

# workers power 5



What is intersectionality?



Theses on the Arab revolutions



Tories play racist card

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Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

## As the bosses launch new offensive...

Grangemouth workers listen to their union but receive no fighting lead



# Stop the retreat!

**Billionaire Ratcliffe blackmails Grangemouth workers with threat of closure and BAE sheds a thousand shipbuilding jobs, while union leaders call off strike action and sign away rights**

JIM RATCLIFFE is a billionaire. His friends insist he's not showy, he's just building a floating palace off the Hampshire coast.

He is also owner of the Grangemouth petrochemical complex in Falkirk, Scotland. As such, he controls the flow of petrol to most the garages in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England and the vast majority of the oil from the North Sea.

When Ratcliffe used his controlling shares in Ineos to announce the closure of the plant, because workers who had made his millions refused to take a huge cut in pay and pensions, he triggered a political, social and economic crisis.

Politicians from the Conservative Party and the Scottish National Party (SNP), along with

the anti-union hacks from the Daily Mail and the BBC, turned on Unite – already in their sights since the made up Falkirk constituency votes scandal.

Ratcliffe's victory – handed to him on a plate by Unite's leadership – could open the door for every boss to bully their workforce.

### Jobs massacre

The bosses are already on the rampage. After making workers pay for the recession caused by the systemic failure of capitalism, they are now demanding we pay with our jobs for the recovery in their profits.

British Aerospace cut 1,775 jobs on the Clyde and at Portsmouth docks. But MPs and the press tried to turn this tragedy for thousands of families into a Scotland versus Eng-

land phoney war.

Tata also slashed 500 skilled jobs on Teesside, Humberside and Cumbria. Troubled bank, the Co-op, could cull up to 1,000 more posts as well. Meanwhile the Health Minister is calling for a continuing pay freeze for hundreds of thousands of NHS staff – despite rising transport, gas and electricity prices.

### Union leaders in retreat

In this context the total collapse of the much-touted coordinated action from our trade union leaders is nothing short of a betrayal.

Unite's Len McCluskey not only threw in the towel as soon as Ratcliffe called his bluff in Grangemouth – he also agreed to “embrace” the deal, which was extended to include the banning of union full-timers

from the site and a three-year no-strike clause.

Billy Hayes and Dave Ward of the CWU first allowed Royal Mail to be privatised under their noses without calling a minute's industrial action. Then they called off action over pay – despite a four-to-one strike vote – preferring to seek out shared “values and principles” with the newly privatised company. As if shareholders' profits and workers' wages and pensions could be reconciled!

Next to fold, as the TUC leaders prepared to cash in their dwindling pile of chips, was the NUT teachers' union executive. The promised strike before Christmas was postponed to sometime in the New Year – don't hold your breathe for that one. And the civil servants' PCS leaders decided

against any national strikes this year, despite conference pledges to pursue an independent strategy.

Even the firefighters, one of the last remaining workers' battalions on the battlefield, have been restricted to strikes of two to five hours in duration by their leaders.

### Crisis of leadership

Some apologists for these class traitors claim that the retreat is due to workers no longer being prepared to make the sacrifices needed for a struggle for victory.

But they have not produced a shred of evidence to back up this utterly false claim. On the contrary, teachers, university staff and bakers have proved recently that strikes are popular.

Others admit the defeats, but placate the union general sec-

retaries by calling them “mistakes” and “setbacks”. We believe in calling a spade a spade – and a betrayal a betrayal.

Not out of spite, but because only when rank and file union members face up to this crisis of leadership can we begin to build an alternative leadership.

One that affords no privileges to its leaders. One that controls its leaders and its collective actions. One that can defy the bosses' blackmail, escape the shackles of the anti-union laws, and take the fight to the bosses.

In short, we need a rank and file movement, rooted in every workplace and committed to a militant class struggle. Only this way can we stop the retreat and rebuild union strength, pride and effectiveness.

[www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)



## Where we stand

The capitalists' property must be expropriated, with not a penny paid in compensation.

Capitalism must be abolished across the globe and a world without class division, state repression or the oppression of women, subject races and nations, must be created. That is what revolutionary socialists call communism.

All power must pass from the capitalist elite into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry and the poor directly elected by the masses and subject to instant recall. These councils must be supported by the armed working class and its allies.

The resistance of the exploiters must be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution. Armed workers must forcibly break up the police and army that exist to support the rule of private property.

All production and distribution must be organised democratically and sustainably, without private ownership and the blind and brutal dictatorship of market forces.

Social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents must be overcome through the planned allocation of humanity's resources: raw materials, means of transportation, communication, technology and labour.

Imperialism, the highest and most violent stage of capitalism, means the exploitation of billions in all countries, it means blockades, invasions and occupations.

We support all resistance to imperialism and its agents and demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad

including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all imperialist pacts.

We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland from Zionist occupation and to create a single country "from the river to the sea", in which Arabic and Hebrew speaking citizens can live in freedom and equality.

There is only one road to this freedom. It is the road of class struggle and revolution, the fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

We demand equal rights for minorities, an end to all racist discrimination and an end to the lies of the racists in the mass media, which whip up violence against black people and other oppressed communities and ethnic groups. We fight against all immigration controls: they are inherently racist.

We fight for women's liberation: from the burden of childcare and domestic labour, which must be socialised; from rape, physical and mental abuse, from unequal pay and discrimination at work.

Women alone must control when and whether they have children, not the state or the churches. This includes defending and extending the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians, gay men and transgender people must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We fight the oppression of young people and demand an end to their harassment by the police, the government and the press. Young workers should have equal pay and equal rights with other workers.

We fight for free, universal education, under the control of students, teachers and other education workers themselves.

We fight for an autonomous, revolutionary socialist youth movement.

We fight the catastrophe of climate change, resisting corporations which pollute the earth, governments that refuse to take action against the emission of greenhouse gases, and policies which put the profits of big oil, the auto industry and the power generators before the very survival of our species.

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. Capitalism cannot be reformed via elections and peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by the masses through force.

We oppose the control of the trade unions by unaccountable bureaucrats. Union members should have full democratic control. All officials must be regularly elected, and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. A rank and file movement to carry out this transformation.

In the fight against austerity, we call for a united anti-austerity movement pledged to oppose every cut, for local councils of action, and for mass industrial and direct action, up to and including a general strike to halt the assault on the NHS, the welfare state and education and to kick out the coalition.

We fight for a workers' government based on the fighting organisations of the working class and the socially oppressed.

We propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in Britain to build a new working class revolutionary party. Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Fifth International. It fights for a world party organised across national boundaries on a programme for world revolution.

# Roma and the recession: new crisis, old racism

Fuelled by racist myths, a new wave of anti-Roma racism is sweeping Europe. **KD Tait** argues for solidarity

IN OCTOBER, Irish police kidnapped two young Roma children from separate Roma families. The parents and children were forced to undergo DNA tests, which proved... they were indeed related.

This followed the case of Maria, a Roma child seized by Greek police, whose parents adopted her from another Roma family in Bulgaria, who were too poor to feed her.

In all three cases the police raids were based on the fact that the children "looked different" to their parents – the Greek press dubbed Maria "the blond angel", with the implication that she must belong to another "race". This was a revival of the ancient lie that "Gypsies" kidnap children – akin to the infamous "blood libel" against the Jews.

### A persecuted people

There are an estimated four million Roma people living in Europe. Since their arrival in Europe from India around 1300, they have been subject to systematic persecution and pogroms across the continent.

In what is today Romania, the Roma were enslaved until 1864. In World War II up to 1.5 million Roma were murdered by the Nazis, an equivalent proportion of their population to the Jewish Holocaust.

As a result of centuries of state-sanctioned violence and suppression of their language and culture, many Roma refuse to declare their ethnicity. This has led some Roma organisations to claim there may be as many as 14 million Roma living in Europe.

The reasons are clear. In Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria, Roma children are educated in segregated classes, or subjected to neglect and abuse in "delinquent schools".

The situation is little better in the developed West. Since 2005 Germany has deported up to 50,000 Roma – refugees from the Kosovo conflict – back to Kosovo. Many were

children when they came and only spoke German.

In Italy the rape of a woman by a Roma man in 2009 was the pretext for fascist gangs to launch murderous pogroms against Roma people. A year earlier a judge ruled that it was "acceptable" to discriminate against Roma on the grounds that "they are thieves".

In 2009 French police deported 10,000 Roma people to Bulgaria and Romania. Over the next two years, riot squads and armoured bulldozers demolished 51 camps and deported a further 10,000 Roma.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls recently called for the expulsion of the remaining 20,000 Roma in France – because they "had no intention of integrating". He backed up his racist rhetoric by arresting a 15-year-old student on a school trip and deporting her the same day.

### Capitalist crisis

The European recession has thrown millions of workers onto the scrapheap. The fear of unemployment, competition for jobs and race to the bottom in pay and conditions that this creates is the most effective way to discipline the workforce, but it is not enough.

The ruling class also maintains an arsenal of tactics to turn working people against each other. Their control of education, the media and the police enables them to sow fear and division to prevent workers from uniting against their common exploiter.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the ruling classes of Europe were turning to fascism to destroy the workers' movements and save their system, the Jews were targeted as outsiders who "racially pollute" the "civilised" peoples of Europe. Just how civilised Europeans were, the Holocaust was about to demonstrate.

Today the horrors of the

Nazis have made anti-Semitism awkward for mainstream racism to resort to. Anti-Roma racism, along with Islamophobia, has become the new form that extreme racism has taken in the current crisis.

The majority of Roma, victims of mass unemployment and state racism which prevents them accessing the education and welfare they are entitled to, cannot be accused of doing anything except struggling to survive. And yet the persecution of the Roma is escalating.

Driven onto the margins of society by official policies, which aim to dehumanise all Roma as criminals and parasites, it is not surprising that theft, petty crime or black market work is the only option for many of those excluded from society. When arrested, they are abused or deported by the police.

### Solidarity

The working class, who make all of society's wealth, share in common our exploitation by a ruling elite, whose filthy tabloids like the Daily Mail and the Express churn out daily dose of racist poison – against Roma, against Muslims, against migrants and against black people – to divide and weaken us.

The working class is an international class that recognises no reasons for discrimination or exclusion on the basis of nationality, "race" or religion. An attack on the poorest amongst us is an attack on all of us.

The cruel eviction of Roma and Irish travellers from Dale Farm in Essex two years ago drew hundreds of activists to take solidarity action alongside them. Despite our defeat on this occasion, the alliances formed remain a model for the future.

We should also fight to abolish the racist immigration controls, which benefit the bosses not the workers. Everyone should be entitled to a job and to equal access to the legal rights and social services of the country they live in.

## CONTACT US

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# The crisis in the unions – and how to organise to overcome it

Jeremy Dewar

IN ANY PERIOD of time – be it the term of a government or a trade union general secretary's career – a moment comes when, amidst the welter of events, a home truth emerges.

At the end of October, Unite leader Len McCluskey – who has a record of talking tough, then conceding – had just such a moment. When Ineos owner Jim Ratcliffe called his bluff over Grangemouth, McCluskey was punctured like Unite's giant inflatable rat.

The same week saw other left wing union leaders deflate. The NUT called off its national strike. The PCS did the same. Most criminally the CWU “suspended” its action.

## The members' fault?

The most scurrilous excuse for these collapses has been to blame union members: “There wasn't a mood to fight” and “The union played the best it could given its hand was weak”, etc.

Some forces on the Left – the *Morning Star* and Counterfire – have offered their services to McCluskey by playing the blame-the-members game. Others like the Socialist Party (SP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have categorised these retreats as mistaken tactics.

No. These retreats without a fight were not mistakes; they were betrayals: not just of each union's members but of the entire anti-austerity movement to which they had promised coordinated cross-union action.

Yet the actions which have taken place showed no signs of a wilting membership. The coordinated universities strikers mounted lively pickets and the probation officers managed to come out in force.

More impressive still, the tiny bakers' union at Hovis held two week-long strikes, the second more solid than the first. The bakers held mass meetings and elected a strike committee to run their dispute, instead of full-time officials. They mounted effective pickets that turned back supplies. And they won!

They proved that serious strike action is more effective than one-day protests. Of course, workers are not always straining at the bit to strike nor are they always to the left of the leaders. Sometimes – especially if they have been called out on a series of one-day strikes, spread months and months apart – they are behind the leaders.

But where was the call for action from Unite, the NUT, CWU and PCS? Nowhere.

If leaders believe it is necessary, they

have a duty to argue with all their might for action – putting out leaflets, calling mass meetings, appealing to allies for solidarity, doing all the things to enthuse members and persuade them that a strike could win. Unless leaders do these things and fail, then any suggestion that “the members weren't up for it” is just a lame excuse.

## Broad leftism

What we are witnessing is a crisis of the trade union leadership's entire strategy, in particular that of the so-called lefts. This strategy is that of the Broad Left.

Its origins lie back in the 1960s. Faced with right wing leaders who trampled on workers' democracy, refused to call any but the most limited strikes and worked hand in iron glove with management to get militants sacked, activists, under the leadership of the Communist Party, formed Broad Lefts.

As their name implied, attempts were made to include everyone to the

left of the corrupt, incumbent right wing. To keep the centre-lefts on board, the Broad Lefts deliberately framed their policies and tactics within what was acceptable to the moderates.

But it meant the hands of socialists in the workplace were bound; the election addresses of left candidates were watered down to what would not offend the left officials.

All talk was of the need to build up union strength slowly, cautiously testing the water and making sure that the more conservative members were not alienated by calls to action. “You'll let the right wing back in if you push too hard,” they protested.

Worse still, the Broad Lefts poured all their energies into one purpose: getting left officials elected. But once elected, they would typically demobilise. Why do we need an independent organisation in our day-to-day activity when we have a “socialist general secretary”? Or so the argument goes.

Over the last decade they had considerable success with this – with

the elections of the so-called “awkward squad” of general secretaries: Tony Woodley (T&G) Derek Simpson (Amicus) Billy Hayes (CWU) Mark Serwotka (PCS), Matt Wrack (FBU) Jeremy Dear (NUJ) Bob Crow (RMT).

Once the left general secretaries were elected, the new converts to Broad Leftism, as well as classical CPers like Andrew Murray, harshly turned on anyone who criticised them. New left formations or challenges are witch-hunted or slandered – as happened to Jerry Hicks in the Unite election earlier this year. In short, the “left” leaders act in exactly the same way as the right wing used to: as bureaucrats.

