

# workers power 5



Crisis in the SWP



French troops out of Mali

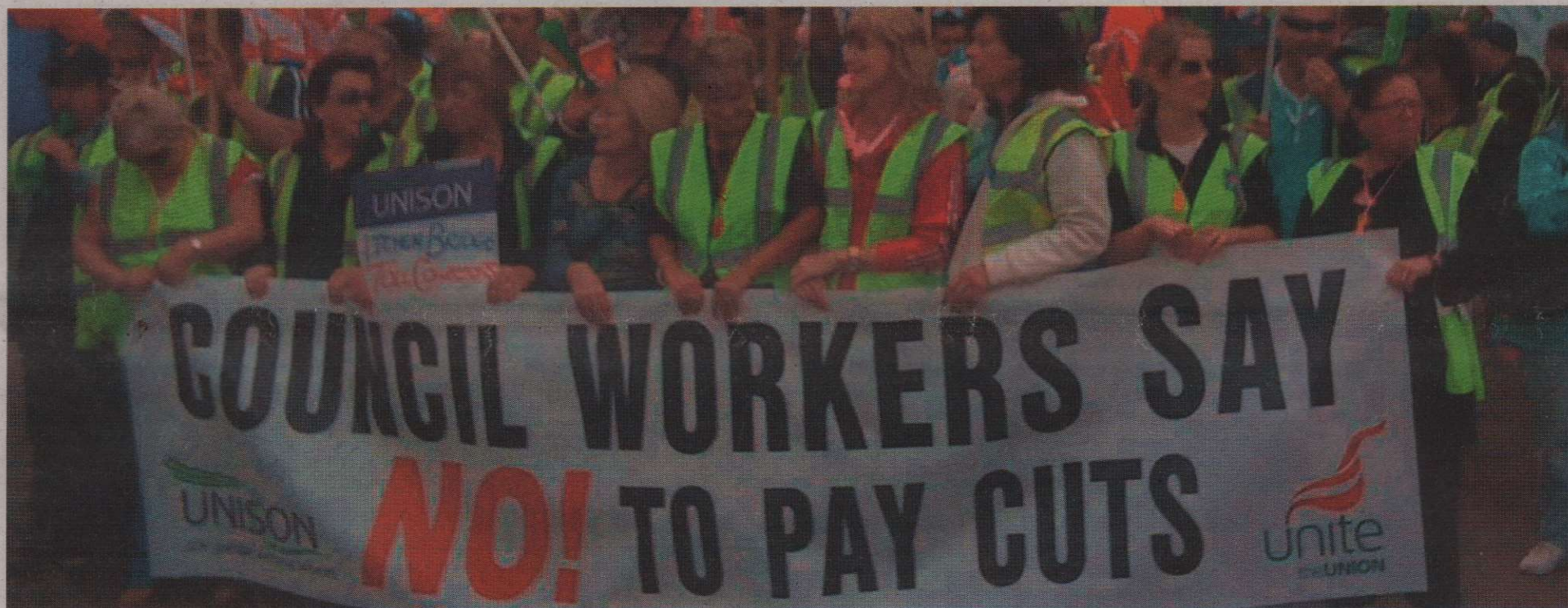


Coordinate pay campaigns

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

## 2013 – make or break time for the fightback



Jeremy Dewar

2013 IS MAKE or break year for the Coalition plans to complete the disintegration of the NHS, the state school and welfare systems and for breaking the resistance of public sector workers to mass redundancies. It is also make or break year for our resistance. If we cannot stop them then by the next election everyone, including Labour and the union leaders, will be claiming the “reforms” are, sadly, irreversible.

Austerity is now set to last till 2018 at least.

Not for themselves of course. This government has looked after its super-rich backers. From April, top earners will receive a £3 billion tax break when the top rate is cut from 50 to 45 per cent.

Meanwhile benefits and working tax credits will no longer be linked to inflation, a move that will cost low paid and

unemployed workers hundreds of pounds a year each and push another 200,000 children into poverty. Benefits have been slashed by £32 billion.

How can that mean, “we’re all in this together”?

All this is designed to help out the same banks and corporations that caused the financial crisis which plunged us into recession. The debt – which is increasing, not decreasing – was caused mainly by the bank bailouts, where the government handed over a trillion pounds to save the system as a whole from going under.

But the Tories have no intention of making the bosses pay for the crisis they created.

George Osborne has slashed corporation tax to a historic low. But even this is too much for tax dodgers Starbucks, Google and Vodafone, who pay less than 1 per cent in tax. Amazon pays a big fat zero. Goldman Sachs is lead-

ing the way for banks by delaying bonus payments so its top employers can take advantage of April’s tax break. How

**Jobs massacre**  
Cuts announced in first three weeks of January:

HMV: 4,500
Jessop: 1,370
Dept for Education: 1,000
Honda: 800
Blockbusters: 760
Worcester Council: 650

greedy can they get?

Well, very, it seems. Energy companies Centrica and EDF, which bought our gas and electricity for a song when they were privatised, have reported profits of £1.4-1.6 billion. But this hasn’t stopped them pushing up our bills by 6-10-per

cent, forcing millions of elderly people and poor families to choose between eating and heating.

And, despite Cameron boasting about employment, thousands of workers join the dole queue each month, adding to the 2,500,000 already there, while public sector posts are being deleted left, right and centre. A million people have been jobless for over a year.

### Fightback

When HMV went into administration, retail workers in Limerick went into occupation. They demanded their wages and redundancy pay before letting the suits in, fully aware that creditors would claim any spare cash before the workers who earned it.

This is an excellent example to all of us. We need a wave of strikes and occupations to stem the job cuts – with ballots if possible, but wildcat action when necessary. The bosses

never give notice of sacking us; why should we tell them before we strike back?

Over the coming weeks, teachers, lecturers and civil servants are planning strike action over pay, increasing workloads and job cuts. The European day of action, 13 March, is being mooted as a possible date.

Good. But we must learn the lessons from the pensions strikes in 2011. Magnificent strikes in June and November came to nothing as union leaders split away and signed rotten deals. Even the “left” union leaders failed to keep the struggle going.

This time, we need councils of action in every town and city to unite the strikes and continue the struggle even if – or rather when – the union leaders sell us out. Instead of frittering away our energies on one-day strikes, spread out over many months, we should sharply step up the action from one day to one week, then

indefinitely: all out and stay out to win.

The TUC is currently consulting unions over the practicalities of a general strike. As if they need to ask – of course it’s practical! If they can hold general strikes in Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain, then we can do the same here. Then, pensioners, students, the unemployed and non-unionised, agency and temporary workers can join in – as a class united against our common enemy.

But none of this will happen without those workers and young people who see the need for it uniting and conducting a political struggle inside the labour movement, in workplaces, housing estates, schools and colleges.

So let’s unite all our forces into one single mighty movement. Then we can really make a general strike to break this millionaires’ government a reality.

## Teachers call for strike action – Gove's attacks must be stopped

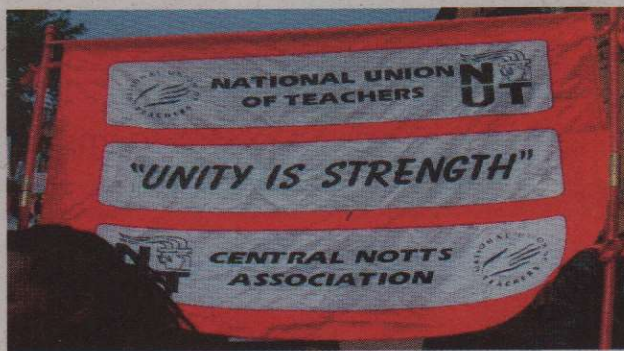
Bernie McAdam, Sandwell  
NUT

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) is gearing up for a national strike on Wednesday 13 March, possibly coinciding with a European TUC Day of Action against austerity.

This is a direct response to Tory Education Secretary Michael Gove's vicious attack on teachers' pay. His plans will involve the scrapping of automatic pay progression from September 2013.

**Pay**  
Performance-related pay would become the norm. The aim is obviously to eradicate national pay bargaining with the unions and leave individual teachers weaker, with consequently greater divisions within the staff room.

This attack comes hard on the heels of a defeat over teachers' pensions. In fact the pay freeze and pensions changes taken together represent a 16 per cent pay cut for teachers. Never was it more true to say that the unions' inability to stop Gove over



pensions merely emboldened him to press home a series of attacks as part of his overall aim of completely dismantling the education system.

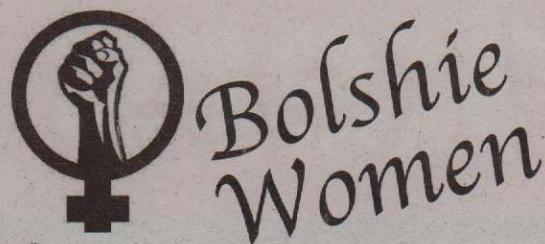
The most spectacular element in this programme is forcing through academies and free schools. Creeping privatisation means no trace of democratic control over these schools and riding roughshod over trade union rights.

**Winning strategy needed**  
The scale of the attacks is so wide-ranging and deep that union leaders involved in the education sector should have long ago developed a joint campaign of action in defence of education with the involvement of all education workers

plus parents and students. Essentially the union leaders have failed to develop a winning strategy. What we need is escalating strike action up to and including an all-out indefinite strike. This has to be campaigned for seriously and in every workplace.

It should not be limited to wages or pensions though that would at least be a start. It must be called as a battle to overturn the entire government strategy on education.

The NUT should take a lead in this direction. The one-day strike in March must be the launching pad for an intensifying battle with the government and a wider appeal for all workers, students and parents for solidarity.



## Why can't rape victims get justice?

Joy Macready

The vicious beating and gang-rape of a 23-year-old student in New Delhi, who died in hospital two weeks later, sparked outrage across India and the world.

The brutality and premeditation of the attack – six men conspired to snatch a woman in order to rape and kill her – spawned mass protests against frequent rapes and their slow and ineffective prosecution. In many cases police refuse to hear reports from victims and some women report being raped by the police themselves.

The state's response to the demonstrations was swift enough. On 26 December, hundreds of armed police and troops battered protesters with water cannon, teargas and baton charges as they marched on the presidential mansion demanding justice for rape victims.

A woman is raped every 14 hours in Delhi, known as India's "rape capital" – one out of every four cases across the whole of India occurs here. Of the 635 rape cases reported in the first 11 months of 2012, only one ended in conviction.

But India is not the only country that has a bad record on rape convictions. In the UK, only 1,070 rapists are convicted despite an estimated 95,000 victims each year.

### Roots of injustice

Although 90 per cent of UK rape victims said they knew the identity of their attacker, just 15 per cent went to the police, telling researchers it was "too embarrassing", "too trivial" or a "private/family matter".

The reason rape victims can't get justice, even in countries where rape laws are well established is because of the inequality between the sexes (sexism) and the role of private property which is fundamental to capitalism.

The root of sexism lies in the family structure and a woman's role as domestic slave within it. Women perform a necessary service for capitalists – they feed, clothe and care for the next generation of workers for free.

In many countries, women are excluded from social production and economically dependent on men. In many ways they are treated as private property, subjected to male guardianship under the father or husband. Their reproduction is controlled through forced monogamy.

Even where they work outside the home, while being systematically paid less than men, women shoulder the vast majority of the housework and caring for children, the sick or the elderly.

Capitalism exploits the division between the sexes in order to drive down wages in the long term. However, this division is maintained because men gain some short-term benefit from it, in the sense they do not have to perform this extra work or face the social and sexual oppression common to all cultures. Thus women's subservient role is preserved inside the (private) home, as well as in the workplace.

This male authority in the private sphere means that, no matter the letter of the law, rape and domestic violence is seen as a "domestic incident" that the head of the household should be left to sort out. Because the assaults are personal and usually behind closed doors, it becomes a "he says, she says" dispute where the victim is often put on trial instead of the accused.

