



The SPARK

For workers' power and international socialism

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The Spark

April 2011

**North Africa/
Mid East uprising**

**Earthquake disaster
in Japan**

**Service sector workers take
industrial action**

Post-quake Christchurch

Irish general elections

**Waterfront lockout: 60 years
on (part 2)**

socialism and womens liberation

Review: Whakapohane

\$1-\$2

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Editorial

Jared Phillips

This issue begins with coverage of the Japan and Christchurch earthquakes. With regard to the very sad situation in Japan we put forward that capitalist social relations extenuate negative outcomes from natural disasters. In the March issue we published a bare facts analysis of the Christchurch earthquake, in this issue we are taking a more sociological look at some aspects of the recovery phase.

We are first-time publishing two articles on the upheaval in the Arab world, one is a major original article on the background to events written by John Edmundson, the other is a report on a public meeting on the issue, partially organised by Workers Party, which attracted 90 people.

Continuing from the March issue, this month's issue of *The Spark* contains part two of three of a major piece on women's liberation. Also continuing from last month is the second and final part of a new article reflecting on

the 1951 waterfront lockout at its 60th anniversary. Margaret Jones, a subscriber to this magazine, sent us a photo of her father with waterfront workers leader Jock Barnes. Together they were standing by Margaret's father's truck which was loaded with a massive amount of food and supplies for the locked out workers. We think this may be the first time the photo has ever been published.

This year members of Unite Union have already been locked out at SkyCity Casino and at First Security. SFWU members were also amongst those locked out at the casino. That the bosses are locking-out in the service sector reveals the current level of confidence amongst employers. In both cases the lockouts were defeated by prompt and militant action. Please see this issue's coverage of recent industrial disputes. As always, please consider subscribing and donating to *The Spark*.

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The Workers Party is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters, and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous). Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in *The Spark* from time-to-time.

The Spark magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Workers Party, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Earthquake results in disaster for Japanese people

Rebecca Broad, Workers Party National Organiser

A magnitude nine earthquake and consequent 23 ft tidal wave, occurring 70km off the northeast coast of Japan March 11, has caused severe and extensive damage to that country. The three prefectures or states of Miyagi, Fukushima, and Iwate have sustained the most damage and loss of life. Multiple coastal towns have been completely destroyed by the tsunami. The Japanese military is heading up the recovery operation with 100,000 troops mobilised. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare estimates that 2.5 million households could be affected, and 1.6 million houses over 11 prefectures have no access to clean water. The number of estimated deaths and officially missing on March 21 was respectively 18,000 and 9,200, according to the National Police Agency. However both of those amounts are expected to continue rising. Nearly 500,000 people are living in emergency shelters and around 22,000 people have been saved by rescuers so far.

The rescue operation is struggling against fuel and water shortage, logistical breakdown, and very cold weather. Minimisation of further deaths from exposure, and lack of basic necessities and sanitation, will only be achieved by a certain degree of community self organisation, through the trade unions and other community groups. This occurred after the 1995 Hanshin earthquake and is already beginning currently through trade unions in Kansai.

An alarming electricity and possibly nuclear crisis is developing. Japanese capitalism is reliant on nuclear energy, which provides 30% of the country's electricity. Authorities are currently struggling to contain products of radioactive decay emanating from the Fukushima power plant that was severely damaged in the quake. The case for nuclear energy is a discussion in itself. However undoubtedly, due the extremely high levels of energy involved in nuclear reactions, nuclear energy possesses the greatest ability to cause



22,000 people have been rescued so far. The Japanese military has mobilised 100,000 troops for the recovery effort.

damage to humans, beyond all other methods of electricity generation. The current situation in Japan now poses the question: is the system of capitalism able to adequately safeguard against this danger? For instance, the Fukushima plant was protected by a tsunami wall able to withstand the occurrence of an 18ft wave. The wave on March 11 was 23 ft and overcame the tsunami wall. However, if nuclear disaster is avoided, the country still faces major electricity problems due to the Fukushima plant being no longer functional. The government has already organised rolling power blackouts across the country. Additionally, Japan has no coherent national electricity framework, but is run by 10 regional private power companies, half of which are not compatible with each other. Despite a currently low level of class struggle in Japan, this still raises the question of nationalisation and reorganisation of the power companies under workers' control and planning, along the more rational basis of how best to safely provide power to the people of Japan, rather than power being distributed for private profit.

A World Bank report issued Monday 21 March estimates the cost of damage as being up to US \$122- \$235 billion, and that Japanese GDP may be retarded by .5 percentage points over 2011. These and other economic factors may have

a minimal effect on other economies in East Asia, such as Philippines and China that have close links with the Japanese economy. The main sectors affected are the financial and trade sectors. Undoubtedly, the working class and the poor will emerge worst-off from this crisis and workers will be expected to in essence pick up the bill for reconstruction.

Private contractors must be prevented from serving their own interests through post-earthquake reconstruction projects. After the Hanshin earthquake, the poor remained in substandard housing years after the event, whilst public money was channeled into large-scale infrastructure projects that failed to provide adequate housing.

Japan is a developed capitalist nation, materially able to carry out the massive rebuild required. Certain pre-conditions to ensure the normal running of capitalism, such as electricity supply, roading and logistics, and provision of housing to a politically acceptable level will undoubtedly be part of the rebuild operation. However, due to the laws and tendencies of capitalism, the interests of the market and Japanese capitalists will ultimately be given priority. In time it will be seen the extent to which the needs of the population in the damaged areas will also be met.

Christchurch

In the last issue of The Spark we ran a public statement on the earthquake from the Representative Committee of the Workers Party. This is viewable here: <http://workersparty.org.nz/2011/02/23/workers-party-statement-on-canterbury-earthquake-disaster-wednesday-february-23-2011/>. In the two following articles Byron Clark, a member of the Workers Party in Christchurch and part of the editorial team for The Spark, assesses the social environment and aspects of daily life in post-quake Christchurch.

Crime and Punishment in post quake Christchurch

Looting seems to be an almost inevitable consequence of a disaster, and post-earthquake Christchurch is no exception. The response to looters has been vitriolic; a 61-year-old sickness beneficiary who had her house burgled after the quake told the New Zealand Herald "These looters should be turned around and shot in the back." One of her neighbours told the paper "If I saw one of those pricks I would f***ing bury the ****". The anger is not limited to the person-on-the-street though; police minister Judith Collins said in regard to looters "I hope they go to jail for a long time - with a cellmate", the implication being that these people are deserving of being beaten or raped in prison. Not the sort of thing we want to hear from a woman who strongly advocated double-bunking in prison cells. Opposition Labour Party leader Phil Goff was calling for execution. Speaking to bFM he said "I saw the army out in the street and I thought court martial, firing squads." He has since claimed this comment was a 'joke'.

It's difficult to have sympathy for the likes of the two men who stole electricity generators in the days following the disaster. The same can not be said for the story of Arie Smith-Voorkamp, the

25 year old man, who has Asperger's syndrome, who was arrested for stealing two light bulbs and an antique light fitting from a quake-damaged home. On the night of his arrest he was taunted by New Zealand Army personnel and brutally beaten by two police officers. The beating left him with a black eye which was still bruised and swollen more than a week later. In a devastated city where lives have been turned upside down an overly emotional response to crime is understandable (though Collins and Goff are likely just being populist). But it doesn't offer a just solution to looting. Instead, looters could be put to work in the relief effort. Prisoners are already helping the recovery. According to a Department of Labour press release:

We had the resources, and the labour, to offer some practical support to Christchurch, and with our prisons largely unaffected by the quake, we were only too happy to do so. We told the prisoners working in the kitchens exactly what we were supporting and the difference it was making and they worked incredibly hard.

Prisoners have made up over 5000 ration packs which were delivered to welfare



Aspergers sufferer Arie Smith-Voorkamp was brutalised by police after being arrested for looting

centres around Christchurch along with around 350 one kilogram heat-and-eat packs of macaroni cheese, stew and mince meals which were distributed by the Rangiora Express group and the New Brighton welfare centre in the east of the city. In addition as many as 2,400 offenders sentenced to community work have been doing clean up work. At present there is a perfect opportunity for restorative justice solutions.



