



world revolution

Our alternative: resist the capitalist regime!

As the government rains attack after attack on our living standards – whether through cuts in health, education, benefits and local services, through redundancies in both the private and public sector, through tuition fee increases or the abolition of EMA, or through the steadily rising price of basic necessities – the TUC has for months now been telling us to fix our gaze on the Big Demo on the 26th March. The bosses of the trade unions have argued that a very large turnout on the day will send a clear message to the Lib-Con government, which will start carrying out its spending review at the beginning of April, involving even more savage cuts than the ones we have seen already. It will show that more and more working and unemployed people, students and pensioners, in short, a growing part of the working class, are opposed to the government's programme of cuts and are looking for an "alternative".

And there's no doubt that people are increasingly fed up with the argument that we have no choice but to submit to the blind laws of a crisis-torn economic system. No choice but to accept the tough medicine that the politicians assure us will, at some point in the future, make everything all right again. There's also no doubt that a growing number of people are not content to sit at home and moan about it, but want to go out on the street, encounter others who feel the same way, and form themselves into a force that can make the powerful of the world take notice. This is what was so inspiring about the unruly student demonstrations and occupations in the UK at the end of last year; this is why the enormous revolts that are spreading throughout North Africa and the Middle East are such a hopeful sign.

But if these movements tell us anything, it's that effective action, action that can actually force the ruling powers to back down and make concessions, doesn't come about when people tamely follow the orders of professional 'opposition' leaders, whether people like El Baradei and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the TUC and the Labour Party in the UK. It comes about when people begin to act and think for themselves, on a massive scale – like the huge crowds who began to organise themselves in Tahrir Square, like the tens of thousands of Egyptian workers who spontaneously came out on strike to raise their own demands, like the students here who found new and inventive ways of countering police repression, like the school kids who joined the student movement without waiting for an endless round of union ballots.....

The TUC and the Labour Party, as well as the numerous 'left wing' groups who act as their scouts, are there to keep protest and rebellion in-



Student protesters in UK

side limits that are acceptable to the status quo. The TUC didn't say very much in the period from 1997 to 2010 while its Labour friends launched a vast array attacks on workers' living standards, attacks that the present government is just continuing and accelerating. That's because the social situation was different – there was less danger that people would resist. Now that this danger is growing, the 'official' opposition is stepping in with its expertise in controlling mass movements and keeping them respectable. The trade unions do this on a daily basis by handcuffing workers to the legal rigmarole of balloting and the avoidance of 'secondary' action. And now, with March 26, they are doing it on a national scale: one big march from A to B, and we can all go home. And during the march itself the TUC will be working

directly with Scotland Yard to ensure that the day goes entirely to their jointly agreed plans.

True, some of the more radical trade unions and political groups call for more than a one-off march: they want the TUC to 'coordinate strike action', even call a 'general strike'. But these approaches just reinforce the idea that the best we can hope for is to get the official opposition to act more effectively on our behalf, rather than organising and spreading the struggle ourselves.

If there is to be a real opposition to the ruling class and its assault on our lives, it's not going to be content with one big demo: it has to be part of a much wider movement of strikes, occupations, demonstrations and other actions, controlled directly through mass meetings and willing to defy laws aimed at rendering resistance passive and

divided.

And when we are taking part in demonstrations, whether local rallies or big national marches, let's use them to make links between different centres of resistance, different sectors of the working class. Let's organise our own street meetings where instead of listening to celebrity speakers we can freely exchange experiences from our own struggles and prepare for the battles of the future. Let all those who stand for independent, self-organised workers' struggles use them as an opportunity to meet up and decide on how to connect to wider numbers of their class.

And let's also use such occasions to challenge not only the deadening methods advocated by the official opposition, but also the false perspective they offer us for the future. The TUC 'alternative' of 'jobs, growth, justice', for example, is completely misleading: this system is in an irreversible crisis and can't guarantee anyone's job; even if it was possible without vast increases in state debt, capitalist growth can only be based on increasing workers' exploitation and further despoiling the environment; and a society based on the exploitation of one class by another can never achieve justice. In sum: inside of capitalism, there is no 'alternative' except increasing austerity and barbarism. The only real alternative is to fight against this regime of capitalism and in doing so prepare the ground for a total transformation of society. **WR 5/3/11**

Libya: Popular uprising buried by bourgeois faction fights P2



Egyptian protesters

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Popular uprising buried by bourgeois faction fights

The unfolding events in Libya are extremely difficult to follow. One thing is clear though: the population has suffered weeks of repression, fear and uncertainty. Maybe thousands have died initially at the hands of the regime's repressive apparatus, but now increasingly they are caught in the crossfire as the government and opposition struggle for control of the country. What are they dying for? On the one hand, in order to maintain Gaddafi's control of the state, and on the other in order to put the Libyan National Council - the self proclaimed "voice of the revolution" - in control of the whole country. The working class in Libya and beyond is being asked to choose between two sets of gangsters. In Libya they are being told they should actively take part in this growing civil war between rival parts of the Libyan bourgeoisie over control of the state and economy. In the rest of the world we are encouraged to support the brave struggle of the Opposition. Workers have no interest in supporting either faction.

The events in Libya started as a mass protest against Gaddafi, inspired by the movements in Egypt and Tunisia. The impetus for the explosion of anger in many cities appears to have been the brutal repression of the first demonstrations. According to *The Economist* 26/2/11, the initial spark was the demonstration in Benghazi on 15 February by about 60 youths. Similar demonstrations took place in other cities and were all met by bullets. Faced with the murder of scores of young people, thousands took to the streets in desperate battles with the forces of the state. These struggles witnessed actions of great courage. The population of Benghazi, hearing that mercenaries were being flown into the airport, descended upon the airport and its defenders en masse and took it over, despite heavy losses. In another action civilians commandeered bulldozers and other vehicles and stormed a heavily armed barracks. The population in other cities drove out the repressive forces of the state. The only response of the regime was ever more repression, but this resulted in the break-up of much of the armed forces as soldiers and officers refused to carry out orders to kill protesters. One private shot dead a commanding officer after he issued a shoot-to-kill command. Initially this seems to have been a genuine explosion of popular anger faced with brutal repression and increasing economic misery, especially on the part of the urban youth.

Why have things taken a different turn in Libya?

The deepening economic crisis and a growing refusal to accept repression has been the wider background for the movements in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. The working class and general population has suffered years of brutal poverty and exploitation as the ruling class has accumulated vast wealth.

But why has the situation in Libya been so different to that in Tunisia and Egypt? In those countries, while there was repression, the main means for bringing the social discontent under control was the use of democracy. In Tunisia the growing demonstrations by the working class and wider population against unemployment was diverted almost overnight into the dead end of who would replace Ben Ali. Under the guidance of the US military the Tunisian military told the president to sling his hook. It took a bit longer in Egypt to get Mubarak to go but even his resistance ensured that the discontent was focused on getting rid of him. Importantly, one of the things that finally pushed him was the outbreak of strikes demanding better conditions and wages. This showed that while workers had participated in the massive demonstrations against the government they had not forgotten about their own interests and were not willing to put them to one side in the name of giving democracy a chance.

In both Egypt and Tunisia the military is the backbone of the state and was able to put the interests of the national capital above the interests of particular cliques. In Libya the military does not have the same role. The Gaddafi regime has deliberately kept the military weak over the decades, along with any other part of the state which

may have been a power base for rivals. "Gaddafi tried to keep the military weak so they could not topple him, as he toppled King Idris" said Paul Sullivan, a North Africa expert at the Washington-based National Defense University. The result is "a poorly trained military run by poorly trained leadership that are on the ropes, not exactly personally stable, and with a lot of extra weapons floating around." (Bloomberg 2/3/11) This meant that the only answer the regime has to any social discontent is naked repression.

The very brutality of the state's response swept the working class up in an outbreak of desperate anger at the sight of their children being massacred. But those workers who joined the demonstrations did so largely as individuals: despite the great courage it took to stand up to Gaddafi's guns, workers were not able to put forward their own class interests.

In Tunisia, as we have said the movement began within the working class and the poor against unemployment and repression. The proletariat in Egypt entered into the movement after having engaged in several waves of struggles over recent years, and this experience has given it confidence in its ability to defend its own interests. The importance of this was demonstrated at the end of the demonstrations when a wave of strikes broke out (see the article on page 3).

