

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 199 30 March 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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# Now make our movement fit to fight!

- **POLITICALLY: REMAKE THE LABOUR PARTY • INDUSTRIALLY: STRIKE NOW!**
- **IN IDEAS: FIGHT FOR EVERY JOB AND SERVICE; MAKE THE RICH PAY!**

## 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.
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- Open borders.
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## Victories for anti-cuts student candidates

By Sacha Ismail

**In recent student union sabbatical elections we have seen many more left candidates — the result of an upsurge in student anti-cuts activism. While there have not been dramatically more left victories, there have been some interesting developments.**

The left has won elections at some very unexpected places, including right-wing bastions. These include Royal Holloway, Bristol and Liverpool universities (see article below). Left-wing, anti-cuts candidates were also elected at Southbank, Edinburgh and Birmingham.

At UCL, the centre of the

student revolt in London, anti-cuts activists are now firmly in control.

In other places where the left did not win any sabbatical positions, left candidates received good votes, and many part-time officers were elected. Victories have been on the basis of a strong grassroots anti-cuts group, almost all of which have revived after the new year lull because of the UCU strikes, new occupations and the run-up to 26 March. Such groups played a particularly important role in Royal Holloway and Liverpool.

The most dramatic defeat came in the University of London Union (the federation of the posher unis

in London), where Counterfire/Coalition of Resistance activist Clare Solomon lost re-election to an unpleasant right-winger by a very narrow margin.

The ULU figures were, in fact, not bad for the left. Left candidates won the two other sabbatical positions and Clare's vote went up quite a bit from last time, when she only won because her opponent was disqualified. With more left-wing officers than before, ULU may well continue to be a base for activism. But the headline is a left-wing president being thrown out after a right-wing witch-hunt against her in the media — a definite setback.

One election not yet concluded when we went to press is Westminster University, where left-wingers, including AWL member and incumbent Vice President Education Jade Baker, are battling Islamists Hizb ut-Tahrir in an extremely tight race. A HT victory would be a disaster. The election will close and the result be known on Thursday 31 March.

**Getting elected is one thing. What is crucial is that the new crop of left-wing sabbaticals continue to be integrated into the activist groups which helped elect them, and act as a lever to continue the revival of student activism.**

## Continuing the anti-cuts fight

Bob Sutton, a Workers' Liberty member at the University of Liverpool has been elected to a full-time sabbatical position as a Vice-President of the Liverpool Guild of Students for 2011-12. Maev McDaid, also of the anti-cuts campaign, beat the incumbent, Josh Wright into second place to win the presidency. Turnout was 4726 — 27% of the student body, beating a record that has stood since 1981. Bob reports.

**I stood as the candidate of the anti-cuts campaign, UoL Against Fees and Cuts, set up at the university in October in response to the findings of the Browne review.**

We were the ones who helped organise the massive student walkouts on the 24 and 30 November in Liverpool against the raising of the cap on tuition fees to £9,000 and cuts to higher and further education, and who subsequently initiated the Merseyside Network Against Fees and Cuts, which has pulled together the anti-cuts campaigns at different colleges and schools across the area.

The election was fought in the same week as the two days of strike action by the UCU on campus.

The combination of getting people to lecturers' picket lines and demonstrations, and getting people out talking about the election has served to reinvigorate the campaign after a relative lull in the new year and pull in a new layer of activists.

Most candidates confined themselves to giving out sweets, building up personalities and relying on the loyalties of "their" various societies, sports teams or whatever.

We went out and talked big politics, convinced people of the basic argument that the student movement can and must fight the cuts rather than accepting what has happened.

To my knowledge or that of any comrade in the AWL or the wider labour movement, this is the first time in living memory that a left-winger has got in at Liverpool.

**Now the real work starts in making sure we use this mandate and space to organise to help the fight for the fate of education.**

## UCL drops court threat over solidarity occupation

**The management at University College London has dropped its decision to take twelve students and one worker to court for their part in a three-day occupation of the University Registry in solidarity with UCU strikers last week.**

The UCU strike received very strong and widespread student solidarity. After the anti-cuts/fees upsurge, student-worker solidarity is axiomatic among student activists. NUS's equivocation on the UCU action was almost universally regarded as a disgrace. A big student presence on most picket lines was crowned by flash occupations in support of UCU at a number of universities, including Edinburgh, Kent, UEA as well as UCL.

UCL management's climbdown comes after a solid, mass-mobilising campaign by both student and workers in the targeted occupiers' defence. This is a victory for student campaigners against a growing climate of repression, symbolised not only by events at UCL but by the violent eviction of the occupation at Glasgow Uni on 22 March.

**There are other disciplinary matters and unspecified "legal costs" outstanding, so the campaign continues, but UCL's retreat is a victory that should give everyone in the student movement a boost to keep fighting.**

## Protests push Tories back on EMA

**Immediately after the TUC anti-cuts demonstration, Tory education secretary Michael Gove announced a concession on the government's abolition of Education Maintenance Allowances for sixth form students.**

The so-called replacement for EMAs was planned to amount to only about 10 percent of the £560 million the old scheme cost. Now Gove has produced funding of £180 million. He also announced that those who began their courses in 2009-10 will receive EMA at full value for their second year, and a more generous "phase out" deal than before for those who began their courses last autumn.

All this is very limited — a 60 percent cut in EMA rather than a 90 percent cut. It is also far more vulnerable to arbitrary decisions and manipulation, with money distributed by college principals. Nonetheless, without the huge protests by school and college students last year, and the protests on Saturday, it is unlikely the Tories would have made even these concessions.

**The Save EMA campaign is a very mild, Miliband-Labour, respectable outfit, and played no real role in the wave of action last year. But it drew the right conclusion when it commented: "Tonight we can celebrate but tomorrow the fight continues!"**

## Israeli left: “We are not loyal to a government of racists”

By Sacha Ismail

**The Israeli Knesset [Parliament], dominated by Israel's extreme-right coalition government, is engaged in a flurry of racist, anti-democratic law-making.**

Last year Israel's Citizenship Act was amended to require new, non-Jewish Israeli citizens to swear their loyalty to Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state”; in January the Knesset launched an “investigation” into Israeli left and human rights organisations. Both were passed over big protests, many-thousands strong.

And on 26 March, Israeli anti-occupation organisation Gush Shalom reported: “The Knesset has finally adopted two obnoxious racist laws...directed against Israel's Arab citizens, a fifth of the population.

“The first makes it possible to annul the citizenship of persons found guilty of offences against the security of the state. Israel prides itself on having a great variety of such laws. Annuling citizenship on such grounds is contrary to international law and conventions.

“The second ... allows communities of less than 400 families to appoint ‘admission committees’ which can prevent unsuitable persons from living there ...it specifically forbids the rejection of candidates because of race, religion, etc. — but that paragraph is tantamount to a wink. An Arab applicant will simply be rejected because of his many children or lack of military service.”

When AWL members and supporters visited Israel and Palestine in November 2010, we took part in a demonstration against this law. That it has passed is very bad news indeed.

The Knesset is also discussing another law which is almost certain to pass — to ban boycotts of Israeli settlements.

According to Gush Shalom, “the law will punish any person or association publicly calling for a boycott of Israel — economic, academic or cultural. ‘Israel’, according to this law, means any Israeli enterprise or person, in Israel or in any territory controlled by Israel. Simply put: it is all about the settlements.”

In Britain, as things currently stand, the issue of boycotting the settlements is difficult to separate from the reactionary and counter-productive drive for a general boycott of Israel. In Israel itself it is quite a different matter. Gush Shalom initiated a boycott of settlement products thirteen years ago as part of a more general political campaign against Israeli colonialism in the Occupied Territories. Recent years have seen actors refuse to perform in Ariel, the largest Israeli settlement in the West Bank, and academics refuse to deal with the “University Centre” there.

The original draft of the law mandated criminal charges and fines for those who broke it. Left activists welcomed this, because it would have meant the possibility of going to prison in defiance of the law. Now, instead, anyone who feels hurt by a boycott will be given the right to sue its organisers — a process which the well-organised and well-funded settlers can use to paralyse solidarity activists by tying them up in thousands of law suits.

This is a question of democratic rights in Israel, but it is also about making solidarity with Israelis who make solidarity with the Palestinians. Clearly the law is aimed against anti-occupation boycotts, not any others (not, for instance, religious boycotts against non-kosher shops!) This is part of a general stepping up of repression against pro-Palestinian Israelis — symbolised by the case of Israeli anarchist Jonathan Pollak, in jail for taking part in an anti-occupation protest.

The law is also, as Gush Shalom puts it, “blatantly annexationist”. It is part of a drive to establish the settlements as a permanent part of Israeli territory. And even as it oppresses the Palestinians, the occupation corrupts Israeli society.

In January, when 20,000 people protested in Tel Aviv against the witch-hunt of human rights groups, Gush Shalom declared: “We are not loyal to a government of racists”.

**Both the Palestinians and the Israeli left will need maximum solidarity in fighting that government in the months ahead.**

## Oppose Egypt strike ban

Extracts from a 23 March statement from the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services and the Federation for Independent Unions.

**The Egyptian cabinet of ministers approved a draft law which criminalises sit-ins, protests and gatherings which hamper work in public or private paces. It decided to submit the draft law to the Supreme Military Council for final consideration and adoption.**

[This] is a legal disaster. It is a return to penalising the right to strike.

The Egyptian workers have struggled for decades for the right to strike. They paid the price by being imprisoned, transferred or killed. There were martyrs in the Iron and Steel strikes of 1989, the Kafr el Dawar strikes of 1994 and the Mehalla el Kobra strikes of 2008.

Article 124 of the old

Egyptian Penal Law, which criminalised the right to strike, was witness to the old regime's reactionary nature. It violated the international labour conventions which are ratified by the Egyptian government and put in the rubbish bin.

...The Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS) and the Egyptian Federation For Independent Trade Unions have been calling since 14 February for the establishment of suitable mechanisms for resolving the problems facing the workers (especially those related to wages and informal workers).

The government of Egypt is still far from dealing with the Egyptian workers as citizens and partners in decision-making who have the right to access knowledge and discussing their conditions.

It is unfortunate that the transitional governments after the revolution could

not recognise the fairness of the labour movement's demands. Their stance was not so different from the regime of Mubarak. Their idea of democracy means only elections under the supervision of the judiciary, and openings towards the Muslim Brotherhood, while they disregard the need to liberate civil society and establish workers' rights.

Real democracy does not stop at the level of representation. It is not a parliament or a consultative council. It is the independent unions and civil society organisations which express the demands of the workers and fight for their realisation...