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Back to work for some, out of work for others

“Great, I’m going to die at work.” Those were the thoughts of Woolston factory worker Bryce Lowry during the 6.3 magnitude earthquake that hit Christchurch last month. Lowry told his story to a local paper; the shake caused him to fall forward and hit his head on the machine he was working at. A roll of rubber fell down on him and he became briefly wedged in the machinery before managing to free himself. Another lucky escape was made by a shop assistant at a High Street boutique; the young woman fell through the floor into the basement as the building collapsed around her, she was helped out by a shopkeeper from the shop next door. The story was recounted in *Woman’s Day* by a columnist who owned the fashion store.

As is now well known, many were not as lucky as Bryce Lowry or the High Street shop assistant, and did indeed die at work that Tuesday afternoon. They couldn’t have known their fate when they left for work that morning and in all fairness, neither could their employers. While some questions were raised about buildings that were assessed as safe after last year’s earthquake but came down so quickly in this year’s earthquake, engineers are unanimous that the February quake exceeded the design specifications of building codes. The message from Mayor Bob Parker in the days following the quake was to not return to work unless you were in a job that would help in the situation; alongside the rescue teams and engineers,

many of the city’s lowest paid workers were back on the job soon, keeping the city fed by allowing supermarkets to open and doing sanitation jobs that helped prevent the spread of disease that was a possibility in the post-disaster environment. Those workers are the unnamed and unsung heroes of Christchurch’s recovery.

Unfortunately others were told to come back to work simply so they could continue to produce profit for their employers, and in doing so were put at risk. One factory, a manufacturer of duvet covers and overalls, was back in business less than 48 hours after the ground shook. The building had not

been assessed and there was little drinkable water available. In another story told to this writer, a young woman decided to hand in her resignation two weeks earlier than she had planned after her employer, an electronics manufacturer whose products are exported to Europe, had staff come back with just a few days off to deal with the disruption the quake had caused. The Department of Labour issued advice for employers reopening after the earthquake – the first point of advice: Don’t rush in.

Those back at work might be considering themselves the lucky ones however, as others such as many of the thousands employed in the

still cordoned off central business district are surviving on the government’s recovery package which is equivalent to the minimum wage, a reduced income for many workers. The first earthquake related mass layoffs were announced on March 1; supermarket company Foodstuffs cut 235 jobs at two stores unable to reopen. Since then the Canterbury Spinners yarn manufacturing operation has announced 195 redundancies. The possibility of job loss is a fear in the mind of many Christchurch workers, some of whom are also coping with lost loved ones and damage to homes and neighbourhoods.



The Canterbury Spinners plant, which collapsed during the earthquake. 195 workers have since been made redundant.

Workers taking action in tough industrial relations environment

Jared Phillips, coordinating editor of *The Spark*

On the first day of this month the new anti-worker laws were introduced. The three main changes are increased restriction on the ability of union organisers to access workplaces, the introduction of 90-day probationary employment periods, and the ability for the employer to require a medical certificate for only one day's sickness.

The fact that service sector employers (casino and security) have been so quick to lock out workers is evidence that the employing class is currently acting with a great deal of confidence.

In this environment of attacks on workers and their unions it is positive to see that some groups of workers have been taking the initiative to fight the employers.

Unite/SFWU and SkyCity Casino

In the last issue of *The Spark* we reported on the New Year's Eve strike and subsequent strike actions that had been taken by Unite and Service and Food Workers Union members at the Auckland Skycity Casino. Prior to those events the casino bosses had tried to entrap the unions in a 'take-it-or-leave-it' offer which included that the new contract would have a three-year term. Long terms of agreement like this can have the effect of demoralising union members by placing such long periods of time between union negotiations. So action had to be taken. The company responded to the strike actions and on March 6 issued a notice stipulating

that any worker who took any form of industrial action, such as a short lightning strike, would be locked out for one whole week.

The lockout notice was met with escalated hard resistance by the unions on Monday March 7. At one stage the union physically blocked the main public and taxi driveway into the casino by parking cars on it. There was also an act of violence carried out by a security guard against a Unite official.

The fightback on March 7 persuaded the company to re-enter negotiations and change its 'take-it-or-leave-it' stance. In particular they have agreed to a two-year term of agreement which has been the length of term of the previous agreements at the casino.



First security workers who are members of Unite Union, outside the First Security depot in Auckland. A hard picket was instigated at the depot after the company issued a lockout notice to patrol officers taking strike action.

Unite and First Security

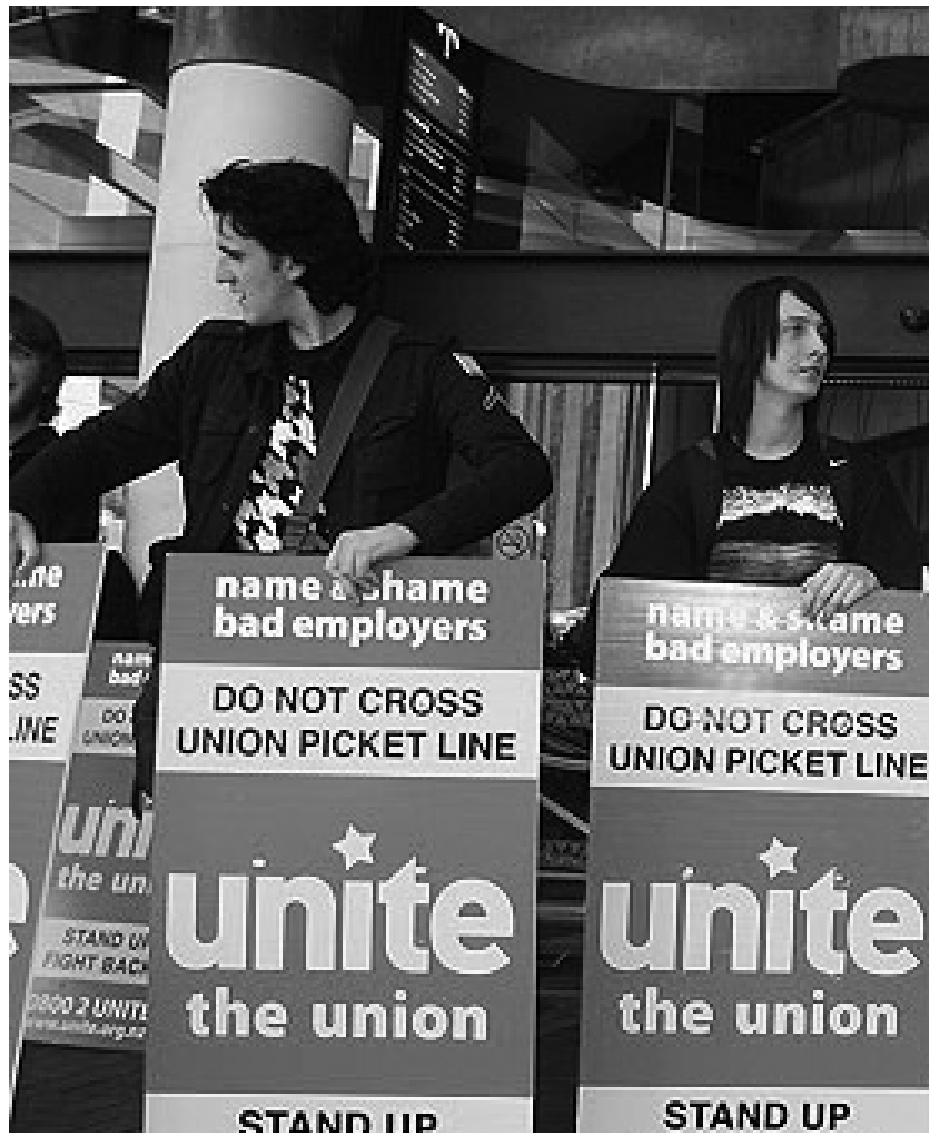
Unite had been in negotiations with First Security for some months for a renewed union contract. On Friday 18 March the Auckland security guards began a strike action. The company responded by issuing a lock-out notice to the striking workers which it intended to be effective until 6pm on the following Monday. The lockout was issued against patrol guards only, static guards weren't placed under a lockout notice. The Unite members held a meeting at Unite's head office on the Saturday morning and decided to challenge the lockout head on by placing a hard picket at the company's main office and dispatch centre. This started at 5pm on Saturday.