Moreover it is precisely by relying on these officials and muting any criticism of them that the resistance to the Tories and the Lib-Dems now finds itself in such a mess.

## Bureaucracy and rank and file

Despite the obvious need to vote for left candidates against the right wing, broad leftism is a left bureaucratic strategy for the unions. Despite what the SWP and SP claim, it cannot be hybridised with a rank and file approach.

For Marxists, the most important division in the unions is not between left and right officials but between the top layers of full-time officers – often supported at branch, sectoral and regional levels by people with full facility time, offices and even junkets with management – and the ordinary members.

This caste of bureaucrats acts as go-betweens in the constant war between the bosses and the workers. Their goal is compromise. Anything that sharpens the class divide is anathema, because it means disputes are not settled around a table but on the field with pickets, lockouts and running battles with the police.

This is not to say that the bureaucrats will never lead a fight. They will – when the bosses or the rank and file give them no alternative. But when they do, they lead it in a bureaucratic way: within the anti-union laws, with stop-start strikes, one sector, one grade or one union at a time. And they call off the action as soon as they squeeze from the bosses a compromise that they can get a majority of members to accept.

This is why Marxists fight for the dissolution of the entire bureaucracy by the active rank and file, organised into a movement within each union and across them all. Of course a union needs full-time officials, but they should be regularly elected, subject to

instant recall and receive the average wage of the members they are supposed to represent.

## Rank and file movement

Now is the time to break with this rotten Broad Left tradition. The larger far left groups continue to systematically shielded Broad Left officials in their front organisations, like the National Shop Stewards Network, Unite the Resistance and Coalition of Resistance. But others, like the International Socialist Network (ISN), are looking for a way out of the impasse we are in.

So what would we do to start a new, rank and file approach?

### • Revive workplace organisation

Hold regular meetings and produce bulletins to report on shop stewards' work; formulate demands and hammer out tactics to fight for them; criticise the officials whenever they deserve it, lefts as well as rights; organise unionisation drive aiming at 100 per cent membership.

### • Workers' control of all disputes

Organise mass meetings and elect strike committees to decide when to ballot, what should be on the ballot paper, when to call and call off strikes and what should be said in negotiations. All negotiations should be out in the open, with mandated rank and file delegates faithfully reporting back in full.

### • Fight the bosses – with the officials where possible, without them where necessary

Demand unions officially back every dispute and every action – but do not limit ourselves to actions that have official backing. Argue for unofficial action, including unlawful action if the anti-union laws are invoked.

### • Transform the unions

We don't want forever to be a militant minority, even if we start out as such. We need to oust the bureaucracy and dissolve it as a separate caste of officials, with elected lay members taking over its functions, so we can pursue a class struggle strategy against the bosses and government

### • Link the unions to the historic working class goal: the overthrow of capitalism and building of socialism

It is no accident that most of the union officials, left as well as right, support the Labour Party; it is, as Trotsky said, the party of the trade union bureaucracy. The rank and file needs political unions, but ones that are prepared to mobilise outside of parliament for a revolutionary change in society – and that means supporting the formation of a new workers party, a revolutionary party.



Unite's giant rat, used in leverage campaigns – as inflated as McCluskey's reputation as a left



# Royal Mail privatisation: the multi-billion pound swindle

## a CWU postal rep

THE PRIVATISATION of Royal Mail last month was not the victory for “popular capitalism” the Coalition government has crowed about. On the contrary, it was a defeat for the users and deliverers of a popular public service.

But even by their own terms, it only succeeded because the government deliberately undervalued the company so the sell-off wouldn't fail – swindling the taxpayer out of billions as hedge funds and millionaire investors cashed in.

Royal Mail was valued at £3.3 billion and shares at 330p each. On the first day of trading on 15 October the share price skyrocketed and the value of Royal Mail jumped by a jaw-dropping £1.2 billion.

When stockbrokers Panmure Gordon claimed publicly a week before the sell-off that Royal Mail was worth much more, Lib-Dem Business Secretary Vince Cable condemned them as “irresponsible”. He desperately tried to downplay the rise in value as simply “froth”.

But 10 days later it hit 555p,

and by early November peaked at 591p – 79 per cent above the initial offer. Analysts have predicted a possible 1033p share price – if “staff costs” are cut quick enough!

## Privatisation porkies punctured

Media leaks show ministers knew Royal Mail was worth far more before privatisation. Three major banks had told them the company was undervalued: Citi, Deutsche Bank and JP Morgan, with the latter saying the company could be sold for £10 billion, three times higher than it was ultimately sold for!

Privatisation was always a con, aimed at opening the postal sector completely to profit and breaking the shopfloor strength of the CWU postal union. Now it's been exposed as a financial swindle as well.

The Con-Dems preach “fiscal responsibility” with policies to pay off the deficit by crushing the poor, like the bedroom tax, which they allege will save £480 million. But this is dwarfed by the billions the sell-off has given to

their millionaire chums.

Cable has since changed his story completely, claiming that the real reason for the undervaluation was a threatened strike by postal workers; in other words the Con-Dems deliberately undersold Royal Mail. But who can now believe this scandalous liar, who has admitted misleading Parliament and the public?

Billy Hayes, leader of the CWU, has accused the Con-Dems of conducting a “conspiracy against the taxpayer” and demanded Cable's sacking. Too right – Cable should be prosecuted for deliberate fraud and thrown into jail... though the capitalist courts would never do this.

## Hedge fund locust

In another privatisation porkie, Cable and Royal Mail CEO Moya Greene emphasised they were looking for long term, “blue-chip”, “socially responsible” investors to run Royal Mail.

But on the 22 October it was revealed that the biggest private shareholder was The Children's Investment Fund (TCI), with a stake of 5.8 per cent

after “buying ferociously” in the shares market – TCI desperately wants to grab hold of Royal Mail.

The nice-sounding TCI isn't a children's charity but actually one of the world's largest hedge funds. Its billionaire boss Chris Hahn's nickname is the “locust” due to his reputation for being “ruthless with the management of the companies he invests in”, according to the *Telegraph*. As a shareholder he fought for Dutch bank ABN Amro to be broken up, forcing a global takeover battle and its sale.

The sell-off also awarded extensive shares to other speculative investment funds like Blackrock and Threadneedle. In short, it's been an asset strippers' field day.

Postal workers' fears about Royal Mail being taken over, broken up, or part-franchised have been proven well founded. Indeed Cable, in a letter to critical MPs defending the company's low sales price, stated that he believes hedge funds may still be buying into Royal Mail even at the now higher share price “in the belief that Royal Mail may be trans-

formed and modernised quicker than anticipated”.

Panmure Gordon has also stated that Royal Mail is a plum take-over target: “If things don't work out on an independent basis, it would look very cosy in the portfolio of UPS or Deutsche Post.” A takeover will become more likely if the government sells its remaining 38 per cent stake before the next election.

## Renationalise

These locusts have descended on the feast for one purpose: to break up Royal Mail and steal the potential millions in profit locked up in the jobs, conditions, and pay of postal workers. Only a strike in their defence could seriously stall this process.

In the long term the only solution is to renationalise Royal Mail – and do the same to the private competitors, like TNT and UKMail – and place an integrated postal service under workers' control.

Not a penny should be paid in compensation to the speculators. To them we should simply say: “You gambled – and you lost.”

## Restore the strikes

AS WE go to press, postal workers in the CWU remain in limbo, after union leaders cancelled the first one-day strike on 4 November in favour of talks.

There have been some concessions – improved pay and longer legal protections for terms and conditions. But the wording of the joint memorandum indicates a deepening of union collaboration in radical job cuts and workload hikes.

If we are to secure the deal we need and maintain our strong position at the heart of Royal Mail, postal workers need to strike.

Go online for an analysis of the deal and how we can win: [workerspower.co.uk/category/unions/cwu/](http://workerspower.co.uk/category/unions/cwu/)

## Was the Halloween strike scary enough?

### KD Tait

ON 31 OCTOBER, the UCU, Unison and Unite staged a 24-hour strike across higher education to force an improvement in the derisory 1 per cent pay offer. But it will take more than a one-day strike on Halloween to scare the government.

Wage restraint and pay freezes have seen a real-terms cut in pay of 13 per cent in just four years.

Meanwhile, the sector is sitting on a £1 billion surplus and average pay for vice-chancellors has hit nearly £250,000 a year.

While the strike was generally solid, the low ballot turnout and diminished picket lines reflected the betrayal of the 2011 pensions dispute.

### Students

Students have not been immune to this process of demobilisation. Although Oxford, Sussex, Sheffield and SOAS all staged occupations of varying size and duration, student support was in general limited to the organised left and a few student unions and sabbatical officers.

While the National Campaign Against Fees

and Cuts carries out some effective actions against the privatisation of tuition fee loans, the absence of campus-based anti-cuts committees limits its effectiveness on a national level.

Nevertheless, joint action of this kind is welcome. We have become more used to hearing about coordinated action than seeing it these last two years.

But with the government forcing through its pro-market reforms in primary, secondary and further education, the privatisation of the Royal Mail already a fact on the ground and the sell-off of parts of the NHS fast becoming irreversible, a larger coordination is needed if we are to stop the Con-Dem coalition picking off each sector at a time.

A prolonged campaign of one-day strikes, even if it leads to minor concessions, could demoralise those fighting to defend jobs and education. Union militants and students should organise for a second strike – this time a strike to win.

Longer strikes, more closely strung together, escalating in duration and backed by appeals for solidarity, are needed to win. Cross-union strike committees, supported by students, should organise the campaign, deciding the nature of the strike, and when it ends.

## The NUT and the Grand ol' Duke of York – or escalate the action!

### Bernie McAdam

TEACHERS FROM both main unions have overwhelmingly supported a series of regional strikes against Education Secretary Michael Gove's attacks on pay, pensions and workload. This action was meant to be a forerunner to a national strike before Christmas.

But now the NUT leadership has decided to call off further action for the promise of talks with Gove. Teachers will feel with a justified sense of déjà vu that they have, in the words of the nursery rhyme, been marched up to the top of the hill and down again!

The NUT and Nasuwt have welcomed confirmation that Gove “is willing to discuss a basis for genuine talks” on teachers' concerns. If talks don't progress we have been assured that joint national strike action will be called no later than 13 February.

This is just not good enough! We are kicking the can down the road again. Our leaders have a history of stalling and delaying. This “cunning plan” invariably leaves us in a weaker position – as happened in 2012 with our defeat in the pensions dispute.

Gove has made it abundantly clear where he stands. In September he wrote that talks would be possible “about the implementation of these changes” only. He has given no hint at all that he will step back from any of his attacks.

This is just a ruse for Gove to defuse our campaign. Union leaders do not see action as anything other than an elaborate protest. There is no other strategy for victory other than “negotiations”.

Meanwhile the Tories are already half way down the road of smashing up our comprehensive education system. We should be escalating the action not calling it off!

A new strategy is needed. Teacher reps should call meetings in their areas to protest. Joint union strike committees should be formed in every school. If the union leaders refuse to act, then we must be prepared to coordinate unofficial action.



# After the Grangemouth defeat – stop the rout

By Jeremy Dewar

UNITE – THE biggest union in Britain with 1.3 million members – has accepted the most humiliating terms of surrender to Ineos, owners of the Grangemouth refinery and petrochemicals plant. Ineos workers' pay will be frozen until 2017 – in effect this means three years of falling real wages. There will be a three-year no-strike deal. The final salary pension scheme will be scrapped. And union conveners will lose facility time.

This defeat is the very worst sort of defeat – a defeat without a fight, giving a green light to every aggressive boss in Britain. If an exceptionally skilled workforce like that at Grangemouth, a union like Unite with 1.3 million members and a left-talking general secretary, Len McCluskey, can be brought to their knees so easily, then managers everywhere will be tempted to do the same.

## Ineos blackmail

Ineos' offensive began in July when it suspended one of Unite's two conveners at the plant, Stevie Deans, on a charge of using company facilities for union and Labour Party business. The union balloted for an overtime ban, work-to-rule and two-day strike. They got a Yes vote.

The strike was due to commence on 20 October. Ineos' response was to close the plant on the 14th, laying off over the next two weeks 2,000 contractors and threatening the livelihood of 1,370 employees, plus the 10,000 people in the locality who depend on the plant for their living.

Encouraged by the Unite leadership's unpreparedness and lack of guts, Ineos issued an ultimatum: accept a three-year pay freeze, the closing of their final salary pensions scheme (which had survived only due to a successful strike back in 2008) and agree to a three-month no-strike clause. Until Unite and the workforce signed away their pay, terms and rights, the plant would remain closed.

Meanwhile Ineos claimed to be losing £10 million a month at the plant, though a Unite accountant showed that this was deceitful and that, discounting costs of investment (as is the usual accounting practice), it in fact made £6 million and £7 million profit in the last two years.



Grangemouth workers will have to return to work knowing their union has been terribly weakened

On top of that, Ineos recently negotiated a £9 million grant from the Scottish government and a £125 million loan guarantee from the UK government (plus a subsidy from BP) to help pay for the £300 million gas plant it now wants the workers to pay for. Hardly the actions of a company contemplating closure. The union should simply have said: "We don't believe you – open the books to the workers' inspection."

Despite all this, plus the chorus from the media and politicians, from nationalist Alex Salmond to Tory David Cameron, demanding a climb-down, the workers and their shop stewards bravely campaigned for a No vote. Indeed over half the workforce and nearly two-thirds of those affected – 665 workers – rejected the plan on Monday 21 October.

Ineos retaliated by announcing the permanent closure of the plant two days later.

What followed was an utter disgrace to trade unionism and a betrayal of the workforce. "Socialist" general secretary and darling of most of the left, Len McCluskey, accepted all of Ineos' demands and "embraced" a deal that extended the strike ban from three months to three years.

## Rank and file alternative

Jerry Hicks, who gained 36 per cent of the vote against Len

McCluskey in the Unite general secretary election earlier this year, was quoted by the *Financial Times* as saying, this was "botched from the very beginning" and "ended in surrender". He is absolutely right.

Unite should have called for the immediate occupation of the plant as soon as the lock out was threatened in mid-October. When its members were called on to close down the refinery, with the union's backing they could have refused and the workforce could have seized control of the equipment and the plant.

Flying pickets and solidarity action around Britain's other refineries would soon have had an effect in the petrol stations across the country. From this position of strength – reinforced by the coming referendum on independence – Unite should have demanded that the British and Scottish governments nationalise Grangemouth, and that the Labour Party and the TUC support the workers.

