



tubeworker

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SOLIDARITY WITH EGYPTIAN WORKERS

The Egyptian people have forced their hated ruler, Hosni Mubarak, out of office. Through mobilising massive numbers of people onto the streets, workers taking action, and refusing to back down in the face of tiny 'concessions', the uprising has won its first main goal. They now face a fight for a future for Egypt free of military rule.

The centre of the mass demonstrations has been Cairo's Tahrir Square. The Square has become a symbol for grass-roots democratic organisation, with mass movements holding daily plebiscites on strategy, with a thirst for political discussion, and a vibrant sense of the power of ordinary people when they lose their fear. Local communities, in the absence of the police, have organised their own defence.

Egypt's people revolted against a regime which for 60 years (30 under Mubarak) has denied them political freedoms, and denied workers the right to organise. Egyptians faced huge unemployment and food price rises, which accelerated over the last six months. Since the 1980s, the regime has been scrapping food price subsidies, trashing social provision, and 'opening' up the economy to privatisation which has enriched a wealthy elite and a relatively small middle class.

US and UK governments backed Mubarak for years, but now hypocritically welcome his fall. William Hague tells the Egyptian regime to 'listen to the protesters', while at the same time his own government ignores the massive protests by students and their supporters.

WORKERS RISE UP

While the situation in Egypt is headline news, the mainstream media do not tell us much about workers' involvement. Despite repression, workers have been building organisation and action in Egypt over the last ten years, and are now playing an increasingly important role in the uprising.

Suez Canal Company workers have been holding an open-ended sit-in strike. 6,000+ agreed not to go home at the end of their shift, but to hold the workplace until their demands against poor wages and worsening health and working conditions were met.

Railway technicians in Beni Suef have been striking, and other cities' railworkers have blocked tracks in support. Bus, oil, telecoms, textiles, chemicals, printing, pharmaceuticals and other workers are striking, walking out or sitting in. Some workers have taken over their

workplaces, kicked out the bosses, and begun to manage production themselves.

By Friday, when Mubarak resigned, there was in effect a general strike, involving Cairo transport workers, doctors and nurses, steel workers, the 25,000 textile workers at Egypt's largest factory in the town of Mehalla al-Kubra, and many others. The workers have been fighting for the end of the dictatorship, and their own economic demands.

A NEW UNION FEDERATION

The official trade unions in Egypt are 'state unions', so closely linked with the regime that they can not effectively represent and organise workers. The only legally recognised trade union centre, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), has close relations with Mubarak's party, the NPD. The ETUF controls nomination and election procedures for trade union office, and strikes can only take place with permission from two-thirds of its board.

Egypt's workers have rejected the yoke of the state unions and declared a new trade union federation, which demands: the right to work and 'unemployment compensation'; a minimum and maximum wage; social security, health care, housing, education, pensions and benefits; workers' right to organise without legal restrictions; freedom for detainees.

The new, independent federation has been welcomed by the TUC and the International TUC. We must support it. Mubarak is gone, but Egypt's future is not yet decided. The Muslim Brotherhood is strong, and will try to steer Egypt towards becoming an Islamic state. In Iran in 1979, a hated dictator was driven out by a mass uprising. Democrats and workers' organisations were central to that uprising, but the Islamists took power afterwards, with disastrous consequences for working-class organisation, democracy, women's rights and sexual freedom. Egypt's revolution can have a better outcome if the workers' movement prevails. We must support it.

DEFEND OUR REPS: ONE BACK, TWO TO GO

RMT stations rep Peter Hartshorn has got his job back on appeal. We have started to turn the tide back against LU's victimisation of union reps.

LU sacked Peter for allegedly swearing at a manager. But the company knew that Peter's workmates in all grades were rallying round him, and that RMT could shut the Piccadilly line through strike action if needed. The company had also been rattled by losing at Employment Tribunal in the cases of sacked driver reps Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, and had no intention of risking a hat-trick of legal defeats.

We now need to get Eamonn and Arwyn reinstated.

This is not just about justice for two individuals. Having won their Interim Relief, Eamonn and Arwyn are now being paid again, and if they win their full Tribunals, they may get a decent payout. But that is not good enough - we need them back at work.

Management may well have decided that a payout is a price worth paying to rid themselves of effective reps and to make the rest of us think twice before standing for a rep's post in future. After all, they will probably just claw back the money by refusing us a decent pay rise. We can not accept this.

Eamonn's and Arwyn's workmates have already held two 24-hour strikes to demand their reinstatement, and are now planning a third. But LUL remains unmoved, and it is clear that 24-hour strikes on individual lines will not be enough to win. RMT is stepping up the profile of the issue with a public meeting and other campaigning, but we also need more action.

We need to escalate to a ballot of all drivers on all lines. Most drivers understand that if we let the company take out our reps, we will all suffer. We will be less able to defend our pay and conditions, and management will go rampant in pushing us around at work. Where there are drivers who are not yet convinced of the importance of this, others need to go round the depots convincing them. We need leaflets from the union, but we need reps and officials in the workplace listening and talking too.