It was a militant action with about 30 members being actively involved on the picket line. There were confrontational moments involving police and a tow truck. Even during that morning's meeting the company had sent people onto Unite's property to retrieve the company vehicle from a locked-out guard.

This was the second lockout Unite had faced in March and the outcome - due to Unite's response - was positive. Workers who were members of the union at March 20 will be receiving a three percent increase back-dated to February 1, 2011, and a further one percent increase from June 1, 2011. New members of Unite, and possibly non-union members, will receive the four percent pass-on, but will do so over a much longer period of time, with one percent from date of ratification, two percent from June 1, 2011, and a further one percent at the end of the contract on December 31, 2011. A number of conditions were changed favourably for the employees, including with regard to application of penal rates, refining of travel allowance rules, and long service leave.

NDU/Chemical Workers and Nuplex

On February 25, National Distribution Union and Northern Chemical Union members took strike action against Nuplex, a company within the aluminium industry. This writer understands that one of the main issues



Casino workers portesing outside Skycity Casino, Auckland, after being issued lockout notices for taking industrial action

was the company's attempt to implement labour flexibility arrangements that were in favour of the employer. Following on from the strike action, members engaged in go-slow activities which proved to be the successful tactic to win and end the dispute.

The year ahead

Throughout the last quarter of last year some reasonable rallies were held in opposition to the anti-worker laws. This was supposed to continue this year with emphasis on national rallies on April 1st to signal that unions are going to remain focussed against the new legislation. The April 1 rallies have now been cancelled with the CTU saying that the decision to cancel was made as a result of the Canterbury earthquake. There is

scepticism throughout much of the union movement as to whether the earthquake is the real reason for the cancellation of the rallies and there is speculation that some public sector unions have withdrawn support for such basic rallies. The EPMU - which we understand has generally remained in favour of the rallies - is preparing to deflect or neutralise the new legislation through its renegotiations of collective agreements. Hopefully an uncompromising attitude towards inclusion of the new legislation will produce some of the battles we need to put militant unionism back on the agenda.

See <http://workersparty.org.nz/2010/09/05/three-clear-points-about-the-employment-law-proposals-for-a-socialist-analysis-of-the-anti-worker-laws>.

Mid-East/North Africa rising up: Background to events

John Edmundson, Workers Party education officer, Christchurch

The biggest political story so far in 2011 has been the upsurge in mass protest in the Middle East and North Africa and the changes in government that have already been ushered in in Tunisia and Egypt. Massive demonstrations have shaken Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Algeria and Jordan. Throughout the Arabic-speaking world, mass movements have emerged, seemingly from nowhere, to challenge long established dictatorial, and largely US-allied regimes that had seemed impervious to change and unthreatened by an apparently passive, depoliticized population. In Libya, civil war has broken out between the rebels, a mix of hastily armed civilians and elements of the army and air force that defected to the revolt, and those military and militia forces that have remained loyal to Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi. Subsequently of course, Western intervention, in the form of bombardments and airstrikes, has ensued under the pretext of saving civilian lives.

So where did these movements come from, how did they arise so suddenly and what potential significance do they have for the region and for revolutionary movements around the world? Many commentators reacted to the massive demonstrations, especially those in Egypt, with surprise, having long regarded Egypt as one of the most stable countries in the Middle East. US administration insiders cited Libya and Iran as much more likely contenders for popular uprisings. Iran of course has seen a renewal of its popular movement and Libya too was soon to be gripped by protest and violent military repression, but how did the pundits get it so wrong about such dependable US allies as Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen? The situation is changing by the day, or in some cases, by the hour, so any attempt to provide up to date commentary would be futile, but an analysis of the background to these events and their potential significance is possible.

The initial events in this upsurge

in anti-government protest began in Tunisia, long considered a secure US ally. Tunisia is not an oil rich country, although it does have some natural gas resources and was a stable country with a burgeoning tourism industry, based on sandy Mediterranean beaches and Roman and Carthaginian ruins. It was also a popular destination for film makers, with both the desert scenes in *Star Wars* and sections of *Monty Python's The Life of Brian* filmed in its stark but beautiful desert landscapes. But behind the picture postcard façade was an equally stark and unforgiving reality – the relentless attacks of capitalist restructuring. Youth unemployment was as high as fifty percent in some parts of the country. Rapidly increasing prices for basic food items combined with poor job opportunities left the young people of Tunisia in particular facing a bleak future, compounded by heightened expectations brought about through higher education.

The spark came with the death of a young Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, who burned himself in a despairing act of anger after he was harassed once too often by the police in his home town of Sidi Bouzid. Bouazizi had been unable to find appropriate work despite a university qualification. Angry Tunisians, repressed by decades of rule by President Zine Al Abadine Ben Ali, reacted by pouring into the streets demanding justice. Before long the demonstrations were calling for the overthrow of Ben Ali and his entire ruling party. When the army declared that, not only would it not fire on the protesters, but that it would protect them from the much hated and feared police and security forces, Ben Ali's fate was effectively sealed. Desperate bids to cling onto power by claiming that the alternative was an Al Qaeda regime and by offering to appoint a new government were met with scorn by an increasingly militant, and secular, revolutionary movement which declared that it would settle for nothing less than the departure

of the entire ruling party. Attempts by Tunisian politicians to retain members of Ben Ali's party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) have been met with renewed demonstrations and the consequent resignations of the old regime's leaders. The Tunisian working class has long been organized under a national trade union body, the General Union of Tunisian Labour (UGTT), aligned closely with the government, but in defiance of its corrupt leadership, the Tunisian union movement has come out strongly in support of the revolution. Two UGTT appointees to the interim government quit after only one day in protest against the inclusion of members of Ben Ali's regime. On March 7 the interim government announced the disbanding of the secret police. Elections for a Constitutional Assembly to write a new constitution have been set down for July.

Egypt's revolution was longer in the making. A key group, the April 6 Movement, was named for the textile workers strike that occurred on that date in 2008. While that strike was repressed, it was clearly identified by revolutionary-minded young Egyptians as a pivotal moment in the history of the movement against President Hosni Mubarak's three decade long rule, all of which has occurred under the shadow of emergency regulations.

Little coverage was presented in the media concerning the importance of the trade union movement until their apparently dramatic entry on the scene in the last days of Mubarak's rule, but in fact the upsurge in trade union activism over the past decade set the scene for the uprising. The April 6 Movement, amongst others, settled on January 25 as the day for a mass protest rally. Twitter and FaceBook were used to promote a number of rally points but leaflets were also distributed in working class neighbourhoods where internet access is less common. Heavily monitored by the security forces, the FaceBook and



Protesters at the Pearl roundabout soon after the military and police withdrew from Manama, Bahrain, February 19th.

Twitter-promoted assemblies were rapidly dispersed but the group marching from the working class neighbourhoods reached Tahrir (Liberation) Square, having caught the police off guard.

From January 25 on, increasing numbers began to see that public rallies against the regime were becoming possible and a tent city was established in Tahrir Square. Attempts to defeat the occupation of the Square with Police and thugs were repelled and eventually, on Feb 11, Mubarak stepped down, to be replaced by a military council. Already some progressive changes have been made, notably the disbanding of State Security Intelligence, the secret police, on 15 March.