Even when rape happens in public, as in this shocking case, it takes a mass mobilisation to force the state to act. Women continually come up against the (mostly male) police force and judiciary who instinctively treat them as second-class citizens and the property of another.

### Raise Your Voice!

It is no wonder that many women do not report a rape. The reasons are the same worldwide: the shame associated with the assault, the fear of not being believed, the torture of reliving the attack over and over again, the length it takes to reach a verdict (two years in the UK), the poor conviction rate and the fear of a repeat attack or reprisal.

Additionally, women are often blamed for their rapes: in one poll, 68 per cent of Indian judges said that "provocative attire" amounts to "an invitation to rape". But it's not about changing what women wear or how we behave – it's about changing the economic and social system that keeps women subordinated. Delhi demonstrators waved placards saying: "Don't teach me what to wear, teach men not to rape."

The women in India are showing the way forward. They are fighting back through self-defence classes and collective action. Mass protests have forced the government into speeding up sexual assault trials.

However, in the midst of this reactionary ideas are also emerging. A village council has decided to ban "vulgar songs" at weddings, prohibit women from wearing jeans and T-shirts, and stop girls from carrying mobile phones to school.

Now that they have a groundswell of support, the protestors need to take their fight to the next level and demand:

- End the two-fingers test, which is used by doctors to determine if a woman has been sexually active before the rape.
  - Root out the rapists in the police and government: over the past five years political parties have fielded candidates for state elections including 27 charged with rape.
  - Zero tolerance for public sexual harassment or molestation.
  - Fully funded refuges for rape and domestic violence victims.
  - Campaign against forced marriages.
  - Divorce on demand.
  - Free contraception and abortion on demand.
  - Free childcare and socialised domestic labour
  - Free education.
  - Equal pay and opportunity for work.
- Special demands need to be raised to combat the reactionary ideas in rural areas:
- Literacy programmes for women.
  - Rights and access to land.
  - Campaign of education among women to understand their rights.
  - Equal say and representation in the village council meetings and decision-making.

The struggle for these demands will mean a collective struggle of both men and women in communities, trade unions and political parties. In order to win these rights for all women, it must be part of an international working class women's movement – one that has the overthrow of capitalism in its sights.

## Civil servants ballot for action

Rebecca Anderson

On 16 January the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) NEC decided to ballot a quarter of a million civil and public servants for strike action over sustained government attacks.

Increased pension contributions and four years of pay freezes and caps mean that civil servants will have seen their income cut by 16 per cent on average by 2014 – and now the government



move forward with the ballot.

Significantly, the union said: "We now need to consider PCS action on pay and terms and conditions in pursuit of specific PCS demands at the same time as pursuing joint action with other unions wherever possible." This demonstrates a strategy change from past years where PCS has only struck when other unions have been willing to. PCS should now publicly call on other union leaders, whose members are facing similar attacks, to launch their own ballots.

This move to action is taking place in the context of the Coalition's massive attack on the union itself, as it tries to squash any opposition to the cuts. All civil service departments have been instructed to halve the time allowed for union reps' facilities agreements, and even to consider making reps use their own annual leave to attend committee meetings and annual conferences.

This attack on the ability of PCS to organise and defend its members should be an explicit part of the ballot and any subsequent industrial action.

Vote 'Yes' for strike action!

threatens to extend the working week and abolish family-friendly policies.

The union wrote to the head of the civil service, Bob Kerslake, to forewarn him that unless the government improved civil servants' living standards and stopped attacking their working conditions, the union would ballot for industrial action. The NEC meeting was informed that Kerslake had refused to engage on any of the issues, so the leadership voted to

### workers power

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# Loyalist Belfast rioters target Nationalist enclaves

The task of the day is to defend the Short Strand and Catholic communities, argues **Bernie McAdam**. These could then become the basis of a political alternative to the government's cuts programme and the continuing repression

After seven weeks of daily loyalist protests and riots, the clashes show no sign of abating. Belfast City Council's decision to restrict flying the Union Jack to 17 days was first opposed by the mainstream Unionist parties. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) whipped up the protests, which have not been massive but turned violent very quickly.

Loyalists attacked and breached Belfast City Hall, trashed Alliance Party premises and issued death threats, and clashed with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). As loyalists made their way back from the protests to East Belfast they repeatedly attacked the isolated nationalist enclave of the Short Strand. On 14 January they petrol bombed St Matthew's chapel where special needs children were meeting.

Even Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness, who has made his peace with the sectarian PSNI, was forced to admit "inadequate protection" of the Short Strand. The police have also been remarkably tolerant of countless loyalist roadblocks, even those with small numbers of protesters.

The PSNI never shows such leniency when dealing with nationalist mobilisations. In fact, only days into the New Year, police raided homes in the Ardoyne, issuing cautions to nationalist residents for "observing" Orange parades going through their areas!

## Loyalist claims

Loyalists claim that the nationalist community is getting all the benefits of the peace process. They moan that re-routing their parades, not flying their flag as often and sharing government with Sinn Fein all mean that they are culturally discriminated against. Loyalist 'leader' Willie Frazer even complained that Aer Lingus planes deliberately flying low to annoy loyalist protesters.

It is not as if the council has banned flying the Union Jack. It will still fly over City Hall and these flags fly in



## Drop the charges: free Stephen Murney

**MORE THAN 150** people held a white-line picket in Newry on 12 January to protest at the arrest and imprisonment of Stephen Murney. Stephen, from Derrybeg, Newry, is a local activist and member of the Republican socialist group *Eirigi*.

At the beginning of December, he was remanded in custody and charged with "collecting and distributing information likely to be of use to terrorists". These spurious charges are based on historical photographs of non-serving police officers, his son's BB guns and band uniforms described as "combat-type" clothing. No hard evidence was presented at his arraignment.

Stephen refused to accept bail conditions that stipulate not staying in Newry or with his

family. He has not been charged with any terrorist offence but has been a victim of the drive to quell all political opposition to the Good Friday Agreement.

Internment by remand is back again in the north where prisoners are kept for up to three years and then acquitted. In the north and south of Ireland both governments seem to be mounting a concerted campaign against political activists who oppose the peace process.

We need to mount a campaign within trade unions and political organisations to end the current victimisation of Republican activists in Ireland and demand that both governments end the repression.

their hundreds in every loyalist estate all year round, where even the kerbs are painted red, white and blue. Even though some Orange parades have been re-routed away from nationalist areas, other parades still march in areas like the Ardoyne every year.

Are nationalists being preferentially treated? This claim is a bit rich given the historic discrimination against Catholics for which the six-county state is infamous and which

underpinned the anti-Unionist rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Peace Monitoring Report 2012 claims that, on every indicator of deprivation, the proportion of Catholics is higher than Protestants. The proportion of people in low-income households is much higher among Catholics (26 per cent) than among Protestants (16 per cent). The Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA) figures show that

eight of the 10 most deprived areas and 14 of the top 20 are in Catholic/nationalist areas. In 2010, 54 per cent of those unemployed were Catholics compared to 46 per cent for Protestants – an unemployment rate of 9 per cent as opposed to 6 per cent.

That gap has narrowed significantly since the 1990s but will inevitably widen again as the public sector, where most Catholics are employed, gets hit by cuts.

It is absolutely clear that both Protestant and Catholic workers are being hit by unemployment and cuts to public services. Therefore would it not be far better to protest about this than a flag?

But while loyalist workers continue to be pledged to their sectarian state, they will always have one hand tied behind their back when it comes to fighting for their class interests.

## Loyalist pogroms

The Union has always been about relative material privilege for Protestants – a Protestant state for a Protestant people. This ideology is supremacist. We can march anywhere we like – its *our* country, we can flaunt *our* union flag right in your face, and we will batter anyone who objects. It is the language of pogroms and the Alliance Party experienced just a small taste of what Catholic communities face.

The state of Northern Ireland was founded on sectarian pogroms. In 1920 Lisburn and Banbridge's Catholic populations were completely expelled. Murderous pogroms swept through Belfast that same year. All Catholic workers were driven out of Harland and Wolf shipyards.

The same sectarian spirit accounted for the Bombay Street pogrom in 1969 and the Battle of St Matthew's, Short Strand in 1970. In fact every street march by loyalists conceals a pogrom in the making, as residents in the Short Strand have recently experienced.

The pogroms are a logical extension of the state-backed discrimina-

tion and repression that has become a permanent feature in the north. Anyone identifying with a united Ireland was fair game. 'Northern Ireland' was always an undemocratic prison house backed by Britain's guns. The Good Friday Agreement can never alter the divisions in society so long as the sectarian state exists.

## Where now?

The immediate task of the day is the defence of Short Strand. As in the 1970s, citizens' defence committees should be built to provide the necessary disciplined and organised defence.

Daily patrols are needed. Residents young and old, male and female, should participate and build a community defence force. A network of support groups should be built across Belfast's nationalist areas.

These groups should develop as democratic defence organs of the community. They should also become a political alternative that fights against the Northern Ireland Executive and the British government's cuts programme and the continuing repression. They should call for joint strikes and occupations and blaze a trail for workers unity.

In this way it can be demonstrated to Protestant workers that a joint struggle against austerity will benefit both communities. This will not suit Sinn Fein or the DUP, and it will expose the peace process for the sham that it is. Increasing impoverishment in the north will provoke more sectarian clashes if a socialist and fighting alternative is not built.

In Britain we will continue to call for the ending of repression against Republicans. We call for the release of Marian Price and all the Republican prisoners. British occupation of the north must end now. The people of Ireland as a whole should determine the future of the north. Only a 32-county Workers' Republic can liberate all Irish workers from sectarianism and the failed states of the north and south.

## Tories attack the poor, while MPs demand a 32 per cent pay rise

*George Osborne's further cuts to benefits and working tax credits will mean cutting back to the bone for a lot of families, Sally Turner reports*

The Coalition's new Welfare Up-rating Bill caps a whole range of benefits at 1 per cent until 2015, including statutory maternity pay and job-seeker's allowance.

Yet at the same time as families are

using soup kitchens to survive, MPs are demanding a 32 per cent pay increase because £65,000 a year just isn't enough for some.

### Don't cut benefits

The Tories tried to convince workers to back the Bill by showing that some benefits have risen by 20 per cent since 2007, while private sector pay has only gone up by 12 per cent.

Even if that is true, just because bosses are cutting wages to ensure higher profits doesn't mean that those on benefits should live below the poverty line. The government should create more jobs so that those who are able to work can and bosses should be forced to raise wages in line with benefits.

The underlying objective of this Bill is to depress all workers' wages by

threatening them with the 2.5 million unemployed who could take their job if they step out of line or become involved in strike action.

### Political response

Although Labour opposes the Bill, it only focuses on the 60 per cent of the benefit recipients who are in work, therefore accepting the argument that those who are unemployed deserve

nothing. We desperately need a new party that will fight in the interests of the working class and act as a tribune for the poor.

At the same time we demand that Labour and union leaders, as well as voting and campaigning against the Welfare Up-rating Bill, fight for a minimum wage of £10 an hour and jobs for all.

# GENERATION RIOT

★ BRITAIN

## Fighting unity

KD Tait

2012 was a bad year for students. The first year of £9,000 fees saw a 10 per cent drop in student numbers. In September the government tried to deport thousands of students from London Met. And aside from local flare ups of resistance, the mass revolt of 2010-11 seemed a distant echo.

As for the 50 per cent of young people who aren't in overcrowded lecture theatres, over a million of them are jobless. With eight times more job seekers than vacancies, the only alternatives are workfare schemes or unpaid internships.

2012 saw a fall in the levels of resistance from young people, as well as from trade unionists. The rivalries in the anti-cuts movement, are reflected by the divisions in the student movement. The decline in the numbers on the 21 November NUS national demonstration reflected a decline in those on the TUC 20 October march. The resistance is stagnating but it is clear to increasing numbers of activists that something has to change. Students have to look at how we can build on our best experiences of collective, democratic, fighting organisation, to unite our forces and join up to the wider struggles in society.

Since the grassroots protests and walkouts of winter 2010, the National Union of Students has been able to re-impose its deadening grip.

