

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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Picture: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

Help Egyptian workers defy the army

**Military threatens strike
ban; solidarity campaign
launched: page 5**



Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi is now in charge in Egypt

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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A mixed message for Berlusconi

By Cath Fletcher

Sunday 13 February saw anti-Berlusconi protests across Italy. The latest scandal to hit the premier centres on allegations that he paid for sex with a 17-year-old, a criminal offence, and more broadly on his now-notorious "bunga-bunga" sex parties. Focused on the rights of women, Sunday's demonstrations sought to link the case to broader anger about sexism in Italian society. But their politics were vague.

The demo in Florence (where I live), which attracted around two thousand people, featured a range of slogans on mostly home-made placards. "If not now, when?" was probably most popular, and one demonstrator compared Berlusconi to the newly-fallen Mubarak: "first the Pharaoh, now the Crook."

The organised left was nowhere to be seen; nor were many of the city's student activists. The sole trade union banner was that of the actors' union: its rather cryptic slogan "a world of stars attacked by rats" presumably referring to the sexual exploitation of aspiring TV actresses.

For the rest, some placards were distinctly moralistic in tone. One nurse was furious that she worked full-time shifts for just 1350 euros a month (equivalent to £17,250 a year; costs of living are similar). But that made her "honourable", unlike the regional councillor Nicole Minetti (alleged to have procured women for Berlusconi's parties). Another protester contrasted those involved in the scandal with "real women". But others were keen to reject such attitudes: the crowds were entertained by a trio of women with placards read-

Demonstration in Florence

ing "We do it for free" and "Neither whores nor madonnas, just women". One demonstrator, responding to recent criticism from the Vatican (not generally known as defenders of women's rights) said Berlusconi was a perfect example of "Catholic ethics".

The mixed messages on the demo sum up the difficulties of the latest twist in the Berlusconi saga for socialist feminists. On the one

hand, anger at the sexist portrayal of women on the premier's TV channels and his sexist and homophobic jokes is entirely understandable. But when that tips into moralism about sex parties and against sex workers it becomes problematic.

Yes, Berlusconi should go, but far better he went in a wave of protest against cuts than amid conservative distaste for his private life.

"We live from our sweat and with the dream of equal rights"

On 25 January around 300 migrant workers in Athens and Thessalonica began a hunger-strike to demand "legalisation". The majority of them travelled to Athens and occupied a section of the law department at Athens University, but that occupation has now ended.

Most of the migrants come from north Africa and have lived and worked in Greece for years.

However, after losing jobs, these workers have now also lost residence and work permits. The number of undocumented people in Greece has grown since the economic fall-out and now stands at half a million.

This is an extract from their statement:

"We are migrant men and women from all over Greece. We came here due to poverty, unemployment, wars and dictatorships. The multinational companies and their political servants did not leave another choice for us than risking 10 times our lives to arrive

at Europe's door...

"[In Greece] we live without dignity, in the darkness of illegality in order to benefit employers and the state services with the harsh exploitation of our labour. We live from our sweat and with the dream, some day, to have equal rights with our fellow Greek workers.

"As salaries and pensions are cut and everything is getting more expensive, the migrants are presented as those to blame, as those whose fault is the abjection and harsh exploitation of Greek workers and small businessman. The propaganda of fascist and racist parties and groups is nowadays the official state discourse on issues of migration.

"The 'proposals' of the far right are announced as governmental policies: a wall in Evros, floating detention centres, a European army in the Aegean, repression in the cities, massive deportations. They want to convince Greek workers

that, all of a sudden, we are a threat to them...

"The answer to the lies and the cruelty has to be given now and it will come from us, from migrant men and women. We are going onto the front line, with our own lives to stop this injustice. We ask for the legalisation of all migrant men and women, we ask for equal political and social rights and obligations with Greek workers. We ask from our Greek fellow workers, from every person suffering from exploitation to stand with us...

"We prefer to die here rather than our children suffer what we have been through."

- More: <http://hungerstrike300.espivblogs.net/>
- Messages of support: hungerstrike300@espiv.net
- Messages of protest to: Giannis Raggousis, Minister of Interior: ypourgios@ypes.gov.gr
The Prime Minister, George Papanedreou: dialogue@politicalforum.gr

What sort of expert is this?

By Colin Foster

However capitalist-minded and ruthless the International Monetary Fund is, at least it knows what it's doing?

According to the IMF's own independent evaluation office, which published a report on 9 February, not so.

"As late as the summer of 2008 [just a few weeks before the great financial crash of September 2008], the IMF's management was confident that 'the US has avoided a hard landing' and 'the worst news' [was] 'behind us'..."

"The IMF's [perception] was hindered by a high degree of groupthink, intellectual capture [i.e. deference to the bankers whose dealings it was supposed to be examining critically], [and] a general mindset that a major financial crisis in large advanced economies was unlikely.. The IMF often seemed to champion the US financial sector and the authorities' policies.. Critical voices within the IMF's staff... were... ignored".

Remember this when economic "experts" tell us that the social cuts are "necessary".

Uni battles

Students in all sectors continue to fight against education cuts. Updates from the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts: <http://anticuts.com>

HULL

The occupation is ongoing. The main focus at Hull is the Student Union election campaign.

We're running on a platform of building a union to fight cuts, linked up with the workers' movement.

The occupation is having a big impact on campus. Management have agreed to joint negotiations with the occupation and the UCU, around the occupation demands and the UCU's pensions dispute.

The SU Council passed a motion supporting the occupation, but some sabbatical officers are reluctant to show support.

We're using the occupation as a base to run the sabb campaign, and launch demonstrations, banner drops and so on.

Chris Marks

SHEFFIELD

Sheffield University sent a large group to the Manchester demonstration on 29 January. The occupation sent people to the international student conference in Paris.

Anti-cuts activists are running in Student Union elections. I'm running for Finance Officer. Traditionally, the post has been seen as apolitical. I'm arguing that union finances are a political question.

We are using our election platform to argue for the SU to take its place in the anti-cuts struggle.

The Right to Work group is planning a demo against the Lib Dem conference in Sheffield on 11-12 March —

but they are doing it behind closed doors and refusing to talk to the local anti-cuts campaign. Independent activists and AWL are trying to make the planning for the demo more effective and democratic.

Jonny Keyworth

GLASGOW

The demo on 16 Feb looks like being the biggest yet.

In Scotland, tuition fees have been a less immediate question, but now big cuts have been announced that will affect courses directly. And the university occupation is giving us a higher profile.

The Glasgow School Students' Union was formed after the first wave of action. A few of us who knew each other organised walkouts in our schools. Off the back of that we approached people from other schools.

We have a public meeting on 2 March with speakers from the teachers' union EIS and different anti-cuts groups.

The major difficulty with school student organising is that you're not allowed to do it. You get police coming to your school. My mate was told that he'd been mentioned in a police intelligence report. Another had a policeman come to warn people against getting involved. I got threatened with exclusion.

There will be more school walkouts in March, around the UCU strike. If you're over 16 and you get signed permission from your parents, the school has to let you go.

If you're under 16, the school is not legally obliged to let you go, but it is encouraged, so the danger is greater.

Aidan Turner

Not so left platform

By Chris Marks

Following the tremendous events of November-December 2010 and the revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, you might have thought that the self-proclaimed representatives of Britain's student left would have been bold when it came to their electoral platform for NUS conference.

In fact, the text is so soft that almost anyone in NUS (barring perhaps student Tories) could agree with it.

It avoids explicit formulations around free education or taxing the rich, preferring the less radical slogan "no cuts, no fees". It does not mention workers, class struggle, anti-capitalism, socialism or student-

worker unity of any kind.

It calls for "free Egypt and Palestine", as if the struggles there were equivalent (who is Egypt's colonial occupier?). It includes no demands for living grants or living wages.

In the backroom negotiations leading to the construction of the slate, it was argued that the AWL be left out because we did not support UAF, STWC or boycotting Israel — but none of these things are in the slate's platform either.

If the left slate won't give prominence to the cutting edge political issues on which it should be intervening in the union — working-class resistance to the Tory government and promoting a class-struggle approach to student politics — who will?

This is what Big Society looks like

By Cathy Nugent

David Cameron's "Big Society" big idea is in trouble. Its critics say it is too vague, little more than a cover for cuts. And there is too little money in the pot to finance the "voluntary sector" and "community involvement" projects the government want.

Cameron was moved to answer his critics in a "big speech" on Monday 14 February.

"Big Society" is not cover for cuts, insisted Cameron, because I've been "passionate" about this idea for years. But it seemed like little more than repackaged conservative politics.

Conservatives (and Thatcherite Blairites) have long said they want to break up the "monolithic state". Under Thatcher and Major this went with driving down public expenditure. Under Thatcher (and Blair-Brown) it went with privatisation.

The accompanying stated intentions — in an earlier era, of introducing efficiencies and better services — have never matched the results. Cameron's stated intentions, to mend "broken Britain", seem equally

Scottish library cuts protest

naive.

The right are still doubtful. Melanie Philips in the *Daily Mail* (15 February) said Cameron will fail because he hasn't "got the balls" to do what is necessary — dismantle the welfare state and rebind British people together with Christian-inspired values!

The liberal left/NGO managers who see community self-help as a "good thing" (as it could be, if genuinely about self-organisation) will continue to be as disappointed as Liverpool City Council was when pulling out of a Big Society pilot project.

Nonetheless the Big Society may survive as a series of projects cobbled together by local councils, working with "social enterprises" to run pared down services using groups of barely trained

volunteers.

In Lewisham, south London such groups have been invited to bid to take over the buildings and services at the five libraries the council wants to get rid of. Such arrangements, if they succeed, will allow the council to say they have not cut the service. But what happens to the service?

None of the bidders want to leave the service intact.

Family Services (bidding for New Cross library) will bring in advice services, and the book service will be run by volunteers. The "new" centre will have to cater for local people suffering from the huge cuts in children's services.

But if Christ Family Assembly Outreach win the bid, the books will have to make room for literally god knows what!

Learning disability and the right to a sex life

By a social worker

I'm a social worker currently working in a learning disability service. On reading about the recent case of Alan, a man with an IQ of 48 banned from having sex, I reflected on how people with learning disabilities in our society are either over-protected and infantilised or ignored and left to fend for themselves.

State restrictions on people with learning disabilities (defined as having an IQ under 70) and other vulnerable adults are sometimes necessary but problematic — forced sterilisation of women, etc.

With an IQ of 48 Alan would be defined as having a moderate Learning Disability (LD). This tells us some things but not that much, as abilities and disabilities are very person specific.