Women have had a high profile within the revolutionary movement and reported extremely low levels of sexual harassment during the occupation of Tahrir Square, a condition that bodes well for the future of Egyptian women. Hope remains that the Egyptian revolution will retain an anti-imperialist direction, with the Coalition of the Youth of the 25 January Revolution having this to say in response to a visit from US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton:

As we are keen on working in a transparent manner, with the masses of the revolution, the Coalition announces that it has received an invitation to meet with the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and due to her negative

stance towards the revolution during its inception and the approach of the US Administration towards the Middle East Region, we decided to refuse this invitation

The revolution in Egypt seems far from over

Large demonstrations have taken place in Yemen, where President Saleh has ruled for over twenty years. He has promised not to stand for reelection but that has not satisfied the protester. A number of demonstrators have been shot by the security forces. In Algeria, still suffering the after-effects of a decade long civil war between the government and Islamist groups, protests were rapidly suppressed by the police. Jordan too has seen large demonstrations against the incumbent government and, in a country where criticism of the monarch is rare, there' have been calls for reform, including calls for a constitutional monarchy.

In Bahrain, strategically important due to its housing the US 5th Fleet, saw unprecedented protests, with huge crowds taking and occupying the Pearl Roundabout and establishing a festive but determined presence. All that changed in late March when, egged on by the tacit approval of the US, which turned a blind eye to troop build-ups, the King of Bahrain called upon troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to enter the country and repress the demonstrations.

Libya has made the biggest headlines because Gaddafi, unlike Mubarak and Ben Ali, was much more willing to resist the uprising there by deploying the army to shoot the demonstrators. The situation there rapidly took on the form of a civil war, between a lightly equipped rebel force and a relatively well equipped Libyan army. Despite numerous defections from the military, the army had, by mid-late March, recaptured almost all rebel towns and cities, with the key exception being Benghazi. At that point, pleas for Western intervention by the self-appointed ex-Gaddafi regime leadership in Benghazi were granted and a no-fly zone and possible bombing of Libyan army targets was approved in the UN. That opportunity was taken up by the West with an initial strike by French warplanes and over one hundred cruise missiles, and ongoing attacks have continued. Western imperialism may now gain inroads into Libya or the Libyan resistance may be forced to listen to its rank and file, who are calling for real democracy and sovereignty.

Much has been made in the media of the online nature of the North African and Middle Eastern revolutions, with Twitter and Facebook being identified as key "game changers". Aside from the self serving way in which certain US commentators are attempting to claim a role in the revolutions due to those social networking sites being of US origin, the claim has also been made that the ability of activists to organize their revolutions has been profoundly altered by the emergence of such sites. The revolutionaries themselves are somewhat less equivocal on the subject. Instead they see online social networks as simply another organisational tool, useful for publicizing events but no substitute for the traditional hard graft of union and community organizing and agitating. The revolutions of 2011 are far from complete, and the final outcomes of these historic struggles are far from certain. But what is certain is that something very special has happened right throughout the Middle East. The people of the region have reengaged with politics in a way not seen for decades, and the Middle East will never be quite the same again. And for the first time in a generation, the prospects for Palestine look a little brighter.

Interview with Joe Carolan: Left alternative gains in Ireland's general elections

Hailing originally from Ireland where he was active in the Socialist Workers Party, Joe Carolan is a leading member of Socialist Aotearoa. This interview by Ian Anderson (Wellington branch of Workers Party and The Spark editorial board) was originally published on March 3 at workersparty.org.nz.

The Spark: Could you start by recapping what shifts happened in this year's Irish General Election?

JC: Well, to start with there was the complete electoral destruction of the favoured ruling class party Fianna Fail. They lost over 60 seats, including seats they've held since they first formed as a constitutional political party. In part this represents the death of nationalist illusions in the party, which had to do with their historical participation in the Civil War. The illusion of Fianna Fail as an upholder of national sovereignty was broken by their sell-out to the IMF and to neoliberalism in general.

Then you had the destruction of the Irish Green Party. The Green Party was exposed in two respects. Firstly they demonstrated that Green Parties are not automatically on the left, similar to Germany where the Greens helped to attack the working class and push through neoliberalism. They also sold out principles of their own, for example their craven surrender to Shell Oil, or the use of Shannon Airport by the US Military. So those two ruling parties lost a lot of ground, and good riddance.

There were significant gains by Fine Gael, the other major ruling class party. The split between the major ruling class parties does not go down left/right lines, and has more to do with the Civil War. Fine Gael came from the tradition of IRA leader Michael Collins, who accepted a free state with partition, while Fianna Fail is associated more with republicanism, the idea of a united Irish state.

Fine Gael is socially liberal, so many liberals treat it as a natural ally. The Labour Party has pursued a strategy of coalitions with Fine Gael.

Sinn Fein, a group broadly associated with left republicanism, has also gained seats – even, to their own surprise, in areas they have never previously held.

They've grown from 4 seats to 13. The growth of Sinn Fein, the growth of the Irish Labour Party, and electoral support for the new United Left Alliance show a strong desire for change among the Irish working class. The parties have not yet formed a coalition.

The Spark: What groups are involved in the United Left Alliance (ULA), and what is the basis for their unity?

JC: To start with, it helps to understand that the United Left Alliance didn't exist four months ago. But the left in Ireland had been searching for unity. Not many workers understood why the left wasn't coming together, as arguments over deformed workers states became increasingly irrelevant.

Left groups had managed to build several substantial movements, including the anti-war movement, and more community-based campaigns against bin charges and water charges.

The ULA is comprised of three key groups: the Socialist Party; the People Before Profit Alliance; the Workers and Unemployed Action Group.

The People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA) helped form some of those initial links. In particular there were key differences between the Socialist Workers Party, who formed the PBPA, and the Socialist Party. These were partly differences over the national question, but also about how the radical left could come together. The Socialist Workers Party thought the radical left needed to unite, to create a synergy and attract other groups, while the Socialist Party thought the time was not right. But you had people like Joan Collins leave the Socialist Party and join the PBPA: she became a key independent player.

Links were formed with community-based groups, such as the Workers and Unemployed Action Group. Members split from the Labour Party, and various

independent socialists also joined.

The Spark: What are the key demands of the ULA?

JC: Well, the ULA is not going for revolution as yet. But they are making popular demands, which challenge the logic of the current system. In particular they've tapped into the fury about the banking system, by taking the position that the working class should not have to suffer from the private gambling debt of Irish banks. They've opposed bailouts and said this money should be invested in creating full employment. There is massive unemployment in Ireland right now, and massive emigration, and nothing coming from the major parties to stop the debt cycle.

Here their demand might not be possible under capitalism, but if not why not? There is a genuine discussion forming in Ireland about the need for a socialist economy.

The Spark: What alliances are the ULA likely to form, and what alliances do they oppose?

JC: Well, in particular they oppose a coalition between Fine Gael and the Labour Party. This demand comes from the mass movement, with Unite Union and others calling for a coalition of leftists to resist any Labour Party coalition with the Blueshirts.

This leaves the possibility of a coalition between Sinn Fein, the Labour Party and the ULA. Now obviously Sinn Fein and the Labour Party have limitations. Sinn Fein in the North have been pushing through neoliberal policies, while the Labour Party has spent its whole career being "ashamed to be a pale shade of pink.", in De Velera's words. However, we have to ask why these two parties had such a growth in working class support this election. It's obvious

that many workers voted that way for the first time, and in some areas they voted for them as the only alternative.

Demanding a left coalition, rather than a Labour coalition with Fine Gael, will expose which side the Labour Party is on. Similar pressure should be exerted on Sinn Fein in the North. If they commit to Tory cuts, the Irish working class will see this betrayal. Many workers who voted for the Labour Party could in future vote for the ULA, or join it.

The Spark: The Workers Party has paid some attention to the socialist republican group Eirigi. What is their likely relation to the ULA?