**We call upon the government to withdraw the draft law, and call on the Supreme Military Council to refrain from implementing it.**

• CTUWS: <http://alturl.com/uejdd>

## Protests in Morocco

By Ziyad (Revolutionary Marxist Current)

**The ideologues of the Moroccan regime were convinced that Morocco would escape the wave of struggle which is sweeping the Middle East and North Africa.**

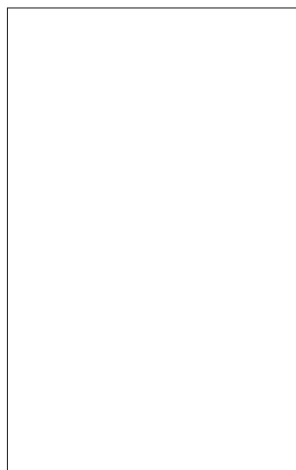
This pretence of Moroccan exceptionalism was based on the one hand on a broad spectrum of trade union, and political and youth organisations, which create an illusion of pluralism; and, on the other hand, on the King's false announcements of “democratic opening-up” and political and social reforms.

The struggle of the youth, organised around the “20 February Platform”, threw all of these calculations. It proved that the masses of Morocco, the workers, peasants, the poor and the students, had long been waiting for the signal to come out into the streets.

The demands of “20 February” didn't even reach the level of minimal democratic demands, but the Moroccan regime reacted with violent repression, arrests and even murders when faced with 70 Moroccan towns which came out into the street. This repression created a determination among the youth.

Over the course of the demonstrations, the authorities have changed their strategy, using two levers.

The first lever is the print and audiovisual media, which has presented the struggling



youth as hooligans, as “atheist Marxists” or “Islamists”, in order to divide the movement. The second lever is the King's declarations. He has promised to change the government, a concession which was dismissed by the 20 February movement.

The phosphate workers of Khoribga, the Tangier car workers, and then the refuse workers in the north of the country have joined the movement. Panic-stricken, the King was forced to announce his support for a constitutional change, and to set up a committee to oversee the change.

This announcement proved to the people that the movement represents a real opposition force. This encouraged the movement to call new demonstrations, on 20 March, raising the level of demands: constitutional-parliamentary monarchy, dissolution of the government and parliament, abolition of the current constitution, and, above all, the election of a Constituent Assembly.

Economic demands such as increased wages, unemployment benefit, nationalisation of public services (which are often under the control of big imperialist multinationals) are also brought to the fore, at the same level of importance as the prosecution of the corrupt judiciary.

The revolutionary Marxists are playing an important role in this movement with the aim of radicalising it and pushing it towards the maximum programme of our class — socialism.

**For us this is only a beginning, and we have great need of international support.**

• Over the last week, a major movement has blown up in the education sector in Morocco.

In the capital, Rabat, teachers struck for better wages and conditions. The strike culminated in a four-day occupation of the Education Ministry. The occupation was broken by the police, who cleared out the strikers and beat one teacher so badly that he died of his wounds on 27 March.

On 28 March teachers and teaching unions in Morocco declared a three-day national strike to support the Rabat teachers.

Since 23 March, students in 70 colleges across Morocco have been striking and demonstrating. The students demand free public education; improved quality of teaching; the right to work after graduation; they demand the resignation of the Education Minister, as he is corrupt.

## Tomlinson inquest

**A jury inquest into the death of newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson is finally underway, two years after he was killed during the G20 demonstrations in London.**

A criminal enquiry previously ruled that Tomlinson died of natural causes. It did not press charges against the cop who, in amateur video footage from the scene, was clearly seen striking Tomlinson.

However, the primary pathologist in the case (Dr Freddy Patel) was later suspended for “deficient professional performance” in other, unrelated, cases, bringing his judgement in the Tomlinson case into doubt.

The inquest will cover the role of the police, pathologists and coroners in the investigations that took place after Tomlinson's death.

**Many, including Tomlinson's family, have accused authorities of a cover-up.**

## Inquiry needed into Smiley Culture's death

By Ira Berkovic

**The family of dancehall-reggae pioneer Smiley Culture are demanding a full and open inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his death.**

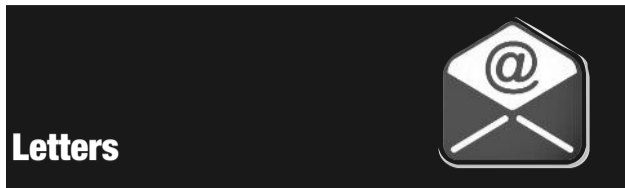
After the police raided his home in connection to a drugs bust, Smiley Culture allegedly stabbed himself in the heart with a kitchen knife.

Since the end of his music career, Smiley Culture (aka David Emmanuel) had become involved in the African diamond industry and had links to some unsavoury forces in countries such as Azerbaijan. But the police's story of his death is bizarre, claiming that Emmanuel asked to make a cup of tea before the police took him away and, while alone in the kitchen, stabbed himself to death.

Quite why the police would allow a suspect to wander off unescorted during a raid on his home, or why Emmanuel would not, if he was suicidal, choose an easier method than stabbing himself with a kitchen knife, are not clear.

A campaign has been set up to demand an inquiry; it organised a meeting of more than 1,000 people in Brixton, where Mike Franklin of the Independent Police Complaints Commission was heckled.

**The campaign has a Facebook page: “Campaign for Justice for Smiley Culture.”**



## Views on 26 March

**The size of demonstration showed why we are right to say the anti-cuts movement needs to be trade union based.**

If CoR or RtW had called the demo it wouldn't have been anywhere near as big and probably with worse politics — with the pro-Qaddafi people and George Galloway speaking and maybe a Liberal just for balance...

*Elaine, Merseyside*

**The section of the demo I spent most time with — the (teachers) NUT — was characterised not by “visceral” anger, as you could have expected, but by a “celebratory” mood.**

Yes, people are pissed-off with the government but there is as yet no “hook” to engage this pissed-offness.

My guess would be that NUT members have some vague notion of the pensions issue but no firm hold on the issues.

*Tom, Nottingham*

**When Climate Camp came to the City of London, they decided that they wanted to “take on capitalism”. But the only way they could think of doing this was to pour a bucket of paint over it — to do spectacular stunts which would show everyone how crap capitalism is and how much people hate it.**

They didn't have a clear idea of how to actually destroy capitalism, so they did the next best thing: showing that they were pissed off with it.

I think that's exactly what's going on with the UK Uncut/direct action people. Some young people will have gone on the 26 March demo just because they wanted a ruck with the police. But the “big ideas” behind fighting the police and smashing up a shop is the way you fight capitalism.

Some quite developed anarchists I know are getting swept up in the “riot-fever”. Lots of students, who went through the student movement in autumn, have become very enthusiastic about property damage for its own sake. A lot of these students are from the posher institutions like Cambridge and UCL — but a lot aren't.

*Ed, London*

**The demo was better than expected in terms of numbers, and we shouldn't be afraid to be “optimists”.**

The turnout gives us a reason to fight and to urgently work out the next steps industrially and politically.

*Paul, south London*

**The ludicrous action of the SWP of petitioning for a General Strike, is cheap and dishonest rhetoric. No union executive has adopted that position.**

A general strike would be illegal and the TUC General Council are hardly going to call one on receipt of a petition from the SWP/ Right to Work. To my knowledge, no-one in any union executive, including SWPers, has even proposed putting that to the TUC.

The Socialist Party position is more practicable; at least public sector unions may be able to co-ordinate strike action legally. But again, are their supporters advocating that in the unions in which they have presence? No.

While drawing attention to such hypocrisy we also need to practically come up with answers about co-ordinating trade union protests.

In the UCU (college lecturers' union) we had a reasonably successful strike on Thursday 24 March. In my own union branch there has been a growth of militancy on the left, more pickets out (about 30) than we had previously, but scabbing was there — possibly as high, if not higher, than we had during our last strike in 2006, despite us being far better organised.

*Pete, Nottinghamshire*

# The press and 26 March



**It was fascinating to observe the British media try to deal with the scale and breadth of the TUC March for the Alternative on 26 March. For the first time I can remember there was a good deal of reasonably fair and accurate reporting.**

Two papers who had openly supported the demonstration, the *Mirror* and *Observer/Guardian*, set aside at least four pages of their Sunday editions to pictures and comments. The more dramatic photos of smashed windows and hooded anarchists were there but prominence was given to interviews with marchers and scenes which confirmed the all-inclusive make-up and the sheer size of the main event.

Even in much of the right-wing press a distinction was made between the violence and the main march. Estimates of numbers varied between over 250,000 and at least 500,000 but there was no obvious political relationship between the high and low estimates. In general the coverage was much more sensitive and discriminating than during the student protests last year.

Those bits of the press prepared to consider the real significance of this event identified questions not so far off those asked within the labour movement and the socialist left.

What did this march tell us about the ability of the British labour movement to mobilise its members? Was it essentially a mobilisation of the public sector, and how relevant is that? What is the relationship between the many-thousand strong peaceful march and the various forms of direct action, from UK Uncut's occupation of Fortnum & Mason to the more incoherent lashing-out at banks and posh hotels?

And the biggest question of all, of course, what next? Is this the start of a co-ordinated campaign of action involving millions or an impressive but futile gesture of protest?

So, for example, the *Observer* editorial declared “Protest fine. Now for a proper debate” and argued that the move-

ment against cuts has a duty to spell out what the alternative is. The same piece made clear that the paper's alternative would mean accepting some of the cuts and “the need for a radical approach to delivering public services when the Exchequer is cash-starved” (code for “privatisation”).

The *Mirror*, whose placards decorated the rally route more than all the left groups combined, was more celebratory and uncritical. They described it as “a massively uplifting day — it made you proud to be part of something so huge and positive”, and ended their main report with the exhortation “Remember the date — Saturday March 26th, 2011 — the day Britain found its voice.”

Even on their best behaviour, however, the right-wing press cannot repress their peculiar and familiar obsessions.

In its lead story, the *Sunday Express* said what the bosses should worry about next is not a general strike or mass walkouts across the country. No — what the march has done most has been to “raise fears for the security of the Royal wedding”.

The *Express* claim that anti-royal protesters plan to occupy five separate locations on the wedding day “to represent a five-pointed star or pentacle”, adding, in case you didn't know, “a symbol revered by Satanists”.

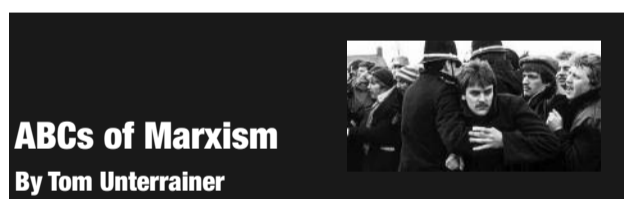
The *Sun* and the *Star* focused almost exclusively on the violence, dusting off the terms “angry mob” and “masked thugs” for fresh use.

