

weekly worker



**Paul Demarty:
demolition of Michael
Gove not down to left**

- Letters and debate
- Gaza protests
- Scottish left nats
- Leninist electoralism

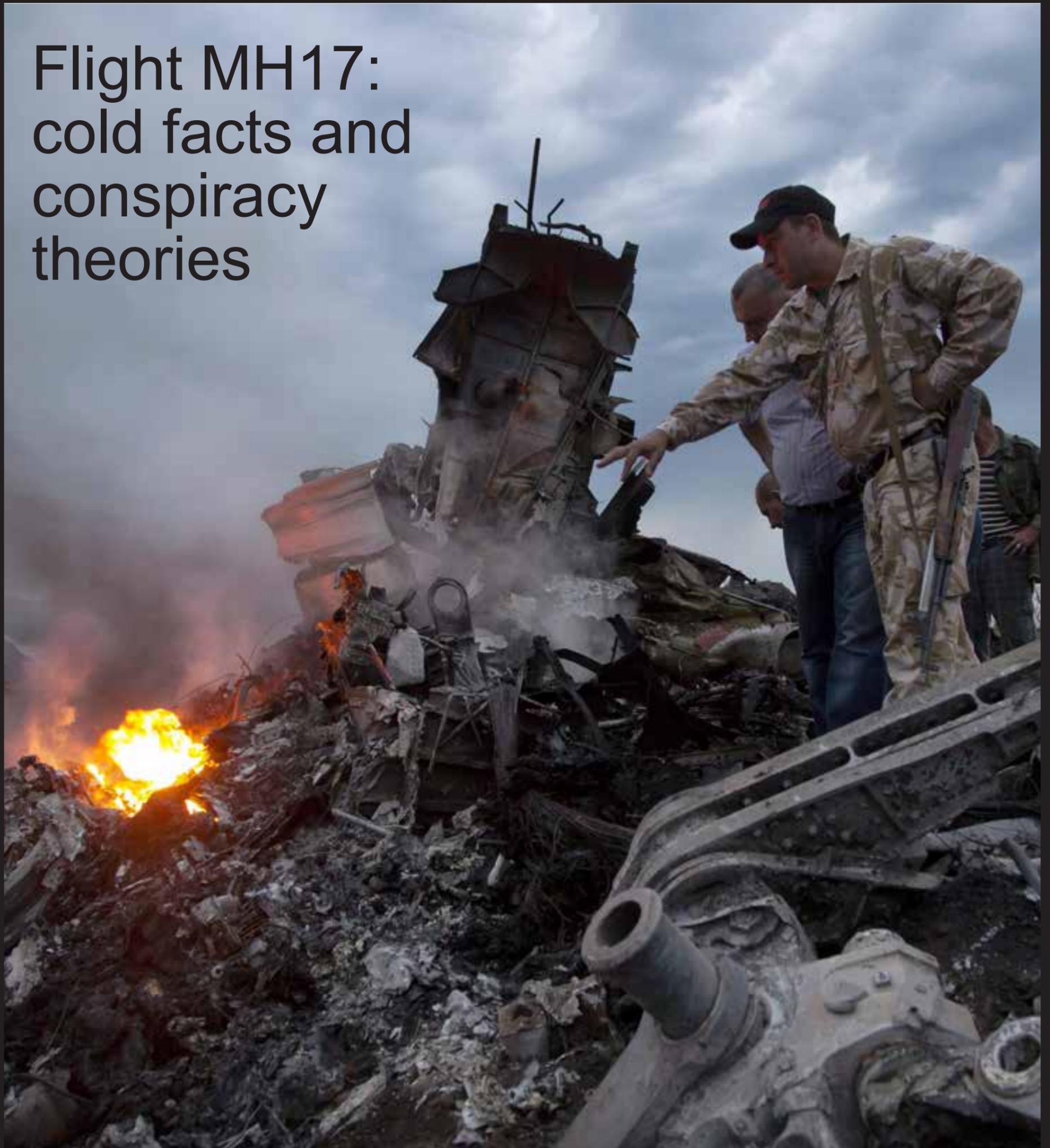
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Flight MH17: cold facts and conspiracy theories



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Federal republic

There are three short points I would like to make in response to comrade Paul B Smith's contribution to the debate on Scottish independence (Letters, July 17).

Firstly, while any Marxist can agree with him that we should be utterly opposed to nationalism, as democrats we also have to recognise that the unity of peoples must be *voluntary*. Where national questions exist, in our struggle against national narrow-mindedness and utopianism Marxists can and should unequivocally champion the *right* of peoples to join together with, or separate from, others - even if we argue against the right to separate being enacted (as with the September referendum on Scottish independence). Our overriding principle, of course, is that we should espouse the highest forms of working class unity circumstances allow. Our 'Trotskyist' comrades who call for a 'British road' withdrawal from the European Union, for example, have precisely sleepwalked into the kind of 'socialism in one country' politics comrade Smith usefully critiques.

While internationalism is a cardinal principle, there *are* circumstances where Marxists correctly call for certain peoples to enact their right to self-determination in favour of separation. It cannot be denied that a Scottish national question exists. Something set to continue, whatever the outcome of the September 18 vote. Marxists must confront this head on with our *own* programme of radical democracy, without pandering to Scottish nationalism - or defending the anti-democratic status quo as the 'least worst' outcome in terms of 'class unity' (it goes without saying that the unity of our class, however pathetic it may be at the moment, is not the same thing as the unity of the British state!) This is what is so disappointing about the typically economicist response of some comrades in the 'no' campaign. One often gets the impression that no national question exists in Scotland: confronting the world as we would like it to be, not as it is.

Second, comrade Smith is wrong to suggest that calling for a boycott of the referendum on Scottish independence "implies that the calling of the referendum is in and of itself reactionary". There is not some inviolate principle by which Marxists approach referenda, elections or any other such matter. Firm in principle, flexible in tactics. Yet precisely because of our principles, referenda should always be handled with extreme caution. Historically they have been a reliable means for real and aspiring Bonapartes to dupe the masses and create a semblance of mass legitimacy or support for their projects: the current Iranian theocracy and the experience of German Nazism bear painful witness to this.

Precisely because politics is an art form, most matters confronting our class cannot be boiled down to a 'yes' or 'no' answer to a question set by a particular regime with its own particular interests. Comrade Smith's example of a potential referendum on British membership of the EU is apposite. Can Marxists really vote 'yes' to the bloated bureaucracy that is the current EU? By the same token, do we want to vote for 'British sovereignty' and the purported 'golden age' of pre-1973 Britain? Of course not.

