

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

Ireland goes to
the polls page 2



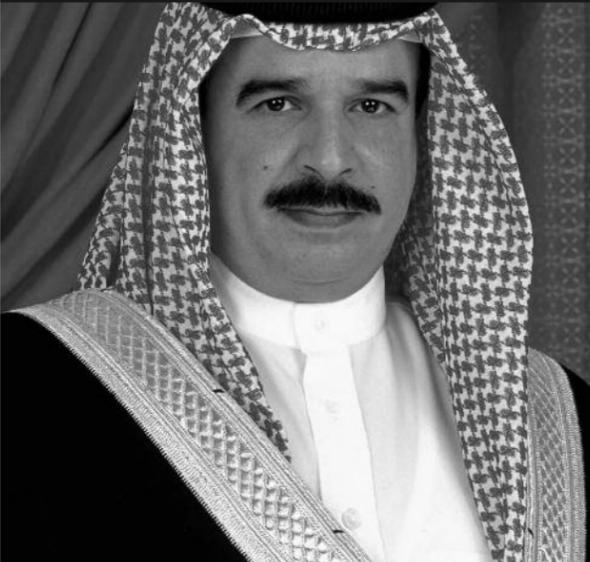
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Topple the tyrants!

NOT WANTED



Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain

NOT WANTED



Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qaddafi, "Leader" of Libya

GONE BUT OLD ORDER INTACT



Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, former President of Tunisia

GONE BUT ARMY IN POWER



Muhammad Hosni Sayyid Mubarak, former President of Egypt

NOT WANTED



Abdullah II, King of Jordan

NOT WANTED



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of Iran

For democracy, workers' rights and secularism in the Middle East

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Fine Gael shifts right

By Liam McNulty

Fine Gael, the largest opposition party and descendant of the pro-Treaty establishment and the fascist Blueshirt movement, has pushed ahead in recent polls leading up to Ireland's general election on 25 February.

It is benefiting from two processes. The first is conjunctural. The recent spell of political instability which saw Fianna Fail leader Brian Cowen unceremoniously pushed out of his leadership position has sown in some the illusion that "strong leadership" is a prerequisite for lifting Ireland out of her current economic malaise.

The second process will have a longer-term impact on the Irish political landscape. The leakage of political support from Fianna Fail looks set to destroy that party's 80-year hegemony.

The Irish ruling class, in many ways, was lucky to have Fianna Fail. Its populist image (which involved Bertie Ahern shamelessly describing himself as a socialist) allowed it to harness broad working-class support whilst at the same time implementing policies in the interests of Irish capitalism.

The working-class support has all but evaporated. In Dublin Central, where Bertie Ahern topped the poll in 2007 [constituencies in Ireland are multi-member, with STV], the party will be lucky to win a seat.

And for the bourgeoisie, a resurgent Fine Gael, shamelessly wedded to neoliberalism, is a much more efficacious instrument.

The lining up of the Irish economic elite and the comfortable classes behind Fine Gael has produced a marked change in their political strategy. In the second live leadership debate FG leader Enda Kenny labelled Labour as a "high-tax party".

Fine Gael is attempting to cultivate momentum to win enough seats to govern alone, or with independents or a diminished Fianna Fail, rather than with its traditional coalition partner, Labour. Cowen's replacement by Micheál Martin has opened up this latter possibility.

Labour has been keen not to rule out the possibility of a coalition within Fine Gael, even though in the leafy suburbs of Dublin 4 FG election literature has

been blaming the unions for the economic crisis and FG wishes to accelerate the austerity programme, sack tens of thousands of public sector workers, and privatise public services.

In the last days of the election campaign, Labour has been warning voters not to give Fine Gael a "monopoly of power", in the naïve hope that a coalition would somehow moderate Kenny's neoliberal programme.

On what programme would such a coalition govern? Fine Gael backed the blanket guarantee for Irish banks proposed by the Irish government during the crisis and is clearly prioritising the interests of bondholders over the interests of the Irish people.

Its manifesto promises it "will seek to ensure that burden sharing with bondholders is part of a renegotiated deal", seemingly blind to the fact that the French and German governments wish to protect the bondholders at all costs.

As the leftwing think-tank TASC has recently argued, Ireland will be unable to meet its interest payments without total economic collapse or intense social breakdown. Irish workers realise this, and Labour is losing out to Sinn Féin and the United Left Alliance [ULA] on its left flank.

Sinn Féin has jumped on the anti-banker bandwagon whilst passively implementing Tory cuts in Northern Ireland. However most commentators predict the election of a Trotskyist bloc in the next Dáil alongside a stronger SF.

Rather than cling to the coattails of one of the larger parties, as the Irish labour movement has done since December 1918, Labour should refuse to contemplate a government with Fine Gael and finally put an end to Civil War politics.

This would facilitate a realignment of Irish politics on explicitly class lines, allowing genuinely left-wing politics to flourish within and without Labour whilst forcing Fine Gael and Fianna Fail to reveal which class interests they truly represent.

Genuine socialists within the Labour Party, along with the unions and the rest of the left should articulate an alternative to the IMF-ECB agenda. Otherwise the Labour Party will be joining history's detritus.

Above: anti-capitalist student activists in Ireland picket the headquarters of Fine Gael

Chances for the left

By Conall Ó Dúfaigh, an independent socialist activist

Unlike most of Europe, the mainstream of Irish politics isn't based on a left-right divide.

Instead, we have what's often described as "civil war politics".

The two main Irish parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, are both seated firmly on the centre right. The main difference between them is their having represented different sides in the civil war that followed the formation of the Irish Free State in the early 1920s.

Every government since the 1930s has been led by one or other of those parties. This general election might prove to be the first where the population vote on a left-right wing basis.

Sinn Féin is showing particular interest in this election. In the past few months they have begun organizing protests independently of other groups, in one case engaging in a tokenistic scuffle with police outside the Irish Parliament building. Their rhetoric in the south is often broadly left wing (anti-cuts, opposition to IMF bailout), but you have to remember that they are implementing many of the same cuts as part of the

SF/DUP administration north of the border.

In the past few years, Labour have begun to eat into Fine Gael's traditional middle-class base. This has led to Fine Gael emphasizing some of their more right-wing tendencies to maintain this base. The inclusion of some of their more reactionary personalities such as Leo Varadkar on the Fine Gael front bench, despite his support for an attempt to oust party leader Enda Kenny, is a clear sign of this.

Of concern to the Labour Party in particular, is the newly formed United Left Alliance (ULA). This is an electoral alliance which includes the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party and the Workers' and Unemployed Action Group, as well as a number of independents.

There are currently no socialist TDs in parliament. It is likely that the ULA will win at least three seats, and they may be able to form a small socialist bloc in parliament — something the country hasn't seen in decades.

- ULA: unitedleftalliance.org
- TASC: tasnet.ie
- Irish Labour Party: labour.ie

A new bloc in Parliament?

By Mark Khan, an Irish Labour Party member

Since last year's local and European elections we have seen a growth in the broader left (Labour, Sinn Féin, and United Left Alliance [ULA]) though the Greens have faded.

However, in the last period of the campaign there has been a noticeable shrinking of the overall left vote in polls, as the newspapers and media, as well as Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, have gone on the offensive against the left as being crazy, unpractical and so on.

The ULA is fielding about 20 candidates in 19

[multi-member] constituencies, but there are several other left or republican leaning candidates who could caucus with them in the next parliament.

In most cases though those candidates are disaffected former Labour people, ex-councillors and sometimes ex-TDs.

I think a few of those left independents will be returned, and they are likely to caucus with ULA as a technical group in the Dáil. To get various rights in the Dáil, a technical group needs at least seven TDs (MPs). Only twice in history has a small party got more than six TDs, and both times that was the PDs [a right-wing splinter from FF].

Labour councillors can help by defying cuts

Greg Marshall is standing as a Labour anti-cuts candidate in Broxtowe, Notts, in the May council elections. He explained to *Solidarity* why had rejoined Labour after the May 2010 general election.

People understand that the cuts are not fair. The economic crisis was not caused by ordinary working people, and yet it is their libraries, swimming pools, schools and fire stations in the firing line.

It is crucial that Labour councillors work with representatives of community groups, local authority workers and trade unions, trades councils and other political activists so that a national movement can be forged to defeat the cuts.

I had no time for the politics of Blair and Brown. But Brown's defeat and the Tory victory changed things and opened possibilities for the Labour Party to fight for workers' interests.

I am standing because I want Broxtowe Council to continue to deliver good quality services for the community, which will not be possible if the Coalition spending cuts are allowed to happen. I want to stand with the community and campaigns to defend our services.

Our anti-cuts stance has been met with some wariness but many others have been reinvigorated. New life has been breathed into a number of local activists who now feel more confi-

dent to take a stand to reject proposed cuts.

Labour councils are being put in an invidious position by the government. They want councils to act as their bailiffs, carrying out part of their attack on welfare provision. This is not what most Labour councillors wanted to do when they stood for election.

There is a compelling argument for Labour councils to refuse to do the Coalition's dirty work, as doing so brings them into conflict with their supporters. We are seeing the occupation of libraries, day centres etc. in protest against their closure. Where do the councillors stand then? Do they call on the police and courts to evict the occupiers?

Trade unions will inevitably be taking industrial action against attacks on their members. Will councillors urge the breaking of strikes so they can continue to carry out the cuts? Yes, councillors should protest at the decisions the government is forcing them to make; and yes, we need to build a mass movement against the cuts.

But councillors could contribute massively to such a movement if they refused to do the government's bidding. If we are to defeat this government we need our movement united in opposing the cuts, not hamstrung by feeling that they are obliged to administer them.

Uni battles continue

The Government's huge cuts in university funding are rippling through, especially in the less posh universities which have no reserves or endowments and don't think they can get students to pay £9000.

Liverpool Hope University is the first of the Merseyside institutions to send out redundancy notices — about 100 of them, 60 to teaching staff.

The Merseyside Network Against Fees and Cuts has been leafleting the campus and we're finding that people who previously might have been resigned to the cuts are stirred up when it comes to the prospect of their module or their lecturer not being there next year.

The UCU is balloting and we're preparing solidarity around that. The Hope Uni SU is organising a training day to teach students how to be part of the "big society", and we're organising a demonstration against that.

At Liverpool University we are standing a socialist anti-cuts candidate for the Guild [Student Union] presidency.

Bob Sutton

On Friday 18 February we passed a motion at our Union General Meeting at the London School of Economics (LSE) calling for a student strike on the day that lecturers strike, and to support UCU's industrial action.

We're hoping that other universities will back that too and give the UCU the confidence to go ahead. We're mainly building for that right now.

Otherwise we're pressuring the vice-chancellor to not increase fees. The departments of sociology, gender studies, anthropology, and geography have all called on management to not increase fees. We're building for the academic board meeting on fees, aiming to pack that out with anti-fees lecturers.