The Libyan proletariat entered into the present conflict in a weak position. There were reports of a strike in one oilfield. But it is impossible to tell if there have been any other expressions of working class activity. There may have been, but we have to say that the working class as a class is more or less absent. This means that the class from the beginning has been vulnerable to all of the ideological poison generated by a situation of chaos and confusion. The appearance of the old monarchist flag and its acceptance as the symbol of the revolt in only a matter of days marks how deep this weakness is. This flag went along with the nationalist slogan of a "free Libya". There have also been expressions of tribalism, with support or opposition to the Gaddafi regime being determined in some cases by regional or tribal interests and tribal leaders using their authority to put themselves at the head of the rebellion. There is also appears to be a strong presence of Islamism with the chant of "Allahu Akbar" being heard on many demonstrations.

This morass of ideologies has exacerbated a situation where tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of foreign workers have felt the need to flee the country. Why would foreign workers line up behind a national flag, no matter its colour? A real proletarian movement would have incorporated the foreign workers from the beginning because the demands would have been common ones: better wages, working conditions and the end of repression for all workers. They would have united because their strength was their unity, regardless of nation, tribe or religion.

Gaddafi has made full use of all of this poison to try and get workers and the population to support him against the alleged threat posed to his 'revolution': foreigners, tribalism, Islamism, the West.

A new regime in waiting

The majority of the working class hates the regime. But the real and gravest danger for the working class is falling in behind the 'opposition'. This opposition, with the new 'National Council' more and more assuming a position of leadership, is a conglomeration of various fractions of the bourgeoisie: former members of the regime, monarchists, etc, along with tribal and religious leaders. All of them have taken full advantage of the fact that this movement has no independent proletarian direction to impose their desire to replace Gaddafi's management of the Libyan state with their own.

The National Council is clear about its role: "The main aim of the national council is to have a political face ... for the revolution," "We will help liberate other Libyan cities, in particular Tripoli through our national army, our armed forces, of which part have announced their support for the people," (Reuters Africa 27/2/11) "There is no such thing as a divided Libya" (Reuters 27/2/11).

In other words their aim is to maintain the present capitalist dictatorship but with a different face.

The opposition is not united though. Gaddafi's former Justice Minister Mustafa Mohamed Abud Ajleil announced the formation of a provisional government at the end of February with the support of some former diplomats. It was based in Al-Baida. This move was rejected by the National Council based in Benghazi.

This shows that within the opposition there are deep divisions which will explode eventually if they manage to get rid of Gaddafi or when these 'leaders' scramble to save their skins if Gaddafi manages to stay in power.

The National Council has a better public face. It is fronted by Ghoga, a well-known human rights lawyer and is thus not too tainted with links to the former regime, unlike Ajleil. All the better to sell this gang to the population.

The media has made a lot of fuss about the committees that have sprung up in cities, town and regions where Gaddafi has lost control. Many of these committees seem to have been self-appointed by local dignitaries, but even if some of them were direct expressions of the popular revolt, it looks as though they have been pulled into the bourgeois, statist framework of the National Council. The National Council's effort to establish a national army means only death and destruction to the working class and the population as a whole as this army battles it out with Gaddafi's forces. The social fraternization that originally helped to undermine the regime's efforts at repression will be replaced by pitched battles on a purely military

front, while the population will be called on to make sacrifices to ensure that the National Army can fight.

The transformation of the bourgeois opposition into a new regime is being accelerated by the increasingly open backing of the major powers: the US, Britain, France, Italy etc. The imperialist gangsters are now distancing themselves from their former buddy Gaddafi in order to ensure that if a new team comes to power they will hold some sway over it. The support will be for those who will fit in with the imperialist interests of the big powers.

What appears to have begun as a desperate response to repression by parts of the population has very rapidly been used by the ruling class in Libya and internationally to their own ends. A movement that began as a furious effort to stop the massacre of young people has ended up as another massacre of the young, but now in the name of a Free Libya.

The proletariat both in Libya and beyond can only respond by increasing its determination not to allow itself to be dragged into bloody struggles between factions of the ruling class in the name of democracy or a free nation. In the coming days and weeks, if Gaddafi hangs on to power the international chorus of support for the opposition in this civil war will grow ever louder. And if he goes, there will be an equally deafening campaign about the triumph of democracy, people's power and freedom. Either way workers will be asked to identify with the democratic face of capitalism's dictatorship. **Phil 5/3/11**

Democracy arms Gaddafi's brutal repression

If timing is the essence of comedy then David Cameron's long-planned arms sales trip around the Gulf and the Middle East couldn't have worked out better. But supplying butchers with the means to attack their populations is far from comic.

The disgusting nature of this sinister farce was further reinforced by his attendance at a ceremony in Kuwait, along with ex-Prime Minister John Major, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the first Gulf War in which hundreds of thousands of innocents were killed by the most lethal weaponry of the advanced democracies.

At the same time as hundreds, perhaps thousands were being killed in Libya by weapons sold to Gaddafi under both Labour and Tory governments, Cameron, who briefly paused for a hastily arranged photo opportunity in Tahrir Square, along with eight executives from the defence and aerospace industries, hawked their deadly goods around to their gangster clientele. In response to criticism Cameron, stretching words almost beyond comprehension, said that not to provide these Arab regimes with arms was "denying people their basic rights", "racism" and undemocratic. The Gaddafi regime had been sold, amongst other things, up until very recently, sniper rifles, tear-gas grenades, crowd control weapons, small arms ammunition, stun grenades, anti-aircraft cannon, mortars, armoured personnel carriers, military aircraft, gun silencers, weapons sights, body armour and military aviation technology. These were all, in the words of the Foreign Office, "covered by assurances that they would not be used in human rights repression".

The UK provided by far the largest pavilion at the last Libyan arms fair and last week, at the Abu Dhabi arms fair, 10% of all the global exhibitors were British. Minister Gerald Howarth, leading the delegation, declared: "We have ambitious plans". At the same time, Labour's defence spokesman, Jim Murphy, whose government undertook wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and several other 'theatres', trying to make a political point but showing the unity of the British bourgeoisie, said: "The UK

has a responsibility beyond its borders and needs to support force".

It was the Labour government that embraced and strengthened the Gaddafi regime and conducted arms sales to Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Iraq, Morocco, Israel, Qatar, Algeria, Tunisia, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Egypt. And it was the Labour government that sat on any enquiry into BAE's al-Yamanah Saudi arms deal citing "national interest". Now that the LibDems have a taste of power they've slunk away from the moral high ground. Business Secretary Vince Cable is complicit in the deals and Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister, apparently in charge of the country while Cameron was off flogging death and destruction, goes skiing while people protesting for basics, bystanders and children were being murdered by British-supplied arms.

The crimes and hypocrisy of these accomplices to massacres are limitless and Cameron has even proposed selling arms to the Libyan "rebels", by whom he means the Libyan government in waiting, should Gaddafi fall. And while condemning the use by the regime of "excessive violence", that is using the weapons it provided for that purpose, Britain has also fallen in behind the calls from the so-called 'international community' for sanctions and humanitarian assistance - which have been shown in the past to be weapons in the interests of the competing imperialisms implementing them.

Defence Secretary Liam Fox has called for "enhanced defence exports" with "the MoD ... at the forefront of the government export-led growth strategy" and the trade minister Lord Green (sitting next to Vince Cable) said that ministers would be "held accountable" if companies fail to secure deals. The only arms deal that has been blocked in the last couple of years has been the \$65 million sale of helicopters, assault rifles, armoured cars and machine guns to the small African state of Swaziland. At the time the British government

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The importance of the massive workers' struggles in Egypt

The article below was written in mid-February, during a wave of workers' strikes which spread to numerous sectors. Although the governing military responded with stern warnings to the strikers, many of their demands were quickly acceded, thus avoiding a head-on confrontation. The strike wave seems now to have abated, but the Egyptian working class has kept its fighting spirit intact. Furthermore, as the article emphasises, the tendency towards the mass strike, which can certainly be discerned in this recent movement, unfolds on a historic scale, so that particular expressions of it contribute to the development of much deeper and wider movements in the future.

The most important development over the last week or so has been the explicit development of mass workers' struggles in Egypt. As Hossam el-Hamalawy¹, put it in an article published by *The Guardian* on 14 Feb, the upsurge of the workers fighting for their own demands was a potent factor in the decision of the army to dispense with Mubarak:

1. Hossam el-Hamalawy is an Egyptian journalist who blogs at arabawy.org and has written extensively about workers' struggles in Egypt over the past few years.

