Royal Wedding: a celebration of privilege and parasitism

UP THE REPUBLIC!
By Dave Elliott

250,000 people joined demonstrations across Germany following the Fukushima disaster, calling on the government to phase out nuclear power completely. And after a massive swing to the Greens in the regional elections, Merkel’s battered government now seems willing to comply, with the backing of a key power industry trade association, BDEW, which has called for a full phase out by 2020 or 2023 at the latest. Two of the association’s clear plant operators E.ON and RWE, opposed the decision, but were outvoted. Germany currently gets 26% of its electricity from nuclear and 17% from renewables, so there will have to be a rapid switch over. Current plans are to push renewables up to 30% by 2020, 50% by 2030, 65% by 2040, 80% by 2050. That may have to be accelerated.

German Environment Minister Norbert Reithofer told Der Spiegel: “The events in Fukushima marked a turning point for all of us. Now we jointly support phasing out nuclear energy as quickly as possible and phasing in renewables.”

In Japan, with the Fukushima plants still far from safe and the exclusion zone now extended to 30 km, there have also been major anti nuclear demonstrations — on 10 April, 15,000 people marched in Tokyo in a demonstration organised by local shopkeepers, and 2,500 called for the closure of the so far unaffected Hamaoka nuclear plant, which is on an earthquake fault line. Meanwhile, what’s happening in the UK? The government has set up a nuclear safety review, and the final phase of the reactor “Generic Design Assessment” process has been delayed until after the safety review is complete later this year. However, initial indications were that the government was not expecting the safety review to result in major changes. Secretary of State Chris Huhne told the House of Commons on 24 March “we will have to wait to see its results and base the debate on the facts”, but he added “I do not anticipate that it will lead to nuclear power being ruled out in the future”. And later on he was quoted as saying: “There is no intention for us to do anything but learn the lessons...for example, about the back up for cooling.”

But there are also some signs that a policy shift may occur — with possible first steps. In 2009 he proposed eight new small reactor projects, reflecting the extra costs likely to be involved in trying to make the plants, and their on-site spent fuel stores, acceptable after Fukushima. They are all on the coast, at sea level. It may also have to rethink the proposal from the nuclear industry to extend the operating life of the UK’s existing plants — many are of similar age to the new reactors. However, in perhaps a poorly timed initiative, the nuclear lobby is pushing for the UK to spend more money on a new plutonium programme, for Mixed Oxide Fuel (MOX) production, using some of the 112 tonnes of Plutonium stored at Sellafield. This plutonium came from the decommissioned spent fuel from existing UK and overseas nuclear plants, some of which has been converted to mixed plutonium and uranium oxide fuel for use elsewhere — e.g. in Japan. There was 95 tonnes of MOX in Fukushima Reactor 3. They may not exactly be in the market for more.

We don’t need any of this. A whole fleet of recent scenarios have suggested that the UK, EU and indeed the whole, can get near 100% of its power from renewables by 2050, or maybe earlier, if the political will is there.
When the revolt against Qaddafi started in Libya, hardly anyone on the left — however clearly defined — could say anything in defence of Qaddafi.

With the start of the "no-fly zone", many on the left started to sidestep the issues within Libya and focus their criticism on Nato. Now, with the denunciation of NATO, in turn, as acting as a lever to introduce defence of Qaddafi and denunciation of the rebels into broad left discourse.

The Morning Star of 18 April, in an article by Alexander Cockburn, started by saying that the casualness in Qaddafi’s as- sasination of civilians, "cause for dismay", were "less than a medieval siege or Leningrad" (the 1941-44 siege of Leningrad by the Nazis, in which up to four million people died).

Remember being told during Serbien tyrant Slobodan Milosevic’s attempt to drive out or massacre the whole Kosovar Muslim population of Kosovo, that Milosevic was not as bad as Hitler? Same argument.

Cockburn slid on to suggest “that the rebels might actually be under the overall supervision of the international banking industry, rather than the oil majors”. Their provisional government has set up a central bank. Why is that sinister? Qaddafi, so Cockburn claims, had a scheme to create a new international reserve currency, “the gold dinar”, to replace the dollar and the euro.

This crasscock, the “Crimea" song para- phrasing the words of Saif al-Islam and declaring that “House to house, room, alley to alley, person to person we will disinfect the whole country from filth". The same will be their intention for Adjudia and Benghazai if the regime has any measure of success.

Fundamentally, NATO does not know what to do. Air strikes outside of rebel-held areas is one thing but intervention into a divided city at war is militarily tricky.

Meanwhile the flickers of Islamism in the rebel move- ment are fading. Even if they become more vocal in a post-war democratic set- tlement, they will be moving away from a jihadist militancy, or at least that is the feeling of both inter- national and domestic observers.

Fearful of the impact that intervention might have on moving people towards Islamists critiques of the US, NATO is wavering towards inaction. But leaving the re- bellion to the hands of the tyranny will also affect NATO’s reputation among the nations of the west fight- ing for democracy in the region, such as Egypt, Syria or the Arabian peninsula.

Our concerns are differ- ent from NATO’s, but there are massive implications for workers solidarity and the bringing together of workers in syria. Newcastle and Yemen around a struggle for democracy and liberty and against the vulgarities of a pro-Tyrant ley.

To throw our efforts into pushing NATO towards supporting the Libyan re- sistance, would amount to backing a massacre of our people, our children on the streets of Misrata.

“Stop the War" abandons rebels

By Dan Katz

The Stop the War Coalition (STW) is now an em- barrassing rump of Statists, Counterfire, the SWP, and similar types. STW, which took its lead from the classless “anti-imperialism” of the SWP and its Counterfire offshoot, is now concerned to strike poses of hostility to Britain and about to fail to help those fighting for democ- racy in Libya.

In its statement “Why we oppose Western intervention in Libya”, STW claims that “Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama have spoken clearly that NATO military intervention in Libya is a war for regime change”.

Sarkozy and Obama have said explicitly that Qaddafi is not a target and their war is only one to pro- tect civilians.

STW demands an “imme- diate end to NATO bomb- ing and military intervention”. It makes no call on Qaddafi to stop fighting. The meaning of these demands is the over- running of Misrata and the slaughtering of rebels, the re-imposition of Qaddafi’s rule, torture and massacre.

STW now sees the rebels as a mere outpost of impe- rialist ambition. “The Libyan opposition in Benghazi has been subordi- nated to the interests of Britain, France and the US.”

But the rebels are fight- ing for democracy, not on the basis of international companies, with whom, anyway, Qaddafi has long been happy to do busi- ness.

By Mark Osborn

From alliance to alley- way, from house to home — don’t over- throw you, Bashar!”

The revenge against the repulsive, brutal regime of Bashar Assad continues to spread geographically and deepen in intensity.

On Monday 18 April, thousands marched in the city of Homs to bury dead protesters killed over the weekend. Mourners chanting, “Either freedom or death, the people want to topple this regime!”

Le Pen, National Front and prominent human rights activist, said 10,000 people had occupied Al-Saa square in the centre of Homs late on Monday night. Demonstrators said the square had been re- taken from troops, and that they planned to occupy it until the regime fell.

The state responded by sealing off the town. Live ammunition and tear gas was fired, leading to the death of at least one person.

Over the past month of protests over 200 people have been killed by the regime, according to the Syrian Civil War Observers’ stew and dissident. A number of soldiers have also died, possibly killed by defusing to fire on protesters.

How SEU’s demonstra- tions were also reported on Monday in the southern city of Daraa – where protests began a month ago – in the Barzeh district of the capital, Damascus, and in Ain al-Alar in the northern province of Idlib.

Alongside repression, the regime has also promised reforms. It has released many in Britain, and Democrat and Islamist politi- cal prisoners. Assad also stated that 300,000 Kurds – born in Syria, but currently living without citizenship – would be granted Syrian nationality.

Most recently Assad has said the hated Emer- gency Laws, in force since 1963, would be abolished. However, the killings continue.

By Vicki Morris

French president Nicolas Sarkozy, flagging in the opinion polls, is attempt- ing to boost his popular- ity with appeals to the right and an exaggerated concern about the state of integration — or not — of France’s Muslim minority into national life.

This has been shown most obviously with the recent ban on wearing the burqa or niqab (face veil) in public.

This law came into force on the 11 May, and is currently being challenged in the Constitutional Court.

Sarkozy has also banned the wearing of “ostentatious religious symbols” at the corner of a mosque, the law has been passed by opinion polls, which is being strongly felt.

Marine Le Pen (authori- ties put the number at about 1,900). There are estimates to be about five million women of Muslim background in France. Sarkozy’s party, the Union pour un Mouve- ment Populaire (UMP), re- cently held a conference to discuss the integration of Muslims into French life, and has produced 26 pro- posals for discussion. These include extending a prohibition on wearing religious symbols in schools to mothers accompanying school trips.

The proposals seem to be aimed most at convinc- ing potential Front Na- tional (FN) voters, with their anxieties about the number of French Muslims (10%), that the UMP is “on the case”, and at confronting the view that they have been attempting for years now, to foster a specifically French Islam, without ties to foreign influences in- cluding more fundamen- talist strains in the Middle East and north Africa.

Thus, one of the 26 pro- posals is “the exercise of religious services outside of religious buildings will be subject to permission”. Sarkozy has expressed concern about the Islam “of the cloister”, where the state cannot hear what is being preached.

In 2004, the government banned the wearing of “os- tentatious religious sym- bols in schools; this included large crosses and the Jewish kippa, but was mainly targeted at the headscarf worn by some young women from a Muslim background. Sarkozy has been shaken by opinion polls which show that he would do worse in next year’s presi- dential first round vote than Marine Le Pen, the new leader of the Front National. A Le Pen poll showed Le Pen on 23 per cent. Sarkozy on 21 per cent, and Socialist Party leader Martine Aubry on 21 per cent. Aubry is likely to be replaced as the So- cialist Party candidate by Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who is likely to do better than either of them.

On these figures, Sarkozy would not be in the second round, which would be between a Socialist Party candidate and Le Pen.

A majority of the pub- lic, around 76%, sup- ports the burqa ban. The ban is also supported by a majority of Muslims.
By Jack Yates

Polls suggest the Tories and Liberal Democrats will lose 1,700 councillors on 5 May, mostly to Labour. That will bring into even sharper relief the contradiction between the unpopularity of the cuts — and the Tory/Liberal government forcing them through — and the reality of Labour-controlled councils imposing them locally.

In Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire these elections look set to force a change in the borough council. Labour is unlikely to win an overall majority but they will almost certainly increase their council representation. But in Broxtowe, two of the Labour candidates are canvassing on a clear “no-cuts” platform. Greg Marshall (candidate in Beeston West) and Anna Oates (Beeston North) joined Labour after the 2010 General Election. During their election campaign, they have combined an anti-cuts message on the streets with arguing inside the party. Greg Marshall: “There are councillors and council candidates in Broxtowe Labour Party who do not support this “last-cuts” position. They are frightened from stories, from 1980s, though individual councillors can no longer be attacked openly. Their argument is that we should wait for the return of a Labour government to sort the mess out. But that means the damage will already have been done.”

Labour activists need to be won to defying the cuts

TRADE UNION LINKS

Greg and Anna have linked five other candidates to sign a letter to local trade unions committing them to campaign with trade unionists who work in or use the services that are under attack.

“As future councillors in a victorious Labour council in Broxtowe, we pledge ourselves to vigorously oppose...cuts, support jobs for our members, defend public services and remain accountable to the organisations such as those in Broxtowe Labour Party’s policies, in the borough council. They will almost certainly take over key Labour and SNP council seats at its core?"

Throughout the past four years, the SNP has implemented reforms — however modest — which Labour failed to implement during the preceding eight years when it was in a coalition with the Lib Dems. The SNP’s election is largely based on promising a continuation of those policies.

The Labour leadership in Scotland is not prepared to attack the SNP from the left and argue that the SNP’s policies do not go anywhere near far enough. Such an approach is precluded by the Labour leadership’s own politics.

ANTI-TORYISM

Their way out of this dilemma is to come clean to a gut anti-Toryism and claim that Labour is best placed to challenge the Tory and Lib-Dem government in Westminster.

One difference between last year’s Westminster elections and this year’s Holyrood elections relates to the strength — or lack of it — of the Labour left in Scotland.

Numerically, it is probably even weaker than elsewhere in Britain, partly because of migrations to the SNP, or to the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) where the SNP was a serious political force. Organisatorily, it exists virtually only on paper.

But now and for the foreseeable future theLabour Party remains the focus for trade unions seeking change in the political arena (although how effectively unions organise and fight to secure such a change is another question).

The SNP on the other hand, has no such links with the trade union movement. Despite the fact that some union activists are SNP members, the SNP by its very nature, has no interest in becoming the “political wing” of the trade union movement in Scotland.

The SNP has moved on from its primitive nationalism of the 1970s and earlier. Its commitment to independence is expressed less vaguely than in the past.

But its overarching political framework is still defined by its goal of an independent capitalist Scotland. Another major difference between the Holyrood and Westminster elections is the fact that Scottish voters — in two votes — one for first-past-the-post constituency candidates, and one for regional “lists” — where the SNP was a serious political force. Organisatorily, it exists virtually only on paper.

Andrea Oates commented at a recent debate organised by Nottinghamshire Trades Council: “We need to build an anti-Tory movement that means it’s not just a minority council standing for a no-cuts budget but the majority of councillors supporting a large campaign.”

Seeking to re-establish and re-make links with the trade union movement locally is an important step in preparing any potential act of defiance by these councils. It also has implications for the kind of parties and labour movement that is needed to not only defeat the Tory/Liberal Alliance but also govern in the interests and under the direction of the working class.

RECKLESS

Also at the Trades Council debate was Councilor Alan Rhodes, leader of the Labour Group on Nottinghamshire County Council.

Although Labour councillors voted against the swingeing cuts-budget agreed by the Tory leadership of the council, he claimed that refusing to vote for setting a no-cuts budget was “reckless”.

Andrea responded that it was “reckless to cut liabilities, reckless to cut social services, reckless to close women’s centres.”

Large sections of Beeston have already been canivased and although many have already said “yes” or “no” when asked whether they intend to vote Labour, they have engaged canvassers in lengthy discussions, expressing doubts about Labour’s ability and willingness to reverse the cuts.

In these situations, having Labour candidates and Labour materials that spell out a “no cuts” position has been decisive in getting votes and winning back votes.

Greg and Andrea’s campaigns demonstrate what is both possible and necessary if we are to translate anti-cuts energy and sentiment into political action.

Unfortunately such campaigns are rare due to a lack of confidence as well as a lack of consistent working class politics.

The campaigns around Holyrood will require further organisation. If elected, the Beaver anti-cuts candidates and others like them can put under huge pressure to toe the party line.

Scottish left is in a sorry state

By Anne Field

Calling for a Labour vote, combined with rebutting the left and pushing the unions to assert themselves, is the only serious left policy in Scotland as Holyrood elections.”

Labour/SDP/Lib-Dem elections on 5 May. That is not because the Labour campaign, or the Labour Party’s policies, are good.

The Scottish Tories will be lucky to hang on to a handful of seats in the Holyrood elections the basic question is: do you want a Labour or an SNP government (or some kind of coalition with one of those parties at its core)?

The SNP does not claim to be a socialist party. But the policies on which it is contesting the Holyrood elections are far removed from those on which the Tories contested the Westminster elections. There is a big overlap between Labour and SNP policies.

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Up the Republic!

In recent years, polls have put support for abolition of the monarchy as high as 43 per cent, and one 2002 poll found that 70% believed Britain would be a republic within 50 years.

A majority still accepts the monarchy as harmless, or a boost to the tourist trade, or “a bit of fun”. But we have moved on a lot from the days — as recent as the early 1970s — when cinemas would play “God Save The Queen” at the end of every programme, and the audience was expected to stand.

The Windsor-Middleton wedding on 29 April will be used by the Government to try to distract people from the grimness of the cuts, and by the ruling class more generally to build up William Windsor as a “nice young man” whose arrival as king, possibly soon, can revive the monarchy.

This is not harmless. The monarchy is objectionable not only as a blatant celebration of inequality and privilege, but politically.

The Queen, not Parliament, chooses the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses the government, and thus “buys” himself or herself a “payroll vote”.

This gives the monarchy huge power. Do not be misled by the fact that the monarchy usually limits itself to showbusiness. The ruling class keeps the monarchy out of ordinary politics the better to have it in reserve for extraordinary politics.

In 1975, the Queen’s representative in Australia, Governor-General John Kerr, sacked that country’s reforming Labor government on the pretext of its difficulties in getting its Budget approved by the upper house of Parliament. Kerr installed the Tory opposition to rule instead, called a general election, rode out a big wave of protest strikes, and saw the exulant Tories win the election.

The Queen, or a future King William, could do the same in a political crisis in Britain.

One of the trade unions should come to reassure control over the Labour Party, and a left Labour majority which the ruling class saw as dangerous were elected to Parliament, the Queen or King William could choose a Labour right-winger for prime minister and through the “payroll” factor enable that prime minister to construct a majority from sections of Labour, Lib Dems, nationalists, and maybe some Tories, pleading the need for “consensus” and “national unity”.

Back in 1925, Leon Trotsky disputed the claim of the Labour Party leaders of that time that “the royal power does not interfere with the country’s problems”.

“The royal power is weak because the instrument of bourgeois rule is the bourgeois parliament, and because the bourgeoisie does not need any special activities outside of parliament: But in case of need, the bourgeoisie will make use of the royal power as a concentration of all non-parliamentary, i.e. real forces, aimed against the working class.”

In 1981, writing a book summing up lessons from 11 years as a Labour minister, Tony Benn asked what would happen “if a government elected by a clear majority on a mandate of reform were to introduce legislation to complete the process of democratic advance?”

“The Lords veto, the prerogative of the crown to dismiss and dissolve, and the royalities of the courts and the services to adjudicate upon legitimacy and to enforce those judgments might all be used to defend the status quo against a parliamentary majority elected to transform it”.

The monarchy is a feeble reserve power than it used to be. Having decided that its traditional methods of self-promotion, deliberately developed by Disraeli and others in the years beginning with Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887, had become too old-fashioned to continue, from the early 1980s the monarchy tried the methods of showbiz— and fell foul of them.

With people such as Sarah Ferguson, “Duchess of York”, as its representatives, it looked seedy, bloated, and boring. Maybe, in time, large sections of the ruling class will decide they could do better with an elected president than with the wretched Windsor family. But for now most of them pin their hopes on William Windsor and Kate Middleton to restore the mystique.

The workers’ government which we need in order to rescind the cuts and establish a decent livelihood for all cannot come into existence without democracy and cannot sustain itself without extending democracy.

We need, first of all, freedom of action for the trade unions. We need a federal republic in which public decisions are taken by accountable, recallable representatives, subject to frequent election on a fair system of proportional representation.

We need freedom of public information and entrenched legal rights for all citizens. We need rights of guaranteed access to the means of mass publicity for all substantial and serious bodies of opinion, not only those with wealth.

We need to force the giant corporations and banks to open their books to working-class scrutiny.

Down with the monarchy! Up the republic!

WHAT WE THINK

Democracy, yes! AV, no!

Many improvements need to be fought for in Britain’s electoral system, says Owen Jones in his book Chavs: the history of the second class. But the main left-wing critics call “bourgeois democracy” (parliamentary-type democracy operating within the social and economic domination of the capitalist class).

The government should be selected and accountable to Parliament. At present the prime minister is selected (or can be sacked) by the Queen, and then the prime minister chooses the government, giving himself or herself a large “payroll vote” to control Parliament.

The House of Lords and the monarchy should be abolished.

The Lords’ veto, the prerogative of the crown to dismiss and dissolve, and the royalities of the courts and the services to adjudicate upon legitimacy and to enforce those judgments might all be used to defend the status quo against a parliamentary majority elected to transform it.

The referendum on 5 May offers no scope for progress on any of those fronts. Neither of the AV political camps is putting forward alternative proposals for electoral reform.

No voting system is perfect. First Past the Post has three big problems:

- It grossly underrepresents minorities, especially minority groups spread across the country rather than localised. It introduces a bias into the electoral system in favour of the currently-dominant parties irrespective of the number of votes.
- It corrupts political choice by pushing people into tactical voting, as for example with the large number of Labour supporters in the south-east who tactically vote Lib-Dem.
- It focuses the major parties’ political efforts on a small minority of voters — floating voters in marginal seats — which means, sociologically, in a middle-class and upper-working-class minority.

AV helps none of those problems except the tactical-voting one. The improvement it gives on tactical voting has to be weighed against the new pressure it adds on parties to focus their electoral efforts on haggling for second-preference transfers from other parties.

The general bias of AV is to polarise politics into two large blocs, each bloc clustered round one main party and tied together by agreements to transfer preferences. It makes it even more difficult than FPTP for radical left candidates to win elections, because of the tendency of second-preference transfers to gravitate towards the centre of politics.