Workers could have demanded that no compensation be paid to a parasite like Ratcliffe, one of the 10 richest people in the UK, whose company HQ moved to Switzerland to avoid tax.

In return for all the millions that Unite donates to Labour, this was the opportunity to call on Ed Miliband to back the nationalisation of

Grangemouth.

## Stopping the rout

A number of people on the left – particularly from the *Morning Star* and *Counterfire* stables – have argued that noting else could be done; the workforce

was not "straining at the leash for action". Bankrupt leaders and their journalistic and academic apologists always resort to blaming the membership.

Others, like Richard Seymour in *The Guardian*, provide another alibi – the power of

neoliberal ideological hegemony. Such clever-clever stuff can be debated by those who have nothing better to do. Militants in the workplaces faced with a confident boss class on the offensive will have to look for practical solutions not defeatist consolation.

The only way we can stop the rout in Unite (and other unions whose leaders are presently panicking) is to build a rank and file movement capable of wresting control of the union from its present leaders.

Starting in every workplace, including Grangemouth, this means a campaign to rebuild shopfloor organisation and militancy, with the goal taking unofficial action whenever the officials prevaricate or sell out, as well as defying the anti-union laws whenever they block effective and democratically agreed action.

It also means fighting for democracy in the union: replacing the union's army of unelected and unaccountable full-timers with elected lay officers and officials, the latter paid the average wage of the members they represent.

This is the urgent task of Unite Grassroots Rank & File, the militant organisation set up in the wake of Hicks' campaign.

## Grassroots Rank & File

By Marcus Halaby

A new rank and file grouping in Britain's largest and most important trade union, Unite, will be founded by a conference to be held in February or March next year.

This was decided by a constructive meeting of Unite members in the SWP and the Grassroots Left, with observers from Workers Power and the International Socialist Network present.

A 70-strong national meeting back in May, held in the aftermath of Jerry Hick's election campaign, had elected a steering committee, but this was the first time it had actually met. Despite the delay and obvious frustration at the slow pace, there is now a sense of purpose to the project.

The recent betrayal of the 1,400-strong workforce at

Grangemouth injected a degree of seriousness and urgency, with the meeting agreeing to launch a nationwide speaking tour by Jerry Hicks entitled: "Where now for the unions after Grangemouth?"

The meeting also agreed to change the name to "Unite Grass Roots Rank & File", and to publicise Hicks' speaking tour at the Unite sector conferences in November.

There is every possibility that that this tour could draw hundreds of trade union militants, mainly but not only in Unite, who are looking for answers in the current climate.

Despite recent retreats, there are and will continue to be dozens of disputes up and down the country, with workers taking some confidence from the limited economic recovery and eager to make sure they claw back at least some of what they lost in the recession.

On the other hand, some bosses will attempt to "do a

Ratcliffe" and use the recovery as an excuse to restructure their workforces, tying new investment to demands for further give-backs. In public services, where Unite has tens of thousands of members – in the NHS, on the buses, in local authorities, etc. – still face year-on-year austerity.

With the "left" bureaucrats being exposed as having little to offer beyond the occasional one-day strike, there could be a lot of interest in a real rank and file alternative.

Now is the time to relaunch Unite Grassroots Rank & File – and to emulate it in other unions, especially Unison and the GMB. The task of transforming the unions cannot be completed in one union alone but requires the cross-fertilisation of experience and ideas across the unions and their unity in action.



# Tories' Immigration Bill is anti-working class

Rebecca Anderson

THE TORIES' controversial new Immigration Bill passed through its second reading by 303 votes to 18 on 22 October, despite speculation that Labour might oppose it.

The Bill's main proposals are to:

- Make temporary residents like students pay for NHS treatment.
- Reduce the number of grounds for appeal against deportation.
- Require landlords, banks, clergy and the DVLA to check people's immigration status.
- Allow for people convicted of a crime to be deported before appeal.
- Require British citizens to earn at least £20,000 per year to be able to marry non-EU nationals.

Home Secretary Theresa May defended the Bill, saying that it would clamp down on illegal immigrants who "take advantage of our services".

It aims to win back lost Tory votes by being seen to be tough, but it also makes it more difficult for migrants to assert their legal rights against the state.

The proposal to remove the right of the bottom half of society to marry non-EU citizens is the Bill's most transparently anti-working class measure. But reading between the lines, it is clear that its overall aim is to allow the state much tighter control over who can live in the UK, allowing better-off immigrants to stay, and making it quicker and easier to deport working class people from non-EU countries.

Turning landlords, bank managers and vicars into de facto immigration officers gives the government more

## The facts about immigration and asylum

- Only 9 to 13 per cent of Britain's population were born abroad.
- UN estimates indicate that only one-fifth of refugees globally are in "developed" countries.
- Around 1,000 children are held in deportation prisons every year.
- Asylum seekers do not have access to the mainstream benefit system.
- Instead, a parallel system provides them with £36.62 a week, just 52 per cent of Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Surviving on £5.23 a day puts asylum seekers well below the UK poverty line.
- Immigrants make a net contribution to the UK economy of £3 billion.



The government revived the National Front's racist 'Go Home' slogan from the 1970s on vans like this one. They have since been withdrawn.

power and control over the country's borders, but also creates an increasingly hostile environment for migrants.

May's recent "Go Home Now" vans were subjected to ridicule for being an ill-conceived media stunt, but they demonstrate the sort of social attitudes that the current Home Secretary wants to promote. Outsourcing firm Capita sent almost 40,000 "Leave the UK" texts on the government's behalf to people suspected of overstaying their visas. Recently, May had to drop proposals to make Asian and African migrants pay a £3,000 deposit for a six-month visa.

## Labour's cowardly role

Labour is supporting the Bill through parliament but Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has criticised it mainly for not dealing with "exploitation of immigration in the workplace", effectively side-stepping the real issues at stake.

Labour leader Ed Miliband gave credence to anti-immigrant arguments in June last year by saying that the Labour government made a "mistake" in not imposing "transitional controls" on the ten mainly East European countries that joined the EU in 2004.

Trying to paint Labour as the party of the people, Cooper has proposed the following amendments to the Bill:

- Banning employers and recruitment agencies from recruiting "foreigner-only" shifts.
- Banning the use of tied accommodation to offset the minimum wage.
- Setting fines of up to £30,000 for employing illegal immigrants.

Labour's amendments are again aimed at attacking immigrants rather than defending them against the Tories' racist proposals.

Although these measures, if implemented, do address some of the worst aspects of employer exploitation of migrants, by stopping employers from

segregating workers or forcing them to live in "tied" slum accommodation, they could potentially push migrants further into poverty and black market employment.

This would not prevent the undercutting of the minimum wage, but would merely reinforce the power of dodgy employers, who might be willing to risk a £30,000 fine to pay migrants £2 an hour.

The solution to poverty wages is to increase the minimum wage to a decent level and to enforce it. Similarly, the removal of immigration controls would undermine the power that gang-masters and other dodgy employers have over migrant workers.

The president of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), speaking at its annual conference, condemned "factually incorrect, emotive debates around immigration". The stance of the bosses' most influential lobbying organisation is pro-EU and for immigration that "benefits business". They essentially want Britain to attract skilled and educated workers from abroad, to make up for the mass of young people excluded from university education by high tuition fees.

Instead of defending the rights of all people to move where they want to, just as capital moves freely across borders, Labour is pandering to these sorts of demands.

## The real story

A recent study by University College London confirmed that immigrants have made a "substantial" contribution to public finances since 2000, and that recent immigrants were less likely to claim benefits or live in social housing than people born in Britain.

Those from the European Economic Area (EEA) contributed 34 per cent more in taxes than they received in benefits in the decade to 2011, while

immigrants from outside the EEA contributed 2 per cent more than they received in the same period.

The Home Office's own research shows that asylum seekers lack a detailed knowledge of the UK benefits system, effectively debunking the popular myth that "bogus" asylum seekers come here to claim benefits.

In fact, most people that come to the UK are fleeing poverty, war and other disasters created by an international order that allows countries like Britain to plunder the resources of their countries.

The Immigration Bill is a racist attack on migrants, as well as an attack on the civil liberties and living standards of workers in general. But there is no political party in Britain making this argument; they all just ape the UK Independence Party (UKIP) as soon as the word "immigration" is uttered.

We need a party that stands firmly for the following:

- Against immigration controls, which are inherently racist: open the borders!
- For a strictly enforced living minimum wage.
- For the right of any consenting couple to marriage or civil partnership.
- Against all NHS charges, for health-care free at the point of delivery.
- Against deportations, no-one should be forcibly removed from the country.
- For equal rights for all residing in the UK.
- For an amnesty and for citizenship for all "illegal" immigrants.
- Against police "racial profiling" spot checks.
- For international working class solidarity.
- For a socialist society free of the poverty and war that drives people to leave their homes and families to start a new life in a hostile environment.

## Super typhoon highlights climate threat

James Copley

AS WE GO TO press, the death toll from the super typhoon Haiyan is rapidly mounting in the Philippines as it smashed through the Pacific nation. Deaths are reported to have topped 10,000, yet the true count is still far from complete.

The typhoon has wrought destruction across the islands. With wind speeds reaching 140 to 170 mph, this makes it one of the most powerful storms on record. Nearly the entirety of the city of Tacloban (population 220,000) has been flattened by huge storm surges.

Large parts of the country are without communications, hampering relief efforts and preventing their effective coordination.

This disaster is hitting a region that is still recovering from a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that hit last month.

Moreover, climate scientists predict that as the global climate warms there will be more such "extreme weather" incidents of even greater intensity. This is the price we are paying for capitalism's excessive pollution of the planet.

The particular cruelty of Haiyan, however, is that extreme tropical storms nearly always strike semi-colonial countries, those with the least resources to protect and rebuild afterwards.

It is likely that the coming days and weeks will see a coordinated international relief effort for the region. This should be paid for entirely by the imperialist nations and also the transnational petrochemicals giant that, standing above national jurisdictions, further the destruction of our planet.

But it also indicates how vital the struggle against capitalism's climate change is, especially as governments use the economic crisis as an excuse for dropping or downsizing their green budgets.



# Revolution and counter-revolution in the Arab world

In the first part of a two part article, **Marcus Halaby** examines the regional and international context of the Arab Revolutions, the role played by the crisis of leadership, and the need for working class political independence in the form of a revolutionary workers' party, making the case for the strategy of permanent revolution

THE RUSSIAN revolutionary Lenin, approvingly quoting Karl Kautsky, once described the epoch of imperialism as being "an epoch of wars, revolutions, and the proletariat's struggle for power". And so it has proved to be. Almost every decade of the last century has seen revolutionary upheavals take place in one or another part of the world, each of them teaching new lessons to a new generation of revolutionaries willing to study and learn from them.

Referring to the revolution that began in Russia in February 1917, Lenin says elsewhere that "during a revolution, millions and tens of millions of people learn in a week more than they do in a year of ordinary, somnolent life", a statement related to his earlier observation that the aim of revolutionary tactics is "the ability to find practical solutions for great tasks in the great days, in which 20 years are embodied".

And this is precisely the point. Revolutions are no mere changes in government, whether "violent" or "constitutional". They are events defined by the entry of the masses into political life, or as Lenin puts it, "a sharp turn in the life of an entire people" in which "it becomes particularly clear what aims the various classes of the people are pursuing, what strength they possess, and what methods they use".

The "Arab Spring", the as yet uncompleted revolutions in the Arab world that began in January 2011, display all of these features. Striking at five "republican" quasi-hereditary dictatorships (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen) and one semi-absolutist monarchy (Bahrain), that all had the appearance of permanence only weeks beforehand, this has been the greatest wave of revolutions to take place since the triumph of neoliberalism in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, they have been the first revolutions to take place since the global financial and economic crisis brought about by neoliberal globalisation's inner contradictions in 2008.

## The Tunisian spark

The opening salvo, the overthrow of Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, famously began with the self-immolation on 17 December 2010 of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor brought to despair by the confiscation of his goods and scales by a corrupt local official. Initial protests at his treatment in his hometown of Sidi Bouzid were met with police violence, provoking further protest suicides and the spread of demonstrations to Menzel Bouzaiane and other small towns in the region, which in

turn were met with lethal force. This spread the protests even further, to Sbikha, Meknassy, Thala, Chebba, Monastir, Gafsa, Sousse, Sfax and finally to the capital, Tunis.

The initial protesters raised demands attacking hunger, unemployment and inflation, but were quickly joined by trade unionists, students, teachers and lawyers, raising political demands around corruption, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and police brutality. The demand for "dignity", a word that would later be repeated in the slogans of protesters in Syria, Egypt and elsewhere, expressed the decades-long pent-up frustration of "ordinary" citizens with their casual humiliation by the state, with officials who routinely demanded bribes and with police officers that harassed, arrested and beat up an alienated generation of youth without cause and with impunity.

The social causes of the masses' discontent are therefore plain: their impoverishment and dispossession by two decades of neoliberalism, exacerbated by a global economic crisis. Most visible of all has been the alienation of a generation of youth that had received a university education with a society in which there was no prospect of their ever being able to make use of it.

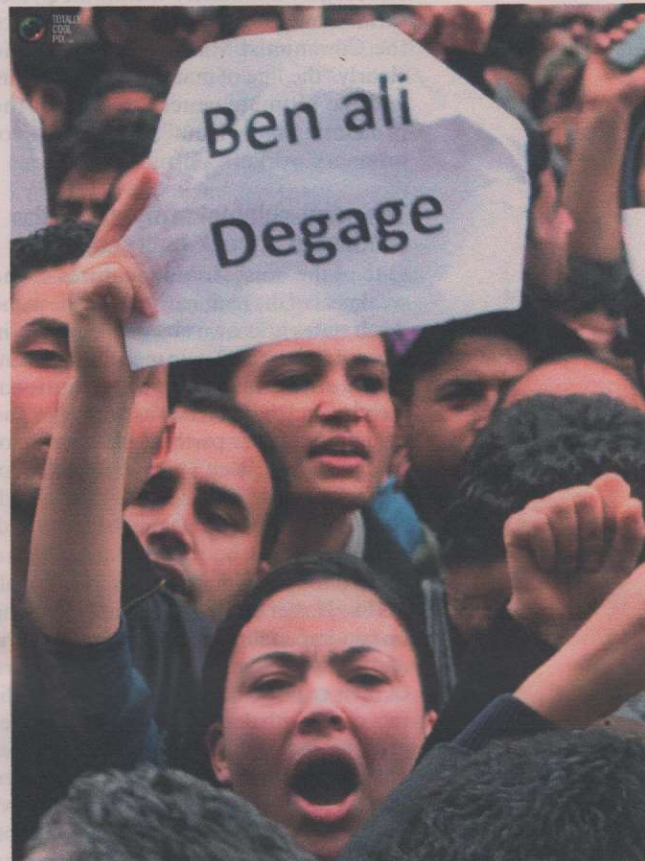
But the demands that brought "the whole people", or at least the illusion of it, into the streets were demands classically associated with the establishment of bourgeois democratic systems: for genuine political pluralism, the "rule of law", the accountability of the state to its citizens, for freedom from arbitrary treatment and harassment by the state's repressive organs.

