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1. Terry Hoad in Cuba

Terry Hoad, UCU's president, visited Cuba recently on a study tour and gave the following impressions of his visit to the country:

"On 18 September this year, as one of a party of 15 – nearly all UCU members, with a few partners and relatives – I set off from Gatwick for a ten-day Study Tour in Cuba. The trip was not an official UCU event, and was entirely financed by the participants, but we all went with the purpose of meeting academic and trade union colleagues and of seeing for ourselves something of life in a small socialist country existing in the shadow of a giant and unambiguously capitalist next door neighbour.

A few of those taking part had been to Cuba previously, but for most (including me) it was the first visit. I doubt that any of us came home without a wish to go there again and to get to know the country more fully than the too-short trip had made possible.

Everyone we met in a formal context conveyed an entirely positive picture of life in Cuba. The country's remarkable achievements in health and education – leading Latin America and surpassing the United States in tables of life expectancy and literacy rates, for example – have been well publicised. We were also offered a very favourable picture of its inclusive democratic processes. The approach being taken seemed to be in striking contrast to the severe reductions in public services in the UK and the too often weak participation in democracy here. But although I didn't believe that we were just being fed propaganda, we were clearly meeting people who had a stake in making the system work well, and in making it appear to do so. My inability to communicate in Spanish made it next to impossible for me to engage in any serious way with Cubans other than the ones the tour had lined up for us to meet, and I certainly never felt we were in contact with anyone who could be described as in opposition to the regime.

I therefore look forward to a future opportunity to discover more about this fascinating country and would be interested to hear of your impressions at thoad@ucu.org.uk.

A more detailed report is due to appear in the next international newsletter, with reference to the various academic and other groups and organisations we visited."

2. Solidarity Issues in the Middle East and North Africa

This section of this edition of the international newsletter will focus on solidarity and human rights issues in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In particular, it features examples from Egypt, Bahrain and Palestine.

Egypt

Solidarity with Egyptian workers and trade unionists

Following a motion at UCU Congress in May, UCU has become actively involved in supporting the new independent union movement in Egypt.

The TUC has also been active in supporting the new union movement in the MENA region, including Egypt. Earlier in the year UCU agreed to donate £2000 to the TUC's MENA Solidarity fund: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-19308-f0.cfm> which will help to support the advice and capacity-building work of the new International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) office in Cairo.

One of the key issues facing the Egyptian labour movement is the repeal of anti-strike laws. UCU recently wrote to the Egyptian government calling for them to bring in a new Freedom of Association law: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-20030-f0.cfm>

Through our involvement with Education International, UCU is looking to strengthen our direct links with unions in the education sector. School teachers have recently been on strike over pay, contracts and demands for the removal of the Education Minister. For further details, see http://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/1972 and <http://menasolidaritynetwork.com/2011/09/25/egypt-strike-suspended-after-huge-teachers-protest-makes-gains/>.

There is also growing union organisation and militancy in the universities, where the key issue has been the campaign to democratise their institutions. The Coalition of University Professors (CUP) has been demanding the sacking of existing deans and department heads of each university, as well reassessing the wage structures and funding for research <http://news.egypt.com/english/permalink/42762.html>

Empowering women at work in their unions remains a priority for union solidarity work in Egypt. That is why UCU hosted a joint fringe event with Amnesty International at the TUC Congress in September. Nawla Darwiche from the New Women's Foundation spoke about women's role in the Egyptian revolution, and their efforts to organise at work and in their unions, drawing from the Foundations' activism in the agricultural, garment, and health sectors and their work with migrant women. See Diana Hendry's impressions of this event below. A full report of Darwiche's UK visit will be available soon.

Joint Amnesty International – UCU TUC Congress Fringe Event:

Egypt: Empowering Women at Work and in Their Unions

On Tuesday 13 September UCU's Public Policy Administrator, Diana Hendry, attended the Amnesty International and University and College Union joint TUC fringe meeting on *Empowering women at work and in their unions*, at which Nawla Darwiche, of the New Woman Foundation, Egypt, was the key speaker. Kate Allen, Director of Amnesty International UK, and Terry Hoad, President of University and College Union, also spoke, and

the event was chaired by Shane Enright, Trade Union Campaigns Manager at Amnesty International. The event was a sensitive but assertive and ultimately rewarding examination of the current situation for women in Egypt following the recent social and political changes. The complex nature of the current relationship between the genders in Egypt was acknowledged and assessed, while the equal role of women in recent social and political changes was celebrated, and the threats to this equality highlighted. The appropriate means for supporting and furthering women's continued equal role in Egyptian society were identified. For further information on the demands made by Nawla Darwiche on behalf of women in Egypt, contact: Shane Enright at shane.enright@amnesty.org.uk.

Bahrain

End the violations against teachers, unionists and students in Bahrain

The Bahraini authorities continue their punitive and vindictive campaign of repression against the pro-democracy movement. President Mahdi Abu Dheep and Vice President Jalila Al-Salman of the Bahrain Teacher's Association were sentenced by a military tribunal for 10 and 3 years respectively in late September, for exercising their trade union rights during the Arab Spring. They are appealing the decisions before a civilian court on 1 December 2011. They are among 80 such people who were sentenced in late September. Hundreds more are awaiting trial. And at least another 1,500 people have been sacked since the Arab Spring started.