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Unison: don’t break ties with the Histadrut

Eric Lee

One litmus test of whether one is engaged in reasonable medium of action or other content from whether you think anyone in the Jewish state is a legitimate partner for discussions.

If you think everyone in Israel is somehow complicit in the occupation, that every Zionist is a racist, and so on, you will not want to have anything to do with Israeli peace organisations or the left.

In the trade union movement, this is expressed through the question of relations with the Histadrut, Israel’s national trade union centre.

Most unions in most countries have no problem with the Histadrut. In fact, at its congress last year the International Trade Union Confederation representing some 176 million organised workers elected Histadrut leader Ofir Eini as one of its vice presidents.

But in some unions there are those who call for a severing of relations with the Histadrut. One of those unions has been Unison.

At its National Delegate Conference in 2009, a resolution was passed calling for “a review of our relationship with the Israeli trade union centre and our sister Histadrut union.”

In early 2010, a Unison delegation was scheduled to visit the region to follow up on this. The trip was delayed until the end of the year and only now, in April 2011, has the union published the report of that trip.

It’s a long report, full of information about the various Israeli and Palestinian workers’ groups, highly critical of Israel and so on, but the bottom line is that the delegation recommends that Unison keep up its relationship with the Histadrut.

And that’s because despite their very best efforts, the Unison delegates could find no one, Israeli or Palestinian, who supported the severing of relations.

In fact, it was the Palestinians who were most adamant on this point.

Here is what the Unison report says in full:

“All the communications we met during the delegation including the PGFTU, the new Israeli trade unions, and Israeli NGOs are or have been critical of the Histadrut in the past for various reasons. However, they all stressed that the Histadrut was a legitimate trade union and with over 700,000 members was clearly the dominant trade union in terms of members and collective bargaining coverage.

“Even the new Israeli unions accepted that the Histadrut had an essential role for Israel’s strong labour and employment protection legislation. They also recognised that the Histadrut remained influential, although less so than in the past, in the Israeli government.

“Neither did any of them call on Unison to sever its relations with the Histadrut, in fact the opposite. The PGFTU in particular said that Unison should maintain links with the Histadrut so that we could specifically put pressure on them to take a more vocal public stance against the occupation and the settlements.

“Kav LaOved, Koach laOvdim and WAC/Ma’an all felt that the Histadrut was essential in moving it towards more progressive policies in relation to migrant workers and discrimination against Palestinian workers.

“Every union in the UK and elsewhere that has considered severing its ties with the Israeli trade unions should be compelled to read that report.”

King Mswati III

Swaziland: epitome of monarchy

King Mswati III of Swaziland and his entourage (he has 13 wives) are expected to be honoured guests at the Royal Wedding, and will stay in a hotel whose rooms cost over €400 a night.

But in Swaziland, demonstrations against the king’s autocratic rule by trade unions and opposition activists have been broken up by the police.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is a landlocked largely-mountainous African state a little smaller than Wales, with a population of about a million people. A former British colony, it remains an absolute monarchy. Political parties have been banned since the suspension of the constitution in 1973.

The four corners of the country’s population are subsistence farmers. Almost 70% live in poverty.

Swaziland has the highest HIV infection rate in the world, with more than one in four of the adult population (those aged 15-49) infected. In the past decade life-expectancy has collapsed from about 60 years of age to around 45 (Amnesty International).

Opposition activists and trade union leaders face arbitrary arrest, beatings and torture by police and security forces. Some have been charged under anti-terrorism legislation.

Moslisi Mhatsa, treasurer of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, died after being beaten by police.

A contingent from COSATU, the South African Trade Union Congress, rallied in solidarity at the border between the two countries and helped ensure wider media coverage of the latest demonstrations.

My daughter is working in Swaziland on a community project. Project-managers held her not to attend work on the day of the recent demonstrations. She heard police sirens through the day, and road-blocks and checkpoints remain in place.

As the Swazi king and his circle prepare to attend another extravagantly-self-regarding exercise in royal pomp and circumstance here, orphaned children in his country go with no heat or light, the poor, inequality and preventable disease take their daily toll.

For further information, including the founding statement of the newly-formed Swaziland Communist Party, see:

http://swazilandcommentary.blogspot.com/

Cliff and Libya

The SNPs line on Libya contrasts with the arguments of its founder Tony Cliff.

While outlining our principled opposition to the police, as the SNP leadership does, he would say that, faced with a sizeable fascist mob, it would be unwise for a small band of socialists to shout “Police out!”

Les Hearn, north London
Inside the Tunisian revolution

From 3 to 9 April, Workers’ Liberty activist Edward Malty went to Tunisia to meet and hear from left activists there. On this and the following two pages he reports. More and longer interviews can be found at www.workersliberty.org/world/tunisia

Thank you, Facebook

Graffiti on walls in Tunis say: “Thank you, Facebook”. Maher, a Facebook activist and blogger, explained why to Ed Malty.

For people in Tunisia, Facebook is a fundamental part of life. The majority of people use it daily. When the dictator censorship censored Facebook, that touched everyone in Tunisia. Everyone felt it.

In 2008 we organised a collective online called “anti-ZBA” (ZBA are the initials of Zinedine Ben Ali). We used pseudo names and proxy servers. Internet technici ans found other ways of connecting us to the internet after connections were shut down. Facebook was the only platform for expressing yourself, sharing information, as all the media were controlled by the state and oppositional newspapers were suppressed.

Our method was to attack Ben Ali and his family, distributing information about their corrupt practices and hypocrisies. It was an organised attack. We could only use Facebook, as YouTube and DailyMotion were blocked.

Our page was attacked by censors. The joke name for it in Tunis was “Facebook to Ammar 404”. When a page is censored, it brings up the 404 Page Not Found error message; and 404 is a kind of van. The stereotypical image in Tunisia of this van is that it’s driven by a guy called Ammar. So the internet censor’s name is Ammar. In 2009-2010, we organised an event on Facebook called “Saysiyh Salah Ya Ammar” – meaning “let Salah go, Ammar”. That slogan meant “let us use the internet freely”.

We used the internet to organise a demonstration in summer 2010, where hundreds of people marched in the streets in white T-shirts to symbolise our anonymity. The police terrorised the demonstrators and there were arrests. One blogger, Azziz Amemou, was arrested. He has now been given a high-ranking post in the ministry of youth. After the revolution, many bloggers, like Azziz, have got a little something for themselves and they’ve dropped out of activity. But we have carried on.

Just after the 14 January, plenty of Americans came to Tunisia to set up organisations and they enlisted journalists and bloggers who were active among us. Now these journalists and bloggers are not with us any more, because they are busy setting up these stupid associations on American money. I view this as a form of colonisation. It is not an apolitical or an innocent move.

As a blogger, if you are not with the people, behind the people, what are you doing? There is a revolution going on, and these people are setting up politically naïve festivals, naïve events and groups, instead of taking part in the struggles of the people.

Anti-ZBA started with five or six of us in 2008-9. But the “404 Not Found” demo, with white T-shirts, in 2010 was just normal students. We anti-ZBA were fighting against Ben Ali; they just wanted freedom of expression. The fight for free expression was then a part of the fight against Ben Ali, so we worked together.

Whereas for us, freedom of speech was only one part of the struggle, for many of them, it was the whole deal, mission accomplished. So now they are dropping out, some taking posts in the new establishment, and so on.

We have carried on fighting against the remnants of the regime. My friend runs a radio station called Kalma, which struggled against the dictatorship, and he doesn’t have the right vise to get a radio frequency, so he is still confined to the internet. Various sites are still being taken down. We want freedom of expression and freedom to organise.

There are bloggers who right now are being beaten by the secret police after participating in agitation around the Casbah.

There is now a page called “Front of Progressive Pages for the Protection of Revolution”, which unites the admins of all pro-revolutionary websites — we want them to all be united with the same demands and slogans.

We will work to be on the same wavelength as the people. The internet was useful in the fight against Ben Ali, but it must not stop on the internet. The role of Facebook is to organise real life events. It is a media support for real-life action. People go to the internet to get real information.

Disinformation exists, sure — but it is disproved by the videos and photos that people take on demonstrations. We send activists onto demonstrations with cameras, who stream footage of events. It’s the collaboration between internet and real-world activists which is on the order of the day now.

Timeline

17 December 2010: Mohamed Bouazizi burns himself to death in protest against police harassment of his work selling fruit and vegetables. This sparks waves of protest across Tunisia.

14 January 2011: President Ben Ali flees the country. His prime minister, Mohammed Ghannouchi, declares he will take over as interim president. Tunisia’s constitutional court rules that the speaker of parliament must be interim president, but Ghannouchi continues as prime minister and forms a new coalition government including many figures from the RCD (Ben Ali’s party) and the old regime.

17 January: Ghannouchi promises wide reforms, press freedom, the release of political prisoners.

20 January: All the ministers in the interim government quit Ben Ali’s RCD party; the central committee of RCD is dissolved.

23-26 January: Demonstrations in the old city, or casbah, of Tunis, and strikes elsewhere by the UGTT union, demand the new government be dissolved. Ghannouchi replaces 12 ministers, but remains prime minister.

7 February: RCD officially “suspected”.

11 February: Creation of “National Council for the Safeguarding of the Revolution”, involving the UGTT and all the left groups.

24-27 February: New demonstrations to demand Ghannouchi go. He resigns on 27 February, and Beji Caid Essebsi becomes prime minister.

3 March: Government announces that elections for a Constituent Assembly will be held on 24 July.

17 March: “Higher Committee for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution” (SPFLOR), set up by gov ernment with participation of the UGTT and the left, holds its first meeting.

On the streets of Tunis

Ed Malty describes his visit to Tunisia

I arrived in Tunis just after the army had prevented a third Casbah sit-in, aimed at extracting fundamental democratic reforms from the third government, under the octogenarian Sebsi.

The movement was in something of a lull, but there were tanks and razorwire all over the city centre; periodic clashes with the police, and new graffiti appearing every day: “Down with repression”; “The women of Tunisia are free”.

“Down with the old”; “Sebsi is a sham”; “Free at last”.

The revolutionary movement in Tunisia is still ongoing. Despite the fact that press freedom has not yet been fully won, young Tunisians are setting up politically naïve events and groups, instead of taking part in the struggles of the people.

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Since 14 January, there have been three governments. The first two, under Ghannouchi, were brought down by sit-ins in the Casbah, the square in front of the government palace.

I’d come to Tunisia mainly to find out what Tunisian revolutionary socialists are doing and saying.

The recent history of Trotskyism in Tunisia goes back to the mid-1980s; when a group called the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (OCR) was founded as a section of the Fourth International (the international network clustered around the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France).

