

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 198 23 March 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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# BUILD STRIKES AGAINST THE TORIES

● **Public sector unions: strike  
on pensions now!**

● **Build labour  
movement-based,  
democratic anti-cuts groups**

● **Stop the job cuts**

● **For a working-class  
political alternative —  
unions should organise  
fight to reshape the  
Labour Party**

● **Defend union rights**

## 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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## NUS Women's Campaign: left gains

By Jade Baker, NUS Women's Committee-elect (pc)

This year's NUS Women's Conference was a far cry from last year's mundane and poorly attended Labour Students saturated affair. Women on the left managed to pass many pieces of progressive policy such as Free Education.

I am a member of Workers' Liberty, supporter of NCAFC and Vice President Education at the University of Westminster. I stood for National Women's Officer against Labour Students and NUS Welsh Women's Campaign stalwart Estelle Hart.

In a sign of the times, I received just under a third of the vote (with 32 votes to me, 60 to Estelle Hart, and 7 reopen nominations). Probably everyone at conference who wasn't aligned to Labour Students in one way or another voted for me. I was later elected to the Women's Committee.

Just under a third of the vote isn't bad considering I'm a new face and haven't been involved with the campaign during my time as a student activist. This is mainly because there's not a lot to get involved with.

Apart from good work on violence against women, over the last decade the campaign has been an empty shell, a stronghold clique of

Labour Students Women.

The priority now must be to sustain the anti-cuts, pro-free education presence in the campaign by getting new women involved from the recent struggles against cuts and fees. Particularly those from further education, who usually don't have access to a student union and are neglected within NUS ranks, but have provided so much of the energy and working-class edge to the recent movement.

Imogen Robertson, a Hull comrade, also got elected onto women's Black Student Committee, which is fantastic and will prop up the left intervention.

Labour Students will not campaign on policy that isn't in line with that of the

main Labour Party. It will be up to leftists to make sure these pieces of policy are acted on:

- To support all strikes (particularly UCU in their upcoming struggle) and to oppose anti-union laws.
- To support Free Education.
- To support sex workers unionising, to support the English Collective of Prostitutes, not to support Demand Change!, the abolitionist anti-sex work campaign.
- To support No One Is Illegal, to oppose immigration controls.

Things are looking positive for the future of the women's campaign. And the more new women we bring in, the better.

## Egypt solidarity

The revolutionary movements in North Africa and the Middle East represent a huge reawakening of working-class struggle in the region.

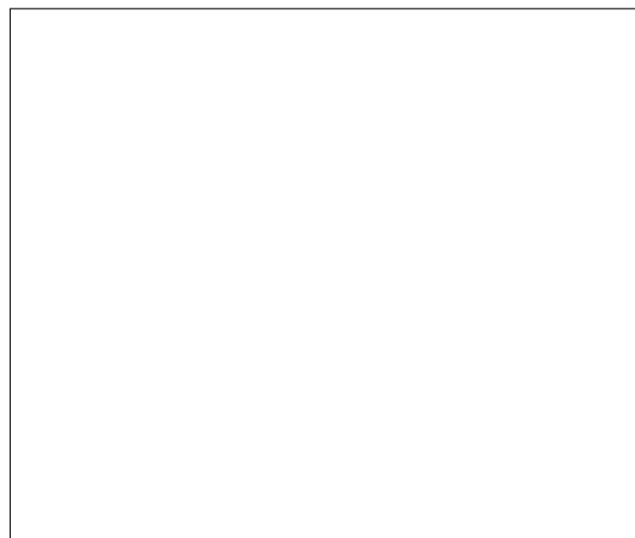
Most significant is the development of an independent trade union movement in Egypt, which is being swept by strikes, occupations and workers' protests. We have been involved in setting up the Egypt Workers' Solidarity campaign to support this new movement. Please get in touch, get a speaker to your union branch or anti-cuts committee, and get involved.  
• [info@egyptworker.org](mailto:info@egyptworker.org)  
[solidarity.org](http://solidarity.org)

## Children will still be detained

The government's promise to end the detention of child asylum seekers has been exposed as a lie as plans to close a special needs school to convert it into a "pre-departure accommodation facility" were revealed.

The centre, in Pease Potage, Sussex, will be surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and detainees will be transported in and out of the site in UK Border Agency vans. This is the detention of children by another name; the only possible beneficiaries are the landowner who will rent the site to the UKBA and whichever multinational firm the UKBA chooses to run the centre.

Britain's racist immigration laws and policy of detention — which even Nick Clegg has called "state-sponsored cruelty" — must end.



Gravy Train street?

## Cut top bosses' pay!

By Joan Trevor

Will Hutton has published the Final Report of his Independent Review into Fair Pay in the Public Sector, along with his recommendations to the Government. David Cameron and George Osborne commissioned the review in June 2010.

The Treasury website summarises Hutton's recommendations:

"...senior public servants' pay will be directly linked to their performance and will be explained transparently to the public. In return, public service leaders are entitled to expect improved public appreciation of the responsibilities of senior public service roles, and the ethos of public service that motivates them."

The top 1% of public officials earned an average of £120,000, with university vice-chancellors on an average of £200,000. The gap between top and bottom earners in the public sector

is growing.

Anyone with a real "public service ethos" would be ashamed to take so much pay when so many really hard working public servants are paid so little! The labour movement's answer to the absurdly high wages paid public service bosses should be: don't pay them so much. And pay ordinary workers more.

That should be our answer as well to the absurdly high wages paid private sector bosses. All the attention paid to high public sector pay distracts from the fact that private sector remuneration is even less "transparent", and pay differentials shockingly more stark.

Top FTSE 100 chief executives earned 47 times median earnings in 2000 and 88 times in 2010.

In the public sector the ratio is far lower, more like 12 to one. (These figures on differentials are taken from an article by right-wing journalist Simon Jenkins!)

## Inflation error leads to pay cuts

By Darren Bedford

Workers have suffered the equivalent of a pay cut of thousands of pounds due to statistical errors which miscalculated the rise in inflation.

The Bank of England admitted in February that the consumer prices index (CPI) should have been 0.3 percentage points higher than it was for every year between 1997 and 2009. The retail prices index (RPI) was even more seriously miscalculated; it should have risen by 0.6 percentage points.

The errors mean that if wages had risen in line with the actual rates of inflation, a worker earning £10,000 in 1997 should now be earning £15,000. Instead, the failure of wages to keep pace with actual inflation increases has meant that the same worker has lost roughly £7,000 in real terms in the 14 years since 1997. Inflation-linked pensions and some benefits will also have taken a hit. Pensions experts estimate that some final-salary pensions would have been 4% higher if the calculations had been correct.

Various sources, including the Department for Work and Pensions, are attributing the errors to "methodological improvements" in how the CPI and RPI are calculated, but even senior figures in the City are admitting that "wage earners have been fooled."

# Yemen opposition gunned down

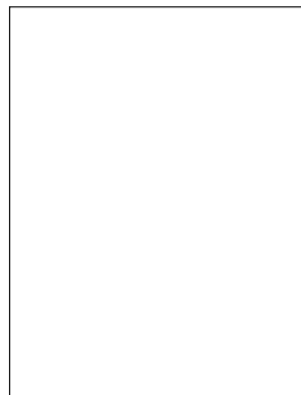
By Dan Katz

**In an effort to maintain himself in power Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, resorted to extreme violence on Friday when over 50 anti-government protesters were killed by snipers in the capital, Sanaa.**

Denying he was responsible for the murders, Saleh then stated, "The great majority of the Yemeni people are with security, stability and constitutional law [bizarrely, meaning himself]."

The protest movement in the capital has been organised by a coalition of nationalist, Islamist and self-styled leftist parties. Much of the movement's membership is made up of young people who – as in Tunisia and Egypt – are generally pro-democracy and forward looking, who want jobs and better lives.

Elsewhere in Yemen other movements are in conflict with the central state – in the south the demand is for secession; a Shia sect in the north has an on-off war with the government in Sanaa; al-Qaeda is also active. Saleh has ruled the desperately poor area for



Ali Abdullah Saleh

decades by deftly manipulating tribal groups, bribing and cajoling, and dispensing patronage. All that is now unravelling.

The political fall-out from the killings continues. On Sunday, President Saleh sacked his entire cabinet (typically, he then had to stay in place in a "caretaker capacity"), and declared a state of emergency.

The deputy speaker of parliament, the governor of the southern province of Aden, and a number of ambassadors have resigned in protest at the mass murder.

Three senior military figures have also announced their resignations. This group are from President Saleh's own Hashid tribe.

Sadiq al-Ahmar, head of the Hashid, told al-Jazeera that it was time for Mr Saleh to make a "quiet exit".

The US has been supplying military aid and training to elite security and intelligence units under the command of Saleh's son and nephews. The US is nervous about losing these relationships with people it can 'do business with'.

Saleh's son now commands the tanks that are in central Sanaa, guarding key buildings. Units from the US-backed Central Security Forces, commanded by one of Saleh's nephews, have played a prominent role in cracking down on opposition protests, and US-made CS gas canisters – allegedly intended for counter-terrorism – have also been used in actions against pro-democracy protesters.

**The US and army may be on the verge of replacing Saleh. And various stark and unpleasant possibilities face the country: military repression as the army attempts to hold the state together; civil war and the disintegration of the central state; the break-up of the country.**

## Egypt: new constitution goes against left

**There were big turnouts for Egypt's referendum on constitutional amendments on Saturday March 19, with people queuing sometimes for hours to cast their votes. The vote was heavily – 77 per cent of the votes cast – in favour of the amendments.**

But most of the groups involved in the "25 January" revolution which toppled President Hosni Mubarak had called for a "no" vote – demanding instead that the entire constitution be scrapped and a new one drawn up by a Constituent Assembly.

The Muslim Brotherhood called, however, for a "yes" vote. Conservative Muslim leaders have told voters that it is their religious duty

to support the amendments (and reject a "no" vote), on the grounds that the existing constitution recognises Islam as the country's official religion.

The Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services, issued this press release:

"CTUWS is calling for Egyptian workers to reject the proposed constitutional amendments and to demand a new constitution that lays the foundations for a new Egypt.

"Since the outbreak of the revolution for freedom and justice, the Egyptian workers played a remarkable role in the massive demonstrations which took place in industrial cities calling to topple the regime. Then came the workers strikes of 9 and 10 February as the

death blow which finished Mubarak's authority.

"The Egyptians are invited today to support the powers of the revolution, refuse the constitution amendments and call for a new constitution which establishes new Egypt, freedom and equality."

(See the full statement here: [bit.ly/gQhMNO](http://bit.ly/gQhMNO))

**The constitutional amendments in the referendum deal with elections and the powers of the presidency. The current constitution, which was amended in early 2007, was heavily skewed in favour of Mubarak and his National Democratic Party. The vote was for the acceptance or rejection of all of them, as a bloc.**

## Defend Zimbabwe socialists

**Forty-five socialists, trade unionists and students in Zimbabwe were arrested on 19 February and charged with treason for attending a meeting about the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.**

They were accused of plotting to overthrow the government in the manner of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. Treason carries a death sentence in Zimbabwe.