Of the serious Tory press the worst was the *Telegraph*, who played the very old trick of linking Ed Miliband with anarchist violence. “The violence began”, they told us, “as Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, addressed a TUC rally.”

And in case the connection might have escaped the confused reader they pointed out that “as he spoke, an apparently co-ordinated attack began on shops and police in Oxford Street as a mob tried to storm into shops including Topshop, BHS and John Lewis.” Do they mean co-ordinated with his speech? Co-ordinated by him?

Maybe, just maybe, Miliband is a modern-day British Manchurian candidate. Behind that geekish, mild-mannered and, let's admit it, robotic surface is a scheming anti-royal and, worst of all, Satanic anarchist of the most dangerous sort. Cecil? Fetch the birch!

## D is for democracy



**“Without democracy there can be no socialism and without a socialist society, there can be no real and complete democracy.” This simple idea is central to Marxism and inseparable from the work of revolutionary socialists. But it is by no means uncontroversial.**

The most basic facet of a socialist society is that ownership and control of the means of production — workplaces, machines, tools and processes — will be taken out of the hands of a small group of people and be taken over by the whole of society. But if collective “ownership” is unaccountable and the control undemocratic, then by any measure it cannot be “progressive” when compared to capitalism.

In the different ways the majority of the Trotskyist movement pushed to one side or eliminated the need for democracy in their conception of the collective ownership of the means of production. In short, they accommodated to and embraced the Stalinist states which emerged in the course of the 20th century.

Yet Marx and Engels expended a huge amount of energy arguing against strains of “socialism” which subordinated the question of democracy to what were seen as “anti-capitalist” imperatives.

Marxism argues for complete democracy throughout the whole of society — economic, social and political — and at each and every point in history.

Marxists have a particular understanding of the democratic content of a future socialist society. But we are also not indifferent to the struggle to defend and extend democracy in the here-and-now.

Marxists advocated and championed great democratic upheavals of the 1800s — political revolutions in Europe, the Chartist movement of British workers. They supported universal suffrage, the right to trade union organisation

within capitalism.

Marxists defend bourgeois democratic gains (such as the right to “trial by jury” or for a free press) against the dangers of those right being taken away. We hold no truck with “radical” critics who dismiss the hard-won gains as falling too short of the “communistic” ideal to be worth defending.

At the same time, we are irrevocably opposed to capitalism and work for its overthrow, which means overthrowing the democratic set up in bourgeois society. How can this make sense? Only if your politics is concerned first and foremost with the interests and future freedom of the working class.

The right wing of the labour movement — up to and including every single leader of the Labour Party — has furiously defended parliamentary democracy against extra-parliamentary political action (protests, strikes, etc.).

When in power, they have used the forces of the state — law, courts, police and armed forces — against such action.

During the miners' strike 1984-5, the then Labour leader Neil Kinnock failed to defend the miners against all-out class war from the Tory Government. He was equally treacherous during the poll tax rebellion in the early 1990s.

In such situations “democracy” is more about what happens outside the confines of Westminster. Our class would benefit from champions within the parliamentary chamber, but our need to organise in whatever way makes sense, in whatever way ensures that we can win class battles, takes precedence. This is worth remembering given the battle lines being drawn by the present Tory government.

Marxists define “consistent democracy in socialist terms, and consistent socialism in democratic terms”. Any ideas posing as Marxism, socialism or in any way “radical” that fail the democratic measure damage our movement.

**Further reading:**

Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume 1, State and Bureaucracy*

August H Nimtz Jr, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*

John O'Mahony et al, *Socialism and Democracy* (Workers' Liberty pamphlet)

# The working-class political alternative

**Last Saturday's TUC-called demonstration was the biggest show of working-class strength in the recent history of the labour movement. In itself, it is not enough. But it is a beginning.**

The important thing about Labour Party leader Ed Miliband's presence on the Trade Union Congress platform was not the mealy-mouthed and inadequate character of the speech he delivered there, but the fact that he was there at all. It is many a long day since something like that has happened. Blair wouldn't have been there, and neither would Gordon Brown.

The situation the working class faces now is stark and simple. British capitalism, like world capitalism, is experiencing a convulsive economic crisis. The likelihood that the crisis will grow deeper and more prolonged seems to be increasing. To solve their difficulties, the capitalists want to make the working class pay the cost. They are cutting and squeezing wages, conditions and social entitlements.

The choice the working class faces is also stark and clear: resist, or be forced to pay for getting the ruling class out of the mess which they, with their greedy, reckless, remorseless pursuit of profit, have got us into. The March 26 demo showed that there is a real working-class appetite for a fight-back.

Our strength now is in workplaces. There we can fight directly and immediately, section-by-section or, better, in a united, union-wide or cross-union fight. The high point of such a developing working-class fightback would be a general strike — either for a day, to muster and test our strength, until we had won a limited demand, or an all-out strike that would be part of a labour movement offensive to win a workers' government, and settle with the bosses once and for all.

This fight against the Tories and Lib Dems is now primarily a political fight. It cannot be adequately waged other than as a political, a society-wide, fight (combined with, or backed by, industrial direct action).

But a fight for what? Minimally, to stop them forcing us to pay for their crisis. And beyond that? We need a workers' government! A government that stands towards the working class as Clegg and Cameron stand to the ruling class of which they are a part. A government that will serve our interests as the coalition serves the bosses'. That will make the bankers and the other fat-cat capitalists pay, not the working people. That will begin to take control of industry, transport, banking and communications.

There are very great difficulties in the way of our doing that, as Saturday's march, which showed that people want to fight, also demonstrated.

## GOVERNMENTAL ALTERNATIVE

**To fight the bosses' government, we must have a governmental alternative to the coalition. Between now and the labour movement being in possession of such an alternative, there is politically and industrially, a long way to go.**

We need to force the trade union leaders to fight now. We need to create, re-create, a working-class political instrument. A working-class, trade union based, political party.

On a certain level, the Labour Party used to be that. It is not that now. It is still financed by the unions, but since the Blair-Brown "New Labour" coup in 1994, carried out with the active support of the then-trade union leaders, and impossible without that support, it has functioned as a neo-Thatcherite party. For 13 of those years it was in government.

It did various bits of more-or-less important redistribution of wealth in the interests of the poor. But in political, class terms the measure of Blair and Brown is that they did not even rescind Thatcher's early 1980s anti-union laws (which outlaw solidarity strikes). The measure of the two generations of trade union leaders in control of the bedrock labour movement, the trade unions, over that time, is that they did not insist on their repeal.

To consolidate their control, the New Labour leaders, and their trade union backers destroyed or silted up the procedures and membership structures that had allowed the Labour Party to function as a forum and platform for trade unionists in politics. In the present situation, the unions need urgently to reclaim and reconstruct the Labour Party, within whose structures the unions still carry immense weight, as well as being the party's chief financiers.

We need to organise an effective class-struggle left to fight in the broad labour movement for such policies. And, of course, to build industrial solidarity action for any section of the labour movement in conflict with the government and the employers, that fights to ensure that no section of the working class is allowed to fight alone.

Saturday's demonstration gives us a sharply-focussed picture of the state of things now. The mass of the demonstrators react as traditional labour movement "anti-Tories", without any very clear notion of what, positively, needs to be done. The trade union leaders are timid and cautious, and probably wishing that the Tories would be more "reason-

## Resisting government attacks is not enough; the working class needs to fight for our own vision of how to organise society

able" and not force them into a corner, leaving them with no choice but to talk an anti-Tory fight. Anarchists on the fringes, rightly impatient with the leaders of the labour movement, act as if they think the capitalist system can be either changed or brought down by a small minority of brave young women and men attacking a few shops in central London. Their numbers will have been swelled by the feeling that the labour movement doesn't offer a credible political alternative to the government or capitalism. They will have been swelled too by the disgusting spectacle of the May 2010 General Election and its aftermath, in which the coalition is ignoring the expressed will of the electorate, which is against what they are currently doing.

And there is the "revolutionary left", primarily the Socialist Workers' Party and the Socialist Party, seemingly calling for immediate general strike. But when you read the SP's small print, you twig that they are actually calling for a one-day public sector general strike. And the SWP call for a general strike on their placards and in their slogans only. Both of them are demagogic, unserious and above all irresponsible.

The labour movement right now is not ready for such an action and there is no urgent focus in the class struggle that would allow such a call now to make some sense, even if people did not believe they were fully ready for it.

"Anti-Toryism" and "anti-Lib Demism" is the beginning of political wisdom right now. But even so, it isn't much wisdom. It will in the period ahead become the common wisdom of the vague left, of uneasy trade union leaders, of careerist would-be Labour MPs, and of militant workers who who haven't thought too much about politics. It is the line of least resistance. Socialists can and should use it with newly-arousing people. But we must also explain to them its limits, and its demagogic misuse.

In the past, vague anti-Toryism has served to camouflage the de-facto Toryism of the Labour, supposed "alternative" to the Tories in power — most recently in 1997. We need to get the labour movement to discuss and understand what an acceptable working-class alternative to the Tories would be.

We must not let what happened in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s happen again, when anti-Toryism came to drive out all thought of the need for a working-class alternative to the Tories. Right now the Labour Party is the up-front alternative to the Tories. It is essential that socialists, sharing the widespread "anti-Toryism", explain the need for a socialist alternative, and the need for a workers' government. In this situation, the educational work of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* is irreplaceable.

## WORKERS' LIBERTY

**Workers' Liberty and Solidarity are dedicated to the following basic propositions:**

- That capitalism is a system of exploitation of the vast majority by a small class who own the means of production. The capitalists use their ownership of the means of production to extract and store up wealth for themselves, not hesitating, for example, to put millions of people on the dole if it is necessary for that purpose.

- That a progressive alternative to capitalism is possible — socialism, a socialist society, in which the economy is owned collectively by producers, living in a self-controlling and self-administering socialist democracy.

- That here and now the alternatives are either the continued deterioration of working-class living standards, and of the working class itself, as capitalist crisis erupts around us, or such a socialist system.

- That only the working class can create such a system, by taking control of society out of the hands of the capitalists.

- That for this to become possible, the existing labour movement must transform itself organisationally, by a process of democratisation and by breaking the undemocratic power of cliques, bureaucrats, and uncontrollable Parliamentary elites within the organisations of the labour movement. That the Labour Party, gutted by the New Labour gang of Blair and Brown, must be restructured, rebuilt and reclaimed by the unions.

- That, simultaneously, the labour movement must re-arm itself politically with the ideas and the immediate goal of a revolutionary socialist transformation of society.