The group was made up of young workers and intellectuals. The foundation of the OCR took place in the context of the implementation of the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programme, an assault on working class living standards which was the spark for bread riots in 1984.

The IMF programme came with a higher level of political repression, orchestrated by the new President Ben Ali; he created a police state. The OCR had to start operating underground. For a period, they produced a newspaper, Al-Charara (The Spark); their militants went to work in different sectors of industry, and organised dissident cultural milieux, and oppositional political associations.

In 1992, 40 comrades were arrested and tried. The group was able to continue its activity, but some were jailed, and others were forced to live underground.

In the midst of the revolution of January 2011, the comrades organised a re-groupment, launching a new organisation, the Workers’ Left League (LGO).

The LGO bases itself around the need to push the revolution forward to working-class power, but it is broader in its make-up than the old OCR.

Its political basis will be clarified when it has its first conference this spring.

SOLIDARITY 7
ARAB SPRING

By Said

People in Bahrain are expecting the worst every moment. The military crackdown on protesters led by Saudi troops has unleashed an ugly racist face. Bahrain was always a lunar country and the ruling regime itself is a secular tribe. But as a tribe, it had a problem with equality and justice. Other citizens, not in tribes, found themselves lost as they were treated as second or third-class citizens.

The ruling regime has always monopolised the nation’s natural resources and wealth — citizens who founded Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco) and other companies found themselves deprived of their real rights.

It was no surprise that Bahrainis were one of the first to rise against their regime. They maintained a peaceful tone throughout, but what happens when Bahrain becomes a Saudi protectorate?

Bahrainis are made up of four main ethnicities: Barha (Arab Shia 60%), Howala (Iranian Sunnis 20%), Ajman (Iranian Shias 10%) and finally tribes (Arab Sunnis 10%).

In the aftermath of the crackdown, the military led government bodies have stepped towards discrimination against Shias of Arab and Iranian ethnicities. It’s clear that the Saudi troops want to pull Bahraini people towards a sectarian state where hatred predominates.

TheOverseas Bahraini Workers’ Union has stepped towards discrimination against ethnically Shia with no national citizens!

The prime minister has explained, “We won’t forgive anyone at any time, no matter how many apologies they present.” Noor Najaf, the captain of Bahraini’s national basketball team, was interrogated on BTV, and arrested until it was revealed that the team was travelling. Noor Najaf is an old religion which was prominent in Iran before Islam spread. Some sectarian people use the word Majoos to derogate Shias which was prominent in Iran before Islam spread. Some sectarian people use the word Majoos to derogate Shias of Arab and Iranian ethnicities. It’s clear that the Saudi troops want to pull Bahraini people towards a sectarian state where hatred predominates.

In one interview on a Wahabi TV channel a Saudi general said: “It’s our land, we the Sunni, no place here for Chamees, Majoo’s. Majoo is an old religion which was prominent in Iran before Islam spread. Some sectarian people use the word Majoos to derogate Shias and link them with Iran. These chants can result in a call to ethnically cleanse Shias.

In recent weeks four detainees passed away in prison with their corpses covered in bruises and evidence of torture. The Home Office has always denied any torture or sometimes the imprisonment of prisoners until deaths are announced.

Among the prisoners are 15 women. Interestingly, 12 hospital doctors were arrested for being active and helping injured people, when the casualties couldn’t reach the hospital without being stopped and investigated at the hospital entrance.

Some students as many as 90 Bahraini students abroad are not safe from Bahraini’s regime. They had their funding to universities stopped because some evidence shows they supported calls for reforms and democracy.

The verdict has been already announced; they are all plotting with Iran against Bahraini’s regime. Iran seemed to be a good enough excuse to excise all the anti-human rights led acts by Saudi troops.

Without Saudi army troops, the Bahraini regime couldn’t get back any control over Bahrain. Yet the question remains whether the Bahraini regime could make a deal with any opposition party or group. There is a huge political gap that couldn’t be filled even by opportunistic parties or people.

The ethnic cleansing that is currently going on will result in a civil war in future, even without the army being part of it.

The government’s threat

The creation of Councils to Safeguard the Revolution was at the outset an almost spontaneous initiative. Immediately after 14 January the old regime startedorganising terror and sabotage.

Inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods armed themselves and have organised in order to defend their streets and lives and their revolution. Men and women, young and old, acted as one body, took up arms and formed committees. It took hold among the youth and the trade unionists.

These Councils have regarded the Revolution (CNRs) were set up in every region and crowned by the creation of the National Council to Safeguard the Revolution (SCSR). The National Council was an initiative of the UGTT, the Front of 14

Fundamentalist threat

Mounjia Hadfi, a women’s rights activist and Marxist based in Tunis, spoke to Ed Malby

Under the dictatorship, and today, we see patriarchal attitudes everywhere. Part of that has to do with our culture here in Tunisia, where societies such as the banning of polygamy in 1950 and laws guaranteeing the right to abortion and so on, which were passed in the 1970s as part of the population planning policy.

But sexism and oppression persist. Many women have even internalised these attitudes. We must unroll all the forms of oppression and all the sexist attitudes which exist.

We see political and economic violence against women. Unemployment is one such form — and the criminalisation of poverty. And the feminisation of poverty.

Poverty has a woman’s face! Because of their precarious status. In underdeveloped countries women are not protected by laws which could guarantee a level of quality of life. So since the business closures came in 2008 the crushing majority of victims have been women.

Women are discriminated against in the realm of inheritance law.

Also, after 14 January we have seen a huge expansion in the political presence and confidence of fundamentalist groups. We are fighting for a secular constitution but they are making it harder. You see those groups in the street and they have absolutely no political programme to offer — except on the question of whether or not the constitution should be secular.

So we must fight for secularism and democracy. In the elections for the Constituent Assembly, we must guard against any drift — away from secularism but also away from rights which we have already won. The old RCDists who are reorganising are not the only counter-revolutionaries. There are also the fundamentalist groups through they fake and claim to be for the revolution and human rights. This will be a great battle we need all the democratic forces to take part in for the revolution and human rights. This will be a great battle we need all the democratic forces to take part in for the revolution and human rights.

The struggle goes on. We need a constitution to protect our rights. Patriarchal attitudes are deeply rooted and intertwined with capitalism, which is why patriarchal politics and pro-capitalist politics go so closely together. It will be a long fight — and for me, the fight against sexist oppression has to be a fight against capitalism.
The army is still a presence on the streets

For 200 years, thinkers have talked about the “Arab exception”. That means that at a time when democracy exists in many countries, self-determination of nations and so on, including in many countries which are similar to the Arab world, such as for example Latin America, the Arab world has stood apart, under dictatorships, despoticisms, totalitarian and even theocratic regimes.

That posed the problem of power. The government started to manoeuvre to supplant the National Council with a parachuted-in committee. There were many protests, but in the end it was created, this spectral committee [the Higher Committee, ISPLOR]. This committee was charged with preparing the electoral law to set up elections to the Constituent Assembly and in a formal sense to supervise the provisional government.

We are struggling in part against the legitimacy of this committee, and seeking to re-establish the legitimacy of the National Council and its project of a government based on consensus, in order to provide a more legitimate basis and conditions for elections to the Constituent Assembly.

When I say “a government based on consensus”, obviously pro-RCD and obsolete, counter-revolutionary parties would be excluded from that consensus.

The National Council is composed of the UGTT (trade union federation), the 14 January Front, and local and regional delegates from local and regional CSRs — but FIDH, Ennahda [the main Islamist group] and some other liberal parties have left the SCSR to join the government’s committee [and many parties are represented in both].

-surprise

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It has been a black period in the Arab world. Pro-democracy forces had lost the historical initiative. People counselled despair: saying the Arab world was out of history and only possibly foreign intervention could shake things up. History has surprised everyone!

Osama: We cannot dissociate these movements in the Arab world from the economic crisis of neo-liberalism. I think that in dictatorial countries in the world, neo-liberalism shows us its most atrocious face. So, see for example, here and in China too. I think the revolutionary wave will have echoes elsewhere in Africa and Asia as well as the Arab world. Those places where neo-liberalism expresses itself in the most atrocious forms cannot remain in place in the face of these movements.

Majid: The precise terminology used is “voyoucracy” — mafia states. These revolutions have laid bare the mafia practices of Mubarak, Ben Ali. It’s not just neo-liberalism, it’s also their mafia system.

Osama: A few years ago, George W Bush said approvingly of China that it was an exemplary vision of neo-liberalism working perfectly.

Majid: From this wave I do not exclude the industrialised countries, which globalisation has made interdependent — economically but also on the level of information — with the rest of the world. A greater level of communication between the oppressed is the result of the information revolution.

It is not out of the question that the exploited classes will make a chain reaction. For example, Sarkozy was very clearly the accomplice of Ben Ali. It’s such links that create an interdependence of oppressed classes.

From these revolutions and these links, we can conclude more firmly than ever before that society revolves around the struggle of class against class and not of nation against nation.

Art in revolution

Atef Ben Hassine, a stage and cinema actor in Tunisia, spoke to Ed Maltby

My new play, “Intox”, is split up into two parts. The first part is set before the revolution and the second part is about our fears for the future of the revolution.

We’re afraid of the revolution being derailed and turned back into the old regime. We don’t trust the old regime. In the play, we put a president in place who is a famous public figure, his face is in all the primers in the schools: “Abi [papa] Mabrouk”. The point is, we should refuse a president who is a “father to the people” — we should just have a President who is employed by the state. We don’t want a father: that is the essential message of the play.

Under Ben Ali, there were two types of art: official art, empty and tacky; and another art, unofficial, under censorship. But in the theatre, we were cleverer than the censors: we had ways of expressing ideas that the censor could not understand.

We would treat social themes — the problem of theatre was the problem of the citizen in Tunisia. We couldn’t talk about politics. But we could put on productions which spoke about social conditions.

Plays were not eliminated, but it worked like this: the state was both producer and distributor. When you were censored, your play didn’t get bought. But that doesn’t mean your play was banned. They didn’t directly ban plays.

Will censorship continue? Let’s say that this latest play is the first time I have performed without having to go before the “commission” and obtain a “visa”.

The revolution has opened horizons. It’s a question of what’s in people’s heads. The thing with this freedom is that we now have to educate Tunisians to be free and accept difference: it’s a matter of democratic culture. I believe artists are responsible for educating people in accepting new ideas. We must see the importance of the artist if we want to really teach people to speak freely.

Regime theatre was very populist. There was no message, political or social, it was empty. Just jokes, no substance, nothing noble. It was grotesque — but malformed, there is at least art in the grotesque but there was none here. It was boudouro — real cheap.