Charges were dropped against most of those detained. However, six people, including the general coordinator of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) Munyaradzi Gwisai and five other ISO members, still await trial. They have posted bail, must stay in their homes and have been forced to surrender their passports. A hearing on 21 March extended the period of their remand. The ISO members are now appealing to have remand ended in the absence of a trial date.

### Solidarity fund:

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Deposit reference:  
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Solidarity Fund  
Bank: NEDBANK,  
Killarney Branch, PO Box  
87157, Houghton, 2041,  
South Africa  
Branch code: 191 60535,  
Current Account number:  
100 185 3784  
Swift code: NEDSZAJJ

Please email with details of what you have deposited, [zimtreason-trial@gmail.com](mailto:zimtreason-trial@gmail.com)

## Two pillars in Tunisia's revolution

Loumamba from the Ligue Gauche des Ouvriers (LGO, Left Workers' League) spoke to *Solidarity*.

**The Parti Communiste-Ouvrier de Tunisie (PCOT) has set up the Committee for the Safeguarding of the Revolution within which Ennahdha [the Islamists] participate.**

That exists to make liberal demands – the constituent assembly, liberty of expression – but has no social or economic foundation. However Ennahdha does not participate in the 14 January Front. The 14 January Front makes social demands, supports workers' demands and demands for economic equality. This divides the progressives and the others.

We are pushing some members of the Front on the logical extreme of these positions. We are counting on the regroupment of a new alliance, on a more clear and more radical basis. We cannot be partners with people who want to go only halfway.

Ennahdha are always a danger. They cannot be trusted. Our choice is to make no alliance with

them but to defend their right to freedom of expression. That has been our position since the 1980s. We want them to have the right of freedom of speech but also we want them to expose their politics.

There is a risk of the relationship between PCOT and Ennahdha developing – but it will be PCOT who lose out if it does. Ennahdha would gain.

The most important mass struggle currently is the mining industry of Gafsa. Other sectors are also in struggle – textiles, administration etc. We are demanding the opening of the books in industry, so that when employers say they cannot pay increased wages, we can check. We want to counteract the idea among workers that our demands are putting the economy at risk and that workers' struggles are illegitimate. The strike movements' demands are around good management and increased salaries and for capitalists to hire more people.

The situation is showing workers the rightness of our revolutionary ideas and they are coming over to us. The fact that the revolution has two pillars – democratic and social –

chimes with our propaganda.

The position of most left parties, Stalinist parties, that the current revolution is a bourgeois revolution purely for democracy, leads them to not support the workers' movements around social demands. We think that it is our task to develop the second pillar of the revolution, the social pillar.

There is currently no centralising grassroots organisation in the UGTT (union federation), or unifying the local committees. But we are working on it – we are doing it by basing our policy on the alliance between democratic and social demands.

The bureaucracy of the UGTT is a problem. Another difficulty is the capacity of the workers to organise themselves on a centralised, national basis. I think we should break from the UGTT but that is not the attitude of the LGO.

**The UGTT is a real enemy of the workers. It is indirectly represented in the government and it is pushing a liberal agenda – calling for an end to social struggles so as to stabilise capitalist normality.**

Bahrain: three protestors have died in recent clashes

## Clashes in Bahrain, protests spread to Syria

By Gerry Bates

**The protest movement in Bahrain has revived recently, with thousands of activists blockading the King Faisal Highway which leads to Bahrain's main financial district. Security forces attempted to disperse them using tear gas.**

At least three people are reported to have been killed in the clashes, with the regime claiming that three policemen have also died.

Following King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa's declaration of a three-month state of emergency, Saudi troops were invited into the country to help quell what the regime is denouncing as an "external plot". Over 60 people are reported to have gone missing since Saudi forces arrived in Bahrain, and Bahrain's own security forces are occupying the main hospital in Manama, Bahrain's capital.

Opposition groups have said that no negotiations



## In praise of health workers

According to the *Sunday Mirror* two city bankers working for the German Deutsche Bank in London laughed at and mocked protesters who were demonstrating in support of the NHS (9 March). One banker waved a £10 note in front of protesters from their high rise secure building while demonstrators looked on in disbelief.

1,000 or so had congregated outside the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, and proceeded through the streets of London until they reached St Bart's hospital. The bankers' disgusting act of mockery was met by chants and boos.

What gives these bankers the right to act in such a disgraceful way? The same bankers who have brought this country to its knees, whose selfishness and greed has left an immense deficit to pay. These bankers have brought pain and suffering to the working class and have left so many in financial turmoil. These same bankers who quite happily lap up million pound bonuses while the rest of us scrimp and save trying to make ends meet.

Does this cowardly act sound familiar? It sure does. The police carried out the same vile act — waving their pay packets at striking miners during the 1984-1985 strike.

The banker who made the taunt is apparently on a basic salary of £350,000 plus bonuses of on average £54,000. He has since been suspended for taunting the crowds of protesters, many of whom were medics and nurses themselves, chanting "save our NHS" and "no more cuts".

I have so much respect and admiration for these NHS workers who work tirelessly every single day caring and serving society, and saving people's lives. Every single one of us benefits from the services they provide.

Debbie French, south east London

## Users must defend the NHS

The criticism by the British Medical Association (BMA) to the government's plans for the NHS is worth publicising (*Solidarity* 3-196). Doctors know better than most concerted laypersons what is wrong with the plans. But we shouldn't be surprised either that they backed away from outright opposition.

Unions involved in the health service, particularly Unison and Unite, are woefully failing to fight healthcare privatisation and huge cuts. In these circumstances, it is tempting to get too over-excited about middle-class professionals speaking truth to the upper-classes.

There was a debate at the BMA and those who wanted outright opposition lost, alas. At the end of the day, however, there is no avoiding the fact that the big unions, and not just the BMA, have got to organise opposition or see jobs shed and transferred to the private sector, and the whole NHS reorganised on the model of US healthcare. The problem of deference also extends, I believe, to the fact that not enough NHS users are involved in health campaigns. Defending healthcare cannot just be left to the professionals.

Vicki Morris, north west London

## Libya demo deservedly small

The Stop the War Coalition protest outside Downing Street on 20 March, against Western military intervention in Libya, was attended by 100 people. It was dominated by Stalinists, mainly the CPB, Socialist Action, the Greek Communist Party and the CPGP-ML — the last of which was distributing a leaflet saying "Hands off Libya! Victory to Qaddafi!"

This was, at least, more coherent than the SWP's oxymoronic line of "No to intervention in Libya! Victory to the Arab revolutions!" A Counterfire activist carried a placard listing the anti-working class policies of the UK government and stating our need for regime change here — as if that solves the problem of what socialists should say about Libya... Meanwhile Chris Nineham of Counterfire was leading the chanting: "Hands off Libya!"

Sometimes socialists need to swim against the stream of public, and even working-class, opinion. But this demonstration was small for good reason — that most left-wing people are not comfortable with protests which are de facto pro-Qaddafi (and which pro-Qaddafi forces can dominate).

Interestingly, there were almost no Arab (or other Muslim) people present. Meanwhile Libyan and other Arab activists continue to protest at the Libyan embassy.

AWL members attended and distributed our leaflet "No illusions in West but 'anti-intervention' opposition is abandoning rebels". We had some useful discussions with people who attended because they are sympathetic to Stop the War, but are uncomfortable with its position on Libya.

Sacha Ismail, south London

# Making time for Marx



Dave Osler

Say what you want about life-threatening illness, but at least an extended spell of convalescence provides a chance to catch up on some serious reading. It is largely thanks to a summer spent in a sick bed that I got an uninterrupted shot at reading volume one of Marx's *Capital*, cover to cover. It almost made a particularly virulent infection seem worthwhile.

I like to think that what I accomplished in those weeks was a real, if modest, achievement. Even though I subsequently petered out half way through volume two, I am reliably informed that I progressed further than the man who leads one of the larger Trot groups in this country.

The thing is, this was long ago. Not only does time inevitably erode the memory of the contents of books devoured in the past, but British capitalism as it is now has been decisively transformed from British capitalism as it was then.

Last year the realisation dawned on me that I badly needed to reread all 1,000 and something pages of the damn thing. Thankfully, the task was made considerably easier by the publication of David Harvey's *A companion to Marx's Capital*, which provides a running commentary chapter by chapter, backed up by video lectures online.

Unfortunately, the idea that *Capital* is readily accessible to a savvy worker without university-level education, is something of a romantic myth. Marx was a bloke with a PhD in philosophy, and while he wrote well by the standards of mid-Victorian didactic literature, he did not dumb down for a proletarian audience.

Accordingly, *Capital* is laden with references from ancient Greek and Roman literature to the prevalent ideas of 18th-century political economy. References that were current then are history now, of course. Even in the most recent translation, some of the sentences are undeniably too convoluted for modern tastes.

Taking everything step by step with Harvey's explanation will make matters as painless as possible. Nevertheless, do not expect an easy time.

But whether you are a younger comrade coming to the book anew, or an old stager revisiting Marx's seminal work, do put in the graft. You will be amply repaid with a greater insight into the sclerotic character of capitalism 150 years on, and the difficulties it faces if it is to secure compound accumulation in the period ahead. This cannot fail to inspire you; just maybe the masters of the universe are not sitting quite as pretty as they would like to believe.

Like many socialists, my understanding of Marxist economics has largely been based on the exegesis provided by commentators from Sweezy to Mandel and Harman. I could level criticisms at all three, but they deserve credit for digesting the material and offering it up as a commentary on modern developments.

Yet none of them beats the thrill of getting back to the source. What's more, I was constantly surprised how well passages from the late 1850s describe contemporary globalisation. I was also struck by the clear continuity with the ideas developed by the younger Marx in his early writings, a point that was at one stage heavily contested within academic Marxism.

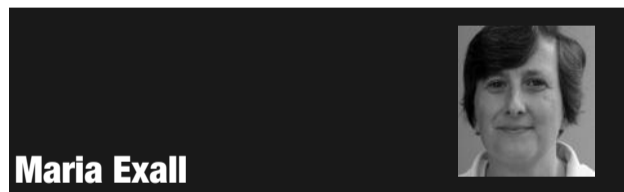
Sweatshops have switched from Burnley to Beijing, and they are nowadays churning out iPhones rather than textiles. But Marx's dissection of being at the sharp end of the manufacturing process retains every bit of the bite it must have had when it was fresh off the press.

And undoubtedly, the political health of the Marxist left would be better if more self-professed Marxists took the trouble to discover what Marx actually said.

Ahmadinejad would have rather fewer fans among British socialists if big name theoreticians could recollect a little more of what they should have picked up from *Eighteenth Brumaire*.

As luck would have it, I am currently in need of minor surgery and I have an operation booked in for May, which will necessitate a week to 10 days off work. Once the anaesthetic wears off, my plan is to recommence volume two. While I am hardly looking forward to being ripped open with a scalpel, I can't wait for the chance to get stuck into the next instalment.