Ashok Kumar

Hospitals shut services

By Darren Bedford

Many hospitals are losing funding from several streams, both central and local government, as well as from Primary Care Trusts.

For example, Homerton Hospital in Hackney, north east London, faces cuts of at least £15m. First in line are midwifery and language advocacy services.

The cuts to midwifery are all the more senseless given an annual growth of 19% of births at the hospital. According to the hospital's Unison branch, "Particularly shocking is the dissolving of the Shoreditch Group Practice which was set up in an area known to have high deprivation and infant

mortality rates, along with high rates of difficulties experienced by women during pregnancy or after birth."

Language advocates help non-English speakers receiving treatment at the hospital. Turkish language advocates (the most-used service) are being reduced from four to three, and the Kurdish service is being abolished entirely. This will reduce the amount of face-to-face time patients have with health-workers; instead they will have to rely on a standardised service provided by a telephone interpreter.

Unions at the hospital held a demonstration at the hospital on 5 February, and union activists from Homerton attended the

large Hackney anti-cuts demonstration on 19 February. The Unison branch has made clear that it opposes all cuts and is discussing further action.

Homerton is only one example. NHS South West Essex has summarily cancelled all hip operations. NHS Warwickshire will no longer be offering "low priority treatments" (which it claims include injections for chronic back pain). Several Trusts, including West Kent, Bury, Medway, and Warrington, are suspending, deferring or cancelling IVF treatments.

A number of Trusts are also suspending or cancelling treatments such as tonsillectomies.

Bigger U-turn needed!

By a Healthworker

The Government has done a small U-turn on the issue of price competition.

As it currently stands, the Health and Social Care Bill proposes that the NHS tariff should be "only the maximum price that can be paid for that service". Private providers would compete with the NHS in a cost-cutting race to the bottom.

In a letter to NHS bosses, Chief Executive Sir David Nicholson has said that introducing price competition would be "extremely dangerous" for the NHS. It looks like there will be a rewording of the Bill before the third reading in the House of Commons.

In the North East, Care UK had beaten a local NHS Trust for a contract though the NHS Trust boss reported that the NHS "was judged better than [Care UK] on quality, delivery and risk." He adds that price was "the only element [Care UK] beat us on."

Care UK boss John Nash and his wife have made over £100,000 donations to the Tory Party since 2006, including £21,000 to Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's private office.

The U-turn on price competition is a small improvement. But the Health and Social Care Bill will still unleash the chaos of market forces, and should be stopped.

Doctors prepare to take action

By Stuart Jordan

On 17 February, at a London meeting of the British Medical Association, around 250 members voted to end the policy of "critical engagement" with the government and move to a position of outright opposition.

The meeting also called for a poll of members on industrial action to

stop the bill.

Doctors have traditionally been deeply conservative. In 1948 the BMA opposed the formation of the NHS, and in the 1950s they threatened to destroy the NHS with action over pay.

Doctors appear left-wing at the moment because the centre of gravity in mainstream politics has shifted to far to the neo-liberal right. These are

educated people who have taken the time to read the documents and guidelines published by the government. Unfortunately, most working-class people (including NHS workers) have no idea about the tsunami of reform about to hit the health service.

Unison, the main health workers' union, should follow the doctors' lead and prepare for action.

Even sop for low-paid is cancelled

By Ed Whitby

In 2010 the Government declared a three year pay freeze for all public sector workers, but said that those on less than £21,000 workers (67% of workers in local government) would get £250.

Even that little promise has not been kept. Now, for the second year running, local government workers are to have a total pay freeze.

Unison, the main local government union, says it is launching a campaign to make Osborne deliver on his promise to the low-paid in local government, schools and

colleges.

But in fact Unison leaders effectively gave up months ago. Back in October Unison put in a pay claim for £250 on all spinal column points. To meet the government's commitment (i.e. to remedy the failure to meet this commitment last year and this) would have a required a claim of at least £500. Unions always put in a higher claim than they usually end up accepting. A £250 annual claim looks like effectively accepting a pay freeze.

A weak pay claim alongside a weak campaign to save jobs and services signals that the leadership has no confidence that we can win.

“I could not stay silent”

On Whose Shoulders We Stand by Jill Mountford

Ada Nield Chew

As the misery and injustices of the capitalist system are laid bare in the starkest manner and the life chances for our children diminish before our eyes, the words of a young and politically inexperienced Ada Nield Chew should be taken on by us all: “I feel it to be personally degrading and a disgrace upon me to remain silent and submit without a protest to the injustice done me.”

Ada, then working in a clothing factory, wrote these words as part of a series of letters she had published anonymously in the *Crewe Chronicle* in 1894, describing the injustices of factory life. Ada explains the piece-work system: in her section women work between 9 and 10 hours a day; however, much of this time is spent not earning money but waiting for work, gathering materials to work with, waiting for work to pass inspection, etc. This results in women needing to take work home, adding a further 4–5 hours to the working day, in order to earn anything like a living wage. She then declares:

“We are not asking for pity, sir, we ask for justice. Surely it would not be more than just to pay us at such a rate, that we could realise a living wage — in the true sense of the words — in a reasonable time, say one present working day of from 9 to 10 hours — till the eight hour day becomes general, and reaches even factory girls. Our work is necessary (presumably) to our employers. Were we not employed others would have to be, and if of the opposite sex, I venture to say, sir, would have to be paid on a very different scale. Why, because we are weak women, without pluck and grit enough to stand up for our rights, should we be ground down to this miserable wage?”

Ada was sacked from her job once her identity as the letter writer had been discovered. But uncowed and undeterred she went on to develop her political ideas through reading, argument and writing; and she used all of these skills to organise within her class.

SPEAKER

Ada was a formidable speaker, always ready to describe the situation of working-women and raise demands to improve their lot.

Ada joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In early 1905 she wrote a letter published in the *Clarion* challenging the policy of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) led by the suffragette “nobility” Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.

Ada argued that the WSPU policy was for “the entire class of wealthy women be(ing) enfranchised, (while) the great body of working women, married or single would be voteless still, and that to give wealthy women a vote would mean that they (would) vot(e) naturally in their own interests...” Christabel responded the following week and a fervent exchange went on.

History proved Ada to be right: Emmeline Pankhurst went on to stand for Parliament as the Conservative Party candidate in 1928. And it was Emmeline and Christabel who wandered the streets of London handing out white feathers to any young man not in uniform during the First World War — defending their own bourgeois class interests. For her part, Ada opposed the war and argued against Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the NUWSS, when she suspended all activities for the duration of the war.

Ada Nield Chew was born more than 140 years ago into a poor working-class family, one of 13 children. Her formal education was brought to a halt at the age of 11. She fought within herself and against others so that her background should not impede her. Instead it propelled her forward.

According to her daughter Doris, Ada was “keenly aware of the difference in education and upbringing between her and the middle class women around her”. Yet she fought against this, was unafraid to speak out against injustice, refused to be silenced or immobilised by those considered to be “better educated” or by their elevated position.

Ada Nield Chew’s political activity should influence working class women in 2011. It should inspire us to “protest the injustice done” to us all — to fight the onslaught of attacks on every aspect of our lives as the bosses’ class takes our jobs, our benefits, our health care and pensions, our children’s chances of going to university. We must not allow them to make us pay, yet again, for the inevitable crisis of capitalism.

These are fine shoulders on which to stand.

B is for Bolshevism

ABCs of Marxism

By Tom Unterrainer

A complete account of Bolshevism would require many shelves-worth of books. But the term “Bolshevism” and its variants are thrown about with such a mix of enthusiastic and antagonistic abandon that some form of straightforward understanding is very important.

One widely-held version of “Bolshevism” claims that the Russian Marxist movement split into two factions (the other being the “Mensheviks”) over the question of “what sort of party” at the 1903 congress of the Social Democratic Labour Party (RDSLP). The split is posed as between the Bolsheviks who advocated building a revolutionary democratic-centralist party and the Mensheviks who wanted something looser and broader. In fact, both factions were committed to the same revolutionary programme and all wings of the revolutionary movement advocated more or less “tight” democratic structures.

So, why the falling out? The initial division between the two camps grew out of Lenin’s refusal to act against the decisions of the congress. What was the burning issue? The answer looks petty today: leading Mensheviks wanted a bigger “Editorial Board” for the publication *Iskra*; congress set the number at three people. Lenin refused to budge. He saw it as an issue of “party spirit” as against “circle spirit”.

The split was not intended to be permanent. Events subsumed that particular division, though in hindsight it shows something of the “cultural” difference between Lenin’s insistence on sharp political decisions and the Menshevik’s bias towards muddling through.

From the 1890s onwards, Russia was a bubbling cauldron: a society which witnessed sizeable advances in capitalist production amidst a pauperised peasant population and under the continuing rule of an absolute monarch (Tsar).

When the situation tipped toward revolution in 1905, all wings of the RDSLP combined, working together on the basis of a working class revolutionary programme. There

were differences between Lenin and the Mensheviks even in 1905, and in the aftermath of 1905 sharp conflicts emerged, over conflicting interpretations of the revolution itself.

In his account of the revolution (1905) Leon Trotsky described the Menshevik interpreters as “bookkeepers of revolution”. He slammed them as opportunists for their revolutionary zeal of the moment and subsequent slump into determiners of the “possible” in the aftermath. The Mensheviks abandoned hope of worker-led revolution in the short term and advocated alliances with liberals and other bourgeois forces toward a bourgeois-dominated democratic revolution. The working class could come into its own at a later stage.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks drew different conclusions from 1905. For them, as for Trotsky, the role of the working class in 1905 (when “soviets” were first formed), and the behaviour of the bourgeois forces to whom the Mensheviks now looked for salvation, demonstrated that whatever the exact details of the revolution to come it could only be completed with the working class at the head. The split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks became definitive in 1912.

There were still important debates within the ranks of those rejecting the Menshevik course. Lenin still believed that, because of the numerical dominance of the peasantry, the revolution, though worker-led, could only be a radical form of bourgeois revolution.

But the key element common to Trotsky and the Bolsheviks was the idea that the workers could lead the coming revolution. Events between 1905 and 1917, including the Menshevik attitude to the First World War and their tactics during the subsequent revolution, demonstrated the validity of Bolshevik politics.

In describing the opportunistic mindset, Trotsky writes: “It is gripped by a special disease... driven berserk by its sickness, it attacks and wounds its own party”. This is true of much of the left today... including some self-proclaimed Bolsheviks.

Further reading:

1905, Leon Trotsky

The History of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky

Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, V I Lenin

Letters

AV debate

The AV referendum on 5 May will not tackle the accountability of MPs, their inflated incomes or the other many flaws of Britain’s bourgeois democracy.

