

CORPORATIONS AND RICH DODGE TAXES WHILE DEMANDING STEEP BUDGET CUTS

By Phil Dickson

On April 4 Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI) presented his budget proposal – a brutal hack-and-slash job aimed at cutting government spending by \$4.3 billion while reducing taxes by \$4.2 billion spread out over a 10-year period. Ryan's plan, hailed by some on the Right as "courageous" and the first "real" attempt to tame the deficit, is nothing less than an assault against the working class and poor.

Demagogues keep spouting that social programs used by millions of Americans everyday, like Social Security and Medicare, are on the cusp of insolvency. To stem the tide of bankruptcy, they say, we must cut now – and cut deep. Many of those claims are, without a doubt, smoke and mirrors. But no matter, the bosses and their political servants have seized the opportunity to act out their deepest wishes of dismembering the welfare state, piece by piece.

Yet if there was ever proof of the perversity of our new miniature "gilded age," it is this: while the Republican controlled congress passed bills to claw back \$50 million in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, \$758 billion was allocated for the defense budget in 2011. \$75 million was cut from homeless veteran benefits, yet somehow



\$27 million was "found" for NASCAR sponsorships promoting the US army.

Against this backdrop, Ryan's plan is merely the most recent bubble to rise out of Washington. The plan itself is really nothing more than a vehicle to gut social spending, privatize Medicare, and attack workers – considering the details focus less on actual measures to reduce the deficit and more on cutting holes in the social-safety net. While the individual provisions of the Ryan plan are too numerous to list, the "market-driven" agenda of the plan itself is clear, considering one of its defining features is the slashing of the corporate-tax rate from 35% down to 25%. Even worse, it seeks to crystallize the combined Bush (now Obama) era tax cuts for top-income earners as a form of permanent tax "relief," despite the fact that most Federal-tax rates are at an all-time low. It is worth noting that this single act adds more to the

deficit than any other, by depriving the federal government of well over \$2 trillion dollars in lost tax revenue since the first cut was implemented in 2001. Medicare, a program used everyday by senior citizens and the permanently disabled will, under the Ryan plan, be privatized and transformed into a voucher program by 2022, leaving recipients with an inadequate, fixed-size subsidy.

President Obama, after remaining mum on the specifics of confronting the spiraling debt, offered his plan stating that it would cut \$4 trillion from the budget over a span of 12 years. Part of the cuts package is the \$38 billion "conciliation" agreement made by Obama to avoid a government shutdown after budget negotiations reached an impasse. The \$38 billion agreement contains the most hard-hitting and short-sighted cuts of all: Pell Grants, job-training programs, and child health-care initiatives all stand to be defunded.

News report after report mention cuts, de-allocations, and reductions, but little is said about actual taxation. Some of the largest and most profitable firms on earth are allowed to realize what could only be described as super profits without having to pay any tax on "earnings." In 2010, the capital lender and manufacturing giant General Electric (GE) made profits in excess of \$14 billion, yet paid \$0 in federal-income taxes. In fact, GE received a \$3.2 billion tax refund from the federal government. From 2006 to the present, GE purportedly spent \$221 million lobbying Congress for a lenient corporate-tax code, and in 2010 alone the corporation spent \$39 million and hired 195 lobbyists to bend senators to its whims. Any illusions that President Obama had the best interests of working-class Americans at heart should have been dashed when he appointed Jeffery Immelt, CEO of a massive tax-cheating company like GE as the head of a Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, a special commission formed to spur American productivity and job creation.

GE, however, isn't the only company to owe billions in taxes. The telecommunications juggernaut, Verizon, made \$12 billion in profits last year. Again, like GE, they paid \$0 in federal taxes. Bank of America, the fifth largest corporation in the

US made \$4.4 billion in profits, yet paid nothing to the federal government. Quite the reverse is true in fact, considering it received \$2.3 billion in federal assistance in 2009. FedEx, the shipping giant, made \$1.9 billion. How much did it pay? The answer: zero dollars in federal income taxes.

But this is not just a highly-selective example of corporate-tax evasion. Tax dodging, as a whole, is endemic to corporate America. Of the 500 top-performing companies listed in the Fortune 500, nearly two-thirds paid nothing in federal income taxes. Of foreign companies doing business in the US, 68% paid no income taxes at all. Taken as a whole, the billions upon billions of dollars that could be reaped from tax-dodging corporations could spare hundreds of social programs from the chopping block. AmeriCorps, student aid, health-care programs for the poor and disabled, along with many others could continue to secure funding and provide the vital services used by millions everyday.

Grassroots anti-cut campaigns like “Uncut” are an inspiring yet nascent step toward the building of the type of durable movement of resistance to the attacks of the bosses that we need. To truly defeat the cuts and the attacks on workers and their organizations, a nationally-coordinated resistance is needed. Such a movement must aim to draw in the most vulnerable sections of American society – women, the unemployed, and the racially and ethnically oppressed – around militant, direct-action methods. Instrumental to success will be linking up with the unions, bringing their tremendous force to bear in the fight with strike action. In this way, isolated store-front occupations and protests can

transcend their current weaknesses and become a power capable of forcing the entire capitalist class and their government to back down.

Such a movement cannot limit itself to calling for the shutting down of tax havens and for putting higher taxes on the rich and corporations, no matter how punitive they may be. The bosses will fight tooth and nail against any tax hike; they may even try to “pass the buck” to working people through pay cuts, layoffs, and higher prices for consumer goods. That is why combining the need for more taxes on the wealthy with the demand for every corporation that fails and has failed to pay taxes to be nationalized without compensation to shareholders and put under workers’ control is so important: it anticipates and provides defense against retaliation on the part of the bosses and removes their stranglehold over economic life.

There is plenty of money out there to fund programs, maintain social services like public education, unemployment benefits and welfare, Medicare and Medicaid, and Social Security. But the majority of it remains currently in the clasped hands of the rich and powerful who don’t want to give any of it up. That is why they are force-feeding budget cuts down our throats instead. Coordination and focused direct action on the part of the working class and all the socially oppressed is needed now to force the rich to pay and defeat the bosses’ brutal bi-partisan austerity drive, but so also is a workers’ party to challenge politically the capitalist agenda and mobilize millions to tear down this rotten system.