# 26 March is just a start



Maria Exall

The TUC "March for the Alternative" is an attempt to put pressure on the Conservative led coalition Government to change the direction of their economic policy.

It is good that labour movement bodies as well as voluntary sector and community organisations are marching together. Realistically, though, the aim of defeating Government policies can only be achieved by a greater level of industrial resistance and much more focused political campaigning.

The Tory led Coalition Government is pursuing an ideological agenda — keeping lax arrangements for bank regulation, cutting back workers' rights (including recently stopping improvements in flexible working arrangements), rolling back the welfare state — all continuations of the "laissez faire" capitalism that gave us the credit crunch in the first place.

But trade union reaction is, so far, very limited. 26 March can only be the beginning, we need a more strategic and political response.

Though trade unions in the public sector are looking at the possibility of co-ordinated industrial action on the major cutbacks in public pension schemes, this is an issue that only affects public sector workers directly.

The ideology behind the Tory plans (supported by constant media references to inefficient bureaucracy and privileged and overpaid public sector workers) is this — a dismantling of decent conditions of employment for public sector workers as a precursor for the dismantling of the

public sector itself. The challenge is for public sector trade unionists to argue against this ideological intent and win over the majority of working people to defend the public sector.

The massive attacks on working-class living standards through job losses, public and private, changes to tax and benefits systems, and the higher prices for necessities will only get worse over the coming year. Progressive trade union leaders need to lead the resistance to this attack on living standards too.

The involvement of a broad coalition of community groups and the voluntary sector will be important, but the commitment of trade unionist to fight cuts and job losses is vital. This is not only because organised labour has economic and political power which it can use through targeted industrial action, but because (imperfect though it is) the labour movement represents working class democracy.

We need to build a truly non sectarian campaign, formally backed by several unions, to take things forward.

A conference called around this aim, and open to all would be a start. We need a broad-based but political coalition against the cuts, left unity amongst socialist groups, and a recognition that the cuts will hit certain groups within the working class harder — disabled people, women, BME and LGBT communities. The demands of such a political coalition can form the focus of community campaigns but also the basis of the policies we should expect from the Labour Party.

Now is the time for focused political demands — putting flesh on the bones of an "alternative". An increase in political involvement in grassroots anti cuts campaigning led by the labour movement is the best chance of achieving political change.

We need a workers' government and this can only be built through workers' democracy.

# After 26 March: build industrial and political action

**We are facing the most generalised attack on the working class for 20 years. The government is waging class war to impose its cuts. It is setting up a special unit to identify areas of likely working-class resistance. This is open preparation for strike-breaking.**

Where the Tory and Lib-Dem enemies of the working class movement are fighting the class war, what are our union leaders doing? They are sleep walking towards the abyss! The labour movement response is hugely inadequate.

The “March for the Alternative” on 26 March looks set, as we write this, to be very big. But it is not enough!

Without industrial direct action to stop their offensive in its tracks, hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost, services devastated and millions of lives ruined.

Without a fight for a political alternative to the Tory-Lib Dem government we will not have an overall alternative to this government and its policies.

Without a labour movement capable of creating such a government, we will not be able to rally large sections of the working people affected by the cuts in living standards around our banner.

The NHS as it has existed since the Labour Government created it, in 1948, faces virtual abolition if the Tories’ plans go through! And that is not all.

The unions will be hugely weakened and undermined, if the Government has its way. A wave of cuts in union facility time, and union de-recognition across the public sector, will most likely follow. The government will press home its advantage with new anti-union, anti-strike laws.

Britain will become a grimmer place, with workers even more under the heel of the rich and the ruling class.

And yet union leaders do little more than speak, vaguely, of big mobilisations to come (sometime, maybe). They are not willing to organise union members to fight back now. Now, when the Government can still be stopped in its tracks. If the labour movement uses its latent strength. What concretely, is the result of this?

- The union leaders undermine working class confidence;
- It blocks any fightback on issues where it is impossible to fight an adequate fight workplace by workplace, where a national mobilisation is the necessary response to the Government (pensions, sometimes jobs too).

All the unions have been slow in their response. The attack on public sector pensions began almost a year ago and goes into effect in April; yet the union leaders are still waiting to see if they can negotiate something with the government. The government that has declared war on them. and on the working class!

For us it is an unavoidable war, forced on us by the Tories and Lib Dems. For the union leaders, like Serwotka, to talk of a fight but do nothing to organise it is a species of throwing in the towel.

The National Union of Teachers now plans to ballot on pensions after their conference at Easter. That is good. But other unions — even the civil service union PCS, with a

supposedly “left” leadership and big talk from Mark Serwotka — are, essentially, doing nothing to mount a fight on pensions.

In Unison there are many groups of workers who want to fight the cuts to jobs and services, but they are routinely being blocked. It is as if the union leaders don’t quite know that they now live in a world where the government has targeted working class living standards, and is out to gut the labour movement.

As if they can’t register the fact that this is the most anti-working class government since Thatcher’s government in the early 1980s

Far from encouraging Labour councillors to defy cuts, Unison and Unite have put pressure on councillors who want to vote against cuts to vote for them!

Even the national leadership of the RMT, the most left-wing union in Britain, recently called off its members’ fight against job cuts on London Underground.

One national union that has begun to fight is the college lecturers’ union UCU. They plan a national strike of workers across Higher and Further Education, on March 24. UCU is right to begin fighting now, by itself, rather than waiting for slower unions to catch up.

Can we win? Yes! There are plenty of small examples of cuts being stopped at a local level, by industrial action and political campaigning.

If the unions were willing to nurture, support and champion every spark of resistance, we would begin to push back the Tories and prepare for a situation where mass, generalised action is possible.

But the struggles, big and little and on their different levels, need to be tied together politically. The fight against the government is a political fight. Without being able to offer

a political alternative, we fight with one hand tied behind our back. We need a workers’ government. A government that serves the working class as the Tories and Lib Dems serve the ruling class.

## THE SHAPE OF OUR FIGHT

**•Ed Miliband’s Labour Party is aligned with the unions against the Tory cuts. That is good. But it is nothing like enough either organisationally or politically.**

- If the union leaders were to face up to their responsibilities, they would move urgently and vigorously to reclaim and re-organise the Labour Party.

- We need a mass trade union based party. The unions still finance the Labour Party. That party, which the Blair-Brown gang hijacked and reduced to its present shriveled state, can be rebuilt in the heat of the struggle against the worst Government since Margaret Thatcher’s, thirty years ago.

- Demand that Labour councils refuse to implement the cuts, and instead join our fight against them.

- Demand that the Labour Party supports the resistance, drop their support for milder cuts and pledge themselves to reverse the cuts and repeal all anti-union laws when they come to office.

- Encourage and champion every spark of resistance, local, industry-wide or national. Every group of workers or union ready to fight should start fighting, trying to pull others in. And we must fight to win, not just sabre-rattle in the hope of winning some token concessions. Fight every cut!

- Ditch, completely and finally, the notion of social partnership, of a common interest between employers and workers. There never was, and there never will be. There is a class struggle — in industry, in politics, and on the level of ideas. There is no such thing as a national “we”: there is only “them and us”. There is class war. Face that fact, and fight for the victory of the working class in that class war.

- Resist attacks on the Health Service, pensions, housing provision, pay, and other broad social issues. The labour movement can win the active support of large sections of the population if it takes the lead in this fight,

- Broader demands will allow us to build strong links between the unions and community campaigners and service-users. It will allow us to build support for a workers’ government.

- The consciousness of the movement will, if socialists do their job, grow as we take action.

- Build strong, democratic local anti-cuts committees.

- Everyone on the demo on 26 March should get involved in their local committee. The best anti-cuts committees have mobilised hundreds on the streets, storming council meetings, etc. We need united, open committees in every area, instead of national anti-cuts groups controlled by different left organisations (Right to Work, Coalition of Resistance) trying to create local fronts they can control.

- Rebuild the unions! Build rank-and-file movements. Our unions are not in a good state to fight. We need to renew them from top to bottom, fighting for democracy, bringing the bureaucrats under control and rebuilding workplace and industrial organisation.

- That in turn requires a serious campaign against the anti-trade union laws and for the right to organise and strike.

- Work to unite the serious left.

## Keeping us in line

**A massive Metropolitan Police operation will attempt to keep demonstrators in line on Saturday. But UK Uncut and others have organised fringe direct action events, that will test the Met’s attempt to present themselves as a family friendly police force for the TUC’s “safe family-friendly day out”.**

Last year’s large, militant student demonstrations have made the bureaucrats in Congress House extra nervous.

The TUC has worked closely with the Met in organising the march; it makes logistical sense, but they are going far too far in helping the police to keep us in line. The police themselves are unlikely to “behave”!

The TUC should not help the police decide what constitutes acceptable protest, yet that is what they have been drawn into by accepting Met training of stewards and agreeing to share information on the day about potential “troublemakers”.

At the Met’s suggestion, the TUC has appointed Liberty as its official legal observer. Liberty say they will be “independent” of the police. They deny rumours that they would be “sharing intelligence” with the police. They do say:

“This is a promising, progressive opportunity, and displays a level of cooperation from the protest organisers and

police that our founders could only have dreamt of. Liberty remains firmly opposed to many police public order tactics, particularly but not just ‘kettling’. Having access to the police’s special operations room won’t prevent us expressing our views, forcefully where necessary.”

How naive can you be?

Liberty should acknowledge that the police are allowing legal observers only because their policing tactics have come under unwelcome scrutiny.

For the police, Liberty are a known commodity, an unaccountable NGO, a civil rights “lobby group”, with a position in the establishment they can be pressured to defend. We should insist on our own independent monitoring, accountable to our own organisations. Trade unions should appoint their own monitors and provide legal assistance to protesters, who are sure, some of them, to fall foul of the police on 26 March.

What is the role of the legal observer? Labour movement observers should explicitly act as witnesses for protesters against the state, because state neutrality is impossible. Other legal observers will be present on 26 March, for example, Green and Black Cross — whether the police wants them there or not. That is as it should be.

# Earthquake, tsunami... and meltdown?

Two views on the issues raised by the damage to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant

## Get nuclear power's risks in perspective

By Les Hearn

**The terrible events recently in Japan have resulted in at least 15,000 deaths, of which those attributable to the overheating cores and hydrogen explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant amount to... zero.**

However, the situation at the power plant is potentially more serious if it is not controlled. What has been happening?

Some time ago, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) decided to build nuclear power plants in an earthquake zone. They judged that their design was robust enough to withstand a powerful earthquake. They judged that safety measures were adequate in the case of interruption of the electricity supply to the coolant pumps. They hadn't considered the possibility of a large tsunami.

The plants are Boiling Water Reactors (BWRs) — sort of giant nuclear kettles. The core contains fuel rods of uranium-235 (235U) and plutonium-239 (239Pu) which undergo fission (atom-splitting) reactions, releasing neutrons, radiation, heat and fission products. The neutrons are fed back into the fuel rods in carefully controlled amounts to sustain a chain reaction, releasing heat which is continuously removed by superheated water under 70 times atmospheric pressure. This is allowed to boil, high pressure steam being used to drive electricity generators.