Even so, and crucially, it was the action of the urban working class that proved decisive in provoking divisions within the state apparatus and in forcing Ben Ali's flight from the country on 14 January, in particular the decision of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) to take part in the protests.

## The Egyptian detonator

The same pattern would be repeated less than two weeks later in Egypt. There, a broad and amorphous "civil society" had already been active for over a decade under the rule of dictator Hosni Mubarak, initially emerging out of a campaign for solidarity with the second Palestinian Intifada of September 2000, and sustaining itself through popular opposition to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

For a period in the mid-2000s, this civil society's most public face was "Kefaya", the Egyptian Movement for Change, which



"Clear out Ben Ali" – the spontaneous slogan of the Tunisian revolution, but which did not specify what should replace him

like oppositional Egyptian civil society as a whole drew support from both Islamists and from the Marxist left, but primarily from secular liberals and Nasserist secular nationalists. Its principal focus of activity had been around calls for democratic reform, opposing Mubarak's May 2005 constitutional referendum, and protesting the sham presidential elections that took place in September of that year.

By early 2011, however, Kefaya had already gone into decline, being eclipsed by a range of "youth movements", of which the most well-known would be the April 6 Youth Movement. And one major focus for these organisations' practical activity would be protests against police violence and brutality, in particular, the June 2010 murder in police custody of 28 year old computer programming student Khaled Saeed.

The publication on Facebook of an image of Saeed's badly beaten body by Dubai-based Google marketing executive and blogger Wael Ghonim would be the catalyst for the calling of protests on 25 January 2011. This was both Egypt's National Police Day and the six-month anniversary of the original Alexandria-based protest at

Saeed's death that was led by Egyptian liberal politician and former diplomat Mohamed ElBaradei.

Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations nationwide on the "Day of Anger" on 25 January, quickly escalating to hundreds of thousands by the "Friday of Anger" on 28 January. In Cairo's central Tahrir Square, demonstrators burnt down the headquarters of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and ignored a government curfew, while protesters in Suez seized the city's police station.

The state would now have to deploy the army in place of the hated and discredited police to "keep order". But it was not just the fraternisation of the soldiers with the millions of people on the street (creating with it the popular illusion that "the army and the people are one hand") that convinced the generals to force Mubarak's resignation on 11 February, but also the emergence and spread of a mass strike movement.

And here, the prior emergence of a "new" and semi-legal union movement in industrial cities like Mahalla El-Kubra, independent of the state and NDP-controlled official unions, was crucial in ensuring the emergence of the Egyptian working class as an at least potentially independent actor. The building of this movement was in part the initiative of far left groups like the Revolutionary Socialists, a group linked to Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

## The Arab 'Spring'

The use of the term "Spring" to describe a wave of spontaneous uprisings, each setting off the one after it drew from commentators an analogy with the European revolutions of 1848. Here we should recall the salutary lesson that, while these uprisings went through various stages or waves, not reaching their final exhaustion until 1850-51, none of them accomplished the fundamental objectives that revolutionaries like Marx had hoped for from them.

After setbacks and renewals of the struggle they ended in counter-revolutionary restorations, albeit that "nothing would ever be the same again", and the great objectives of democracy, national unity, and workers' rights were the subjects of reforms and revolutions over the next half-century and more.

If Tunisia's uprising was the spark, then Egypt's was the detonator. In Yemen, a weak state beset by secessionist movements north and south, never fully in control of its neglected "tribal" periphery, and with its sovereignty and credibility undermined



by US drone strikes on alleged “terrorists” operating from its territory, saw protests break out in its capital Sana’a demanding the removal of president Ali Abdullah Saleh on 27 January.

In Bahrain, a semi-absolutist monarchy that had survived a previous uprising between 1994 and 2001 saw this movement’s re-emergence on 14 February.

Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi’s hysterical broadcast response to Ben Ali’s overthrow would be vindicated on 17 February, as popular protests in Libya’s second city Benghazi quickly escalated into a stale-mated armed uprising.

And finally, in Syria on 15 March, the arrest and torture of 15 schoolchildren in Daraa for writing anti-government graffiti provoked a series of mass protests across the country that would continue, despite president Bashar al-Assad’s promises of “reform”, and his security forces’ attempts to shoot them off the streets.

### **Bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the epoch of imperialism**

Here it is necessary to take a step back and examine the bigger picture. As previously noted, the initial tasks of both the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, and of the revolutions inspired by them elsewhere, have been those of establishing “democratic” systems, and are therefore the tasks of what Marxists refer to as the “bourgeois-democratic revolution”.

In their original form in Western Europe and in North America, revolutions of this sort were associated with the rise and consolidation of the capitalist order, and were either led by the capitalists (the “bourgeoisie”) themselves, or by elements drawn from those less wealthy but still “property-tying” classes (the “petit bourgeoisie”) who by their actions paved the way for bourgeois democracy, a relatively stable form of capitalist rule, one that obscures the realities of class rule under the outward appearance of “government of the people, by the people, for the people”.

The Arab democratic revolutions, however, have arisen a hundred years and more into the epoch of imperialism, a system in which the capitalist mode of production already encompasses almost the entire planet; in which the bourgeoisies of a handful of imperialist states dictate to the rest of the world the form and pace of their economic and social development; and in societies in which the native bourgeoisie is too weak (in the face of foreign imperialism and the remnants of pre-capitalist ruling classes), and too afraid of “the people” (and in particular, of the urban working class, the proletariat), to give any effective lead to “its own” revolution.

### **The proletariat as the leading class of the nation**

It therefore falls to the proletariat, the revolutionary class created by capitalism itself, to assume the role played in the “classical” bourgeois revolutions by the bourgeoisie or its agents, of leading and completing the democratic revolution and of making its achievements permanent. This, in turn, requires it to achieve for itself political independence as a class.

But while the proletariat is therefore called upon by historic conditions to lead all the various other oppressed classes

behind it, like the “revolutionary” bourgeoisie in the period of capitalism’s rise before it, it cannot take on this leading role without pressing its own demands, which prompt it objectively to threaten the overthrow of capitalism itself. To achieve this, however, requires that it become the subjective, that is, conscious agent of social revolution.

The completion of the democratic revolution therefore requires the revolution to advance from democratic tasks to socialist tasks, in order to avoid its own ultimate defeat. But this cannot be the inevitable result of any spontaneous “process”. It must be fought for first consciously, by a minority within the proletariat’s own ranks who, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, understand clearly “the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement”, in short a revolutionary workers’ party.

### **The semi-colonial army-state: the product of a weak bourgeoisie**

One of the most striking features of the weakness of the national bourgeoisie in the Arab states is its own abject prostration in front of a dictatorial state machine that consumes such a large part of the national income, and that defends its privileges and its political power partly at the expense of the bourgeoisie itself. This is the problem of Bonapartism, from which few if any Arab states (perhaps only Lebanon) have escaped.

Even when the “Bonapartes” who headed these regimes were Arab nationalists like Nasser or the young Gaddafi, strong on anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric and wildly popular with the masses, the core of their regimes has always been the military caste, with democratic liberties (especially for independent unions or the parties of the left) virtually non-existent. Moreover, they all rapidly outgrew their radical “revolutionary” origins, turning into corrupt, parasitic and stiflingly repressive regimes, often effecting a transfer from an anti-US to pro-US stance in the process. Civil society – even its bourgeois élite – has remained weak and incapable of ousting these egregious “praetorian guards”.

In Mubarak’s Egypt, neither of the two major wings of the bourgeoisie, neither the Islamists nor the “secular liberals”, have proved capable of standing up to the power of the military. There, the army, boosted by the US military and economic aid that is its reward for maintaining a reactionary peace treaty with Israel, is an economic power in its own right, controlling a vast empire of enterprises that are estimated to control up to 40 per cent of the country’s economy.

Similarly, in Assad’s Syria, a bloated military and security apparatus, ostensibly there to defend the country against Israel, and recruited partly on the basis of kinship and sectarian affiliation, stands violently and menacingly “above” society as a whole.

In both cases, the upper ranks of the state apparatus are partly incorporated into the bourgeoisie, either “legally” or through various forms of corruption, and possess through the state a network for distributing patronage to a wider base of support located in the more plebeian classes. This gives this “army-state bourgeoisie” the ability to dominate the bourgeoisie as a whole,



Days of Hope – Tahrir Square, Cairo on 10 February 2011

unproductively extracting rents from it while blackmailing it with the threat of social chaos in the event that the “private” bourgeoisie tries to clip its wings or curb its excesses.

### **Imperialism and semi-colonial subordination**

This, in turn, is not just the product of internal dynamics, but of these countries’ position within the global system. The domination of world markets by the bourgeoisies of the imperialist countries, and their use of international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to manipulate these markets in their favour, ensures that the “private” bourgeoisie cannot simply “trade its way out” of its semi-colonial subordination to them, even when, as in the case of the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, it is in possession of a strategic global commodity.

The bourgeoisie is therefore obliged to compensate for its own weakness by conceding to the state part of its own historic role, of developing strong national markets by acting as a forcing-house for the creation of national monopolies.

In turn, the state develops an ideology that it disseminates to society as a whole, according to which the army itself is the “representative of the people”, and therefore a source of political legitimacy in its own right. A bellicose but empty “nationalism” forms a key part of this ideology, even though the army’s actual record in defending the country’s national independence often contains very little to boast about.

### **The need to smash the state’s organs of repression**

The failure of the initial uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia to decisively break this state

apparatus in the process therefore allowed the core of the old regimes, the so-called “feloul” or “remnants”, to remain in existence, taking the opportunity to regroup to defend their own long-term preservation partly by assuming the legitimacy of the revolutions that overthrew the tyrants that they themselves previously served.

One reason for this lay in the self-limiting “peaceful” tactics of square occupations, and the “army and the people are one hand” agitation that the young revolutionaries picked up from their liberal (and libertarian) mentors in the US and Europe (Gene Sharpe at al). The “older” revolutionary models like Bolshevism, so scorned by these people, had better advice: that if the rank and file of the soldiers could not be detached from the officer caste and the high command then the “regime” whose downfall the people wished would in fact survive the retirement of its ruling figurehead and his family. Events in Egypt and to some extent in Tunisia and Yemen have confirmed this.

In Syria, by contrast, the totalitarian state’s repressive apparatus did not eject its figurehead in the interests of its own self-preservation, but merely haemorrhaged, as a flood of individual defectors from the country’s conscript army began to form the core of an amorphous and poorly-equipped “armed opposition” to the Ba’athist regime, loosely grouped together in the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

There, the domestic bourgeoisie, itself partly dependent for its wealth on its maintenance of a corrupt relationship with the state, has remained solidly behind the Assad regime, thereby reinforcing its own subjection to it. Its “oppositional” cousins in exile have tried to compensate for their own weakness and inability to influence events on the ground by appealing to the Western





imperialist powers for support, vainly pleading with them to intervene militarily on their behalf.

They are cowed not just by the Assad regime's almost unlimited capacity for violence against its own people, but also by the fear that the masses, having armed themselves in self-defence, will prove unwilling to return to "normal" conditions in the event that they overthrow the Assad regime by their own efforts.

### **A crisis of leadership allows Egypt's generals to steal the revolution**

As noted above, the preservation of the core of the Mubarak regime allowed the Egyptian generals to manage the transition to a "constitutional" system, holding a constitutional referendum in March 2011 that paved the way for parliamentary elections between November 2011 and February 2012, and presidential elections in May and June 2012. In the course of these, Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists (and the British SWP with them) made the grave error of calling for a vote for the Muslim Brotherhood, violating the key principle of preserving working class political independence in the process.

As a mass organisation with a petit bourgeois religious ideology drawing support from all classes of society, the Brotherhood could not avoid the influence of the mass anti-Mubarak protests on its own mass base. It was the spontaneous participation in these protests of a part of this mass base, against the advice of their own leaders, which forced its leaders to half-heartedly throw their weight behind them. A socialist policy should have sought to widen this contradiction between the Brotherhood's leadership and its mass base, rather than allow its leadership to try to overcome it by

encouraging illusions in its democratic and popular character.

In the absence of any independent working class leadership, political initiative therefore fell to the only organised mass forces in existence: the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the former's association with Mubarak's regime, and the latter's belated and reluctant participation in the 25 January revolution. Here, secular bourgeois "liberals" like ElBaradei could play only a supporting role, seeing in the Egyptian generals a guarantee against any threat to "secular values" from the Brotherhood or its Salafist allies.

A deeply undemocratic "constitutional" process that kept intact the prerogatives of the military and sought to maintain its independence from an elected parliament and presidency saw the military hand purely formal political power to a Brotherhood-dominated parliament and a Brotherhood president, Mohamed Morsi.

The Muslim Brotherhood's leadership was happy to go along with this charade, seeing in it the prospect of a long-term Turkish-style military-Islamist alliance to restore capitalist stability. The generals, however, were far less enthusiastic, and merely bided their time, allowing feloul elements within the police to sabotage the Morsi government's attempts to impose its authority, as a test of its will. Mysterious "shortages" of fuel and other staple commodities also indicated an attempt at economic sabotage by the military or by pro-military elements within the bourgeoisie.

Seeking to improve his credibility with that wing of the Egyptian bourgeoisie that either supported the Brotherhood or was willing to tolerate its presence in government, Morsi's capitalist government tried to strike at the only real gains of the democratic revolution established so far: the

rights to protest, to strike, to organise and to express political opinion.

Morsi's authoritarianism, the Brotherhood's hostility to Coptic Christians and other minorities, its imposition of austerity measures to placate the IMF and its clumsy affronts to secularism all combined to produce a mass movement for Morsi's resignation that brought up to 17 million people onto the streets on 30 June 2013.