Obama Just Can’t Help Looking Like Bush

By Jamie Traska

When Barack Obama was elected into office in 2008, it was under the premise of “Change.” The hope and promise of a different kind of politics than the one practiced by George W. Bush carried Obama into the White House and granted him support even though it soon became apparent that his actions in office were rather self-contained. His followers, however, gave him extended leeway, claiming the limits of his possibilities faced with Republicans obstructing his initiatives, or just needing more time.

Recent polls indicate that people are starting to get fed up with the waiting game for change and are questioning Obama’s basic integrity. His approval ratings plummeted to 42% the other week, an all-time low. Small wonder, the similarities between Obama and Bush are striking, and they can be seen most clearly when examining recent counter-terrorism legislation, specifically the open-ended perpetuation of the Guantanamo prison camp and the ongoing imperialist war efforts,

Trampling upon human rights

On January 22, 2009 President Obama signed an executive order to close down Guantanamo within one year. He emphasized the necessity of doing so by stating: “This is me following through on not just a commitment I made during the campaign, but I think an understanding that dates back to our founding fathers, that we are willing to observe core standards of conduct, not just when it’s easy, but also when

it’s hard.” One year later, in January 2010, nothing had happened, there were still about 200 prisoners in the camp, many of which held indefinitely without a trial or even any kind of charges.

Still another year later, it became clear even to the die-hard supporters of Obama that his words were nothing but lip-service. In January 2011, he signed the Defense Authorization Bill which prevented the transfer of Guantanamo prisoners to US soil or to other foreign countries. And in March 2011, Obama issued an executive order that legitimized indefinite detention and resumes the military trials for detainees at Guantanamo. These are certainly not steps towards closing down this inhumane and despicable pit of imperialist oppression and suffering. No, these are steps toward keeping the status quo and continuing what Bush set up before him.

Moreover, even though Obama repeatedly talked about more “judicial oversight” with respect to the Patriot Act and expressed concern over some warrantless searches, he continued to support the extension of them without suggesting changes or even attempting to soften the legislation. The latest renewal of these measures, including roving wiretaps, seizure of any “tangible item” during surveillance by government authorities, and the spying on library records, is a 90-day extension that will end May 27, 2011. It is, however, almost certain that Congress will promote another extension at least until 2013, as has already been proposed by Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

Anyone opposed to the US government’s politics – be it at home or abroad – and express-

es the anger and frustration about it openly or acts accordingly will be faced with relentless and ruthless surveillance, prosecution, and punishment. The damnation of WikiLeaks is the prime example of the nauseating methods of Obama's administration to shut people up and scare them into inaction. Bradley Manning's inhumane treatment is correctly characterized as torture and carries an abundance of similarities to the way the Bush administration treated detainees from Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the US cannot wait to get their hands on Julian Assange. Once he gets deported from England to Sweden, he will most likely face extradition to the US and suffer under a similar abhorrent treatment as Bradley.

We can expect more FBI-like raids similar to the ones in Illinois and Minnesota last year, more attempts to infiltrate social and anti-war movements, and more brutal and inhumane behavior on the part of the state. Obama is now leading the pack – just like Bush before him.

Beating the war drum

Instead of decreasing US war efforts, Obama is intensifying them. Not only is the withdrawal of the remaining 50,000 troops out of Iraq until the end of 2011 questionable, since it is dependent on "conditions on the ground," but the war in Afghanistan becomes ever more violent and an impasse that costs thousands of innocent lives.

90,000 US troops are now concentrating on "key terrain districts"; moreover, 2010 saw the highest number in casualties for the US since the war started in 2001 – 701 soldiers have lost their lives and thousands more have been wounded.

Furthermore, the war has long ago crossed the border into Pakistan. Thousands of civilians there are dying from US drone attacks while the political situation in Pakistan is anything but stable. Even the Western puppet Hamid Karzai is furious about the latest atrocities of US troops in Afghanistan, saying that the world has to "wake up." Obama, however, is wide awake and determined to follow Bush's path of illegal attacks against sovereign nations.

And the next imperialist intervention has already begun. This time the US with its NATO allies is bombing Libya in order to "protect civilians." Obama did not even bother to inform Congress about the decision to go to war. There is no clearly stated

vision on when and how this new intervention would end. Instead, he cynically explains: "Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world's many challenges. But when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act." Quite to the contrary, the military interventions since 2001 prove that the US indeed wants to solve the world's challenges by military force.

This hypocrisy of the Obama administration becomes even more blatant in the case of Saudi Arabia's invasion of Bahrain. After demonstrations in the capital Manama and other parts of the country were brutally smashed by Bahrain police forces, the Saudi's sent their military to help the 200-year-old monarchy. Besides broadly claiming that "people have certain universal rights including the right to peaceful assembly" and urging "Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen to show restraint in responding to peaceful protests," Obama had nothing consequential to say. Nothing about Saudi Arabia's invasion of Bahrain, nothing about the lack of the right for peaceful assembly in Saudi Arabia, nothing about the cruelty of the murderous regime in Bahrain, and nothing about "protecting civilians" in these countries.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are some of the United States' most important allies in the Middle East. Not only is Saudi Arabia a major supplier of oil for the US and a reliable henchman in the so-called "War on Terror," but Bahrain is also home of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet – 150 miles off the coast of Iran on the other side of the Persian Gulf. As long as countries serve the interests of the United States, they are allowed to oppress people, kill protesters, and torture political prisoners as much as they want.

US imperialism continues its work of destruction across the globe, but this time it is Obama who is heading it. And even though he is a more elegant and glossy trooper than Bush, he still uses the same methods to feed the beast. Workers in America should not put any more trust in Obama and the Democrats. They have had their chance. Now they must focus on building a workers' party that genuinely fights for their rights, puts a stop to the wars and occupations, and heads the struggle to put an end to the murderous capitalist system.

Free Bradley Manning

By Joy McReady

He is kept in his cell 23 hours a day, force fed a daily diet of antidepressant pills, forbidden to exercise in his cell, and forcibly woken if he attempts to sleep in the daytime.

For the first few weeks of March he was forced to sleep without clothing and stand naked for morning parade, which his lawyer described as ritual humiliation. Welcome to justice in Obama's America.

Bradley was arrested in May 2010 in Iraq, on suspicion of having passed classified information to the whistleblower website, WikiLeaks. He was charged in July with transferring classified data onto his personal computer and communicating national defense information to an unauthorized source. An additional 22 charges were added in March 2011, including "aiding the enemy," a capital offense which carries the death penalty.