The radiation is absorbed by the core and cannot escape. It eventually contributes to the heat of the core.

The fission products are smaller atoms, usually radioactive. Most dangerous are caesium-137 (137Cs) and iodine-131 (131I). They are contained within the fuel rods, paradoxically making these more radioactive for a while than the original U or Pu.

So what are the safety features of the Japanese BWRs? If the electricity to the pumps cuts out, the chain reaction must be stopped to prevent the release of more heat. This is done by inserting boron control rods into the core. These absorb neutrons so that new fissions cannot occur. Then residual heat must be removed from the rods. The fact that the coolant water is at about 300 °C shows that the core heat is considerable. If current is cut to the electric pumps, back-up diesel pumps come into operation. If these fail, batteries operate the pumps electrically. Before these run out, TEPCO assumes the main or diesel pumps will be working again.

What actually happened on 11 March and after was as follows. The buildings withstood one of the most powerful earthquakes in recorded history and the control rods were automatically inserted into the core. However, the electrically powered pumps were disabled when the earthquake felled power lines. Diesel pumps kicked in but were then swamped by an unexpectedly large tsunami. Then the shed-load of batteries took over for a few hours but, when they ran down, neither had the electricity had been restored nor the diesel pumps restarted. The core started to overheat.

This risked damage to the fuel rods, resulting in emission

of caesium-137 and iodine-131. The risk of damage was increased as the heat of the core made it difficult to cool it with the seawater that the plant workers and emergency services were trying to dump on the reactors. The water was instantly boiling and being driven off as steam. The danger of the fuel rods melting and emitting even more radioactive substances was growing. It is not clear that this would lead to a more catastrophic breach of the steel containment: this would require temperatures exceeding 1500 °C. But it would increase the danger to the workers of excessive radiation, and risk spreading radioactive caesium and iodine in the surroundings.

The problem of these substances is two-fold. Caesium compounds are very soluble and chemically similar to compounds of sodium and potassium. Caesium rapidly spreads through the environment and is absorbed by plants and animals which may be part of the human diet. Its half-life is about 30 years, meaning that it takes about 100 years to decay to 10% of its original level. However, except locally, it is unlikely to be particularly hazardous. Iodine is more problematic. It is absorbed easily and passed on to humans in food. The body then concentrates it in the thyroid gland, converting a low general dose of radiation to a much higher specific dose to one tissue. It has a half-life of eight days, making it more radioactive atom for atom than caesium-137 but dropping to less than 1% in two months. Preventative measures can easily be taken, minimising the risks.

It is not clear whether the reactors will be brought under control without substantial emission of radiation. It is clear that TEPCO should have sited the back-up pumps higher

**The earthquake and tsunami has caused at least 15,000 deaths**

to avoid inundation by tsunamis. It is less clear but arguable that an earthquake zone was not a wise choice.

**Nevertheless, the minimal injuries and absence of deaths compared with the effect of the earthquake and tsunami should help to put nuclear power's risks in perspective. And we're not talking about another Chernobyl.**

## Update on Chernobyl

**According to the UNSCEAR report 20 years after the Chernobyl accident\*, 134 people got acute radiation syndrome. Of these, 28 died soon after the accident, and 19 subsequently, mostly from illnesses that are unconnected to their exposure.**

More than 6,000 cases of thyroid cancer have occurred among people, predominantly children, exposed to radioactive iodine (131I). Not all but the vast majority of these are thought due to this exposure. This resulted from contamination of milk but was not an inevitable result of the Chernobyl accident. As the UNSCEAR report notes drily, "prompt countermeasures were lacking [which] resulted in large doses to the thyroids of members of the general public".

Iodine is needed to synthesise the hormone thyroxine, which controls metabolism in adults and, crucially, growth in children. It is efficiently extracted from food and concentrated in the thyroid gland. Grazing cows would have eaten grass on which radioactive iodine had fallen and in-

corporated it into their milk which, of course, would have been drunk fresh largely by... children.

The countermeasures are simple: flood the system with ordinary iodine (127I, since you ask) by giving people tablets containing iodine salts. This was not done by the incompetent bureaucrats of the former Soviet Union and the result was that low whole body doses of 131I were converted into high doses in the thyroid.

The good (or, rather, less bad) news is that thyroid cancer responds well to treatment and only 15 of the 6000+ cases have died. There is also little evidence of more than a slight increase in other cancers. Thus the total of deaths proven to be caused by the worst accident in the history of nuclear power is not many more than 43.

\* United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, Vol II Annex D Health Effects due to radiation from the Chernobyl accident, 2008 (downloaded from the IAEA website)

There were warnings about safety issues prior to Fukushima

# There should be a fight for renewables

By Dave Elliot

**Japan is prone to major earthquakes, and buildings and other structures are designed accordingly. As was well demonstrated with this massive magnitude 9 quake, they had done very well in this regard, with few major building collapses. Otherwise the death and injury toll, bad enough as it was, would have been far worse.**

However, the tsunami added an extra dimension for structures on the coast, which is where most of Japan's nuclear plants are located. The plants at Fukushima clearly didn't fare so well — precipitating the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

There were warnings about nuclear safety issues prior to these events. The major seven reactor Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex in central Japan was hit by a Richter scale 6.8 earthquake in July 2007, which fortunately only led to a relatively small radioactive leak into the sea.

However, these events reveal more than just technological failures. The problems in the nuclear sector also reflect major institutional and political fault lines.

In 2003 Tokyo Electric Power was forced to close all 17 of its reactors after it admitted it had tried to conceal reports of cracks for 15 years. After the 2007 episode, all seven plants were closed and a review of others plants around the country was initiated.

Most of Japan's 55 reactors are only designed to withstand quakes of 6.5 — and, of course, it's not a linear scale, every unit increase in the Richter scale is 10 times more in energy effect terms. An earlier proposal to raise the standard above magnitude 7.1 was shelved because of the high costs.

Japan's Citizen's Nuclear Information Center commented "Japan is simply too quake bound to operate nuclear plants," but little changed, with the result that we have now had a major nuclear disaster.

Hundreds of workers have been exposed to high levels of radiation, tens of thousands of residents have been evacuated and terrified by fear of contamination. The situation is still ongoing (with the waste pools now a major focus of worry), but, unless things go from bad to even worse, the final death and injury toll may end up being small compared to that from the quake itself.

However, the tragic events are likely to lead to changes in energy policies in Japan and elsewhere. If Japan can't run nuclear plants safely, who can?

Germany immediately closed down eight older nuclear plants.

China halted its nuclear programme for a review (it currently gets 2% of its electricity from nuclear and was planning to expand that to 4% by 2020), and reviews were set up in most other countries.

In Japan we can expect a period of blaming and shaming — and, hopefully, a new approach. A 2008 US Embassy Cable recently released by Wikileaks reported outspoken criticisms of the existing approach from Lower House Diet Member Taro Kono, with the Japanese bureaucracy and power companies seen as "continuing an outdated nuclear energy strategy, suppressing development of alternative energy, and keeping information from Diet members and the public".

Kono claimed that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) was committed to advocating nuclear energy development, despite its problems, and although METI claimed to support alternative energy, in actuality it provided little. He claimed that METI in the past had "orchestrated the defeat of legislation that supported alternative energy development, and instead secured the passage of the Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS) act," which simply required power companies to purchase a very small amount of their electricity from alternative sources. He also said that "the subsidies were of such short duration that the projects have difficulty finding investors because of the risk and uncertainty involved".

He provided a specific example of how renewables were sidelined, noting that "there was abundant wind power available in Hokkaido that went undeveloped because the electricity company claimed it did not have sufficient grid capacity". But in fact there is "an unused connection between the Hokkaido grid and the Honshu grid that the companies keep in reserve for unspecified emergencies".

How much energy could Japan get from wind and the other renewables?

Although renewables have been downgraded over the years, Japan is still one of the leaders in solar PV production and it has large offshore wind, wave and tidal stream potentials, plus many other renewable energy options. A study for Greenpeace in 2003 suggested that, if energy efficiency was properly addressed, Japan could make a full transition to clean, renewable energy "without any sacrifice in living standards or industrial capacity". ([www.energyrichjapan.info](http://www.energyrichjapan.info))

Since 2003, renewables energy technology has developed rapidly with several scenarios now suggesting that renewable energy, backed up by energy efficiency, could supply

nearly 100% of global energy, not just electricity, by 2050, if there was proper support.

Japan represents one of the hardest places to make such a transition, since it currently imports nearly all its energy (oil, gas, coal), but the disaster at Fukushima may mean that at last support will be provided for a major change in direction, towards a climate-friendly non-nuclear future.

**However, as elsewhere, that won't be automatic: it will have to be fought for, against those with vested interests in the current approach.**

• Dave Elliot is the editor of *Nuclear or not? Does nuclear power have a place in a sustainable energy future?* (Palgrave, 2007)

## Japan union solidarity

• The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) has a page with extensive information on the earthquake, tsunami and what followed. You can send messages of solidarity from their website.

• **Public Services International (PSI) has also issued a statement and has set up an aid fund to which unions can donate.**

• The ICEM, which represents chemical, energy and mine workers — whose members are currently involved in the efforts to prevent catastrophes at the nuclear power stations — has a web page with details on how to pass on donations directly to the Japanese unions, who have set up a special bank account for this purpose.

• **The International Metalworkers Federation also has detailed information on how your union can donate money directly to the Japanese unions and has issued a statement.**

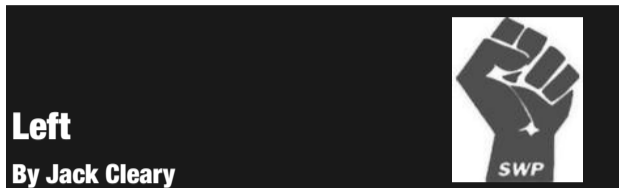
• Education International has set up a Japan earthquake and tsunami fund to which unions can contribute.

• **The IUF (global union for the food and hotel sector) has sent a circular to all its affiliates which includes an email address in Japan to which solidarity messages may be sent — [iuf-jcc@iuf.org](mailto:iuf-jcc@iuf.org).**

• If your union is affiliated to one of the global union federations listed above (and it probably is), please check out what they are doing and how your union can be involved.

From *Labour Start*: [www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org)

# Should we denounce intervention in Libya?



An individual, a group,  
A party, or a class  
That “objectively” picks its nose  
While it watches men drunk with blood  
Massacring  
Defenceless people  
Is condemned by history  
To rot and become worm-eaten  
While it is still alive. (*Leon Trotsky*)

**The would-be left is yet again tying itself in knots over a political dilemma: the belief that in order not to give general support to the British-France “liberal intervention” in Libya, they must stridently oppose them on this and on every specific thing they do or at least on every military action. In fact it is a dilemma of their own making.**

Of course, socialists should not give positive political support to the governments and the ruling capitalists of Britain, France, the USA, or the UN, in Libya or anywhere else. Even when what they seem to be doing is likely to or may produce desirable results, they act for their own reasons, not ours.