The choice is between the current first past the post (FPTP) system or an AV system that arbitrarily manufactures an apparent majority for every MP, as a paltry means of shoring up their legitimacy.

AV is not proportional representation, because it retains the constituency link. AV might be more proportional in some elections, but it could be perversely disproportional in others. In 2005, New Labour had a 66-seat majority with 35% of the vote; under AV it would have had a 108-seat majority.

AV conflates the distinction between support and acquiescence. Democracy is scarcely improved by an MP getting 50.1% after third preferences than one elected on 49% under FPTP. Supporters of AV reduce democracy to a mangled form of aggregation.

AV does not help much with standing independent working class candidates. It assumes candidates are proximate substitutes, whereas from a class perspective, we vote for either socialist/labour movement candidates or not at all.

AV is likely to boost the number of seats won by the Lib-Dems, allowing them to arbitrate on who forms the government. Given their current role it is entirely right that many workers will see the referendum as an opportunity to chastise Clegg. We should advocate a vote “No” in the AV referendum and fight for authentically democratic mechanisms to hold the rascals to account.

Paul Hampton

I favour a critical vote in favour of AV, but not so much for the minor democratic gain I believe it would be.

The problem is the massive reduction in parliamentary seats being pushed through at the same time. With FPTP and the reduction in the number of seats, the Tories would have an in-built majority. This would be tempered by AV.

Mark Catterall

I don’t want to side with the rotten bloc of No Vote reactionaries who oppose in principle all democratic changes.

There’s a tactical argument to be had about whether we should call for a “critical yes” vote in order to be part of the debate, rather than be drowned out by the Tories and reactionary left by being in the no camp.

The minimum line should be that we’d call for abstention as we would have done in a referendum on the Euro.

Martin Ohr

Berlusconi a hypocrite

I should like to take issue with Cath Fletcher’s view (*Solidarity* 3-193) that a significant part of the recent anti-Berlusconi protests smacked of “conservative moralism” in its criticism of Berlusconi’s private choice to enjoy sex parties.

Berlusconi is not a private citizen but the head of a government in an unspoken alliance with the Vatican. It fully supports the latter’s profoundly anti-women, anti-gay, pro-life policies and attitudes, underwritten by billions of euros to sustain schools, property and the 50,000 religious teachers in the public school system.

Berlusconi annually presides over the celebration of “Family Day” in an exercise of vomit-inducing hypocrisy by church and state. This incarnates the compulsive misogyny, sexual repression and oppression so evident in the personality of Berlusconi and, alas, widespread in Italy.

The growing numbers of prostitutes underscore the dynamic of worsening economic and social conditions. That Berlusconi also chooses to appoint, from among the prostitutes that he knows, ministers and public officials is a mark of the further degradation and contempt for both the principle of democratic representation and the equality of the sexes — in a country which has one of the worst records of female representation in public life!

Berlusconi’s conduct has been from the beginning a political question, which should have been at the forefront of any serious socialist feminist politics. Unfortunately, the one-eyed Italian left and feminist movement choose to see it, like Cath, as a “personal matter”. They have thus allowed the political heart of the matter to be raised and distorted by campaigns of liberal journalism. The protestors are undoubtedly vague and unfocused, impregnated with a confused moralism, but the most damaging confusion lies elsewhere.

Hugh Edwards

Support the new Middle East workers' movement

Libya erupts

Two months after Mohamed Bouazizi, a street fruit-seller in Tunisia, burned himself to death in protest at poverty and official harassment, setting off an upheaval in his country, almost the whole Middle East is socially aflame.

Tyrants have fallen in Tunisia (14 January) and Egypt (11 February). As we go to press it looks as if Qaddafi in Libya, the most vicious of them all, is the next to go.

Protests have spread to Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, and Iraq, and beyond the Arab world to Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan.

We can read well-informed analyses telling us why Syria, or Jordan, or Saudi Arabia will escape upheaval; but before 17 December we could read well-informed analysis telling us that the one thing “clear” about Tunisia was that “political change [there] will not come about through some dramatic event”.

Soaring world food prices stirred up exasperation in Tunisia and Egypt, and with the political revolts have come workers' struggles demanding better wages. But the core of it is an elemental revolt for democracy and civil liberties, including in countries where food is a much smaller part of household budgets than in Egypt. (Libya's average income per head is over twice Egypt's; Bahrain's is three times higher again, and higher than Britain's).

The tyrannies of the region have been shaped by a history in which the three main chapter-headings are empires; oil; Israel.

Under the Ottoman empire and then British, French, or Italian empires, local society everywhere was polarised into corrupt landed elites and a pauperised peasantry, with a small layer of urban middle class.

After World War Two, the British and French empires could no longer hold on. It was not a quiet transfer to the local landed elites. In the same period, the Arab elites suffered a great blow to their prestige from the success of the new Jewish state of Israel in establishing itself and — with tiny numbers — defeating the Arab countries' apparently much stronger armies in war in 1948.

COUPS

Almost everywhere the old regimes were overthrown, often by coups led by army officers rooted in the middle class, and replaced by “Arab socialist”, “Muslim socialist”, or “Arab nationalist” regimes.

These regimes consolidated independence from the old colonial powers. They copied much from Stalinism — large nationalisations, industrial plans, one-party states. After three decades of privatisations, in Egypt the state is still a very big employer.

Oil became the region's dominant money-earner after World War Two. (It started in Iran, not part of the Ottoman empire but informally dominated by Britain and Russia in

rivalry, from 1908; in Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, from the 1930s; in Libya and Algeria, from the 1960s). Oil also made the region central to world power politics, and the big powers anxious to sustain whatever regimes there seemed passably cooperative and stable.

Oil wealth, trickling out to states with little oil through workers' remittances, meant that the people of these countries could see the lavishness of capitalist riches only just beyond their reach. But beyond. Their governments built up huge state bureaucracies, greatly expanded education, and urbanised their countries rapidly: but in the swollen cities most people, even university graduates, could not find regular jobs.

For their failings, the regimes had one excuse: Israel. Israel in fact had greatly harmed the Palestinians, and not significantly hurt the other Arab peoples; but the rulers cited “Zionism” as the only reason why the Arabs had not become a unified and prosperous nation.

STALER

The worst tyrants, like Qaddafi, bolstered themselves by also being the most “militant” against Israel.

The rhetoric became staler and staler, the bureaucratic structures more and more stifling and discredited — as in Eastern Europe before 1989.

Now the peoples of the region are overturning all the old clichés about Middle East politics. How far will it go?

Maybe the present ruling classes and state bureaucracies will be able to survive by opening up politics, operating limited purges, and conceding limited social-welfare measures. Maybe they will then try to take back the concessions.

The upheavals so far have been secular, and have spread to protests against the Islamist regime in Iran. But in some countries political Islamists were the main visible political opposition under the old regimes. If strong enough political alternatives are not built, they could confiscate the revolutions for counter-revolution.

The working classes are a new factor. Before the “Arab socialist” period industry was too weak for the working classes to be powerful. In recent decades the working classes have expanded in numbers, but been unable to move decisively for lack of political and trade-union freedom.

Now a great new union federation is growing in Egypt, and strikes are spreading almost everywhere. New workers' movements can give the broad surge for democracy and civil liberties decisive social backing and precise political edge, fend off counter-revolution, and create the potential for going on to workers' power.

All the forces in the region of modified conservatism will get anxious and ample support from one faction or another of the world's wealthy. The new workers' movements need international support too. That is the duty that falls to us.

Government to set up strike breaking unit?

The Daily Mail on 22 February carried an article reporting on “top secret” government plans to undermine strikes, with the Cabinet Office setting up a special “unit” to “prevent Britain grinding to a standstill in the event of mass public sector walkouts.”

According to the *Mail*, the plans include developing relationships with private firms to provide scab labour to break strikes, and establishing special contingency arrangements in key areas to maintain services during any industrial action. The *Mail* claims that government minister Francis Maude has analysed the workforce at thousands of prisons, schools, hospitals, railway stations, bus depots and energy facilities to work out where the most militant union staff are based.

The *Mail* loves to sensationalise any story about industrial action in order to create ludicrous caricatures of the labour movement as a monstrous “enemy within”. But if there is even the remotest shred of truth in the story, two conclusions are evident for revolutionary socialists.

First, we must ask why the leaders of our class are not conducting the class war with as much vigour as bosses' leaders and the politicians who represent them. For militants in unions such as Unison — where getting the union bureaucracy to sanction a strike ballot over an individual local issue, much less one for coordinated national action, is frequently an uphill battle — the “mass public sector walkouts” and “general strike” spoken of in the *Mail*'s article are distant fantasies.

But, second, the moves represent a clear trend towards much more concerted efforts by bosses to undermine and effectively outlaw strike action.

Recent disputes involving NUJ, RMT, Unite and other unions have all fallen foul of expanded and more stringent interpretations of anti-union legislation, and senior figures in government and industry have called for new legislation to make strikes more difficult. Leaders in both the Tory and Lib Dem parties were making noises about the need to ban public sector strikes even before the coalition government came to power.

As the government goes after services such as the NHS and Royal Mail, we can be sure they will simultaneously attempt to hamstring any effective resistance, by shackling the workers in those services.

We need a real, direct-action campaign against anti-union legislation and strike breaking, and a frank discussion among rank-and-file militants across the public sector about ways to get around — and, where necessary, break — the law.

Spread the strikes

Unison members at Nottinghamshire County Council will strike on 24 February against the Tory-run authority's plans to axe 1000 jobs in the next three months. The council proposes to spend a total of £60 million making 3,500 redundancies over the next three years.

Voting two to one in favour of action, these workers are the first to stage industrial action against job cuts. Their action is vitally important for all public sector workers facing cuts.

Since winning the council in 2009 the Tories have pledged to transform their ideological commitment to “smaller local government” into direct political action.

The threat to 1000 jobs is just a small part of the picture. Back in 2009 they announced the wholesale privatisation of council-run care homes. The figures for cuts to jobs and spending have now increased, as has the pace of privatisation. Already, contracts are out to tender for a large number of previously council-run services.

Local Unison stewards and officers have been building toward action since last year. They have been consistently organising and rallying the membership for action.

In the face of overwhelming support from the membership, the national union had to grant permission for action.

Elsewhere, union members in Tower Hamlets and Doncaster are balloting.

To defeat the Tory cuts agenda, this sort of action must spread wider, and needs to be combined with strikes across the public sector.

Strikes sweep Iraq

By Falah Alwan, President of the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq

Strikes in the [state-owned] leather industries were held on 1 February. The workers called for safety benefits and remunerations. They wanted to expose the lies of the administration about the bankruptcy of their company. They have more than one contract with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Trade and other ministries to provide them with leather goods.

The third demand was against "self-financing", which is a kind of privatisation. The strike continued for two weeks, until 14 February. The administration promised to answer the workers' demands, except the demand safety benefits.