His father Brian Manning, an ex-navy intelligence specialist, has compared his son's treatment to those in Guantanamo, while Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, compared the treatment to what happened inside the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Ellsberg wrote that it amounted to what the CIA calls "no-touch torture," and said he believed its purpose was to demoralize Manning.

Bradley's treatment is creating cracks in Obama's administration, which criticized the extreme treatment of detainees by George W. Bush as being against the national interest. State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley was forced to resign after stating that Manning's treatment was "ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid." Obama weakly said that the Pentagon had "assured" him that Bradley's confinement was "appropriate" and "meeting basic standards."

On 19-20 March protests were organized across the world demanding his release, including Minneapolis, London, Montreal, The Hague, Phoenix, San Diego, and Vienna.

Michigan on the Verge of “Financial Martial Law”

By Jeff Albertson

The Local Government and School District Fiscal Authority Act put forth by Republicans and demanded by Governor Rick Snyder since the beginning of the year promotes nothing short of what one State Senator from Michigan has dubbed “financial martial law.” It broadens and deepens the immense powers enjoyed already by emergency financial managers [EFMs] under Public Act 72 passed in 1990.

A number of the new provisions are simply astounding. Under the law, EFMs will be granted the ability to modify or nullify authoritatively collective-bargaining agreements, privatize public services and property, remove elected officials from office, dissolve local governing bodies of schools and cities, scrap any law or local ordinance that gets in their way, and a variety of other draconian powers.

The basis of the present bill lies in the struggles between Robert Bobb, an EFM appointed to run the the public-school system in Detroit, and the city’s school board. The Board sued previously over his heavy-handed approach and a circuit court agreed. Now if the government were to continue its efforts to take extraordinary powers into its hands in order to resolve Michigan’s \$1.4 billion budget deficit, then there could be no restraints, not even from the courts, put on the ability of the EFMs to take action.

In some parts of Michigan, such managers are already in place (Benton Harbor, Pontiac,



and Ecorse – all predominately black neighborhoods). Dozens of takeovers of municipalities and districts are projected, made possible by the perfect-storm combination of the economic crisis and previous steep reductions in property taxes and now slashing of the State’s budget. All this while Snyder is granting businesses with \$1.8 billion in tax breaks. Labor Notes reports that he would tax corporations just 6% while taxing workers’ pensions and eliminating the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers.

Even electoral democracy is being forced to take a backseat to ensure the fulfillment of the immediate financial needs of the capitalist class. While the inserted managerial “consent agreement” contained within the bill does allow communities to avoid coming under the control of an EFM, they can do so only if the elected representatives abide by the decisions of the executive and eliminate collective bargaining.

Union leaders for their part have been unable to answer seriously these deliberate attempts to resolve the econom-

ic crisis off the backs of the working class. Michigan AFL-CIO president Mark Gaffney reported that while “[collective] bargaining in Michigan is dying by a thousand cuts,” he claims that Snyder has not made his positions on collective bargaining, “Right to Work,” or project-labor agreements (where the prevailing wage is paid on all public-construction projects) entirely clear.

As opposed to calling for direct union and worker mobilizations to defeat the bill, Gaffney prefers to rely predominately on the Republican governor remaining a “rational” centrist capable of making sound political judgments and protecting the unions. “Snyder is going to have to make a decision about who he is politically...I think it [the assault on collective bargaining] can be stopped by the governor deciding he wants to govern from the center, not the far-Right,” said Gaffney. He mentions that while the Governor claims to want to work with unions, Snyder has thrown his support behind the emergency financial manager bills. He also recounts how

the administration previously stripped legal recognition of the child care workers’ union. Putting any trust and confidence in such an individual it would seem would be at the height of unrestrained imagination and bound to produce a very rude awakening.

There is no alternative to action at this point. Waiting around for the Governor to somehow see the light, to stop being a spokesman and tool of the capitalist class, and reverse course is worse than wishful thinking. Gaffney and other labor leaders need to snap to and organize a mass fight back – not with admonition but with militant tactics, demanding the whole bill be killed as well as any laws that allow unelected, undemocratic managers of the executive the authority to dictate for all to obey without question.

Gaffney has reported the unions and the wider working class will “revolt” if the bill goes through in a manner similar to what took place in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana. “That time is near for Michigan too,” he said. “Some of us [the unions] are already over that line.” Excellent! Now defend your members and mobilize the union rank and file and the working class to win, to force by any means the bosses’ politicians to back down and concede defeat. For if nothing is done now, the attacks will surely get worse – as they have in Michigan for the last 20 years. Workers should keep a close watch over their leaders and be prepared to mobilize for struggle independently of them if they refuse to fight.

Millions Mobilize in National Day of Actions

DOCKWORKERS IN OAKLAND SHUT DOWN PORT

By Jeff Albertson

April 4, 2011 was a day of both historic and contemporary significance. 43-years ago on this day, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered in Memphis, Tennessee after turning out in support of striking sanitation workers. Today, organized labor and the entire working class are fighting back against one of the most direct and brutal onslaughts of organized capital in decades.

A little over a month after workers, students, and unions rocked Madison, Wisconsin, a struggle that spilled over into neighboring mid-western states, it seems fitting that a nationwide day of rallies and demonstrations in support of workers and in broad opposition to a variety of anti-union, austerity bills facing down just about every state came on this day. The most radical retaliation to the proposed service cuts, the union-busting, and other such attempts to attack the working class came from none other than the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU).

Bay Area Local 10 of the ILWU is known internationally as one of, if not the most, militant bastion in the workers' movement today. Their record speaks for itself: shut downs on May Day, job walkoffs against the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, pickets and stoppages to combat racism (see ILWU shuts down ports to combat racism), and now strike action in solidarity with



Longshore workers of ILWU Local 10 shut down the ports of Oakland and San Francisco for 24 hours, in solidarity with the struggles in Wisconsin.

their class brothers and sisters in Wisconsin and across America.

That morning workers walked off the job at the port of Oakland. They hoisted up upside down, "distress mode" flags of the state of Wisconsin on their cranes. Although there were no other port shutdowns that day, long-shore workers along the entire West Coast flew the Wisconsin state flag.

Many unionists joined together to stage a sit-in at the Oakland Wells Fargo branch, but were beat to the punch by management who closed the business that day knowing what was coming.