Finally, and perhaps relatedly, comrade Smith gets our call for a federal republic completely wrong - surprising for one who has been a reader of our publication for many years. His response is obviously tainted by the malignant experience of 'official communism' and its distortion of Marxist republicanism, whereby the call for the 'democratic republic' as "the form of working class rule" (Marx) was hollowed out and turned into a key pillar of cross-class popular frontism: one of several 'stages' which purport to lead towards socialism, but actually do the *opposite*, as evinced by the South African Communist Party's

role in the so-called 'national democratic revolution', which is making conditions as comfortable for capitalism as possible - with occasionally shocking repercussions for workers' rights and conditions.

However, it goes without saying that the CPGB's call for a federal republic for the peoples of England, Scotland and Wales has nothing to do with such an approach. I would refer comrade Smith to our *Draft programme, Weekly Worker* pieces critiquing popular-frontist 'republicanism' or even the very Jack Conrad article comrade Smith was responding to, in which comrade Conrad explicitly states that the federal republic "is, needless to say, the specific form under which we envisage the working class coming to power" - crucially as an integral part of a workers' Europe. So, yes, comrade Smith, such perspectives are *precisely* antithetical to 'halfway housism' - and to all political projects which gloss over or sidestep the need to defeat the capitalist state.

Comrade Smith assures us that "some of the first measures of a workers' government" would be, *inter alia*, to "abolish monarchical forms of government". This is all well and good (although I think we have to be much clearer about the *positive* measures this would involve: the experience of 'official communism' underlines how there are many different forms of so-called 'republican' government). But what about the alternative constitutional outlook we should fight for *in the here and now*? Can we not uphold radical republicanism today? Is it not possible to win substantial constitutional reforms and concessions which will facilitate the struggle for working class republicanism?

Socialism, the rule of the working class, represents our side's victory in "the battle of democracy" and as such cannot be achieved without positive solutions to all democratic questions and manifestations of democratic injustice and oppression. Hence the indispensability of the federal republic and the minimum programme. I would urge comrade Smith to have another look at our material.

Ben Lewis
South Wales

Run its course

Last week Paul Smith explained how his view of the national question was informed by the theory of bourgeois democratic revolution. This theory claims that the struggle for democracy is progressive in the early stage of rising capitalism, but is reactionary in the epoch of capitalist decline.

He expresses this idea by saying: "Nationalism within a *declining capitalism* is of a different nature than during its ascendant phase. In the 19th century, nationalism destroyed feudal relations that held back workers' movements towards socialism. In a *post-Stalinist world*, nationalism is no longer progressive".

Paul's theory concludes that the right of Scotland to self-determination and the establishment of a republic is objectively reactionary. This is nothing new. Lenin called it the "nascent trend of imperialist economism". What is new is that Paul makes the collapse of Stalinism the dividing line, after which all nationalism is reactionary. Since the collapse of Stalinism, Paul believes Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is just as bad or worse than Turkish nationalism!

It is true that some nationalism, such as British unionism, is conservative and often reactionary, as clearly represented by the UK Independence Party, the British National Party or the Orange Order. But democratic nationalism still inspires people in Kurdistan, Palestine, Ireland, Catalonia or Wales to seek a more democratic future. It is nonsense to say this is equally reactionary. To do so is to side with imperialism.

Paul says: "Steve Freeman has intimated that Marxists who characterise Scottish republicanism as a form of nationalism are secret agents of the British state." This is a great invention. I note Paul doesn't actually quote anything I said.

The 'Donovanian' method of polemic is spreading.

Speaking of Ian Donovan, in trying to defend his untenable position it has collapsed. He says: "In commenting about the 'dark side' of the English ruling class (as opposed to the very light-sided Scottish ruling class)..." (Letters, July 17) This is complete nonsense. There is no "English ruling class", nor Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish ruling classes. There is only an historically constituted British ruling class.

Ian defends the British unionist ruling class by removing it from view! Yet it is at the very centre of the whole struggle. Then, to add to the absurdity, he says MI5 is not a class institution: that is, not an instrument of the British ruling class. He says: "It is certainly *not unlikely* (ie, likely!) that MI5, or at least elements of it, will engage in hostile activity to [Scottish independence], though not on the basis of fundamental class interest; rather of bureaucratic convenience".

So on the national question MI5 is not on the side of the British ruling class, as expressed by the coalition government, the Tory Party, the Whitehall mandarins, Lib Dems, Labour, the crown, the City of London, CBI, etc. First, he thinks there is no British ruling class. Then, if there is, it has no class interests in the referendum. But, if it does have class interests, MI5 does not fight for them. Only 'elements' of MI5 are fighting - not for the ruling class, but for their own special bureaucratic interests!

When an argument collapses under pressure into absurdity there is no point in carrying on. I will, of course, continue to claim that the dogs of unionism are ruthless and dangerous enough to stir up fears of anti-English racism amongst English people in Scotland in order to build a 'no' vote. I provided evidence from the Scottish Tories. Ian's answer is to allege I am an anti-English racist and chauvinist for daring to expose unionist plans. This slander is not even worth dismissing. The argument with Ian has run its course.

Steve Freeman
LU Scottish Republic Yes tendency

One-sided

Whilst I agree with Paul Smith's overall argument on the Scottish referendum, I disagree with some points he makes. In my opinion, these arise from a one-sided view of history, with specific regard to (a) the national question and (b) the question of nationalisation. Perhaps this is because, for Paul, Stalinism - and its poisonous legacy - have become an *idée fixe*, which sometimes clouds his otherwise excellent work. What is lacking is a concrete analysis of concrete situations, *vis-à-vis* modern history. Where convenient, he just leaves things out (and not just for the purposes of his letter).

Paul correctly states that "Nationalism within a declining capitalism is of a different nature than during its ascendant phase." He goes on to attribute this to the negative effects of Stalinism for the ongoing class struggle. This has, of course, become increasingly distorted - grotesquely so, when one considers what has happened in the Middle East. Therefore he concludes that "there are no instances of struggles for national liberation within the last 70 years that have advanced the struggle for socialism. On the contrary, they have retarded or actively destroyed it." Whilst this is true, he then ascribes a sweeping and one-sided explanation as to why this is the case.