There is no theatre in the working-class neighbourhods. We have not had that experience. It is something we have dreamed of, a people’s theatre, but it hasn’t happened. If I went now and did a play in a working-class neighbourhood, got dressed up, it would turn people’s heads around: and the state did not like the thought of that. It would be great to see an infrastructure which would allow theatre in these neighbourhoods — but that takes preparation and resources.

What you see in the streets in the way of popular culture is music, because it’s easier for a musician to just come up and play in the street. If I went into a café now and put on a spectacle, people wouldn’t accept —

We talk a lot about the social and political aspect of the revolution — work, money, dignity. That’s true. But we must not forget the cultural aspect. If we want to win this revolution, it will come via ideas, via people’s heads. That’s the role of art and artists.

I teach theatre, and teaching to think differently is part of that work for me. We must educate people, and theatre, art is a part of that.

More on AWL website

Interview with Jalel Ben Brik Zoghlami, Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière (Workers’ Left League/LGO)

http://alturl.com/rzhuj
Keeping your head

Bambery quits SWP

By Tom Underrainer

On 10 April, long-time leading member Chris Bambery resigned from the Socialist Workers Party, complaining about “factionalism”. Chris Bambery has been secretary of the SWP’s front anti-cuts campaign, Right to Work. On 12 April, 38 Scottish SWP members followed. Tom Underrainer analyses the background.

According to Chris Bambery there is a “cancer eating away” at the SWP’s “heart”. The name of this cancer is “factionalism”.

This claim is repeated in a joint letter of resignation signed by a significant number of SWP members in Glasgow.

Bambery claims that the “party has been afflicted by factionalism for four years and grips the leadership on the [Central Committee] which is seen as the gang of “them” against “us”.

The “factionalism” found expression at a recent meeting where Bambery’s fellow CC member Martin Smith variously described him as having played a “filthy”, “disgraceful” and “foul” role within the party. Along with the vast majority of SWP members, we have no idea if this is a fair summary of his recent activity.

His robust treatment at the hands of the leadership committee of the SWP — including accusatory language — would not encourage any pity for the man. Bambery has all the charm and savoir faire of a sledge hammer and meted out similar invective to SWP members when serving as National Secretary over many years.

Yet, one can be forgiven for noting the coincidence of his resignation with the resignation of the Scottish group leader, Bambery has taken a sizeable number out of the organisation which strivestosuppress real debate and discussion. No one of it is related to the specific issues resulting in the “factionalising” of the party.

Likewise, documents produced by the party leadership in the run-up to conferences throughout the “four years of factionalising” have contained not a single substantial theoretical contribution explaining or analysing the differences.

Search the website of the Counterfire organisation and there’s really nothing explaining where they came from and why they’re no longer in the SWP.

These features make clear not just an unwillingness but an inability to coherently articulate the political differences.

So why the inability to explain? Could it really be the case that there are no real differences? Or is it the case that an organisation which strives to suppress real debate and discussion cannot do other than crush the ability to theorise and explain your approach and political ideas?

The few political mos in the letters from Bambery and his activity bureaucratically, but because they have neither the will, ideas or organisational power to contest and operate in a democratic and open party, such facts cannot be anything other than discouraging for the majority of SWP members.

Since Bambery’s removal from the position of National Secretary and the subsequent reign of first Martin Smith — who was himself removed from the post under a cloud — and then Charlie Kimber, the SWP has taken a turn towards “party building”.

One would expect “party building” (i.e. recruitment and the promotion of revolutionary organisations as a parcell of any normal revolutionary organisation’s functioning. Not so for the SWP. It seems that first Rees and German and now Bambery and the Scottish group have accused the current Party leadership of abandoning the “successful” model of “united front work”, tried and tested through the zenith of Stop the War and Respect, in favour of blunt and inward looking recruitment exercises.

Accordingly — so the criticism runs — the party has negotiated anti-cuts workdate splitting from the outside at local and national anti-cuts events and initiatives.

But from close observation and first-hand experience, one of the few admirable qualities possessed by every and every anti-cuts member is their total lack of intellect for recruitment. No opportunity is wasted to sell the paper or wave the recruitment form. This is good and normal practice for a truly party socialist organisation.

But the obvious danger is that the way is open for all manner of proclamations, handouts and self-proclaimed “methods” of recruitment. One can be sure that no anti-cuts member is unaware of the “promotion” of revolutionary ideas to be part-and-parcel of any normal revolutionary organisation’s functioning. Not so for the SWP. It seems that First Rees and German and now Bambery and the Scottish group have accused the current Party leadership of abandoning the “successful” model of “united front work”, tried and tested through the zenith of Stop the War and Respect, in favour of blunt and inward looking recruitment exercises.

WHAT NEXT?

By any account, the SWP is a much diminished organisation. According to Bambery’s letter, there is now only one person on the leadership body with any significant influence in the group — Alex Callinicos. With Bambery, the SWP has lost a leading comrade who — whatever his personal qualities — is a proven political force. There is no clear direction from the leadership, other than a new call to “build for June 30” when united national strike action is likely in some public sector unions. The SWP is politically and organisationally adrift, and there is no-one and no group of people set to turn the situation around.

This much is clear: there has been no promised democratic renewal in the SWP and ordinary party members are unable to express dissent or be organised into a democratic minority. As long as the SWP continues to function in such a way, it will be susceptible to more such defections.

If a party is to survive, it must have a clear direction. The leadership remained in the SWP after the previous round of resignations in order to maintain the organisation in its current state. But at a later date, this speaks of a majority of the leadership who are — to put it bluntly — politically-wright.

Neither Bambery failed to “deal with” Bambery and his activity bureaucratically, but because they have neither the will, ideas or organisational power to contest and operate in a democratic and open party, such facts cannot be anything other than discouraging for the majority of SWP members.
The basic issue for socialists in confronting the Libyan situation is this: we wish Qaddafi to be defeated, but we are not indifferent to who defeats him. That is because who defeats Qaddafi involves how the regime is brought down and the consequences of that downfall. We are not in support of capitalist imperialism being the agent of that defeat, even though almost any conceivable result that replaces Qaddafi would most likely be a “lesser evil” to this, one of the world’s most horrific police states.

It follows that any alternative that imperialism would summarily impose on the Libyan people would subordinate the ability of that nation to fully exercise their freedom to develop, to be free from the manipulation and pressures of foreign capital. Nor would we have good reason to believe that we would be doing anything other than contributing to the political and economic conditions of the new ultimate imperialist government. We cannot raise demands that we who refuse to endorse any imperialist upsurge, such as who defeats Qaddafi, would most likely be a “lesser evil” to this, one of the world’s most horrific police states.

How then do we apply these principles to a situation in which freedom fighters, heavily outnumbered and struggling simply to survive, ask — in desperation — for a limited imperialist intervention on an “enemy of my enemy” basis, as opposed to offering a quick pre-quo? How do we distinguish our response when imperialists are asked by a legitimate leadership group for limited assistance from those unilateral interventions in which some same imperialists simply arrogate to themselves the unquestioned right to impose their will, unchecked and unqualified, by a legitimate oppositional democratic force? Historically, socialists have distinguished between calling upon their own capitalist governments to give arms and aid to insurgencies that we support and the right of these insurgencies to choose their own channels they can establish, even with imperialist powers. We reject the first alternative because it entails taking responsibility for imperialist interventions in the conflict. Were we to do that, we would also have to accord in how imperialism chooses to provide this aid and to accept as legitimate the advances imperialism seeks to attain through its involvement.

Conversely, we accept the latter proposition in deference to the unchallenged right of all embattled democratic forces — including those fighting under authoritarian or bourgeois leaderships whose victory nevertheless does not foreclose breathing democratic openings — to seek an edge wherever they can find it.

The Irish rebels of 1916, according to third camp lore, accepted arms if the German government offered for its own reasons. That is, it would have been unchallenged as long as no strings were attached. Needless to say, this did not mean that Liebknecht and Luxembourg were called upon to revisit this aid from the Kaiser. The point is not our attitude towards that revolution, but our attitude toward our own imperialist government. We cannot raise demands that we cannot support.

Aging these lines, American socialists supported the call to lift the arms embargo on the Spanish loyalists during the civil war, while refusing to ask our government to send arms to the Republicans.

The capitalist democracies famously refused to answer the call from the Spanish democracy. Had they done so, the capitalists would have been free to choose who among the rebels to privilege, what arms to furnish, the schedule of deliveries they would adhere to, as well as the political terms around which they were willing to premise their aid. Needless to say, we socialists would have advised the revolutionists, that unless they — like the Irish rebels of 1916 — could accept such aid as democratic imperialism was willing to offer without making a political deal in exchange, they would have our full support.

But what if an insurgency is unable to satisfy these terms? How then would we gauge our response? What if “an enemy of our enemy” basis is insufficient and imperialism seeks concrete concessions, or seeks to shape outcomes or exploits openings to burnish its image?

This is the crux of our dilemma with the Libyan situation. Up until now we have been successfully spared this conundrum. But that is also our problem. There are no obvious historical precedents to guide us, no historical lessons upon which we can draw. The imperialist powers stated, in essence, that they would not release Qaddafi’s funds to the rebels, nor would they relax the arms embargo to the advantage of the democrats. They refused, in effect, to engage the rebels on “an enemy of our enemy” basis.

What have been left responses? Among anti-imperialist fundamentalists, Western aid in the form of direct military intervention at any level, either clarifies or redeﬁnes the dynamic.

For that camp, it is Qaddafi who is seen as fighting an anti-imperialist war. And it is very difficult to understand why this would have been markedly different had imperialism simply lifted the embargo and either armed or allowed the insurgency to arm itself. It is not the nature of the intervention but the fact of intervention that is crucial to this position.

There are those who actively politick for Qaddafi as a genuine face of Arab independence and dignity and those who, recognizing the repugnant nature of the regime and who would extend military, but not political support to the Libyan police state.

A somewhat weaker response along the same lines is the assertion that socialists no longer have a stake in this fight. Neither side, they argue, can any longer be relied upon to advance interests aligned to the needs of the Libyan people. All factions of this anti-imperialist fundamentalism would raise the demand for an immediate halt to the imperialist intervention.

These responses are distant enough from the traditions of third camp socialism as to not require any extended response here. This is not to claim that there are no self-identiﬁed third campists who lobby for these positions; only that they are no longer arguing within a tradition that we clearly recognize as our own.

More pertinent are those who do not withhold their support for the insurgency, but would also, and above all else, actively intervene to demand an immediate halt to the imperialist enforced by its own. They have balled themselves into a knot, insisting incomprehensibly that actions which would cleanse the perceived political stain from the rebels, that restores their uncompromised revolutionary “agency” — even if it results in their certain demise — is an act, not of treachery, but of unvarnished even unparalleled solidarity.