The AFL-CIO reported that over 1,000 solidarity actions took place nationwide. Clay Christenson a firefighter from Madison, Wisconsin exclaimed, "[forty] three years after the assassination of Dr. King, working men and women face politically motivated attacks aimed at silencing their rights and voices. Today we stand

together not only against Scott Walker's [the governor of Wisconsin] attempts to destroy more than 50 years of labor-management cooperation in Wisconsin, but against attacks on workers nationwide."

Memories of King's calls for a general strike in the city of Memphis as the way to win workers' demands helped embolden the union rank and file and unorganized alike. "I am not a union member, but I came out to support workers' rights...We will not stand for these outrageous political attacks that seem to be sweeping the nation from conservative governors," proclaimed Lynn Hirsh, a retired social worker from Madison.

Undoubtedly these days of actions and mobilizations are important, but we face a ruling-class offensive pulling out all the stops – as we've seen in particularly striking fashion in Michigan – to make workers and their communities pay for capitalism's failures. They

won't be enough on their own to defeat their attacks. Likewise, putting confidence in formal legal proceedings, where the courts operate merely as justification bodies for the bosses' actions and needs, is no solution.

In times like these, faced with a historic crisis of the global profit system, workers and their organizations need to rise to the occasion. Union militancy, like the kind we've seen already by workers of ILWU Local 10, needs to not only be repeated but extended – and not just for one day – across the entire workers' movement. Building a nationwide anti-cuts movement that utilizes militant tactics like indefinite strike action, including general strikes when necessary, and occupations is the best way for the working-class movement to counter the capitalist offensive and defeat the bosses.

NATO Over Libya

The Tide Begins to Turn

Imperialism has intervened into Libya not to save the revolution, but to co-opt it, writes **Simon Hardy**

Imperialism has intervened into Libya not to save the revolution, but to co-opt it, writes Simon Hardy

It is happening again. After weeks of debate and climb down concerning international military action against Gaddafi, suddenly - almost out of nowhere - a UN resolution was agreed and bombing commenced. But it is OK they say - this is one of the good wars.

Of course it is hard to believe what the imperial powers say these days. After the WMD's and the Abu Ghraibs and all the uncounted dead across Iraq and Afghanistan it seems that they like to get their hands dirty on a regular basis and will happily lie to justify it. But it is OK they say - we learnt from our mistakes.

As the tomahawk missiles and B2 bombers rain down destruction on Libya one is entitled to ask some questions. Most importantly we must ask why now, why here?

The apparent imminent defeat of the Libyan revolution was ostensibly the cause. The political debate in the western world fell into the usual patterns with the usual terms and categories. Humanitarian. No-fly zone. Civilians. Threat. These buzz words are fired out at press conferences like bullets from machine guns. They speak to our hearts and our compassion but they are also lies. The entire operation is a cynical manipulation of truth and people. The Libyan revolution was clearly on the verge of some kind of strategic, perhaps even permanent, defeat

- unable to stand up to Gaddafi's mercenaries and praetorian guards. But this was not the reason for the intervention.

The decision making process which led the West to justify intervention was very revealing. Don't forget that when Ben Ali was on the verge of being overthrown in Tunisia the Sarkozy government offered to send in French special forces to protect him and put down the uprising. Skip forward three months and France is suddenly apparently on the side of the angels, instead of defending a nasty tyrant from his people now they are defending the people from a nasty tyrant. The western world was cautious and concerned about the uprisings in countries where they had long term invested interests (Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) but now it seems they have made a decision to support some of the movements. The reason why they support the revolution in Libya is simple. Whilst it is true that Gaddafi came in from the cold a few years ago, he has never quite been 'on message'. His supposed anti-imperialist past always left a sour taste in the mouth of the western elites, although they were happy to wash the taste out with Libyan oil. But they always knew that Gaddafi could be sacrificed more easily than Mubarak if someone potentially better came along. Gaddafi is no Mubarak as far as the US is concerned. The rebellion in Libya rapidly became a civil war and the West clearly came out for the rebels when

they had almost surrounded Tripoli. Overstretched and under equipped, however, they were unable to resist Gaddafi's counter attack and they were forced to retreat and retreat. The factors that could be used to justify an intervention began to align.

Along with the rush to war, there is a necessary obliteration of memory, which must take place to manufacture consent for the action. Turn back the clock a month before the rebellion started in Libya. The western world was supplying military equipment and training to the Libyan army. We were educating the sons of the elite, and Gaddafi himself, in the privileged academic institutions of central London. We were trading happily with the regime. Everything was sunny in the garden. Suddenly it changed - suddenly the friendly dictators of yesterday are the monsters of today, a road that is familiar to the Taliban and Saddam Hussein who came before. Of course, socialists always knew Gaddafi was a monster - we never pretended otherwise. The hypocrisy lies with the imperialists and how they now seek to manipulate the new situation to their own advantage. Just don't ask too many questions about what things were like before the UN resolution was passed.

It is the sheer scale of military power which is central to the power relations here. The hypocrisy of the west's actions must be drowned out by a constant barrage of military reports, the hope is that people become so interested in the war as a news story, as a

spectacle, that they forget any critical questioning of why it is happening.

In the age of shock and awe (the modern day blitzkrieg) extreme displays of violence and military power are essential to a declining imperial power. Especially when it has lost much of its legitimacy through its neo-colonial attitude toward Afghanistan and Iraq and the sheer brutality of the war on terror, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and the recent "kill team" photos. The shock doctrine of modern capitalism requires massive salvos from warships and war planes, it requires the regime that has broken ranks with official policy to be humbled and broken bloodily and crudely. Asking the imperialists to do a surgical strike to take out key installations is like asking a bull to tip-toe through a china shop.

The UN authorised coalition began to show cracks within days of the assault starting. Although it was French war planes that first took to the skies above Libya, it was clearly the US, through its command and control centre in AFCOM, which directed the operations. For its own reasons, domestic as well as foreign, the US began to look around for someone else to take charge. This revealed the divisions within the coalition even more; France did not want NATO control, Turkey did not want offensive actions, Germany had not supported the UN resolution, following the US lead, Britain did want NATO control. The outcome was a potentially unwieldy agreement that NATO would oversee the no-fly zone (an objective already achieved, largely by US forces) while Britain, France and the US would be responsible for attacks on ground forces.