I would imagine he has communication difficulties and probably has some support with everyday life

activities. He may have specific areas of cognitive strength and weakness. Consent to sex is a complicated concept for someone with Alan's level of disability.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 is in my opinion generally a good piece of legislation. It covers capacity issues for people with many issues including learning disabilities.

When looking at specific "big" decisions for people like Alan, people like me have a duty to assess their capacity to make them, with the right support, and ultimately to decide whether they can or can't make them independently.

The Act specifically excludes marriage, civil partnership and sexual relations. If a decision is made that a person lacks capacity, then a best interests decision can be made. This involves family, friends and workers like me deciding what we think would be best, e.g., where should a person live. If they

have no family then a specialist advocate is there to act on their behalf (they should be there for everyone, but that would be expensive).

For a case like this to have got to court, a lot of work must have gone in to resolving it differently.

Homophobia is unlikely to be entirely absent, as is certain prudishness when it comes to adults with learning disabilities having a sex life. However, I wonder if there was some exploitation going on. Certainly I doubt a worker would have had time to look twice if it didn't end up with a "safeguarding" label.

Reports of the legal case tell us little about Kieron, the man that Alan had been having sex with. It is typical of the system that victims get blamed if they have suffered abuse.

Usually any victim of domestic violence, for example, is expected to be the one to move. Shockingly, elderly or vulnerable residents are still often ex-

pected to move from residential homes where they have suffered abuse. Why the restriction appears to have been placed on Alan as a blanket ban as opposed to certain situations or people isn't clear. It isn't the case that everyone with that level of IQ is unable to consent to sexual relationships.

"Mate" crime is on the increase. People "befriend" vulnerable people like Alan, but this friendship depends on free accommodation, food, money, drugs — sex less so, but it can be a factor. Of course, it is a sad indictment of the type of society we live in.

None of this negates the right of people with learning disabilities to live as full a life as possible and to fulfil their potential in all areas of their lives. That might include the right for people to make mistakes and have relationships they might regret.

But these projects will not preserve well-stocked libraries promoting literacy and learning, organised by people who have spent years studying the best ways to do that.

Libraries can and should be "opened up" to the communities they serve, but that can only be done consistently on a solid foundation — with resources, books, and people with the skills and knowledge to pass on to others.

Cops against cuts?

Sofie Buckland

A small Twitter storm recently erupted over potential demonstrations by the police against job cuts, and whether the left anti-cuts movement should join in.

There seems to be some confusion going on, and some outright naivety. People can refer to police strikes of 1918-19, and state that revolutionaries need to win over cops (probably true). But this is not a revolutionary situation, or even close. It's not a case of police beginning to join in with a serious class struggle, who need to be won over to our cause to stop them from shooting us. It's not even a serious attempt at self-organisation into union-like structures by police.

We might want to win some of them over, of course, but what does that mean? Being a copper is in direct conflict with being a socialist. The police form part of the armed wing of the state. Their reason for existence is to keep public order. We're going to need to pretty much destroy public order to even begin to challenge capitalism (the bosses aren't just going to hand over the means of production with a "with compliments" slip, yeah?). This much should be abundantly obvious to anyone who took part in the student protests last year. Winning over individual police is a case of persuading them not to be police any more.

Marching alongside them in their attempt to stop job cuts is hardly going to achieve this. Joining in such a demo explicitly suggests you don't want a cut in police numbers. Kind of hard to have individual arguments with coppers about not being coppers when they're marching for their right to be coppers.

Some are making the argument that all cuts should be

fought (who says the police even think this, and don't want to sacrifice libraries, universities and healthcare to the crucial task of preventing anarchy?!) and, worse, that police cuts should be specifically opposed because crime hits working-class communities hardest.

Now, I'm not an anarchist (hi comrades!), and I don't actually know anyone, anarchist or not, who calls for the immediate abolition of the police. It's clear they play a (very) limited protective role. But to jump from recognising this to supporting the maintenance of police numbers is extremely dodgy ground. Why not call for more police and have done with it?

It's also worth excavating what this says about your attitude to what crime is, and where it comes from.

The Howard League for Penal Reform reports that 78% of all people sentenced to custody were convicted of non-violent crime. The vast majority of crime is acquisitive — stealing stuff to make money, often in order to fund a drug addiction. Or, in the case of many women, crimes like shoplifting to support families — 54% of women in prison in 2000 cited their lack of money as a reason, 38% the need to support children and 33% having no job.

STRUCTURAL

Of course it's shitty to be robbed, particularly when you haven't got much yourself. But it doesn't mean sliding into rhetoric that occludes the underlying structural reasons for much crime — poverty, lack of opportunity, drugs, shit low-paid work, you name it — from a socialist analysis.

Worse, our chums at the Third Estate [a left-wing blog] go on to complain about anti-social behaviour: "The day to day business of the police isn't kettling protesters but protecting working class communities from anti-social scumbags."

Some of what these "scumbags" (ouch) do is pretty scary. I live on a pretty quiet estate, but I'm still intimidated by the kids hanging round the bus stop at 9pm and occasionally smashing bits of it. It's much worse elsewhere.

But this kind of statement fits uncomfortably in a debate about the police. Firstly, it misdirects the police's primary function (sure they do more day-to-day on ASB than on political protest, but hey, it's not the revolution yet, and watch priorities switch when it is...). But worse is what it implies, again, about what anti-social behaviour is and how to deal with it.

Do we really want to maintain (or increase) police numbers as an antidote to low-level anti-social "crime", with its myriad of underlying structural reasons? Sure, it can be annoying and frequently genuinely upsetting and life-affecting, but the solution isn't calling for the big, shiny black jackboot of the law to stamp down on it. And then presumably send those involved to prison, or give them ASBOs or something. Well, not if you're a socialist anyway.

Even if the kids involved are just "scumbags" (watch people get upset when you call the cops that...), without having any truck with any arguments about the social production of crime, would you want the police — the baton-wielding, state-upholding, frequently-deadly police — to "crack down" on them, in this society, with all its cards stacked against these kids even before they see the inside of a court room?

We're not talking individual offences here; the Third Estate tweets suggest the real structural problem is one of scummy working-class people versus nice working-class people (Alarm Clock Britain maybe?), as arbitrated by the police.

Never mind how the police routinely harass and intimidate people themselves, producing their own chunk of fear in working-class communities. And I'm not even going to get into police priorities and procedures affecting crime stats, and showing just who gets pinched for what depends so strongly on class.

Go read some Stuart Hall. Just stop hiding pretty unpleasant anti-working class sentiments behind the rhetoric of concern for the very same people. And don't march to protect the police.

Letters

AV won't help left

David Kirk's main argument (*Solidarity* 3/191) is that AV will help left-wing "propaganda candidates". But with Australia's AV left and not-so-left minority party candidates have generally done worse than with Britain's FPTP setup. This seems odd, but it is a fact. Knowing that fact, left and pseudo-left groups focused on electoral activity — Socialist Party, Respect, Green Left — oppose AV.

With AV people know that their vote will count towards the result only when it transfers to the bigger party they've chosen as second preference, so they often cut out the middleman and vote for the bigger party direct.

In Australia the main bias of AV is to polarise electoral politics into two blocs, organised around the two big parties (Labor and Liberals) to which the smaller parties in each bloc transfer.

Argue for the British Labour Party not to do preference swaps? You could, I suppose, but the chance of anyone listening is zero. Under AV a party eschews preference swaps only if it has no interest in winning (and usually not even then).

The evidence from Australia is that parties' recommendations on preference swaps have surprisingly great effect.

AV is no more democratic than FPTP, maybe less so. The detailed balance will depend on how the Lib Dems choose to work the system, and whether British voters react to AV differently from Australians, neither of which we know.

AV would however be more stable than FPTP (there is no outcry to change it in Australia), so voting in AV would gazump any other electoral change for, probably, decades.

The fact that AV will ensure that the Lib Dems "win" the next election however we vote (even though longer-term it may hurt them), and the fact that the referendum will be at least partly a referendum on the government, indicate no to AV.

Colin Foster, North London

Class struggle is not "alien"

Tim Flatman (*Solidarity* 3/192) claims labour-movement organisations were "culturally alien" to South Sudan and that we should not "impose" them on the new

country.

Undoubtedly, labour movements as we know them in the advanced-capitalist world cannot be wished into being in a massively less developed country. But what is the "culture" that workers' organisation seeks to embody? Simply the "culture" of organising the exploited against their exploiters. This is something common to all human culture throughout history.

Even in a country where advanced-capitalist class-relations do not yet predominate, organisational forms based on a struggle against exploitation will emerge... in their own specific way for sure, but with the same basic template. Some of the most inspiring recent instances of worker-organisation have not come from the advanced-capitalist west but from countries like Indonesia, Nigeria, Eritrea.

As Tim's own reports show, there are ongoing efforts to build workers' organisation (not "imposed" but fought for by South Sudanese workers themselves), and Tim is right to call for our solidarity. But if we start giving ground to the idea that certain things are simply too "culturally alien" for countries like South Sudan then where do we draw the line? What else is "culturally alien"? Democracy? Human rights? Relativism is a slippery slope.

Daniel Randall, East London

Palestine and preconditions

In *Solidarity* 3/191 Sean Matgamna argued that the *Guardian's* recent condemnation of the Palestinian Authority was demagogic (pretended "shock" at the "leak" of negotiating positions which were already well-known) and a backhanded way of supporting those who uphold the "right of return", i.e. collective Arab repossession of Israeli territory rather than "two states".

Broadly Ira Berkovic (in a letter *Solidarity* 3/192) agrees, I think.

Ira agrees that it is wrong to propose the "right of return". But he charges Sean with being imprisoned by "the admittedly very unpleasant realities of bourgeois diplomacy".

Sean's article condemns, not approves, the Israeli negotiating stance: "Israel refuses to make a peace which the Arab states and the Palestinians offer it". Is Ira's complaint that Sean does not expand on this condemnation of Israeli governments?

The article is not about Israeli negotiating stances. It is about Palestinian negotiating stances and the *Guardian's* condemnation of them ("Palestinian leaders gave up on refugees").

At Taba in 2001, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators agreed to talk about a limit to the number of "returners". The Israeli side suggested 25,000 over three years, or 40,000 over five, with "return" to be resolved over a fifteen year period.

The Palestinian side said nothing more precise than "six

figures" over an indefinite period.

The Geneva accord formulated in 2003 between unofficial negotiators, endorsed by Yasser Arafat, and welcomed by AWL at the time, set no minimum figure at all: Israel would admit "returners" at its "sovereign discretion".

Something more generous than 10,000 would be good? Sure. But it's a matter of adjustments, not of valid principle or abandonment of principle. If Palestinian negotiators could deliver an "ultimatum" for a real independent state, that would be good. An "ultimatum" for the "right of return" would be destructive in principle, not just unwise negotiating tactics.