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claimed that this was because these arms could be used for "possible internal repression". But US embassy documents released by Wikileaks show that the Americans stopped it because of "end user concerns", i.e., that the weapons were likely to end up in Iran. This didn't stop the Campaign Against Arms Trade from welcoming the move as a refusal "to sell arms to a known human rights abuser" and this when British arms to war-torn Africa amounted to over a billion pounds in the last year.

Britain of course is not alone in this deadly trade, all major countries are involved and global arms sales have risen 60% since 2002 to total \$400 billion (based on official figures) in 2009.

Britain's BAE Systems was the second largest company involved in that period with its \$33.25 billion just behind the USA's Lockheed Martin. But it is Britain's role in backing and arming the Gaddafi regime which is particularly nauseous in the present circumstances; feted by the Labour government, financiers, academics and the royal family, the Coalition government was about to continue the work of grooming Saif al-Islam Gaddafi as its place-man in the murderous regime.

Russia, among others, has also provided the regimes with weapons and France, in competition with the US and Britain in the Mediterranean, Maghreb and the Middle East has provided Gaddafi with anti-tank missiles, military telecommunications and maintenance for his Mirage fighter-bombers. The French ruling class has nothing to learn from Perfidious Albion. It has already sent two planeloads of so-called 'humanitarian' aid which the French Prime Minister says "will be the beginning of a massive operation of humanitarian support for the populations of the liberated territories".

It's not just in supplying the weaponry to these murderous regimes that Britain profits economically and strategically. Various special forces supply training to the killers as an adjunct to the arms trade and, unsurprisingly, there's absolutely no scruples here. One of the most notable achievements of the SAS was in training the cadres of Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge in the 1960s. More recently, we've seen the role of West Mercia and Humberside police officers in training associates of the death squads of the Bangladeshi government.

And, finally, it is worth recalling that the weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological, that Gaddafi was supposed to give up in return for his embrace by the 'international community' are still intact in the state's bunkers and a possible threat to large numbers of people in the region. **Baboon 1/3/11**

"All classes in Egypt took part in the uprising. Mubarak managed to alienate all social classes in society. In Tahrir Square, you found sons and daughters of the Egyptian elite, together with the workers, middle-class citizens and the urban poor. But remember that it's only when the mass strikes started on Wednesday that the regime started crumbling and the army had to force Mubarak to resign because the system was about to collapse... From the first day of the January 25 uprising, the working class has been taking part in the protests. However, the workers were at first taking part as 'demonstrators' and not necessarily as 'workers' – meaning, they were not moving independently. The government had brought the economy to halt, not the protesters, with their curfews, and by shutting down the banks and businesses. It was a capitalist strike, aimed at terrorising the Egyptian people. Only when the government tried to bring the country back to 'normal' on 8 February did the workers return to their factories, discuss the current situation and start to organise en masse, moving as an independent block".

An article by David McNally² on www.pmpress.org gives an idea of how widespread this movement has been:

"In the course of a few days during the week of February 7, tens of thousands of them stormed into action. Thousands of railworkers took strike action, blockading railway lines in the process. Six thousand workers at the Suez Canal Authority walked off the job, staging sit-ins at Suez and two other cities. In Mahalla, 1,500 workers at Abul Sebae Textiles struck and blockaded the highway. At the Kafir al-Zayyat hospital hundreds of nurses staged a sit-in and were joined by hundreds of other hospital employees.

Across Egypt, thousands of others – bus workers in Cairo, employees at Telecom Egypt, journalists at a number of newspapers, workers at pharmaceutical plants and steel mills – joined the strike wave. They demanded improved wages, the firing of ruthless managers, back pay, better working conditions and independent unions. In many cases they also called for the resignation of President Mubarak. And in some cases, like that of the 2,000 workers at Helwan Silk Factory, they demanded the removal of their company's Board of Directors. Then there were the thousands of faculty members at Cairo University who joined the protests, confronted security forces, and prevented Prime Minister Ahmed Shariq from getting to his government office"

We could add numerous other examples: about 20,000 workers in Al-Mahalla Al-Kobra, more than 100 kilometres north of Cairo, who have relaunched a strike after a three-day break in the largest spinning and weaving factory in Egypt. Workers in the tourist industry, like the 150 who staged a well-publicised demo against their miserable wages in the shadow of the Great Pyramid; bank workers demanding the sacking of their corrupt bosses; ambulance drivers using their vehicles to block roads in a pay protest; workers who demonstrated outside the HQ of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation denouncing it as a "den of thieves" and "a group of thugs" and called for its dissolution – their words received instant verification as ETUF goons responded with beatings and missiles. The police have also been publicly protesting against the way they have been used against demonstrators, a clear indication of plummeting morale among the lower echelons of the force. No doubt there will be many more examples to be added to these.

As McNally notes, this movement shows many of the characteristics of the mass strike as analysed by Rosa Luxemburg:

"What we are seeing, in other words, is the rising of the Egyptian working class. Having been at the heart of the popular upsurge in the streets, tens of thousands of workers are now taking the revolutionary struggle back to their workplaces, extending and deepening the movement in the pro-

2. David McNally is a professor of political science at York University in Toronto. The titles of his books give some clues to his general political standpoint: *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*, (Winnipeg 2005) and *Against the Market: Political Economy, Market Socialism and the Marxist Critique*, (London, 1999).

cess. In so doing, they are proving the continuing relevance of the analysis developed by the great Polish-German socialist, Rosa Luxemburg. In her book, *The Mass Strike*, based on the experience of mass strikes of 1905 against the Tsarist dictatorship in Russia, Luxemburg argued that truly revolutionary movements develop by way of interacting waves of political and economic struggle, each enriching the other. In a passage that could have been inspired by the upheaval in Egypt, she explains,

"Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle. . . . After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle burst forth. And conversely. The workers' condition of ceaseless economic struggle with the capitalists keeps their fighting spirit alive in every political interval".

As both McNally and Hossam el-Hamalawy point out, the power of this movement was not acquired overnight. For the past seven years, it is the workers who have been at the frontline of resistance against the poverty and repression imposed on the entire population. There were a number of strike movements in 2004, 2006-7 and 2007-8, with the textile workers of Mahalla playing a particularly significant role, but with many other sectors joining in. In 2007 we published an article which already discerned the "germs of the mass strike" in these struggles, because of their high degree of self-organisation and solidarity³. As Rosa pointed out, the mass strike is something that matures over a period of years – the struggles of 1905 which she wrote about had been fermenting in successive struggles over the previous two decades – and 1905 was also a bridge to the revolution of 1917.

But despite all the talk of revolution in these countries – some of it honest if flawed, some of it part of the mystifying discourse of leftism which always seeks to banalise the very concept of revolution – this movement towards the future mass strike faces many dangers:

- the danger of repression. Now that the massive protests have dispersed, the army which has 'assumed power' (in fact it was always there at the heart of it) is issuing urgent calls for Egypt to get back to work. After all, the revolution has won its victory! There have been hints that workers' meetings will be banned. We already know that throughout the period when the army was claiming to be protecting the people, hundreds of activists were being arrested and tortured by this very same 'popular' institution, and there is no reason to expect that this kind of 'quiet' repression will not continue, even if head-on clashes are avoided;

- the illusions of the combatants themselves. As with the illusion that the army belongs to the people, these illusions are dangerous because they prevent the oppressed from seeing who their enemy is and where the next blow will come from. But illusions in the army are part of a more general illusion in 'democracy', the idea that changes in the form of the capitalist state will change the function of that state and make it serve the needs of the majority. The call for independent trade unions which is being raised in many of today's strikes⁴ is at root a variant of this democratic

3. <http://en.internationalism.org/wr/304/egypt-germs-of-mass-strike>

4. See the following document at <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article20203>. This looks like a serious effort by the workers' movement in Egypt to develop its self-organisation through general assemblies and elected committees, while at the same time expressing an attachment to democratic and trade unionist ideas.

"Demands of the Iron and Steel Workers"

1. Immediate resignation of the president and all men and symbols of the regime.
2. Confiscation of funds and property of all symbols of previous regime and everyone proved corrupt.
3. Iron and steel workers, who have given martyrs and militants, call upon all workers of Egypt to revolt from the regime's and ruling party workers' federation, to dismantle it and announce their independent union now, and to plan for their general assembly to freely establish their own independent union without prior permission or consent of the regime, which has fallen and lost all legitimacy.

myth: specifically, it is based on the idea that the capitalist state, whose role is to protect a system which has nothing to offer the workers or humanity as a whole, can allow the exploited class to maintain its own independent organisations on a permanent basis.