The generals took this opportunity to stage a coup to "defend the revolution", arresting Morsi on 3 July and appointing a new military junta led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. For the second time running, the military stole the legitimacy of popular protests to seize power for itself. This time, however, the army would kill hundreds in order to crush the Brotherhood's mass base, hoping in this way to kill the revolution itself.

We can hardly condemn the masses that came out onto the streets against Morsi for this outcome; for any revolutionary, the revolutionary people are just as entitled to overthrow an "elected" government as any other. But we certainly can and should condemn those spineless "liberals" who supported Sisi's coup, and who continue to support his attempts to crush the revolution.

And it is a lesson that needs to be learned that the Egyptian revolution's fatal weakness has been precisely that feature that many on the international left have celebrated as a strength: its lack of leadership.

An amorphous movement with the simple and negative slogan "the people demand the downfall of the regime" has been able "bring down" two presidents in succession, but without transferring power into the hands of the people on either occasion.

The absence of a mass revolutionary workers' party has ensured once again that political power, or the prospect of it, can pass only into the hands of those mass forces organised and coherent enough to wield it, thereby allowing reactionaries to fill the resulting breach.

### **The changing regional 'Arab system'**

None of these events, however, should be seen in national isolation: Sisi's repression has emboldened the Assad regime's bloodlust, and Assad's chemical weapons strike on the Ghouta suburbs east of Damascus on 21 August 2013 gave Sisi an opportunity to intensify his killings of pro-Morsi protesters.

Moreover, the pre-revolutionary Arab dictatorships collectively formed part of a regional system, one shaped by its place in the global imperialist order. Within this system, Israel played the role of US imperialism's watchdog and enforcer, using its military power to punish any Arab regime that transgressed its permitted boundaries within this system, and cutting down to size any state that threatened to break Israel's monopoly as the dominant regional power.

Turkey, as a NATO member and as an Israeli military ally, helped to contain "nationalist" Arab regimes like Syria's and Iraq's, while Saudi Arabia's oil wealth was used to fund reactionary movements (not all of them "Islamic") across the Arab world, and to prop up dictatorships like

Mubarak's and Ben Ali's.

The oil-rich Arab Gulf states as a whole acted as a regional social "safety valve", taking in migrant workers and otherwise under-employed professionals from the poorer and more populous Arab states, and beyond. This "safety valve" could be turned on and off, rewarding friendly regimes and punishing others, as with Saudi Arabia's expulsion of Yemeni nationals in response to Yemen's support for Saddam's Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait.

This regional system came into existence during the Cold War, and included a role for Soviet-backed "nationalist" regimes in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Algeria. The 1979 Iranian revolution disrupted it by overthrowing the Shah, US imperialism's other great pillar of regional stability, prompting the US to encourage Saddam Hussein's 1980 invasion of Iran, in the hope that Iran and Iraq would exhaust each other in the destructive eight years of war that followed. Egypt's military under Sadat and Mubarak received billions in military aid annually to maintain the 1978 Camp David Accords that marked the official end of Egypt's 30-year state of war with Israel.

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq disrupted this system even further, unintentionally strengthening Iran's position as a regional power by making the US dependent on pro-Iranian Shia politicians to ensure Iraq's pacification. And the election of Turkey's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in November 2002 has seen Turkey move away from Israel and develop regional ambitions of its own, clashing publicly with Israel over the attack on the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" in May 2010.

### **The rebalancing of regional actors, and the need for internationalism**

The Arab revolutions have thrown up new challenges to this regional system. Oil-rich Qatar, the most apparently "stable" Gulf autocracy, allowed its pet television station Al Jazeera to act as the "voice" of the Arab revolutions, loudly cheering the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, and playing a key role in agitating for NATO's intervention into the civil war that took place in Libya between the February 2011 Benghazi uprising and Gaddafi's overthrow six months later.

Qatar is now effectively competing with Saudi Arabia for the role of chief political and financial sponsor of the pro-Western Arab regimes. In place of Saudi Arabia's preference for preserving apparently strong but now visibly brittle dictatorships, Qatar hopes to become godfather to somewhat more flexible and durable pro-Western pseudo-democracies. This Saudi-Qatari rivalry is at its most visible in Egypt, where the Saudis supported the overthrow of Morsi, and where Sisi's dictatorship closed down Al Jazeera's local affiliates.

All the same, Qatar did not oppose, and indeed took part in the March 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) intervention in support of Bahrain's monarchy, as its quid pro quo for NATO's intervention in Libya.

And this all takes place in the context of heightened inter-imperialist rivalry and the decline of US hegemony that George W Bush and Tony Blair's wars on Afghanistan and Iraq were meant to offset. Russia has recovered from the weakened state that



followed its crisis-ridden restoration of capitalism in the 1990s, while China, whose capitalist restoration took a very different form, is now, like Russia, a rising imperialist power with global pretensions. China now already imports more crude oil from Saudi Arabia than the US does.

This in turn has produced a Russian and Chinese challenge to US power in a region that had effectively been the USA's uncontested sphere of influence after the end of the Cold War.

Arab nationalism in its most radical phases, taking advantage of the existence of a common national language (for all the regional differences in its spoken form), rejected the borders imposed by the European colonialists who carved up the region after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The European powers subjected the region to the same process that afflicted the Balkans in the nineteenth and early 20th century. Followed by the Communist parties (who rapidly became Stalinists), the idea of an Arab nation inescapably suggested the idea of a single state or at least a federal state for the entire region.

The crystallisation of ruling classes and military elites within these "artificial" states doomed this project for as long as capitalism endures. Nevertheless there remains amongst the popular classes a profound sympathy for other people across the region fighting for freedom. The same applies to the main victims of imperialism and its Zionist agents, the Palestinians.

The rapid spread of the Arab uprisings and the mutual sympathy between the various countries where they took place has to be understood against this background. And it also raises another issue: that the revolutionaries of the region can learn from one another's struggles, their mistakes and disasters as well as their victories.

But they will do so only if they create a powerful organisational unity between each other, and indeed with revolutionaries around the world. This way the creation of national parties and programmes will not have to await local developments. Periods of repression and exile can be used as fruitfully as they were by the Russian revolutionary exiles before 1917. In other words, the workers and socialists of the Middle East need not just class independent revolutionary parties but a new revolutionary International.

### Cold War paradigms, 'humanitarianism' and pacifistic 'third campism'

First in Libya, and then in Syria, the rise of Russian and Chinese power has produced in some parts of the international left a degree of indifference or even hostility to those countries' revolutions against their respective tyrants.

Wrong-footed by President Barack Obama's support for Mubarak and Ben Ali, the United States, encouraged by France's Nicolas Sarkozy, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Britain's David Cameron, saw in Libya's stalemated uprising an opportunity to recover lost prestige and try to control the outcome of the emerging Arab revolutions.

Some on the left, influenced by the legacy of Stalinism and viewing these events through the prism of Cold War-era alignments, according to which an "imperialist



Supporters of Mohamed Morsi carry an injured man during clashes outside the Republican Guard building in Cairo on 5 July

camp" dominated by the US faced off against a "socialist camp" led by the Soviet Union, saw in this a pretext to support Gaddafi's regime against its own people, in the name of an empty and purely formalistic "anti-imperialism".

Others, encouraged by the illusion of "peaceful" revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, saw the development of the Libyan uprising into a revolutionary civil war as a sign that the revolution had failed, or indeed that there was no revolution, and that this was now merely a "tribal war" in which revolutionary socialists could not take sides.

Others still were willing to abandon the principled position of opposition to NATO's imperialist intervention, in the belief that it might at least aid the Libyan revolution and prevent a complete slaughter of the insurgents.

The same errors would be repeated on an even bigger scale in Syria, this time even without the excuse of any direct Western intervention having taken place. And it is in Syria that the decline of US power, and the counterrevolutionary role of the rising Russian and Chinese imperialisms has been most visible.

### The isolation and betrayal of Syria's revolution

Syria's Ba'athist regime, in power in its current form since 1970, shared with Gaddafi's the attribute of being a "totalitarian" regime without a functioning civil society (not even on the scale that existed in Egypt or Tunisia) that legitimised itself through a demagogic and bellicose "anti-imperialist" nationalism. It also shared with Libya the attribute of having enjoyed a period of partial rehabilitation by the West, alongside a turn towards neoliberalism and away from state-led economic development.

Both Syria and Libya had taken part in "extraordinary rendition", the extrajudicial transfer and torture of "terrorist suspects" on behalf of the US and its allies in pursuit of the so-called "War on Terror".

Gaddafi's rehabilitation after the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, saw Libya open up its markets to Western multinationals, in particular

those of Britain, France and Italy. Similarly Bashar al-Assad, who inherited power from his late father Hafez al-Assad in July 2000, privatised much of Syria's economy, selling it off to a corrupt kleptocracy personified by his billionaire cousin Rami Makhlouf, and to some extent turning Syria into an economic satellite of the Arab Gulf states.

Assad's regime, however, officially maintained the state of war with Israel that began in 1948, and loudly opposed the 2003 Iraq war, allowing Sunni sectarian jihadists of a sort that were otherwise quite hostile to its "secular" ideology to travel through its territory into Iraq. It similarly supported Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia movement whose resistance drove Israel out of Lebanon in May 2000, and the various anti-Oslo Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

This "pro-resistance" foreign policy was broadly popular, both domestically and abroad. But despite the complacency of Assad, who believed that Syria was "stable" because its regime was "very closely linked to the beliefs of the people", and who attributed Ben Ali's and Mubarak's overthrow to their divergence from "the people's beliefs and interests", it could not indefinitely counteract the effects of more than a decade of neoliberalism, which devastated the rural masses in particular. And Assad's neoliberal demolition of the mass base inherited from his father led his regime to rely ever more on cronyism, corruption and sectarian favouritism.

That the Syrian people should also have risen up against their tyrant should therefore be no surprise. Nor should be the regime's response, preferring civil war and the destruction of Syria's cities and countryside alike to the "peaceful" removal of its figurehead. What should be a scandal, however, is the Syrian revolution's abandonment by left wing and "progressive" forces across the globe. As in Libya, it is the poisonous legacy of Stalinism that some on the left prefer the illusion of support for "anti-imperialist" dictators to the democratic and anti-imperialist aspirations of their peoples.

The emergence of an "armed opposition" to the Assad regime, after four months of the state's slaughter of unarmed mass protests, naturally saw outside pow-

ers try to turn the situation to their advantage. Both Syria's old adversary Saudi Arabia, and its recent former allies Turkey and Qatar began to sponsor factions within the armed opposition that might advance their agenda in the country. Israel, however, preferred the devil it already knew – a regime that had not fired a shot over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights in decades – to the threat of a genuinely popular Syrian regime coming to power through an armed revolution.

And despite Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's condemnations of Assad's barbarity, and their verbal support for the exiled Syrian opposition, the USA's actual policy has effectively conceded Syria to Russia's sphere of influence.

Here the US is constrained not only by Russia and China, who feel cheated and betrayed by the US and European imperialist powers' use of a UN resolution that they voted for to assist the overthrow of Gaddafi without their prior consent. Like Israel, and like the Syrian oppositional exiles, they fear above all the sudden collapse of the vast repressive apparatus that Assad and his clique preside over. This is the lesson that the US has learnt from the Iraq war, where the overnight dismantling of Saddam's totalitarian state created a power vacuum that vastly complicated the task of pacifying the country.

### A further examination

This article cannot claim to present a complete overview of the Arab revolutions as they have unfolded so far. In particular, further contributions are necessary to examine the role played by women and youth in all the revolutions, the forms taken by the self-organisation of the masses (especially in Syria), the role of the trade unions both "old" and "new", and the contradictory class character of the various strands of political Islamism.

Especially important, in view of the Syrian and Egyptian regimes' attempts to exploit ethnic and sectarian divisions, will be an assessment of the national question in the Arab world, and the position of national, ethnic and religious minorities: Kurds, Berbers and Copts; Christians, Shia, Druze and Alawites; and last but not least the revolutions' implications for the Palestinian people.

Likewise, the early occurrence of racist pogroms against black African migrants in Libya, and the relative calm of the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, prompt an examination of the role played by the exploitation of migrant labour in maintaining their stability.

The international impact of the revolutions, not just on the other Arab countries but also on the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy movement in the West deserve consideration, as does the role played by the "traditional" Stalinist and Arab nationalist left, and the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary phases through which the revolutions have passed.

The second part of this article will conclude with an examination of the key issues of programme for the main states of the region including how the defence of democratic rights, workers' rights, and the struggle for social and economic justice can achieve the genuine and complete "downfall of the regime" and open the road to a United Socialist States of the Middle East.



# Towards revolutionary regroupment

KD Tait welcomes the decisions of the recent ISN conference and the encouraging work of the RevSocs, before outlining our perspectives for revolutionary unity in both theory and practice

## ISN conference takes step forward

IN OCTOBER, the International Socialist Network (ISN) a recent split from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), held its first "Politics and Policy" Conference.

The conference was democratic and inclusive, with observers from the Workers International League (WIL), Socialist Resistance (SR), the Anticapitalist Initiative (ACI) and Workers Power.

The weekend was an example of how a commitment to democratic debate and participation can enable political confidence to grow and practical initiatives to flourish.

Debate ranged from the nature

and tasks of rank and file organisation in the unions, to the role of intersectionality and feminism in elaborating a Marxist analysis of social oppression.

Perspectives were agreed for an orientation towards militant working class antifascism, building a rank and file movement in the unions and launching a women's newspaper.

These are all positive steps forward, which show the ISN – just a few months old – is beginning to take the first steps in distinguishing the best of the SWP's tradition whilst separating from and rejecting the worst of its opportunist practice.

The ISN is distinguished from

the other SWP splinters Counterfire and the International Socialist Group (ISG) principally by its orientation to the task of regrouping various fragments of the revolutionary left.

We welcome the plan agreed by the conference for joint work between SR, the ACI, the ISN and Workers Power towards a conference in early Spring, which aims to be the setting off point for a process of regroupment.

A final positive feature of the conference was the role played by the ISN's young members. Often astute, sometimes iconoclastic, the youth of all the organisations will be key to the success of the project.

## Perspectives for unity

OVER THE LAST month a barrage of defeats and sell-outs has hit the labour movement.

The privatisation of Royal Mail without a fight, the calling off of teachers' strikes, and above all the surrender by Unite at Grangemouth have all sparked a debate about how the left, especially those who consider themselves to be revolutionaries, should respond.