Ira seems to want to "escape" rhetorically into "another way" between an "ultimatum" for the "right of return" and getting the best "return"-or-compensation deal possible in real life now. "Any democratic two-states settlement would involve open negotiations on these questions [presumably, the returner-number question] and others that go far beyond the boundaries of bourgeois diplomacy".

Doubtless negotiations between an Israeli workers' government and a sovereign Palestinian workers' government could produce something much better than any bourgeois diplomacy can produce. But what has that got to do with the issues as regards the *Guardian*? And what sense would it make to condemn the bourgeois Palestinian negotiators for negotiating within bourgeois bounds, i.e. not setting a socialist revolution in the whole region as a precondition for any movement?

Martin Thomas, North London

Perjury unpunished?

I don't believe in custodial sentences for many offences, including the one for Tommy Sheridan (*Solidarity* 3/192). However I am getting the feeling *Solidarity* believes the courts have no rights here. I disagree.

The argument that because the judicial system has biases and prejudices we do not use it is as ridiculous as saying that because democracy in this society is limited flawed and biased we shouldn't vote. Many issues are pursued through the courts however imperfect, that actually give people a right of redress to what may have happened to them.

There has to be, for instance, some consequence for the taking of a life, and if that has to be through an imperfect court system so be it.

Whatever system of socialism and democracy you believe in, some judicial system, separate from the political, is I believe essential. To say that anybody should be able to lie in court and not think there will be consequences is crazy. What if a defendant sought to mislead a jury in a murder case... no consequences?

Mark Sapsford, posted on website

Help Egypt's workers defy army

- Support democratic revolution and workers' rights
- Oppose Islamist counter-revolution and military repression

On Sunday 13 February, an Egyptian army representative told the news agency Reuters that the next day the army would decree a ban on all union meetings and strikes.

After taking over from the hated president Mubarak when he resigned on 11 February, the army wanted to stop the social upheaval in Egypt, and restore capitalist calm, in the most abrupt way.

On Monday 14 February the army limited itself to an appeal to strikers to return to work: "Noble Egyptians see that these strikes, at this delicate time, lead to negative results". It "call[ed] on citizens and professional unions and the labour unions to play their role fully" in restoring normal business.

The army also made Monday a public holiday, in addition to Tuesday 16 February which was a public holiday in Egypt anyway, hoping that strikes would peter out.

According to the Cairo *Daily News* (15 February): "The statement by the ruling military council [on Monday 14 February, calling for strikers to return to work] appeared to be a final warning to protest organisers in labour and professional unions before the army intervenes and imposes an outright ban on gatherings, strikes and sit-ins".

The army has pushed the people off Tahrir Square, in the middle of Cairo, where they had been demonstrating 24/7 for weeks.

STRIKE WAVE

But Tahrir Square has already sparked a huge wave of strikes in areas as diverse as the stock exchange, textile and steel factories, media organisations, the postal service, railways, the Culture Ministry and the Health Ministry.

On Monday 14 February hundreds of bank workers demonstrated outside a branch of the Bank of Alexandria in central Cairo, urging their bosses to "leave, leave!" (like Mubarak). Other bank workers have struck.

Outside the TV and state radio building in central Cairo, hundreds of public transportation workers demonstrated to demand better pay. Not far away, ambulance drivers

demonstrated, also to demand better pay and permanent jobs.

Even police officers have been demonstrating for better pay and saying: "It's hard for us to go back to work because people hate us".

As the upsurge for democracy spreads into the workplaces, it inescapably becomes an upsurge for social democracy — not just for formal rights to do with elections and so on, but also for economic improvements, against the stifling bosses' rule there which has gone together with Mubarak's stifling rule in politics.

And the workers who forge solidarity and confidence in their workplaces will be, in turn, the strongest and most consistent fighters for political democracy.

Egyptian workers launched a new independent union federation on 30 January. The old government-run fake union body, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), has demanded that the independent federation be banned. On 14 February, 500 workers demonstrated outside the ETUF offices, demanding that ETUF be dissolved and its assets handed over to the workers.

NOT FREE YET

At the official rally in support of the people of Egypt in London on 12 February, British trade-union leaders said repeatedly from the platform: "Egypt is now free!", as if the removal of Mubarak guaranteed that.

But the threats to ban strikes and meetings should be no surprise. The army high command are all Mubarak's cronies. The Egyptian army is as corrupt as the whole state machine. It has a hierarchy dominated by old careerists, and it has its own large business empire.

Military-owned companies are active in the water, olive oil, cement, construction, hotel, and fuel industries. Large amounts of land are owned by the military in the Nile Delta and on the Red Sea coast.

The army could command enough credibility to take control because it is *organised*. Mubarak's repression made it difficult for opposition groups to develop beyond small circles. The army appeared as the only fallback force already prepared to take political control.

The army chiefs will know that the social upheaval must have affected their conscript rank-and-file. That (and US pressure) will push them to show some flexibility. But they will be determined to defend the essentials of the old order of crony capitalism.

Workers will challenge the army. To win, Egyptian workers will need to acquire the organisation which the army now semi-monopolises. The workers have started organising. They need our support.

After the Tsar was overthrown in Russia, early in 1917, Lenin wrote: "The basic slogan, the 'task of the day' [is]: 'Workers, you have performed miracles of proletarian heroism... against tsarism. You must perform miracles of organisation, organisation of the proletariat and of the whole people, to prepare the way for your victory in the second stage of the revolution.'" The same message holds for

Egypt!

Much will depend on whether, and how much, the Egyptian workers can organise politically as well as on a trade-union level.

Egypt's revolt has so far been secular. The Iranian regime lyingly hailed it as an "Islamic uprising" — only to find that the people of Iran have been inspired by Egypt to come on the streets themselves, for democratic rights, *against* Iran's Islamist regime!

However, the next organised political force in Egypt, after the army, is the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. Though illegal for decades, it has been allowed a little space by the regime, so that it has been able to take over professional associations of lawyers, doctors, business people, and the like, run welfare projects, and win seats in Parliament. It is said to have 300,000 members.

The Brotherhood is being studiedly moderate. It does not want to rush into a showdown with secular forces in Egypt, or with the army, or with the USA.

But if the ferment continues, and the old state system crumbles, it can stand out as the main pre-organised opposition force, and become bolder. A Brotherhood takeover would mean confiscating Egypt's revolution for counter-revolution.

It can be countered only by political organisation. Socialists across the world should do all we can to help Egypt's workers organise politically. The many on the left who depict the Brotherhood as a benign democratic movement, to be censured only for its caution, act directly against the interests of democracy and workers' rights in Egypt.

AWL fund drive

As Egyptian and Tunisian workers strike out against repressive state machinery, they will need those of us active in freer labour movements to fight for our movements to use their weight and power to support those international struggles.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty will have a crucial role to play in building that solidarity as well as arguing against those on the British left who would dilute the working-class content of that support into classless, apolitical cheerleading, or even support for Islamists. If you want to help us make those arguments, and increase our own ability to provide material support for working-class activists in the Middle East, please help our fundraising appeal. Thanks this fortnight to Stuart B for £50, Bruce for £150 and Linda for £10. That brings our fundraising grand total to £20,510. We're aiming to raise £25,000 by 26 March so we are going to be asking a lot of people to help us out in the next five weeks! Please help as much as you can.

New campaign set to launch: get involved!

Activists from a range of unions will come together on Thursday 17 February at the headquarters of the Unite union to discuss plans for launching a new campaign to build solidarity with workers in Egypt and across the Middle East.

For more information on the campaign, and on how to get involved, email markosborn61@gmail.com and check out middle-east-workers.blogspot.com

Strikes, fatwas and repression

TUNISIA

The Tunisian Ministry of Defence has asked all reservists to report to barracks from 16 February. That may indicate a crackdown against the bubbling workers' movement is being prepared by the transitional government.

In Tunisia, class struggle is continuing. Strikes and protests are breaking out in many different sectors of the economy as groups of workers take advantage of the relative political freedoms.

On 13 February, the new Tunisian foreign minister, Ahmed Ounaies, resigned following strikes by workers in the ministry. The strikes were sparked by Ounaies' complimentary remarks about the French foreign minister Michèle Alliot-Marie. It was Alliot-Marie who suggested that French specially-trained riot police should be sent to prop up the old regime.

Workers in Tunisian bakeries are due to start a strike to demand better pay, pensions and rights at work. Bakery workers played an important role in the revolution, maintaining food distribution, often working unpaid, under extremely dangerous circumstances.

In the headquarters of the Gafsa Phosphate Company in Tunis, 50 young workers are staging an indefinite sit-in to demand measures to alleviate unemployment in the Gafsa mining basin. There are 17,000 unemployed in Gafsa, a traditionally industrially militant area where recent protests forced its corrupt governor to leave office in an armoured car. The 50 occupiers allege high-level corruption in the Gafsa Phosphate Company and in the relevant ministry.

While this wave of strikes is taking place, it is unclear how or whether workers' organisations are developing to co-ordinate these fights and elaborate a political programme for the their movement.

A new trade union federation has been set up to rival the long-established UGTT, a real union movement, though a bureaucratic and conservative one. This new union, the CGTT, describes itself as being in favour of "social dialogue" and promises to "not sideline enterprise, like the UGTT does".

Tunisia has finally ratified the international convention against torture; benefits for the long-term unemployed have been agreed; and there is ongoing public debate about the nature of the new constitution.

BAHRAIN

Bahrain, a chain of 30 islands off the Saudi Arabian coast, is inhabited by 800 000 people. Facing the threat of protests, the country's rulers have attempted to buy-off trouble by awarding the equivalent of over US\$2000 to every Bahraini family.

However on Monday 14 February security forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse dozens of protesters in Bahrain's capital, Manama. One person is reported to have died.

The King and the elite in Bahrain are Sunni; 70% of the population are Shia Muslims who face unemployment and discrimination.

The state became a form of constitutional monarchy in 2002. Elections in October 2010 gave supporters of the country's Sunni government a slight majority in the 40-member lower house of parliament. A reactionary Shia opposition party, al-Wifaq, took 18 seats.

In the run up to the election oppositionists were rounded up. 250 Shia activists were detained, some on terrorism charges.

The lower house, the Council of Representatives, has restricted powers. The upper house — or Shura Council — all of whose members are appointed by the royal family, can (and does) over rule the lower house.

SAUDI ARABIA

State-sponsored clerics have issued fatwas against the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings and forbidden any repeat in Saudi Arabia. The king has supported for Mubarak as a pro-Western, anti-Iranian ally.