The war was clearly another

display of the kind of shock and awe tactics that the US has perfected, made possible by the sheer size and scale of their military capacities. Of course, don't forget that every Tomahawk missile fired pays 10 teachers' salaries for a year. Nevertheless, even in times of austerity the missiles are fired, repeatedly. The aim is clearly to destroy Gaddafi's military, to leave his regime weak and isolated. The sheer ferocity left many governments feeling uneasy. Russia and China, who had abstained on the UN resolution in order to allow it to pass, tried to justify their positions by saying they regretted their actions when they saw what the west was really up to. Was it really so difficult to predict?

Across the Middle East and beyond, governments and peoples watch nervously. Could this happen to us? A liberal might argue that this kind of action will force regimes to respect democratic rights and not massacre their people. Actually this is not the message. The message is that these regimes better get into line with the US, not just some of the way - but all of the way. After all, there are massacres happening in Yemen and Bahrain and plenty of terrible things happening in Saudi Arabia. But there is no UN resolution authorising a no-fly zone over Saudi Arabia or sanctioning "all means necessary" to prevent the Saudi King Abdullah from repressing "his" people. Only a couple of days into the bombardment, Israel (the favourite child of the imperialists) attacked the Gaza strip, injuring 20 people including 7 children. Again, there is not a UN no-fly zone over Gaza, no aerial combat between French and Israeli fighter jets. The privileges of some of the dictators and the Zionist state protect

them from any real challenge from the west. Crucially, it protects them from having to legitimise themselves using the liberal buzz words of the humanitarian interventionists.

Those who - for good intentions - support the no-fly zone and military bombardment, are misunderstanding the central dynamic of what the conflict is about. This is not about saving the civilians, never mind saving the revolution. This no-fly zone is intended to destroy the essence of the revolution, the people's struggle for control over their own lives and their own country. It is intended to allow a regime change to occur, if necessary, but only in such a way that the people become subordinated to the imperialists and their new allies in the country. To the extent that the imperialists are responsible for bringing down the Gaddafi regime, they will be able to determine who replaces him. The rebels who take power in such a situation will be politically and morally weak, indentured permanently to the imperialists, reliant on them, dependent on them for their existence. By the time the rebel forces get to Tripoli they may be led by utterly pro-imperialist figures - ready for Libya to become a client state of France, Britain or the US. This would reinforce the myth that imperialist intervention is necessary to resolve such situations, that nothing can be done without Washington and that the western powers are somehow benevolent.

This war is being waged to reassert the dominance of the imperialists. Imperialist intervention, even on the side of the insurgents, is reactionary and must be opposed. It will strengthen the pro-imperialist trend within the revolution in Libya (and elsewhere) and allow the imperialists to posture



as defenders of democracy when they are no such thing.

Within the rebel camp, there is clearly a growing disparity between the Transitional National Council (TNC) operating a slick media machine from the Benghazi court house, and the enthusiastic but disorganised fighters, many of them youth, who are on the front line. The stories of the rebel fighters, lightly armed and with no real military experience, launching headlong attacks on the entrenched positions of the Gaddafi forces shows the problems facing the revolution. Its strength and dynamism is undoubtedly represented by those fighters and the masses of the people who support them but, without the force of a working class insurrection in the big cities, the struggle in Libya is starkly reduced to the military question; who has what weapons and what training. The TNC in Benghazi does not seem to be directing very much apart from press conferences, and the generals and leading dissidents who went over to the rebellion at the beginning appear to have gone to ground. Certainly it is not clear who is directing the rebel army's actions, other than the genuine enthusiasm of revolutionary youth.

What to do about Gaddafi?

Some on the left have blindly supported Gaddafi from the beginning, claiming that he

was some kind of progressive. They pointed to his various anti-imperialist outbursts over the years and his limited redistribution of oil money to various quarters. When the rebellion began, they were quick to dismiss it as pro-imperialist or pro-monarchist, choosing to ignore both the context of the uprising (the Arab revolutions generally) and the clear desire of ordinary people to overthrow a dictatorship, no matter how allegedly benevolent. Are the rebels ideologically homogenous? Certainly not, but they are clearly in the same mould as those who occupied Tahrir square and demonstrated in Tunis to bring down Ben Ali.

Others on the left decided to support Gaddafi when the bombs started falling, calling on all the Libyans to form an anti-imperialist united front. This position assumes that the working class should automatically side with those targeted by imperialism, irrespective of political context or the war aims of either side. What would be the agreed objective of this anti-imperialist united front? What immediate aim do Gaddafi and the Libyan workers share? Are the workers and the poor of Libya supposed to make common cause with Gaddafi so that he can continue his repression of their revolution?

The overriding question in Libya today is not "Who are

the imperialists attacking?" It is "How can the Libyan Revolution succeed in overthrowing Gaddafi's regime?" A united front with Gaddafi in this situation would be literally impossible. Certainly, those who live in the countries whose forces are taking part must launch a campaign against the bombings. Within Libya, we oppose the calls on the imperialists to intervene but that does not prevent the forces of the democratic revolution taking advantage of the impact of the imperialists' intervention against Gaddafi. It would be bizarre, indeed, to refuse to continue the campaign against Gaddafi's repressive apparatus because it had been weakened by imperialist action! We recognise that the rebel forces are entitled to get hold of weaponry from whatever sources they can, but our strategy would be to call on their brothers and sisters in Egypt and Tunisia to come to their aid with weaponry and people who can support the fighting. The rebels should also take advantage of the new situation to press ahead – organise themselves into more effective combat units and seize lost territory.

It is reported that Gaddafi has said that he will "open the arsenals and arm the people" in order to defend Tripoli from a threatened imperialist invasion. Within the territory that he controls, supporters of the democratic revolution, to the extent that this is possible, should demand that the arms should be distributed immediately and that a popular and democratic militia should be established. If the imperialists do attempt any ground attacks, these militia could operate a principled united front with Gaddafi's forces – both to defeat any attempt at occupation and to strengthen their own ability to

overthrow Gaddafi and his regime.

If Gaddafi could successfully use the imperialist attack to bolster support for his regime and to wear the rebels down, then this would have an important, and negative, impact on the Arab revolutions. If the imperialists bomb Gaddafi into submission then it could reconsolidate their power in the region and divert the Libyan revolution into a safe, acceptable pro-imperialist regime.