JC: Eirigi is an interesting formation. I'm a socialist republican myself, in the tradition of James Connolly and Jim Larkin. Eirigi will have to grapple with what methods they want to use. Irish republicanism has traditionally split between constitutional nationalism and armed struggle. Do they want to participate in elections? They have rejected armed struggle in the current conditions, but is that part of their long-term strategy? In any case they will need to grow their support base.

I would support their joining the ULA, though others would disagree. The ULA trajectory is open to other

socialist groups and anyone serious about changing society, and in my view this ultimately means a workers' republic.

The Spark: What kind of support do the newly elected TD's (members of parliament) have from the union movement?

JC: This is the next really important step for the left in Ireland. The Labour Party has strangled the Irish union movement. So many European countries recently have had general strikes. In Ireland the workers movement is furious, and organizing huge marches: recently they've had marches of up to 130,000 workers. Branches of unions called for general strike. The trade union bureaucracy stifled these moves. But the ULA has achieved legitimacy through its electoral victories, so leftists can no longer be dismissed as marginal ranters. With support from the working class, leftists can really challenge the bureaucracy and build a fighting union movement. Not just in the public sector unions where the Labour Party is dominant, but also among the masses of unorganized private sector workers.

The Spark: What is the international significance of a victory for the Irish left?

JC: Well, it's part of a revival for the hard left all over Europe. In Portugal you've got the Left Bloc, formed between two rival Trotskyist groups. In Greece there's a growth across all the far-left groups, from the KKE to the Trotskyist led coalitions. In Germany, Die Linke is a big fixture. There have been general strikes throughout Europe, and growth not just in electoral formations. Ireland is now a part of that.

The lesson for the serious left in New Zealand is that long-term commitment pays off. During the Bin Tax battles, I remember getting up early at 5:30am in the morning in the rain, to carry bins to communal dumping zones, only to see coppers wade in and arrest our comrades, and I'd think "What are we doing?" But these victories in Ireland and elsewhere only happened because leftists didn't give up, and we gained the loyalty of working class people in their communities. There are several good socialist groups here in NZ, including the Workers Party, Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation. We've worked well together in Unite and through the Living Wage and Anti War campaigns. With that common work we're starting to ask how we can move on from small groups of 30 or so in each city to the next stage, and we can learn from the movements in Ireland and elsewhere.

The Spark: What significance does the Irish left have for the United Kingdom generally?

JC: Well, Ireland is not part of the UK! Northern Ireland is under occupation. Within the ULA I would advocate standing on a 32-county basis, and opposition to British imperialism, and if it means Protestants won't vote ULA we can't fudge that.

The idea of a united workers' republic is back on the map, and leftists need to push it.

The Spark: Any other comments?

JC: We shouldn't forget the importance of the revolution in the Middle East. It shows that revolution is possible, the effect of not simply going home after a mass march or a strike, but occupying central squares and buildings, and that is very infectious.



United Left Alliance candidates at the launch of Ireland's left coalition election campaign; Richard Boyd Barrett second left, and Socialist Party leader Joe Higgins third left.

Lessons of 1951: The waterfront lockout 60 years on (part two)

Josh Glue, Workers Party, Hamilton branch

The waterfront lockout of 1951 was one of the most important events in New Zealand labour history. For 151 days, the men who worked the waterfront and those who supported them fought back against the combined power of the ship-owners and the state, who were determined to force cutbacks upon them and destroy their union. Seen as an historical defeat by some, an inspiring fight-back by others, the waterfront lockout holds important lessons for those who struggle for workers rights today.

In this second of two articles about this pivotal moment in the history of the working class of this country, we will examine the way working people came together to oppose the emergency regulations and support the wharfies, the way the government attempted to crush this support, and the way the lockout ended. Most importantly, we will see the importance of these events for modern New Zealand, what we can learn today from the men and women who stood up for their rights in 1951.

The people choose the wharfies

With the Waterfront Workers Union (WWU) locked out by the ship owners and deregistered by the collaborationist Federation of Labour, and the National government's draconian Emergency Regulations in place to restrict their ability to fight for better pay and conditions, things looked bleak for the country's hardest fighting union.

If the union accepted the government's conditions for return to work, it would spell the end of their union and near-guarantee a deterioration of conditions, pay, and negotiating power.

The emergency regulations made any material support for the wharfies illegal and any media argument in favour of them illegal. Despite this thousands of workers up and down NZ voted to strike

in solidarity with the WWU. Miners, freezing workers, and hydro-electric workers struck, voicing support for the WWU and showing opposition to the regulations. This was followed by railway and gas workers "blacking" (refusing to transport) cargo loaded by scab (army or non-union) labour. At the height of the lockout, 22,000 workers were locked-out or on strike, but only 8000 were wharfies. The majority were working people who fought for the rights of their fellow union members.

As the strike wore on, this popular support became pivotal. Sympathisers established relief depots throughout NZ that distributed donated food and clothing to the families of locked out workers, in violation of the regulations. Women played a major role in this work, through women's associations, church groups, and the auxiliaries of the unions themselves. These women helped feed 22,000 people, in opposition to the law, in the service of common justice.

The police choose the bosses

During a brief period in late May-early June the government relaxed restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly. People responded by having more public talks and demonstrations. On the last day of May a peaceful solidarity march occurred, and was peacefully dispersed by police. The next day another march was held, advertising an upcoming WWU talk. The police ordered the marchers to disperse, giving a 5 minute deadline. Within 3 minutes, as marchers were starting to leave, the police charged, bringing their batons down on the heads of the protesters. Most of those attacked ran or fell, while a few fought back with their fists or banner poles. One policeman, being beaten by a union man, begged "Don't hit me, I'm just doing my job!" while dozens of other policemen

beat those who didn't defend themselves. The day came to be known as Bloody Friday.

Amongst those with arms broken and faces bloodied at the hands of the police were women and the elderly; even one Gallipoli veteran was injured. Although the public outcry against this violence was strong, in less than 24 hours the "free" press jumped from semi-honest reporting on the attack to saying the demonstrators attacked the police with bottles and sticks.

One witness who saw much of the attack out of the windows of a tram said, "Men and women were being hit by lumps of wood by big, strong uniform-protected police. It was the most cruel and unbridled display of unnecessary force I have ever witnessed."

Long-grind and defeat

Those on the left looked to their leaders to support the strikers and oppose the government. The Labour Party paid only lip-service to the rights of the strikers, pleading for more humane treatment, not opposing the government's general line. The Federation of Labour also failed the strikers, choosing the side of the government and the ship owners over men who had so recently been comrades and fellow workers.

The lockout continued into July, until the wharfies, desperate and worn out, their leader Jock Barnes frivolously imprisoned over a criminal libel charge, their union funds depleted, returned to work, accepting the government's union-crushing conditions.

The working men of the waterfront fought against repression and injustice in this country, and did not defeat it. The power of the government to ignore the will of the people and enforce the cruel exploitation and petty injustice of capitalism was reinforced in the

eyes of every New Zealander. The implementation of fascistic laws against freedom of speech and assembly was defended by the government.

But there are other ways to view the waterfront lockout. The defeat on the waterfront gives working New Zealanders today, in 2011, a lesson in the nature of our society. When working people fought, not for revolutionary transformations, but for simple union freedoms and improvement in their conditions, the government responded by throwing everything it had at destroying their union, demonising their leaders through propaganda, and attacking those who took to the streets. The events of 1951 were an example of the violence of the class system and the brutality with which the ruling class is willing to implement in order to crush popular and democratic movements. Despite the immorality and illegality of the emergency regulations, the police lined up squarely with the government, enforcing the law.

The history of New Zealand is also a history of class struggle

As a witness of Bloody Friday put it, "What happened on Queen Street is a warning of how ruthless and cruel authority can be when it is under no control."

Most importantly, those events stand as a testament to the power of ordinary people, a lot like you or me, to fight against injustice even at the risk of their own freedom and safety.

The support and opposition shown by regular people was inspiring. Thousands of workers had an opportunity to actively break the law, to put the need to feed the hungry above the government's will. Thousands of regular people chose what was right over what was lawful.