But many Saudis will support the rebellions and oppose

Saudi Arabia offering refuge to former Tunisian dictator Ben Ali. They do so for radically differing reasons. Liberals support the democratic upheavals; religious reactionaries see opportunities for Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt, and oppose Ben Ali as a secular leader.

ALGERIA

On Saturday 12 February, the Algerian government deployed 30,000 riot police to (successfully) disperse a demonstration called by the opposition umbrella group National Co-ordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD).

Many young Algerians attempted to stay in Algiers' 1 May Square overnight, but they appear to have been unsuccessful. The CNCD met afterwards and announced another demonstration for Saturday 19 February. Estimates of numbers at the demonstration stretch from 250 (from the regime) to 5,000 (organisers).

Under an emergency law in effect since 1992, demonstrations are banned in Algeria. The regime says it will repeal that law "soon".

WEST BANK AND GAZA

Both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas regime in Gaza have suppressed demonstrations in solidarity with the Egyptian revolution.

The Fatah-led regime in the West Bank openly supported Hosni Mubarak until the end. Demonstrations for Tunisia and Egypt were stopped from happening in January, and on 2 February the Palestinian Authority's EU-trained Special Police Force violently dispersed a small demo in Ramallah.

However, on 7 February a larger protest, led by the Palestinian left parties and including several prominent Fatah members, went ahead, and there were protests in other West Bank towns.

Perhaps more surprisingly given the links of Hamas to the Muslim Brotherhood and the position of Iran — which is presenting the Egyptian uprising as the first stage of the Islamic Revolution — Hamas was until recently hostile to the movement in Egypt, or at least did not support it.

On 31 January the Gaza authorities broke up a demonstration in Gaza City, arresting six women and making them sign pledges not to take part in authorised protests.

Both Fatah and Hamas fear the spread of working-class and popular unrest into Palestine.

Since the fall of Mubarak, Hamas has changed line, hailing the Egyptian revolution and allowing demonstrations for the opening of the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, in what seems to be an embryonic campaign for the tearing up of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

Socialists should support the opening of the border, naturally, but oppose agitation for war between Egypt and Israel. Our priority must be solidarity with the left and labour movement — in Egypt, Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

• Reporting by Mark Osborn, Ed Maltby and Sacha Ismail.



Solidarity demonstration in Ramallah

Yemini students demonstrate in Sanaa

Yemen protests grow

By Dan Katz

In Yemen the beleaguered President Ali Abdallah Saleh is attempting to force an end to protests that demand his resignation, using state forces and groups of thugs to attack the opposition.

On Monday 14 February several thousand protesters gathered in the capital Sanaa chanting: "After Mubarak, it's Ali's turn". The protests are growing in size.

Supporters of the president, armed with traditional Yemeni knives, broken glass, and sticks attacked the demonstrators.

The protests in the capital have been organised by the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). The JMP is an alliance of leftist, secular liberal, nationalist and Islamist groups and has been in existence for most of the past decade.

The programmes of the JMP's constituent elements do not match up. And in addition the leaderships of key groups are also divided. For example, the Yemeni Socialist Party is split over whether and to what extent to align with the demands of the Southern Movement (al-Harak), the grassroots grouping agitating for greater autonomy for the southern provinces and, increasingly, secession.

Islah, the largest of the Islamist parties in the JMP, is split along ideological lines (which also appears as a generational divide) over, among other issues, the role of women in the party.

The JMP has styled itself as a very different type of opposition to the armed struggle which erupts periodically in the north of Yemen, led by Shia tribesmen or al-Qaeda which is active too. JMP protesters have adopted pink as their colour and their rallies have been orderly and peaceful. (MERIP report, 9 February).

Some formal concessions have been won from the long-ruling President. He has promised not to change the constitution so he can rule for life, and that his son will not inherit his position. However he has reneged on promises before.

It is possible that Saleh will ride these protests out, forcing the opposition to back down or he will buy sections of it off. However, if he does go then according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, there are three possibilities: an orderly transition to democracy, with the proportional representation favoured by the opposition; the fragmentation of Yemen; a military coup and the possible secession of the southern part of Yemen.

Half of Yemen's 23 million people live below the poverty line. Unemployment is at nearly 40%; the country is running out of oil and water, and corruption is rampant. Illiteracy stands at over 50%.

Egyptian workers' organisation: "We still need international solidarity"

By Tamer Fathy, International Coordinator of Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services

There are many workers on strike — on the Suez canal, in public transport, in the Cairo metro system and in many industries. I'm not sure how this will develop. The strikes are strong because workers have been raising their demands for a long time, since before the revolution. The main demands are higher wages, for temporary workers to get permanent contracts, and for prosecution of the leaders of the "official" unions.

Beyond that, we are fighting for independent unions and collective bargaining. Workers forming independent committees in the factories and enterprises is the key.

The military council did say they want to stop strikes, but in practice it has been a request to go back to work, not a ban. The army is too clever, I think, to take an aggressive or violent stance towards the workers.

The bosses say our demands are unaffordable, that budgets will not meet it, but there is a huge gap between what workers earn and what the heads of factories and companies receive. The wealth is there in society; we want it to be redistributed.

Like almost everyone in Egypt, the workers do not want a military regime — particularly after the bad experience of the last 60 years.

We need elections, a civilian government, and the establishment of a new constitution.

The "official", state-run unions are still functioning — three of their leaders have filed a legal action against CTUWS, claiming that our general coordinator Kamal Abbas is corrupt and engaged in secret activities with foreign governments. Meanwhile these unions are still trying to take money from those workers and unions that have left their federation. Their top people are rich: their chairman Hussein Mugawer is a businessman as well as a so-called workers' leader.

We organised a peaceful sit-down protest outside their headquarters yesterday [14 February] and their thugs attacked us with bottles and sticks. Eventually the military police intervened and arrested some of them. We are demanding an investigation. We still need international solidarity.

"Already people in Iraq are taking to the streets"

Nadia Mahmood from the Worker-communist Party of Iraq spoke to *Solidarity* about the impact of the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt on Iraq and the whole Middle East.

These two great revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt are opening a new arena in the entire world. They have a huge impact and influence on the people in the Middle East in general and all over the world.

Many of the presidents in the Middle East have now announced a number of changes. For example, Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq has announced that he will not nominate himself for another election. The same in Yemen from Abdullah Saleh. Saeb Erekat has resigned from his job as a Palestinian negotiator with the Israeli authorities. King Abdullah has dismissed his government and called for another one. In Kuwait the government has announced that they will pay each citizen \$3400.

In Iraq the monthly rations are now to be delivered on time, and three months' worth are to be distributed to families in advance. Before these revolutions the government was threatening to cut the rations. Now a number of MPs are announcing that they will donate their salaries, or take only half of their salaries.

Already demonstrators have taken to the street in Iraq. In Diwaniya the police opened fire and killed some demonstrators.

Now there are preparations for a demonstration of one million, planned to take place in Baghdad on 25 February in Tahrir square — it is the same name as the square in Cairo. Facebook and email has been used intensively to organise people for what is called the "day of rage". Spreading the revolution is now a real possibility. It is on the agenda of hundreds of thousands of people in the whole area.

Just a few days, after the government came into office, it imposed the closure of shops selling alcohol. Even before that the sale of alcohol was banned in some cities in southern Iraq, but in Baghdad there were shops selling alcohol. Now the government has said that Muslim people are not allowed to have shops selling alcohol.

The education ministry is trying to impose a new segregation between boys and girls in universities. Some ministries also want to impose the veil formally.

Islamisation in Iraq is now going ahead formally, led from the government. We are organising demonstrations and mobilising people to stop these violations of basic individual rights.

Q. In Iran in 1978-9 there was a democratic upheaval, with working-class action, which was taken over and annexed by Islamists to produce a regime even more brutal than the old one...

A. I think the movements in Tunisia and Egypt show that

the curve of political Islam is declining. The golden days of political Islam are coming to an end. It is a joke when Ahmadinejad or Moqtada al-Sadr describe the revolution in Egypt as an "Islamic revolution". It is not.

For a third of a century Iran has been ruled by political Islam, and people see no good in their rule. Just last year, millions took to the streets against the Islamic Republic of Iraq. Political Islam has had no solution to economic problems, but only intensified them. And they add to it political oppression similar to medieval abuses.

People have seen Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Palestine, Algeria. They don't want political Islam. You can hear people from Tunisia saying on the television that they don't want a Khomeiny in Tunisia. The revolutions have been secular.

In Iran the revolution was not an Islamic revolution: as Mansoor Hekmat described it, it was the suppression of the revolution that was Islamic. If America sees the revolution in Egypt and Tunisia going beyond their control, it may see no option but to use the Islamic movements as a "representative" and "legitimate" power to impose calm and "work" with them, as in Saudi Arabia. But, again, people have to make their decision.

Q. Some people say that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has learned to be a democratic party and it is different from the Islamists in Iran and Algeria...

A. No. Of course not. Mubarak claimed to be "democratic" too! The Brotherhood won't say that they will impose an Islamic state now, when they are not in power. In Iran, after the revolution, Khomeiny did not change everything suddenly. It took a process. To force veils on women, for example, they started in the universities, and it took them three years to impose Islamic rule completely on the country.

Of course the Muslim Brotherhood talks about democracy now. But if they come to power, we will not see anything better than Islamic rule in other countries.

Already the culture of Egypt is very influenced by the Islamic movement. You see many women veiled, which you never saw in the 1960s or the 1970s. You see the attacks on writers, on film-makers, on singers. The Muslim Brotherhood is not in power, but they already exert pressure on the society.

In Egypt now the trade unions are forming themselves and trying to impose their demands. But there is still a vacuum in terms of a political party that represents workers. That gap needs to be filled. It is a great weakness now in Egypt that we do not have a communist workers' party.

The result of this movement can at least bring political openness, and prepare better ground for workers and communists to function and to work.

• Abridged. Full text of interview: www.workersliberty.org/node/16065

Suez canal workers

How do we oppose the Muslim Brotherhood?

NOT ALARMIST

We are all agreed that the Muslim Brothers are a potential threat to the working class, the left, and democracy in general. We are all agreed that we — the left and the labour movement in Britain and internationally — have an urgent duty to build solidarity with the new workers' movement in Egypt and whatever left develops.

There is a difference of emphasis in how to pose this. I think we need to avoid appearing to say that because the Brotherhood is the strongest force, all prospects are bad; or to say that the only thing which stands in the way of the Brotherhood destroying all democracy is us, the socialists.

There are real forces, principally but not only the Egyptian workers' movement, which are an alternative to the Brotherhood.