Many student unions have dismantled their democratic structures, replacing democratic accountability with tokenistic and passive participation, which is incapable of engaging more than a small minority of students, leaving decisions from grand strategy to publicity in the hands of time-serving bureaucrats who are divorced from the mass of students.

But the total fiasco of the NUS demonstration shows that we ignore the bureaucrats at our peril. Equally, joining in the petty squabbling and factionalism of NUS conference in order to win a few positions is no long-term solution.

By drawing in students into genuinely democratic structures we can expose the undemocratic nature of the NUS on campus. Working with sabbatical officers where possible and against them where necessary, we can start to break the stifling bureaucratic attitude which sees students as a stage army, not as conscious participants.

There is no question of 'reclaiming' the NUS for the students. But its peculiar character – funded and managed as a mechanism of state control, yet with leaders reliant on a relationship with students – means we should work with them where they act in our interests, yet be able to openly criticise and independently organise

whenever they put their own careers before the needs of students.

The student movement didn't appear out of thin air. The wave of occupations against the war in Gaza in 2009 fuelled the growth of student committees, which took on the task of coordinating action against cuts and the tuition fee increase.

During the student movement, several towns organised general assemblies, which represented the highest form of democratic decision-making and representation. At their best, they attracted participation from schools, colleges and organisations of students and education workers.

Many of these structures have withered, but they remain the basic tactic for collective struggle both on campus and in schools.

Our primary task is to rebuild these committees. They should have representatives from every academic department and the trade unions – just like they did in the successful Québec student movement. It's important that we pressure the student unions to submit to the democratic decisions of the general assemblies.

On campuses, the UCU and workers' unions are fighting to defend education and save jobs. In universities, schools and colleges, students need to launch a determined struggle for democratic rights to oversee education policy, financial decisions and hold management to account.

In the fight to defend education and to increase students' control over what we learn, committees of action should work for the widest representation, drawing in students, teachers, cleaners and other staff – all who have a common interest in defending a properly funded, accessible education system.

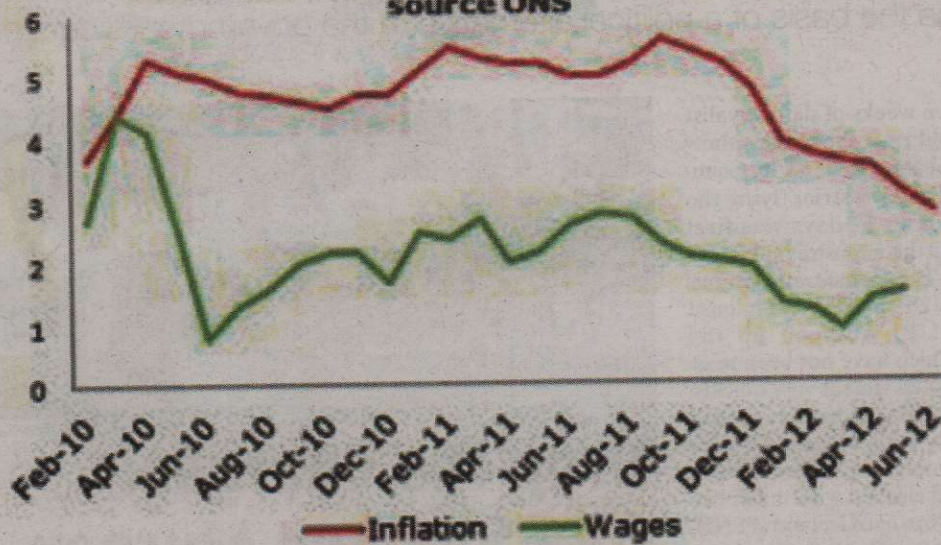
The infighting and competition that plagues the anti-cuts movement has its echo in the student movement too. But the solution is the same.

We think all the campus and school anti-cuts groups should affiliate to a democratic, national federation. The decision by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts to allow both group affiliation and individual membership (£1) with full democratic rights is a good step forward.

NCAFC, Education Activist Network and Youth Fight for Jobs and Education should co-sponsor a spring conference to decide on a common strategy to defend education and unite our forces into one fighting federation. We encourage all youth to join NCAFC and fight for this to happen – a common campaign is the strongest basis for building general assemblies and uniting with the working class struggle do kick out the Tory wreckers with their austerity, privatisation and mass unemployment.

## What should socialists fight for in the pay campaigns?

RPI inflation versus average wages  
source ONS



Marcus Halaby and Peter Main

The pressure is mounting on union leaders in the public sector for a coordinated pay campaign. The National Union of Teachers is likely to call a strike in March, the University and College Union could join them and the Public and Commercial Services union is also balloting on pay and related issues. Unison, the GMB and Unite have also submitted a pay claim in local government, though they are far from agreeing to strikes.

The struggle over wages is becoming a key part of the struggle against austerity. After three years of public sector pay freezes, and effectively the same, if not worse, for workers in the private sector, average earnings have declined by £4,000 since December 2009, and this figure is expected to be £6,000 by the end of this year. That is the equivalent of 25 per cent of total average pay.

One of the key factors in forcing down wages has been the threat of unemployment. Millions of people have been forced to accept part-time work in order to have any work at all. The total of part-time workers was up by 10.5 per cent to 8.12 million in the four years to September 2012. Within this, the number of involuntary part-time workers almost doubled from 727,000 to 1.41 million.

Much the same holds for temporary work, where the total number of workers has increased by 19 per cent to 1.62 million and the number of people who wanted full time work but were forced to accept temporary contracts increased by 86 per cent from 348,000 to 650,000.

This is the reality behind government claims that the economy is recovering because more people are in work, up by 0.87 per cent to 29.6 million, even if the number of unemployed has increased by 34 per cent to 2.51 million – an unemployment rate of 7.8 per cent. Bogus self-employment has played a similar role in massaging the unemployment fig-

ures, with the number of self-employed rising by 11.1 per cent to 4.2 million.

Worst hit are the under-25s, of whom 945,000 are now jobless, up by a fifth from 780,000, and the long term unemployed, whose numbers more than doubled from 437,000 to 904,000. Since the vacancy ratio has increased by about three quarters, to 5.2 claimants per job, their prospects are bleak.

Many workers, and even more union leaders, accept the argument that there has to be a trade off between wages and jobs. According to this, firms, or the government, can only keep workers in work if the "wage bill" is cut. Ed Multiband made exactly this point in an interview with the BBC. When he was asked, "Would you urge public sector workers to agree to pay cuts to save jobs?" he replied, "Well we're talking, actually, about a pay increase limited to 1%, but absolutely. Look, the priority now has to be to preserve jobs".

But do pay cuts preserve jobs? If so, why has unemployment risen despite wages falling?

Behind this argument lies the idea that wages are paid out of profits. That being the case, if profits are down, then wages have to go down. At first sight this seems to add up – and it is certainly the way society works. However, in reality, it is an example of what Karl Marx called "ideology", that is, a reflection of social reality – but an upside down reflection.

Far from wages being paid from profit, Marx showed how profits were a deduction, by the capitalists, from the increased value created by the working class in the process of production after all production costs, including wages, have been paid. This additional value, or "surplus value" as economists called it, even before Marx, could go either to the employers or to the workers.

If it goes to profits, it strengthens the position of the employers. Quite apart from any self-indulgence, it can

fund investment in further profit-making, for example, the purchase of new technology which reduces the number of workers employed. However, given the current economic situation, it is more likely to be spent on the bond or currency markets in the hope of a quicker return than could ever be achieved in production.

The situation in the public sector is rather different – the majority of workers there are paid from revenue collected through taxation, largely from other workers in the form of income tax, National Insurance and VAT. However, holding down wages has the same effect in the end. If less of the revenue is paid out in wages, more is available to "pay off the deficit", that is, to guarantee the winnings of the corporations and financiers who gamble on the international bond markets from which the government borrowed billions to bail out the banks. In other words, this, too, strengthens the capitalists.

Of course, the alternative, an increase in the value paid out in wages is not something the bosses would voluntarily agree to, it would require a successful struggle by the workers. The effect of this in the short term would be to maintain their standard of living, their health and that of their families. At a different level, in the longer term, it would strengthen their position as a class, increase collective identity and raise their ability to resist the inevitable counter-attack from the bosses – and their government.

Within capitalism, there can be no end to this struggle over the surplus value but, for socialists, it is not only the pre-condition for maintaining the working class but also the training ground for a bigger battle. That is the battle to take control of the entire economy away from the tiny class of capitalists and into the hands of the overwhelming majority in society. Only then could the huge potential of modern production be used rationally in the interests of society as a whole.

# Crisis in the Socialist Workers Party

## Rape, sexist behaviour and the revolutionary working class movement

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is the largest far left group in Britain and the leading organisation in the International Socialist Tendency. It is also one of the most left wing tendencies calling itself Marxist.

But it is in crisis, due to the bureaucratic methods of its leadership, which are in turn a result of its break from the revolutionary traditions of Lenin and Trotsky.

Over the next four pages we analyse the crisis and propose a principled way forward for the oppositionists inside the SWP/IST

THE SOCIALIST Workers Party (SWP) is presently undergoing its most serious crisis since the 1970s. This is entirely the direct result of the disloyal actions of its own leadership, the 12-person Central Committee (CC), before, during and after the annual conference held on 5 and 6 January 2013.

The immediate issue of the crisis is an accusation of rape made by a woman party member against the former national secretary and current party full timer, Martin Smith. The conference received a report from the party disputes committee, which concluded that the charge was "not proven". This report was approved by only the narrowest of margins.

Since conference the debate, transcribed and leaked by someone present, has become public knowledge, indeed a matter of national and international debate. And the CC has tried to close down this debate by threatening any comrade who ignored this instruction with disciplinary measures.

This immediately led to an explosion of dissent, and left members with no alternative but to take up the issues outside the party. Well known SWP figures like Richard Seymour (of the Lenin's Tomb blog), Tom Walker, a prominent journalist on Socialist Worker, the novelist and legal theorist China Miéville, and a number of Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) groups have all publicly condemned the CC.

During the pre-conference period, a number of SWP members discussed the possibility of forming a faction, to take up the issue of the CC's handling of the complaints of gross sexist behavior, but also relating it to wider issues such as the lack of party democracy. In early December, four of the participants in the discussion were summarily expelled by the Central Committee on a charge of "forming and taking part in a secret faction".

The right to form factions within the SWP is strictly limited to the period just before a conference, and after this they must be dissolved (as "secret" and "permanent" factions are banned). The discussions referred to in the charge took place within the allotted time. However, the four comrades expelled had decided not to form a faction, and from this comes

the charge of "secret" factionalism.

As news of the four expulsions spread, those who had initially rejected forming a faction decided that now they had to, and were joined by many more, to form the "Democratic Opposition", whose principal purpose was to overturn the expulsions. The four members were denied the right to appeal in person to conference. The Democratic Opposition motion rejecting the CC's actions and re-instating the four was defeated, but over 100 delegates voted for it and a significant number abstained.

Once the events became public, on the streets and in their workplaces, SWP members found themselves interrogated about them by non-party members, unsurprising given that it comes at a time when the issues of rape and the oppression of women are being discussed worldwide.

From the conference transcript, a number of shocking facts emerge. Although a member of the CC was accused of rape, the "trial" of the issue was left to a committee dominated by close comrades of the accused, indeed with two current and three former CC members on it. The accused was given two weeks to prepare his case, whereas the woman member who complained was given no notice of his claims in his own defence. Worse, she was asked some of those highly sexist questions about her previous sexual history that rape campaigners have rightly condemned the police and the courts for.

When the committee found the case "not proven", the woman was not allowed to appeal to conference, despite requesting to do so. The leadership insisted that another complaint of gross sexist behavior, also against Martin Smith, be postponed till after conference.

No organisation is entirely immune from the reactionary ideas and forms of behavior prevalent in society as a whole. Lenin once remarked: "scratch a Bolshevik and you will find a Great Russian chauvinist". This applies also to the issue of sexist behaviour in its many forms.