Likewise the level of support from other workers showed what is possible when working people unite in struggle. In the face of repression on a scale this country had never really seen before, tens of thousands of working people banded together to help each other.

The story of the relief depots, the

women's auxiliaries, the support strikes, and the wharfies themselves and the strength with which they challenged the power of the powerful is an inspiring chapter in NZ history, a piece of our collective class history that can never be erased. Every fight brings the working class one step closer to liberation, and 1951 was a big step.

As waterfront workers' leader Jock Barnes put it:

1951 was a year in which no compromise was possible. The veil of class consensus was ripped from NZ politics, revealing the harsh reality of a bitter class conflict. Conceding in these circumstances would have meant utter demoralisation of the entire militant wing of the labour movement...we had no option as unionists and men to fight back and make our attackers pay as dearly as possible. In this we succeeded.

Working people fighting to advance pay and conditions on the job through union activism today have the brave tradition of the Jock Barnes and the wharfies to inspire them.



Leo Sim (right) with Jock Barnes, 1951. It was a regular occurrence on a Friday afternoon, Sim and his truck laden with food and supplies for the locked out wharfies. Picture provided to *The Spark* by Margaret B Jones, daughter of Leo Sim.

Revisiting socialism and women's liberation (part two)

The following is the second instalment of a three-part series by Kassie Hartendorp, organiser of the Wellington branch of the Workers Party. The Workers Party has also decided to run a regular section on the subject of women's liberation in each issue of The Spark. The three instalments of this article are the first item within this new regular section.

Marriage and the Family

One of the most widely discussed topics in regard to socialist feminism is the institution of family and more specifically marriage. Karl Marx's friend and co-thinker Frederick Engels wrote *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State* (1884), which was his only substantial work on the position of women. Ideas contained in *The Origin...* are considered to be the definitive communist answer to women's oppression within the domestic sphere. Engels started his argument by tracing history back to locate the reasons for women's oppression. He drew from anthropologist and sociologist J.J. Bachofen's study on matriarchal clans to show evidence of woman's higher social position in the ancient world. Engels analysed Bachofen's view that humans originally lived in a state of sexual promiscuity which meant that descent was only traced through the female line, which is described as "mother-right." Women were the only known parents, and it was said that this secured them a higher social position within their society. However, this changed when monogamy came about, which expected a woman to surrender herself for a limited period with a man, in order to create certainty of a child's lineage. This theory, since subjected to much criticism, has formed the basis for Marxist thought on the role of women in history.

Engels expanded on this theory by tying the establishment of private property to the demise of the mother-right; the combination of the two he argued, lowered women's status. The development of cattle-breeding, metalworking, weaving and agriculture provided families with a surplus, which led to concentrated private wealth within kinship groups. There became a gender division of labour in which men obtained the food and owned all the

tools or machinery used for this process. This meant that the man was the owner of new sources of subsistence, including cattle, and later slaves. Engels stated that because the male's children could not inherit this wealth, mother-right was abolished and he asserted that this "overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex." He continues by saying after this event, "man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of his children."

Engels developed this argument further by placing emphasis on the role that monogamy has to play in the institutional oppression of women. The monogamous tradition was "based on the supremacy of the man" and originated from the "concentration of a considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual – a man- and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and no other." As with the later analysis of Zetkin and Bebel, historical materialism was used as the framework to assess the oppression of women.

Without both the establishment of private property and the surplus that families could now create, there would be no concentrated wealth that men possessed to pass on to their children, meaning that monogamy would not have become the most common marriage type. The monogamous marriage was described by Engels as often turning into a crass form of prostitution,

sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piece-work as a wage-worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery.

Needless to say, this is a very strong statement which postulated that the

difference is that a prostitute will sell her sexual labour for an agreed upon price on many separate occasions, whereas upon marrying, a woman has entered into a financial transaction where her body has been sold to her husband for an indefinite period, in exchange for economic security.

Although this seems like an extreme comparison to make; the idea that a woman belonged completely to her husband was commonplace and still survives. The fact that rape within marriage was legal in most countries until the late 1970s is ample evidence of this. The laws stemming from the legalisation of spousal rape are traceable to a Chief Justice in England during the 17th century who said that a husband cannot be guilty of rape of his wife "for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto the husband which she cannot retract." This view was not uncommon, and was still prevalent up to the 20th century. Engels argued that in this way, marriage is based on the oppression of women.

Engels believed that it was necessary to create social equality between husband and wife, and that the first condition for the 'liberation' of the wife was to bring all women back into public industry. He wrote

the emancipation of women will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.

Time has shown that Engels was correct on this point, as with more women in the workforce, and technological development in the household, women have indeed become more liberated, and are not as financially dependent on men.

The second and most contested condition that Engels put forward was

Womens' oppression

the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society. This depends on the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, where the single nuclear family ceases to be necessary. Engels proposed that once housework, childcare and education become a social industry women will have more time to participate in the public sphere, meaning they will not need to enter marriage for economic reasons. He concluded this stating that the full freedom of marriage cannot be established until capitalist production has been abolished as well as the

property relations created by it. Only then will people begin to get married purely because of mutual inclination. Engels' analysis of women's oppression is predominantly linked to economics. Only with a radical change to the social and economic system could full gender equality be achieved.

August Bebel argued many of the same points as Engels, in *Women and Socialism*. His book is said to have been read more widely than *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State*, but is now less well-known. Like Engels, Bebel also believed that marriage under

capitalism is nothing more than sexual slavery, and acknowledges that women have a double load to bear, because of both their economic dependence on men and their social dependence due to their "inferior position allotted to them in society." He also recognised that proletarian women suffer from these inequalities more than their middle-class counterparts.

Bebel was stronger in his views on women's oppression and could be described as more explicitly feminist than Engels. He stated that whatever the similarities between the proletarian



Frederick Engels used historical materialism as the theoretical framework within which to assess womens' oppression

Womens oppression

woman and man, woman has one precedent over the working man, in that she was “the first human being who came into servitude.” From the progressive and pro-feminist socialist men, there were still a great number who did not think that women’s rights were a priority, and that the exploitation of workers was the main form of oppression to be combated. To have a man writing specifically about women, was no small matter, and the book itself stirred many women into taking feminist action.

In regards to offering an answer to the marriage problem, Bebel tends to employ an ‘after the revolution’ solution in the conclusion of his title. He writes that in a new socialist society, a woman is as free in the choice of love as a man, as marriage will become a union of “private agreement, without the interference of a functionary” and will reinstate what “generally prevailed before private property dominated society” but on a higher level of civilisation and under a different form. He continues by saying that the abolition of private property and inheritance laws will make women truly free and that instead of impairing this freedom, the birth and care of her children will only add to her pleasure in life. Although Bebel’s solution seems plausible if you agree with the idea of socialism, his argument still seems grounded in the idea that once society has achieved a social revolution, everyone will be free, and that it is a matter of waiting until this happens before women can be emancipated. This type of view has been problematic within socialist and Marxist theory. Social institutions and subsequent cultural attitudes should constantly be challenged in order to bring about positive social change to those yet to be fully liberated.

Three decades after Bebel and Engels, Alexandra Kollontai focused on the way that capitalism individualises social relations. She wrote in *Society and Motherhood* that capitalism maintains a system of individual economies and that the family specifically exists as an independent economic unit concerned with consumption (in the case of the urban family). This unit involves both “the uneconomic expenditure of products and fuel on the part of small domestic economies” and “unproductive labour, especially by women in the home.”

What Kollontai is arguing for is a more efficient economy that is focused on collective social consumption, as opposed to the present individualised system. Once domestic labour is socialised under Kollontai’s envisioned communist society, there would be no need for the family as we know it now, as jobs such as laundry, cooking and childcare are integrated into the public sphere. Once again, women’s emancipation is linked to freeing up women’s time for actual socialised labour, which can be achieved with a transformation of the current family structure.