I think there is no escaping the conclusion that more crucial than the success of the rebels, from this vantage, is denying imperialism a platform to inﬂuence outcomes or repackaging its image.

Perhaps I am being overly generous here. Most of those who make the demand to halt the bombings, who also claim to support the rebels, have not spelled out why precisely they find one form of imperial intervention and intrusion acceptable — the delivery of arms, while condemning another — the no fly zone.

Both forms of intervention are limited. They do not involve an imperialist invasion and the displacement of the rebels to auxiliary status. It is still the rebels who are doing the fighting and dying. The distinction is therefore only rational — if one accepts the assumption, unvarnished on its face, that an elimination of the arms embargo alone would have resulted in a “no fly zone” — is of little meaning, for the NZF is indicative of something else entirely.

They have in any case confused themselves with the rebel-socialists, having adopted the motiva- tions and designs of this intervention, did not call for a no fly zone and did not ask the imperialists to intervene. They are not interested in adopting the fact that the imperialists who support them. They — and by that I mean, we — are similarly under no political obligation to call an immediate halt to the bombing. We need only question the conditions under which this intervention was undertaken. That does not compel us to deny the real dangers that victory under such circumstances portends. This may be un- pleasing to some, but it is the terrain on which is issue of revolutionary solidarity — of socialist internationalism — is decisive. We need, first, to forthrightly denounce the pretenses under which this intervention was underway taken. We must be clear that it has nothing to do with humanitarian interests and everything to do with establishing some level of imperialist credibility with the Arab masses in revolt.

Beyond that, it is our duty to proclaim that any concessions made to imperialism in exchange for the no fly zone, were made under duress and cannot be seen as a binding quid pro quo on any future Libyan government. We will do our best to expose these concessions as we become aware of them and will fight along with honest Libyan democrats and socialists to nullify them. If economic concessions were demanded, we will fight our ruling class, with whatever meager political resources we can muster, to annul them. If political concessions in the form of future alliances or military bases are expected, we will fight best we can against breaking them. If imperialism seeks to raise the Karzais and the Chalabis from the nether reaches of the insurgency and impose them on the Libyan nation, we will campaign to expose this for the democratic fraud it is and mobilize domestic and international opposition against it.

What I advocate here is that socialists show our support for the Libyan insurgency by actively fighting for the conditions under which a democratic foreign policy can be realistically hashed out, to ensure those issues in a way that clearly distinguished our position from the simple isolationism and the confused anti-imperialism of the “halt the bombings now” stripe.
Manning Marable, US academic and long-standing member of Democratic Socialists of America, died on 1 April, three days before the release of his book "Malcolm X: A Life of Reckoning." Dan Katz looks at Marable’s account.

Malcolm X was gunned down by former comrades of the Nation of Islam ( NOI) on 21 February 1965, aged 39.

When Malcolm returned to New York, his murder made headlines across the world. In the US he divided opinion sharply: for the majority he represented a threat of black violence and retribution; for many black activists he was an intransigent, unbending opponent of white supremacy and advocate of black pride. Having been pushed out of the NOI a year previously, and beginning to turn his back to the NOI’s rigid black separatism, Malcolm X also died in a state of ideological flux. This political and religious uncertainty and development at the end of his life has allowed many competing organisations — from Trotskyist groups to orthodox Sunni Muslims — to attempt to claim Malcolm X’s legacy.

Manning Marable’s aim was to present a rounded picture of Malcolm X’s life and his “reinventions” of himself. In particular, he argues that Malcolm’s image and legacy has been shaped (and distorted) by his widely-read autobiography, which was in fact written by Alex Haley (who was later to write the enormously popular TV series Roots). Marable argues that Haley — a Republican — had his own agenda, and had little interest in presenting a clear account of Malcolm X’s views in the final year of his life. Haley wrote the concluding section of the autobiography after Malcolm’s death.

**REVIEWS**

**The many sides of Malcolm X**

Marcus Garvey

Malcolm X was born Marcus Little John in Omaha, Nebraska, on 19 April 1925. His father and mother, Earl and Louise, were militant supporters of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey built a mass movement appealing to the black workers and poor. His message was black pride, self-improvement and racial separation, helping the struggle of black people in the US as being bound up with the fight against white colonialism in Africa. Garvey was also enthusiastically pro-capitalist. The more conservative elements of Garvey’s programme built directly on the previous work of leaders like Booker T Washington, and represented a series of concessions to white racism and acceptance of it. However in the US another distinct tradition had emerged: integrationism. Among the black middle class this current was represented by W E B Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This divided — between those that fought for equal rights for black people in the US, and those that effectively accepted the inevitability of white hostility and sought to escape the US — would remain the key to understanding Malcolm X’s political choices and development.

By the mid-40s Malcolm X was drifting and becoming involved in petty crime and drug use. His gang was rounded up after committing a series of robberies. In 1946 he got a long sentence, probably because his associates included white women. He began his sentence in the notorious Charlestown State Prison.

According to Marable the version of Malcolm’s conversion to the NOI that appears in, for example, Spike Lee’s 1992 film of Malcolm’s life, is inaccurate. Marable states that the pressure to join the sect came from family members. What the family found in the NOI sounded similar to their vision to the NOI that appears in, for example, Spike Lee’s 1993 film of Malcolm’s life. Inaccurate. Marable states that the world. In the US he divided opinion sharply: for the majority he represented a threat of black violence and retribution; for many black activists he was an intransigent, unbending opponent of white supremacy and advocate of black pride. Having been pushed out of the NOI a year previously, and beginning to turn his back to the NOI’s rigid black separatism, Malcolm X also died in a state of ideological flux. This political and religious uncertainty and development at the end of his life has allowed many competing organisations — from Trotskyist groups to orthodox Sunni Muslims — to attempt to claim Malcolm X’s legacy.

Malcolm X flew to Harlem, New York. At this time the NOI had less than 1000 supporters, and Temple No. 7 was badly run with less than a dozen members.

Malcolm X began to grow quickly. From 1953–1965 the NOI grew from 3000 to 10,000 members. By the 1950s the NOI had split into two organizations, the Fruit of Islam (FoI). Ironically, all of Malcolm’s new political movement was hampered at every turn by a campaign of harassment and violence by the NOI. The future leader of the NOI, Louis Farrakhan (then Louis X) stated that Malcolm was “worthy of death.”

The NOI was an authoritarian sect which had a powerful paramilitary wing, the Fruit of Islam (FoI). Ironically, although Malcolm and the NOI had a reputation as an organisation willing to meet racist and police violence with their own, mostly the FoI was used against NOI members or dissidents. The FoI regularly beat — and occasionally killed — those NOI members who had crossed the organisation.

During 21 February a group of five NOI members shot and killed Malcolm in front of his wife Betty, and children at a rally at the Audubon Ballroom. It was a tragic, stupid killing.

During the last phase of his life Malcolm X spoke at a number of meetings organised by the US Trotskyist group, the Socialist Workers Party (no relation to the British SWP), who believed that Malcolm’s ideas were “growing over” towards Marxism. In fact Malcolm would have needed a sharp, consistent break with black nationalism and a general ill-defined “anti-imperialism” to come over to Marxism. If he had developed in a “straight line” he would have found himself in a lot of conflict with the Black Panther Party.

Malcolm X remains an important, even iconic, figure. He was a brave, dedicated fighter against racism and injustice. That is how we should remember him.

**A PUBLIC FIGURE**

During the massive growth of the NOI Malcolm X was its public face, speaking regularly at NOI rallies, as well as on university campuses and to the media.

As a consequence he came under political pressure from the mainstream civil rights movement, occasionally openly bending towards the need for black people to participate in the ongoing struggle. This was one factor behind Malcolm’s expulsion from the NOI at the end of 1963, 1964.

But there were other factors which led to its downfall: its membership and made money from investments, and selling its own newspaper, Muhammad Speaks. As a result, Elijah Muhammad and his family became very well off, living in luxury. Malcolm X also became aware that Elijah Muhammad was a sexual predator, who had fathered children with a number of young women, while enforcing a conservative sexual code on his followers.

Malcolm X — famous in the US and beyond — was living with his young family on modest NOI funding and appeared as a threat to those around Elijah Muhammad at his Chicago headquarters. At the end of 1963, in the aftermath of the assassination of president J F Kennedy, Malcolm came home to roost,” something that, “never did make me sad; they’ve always made me glad.” Malcolm X was deprived of the possibility of participating in the incipient to freeze Malcolm X out of the organisation.

**The SPLIT**

Malcolm X took a small number out of the NOI and formed a new Islamic organisation Muslim Mosque Incorporated (MMI). He then took two long trips abroad which helped to alter his worldview.

First, he visited Mecca, where he was sponsored by the Saudi authorities, and adopted a more orthodox form of Islam. Bound up with this religious shift was a political one: he had discovered that there were many perfectly good Muslims who were white, which brought him flatly up against the NOI idea that all white people were “devils.”

Second, he toured many newly-independent African states. He began to place more emphasis on the black struggle as a part of a global anti-racist, anti-colonial fight. He praised the Cuban state and, worse, the development of a Chinese nuclear bomb.

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Malcolm X was determined to freeze Malcolm X out of the organisation.

Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X

with Marcus Garvey’s philosophy they didn’t have to convince us we were black and should be proud...”

What is clear is that Malcolm X converted to the NOI as a part of a global anti-racist, anti-colonial fight. He praised the Cuban state and, worse, the development of a Chinese nuclear bomb.

However, if Malcolm X was now situating the cause of the civil rights movement demanding black equality to the centre of American politics. In fact the pressure for this political explosion had been building for some time (as detailed, for example, by Marable in his excellent Race, Reform and Rebellion) and produced a white backlash.

The NOI had opposed its members registering to vote or being involved in campaigning on political matters.

The Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955–6 pushed the civil rights movement demanding black equality to the centre of American politics. In fact the pressure for this political explosion had been building for some time (as detailed, for example, by Marable in his excellent Race, Reform and Rebellion) and produced a white backlash.

The NOI had gone to court. From 1953–5 its membership quadrupled to 6,000. And from 1956 to 1961 expanded “tenfold” to between 50 and 75 thousand, “now recruiting middle class black people and skilled workers as well as prisoners and the urban poor.

However, the NOI was essentially parasitic on the upheaval among Black Americans. Its appeal to a minority lay in its passivity and pessimism. It used the white supremacists who fought to maintain the racist system of Jim Crow segregation that existed in the southern states to illustrate its message that black people would never be granted equal rights. Advances were denied, and leaders like Martin Luther King were denounced as “Uncle Toms”.