We are a long way from revolution in the only sense it can have today – the international proletarian revolution. The authentically revolutionary consciousness required to guide such a revolution to victory can also only develop on a world scale, and it cannot come to fruition without the contribution of the workers of the most advanced capitalist countries. But the proletarians (and other oppressed strata) of the Middle East and North Africa are here and now learning vital lessons from their own experience: lessons about how to take charge of their own struggles, as exhibited in the strikes being spread from below, in the neighbourhood protection committees that sprang up after Mubarak unleashed the police and the dregs of society to loot their homes; in the daily 'direct democracy' of Tahrir Square. McNally again:

"Developing alongside these forms of popular self-organization are new practices of radical democracy. In Tahrir Square, the nerve centre of the Revolution, the crowd engages in direct decision-making, sometimes in its hundreds of thousands. Organized into smaller groups, people discuss and debate, and then send elected delegates to consultations about the movement's demands. As one journalist⁵ explains, 'delegates from these mini-gatherings then come together to discuss the prevailing mood, before potential demands are read out over the square's makeshift speaker system. The adoption of each proposal is based on the proportion of boos or cheers it receives from the crowd at large.'"

Lessons too in how to defend yourself collectively against the onslaughts of police and thugs; in how to fraternise with the army; in how to overcome sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia, Muslim and Christian, religious and secular. Lessons in internationalism, as the revolt spreads from country to country, taking its demands and its methods with it, and as proletarians everywhere discover that they face the same declining living standards, the same repressive 'regime', the same system of exploitation.

Perhaps most importantly, the very fact that the working class has affirmed itself so emphatically precisely at the moment of 'democratic triumph', after the departure of Mubarak which was supposed to be the true goal of the revolt, reveals a capacity to resist the calls for sacrifice and renunciation on behalf of the 'nation' and the 'people', which are always central to the bourgeoisie's patriotic and democratic campaigns. Interviewed by the press over the past few days, workers in Egypt have frequently pointed to the simple truth that motivates their strikes and protests: they cannot feed their families, because their wages are too low, prices are too high, or they have no prospect of jobs at all. This is increasingly the condition facing the working class in all countries, and no 'democratic reform' will go any near alleviating it. The working class has only its struggle as its defence, and the perspective of a new society as its solution. **Amos, 16/2/11**

4. Confiscation of public-sector companies that have been sold or closed down or privatized, as well as the public sector which belongs to the people and its nationalization in the name of the people and formation of a new management by workers and technicians.

5. Formation of a workers' monitoring committee in all workplaces, monitoring production, prices, distribution and wages.

6. Call for a general assembly of all sectors and political trends of the people to develop a new constitution and elect real popular committees without waiting for the consent or negotiation with the regime. A huge workers' demonstration will join the Tahrir Square on Friday, the 11th of February 2011 to join the revolution and announce the demands of the workers of Egypt.

Long live the revolution!

Long live Egypt's workers!

Long live the intifada of Egyptian youth—People's revolution for the people!"

5. Jack Shenker, 'Cairo's biggest protest yet demands Mubarak's immediate departure,' *Guardian* 5/2/11

The capitalist economy locked in permanent decline

At the very moment that Ireland was negotiating its rescue plan, the International Monetary Fund admitted that Greece would not be able to fulfil the plan that they and the European Union devised in April 2010. Greece's debt would have to be restructured, even if they didn't use this word. According to D. Strauss Khan, the boss of the IMF, Greece must be allowed to repay its debt not in 2015 but in 2024. That is, on the Twelfth of Never, given the course of the present crisis in Europe. Here is a perfect symbol of the fragility of some if not most European countries undermined by debt.

This concession to Greece has been accompanied by new austerity measures. After the austerity plan of April 2010 - which was financed by the non-payment of two months of retirement, the lowering of indemnities in the public sector, and price rises resulting from an increase in tax on electricity, petrol, alcohol, tobacco, etc - there are also plans to cut public employment.

A comparable scenario unfolded in Ireland where the workers were presented with a fourth austerity plan. In 2009 public sector wages were lowered between 5 and 15%, welfare payments were suppressed and recruitment frozen. The latest austerity plan includes reducing the minimum wage by 11.5%, reducing welfare payments, eliminating 24,750 state jobs and an increase in sales tax from 21 to 23%. For these two countries, these violent austerity plans presage future measures that will force the working class and the major part of the population into an unbearable poverty.

The incapacity of new countries (Portugal, Spain, etc) to pay their debts is shown by their attempt to avoid the consequences by adopting draconian austerity measures and preparing for more, like in Greece and Ireland.

What are the austerity plans trying to save?

Naturally, these policies are not intended to relieve the poverty of the millions who are the first to suffer the consequences. The bourgeoisie's biggest fear is of a domino effect i.e. that if the weakest countries default, the effect will quickly spread throughout the system.

At the root of the bankruptcy of the Greek state is a considerable budget deficit due to an exorbitant mass of public spending (armaments in particular) that the fiscal resources of the country, weakened by the aggravation of the crisis in 2008, cannot finance. In Greece, it is clear that a country of 11 million people, whose GNP in 2009 was 164 billion euros, will not be able to pay back a loan of 85 billion euros. As for the Irish state, its banking system had accumulated a debt of 873% (ie nearly nine times!) GDP which the worsening of the crisis had made impossible to cover. As a consequence, the banking system had to be largely nationalised and the debt was transferred to the state. Accordingly, the Irish state found itself in 2010 with a public deficit corresponding to 32% of GDP!

In both cases, faced with an insane level of indebtedness of the state or of private institutions, it is the state which must assume the integrity of the national capital by showing its capacity to reimburse the debt and pay the interest on it.

The potential for a 'domino effect' lies in the fact that it is the banks of the major developed countries who held the colossal debts of the Greek and Irish states. There are different opinions concerning the level of the claims of the major world banks on the Irish state. Let's take the 'average': "According to economic daily Les Echos de Lundi, French banks have a 21.1 billion euro exposure to Ireland, behind the German banks (46 billion), British (42.3 billion) and American (24.6 billion)". And concerning the exposure of the banks by the situation in Greece: "The French institutions are the most exposed with 55 billion euros in assets. The Swiss banks have invested 46 billion, the Germans 31 billion". The non-bailout of Greece and Ireland would have put the creditor banks in a very difficult situation, and thus the states on which they depend. It would have been even more the case for countries in a critical financial situation (like Spain and Portugal) which are also exposed in Greece and Ireland and for whom such a situation would have proven fatal.

Worse, a failure to bailout Greece and Ireland would have unleashed a crisis of confidence and a stampede of the creditors away from these countries, guaranteeing bankruptcy of the weakest of them, the collapse of the euro and a financial storm that would make the failure of Lehman Brothers in 2008 look like a mild sea breeze. In other words, the financial authorities of the EU and the IMF came to the rescue of Greece and Ireland not to save these two states, still less the populations of these two countries, but to avoid the meltdown of the world financial system.

In reality, it is not only Greece, Ireland and a few other countries in the South of Europe whose financial situation has deteriorated. The following figures show the level of total debt as a percentage of GDP (January 2010): "470% for the UK and Japan, gold medals for total indebtedness; 360% for Spain; 320% for France, Italy and Switzerland; 300% for the US and 280% for Germany". The levels of indebtedness of all these states show that their commitments exceed to an absurd degree their ability to pay. Calculations have been made which show that Greece needs a budget surplus of at least 16% - 17% to stabilise its public debt. In fact, all these countries are indebted to a point where their national production won't allow the repayment of their debt.

In other words these states and private institutions hold debt that can never be honoured. Given that the rescue plans have no chance of success, what else is their significance?

Capitalism can only survive thanks to plans for permanent economic support

Nevertheless the Euro zone countries have another difficulty: its states are unable to create the monetary means to 'finance' their deficits. This is the exclusive preserve of the European Central Bank. Other countries like the UK and the US, equally indebted, do not have this problem since they have the authority to create their own money.

Such support to the financial sector, which finances the real economy, can reduce the impact of austerity which is why all those who are able to print money are doing so. The US is going furthest in this direction: Quantitative Easing N°2, creating \$900 billion.

The fact that the dollar is an international reserve currency allows the US to pump out dollars at a level that would cripple its rivals should they attempt such a strategy. A further round of 'QE' cannot be ruled out.