- That because socialism is impossible until the working class acts to realise it, and because there is only one working class and one mass labour movement, revolutionary socialists must work and organise within the existing labour movement, built by many decades and even centuries of working class struggle, to help the movement achieve this political and organisational self-renovation.

- That if those who hold to the basic ideas of revolutionary socialism refuse to do this, they condemn themselves to sterility, by way of impotent sideline carping at the movement as it has been shaped by history so far, and to sectarian irrelevance in the irreplaceable work of changing the movement.

- That there are in stark logic only two alternatives: either to fight to change the existing labour movement, including its old organic political wing, the Labour Party. Or, to adopt the project of building one's own "pure" labour movement from the ground up, in parallel to the one the working class has so far created. And therefore that those who reject the former, and, implicitly, accept the latter, are in fact pessimistic and defeatist about the prospects facing the labour movement in the next historic period... no matter how "left" and "revolutionary" be their talk and their view of what they themselves are, and however "intransigent" and "uncompromising" their denunciations of the existing labour movement are.

For if we do not, in the relatively short period ahead, succeed in reorganising and politically transforming the existing labour movement, which is the only mass labour movement, and which holds the allegiance — often reluctant and by default — of millions of the most advanced workers, and if we fail to win it for revolutionary socialist politics, methods, and perspectives, then the working class will face another historic defeat

- That therefore there is great urgency about the work of organising a non-sectarian and anti-sectarian left wing in the labour movement, to help it make itself ready to answer the needs of the situation which the working class faces in capitalism's crisis.

- That because such a left wing must unite the revolutionary left around a perspective of winning the existing labour movement to revolutionary socialism, it must also be a left wing which fights (by reason and argument) the sectarians who counterpose political shibboleths not in consonance with the class struggle or who counterpose their own organisations to those of the mass labour movement in a way which is destructive of the work that needs to be done.

- **That this left must set itself the goal of winning the labour movement to fight immediately to drive the Tories out and install a workers' government. This will differ from even the best Labour governments so far. It will be based directly on the organisations of the labour movement. It will be under the labour movement's direct control (at least to as full an extent as possible). And it will fight to serve the working-class interest against the bourgeoisie.**

## Open letter to a direct-action activist

Comrade,

We are sympathetic to the direct action taken against banks, Fortnum & Mason, the Ritz Hotel and other locations throughout central London on Saturday 26 March. We will not join in with moralistic condemnations of your “violence”, nor will we go along with attempts to “disown” you or pretend you are not part of our movement. Indeed, some Workers’ Liberty members were involved in the direct actions which took place on Saturday.

We will not join in with attempts in the media and elsewhere to create a division between respectable, non-violent direct-action activists and “bad”, troublemaking “anarchists”.

We share many of your instincts; you have our sympathy, our solidarity against any police repression.

Like you, we see the conservatism of the labour movement leaders as an obstacle. Like you, we know that the working-class anti-cuts movement will need more creative tactics than “A to B” marches followed by long rallies if we are seriously to threaten this government. And, like you, we think that places like the Ritz Hotel and Fortnum & Mason — symbols of the opulent luxury the rich continue to enjoy while we lose our jobs, homes and services — are

legitimate targets for symbolic direct action.

But we also think that such action is only symbolic. Symbolic actions have their place, but they are not enough. A mere proliferation of symbolic action, counterposed to traditional demonstrations, will not in itself give us the movement we need. To get that movement we will need a serious political campaign to build it, the frontline of which will not be in the exciting and dangerous cut-and-thrust of a ruckus with the cops but in the day-to-day lives of our fellow workers in workplaces and communities.

We think there’s a problem with the way in which direct actions of the kind undertaken on Saturday can create unnecessary and unhelpful, even hierarchical, divisions between the mass labour movement and direct-action activists. If activists meet in secret, have special direct-action “skills”, and undertake their actions without any accountability to mass labour movement organisations they risk becoming an “elite”. Wouldn’t it be better to organise direct actions which took with them, or had the sympathy of, sizeable sections of the main movement against cuts?

The labour movement is frequently a politically dull and conservative place to spend your time. Smashing up some ostentatious symbols of capitalist excess certainly makes a more immediate impact than plugging away within most trade union branches to democratise and radicalise them, and it usually feels a lot better, too.

But means condition ends, and if your end goal is a mass, class-based movement capable of mobilising not just seasoned direct-action veterans but hundreds of thousands of ordinary workers (the sort of people who, for the most part, stuck to the main route of the march on Saturday and probably wouldn’t have known how to get involved in the direct actions even if they’d wanted to), then means other than taking those actions in a unilateral and unaccountable way will be necessary.

We believe that many of the people who see radical direct action as a primary focus (some of whom identify as anarchists) share with us some form of class politics; you believe that the working class is the social force capable of changing the world. If that’s true, we think you should consider what relationship your activism has to the organised movement of that class — however politically inadequate its leadership may currently be.

The labour movement needs your energy and innovation. For want of better words, it needs your “courage” and daring. The size of Saturday’s demonstration shows us that we could now be entering a period where mass action of working-class people becomes a more viable possibility. This means we need to be creative and innovative and come up with direct-action tactics that are accessible to the “mass” of people and are not the exclusive property of those with the skills to undertake them. To develop those tactics, the dynamism and creativity of the direct-action movement and of activists like you will be needed.

But, conversely, you “need” the labour movement. Your revolutionary anti-capitalist instincts cannot become a political reality without an agency capable of giving them meaningful content. That agency is the working class.

This doesn’t mean that it’s only legitimate to take radical direct action if some labour movement body sanctions it or if there’s a critical mass of workers taking part. But it does mean that without mass working-class direct actions, symbolic direct actions can ultimately only serve to create direct-action “elites” and provide ammunition to the right wing and the state.

**Our aim is a movement of workers capable of taking over shops, banks and other buildings — not just smashing them up. If you want to build that movement too, direct-action organising is at best limited and inadequate. You should become — or, if you are already, more consistently see yourself as — a labour-movement activist.**

Ira Berkovic

The labour movement needs young activists and the energy of the direct-action movement

## One der

By Rosalind Robson

There were around half a million people on Saturday 26 March’s TUC demonstration against the cuts, the biggest mobilisation of the labour movement for many years.

The turnout showed beyond doubt that there is widespread and deep rooted opposition to the Government’s austerity drive. It should, if we build on it, act as a lever to further action — industrial and political campaigning.

The march was joined by several feeder events around London, including a some thousands strong education feeder march and a 6,000-strong feeder march from Kennington Park in south London. The demonstration organised by the anti-cuts groups in Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham marched over Westminster Bridge to join the main demonstration, accompanied by an anti-cuts Trojan horse!

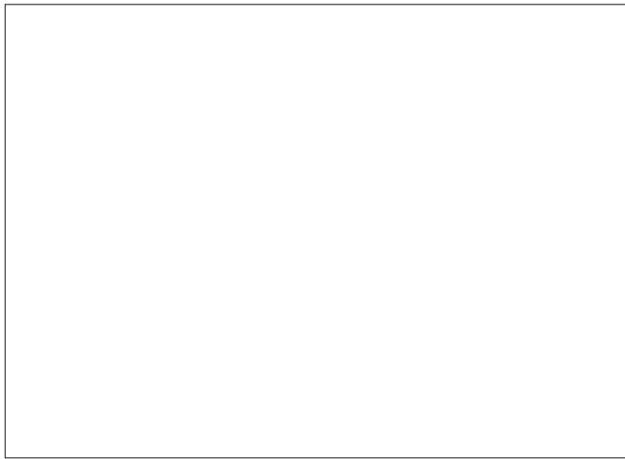
Even by 1pm not all of the march had yet to set off, so great were the numbers. The usual mix of “official” and home-made banners and placards were in evidence. Reportedly a large number of people were new to marching.

A huge contingent was in the colours of Unison — if that translates into more people actively involved in the union it will have to be matched by a renewed drive by the left to democratise and renew the union.

On some of the different sections of the march there was an almost jubilant mood. The GMB’s orange vuvuzelas added to that atmosphere. On the other hand, the mood of the main demonstration was not very “angry”; AWL comrades reported a marked lack of chanting.

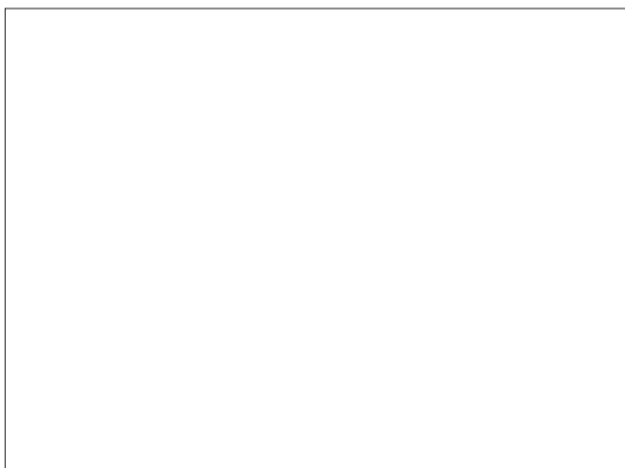
By early afternoon alternative direct action was starting to

# monstration or many?



happen around central London. Small breakaway marches occurred. UK Uncut organised action in a “tax avoiding” Boots store, outside Top Shop, a comedy venue in Soho Square and, later, an occupation at Fortnum & Mason.

Throughout there were serious scuffles with the police who, in this section of the day’s events — in contrast to the main demonstration — were acting with their usual heavy-handedness. For example, a police van rammed a group of acrobats and spectators!