The NOI stood it led to some strange political alliances. In the 1920s Marcus Garvey had met the leader of the Ku Klux Klan, Edward Young Clarke, reasoning that as they both opposed racial intermarriage and favoured the separation of the races, they had common ground.

The NOI predicted Garvey’s craziness — for similar reasons — by inviting American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell to its rallies. In 1962, in front of 12,000 NOI members Rockwell declared, “You know we call you niggers. But wouldn’t you rather be confounded by honest white men who tell you to your face what others say behind your back?” The NOI presented Rockwell as the authentic voice of white America.

The words “by any means necessary” have often been read as a call to arms (they were, that in the least in sense of advocating the right to defend) but “by any means” has always been understood as mean political activity. And just as important was the fact that Malcolm X was now situating the struggle within the framework of a general fight for human equality.

**HE MURDER**

However, Malcolm X’s new political movement was hampered at every turn by a campaign of harassment and violence by the NOI. The future leader of the NOI, Louis Farrakhan (then Louis X) stated that Malcolm X was “worthy of death.”

The NOI was an authoritarian sect which had a powerful paramilitary wing, the Fruit of Islam (FoI). Ironically, although Malcolm X and the NOI had a reputation as an organisation willing to meet racist and police violence with their own, mostly the FoI was used against NOI members or dissidents. The FoI regularly beat — and occasionally killed — those NOI members who had crossed the organisation.

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Malcolm X remains an important, even iconic, figure. He was a brave, dedicated fighter against racism and injustice. That is how we should remember him.
Glorious Dublin, 1913

The Dublin Labour War was one of the great battles of the working class. In 1913, under the leadership of Jim Larkin, the Dublin Transport and General Workers’ Union was making Dublin one of the best organised cities in the world.

Dublin’s slums were officially admitted to be among the worst in the British Empire. Infant mortality was higher there than in Calcutta. During the 1914-19 war, a British Army recruiting leaflet would tell the world of Dublin that the war trenches of France were healthier than the slums of Dublin! But now the workers were on the move.

The workers had discovered the power of the sympathetic, solidarity strike. Where necessary they brought their weight as a class to bear on each individual employer on behalf of his employees. Wages Conditions began to improve. The workers, long downtrodden, became everywhere assertive and confident. A tremendous growth of working class solidarity struck. Where necessary they brought their weight as a class to bear on each individual employer on behalf of his employees. Wages Conditions began to improve. The workers, long downtrodden, became everywhere assertive and confident. A tremendous growth of working class solidarity struck.

This week we print two articles by James Connolly, “Glorious Dublin” and “A Titanic struggle.”

By James Connolly

To the readers of Forward possibly some sort of apology for the non-appearance of my notes for the past few weeks, but I am sure that you quite well understand that I was, so to speak, otherwise engaged. On the day I generally write my little screed, I was engaged on the 31st of August in learning how to walk around in a ring with about forty other unfortunates kept six paces apart, and yet slip in a word or two to the poor devil in front of or behind me without being noticed by the general public.

The first question I asked was generally “say, what are you in for?” Then the rest of the conversation ran thus: “For throwing stones at the police.” “Well, I hope you did throw them and hit.” “No, by God, that’s the worst of it. I was pulled coming out of my house.” “Pulled” is the Dublin word for arrested. It was some- what trying to me to know that I was the only person apparently in prison who had really committed the crime for which I was arrested. It gave me a sort of feeling that I was lowering the moral tone of the prison by coming amongst such a crowd of blameless citizens.

But the concluding part of our colloquy was a little more encouraging. It usually finished in this way: “Are you in the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union?” “Of course I am.” “Good. Well if they filled all the prisons in Ireland they can’t beat us, m’boy.” “No, thank God, they can’t; we’ll fight all the better when we get out.” And there you have the true spirit. Baton charges, prison cells, untimely death and acute starvation—all were faced without a murmur; and in face of them all, the brave Dublin workers never lost faith in their ultimate triumph; never doubted but that their organisation would emerge victorious from the struggle. This is in fact the great truth that many of our critics amongst the British labour leaders seem to lose sight of. The Dublin fight is more than a trade union fight; it is a great class struggle, and recognised as such by all sides. We in Ireland feel that to doubt our victory would be to lose faith in the destiny of our class.

One case in point is the case of a labourer who was arrested to sign the agreement forswearing the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and he told his employer, a small capitalist builder, that he refused to sign. The employer, knowing the man’s circumstances, reminded him that he had a wife and six children who would be starving within a week. The reply of this humble labourer rose to the heights of sublimity. “It is true, sir,” he said, “they will starve; but I would rather see them go out one by one in their coffins than that I should disgrace them by signing that.” And with head erect and shoulders square he entered the prison and privation with his loved ones. Hunger and privation—and honour.

Debat, bah! How can such a people be defeated? His case is typical of thousands more. Take the case of the United Builders Labourers’ Trade Union, for instance. This was a rival union to the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union. Many sharp passages had occurred between them, and the employers counted confidently upon their cooperation in the struggle; but William Martin Murphy especially

praising them and existing in their supposed acquiescence in his plans. Remember also that they were a dividing sosti- ety, dividing their funds at the end of each year, and there- fore without any strike funds. When the members of their union were asked to sign the agreement, promising never to join or help the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, not one man consented—but over Dublin 2,500 members marched out “to help the I.T.&G.W. boys.” Long ere these lines are written, they have experienced all the horrors of starvation, but with grim resolve they have tightened their belts and presented an unyielding front to the enemy.

The first sight I had of these men was lowering the moral tone of the prison by coming amongst such a crowd of blameless citizens. The Dublin women were asked to sign the agreement, and, cheering, lines up along with the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union was dreamed of.

What is true of that union is also true of most of the trade unions. All are showing wonderful loyalty to their class. Coachbuilders, sawyers, engineers, bricklayers, each trade that is served by general labourers, walks out along with the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union; re- fuses to even promise to work with any one who signs the employers’ agreement, and, cheering, lines up along with their class.

WOMEN

Or think of the heroic women and girls. Did they care to evade the issue, they might have remained at work, for the second part of the agreement asks them to merely put aside the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and we know they were merely pawns in the game in order to neutralise the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and to help the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union. But the second part pledge them to refuse to “help” the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union—and in every shop, factory and sweating hell-hole in Dublin, as the agreement is presented, they march out with pinched faces, threadbare clothes, and miserable footgear, but with high hopes, undaunted spirit, and glorious resolve shining out of their eyes. Happy the men who will secure such wives, thrice blessed the nation which has such girls as the future mothers of the race! Ah, comrades, it is good to have lived in Dublin in these days!

And then our friends write deprecatingly to the British press of the “dislocation of trade” involved in sympathetic strikes, of the “perpetual conflicts” in which they would involve great trade unions. To those arguments, if we can call such arguments answering questions of administration, or taxation, or only occasionally, as in the miners’ strike, really rise to a realiza- tion of their true role of parliamentary outposts of the industrial army.

The parliamentary tail in Britain still persist in wagging the British industrial dog. Once the dog really begins to as- sert his true position, we will be troubled more by carp- ing critics of labour politics, nor yet with labour politicians’ confessions of their own impotence in such great crises as that of the railway strike or the Johannesburg massacres.

Nor yet would we see that awful spectacle we have seen lately of labour politicians writing to the capitalist press to denounce the methods of a union which, with 20,000 men and women locked out in one city, is facing an attempt of 400 employers to starve its members back into slavery.

And you, Brutus, that you should play the enemy’s game at such a crisis! Every drop of ink you spilled in such an act stopped a loaf of bread on its way to some starving family.

From Forward, 4 October 1913

William Martin Murphy led the bosses in the 1913 lockout

The adoption of such a principle, followed by a few years of fighting on such lines to convince the world of our earnestness, would not only transform the industrial arena, but would revolutionise politics. Each side would necessar- ily seek to grasp the power of the state to reinforce its posi- tion, and politics would thus become what they ought to be, a reflex of the industrial battle, and lose the power to mas- querade as a neutral power detached from economic pas- sions or motives. At present I regret to say labour politicians seem to be losing all reality as effective aids to our struggles on the indus- trial battlefield, are becoming more and more absorbed in questions of administration, or taxation, and only occasionally, as in the miners’ strike, really rise to a realiza- tion of their true role of parliamentary outposts of the

SOLIDARITY
HISTORY

At the Titanic struggle

By James Connolly

What is the truth about the Dublin dispute? What was the origin of the Dublin dispute? These are at present the most discussed questions in the labour world of Ireland. The national federation of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, led by Jim Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, has won for some of the men and boys in the bottle-blowing works from 2s. to 10s. per week. For men working for the Merchants’ Warehouse Company 3s. per week, general carriers 2s. to 3s., coal fillers halfpenny per ton, grain bushellers 1d. per ton, and boys in the bottle-blowing works from 2s. to 10s. per week, and a long list of warehouses in which girls were exploited were compelled to give some slight modification of the inhuman conditions under which their employees were labouring.

As Mr. Havelock Wilson, General Secretary, National Seamen’s and Firemen’s Union, has mentioned the strike on the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company as an instance of our erratic methods, it may be worth while to note that as a result of that strike some of his sailors got an increase of 5s. 6d. per week.

In addition to the cases enumerated I might also mention that the labourers on the Dublin and South-Eastern Railway got increases of 6s. per week, and those in the Kingsport Gas Works got increases varying from 3s. to 10s. per week per man.

All of these increases were the result of the sympathetic strike policy, first popularised by its success in winning the battle for the Seamen and Firemen—who are now asked to repudiate it. These things well understood explain the next act in the unfolding of the drama. Desiring to make sure what had been gained, Mr. Larkin formed a committee to the Conciliation Board.

This was adopted by the Trades Council, at least in essence, and eventually came before the Employers’ Executive, or whatever the governing committee of that body is named. After a hot discussion it was put to the vote. Eighteen employers voted to accept a Conciliation Board, three voted against.

Of that three, William Martin Murphy was one. On finding himself in the minority he rose and vowed that in spite of them he would “smash the Conciliation Board.”

Within three days he kept his word by discharging two hundred of his tramway traffic employees for being members of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and thus forced on the strike the tramway men. Immediately he appealed to all the Dublin employers. In 1914, when the battle was at its height, it became a mass meeting of 400 employers who insisted on locks out all workers who continue to be members of the ITGWU. Thousands of workers were compelled to pay, and lured them on to a desperate effort to combine and destroy the one labour force they feared. The employers, mad with hatred of the power that had withered in 1910, because of年的 an effort for the franchise of which I have named, rallied round Murphy, and from being one of the syndicates of the leaders, the centre leader and organising spirit of a band of four hundred.