US fiscal and monetary measures are, therefore, far more aggressive than in European countries but even the US is now trying to drastically slash its budget deficit, as illustrated by Obama's proposal to block the wages of federal employees. In fact one finds in every country in the world such contradictions revealed in the policies adopted.

The bourgeoisie has exceeded the limits of indebtedness that capitalism can sustain

As Marx showed, capitalism suffers genetically from a lack of outlets because the exploitation of labour power necessarily leads to the creation of a value greater than the outlay in wages, because the working class consumes much less than it produces. Up and till the end of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie had to offset this problem by the colonisation of non-capitalist areas where it forced the population, with various means, to buy the merchandise produced by its capital. The crises and wars of the twentieth century illustrate that this way of answering overproduction, inherent to capitalist exploitation, was reaching its limits. In other words, non-capitalist areas of the planet were no longer sufficient for the bourgeoisie to realise the surplus product that was needed for enlarged accumulation. The deregulation of the economy at the end of the 1960s, manifested in monetary crises and recessions, signified the quasi-absence of the extra capitalist markets as a means of absorbing the surplus capitalist production. The only solution henceforth has been the creation of an artificial market inflated by debt. It has allowed the bourgeoisie to sell to states, households and busi-

nesses without the latter having the real means to buy.

We have often shown that capitalism has used debt as a palliative to the crisis of overproduction that has ensnared it since the end of the 1960s. But we should not confuse debt with magic. Actually debt must be progressively reimbursed and the interest paid systematically, otherwise the creditor will not only stop lending but risk bankruptcy himself.

Now the situation of a growing number of European countries shows they can no longer pay the part of the debt demanded by their creditors. In other words these countries must reduce their debt, in particular by cutting expenses, when 40 years of crisis have shown that the increase of the latter was an absolutely necessary condition to avoid a world recession. All states, to a greater or lesser degree are faced with the same insoluble contradiction.

The financial storms shaking Europe at the moment are thus the product of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism and illustrate the absolute impasse of this mode of production.

Developing inflation

At the very moment when most countries have austerity plans that reduce internal demand, including for basic necessities, the price of agricultural raw materials has sharply increased. More than 100% for cotton in a year; more than 20% for wheat and maize between July 2009 and July 2010 and 16% for rice between April-June 2010 and the end of October 2010. Metals and oil went in a similar direction. Of course, climatic factors have a role in the evolution of the price of food products, but the increase is so general that other causes must be at play. All countries are preoccupied by the level of inflation that is increasing in their economies. Some examples from the 'emerging countries':

- Officially inflation in China reached an annual rate of 5.1% in November 2010 (in fact every specialist agrees that the real figures for inflation in this country is between 8 and 10%)

- In India inflation reached 8.6% in October

- In Russia it was 8.5% in 2010

The development of inflation is not an exotic phenomenon reserved for the emerging countries. The developed countries are more and more concerned: a 3.3% rate in November in the UK was seen as worrying by the government; 1.9% in virtuous Germany caused disquiet because it occurs alongside rapid growth.

Inflation is not always the result of vendors raising their prices because demand exceeds supply and therefore carries no risk of losing sales. The printing of money, that is the issuing of new money when the wealth of the national economy does not increase in the same proportion, leads inevitably to a depreciation of the money in circulation and thus to an increase in prices. This is the natural result of Quantitative Easing.

There is also the question of speculation. As profitable outlets decline, capitalists no longer invest directly in production that can tie up capital for long periods with little return. Instead, they keep capital liquid; ready to be invested in any activity that looks likely to make a profit. When prices of a particular asset or commodity begin to rise for any reason, the capitalists pour money into the market anticipating further price rises so they can sell at profit. For example, a bad wheat harvest suggests prices will rise so capitalists buy up large amounts of wheat hoping to make a killing. This very action pushes the prices up further, which encourages other capitalists to invest, pushing the price up even more! Increasing the money supply gives more cash to invest and accelerates the process even further.

The problem is that a good part of these products, in particular agricultural products, are also commodities consumed by vast numbers of workers, peasants, unemployed, etc. Consequently, as well as a lowering of income, a great part of the world population is hit by the rise in the price of rice, bread, clothes, etc.

Thus the crisis which obliges the bourgeoisie to save its banks by means of the creation of money leads the workers to suffer two attacks:

- the lowering of their wages
- the increase in the price of basic commodities

A similar process occurred in 2007-2008 (just before the financial crisis) triggering hunger riots in many countries. The consequences of the present price explosion have immediately led to the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria.

The level of inflation won't stop rising. According to *Cercle Finance* from 7 December, the rate of 10 year T bonds has increased from 2.94% to 3.17% and the rate of 30 year T bonds has increased from 4.25% to 4.425%. That clearly shows that the capitalists anticipate a loss of the value of the money they invest and thus demand a higher rate of return on it.

The tensions between national capitals

Contrary to the pious intentions published by the recent G20 in Seoul, protectionist tendencies are clearly at work today behind the euphemism of 'economic patriotism'. It would be too tedious to list all the protectionist measures adopted by different countries. Let us simply mention that the US in September 2010 was taking 245 anti-dumping measures; that Mexico from March 2009 had taken 89 measures of commercial retaliation against the US and that China recently decided to drastically limit the exportation of its 'rare earths' needed for a lot of high technology products.

But, in the present period, it's currency war which will be the major manifestation of trade war. Increasing the money supply also allows national capitals to make their products cheaper on the world market, another benefit to countries using this policy. Other countries like China, deliberately undervalue their currency to maintain exports.

However, despite the trade war, the different countries have agreed to prevent Greece and Ireland from defaulting on their debt. The bourgeoisie is obliged to take very contradictory measures, dictated by the total impasse of its system.

What solutions can the bourgeoisie propose?

Why, in the catastrophic situation of the world economy do we find articles entitled 'Why growth will come' or 'The US wants to believe in the economic recovery'? Such headlines seek to maintain the illusion that the bourgeoisie's economic and political authorities still have a certain mastery of the situation. In fact, the policy options available, in so far as they are effective, bring with them their own dangerous side effects:

- creating money can stimulate the economy and help reduce deficits (when these funds are directed to buying state bonds) but creates currency instability and unleashes dangerous inflationary trends.

- austerity measures can reduce debt and make the working class pay for the crisis, but they can also curtail economic activity and exacerbate the tendency for depression and breakdown, which actually makes the debt problem worse and necessitating further austerity. This is the situation Ireland now finds itself in.

In fact, many governments are pursuing both policies simultaneously in the hope that the effects of one will offset the negative effects of the other. Unfortunately, this often results in the worst of all worlds: 'stagflation' i.e. low growth plus inflation.

The only true solution to the capitalist impasse will emerge from the more and more numerous, massive and conscious struggles of the working class against the economic attacks of the bourgeoisie. It will lead naturally to the overthrow of this system whose principle contradiction is that of the production for profit and accumulation and not the satisfaction of human needs. **Vitaz 2/1/11**

What future for the young in capitalism?

Youth unemployment has risen to 18.1% for those aged 18-24. This is worse than the official rate for the general population which is 7.9%. This only begins to tell the story: unemployment is 27% for 18-20 and 44.3% for 16-17 year-olds not in education, and for new graduates 20% (up from 10.6% at the start of the recession). Overall graduates do a little better than non-graduates at age 21-24 with 13.4% rather than 16% unemployment. No wonder students had such militant protests last November and December demanding “we want a future”.

The state orchestrates attacks on living standards

The underlying cause of unemployment is the crisis, in this example the fact that capitalism can no longer make a profit from exploiting the available workforce, and so is ‘socially excluding’ large numbers, particularly the young, from jobs. Not just here, not just in North Africa, the Middle East, but around the world.

It’s not just the recession that started with the credit crunch. Even in the developed countries employment has never returned to the levels of the 1960s and early 1970s. Already over a million in 1979, unemployment trebled in the 1980s before statistics were massaged and millions of the jobless reassigned to incapacity benefit – the origin of the 269,000 households where no-one has ever worked.