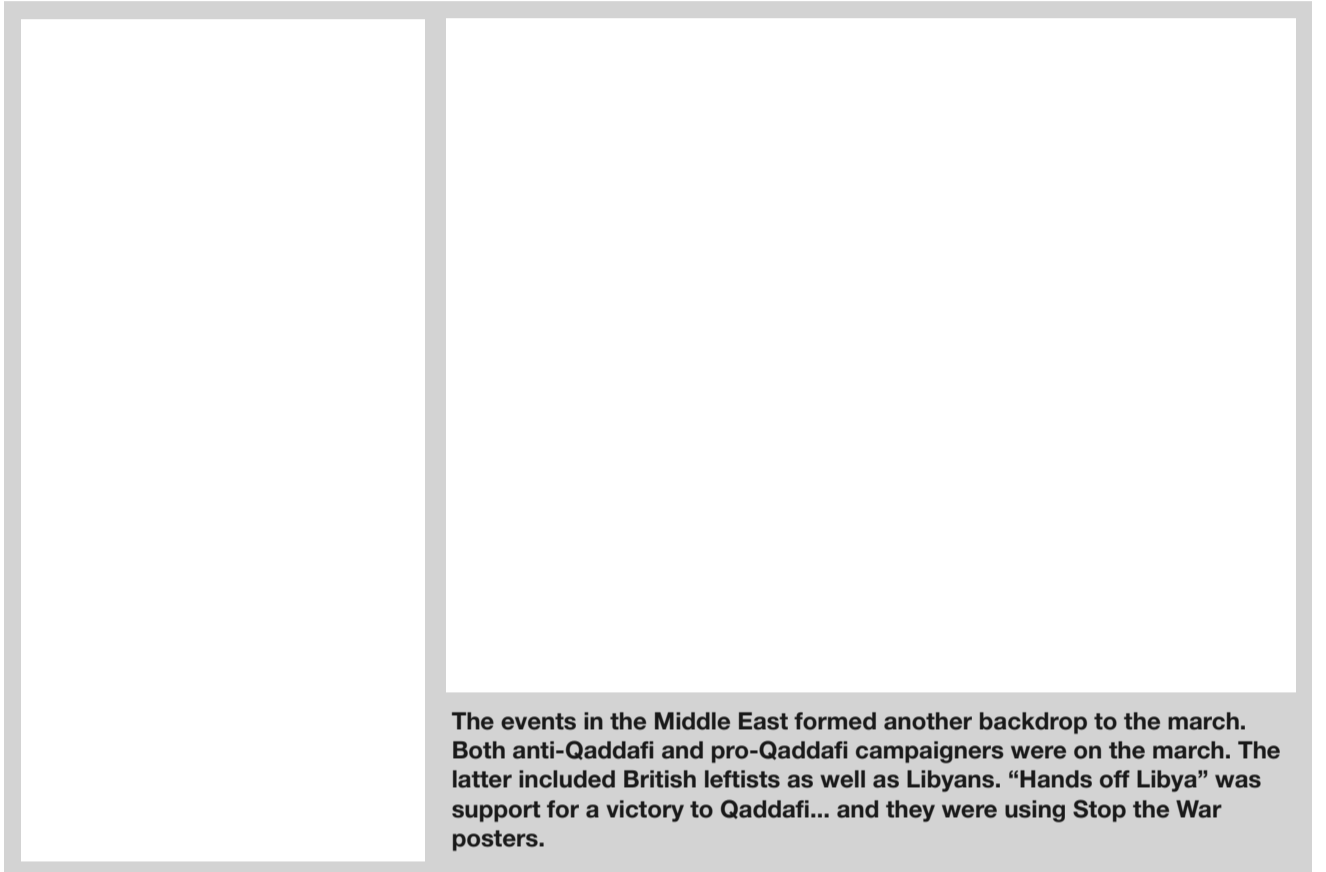


Both police and shops were “paint bombed”. The outside of the Ritz Hotel was trashed. Anarchist-organised groups also gave the police the runaround in the West End. A samba band also made its way around the area. UK Uncut have distanced themselves from the damage to property caused in and around these actions.

Ed Miliband and all of the main trade union leaders spoke at the TUC rally in Hyde Park. Miliband told the crowds that the Government’s cuts are too deep but that he did not oppose all cuts.

This contrasted sharply with the speech from Mark Serwotka, the leader of the civil service union PCS, who called for no cuts at all. Yet Serwotka’s call for co-ordinated strike action is pure rhetoric unless he and other “left” union leaders begin to seriously organise for that. Instead of waiting on all unions to fight on pensions Serwotka could organise to fight the massive job losses facing his members.

Around 5pm the rally in Hyde Park was ending and people starting their journeys home as the last of the marchers



The events in the Middle East formed another backdrop to the march. Both anti-Qaddafi and pro-Qaddafi campaigners were on the march. The latter included British leftists as well as Libyans. “Hands off Libya” was support for a victory to Qaddafi... and they were using Stop the War posters.

were reaching the park. At about the same time the police began to kettle the people doing actions elsewhere. The Fortnum & Mason occupiers were surrounded by police, arrested, and shipped off in a coach.

Late into the evening a few hundred protesters remained in Trafalgar Square in a party atmosphere. Others were around Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Street. Around 9.30pm large numbers of riot police found a pretext to kettle the people in Trafalgar Square and, according to reports, the worst acts of police violence of the day took place.

As we go to press around 150 people have been charged with public order offences. The Government has announced a review that will look into granting the police more powers including banning named people from going on demonstrations and ordering people to remove face coverings.

**The AWL had a stall at Speaker’s Corner on the day, and our members sold between 4-500 copies of *Solidarity*.**

# Chronicler of Russian life

By Russell Carr

**Alexander Rodchenko, having achieved international acclaim as an avant-garde painter, sculptor and graphic designer, took up the cause of photography in 1924 with novel and thrilling results.**

His trademark shot was taken from high above or “bottom-up”, the lens tilted to create an angular, jarring effect. Whether focusing on the anonymous individual, the Soviet masses at work, or at play, or radical new forms of architecture, Rodchenko was able to reflect back his images in bold, memorable and often unusual, geometric perspectives. In a post-Tsarist society in which over 70% of the population were illiterate, the medium of photography was as democratic, relevant and accessible an art form as any other at that point in time.

“Rodchenko and his Circle” is an exhibition grouped around the key themes of: Lenin, Stalin, architecture, the organised masses, industrialisation, the photographers (“his circle”), the central Asian republics, and the Pioneers (Leninist youth corps). It is a compact yet potent collection of more than 600 images — 200 are on display for the first time — drawn from his family’s personal archive as well as a variety of other institutional sources.

The walls of the gallery have been graffitied with Constructivist slogans, of which my favourite is: “Down with art as a stone amid the dirty, dark life of the poor man.”

Striking images from the turbulent, experimental days of the revolutionary 1920s jostle for position with more “con-

## Rodchenko’s “White Sea Canal”

servative” works from the culturally stultified era of the 1930s, a period in which Socialist Realism had become the official, state-sanctioned art doctrine.

Stand-out stills from this grouping of photographic innovators include: Zelima’s portrait of a Stalin who leans forward into the camera’s range (notable for the etched-out faces of the three figures sat behind him!); the ethnographic studies of Uzbek citizens whose village lifestyles are about to disappear forever before the sweep of collectivisation and industrialisation; and the radical new architectural forms, as evidenced in Rodchenko’s images of the Soviet Pavilion,

Paris, 1925, and “The School of Communism”.

The most vibrant and dynamic examples of Rodchenko’s art are to be found in the photographs of the bustling, hectic activity of the Moscow streets. Whether the photographer is perched perilously atop some apartment block to record the movement of the individual or the mass, or adopting a more static, street-level position to document the mercantile activities of “Street Vendors, 1929” — “liberated” by Lenin’s NEP to stimulate the small market — his art serves to both engage and enthrall the spectator.

The most unsettling images of the exhibition are to be found in Rodchenko’s visual records of the construction of the White Sea Canal (1933). Two hundred thousand criminal (dissident!) slave labourers would be worked to death in the service of “the Revolution” on this one “project” alone. The photographer, almost unemployable at this point after having been denounced for bourgeois formalism, captures the endeavour in a flat, lifeless photo-journalistic style. This stands in sharp contrast to his pioneering, free-wheeling camera work from earlier and more revolutionary times.

Unlike many of his comrades, who were to face prison, show-trials and execution, Rodchenko was not devoured by the Revolution. Instead, in later years he was to lay aside his Leica and return to the medium of painting. Needless to say, the results could not match the adventurous, photographic handiwork, many examples of which are contained within the space of this exhibition.

“Rodchenko and his circle: constructing the future through photography” has been extended until April 16. It is a free exhibition and is at Art: Sensus, 7 Howick Place, SW1P 1BB.

# The British state against the Bolsheviks

By Mark Catterall

**“Document” is a BBC Radio 4 series that attempts to shed light on murkier aspects of history, that have either been forgotten or covered up.**

Using recently discovered documents, previous series have brought to light many interesting historical documents. These have included such nuggets as the plan by Tom Wintringham and other socialists associated with the newly formed Home Guard to turn their weapons on any quisling type government that attempted to come to a Vichy type arrangement with Nazi Germany.

Last Monday’s episode (21 March) covered the British government’s attempt to overthrow the new Russian revolutionary workers’ state in 1918.

From 1918, first the Soviet government under Lenin and then the Stalinist regime accused Britain of organising a plot to kill Lenin and overthrow the Soviet government. Successive British governments have denied involvement in the assassination and coup attempt. However, from the 1950s there has been some partial admission of limited British involvement through the “renegade” MI6 agent Sidney Reilly. Recently Robert Service, the establishment’s expert on the Russian Revolution, has found new evidence that confirms Britain’s close involvement in an attempted assassination of Lenin and counter-revolution.

The Soviet government formed after the Russian Revolution of November 1917 was, in the main, made up of Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, but also included the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs).

In 1918, with the country in ruins, with the Imperial German army advancing into the Ukraine and the East, the new Soviet government reluctantly signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany.

The new treaty ended Russia’s involvement in World War One and, the Bolsheviks hoped, would give the new Soviet government some breathing space. However, the SRs opposed the Treaty and broke with the Bolshevik-led government.

Britain and France, now faced with the full undivided attentions of the German army, looked to overthrow the Soviet government.

Bruce Lockhart, the British government’s representative in Soviet Russia, and the MI6 agent, the sometime arms dealer Sidney Reilly (born Georgi Rosenblum), began financing opposition groups, including those around Boris

Savinkov of the SRs, and making links with apparently disaffected officers of the nascent Red Army, especially those around a Latvian Division.

Using the divisions within the Soviet government over Brest-Litovsk, they hoped to overthrow the Soviet government and bring to power a government prepared to bring Russia back into the war. The middle of 1918 saw a series of events that were key to what was the start of the bloodiest period of civil war.

May saw the Czech Legion (exiled Czech soldiers who wished to carry on the war against Germany) seize large stretches of Siberia. In July, Left SRs assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow hoping to start a popular uprising against Bolshevik rule. Fighting now broke out across Soviet Russia. In August 1918 Fanny Kaplan, who had been a member of the now banned SRs, attempted to kill Lenin. Lenin was left fighting for his life.

Within hours of Kaplan’s assassination attempt, Lockhart was arrested. In his lurid memoir, published in the 1930s, he recounted how he was able to dispose of his list of paid oppositionists as toilet paper before the Cheka (Soviet secret police) could discover any of the information. Sidney Reilly was able to escape capture until 1925 when he was lured to his death in a Cheka trap, as was Boris Savinkov.

Bruce Lockhart, later exchanged for a Soviet representative, on his return distanced himself from the assassination attempts and limited his admissions to paid subversion. Sidney Reilly was fingered as exceeding his brief, if not going renegade.