What a revolutionary organisation committed to fighting sexism can do is to establish procedures to deal with it. Such methods include the right the right of socially oppressed groups to caucus, and to raise complaints in front of the entire member-

ship if need be. But without a more general democratic right to form groups, tendencies and, if need be, factions, a leadership will always be at an overwhelming advantage against individual members.

Without such measures, the development of a culture of leadership impunity is more than likely. It is certain. Outside periods of severe repression, there are no good reasons for limiting these safeguards. Certainly, the reported opposition to women's caucuses on the grounds that they are a concession to feminism is outrageous.

The debate over this has raised a number of other issues. Some on the left have argued that a political organisation does not have the capacity to investigate or punish its members for sexist behaviour when this involves serious breaches of the law, including assault, domestic violence, mental and physical cruelty etc. Instead, they argue that, in this case, the woman comrade involved should have gone straight to the police or should now do so.

Certainly, every victim of such crimes has the right to go to the police. In this case, the woman comrade preferred to raise the issue within her party, no doubt aware of the implications of inviting the state to investigate an organisation committed to its overthrow. To demand and expect that her own organisation deal with these issues was in our view correct, providing that she was not put under any pressure not to report the case.

This is of course a big "if," given the leadership's later behaviour. But the police and the courts are infamous for their mishandling of rape accusations, and she should have been able to rely on the response of an organisation pledged to fighting sexism. In fact she was cruelly let down, and betrayed is not too strong a word.

To suggest that a party cannot, or should not, investigate and act on the case itself, because it does not have the resources available to the police, ignores the fact that a socialist political organisation works with different criteria as regards such an investigation, and is not intended to act as a substitute for the state.

Moreover it has not only a right but also an imperative duty to investigate. Its standards should be stricter with regard to the alleged offender and

more sympathetic and understanding to the complainant than the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts can be expected to be. Given the mass of evidence as to how badly women always have been treated by these institutions and (despite some reforms) still are, and given, too, the prejudice to be expected from them against members of a revolutionary organisation, such expressions of confidence in the state are misplaced, to put it mildly.

The party should indeed have created an investigating body, but one that could be seen to be as impartial and independent as possible. It should not have contained any friends of the accused, any members of the CC, or any full timers, and it should have had a majority of women on it. Nor should there have been any suggestion that the party investigation and disciplinary action precluded the woman comrade's right to take the case to the police. That way the party and its members could not have been accused of violating the rights of the alleged victim, if she wished to exercise them.

By failing to act in this way, the CC has opened up the organisation and its membership to a flood of hostile attacks on it by the bourgeois media and potentially by the police, too. It is necessary for all socialists to defend SWP members against any media-state witch-hunt; but the best way for SWP members themselves to do this is to speak out against the CC's undemocratic and sexist misconduct, and set about putting it right. This means fighting for an emergency recall conference to restore the basic norms of democratic centralism in their party.

These include, most urgently, putting right its woefully inadequate system for dealing with such cases, including creating the right for women, and other socially oppressed groups, to caucus, and investigating all outstanding accusations of harassment or abuse.

On a broader level, the affair has underlined the need to make major changes in the constitution, particularly restoring the rights of factions without any time limit. Inevitably, any recalled conference would also have to reconsider the composition of the existing leadership that was elected by such a flawed set of procedures.

# Democratic centralism in the I

“Only a correct policy can guarantee a healthy party regime. Before a conference, when the problem is one of formulating a political line for the next period, democracy triumphs over centralism. When the problem is political action, centralism subordinates democracy to itself. Democracy again asserts its rights when the party feels the need to examine critically its own actions. The equilibrium between democracy and centralism establishes itself in the actual struggle, at moments it is violated and then again re-established. Neither do I think that I can give such a formula on democratic centralism that “once and for all” would eliminate misunderstandings and false interpretations. A party is an active organism. It develops in the struggle with outside obstacles and inner contradictions.”

Leon Trotsky: *On Democratic Centralism and the Regime* (1937)

## Dave Stockton

WE HAVE covered elsewhere the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) Central Committee’s mishandling of the dispute concerning a rape allegation. But what is it about the SWP’s culture and politics that has allowed this issue to spark a wider internal rebellion? It clearly lacks any mechanism that could have corrected mistakes before they threatened to tear it apart.

We think that democratic centralism is the cornerstone of a practice that enables members of a revolutionary organisation to own it and to hold their leaders accountable. This article will look at how decades of bureaucratic reprisals have smashed the self-righting mechanism of party democracy in the SWP.

The expulsion of four comrades on 11 December, shortly before conference, on trumped-up charges of “secret factionalism” was plainly an attempt to deny conference the possibility of overturning the purge. By denying them the right to appeal to conference, these summary expulsions violated conference’s right to hear their political criticisms, and then make a judgment on that basis. Thus it was the contempt of the Central Committee (CC) both towards conference and the members concerned that constituted the real violation of democratic centralism.

The CC thereby made a rebellion and disruption of the party’s life inevitable. Doubtlessly, they assumed that because the party leadership had got away with it in the past, that they would always be able to do so.

Since 1975 the SWP and its predecessor, the International Socialists (IS), has operated with a bureaucratic pastiche of democratic centralism. While it is not the absolute dictatorship of the leaders characteristic of high Stalinism, it does resemble the regime in the parties of the Communist International in the mid to late 1920s. Its political basis then, as now, was the leadership’s need to suppress criticism of its centrist zigzagging

between opportunist and ultra-left policies. The disastrous consequences of those policies drove the Communist International’s leadership to smash the self-correcting processes of genuine democratic centralism. It had to ban factions, rig the method of electing of the leadership, and suppress dissent generally.

The comparable growth of bureaucratic centralism in the SWP was not simply a question of a caste of paid full-timers, as US academic Pham Binh and his British admirers claim. In the 1920s, just as today, it was political degeneration that preceded organisational degeneration. The rise of a full-time apparatus outside the control of the members was a result of the then IS leadership’s failures in the stormy period of struggle between 1968 and 1975.

These included the IS’s policies on Northern Ireland, the strike waves of 1971-72 and 1974, the creation and later abandonment of work amongst women, tactics towards the Labour party and the 1974 Wilson-Callaghan government, the rank and file movements in the trade unions and, last but not least, the necessity for a party programme.

Furthermore, when the IS leadership used organisational measures to break up opposition, this caused experienced branch level cadre, women and gay activists and industrial militants to revolt.

A whole series of factional struggles erupted between 1971 and 1975. First there was the expulsion of the Trotskyist Tendency – a group who became Workers Fight, then Socialist Organiser and finally, after major political mutations, today’s Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL). In 1972, Workers Power’s predecessor the Left Faction came into being. In 1973 another grouping, the so-called “Right Faction” around David Yaffe was expelled.

The tensions within IS eventually even split the old guard gathered around its founder, Tony Cliff. Jim Higgins, Roger Protz, John Palmer and a number of car worker militants in Birmingham formed the IS Oppo-

sition. Cliff and his loyalists launched a massive series of purges in 1975, decimating the party’s cadre and consolidating the bureaucratic centralist regime that exists today. Thereafter, the party was held together only by an apparatus of full-timers.

In a revolutionary organisation, experienced members, branch and district leaders, union militants and the leaders of women’s and other fractions, act as its cadre, its officers and NCOs, and build up a wealth of experience that makes them not just an invaluable resource for the leadership, but also a check on its excesses.

Of course this cadre can also at times be a conservative factor, and leaders may find its resistance to tactical “turns” irksome. But the solution Cliff and company resorted to was a bad one: the repeated ousting of dissidents, purging experienced cadres as “routinists”, and their replacement with new full-timers who were denied the right to act as thinking party members with their own views, or who were quickly ousted if they did.

### Our view of democratic centralism

A point needs to be made here that often seems to get lost. What is a revolutionary party for? For Workers Power the purpose of the party is to be an effective weapon in the struggle of the working class for power. The actuality of the revolution, its present relevance to what we are doing now, however far away it may seem to be, gives questions of organisation a deadly seriousness. Unlike libertarians, we do not start from the rights or autonomy of individuals, nor do we make democracy a “categorical imperative.”

The party’s structure is determined by its intended function – to fuse with and lead the revolutionary class in its struggle for power. This in turn is subject to considerations determined by the external conditions of that struggle, and by the very process of building that party: by the different stages that this process passes through, and by what social and political forces



participate in it. Internal struggles are an inevitable and necessary part of this, as are splits and fusions with other forces.

Workers Power considers itself a Leninist and not a libertarian organisation. We do not believe that a revolutionary organisation can grant absolute rights to individual members to say or do whatever they want. As members of a voluntarily organisation, they should act in public as its representatives, and should be expected to carry out its decisions, including arguing for its agreed positions. Since instantaneous and direct democracy for every policy and action is impossible – as the Occupy movement discovered to its cost – this must mean that the individual does indeed accept leadership “from above”.

As long as all members have the right to play a full part in the democratic decision-making process, and have the right to appeal against any disciplinary measures, this is neither authoritarian nor an alien imposition. Only an individualist anarchist can argue against this with any consistency. But this does not stop many people who call themselves socialists or even Leninists from stealing the anarchists’ clothes and trying to deceive the unwary.

The democratic rights of individual members are to participate in the collective making of party policy, both in branches and at conference; at all times to discuss freely and to criticise, providing this does not disrupt an ongoing action. A leadership that obstructs or “rigs” this process is behaving in a disloyal way to its own membership, and is itself acting as a “secret faction”.

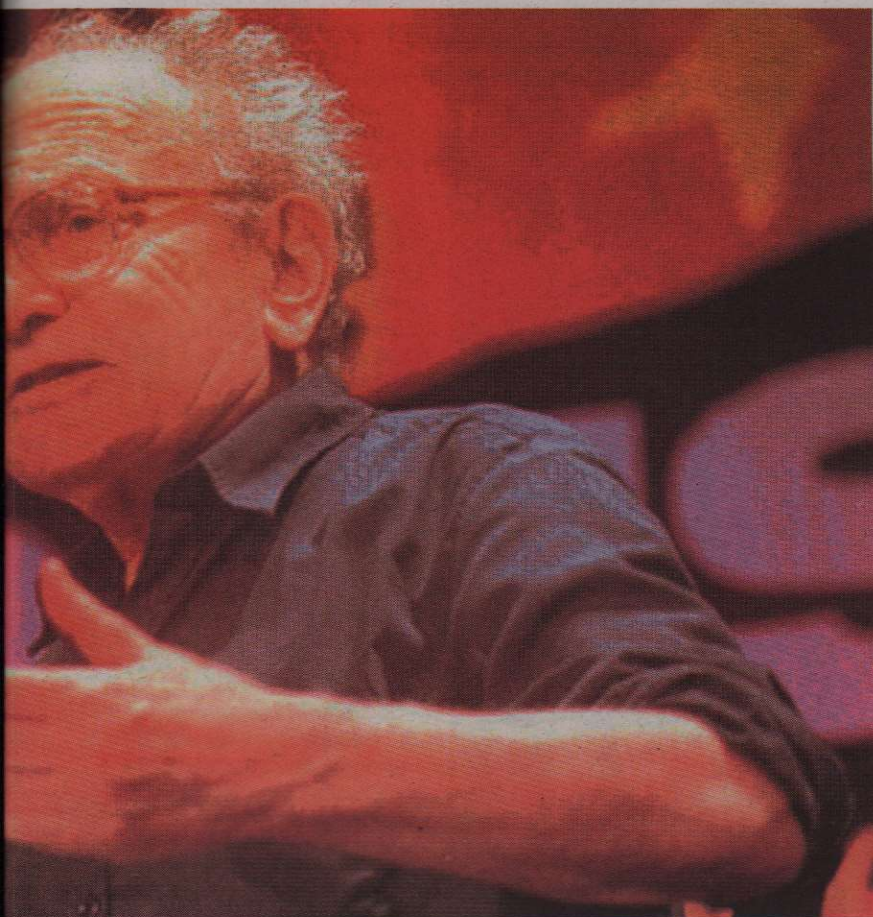
To prevent the facilities granted to a leadership (an office, full-timers, communications, transport etc.) from turning into privileges against the membership, the actions of the leadership must be open to criticism – either by individuals or groupings, both in private and at party meetings.