Some on the left have gone so far as to say that – because revolutionaries are so few, divided and isolated – we are simply not fit to offer a way forward. First we have to re-examine everything and then begin a slow and painful re-elaboration of socialist politics. This is a counsel of despair and it lets the rotten leaders off the hook completely.

Armed with an alternative strategy for the working class around which we can unite our forces, we can begin to mount a challenge to the political and union leaderships with no stomach to fight.

### The importance of programme

In fact the task of developing a fighting strategy – an action programme – is more urgent than ever. It is also inseparable from its embodiment in a fighting revolutionary socialist organisation, one which can challenge not only the union bureaucracy and the Labour Party but also the serious misleadership offered by the larger "revolutionary" groups within the working class.

They have played their own part in the failures of the last three years, either through wilfully dividing the forces of resistance (the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party) or by toadying to the left bureaucracy (Counterfire and the Communist Party of Britain). A new organisation must fight, equally, this sectarianism and this opportunism.

The (narrow) vote of the ISN conference not to immediately liquidate itself into a so-called pluralist or "broad" organisation with Socialist Resistance (SR) and the Anticapitalist Initiative (ACI) was a wise move, as was the decision to enter into



serious political discussions with Workers Power and other left forces.

Workers Power will take these discussions very seriously. Our aim is no less than revolutionary unity on the basis of a revolutionary action programme and an agreement to work together in a coherent and effective way in the struggles of the working class and the oppressed.

We do not expect to resolve all the political issues that divide our different traditions before we unite and work together. Indeed we suggest right away as much common work as possible on a wide range of issues like antifascist and antiracist mobilisations, local anticuts actions, and solidarity with the Greek workers and the Syrian revolution.

Discussions and differences would likely continue for some time even after a principled fusion, and we would loyally accept all majority decisions about, for example the public expression of differences, an issue where we have disagreed with SR and with our former comrades in the ACI. In any case it is the disciplined carrying out of democratically agreed decisions for action in the class struggle that is the heart of genuine democratic centralism.

### Revolutionary regroupment

We suggest that the process of seeking revolutionary unity should begin by discussing questions such as the following:

- Should we be building rank and file organisations in the unions, independent of the bureaucracy, left as well as right, rather than

"Broad Lefts"?

- How can we relaunch the stalled fight back against the austerity government? How can we stop the headlong retreat by the union leaderships after another year of failed "coordinated action"?
- Can the People's Assembly do this given its present leadership's closeness to the leaders of the big unions? Can the local People's Assemblies be a starting point for coordinating the fightback against the attacks on jobs, pay and living conditions?

• What is the character of the Labour Party today? What is our attitude to the Labour Left? What sort of party do we need today? Is a building a left reformist party a necessary stage? If we need a revolutionary party, is it realistic to attempt to build such a party in Britain in the foreseeable future? The Left Unity Conference on 30 November will see these issues debated, if not resolved.

- The reviving and growing women's movement: will it and should it be an all class feminist movement, a socialist feminist one, or do we need a working class women's liberation movement?
- What kind of international political organisation do revolutionaries need to build? Can it and should it be a new International?

We would suggest series of local forums, open to all organisations and individuals participating in the process – whose goal is to reach agreement on a programmatic basis for an organisation which can intervene in the class struggle.



Over 100 students and youth joined the RevSocs contingent in Manchester on the TUC's demonstration on 29 September

## Revolutionary Socialists: a new force on campus

THE STUDENT members of the ISN and Workers Power have been active in forming and building the Revolutionary Socialists (RevSocs), a group for students and youth. In Manchester, the ACI has built the Manchester Anticapitalist Students group with former members of the Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS).

The RevSocs held their first national meeting in August, where we agreed a common platform and constitution.

Although many of the plans and perspectives agreed at the conference were probably over-ambitious, an excess of enthusiasm and ambition is no bad thing – especially in a student movement that was defeated in early 2011 and that has seen many of its national and local structures wither away.

Nevertheless, the strongest groups, Sheffield and Leeds, have made headway in the first term of activity on campus, and the Liverpool group has held sizeable meetings.

The main focus of activity has been joint work with Feminist Societies to campaign against the rape culture dominating the student club scene, and mobilising student support for the 31 Octo-

ber higher education strike.

Although the joint strike by Unite, Unison and UCU was a welcome step forward, the day itself exposed the weakness of the student movement. While Sheffield, SOAS and Sussex staged brief occupations; other campuses like Leeds were unable to even get a Student Union presence on the day.

The RevSocs face a long and uphill struggle to build a genuinely independent, self-sustaining national youth organisation. We cannot foresee what struggles are to come, nor whether we will succeed in overcoming the sectarian self-isolation of the youth wings of other left organisations.

What we can say though, is that in order to thrive and grow as a revolutionary organisation, the RevSocs groups will need to be a central part of the revolutionary regroupment process.

In this process we will defend the autonomy of our organisation – that is, our right to criticise, think freely, and democratically make our own decisions – and champion the special methods of agitation and struggle needed to win radicalised youth to a perspective of the revolutionary socialist transformation of society.



# Intersectionality – not the basis for the liberation struggle

The methodology of 'intersectionality' is currently gaining increased support on the left in the UK. Joy Macready argues why it shouldn't be used as the basis for a socialist approach to liberation

'INTERSECTIONALITY', or the study of how multiple systems of oppression or discrimination interact, is gaining prominence amongst the left in the UK. For example, in the lead up to the Left Unity founding conference on 30 November, the Equalities Commission has suggested that the new organisation "adopt a form of approach to liberation politics based on intersectionality".

In many meetings, particularly in the student and academic milieu, this approach is held up as the way to recognise diversity and address the sexism, racism, homophobia, etc that can manifest within the left, trade unions and broader social movements – by highlighting how these oppressions overlap in the everyday lives of people to produce an identity that is unique to them in degree and composition.

It is understandable how, on the surface, intersectionality seems like a progressive approach to liberation. As its proponents argue, it gives the most vulnerable in society a "voice" that challenges the dominant paradigm of white, male, heterosexual, binary gendered, able-bodied and class privilege.

However, what intersectionality obscures is the importance of the question of class within all liberation struggles, whether women, black people, LGBTQ, or disabled and other oppressed sections of society. It effectively treats class as another category of oppression.

Of course class is not a "trump card" of oppression, being a worker does not make you more oppressed than any other, but starting from a class analysis enables us to locate the essential agency for socialist revolution: the working class; female and male; gay, straight and trans; black, Asian or white; disabled or not; and from all nationalities.

Socialist revolution not "only" opens the road to all liberation, but without it liberation is impossible. However, this does not mean that the struggle against oppression must wait for socialism or subordinate itself to a narrow and economic

definition of the class struggle.

The struggle against oppression, in society in the labour movement and in the revolutionary organisation, is an integral part of the socialist programme. The fact that some organisations that claim to be Marxist, Leninist or Trotskyist have ignored this and behaved in the most economic and outright sexist way does not mean that the Marxist approach to this question must be rejected.

## Intersectionality origins

Black American feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term "intersectionality theory" in 1989. However, many feminist academics locate its origins in black feminist politics a decade earlier, specifically the Combahee River Collective, an organisation of black lesbian socialist-feminists active in Boston who advanced the concept of "simultaneity". They wanted to expose the fact that the white, heterosexual middle-class woman's perspective, that they believed dominated the feminist movement, didn't represent the totality of that movement. In the Collective's statement, they wrote:

"This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression..."

Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality was developed in response to the identity politics that came to dominate the feminist movement in the 1980s. She wrote: "When we don't pay attention to the margins, when we don't acknowledge the intersection, where the places of power overlap, we not only fail to see the women who fall between our movements, sometimes we pit our movements against each other."

However, what these different strands of feminism have in common, despite their important insights into how gender is constructed by institutions, ideology, the family, society, etc, is that it is a pan-class ideology and therefore cannot put for-



ward a consistently materialist world-view, because it either does not recognise capitalism and class, or regards these categories as being only another oppression, not especially more or less fundamental than another.

These movements are therefore condemned to be "sectional" (as also are other "autonomous" movements of the oppressed, like black nationalism, gay liberation, etc), effectively approaching the struggles of other oppressed groups as potential allies with whom one strikes agreements on the basis of a sort of "activists' diplomacy".

Although intersectional politics arose in opposition to this, as a result of "sectional" identity politics' inability to account adequately for the experience of people who suffer from more than one oppression, it nevertheless addresses the problem either by reducing the sectional basis of its proposed forms of organisation to a kaleidoscope of ever-narrower "intersectional" identities, or by reducing things to a matter of unique individual identities within a broad amorphous movement.

In addition, intersectionality effectively reduces things from the level of the politics of a collective to the level of individual choices about identity.

This can be clearly seen when intersectionality is used in common practice. In many social movements intersectionality collapses back into the very "hierarchy of oppression" conflicts it arose to combat, that is,

the idea that those who can tick the greatest number of boxes (woman, transgender, gay, disabled, black, etc) deserve the most respect and political weight in a meeting. Whereas others have to "check their privilege" and acknowledge that those with greater oppression are more qualified to determine the course taken or the policies adopted.

Marxists should reject this approach. Just because a person subjectively experiences a specific form of oppression does not necessarily mean that they are best placed to come up with a strategy for liberation. Contrary to the Combahee River Collective's statement, the most oppressed in society are not automatically the most radical, militant or revolutionary.

At every given opportunity, socialists should listen to and champion the struggles of oppressed layers in society, but we also can bring into those struggles a revolutionary strategy, based on consciousness of the class as a whole.

The Left Unity Equalities Commission draft tries to qualify an intersectional approach: "We don't however in doing this take this approach on the basis of agreement with those who reduce the question of class to the question of an identity – but indeed none of the other issues we deal with directly are solely questions of identity but are based on material realities."

But this evades the question of the working class as the driving force of revolutionary

change. It is the working class and its organisations that can – providing it understands the nature of oppression and is constantly struggling against it – unite the oppressed and exploited in a common struggle against capitalism and all its oppressive manifestations.

## Fighting oppression

The working class is the class with "radical chains" that cannot be broken except by uprooting capitalism and in doing so the last form of class society. This ending of class society is the objective and indispensable necessity for ending all forms of oppression. This includes those like racism that flow from slavery, colonialism and imperialism and those that flow from the oppression of women via the institution of the patriarchal family.

To this latter are related all the oppressions relating to sex and gender and the ideologies that sustain and defend it and oppress those who reject it or just live differently.

Marxists don't believe – as many opponents of Marxism and many bad Marxists claim – that just by seizing power and expropriating the capitalists will oppression vanish, anymore than classes and economic inequality themselves will do. Building socialism is precisely a process of struggle against all forms of oppression.

Moreover, long before the socialist revolution, revolutionaries and their organisations have to be champions of all the exploited and oppressed. Lenin

famously stressed in *What is to be Done?* that "the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects."

Marxists have – since the days of Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai – long recognised that special organisations and movements of the oppressed inside and outside the revolutionary party are necessary to draw the maximum number of them into the struggle against capitalism and its inherent sexism, racism, homo- and transphobia etc. They also recognised that prejudices and oppressive behaviour exist amongst workers and revolutionary communists, and have to be constantly fought.

Instead of promoting intersectionality, socialists have their own methods to fight sexism, racism, homophobia, etc that can and do manifest themselves within a left organisation, trade union or other social movement – as recent events in the SWP have shown all too clearly. Socialists should advocate the right of women and other oppressed groups to caucus, that is, to meet to discuss any issues relating to their oppression and the struggle against all examples of sexism or oppressive behaviour, and should be able to submit proposals for dealing with these issues directly to the membership and the leadership.

But to restrict the making of a party's policy on these issues only to those who suffer a specific oppression will just bring us back to the old conflicts of the "hierarchy of oppression". And to reject founding our politics on the subjective experience of identity certainly does not equate to the assertion that oppression doesn't matter, or must be "subordinated to the class struggle", meaning to the trade union struggle or even to struggles by workers alone.

That is "economism" or "workerism", and in no sense represents Marx and Engels' or for that matter Lenin and Trotsky's position.



# Commonwealth leaders endorse Rajapakse

Peter Main

THERE WILL BE no limits on the extravagance of the ceremonies that will greet the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) when they arrive in Sri Lanka. As they are whisked from the airport to their hotels along the newly completed Expressway, built and operated by Chinese capital, they will see no end of posters and flags celebrating the achievements of their host, Mahinda Rajapakse.

There will also be no limits to the hypocrisy to be displayed by the Heads themselves. According to the Commonwealth Charter, its members are united by core values that include democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. Rajapakse's government has raptured each of these 'values', and many others. The holding of the CHOGM is a ceremonial whitewashing of his crimes.

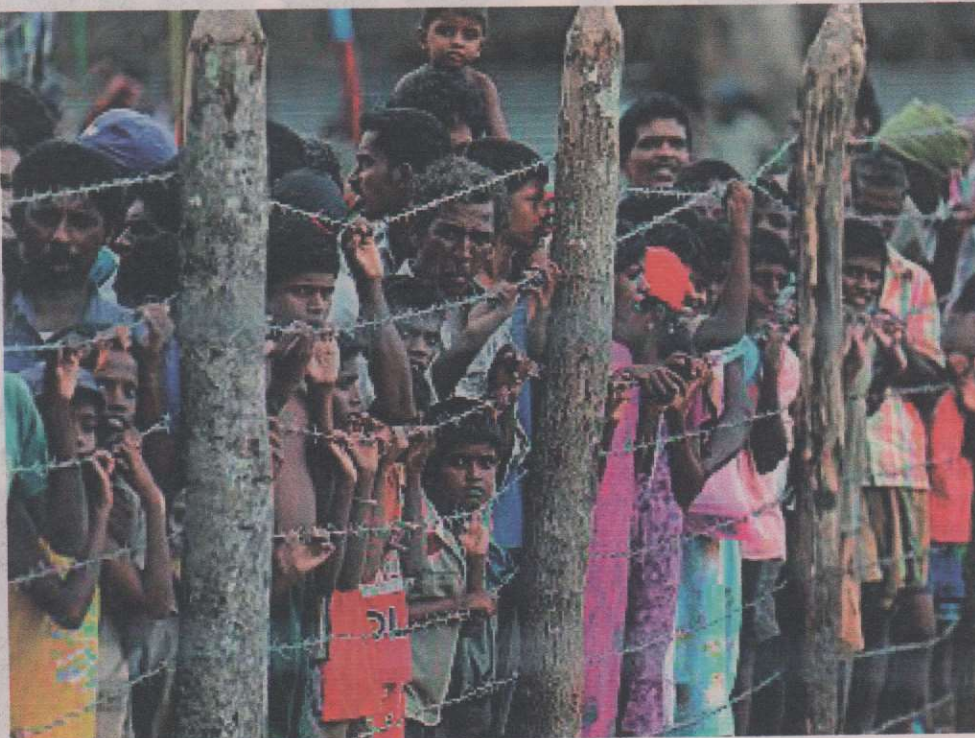
Nor can the Heads claim ignorance of those crimes. A UN report estimates that between 40,000 and 70,000 Tamil civilians were indiscriminately killed in the final months of his war against them. Many Tamils, both men and women, have been abducted and then raped and tortured in "rehabilitation centres" by Sri Lankan security forces; a BBC programme spoke to a young woman who

was raped every three days while in detention.