Of course, their “humanitarian” concern to prevent Qaddafi murdering the Libyan rebels is not unconnected with their concern for Libyan oil. Of course they are hypocrites. Of course they operate double standards. Of course, we should not give them political credence or endorsement for anything they do. Of course we cannot trust them to do what they say they are doing and only that.

Of course the no-fly zone on Qaddafi might in certain conditions develop into invasion and occupation. Wars escalate, combatants respond to situations they did not foresee. Of course, political logic unfolds according to its own needs and the interests of the big powers.

In 1882 the Gladstone Liberal government occupied Egypt “temporarily”, and then Britain remained there until 1952. To give them support would be to repeat the experience in relation to Iraq of those who ardently backed the Americans in Iraq. In other words it would be stupid and, for revolutionary socialists, self-destructing.

Nevertheless, we have to look at a situation as it is. The UN, with Britain and France as its instruments, has set very limited objectives in Libya. There is no reason at all to think that the “Great Powers” want to occupy Libya or are doing other than a limited international police operation on what they see as Europe’s “southern border”. The bitter lessons of their bungling in Iraq are still very fresh to them.

What they are doing now has prevented, for now at least, the immediate fullscale massacre that Colonel Qaddafi threatened to inflict on his opponents, to whom he vowed “no mercy”. In the name of what, then, should we oppose what they so far are doing in Libya? In the name of what alternative should we have told them to stop using air power to prevent Qaddafi massacring an incalculable number of his own people?

That is the decisive question in all such situations. Why? We tell them to stop preventing Qaddafi killing his own people? Because we are pacifists pure and simple and oppose military action of any sort in any conditions? Because we positively want Qaddafi to re-establish control in all of Libya? Because actions that might in themselves appear good are not really “good” if they are carried out by those we rightly distrust and want to overthrow?

Because it is a principle in all circumstances to defend the self-determination of any state against intervention by outside stronger states? Because we have slogans like “troops out” (of wherever) that are outside of history and circumstances; which we worship as a fetish?

Obviously, this is to reduce the whole question to absurdity. Or rather, it is to bring out the logic of the would be left’s belief that they have got to oppose France and Britain, whatever the consequences.

From any humanitarian, socialist or even decent liberal point of view it is desirable that the Qaddafi forces, trained military personnel and mercenaries, should not be allowed to slaughter the comparatively unarmed and untrained rebels they have in their sights.

It is not necessary to believe that Britain and France are certain to do good. But it is possible to separate certain actions of such powers. Some things they do are, from our

point of view, desirable and should not be “opposed”. Take an historical example.

Britain abolished the slave trade in 1808. Britain did not abolish slavery in such colonies as Jamaica for 30 years more. This was a Britain in the hands of the corrupt oligarchy that opposed the American democratic republic of that time, had opposed and fought the French revolution, and was at war with post-revolutionary France. The motive of the ruling class was by no means pure and simple. Yet Britain did make war on the slave trade at sea. It stopped ships in which large numbers of human cargo were packed like sardines; ships whose masters in bad weather or when the need for speed became predominant routinely threw large numbers of living slaves overboard. That was good work, whatever the motives of Britain. Recognising that it was good work does not commit anybody to retrospectively backing Britain against Napoleonic France or against the USA with which it again went to war in 1812.

## LEFT ARGUMENTS

**The arguments deployed by the left groups whose starting point is that they have to oppose Britain and France whatever they do, show the foolishness of such a posture.**

On the *Socialist Worker* website, for example, their relevant article contains a laboured list of possible bad consequences — maybe occupation, etc — to justify opposing not occupation, which, if it were to come, socialists would surely oppose, but this limited police action to stop massacre. The article lists the ruling class’s hypocrisy, double standards, etc. It even lets itself deploy the idiot argument that to bomb Qaddafi’s strongholds “would kill innocent civilians”. That is an argument for opposing action aimed at stopping very large scale massacres is an example of the political self-killing of people who are utterly confused!

At the end of the day, their posture comes down to opposition to whatever the main imperialist bourgeoisies are doing. Much that they do, most of what they do, should indeed be opposed. But to equate our long term, rooted, class opposition to these powers with deep opposition to every specific thing they do is not to be independent of them, but to be their slavish mirror image.

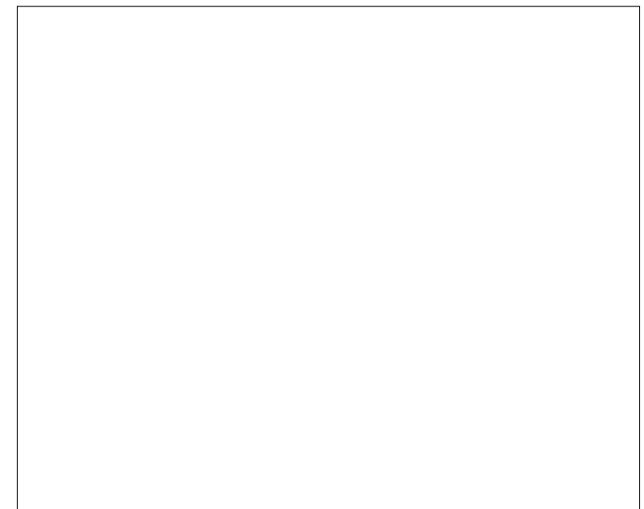
You will often end up being utterly foolish from the unrefined impulse to oppose what ever they do or say. The last thing this is is independent working class politics.

Or coherent anti-imperialism. On this question, the left, and in the first place the SWP, is hamstrung by its own recent history.

When in 1999 the Nato powers undertook a police action to stop a Serbian drives to massacre and drive out the Albanian population of Kosova, Serbia’s long time colony, the SWP and others started an anti-war movement which focused entirely on the demand to stop bombing Serbian installations, which was the coercion used to force Serbia to withdraw from Kosova.

In that situation, they sided entirely, and consciously, with the Serbian regime engaged on an attempt at genocide. (See *Workers’ Liberty* 55, April 1999, [www.workersliberty.org/node/4406](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/4406))

**It is impossible to find a clearer example of the lethal consequences of negativism on principle rather than independent working class politics that look critically and independently at what is going on, and whose proponents think about the issues and do not do the political equivalent of paint by numbers in concocting mindless and often reactionary “anti-imperialist” politics.**



Stopping Qaddafi is what matters right now

## Us and them in 1981

Cathy Nugent reviews *The Reunion*, Radio 4, Sunday 20 March

**The Reunion brought together people from both sides of the “Brixton riots” of April 1981. And, as the programme made very clear, there were just two sides in this event. It was cops versus the black and white — but mainly black — youth. The people who had been systematically bullied, discriminated against and physically injured by police over many years, were taking a spontaneous, messy, but perfectly logical and well-understood stand.**

The running street battles of Saturday 11 April 1981 followed a Friday day and night of massive police presence on the streets: stopping and searching hundreds of young black men “on suspicion” of being about to carry out a crime. At one point an injured man was taken away by police in a police vehicle and rumours spread.

There had been six days of such police harrassment — a planned attack on Brixton’s youth — Operation Swamp(!) — justified as an attempt to cut street crime.

Getting participants and witnesses to recall what they were doing on that day and night resulted in a much more vivid and interesting retelling of the story than a standard documentary. Not least because each participant was forced to account for themselves, and betray their own weaknesses in the process.

The left-wing journalist Darcus Howe admitted that he played no active part in the street battles. By this point, he said, he was regarded as a thinker writer — it was up to the youngsters to fight this kind of battle.

Howe’s wistful defensiveness was endearing. The general excuse-mongering of Brian Paddick (the former top cop, turned Lib Dem politician) was not. Apparently there were, he said in so many words, a few “bad apples” in the police-force at the time. That is all!

But Paddick was given short-shrift by Peter Bleksley. Another ex-cop Bleksley is now a script adviser on TV cop shows. He described how the police routinely planted evidence on “suspects” and tortured them into making confessions. He admitted, “I did not join the police as a racist but whilst I was in the police I became one.”

Ted Knight (then leader of Lambeth council) used the opportunity to blow his own political trumpet. This is the same Ted Knight who failed to organise a decisive confrontation with the Tory government against cuts in Lambeth.

Bleksley — who came over as a “reformed” aggressively unpleasant man — also tried to put Knight right. Knight claimed that the police had a planned in advance response to the events of Brixton on Saturday night — the explosion was expected. Bleksley said this was a rubbish conspiracy theory. In fact, the police arrived at Brixton spontaneously. Because no police officer off duty would have missed the chance to have a gigantic Saturday night ruck.

That night the police lost because the youth knew the streets, the back allies, the ways to get away. 279 police were injured. 45 of us. It was a crude, but in the long run effective, righting of wrongs.

Today, Brixton is full of trendy bars and shops; it is gentrified somewhat. But police racism still exists — under the surface, sometimes rising to the surface. “Stop and search” is still used by police — indeed has been extended. Deep social inequality, the background to the “riots” will now get worse as millions in service cuts by the Labour-controlled authority are pushed through.



# Memories of despotism

By Martyn Hudson

**My experience of Libya from the 1970s to the 1990s defined what would become my third-camp politics.**

My parents were migrant workers in Libya — working in the central oil fields region around Brega, part of a community of expatriate workers from all around the globe including Filipino, Sudanese, Palestinian and American workers.

The Brega camp where both migrant and Libyan workers lived was the site of an old Italian concentration camp and there were many monuments to the old Italian occupation which was remembered with anger by many Libyans — so much so that many of the Italian migrant workers were mistreated by Libyan managers. Having visited the memorial to the Libyan resistance fighter Omar Mukhtar on his execution ground near Benghazi I could sympathise with those who resisted and those who remembered that terrible occupation under Mussolini's fascists.

As anybody knows who has either lived under or read novels about totalitarian regimes, they are comprised both of tragedy and farce. Unwilling to countenance that Libya could have been occupied twice by Italian forces Qaddafi at one point issued a decree that the magnificent Roman cities at Sabratha and Leptis Magna were actually Arabic! Despotism could win that point by allowing no other opinion — hence eliminating the terrain of real history.

Also farcical is the cult of the leader, particularly when po-faced Stalinised personality cults are put in place by tyrants who are wilful in their abject stupidity. Qaddafi's green book was a classic example of stupidity manifesting itself as wisdom. It is reminiscent of Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* mixed with an *Arabian Nights* conception of Islam. Slogans from it adorned our town and of course its authority was unquestionable.

More tragic was the routine execution of students, and the bodies that would turn up in the squares of Tripoli and Benghazi — undoubtedly at the hands of the security forces. Executions were regularly televised and were often public.

As children, myself and friends would often stay in the Libyan Palace hotel in Tripoli — playing and running in the

corridors past many of the Soviet advisors who lived in these hotels and probably up to nefarious activities including the training of the large Palestinian diaspora in Libya — who Qaddafi sent to the war in Chad — many of them never to return.