Critics must be free to form temporary blocs to promote their proposals, and longer-term tendencies and factions to put forward their ideas without fear of disciplinary action for doing so. Here the question of internal bulletins (or their equivalents in the modern electronic world) comes in. A leadership that is confident in the correctness of its policies will accord its critics the resources to make their views known. That way it can retain their loyalty, even if it cannot persuade them, and help immeasurably to preserve the trust of the members as a whole. As Lenin said in “What Is To Be Done?” the spirit underpinning and making discipline effective is “mutual comradesly confidence.”

Workers Power do not believe that individual members have a right to argue publicly against a revolutionary organisation’s policy. This does not mean that we have never or would never allow internal differences to be expressed in public. But we insist this must be a decision of the organisation and is not, therefore, a right.

The revolutionary organisation has, in our view, the right to decide which matters may be or may not be discussed publicly, because the collective rather than individuals must decide what is in the general interest and what is not. If people cannot bear any restric-

# International Socialist tradition



tion at all on their “right” to individual self-expression, then they are plainly not what Lenin called “party people”. However admirable they may be in other respects, they are obviously incapable of discipline and unsuited to be members of a Leninist organisation.

In small propaganda groups, organisations whose size restricts them to arguing that the mass workers’ movement or larger organisations should adopt their policies, the ability of all members to concentrate their arguments becomes critical. If groups of members in one propaganda group argue against one another in public, they are for all intents and purposes two propaganda groups. And if their voices are so multitudinous (and cacophonous), then they are not serious organisations at all, but only a discussion club. If that is what some people want then by all means set them up, but leave those of us who want to build revolutionary parties our freedom to do so.

Even the most elementary workers’ organisations, strike committees and trade unions, require the submission of minorities to majorities once a decision is democratically taken. In political organisations this principle encompasses much more.

A party cannot offer individual autonomy or make it into an absolute principle without destroying itself. The reason for this discipline – in the arguments we present as well as the actions we take – is that for a Marxist, words and deeds do not belong on different planets – one the sphere of organisation, and the other of individual self-expression.

The arguments we make (whether

of theory, propaganda or agitation) have as their objective winning people, individuals, whole groups and “the masses”, to those actions we believe are vitally necessary: uniting the fragmented anti-cuts campaigns, fighting for a general strike to kick out this government, etc.

That is why the content of these arguments is vitally important, and deciding on this is what a party exists for quite as much as carrying out the actions themselves. In order for these ideas to be tested by action (and corrected if they are proved wrong in the light of experience), centralised discipline is required during the entire process – from words right through to deeds. But at the beginning and at the end it requires an objective and collective discussion and decision by those who will carry them out. This is why democracy is inseparable from centralism.

Democracy from the working class point of view is simply the best way of arriving at the correct strategy and tactics, establishing agreed goals, and uniting all the available capabilities and insights of groups and individuals into the best possible common approach.

Bureaucratic centralism, however, blocks this process, reducing the membership to silence and leaving “ideas” to a self-perpetuating clique of leaders. When, as inevitably happens, these leaders fall out, they then try all they can to not have their disputes “in front of the children.” Such behaviour infantilises the members and lowers their political level, transforming the leadership’s internal disputes into little more than clique feuds. Political rationalisations appear

only after the event, after the resultant splits and expulsions.

So what does the democratic part of democratic centralism involve, especially in the light of recent events in SWP? We might start by explaining how it works in Workers Power, a much smaller organisation than the SWP, which itself in our view is much smaller than a genuine revolutionary workers’ party would be.

Unlike the Fourth International and its British section, Socialist Resistance, we do not believe that the existence of factions or tendencies should be a permanent feature of party life in a healthy revolutionary organisation. The right to form factions should be ensured in the constitution, and there should be no time limit or restriction on forming them beyond carrying out the decisions of the party’s legitimate leading bodies, as long these decisions are themselves legitimate. But the existence of permanent factions or tendencies, and the idea that a party’s internal life should consist of constant struggles for representation or dominance in its leadership is not Bolshevism or Trotskyism, but Menshevism. It was also a feature of the Labour Party until the purges of the late 1980s and 1990s.

In a federal party, combining unions and propaganda societies, it is inevitable; in the formation of new workers’ parties it may even be desirable and a necessity; but it is not an ideal and certainly has its bad features. The autonomy of its component parts usually means the autonomy of the parliamentarians and trade union leaders, not freedom for all but the freedom of privileged interests from control by their members. A Bolshevik (and not a Stalinist) model, flexible and adapting to changing circumstances and legal conditions, extremely democratic as well as centralised and disciplined, is the only successful party model we have, and there is no proven or trustworthy alternative to it.

**A revolutionary programme is the only basis for democratic centralism**  
A problem for the SWP’s membership is that it cannot easily distinguish between the party’s fundamental politics – its overall strategy – its tactical and organisational principles and its changing perspectives and necessary tactical turns. It is ridiculous to claim that the “Where We Stand” in Socialist Worker is the party’s programme. If so, it must be the shortest and most threadbare programme in history.

Of course, various leading figures over the past four decades have written pamphlets summing up the party’s ideas, but these are not the product of democratic discussions and do not have the authority of a conference behind them. So they cannot be used to check the party leadership’s sudden departures from its former principles – like the cross-class

electoral adventure Respect – or its zigzags around its various united fronts “of a special type”.

So misled are SWP members about what a transitional programme is – with those who argue for one labelled “programme fetishists” – that we need to state it clearly. It starts from an assessment of the period ahead, a perspective for the class struggle. It characterises the existing political and trade union leaderships of the working class, and explains why they are a misleadership that have to be replaced because of the destructive effects of their actions on workers’ struggles. It goes on to elaborate the sort of demands needed on all key fronts of the class struggle, and the types of organisation needed to win, to unite them, and to pose the question of workers’ power and a the overthrow of capitalism.

An example is the struggle for workers’ control – to prevent closures and sackings, and the need for occupations to enforce this. In a situation of mass resistance using such methods, workers’ control poses a decisive challenge to managements’ “right to manage”, and opens up the prospect of workers’ management of a socialised economy. In short it is a bridge from today’s need to combat mass unemployment to the struggle for political power. Associated with Trotskyism, it was a method first developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks between 1917 and 1923.

The programme must also explain the guiding principles behind the various tactics – the united front, the struggle for rank and file democracy, and the workers’ council as the highest form of the united front, one that can eventually organise the struggle for power. It must include, too, the various democratic and social struggles – for women’s liberation, against racism, etc.

With such a document it is possible to politically train the party’s membership. With a thinking cadre that understands the programme, the leadership is obliged to explain how its specific perspectives or tactics accord with it. On this basis, members of the party themselves can become cadres in the wider class struggle.

Of course nobody should ascribe magical properties to just publishing programmes and making propaganda for them, as something separate from agitating and organising in “the real world”. Any programme has to be supplemented by and developed into many other more concrete and specific policies, in order to be carried out in practice. Nor can a programme be held onto unchanged in changing conditions. Indeed, new programmes have to be elaborated whenever major transformations occur, albeit using the same method and containing fundamentally the same principles.

In fact the SWP fetishises not having a programme – a very British vice. After all, the Labour Party never

really had one, making do with Clause Four, which is even shorter than the SWP’s “Where We Stand”. In justification, the SWP relies on Tony Cliff’s oft-repeated quips that Lenin made the 1917 revolution with a programme written in 1903.

But what of the April Theses, and all the programmatic resolutions Lenin wrote for the congresses of Russian Social Democracy? These were in effect the action programmes of the October revolution. Another classic Cliffite argument is that when you need a gun, to be given a blueprint of one is no use. But to produce functioning guns, accurate blueprints are needed; and if the party is a weapon of the class, then the programme is indeed the blueprint for its construction.

The SWP’s lack of a programme ultimately ensures that its members have no measuring stick by which to judge the leadership’s turns, or to correct mistakes before they do irreversible damage.

Unlike some others on the left, we do not want to see the Socialist Workers Party torn into pieces by its own Central Committee, determined to hang onto power by any means necessary, with cynical interventions by the bourgeois media and state only too glad to help the left commit suicide. We want to see the membership of the party wrest it from the its present inept and bureaucratic leadership, and put it at the front ranks of a powerful united front that can organise the crucial upcoming struggles against Cameron, Osborne, Clegg and their government of social wreckers.

If SWP members want to save their organisation from ruin by creating a democratic structure that ensures the rights of members to have their complaints and grievances taken seriously, and to organise to change the politics and leadership of the party then – as the opposition already says – an emergency conference must be convened. It must be prepared by discussion of all the disputed issues in branches as well as districts, and delegates must be elected that truly reflect the balance of opinion.

Only if a conference overhauls the democratic structures will the membership be enabled to determine the way forward for the SWP. Obviously a fresh investigation will be needed into all the rape and sexual harassment allegations. The establishment of the rights of women to caucus within the party at every level would enormously help this and help prevent recurrences of abuses.

But the most solid political basis for putting the SWP on course to be a major factor in building a revolutionary party would be for it to undertake a democratic process of discussing and drafting a programme. And this could best be done in the context of a unity initiative with the other organisations on the left.

# Revolutionary unity – a proposal

The crisis in the SWP and its inability to grow, despite the crisis, have opened up a welcome discussion about revolutionary unity. Here we print a statement from Workers Power Political Committee

TO CHOOSE the present moment to propose that the revolutionary left in Britain should unite its forces to build a new revolutionary socialist party will seem positively quixotic to most people.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), by far the largest far left group, is in disarray, if not in meltdown. The Socialist Party (SP) continues to think of itself alone as being the centre of the labour movement, and everyone else as being “on the fringes” of it.

The five-year crisis of world capitalism has led to a crisis of the far left, and this is an international and not just a British crisis.

In France it is expressed in the splits and dramatic decline in numbers of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA). In Italy it is reflected in the splintering and demoralisation of the Italian left – a painful contrast to its flourishing situation ten years ago, witnessed by all those who attended during the first European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence.

Even the libertarian left, which many in 2011 thought had found the answer with the US Occupy movement, has seen this movement dissipate, leaving little in the way of permanent organisation.

These splits in the left extend into a movement of resistance against austerity that cries out for maximum unity in action if the jobs, rights and social gains of the working class, young people, women and migrant communities are to be defended.

## The party

Some people say that it is the very existence of socialist groups with their own programmes and internal discipline that is to blame. We do not agree. We believe that such propaganda groups have always existed, and will do so until and unless a party of the working class vanguard unites all those who are not willful sectarians, uninterested in the class struggle.

Workers Power has always rejected the idea that as soon as a group reaches a few hundred or a few thousand members, it can simply proclaim itself “the party” and thereafter just invite the working class to join its ranks.

This approach was seen

most in its most extreme form with the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of Gerry Healy between 1973 and 1985. But more modest versions of this approach have included the proclamation of the SWP (founded in January 1977), the SP (founded in 1997) and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) (founded in 1998).

The belief that an organisation that is still really what Trotsky would have called a propaganda society has become the vanguard party of the working class, its revolutionary leadership, leads to it developing a false relationship to the mass struggles and organisations of the working class.

If such a “party” cannot in reality lead the class or even its vanguard in struggle, then it feels driven to establish at least the illusion of this relationship with imitation mass formations.

The most common form of this is the habit of transforming the revolutionary tactic of a united front with the mass organisations of the working class, that is, unions and mass parties still under reformist and bureaucratic leadership, into mere campaigns on issues like war, racism and fascism, or a rank and file organisation in the unions, which accept from day one the “party’s” open or thinly disguised control or hegemony.

These “fronts” can then be used as closed recruiting grounds. The illusion of a genuine workers’ united front can then be maintained by annual conferences, at which some prominent left union leaders and MPs speak, but at which nothing of significance for the movement at large is decided.