Although it is undoubtedly the Tamil community that has borne the brunt of the regime's brutality, increasing repression of all opponents is inevitable under a government like Rajapakse's. With the great bulk of public spending passing through the hands of his family and cronies, the opportunities for corruption are boundless, and that itself generates a need for secrecy and extra-judicial measures.

## The role of the army

The Sri Lankan Army comes under the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development. The Minister in overall charge is Rajapakse himself, but day-to-day control is in the hands of his brother, Gotabaya, a former high ranking Army officer who was at one time seconded to the USA's infamous Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. The Ministry is responsible for reconstruction in the war-devastated Tamil regions, where it is building military installations and repopulating the area with Sinhalese settlers. Elsewhere, it is developing tourist resorts and demolishing the homes of some 70,000 people in central Colombo to make way for hotels and corporate office blocks. Needless to say, all this generates opposition that is then condemned as



Tamils detainees face torture in camps

"unpatriotic" or even "terrorist", which justifies further repression.

Government protection of corporate interests also generates opposition. For example, when local people in Weliveriya protested against the pollution of their drinking water by a factory making rubber gloves, which also operates rubber plantations on the island, their demonstration was attacked by military units, leaving three dead

and more than 20 seriously injured.

In January, President Rajapakse removed the most senior judge, Chief Justice Sharina Bandaranayake. The Supreme Court ruled the impeachment of the Chief Justice as "unconstitutional" – Rajapakse simply installed a new Chief Justice more to his liking. This episode underlines the impossibility of removing his government by normal con-

stitutional means.

Under such a regime, democratic demands, ranging from defence of the rights of the Tamils through to independent control of elections, repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the removal of censorship will play a major role in mobilising the mass action that can force the government from office. For the working class movement, however, that should not mean only raising such demands.

The Sri Lankan section of the League for the Fifth International, the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, does not oppose participation in demonstrations for democratic demands initiated by, for example, the United National Party (UNP) led by the former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe. However, it does oppose any political endorsement of such figures, as has been given by the Nava Sama Samaaj Party (Fourth International) and the United Socialist Party (Committee for a Workers' International).

But the key to removing Rajapakse is in the building of an independent working class mass movement that campaigns not only for democratic rights but also for the specific interests of the working class including: the repeal of laws inherited from British rule that limit trade union organisation; across the board wage increases to compensate for inflation; reversing all privatisations without compensation; and a programme of public works, under workers' control, to upgrade housing, transport, health and education provision.

All the forces that can be won to such a programme should also commit themselves to the founding of a new workers' party that can oppose not only Rajapakse but also the system that brought him to power.

## French youth raise barricades against racism

KD Tait

IN OCTOBER, thousands of French school and college students blockaded schools and took to the streets to protest the deportation of 15-year-old student Léonarda Dibrani.

Dibrani, a young Roma woman, was dragged off her school bus and deported to Kosovo on 9 October. One week later, Armenian student Khatchik Kachatrian was also deported.

As part of the protests, called by the Socialist Party (PS) affiliated Independent School Students Federation of High School Students (FIDL), barricades were erected outside dozens of schools in Paris. Students clashed with police in cities across France as protests continued for several days.

Students marched with banners calling for Interior Minister Manuel Valls' resignation and others saying "Léonarda isn't going to class and

neither are we".

The protests targeted the racist policies of the Francois Hollande's PS government, in particular Valls, who in September sparked outrage by claiming that most of the 20,000 Roma in France had no intention of "integrating" and should be sent back to their country of origin.

### Racism against Roma

The round-ups and police sweeps are a direct continuation of the attacks started by former president Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009. In just two years, Sarkozy's right-wing UMP government deported nearly 20,000 Roma and bulldozed 51 campsites. Mainly of Bulgarian and Romanian origin, they are sent back to countries where they face even greater state persecution and social isolation.

Dibrani was deported after her family's request for political asylum was refused on the grounds of "insufficient prospect of social and economic inte-

gration". With much higher than average rates of unemployment and a surge in anti-immigrant racism promoted by the fascist Front National (FN) and backed by the government, it's not surprising that many immigrants struggle to "integrate".

The protests come at a time when the popularity of the government is at an all-time low. Hollande has scored the lowest approval rating of any French president.

### Parti Socialiste

Although the head of the school directors' union called the blockades "a detestable habit" that "represent the lowest level of political consciousness", in fact they demonstrate that students have few illusions in a supposedly left-wing government – one which has carried out military adventures in Mali, persecuted Muslim women and failed to tackle spiralling youth unemployment.

With municipal elections due in

2014, the PS feels increasingly threatened by the surge in polls for the far-right FN. The FN, whose candidate Marine Le Pen took nearly 20 per cent in the 2012 presidential election, has put vicious anti-immigrant rhetoric at the heart of its attacks on the government.

The PS has responded by moving right – hoping that by focusing anger on a marginalised and defenceless section of the population they can deflect attention from their failed policies.

The economic programme of the PS has been a disaster for French workers and youth. Instead of talking about why "liberalisation of the labour market" – in reality attacks on hard-won job security and union rights – has not boosted employment, the government has teamed up with the fascists and the right wing to portray immigrants as the problem.

### Bosses are the enemy

The reality is that the PS government

is carrying out the economic programme of the French capitalist class. Although it has raised taxes on the rich (who can afford it), it has cut thousands of jobs and allowed bosses to close factories, devastating communities who cannot afford to lose a cent from their pay.

The common enemy of workers and youth in France is the international class of bankers, industrialists and speculators who insist workers must pay for the economic crisis with their jobs, pay and public services.

French youth have shown the way forward: a massive campaign in defence of immigrants against the police, the PS and the fascists, combined with a social movement in defence of jobs.

The PS government is the main enemy – it must be thrown out and replaced by a government of the working class and their organisations, which can challenge the economic dictatorship of the bosses.



# Chile's Popular Unity

With the dramatic rise of Syriza in Greece in 2012 and the continuing prospect of a "government of the left" coming to power there in conditions of acute crisis, a debate is necessary on what sort of government could meet the burning needs of workers.

Dave Stockton looks at the highly relevant lessons of Chile in 1970-73

ON 11 SEPTEMBER 1973, Chilean armed forces launched a military coup against President Salvador Allende and the Popular Unity government. The coup had the full backing – and active assistance – of US President, Richard Nixon, and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. The latter had recently cabled the CIA chief in Santiago: "It is the firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup."

The political parties of the working class – the Socialist and Communist Parties (SP and CPC) and the organisations of the revolutionary left – were smashed and the trade unions closed down. A four-man junta, headed by Army Chief of Staff, General Augusto Pinochet, seized power and established a brutal totalitarian regime operated by the vicious secret police, DINA. They had the support of all the bourgeois parties, including the so-called liberal Christian Democrats, and the endorsement of the Catholic Church in Chile.

Working class and popular militants faced savage beatings, rape and torture. At least 30,000 were murdered or "disappeared". In the following months and years, hundreds of thousands were driven into exile. Yet these tragic events were not inevitable. Millions supported Allende's government and a vanguard of hundreds of thousands of militant workers were willing to fight, arms in hand, to defend it – if only they had arms in their hands.

In fact, it was the fundamental strategy of the Allende government, and the policies relentlessly pursued by Popular Unity and its main components, the SP and CPC, which ensured that the workers and peasants were not prepared for the inevitable counter-revolutionary assault and were not armed to resist it.

## Popular Unity

In December 1969, the CPC, the SP and four other leftist parties signed the Popular Unity programme, with which they would fight the upcoming presidential elections. It pledged far reaching social and political reforms – nationalisations of the copper and other industries, distribution of land to the poor, improved wages and health services. It described this as a "democratic, anti-feudal, anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist" programme. The whole programme, the SP and CP both asserted, could be enacted whilst preserving "national unity" and class peace.

Both the major workers' parties also talked vaguely of a socialist perspective that the Popular Unity government might open up. In November 1969, the CPC had defined the stage of the Chilean revolution as "anti-imperialist, anti-monopolist and agrarian with a



socialist perspective". Allende, too, talked of "the Chilean way to socialism", whilst insisting that it could and should remain strictly legal and constitutional.

The vagueness of this commitment to fundamental social transformation was reflected in the language of the programme of Popular Unity, which talked of "popular power", not workers' and peasants' power.

In fact, the Popular Unity government had no intention of challenging the main pillars of capitalist rule, that is, the ownership of the major elements of the economy, or the control of the repressive forces of the state, the armed forces and the police. Its goal was a "mixed economy", the classic scenario of Social Democratic and Labour reformism in Europe. The programme proclaimed: "The Popular Government will respect the rights of the opposition as long as they are exercised within the legal framework."

Even more importantly, it stressed: "The Popular Government guarantees the national integrity of all branches of the Armed Forces."

## Allende's early successes

On 4 September 1970, Allende won the presidential elections by a plurality of 36.2 per cent, as against the 34.9 per cent and 27.8 per cent for the candidates of the two main bourgeois parties, the National Party and the Christian Democrats. Chile's constitution now required parliament to decide who should be president, although precedent dictated that the candidate with the highest vote be inaugurated.

The strategy of the CPC and SP was based on the acceptance that they had to win the support of the Christian Democrats, the more liberal and social reformist of the bourgeois parties. Without this, they

accepted the logic of the parliamentary arithmetic – with no overall majority in parliament, Popular Unity would be unable to pass legislation. From the beginning, they rejected any suggestion that a minority government, supported by the mobilisation of its working class and peasant supporters, and taking advantage of the president's wide executive powers, could challenge the obstruction of the bourgeois parties.

The Christian Democrats saw their opportunity and agreed to vote in parliament to recognise Allende as president but demanded that he sign a "Statute of Constitutional Guarantees" pledging to preserve the main institutions of the capitalist state. In truth, this was hardly necessary, since he had solemnly promised to do so many times, but it served to set a public limitation on future government policy and actions.

For the workers and poor peasants, the inauguration of Allende appeared to be a tremendous victory over the country's traditional élite, inaugurating a period of major measures against exploitation and poverty. Many militants of the left, in the unions and the student movement also hoped to see a rapid opening of the road to socialism.

In its first year, the government did indeed distribute land to the peasants and, with the support of an overwhelming majority in parliament, it nationalised the 49 per cent US holding in Chile's copper mines – this time without compensation.

Copper was vital to the export earning potential of the Chilean economy. The US multinationals made gigantic super profits by selling Chilean copper to their US-based plants at half the world market price. It was nationalised without compensation with virtually the entire parliament – right and

left – voting for it.

In that first year, the Chilean economy surged forward. Industrial production rose by 12 per cent and unemployment fell from 12 per cent to an all-time low of 3.8 per cent. The real wage earnings of Chilean factory workers went up by as much as 35 per cent. Inflation fell from 34.9 to 22.0 per cent and statistics showed a redistribution of income and an increase in consumption by the popular classes.

The victory of Popular Unity also encouraged an upsurge in working class struggle and self-confidence. It saw a dramatic expansion of trade union membership: the Central Unica de Trabajadores (CUT) reached 800,000 members by 1972 (25 per cent of the economically active population).

The government implemented a series of wage increases, averaging 35 per cent. Social welfare measures, such as increased family allowances and free school milk, were introduced and, in addition, six million acres of land formerly held by the large landowners was taken over. However, this process was slow and was challenged at every turn in the courts and the landowners were allowed to keep much of the best land. This prompted a veritable class war between the campesinos (rural workers) and the landowners.

The peasants and landless labourers began to occupy the land for themselves, not waiting for the government and the courts. They were supported and encouraged by the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) a previously guerrillaist organisation that remained outside Popular Unity.

The reactions of the SP and CPC leaders were strongly hostile to this movement. Allende announced legislation to punish those who instigated land seizures. Luis



# — lessons for today

Corvalan, General Secretary of the CPC, declared: "We do not approve of land occupations because we have an obligation to the country, and because we are going to carry out agricultural development within the limits of the law."

## The capitalists' counterattack and the workers' response

The Chilean bourgeoisie became afraid, not without reason, that the masses were beginning to lead Popular Unity, rather than being led by it. Such a development had to be stopped before it turned into a real revolution from below. In fact, the masses still saw their actions not as challenging or undermining Allende, but as supporting him.

By 1972, an economic crisis was developing across Chile. This was partly a product of a US blockade in response to the expropriation of its copper interests and partly the result of sabotage by the Chilean capitalists, who resolutely refused to play the role of the "national bourgeoisie" who were supposed to collaborate with Popular Unity in the national interest, according to the SP and CPC popular front strategy.

Inflation shot up to 100 per cent and hoarding and speculation by distributors and shopkeepers led to widespread shortages. Middle class women organised a "march of the empty pots". The Christian Democrats, the SP and CPC hoped for partners in reform, now dropped their mask of neutrality. Their leader, Patricio Aylwin, president of the Senate, denounced Allende as a communist bent on overthrowing the constitutional order. They formed a block with the right and all the reactionary forces outside parliament preparing the way for the coup, which they fully supported.

The bosses now judged that the time was ripe for an offensive to oust Allende from power. In October 1972, they launched a lorry owners' strike (funded by the US Embassy) to bring the country to a standstill. The fascist gangs of *Patria y Libertad*, again funded by the US as was later revealed, carried out terrorist attacks on workers' and popular organisations.

The workers, with hardly any initiative from their national SP or CPC leaderships or the CUT bureaucracy, answered the bosses' strike with a wave of occupations. Workers' regional committees, the *cordones industriales*, spread across Chile. They organised the transport of food and materials and defence against the bosses' fascist thugs. Neighbourhood committees, in which women played a leading role, forced supermarkets to open, requisitioning food and distributing it amongst the poor. In short, workers began to develop their own forms of revolutionary organisation and control.