I travelled widely in Libya and grew to love it immensely — the ruined tanks in the deserts, the green mountains of Cyrenaica. But I also respected the people, many of whom were dissidents. Most of these were monarchists who had been dispossessed under the new regime and who were not trusted by the government.

In private they would tell us about the rumours of new executions or revelled, as many did, in sordid details of the private lives of the elite. These very same people, correctly I think, blanked us in public in case the security personnel focused on their closeness to British workers. One close friend of mine, from a monarchist family, faked insanity rather than go to fight in Chad. He survived but as a punishment was sent to work in a Cola factory.

By the late 1980s it was clear that there was some kind of Islamist opposition developing and we heard of gun battles

being waged in the cities. At one point Libyan workers warned foreign migrant workers against the wearing of beards in case they were mistaken as Islamists by gun-toting militias. Demonstrations in the 90s took on an increasingly Islamist hue but it was also clear that the organised Al-Qaeda forces were relatively marginal.

## POLARITIES

**Being very aware of imperialism, racism and class politics by the mid 80s I was becoming increasingly politicised as a socialist. Having spent time in both Libya and the UK during the miners' strike, I was very aware of the two polarities popular in left circles — imperialism and anti-imperialism.**

At the Anti-Fascist Action Remembrance Sunday demo against the National Front in November 1986 I listened to Royston Bull, then of the International Leninist Party, banging on about Libya being the workers' paradise. I pointed out to him and his comrades that, if so, it was one in which the workers were quite regularly executed. "Lies", he shouted at me, "Lies and imperialist slanders against the Libyan People's Socialist Arab Jamahiriya!"

For these people Libya was a bastion against US and UK imperialism. For me the Libyan regime had very little to do with socialism and it taught me a clear lesson about where my politics should lie — not with my own ruling class or with any other sub-imperialism like the Libyan regime — but with the global working class.

The global working class, however, was not some abstraction to me. I had seen it in the bonds of solidarity between American, Libyan, British and Filipino workers on the oil-fields of my childhood. Just as I had seen it when I stood again on a long-ago Sunday morning in Trafalgar Square — the massed ranks of Imperial Whitehall and Horseguards Parade behind me and froth-mouthed pedants and self-deceivers before me.

## Views on the Western intervention

**Three more viewpoints on the Western intervention from other socialists. We print them to promote further debate. Much more contentious debate can be found on our website [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org).**

### Cannot oppose if only way to prevent massacre

**Given the urgency of preventing the massacre... and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no one can reasonably oppose [the UN Security Council resolution]...**

The Western response, of course, smacks of oil. The West fears a long drawn out conflict. If there is a major massacre, they would have to impose an embargo on Libyan oil, thus keeping oil prices at a high level at a time when, given the current state of the global economy, this would have major adverse consequences... Only France emerged as very much in favour of strong action, which might well be connected to the fact that France — unlike Germany (which abstained in the UNSC vote), Britain, and, above all, Italy — does not have a major stake in Libyan oil, and certainly hopes to get a greater share post-Qaddafi.

We all know about the Western powers' pretexts and double standards...

The fact remains, nevertheless, that if Qaddafi were permitted to continue his military offensive and take Benghazi, there would be a major massacre. ...The attack by Qaddafi's forces was hours or at most days away. You can't in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians. In the same way, even though we know well the nature and double standards of cops in the bourgeois state, you can't in the name of anti-capitalist principles blame anybody for calling them when someone is on the point of being raped and there is no alternative way of stopping the rapists.

This said, without coming out against the no-fly zone, we must express defiance and advocate full vigilance in monitoring the actions of those states carrying it out, to make sure that they don't go beyond protecting civilians as mandated by the UNSC resolution. In watching on TV the crowds in Benghazi cheering the passage of the resolution, I saw a big billboard in their middle that said in Arabic "No to foreign intervention." People there make a distinction be-

tween "foreign intervention", by which they mean troops on the ground, and a protective no-fly zone. They oppose foreign troops. They are aware of the dangers and wisely don't trust Western powers.

The Egyptians are reported to be providing weapons to the Libyan opposition — and that's fine — but on its own it couldn't have made a difference that would have saved Benghazi in time. But again, one must maintain a very critical attitude toward what the Western powers might do.

*Gilbert Achcar, writing in International Viewpoint*

### Why not arm the revolutionaries?

**In Libya, we think that supporting and defending the revolution can be achieved by different means than the western military armada. no to western interests in Libya; no to Libya becoming Iraq; no to Qaddafi. Why not arm the revolutionaries? Why "defend" the revolution in precisely this manner? We have no confidence in the intervention.**

But we cannot demand the immediate end to the bombardment because we are against the massacre of civilians. We demand the immediate end of the massacre of civilians. It is complicated. We are against the bombardment but we can't call for it to end immediately.

*Loumamba from the Ligue Gauche des Ouvriers (Tunisian socialist group)*

### Be vigilant against re-run of Iraq intervention

**The Libyan insurrection is a fundamental element of the revolutionary wave in the Arab world. Its objective is to do away with 40 years of political oppression, tribal division of society and regional inequalities. If Qaddafi has enjoyed a certain prestige in the Arab world, that was based on the false idea that Libyans had profited from the redistribution of oil revenues.**

The poor masses, in particular in the vast rural areas of Libya, were in fact completely excluded from these revenues, which were essentially given over to the reinforcement of the ruling clan and its fat financial profits.

This ruling clan has not hesitated to put itself several times at the service of Western imperialism, in intervening in the affairs of different African countries, then becoming more and more openly an agent for guarding the borders of the European Union from immigration. We therefore unconditionally support the revolt of the people of Libya.

In the face of the bloody military repression of the regime, the insurrection found itself isolated from the world. In this context, Qaddafi was able, town by town, to re-take control of regions which had fallen into the hands of the insurgents. He was aided in that by weapons which French imperialism had provided him with, to the tune of 30 million euros in the year 2009 alone...

Imperialism's cynical gambit was: weaken the insurrection, then weaken Qaddafi, make itself the arbiter of the situation, re-establish and strengthen control over the region.

We cannot reproach the population of Libya, facing death, for welcoming and favouring certain military actions of the coalition — even when that coalition includes the worst criminals, imperialist powers, or Saudi Arabia which is firing on its own people and intervening in Bahrain. ... it is because the aid which they had a right to expect from the whole world, and in particular from the international proletariat, never arrived — because for a long time, the powerful revolutionary organisations which could provide it have not existed. We have to remedy this...

The peoples and the workers should intervene!

It is urgent that the exploited, in dominant countries like France, stop being spectators of the situation and intervene to put an end to the capitalist order and its leaders, who are leading the world into poverty and murderous wars! ... In the first place, we must be attentive to changes in the military situation, and ready to mobilise, when it becomes necessary, against any re-run of the Iraqi scenario in Libya, for the withdrawal of any military presence strategically turned against the peoples, and to support and extend the revolutionary process.

*The Union for Communism (group based in Lyons who work closely with the Worker-Communist Parties of Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan. They are in close contact with the Moroccan Revolutionary Marxist Current)*

# Women in the Paris Commune

By Jill Mountford

**Women's role in the Paris Commune was not limited to the morning of March 18 when a crowd of working class women put themselves between the cannons in possession of the National Guard (the citizen's militia) and the troops of the National Assembly, led by Adolphe Thiers; the action which sparked the revolution. Throughout the 72-day reign of the Commune, women organised, argued, theorised and fought alongside men to defend and develop the revolution.**

## THE CLUBS

**Women discussed ideas, argued about demands and expressed their hatred of the church and the state and the role these institutions played in their oppression.**

Much of this discussion took place in the various political clubs, many of which were established during the siege (from September 1870 to February 1871) and following the tradition of 1789 and 1848.

During the Commune more clubs sprang up, often in churches that had been taken over by communards.

Paule Mink organised in the clubs. She took an action-over-organisation approach to things and was a "rhetorically violent and anti-clerical communard". Mink took part in at least four clubs and shared platforms with working class women.

Working-class women's anti-clericalism was a result of their poverty and position in society. The church was immensely wealthy, it controlled education, particularly girls' education. It influenced wages and played a considerable role in driving down the wages of women in the needle trades by undercutting women workers' rates of pay through the charitable labour of needlewomen in the convents.

Around 60,000 women and girls were employed in this trade out of 112,000 working women in Paris.

During the Commune Mink helped organise the Club de la Victoire, in St Sulpice. She spoke regularly at the other clubs. She established a free school for girls, helped organise an ambulance corps, met and strategised with other women, and travelled around the provinces to make propaganda for the revolution.

Mink was not seen (and did not see herself) as a Jacobin during the Commune, but in later years she described herself as a Jacobin-Blanquist.

An example of the anti-clerical rhetoric in the clubs is summed up by the speech of a 16-year-old communarde named Gabrielle who announced at the Club Saint-Sulpice:

"We must shoot the priests; they prevent us from doing what we want. Women are harmed by going to confession... I therefore urge all women to take hold of all the priests and to burn their ugly mugs off (brûler la gueule)! When they are gone, we will be happy. Never fear... go with a good heart... I will be the example. To death, to death! That is the cry of my soul. The same for the nuns. Attack these breeders of hell. To death, to death!" (Few priests were actually shot and no nuns were murdered during the Commune.)

Marriage fared no better than the priests in club discussions.

A communarde known as La Matelessière ("the mattress maker") declared at a Club des prolétaires meeting, "I have a 16-year-old daughter, and never as long as I live will she marry... She now lives with someone, and she is very happy without sacraments of the church."

Mink had a class analysis beyond anti-clericalism:

"Another evil of the present society is the rich, who only drink and amuse themselves, without ever troubling themselves. We must get rid of them, along with the priests and the nuns. We will only be happy when we have no more bosses, no more rich and no more priests."

After the defeat of the Commune Mink was exiled and did not return to France for 10 years. But on her return she resumed political agitation.

## THE UNION DES FEMMES

**On 11 April 1871, the *Journal Officiel* (the official newspaper of the Commune) carried on its front page an appeal by "un groupe des citoyennes" (women citizens) calling for the setting up of "a women's movement for the defence of Paris". The appeal went on to say it welcomed "the advent of the reign of Labour and of Equality..."**

At the inaugural meeting there was discussion about women's oppression and how equality should be fought for; practical decisions were taken as to how things should proceed. The meeting agreed to set up local committees in the *arrondissements* (districts). These committees would recruit volunteers for nursing, canteen work, construction of barricades and staffing barricades.

Along with Eugene Varlin, Lemel set up and ran "La Marmite" cooperative restaurant and meeting place. Later, during the siege of Paris, other branches of La Marmite were created.

Lemel had extensive organisational skills. After the Commune she was deported to New Caledonia. Henri Rochefort, founder of the *L'intransigeant* newspaper, recalled a discussion with her on the prison ship on the way to New Caledonia. He said of her: "One of the most intelligent women I have ever known. Eloquence and common sense equalled her courage: her thinking was marked by astonishing clarity and rigour."