The documents found by Robert Service now confirm what had been obvious to the left for many years, that Britain had decided on an active campaign to overthrow the Soviet government. In May 1918, under the pretence of preventing arms stored at Archangel falling into German hands, 5,000 British troops were landed. Documents now reveal that their main role was to link up with opposition forces and turn over the supplies.

Documents also reveal that in June 1918 Arthur Balfour, the Conservative Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George’s coalition government, asked that the money urgently requested by Bruce Lockhart be supplied and that Boris Savinkov’s plan of assassination and counter-revolution be supported.

Right-wing commentators have often pointed to the reaction of the Bolsheviks to these events as the “Red Terror”. These documents show that the nascent workers’ state faced a campaign of assassination and armed uprising, paid for in part by the Lloyd George government. While in retro-

## Sidney Reilly

spect, it is obvious that the Bolshevik campaign of self-defence made many mistakes, the alternative of doing nothing would have led to the collapse of Soviet power.

Robert Service has also recently discovered a document of Bruce Lockhart’s son confirming his father’s involvement in the events, and that Sidney Reilly was not renegade but working as part of a government operation to overthrow the Bolsheviks.

Nearly 100 years later, many of the documents that would tell the full story of British intervention in the Russian Revolution are still secret. The recent discoveries have been found in US archives or by accident. Robert Service’s view is that successive British governments liked the cosy myth that Lockhart’s assassination and subversion plots could never be carried out by British governments.

**Of course British establishment “fair play” is just a myth, as Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran and others have found out to their cost.**



Demonstration during the Iranian revolution

## The battle for “democracy” in the Arab revolution

### Reason in Revolt

By Gerry Bates



The Arab revolution, the inspiring mass popular movement for freedom and democracy, sweeping across the Middle East might be compared to the “Springtime of the Peoples”, in 1848, when mass popular revolution spread from France to Germany, then to other countries, such as Hungary and Italy. Most of them were quickly defeated.

Today the nearest modern equivalent — so far — is the collapse of East European and Russian Stalinism, in 1989-91. A tremendous mass movement demanding and embodying “democracy” and demanding “western standards” swept from country to country and finally to Russia, Stalinism’s heartland.

European Stalinism which had seemed solid, congealed, immovable faded to next to nothing in a very short time. As many of the Arab regimes seem to be doing.

There is something else that, in its early stage, also had much in common with the Arab revolution now: the Iranian revolution of 1978-9. There too a tremendous mass movement brought down the autocratic regime of the crowned king, the Shah.

The great and for now unanswerable question hanging over the Middle East is whether the Arab revolution of 2011 will culminate in the East European model, the established if flawed bourgeois democratic regimes, or the Iranian.

In Iran — which, though Muslim, is not Arab — the great mass movement in which workers struck, and set up factory councils; and in which women played an important part, quickly led to mass-based Islamist totalitarianism — a clerical-fascist regime that has been in power now for a third of a century.

In terms of the treatment of women and levels of repression, that regime has been worse than the Shah’s. It was not something imposed on the people, a contending political movement that overthrew and suppressed those who made the 1978-9 revolution. It was there in the revolutionary movement all along.

Its proponents had led the revolution. They had talked of “democracy”, denounced the Shah’s “repressions” and led many in Iran, as well as outside it, to think they were against repression per se. They talked of “democracy” which was understood in the west in terms of bourgeois-democracy, but by which they meant their own theocratic rule, backed by mass popular support.

In power, they quickly repressed all those who objected to the imposition of a Sharia-based regime in place of the modernising dictatorship of the Shah.

Right now, conditions and forces, and therefore likely results, despite the common cry for democracy and dignity and an end to corruption, vary greatly from country to country.

Compared to the outcome in the fall of Stalinism, the differences between now and then are instructive. Most of the people of Eastern Europe and Russia were very hostile to Stalinism. Even the ruling class had lost all belief in their own system. In Romania, some miners at first rallied to the old regime, but mostly the working class was very hostile to the old system too.

They had as their ideal the freedom and plenty they thought they saw in Western Europe and America. The nationalism of different identities played a large part, but there were no aspirant Stalinist or fascist, or clerical-fascist move-

ments preparing an alternative to the ruling Stalinists — or to bourgeois democracy. Western Europe and US democracy and liberty was their model and goal against the old regimes. Intellectuals influenced by the West were politically and intellectually dominant. The churches offered no other system or goal.

In the Arab world now vast numbers of young people see on the internet and on the satellite TV stations the ideal they want. But what “democracy” means in these countries is undefined and has different dormant meanings. Islamist movements are powerful — movements which politically as well as religiously demand the remodelling of society according to Sharia law. The age-old mix of custom and religion demands the subordination and suppression of women. With them, religion is also a political programme.

Despite the near-uncritical accord in the Western media that these are “democratic” movement, it is impossible that political Islam is in these societies as insignificant as it seems now, where the cry for “freedom” and “democracy” seems to unite the people. Within that cry there are many different definitions of democracy. The Islamists are for “freedom” now, but they mean freedom for their religion. And to deny freedom to sin against Allah. By “democracy”, they mean freedom for their “majority” to impose their ideas on society.

When the most powerful mass movement in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, says that it no longer aspires to control Egypt, only political fools will take their word for it.

The outcome of the Arab spring will be shaped by the interaction and conflict of political-social movements. Central is the fact that the old states, and the old army regimes — in Egypt, for example — remain in being. In that conflict Islamist politics have a tremendous advantage. The Shia have clerical hierarchies that can — as in Iran — function as a powerful political party, (as the Catholic churches sometimes did in Europe).

They can harness the rural population, including the rural poor. They can gain strength, as they already do, from those disoriented by the “Western values” and the dislocation and by horrors of that capitalist system which accompany bourgeois “democracy” and “liberty”.

Their medievalist criticism of modern bourgeois society can win support for an Islamist political programme.

It is here a variant of what Marx and Engels called “reactionary socialism” — the desire to go back from an existing bourgeois system to an idealised Middle Ages and beyond. It can and does amalgamate Islamist criticism of Western society and its sinful systems with “anti-imperialism” — an anti-imperialism as reactionary as its “alternative to capitalism”.

By contrast, the labour movements in Egypt and elsewhere, are weak, and qualitatively more so than the forces of Islamist reaction now being unleashed.

Socialism is what it is everywhere — weak and still trying to get its political bearings. The idea that in the Middle East the “masses” can quickly become socialist, unleash a “process of permanent revolution”, and offer a socialist alternative can not but function in socialist observers to dissolve political standards, critical faculties and sober political judgment — and replace them with open-mouthed credulity and naivety towards political Islam.

During the Iranian Revolution, 1978-9, the left took that attitude — in different degrees, but all of us to some degree.

**We must critically assess what is happening, and do everything we properly can to encourage and help the labour movements and, though they are far from identical, the socialists in the Arab countries. We have a right to allow ourselves to be inspired. We do not have a right to switch our political minds off.**

Left

By Alex Irving



## General strike everywhere

There were hundreds of placards on the TUC anti-cuts demonstration with the words “General strike” — produced by the SWP and, in a new development, the Socialist Party.

Workers’ Liberty has criticised the SWP’s use of this slogan because it is not the right demand to take the movement forward from where it currently is. If the TUC did “call a general strike”, it would almost certainly flop.

But the SWP don’t believe this is a serious possibility either. Therefore it is deeply opportunistic; it brandishes “general strike” to sound left-wing and attract recruits, but nowhere in the labour movement do its activists propose the unions adopt this demand.

Now the Socialist Party has added its own sectarian and opportunistic twist.

The SP placards on 26 March shouted GENERAL STRIKE NOW! in big letters. Much smaller, and difficult to see from any distance, were the words above, “One day public sector”.

But a one day, cross-public sector strike is not a general strike — an ongoing mobilisation breaking across both legal and institutional constraints and sectional boundaries. But the SP cannot let the SWP sound more “left” than it does — hence the placards.

And the SP is just as opportunist as the SWP. It does not use its considerable influence in the unions to fight for its demand, but instead uses it to ward off the possibility of action by individual unions or groups of workers (for example in the civil service union PCS).

**Such demagoguery hinders a struggle against bureaucrats who do not want to seriously fight any battles. We should demand the unions champion and fight to win every dispute currently in the offing, and encourage rather than hinder the development of further struggles.**

## Our critique... and theirs

The EDL blog “English Defence League Extra” has republished, with critical comments, a recent *Solidarity* article on David Cameron’s 5 February speech on multiculturalism. The EDL writer uses our article as a stick to beat the SWP.

We have heard reports that a few SWP students have leapt on this as evidence of the AWL’s political closeness to the EDL. They should read Trotsky’s response to Stalinist accusations that, because right-wingers cited his attacks against the Soviet bureaucracy, he must be in league with them.

In fact a large element of the EDL commentary on our article is incoherent rambling. Then there is the Trot-bashing: apparently, “getting Workers’ Liberty to sort out the Socialist Workers Party” is like getting “extremist Muslims to sort out extremist Muslims”!

Then, after a bit of demagoguery about “easily agreeing” that all non-white people in Britain face racism, there is anti-Muslim racism galore, including a particularly hideous paragraph in which the blogger casts French Arabs, and not racists like the Front National, as the real problem in France.

But the core of the EDL Extra commentary is connected our attitude to political Islam and to “multiculturalism”. The commentator for example is enthusiastic about our description of multiculturalism as “the orthodox bourgeois policy in Britain of recent decades”.

Of course our article attacked the anti-Muslim bigotry of the EDL, as well as newspapers like the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* noted that Cameron’s policies are playing to the far-right gallery.

On multiculturalism, our piece counterposed a “democratic and secularist criticism” of it to “old-fashioned chauvinist and racist criticism”. When the EDL, and in a different way Cameron, attack political Islam in the name of “British” culture and values, we attack both in the name of an “evolving universalist culture” of democracy, human freedom and working-class solidarity (one essential element of which is anti-racism). But that is also why we oppose bourgeois “multiculturalist” measures such as more religious schools — measures which Cameron is promoting and which, bizarrely, the SWP endorses.

**The left should never be afraid to say what is for fear the right will exploit the truth for its own, dramatically different purposes. But then the truth is not something the SWP are very well acquainted with.**

# The first workers' government

The following text is from Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France*. It is an account of the events leading up to and during the Paris Commune of March-May 1871 when a radical democratic government of the people (in the main working class) held power. It is a militant defence of the Paris Commune — it caused a stir at the time — and was written for the "First International" (the International Working Men's Association), the socialist and labour movement grouping in which Marx was a leading member. The French members of the IWMA played important roles in the Commune. In this extract, Marx develops his ideas about the capitalist state and the forms of proletarian democracy that should replace it. This is a book that all socialists should read.