In Kut, there was a strike in a textile factory. Workers shut down all parts of the factory. Because of the situation in that factory, US troops came directly to the factory and surrounded it. The administration has promised to answer the workers' demands, but there are no official or written documents — only a "promise".

Oil workers employed by the Northern Oil Company in Kirkuk have also been protesting. They have a particular system of contracts; they want to be full-time employees and have full contracts with the company. They have been working on the current system of temporary contacts for more than 10 years, but the administration has refused their demands. They threatened to hold a strike and stop oil production.

There was a lot of support for them from the oil unions in Basra and other provinces. Their committees, especially those which affiliate to the FWCUI, threatened to hold a supportive strike in Basra. They are preparing for a strike in the event that the Ministry of Oil refuses to answer the demands of the Northern Oil Company. Two or three of the main workers' committees in the south, at the pipelines and refineries in Basra, met on 11 February. I attended the meeting and they said they are prepared to take strike action in solidarity with the Northern Oil Company workers. There has been no action yet but I think the workers are very supportive.

There is also an issue around workers working for foreign companies earning more than workers working for Iraqi

companies; the oil workers' committees in the south are calling for a levelling-up to the same levels of pay and benefits. They are also prepared to strike over this issue.

The main committee organising workers at the Northern Oil Company is affiliated to the GFIW. I have spoken with the president of this committee and he is resolved to continue his struggle against the administration at the company and against the Ministry of Oil.

In Basra itself, electricity workers demonstrated for two days. Workers who work in high towers to connect electricity to other stations have risk payments, but the Ministry of Electricity are refusing to pay up. They held their first day of demonstration inside the electricity station, and the second day was in front of the government buildings in Basra.

Over the last two weeks, we have been in contact with workers in Egypt, including the leaders of the new independent unions. We are also in contact with workers' organisations in Tunisia and Algeria. The participation and influence of workers and their unions in the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt is very clear. They were the leaders of the demonstrations. Our attitude is that we want the workers in Iraq to follow the same model and hold vast demonstrations and protests.

We are building for new strategies for the workers' movement in Iraq, to be part of the changing political situation. There are mass demands calling for change in Iraq; most demonstrators are calling for an end to the existing parliament, and to elect a new one. It is a wave of change in Iraq.

To build support, activists worldwide can make sure these reports are spread as widely as possible to inform people of the realities inside Iraq.

The government has been saying the planned demonstration on 25 February is being organised by Ba'athists. We need to tell people that the workers themselves want to hold the demonstrations. It is the workers, the unemployed, students, young people — the freedom lovers — who want to change things, not the Ba'athists and fascist parties in Iraq. We need to widely distribute the reports of the workers in Iraq. We will take part in the demonstration on 25 February; it could be a very big step forward for workers' struggle and the independent workers' movement.

Egypt: unions and parties organise

By Clive Bradley

So far 13 new political parties have announced their existence in Egypt. Among them is a "Liberation, Development and Defence Front", which declares itself as of the secular left, and has collected 20,000 signatures calling for its recognition. It seems likely this is an initiative from people from a broadly Communist Party background (although the Egyptian CP formally dissolved in the mid sixties).

Within the youth organisations which were central to organising the protest movement from January 25 onwards, there are attempts to develop more long-term forms of organisation. When a committee of the various youth organisations proved to consist entirely of men, angry women set up their own organisations...

This is a measure of the profound change that has occurred in Egyptian political culture.

Kamal Abbas was the leader of major strikes back in 1989 in the huge Iron and Steel plant in Helwan, just south of Cairo. He was sacked and threatened many times with jail. He was a founder of the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS) which has been central to organising and publicising the new, independent unions which have formed during the revolution which ousted Hosni Mubarak.

In mid-February he sent a message of support to the workers fighting for their rights in Wisconsin, USA. "Today is the day of the American workers. We salute you American workers!" (Video here: www.michaelmoore.com/words/must-read/statement-kamal-abbas)

There's no cheap anti-Americanism here: these militants understand who their necessary allies are.

It was the development of a general strike which actually spelled the end for the Mubarak regime, especially as it gripped the economically vital Suez Canal. Immediately, the

new military rulers called for workers to go back to work, and threatened to ban strikes. The workers paid no attention. Across the country, strikes only intensified. Major struggles occurred in Helwan, and Mahalla al-Kubra, where there is a huge textile plant which has been central to opposition to the government since 2006. At the time of writing strikes continue despite further government threats to ban industrial action.

Workers' movement activists also successfully forced the government to withdraw the appointment of Hussein Megawar, leader of the official state-run union federation, as Minister of Labour. In addition to his lamentable record as the federation's boss, Megawar is widely believed to have been an organiser of the pro-government thugs who attacked Tahrir Square on 2 February in an unsuccessful attempt to intimidate the revolution.

Generally there is a mood of suspicion about the army. The Western media has tended to portray the Egyptian protesters as naive or gullible, simply welcoming the transfer of power from Mubarak to the military command as in the national interest. In fact, it took some time even to clear Tahrir Square of demonstrators, and last Friday (18 February), a week after the dictator's fall, over a million people came back onto the streets to demand that the army fulfill its promise to introduce democracy.

The immense blossoming of civil society continues. All over Egypt, new political parties are being formed — sometimes with no clear political programme, but simply out a desire to continue the struggle and not return to things as they were before.

The first political party to be officially recognised was the centrist-Islamist Wasat Party, a split from the Muslim Brothers in the 1990s. Meanwhile there are indications of serious divisions within the Brotherhood, the largest and best organised of Egypt's opposition movements.

Monarc

By Dan Katz

On Saturday 19 February security forces withdrew from the Pearl Square area in the capital, Manama, allowing pro-democracy demonstrators to return to a place which had become the centre of the protest movement.

The state forces, many of whom are Sunni Muslims recruited outside Bahrain, had killed seven protesters over the previous week.

The overwhelming majority of the demonstrators and 70% of the population are Shia. Shia people are discriminated against in Bahrain. All real power is in the hands of the Sunni monarchy and its hand-picked politicians.

On the marches one popular chant has been: "There are no Sunnis or Shias, just Bahraini unity." According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Protest organisers and participants have stressed the non-sectarian and secular nature of their demands for democratic reforms, and their independence from any Iranian or pan-Shiite agenda."

On Monday King Hamad ordered that a number of political prisoners be freed, which is a central demand of the opposition. Other demands include: the government's resignation, the investigation of the deaths of protesters; political reforms that will lead to a constitutional monarchy. However, on Monday, for the first time, protesters could be heard chanting for the abolition of the monarchy.

Thousands of pro-government Sunnis rallied at a Manama mosque on Monday evening, pledging loyalty to the al-Khalifa royal family. Saudi Arabia, which has a large Shiite minority, and is connected to the main island of Bahrain by a short causeway, has backed the king, standing "with all [our] capabilities behind the [Bahraini] state."

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) had called a national strike for Monday, but called it off saying all its demands had been met. It was calling for tanks to be removed from the streets and for the freedom to protest.

It seems that some sections struck anyway. 1500 striking teachers rallied in Pearl Square; civil servants also struck.

The Egyptian Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services has sent the Bahraini Federation a message of solidarity.

A large demonstration is taking place as we go to press on Tuesday 22 February. For the first time it is formally backed by opposition parties.

A key opposition grouping is a reactionary Shia party, Wefaq. Its 17 MPs in the 40-seat Lower House of Parliament resigned last week in protest at the state's use of violence against protesters.

Yemen: ongoing protests

On Sunday 20 February protests in Yemen entered their 11th consecutive day.

In the capital, Saana, government supporters tried to break up a demonstration outside Sanaa University by 3,000 protesters. Students carried signs reading "Get out [president] Ali for the sake of future generations". These protests have been organised by an alliance of leftist, nationalist and Islamists groups.

In the port city of Aden, tanks and armoured vehicles were out on the city's main streets.

In the southern city of Ibb, around 1,000 protesters set up camp in Freedom Square waving banners which read, "The people want the fall of the regime".

The government is concerned about moves for the independence of southern Yemen. Hasan Baoum, a southern movement leader, was arrested on Sunday.

chry in retreat

The security forces killed seven protestors in Bahrain. They have now retreated.

Kurdish government shoots protestors

The democratic rebellion in the Middle East has spread to Iraqi Kurdistan, where protestors in Sulaimaniya on Thursday 17th chanted: "Do you remember Mubarak?" The authorities responded with gunfire, killing two and injuring 47.

Undaunted by the violence, the people of Sulaimaniya took to the streets again on Sunday 20th.

Although Iraqi Kurdistan has been more prosperous and peaceful than the rest of Iraq since 2003 — it has been the USA's prize exhibit for the "good side" of the 2003 invasion — the benefits have gone overwhelmingly to a small elite around the two main parties, KDP and PUK, both of them more machines of patronage organised round aristocratic families than real political parties.

The demonstrators in Sulaimaniya — as in many cities in

the southern, mainly Arab, part of Iraq — demanded better public services and the removal of corrupt officials.

In Baghdad, the central government has hurriedly modified the new year's budget to give more priority to public services. It has promised "immediate action to improve the food ration card system and to work on reforming the social benefits system" and "job opportunities to reduce unemployment".

That follows protests in Fallujah, Kut, Basra, Kirkuk, and other cities.

In London, activists of the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan and other Iraqi Kurdish groups ran a round-the-clock protest against the repression in Sulaimaniya outside the Kurdistan Regional Government London office from 18 to 21 February.

Palestinian unions seek links with new workers' movements

Comrade X, a socialist and trade-union activist in Palestine, spoke to *Solidarity* about recent demonstrations in the West Bank and the response of Palestinians to the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa.

All Palestinians condemn the US veto on the UN Security Council resolution about Israeli settlement building. We see it as an attack on our national rights. It also proves that the ongoing dependence of the Palestinian leadership on the USA is a mistake and sows illusions in their role. US foreign policy hasn't fundamentally changed since the election of Obama.

The alternative to dependence on the USA is for us to depend on ourselves; we cannot wait for a knight on a white horse to rescue us. We need to base ourselves on the principles of the first intifada — grassroots organisation and popular struggle. What's happening in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt, is because of popular self-organisation and struggle, not because of any foreign power.

There is also an element in the situation of the Palestinian Authority trying to distract attention away from internal issues like democracy, elections, human rights and the split between the West Bank and Gaza and onto external questions. They did the same thing with the Al-Jazeera leaks about the negotiations. We cannot just focus externally; we need to look at struggles going on inside Palestine as well.

In general the response in Palestine to the uprisings in the Arab world has been incredibly positive. We have been in a weak position and we know that the Arab states have not played a good role, so we hope that new democratic regimes in the region will support us. We would prefer change without bloodshed, but the most important thing is to get change.