Motherhood

Rarely discussed by male socialist theorists, Kollontai furthered the analysis of motherhood from a Marxist perspective. She identified the existence of the ‘motherhood problem’ whereby both woman and child suffer under a state that does not provide for them or protect them. Abortions were illegal, contraception scarce or unreliable, and social securities such as paid parental leave didn’t register. Most working class women were forced to continue in their paid work straight after childbirth in order to earn the subsistence necessary for the family’s survival. Kollontai linked the problem of motherhood with that of labour and the living conditions of the working class when she asked:

Will the mother and child gain any significant benefit from the introduction of relatively comprehensive protection if the working woman is subjected for the rest of the time to unrestricted exploitation by capital, if her working day is so long as to sap her strength, and the whole of the working class exists permanently on the edge of starvation?

Here she argued that although reforms that help protect mothers are necessary, they must go hand in hand with a transformation of the relations of production. This is an example of the intersection of both women’s liberation and the class struggle, and is indicative of revolutionary socialist theory, rather than reform-focused liberalism. Although it is important that women and children get provided for by the state, there is still the issue of poverty that will not disappear without a radical restructuring.

Kollontai traced the concept of the family back to when it was a productive unit that required new members in order to help with the share of labour. During that period it could be argued that the individual upbringing of a child was economically justified, but because the modern family unit has no such requirements within developed capitalism, there seems to be no reason for keeping all responsibility for the new generation within this private unit. Therefore, Kollontai argued that once the outdated family unit has ceased to exist, the responsibility of raising children will transfer to the entire community.

Until such time, she had concrete plans (that she attempted to implement during her time on the Central Committee of the CPSU) for how to progress in regards to the care and protection of both mother and child. Firstly, it was imperative to provide appropriate conditions for a healthy childbirth, excellent care for the two during the first few vital weeks of the child’s life, and the possibility to the mother of feeding the baby herself without risk of loss of pay. In addition, the state should build refuges for expectant and nursing women, arrange medical consultations for both mother and child, and create a network of childcare services so the mother could continue work. The next step would be to establish a short working day, break periods and safer labour practices for women returning to the workforce. And finally, the last important step forward in solving the motherhood problem would be for the state to guarantee sufficient material assistance to mothers during pregnancy, birth, and the nursing period. Kollontai saw these steps as practical ways for the socialist state to help mothers overcome the difficulties forced upon them. Although she stated that the revolution would have to be complete to ensure the proper provision and protection of both mother and child, as Commissar for Social Welfare Kollontai had provided examples of legislative reform to relieve women immediately.

Please visit the March 2011 archive at workersparty.org.nz to read the whole article and to access sources.

90 people attend 'Democracy in the Arab world' meeting in Wellington

Marika Pratley, PFLP Campaign co-coordinator for Wellington branch

Public meetings and pickets have been held around New Zealand in solidarity with the people of Egypt in light of the February rebellions against Mubarak. Since then war in Libya has begun, Saudi Arabia has invaded Bahrain, and with so many drastic changes and uncertainties in the Middle East, the rest of the world watches in anticipation for the next events to unfold.

How far will these events advance the interests of those leading the protests? And to what extent can the movement be exploited as a gateway for politicians with similar interests to Mubarak? To address these issues a public meeting organised by Peace Action Wellington and Workers Party was held on March 3 in Wellington. Over 90 people turned up to the event. The main speakers were Dr Nigel Parsons (Political Scientist, Massey University) Joel Cosgrove (The Workers Party and PFLP solidarity campaign) and Omar Kamoun (Wellington Palestine Group).

Egypt and the fall of Mubarak

Dr Nigel Parsons's talk was an overview on the current situation in Egypt. Mubarak has been overthrown and the military put in charge. His talk was focused on the current state of the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Muslim Brotherhood, and potential outcomes of the upcoming elections to be held in 6 months. Dr Parsons addressed the fact that the NDP is in a problematic situation and also raised the possibility of US interfering with the elections.

Rebellion or revolution

Joel Cosgrove discussed a socialist perspective of what is going on in Egypt with references to Libya and Tunisia as well. He said that it was not just a spontaneous series of events that happened in late 2010/ early 2011 but that tensions had been building for a long time leading to rebellions and (in

the case of Tunisia) revolutionary actions taking place. He argued that what has happened in Egypt is not a 'revolution' because the Egyptian military are still in charge. For there to be a revolution it would need to be an overthrow of not just one politician or political party (Mubarak and the NDP) but an entire change of the socio-economic system too. The armed forces of the state had been deployed as a barrier to Egypt advancing to a revolutionary stage. However the rebellions were the beginning stages of democracy – it is an ongoing process.

Why we should oppose Western intervention

Questions about the true political agenda of the West were also raised. Western governments in Europe, NZ, UK, Australia and the USA have historically had a strong interest in the Middle East. New Zealand has troops stationed in not just Afghanistan but the Sinai region of Egypt as part of the New Zealand Contingent Multinational Force and Observers. New Zealand troops have been there since 1981, to help implement the so-called 'security provisions' of the Egyptian-Israel Treaty of Peace and guard the border between Egypt and Israel. Peacekeeping is never neutral and it is in the interests of imperialist powers such as Israel and the United States that the border control is maintained. Western intervention is about Western powers exploiting situations for the benefit of large capitalists and politicians, not about the welfare of the people.

Omar Kamoun's presentation also touched on the issues relating to Western intervention. He extended this by including several examples of how islamophobia is used as the current scapegoat by western forces as a justification for invading countries, but that this is not a new tactic. Many scapegoats have been used to mask the real reasons for interfering with the affairs of other countries, and it



Omar Kamoun of Wellington Palestine Group, attending a rally in support of the Libyan uprising, February 23 in Wellington.

has always been about nations such as Britain and France extending power by having socio-economic control over other countries. Opposing western intervention does not mean endorsing leaders such as Mubarak or Gaddafi – it is about acknowledging that it is the right of the working classes in those countries to fight and win from the ground up.

The presentations were followed by contributions from the floor and discussions of how to further support for the uprisings.

The Workers Party supports the rights of workers in Egypt and the Middle East to oppose political/military powers whether they are internal or from abroad. We must demand troops out of Egypt, Afghanistan and the Middle East and support the workers in those countries in any resistance against New Zealand's armed forces. Internationalism is about supporting the people on the ground, not serving the interests of politicians in the UN and imperialist countries that operate to serve their own political agendas.

Whakapohane Te Ringa Mangu (Dun) Mihaka & Diane Patricia Prince Ruatarua Publications, 1984