When Paul implies that Stalinism is the root cause of the failure of national liberation movements over the last 70 years, he leaves out the role of imperialism and social democracy, which is something of an oversight. After all, it was the latter which were jointly responsible for the isolation and degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution in the first place, out of which grew the bureaucracy within which Stalinism took root.

In this regard, nationalisation, in and of itself, was not responsible for the rise of Stalinism. By the same token, imperialism

and social democracy were directly responsible for the defeat of the national liberation movement in the latter part of the 20th century. How? They physically smashed it up - a genocide to rival that of the holocaust. Stalinism played the role of 'second assistant director', due to the fact that its ideology and programme for the rest of the world, including the oppressed colonial peoples, was counterrevolutionary. It so divided the international working class ideologically, on the grounds that bourgeois democracy is better than Stalinist tyranny. (But, given the decline of voter participation, for reasons I can't go into here, we may also ask, for how long?)

Just to give one example, in my opinion, the degeneration of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation has more to do with Zionist Israel than the corrupt leadership of Arafat and his cronies, simply because the liberation of Palestine constitutes a threat to imperialism and Zionist expansionism in particular. It had to be defeated militarily, by means of overwhelming firepower, collective punishment of the civilian population (its lifeblood), alliances with fascist Christian militia groups and not forgetting assassinations of key personnel. At least the PLO was a secular movement. As a result of this defeat, a vacuum was created, into which the Zionists inserted extremist Islamic groups, such as Hamas, which then took up the struggle for liberation - ie, the slave turned on its master.

The same imperialist strategy has been deployed in Cambodia (out of which came the Pol Pot regime), Afghanistan (out of which came al Qa'eda), and now northern Iraq and Syria. Which brings us to the worst one of all: Isis! By comparison, the democratically elected Hamas government in the Gaza strip appears to be a civilised movement, which it isn't.

Paul ignores the fact that, in the first instance, it was imperialism which was directly responsible for the defeat of the national liberation movements in places as far apart as Indochina and Palestine (where it relies on its proxy, Zionist Israel). As a result, many *millions* of oppressed peasant workers, especially civilians, were wiped off the face of the earth, simply because they fought for the basic democratic right to independence. It would appear that the "battle for democracy", as the *Weekly Worker* correctly describes it in 'What we fight for', is not part of Paul's programme.

One wonders whether he would have called for a boycott (in terms of looking the other way) of the struggles for national liberation in the past, as well as what is happening in Gaza *now*.

Rex Dunn
email

LU democracy

Last weekend I attended Left Unity's Eastern region aggregate. Jon Duveen gave a brief report of the June 7 national council meeting, which focused on contesting next year's elections and campaign priorities.

Comrade Duveen claimed that LU is the only left party in Britain "in favour of immigration", but somebody at the meeting was worried about the electorate on the doorstep - many people were concerned about immigration and the pressure on services and thought there was a need for controls. I pointed out that migrants could be turned into militants if we focused on getting them unionised.

Others mentioned the need to work with other left organisations like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition during elections. The chair, Karen Michael, said that it was right not to stand LU candidates against Tusc. She favourably contrasted LU with the Socialist Workers Party and thought it was a good thing that we don't have a 'party line': "It is chaotic and slower, but that's democracy." But the SWP was top-down, which was why she would be against the SWP joining LU (not that they are likely to want to join).

Karen Michael led off the perspectives part of the meeting, emphasising the

likelihood of a strong vote for the UK Independence Party in the region, especially in Norfolk. At this point one comrade handed out leaflets from Stand Up to Ukip, which he admitted was an SWP front. I said that, while Ukip needs to be challenged, by focusing solely on Ukip we're ignoring the rest of the right - for instance, the Tories, who'd probably thank us for taking the heat off them. An Italian comrade also thought we should not obsess over Ukip - at the end of the day it was the Tory government that was administering austerity and attacking our class. The main issue for him was that the left since the 1980s has been in a long period of crisis - Ukip were just exploiting this.

There was a discussion on LU's internal structure, when it was pointed out that most branches are more notional than real. Also, a comrade from Southend said that male-female parity wasn't working in his branch. Two of the five members were women, but they were not interested in being regional delegates, for example.

In conclusion, it wasn't a bad meeting. There was genuine discussion and a reasonable attitude to disagreement, cultivated by a competent chair. But what is missing is a lack of any political strategy and this is combined with illusions in, for example, the Greens.

Justin Cousins
email

LOL

I appreciate Alan Johnstone's comments and response to me, but I am afraid Jon D White's claim that the Socialist Party of Great Britain has never expelled anyone for upholding a minority view made my cat laugh out loud (Letters, July 17).

In 1991, the SPGB suffered a major and debilitating split, when two London branches, which happened to contain some of the most longstanding and prominent party writers and speakers, were expelled for (1) continuing to use the full name, 'Socialist Party of Great Britain', in public in contravention to a conference decision to use the shortened 'The Socialist Party'; and (2) continuing to adhere to and publish prominently the 'Object and declaration of principles' which have defined the basis of the party since its foundation in 1904.

Underlying the expulsions and split was something of a generational and cultural shift within the SPGB during the 1970s and 80s, where 'younger' members sought to update and modernise the party's case and appeal, while those in the London branches tended to represent an older generation and a more conservative and traditional approach to politics.

Shamefully, in recent years, a leading member of the Clapham SPGB, as assistant general secretary, carried out a vicious and almost obsessive campaign against the Ashbourne Court SPGB, using institutions of the capitalist state such as the police, the judiciary, the banks and the post office to, in effect, force the shut down and liquidation of the expelled SPGB branches. Fortunately, this character did not have direct access to state power; otherwise the results could have been individually more lethal.

I personally have more sympathy with the politics and presentation of the 'modernisers' in the SPGB, but I do think it ridiculous and damaging for socialists and socialism generally for such splits and expulsions to take place within what are claimed to be democratic socialist (as opposed to democratic centralist) parties and over somewhat doctrinal and obscure 'angels on pinheads' disputes.

After all, people see two organisations, both calling themselves the SPGB and both claiming to adhere to exactly the same 'Object and declaration of principles'. What good or use is that to anyone, let alone the working class?