**United fronts, not party fronts** But there are today – in spite of everything – good reasons not to despair. Firstly, a considerable number of courageous individuals in the SWP are fighting back against their leadership’s bureaucratic follies.

If, as we sincerely hope, they succeed in rallying the membership to call this leadership to order and go on to institute a new regime, and if they put an end to the SWP’s “party front” policy, presently embodied in Right to Work and Unite the Resistance, then some



good can come out of the present evil.

If as a result of this, and as a result of debate with the rest of the left, the SWP adopt a sensible and honest united front policy in the anti-austerity movement, then at we could create a movement as powerful at the local, regional and national levels as the Stop the War movement was in its early days. This would be fertile soil in which a deeper revolutionary unity could take root and grow.

We believe this can happen – if we take certain definite steps together.

The first means seeking agreement on a common immediate policy to defeat the Coalition’s attack on the post-war gains of the working class. The second – a far more difficult one it must be admitted – is to work towards creating a revolutionary party with a programme for working class power, drawing into its creation as many as yet unaffiliated working class and youth militants as possible.

## Key policies we need today

- Unite all the anticuts and grassroots union movements

into a single massive resistance movement similar to the antiwar movement of 2002 to 2004.

- Work in the unions to coordinate the planned sectional strikes into all-out action to stop all the cuts.
- Campaign to make the TUC call a general strike to drive this government from power.
- Build local councils of action to coordinate the defence of our jobs and services, to fight for a general strike and, if it is called, to fight to control it.
- Build a rank and file movement in every union and across the unions to democratise the unions, taking action with the official leadership where possible, and without it where necessary.
- Build an antifascist workers’ united front to stop the marches and meetings of the EDL and the BNP, denying them any platform for their racist filth.
- Build international solidarity, especially with Greece, and pan-European action and coordination of the resistance

And we can start today by simply uniting the rival anticuts campaigns.

But to do so means pursuing a policy independent of all wings of the trade union bureaucracy. This does not at all mean standing aloof from united action with the union leaders whenever they fight.

Indeed even when they do not fight, we must challenge them to do so and do all in our power to win their membership to such action.

By this means we could advance from today’s swamp of “factions without a party” to being, if important differences cannot be overcome, factions within a single party, but one that is capable of united and disciplined action in the class struggle.

Anyone who remembers the initial enthusiasm and comradeship of the early days of the Socialist Alliance should be aware that such unity could give a powerful initial impulse.

## Why programme?

But this unity in action would not suffice unless a serious and loyal debate, both internal and public, was initiated to discover the strategic questions that unite us as well as those still dividing us.

In a debate on programme,

all the tendencies involved should advance their viewpoints. A series of commissions, working groups and conferences should aim at a draft, which is not a lowest common denominator but the highest common factor of a revolutionary strategy.

## Democratic centralism

But as well as the question of programme we need to debate what sort of organisation is necessary to fight for it. Events today show how vital it is to ensure that a party does not succumb to bureaucracy, and that means establishing genuinely democratic centralism.

Apologists for capitalism, reformists and anarchists alike say that this is a contradiction in terms. That it was always a bureaucratic and undemocratic way of organising. This is not true.

Democratic centralism – as the Bolsheviks practised it – means the maximum of debate and discussion within the party over the correct strategy and tactics to adopt. It means the right of members to form temporary groupings, as well as longer-term tendencies and factions with no constitutional time limit.

But an open and flourishing democracy and well thought out policies and tactics should also mean that such groupings are spontaneously not permanent features, or even the “normal” way that internal debate is conducted.

However, when a decision on a policy or specific action has been reached, it requires disciplined unity in its implementation by all members in a loyal manner, to the best of their abilities. Then, once the campaign or battle is over and the results can be seen, it allows for full and democratic appraisal of it once again.

Is there a guarantee we will succeed in unifying the whole left? Not at all: political life does not offer us such guarantees. But at least some – maybe many – of the more unnecessary divisions on the left could be overcome.

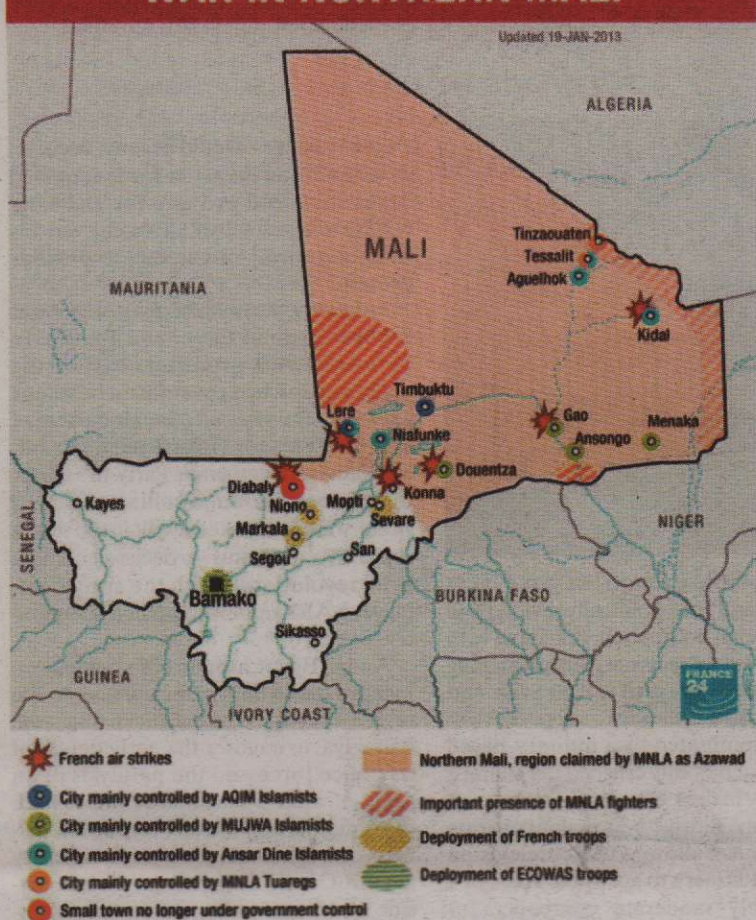
The history of the Russian revolutionary movement and the early years of the Communist International prove that the unification of revolutionaries hailing from diverse traditions is a real possibility. We ought to try to do so today.

The severity of the capitalist crisis and repeated failure to create a party that can seriously raise the prospect of working class power presents the prospects of far more serious defeats ahead.



# French boots on the ground – fire fighters or arsonists?

## WAR IN NORTHERN MALI



### Martin Suchanek

“FRANCE REPRESENTS only humanitarian interests,” insisted president François Hollande, justifying the use of 2000 French troops and warplanes in Mali. It is a case of the war on terrorism, he claims, necessary to stop al-Qaeda turning the country into another collapsed state from which to mount operations in Europe and beyond.

And the world’s media seems to have swallowed this, hook, line and sinker. Strange after a decade of imperialist wars and interventions, made with exactly the same excuse. Strange too to ignore the fact that France has intervened militarily 60 times in its former colonies in Africa since they gained independence. That’s a lot of humanitarianism!

Yet the sight of Malian crowds cheering French troops in the country’s capital Bamako seems to justify the intervention. So too do the brutalities of Islamist forces in the north of the country, and their assaults on the historic religious practices of the people there. So why should socialists, nevertheless, condemn this as an imperialist intervention and demand French troops get out at once?

After the collapse of the regime in Libya, the Islamists formed an alliance with the Tuareg separatists of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), many of whom fought for Gaddafi

against the revolution. As a result they massively increased their forces, bringing between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters under arms. But the alliance between the MNLA and the Islamists was breaking down before the French intervention and has now completely disintegrated.

There is no question about the reactionary aims of the different Islamist groups who are imposing the brutal punishments in the areas under their control. Although the overwhelming majority of the population in northern Mali is Muslim, they are by no means Wahabi or Salafist fundamentalists. The Islamists’ attempts to impose their extremely repressive version of Sharia law led to clashes with organisations of the other nationalities of Mali, of which there are some thirty.

The Islamist groups now account for only around 2,500 armed fighters. So how were they able to rout the Malian army and take control of the northern half of the country? To answer this means looking at the country’s colonial and post-colonial history, as well as at the neoliberal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the beginning of the 1990s.

### Mali as a semi-colony

Mali is a typical product of “decolonisation”. Its borders were drawn by the former colonial power, France, and took no account of the distribution of its different peoples or their

economic relations. Mali’s independence was formal rather than real, its economy and its ruling élites still tied irreversibly to French imperialism. In short it is what Marxists call a semi-colony.

The formation of the Malian state violated the free movement of the nomadic Tuareg, and the self-determination of the Moors and other nationalities was trampled on. The Tuareg and Moors were opposed from the outset to their regions being included in the states south of the Sahara, leading to uprisings in 1963, in 1990 and most recently in 2006.

The devastation of Mali is clearly not limited to the north. Since 1991, the IMF has imposed its “structural adjustment programmes” on the country. This has meant cuts in infrastructure, health and social services, as well as massive inflation. The social consequences in an already poor country were dramatic.

Today some 30 per cent of the population is officially unemployed, approximately three times as many as 15 years ago. Only 50 per cent of children ever attend school, and three quarters of the population are illiterate. One third of people have no access to clean water, and average life expectancy is just 48 years.

The economy and the society of the north of Mali have developed a “distorted” character. The lack of resources and increasing desertification has also had a severe impact on its agriculture and cattle rearing. The smuggling of raw materials, drugs and even people became in many places the most important source of income. In turn, that strengthened the fragmentation of the region, and meant that armed groups, including the Islamists, controlled the trade in water, in conjunction with criminal forces.

### Military coup

Even though Mali had a formally democratic government before the coup of 22 March 2012, there was large-scale corruption, clientelism, and the enrichment of a few. Although the main reason given for the military takeover was the failure of the government to pacify the north, it also expressed a more general social discontent with corrupt President Amadou Tourmani Touré and his government.

The new “interim government” set up by the coup makers also promised

an improvement in the social conditions of the masses. They won support from parts of the trade unions and peasant organisations, from African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence (ASDI), the peasant union Earth, Labour, Dignity, as well as the CSTM, one of the country’s two big trade union confederations.

Against the coup were ranged, the United Front for the Defence of Democracy organised by the former president, the right wing parties, the Social Democratic RARENA (which had previously formed a common parliamentary fraction with the ASDI), and also the National Union of Workers of Mali, the other big union federation.

In a situation where the elites of the country are divided, the leaders of the working class and the oppressed masses failed to pursue any independent politics, but sided with one or other of the ruling cliques, and through them the imperialist powers.

Because of the social and economic crisis caused by France and global capitalism’s economic penetration, control and exploitation, the state structure of Mali has been eroded to the point where French imperialism felt it had to step in to prevent its complete collapse. Why? Because the country had to be stabilised to save French investments in the country.

Mali is economically important to France. In the north of the country, there are material resources, including uranium. Securing Mali means securing these riches.

But the re-conquest of the north would undoubtedly lead to the strengthening of the oppression of the Tuaregs and the Moors – who have a right to self-determination, including to a separate state if they so wish. It would not overcome the national and social roots of the numerous insurrections, the poverty of the population, the decline of the economy or the expansion of semi-criminal forms of trade, but rather would strengthen them.

Last but not least among the reasons for the intervention is the fact that Africa is a continent in which the struggle for the re-division of the world between rival blocs of imperialist power is increasingly being played out. The securing of “Francophone Africa” is a key task for French imperialism, in order to maintain itself as a player in the global

struggle for power.

Hollande’s excuse for his imperialist invasion is strengthened by the fact that practically all sides of the French parliament support the intervention, or at least offer no real opposition. This is naturally true for the governing Socialists and their Green allies, as well as the bourgeois Gaullists and the extreme right Front National.

### French left

But even the Parti de Gauche could not bring itself to unequivocally reject the intervention. In a statement on 15 January, the party failed to demand the withdrawal of troops from Mali but asked only that they should restrict their operations to the south of the country.