There is a real social force emerging in Egypt. What happens in the next weeks, months and years depends on that social force; it does not literally depend on just us.

There is the real possibility of something good coming out of this. We should argue that we need to build solidarity to make sure other forces triumph over the Brotherhood and other reactionary forces, rather than making our keynote, in effect: "Things could easily go horribly wrong".

Concern about the threat from Islamism should not prevent us from trying to be concrete. And as far as I can judge, concretely, there is no imminent danger of a Brotherhood take-over.

We should not imply the Brotherhood is no threat at all, or deny that it could quite soon become a serious one. But we shouldn't be alarmist, either.

Clive Bradley

WORSE POSSIBILITIES

In shaping what we say, we must be mindful of our role as a voice of Marxist sanity in a sea of pro-Islamist stupidity on the British left.

If the points Clive considers that "we are all agreed on" were taken as read by the self-defined socialists in Britain and beyond, then we could be much less strident about warning, polemicising, emphasising the dangers posed by the Brothers.

There may also be a difference of assessment about how big a problem the MB might be. The new gains in Egypt are wonderful. But the new movement has only just been born and so is fragile. The MB have a cadre, cash, resources, many tens of thousands of members, resilience...

It is inevitable that amidst general jubilation, many will focus on what's positive and blank out the nasty possibili-

ties. We need to state what is. Obviously this can be done in a way that gets in the way of a positive message, but we need to consider the possible worst cases, not just the better ones.

Mark Osborn

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

I don't think a Brotherhood takeover is imminent. The Brotherhood consider it rash to go for power straight away.

But a workers' government, or a revolutionary-democratic government, are also un-imminent. The only "imminent" governmental possibilities are some variant of "technocratic" army-based regime — with more or less army control, granting more or less democratic space in a more or less durable way, granting more or less social reforms, more or less pushed by Brotherhood pressure to introduce piecemeal "Islamisation" of daily life as in Pakistan and Iraq, etc.

Maybe things will just stop there. But we also, and maybe most of all, discuss the possibilities if the mass movement continues, if the army and the state bureaucracy prove fragile and discredited.

In that case it is not enough that a new social force should exist to counter the Brotherhood.

It also requires a new political force. Unless a strong secular middle-class-based movement emerges, it requires that a political force (not necessarily a clearly socialist one, but a political force) emerges from the new workers' movement.

The possibilities for that are very exciting. But it is not automatic. The experience with the South African unions in the 80s and 90s should warn us against any illusion that it will happen automatically.

Of course we should avoid any appearance of aligning with the manic US hawks who think that an overthrow of Mubarak means Taliban-style rule tomorrow. I'm sure we have thoroughly avoided that.

Martin Thomas

14 February march was broken up by police

Constituent Assembly in Iran and the Middle East is the key idea

By Behzad Kazemi (an Iranian socialist living in Britain)

The Green Movement leaders in Iran used the opportunity of Khomeini's call for support for the Egyptian people to call for demonstrations (on 14 February). They said these demonstrations were to defend the Egyptian people and pushed the establishment not to attack them. That did not happen. [The demonstrations were attacked with tear gas and one person is reported killed].

The Iranian secret services are well trained and stopped the demonstrations from becoming a big force. In the end there were several sizeable demonstrations around Tehran, of 5,000 and 10,000, marching from and to different points.

However, these demonstrations were organised by people with a mullah's point of view. The Green Movement leaders, Mousavi and Karoubi, do not want to overthrow the Islamic Republic — they want to reform it. This is why the demonstrations probably won't continue.

There is a lot of confusion and political difficulty around how to mobilise in Iran, especially around the immediate issues such as free speech.

I think a political call for a Constituent Assembly is very important all over the Middle East. The Constituent Assembly, we say, should be based on neighbourhood assemblies, trade unions, citizens' groups and sections of the army that have been split away. The left also needs slogans to neutralise the army. Such an Assembly would be an opportunity for different layers in society to discuss how they relate to the workers and what they think about alternatives to capitalism.

During the last two years there have been important developments in Iran, for the workers and for the youth and students.

Subsidies (on food etc) have been cut. This is affecting the workers badly, has affected their confidence. In the important oil industry workers don't have rights and they have become conservative. The new generation of workers don't have the same experiences as the older and this affects their ability to organise.

Youth and students have now recognised the need for underground organisation. But they have no political leadership. The left is very weak and has no clear programme. Most come from a Stalinist tradition, but have now become "ultra-left". They adopt a minimum-maximum programme and do not understand transitional demands and ideas such as the Constituent Assembly.

There are three key democratic demands in the Middle East and in these countries. These are democracy; secularism; and the constituent assembly.

In backward countries such as these, with dictatorships, existing in the advanced capitalist world, these demands become transitional. For example any movement for "free speech" quickly becomes radicalised and wants to move towards to overthrow dictatorship.

That is why things are moving so quickly right now.

Egyptian Brotherhood on the march

won't change its principles: The full Islamic method is the end of our work, and the success we seek is when when it is applied and carried out in all aspects of life among all individuals, groups, societies, institutions and the regime.

"The Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) declares its approval and satisfaction with secularism of the country according to the well known Western concept. This differs from our great main target of founding an Islamic state for Muslims, not a theocratic state..." (Mohamed Morsi, MB website, August 2007).

Because Sunni Islam (a bit like Protestant Christianity, and in contrast to Shia Islam) has no structured religious hierarchy, and most Sunni Islamist activists are not clerics, the Brotherhood argues that its version of an Islamic state is different from Shia Iran's, which it calls "theocracy". "The concept of governance based on sharia is not a theocracy for Sunnis since we have no centralised clergy in Islam. For us... sharia is a means whereby justice is implemented, life is nurtured, the common welfare is provided for, and liberty and property are safeguarded. In any event, any transition to a sharia-based system will have to garner a consensus in Egyptian society." (Abdel Moneim Abou el-Fotouh, 10 Feb).

The Brotherhood also maintains such tenets as: "Religious texts ordained that the woman's body, except for the face and the hands, should be covered in front of all except those who are [close relatives]. And that a woman should not sit in private with a man who is not [a close relative]" (The Role of Muslim Women in an Islamic Society, 2006: MB website).

It commits itself to the destruction of Israel. "Arab nations must sever all ties and declare a state of non-normalization with the Israeli Zionists" (MB statement, 31 May 2010). "The Palestinian cause can never be isolated from other issues like Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Egypt, because all these issues are actually stemming from one issue caused by the US backed Zionist entity, said MB chairman Mohamed Mahdi Akef..."

"Akef said, directing his speech to the Zionists: Regardless of the bloodletting our nation is facing, it will live and you will perish..." (March 2008).

Briefing

By Colin Foster

The Muslim Brotherhood, on its website, constantly stresses how moderate it is.

"The MB confirms that it and the people respect and trust the army which throughout the revolution continued to demonstrate poise, caring for the good of one and all" (MB statement, 14 February).

"The Muslim Brotherhood [has] reiterated that it does not seek power" (MB website, 13 February). "We do not intend to take a dominant role in the forthcoming political transition. We are not putting forward a candidate for the presidential elections scheduled for September".

The Muslim Brotherhood's official English website editor-in-chief Khaled Hamza declares: "the current uprising in Egypt is a revolution of the Egyptian people and is by no means linked to any Islamic tendencies, despite allegations nor can it be described as Islamic..." Hamza "criticised allegations and reiterations by some countries that the uprising was Islamic and denounced claims by the Iranian Supreme Leader... that the protests are a sign of an Islamic awakening inspired by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran" (MB website, 5 February).

"It is our position that any future government we may be a part of will respect all treaty obligations made in accordance with the interests of the Egyptian people" (including Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, or is that an obligation not "in accordance with the interests"? Abdel Moneim Abou el-Fotouh, MB website, 2 February).

It is widely said that there are serious differences within the Brotherhood. However, in its statements the Brotherhood holds by all the fundamentals of its traditional Islamist programme.

The Brotherhood dissociates itself from the more secularised politics of the AKP party in Turkey.

"The Muslim Brotherhood group hasn't changed and

SWP hopes for Egypt to declare war on Israel

Left

By Ira Berkovic

Of the many pithy formulae which members of the Socialist Workers' Party use, one that seems to have a particular current resonance is that idea that "the road to Palestinian liberation runs through Cairo." Or, as the headline to an article by John Rose in *Socialist Worker* (12 February 2011) puts it, "Answer to Palestine question is in Cairo."

What do the SWP mean by this? Rose's article argues against any possibility for Palestinian liberation that does not involve "the rest of the Arab world", and asserts that "the outcome of the Egyptian revolution will shape the Palestinian leadership."

Hamas, the clerical-fascist party which rules Gaza as a theocratic state and which the SWP supports, has already repressed demonstrations in solidarity with the Egyptian uprising — an action Rose explains away and implicitly defends by claiming that Hamas is "waiting to see what happens rather than making any move that might be perceived as provocation."

Hamas's sister organisation in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, is currently positioning itself to win power and influence; the SWP has implicitly supported the Brotherhood, viewing it as some kind of reformist, almost social-democratic, formation that the left should ally with.

The focus on Cairo as the epicentre from which the shockwaves that would eventually liberate Palestine would spread has another purpose.

Rose cites Tony Cliff, "the road to both liberation [of the Arab population generally and the Palestinians in particular] was routed through Cairo [...] and not Jerusalem." The message here is clear; the Israeli workers have no role to play. If there is no road to liberation through Jerusalem then the Israelis must accept their fate at the hands of external forces. They have no agency in the struggle for liberation in the region.

It also effectively robs the Palestinians themselves of any agency and counsels them to sit tight — presumably under the watchful gaze of the heroic "radicals" of Hamas — and wait for a more belligerently Arab-nationalist government to emerge in Egypt.

Rose comments, without explanation or elaboration, that "Egypt is the leader for all classes throughout the region — the ruling class, the peasantry, and the working class." The SWP's conception of "Arab liberation" and "the Arab revolution" is essentially classless — or rather, cross-class. It is not a revolution of workers in the Middle East (regardless of their ethnic or national origin) against bosses, but of "Arabs" against "imperialism".

Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1978/79 and has remained one of only three Arab states to recognise it. Rose quotes Henry Kissinger in his comment that the US's role in brokering this deal was about "breaking up the Arab united front." Again, the space between Rose's lines is large and the writing is very big: "the Arab united front" of bourgeois or Stalinoid nationalists against Israel was something progressive, worthwhile, positive. Something to be supported and defended. The SWP's hope is that something like it may re-emerge from the current uprisings.

Rose concludes that "any kind of progressive outcome in Egypt will significantly weaken Israel's historic position."