And it is in flat and risible contradiction to Jon's claim that people or branches are never expelled from his party for publicly expressing different views which are within the scope of their declaration of principles.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

GAZA

Solidarity and anti-Zionism



Impressive spirit, impressive turnout

Saturday July 19 saw tens of thousands marching from Whitehall to the Israeli embassy in Kensington to protest against the Zionist regime's latest series of atrocities in the Gaza strip. Organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and, as can be expected, scantily covered by the BBC, the march was attended by virtually all organisations within the British left, several Muslim associations, and a variety of anti-Zionist Jewish groups. With the exception of Left Unity and the soul-searching International Socialist Network, most left groups had newspapers and other such literature on offer.

The atmosphere of the demo has been described by many as inspiring. And, it is true, it has been a while since this writer has witnessed a protest with comparable levels of energy and a genuine feel of kinship. While a good slice of the participants could be described as young, loud and Muslim, the secular minority was very sizeable. To see swathes of angry young people whose fire was, for once, not directed at the Socialist Workers Party must have reminded its activists of simpler times - the "period of good feelings", as Alex Callinicos has dubbed it. Accordingly, the comrades seemed very excited and were falling over themselves to get people to sign petitions and such.

Another left group present was the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, whose paper-sellers were loudly proclaiming a "state alongside Israel" for Palestinians. The AWL had been slow to react to the news, initially pushing older articles to the top of its website instead of commenting on Israel's most recent acts of military aggression. The relevant editorial that was finally published on July 16 ('Two nations, two states') peddles the narrative of a "disproportionate" Israeli "response" to Hamas rockets which threatens to undermine the legitimate "self-defence argument" of the Israeli state.¹ Implicitly, the piece also makes concessions to the Israeli state's well-worn "human shield" apologia for its collective punishment policy of bombing densely populated areas.

Rather generously, the AWL concedes that "the Palestinians, too, have the right to defend themselves", although it remains unclear just how they might exercise this "right" against a major US ally which is armed to the teeth, including with an arsenal of nuclear weapons.² Ultimately, the solution offered by the AWL is a "peace" deal brokered by the oppressor state itself, with Israel "ensuring equality" and "allowing" Palestinians to set up their own state. A real happy-clappy outcome.

It is hard to believe, however, that the AWL hacks behind the 'editorial' moniker are actually this naive. As comrade Moshé Machover explains, Israel's present leaders are positively keen to assume precisely this type of peacemaker role: "Their cherished wish is that the Palestinian people, dispossessed and subjugated, should peacefully accept their lot and give up the struggle". The concern of the colonised, however, "is not to make peace with their dispossessors", which inevitably occurs on the latter's terms, "but to resist being dispossessed".³

Over the past year or so, the AWL has faced criticism over its 'racism' - especially in the leftist student spectrum, which is its preferred recruitment ground. True to the often idealist worldview of this milieu - where anti-emancipatory politics are seen as a consequence of bigoted thinking rather than the other way round - the AWL is depicted as driven by irrational prejudice against Muslims or 'brown people'. Behind Sean Matgamna's notorious gaffes, however, is the social-imperialist concept that there can be no talk of socialist transformation until western 'civilisation' is introduced across the globe - including, crucially, as an accidental by-product of military conquest and regime change from above. This implausible - not to mention discredited - strategic outlook forms the political basis that occasionally gives rise to quasi-racist figments of the imagination such as Matgamna's "envious", "knife-sharpening" Muslims. Far more commonly, though, it finds expression in diplomatically worded ambivalence regarding imperialist ventures.

Matgamna asserts that the anti-imperialist left is "de facto anti-Semitic",⁴ and I have little doubt that he reserves similar words for Muslim-dominated protests in defence of whatever is left of Palestine. While it would be foolish to deny that there exists such a thing as a 'chauvinism of the oppressed', no such sentiments were manifest on Saturday's massive demonstration. When a speaker at the closing rally asked the crowd whether they were anti-Semitic, he received a unanimous and unhesitating "No!" Conversely, thousands replied in the affirmative when prompted to say whether they were anti-Zionist. But there is no pleasing some people: *The Spectator's* neocon firebrand, Douglas Murray, for instance, dubbed the protest a "disgusting anti-Semitic spectacle".⁵

Despite sub-tropical conditions and protestors suffering varying stages of dehydration, the mood was electric until the end. Electric enough to get carried away for a few fleeting hours, for it was impossible not to notice the contrast in enthusiasm and militancy when compared to most labour movement activity of the past few years. How quickly tens of thousands can be mobilised against national oppression. And how stubbornly ethnic, community, religious and other sectional ties continue to feature as powerful mobilising factors in people's consciousness, compared to class affinity.

The path to liberation, alas, will not be found via short cuts - ie, by adapting to the various subjectivities of the oppressed - but through the protracted and patient struggle to raise working class political consciousness ●

Maciej Zurowski

Notes

- 1 www.workersliberty.org/story/2014/07/16/two-nations-two-states.
- 2 'Israel's secret nuclear arsenal' *Weekly Worker* July 17.
- 3 'Why I am not an Israeli peace activist' *Weekly Worker* June 10 2010.
- 4 www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/10/07/first-anti-zionist-anti-war-movement-jews-boer-war-discussion-israel-n-ireland-apar.
- 5 http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2014/07/londons-pro-palestine-rally-was-a-disgusting-anti-semitic-spectacle.

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 27, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: *Capital* Vol 1, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued). Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Crisis in Iraq

Thursday July 24, 7pm: Public meeting, 'How the US-UK wrecked a country', St Saviour's Hall, St Saviour's Road, Saltley, Birmingham B8. Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Palestine solidarity

Friday July 25, 8pm: An evening of Arabic song, Rich Mix, 47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1. With Reem Kelani. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Stop the Gaza slaughter

Saturday July 26: Demonstrations against Israeli military aggression **London, 12 noon:** Assemble opposite Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street, London W8 for march to rally at Westminster.

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 11.30am: Assemble outside City Pool, Northumberland Road, Newcastle NE1 for march to rally at Grey's Monument.

Middlesbrough, 11.30am: Assemble outside town hall, Albert Road, Middlesbrough TS1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Roadmap to apartheid

Tuesday July 29, 6.30pm: Film screening and discussion, Transport House, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11. Award-winning documentary exploring parallels between South Africa and Israel.

Organised by Cardiff Troops Out: cardiff_troopsout@hotmail.com.

Justice for Mark

Monday August 4, 5pm: March and vigil to remember Mark Duggan. Tottenham Police Station, 398 High Road, Tottenham Hale, London N17.

Organised by Justice for Mark: www.justice4mark.com.