I have always told our friends in Great Britain that our fight in Ireland was neither inspired nor swayed by theories nor theorists. It grew and was hammered out of the hard necessities of our situation.

Here, in this brief synopsis, you can trace its growth for yourself. First a fierce desire to save our brothers of the sea, a desire leading to us risking our own existence in their cause. Developing from that an extension of the principle of sympathetic action until we took the fierce beast of capital by the throat all over Dublin, and loosened its hold on the vitality of thousands of our class.

Then a rally of the forces of capital to recover their hold, and eventually a titanic struggle, in which the forces of labour in Britain openly, and the forces of capital secretly, became participants.

That is where we stand to-day. The struggle forming our theories and shaping the policy, not only for us, but for our class. To those who advise us we can only reply: we fight as conditions dictate; we meet new conditions with new policies. Those who choose may keep old policies to meet new conditions. We cannot and will not try.

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Who’s who

Jim Larkin: A Liverpool Irishman who moved to Belfast in 1897. In 1903 he organised the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and then started the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU). He was in the USA between 1903 and 1910; returned to Ireland in 1910; became an organiser for the ITGWU, and then started the Irish Socialist Republican Party. He was in the USA between 1903 and 1910; returned to Ireland in 1910; became the leader of the Sinn Féin Sinn Fein party; was the main leader of the workers in the Dublin lockout (1913); in 1914 Larkin was in jail in Britain; led the Irish Citizen Army into the Easter Rising in April 1916; and was shot by the British Government after the defeat of the Rising. Died in 1919.


By police batons in protests on 30 August.

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Timeline

Between 1911 and 1913: By use of sympathy strikes, the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU), led by Jim Larkin and James Connolly, won improved conditions and organisation for Dublin workers.

From 15 August 1913: William Martin Murphy sacks more than 200 workers from the Dublin trams, which he owns, for being ITGWU members.

26 August: The ITGWU responds by a strike on the trams, and other sympathy action, for example, a boycott of the distribution of the Irish Independent newspaper, also owned by Murphy.

30 August: Police issue a warrant for Larkin’s arrest on charges of “seditionary language”.

31 August: Police baton-charge a workers’ rally in Dublin city centre. Larkin, who is the leader of the movement, is injured by the government, injured more than 400. Larkin appears at a city-centre balcony to speak to the workers, and is then arrested.

3 September: William Martin Murphy organises a meeting of employers and line workers. The line workers, who continue to be members of the ITGWU, agree to continue to be members of the ITGWU. Thousands of workers attend the funeral of James Nolan, a worker killed by police batons in protests on 30 August.

Early September: British TUC meets, hears pleas for solidarity from Dublin, but responds only by organising food aid for the locked-out workers.

26 September: British government appoints George Asquith to head an inquiry into the dispute.

27 September: A ship arrives in Dublin, bringing 40 tons of food that was raised by British trade unionists to feed the locked-out workers and their families.

4 October: Asquith’s inquiry reports, recommending a Conciliation Committee be set up to resolve the dispute without lock-outs or strikes. Bosses reject the report.

17 October: Dora Montefiore and other British socialists and trade unionists arrive in Dublin with plans to help the workers by having children looked after by British trade unionists’ families during the lock-out. The Catholic Church and the bosses raise a hue and cry against this as a threat to the faith and morals of “Catholic children”.

13 November: Larkin, released from jail, tours Britain calling for workers’ solidarity.

November: The union launches the Irish Citizen Army, a workers’ militia, to counter further police violence like that on 31 August.

18 January 1914: ITGWU concedes defeat and advises workers to seek reinstatement. Murphy claims that he has “smashed Larkinism”, but in fact the ITGWU survives and grows in the following years.
BA strikes on hold

By Darren Beddow

Unité has put the brakes on potential industrial action as it enters into new “exploratory” talks with British Airways management.

In late March, workers voted by 85% (for a 72% turnout) to take further strikes in a dispute which has stretched over two years. That most recent ballot gave Unité a mandate to call a single 24-hour strike in May, but according to a union statement BA bosses have agreed to grant the union a three-month extension while talks take place.

The union has declared that “lastingly peace is essential for the well-being of all cabineers and for the benefit of British Airways’ customers.” The overly-conciliatory language does not bode well.

Workers are already in a worse position now than when they went on strike last autumn with the latest ballot focusing on attacks suffered during earlier strikes.

Unité says it wants to reach “a long-term perspective,” two of which pertain to the attacks and victimisations.

The final one calls for “measures to address concerns on earnings and conditions associated with the established changes in on-board crew numbers and the introduction of Mixed Fleet.” This implies fairly clearly that the union has now given up on defending the introduction of the cuts which sparked the initial dispute, seeing them as “established changes” and hoping only for “corrections” to be “addressed.”

Unité’s statement may leave some cabin crew wandering what they’ve been in dispute for two years (and on strike four times) might amount to a single crumb (and indeed being markedly worse-off in many cases).

There has also been some backtracking in terms of membership-control and democracy in the dispute.

The BA cabin crew workers, who have stood united under the banner of a strongly anti-authoritarian union, deserve better than to have their dispute wound up from above in return for some phoney “peace talks” with BA bosses.

Students shifting left?

By Ed Malbay

At the 2011 National Union of Students conference, 12-14 April, the minority votes against the leadership on a national demo and on university grants were strong.

NCAC supporters Michael Chassidam and Sean Rillo Raczka scored well in the elections for VP Education and VP Welfare.

The results for the part-time section of the executive, where AWL member and Royal Holloway presiden-elect Daniel Cooper, who has been locked out, withdrew in favour of Michael Chassidam, were not out when we went to press.

In the election for President, the leadership was split, after incoming Aaron Porter’s decision to stand down following his humiliation by student protesters.

The more left-leaning of the two leadership candidates, Liam Burns, a former of the National Association for Engineering and Construction Industry (NAEIC), with lower paid support not covered by the agreement, GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said “I re- emphasise that neither the contractors nor the site’s owners, BP, seem to care about these 430 workers who are being laid off. GMB does care and will work to stop the campaign for justice.”

Solidarity at the site has already begun to develop, with other grades of construction workers refusing to cross pickets put on by the locked-out engineering-construction workers.

Protests at the gates of the site, near Hull, have already stopped traffic. Vivergo has said it has “capped” by the protests.

them there was no more work available. The delegate is widely believed to be a play to replace the workers, who work under the terms of the National Agreement for Engineering and Construction Industry (NAEIC), with lower paid support not covered by the agreement.

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Slump which would entail short of economic tens of thousands of economic to reducing numbers of hundreds of thousands of migration to tens of thousands is widely reckoned to be the Tory vote for 5 May with a hardline speech

By Gerry Bates

On 14 April anti-Qaddafi rebels in Misrata – Libya’s third-largest city, and the main city held by rebels in the west of the country – were reported saying that there had been no NATO air strikes on the siege troops for three days. The European Union has a plan to send up to one thousand ground troops to Misrata “to secure the delivery of aid supplies”, and to fight only in self-defence. EU officials say that they are waiting for UN endorsement of the plan. On 19 April the British government said that ten British officers and a similar number of French would go to Libya to advise the rebels. The UK, like NATO, talks of helping the rebels only because they want to “live down” their past links with Qaddafi and lay the basis for good relations with the post-Qaddafi regime in oil-rich Libya. Socialists must oppose any trust in or endorsement of the EU and NATO. But positively to try to stop EU and NATO aid for the rebels – as some on the left are doing – is to get our priorities entirely wrong. In the same way that Gaeruca, and Srebrenica in more recent years, held a place in the aweful annals of tyrant history, so will rebel Misrata, now and for the decades to come. Whilst the majority of the UK left wavers or does what it can to stop NATO action against Qaddafi, 300 000 people are being left to their fate in an murderous onslaught by Qaddafi loyalist forces. Some humanitari-an access has been granted in theory by the regime but so far only the Red Cross has been allowed in – and their report is absolutely damning in terms of the at-tacks on the civilian popula-tion of the city.

Cluster bombs are being rained down on the streets and houses of Misrata and loyalist militias, sometimes unformed, sometimes not having been trying to take the city street by street. They are using mosques, schools and hospitals as forward posts. Civilians, including women and children, are being used as human shields. NATO commander Charles Houbard has argued that it is like watching a knife fight in a telephone booth. And that is what NATO is doing – watch-ing.

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Cameron slaps Lib Dems, woos racist vote

By Patrick Murphy, National Union of Teachers, Executive, (pc)

If all goes to plan the conference of the National Union of Teachers (22-26 April) will vote to insist union members on taking strike action to de-fend pension rights. If they do there is every chance that they will be joined by college lecturers’ union UCU and civil serv-ants’ union in co-ordi-nated strike action. The NUT may also be joined by other teaching unions, ATL and NASUWT.

We will have put in place the beginnings of a trade union action prepared to take action. We will need, however, to move onto the next hurdle very quickly. The first is to deliver a huge vote for action – the survey work done by the union shows that to be the case. The real challenge will be to achieve a strong turnout. If other teachers’ unions decide to take action, the prospects of a coordinated and ever overwhelmimg yes vote will be massively increased.

FIGHT TO WIN

We enter onto this battle with the idea that we are simply “making a valid point”. This is not the case. The demonstrative protest ac-tion in the way that, for the most part, the 2008 pay strike was. We need to win.

If the government get away with increasing the retirement age on a sliding scale (65, 66, 68 then 70), making us pay more even though the pension scheme is in no financial difficulty and reducing what’s left to a “emergency cover”. This will give us more control of our dispute and help main-tain national and public support.

To convene regular school reps’ councils for the duration of the dispute.

To encourage local as-sessment of the workloads and the possible ineffectiveness of the maximum effectiveness of the government.

The government has set about attacking the welfare state using the tactic of “shock and awe”. We can learn from this. Most suc-cesful industrial disputes win quickly – most long drawn out disputes lose. The Coalition will be reeling from the effect of our action on pensions as soon as are serious about this action we can win. And if in can win the the government’s agenda does not have to be accepted and in its evi-dent collectivism can still defend our condi-tions and our rights.

Justice for Smiley Culture

Around 3,000 people attended the 16 April protest about the death in police custody of reggae singer David Emmanuel, better known as Smiley Culture.

The Campaign for justice for Smiley Culture is demanding a genuinely independent inquiry in place of the one by the so-called Independent Police Complaints Commission.

The mood of the demo was militant. The police kept a low profile – they evidently prefer to keep their racist violence under wraps.

• Facebook: “Campaign for Justice for Smiley Culture”