The bosses were soon on their knees demanding negotiations. At this point, a decisive revolutionary leadership could have smashed the bosses' system once and

for all. The *cordones industriales* could have taken over the running of the factories and expropriated the bosses' land and factories and demanded the cancellation of debt repayments. But there was no sizeable revolutionary party to act as the Bolsheviks had done in 1917.

In the face of fascist violence, workers at local level tried to get hold of arms for protection but they met obstruction from their leaders. Worse still, twice in the final 18 months of his government, Allende invited the army to put ministers in his cabinet and acceded to their demands to disarm the popular forces.

A sizeable revolutionary party would have supported the organisation of workers' militias and waged a campaign amongst the rank and file soldiers and sailors to win them to the side of the workers and peasants. In short, a revolutionary party would have prepared the workers for a revolutionary civil war. Instead, the workers' parties led them unprepared into a counter-revolutionary civil war.

Rather than welcoming the workers' initiatives and building on them to attack the right wing, the CUT and the workers' parties worked hard to end the occupations and to tame the *cordones*. Allende was so busy looking for allies amongst his enemies that he turned his back on an army of millions of workers and peasants who had the means to break the rule of capital. Instead of arming the workers, he gave more power to the generals. Instead of supporting the workers' and peasants' occupations against the bosses, he declared them illegal.

## The coup

After a failed attempt to oust Allende in the municipal elections of March 1973, the bourgeoisie turned to the army for a solution. On 29 June 1973, a revolt by a tank regiment was put down, but the plotters pressed on. One by one, the key neutral figures in the Army High Command were pressed to resign. The Commander of the Air Force, General Ruiz, resigned and was followed, on 24 August, by the army's Commander-in-Chief, General Carlos Prats.



The left and many workers now knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the senior ranks of the army were preparing a coup. Mass demonstrations in front of the Moneda Palace called on Allende to arm the people. Instead, there was a wave of army raids on trade union and left party headquarters searching for and confiscating arms. In Valparaiso, a group of sailors and petty officers that exposed the coup preparations to the President were arrested and tortured.

Then came the coup. The airforce bombarded not only the palace but also the workers' districts. The CUT uselessly called on the workers to remain in their factories and guard them rather than engaging with the rank and file soldiers, agitating amongst them to obstruct the coup. Some workers and youth bravely did this but it was neither sufficiently coordinated nor on the necessary scale to be successful.

Once again, the absence of a revolutionary party – and the near monopoly of two reformist parties – was plain to see and tragic in its consequences.

## Lessons for today

The Chilean tragedy underlines a strategically central fact of the class struggle, witnessed in defeats as well as victories. In Russia in 1917, in China in the 1920s, in Spain in the 1930s, in objectively created pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, the development of struggles by workers against their bosses could not be kept within the straightjacket of bourgeois democracy and capitalism. Nor could the struggles of the peasants and rural workers against the big landowners.

When factory owners drive down wages, sack their workforces or close their plants, then only their occupation – and nationalisation by the state without compensation to the bankrupts and saboteurs – can save jobs, livelihoods, families and communities. Likewise, land hungry peasants cannot afford to wait for government decrees, especially decrees that compensate the rich landowners and leave them the best land, machinery and livestock – they must seize the land for themselves.

This was the objective dynamic of the class struggle in Chile, a dynamic to which



General Pinochet (left) and President Allende (above)

Trotsky had drawn attention as early as 1905 in his theory of permanent revolution. At that time, it also became clear to Lenin that there must be a workers' and peasants' government with the power to enforce its will on the exploiting classes, he called this "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". Whilst at this point Lenin still thought such a government would have to limit itself mainly to anti-feudal measures, he had no doubt that it had to be a dictatorship, not a government which left real power in the hands of the generals and police chiefs.

Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution does not at all deny the existence of profound democratic and anti-imperialist tasks in countries like Chile and even ones against the remnants of a semi-feudal landowning system. Far from suggesting that the working class could "leap over" these tasks and go straight to socialism, as the Stalinists tried to make out, he recognised that the working class had to take up these struggles as its own.

What Trotsky insisted was that these pre-socialist tasks could not be fulfilled with the bourgeoisie in power and whilst protecting capitalist ownership of industry, agriculture and commerce. Like Lenin, he recognised that a workers' and peasants' government with real power, that is, armed forces to impose its will, would be needed. Trotsky's insight was that such a government would immediately have to make massive inroads into the property of the bourgeoisie as well as the imperialists. In a word, it would have to take measures that were transitional to socialism. This could not be done by peaceful means until the entire capitalist class was forcibly disarmed.

In short, even to achieve democratic and anti-feudal measures, the working class would have to establish its own class dictatorship over the capitalist and landowners. It would have to arm itself and establish its own governmental authority by smashing the control of the generals and police chiefs over their apparatus of repression.

To hope for a peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism via a series of perfectly legal reforms was a utopia. And even if the working class, or rather its political and trade union leaders, would not – or could not – recognise this, the bourgeoisie and its political and military leaders certainly would.

They would wage a merciless class struggle against the workers and peasants to retain or restore the full power of their dictatorship from the real inner stronghold of the capitalist state: the armed forces, the police and the secret services, which always exist behind the facade of presidents, governments, parliaments, elections and the rule of law. Chile's 9/11 remains the prime example of the disastrous consequences of the tragically misnamed "peaceful road to socialism". In a period of increased capitalist instability, its lessons – so tragically taught – should not be forgotten.



## Big Brother is listening to you

By Jeremy Dewar

THANKS TO THE actions of former CIA employee and intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, it is now widely known that Britain and the US are actively monitoring and listening to millions of our private emails, phone and Skype conversations every day.

George Orwell, author of *1984*, couldn't have dreamt of the scale of the operation, though he would certainly have recognised the mindset of those behind the biggest secret surveillance programme in history.

Snowden first revealed the existence of large internet surveillance programmes, Prism in the US and Tempora in the UK, six months ago. Since then he has been forced to seek asylum, first in Hong Kong, now in Russia.

The horrible treatment of Chelsea Manning – the US soldier who handed over details of war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay to Wikileaks – must have weighed on Snowden's mind. He was denied any clothing or bedding for whole periods before being sentenced to 35 years imprisonment.

### Who is being watched?

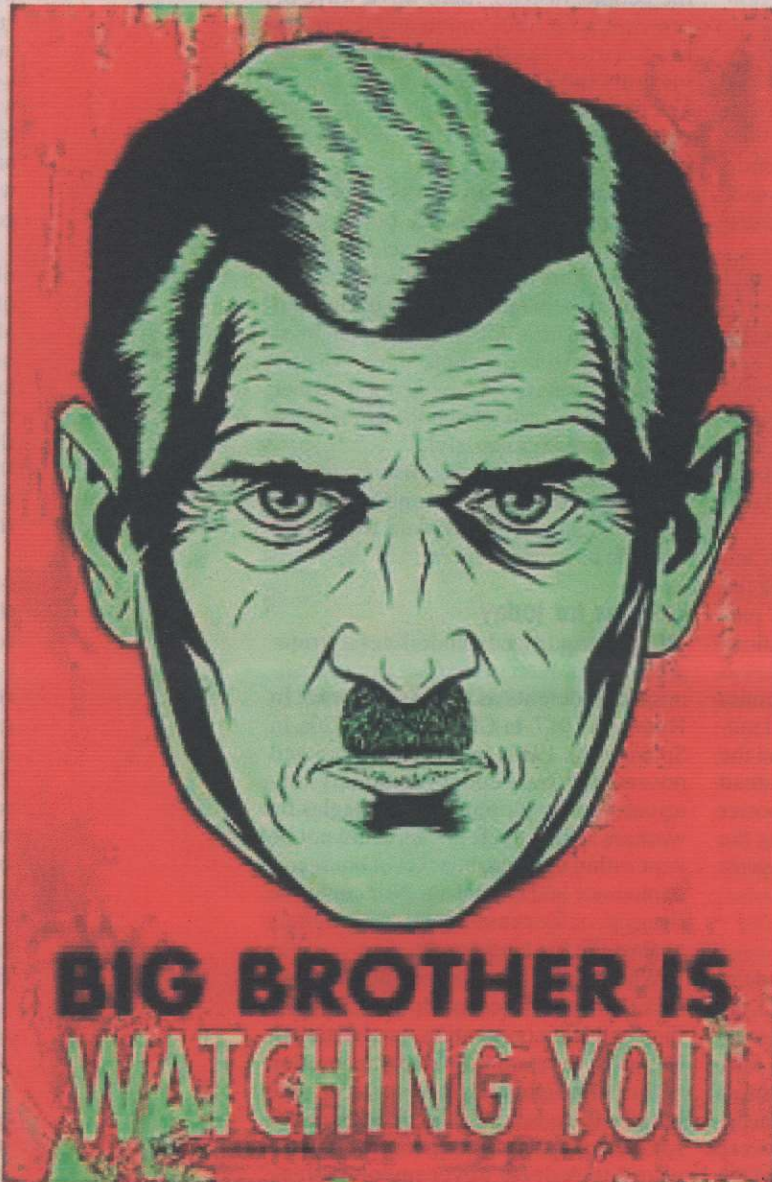
First off, the scope of the programme is vast. Potentially all electronic data passing through Britain or the US, which act as hubs for all world traffic, can be captured.

The US and UK share each other's information. Snowden revealed also that internet giants, like Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, Facebook, Skype, Apple, AOL and YouTube, have all given US National Security Agency (NSA) permanent backdoor access to their databases and servers.

When minor email provider Lavabit refused to comply, they were forced to close their company – and the founder Ladar Levison now faces a court case to force him to reveal encryption keys.

The *New York Times* has described the NSA as “an electronic omnivore of staggering capabilities, eavesdropping and hacking its way around the world to strip governments and other targets of their secrets, all the while enforcing the utmost secrecy about its own operations...”

“It sucks the contents from fibre-optics cables, sits on telephone switches and internet hubs, digitally burglarises laptops and plants bugs on smartphones around the globe.”



George Orwell would have recognised some of the surveillance methods used by the US and Britain today from his classic novel, *1984*

In their defence intelligence agencies and government ministers have emphasised that only “meta-data” is being stored – that is who contacted who, where and when – not the content.

Besides, according to Sir Iain Lobban, head of spy centre GCHQ, they would only monitor “a terrorist, a serious criminal, a proliferator, a target or if your activities pose a genuine threat to the national or economic security of the UK”.

This sounds comforting – except who decides who is a “terrorist”?

The Metropolitan Police gave us an insight into its thinking this month when it defended its nine-hour detention of Brazilian journalist David

Miranda, who collaborated with Snowden, saying his “disclosure, or threat of disclosure [of Snowden's documents] is designed to influence a government and is made for the purpose of promoting a political or ideological cause. This therefore falls within the definition of terrorism.”

The Met's lawyer Jason Beer told the court: “The definition of terrorism [in the Terrorism Act] is exceptionally broad... Terrorism is terrorism, whatever the motive.”

So under this “exceptional” remit, anyone can be listened to – even or especially those who threaten to expose the spy rings.

New MI6 chief Sir John Sawyers told parliament that, “It is clear our

advisories are rubbing their hands with glee [at the disclosures]. Al Qaida is lapping it up.” This led David Cameron to make a veiled threat against *The Guardian*:

“I don't want to have to use injunctions or D notices or the other tougher measures. I think it's much better to appeal to newspapers' sense of social responsibility. But if they don't demonstrate some social responsibility it would be very difficult for government to stand back and not to act.”

### Political targets

The Cold War still resonates for these spymasters.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been phone-hacked since 2002, along with 34 other heads of state. French president François Hollande complained that millions of his citizens were being bugged.

Another document from Snowden's haul details how British and US Embassies have installed their own spy nests to listen to supposedly neutral or even friendly governments, including Germany. All illegal, of course.

More obvious targets included those governments who have recently balked at the US treating them as its own backyard. Venezuela was an obvious and consistent target. Ecuador was certainly leaned on for initially offering Snowden asylum. And Bolivia's president Evo Morales had his plane forced down in Vienna because the US thought Snowden was on board!

So if this is happening to elected politicians, states that are formally allies of the US and UK and mainstream journalists, imagine what they are doing to activists in the workers' movement, anti-war campaigns and socialist groups.

The fact that this is done in the name of the “war against terror” should fool no one. Remember, these are the spooks who fed us the dodgy dossier claiming Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They are liars.

It would be interesting to know how many of the alleged 34 plots foiled since 2005 were really busted by this mass surveillance – if they ever existed. A similar claim in the US that the NSA has prevented 54 terror plots since 9/11 was investigated by ProPublica, who could only find evidence of four; NSA director John Inglis has since admitted only one such incident existed.

But even if terrorists are caught, it

does not justify the negating of our basic human rights. British police “stopped and examined” 60,000 people in 2012 alone under the Terrorism Act (2000) – not many were arrested.

### What should be done?

We should demand the immediate closure of GCHQ and its US equivalents and the cessation of Prism, Tempora and other surveillance programmes. Elected trade union and popular representatives and trusted experts should have access to these files and databases. All the secrets should be made public.

Of course there should be safeguards against the press hacking into private phone messages and emails – as the case against *News International* journalists has revealed. But the threat – and practice – of muzzling press freedom, as evidenced in this case and by the Royal Charter's code of conduct, must be resisted.

What a hypocrite Cameron is – he rails against *The Guardian* for leaking information and threatens the law against them, while he was quite happy to invite Rebekah Brooks into his inner circle and Andy Coulson into Downing Street, when it was widely known that the newspapers they ran were using these very same secret surveillance methods.

He, along with the parliamentary subcommittee which failed to subject Britain's spymasters to any serious investigation, is no guardian of our rights. Indeed none of the Westminster set-up could be since they share a vested interest in protecting the state against the people they are supposed to serve.

Only a workers' government, based on real workers' councils of action and determined to oversee the most thoroughgoing destruction of the state's bodies of coercion and control, could carry out such a task: a revolutionary task.

In the final analysis, these methods of surveillance serve one ultimate purpose: to protect and promote the interests of imperialism and the capitalist system. To those who think capitalism and democracy are synonymous and intricately intertwined, let this be a warning.

Capitalism treats individuals as cogs in its profit machine. If they even look like they may be questioning the status quo – or communicate with others who do – then they become targets. Time we targeted the targeters.