Socialists and World War I

Monday August 4 to Sunday August 20, 11am to 5pm: Exhibition, SPGB head office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4.

Organised by Socialist Party of Great Britain:

www.worldsocialism.org/spgb.

Deception in high places

Saturday August 16, 1pm: Book launch, Word Power, 43-45 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, EH8. Nicholas Gilby discusses his new book *A history of bribery in Britain's arms trade* (part of Edinburgh Book Fringe 2014).

Organised by Word Power: www.word-power.co.uk.

No to Nato

Saturday August 30, 1pm: Anti-imperialist protest, through central Newport. Assemble Civic Centre car park, Godfrey Road, for march to rally at Westgate Square.

Sunday August 31, 10am: Counter-demonstration, County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10. Speakers include: Boris Kagarlitsky, Jeremy Corbyn, Lindsey German.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Austerity wrecks lives

Saturday September 6, 11am: Rally, Castlefield Arena, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3.

Organised by Unison: www.unisonnw.org/sat6sep.

Remember Featherstone Massacre

Saturday September 6, 2pm: Guided commemorative walk, from Bradley Arms, Willow Lane, North Featherstone.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk.

Right to Remain

Saturday September 6, 12 noon to 5pm: Conference on immigrant rights, Praxis Community Projects, Pott Street, Bethnal Green, London E2.

Organised by Right to Remain: www.righttoremain.org.uk.

No glory

Saturday September 20, time tbc: Peace History Lecture, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speaker: John Westmoreland.

Organised by No Glory: www.noglory.org.

Britain needs a pay rise

Saturday October 18, 11am to 5pm: National anti-austerity protest, Hyde Park, Westminster, London W2.

Organised by Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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UKRAINE

West's propaganda war

The downing of flight MH17 is being cynically used as an opportunity to step up sanctions against Russia, says **Eddie Ford**



Right Sector: explanation for Russian separatism

According to senior American intelligence officials on July 22, all the evidence points to the fact that Russian separatists shot down Malaysia flight MH17 "by mistake" and there was no "direct link" to Moscow. Rather, everything indicates that a single Buk missile hit the aircraft at an altitude of some 10,000 metres. Some local residents in Torez, a small city in the Donetsk *oblast*, report seeing a missile launcher on the day of the appalling incident. Having already shot down two Antonov military transport aircraft, separatists boasted on Facebook about shooting down another plane - only to delete the posts when it became apparent that it was a civilian airliner.

Furthermore, an Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, carries a more than plausible account of a separatist from Torez being told by his commanders that they had "hit a plane of the fascists from Kiev" - and how he thought "we'd be fighting Ukrainian pilots landing in parachutes". But instead, he says, "we came across the corpses of civilians", including the body of a little girl not more than five years old - "it was terrible".

Yes, the US officials did go on to accuse the Kremlin of "creating the conditions" for the deaths of the 298 people aboard the plane - that is, by arming the rebels. Yet this charge is transparently disingenuous. You could just as easily argue, if not more so, that the Kiev government and its western backers are responsible for "creating the conditions" for the tragedy by launching a military offensive in eastern Ukraine. After all, who benefited from the downing of MH17? Definitely not Vladimir Putin, who now finds himself in a very awkward position - having to distance the Kremlin from the separatists' terrible blunder whilst continuing to lend them general political support. A tricky act to pull off. Nor, quite obviously, was it in the interests of the separatists - now facing international opprobrium. On the

other hand, if you happen to be the Kiev government (or associated forces) then you benefit significantly - so long as you can blame it on the others.

None of which is to suggest that the Kiev government was actually responsible for shooting down the jet - which looks incredibly unlikely. The real point, however, is that the downing of MH17 was the result of cock-up and not conspiracy - the sort of thing that happens in a *war zone*, especially when you are dealing with an irregular army that operates according to a fuzzy command structure.

Hypocrites

Irrespective of the true facts and motivations behind the attack on the plane, western politicians and the media have lost no time in cynically using it as an opportunity to step up the propaganda war against Moscow - truth be damned. Typically, the front page of *The Sun* proclaimed: "Putin's missiles" (July 18) - the unsubtle message being that the Kremlin is guilty of bringing down MH17. Indecently, the 298 who died on that day have been recruited to the western offensive.

David Cameron, naturally, is at the forefront of the campaign to vilify Russia, calling the MH17 disaster a "defining moment". He urged European Union foreign ministers to impose tougher, US-style sanctions on Russia, which involve targeting members of Putin's inner circle and their businesses. Cameron has complained that there is a "reluctance" among some European countries to take more decisive action, attacking the sale of two French-built Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia. When asked about the Mistral deal, the French president, François Hollande, said the first of two ships is "almost finished and must be delivered in October" - though the rest of the contract would depend on Russia's "attitude" to Ukraine, he added.

American and British demands to enforce harsher EU sanctions have been agreed - though it is clear why there are calls for a delay in implementing them. Many EU countries, but especially Germany and Italy, are heavily reliant on Russian gas. Indeed, there are fears in some EU countries that a move against Russian energy exports could undermine the fragile recovery in the euro zone.

Frustrated, Cameron on July 21 called on the EU leaders to "consider" an arms embargo - and the next day the new foreign secretary, Philip Hammond, said such a move was "under consideration" following a meeting of foreign ministers. Unfortunately for them, this attempt to secure the moral high ground was scuppered by a cross-party parliamentary committee report, which disclosed that the value of arms licences to Russia rocketed by more than half in the last year from £86 million to £131.5 million. In fact, only 31 UK licences had been halted or suspended. Permits covering sniper rifles, night sights, small arms ammunition, gun mountings, body armour, military communications equipment and "equipment employing cryptography" remained in force, the report revealed. Sir John Stanley, the Conservative MP heading the committee, said the relatively small number of licences which had been withdrawn reflected the "circumscribed" nature of the UK's moratorium which applied merely to equipment that could be deployed against Ukraine and did not cover Russia's "wider" defence needs (the committee also strongly criticised the award of licences for the export of chemicals).

Perhaps with some justification, France's foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, acerbically suggested at the beginning of the week that Britain should look at the number of Russian oligarchs residing in London before criticising his country. Similarly, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the first secretary of the Parti Socialiste, denounced the UK stance as a "false

debate led by hypocrites". He advised Cameron to start "cleaning up his own backyard" - just look at the Russian money swirling around London. Paris is squeaky-clean, of course.