In these circumstances the role of the state is to manage the economy in the interests of capital, and right now that means lowering the cost of labour power. So although the crisis is an international and historic phenomenon, the state plays an essential role in coordinating and directing the attacks on jobs, on health, on education. Redundancies at the end of last year may have eased off a little since 2008-9, but we are now seeing an-

other spate of announcements particularly in local government – 1200 in Liverpool, 800 in Oldham, 500 on the Isle of Wight, 500 in Plymouth... and a few hundreds in many others. These job losses are all essentially due to the cut to local government funding or formula grant of 27% announced in the spending review last year, meaning cuts of up to 8.8% this year. And of course when funding and jobs go, so do services that workers rely on. For example, among the £15 million cuts made by Solihull is a cut of £4.1m in children’s services, and all over the country Sure Start and children’s centres are either being closed or cut down to a skeleton service, worsening the prospects for those starting families. Connexions services that were supposed to give young unemployed the skills and support they need to find work are closing.

NHS is not immune

The NHS is losing 53,000 jobs, for example: 1,115 at Devon and Exeter Trust, 1,755 in Belfast, including 120 doctors and 620 nurses, 1,013 in East Lancashire including 50 doctors and 270 nurses. It will be no comfort whatsoever to the unemployed of any age, and particularly the young, that most of these will be through ‘natural wastage’. Remember that health service spending was ‘protected’ last year, although required to make around 20% efficiency savings. Front line services will inevitably feel the effects – it is precisely the intention to move as many activities as possible out of hospital, to shorten stays, and has been over the lifetime of several governments. In fact many of the initiatives that have received government funding – from Tony Blair’s Community Matron project to prescribing advice for GPs have been designed with cost cutting in mind. And the new reorganisation of the NHS under way at the moment is no different.

In education, money has been withdrawn from

school rebuilding and repair, the National Audit Office is warning that cuts in funding will put more universities at risk of bankruptcy – remember the London Metropolitan redundancies. 400,000 teenagers are doing ‘vocational courses’ that are of no value in the job market. Young people and their families must foot more and more of the bill for their deteriorating education, with the abolition of the EMA in September and a rise in tuition fees at the universities that survive. Together with cuts in pre-school services this can only worsen educational outcomes at all levels.

And ahead of us we have all the attacks announced last year by the current coalition and previous Labour governments: the two year public sector pay freeze, cuts in housing benefit, restriction of Sure Start grants to first child, increase in fuel duty and many others come in this April, with more rolling out over the next two years, along with the continuing rise in the pension age. Not forgetting that there will be another budget later this month, no doubt with new cuts announced.

It is easy to see the role of the state in making redundancies in nationalised industries and local government, but it also applies in the private sector. Last November the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development warned that public sector cuts would cause even more job losses in the private sector, around 1.6 million. For example BT which gets 10% of its revenue from government contracts has had to cut costs with 35,000 job losses.

What is noticeable about these redundancies and cuts is that while they result from policies managed by central government, they are administered by innumerable employers – this or that NHS Trust, or Local Authority, or school or college. Legal resistance is now limited to actions divided up along the same lines.

We are all under attack, we need to fight back together

The attacks we face are class-wide, across the board, attacks on the young, but also on pensions, job losses in the public and private sector, attacks on benefits for the unemployed and the sick, but also benefits needed by families in work (child benefit, Sure Start grants, housing benefit). They are attacks orchestrated by the state on behalf of the entire capitalist class. And they aren’t going to stop – capitalism is in an impasse and can only come back for more attacks again and again.

There is obviously a lot of anger – shown, most recently, for example, by protesters storming Lambeth Town Hall. The attacks are coordinated, and so must be struggles be. **Alex 5/3/11**

The forum

“The aim of discussion should be not to “provoke” one’s “antagonist”, but to develop a better understanding of different ideas, even if one is opposed to them.” (Rules of the forum)

A selection of quotations from the thread: Egypt: The class struggle takes centre stage

“The fundamental origins of the movement in Libya appears to be the same as that in Tunisia etc: unemployment, poverty and a youth desperate for some form of future. However, the main difference appears to be the nature of the formation of the state in Libya.”

“My impressions are completely different. Yes of course the economic conditions play an important role, but the movement comes across to me as tribal and Islamicist, and offers no sort of perspective to the working class.”

“The question of the nature of the unemployed and socially marginalized rebellion is an important one. What is the class nature of these revolts?”

“The question of the origins of the present situation in Libya is important, but it is also important to analysis what is happening now as well. Whatever the origins it is becoming increasingly clear that the movement is now becoming predominantly a bloody intra-bourgeoisie fraction fight.”

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**France, Britain, Tunisia
The future lies in the
international development of
the class struggle**

**Capitalism has no way out of
its crisis**

The economic crisis in Britain

**The Hungarian revolution of
1919: the example of Russia
inspires the Hungarian workers
(part II)**

**The Manifesto of the Workers’
Group of the Russian
Communist Party (part III)**

Continued from page 8

The bourgeoisie fears the contagion of revolt

where the secret police are everywhere, demonstrations have been minuscule and the clamp down immediate: 200 people trying to express solidarity with the revolt in Libya were violently dispersed. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, the king initially tried to buy off discontent by announcing a series of wage increases and social measures. However, in anticipation of future demonstrations, all protests and marches are to be banned. An official announcement stated “Regulations in the kingdom forbid categorically all sorts of demonstrations, marches and sit-ins, as they contradict Islamic Sharia law and the values and traditions of Saudi society.” It added that police were “authorised by law to take all measures needed against those who try to break the law.”

Asia, Europe, America....

Despite the pseudo-explanations of the press, this mood of rebellion is not an ‘Arab’ phenomenon. 100,000 people demonstrated in New Delhi on 23 February to voice their growing disquiet over unemployment and rising prices. One demonstrator said in an interview: “I earn 100-125 rupees a day [2 or 3 dollars]. How can we survive on that if prices are going up so much?” December figures put inflation at 18%. One banner read “prices will end up killing people on the street”.

In China there was a major wave of strikes last year and the government is extremely sensitive to any form of dissent. It responded to Internet appeals for a ‘Jasmine revolution’ in China with further restrictions on access to the web and by a heavy police presence on the streets, with the use of barriers to prevent free movement on the day designated for the protests.

Conditions facing the population in south east Europe have deteriorated rapidly and there is a groundswell of discontent. In Albania on 25 February at least three people were shot dead during a protest in front of government buildings. In

Croatia, there has been a series of demonstrations against the government and the rising cost of living. Some of the initial ones seem to have had a very nationalist flavour, but more recently they have had a more working/class student composition, with banners and slogans critical of capitalism gaining an echo. In Greece, on top of the youth revolt at the end of 2008, there has been a series of general strikes against the government’s well-publicised austerity packages. Tightly controlled by the unions, these one-day strikes were beginning to look like rituals, but the last one, on 23 February, seems to have had more life: more massive participation of public and private sector employees affecting banks, schools, hospitals, transport and other sectors, along with a series of strikes going on outside the ‘official’ days of action.

One of the most significant struggles in the recent period, however, has been the mobilisation of public sector workers in Wisconsin, USA, which has crystallised the mounting frustration of the American working class.

“Over 200,000 public sector workers and students have taken to the streets and have been occupying the state capitol in Wisconsin to protest proposed changes to collective bargaining agreements between the state government and its public employee unions. The state’s rookie governor, Tea Party backed Republican Scott Walker, has proposed a bill removing collective bargaining rights for the majority of the state’s 175,000 public employees, effectively prohibiting them from negotiating pension and health care contributions, leaving only the right to bargain over salaries. Moreover, according to the legislation, public employee unions would have to submit themselves to yearly certification votes in order to maintain the right to represent workers in future scaled down negotiations. Firefighters not affected by the proposed changes (because their union supported Walker in the November election) have shown

their solidarity with those under attack by joining the protests, which many say have taken inspiration from the wave of unrest sweeping Egypt and the wider Middle East. Many Wisconsin protestors proudly display placards giving the Governor the ominous moniker Scott ‘Mubarak’ Walker, while others hold aloft signs asking ‘If Egypt Can Have Democracy, Why Can’t Wisconsin?’ Protesters in Egypt have even shown their solidarity with workers in Wisconsin!” (From the ICC online article ‘Wisconsin public employees, defence of the unions leads to defeat’).

The conflict in Wisconsin is presented as a fight to defend the trade unions, and the majority of workers do perceive it in these terms, just as hundreds of thousands in the Middle East see theirs as a struggle for democracy. The ruling class makes maximum use of these ideological weak points, but the underlying motive for all the current revolts is the necessary reaction to the economic degradation and political repression imposed by the world-wide crisis of this system. The germs of an international movement against the system itself can be glimpsed in the rapid spread of revolts across national boundaries and the raising of slogans which express real international class solidarity. When workers in Egypt and America consciously support each others’ struggles, the road to revolution becomes a little bit wider, and the ruling class has every reason to fear this. **Amos 5/3/11**

The social and political aspects of revolution

It seems that everyone is talking about revolution. The recent social upheavals in North Africa have been described as 'revolutions'. In Ireland, Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny has proclaimed a "democratic revolution" because now it's his turn to impose the austerity measures previously administered by his Fianna Fail and Green Party predecessors. In the US celebrity chef Jamie Oliver is fighting a "Food Revolution" against obesity.