The French Communist Party took a position even further to the right, demanding only that French troops should carry out their mission under the aegis of the United Nations and the African Union. This is the scantiest fig leaf for supporting the intervention, since even though the UN has not so far mandated it, the West African alliance ECOWAS has – and if asked the UN Security Council will probably do so too.

The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) on the other hand has openly opposed the intervention, rightly pointing out that France is the cause of most of the problems of the country and therefore cannot be the solution. The NPA’s website carried a statement of the Socialist Workers Party of Algeria with the title “Stop the French military intervention in Mali – No to Algerian Cooperation”.

The demand for French troops, with or without a mandate from the UN, is like demanding arsonists take over from the fire brigade. It must be opposed with no ifs and no buts. The labour movement and the entire left must campaign for the immediate withdrawal of these troops and against any imperialist intervention whether unilaterally or in the name of the UN.

In Britain and Germany socialists too need oppose their governments’ involvement in this new theatre of the War on Terror. Our solidarity must go to the youth and workers of West and sub-Saharan Africa, whilst warning them that the European powers’ interventions are far from humanitarian either in their motives or in their disastrous results.

We must encourage them to rely on their own forces to establish a region of political freedom, social and economic liberation from the IMF and the multinationals seeking to exploit the mineral wealth of Mali and its neighbours. In this direction runs the road of victory against the reactionary forces of Islamism. Their goal must be workers and peasant’s governments and a socialist federation of West Africa.



French troops land in Mali

# The Arab revolutions and counter-revolutions: two years on

Marcus Halaby analyses the great – and as yet uncompleted – Arab revolutions of 2011, debunking a number of myths and proving the relevance of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution today

REVOLUTIONS ARE always unexpected events as far as their timing, form and immediate causes are concerned. Revolutionaries spend decades advocating them, and their whole political lives trying to prepare themselves and the most advanced section of the masses for them, but even the most far-sighted and committed revolutionaries will be caught off-guard by the sudden outburst of anger, mass activity and popular initiative that is the hallmark of all genuine revolutions.

Nevertheless, once begun, they follow certain general laws, conditioned by the specific histories and material circumstances of the country and region.

As Lenin famously put it, revolutions happen when, firstly, the lower classes “do not want to live in the old way”, and when, in addition to this, the upper classes are unable “to rule and govern in the old way”; when “it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change”, leading to “a crisis in the policy of the ruling class”, which creates “a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth”.

The trigger for this is often enough that “the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual”, with the result that “there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in ‘peace time’, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the ‘upper classes’ themselves into independent historical action”.

The great – and as yet uncompleted – Arab revolutions of 2011 have proved to be no different. The revolutionary struggles that took place in the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s confronted a fragile system of independent states that had only just been created, one of a patchwork of retrograde monarchical or “notable” regimes, brought to power by foreign imperialists, within borders the latter had drawn to divide the spoils of the region in their own conflicting interests. Whereas the Arab revolutions of the 21st century confronted a very different order: one characterised by entrenched and apparently “stable” dictatorships, many of them in place for decades and set to reproduce themselves for another few decades more. Indeed in the decade or so before the outbreak, Western commentators used to smugly proclaim that the “Arab street” was an extinct volcano. But they too – as Pompeii and Herculaneum found out – have a nasty habit of proving those who build on their slopes wrong.

Where once the slogan of “Arab unity” served as a rallying cry for a struggle against the old British and French colonial powers, the new US imperialism and the racist colonising Israeli state, today the popular revolutionary slogan has been



one or another variation on “ash-sha'b yurid isqat an-nizam”: “the people want the downfall of the regime”.

#### Capitalism in crisis

In this case, the immediate cause of the increased “suffering and want of the oppressed classes” has been the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-09. Although a crisis that affected almost every country in the world, it is one which in the Arab world has accentuated all the existing problems of the capitalist system's inability to absorb and pacify an increasingly educated and articulate generation of youth – with social aspirations to match – under systems of rule that provided them with little or no legal outlets for their discontent.

If the Arab revolutions of the last century took place against the backdrop of the Cold War, and were in turn influenced by the hostile or friendly response of the Soviet and American superpowers, then this wave of revolutions has taken place against the backdrop of the failure of neoliberal globalisation to raise the living standards of the masses as a whole, the decline of the hegemonic American superpower, and the revival and rise of its imperialist rivals, Russia and China.

And this is after a decade in which the US, intoxicated by the hubris of being the sole global superpower and after a decade of murderous sanctions on Iraq under Saddam, had invaded and destroyed first Afghanistan and then Iraq as well as backing to the hilt Israel's bloody suppression of the September 2000 Palestinian Intifada. These events, combined with US support for a fraudulent “peace process” that allowed Israel to accelerate its theft of Palestinian land, fatally undermined the prestige of its Arab allies.

No Arab regime could reckon itself entirely safe. Regimes in both pro-Western Egypt and Tunisia and “nationalist” Libya and Syria, both oil-rich Bahrain and Libya and poor and backward Yemen, have seen the aroused masses threaten their continued existence or bring it to an end. Even “traditional” Arab monarchies, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (each less than a century old) feared disruption.

The notable exceptions have been Palestine and Iraq, politically divided and under foreign occupation; Lebanon, with its patchwork of sects nervously watching the revolutionary civil war in Syria and divided as to which side to support; Algeria, still dominated by a military-based regime that bloodily crushed the Islamist insurgency in the 1990s; and oil-rich Qatar, whose apparently “benevolent” ruling autocracy has allowed its pet television station Al Jazeera to act as the voice of a few suitably “moderate” contenders for power in the new post-revolutionary order.

Like all revolutions, the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions quickly developed their own myths: that revolutions can be “peaceful”; that these revolutions were made by “the whole people” against regimes that lacked any real support; and that the apparently spontaneous and “leaderless” character of these revolutions demonstrates the irrelevance of old-fashioned political parties and programmes.

#### “Peaceful” revolution?

Riding high on the successes of these two initial revolutions, and in the expectation that this pattern would be repeated elsewhere in the Arab world, these three interlinked myths found retrospective justification (at least in the eyes of some Western commentators) in the pedestrian writings of Gene Sharp, a run-of-the-mill liberal-radical US academic. His ideas on “nonviolence”, recycled from Tolstoy, Thoreau and Gandhi, have in turn been recycled by liberal-radical academics the world over as the very latest “new” strategy, which condemns the “old left” notion of revolution to the dustbin of history.

It would not take long, however, for all three of these myths to become at least slightly tarnished. The revolutions in Libya, Syria and Yemen all developed into civil wars, opening the way for imperialist military intervention in Libya's case, imperialist diplomatic power-broking in Yemen's case, and 60,000 dead and a million displaced in Syria's.

In tiny Bahrain, the question of violence

– state violence – would become decisive, as a Saudi-led invasion force imposed order in a quid pro quo for allowing NATO to bomb Libya, although even this has not entirely put an end to popular protest.

Moreover, the myth of nonviolence was not true even in Egypt and Tunisia. In both countries, protesters battled the police and torched government buildings, among them the Cairo headquarters of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party. In Tunisia, the protests included calling a general strike, which provoked a split in the state's repressive apparatus – a decisive moment in all revolutions – with the army fighting Ben Ali's snipers as he fled the country.

And in Egypt, around 800 people were killed in the 14 days of the uprising, as the regime unleashed its unofficial thugs, the *baltagiya*, to counter the early defeat of its police force and the paralysis of an army infected by the popular mood. Since that time, the new military regime has carried out other attacks, most notably against Coptic Christian protesters outside the Maspero television station, inflicting on the Egyptian people a blood sacrifice that certainly demands retributive justice if its perpetrators are to be prevented from doing it again.

In fact, the enthusiasm for “nonviolence” really amounts to applauding the masses for not having taken up arms. But it is precisely this fact that has allowed the Egyptian and Tunisian ruling classes to try to manage the transition back to capitalist stability, leaving many of the dictatorial power structures in place even after the dictators have fallen.

And those doomsayers on the international left, who have written off the Syrian and Libyan revolutions because they have developed into civil wars, demonstrate at best naïve pacifism or, worse still, a cynical *realpolitik* that can only recognise a revolution's legitimacy if it quickly achieves victory. What would they have made of the Russian Civil War if they had lived through it?

#### Democratic phase

It is certainly true that all the Arab revolutions have seen “the people” come out onto the streets: that diverse collection of students, youth, workers, urban poor, shopkeepers, traders and educated professionals, who despite their varying material interests had a shared experience of corruption, brutality, incompetence and sheer contempt at the hands of the state. It is not for nothing that “dignity” has been one of the most important slogans of all the Arab revolutions.

This, in turn, is a common feature of the initial phase of all revolutions that begin with “democratic” demands. As the German revolutionary Frederick Engels

wrote of the Vienna uprising during the European revolutions of 1848: "It is the fate of all revolutions that this union of different classes, which in some degree is always the necessary condition of any revolution, cannot subsist long. No sooner is the victory gained against the common enemy than the victors become divided among themselves into different camps, and turn their weapons against each other."

Moreover, he regarded this tendency towards class struggle not as a matter for regret, but as the motor force of history, adding that: "It is this rapid and passionate development of class antagonism which, in old and complicated social organisms, makes a revolution such a powerful agent of social and political progress; it is this incessantly quick upshooting of new parties succeeding each other in power, which, during those violent commotions, makes a nation pass in five years over more ground than it would have done in a century under ordinary circumstances."

Contrary to the popular myth, it was not just "the people on the streets" but also the action of the workers that forced the hand of the state apparatus in Egypt and Tunisia in ejecting their figureheads: mass strikes and the threat of mass strikes.

In Syria, this split between the poorer and better-off layers of the people – which in Egypt became apparent only after Mubarak's departure – was visible from the outset, as Bashar Assad's regime rallied to its side that minority of the population who had benefited from a decade of corruption and neoliberalism. It also mobilised those elements of the Alawite, Christian and Druze minorities who could be blackmailed with the prospect of Sunni sectarian retribution in the event of the secular Ba'athist regime's fall.

In Libya and Bahrain, both dependent on a workforce of foreign migrants lacking in any rights and possessing no conscious stake in the country's political future, the indifference of such a large part of the working class to the democratic demands of the "native" workers and petty bourgeoisie weakened the revolution. In Libya's case, this paved the way for the NATO-led effort to control the revolutionary surge, reinforced by the murderous pogroms of African migrants and black Libyans.

#### Leading the revolution

It is, however, the myth of "leaderlessness" that remains the most difficult to shake off. Karl Marx once noted: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." And the legacy of Stalinism in the Arab world – both its adaptation to bourgeois nationalism and the tendency of some Arab regimes to imitate Stalinism's worst features in power – certainly weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the Arab left.

It should not, perhaps, be surprising that the working class movements of countries that have suffered under decades of political repression were not able to develop institutions of their own – in particular political parties – that were capable of asserting consistently the interests of the working class and the need for its political independence from "the people" as a whole.

To this we might add, however, that the possible nucleus of such a movement did at least exist in Egypt and Tunisia, in the form of small socialist propaganda groups and the beginnings of an independ-

"It is the fate of all revolutions that this union of different classes, which in some degree is always the necessary condition of any revolution, cannot subsist long. No sooner is the victory gained against the common enemy than the victors become divided among themselves into different camps, and turn their weapons against each other."

Frederick Engels



ent trade union movement. It is no accident that it was possible to do this under "authoritarian" regimes like Mubarak's and Ben Ali's, but not under "totalitarian" regimes like that of Gaddafi's Libya or Assad's Syria.

Similarly, it should not be surprising that masses that have come of age under the rule of dictatorships legitimised by a ruling party with a monopoly on power, occasionally spouting "socialist" or "anti-imperialist" rhetoric, should be sceptical or even hostile to the idea that a party is necessary to provide political leadership to the revolutionary masses, to ensure that the working class and its allies do not have their struggle stolen from them by elements of the old order, or by new elites in the making. Their experience was of parties as bureaucratic institutions for exercising dictatorship, rather than for overthrowing and smashing it.