HANDS OFF OUR STAFF AND NOMINEE PASSES!

The *Evening Standard* is trying to stir up a campaign for the removal of our staff and nominee passes. The Standard stoked up some rather pathetic pieces of poison, including a claim that our passes cost TfL £30m. But this is the maximum amount if every member of staff and our partners would have bought an all-zones annual season ticket if we didn't have the pass. Not very likely!

If you want to find ways of saving TfL money, there are better places to look - like the over-inflated salaries of the top managers. Chief opponent of our passes is Tory GLA member Richard Bacon, who receives a great deal more 'taxpayers' money' than we do, with a salary of £53,439 plus generous expenses. But our political masters - and their pathetic servants in the press - would rather encourage working-class people to have a go at other working-class people rather than target those with their snouts in the trough. So the *Standard* quoted a couple of naive people, who seem to think that if TfL did not give us passes, then fares would be lower, stations would be properly staffed or students would not be in debt. As if! Any money saved would be far more likely to be spent by our bosses on feathering their own nests.

BoJo is currently stating that he has no intention of taking our passes away, as he recognises that they help TfL to recruit and retain staff. But we all know what a promise from Boris is worth! So we all need to be ready to defend our passes. They are not "perks", they are part of our wages - we have earned them, and we should not have to pay to travel on the system that we keep running. Not only should the passes not be scrapped, they should be extended to those transport workers who do not already get them eg. cleaners and other contractors.

TICKET SELLERS ON THE CHEAP

Management have snuck in a further attack on ticket office jobs and our working conditions, modifying Advanced Fare Machines (AFMs) in the ticket halls so that staff with a ticket seller's licence can resolve Oyster journeys.

They disguise this as improving customer service. But it is a way of easing in the job cuts because they know that reduced ticket office opening hours will hurt customers.

As well as taking further duties away from ticket sellers, this is bad for CSAs. There are now fewer gateline staff after the cuts. LU has removed Customer Care Assistants from all rosters, so no-one will be attending the machines. Will gateline staff be expected to work a gateline on their own and simultaneously do ticket sellers' duties at the machines? There will be a lot of added pressure.

Is it safe to be having arguments about unresolved journeys without a sheet of protective glass between you and the customer? We all know how unfair Oyster maximum charges are and that there is a limit to what you can resolve. It will lead to a lot of face-to-face abuse.

Most gallingly, CSAs with a ticket office licence obtained one in the hope of one day getting a ticket office job. With the cuts, this prospect has all but disappeared. Now LU is asking us to use our licence as a method of eliminating ticket office duties: our own promotion prospects!

At least when we occasionally do 'higher grade working' in the ticket office, we get paid extra money. With this, CSAs will be doing work of a higher grade with no extra recompense.

We need to defeat this measure. The good news is that RMT is to put on a boycott of the Enhanced AFM Functionality. Once it starts, we will be able to refuse to do it, with the protection of a legal ballot. It also looks like the union is going to give us the support we need in the workplace to carry out the boycott and stand up to management pressure. TSSA should call a boycott too.

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WOT NO BONUS?

Sadly but not surprisingly, Mike Brown mournfully tells us that we won't get a customer satisfaction bonus for the last quarter. It seems the customers are just not sufficiently satisfied with all those delays and asset failures. No shit, Sherlock.

Mike cheerily tells us, though, that 79 is a 'fine score' given the circumstances. Perhaps he expects his kind words to make us feel proud despite being out of pocket. But they amount to an admission that the CSS bonus does not reflect our hard work or performance but instead reflects factors beyond our control - mainly, management cock-ups.

We'd rather have a decent pay rise than an unreliable, arbitrary bonus.

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN?

Staff who have recently attended CDP report that the message coming out of it is: play by the rules or else ...

As CDP goes through the policies and procedures we all need to do our jobs, they are warning that the consequence of not doing so will be the sack!

We have seen the dramatic rise in LU's sackings for things that would have

previously been minor disciplinary offences. The bosses, not just in our industry, have a

recession and a Tory government to give them the confidence to inflict brutal measures on their workforce.

They have savings to make and can't seem to see any other target than the staff who do the work. While they plead poverty, it also suits their interests to have a workforce cowed into toeing the line for fear of their jobs.

It is a shame to see CDP being used to reinforce this message of fear and demoralisation. Our best defence against vindictive management is to stand together as workmates and stick with our unions, not, as management would have you believe, 'look after yourself and keep your head down'.

BREAKING IN

Once again, London Underground has left stations unstaffed, and once again there have been potentially dire consequences.

On a Friday evening last month, Chigwell station was left with no staff, and there was an attempted robbery of the ticket office. When staff from other stations responded to the alarm and the police attended, they found physical evidence of an attempt to break down the door.

The company will probably complain that no harm was done! But staff had to leave another station to deal with the incident. And future attempts at robbery may be successful - and may have disastrous consequences for any witnesses.

Tubeworker is produced by Tube workers and published by Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.

We want one democratic, fighting union for all railworkers. We reject artificial divisions between workers of different grades. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.

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