In terms of Palestinian workers, I'm involved with a national campaign around social rights which focuses on the minimum wage and social security. We held a conference in January which happened to coincide with the Tunisian uprising. Some PA officials were in attendance and they tried to say that something like that could never happen here, but workers face many issues in Palestine too.

The PGFTU [Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions] has already issued statements of support for the independent unions in Bahrain and Egypt; it's those new, independent unions we want to have a relationship with, not governmental unions. We'll be doing everything we can to support them.

Morocco touched

A weekend of demonstrations on 19-20 February marked the outbreak of widespread pro-democracy protests in Morocco, a country some analysts thought would be better insulated against uprising due to its relatively prosperous economy and relatively flexible constitutional-monarchy system.

A march on Morocco's parliament building ended with protesters calling for the parliament to step down; despite the relative prosperity, unemployment is still high, the gap between rich and poor is enormous, and corruption is endemic.

Protests have erupted throughout the country, leading to at least five deaths. Although few elements in the protest movement are calling for the overthrow of the monarchy (current King Mohammed VI is widely seen as far better than his tyrannical father Hassan II), even elements within the monarchy itself recognise the potential of the situation.

In a recent interview with Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, Prince Mulay Hicham, the king's cousin, said "Almost every authoritarian system will be affected by this wave of protest, Morocco will probably be no exception... The gap between social classes undermines the legitimacy of political and economic systems... If most social agents recognize the monarchy, they are, nevertheless, dissatisfied with the strong concentration of power in the hands of the Executive."

Make solidarity with independent Egyptian unions

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

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

• Email: info@egyptworkersolidarity.org • Web: <http://www.egyptworkersolidarity.org/>

Vanessa Redgrave, the WRP and Libyan money

By Dan Katz

The British Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) was a sizeable organisation up to its implosion in 1985.

From 1976, in order to fund its daily paper, *Newsline*, the WRP took money from Libya, Iraq and other vicious dictatorships, rewarding its paymasters with anti-Jewish propaganda and support for those regimes, dressed up as "anti-imperialism".

In 1981, actress Vanessa Redgrave, the WRP's best known member, sued our comrades John Bloxam and Sean Matgamna for libel for comparing the WRP to the Moonie sect and the Scientologists, and for reporting that the WRP used systematic emotional and physical violence against vulnerable young people.

The WRP tied us up in an expensive legal case for four years, although they never took the case to court. In response, we launched a campaign for a labour movement inquiry.

We wrote in our paper that there was "circumstantial evidence" the WRP was getting money from one or more Arab governments. We challenged them to sue us on that. They never did. Their paper spoke glowingly of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the Libyan despot Qaddafi.

The WRP ran a heresy hunt against us because we told the truth about them. They were able to make some headway. Sizeable numbers on the left accepted the WRP's public enthusiasm for the Libyan regime as "anti-imperialism". A WRP-run broad paper, *Labour Herald* (1981-5), was able to get articles, and speakers for its meetings, from Labour Party dignitaries such as Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight, David Blunkett and even Margaret Hodge.

We were vindicated in 1985 when the WRP expelled its 72-year-old leader Gerry Healy, accusing him of sexually abusing young women members. As the fall-out increased, Healy's associates admitted that the organisation had, in return for money, spied on Arab dissidents and prominent Jews in Britain. Most shamefully of all they helped to get a number of Iraqi Communist Party members shot by Saddam Hussein.

We were right to stand up for honesty and clean political hands in the labour movement. We were right to stand up against people who had sold themselves and become the mouthpieces for vicious despots. And we were right to say that anti-semitism and self-serving Arab nationalism, dressed up as "anti-Zionism" and "anti-imperialism", is political poison.

• More: <http://bit.ly/e6BZzs>
<http://bit.ly/hLdoPa>

On workersliberty.org...

"The tragic fiasco of Liverpool City Council under Militant-Socialist Party leadership"

An assessment of Liverpool Labour council in 1983-6. Through that council, the avowedly Marxist "Militant Tendency" (forerunner of today's Socialist Party) had the leadership of a mass workers' movement which could have shaken or defeated Thatcher's government. Arguably it marked the highest point ever (so far) of active mass influence for would-be revolutionary Marxists in Britain. Yet the battle ended in fiasco. The importance of learning the lessons is as huge as were the opportunities.

<http://tinyurl.com/67z6bh3>

Church and school in the Soviet Republic

Essay written in 1919 by Nikolai Bukharin. It begins: "The working class and its party — the Communist-Bolshevik Party — aim not only at an economic liberation, but also at a spiritual liberation of the toiling masses. And the economic liberation itself will proceed all the more quickly, if the proletarians will throw out of their heads all the crazy ideas that the feudal landlords and the bourgeoisie and manufacturers have knocked into them."

<http://tinyurl.com/6gwqsr>

The Muslim Brotherhood and business

By Rhodri Evans

Some reports suggest that the upheavals in Egypt have created ferment within the Muslim Brotherhood, the political-Islamist movement which was the largest visible political opposition force under Mubarak and also the oldest of the Middle East's Sunni-Islamist movements.

Groupings such as Hamas, among the Palestinians, originated as offshoots of the Brotherhood.

A 2009 study by Husam Tammam and Patrick Haenni, written for a Swiss-based research institute, sets a baseline for assessing the more recent reports by giving an overview of the Brotherhood and the "social question".

In line with the call from the Brotherhood's founder, Hassan al-Banna, for the creation of elements of Islamist economy, several Brotherhood-owned capitalist corporations were created in the 1940s.

In Egypt's "Arab socialist" period, under Nasser, Brotherhood capital fled to the Gulf, and developed strong interests there, mainly in construction and import-export business.

The Brotherhood both supported and took advantage of Sadat's "infatih" (neo-liberal) policies from the 1970s. Brotherhood capital returned to Egypt and invested massively in construction, property development, health, education, and transport.

These moves have created a veritable "business lobby" within the Brotherhood. In 1997 the Brotherhood supported an agrarian counter-reform, by Mubarak, which returned certain lands nationalised by Nasser to the old landlords.

A Brotherhood economic expert has called for a two-thirds reduction in Egypt's public-sector payroll "to guarantee an increased workforce for the private sector"; and the Brotherhood has called directly for privatisation in the health and education sectors, hoping to benefit by organising its own substitute "Islamic" provision.

Historically, political Islamism has presented itself as a just alternative to both "socialism" and "capitalism". However, in the Brotherhood social and anti-capitalist agitation

Ghazl al-Mahalla textile workers, 2008. Photo: Jano Charbel

has dwindled in recent decades. "The new Islamists never speak of social justice and redistribution... Their demand is that they should be rich in order to be good Islamists..."

The late 1930s to the early 1950s was the "golden age" of Brotherhood "workerism". It set up a "worker" section and supported some strikes; but it opposed others, and insisted that the first job of Brotherhood worker-activists was to preach Islam.

When government repression against the Brotherhood eased in the 1970s, it first re-implanted itself in the universities and professional associations (lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc.) rather than among workers. But from 1998 the Brotherhood began an effort in Egypt's state-controlled "unions", with a little success.

The Brotherhood's refusal to support the strikes in solidarity with the Mahalla workers in 2008 was due not only to caution, but also to the fact that a Brotherhood leader was among the owners of the Mahalla factory.

• <http://bit.ly/hMtdtQ>

Brotherhood leader calls for turn

By Martin Thomas

According to a startlingly frank interview given by Khaled Hamza, editor of the Muslim Brotherhood's English-language website, to the Swiss-based researcher Patrick Haenni, the upheavals in Egypt have provoked major dissent — with which Hamza plainly identifies himself — in the 80-year-old Islamist organisation.

The interview suggests that if secular socialists can organise themselves rapidly and strongly enough in Egypt, and present a sharp alternative to the Brotherhood's historic demand for an "Islamic state", then they can win over sizeable numbers from the Brotherhood's youth.

Hamza says that the Brotherhood was first pulled into the movement by "a certain number of MB dissidents, who had quit the movement following their activity on blogs and Facebook.

"Those dissidents played the role of a link between the student sections of the Brotherhood and the protest movements..."

"The young ex-Brothers were the link, and pulled the young Brothers from the universities into the movement while the Brotherhood leadership was hesitating about throwing the Brotherhood into the protests. On the one hand, because they distrusted these protest movements which they knew little about. On the other, because they fear the blows of repression.

"But they did not want to repeat the mistake of 6 April" [2008, when the Brotherhood did not support the general strike in support of the workers of Mahalla].

The dissident and semi-dissident youth threw themselves into the movement. "The leaders of the Brotherhood knew what was happening, and let it go".

Haenni put it to Hamza that the Brotherhood leadership changed line on 28 January.

"Yes, on the 28th, when repression had already begun to appear, the Brothers decided to commit the core of the organisation. They were convinced that this time they would be in the midst of the population, that they would

not be alone.

"Besides the numerical mobilisation, we should note a fundamental about-turn: for the first time in their history, the Brothers abstained from brining out their big slogans like 'Islam is the solution' and did not wave copies of the Quran. Instead, they spoke of democracy, bread, and revenge for the martyrs who had fallen. It was a historic shift..."

"In their discourse, the Brothers had the good sense not to Islamise the revolution. Our revolution is not Islamist, and we have no Islamic demands, for that is the reality of the Egyptian revolution. We then immediately rebuffed the attempts to Islamise the revolution as manifested in the declarations of Al Qaeda and Khamenei..."

"Among the young Brothers, the dominant idea now is that the historic choice of Hassan al-Banna [founder of the Brotherhood] for progressive change in society 'from below' [by changing individuals, families, etc.] was a mistake. The youth understand that they are not trapped in a dilemma between a strategy of transformation from below via the [religious] reframing of society, or a putschist and violent strategy 'from above'.

"Beyond those two alternatives, they are discovering a third way: mass civic peaceful protest, the strategy of 'million-strong demonstrations'.

"A whole debate is now underway within the Brotherhood on the very nature of the state. The youth say: we want a state for Muslims, not an Islamic state".

That historic demand of the Brotherhood is still upheld by the MB English-language website which Hamza himself edits. Despite launching a "Freedom and Justice Party" (21 February), Brotherhood leaders have said that they are not abandoning historic Brotherhood doctrine. Tension and splits within the Brotherhood look more likely than a wholesale move to "Muslim-democratic" politics.

• Interview: <http://bit.ly/f2PQ61>

• MB English website: <http://ikhwanweb.com>

• Classic Brotherhood doctrine: www.workersliberty.org/qutb

Egypt and the fight for democracy

By Martin Thomas

"It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it..."

"As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie."

"Then, at a certain stage in the mobilization of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets [workers' councils] can and should arise..."

"Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution..."

Are these ideas — put forward by Leon Trotsky in the Transitional Programme in 1938 — relevant to Egypt today? I think so, and primarily by virtue of the first clause: "it is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it".