**On the dawn of March 18, Paris arose to the thunderburst of "Vive la Commune!" What is the Commune, that sphinx so tantalising to the bourgeois mind?**

"The proletarians of Paris," said the Central Committee [defence committee in Paris then under siege by the Prussian army] in its manifesto of March 18, "amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs.... They have understood that it is their imperious duty, and their absolute right, to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power."

But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.

The centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature — organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour — originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle-class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism. Still, its development remained clogged by all manner of medieval rubbish, seigniorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies, and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the 18th century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hinderances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France.

During the subsequent regimes, the government, placed under parliamentary control — that is, under the direct control of the propertied classes — became not only a hotbed of huge national debts and crushing taxes; with its irresistible allurements of place, pelf, and patronage, it became not only the bone of contention between the rival factions and adventurers of the ruling classes; but its political character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of society. At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.

After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief. The Revolution of 1830, resulting in the transfer of government from the landlords to the capitalists, transferred it from the more remote to the more direct antagonists of the working men. The bourgeois republicans, who, in the name of the February Revolution, took the state power, used it for the June [1848] massacres, in order to convince the working class that "social" republic means the republic entrusting their social subjection, and in order to convince the royalist bulk of the bourgeois and landlord class that they might safely leave the cares and emoluments of government to the bourgeois "republicans."

However, after their one heroic exploit of June, the bourgeois republicans had, from the front, to fall back to the rear of the "Party of Order" — a combination formed by all the rival factions and factions of the appropriating classes. The proper form of their joint-stock government was the parliamentary republic, with Louis Bonaparte for its president. Theirs was a regime of avowed class terrorism and deliberate insult towards the "vile multitude."

If the parliamentary republic, as M. Thiers [in charge of suppressing the Commune and President of the Third Republic] said, "divided them [the different fractions of the ruling class] least", it opened an abyss between that class and the whole body of society outside their spare ranks. The restraints by which their own divisions had under former regimes still checked the state power, were removed by their union; and in view of the threatening upheaval of the proletariat, they now used that state power mercilessly and ostentatiously as the national war engine of capital against labour.

In their uninterrupted crusade against the producing masses, they were, however, bound not only to invest the

**Marx: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."**

executive with continually increased powers of repression, but at the same time to divest their own parliamentary stronghold — the National Assembly — one by one, of all its own means of defence against the Executive. The Executive, in the person of Louis Bonaparte [Napoleon III], turned them out. The natural offspring of the "Party of Order" republic was the Second Empire.

## CHIMERA

**The empire, with the coup d'etat for its birth certificate, universal suffrage for its sanction, and the sword for its sceptre, professed to rest upon the peasantry, the large mass of producers not directly involved in the struggle of capital and labour. It professed to save the working class by breaking down parliamentarism, and, with it, the undisguised subserviency of government to the propertied classes. It professed to save the propertied classes by upholding their economic supremacy over the working class; and, finally, it professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory.**

In reality, it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation. It was acclaimed throughout the world as the saviour of society. Under its sway, bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself. Its industry and commerce expanded to colossal dimensions; financial swindling celebrated cosmopolitan orgies; the misery of the masses was set off by a shameless display of gorgeous, meretricious and debased luxury. The state power, apparently soaring high above society and the very hotbed of all its corruptions. Its own rottenness, and the rottenness of the society it had saved, were laid bare by the bayonet of Prussia, herself eagerly bent upon transferring the supreme seat of that regime from Paris to Berlin. Imperialism is, at the same time, the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the state power which nascent middle class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism, and which full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital.

The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune. The cry of "social republic," with which the February Revolution was ushered in by the Paris proletariat, did but express a vague aspiration after a republic that was not only to supercede the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that republic.

Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers and the Rurals to restore and perpetuate that old governmental power bequeathed to them by the empire. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.

Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members

of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workman's wage. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune.

Having once got rid of the standing army and the police — the physical force elements of the old government — the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the "parson-power", by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles.

The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.

The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subserviency to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable.

## MODEL

**The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal regime once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralised government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers.**

In a rough sketch of national organisation, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal and thereafter responsible agents.

The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organised by Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence.

While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society. Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business. And it is well-known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and, if they for once make a mistake, to redress it promptly. On the other hand, nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supercede universal suffrage by hierarchical investiture.

The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favour, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all the previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this:

It was essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.

**Except on this last condition, the Communal Constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion. The political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule. With labour emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labour ceases to be a class attribute.**

## Camden teachers strike alongside Tower Hamlets workers

By Darren Bedford

**As members of the National Union of Teachers and Unison in Tower Hamlets prepare to strike on Wednesday 30 March, NUT members in Camden will join them in a one-day strike as anti-cuts industrial action slowly begins to spread.**

85% of Camden NUT members voted to strike, with 79% also voting for further action. Like Tower Hamlets, Camden has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the UK and faces devastating cuts to vital services. The borough is set to lose two children's centres, its play service and the Cognition and Learning team. Local nurseries are also planning to introduce charges, stricter rationing of places and will open for less hours. Teachers who specialise in areas such as special needs, music and sexual health could face redundancy as part of a 20% cuts package to the council's budget. One of the demands of the strike is for the council to operate a policy of redeployment rather than redundancy.

The strike is particularly significant because it represents one of only a few live industrial actions explicitly aimed at opposing and ultimately reversing the cuts.

Despite the massive potential job losses across local authorities, very few public sector unions have balloted for strikes against the cuts. The fact that the NUT has now moved into action, if only in two London boroughs, might help

catalyse further action elsewhere.

Camden NUT secretary Andrew Baisley said, "no teacher votes for strike action lightly but the cuts are a historic step backwards. We are ultimately hoping the council will reverse these cuts."

Strikers will gather at 10:30am at the Crowndale Centre before marching to the Town Hall.

• camdennut.com.

**TOWER HAMLETS Tower Hamlets workers will assemble at 11am at Weavers Fields before marching to a rally at the London Muslim Centre as part of the NUT and Unison strike against massive cuts and job losses in the borough.**

Picket lines will be put on at schools and local government workplaces across the borough as trade unionists attempt to maximise the impact of the strike.

NUT leader Christine Blower said, "Cost cutting exercises such as those being implemented in Tower Hamlets will see the most vulnerable children being deprived of the services they need and their teachers of the support they require. While industrial action is always a last resort the NUT cannot stand by and watch vital education services axed."

AWL members are active within both NUT and Unison in Tower Hamlets and will be integrally involved in the strike. Next week's *Solidarity* will feature reports and photos from the picket lines and rally.

## More strikes at BA

**For the fourth time in two years, cabin crew workers at British Airways have returned a huge majority for strike action on an enormous turnout. 83% of workers voted to strike, on a turnout of 72%.**

Their union, Unite, now has a month in which to declare action, which has elicited predictable bleating from the tabloid press about potential disruption to Easter holidays.

Despite the impressive ballot result, the strike is one that sees workers on the back-foot. The current

dispute focuses on reversing victimisations and attacks suffered during previous strikes around pay freezes and job cuts which BA boss Willie Walsh wants to impose on staff.

Unite leader Len McCluskey said, "this vote shows that cabin crew remain determined to win justice. We urge BA's boardroom to see this as a clear message that they must think again about how to regain the trust and confidence of a significant part of their cabin crew operation."

## Northern Rock sheds jobs

**Northern Rock, the bank whose near-collapse was part of the early shockwaves in the financial crisis, is set to shed nearly a quarter of its workforce in a move that will reduce its total number of employees to under 2,000. In 2007, it employed over 6,000.**

## College strikes across UK

By Stewart Ward

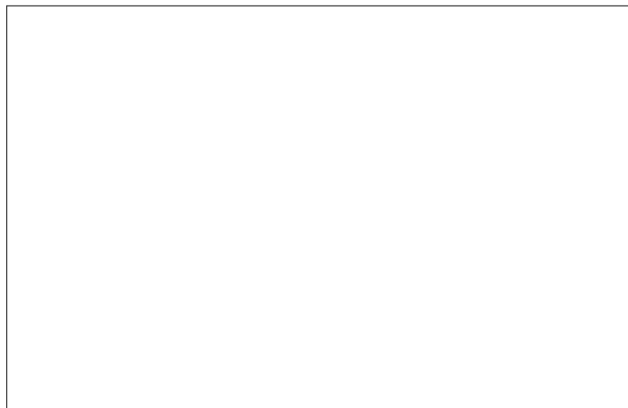
**UCU members in around 500 institutions took strike action last week as part of a series of parallel disputes over pensions and pay.**

UCU branches at many institutions turned out lively picket lines, particularly on Thursday 24 March which saw action across the further and higher education sectors throughout the UK. At Manchester Metropolitan University, management used university security to evict workers from their own picket lines! In a union statement, UCU regional official Martyn Moss said: "I was on the picket line at MMU today and absolutely astounded to have been told by the university's security to leave the premises. I am not aware of anything like this happening elsewhere and I fail to see some leaflets being handed out

to staff, students and visitors can be anywhere near as damaging as this incident will be for the university."

In many places, student activists organised impressive solidarity with their lecturers, with student occupations at Goldsmiths, UCL and Glasgow being used as specific bases for organising strike support. LSE Students' Union organised a mini-festival in support of the strike while London UCU members gathered in the LSE quad before marching to Downing Street. Earlier in the day in London, ESOL teachers had held an action in defence of ESOL provision.

As the first national strike in response to the cuts, the UCU action has enormous significance. Rank-and-file militants inside the union now have to find ways of extending the action, and linking up with other workers moving into struggle.



## Taking action for language teaching

**On Thursday 24 March the campaign Action for ESOL called a day of action against the cuts in funding for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses.**

Government plans will see full fee remission restricted to students claiming "active benefits". All students claiming "inactive" benefits, such as income support, disability allowance and housing benefit will have to pay up to £1200 a year for their English classes. Students on low incomes, spouses of low-wage workers or benefit claimants and refugees and asylum seekers will also be obliged to pay.

Around 500 people attended a teach-in (out!) in central London with theatre, speakers, and other activities. At 1pm the pro-

testors walked to Downing St to hand in a petition with 20,000 signatures.

Local actions took place in other areas including a sizeable demonstration in Nottingham.

Meanwhile further education colleges are preparing to make big cuts and job losses and as in the past ESOL classes re being disproportionately affected.

Funding is not the only issue in this campaign — some colleges want to set up private language colleges and others are beginning to use (untrained or undertrained) voluntary teachers.

The long-term future of ESOL provision will depend in large part on the ability of college education workers to fight wider cuts and job losses.