In the mass media we don't expect to see any serious attempt at examining the idea of revolution as understood by marxists in the workers' movement. It would be like expecting fashion magazines to be referring to 'images created as a focus for religious veneration' or 'small pictures on a computer screen' when they write of 'icons'.

The *commune* is a publication that makes claims to a marxist heritage. On its website in mid-February there appeared an article "on Egypt, and revolution". It starts:

"Revolutions are actually quite common. It's only February and there have been two already this year in Tunisia and Egypt. Other recent revolutions include Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Kyrgyzstan (2005) and Ukraine (2005). Recent failed endeavours include Thailand (2009), Burma (2007), and Iran (2009).

All of these revolutions were, to use the Marxist term, political rather than social revolutions. That is, they overthrew the faction which ruled the state and replaced it with another one". The distinction made by the author between political and social revolutions is that "a social revolution is one which transforms not just the ruling clique, but the way in which all society is organised".

Trotsky's view, in a period of defeat

This is not a unique approach to the question by someone claiming to be a marxist. In Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, he looks at the Russian state and indicates a perspective for the working class. Because he saw nationalised property as a gain the changes he thought necessary specifically precluded any action against the state. Anticipating a more democratic regime he wrote "...so far as concerns property relations, the new power would not have to resort to revolutionary measures. It would retain and further develop the experiment of planned economy. After the political revolution - that is, the deposing of the bureaucracy - the proletariat would have to introduce in the economy a series of very important reforms, but not another social revolution." In this passage the "political revolution" means not having "to resort to revolutionary measures" - it is not a "social revolution."

Elsewhere in the same work Trotsky says "The overthrow of the Bonapartist caste will, of course have deep social consequences, but in itself it will be confined within the limits of political revolution."

This concept of the 'limits of political revolution' is also found in Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism*, a work collecting material written in 1939 and 1940. Here he sees the Russian state "as a complex of social institutions which continues to persist in spite of the fact that the ideas of the bureaucracy are now almost the opposite of the ideas of the October Revolution. That is why we did not renounce the possibility of regenerating the Soviet state by political revolution". Despite the fact that the state in Russia had become the overwhelmingly dominant means for the exploitation and suppression of the working class Trotsky thought that it could be regenerated by the process of 'political revolution'.

The history of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution is, within certain parameters, open for discussion. Trotsky's distinction between 'political' and 'social' revolution is unambiguous.

Marx, the founder of marxism

To find the basis for the marxist understanding of what a revolution is, it is necessary to start with Marx.

In his 1844 article "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian'" Marx examines the phrase "A social revolution without a political soul" and concludes

that "every revolution dissolves the old order of society; to that extent it is social. Every revolution brings down the old ruling power; to that extent it is political".

He goes on: "But whether the idea of a social revolution with a political soul is paraphrase or nonsense there is no doubt about the rationality of a political revolution with a social soul. All revolution - the overthrow of the existing ruling power and the dissolution of the old order - is a political act. But without revolution, socialism cannot be made possible. It stands in need of this political act just as it stands in need of destruction and dissolution. But as soon as its organising functions begin and its goal, its soul emerges, socialism throws its political mask aside".

It is clear that, while still continuing to base himself in the same framework, Marx was alive to historical developments throughout his life. The preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Communist Manifesto* says that events have made some details of the its political programme "antiquated". In particular one thing proved by the Paris

Commune (quoting *The Civil War in France*) was that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes". The state has to be destroyed for the working class to take its transformation of society onto a higher level. The Paris Commune "was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour. ... The political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule" (*The Civil War in France*).

There have been further subsequent developments in the marxist view of the process of revolution, most notably Lenin's *State and Revolution*. What the clearest have in common is an understanding that a working class revolution is 'political' in that it has to destroy the state of

its exploiters, and 'social' in that its goal is the transformation of society. The 'political' and the 'social' are not two separate phenomena but two aspects of one struggle.

When one capitalist faction replaces another in government following parliamentary elections, when a capitalist faction seizes power in a military coup, or when material reality forces the bourgeoisie to re-organise the way it functions as a ruling class, none of these are 'revolutions' as the capitalist state remains intact.

The 'revolutions' on the *commune's* list are not social revolutions, but neither are they political revolutions. The replacement of one faction by another is not, from the point of view of the working class, a revolution of any sort. For the working class the destruction of the capitalist state is an essential political moment in a social revolution, part of the process that can lead to the liberation of all humanity. **Barrow 4/3/11**

Gaddafi's friends on the left

What's been happening in Libya has been rapidly changing and marked by many uncertainties, but many on the Left are quite clear on what they want their demagogues to do.

In a *Guardian* (28/2/11) article headlined "How can Latin America's 'revolutionary' leaders support Gaddafi?" Mike Gonzalez criticises Presidents Ortega of Nicaragua and Chavez of Venezuela, along with Fidel Castro, for expressing their sympathy for Gaddafi and the Libyan government. He says they "cannot support an oppressive regime that now faces a mass democratic movement from below" when, apparently, they do.

The exact nature of the movement is open for discussion, but there can be no quibbling with the fact that the Libyan capitalist state is repressive.

In contrast to the Gaddafi regime Gonzalez says that Ortega and Chavez came "to power as a result of a mass insurrection" and that when Castro overthrew Batista it "was hugely popular". Regardless of their route to power Ortega, Chavez and Castro are integral parts of the capitalist ruling class in their countries. As it happens Ortega and Chavez are presidents following elections, but, whether in power through the ballot box, or through a military coup like Gaddafi, they have done their best to serve their national capitals.

What Gonzalez wants to hear is a passionate denunciation of Libyan repression and expressions of solidarity with the people. His explanation for the failure of his fallen heroes is that "Libya has invested in all three countries and presented itself as an anti-imperialist power." This is a rather crude, partly materialist explanation. In reality all these left-wing leaders proclaim their anti-imperialist credentials, and recognise Gaddafi as one of their own, one of the bosses that can talk 'radical'. Meanwhile the exploited working class and other oppressed strata endure the capitalist reality which they preside over.

There is an exception to this pattern. Iranian President Ahmadinejad has criticised the "bad behaviour of the Libyan government towards the people" and said that the state should listen to the people's desires. This is what 'radical' leaders are supposed to do, and, if they criticise other governments their message will be transmitted by their leftist admirers.

Leftist hypocrisy over WRP's Libyan connections

Gaddafi's 1969 coup looks a little different through the eyes of the Workers Revolutionary Party that publishes *Newsline*. They refer (28/2/11) to "the Libyan revolution, through which the Libyan people took control over their country from

UK and US imperialism in 1969."

Other leftists scoff at the WRP because of the agreements and communiqués it signed with the Libyan government, its slavish loyalty to the Libyan 'socialist' state and Iraq of Saddam Hussein both of which gave money to the WRP, its defence of the execution of Stalinists in Iraq, and a whole range of sordid activities in collaboration with regimes in the Middle East during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Even now, after any Libyan contributions have possibly long dried up, they "urge the Libyan masses and youth to take their stand alongside Colonel Gaddafi to defend the gains of the Libyan revolution, and to develop it. This can only be done by the defeat of the current rebellion" (*Newsline* 23/2/11), and publish one of the longest available extracts from Gaddafi's speech "to the Libyan people made ... to rally them against the internal counter-revolutionary forces and their UK and US backers" (ibid 24/2/11).

But the leftists who have pointed a finger at the WRP for accepting money from the blood-stained regime of Gaddafi don't have a leg to stand on. What the WRP was paid for most leftist groups do for free.

Take the example of the Vietnam War. In the 1960s and 70s the International Socialists (who went on to become the SWP) described North Vietnam as 'state capitalist', while more orthodox Trotskyists called it a 'deformed workers state', and Stalinists called it 'socialist.' These differenc-

es amounted to little in the unity of the Left in insisting on the necessity for workers and peasants in Vietnam to lay down their lives for the capitalist North against the capitalist South.