Provocatively, at least if you are Vladimir Putin, the British government has announced that it will "re-examine" the death of the former KGB officer, Alexander Litvinenko - who died in 2006 in a London hospital after he was poisoned with radioactive polonium, a favourite assassination tool of the Russian secret services. The inquiry will be chaired by Sir Robert Owen, a high court judge, who has stated that the material available to him does "establish a *prima facie* case as to the culpability of the Russian state". But the decision represents a significant governmental U-turn. Theresa May had previously resisted calls for a public inquiry, later admitting "international relations" had been a "factor in the government's decision-making" on this matter. Now "international relations" will be a factor again, only this time the objective is to discredit Putin, not appease him.

Just like with the recent Gaza ground invasion, we have seen a massively disproportionate response to the Ukrainian crisis. In the case of Gaza, this has taken the form of an excessive concentration on the tiny number of Israeli casualties - perversely betraying a nuclear-armed regional superpower as the victim. With regards to Ukraine, there is the ridiculous implication - posing as moral outrage - that Putin is virtually another Adolf Hitler (how many is that now?) embarked on a campaign of aggressive expansionism; portraying the Crimean referendum as a sinister *Anschluss*, if not a prelude to World War III. All total nonsense, of course, shamefully parroted by some on the left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Still, what else do you expect from social-imperialists?

In reality, quite the opposite is true.

What has essentially taken place in the Ukraine is a western *power grab* - with both the EU/Nato and the US attempting to expand their sphere of influence considerably to the east. The sudden and forced removal of the elected president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, represented a direct threat to Moscow's interests - which were already threatened by the growing western presence in the former Soviet republics to its south. Writing in the *Mail on Sunday*, Peter Hitchens - brother to the deceased socialist-cum-neocon, Christopher - argued that the "aggressor" in the current war was the EU, "backed by the USA", as they "sought to bring Ukraine into its orbit" through "violence and illegality", "an armed mob" and the "overthrow of an elected president" (July 20). Hitchens may be a reactionary British nationalist, but here he does have a point.

Near abroad

Except for the wilfully blind, there is a clear western plan to gobble up the 'near abroad' piece by piece. Salami tactics. From the Russian point of view, what was the EU/US - and, by extension, Nato - doing at all in Ukraine, especially Crimea? The latter has always been viewed by Moscow as an highly valuable geopolitical asset: its direct route to the Mediterranean and hence status as a genuine global power. To have lost its Crimean military base would have denied Russia easy access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean - something that the Kremlin would never allow to happen, no matter who was president.

Then you have to ask the larger question: what caused the outbreak of Russian separatism in Ukraine? For an answer, all you have to do is look at the political forces involved in the Maidan 'revolution' - not just the billionaire 'chocolate king' president, but the actual fighting forces on the ground. Independence Square was organised and policed by various far-right militia forces associated with a virulently anti-Russian world outlook, embracing an ideology of Ukrainian nationalism that in the 1930s looked to Hitler and the Nazis. The Kiev government itself has open fascists in its ranks and one of the very first actions of the reconstituted parliament was to pass a vote stripping the Russian language of its 'official' status - a deliberate provocation directed against the ethnic Russian population.

Another vitally important aspect is the economic question. Integration with the EU and the opening up of Ukraine to western competition would decimate the Soviet-era heavy industries of the Russian-speaking east of the country - it is no exaggeration to say that up to nine out of 10 jobs could go. When you consider all these factors, it is not an act of irrationality to rebel against Kiev's fiat, let alone imagine that Russian separatism is a movement that has been conjured out of nothing by a Machiavellian Vladimir Putin. The fighting formations in the east have grown in a soil of fear and uncertainty.

For communists, the big worry with Ukraine is that one thing will lead to another. First it starts with tougher sanctions against Moscow, which will then lead to the supply of military ordnance to the Kiev government - then next it will be 'advisors' and finally, perhaps, boots on the ground. A fearful prospect, given that Russia, like the US, is a nuclear power ●

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Cold facts and conspiracy theories

Yassamine Mather examines the most likely explanation for the tragedy in eastern Ukraine

In the midst of all the propaganda about Malaysian airline MH17 and the loss of 298 lives, myths have replaced reality. New conspiracy theories appear seemingly every hour, making it almost impossible to distinguish fact from fiction when it comes to understanding the causes of this tragic event.

Indeed truth has become the first victim of the conflict between the Kiev government and pro-Russian separatists in what is now developing into a west vs Russia conflict. Ukraine accused pro-Russian separatists of shooting down the plane, while the Russian media blamed everyone but pro-Moscow rebels. On July 21, prime minister David Cameron echoed the headlines of the tabloids: bringing down the plane was “murder” - in other words, the intentional killing of innocent civilians. We have not heard the same sort of outcry about the hundreds of civilians killed in Gaza since last week - the western media does not seem to see the hypocrisy in the way the two events are reported.

This is what we know for certain. The European air traffic control body recorded flight MH17 flying at 10,000 metres - just 300 metres above the disputed/restricted airspace - when it was shot down. According to the Malaysian transport minister, Liow Tiong Lai, the pilot had asked to fly at 10,700 metres over Ukraine’s airspace but was told by air traffic control in Kiev to fly at 10,000 metres. Two units navigated the plane: Ukrainian air traffic control and the Rostov centre for air traffic control in the Russian Federation.

According to Ukrainian air traffic control, “The Boeing’s beacon disappeared abruptly, without any warnings or SOS signals. The plane dropped from the flight level instantly, in the Torez area. After exchanging opinions with our Russian colleagues, we jointly concluded that the Boeing was shot down.”¹ All this was confirmed by Malaysian airways. Both air traffic controls should have recordings of this joint conversation/conclusion and this should be available to air accident inspectors.

It is doubtful if flying at a slightly higher altitude (300 or even 1,000 metres higher) would have made much of a difference. According to current information, the airliner was hit by a Buk missile system, which can reach targets up to 23,000 metres. The air safety organisation, Eurocontrol, has recordings of the Ukrainian authorities barring aircraft flying at up to 9,750 metres. However, at 10,000 metres, the plane was still flying over a danger zone and was not out of reach from missile attack.

Back in June, the UK Civil Aviation Authority urged carriers to avoid overflying Crimea and parts of southern Ukraine. This did not include Donetsk and the Dnepropetrovsk flight zone, although the CAA advised airlines to “review current security/threat information”. British Airways, Air France, Cathay Pacific and a number of other airlines have avoided the area since the conflict started, but other airlines have not. Since April, when the conflict started in eastern Ukraine, Singapore Airlines, for example, has flown 75 planes over the same area. Ukraine is a vast country and avoiding its entire air space is costly both in terms of flight time and fuel.