## ELISABETH DMITRIEFF

**The other main driving force behind the Union des Femmes was a young Russian émigré and member of the International, Elisabeth Dmitrieff.**

Around 20 years old, she was delegated by Russian revolutionaries to visit Marx in London. There is conflicting evidence as to when she arrived in Paris, some claiming she was in Paris before the Commune began and other evidence saying she arrived around 28-29 March after the inauguration of the Commune. Regardless of when she arrived, Dmitrieff wasted no time in getting involved and organised. Just three weeks into the revolution she published a call to women:

"Citoyennes, the decisive hour has arrived. It is time that the old world come to an end! We want to be free! And France is not rising alone, all the civilised people have their eyes on Paris... Citoyennes, all resolved, all united... to the gates of Paris, on the barricades, in the neighbourhoods, everywhere! We will seize the moment... And if the arms and bayonets are all being used by our brothers, we will use paving stones to crush the traitors!"

Dmitrieff escapes Paris after the Semaine Sanglante (the bloody week of 21-28 May) and flees to Russia where she ends her days in Siberia with her husband, who is exiled there.

## ANDRÉ LÉO

**André Léo was a journalist and novelist. In the late 1860s through to the siege she devoted her time to making propaganda for socialist and feminist ideas and using the discussion clubs as a forum.**

During the Commune, Léo advocated aggressive broad-based military effort against the Commune's enemy, Thiers and his Versailles troops. She argued that the Commune's National Guard must incorporate women. In her memoirs she argued that civil war, unlike International war, "made for the profits of kings in the interest of thievery and pride" is "the only legitimate war from the perspective of the oppressed".

The Commune, for Léo, meant the destruction of class and gender barriers. Léo established the newspaper *La Sociale* at the beginning of April 1871. She used the paper to influence rank and file communards about socialist feminist ideas.

On April 12 she wrote an editorial "Toutes avec tous", "All Women with All Men", arguing for men and women to fight together on the battlefield. She pleads: "Women's help is now necessary... Let them fully participate in the struggle to which they have already given their hearts. Many desire it, and many are able."

She did not, however, call for the participation of women on the Commune's executive.

Like Dmitrieff, Lemel, Mink and Louise Michel, Léo did not argue for women's political rights during the Commune, largely on the basis that they saw these structures as temporary and believed things would change rapidly. They also regarded social changes to be of far greater immediate value.

Alongside arguing for women's right to participate in the battlefields as fighters and in a supportive role as nurses, etc, Léo also dared to argue that the Commune's military strategy was wrong.

She argued that they had missed a unique offensive opportunity to attack the city of Versailles in the early days of the revolution.

Léo had argued for women's participation in the National Guard during the siege of Paris from September 1870. She concerned herself with challenging gender stereotypes and breaking down the restrictive practices placed on women. Léo spent her whole political life challenging the dominant ideology of what a woman's role is and she saw education as being the liberating force for women and men.

## Natalie Lemel

At the same meeting procedural statutes and memberships rules were agreed on and a provisional central committee was elected to be replaced by a committee made up of delegates from the *arrondissements* eventually. At this meeting they also agreed to send a proposal to the Executive Commission of the Commune requesting material aid in setting facilities in each *arrondissement* town hall.

The entire text of the Union des Femmes central committee was printed on 14 April in the *Journal Officiel* alongside a summary of the decisions taken at this first meeting.

Working-class women are central to all of the ideas discussed and voted on at this first meeting. Six of the seven signers of the central committee's address signed "worker" after their name.

The address sees the ultimate objective of the Commune to end discrimination and inequality, including discrimination against women. And it argues that sex discrimination is employed by the powerful, and recognises that sex discrimination divides men and women of the working class.

A well-distributed poster printed by the Commune for the Union des Femmes replies to publication of a truce appeal put out by an anonymous group of women. The Union poster insists that "conciliation... would be a denial of all working-class hopes for total social revolution, for the abolition of all existing social and legal structures, for the elimination of all privileges and forms of exploitation for the replacement of the rule of Capital by the rule of Labour...in short for the emancipation of the working class by the working class..."

"Once victorious, men and women workers in complete solidarity will be able to defend their common interests and with one final effort they will extinguish all trace of exploitation and exploiters."

In a second address the Union goes on to argue for equal pay for equal work, which is the first time this demand had been raised by a large group of French women.

Of the seven women who set in motion the Union des Femmes on 11 April, Elisabeth Dmitrieff and Nathalie Lemel were both active members of the International Working Men's Association (later known as the International or First International); and together they appear to have been the Executive Commission's driving force during the Union's six-week life.

Of the other five little is known, other than Aline Jarry, who had been associated with André Léo in the late 1860s, and Blanche Lefèvre, who was a frequent speaker in the discussion clubs and was to die a few weeks later at the barricades.

## NATHALIE LEMEL

**Nathalie Lemel was a member of the French section of the International Working Men's Association, a seasoned organiser by the time of the Commune.**

She was a driving force behind the Union des Femmes along with Elisabeth Dmitrieff. She was active in the bookbinders union in the 1860s and was elected to the bookbinders strike committee in 1864-65. She also worked in the union's mutual aid society and frequently contributed to the discussion club of the 6th *arrondissement* during the siege.

## Royal Mail job cuts

By Darren Bedford

**Two London mail centres could close as part of a Royal Mail restructuring plan, which puts over 700 workers and 1,000 managerial jobs on the chopping block. A further 1,700 head-office posts could go in a future review.**

Centres at Nine Elms and Bromley-by-Bow face complete closure, and Royal Mail bosses have warned of further cuts to come; the company says that up to half of the UK's 64 mail centres could face closure by 2016.

Royal Mail has cut around 65,000 since 2002 but claims that voluntary redundancy and natural wastage mean that the current cuts will not involve any direct sackings. However, a spokesperson for the Communication Workers' Union said "We don't believe that the closure of two major mail centres in London can be managed without compulsory redundancies. We also believe that Royal Mail's announcement is not in accordance with the existing national agreements we have with the company."

In a further blow to postal workers, a new valuation of the employee share scheme has revealed that workers' holdings in the scheme are now entirely worthless.

**With workers at Crown Post Office sites voting recently to take strike action, rank-and-file activists working for Royal Mail (particularly at the effected sites), should organise urgently to push the union into action against closures and job cuts.**

### In brief

By Ira Berkovic

#### RMT

**The Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT) is moving towards escalation in a dispute against victimisations on London Underground.**

Two drivers, Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, have been sacked on trumped-up charges and have not been reinstated despite both workers winning their Interim Relief Appeals. Following strike action involving workers on their own lines (Bakerloo

## Strike ballots in Lambeth

By a Unison activist

**Library workers in Lambeth have voted unanimously, in an indicative ballot, for strike action against job and service cuts.**

Unison has 90% union density in Lambeth Libraries; if it goes ahead, strike action would shut all of Lambeth's libraries.

All "enquiry desk" staff are facing redundancy, and the mobile library service is closing as a result of a proposed Cultural Services restructure. As well as providing advice, enquiries desk staff run reading groups and story times.

Lambeth Libraries get more than 100,000 visits per month, and many local people rely on the services the council plans to axe. Councillors have suggested replacing staff with an "Amazon-style" service or more self-service machines, as well as volunteers.

Lambeth has the highest unemployment figure of

any London borough, yet the council plans to add to this by cutting hundreds of jobs.

Local unions and anti-cuts group Lambeth Save Our Services are calling on the Labour council not to cut local services but instead to use reserves and sack high paid consultants and join with the local labour movement in fighting the Tory cuts.

After hearing the result of the libraries indicative ballot, Lambeth's park rangers, who have also all been sacked in the restructure, voted to join library workers in a ballot and hope to be taking action with them over job and service cuts. Now both park rangers and library staff must wait for the ballot to be approved by Unison's London Region.

One library worker described why they felt they had to take strike action

"Some people are fighting for their own jobs, people on my grade are standing with our col-

leagues who are being sacked. But we're all fighting for more than that. They are destroying the service we care about because the people who design restructures don't understand how it feels to need a library service. We have to protect it.

"It's time to stop complaining to each other or worrying and do something. Otherwise we know next year or the year after there won't be libraries or youth clubs. There probably won't be hospitals or benefits or pensions. What will be left? Jobs at McDonald's for the lucky ones and the rest of us... I don't know."

To defeat the Tory cuts agenda, action like that which should happen in Lambeth soon must spread wider.

**We need strikes across the public sector to protect our jobs and our services. The ruling classes are uniting to fight and therefore so must we.**

## Tower Hamlets strikes are a fight against poverty

By a Tower Hamlets worker

**Whilst Unison members who bear the brunt of the job cuts caused by the Tower Hamlets Council budget await the outcome of their strike ballot, child poverty action groups publish figures showing that Tower Hamlets has the highest levels of child poverty in London and the third highest in the country.**

The majority of children (57%) in the Borough live in poverty (defined as the family having less than £11 a day to spend after housing costs.)

The huge numbers of redundancies in Tower Hamlets include 55 full time posts from in-house home

care, 30 posts from Children's Centres, over 70 posts from Junior Youth Service after school clubs. This represents many more people than posts, as a large number of them are part-time or job-share.

These cuts, and the colossal loss in services to parents and children in the Borough can only ensure that Tower Hamlets remains at the top of this particular league table.

The full council meeting which finalised the cuts was triumphant in its success. Councillors congratulated themselves and each other, standing and clapping in a meeting from which all but a handful of protesters had been excluded.

The most sickening speeches were from the in-

dependent women councillors, supporters of mayor Lutfur Rahman, who reminded us all that this was International Womens' Day and how they are working for the women in their community. A woman Labour councillor spoke about the great women on whose shoulders they stand!

Since the working class and the poor of Tower Hamlets cannot rely on our elected representatives to respond to their needs, we must do it ourselves.

**This is why the two biggest unions in the borough, Unison and NUT, are balloting to strike in defence of jobs, and it is why the people who rely on crucial services should fight to save them.**

**A BP plant near Hull is continuing, with 430 workers currently locked-out.**

The workers are employed by engineering construction contractors to carry out building work on a refinery owned by Vivergo, a consortium involving BP, British Sugar and Du Point. Redhall's contract was terminated by Aker-Process, the managing contractor, but instead of finding alternative work at the site for its employees it told them to turn up for work as usual, whereupon they found themselves locked out.

Workers at the site had previously staved off a raft of sackings by taking wild-

cat strike action. Unions including Unite and GMB are now investigating legal challenges.

#### ISLE OF MAN

**Post office workers on the Isle of Man will take action after a ballot returned an 84% majority for strikes.**

Workers have suffered a pay freeze since 2009, despite an increase in profits for the Isle of Man Post Office and a 5% increase in the amount it pays to Manx local government coffers. It has also increased pay for managerial staff.

The ballot was the first in IMPO history in a dispute over pay.