The underlying message from the UN is clear - the Libyans could not emancipate themselves, now the we must do it for them. Hypocrisy still dominates their actions - their message to the people of Saudi Arabia is "Do not rise up, accept your place in the world as subjects of King Abdullah and his armed forces." Only when imperialist capitalism is destroyed as a world system and all their disgusting servile governments have

Yemen Regime on the Brink as Army Splits

By Chris Newcombe

Yemeni President Saleh's tottering regime has taken a further blow with the defection of five generals, including the commander of the 1st Brigade, major general Ali Mohsin Saleh Ahmar. Soldiers of the 1st Brigade joined protesters in the capital Sanaa, where tanks patrol the streets, as troops loyal to the dictator surrounded his presidential palace. Talk of an army coup is now rife.

Impatience with the meagre concessions grudgingly granted by Saleh - who has held office since 1978 - had already toughened the mood of protesters. But last Friday saw the worst regime violence yet. Soldiers on the ground and rooftop snipers fired on unarmed, peaceful protesters in front of Sanaa university, killing over 50 and wounding 200. That compares with 29 deaths reported since protests began in early February! Bullet wounds to the heads of victims indicate that snipers shot to kill.

Undoubtedly, the bravery and determination of the protests, along with the deepening crisis of presidential rule, has been the key factor in fomenting the split in the military. The Friday massacre was the last straw for general Ahmar, who held the president responsible for the bloodshed and stated that his defection was "an answer to the developments in the streets."

Increasingly desperate, Saleh is now raising the spectre of civil war, but it seems unlikely he has the basis of support

to mount such a fightback. On his part, general Ahmar is seen as a regime man, corrupt with conservative Wahhabi sympathies – not likely to be popular among radical youth. The troops of the 1st Brigade, on the other hand, are hailed by the protesting crowds.

The democracy movement, whilst strong and united in opposition to Saleh's rule, is – like the movements in other Arab states – extremely heterogeneous. It includes students, Islamists, socialists, and tribal leaders, some veteran oppositionists, and some completely new. Needless to say, they have diverse views of what kind of government and society should replace the present regime.

Well before this movement emerged, Yemen was facing acute problems on several fronts: a northern rebellion, secessionists in the south, and the activities of Al Qaeda. Saudi Arabia involved itself in the north, sending in troops against the Houti rebels, and the USA made air strikes on what it calls "terrorist" positions, killing hundreds, prompting some to call Yemen the USA's 'third war', after Iraq and Afghanistan. Yemen's strategic location between the Middle East and the Horn of Africa is perhaps the most important factor motivating the USA's involvement.

Apart from these conflicts, Yemen faces economic woes unlike those in most Arab states. Dwindling resources - oil is tipped to run low by 2017 – and an undeveloped economy combine with a growing, youthful population to produce 65% unemployment and seething frustration and unrest. Whatever regime replaces the rule of president Saleh will have to deal first and foremost with this economic challenge.

Revolution Sweeps Syria

By Simon Hardy

The Arab revolution has spread to Syria - are the Ba'ath party's days numbered? Simon Hardy looks at the context of the movement in Syria and how it can develop

Just as the tide of democratic revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa appeared to be on the turn, with Gaddafi counter-attacking in Libya and the isolation and crushing of the pro-democracy demonstrations in Saudi Arabia, mass protests have broken out in Syria.

Like Egypt, Syria has existed under a one party state since the 1960s and its people suffer under an oppressive Emergency Law. The conditions for the resistance in Syria are similar to those for their brothers and sisters in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya. In Syria, there are religious divisions between the Sunni, the Shia and the Alawi. The Ba'ath party has ruled as a one-party state since 1963. It carried out some limited economic reforms whilst ruling with an iron fist. Under Bashar al-Assad, clientelism and favouritism ensured benefits for some whilst others were cast out, just as under his father. The regime's social base is among the Sunni merchants in the larger cities like Damascus, as well as the Alawi minority group.

The movement against the government began in January when Hassan Ali-Hakleh burnt himself to death, just as Mohammed Bouazizi had done in Tunis in December 2010. This did not lead immediately to large protests. Some smaller demonstrations were organised across the country but they were quickly repressed by

the security forces. A planned day of rage on 5 February fizzled out as only a few hundred people turned out (they, too, were dealt with brutally by the police). Assad no doubt sat back and smiled; apart from a few small groups of malcontents his country appeared immune to the protests.

But small sparks began to fly across the country. A protest in Damascus against the beating of a shop keeper by police officers escalated into a serious confrontation. A protest outside the Libyan embassy against Gaddafi was eventually ended by the police with several arrests and beatings. These events no doubt began to harden people's resolve. The police beatings were not aimed at seasoned political activists but at ordinary people and demonstrators who were simply expressing solidarity with the Libyan people.

The simmering unease and growing rage exploded into a social movement capable of bringing down the government on 6 March. Some school students wrote "the people want to overthrow the regime", a slogan that has effectively become the motto of the Arab revolutions, on the walls around Daraa, in southern Syria. Their arrest angered people who mobilised to demand their release. Immediately the protests started, they were critical of the entire regime and demanded more democratic rights and the lifting of the Emergency Law.

The regime has pursued a dual strategy. On the one hand, it has declared the protests legitimate, even acknowledged that reforms must be made. Assad claims to be willing to listen to his people. At the same time, the secu-

rity forces have been gunning people down in the street. The spokespeople of the regime have told international media that the problem is not the protests, it is that foreigners have infiltrated the protests to cause trouble. They claim that security forces have been fired on by people from the crowd. Anyone familiar with progressive struggles will know these lies when they hear them. They are the same lies that were used by the British when their soldiers shot dead Irish civil rights protesters in 1971 in the Bloody Sunday massacre. This language of "outside agitators" is always used by ruling powers. Protests in the west are also 'infiltrated' by 'trouble-makers'. These are simply attempts to deny the fact that mass revolts have broken out and that more and more people are turning against the ruling regime.

Al-Assad now has the same problem that faced Mubarak and Ben Ali before him. The movement has become too big, too many people are mobilised. It would still be possible to crush it, but it would mean killing a lot of people. At least 130 people have died already, with many more arrested and detained, but this has only angered people even more. For instance some 20,000 people braved police intimidation to show their solidarity by attending the funeral of people killed on a recent demonstration.

Now the movement is becoming more radical. In the towns of Latakia and Tafas, police stations and Ba'ath party buildings have been burnt down and people are becoming more organised on the protests.