Reviewed by Mike Kay, Workers Party Auckland and *The Spark* editorial board

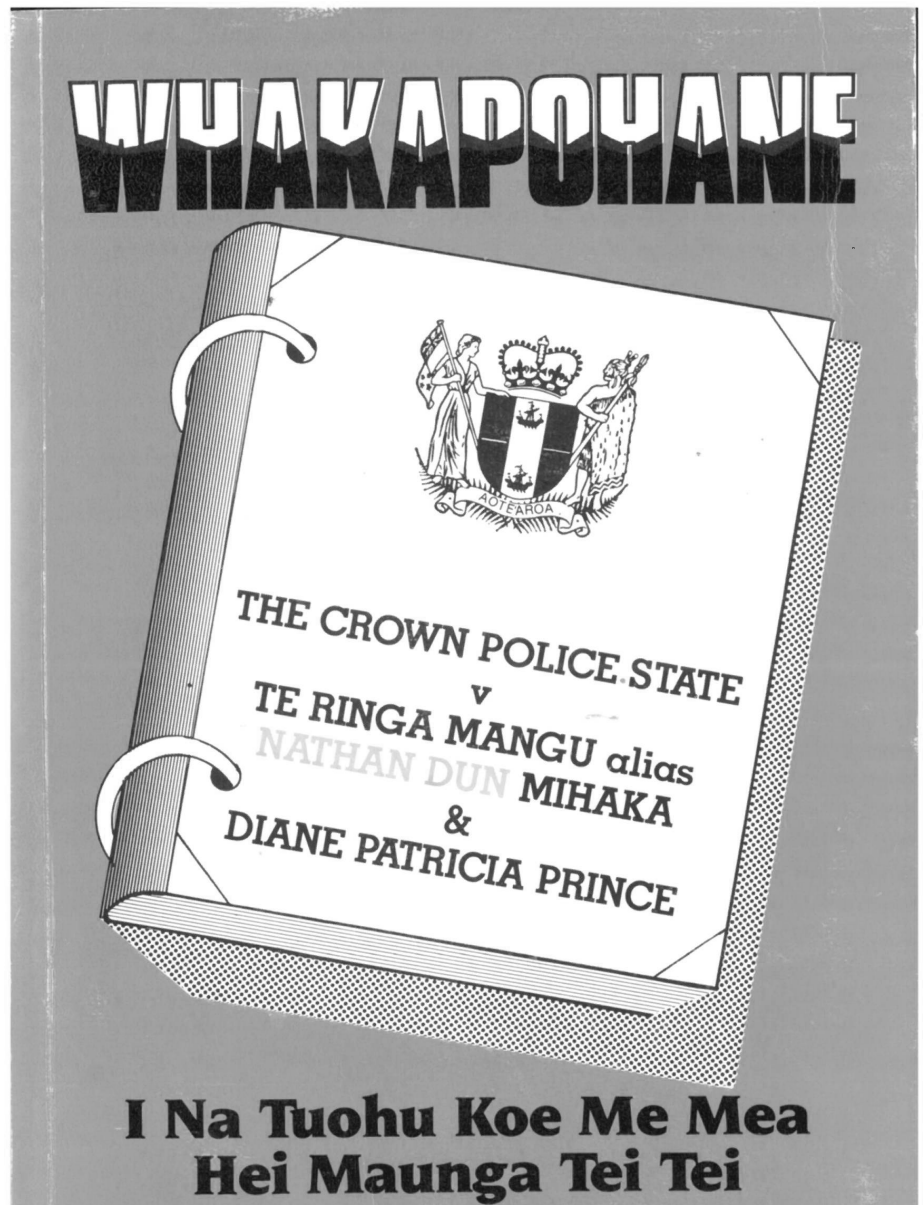
As the media ramps up the hype around the Royal Wedding on April 29, now seems like a good time to revisit a period in New Zealand history when there was a republican movement willing to take militant action against the Monarchy.

During the 1983 Royal Tour of New Zealand by Prince Charles, Diana Princess of Wales and their infant son William, Dun Mihaka achieved international notoriety by performing a “whakapohane i te tou” (baring of the buttocks) in front of the Royal limousine as it exited Wellington Airport. He was immediately arrested following his protest. The brutality of the arrest (two police officers forced him to the ground) provoked his confidante and wife, Diane Prince, to attack the police, and she herself was taken into custody. This book is essentially the story of the resulting trial. The authors have left us with a superb example of how to present a political trial; they effectively put the whole system - police, courts, media, politicians and the Monarchy itself - on trial.

Conducting his own defence, Mihaka displays a refreshing lack of deference to judges and police officer witnesses. He sets out the purpose of the book thus:

if we hadn't have done it [the protest], we would not have been able to bring you this blow by blow account of why it was done, the profound historical, cultural and social implications of the act itself, and the reasons why the monocultural system of justice that we have in N.Z. is completely incapable of fairly determining the criminality of any issue of another national culture. In fact the act itself is as native to Aotearoa as the Kauri is, as the system that inevitably ruled it to be criminally offensive and the Oak are native to England.(p.15)

The book starts with some background. Responding to the Muldoon's criticism



that the Māori protest movement was “being led by pakehas”, using pakeha methods, Mihaka hit upon the idea of using a traditional Māori form of protest. The whakapohane was carefully planned and prepared. Mihaka donned himself in tā moko, then wearing only a piupiu (flax skirt) he performed a haka as the Royal

party approached, then turned around and exposed his bum.

Later in court Mihaka presented as evidence a leaflet signed by a coalition of Wellington progressive groups in the form of an open letter to the heir to the British throne. It is worth quoting at length:

Dear Charlie,

After lengthy and serious discussion on the matter, we the undersigned express our strongest and unequivocal objection to your visit to our country. While it is clear you don't have too much control over such matters, it is equally clear that, as heir to the so-called Commonwealth, and therefore, head of State of N.Z. - whose foremost priority has always been to protect the interests of Big Business - you are a well rewarded, willing, and consequently acquiescent "victim of circumstances".

With the World Economy as it is, and the irreversible decline of the average New Zealander's basic standard of living, we consider your expenses-paid tour - to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars- to be a gross insult, to any reasonably intelligent person. This is not to say of course, that those who are supposedly full of love and enthusiasm for you - conservative anguine anglomaniacs, unsuspecting school-children, so called responsible Maoris or fervent readers of N.Z. Women's Weekly - should be deprived of the pleasure of seeing you, your now wedded fiancée or your son. All we say is if they do, then it is a pleasure for which they, who are that way inclined, should be made to carry the burden...

The Treaty of Waitangi of 1840, which a N.Z. Company correspondent at the time considered to be merely be "something to occupy the minds of savages" and is linked to your Tipuna whaea, Queen Victoria's name, should properly be described as the TREACHERY of Waitangi. For the effect of that event, accelerated the disintegration and dissipation of the Maori people.

This prompted them to resort to various measures to arrest the demise of their nation. One of these was to establish a Native Monarchy...

We are as hostile to the national label as we are to the very essence of what constitutes that institution - the Monarchy. That is whether they be skinny or fat, black or white, Maori or Pakeha, male or female.

The only consolation to us (which should not be confused with hope), is the knowledge that history often repeats itself. This immediately brings to mind the sad but perhaps unavoidable fate of your tupuna or ancestor, THE FIRST CHARLIE in Jan of 1649. Then he had seriously misjudged the outrage of (what he thought were his loyal subjects) the people, at their deplorable social conditions, as love and longing for him. He appealed to them to take up arms and help him regain his estates from Parliament, but that proved to be an error he literally paid for

with his head.

God rest his soul.

Naturally we hope for better things for you.

In conclusion and citing this occasion as reliable precedent, we will take this opportunity to remind you again, "of all political elements, The People is by far the most dangerous for a King." (p. 33)

Mihaka was at pains to point out that the protest was not simply a "brown eye" as some newspapers and one police witness had described it. He called as a witness retired Senior Lecturer in Maori Studies at Victoria University William Parker. Parker gave a thorough account as to how the act was culturally sanctioned in Maoritanga. He gave several historical examples, including the case of Dr Maui Pomare's attempt to enlist Waikato Māori to fight for "King and Country" in the First World War. Pomare was greeted by a large number of Tainui women who treated him to a whakapohane en masse, in order to communicate their unequivocal verdict on conscription.

Mihaka used the platform of the court to deliver a Marxist analysis of how the Monarchy has been a vital prop of class society for centuries. He also detailed the close link between the

Crown and imperialism, illustrated by the example of Prince Charles' speech in Papua New Guinea for the Independence Celebrations in 1975. Charles addressed the people of Bougainville, who had declared their own independence in an attempt to throw off the stranglehold of Rio Tinto Zinc, who were destroying the island with open cast copper mines. Quoting an epistle of Saint Paul he warned:

Everyone must obey the State Authorities for no authority exists without God's permission and the existing authorities have been put there by God. Whoever opposes the existing authorities opposes what God has ordered and anyone who does so will bring judgement upon himself. (p.80)

Along the way, the authors give plenty of sound practical advice as to how radicals should deal with the legal system. What "Whakapohane" shows is that, if well-thought out, stunts can occasionally be deployed as an effective form of protest.

Forward to a Working People's Republic!



Workers Power 2011

National conference of the
Workers Party

Hamilton Trade Union Centre
4/5/6 June

Panel discussions:

- **1981 Springbok tour**
- **Maori oppression**
- **Perspectives for the left**

for updated schedule see www.workersparty.org.nz