In the eight year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, during which maybe a million people died, the Left put all the emphasis in their propaganda on the support by the US and others for the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. There might have been reservations over the Iranian regime and its archaic religious ideology, but the consensus on the Left was that it was better to die for Iran than Iraq. Of course, when Iraq was under attack from the US and its 'coalitions' the leftists found Saddam defensible, even though the position of the working class had not altered in any way.

During the conflicts in disintegrating Yugoslavia in the early 1990s the leftists chose their camps once more. The logic of defence of Bosnia or Kosovo led to support for the bombing of Belgrade. Support for Serbia and a united Yugoslavia meant support for the massacres undertaken by both 'official' and paramilitary forces

The brutality of the WRP is easy to see, but the 'critical support' offered by other leftists for various factions of the bourgeoisie is just as poisonous. With calls for military intervention in Libya growing louder it will be interesting to see who the leftists rally to. Past experience shows that it won't be for the working class in defence of its class interests **Car 4/3/11**

ICC online

Wisconsin public employees:

Defence of the unions leads to defeat

"Firefighters have shown their solidarity with those under attack by joining the protests, which many say have taken inspiration from the wave of unrest sweeping Egypt and the wider Middle East. Many Wisconsin protesters proudly display placards giving the Governor the ominous moniker Scott 'Mubarak' Walker, while others hold aloft signs asking, 'If Egypt Can Have Democracy, Why Can't Wisconsin?' Protesters in Egypt have even shown their solidarity with workers in Wisconsin!"

en.internationalism.org

Contact the ICC

Debate is vital to the revolutionary movement. One of the most important elements of our activity, defined in our Basic Positions, is the "Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions". This, we are convinced, is only possible through the confrontation and discussion of differing views and positions within the revolutionary camp.

For this reason, we urge our readers to write to us with their comments, opinions and disagreements on the positions and analyses that we defend in our written press, including our web site.

We will do our best to reply to all serious correspondence as quickly as possible, although given our limited resources we may not always be able to do so immediately. Should the subject matter be of general interest, then we may publish both correspondence and our reply in our press.

While debate amongst revolutionaries is vital, it is equally necessary not to fall into the trap of thinking that our activity is something anodyne and acceptable to the bourgeois dictatorship disguised under the trappings of the democratic state. We will not under any circumstances publish our correspondents' real names, nor their home or e-mail addresses.

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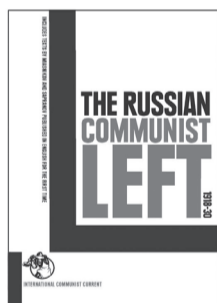
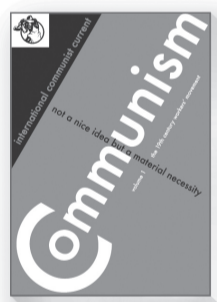
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The bourgeoisie fears the contagion of revolt

Revolt is contagious, above all when more and more of the world's population are facing a future of misery thanks to the deepening of capitalism's economic crisis. The ruling class has no real control over the crisis and is becoming increasingly concerned about the growth of resistance to its austerity plans. This concern is manifested in two ways: the attempt to make concessions and 'democratise' its rule, coupled with the strengthening of its whole apparatus of repression.

Egypt: the 'People's Army' against the people

The centre of the epidemic is obviously in the Middle East. Mubarak is so far the most significant of the scalps claimed by the movement sweeping the Middle East. This is because Egypt is an important regional power and also has a relatively well-developed working class with a history of struggle behind it. It is important to note, however, that meeting this demand has not meant the dispersal of the movement. On 25 February mass protests once again took place in Tahrir Square demanding that the rest of Mubarak's government (largely still in place) also depart. After several hundred of the more determined protesters tried to camp out in the square overnight, they were met with the full force of the 'democratic' army. The Occupied London website (which seems to have direct links with the movement in Egypt) drew the appropriate conclusions:

"The sad events of tonight will hopefully bury that relatively misguided phrase 'the people and the army are one hand' and reveal that the true nature of the situation in Egypt is better described as 'the army and the police are one hand.' A group of several hundred peaceful protesters, attempting to stay the night in Tahrir square and in front of the People's Assembly to protest continued military rule and the persistence of the old regime's illegitimate presence in government, were violently attacked and driven away by Military Police, Army officers and commandos wearing balaclavas and wielding sub-machine guns. One protestor, taken inside of the People's Assembly building by army officers and beaten, was told bluntly 'don't fuck with the army.....the army is no friend of the people.' This institution is as much a part of the regime as any other, representing not just the same entrenched military-political elite that have ruled Egypt for 60 years, but

also enormous and substantial business interests that benefit from preferential treatment and systemic corruption. There has been little doubt in anyone's mind that the army's preference would be to maintain most of the country's infrastructure (police and political) just as it was before, while placating the people telling them that it was their ally and guardian" <http://www.occupiedlondon.org/cairo/?p=355>

Iraq, Iran, Algeria...

If the 'struggle for democracy' is how the capitalist media present the situation in North Africa, the situation in Iraq is rather embarrassing for them. After a brutal war campaign and occupation that left thousands dead, Iraq is now supposedly a democracy and yet Iraq, too, has seen its own wave of mass protests. The appalling 'security situation' (i.e. the threat to daily life from both rival militias and the state security forces themselves) has been a focus for the initial demonstrations, as has the issue of state corruption. However, many of the demonstrations have been demanding the provision of basic utilities: electricity, water, etc. The government has already been forced to subsidise electricity costs in an effort to deflect the anger, but this hasn't stopped the protests. In the latest protests on 4 March, thousands gathered in central Baghdad to protest against corruption and unemployment.

While the bourgeoisie has been happy to show pictures of the brutal repression in Egypt and especially Libya, it seems to have little stomach for dealing with the 29 deaths of protesters in Iraq at the hands of the security forces on the "Day of Rage" on 25 February. Nor does it seem to recognise the attempt to disperse the March 4th protest with mass beatings and water cannon. At the time of writing, we have little information on whether there is an attempt by the working class to develop an autonomous struggle in Iraq - although Kirkuk oil-workers were threatening strikes in mid-February - as seemed to be the case in Egypt; but it is certain that the response to dissent from 'Iraqi democracy' is much the same as 'Egyptian dictatorship'.

Iran, possibly the most significant power in the region, has also been affected by the wave of protests. The so-called 'Green Movement' has been at the head of discontent with Ahmadinejad government since 2009 and seems to be trying to use the protests to push forward its own agenda. Protests



have been met with typical brutality by the regime with mass arrests. But the working-class has also been raising its own voice in Iran. In the words of *Time* (22/2/11): "Over the past year, strikes and walkouts have broken out in the automobile, tire, sugar, textile, metals and transportation industries. Many of these protests were concerned with bread-and-butter issues: wages not paid, unexpected layoffs, deteriorating benefits and rising unemployment". Most recently, strikes in the refineries at Abadan, where workers haven't been paid for 6 months, were timed to coincide with the protests on the streets. The Iranian regime cannot help but be nervous about the developing situation in Abadan - one of the largest refineries in the world, it was also one of the epicentres in the revolt against the Shah in 1979.

In Algeria, following demonstrations in January and February, the regime has announced the suspension of the 'state of emergency' in place since 1992. Under the banner of fighting terrorism, this decree made any public meeting or demonstration illegal. The government has also announced steps to combat unemployment and homelessness, two major themes of the recent demonstrations. There is no substance to these concessions. Demonstra-

tions of 2-3000 in mid-February were contained by 30-40,000 police, and a demonstration planned for 26 February was preceded by a flood of arrests. Despite the continuing atmosphere of state repression, however, there was an energetic demonstration by students in Tizi Ouzou. There are also signs of resistance coming from the workplaces: 300 employees of a phosphate enterprise in Annaba demonstrated outside the company HQ demanding wage rises and social benefits; paramedics came out on strike nationally in early February and education workers struck for two days in Bejaia.

Protests continue in Tunisia despite the departure of Ben Ali: on 25 February 100,000 people demonstrated against the 'transition government' which is seen by many as the old regime in make-up. More street protests in Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, and Bahrain, where the social situation remains tense. Again, the bourgeoisie responds with the same mixture. Police killed six demonstrators in Morocco. In Bahrain the government initially used strong arm tactics to break up the occupation of the Pearl Roundabout, and then backed off on the advice of the American bourgeoisie. In Syria,

Continued on page 5

Political positions of the ICC

World Revolution is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

* The stratified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1884-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.