You could make a case that the argument is anachronistic. In 1938 Trotsky was writing about what he called the "colonial and semi-colonial countries", and identified the "central tasks" there as "the agrarian revolution, i.e. liquidation of feudal heritages, and national independence".

Egypt acquired national independence 58 years ago, when a military coup overthrew the British-backed monarchy. Successive land reforms in the 1950s and 60s broke up many of its quasi-feudal large landed estates, limited maximum holdings to 84 hectares, restrained rents and gave security to tenants, and redistributed a sizeable amount of land to small farmers.

Recent "counter-reforms" in agriculture are geared to capitalist export business, rather than anything "feudal".

But the "bourgeois revolution" of national independence and land reform in Egypt, as in many other countries, was carried through by middle-class forces using the template not of Russia's 1917 workers' revolution, nor even of 19th century democratic revolutions, but of the results of Russia's Stalinist counter-revolution.

Stalinism in Eastern Europe generated land reforms and industrial development — but also a political frame for society which was in many ways "pre-bourgeois" and which would, when the people finally rose up in 1989 to break it, generate a series of... bourgeois-democratic revolutions.

In the heyday of Nasserism Egypt had incomplete forms of many of the characteristic structures of Stalinism — the monopoly over politics of a single "party", state-controlled

Egyptian parliament: "no real elections since 1922-52"

trade unions, ownership of much of the economy by a corrupt bureaucracy calling itself "socialist"... Much of that heritage remains, melded with the results of decades of neo-liberal policy.

Time has moved forward since Trotsky wrote in 1938 — but also in some ways backwards, or sideways. Trotsky was codifying the ideas of an era, the 1920s, when the prime model for revolutionaries in poorer countries was the workers' revolution in Russia in 1917; when sizeable working-class revolutionary parties, inspired by the Russian workers' example, existed in countries like China and India.

EGYPT TODAY

In Egypt, as under Stalinism, independent working-class politics has been stifled for decades. There has been a tremendous upsurge of trade-union battles in Egypt since 2004, but for independent working-class politics everything is yet to be built. The working class needs time in the "open air" to discuss, to clarify, to build.

The "Socialist International", the international association of social-democratic parties which includes in many countries the main parties linked to the labour movement, like the Labour Party in Britain, recognised Mubarak's stooge "party" as its Egyptian affiliate!

To propose that in Egypt, too, "the workers must be armed with this democratic program", is not to propose any rigid "stages" theory, any more than Trotsky was proposing such a thing in 1938.

It is to learn a lesson from Iran. One of the mistakes we

(AWL's forerunners) made in 1978-9 was to pose the issues as "workers' rule versus the Islamists", and to assume that the Islamists were only an ideological veil for bourgeois economic interests. To imagine that the issues of democracy and secularism had been left behind by class struggle was in fact fantasy.

Egypt's working people need free trade unions, with the right to strike; freedom of association, freedom of the press. Those have scarcely existed there, except very feebly in 1922-52.

They need to break the stifling hold of the army, which is also a major factor in big business. The army must be pushed out of politics; stripped of its corrupt economic interests; and have its officer corps purged.

The Tahrir Square demonstrations were inspiringly secular: "Muslims, Christians, we are all Egyptians!" Yet since 1980 Egypt's constitution states that "the principles of the Islamic Sharia shall be the main source of legislation".

This was in good part "fake Islamism", used by Mubarak to fend off the real Islamists. But issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody of children, are regulated for Muslims by sharia courts, and for Christians by separate courts. There has been a "creeping Islamisation" of Egyptian society for decades now, and the real Islamists are strong.

Egypt's working people need to reverse that, to win a secular society with equality before the law for all and especially for women.

They need an elected constituent assembly. Egypt has had no real elections since the feeble landlord-dominated parliaments of 1922-52. Elections are not the whole of democracy: elections won by a political-Islamist party which would then suppress all democracy, claiming to substitute "God's law", as in Algeria in 1992, would be undemocracy. But the demand for a democratically-decided constitution must be part of the package.

Egypt's working people in the countryside need a new land reform. Today, 43% of farmers have plots of less than 0.4 hectares, nowhere near enough to support their households, while a three per cent minority own 33% of all agricultural land. Agricultural rents have rocketed since the government deregulated them in 1997, driving many tenants off the land.

All these struggles can intertwine with battles pointing to workers' power and socialism — for the purging of old-regime managers, for workers' control, for the organisation of rank-and-file soldiers' committees, for the election of officers, for publicly-provided welfare provision under democratic control, for neighbourhood committees.

Egypt: what trade unions must do now

Eric Lee

What happened in Egypt over the last few weeks has a clear historic parallel in the events of August 1980 in Poland.

In both cases, weakened authoritarian regimes crumbled as popular unrest spread. In Poland and Egypt, state-controlled labour fronts proved unable to control the masses; new, independent unions were formed in struggle. In both countries, religion provided a means of expressing dissent — and both the reactionary Roman Catholic church and the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood posed threats to the prospects of genuinely progressive change.

And in both countries, small groups of workers and intellectuals struggled over many years (KOR in Poland, the CTUWS in Egypt) building the basis for the independent unions that eventually emerged.

The lessons we learned in 1980 apply today, and the battle is already on to determine what happens next for the Egyptian working class — and for the region as a whole.

In Egypt, a fight is now underway over the fate of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), the state-controlled labour front.

At stake are the assets of the organisation, the fate of its corrupt leadership, and its monopoly power in the workplace.

This struggle is taking place side by side with the fight for the right to strike, and the right to form free and independent trade unions.

In fact the complete defeat of the ETUF and its replace-

ment by genuine unions is essential if the workers' movement is to make any progress at all.

So while Egyptian workers demonstrate outside the ETUF headquarters and others demand the arrest of the corrupt ETUF leaders and the seizure of their assets, there are things we in the international labour movement can do to support them.

First of all, we must assist Egyptian workers in isolating and delegitimising the ETUF. We can do so by urging the global union federations to which our unions are affiliated to expell the ETUF members from their ranks. The rotten and corrupt ETUF never belonged inside the international trade union movement and its expulsion is long overdue.

We should also insist that the ETUF not be allowed to represent the Egyptian working class at the International Labour Organisation. Instead, representatives of the new unions should take their place inside the ILO Workers Group. The TUC and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) should insist upon this point.

Second, the ETUF and its equally rotten counterpart in Syria have long controlled the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU). ICATU represents all that is wrong with state-controlled labour fronts and is currently headed up by one of Colonel Qaddafi's stooges.

STOP

But it is treated seriously and with respect by the TUC and the ITUC — and this must stop. ICATU, like the ETUF, should be isolated and allowed to wither away.

Instead, our unions should encourage the formation of a genuine regional body for democratic and representative unions in the Middle East. (And such a body would not have the word "Arab" in it.)

Ideally it would include not only the Tunisian UGTT and the new Egyptian unions, but also the Iraqi unions, including the Kurdish ones, the independent workers' groups in

Iran, and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU).

The fact that the PGFTU was excluded from ICATU because of its alleged "collaboration" with the Israeli Histadrut tells us just how useless and reactionary ICATU was.

And we should not hesitate to call for the inclusion of the Israeli working class — both Jews and Arabs — in any such regional body. That means the affiliation of the Histadrut as well as smaller unions to a regional organisation.

The Egyptian workers will not win their fight unless it spreads throughout the region, as is already happening. Countries which do not tolerate independent workers' organisations such as Syria, Jordan, Iran, the Gulf states, Hamas-controlled Gaza and so on, are all seeing signs of worker unrest. All those struggles need our support.

While practical gestures of solidarity such as delegations, raising funds and so on are vitally important, there is also a political fight taking place here within the trade union movement and the left.

Many on the self-styled "left" of our movement, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), were long identified as supporters of the state-controlled labour front in Egypt, as well as those in other countries in the region.

Those on the left, such as the Socialist Workers Party, who once called independent Iraqi trade unionists "quislings" (thus endangering their lives) and who see the Palestinian trade unionists as "Zionist collaborators" have suffered a massive defeat in the streets of Egypt.

Egyptian workers have rejected the lies put out by the ETUF and ICATU and are insisting on a new beginning.

Anything is possible now, including a regional union federation in which Israelis and Palestinians can finally take part. The Egyptian workers have made this possible. We must stand with them, and support them in any way we can.

Historian of Chartism

By Edd Mustill

Labour and socialist historian Dorothy Thompson died on 29 January at the age of 87. She is best known for her large and tremendously important work on the 19th century Chartist movement.

Thompson took an over-arching view of Chartism as a movement, never overlooking the contributions of the individual men and women involved.

She studied in detail the culture of Chartism and the role of gender within it, without retreating from what was at root a class analysis. In *The Early Chartists* (1971) she stressed the diversity of Chartism while emphasising its national character. Her major work, *The Chartists* (1984), brought the role of women and Irish radicals into discussions of the movement.

Thompson helped develop an understanding of Chartism as something much more than a fight for the right to vote; it was, she argued, a radical working-class social movement. This “cultural” approach was similar to that taken by her partner E P Thompson in many of his works (e.g. *Customs in Common*). The idea was that culture was not a static “thing” but a process by which people developed ways to struggle against dominant social systems.

Edward and Dorothy Thompson were part of a group of Communist Party historians who, after the Second World War, were instrumental in a turn away from studying just “high politics”. They helped give birth to “social history”.

But the Thompsons also became dissidents in the CP — leaving the party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary along with 19 journalists who worked in the party paper the *Daily Worker* and thousands of members. Eric Hobsbawm was the only prominent member of the Communist Party Historians’ Group who did not leave.

GROUPED

They were part of a group of intellectuals who grouped around the *New Reasoner*. The *New Reasoner* was strongly humanistic, and used the language of “progressive” politics that dates back to the “Popular Front” period of the 1930s when Communist Party’s advocated alliances between workers’ organisations and middle-class and bourgeois elements.

It is a politics that still lingers strongly in Stalinist influenced left.

A break with Stalinism had occurred, but took a long time because many involved had, like Dorothy Thompson, spent their whole lives, from childhood, as Communist Party members.

Dorothy Thompson’s political role in the “New Left” was mainly in opposing nuclear weapons. This included editing the collection *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb* (1982).

Ray Challinor, labour historian and long-time member of the IS/SWP, also passed away recently. E P Thompson died in 1993 and Christopher Hill in 2003.

They were part of a generation of left-wing historians whose work attempted to study class struggles over periods in history. Hill spent his life analysing 17th-century Britain and the rise of the bourgeois state. EP Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* looked at the process of class formation in England. And Challinor looked at aspects of the British revolutionary socialist movement.

From the 1980s much academic history lapsed into micro-history. It was influenced by post-modernism and the idea that things are too complicated, or analytical frameworks are too flawed, for us to attempt comprehensive study of whole periods or to apply “big ideas”.