• <http://actionforesol.org>

## George Galloway stands against cuts? No, just for himself!

By Dale Street

**"We should get George Galloway elected so he's a voice which stands up for people in this city. He will stand against the cuts," said Socialist Party Scotland member Brian Smith at the press conference held last week to formally launch "George Galloway (Respect) — Coalition Against Cuts" (GRC).**

The GRC is an electoral bloc involving Galloway, the Socialist Party Scotland (SPS), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and some organisationally unaligned members of "Solidarity — Scotland's Socialist Movement" (set up in 2006 when the SPS, the SWP and Tommy Sheridan split from the Scottish Socialist Party).

In this May's elections for the Scottish Parliament the GRC will be standing eight candidates for the Glasgow "list" seats.

Brian Smith was right to focus on the perspective of George Galloway — number one on the GRC "list" — securing a seat in Holyrood. That is the sole function of the GRC.

Ironically, the Socialist Party used to criticise the Respect Party because it allowed Galloway to enjoy "an exaggerated profile" and also because it had shown "particularly through the behaviour of its MP George Galloway, that its public representatives are far from accountable to the party."

But now the SPS has reduced itself to a mere appendage of the George Galloway (Respect) electoral bloc. Galloway's profile in that bloc is even more "exaggerated" than it was in Respect Mark 1.

Brian Smith was rather less right in his naïve confidence that Galloway "will stand against the cuts." Galloway's approach to fighting — or not fighting — the cuts is far removed from that of the SPS.

In the 1980s Galloway was opposed to councils setting "needs only" budgets and defying the Tories' cuts. More recent events indicate that that remains his position.

Galloway is the leading figure in the rump of the Respect Party, which still has two councillors in Tower Hamlets (down from the twelve it had at

its height).

In February of this year the council's elected mayor proposed a budget with £56 million cuts. The Respect councillors did not fight this but signed up to an amendment from the Lib-Dems which merely proposed some additional funding for apprenticeships and social housing.

In a subsequent council press release the Respect councillors were deservedly congratulated by the mayor for the role they had played in facilitating £56 millions worth of cuts.

In the pages of the local press, Respect councillor Fozol Miah defended the line which he and the other Respect councillor had taken.

"We are with the people and against the government. But the town hall will be prevented by law if it tries setting a budget which ignores the cut in government grant. Budget decisions will then be taken by officials."

Galloway has failed to criticise the words and actions of his party's councillors in Tower Hamlets. But why should he criticise them? What they have done is in line with Galloway's own politics.

Galloway's longstanding advice for councillors confronted with cuts in government funding is that they should adopt "a posture of militant opposition but stop short of political suicide, in order to live to fight another day."

This is the exact opposite of what is argued in every issue of the paper sold by Brian Smith and other members of the SPS.

Ironically, the Socialist Party and the SPS have recently taken to attacking the SWP for their alleged "softness" on councillors who vote for cuts.

At the recent launch conference of the Scottish Anti-Cuts Alliance, for example, the sole item of debate was one between the SWP and the SPS about what attitude to take towards councillors who declare their opposition to cuts, but then go and vote for them.

Now, however, the SPS is not only in alliance with someone who acts as an apologist for councillors who implement cuts but is actually doing the spade-work to try to get him elected to Holyrood — as the anti-cuts candidate!

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Endgame in Libya?

By Martyn Hudson

As we go to press, the key towns of Brega and Ajdabiya have now been taken by the rebels and Qaddafi forces are everywhere in retreat. Libyan rebel troops are surrounding Sirte, birthplace and symbolic heartland of the Qaddafi regime. Their siege positions in Misurata are also less under-threat than last week. The change of fortunes for the rebels is largely as a consequence of the international air strikes. And that action now seems to be directed at "regime change". Germany, Italy and Turkey continue to argue for a softer option.

There is undoubtedly a huge amount of support in the liberated zones for the air strikes with accounts of some rebels chanting "Sarkozy! Sarkozy!" in admiration of the role of France. There are also reports that youth in the Ben Ashour and Souk el-Jumaa districts of Tripoli have been attacking government militias and symbols of the regime with stones.

Certainly without the air strikes the rebellion would have been totally repressed — the threat that the regime would take Free Benghazi back house by house is made more tenable in that the air strikes took out a loyalist column just outside the Benghazi city limits.

There are reports of mass torture, imprisonment and widespread executions. The idea that this talk of genocide is just "western" propaganda talking up an imperialist war is frankly pathetic. The "Liberated Libya" of "pro-western thugs, Islamists and drug-takers" is itself the construct of a tottering regime unable to understand its own collapse and the destruction of its "green" anti-imperialist revolution.

Undoubtedly there is an Islamist strand in the uprising, as there is a monarchist strand and a democratic strand. Worryingly, the leadership in the liberated areas are largely themselves former acolytes of the Qaddafi regime and are themselves complicit with its crimes. There are reports of the rebels killing civilians. These are matters of concern.

The uprising is now faced with two central problems.

First, there is the issue of the pro-Qaddafi resistance in both Sirte and Tripoli which is substantial and will not give up power easily. Even when confronted with military defeat, it could perpetuate a low-level, possibly terroristic, war of resistance against any new democratic settlement.

## Syria: regime lashes out at protests

By Dan Katz

The uprising which began in the southern Syrian town of Deraa on 18 March continues to shake the nasty, brutal regime of Bashar Assad.

Protesters have been demanding more political

freedom and have targeted businesses run by Assad's relations. On Monday demonstrators converged on a main square in Deraa chanting: "We want dignity and freedom!" and "No to Emergency Laws!" The protesters also want the release of thousands of political prisoners.

On Saturday, demonstrators set fire to the ruling Baath party's local headquarters in Tafas.

Government thugs and gunmen have killed over 100 people and Amnesty International has listed 93 people the state has detained.

Following the murderous crackdown by state forces last week there are signs that the regime is divided about how to respond to the pro-democracy protesters.

Although the army has been sent into Latakia,

Linked to this is the fate of Qaddafi himself and his inner family circle, now confronted by annihilation or exile.

Second is the composition of the resistance movement and its rag-tag militia; when it takes Sirte and Tripoli will it play out a similar project to that which Qaddafi had in store for Benghazi? This would largely depend upon the scale of the pro-Qaddafi resistance to them and whether it goes hand-in-hand with a popular uprising of the people of the capital.

We may see an Iraq scenario of contending forces which are unable to decisively achieve victory, and in which democratic manoeuvres and communal violence might figure significantly.

**However, experience in "Free Benghazi" does show that democracy and liberty have a huge mandate; with the development of civil society and freedom for workers to organise there is great potential. The huge level of sacrifice over the last seven weeks will surely mean that the liberty of the Libyan people will not easily be surrendered. It has been bought at too high a cost.**

where the local hospital treated 90 demonstrators — mostly for gunshot wounds — on Friday, the government has also been signalling it will make concessions.

Some political prisoners — mainly Islamists — have been released. There are rumours that the State of Emergency — in place for nearly 50 years, since the Baath party took power in a coup in 1963 — will be abolished.

Some at the centre of the state seem to favour all-out repression, others a "dialogue". Bashar Assad has not made any public comment since the start of the protests. Al-Jazeera explain Assad's absence by quoting a senior diplomat in Damascus: "I think [Assad] is not decided on whether to go on television and try to defuse the situation or choose an even

more brutal crackdown route."

He added, "I do not see Assad scrapping the emergency law without replacing it with something just as bad."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said there will be no US intervention in Syria along the lines of the action in Libya. She explained that the US saw Assad as a "reformer".

It seems that Clinton is responding to Saudi, Jordanian and Israeli pressure — all these states are worried about the threat to regional stability caused by the rebellion.

We, however, champion the movement for democracy in Syria. It will be a great day for human freedom when the Syrian people sweep away their absurd, corrupt government. For liberty and democracy!

## Class war Budget deepens attack on the working class

By Paul Brazhensky

Last week's Budget was further proof that the Tory government and its Lib-Dem hand-raisers are waging a vicious class war against the working class on behalf of their wealthy friends and backers.

Dubbed a "Budget for Growth", its lustre was diminished instantly when Osborne downgraded his own 2011 growth forecast from 2.1% to 1.7%. But they hope to turn the crisis into an opportunity. Restructuring British capitalism and reconfiguring the British state, making the system and its components fit for profiteering — that was the real rationale for this Budget.

This was clear from the favours Con-Dems did for the rich. The bosses aren't expected to pay for the recession they created. Instead they will get a nice tax break.

Corporation tax will be cut by 2% in April, not 1% as previously planned, and the tax will be cut by 1% in each of the next three years, reducing it to 23%. Osborne boasted how it was lower than in other major capitalist states, begging international capital to toss him some crumbs ahead of Britain's major competitors.

While oil firms and the banks received a little prod to allay some flack about petrol prices and bonuses, their profits and their prospects for more were left intact. And energy capitalists avoided a windfall tax on their escalating profits, while fuel poverty grows.

Small capitalists with fewer than 10 staff will not face new regulations for three years. Lord Young's attack on occupational safety and health will largely decimate the safety inspectorate and leave employers free to maim and injure workers with barely the possibility of redress.

What of the so-called "non-doms" levy of up to £50,000 on someone resident in the UK for 12 years? For a millionaire that's 5% — and these people don't consider six zeros to be a fortune. A government could happily tax them 95% and still leave plenty to live on. The 50% tax on incomes over £150,000 will be subject to review, a prelude to scrapping it — when they think they can get away with it. So those who currently pay £50,000 tax and get to take home £100,000, will get to keep even more.

Probably the most penni-

ous attack on the working class in this Budget was on pensions. The Tories announced in October they intend to make public sector workers pay 3% more contributions to occupational pensions. That's £500-£1,000 a year for many workers.

Now they've accepted Lord Hutton's recommendation to make workers in the public sector work five or more years longer than expected — thereby paying more pension contributions (and taxes). But it's not just the inputs. The value of pensions paid out will be diminished by using consumer prices (CPI) to uprate contributions rather than retail prices (RPI). The difference is £50-£100 a year, and grows over time.

And as if that were not enough, Osborne also accepted Hutton's demand for career-average rather than the current and higher final salary schemes. If pensions are deferred pay, then the pensions robbery is the biggest sustained slashing of wages seen in the history of British capitalism.

In the Budget, Osborne did what was expected of him — he represented the millionaires. The labour movement has to be transformed and made ready to fight for the millions of working class people on the receiving end of these attacks.

### You are £1,000 worse off!

According to research conducted by the BBC's Panorama programme (28 March) a British worker on average pay (just over £20,000) is more than £1,000 worse off than they were two years ago.

This is because their pay has failed to keep pace with rises in the cost of living. The average worker's wage has dropped £1,088, or 5 per cent, in real terms.

Workers in the construction sector have been hardest hit — their take home pay has fallen by £1,188 a year in real terms since 2009.

The fact that people are fearful of losing their jobs and are therefore too afraid to ask for a pay rise has made the situation worse.