UCU has written to the Bahrain authorities calling for the release of the imprisoned trade unionists.

For further information and to sign a petition by Education International calling on Bahraini authorities to end the violations against teachers, unionists and students, click here:

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/uas/uaa_details/31

Palestine

Update on the detention of Ahmad Qatamesh

Back in May, and following a campaign led by Amnesty International, UCU Congress expressed its concerns about the administrative detention of the Palestinian writer and academic Ahmad Qatamesh: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/palestinian-writer-detained-without-charge-israeli-authorities-2011-05-10>

During the summer UCU wrote to the Israeli embassy in the UK with our concerns about Ahmad's detention. Originally detained on 21 April, Ahmad was given another six-month administrative detention order on 2 September, the day that his original order was due to expire.

Amnesty is concerned that he may be detained solely for the peaceful expression of his political views, in which case the organisation would consider him a prisoner of conscience. According to his wife and his lawyer, he has been interrogated for no more than a total of 10 minutes since his arrest on 21 April.

Amnesty have conducted a letter-writing campaign calling for supporters to write to representatives of authorities in Israel and urging them to release him without delay unless

he is to be charged with a recognisable criminal offence and tried promptly in accordance with internationally accepted standards for a fair trial. Amnesty is also calling on authorities to end the use of administrative detention.

UCU has written to the Israeli authorities about the continued administrative detention of Ahmad. For more information on the Amnesty campaign:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/024/2011/en/209094f7-e91f-48d0-945f-c8df1dd4324f/mde150242011en.pdf>

3. 3rd Conference of the Latin American Higher Education Unions

Paul Bennett has been invited to attend the 3rd conference of Latin American higher education unions organised by the Argentinian union CONADU in Buenos Aires in November, and to talk to them about the planning of next year's Education International higher education and research conference, which CONADU will host. There will be a report in the next, 'Latin American' issue of the newsletter.

4. ETUCE Statement on the Economic Crisis

The ETUCE Committee meeting in Brussels 10-11 October 2011, representing teacher unions in all the countries of Europe, issued a powerful declaration on the economic crisis, laying the blame firmly on the greed and incompetence of the banking sector and the complicity of national governments and international agencies in allowing the crisis to grow to such catastrophic proportions. In both EU and non-EU member countries, 'Austerity has proven itself unable to tackle the crisis, weakening the demand and hence blocking the start of a new growth cycle. Morally speaking, Austerity is unfair in its essence as it intends to make ordinary citizens, and even more, the most disadvantaged in society, pay for the greedy and short-sighted behaviour of some private players who led the economy into the crisis'.

ETUCE supported the alternative programme of restructuring and investment put forward by the European Trade Union Confederation in September, and argued forcefully for investment in education as part of the way out of the crisis. The ETUCE will take the statement to the European Commission, the European Parliament and other key decision making bodies and continue to press for the protection of education from a crisis for which it is in no way responsible.

5. The Latest on the Bologna Process

At the latest meeting of the Bologna Follow-Up Group in Cracow on 13th / 14th October, EI representatives set out proposals for the implementation of a 'supportive environment' for staff in higher education institutions which was proposed in the 2010 Bologna Ministerial Communique. There was a mixed response from the national representatives but it is hoped to work with the other consultative organisations to develop this concept and bring it to fruition. The meeting also prepared the ground for next year's Ministerial meeting in Bucharest and the global Policy Forum of countries interested in the Bologna Process that will take place in association with it.

6. Resources

Middle East and North Africa

The following resources related to trade union developments in Egypt are available. The Middle East and North Africa Observatory (see: <http://www.menaobservatory.org/>) aims to monitor the development of the trade union movement in the Middle East and North Africa with a focus on trade union rights. The Observatory gathers and publishes information about demonstrations, strikes and other labour protests taking place in the region, with the objective of increasing knowledge and awareness among workers by making information available on the internet.

UCU is affiliated to the MENA Solidarity Network. This is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity links with workers in the Middle East and North Africa. Its website has a number of useful resources, including updates on strikes and union activities, including in the higher education sector:

<http://menasolidaritynetwork.com/>

Internationalisation of Education

The European Commission has done a major mapping exercise on the national policies and programmes that facilitate and support the internationalisation of education, and drawn conclusions about the way forward for international cooperation and development. For the details, follow the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/international/mapping_en.pdf

7. Dates for Your Diary

The Latin American 2011 Conference: Making a Better World Possible **Saturday 3 December, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London**

Speakers include Sally Hunt

Led by countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia, progressive governments in Latin America have transformed the lives of millions in recent years, extending health and education for the first time and enhancing social equality.

As part of the ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, these countries are joining together to forge a better and more just society for people across the region.

The conference, Latin America 2011, is open to all. Come and find out firsthand about the latest developments in the continent and how we can offer solidarity at this crucial time.

Click here for further details: <http://www.latinamericaconference.org.uk/>

If you have any comments or feedback on International News, please send to Diana Hendry at dhendry@ucu.org.uk.