Nevertheless, the absence of such a "leadership" – a revolutionary workers' party – has affected the outcome of revolutionary struggles in all of the Arab countries currently in revolt.

In Egypt it would mean that the Muslim Brotherhood – slow to support the uprising, but quick to respond to Mubarak's calls for "dialogue" and equally quick to support the military junta that took power from Mubarak's hands – would be the principal beneficiary of the military's staged transition to a form of "constitutional" rule, allowing the old guard to preserve their privileges and unaccountability.

In Libya, it would allow those elements of the Gaddafi regime who switched sides early enough to appoint themselves as the revolution's leaders – and to use this opening to appeal to the imperialist powers to tip the scales in their favour.

And in Syria, it meant that fractious bourgeois opposition politicians in exile would take the political initiative, with regards to the future shape of any post-Assad regime. In their case this meant no initiative at all, as "leaders" without any following on the ground scuttled from one foreign power to another in the hope of bypassing the Syrian people – first in the guise of the Turkish-sponsored Syrian National Council and then the Qatari-sponsored Syrian National Coalition.

However, the development of the Local

Coordination Committees and the emergence of a mass movement of armed civilians and military defectors acting in defence of the Syrian revolution show that it is entirely possible for the masses to spontaneously throw up leaderships of their own, bypassing the bourgeois exiles and exercising an authority that rests on their representation of real material forces engaged in an active struggle with the regime.

#### Party and programme

But it is precisely in the course of such a "spontaneous" development that a political party is needed, to contend for influence amongst the masses with all the other currents, ideologies and social layers that are thrown up and temporarily given power by the revolution: conservative and liberal, secular and Islamist, civilian and military, intellectual or plebeian, traditional and modernist.

What should its programme consist of?

In the first instance, it should express in the most consistent possible form the democratic content of the revolutionary struggle now taking place: for full political freedom and an end to one-party rule; for freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, against censorship; for the right to protest; and, crucially, the right to strike.

It should call for a thoroughgoing purge of the state apparatus to remove the placemen of the old regime, and the punishment of torturers, those guilty of corruption and those with blood on their hands. It should demand the disbandment of all those elements of the security forces that have committed crimes against the people and the creation of a mass popular militia to defend the revolution, in place of the old standing conscript army with its officer corps and its elite units.

Its crowning demand should be a call for a sovereign constituent assembly, based on free and fair elections, universal suffrage and a secret ballot. A provisional government, based on the revolutionary committees and the organisations of the workers, peasants and youth, should ensure that this assembly could freely debate and determine the social and class character of the new state.

But, going beyond this, the party's programme should also recognise that such

democratic demands will not be achieved unless the working class comes to the head of the revolution, and acts as the central axis around which the nation reconstructs itself.

To do this, it will be necessary to raise the social demands of the working class and its allies in the peasantry, the urban petit bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia: for the reversal of the neoliberal policy of the last decade; for the seizure of privatised state enterprises; for measures to protect the unemployed and impoverished against immiseration; for pensions for the families of the revolution's martyrs, and compensation and adequate medical care for the many tens of thousands of injured; for a massive house-building programme including compensation and reconstruction to re-house those displaced or whose homes and districts have been destroyed; for a reduction of the working day and an effective prohibition on child labour to fully absorb the unemployed and economically dislocated; and for a programme of public works to address the regime's criminal neglect of the rural regions.

Rejecting the siren calls to respect the unity of the whole people by sacrificing the interest of the workers and the poor, a party armed with such a programme will have to recognise that its fulfilment will demand transcending the boundaries of private ownership of the means of production, of the fields and the factories. It will need to recognise that the revolution's completion will require not just the overthrow of a regime, but the overthrow of capitalist social relations.

In place of the diplomatic politicking of the exiles, shuffling the pack to see which foreign power's protégés and which current or defected elements of the old regime might be able to sit together in a future government, the new party will state openly its goal: for a revolutionary government of the workers and peasants.

This is the programme of the permanent revolution, one originally sketched out by Leon Trotsky in Russia in 1905, and actually put into practice in 1917. And today's Arab revolutions will either have to go down this road, or risk facing a defeat that will set back the cause of both political and social freedom in the Arab world for another generation more.

## Vote Jerry Hicks for UNITE General Secretary

Jeremy Dewar

LEN MCCLUSKEY has called a snap election for the top job in Unite, even though he has over two years left to run in the post. This is outrageous and undemocratic.

The controversial decision was okayed by the national executive in mid-December and is being rushed through in the shortest time possible, giving hardly anyone else time to put themselves forward. But that is the intention – McCluskey and his supporters want a shoo-in.

However, he may not get his own way: Jerry Hicks, the rank and file candidate who came second last time round in 2010, has thrown his hat into the ring. He needs 50 branch nominations between 1 January and 15 February to force a ballot, a tall order but achievable if all those who claim to stand for rank and file control of the union get behind him.

After all, Jerry received over 50,000 votes three years ago and, though victimised and effectively blacklisted, is still well known and highly regarded for his work as a convenor at the Rolls Royce plant

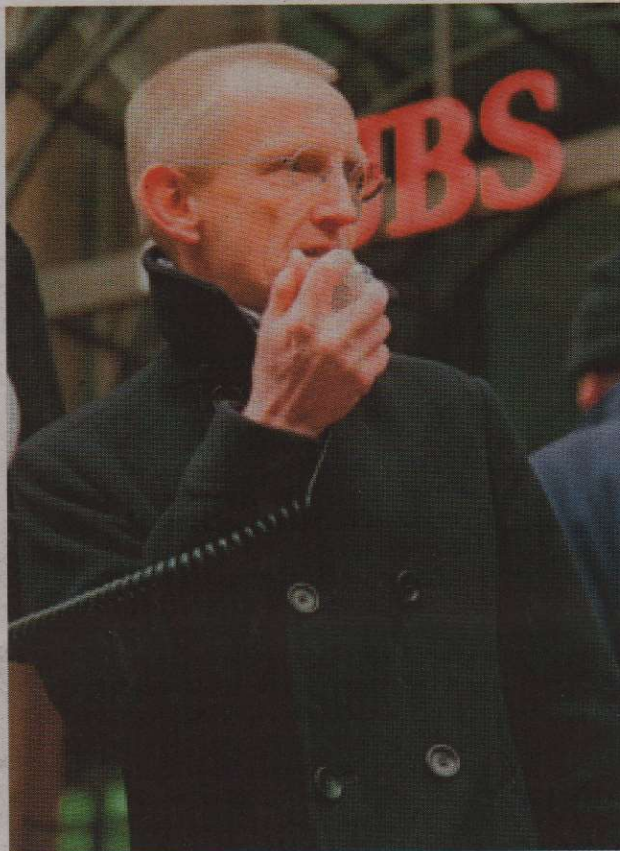
in Filton, near Bristol.

Even more importantly, Jerry used his vote to help found a national rank and file grouping in Unite, Grass Roots Left. Though still small, the GRL is committed to fighting for rank and file control of the union, the election of all officers and for all strikes to be run by the members in dispute, not unaccountable bureaucrats and lawyers.

In contrast to this, the faction that supports McCluskey, United Left, is in reality a ginger group for supposedly left wing officials. UL supported the sell-out of the British Airways dispute in 2011 and have now expelled SWP members from its ranks for daring to oppose this unnecessary snap election.

The real reason for the election – and McCluskey has admitted this – is to avoid a clash with the general election in May 2015.

Why is this important? Because the Labour leadership do not want working class militants debating politics and what a real workers' government should do while the union-funded party is attempting to "triangulate" –



that is, shift its policies to the right in order to attract middle class voters by distancing itself from the unions.

For all his guff about "kick-

ing the cuckoos out of the Labour nest", McCluskey is actually feathering Ed Miliband's with Unite members' money. Since 2001, Unite

(the biggest donor to Labour) has given an eye watering £41.4 million, and will doubtless give another series of huge contributions in the next two years. In return however, the two Eds just brush off McCluskey's criticism using him as the fall guy to prove Labour isn't "in the pocket of the unions". That in fact the union leaders are in Labour's pocket.

In a recent speech at the London School of Economics McCluskey stated;

"As the working class reasserts itself, Labour is the natural, historic, vehicle for their voice... But let me be clear – if in the future there is any return to the discredited recipes of Blairism the Labour Party will be over for me and I believe millions more besides." Return? Who is he kidding? "Blue Labour" has Blair written all over it.

Jerry, on the other hand, proposes Unite only backs those Labour candidates who support union policy. He also supports the election of all officials, a programme of public works and the creation of a million "green" jobs. Unlike McCluskey, who is on a six-fig-

ure salary, Hicks will only take the average member's wage if elected.

We urge all Unite activists to rally to Jerry's cause and motivate his nomination at their branch and chapel meetings. With thousands of car workers facing redundancy, the NHS being privatised and cut to shreds, and construction workers being blacklisted for basic union activity, we need a real fighting General Secretary in Unite.

**Jerry already has 33 branch nominations but needs 50.**

- **Nominate Jerry Hicks for General Secretary**
- **Join Grass roots Left at grassrootsleftunite.blogspot.co.uk**
- **Read Workers Power's contribution towards an action programme for Unite at tinyurl.com/au5yl2e**

**For Jerry's Nomination you will need the following details:**

**Name: Mr J R Hicks**  
**Membership number: 31247909**  
**Branch: Bristol Area Community Branch SW/001500**

## Why I'm standing

CREDIT WHERE credit's due, McCluskey's speech, his Ralph Miliband lecture, was good – though he lifted most of it out of a speech I made back in 2009 – and he said I was exaggerating then – so he's three years behind the times. It should have been made on the gates of Honda, not just at the LSE.

Credit where it's due also: the Community branches are a good idea but they don't go far enough.

But McCluskey's rhetoric doesn't meet reality. He talks about coordinated national strike action. But back in March Unite's leadership pulled the plug on action over pensions and isolated the PCS and NUT.

In 2010 he said no blank cheques for Labour, but in fact he has handed over £6 million of Unite's money to them. I say, payment by results: let's see Labour

pledge to reverse the cuts, make changes and stand against the anti-union laws.

Instead, McCluskey talks tough but lets them off the hook. He's already caved in on the date by shifting the General Secretary election so as not to embarrass them in 2015. He may be pinching John McDonnell's rhetoric now but he backed "Red Ed" for leader, and agreed he should get him £100,000 of Unite's money.

We don't offer less but more. More democracy: election of all officials, not the appointments system. More control over our money, demanding results from Labour before we hand over funds. More support for direct action.

McCluskey claims Unite had a successful Olympics. He claims success on the London buses, winning the £500

Workers Power spoke to Jerry Hicks on his way to Peterborough for a meeting with Unite reps. He explained to us why he was standing and what he thought of Len McCluskey's left talk. This is a transcript of what Jerry said

Olympic bonus but we could have got a lot more like the RMT. Money's good but more importantly we had a chance to smash the blacklist and take on the anti-union laws on the construction sites over the Olympics.

We should have been capable of inspiring occupations of the threatened Remploi factories (government-owned facilities specially fitted for disabled workers) during the Paralympics – that's joined-up thinking!

My views are shared by more and more people – Occupy, UK Uncut, Arab spring... Leaders lead, people control. My vision for the union, for the UK, the world is that it is people who control, take responsibility, deliver change.

Inspirational leaders are important but... look at the Berlin Wall, the poll tax... ordinary working people – and

unemployed people – are the ones who make things happen.

I worked with the construction rank and file [the "sparks"] that McCluskey tries to take credit for. Yet the National Construction Officer called the rank and file committee and Jerry Hicks – he mentioned me by name – a "cancer" and a "poisonous group", and he's still there. That's the appointments system for you.

This election shouldn't have been called now. We're in the midst of a crisis. The focus should be on fighting the cuts and defending jobs, terms and conditions.

It's been brought forward three years on a false premise, fast-tracked to avoid an election. McCluskey can claim no mandate – renewed or otherwise – unless 1.5 million members get the chance to vote. That's why I'm standing.