It is certainly to be hoped, and worked for, that if a genuinely democratic government emerges in Egypt it will be able to play a role in pressuring Israel to end its occupation of the West Bank, dismantle the settlements and recognise an independent Palestinian state. But this is not what Rose means.

His hope, and the SWP's hope, is for a government in Egypt that will reverse the last 30 years of history and break off any notion of peace or co-existence with Israel. Taking it altogether there is only one possible conclusion: the SWP wants an Egyptian government that is prepared to declare war on Israel.

A real socialist programme for the region should be based on facilitating common struggle of workers across the Middle East — Arab, Israeli-Jewish, Kurdish and others — against their bosses. The SWP's desire for a nationalist or Islamist "Arab united front" to take on Israel is a bloodthirsty and reactionary fantasy.

Cameron backs faith schools. Such policies do not help social integration and equality

Cameron: behind the outcry

By Martin Thomas

Far-right activists and racists have jumped on Tory prime minister David Cameron's speech about multiculturalism in Munich on 5 February to boost their cause.

But the kneejerk "Cameron-is-a-racist" of some supposedly left-wing responses is as false as would be taking Cameron's speech as secularist and liberal good coin.

The English Defence League and Marine Le Pen, new leader of France's fascist and virulently anti-Arab National Front, claimed Cameron's speech as backing for their views.

We know what is happening there: racists are keen to pick up on anything that can be recycled as saying that there is a "problem with" Muslims, or immigrants. Cameron may well have calculated on it, hoping that his speech would pull EDL types towards the Tories.

In his actual text, Cameron (or his speechwriter) said something very different from the EDL's interpretation. Cameron (or the speechwriter) had taken note of the 20 January speech by Tory party chair Sayeeda Warsi denouncing Islamophobia.

Yet *Socialist Worker* (12 February) made its front page headline "Don't let the Tories play the race card", and started its lead article by screeching: "David Cameron... launch[ed] a vicious attack on Muslims... a tirade against Muslims".

Socialist Worker's demagoguery amounts to shouting down reasoned discussion of *political Islam* — the political doctrine that pretends to deal with social problems by constructing an "Islamic state", perhaps better called "Islamic clerical fascism" — by equating any attack on that *political doctrine* with a "racist" attack on all Muslims.

CONCUR

Far from making *Socialist Worker* the best and most militant opponent of Cameron, the demagoguery serves as cover for *Socialist Worker* to concur with Cameron on many of his substantive policies, such as the promotion of "faith schools".

Socialist Worker supported New Labour's Religious Hatred Act of 2006, and official backing for such bodies as the Muslim Council of Britain. As the LSE academic Chetan Bhatt points out, "The overwhelming number of [Muslim] organisations that the [British] government talks to are influenced by [or] dominated by... Jamaat e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood".

Old-fashioned chauvinist and racist criticism of "multiculturalism" would assert that there should be one "culture" in Britain, "traditional British values", and everyone should defer to it. Democratic and secularist criticism objects to classifying people (especially children) into different "cultures" (usually, moreover, identified with different religions) and instead seeks an evolving universalist "culture". *Socialist Worker* endorses "multiculturalism" — the orthodox bourgeois policy in Britain of recent decades — by way of ignoring the democratic and secularist criticism of it and pretending that the old-fashioned chauvinist and racist criticism is the only one around.

Muslims in Britain, mostly of Bangladeshi or Pakistani background, suffer from the racism which hurts all non-white people in this country. They suffer also when papers like the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*, and groups like the

EDL and the BNP, seek to "rationalise" their racism as opposition to Muslim bigotry, in much the same way past anti-Irish discrimination in Britain was once "rationalised" in terms of protest against Catholic bigotry.

At the same time, successive governments have sought to accommodate and link up with socially-conservative Muslim "community leaders", because that seems a cheaper way of keeping social problems under control than measures that would really improve things for badly-off people tempted by radical ultra-Islamism on one side or the EDL and BNP on the other. The New Labour government told the British press to shut up when Islamists and the Saudi government launched a campaign against a Danish newspaper publishing cartoons which included depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Tories did not dissent.

SPEECH

What did Cameron say in his speech? He criticised those who "talk about moderate Muslims [as the only acceptable one] as if all devout Muslims must be [politically] extremist. This is profoundly wrong".

He insisted on the difference between Muslim people in general, as people, and the political ideology of Islamism. Despite waffle in his speech about "British values" or "Western values", as if democracy and so on are specially "British", he explicitly rejected the American right-wing thesis of a "clash of civilisations". He even recognised that political Islamism can be generated by an alienation from Muslim religion rather than an immersion in it. "Some young men find it hard to identify with the traditional Islam practised... by their parents, whose customs can seem staid". In short, he did not attack Muslims in general.

He did not distance himself explicitly from the New Labour record, but he criticised government policies under which "some organisations that seek to present themselves as a gateway to the Muslim community are showered with public money despite doing little to combat extremism".

The choice of the word "extremism" reflects the conservative, servile mindset according to which any political view close to the status quo is respectable and reasonable, and anything seriously different is bad ("extremist"). But replace the word "extremism" by "political Islamism" and secular-minded or secularising Muslims who have seen Jamaat e-Islami or Brotherhood types accredited by government as the "gatekeepers" to their "communities" would have good reason to agree with Cameron.

Anti-Tory demagoguery is not helpful here — and least of all from *Socialist Worker*, which combines it with accepting David Cameron as a sponsor for the "Unite Against Fascism" campaign which it promotes!

Most of the actual words of Cameron's speech were not objectionable. The problem is the context (Cameron's social policies and his probable courting of EDL) which can make an ostensibly democratic critique of multiculturalism feed into its reactionary opposite.

One word yelled out from Cameron's speech by its absence: secularism. And a government which slams through big social cuts, axes half the funding for the teaching of English for speakers of other languages, tightens immigration controls (for all but the ultra-rich), promotes "faith schools" and increases their scope for sectarian admission criteria, is not helping social integration and the creation of an inclusive culture.

Finance capital cannot be our climate ally

Paul Hampton reviews *Climate Capitalism* by Peter Newell and Matthew Paterson

It is a measure of the state of climate politics when apparently radical thinkers accommodate themselves to the mainstream. In *Climate Capitalism* the disorientation of climate activists has found its academic expression.

Paterson's seminal *Global Warming and Global Politics* (1996) pulled to pieces the standard bourgeois international relations theories of global climate politics and proposed a more adequate political economy framework based on Marx and Gramsci. Peter Newell's book, *Climate for Change* (2000), built on this approach, to critique the function of IPCC scientists, the role of the media and fossil fuel corporations, as well as championing the work of NGOs in the climate process. Although neither has been an exponent of working class politics, much of their analysis was at least anti-capitalist and sympathetic to radical ecology. This work lurches towards detente with orthodox climate politics.

Newell and Paterson believe that low-carbon capitalism is not only possible but also the only viable alternative to neoliberal capitalism today. Climate activists should build a coalition with financial capitalists to bring this low carbon capitalist society about.

CAPITALISM

Newell and Paterson argue that: "the challenge of climate change means in effect, either abandoning capitalism, or seeking to find a way to grow while gradually replacing coal, oil and gas". However for them, "the issue is less whether we have climate capitalism or not, but rather what sort of climate capitalism we end up with."

Campaigners often say "we can't wait for socialism" to take action on climate change. Some point to the labour movement but argue that it is a long way from being a force that can contend for power. However recognition that capitalism provides the immediate context within which climate change has to be tackled does not mean the only way to campaign is to accept these limits and further to support capitalism.

Better to frame it this way: 1. the fight to tackle climate change under capitalism proceeds in spite of and against

the capitalist system and its actors; 2. without socialism, a systematic, democratic, collective, planned alternative to capitalism, it is highly unlikely climate change will be tackled adequately at all, or at least in an equitable way.

Newell and Paterson rightly acknowledge the dominance of neoliberal climate change politics.

The four key elements... "the fixation with markets, the domination of finance, the widening of global inequalities, and the focus on networks as a means of organising — have all combined to shape the character of responses to climate change". However by accepting capitalism as the only alternative, they make huge concessions to this actually existing neoliberal regime.

MAINSTREAM

Much of the book elides into outright support for the mainstream market "solutions" to climate change, such as the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme and the Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism.

They write: "From our point of view, the EU ETS has been a success — in political terms at least — because it satisfies one of the key questions raised by the imperative of climate capitalism: it creates a cycle of economic growth which can (in principle) promote decarbonisation, and can generate a whole constituency of interests in maintaining, even ratcheting up the system."

The collapse into mainstream politics is nowhere better illustrated by Newell and Paterson's advocacy of finance capital as the crucial social agent for tackling climate change. They write that: "Advances can be made when environmental activists get together with city financiers, or when carbon traders and development NGOs put their minds together to get money to flow into low-carbon development."

They conclude: "To shift from capitalism-as-usual to climate capitalism will require novel and imaginative forms of coalition and alliance-building... it is about bringing together people who could never have previously imagined working together — environmentalists with venture capitalists, trade unionists and business leaders, local government officials and UN bureaucrats." Here is precisely the kind of climate popular frontism we have denounced elsewhere, such as over the Green New Deal.

Working-class climate politics starts from the recognition that the causes of climate change are rooted in the

core drives of capitalism.

The mechanisms through which the working class is exploited by capital are those that give rise to spiralling carbon emissions, and lead to the real subsumption of climate under capital.

A Marxist understanding of neoliberal capitalism puts finance capital at the centre of this modern regime. Far from being separate and opposed to fossil fuel capital, finance is intimately bound up and integrated with it. One need only ask who finances fossil fuel capital, who moves its profits around, who invests and advises energy multinationals, to see the interconnections between the two. Therefore finance is not a potential ally in the enemy camp — it is just as much the enemy of climate campaigners as Shell and BP.

Working class climate politics requires a conception of change that has much in common with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. In this view the bourgeoisie are not the best makers of even a bourgeois revolution. Instead we put the working class and the organised labour movement at the centre of alliances with other social forces and campaigners.

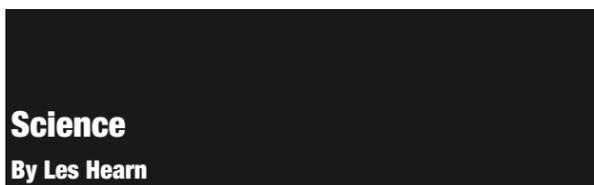
POSSIBLE

It is possible to raise demands to reduce emissions and tackle climate change while fighting capitalism. It is possible to integrate demands to protect the climate with the fight for socialism.