## Pensions: fight like the French!

### Briefing

By Ed Maltby

**The generalised attack on public sector pensions that the UK government is pushing through now is not unprecedented.**

The French government did the same, going for wide-ranging "reforms" of retirement law last year, pushing up the retirement age, and reducing workers' pension entitlements.

The major difference so far is that the French government was met with a massive strike wave which came close to bringing it down.

The French union leaderships first co-ordinated single strike and protest days in April and May — these were spaced far apart, and although massive, were intended to be limited, controllable shows of force by union leaders to strengthen their hand in negotiations. But as 2010 wore on and it became clear that Sarkozy had no intention of negotiating, union leaders worried that their prestige would be damaged. The action was intensified, with general strikes tabled for September and October.

### BLING-BLING

**There was a general political disgust in the French working class at Sarkozy, the "bling-bling" president driving through the cuts.**

Combined with pressure from the lower levels of the union structures — regional executives, shop stewards' committees — on the union leaderships, this opened the way for the extension of the strikes.

By 8 October, rail, road and dockworkers' unions, as well as oil refinery workers, were issuing notices that they would be taking indefinite strike action — voting in workplace "general assemblies" each day on whether to strike. After the 12 October one-day strike, there began nearly a month of all-out indefinite strikes in several industries — parts of the rail network, oil and docks in particular.

Another key factor in the dispute was the youth movement. As soon as the strikes began, there were walkouts every day in dozens of universities and hundreds of further education colleges, with students demonstrating and making links with workers. This

gave a huge boost to the morale of the strikers. Soon, the strike had spread beyond the "core" sectors and extended across most of the public sector, some workers coming out for one day, others staying out for days or weeks.

By the middle of November, however, the strikes were running out of steam. The union leaderships weren't fighting to stop the strikes, exactly — but they weren't leading, either. Rank-and-file organisations were not strong enough to continue the action when union leaders went in for sell-out negotiations, effectively pulling the plug on the strongest sectors of the strike. However, rank-and-file networks had begun to spring up. In Rouen, a daily inter-industry strike bulletin was being published. Inter-industry general assemblies were being organised effectively in other areas as well. A whole swathe of young workers had come of age in the strikes, joined unions and learned how to organise.

### CONFIDENCE

**The French strikes did not come out of nowhere. French workers are not all super-militant strike-enthusiasts (unfortunately!). French workers did not go into October with buckets of confidence.**

They were hesitant. They found their confidence from three sources. The first source was leadership from the local structure of their unions. The strike was "union-led" — local shop stewards and regional committees went out and fought for the idea of a strike. Secondly, they drew inspiration from the strikes of the most militant sectors — the rail, docks and oil workers. The workers in these sectors understood that they were giving an example to the rest of the class, and said as much in their strike meetings. That was one reason for the strength of the transport, oil and dock strikes. The third source of confidence was the youth revolt. Seeing the youth — in many cases, their own children — fighting in the streets had a big impact on French workers' confidence.

**Workers in Britain can find the same confidence to fight, from the same sources. We can fight like the French!**

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Libya: opposing no-fly zone means helping Qaddafi

By Cliva Bradley

**On 17 March, after much procrastination, the United Nations agreed to military action against Libya's dictator Muammar Qaddafi, whose murderous forces were advancing on the rebel stronghold of Benghazi. The immediate disaster — a mass slaughter in Benghazi — has been averted.**

The Stop the War Coalition immediately issued a statement condemning "a new war", and "escalating armed intervention in Libya". *Socialist Worker* headlined "No to intervention in Libya! Victory to Arab revolutions!" Much other left-wing commentary has focused on opposing intervention.

But the rebel forces in Benghazi greeted the UN decision with jubilation. Benghazi is a city where Qaddafi has, in the past, conducted the mass public execution of oppositionists. They knew what they could expect if Qaddafi triumphed. And it seemed likely that Qaddafi was on the verge of defeating the revolution, or at least inflicting terrible slaughter.

To oppose — that is, demonstrate against, and make a serious effort to prevent — the limited military action against Qaddafi, is to tell the rebels in Benghazi "you're on your own."

What socialist would want to send out such a message? Only one not deserving the name.

There is of course no reason to trust the armies of the West, or their Arab allies, to bring democracy to Libya or anywhere else.

We take for granted the abject hypocrisy of western bourgeois governments. The same politicians who accepted Qaddafi's "rehabilitation" and reintegration into mainstream international political life, are now condemning the abuse of Libyan people. We stand aside from the hysterical, gung-ho headlines of the tabloid press.

The force which is genuinely advancing democracy across the Middle East is the mass movement, above all the workers' movement. In Egypt a new, independent trade union federation has been formed in the midst of a wave of militant strikes.

This is the agency to which socialists look to

### Qaddafi's army

transform the Middle East.

But neither such workers' movements nor the labour movement internationally have a military force of our own to come to the aid of Benghazi. We can build our own forms of solidarity with the popular movement in Libya. We can be vigilant against whatever political steps the Western powers take.

But what issue of principle should make us demonstrate against the one thing which might prevent untold slaughter, prevent Qaddafi's immediate bloody victory, and therefore a crushing defeat for the wave of revolutions?

It is not good enough for socialists to point out that Cameron, et al, are no friends of the Libyan people. Indeed they are not. But what do you propose to do, instead, then, to prevent Qaddafi crushing his enemies? Socialists either address this real, life-and-death question or they are irrelevant poseurs.

It's not good enough to argue that the West has supported dictators in the past and will do so again. Of course it will. But how able the West is to impose its agenda on the Middle

East in future depends on the self-confidence of the mass movement. A terrible defeat in Libya might sap that self-confidence much more than a temporary acceptance of Western assistance.

This is not a full-scale invasion with the intention of occupying the country. We are not yet looking at any long term presence of an army — "boots on the ground" as the generals put it. For now it is still a question of the immediate slaughter of a revolutionary movement. We will of course have to reassess the situation in Libya.

We need to develop a strong solidarity campaign which is independent of Western (or Arab) governments. We need, in particular, to help the new Egyptian workers' movement to continue to grow and develop, which could have an immense, positive effect on the whole region.

**Instead, some socialists have responded to this crisis by putting their hostility to America above the lives of the Libyan rebels. This is a shameful disgrace.**

• More on Libya: pages 8-9

## UCU action shows the way

By a UCU member

**The University and College Union (UCU) lecturers' strike on Thursday 24 March is the first ever national strike of UCU members in both further and higher education. The action is over a number of issues. Pay, jobs and pensions in higher education and pay and pensions in further education.**

Pensions is the issue that is providing most of the heat in this dispute. The clutch of proposed changes to the University Superannuation Scheme and the Teachers' Pension Scheme would result in all members paying more, working longer and getting far less.

Hidden away within the recent Hutton report on public sector pensions is evidence that explodes the myth of the "public sector pensions time bomb". Public sector pensions as a percentage of GDP are peaking now and will decline year by year to 2060.

It is much to the credit of UCU that it has balloted and is taking action now. Activists in other public sector unions should be pressing for their unions to ballot now to link up the fight over pensions.

Apparently the NUT will be balloting over pensions after Easter and this is really good news. The joint strike action in 2008 uniting NUT, PCS and UCU gave a big boost to all our strikes. Members still talk about the joint demonstration in London. Let's work to ensure that we see more of this in the coming months.

There is no point in unions waiting for some illusory "better time to fight". There is no point in building towards "one big demo" (i.e. on the 26 March) without any ideas about what to do next.

The Tories are racing ahead with their plans at breakneck speed because they want to create "facts on the ground" which will be difficult or impossible to reverse. You could read it as arrogance — they're certainly arrogant! But the other reason is because they realise how their unpopularity is going to grow and grow rapidly.

### WHAT NEXT?

**So where does the UCU go after Thursday? While the strike will undoubtedly go well we need a**

**coherent strategy to ensure enthusiasm isn't quickly burned away. An essential part of that strategy must be coordinated action across the public sector.**

The other real and pressing issue is redundancies. The next few weeks will see announcements on proposed redundancies across the sectors. We will soon be fighting on another front and within our individual institutions. This will present even more challenges, but what's the alternative to fighting? Any union that sits back and accepts a huge tranche of redundancies this year will make resistance next year and afterwards ten times harder.

Students in many places have already been active in organising solidarity with the strikes. Occupations in support of the UCU are underway at UCL and Goldsmiths. The silence from the National Union of Students on the dispute, however, is deafening.

NUS president and notorious invertebrate Aaron Porter has been quoted in the national media in support of the action, but unfortunately Aaron's support has not thus far extended to even a single article on NUS's website. Only the union's LGBT campaign — traditionally to the left of the union nationally — has released a publicly-available statement in support.

Arguably the silence on the issue is an improvement from the situation in 2006, when then-president Kat Fletcher said that her members needed the AUT/NATFHE strike "like a hole in the head", and SUs like Liverpool organised demonstrations against the strike. But after a period in which it spectacularly scabbed on its own members taking direct action, it is hardly surprising that NUS is incapable of organising any meaningful support for another union's strike.

**There's a parallel with the early years of Thatcher. The mistake the labour movement made then was not to launch a united fight early on. The Tories' policies now are designed to create mass unemployment to strengthen their hand. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past. For coordinated national action across the public sector!**

## Fight the Tories' class war budget

By Stephen Wood  
**The 2011 UK Budget will once again be more fuel on the Tory Government's class war fire.**

The class war being fought by business and the bosses is to prepare the economy to withstand and facilitate the worst cuts and attacks on the working class and labour movement since Thatcher. Whatever George Osborne says about it being a "budget for growth" this is what is going on. Unemployment is rising. Living standards are falling. Average earnings are falling. Those trends will continue.

Lib Dem coalition partners are saying this budget will be more compassionate and fairer than

a straight Tory budget would have been. The facts give the lie to that.

Increasing the threshold by which the lowest earners pay tax to £8000 may seem a small step in the right direction, but coupled with cuts in tax credits, services, pensions and the rise in VAT, those on the lowest income are still suffering hard and that will continue.

Recent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) outlines the factors that are involved in a fall in real incomes and the fact that all of these factors have been acute in the last three years. They are: lower employment, lower interest on savings, lower real earnings, and tax and benefit changes.

Between 2008-2011 me-

### George Osborne:

dian incomes have fallen by 1.6% or £360 a year. This is the first time median incomes have fallen in a three year period since 1990-93 and it is the biggest drop since 1980-83.

Moreover in the previous 50 years the lowest earners could have expected their incomes to rise. Not so now. The same group's income has dropped by just over 2%.

The TUC's statement on the economy, coming days

before the "March for the Alternative" is completely uninspiring stuff. While condemning the Chancellor's pro business outlook and empty rhetoric about job creation it calls for a "sustainable recovery". That is just weasel words for "some cuts", but slower. There is no programme for the labour movement to fight these measures.

**The demo on 26 March will show the scale of opposition to these cuts but it is up to the rank-and-file to transform their unions into combative bodies that are prepared to organise, strike, demonstrate, link up across sectors and with local communities to mount a genuine fightback.**