Whatever the differences in detail and circumstances,

there is a lawfulness to how such popular revolutions unfold. The political struggle in Syria will follow much the same pattern as those in Tunisia and Egypt. First there is repression, then the masses lose their fear, the protests grow. The regime tries to counter this with talk of reform but this only encourages the masses until the point is reached when real concessions have to be made. This is the stage towards which Syria is now moving - Al-Assad has promised political freedoms, including the right to form political parties.

Syrians are now facing the same tasks as faced the popular movements in Tunisia and Egypt, which have already toppled governments. They can constitute a new civil society, claiming the rights of the modern capitalist age, but they will have to use revolutionary methods to achieve this. They must also learn from the problems of Egypt and Tunisia - sacrificing a president or two can still leave the old regime intact. The ruling party, and those agents of repression that it rests upon, must be brought down and their state machine must be broken up. This means fighting for a constituent assembly in Syria that can achieve the democratic reforms that people want - but it must be based on revolutionary committees of struggle to build a new kind of state from below, one that must be based on the workers and farmers of Syria.

Unions Enter the Battlefield:

Half a Million Surge onto London Anti-Cuts March

By John Bowman

It was a long time coming, but yesterday London was crammed full of people for one of the largest demonstrations in years.

Trade unionists, families, pensioners, communities, youth and students took over central London in defence of jobs and services, and against the Con-Dem coalition.

The march was so huge that some protesters took over five hours to complete the short march route, engulfed in a sea of union banners, placards, flags and balloons.

The TUC, who called the demonstration, told media sources that they expected 100,000 to march. On the day, it was clearly many times that figure. Some estimate that as many as 500,000 took to the streets.

The unity of so many different sections of the working class and angry people from across Britain coming together sent a powerful message. It was clear from the chants and the slogans that this was not just workers airing their individual grievances, but against the whole government and its austerity package.

Older workers from Derbyshire told the BBC, "We're youth workers...but the major reason we're here is because young people are getting a real raw deal."

The 'March for the Alternative' struck a heavy blow at the myth that Britain's trade unions are a spent force. On the contrary, it showed how powerful Britain's labour movement still is.



Many protesters were calling for the TUC to take further action after the demonstration. Thousands waved placards calling for a general strike. Trade unionists and their families joined in general strike chants by Workers Power and the REVOLUTION youth group.

Protester Michelle Lambert, who held a home-made general strike banner told the BBC, "Maybe they will call a general strike after this. It will give people more confidence."

Strategy

On the tubes and busses home, thousands of protesters were discussing where to go from here. Few, if any, were under any illusions that the cuts programme can be stopped with one demonstration, even one as large as this.

Vince Cable, business minister has already said "No government - coalition, Labour or any other - would change its fundamental economic policy simply in response to a demonstration of that kind."

This shows that industrial action has to be the next stage in the campaign, including a general strike.

At the rally in Hyde Park, Len McLuskey, Unite union leader

and Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS union both called for coordinated strike action. McLuskey called on Labour to change tack and be a "strong opposition."

But the more right-wing leaders had a different message. Dave Prentis avoided calls for strike action in the public sector, saying "we should march in our thousands and vote in our millions."

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband made clear that he did not want the fight against cuts to become a class issue and lose middle-class support. He said "We are here today from ALL walks of life, ALL classes" and he was booed when he said "we need some cuts, but this government is going too far."

Miliband listed a series of struggles from the past from which we should take inspiration - the suffragettes, the US civil rights movement, the anti-apartheid movement. But he deliberately left out great struggles of the working class in Britain against Tory attacks: the general strike of 1926, the Miners' Strike, the great anti-Poll Tax movement that brought down Thatcher.

Brendan Barber TUC general secretary focussed his

speech on healthcare. He said "The NHS stands for something special: care, compassion, social solidarity, and let us pledge to do everything in our power to defend it." Fighting talk! But what will exactly will he do? The challenge now is to hold these leaders to their words and demand that they actually do "everything in their power" and call a general strike. If they do not, it will become too late.

To deliver action with the TUC if possible, but without them if necessary, we need to build up the anticuts committees into local delegate-based councils of action, drawing in delegates from every union, every workplace, every campaign, every section of the working class.

Going forward

The people that took part will remember March 26 as the day that we all came together in solidarity against the cuts. For many, it was their first march, but it will certainly not be their last.

The 'March for the Alternative' encapsulated the size, scale and diversity of opposition to the Con-Dem coalition.

It will have woken up millions of people to the power that they didn't know they had. Now we need to use that power to break the Con-Dems, and bring down their millionaire coalition with a general strike.

Blood and Tragedy on the Ivory Coast

As French helicopters fire on forces still loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and militia supporting his rival Alassane Ouattara take over the country's largest city, **Joana Ramiro** explores the political history and contemporary challenges of a country ruled by war and terror since the 19th century.

The Ivory Coast, situated in the West of Africa, has a history drenched in blood and oppression. From dictatorship to genocide and civil war, Ivorians have lived in a state of fear over a century. Now two men, Gbagbo and Ouattara are battling it out for control of the country, but neither offers a solution to the problems facing Ivorians today.

The Ivory Coast as an artificial colonial construct

As a former French colony, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) became a vital port of trade for coffee, cocoa, bananas and other agricultural commodities, which French plantation owners produced with the help of a forced labour system. As was the case in the colonial empires, the country was ruled under a system of racial and ethnic discrimination, political inequality and a doctrine of forced assimilation. From taxes to a different law system, indigenous Ivorians were divided not just from colonisers, but amongst themselves in a complex class-system concocted by the French. Geographical borders were set with Liberia and then British Ghana (The Gold Coast) at the end of the 19th century, but the northern frontier remained ambiguous until the late 1940s as France unsuccessfully tried to annex

territories from today's Mali and Burkina Faso.

This perimeter encompassed several kingdoms and tribes of different languages, cultures and religious creeds and disregarded local politics in favour of European and particularly French interests. The principal religions are Islam (38.6 per cent), Christianity (32.8 per cent), (mainly Roman Catholic) and various indigenous religions (11.6 per cent). These differences ran almost unnoticed under oppressive regimes, but came quickly to surface as soon as sovereignty and national identity were put into question. They have been, amongst other, key factors in the long term conflicts in the region and enablers of the hierarchical society implemented in the Ivory Coast.