We can hope that a labour history movement returns to the foreground as the tide of class struggle in society rises. As and when it does, we have a wealth of material to rediscover, reapproach critically, and build on.

Dorothy Thompson

By Louise Gold

In the dark of the Crucible Theatre’s studio, a light is cast on a tall, middle-aged, middle-class Englishman. He is benign, slim, the curve of his spine slightly hunched, hair longish and auburn, dressed in understated shirt and navy blue trousers, his glasses large and round. His voice chants a Received Pronunciation through the room, artful and perfectly suited to the stage. He is David Hare; and he is performing a reading of “Via Dolorosa”, a monologue on Israel and Palestine, something between play, political essay and poetry.

“Via Dolorosa” is about Hare’s visit to Israel and Palestine in 1997 but is still utterly — and unfortunately — relevant to today.

The passage of Hare’s speech moves from the ailing West where no one believes in anything anymore, to what is described by an Israeli he meets as the “fucking capital of the world”. This is Tel Aviv. But it is not the epicentre for human life but a modern cosmopolitan city where sex and “the buzz” are king.

In Jerusalem he meets arty drama types, who are putting on a production of “Romeo and Juliet”, which casts Israelis as Montagues and Palestinians as Capulets; He interviews people still demoralised and disorientated by Rabin’s untimely assassination.

He meets the lunatics of the settlements, who believe that same assassination was staged to damage the Israeli right-wing.

He meets Palestinian politicians and academics in Gaza and the West Bank who seek to create a civil society in Palestine, and who at once denounce Israel and Arafat.

And he walks the Via Dolorosa until he reaches his homeland, in Hampstead, where he repeatedly conjures the question “stones or ideas”?

It is hard to isolate any one meaning in this refrain. I think it serves to emphasise how for the religious zealots of the region ideas are set in stone, and how immovable ideas have become the opportune justification for the seizure of the minerals underfoot, on the battleground, and as the prize.

While secular Israelis declare the 1967 victory to have set Israel on a course that is very “un-Jewish”, because of the new obsession with expansion and property, the settlers declare it the greatest victory in history. They proclaim the myth that the Jews have religious and hereditary right to the Palestinian territory. With the madness of biblical dogmatism in mind, Hare considers how ideas are formed by preconception, how changeable and yet cemented they are.

David Hare

He finds himself struck at once by the fluidity of belief and its bias.

I think it a shame that this is essentially Hare’s conclusion, for while he gives relative explanation of different ideas, he does not always consider why they are so. For instance, while the settlers are ideological, many move to the West Bank because they are given financial incentive to do so by the government. In retrospect, ideas are often the product of material circumstance and necessity.

Hare’s reading is incredibly moving, and the power with which he interprets his piece breathes the chaos of Middle-Eastern life into it, his voice delivering both tragedy and humour. So let him ask us, if he likes, “stones or ideas”? I would answer ideas are the product of stone and stone the invention of ideas.

A workers’ revolution will be fought for in stone and maybe even sometimes with them, yet ideas make up the real theatre of war and the real prize.

• Extracts of “Via Dolorosa”: www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/oct/28/israelandthepalestinians.books

Searching for a more tolerant England

By Matt Cooper

The average anti-war song is often a pretty basic affair and they often work best like that.

Edwin Starr’s version of “War” is the archetype of this. It is literally a shout of pain. And then there are songs about soldiers returning to a land that would rather forget, as with Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the USA” or most memorably in Eric Bogle’s “And the band played Waltzing Matilda”. But in *Let England Shake* Polly Jean Harvey has attempted something more considered and nuanced, something more lyrical, poetic and thoughtful.

Harvey tries to play the role of an unofficial war-artist in her album, although the ambition is not as out-of-court as one might imagine. The Imperial War Museum’s commissions of conflict art in recent years have been far from jingoistic. For example, Jeremy Deller’s *Baghdad, 5 March 2007* was the rusted wreckage of a car from the bombing of the Al-Mutanabbi book market in Iraq.

Without firsthand experience, Harvey has attempted to create an impression of war and its consequences on those who fight them, and those in whose name they are fought.

In several songs (“Battleship Hill”, “The Colour of Earth”) she works on accounts of the Gallipoli landings of 1915, although this does tend to create rather a distanced and ab-

stract criticism of “war in general” rather than concrete material about current conflicts. But elsewhere there is a more direct focus, e.g., focusing on the human cost of conflict on the people of Iraq in “Written on the Forehead”.

In contrast to her previous album, 2007’s *White Chalk*, this is much more direct. Whereas *White Chalk* was lyrically opaque and musically ethereal and piano led, in *Let England Shake* Harvey has returned to a more rocky if subdued style which searches for a sense of community in the directness of the songs’ melodies.

Harvey is striving for a sense of lost collective identity, a sense of an open and tolerant Englishness, that she feels has been lost. This is carried in a second lyrical theme through the album (and one started on *White Chalk*) of English identity. In “The Glorious Land” she explores the warping nature of military conflict on the way the way a nation views itself, and in “England” the ultimately illusory grasping for such national identity.

The result is only partially successful. The album is carried in the end by Harvey’s musical restlessness. There are atmospheric use of autoharp and dark musical shades that carry her message well. But lyrically the album falls short of its ambition, serving up too little beyond a “war is hell” message.

Lobbies, marches and “calling the cops”

NORFOLK
As 250 people protested outside Norfolk County Council’s chamber, and dozens more protested inside it.

Tory Council leader Derek Murphy said: “People are rightly passionate about their county, their services and their jobs. But needs must, and those needs are very great indeed.”

Such is the financial logic of the ruling class that means a £60 million cut from council spending. Another £90 million worth of cuts is likely over the next few years.

Youth and children’s services, adoption and family intervention work are especially badly hit.

Unions need a campaign to build for strike action.

BROMLEY
Bromley Council in south east London is set to make massive cuts to children’s and youth centres, sheltered housing and library services.

Activists plan a protest outside the council meeting, outside the Civic Centre, at 6pm on Monday 28 February. Contact: bromleycuts@gmail.com

BARNET
On 14 February Barnet’s anti-cuts group lobbied the council cabinet meeting that adopted a cuts package of £54.4 million over three years.

We were joined by first-time protesters, including staff, parents and children from schools whose crossing patrols are being cut, and angry residents living

in the Controlled Parking Zones, whose charges are going up by 130-400 per cent.

The cabinet were heckled throughout and adjourned for 45 minutes.

WALTHAM FOREST
More than 200 people marched from Leyton to Walthamstow. The march was organised by the Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union.

The demo was broad, and emphasised youth services and the NHS. Less was said about elderly care — an area where the borough faces massive cuts.

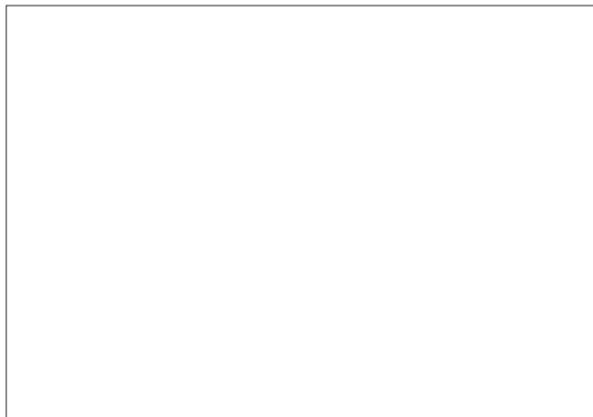
LIVERPOOL
Liverpool City Council led a march against the cuts on Sunday 20 February, but come Monday morning, they got back to making cuts.

More than 1,000 people turned out on a the demonstration.

The council intends to make cuts totalling £91 million this year with the loss of 1500 jobs. This is to be followed by a further £50 million in cuts next year.

The demonstration was publicised under the slogan “Fair Deal for Liverpool”. The argument being that the cut to Liverpool is disproportionate and if the cuts had been applied “evenly” across local authorities, then Liverpool would “only” be facing a cut of 9% and therefore be some £27 million better off.

The Labour group has formed a “coalition” to write this budget with the Lib Dems, the Liberal party, and the Greens. This



Around 1000 people took part in Lewisham’s Carnival Against Cuts on 19 February

“united front” is described by the [Liberal] Lord Mayor Hazel Williams as some kind of ‘blitz spirit’ effort.

In fact, at the last Liverpool Riverside Constituency Labour Party it was made clear by Councillor Paul Brant that this was being done order to protect the Labour councillors from attacks from the right.

Despite everything, people still see the Labour Party as the force that is going to protect them from the Tory attacks, but, as was made very clear by many people you spoke to, this is on the basis that they expect a fight.

Liverpool Trades Council has called a lobby of the council for its official budget setting on 2 March.

ISLINGTON
On Thursday 17 February Islington council unions organised a lobby of Islington’s council meeting where the Labour majority would be voting their cuts budget through (£100 million over four years).

The rally — supported by the trades council and anti-cuts campaign — wasn’t well attended, unfortunately. The rally was focussed on calling on the Labour Party not to vote through the cuts. Labour

council leader Catherine West, who led the last demo against the cuts, was noticeable by her absence and later by her decision to have protestors removed by the police from the public gallery.

The main focus was simply to go into the public gallery and make things uncomfortable for the people who have until very recently been leading demos and speaking at public meetings against the cuts. We did this for the first hour of the meeting, including my favourite chant of the evening “Labour councils gone berserk, doing all the Tories’ work”. This shouting made it impossible for Labour to discuss, let alone vote, on their budget, and had a really good spirit and feel to it.

But to Labour’s shame the police were called on us as a “warning”. During a 10 minute break the police appeared with reinforcements. Now the police were much more physical, dragging people out and threatening them with arrest.

Once the police had cleared the public gallery, the council unanimously voted through the cuts budget.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/node/16121

UCU: national ballots begin

By Darren Bedford

Academic workers in Higher Education will take part in three separate ballots as their union, the University and College Union (UCU), moves into action against the effects of enormous government cuts.

One ballot is over job security; UCU estimates that 40,000 jobs might be at risk due to an 80% government cut in the HE teaching budget. For the second year running, HE sector employers have refused to negotiate over providing a framework for job security. The second ballot, which involves UCU members in pre-1992 universities, is against bosses’ attempts to

downgrade the Universities Superannuation Scheme (the staff pension scheme). The third ballot focuses on similar attacks to the pension schemes of workers in post-92 universities. The first two ballots close on Wednesday 2 March, with the third closing on Monday 14 March.

In a statement to members, UCU said “for two years, we have tried to pursue this through negotiation without any success. The employers have chosen the path of confronting the unions, hoping that they can break us in the long term.

“That means we have to ballot you for action.”

• More info: tinyurl.com/ucuballot

Amnesty vs. unions

Human rights charity Amnesty International has effectively de-recognised Unite for workers working outside the UK, and is threatening to de-recognise the union for UK-based workers too.