We also know that at least one Malaysian airline pilot refused to fly this route, while the pilot of MH17 is reported to have radioed a message



Buk missiles: but who is friend and who is foe?

saying he “felt uncomfortable” about the route given to him by Ukrainian air traffic control. However, Russian claims that he then decided to change his route without authorisation, with fatal consequence, are hard to believe. Pilots are not in a position to challenge or ignore air traffic controllers’ directives and it is highly unlikely that the pilot flying the Malaysian airliner did so.

The most likely scenario is the one proposed by Dr Igor Sutyagin, a research fellow in Russian studies from the Royal United Services Institute, who believes separatists mistook the passenger flight for a Ukrainian government military transport aircraft.

The crashed plane was a Boeing 777-200ER, and unfortunately for both Boeing and Malaysian Airlines, it is the same model as the flight which disappeared on the Kuala Lumpur-Beijing route in March. However, the plane had no known technical problems - it was last checked six days before the incident.

The missile

The Buk is considered a mid-range surface-to-air missile system that can hit targets at an altitude of up to 23,000 metres. It was designed in the 1970s in the former Soviet Union. The Buk is not hand-held (such weapons have a much shorter range), but a mobile system that is usually installed on vehicles and guided by radar. A plane at 10,000 metres would not be visible to the eye.

The Buk works in this way. The radar identifies a potential target, and on the screen in front of the operator the plane will appear as a dot. While the size of the dot is proportional to the size of the plane, there is no way to identify whether this is a military or passenger plane. The personnel in the land device might share a view on their interpretation of the image or they may have been given sufficient information to identify a particular target. When it

is launched the missile is guided by a radar locked to the target, but later its own radar system takes over. There is another method of delivery, whereby the missile is remotely detonated.

However, both methods would require a level of Russian involvement. The accusations against pro-Russian separatists are based on a report carried in *Jane’s Intelligence Review* of a conversation between Russian military intelligence officers, assumed to be in separatist-held Ukrainian territory, and recorded by the Ukrainian security service, SBU. According to tapes quoted by *Jane’s*, immediately after the incident the separatists sent a team to investigate. They reported “bad news” - the target had been a civilian airliner, not a military aircraft. A Russian officer is heard saying the flight “was probably trying to drop spies”, but, in any case, it “should not have been flying over a war zone”.²

US secretary of state John Kerry claims he has evidence of Russian complicity in the incident, and the US airforce alleges a Buk launcher was moved back into Russian territory soon afterwards.

However, as Peter Hitchens, of all people, reminded us in the *Mail on Sunday*, “Powerful weapons make it all too easy for people to do stupid, frightful things. Wars make such things hugely more likely to happen.” He gives examples of the shooting down of a Korean Airlines 747 by the Soviet airforce, “inflamed by cold war passions and fears”, in September 1983, when 269 people were killed. Then, in July 1988, “highly trained US navy experts aboard the cruiser Vincennes, using ultra-modern equipment, moronically mistook an Iranian Airbus, Iran Air Flight 655, for an F-14 Tomcat warplane.” This resulted in 290 deaths - “all kinds of official untruths were told at the time to excuse this”. Then, in October 2001, Ukrainian servicemen on exercise were “the main suspects

for the destruction of Siberia Airlines Flight 1812 over the Black Sea”.³

By the way, the US government always refused to admit any responsibility for the July 1988 incident, blaming unspecified “Iranian hostile actions”. However, in February 1996, the US agreed to pay Iran \$131.8 million in out-of-court compensation when Tehran took the case to the International Court of Justice.

For all the hype about the delay in handing MH17’s black boxes to investigators in the UK (and

Cameron’s claims that this is in recognition of UK expertise in air accident investigation), it is unlikely that they will have much value. Experts might learn something from the last comments recorded in the cockpit, but in this particular case black boxes are not going to shed much light on the event.

Whatever the definitive truth about the shooting down of MH17, socialists should have nothing to do with western or Russian ruling class manoeuvres in eastern Europe. Sections of the left have openly sided with Russia and some are now among those coming up with the most fantastic conspiracy theories about the downing of the plane, including the idea that it was all an HIV/Aids cover-up - a number of well known HIV scientists were said to be on board, travelling to an Aids conference. Other pro-Russian elements have suggested the incident was actually an attempt on the life of Russian president Vladimir Putin, as his own plane was said to be flying over the same area on the same day (obviously not true). Meanwhile, the pro-separatist website *Russkaya Vesna* even claims some of the passengers were already dead when the plane left Amsterdam! It quotes eye witnesses at the crash site claiming that “a significant number of the bodies weren’t fresh”.⁴

When such idiocies are repeated by the pro-Russian left, they are expressions of a nostalgia for the former Soviet Union - illusions about a phenomenon which remains an *obstacle* to socialism more than two decades after its demise ●

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Notes

1. <http://maidantranslations.com/2014/07/17/source-in-ukrainian-air-traffic-control-crashed-malaysian-airlines-plane-was-shot-down>
2. www.janes.com/article/40908/mh17-mostly-likely-downed-by-russian-backed-separatists
3. www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2698652/PETER-HITCHENS-Mourn-victims-dont-turn-one-tragedy-global-catastrophe.html
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Summer Offensive

Our SO spirit

The Summer Offensive, the annual fundraising drive of the CPGB, has had another good week. £2,302 came in, taking our running total to £9,396.

Just £500 short of the first £10K isn’t bad, since, although we’re halfway through the campaign and we’re aiming for three times that amount, we normally pick up tremendously during the final week of the SO, which coincides with our week-long Communist University. If we can manage the second 10K by the time CU starts, I am confident we will be able to go the whole hog in those final seven days.

Individual contributions this week include no less than £508 from TM - he decided to make good the dues he didn’t pay during a period of unemployment now that he’s working! That’s the spirit, comrade. For his part, MM totted up two separate standing orders - one each to the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB - and threw in a cheque for £100 for good measure: all that came to £215. There were equally

generous sums from SK (£230), YM (£200) and MWL (£180). Finally TM handed over £200 in crisp £20 notes.