The best revolutionary socialists have always fought for reforms, as part of preparing the workers and their allies for the bigger struggles ahead, to widen the scope for action, to improve the context in which fundamental change can take place. Raising transitional class-based demands, building united fronts between workers' organisations and with others, without losing sight of the need to change the government and ultimately the system — this is a real alternative for climate politics.

Perhaps the fight to tackle climate change may not end in the overthrow of capitalism. It may just "decarbonise" capitalism. However to start with self-limiting politics and to promote alliances with the very actors who are bound up with the problem and who do so little about it seems precisely the kind of astroturf climate politics the authors have previously been keen to criticise.

Truth, science, and climate change



Science

By Les Hearn

Pilate: "What is truth?"; Lewis Carroll: "What I tell you three times is true".

Last time, I wrote about something which is scientifically uncertain, the role of human activities in the Queensland floods. This raises the question of truth — scientific truth — for example, whether it can be truthfully said that our activities are changing the climate of the Earth.

Nowadays, many have a sceptical view of what scientists say, such as on the consensus among climate scientists that emissions of carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases are resulting in global warming.

So what do scientists say about scientific truth? The best ones are surprisingly modest. Physicist Richard Feynman once said "We never are definitely right: we can only be sure we are wrong."

The best of science is done according to Mertonian norms, abbreviated by Robert K Merton to CUDOS: Communalism (research findings belong to the whole scientific community); Universalism (all scientists can contribute, regardless of race, nationality, culture, or gender); Disinterestedness (findings should not get tangled with one's beliefs or activities); Organised Scepticism (claims must be subject to critical scrutiny).

Scientists are always therefore giving their assessment of what the research currently says, in the form of a model consistent with fact and with predictive power (otherwise it's not much use!).

Models should be as simple as possible, making a minimum of new assumptions, according to Ockham's razor ("entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem"). This corresponds with the view that scientific theories should be "beautiful". Einstein felt that his theory of gravity, unlike Newton's which it corrected and replaced, was beautiful.

But, as Feynman said, "It doesn't matter how beautiful your theory is... If it doesn't agree with experiment, it's wrong." In fact, according to Karl Popper, if it isn't possible in principle to refute it, it isn't a theory at all but an article of faith.

Inevitably, scientists, being human, may depart from Mertonian norms and be influenced by career needs, prestige, laziness, or even money. However, this also holds true for sceptics of science, such as those who describe the work of the IPCC¹ as a conspiracy, or as environmentalist fundamentalism.

Theories of climate are imprecise and not, in general, beautiful; they reflect our imperfect knowledge of the world. However, the models are getting better all the time. Writing in *New Scientist*², Anil Ananthaswamy points out that, since there is only one Earth, scientists must rely on computer simulations to predict how the Earth will respond to human actions.

APPROXIMATE

The various models have to make approximations because of incomplete data and finite computing power.

They look at changes in land, oceans, atmosphere, and cold regions. They also look at the interactions between these; they divide the Earth's surface into units, called grid cells, and look at the effects of changes, say, in vegetation. Grid cell size has been reduced fourfold to 110 km across in the IPCC's 4th report in 2007, allowing more precise predictions.

Factors such as the effect of water vapour in the atmosphere are difficult to assess but newer models are attempting to do this. Briefly, water vapour is a greenhouse gas and more evaporation of oceans in a hotter climate might lead to positive feedback with an increasing rate of temperature rise. But more vapour would lead to more cloud cover, which can have a warming or cooling effect according to circumstances. Computer models will be more able to take clouds into account by the next IPCC report in 2014.

It is striking that all models give similar predictions for the temperature rise if the CO₂ levels double — from 2 to 4.5 °C. It is also not true, as various climate change deniers charge, that factors such as sunspots and cosmic rays have been ignored. Nevertheless, it is difficult to get across in a

headline that a rising trend in temperature is compatible with temporary decreases.

Deniers have also seized on errors and apparent underhand methods revealed in hacked emails. When these were shown not to invalidate the overall predictions, this got less publicity. As a result, public confidence in climate scientists is at an all-time low.

As Evelyn Fox Keller, emeritus professor of the history and philosophy of science at MIT, pointed out in *New Scientist*³, there has been a long campaign to discredit them, initially funded by business and libertarian-conservative interests in the US. An "army of sceptics" was recruited, some opposed to government regulation, some rejecting of intellectual authority and some believing that everyone has a right to an opinion. "The upshot is," says Keller, "that internet sites, radio and TV channels now transmit 'contrarian' attacks on climate scientists" daily. And, in the interests of "balance", even responsible media may give the impression that scientists are divided 50:50, rather than 95:5.

Our "own" contrarians, the former writers for *Living Marxism* magazine who now write for *sp!ked*, regularly attack climate change science. Ben Pile⁴ accuses climate scientists of pursuing their theories in order to give themselves a purpose in life. Paul Nurse, president of the Royal Society, says "Trust no-one: trust only what the experiments and data tell you." Pile cheekily says "But isn't this also the message from climate sceptics, who accuse institutional, official science of corruption and political motivation?" No, it isn't.

sp!ked journalists should listen to the economist Murray Rothbard who might have said "It is no crime to be ignorant of [climate science], which is, after all, a specialized discipline ... But it is totally irresponsible to have a loud and vociferous opinion on [climate science] while remaining in this state of ignorance."

Is the theory of global warming a scientific theory? Yes. It can be refuted, not quickly but in time — certainly well within the lifetime of most readers.

1. IPCC = Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change <http://www.ipcc.ch>

2. "Behind the predictions", *New Scientist*, 15 January 2011

3. "Stick to your guns", *New Scientist*, 8 January 2011

4. "Scepticism is not an 'attack on science'". www.spiked-online.com/

Lessons of the Underground jobs fight

By a Tubeworker

Despite widespread opposition from workers and passengers, London Underground (LU) cut hundreds of station staff posts on 6 February.

When LU announced these job cuts last March the RMT's London Transport Regional Council already had a campaign in place. "SOS: Staff Our Stations" had activists at dozens of stations giving out thousands of leaflets and collecting signatures on petitions.

That campaigning was particularly important for station staff, as they are customer-facing, they are often quite concerned to get public opinion on the side of tube workers. The Regional Council even produced station-specific leaflets letting passengers know exactly how cuts would affect their local stations. Several passengers' groups, including those representing disabled people, opposed the staffing cuts. After two meetings which the Tories deliberately made inoperative, the Greater London Assembly voted to oppose cuts.

But we needed industrial action as well. To the RMT's credit, it organised this as an all-grades dispute so that station staff would not be left to fight alone. TSSA (the clerical union) was involved, but it only balloted its station staff members; others, such as revenue control, engineers and service control, were not, and consequently worked during the strikes. Drivers-only union ASLEF refused to join the dispute, despite acknowledging that station staffing cuts adversely affect drivers.

But it took a long time to get a ballot going after the cuts were announced. A December 2009 legal ruling during a dispute on EDF Powerlink required the unions to provide the exact grade titles and work locations of everyone being balloted and they had to significantly update membership records. However, the unions should not have taken so long to update records and organise the ballot — that took until July, by which time people had started talking about "when" the cuts were coming in rather than "if".

Eventually RMT and

TSSA jointly announced four 24-hour strikes at four-week intervals from early September, with additional "action short of strikes" — an indefinite overtime ban, and later, a boycott of LU's policy of a £5 minimum Oyster top-up, a ban on higher grade working, and a work-to-rule for the engineering grades.

The strikes should have been for longer than 24 hours. 24 hours are never enough to put pressure on the bosses. Managers and scabs work 24-hour shifts on strike days then go home to sleep it off for two days. If we strike for two or three days at a time, they cannot do that.

But the four strikes were stronger each time, many more picket lines than in previous disputes, and significant unofficial participation from rank-and-file ASLEF members. This surprised some more pessimistic union officials and reps, and had management under real pressure.

XMAS

Instead of stepping up the action and calling new, longer strikes, with strike pay to help people cope with the financial pressure, the leaderships announced to the press that there would be a truce over Christmas, despite having no democratic mandate to do so.

A "truce" means both sides laying down their weapons but LU pressed ahead with cutting the jobs.

The unions did not explain to members properly why they had called no more strikes, nor why they changed some of the other action. Talks eventually restarted, but members felt that they were being left in the dark, which led to a loss of momentum and confidence.

The majority of reps and branches wanted a further, 48-hour strike before the implementation date, but TSSA and RMT's Executive decided against doing this. In effect they had given up more than two months before the cuts were due to come in; and then they rejected an opportunity to reassert pressure on the company.

There are already lots of incidents occurring due to low staffing levels. At a recent fight on a train at

Bermondsey there were not enough staff to deal with it. The staff member had to leave the gateline to assist, the gateline was left open and passengers streamed through while the fight spilled out onto the platform. One worker was threatened with a glass bottle. Eventually the police were called.

The unions can use these stories in the press and in the ongoing talks with management — but without effective industrial action, the effect will be limited. While reps run rings round management in "review talks" on job cuts, without industrial action they are unlikely to come to much.

Those in the unions who opposed striking again before implementation argued that if the talks do not lead to the restoration of a significant number of jobs, the unions could then call more strikes. But this, as we and others said, was not a credible strategy as by the end of the reviews, the new rosters would be established and members demoralised.

The dispute needed more rank-and-file control — democratic forums where members could give their opinion about where the dispute was going and have a direct stake in its direction. We also need stronger workplace organisation to support members through such a protracted disputes.

Ultimately, we need one all-grades union on the underground where different grades stick by each other.

"These staffing cuts are disastrous for both workers and passengers. There were a lot of positives in the union's attempt to stop them — the ever-stronger series of strikes, all grades and both unions acting together, public campaigning, and more. But we have not stopped this round of job cuts, because London Underground management dug in under instruction from their political masters. There are lessons for the unions to learn, and better ways to do things in future disputes. We can be sure that this is not the end of job cuts from London Underground or other employers: workers and our unions will fight every attack, and must do so more effectively."

Janine Booth, London Transport representative, RMT Council of Executives (personal capacity)

Unite declares its ballot illegal

By Darren Bedford

Unite has declared its own recent ballot of cabin crew workers, which returned a 78.5% majority in favour of strike action, unlawful.

This action sets a new and worrying precedent in the ongoing battle against Britain's anti-union laws. If Unite, the country's biggest union, is now so jumpy that it will do the bosses' and courts' work for them the ruling class will only grow in confidence.