One worker said “now every time I write or work on discrimination issues, I will think about how Amnesty workers outside London are being treated by the senior management

in London.”

Unite and its predecessor unions have been recognised at Amnesty since 1973. The attack on freedom of association and union rights represents a growing trend towards more authoritarian and corporate management styles by bosses at charity, voluntary and other “third sector” companies.

In brief

By Ira Berkovic

MIGRANT WORKERS
On Friday 18 February 30 people demonstrated outside St Thomas’ hospital in Westminster in solidarity with 72 migrant workers who were “disappeared” (arrested without anyone’s knowledge) by the UK Border Agency last month.

Migrant workers occupy an extremely precarious place in the European labour market; they experience high levels of exploitation and the constant threat of being deported, which very effectively dissuades them for organising for better conditions. Raids and disappearances are quite common UK Border Agency practice.

The labour movement should know no borders. So it is imperative that trade unions in the UK begin organising vulnerable migrant workers.

PORTSMOUTH
Council workers at Portsmouth City Council organised by the GMB will apply to their union’s Central Executive Com-

mittee for permission to hold a strike ballot.

Council bosses have announce a cuts package that could hit over 400 jobs, as well as leading to cuts in pay, cuts in overtime payments, cuts in unsocial hours pay and cuts to holiday pay and entitlement.

Overall the cuts would represent the equivalent of a 6% pay cut for GMB members, who include workers such as non-teaching staff in schools.

The cuts come despite the council’s recent announcement that it has £76 million in reserves, including £16 million cash. The cuts are therefore clearly ideologically driven without even the veil of financial necessity.

SOUTHAMPTON
Southampton council workers held a strong demonstration outside a recent council meeting in protest at proposed pay cuts of over 5%.

The council is also planning to adopt the mass dismissal tactics several other local authorities have used to impose new terms; Unite and Unison have said they will ballot for strike action if this goes ahead.

Ward campaigns in Hackney

On Saturday 19 February over five hundred marched from Stoke Newington to Hackney Town Hall in opposition to cuts.

The borough anti-cuts group, the Hackney Alliance, has split into ward groups to carry out the day-to-day campaigning work, while Hackney-wide fortnightly meetings organise the whole area. This will allow the campaign a high level of flexibility. Activists are mobilising local residents for a 2 March lobby.

Liverpool demonstration 20 February

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Labour war in Wisconsin

By Ed Maltby

A labour war has broken out in the state of Wisconsin, USA. Republican Governor Scott Walker has proposed a Bill to remove the right of public sector unions to engage in collective bargaining on any issue other than pay (and then they are forbidden from negotiating above-inflation pay increases).

Thousands of teachers across Wisconsin shut down schools for five days through a "sick-in", effectively an illegal strike. Thousands of workers have been staging a sit-in in the capitol building in Madison, holding up a vote and using the mass occupation as a centre for organising.

School students have staged walkouts; workers from virtually every branch of the public sector in the state have joined the movement; workers' co-operatives have joined protests; supporters from across the US are flooding in; and the minority of shops which do not display pro-union notices are facing a boycott.

On 17 February the minority of Democrat state senators fled Wisconsin to keep the senate vote from quoracy and thereby hold up the vote. However, it is rumoured that they could soon return from their hiding place over the state border and trigger a vote.

A debate is now going on between the union leaderships and Democrat politicians, who are consid-

ering amending the Bill, and the rank-and-file, among whom a popular slogan is still "Kill the Bill!"

As we go to press, Madison area AFL-CIO has voted for a general strike if the Bill is passed. Such a general strike would be illegal, as it is political and sympathy action. But the Madison area AFL-CIO motion calls on affiliates to "educate members on the organisation and function of a general strike" — a legal way of calling for such an action.

Socialist commentators like Dan LaBotz from the Solidarity group are drawing comparisons between the movement in Wisconsin and the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, where militant grassroots action in industrial centres transformed the labour movement nationally and sparked the creation of new organisations which pushed aside the bureaucratic leadership of the union movement. US union organiser and socialist Traven Leyshon spoke to *Solidarity*:

"Governor Walker has created a large deficit by changing the tax structure

so that the wealthy will pay less. Last year two thirds of Wisconsin corporations paid no tax at all. He has managed to manufacture a budget crisis.

"Public sector employees in the US did not have bargaining rights before the 1960s-1970s. Wisconsin was an interesting test case where those rights were won. There was a strike wave which gave birth to public sector trade unionism. So you had the famous Memphis sanitation strike, for example, where Dr Martin Luther King was killed.

"Wisconsin is now a test case for a co-ordinated, well-financed national strategy to weaken public sector unions. Bills similar to Walker's have been submitted in many states in January and February.

RALLY

"There is a significant national response on the part of labour to what's happening in Wisconsin.

Many of our state federations have limited their political efforts to lobbying legislators and focusing on personal relationships with political leaders, so the approach of trying to rally members and supporters is new.

"We are seeing secondary action in Wisconsin and not just in Madison. The schools were closed by co-ordinated sick-call-ins for five days and that's very significant. Perhaps you could call these political strikes.

"This is part of a strategic move by the ruling

class — the moment to go for the jugular vein of what remains of the union movement. It is a do or die moment for us.

"The priorities for the left now are to build the local rallies, to expand the communication networks within the unions and among our allies.

"There are significant possibilities for political discussion.

"The Democratic Party is trying to pose as the saviour of union rights in Wisconsin. But every public sector worker knows that the Democrats are lowering taxes on the rich, cutting budgets and laying off employees.

"The unions have done their politics almost entirely through the Democratic Party, and that's true of other social and anti-war movements as well.

"But the need for developing a mass alternative to the Democratic Party will once again become a proposal with some real traction.

"For example, at the Emergency Labour Conference in Cleveland in March a small wing of the labour movement will discuss the need for a labour party. It will attract a couple of hundred middle-level and low-level labour leaders. It is not yet on the scale of the attempt in the mid-1990s.

"Is it transformative? Do we have a new labour movement? Perhaps. We'll know in a week or two when we see if there will be a national response in Ohio, Iowa and so on."

Libyans fight for democracy and freedom

By Mark Osborn

Following the uprisings in the bordering countries of Tunisia and Egypt the democratic revolution has spread to Libya. And as *Solidarity* goes to press on 22 February it is unclear whether one of the most brutal and repressive regimes on the planet will survive.

With extraordinary rapidity, following demonstrations and then a rising in the eastern town of Benghazi, the regime appears close to collapse. Although clear information is difficult to obtain, it seems that the army has split and those forces remaining loyal to Qaddafi are resorting to great violence. Reports suggest the regime is using planes to bomb civilian areas and snipers to shoot down unarmed pro-democracy protesters. Hundreds are dead.

Protests spread to the capital, Tripoli, on Sunday night as fantastically brave, unarmed citizens went on to the streets to demand freedom. Demonstrators at a huge anti-government march in Tripoli on Monday afternoon came under attack from planes and security forces using live ammunition. On Monday two fighter pilots flew their planes to Malta rather than attack their own cities.

Much of the east of the country appears to be now in the control of those rising up against Qaddafi. According to Al-Jazeera protesters are also in control of Sirte and Tobruk in the east, as well as Misrata, Khoms, Tarhounah, Zenten, Al-Zawiya and Zouara.

A number of senior Libyan diplomats have publicly denounced the government's violence. Ibrahim Dabbashi, Libya's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, said Qaddafi had begun a "genocide against the Libyan people."

Early in the morning of Tuesday 22 February Qaddafi showed himself on Libyan state television to prove he had not fled

the country.

Qaddafi has built a powerful security apparatus to protect his rule. The various branches of the army, police, secret police, special units and militias of the so-called Revolutionary Committees total over 100,000. Qaddafi will not give up easily and his state is capable of extreme ruthlessness — for example in 1996, following a prison riot, Qaddafi had over 1000 prisoners killed.

Muammar Qaddafi came to power 42 years ago in a military coup. Libya's six million citizens have since been the prisoners of an increasingly grotesque dictatorship which uses pseudo-revolutionary, anti-imperialist language to justify itself. Qaddafi recently called for a Middle East without Israel. He uses such reactionary populism to prop up his rotten regime.

Qaddafi has also spent the country's oil wealth to buy off opposition, as well as funding the lifestyles of his family and cronies (for example, the football career of his son Saadi).

Demonstrations have been held outside Libyan embassies across the world. In London a protester pulled down Qaddafi's all-green Libyan flag and replaced it with the tri-colour flag — adopted by protesters — that Libya used after gaining independence in 1951.

Libyan political life has been pulverised under Qaddafi and the political demands of the oppositionists remain unclear. However outside the embassy in London one demonstrator told me, "The people here don't want Qaddafi. We don't want Islamists. We just want to live in peace. I came to London 39 years ago only intending to stay for two years. I just want to go home.

"And we want the Libyan Christians and Jews to come home too — they are all our Libyan sons and daughters. We can all live together again in peace."

Putting the poor under pressure

By Rosalind Robson

On 16 February the government set out their welfare reforms. They promise to "revolutionise" and simplify the system and make sure people coming off benefits are always better off in work. But the details as they emerge are far from benign.

The over-riding concern is to save money (£88 billion was spent on all welfare benefits in 2010). Simplifying the system by introducing a single benefit, Universal Credit, to cover many benefits is a key part of the package. But many allowances will simply be cut.

The real sting will be a new barrage of "claimant

responsibilities".

One of the most affected groups will be single parents and "main carers" who currently claim JSA or Income Support — mostly they are women. They will be expected to be much more "actively seeking work". Formal "job seeker interviews" etc start from when a youngest child is one year old.

Evelyn from Merseyside explained how the pressures are bound to get worse.

"I work as a school lunchtime supervisor. For seven and a half hours a week term time, my take home pay is £178 a month. After deductions from my benefits I am about £10 a week better off. Perhaps I will get just another £5 a

week with the changes. This is a job I do in the hope it could lead to more work.

"These kinds of jobs are becoming the norm for women with kids. One other supervisor pays out more for childcare than she earns. Two women at my school are working as Teaching Assistants for nothing. There is a union here but it is so underorganised it tolerates this kind of thing.

"At my Job Centre there are people who "volunteer" for a year or more. But still they have not found work.

"The signing on rules are going to get even tougher. My worry is that the dole will make me give up my current (secure) job for some tempo-

rary job with more hours.

"I don't let myself be bullied, but one woman I work with is terrified everytime she goes to sign on.

"Changes in housing benefit rules will mean we will not be able to afford to live where we do. None of it makes sense except as a brutal cost-cutting exercise.

"Wirral council are about to cut 1,000 "proper" paid jobs, and these are mainly women workers. At the same time they are trying to herd women into "work"; but jobs that will now only become available if they are unpaid,

"Making us better off? They are having a laugh!"