Independence rooted in political compromise and dependence on the West

In 1960 Ivory Coast gained its political independence from France. Its first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, a member of the local nobility set up the first agricultural trade union and pushed for legal reforms. His political success and strong relationship with the French administration (being a French Member of Parliament for the

region of West Africa before independence) put him in the lead position to become President of the independent Republic of Côte d'Ivoire in 1960. His previous political alliances, often supporting or aligning with communist groups within parliament, were quickly discarded.

The Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) became the country's only legal party and under Houphouët-Boigny a merciless political machine. His undemocratic ruling comprised the adoption of liberal economic systems and a wretched relationship with Western powers. His *Françafrique* policies turned the Ivory Coast into France's number one ally and a Western watchdog in Africa. He became known for his anticommunist foreign policy and was involved in the coups against left-wing African leaders such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah in 1966, Benin's Mathieu Kérékou in 1977 and Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso in 1987.

But the Ivory Coast suffered from the same problems as most countries in Africa after the nightmare of colonialism. Their economies were too weak to really develop independently and much of the population was consigned to live in serious poverty for generations. With the decline in the prices of coffee and cocoa, a serious draught and an economic recession in the 1980s, the country entered a financial crisis. In 1990 civil servants and students launched strikes across the country and the government found itself forced to implement political reforms. Multi-party elections

were held as a token gesture in the face of blatant political corruption and a clientelist system. Houphouët-Boigny's PDCI was the winner with over 80% of the votes. However, after the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 his protégé, Henri Konan Bédié, could not continue with the old policies. Bédié responded to growing dissent with the arrest of opposition leaders and supporters. He implemented an extreme nationalist ideology that ostracised all foreign-descendant Ivorians. These policies of "Ivoryity" alienated almost a third of the country's population, particularly in the northern, largely Muslim region, where plantation workers are frequently immigrants from neighbouring countries. From there onwards ethnic discord has been a prevalent feature in the country's politics, an Achilles heel to developing stronger fighting militancy from the poor against the rich. In this sense it is clear that the current Ivory Coast bourgeoisie learnt their policy of ethnic division from the French before 1960.

Strikes, coups and civil war

But, as Bédié excluded large chunks of the population from civil society, he also estranged members of the military elite, leading to a coup in 1999 which put General Guéi in power. In the eyes of many Laurent Gbagbo, leader of the social democratic Ivorian Popular Front (IPF), was the only political alternative to military rule and he won widespread support not only in his own country but across much of the African left.

The following year popular uprisings prior to elections placed Gbagbo in charge. In order to undermine his most dangerous rival, Alassane Ouattara, he too resorted to

Ivorian xenophobia as a political strategy.

Gbagbo's presidency has been challenged from the beginning, but violence peaked as Northern military mutineers launched attacks on several cities taking control of the largest city, Abidjan, for some hours and eventually setting base in Bouake, further to the north. As France and the United States deployed forces to control the conflict a large number of rebel movements emerged to dispute control of the country. An intermittent civil war continued until 2007.

2010 Elections and new conflict

Laurent Gbagbo's government delayed the elections six times until finally agreeing to hold them in October 2010. Despite being considered free and fair by foreign observers, the electoral campaign was accompanied by violent clashes between supporters of all factions. And whilst the Independent Electoral Commission considered Alassane Ouattara the winner, the Constitutional Council considered many votes invalid and declared Gbagbo the new President. Both bodies are criticized for their clear bias (the Commission being predominantly formed by members of the opposition, the Constitutional Council's President being one of Gbagbo's allies), but the international community recognises Ouattara as the new elected head of state of the Ivory Coast.

Armed conflict broke out again in February 2011 as the Forces Nouvelles de Côte d'Ivoire militia (a political coalition of three rebellion movements with a strong nationalist doctrine lead by Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, an opponent of Laurent Gbagbo) tried to close off the border with Li-

beria under the suspicion of several thousand mercenaries being ordered by Gbagbo from that country. Gbagbo, however, maintained control of most southern cities with the strong support of the military and large youth groups like the Young Patriots.

Ouattara himself has been protected by UN forces within Ivorian soil. The UN is currently backing someone whose forces have been accused of carrying out a massacre in the town of Duekoue where 800 people have been found dead after Ouattara's men 'liberated it'. UN secretary Ban Ki Moon said he was "concerned and alarmed" at the claims of a massacre, though of course Ouattara denied it.

On the 31st March 2011 troops loyal to Ouattara took control of the formal capital, though the real centre of power lies in Abidjan. By early April street fighting had broken out in Abidjan as Ouattara's fighters attempted to surround the presidential palace and seize Gbagbo.

Exploitation or workers' power

The great tragedy of the Ivorian conflict is that of utter destruction of its civil society and the diversion from the real problems: poverty, political and financial corruption, authoritarianism and xenophobia. These could and should be the objectives of a class struggle against both the Ivorian ruling elite and the French and other imperialist exploiters of the country. Ivorians fight each other under the banner of national unity and even democracy, but they do it for benefit of those who undermine the success of these desires. There can be no democracy while Ivorian politicians strategy is based on racism and Islamophobia.

And if French colonial rule is to blame for the ethnic and religious contradictions that form the political body of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian despotic autocrats are certainly prolonging the system and bear the culpability for a society where class consciousness is constantly displaced by tribal and religious identification, coupled with the prevalent violence that is lodged in the logic of the countries existence.

The military wants the rule of a southerner, a Christian, a representative of the middle classes. The international community is, however, not defending Ouattara for being a Muslim, from the poverty-stricken north, the son of immigrant workers. They dismiss Gbagbo because he positions himself as a socialist, anti-imperialist and thus anti Western interference. They support Ouattara because he is willing to negotiate with the West, in the tradition of Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

To support either is impossible. The political fronts and coalitions these men head have no principled basis other than power play politics. They are effectively militias ruled by rival war lords, whose conflicts - so disastrous for ordinary Ivorians - are arbitrated by foreign imperialist meddling.

What the Ivory Coast and Ivorians need is a united, secular, inter-ethnic movement based on class, not creed or culture, based on understanding between the oppressed in their struggle against the oppressor. In the case of the Côte d'Ivoire it is necessary, it is vital, that a radical turn takes place from war amongst people to war between working class and political and military élites.

To end despotism and corruption the people in the streets of Abidjan, Yamous-

soukro, San Pédro, Bouaké, Man and Daloa must unite. Workers need to establish their own militia and defence committees to defend their communities from the violence of the warring presidents. We must clearly stand for the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Ivory Coast, after all they are only there to install a pro-western leader, despite their usual claims to be here to protect civilians.