Unite's decision is all the more bizarre given that the last time BA attempted to seek a High Court injunction against their strike ballot, the union appealed and had the injunction overturned. Senior union fig-

ures blame a BA "assault" on the Electoral Reform Society, the independent scrutineers that oversaw the ballot for the climbdown. BA saw an opportunity to act against the union when it picked up on statements surrounding the recent strike on Unite's website which appeared to link the ballot to the job cuts which sparked the 2010 dispute. In fact, this latest ballot is over sackings and victimisations which took place during last year's strikes; according to the 1992 anti-union legislation, bosses can sack workers for striking for the same reason if a period of three months has elapsed since the first strike. Although Len McCluskey, Unite's general secretary, doubted whether

BA would actually attempt mass dismissals of strikers, the union felt the risk was not worth taking.

Unite are dealing with a belligerent and anti-union employer in BA boss Willie Walsh, and caution, stemming from a desire to protect its members' jobs, is understandable. But to declare its own ballot illegal without even testing the employer's resolve indicates that it is running scared from Walsh.

The union has said it plans to re-ballot its members; cabin crew workers, who have shown their will to fight by voting in such significant numbers for further strikes, must hope that their union shows more backbone next time.

SWP all at sea

By Sacha Ismail

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is floundering. It had a big opportunity with the "People's Convention", organised through the "Right To Work" campaign, on 12 February.

The celebrity-heavy "Coalition of Resistance" (COR) and the narrowly factional NSSN had given it the opportunity, if the event were open, serious about debate, and oriented to unity, to become the centre for real networking against the cuts.

The SWP went through the motions, issuing calls for unity and inveigling the Labour Representation Committee into co-sponsoring. But on the day it produced only a drabber version of COR. The attendance was only about 500 (half COR's), and heavily SWP.

If the event turned out to be an SWP rally, then at least the SWP could have used it to enthuse members and friends for its main anti-cuts slogan: "the TUC

should call a general strike". It didn't mention the slogan.

Other recent events have given the same picture. When the English Defence League marched in Luton on 5 February, the SWP rightly, through UAF, counter-mobilised. But the turnout was (in proportion to UAF's reach) small, and confined to a dull, well-"kettled" concert in Luton city centre while hundreds of young local Muslims took to the streets elsewhere in the town.

The SWP has some weight among students and its strongest union fraction is in the lecturers' union UCU. But its National Education Assembly on 30 January had not much over 100 people, less than the SWP's own student membership.

The SWP has been ailing ever since the Respect debacle of 2004-7. Its position as the biggest group of the would-be left gives it durability and an almost "automatic" ability to win new recruits even when stumbling. But now the ill-health seems to be turning acute.

Young Labour revolt

By Patrick Finan

Young Labour Conference took place in Glasgow on 12-13 February.

Disgusted by the nature of the event a number of leftwing delegates organised an unofficial meeting to discuss how to democratise Young Labour. An informal national network of Young Labour delegates has been formed.

The Labour Party leadership regard Young Labour as a potential breeding-ground of leftism. The or-

ganisation is kept locked-down (elected YL officers are not given access to membership lists and the website has not been updated for two years); and so was this conference. There were no debates or votes on motions, only vague "seminars" and speeches from Labour MPs.

The organisation of the conference meant that out of around 1,300 potential delegates, only 300 were able to come. The Labour Students-aligned candidates for the YL Committee won almost all elections.

UWE academics strike

Following a 66% vote in favour, University and College Union (UCU) members at the University of West England in Bristol have struck over a management restructure that would cut some academic posts by 25% and force existing staff to reapply for their own jobs.

The strike action is the first in the UCU branch's history, and was bolstered by a flash occupation of UWE students which took control of a central campus location. The Core24 site was previously occupied for nearly a month in the November-December 2010 wave of student occupations.

Birmingham council strike ballot

Local government workers in Birmingham will demonstrate on 26 February and lobby their employer, the council, on 1 March, following unanimous votes at four mass meetings to push for a strike ballot.

Birmingham council, the largest local authority in Europe, is planning a cuts programme which would see workers lose allowances for night shifts and anti-social hours, and lead to a pay cut of up to a third for some workers. Park rangers and some library workers stand to lose up to £4,000.

Strike against academy status

Teachers at a south London school will strike this week against proposals to turn their school into an academy.

An 84% turnout returned

a 76.5% majority for strike action at Chestnut Grove school, which is set to lose money following the government's scrapping of the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Daily Star comes out for the EDL

By Patrick Murphy

You don't expect to see political news stories on the front page of the Daily Star. More than any other tabloid the Star is mostly a showbiz scandal sheet, leading most days with gossip about the sex lives of soap stars and premier league footballers. Was it then progress to see this paper, with so many working class readers, turn to politics for its front page?

Not at all. On 9 February the *Daily Star's* front page was "English Defence League to become political party" alongside an incendiary photo of an Islamist demonstrator at a military homecoming parade holding a placard reading "British soldiers burn in hell". Even by the standards of a paper known for exploiting anti-immigrant and asylum seeker the prejudice on display was stark. Here was an explicit endorsement of a street-fighting racist group by a mainstream newspaper.

Readers were told that "There is a visibly growing support for the EDL. It is attracting people across Britain to its ranks who feel the same way". To ram home the message that these thugs are people we can all identify with, the *Star* reported on a phone poll they had carried out which found, so they claimed, that if the EDL became a political party 98% of their readers would vote for it.

The 9 February front page was part of a longer

term campaign to boost the EDL by the *Star*. The previous day they ran a story about two Muslim councilors who allegedly "snubbed a British war hero" who had been awarded the George Cross (by refusing to stand up for him, as far as I can see). Another recent article was about poor helpless EDL leader Tommy Robinson needing a 24-hour guard as he was living under a death threat from "Muslim extremists". As it is Muslims, the death would have to be by "beheading" apparently.

I mean, they aren't going to know how to use guns, they are hardly James Bond. Little has changed in yellow journalism since the days of Boer fighters eating babies.

1930S

The parallel here is with the Daily Mail's support in the 1930s for British fascists, Oswald Mosley's "brownshirts" and Hitler's rise to power in Germany.

Then the relatively serious papers of the time endorsed fascism mainly on the basis that it was the only force, so they said, capable of defeating communism. In many ways the *Star's* open support for the EDL is worse. This is not a lazy love affair with an overseas fascist regime, before the Second World War, but an attempt to mobilize for a UK-based far-right movement based on racism.

The EDL has denied the claim that it plans to run in elections, but EDLers were

pleased by the boost from the *Star*. EDLer Stephen Martin responded to the article with the following:

"TODAY I sat there with my daily star with PRIDE, the pictures and banners were fair, the write up was fair, the Star comment was fair and 98 per cent back us... We have a voice now, 25p a day, if they have 74,000 new readers, we have a BIGGER voice" [sic].

And the *Star's* decision to back the EDL comes at an interesting time. The EDL demonstration in Luton on 5 February was supposed to be "the really big one". Their numbers were a lot lower than they boasted about expecting and there was no confrontation with anti-racists or Muslim youth.

As the left often find out, there is a limit to how much you can go on expecting people to turn out on a Saturday from all over the country for much-hyped events which turn out to be no more than hours of standing inside a police cordon. The EDL are therefore at a crossroads, considering where they go next. The *Star* appears to be goading them into becoming a political party and standing in elections. Party politics has usu-

ally been a road to disunity and decline for the British far right, and in this case it would mean tackling head-on a problem the EDL has been happier to avoid — the presence of the BNP. It would also test to breaking point their claim to be for lesbian and gay rights and race equality. Instrumental and odd though this part of their identity is, it serves an important function in attracting working-class people who do live in the modern world and think that explicit racism and homophobia make no sense.

Liberal commentators have focused on the argument that the *Star* is "playing with fire" and should consider what it could unleash. In fact the EDL would only reflect *Daily Star* politics if it became even more coherently right-wing, ditching the pretence at being anti-Islamic only out of some warped hostility to clerical religious conservatism and adopting explicitly homophobic and racist politics across the board.

The fact is, one of Britain's best-selling tabloids has for years been even more comprehensively right wing than the EDL!

Where are our workmates?

By the Cleaners Defence Committee

Last month 72 workers disappeared from Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals. They were part of the hospitals' ancillary staff.

They are migrants. Where did they disappear to? The economic crisis means their cheap labour is not as useful any more — at least for the moment. So the UK Border Agency was called in to get rid of them. The NHS trust complied. The workers were either arrested or deported.

The workers who clean the hospital and feed the patients earn around the minimum wage. And due

to the UKBA the workers are not even always paid for their hard work. Isn't this slavery?

As hospital users, as workers, as trade unionists, as migrants' rights activists we cannot stay silent in the face of this brutality. This is an attack on all workers.

We call for solidarity with the disappeared, with all migrants, with all workers, on Friday 18 February 5-7pm outside St Thomas' main entrance (Westminster Bridge Road, SE1 7EH). Called by the Cleaners Defence Committee and others.

• More information: email cdclondon@gmail.com or 07971 719797.

Teachers build for strike action in east London

By an east London teacher

In January the biggest local meeting of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) for a generation saw more than 120 members vote unanimously for a ballot for strike action to defend jobs and services in Tower Hamlets.

Over the next three years £70 million is being cut from the budget of one of the poorest boroughs, £38 million of that this year. In education huge cuts are being made to central services which provide outreach and support to schools and families.

These cuts include reducing Special Educational Needs provision to the statutory minimum and closing the junior youth service, which provides out of school care for children.

The school improvement team has been massively reduced, the e-learning and ICT support service will close, and the 15

teachers that work in children's centres have been cut to four. At least 40 NUT members will lose their jobs by 31 March. Many more Unison members' positions will be at risk as our LEA is more-or-less demolished.

The NUT is balloting all members in the borough asking them to vote yes to a one-day protest strike in March, and discontinuous action if necessary.

A package of services is being devised for schools to buy-back. Should individual heads opt-out of this scheme, the NUT would be able to pull out individual schools or clusters of schools without reballoting.

But all members are being balloted in Tower Hamlets, not only those who work in the small and isolated realm of central services.

A positive result is expected in the coming weeks. We plan to work closely with parents and students to organise events for the strike day.

230 pupils plus staff, parents and under fives at St James Hatcham Primary School in New Cross, London abandoned classes for a lesson in protesting on 14 February. They marched through local streets against the proposed closure of St James Hatcham Family Learning Centre. More than 200 families access services are provided by the centre. Lewisham council are cutting its £78,000 budget.

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

Women's liberation meeting

Monday 26 February, 6.30-9pm, at University College London, Gower Street

A meeting for women students, education workers and others who support the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts to come together, debate the issues and discuss our campaigning.

(Please note: this is a self-organised meeting open to all self-defining women.)

Email j.baker3@westminster.ac.uk for more details

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

Saturday 26 February, 11am-6pm, Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, London N19 5DQ

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

£5 waged, £4 unwaged/unl students, £3 school/college students • More information: students@workersliberty.org / 07961 040618