Also worth mentioning is the total of £67 that came in to the *Weekly Worker* via PayPal this week. Mostly it was £5 or £10, but the comrades who contributed were among 8,091 who read our paper online during that time. It’s worth reminding comrades that donations intended for the *Weekly Worker* will, of course, be used for that purpose, but during the SO we count it all towards the overall £30,000 target set by our last CPGB members’ aggregate.

So I’m not fussed: send your cash either to the paper or to the party - by cheque, cash, PayPal or bank transfer. Help lift the fight for a united Marxist party and the paper that champions that fight ●

PM

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

SCOTLAND

Exeunt, stage left?

Would an independent Scotland provide a radical impetus for socialism? Chris Gray examines the claims

As readers will know, in the Scottish parliamentary elections of May 2011 the Scottish National Party won a working majority. The UK prime minister, David Cameron, and Scotland's first minister, Alex Salmond of the Scottish National Party, subsequently agreed that a referendum would be held on September 18 2014 to determine whether Scotland should remain part of the UK. How did all this come about?

Political journalist and author David Torrance sees the "turning point in the British general election of October 1974, when the SNP captured 30% of the vote, gaining 11 MPs".¹ In contrast, Chris Bambery - formerly of the Socialist Workers Party and now a leader of the International Socialist Group split from the SWP in Scotland - locates the Thatcher government as marking the period when the decisive change took place:

The Thatcher years were a pivotal moment in the history of Scotland. When she was first elected in 1979, there seemed no possibility of a Scottish parliament being achieved - support for the Scottish National Party had collapsed and the union seemed totally secure. Under Tory rule all changed utterly.

At the 1987 general election, the Tory share of the Scottish vote had fallen to 24% and they had lost 11 MPs, holding just 10 Westminster constituency seats ... The Tories never won a majority in Scotland under Thatcher, and by the time she quit they were facing annihilation.²

He goes on to record: "In the 1997 Westminster general election, the Tories were wiped out north of the border. Because of the proportional representation system they were able to maintain a presence in the forthcoming Holyrood parliament, but only as a fringe party."³ On balance, I think Bambery has it right.

Why, then, does the SNP argue that Scotland requires independence? Alex Salmond states, quite correctly, that Scotland is a nation and therefore has the right to determine its own fate: "... nations have a right to self-determination. [They] usually are better able to govern themselves, as opposed to let somebody else do it for them."⁴ On the same basis Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's deputy first minister, believes Scots have the right to refuse what they see as misgovernment:

I simply do not believe that Scotland should have to put up with long periods of UK government led by a party we did not vote for. It is - surely - democratically indefensible that, although the Tories have never won a majority of votes or seats in Scotland in my entire lifetime - or even come anywhere close - they have nevertheless governed Scotland for more than half my lifetime.⁵

Coupled with this is the assertion that the available powers of devolved government do not adequately compensate for this disadvantage. Salmond argues:

... with devolution, we can create a social wage. But we cannot avoid the anti-social consequences of the UK's austerity measures. With devolution, we can take steps to



Alex Salmond: pro-capitalist to the marrow

mitigate the impact of the UK government's welfare reforms. But only with independence can we create a welfare system which makes work pay without reducing people to penury and despair. With devolution, in many key areas we can only lobby Westminster. With independence, we can deliver for Scotland.⁶

This has a certain plausibility, although it is not entirely clear how being independent could offset UK-generated austerity - especially if, as will surely be demanded, an independent Scotland is forced to take over the burden of the country's proportionate share of UK government debt.

More benign

Resonating with Alex Salmond's broadly 'social democratic' stance we find assertions to the effect that Scottish nationalism is essentially a more benign form than other specimens of that ilk. This idea in fact goes back at least as far as John MacLean (1879-1923), who, concluding that support for socialism was stronger in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, decided to found a Scottish Workers' Republican Party.⁷ Several subsequent Scottish

nationalists, especially those of a leftwing persuasion, have argued that, in effect, Scotland is special. (Actually, the members of every nation are special, but nationalists regard their own nation as more special than any other.) For example, Tommy Sheridan asserts:

"... Scotland ... undoubtedly emerges as red and radical in relation to trade unionism and support for socialist ideas. Such a conclusion does not indicate that individual Scottish citizens are more acutely predisposed to socialist, radical or progressive ideas than English citizens; it is merely that Scotland's size, culture, tradition and working class history fuse to produce a positive environment for such ideas to flourish and, within the new Scottish political system, find positive expression in growing support for radical forces such as the [Scottish Socialist Party], the Greens and the independents."⁸

Chris Bambery argues along similar lines:

Scots are more likely to identify themselves as working class and

to support policies that aim to redistribute wealth from top to bottom. In many ways, that's not different from working people in the north of England, who also do not vote for Tory governments ...

[However,] two-thirds of Scots regard themselves as working class, and the Scottish Election Survey in 2007 found that those who identified as working class saw themselves as more Scottish than the middle class did, reinforcing the politics of class and nation."⁹

Both these authors are following in the footsteps of former Scottish Labour MP Jim Sillars, who eventually ended up in the SNP. He declared:

What is emerging is an active and progressive nationalism, not ugly, not born of a desire to do down anyone else, with a wish to free the energies and attributes of the Scottish people so that they can engage not only on the reconstruction of our own society, but on the problems that keep the vast mass of humanity in a miserable existence."¹⁰

Well, he would say that, no

doubt, wouldn't he, given his own efforts to promote just that sort of 'internationalist nationalism'? But Sillars gave this position his own special twist, arguing that, "As the European Community develops and extends its influence on policy, it is essential that Scotland has a seat at its top table, where issues are considered and policy decisions made."¹¹

Sillars envisages a special role for Scotland in this regard:

We can reinforce the cause of the small nations and the autonomous groups inside Europe and start a movement designed to force the institutions to be more open and receptive, recognising the legitimacy of the decentralist case.

There is a lack of leadership among Europe's small nations. Too often they readily allow the larger units to dictate the agenda and point the direction for future development. I see a leadership role for Scotland within the community, leading the coalition of the small against the large - and winning."¹²

This would be plausible if it were certain that a Scots government would definitely play a leftwing role in reforming the European Union, but it is, alas, far from certain that we shall get this kind of Scottish government.

Sillars' latest literary contribution to the debate - while including some useful additional proposals, such as a land value tax to replace council tax and business rates - does not add substantially to his position.¹³ Running through the argument is an assumption that any rejection of independence will merely entail a repetition of the existing set-up. This is asserted, but nowhere proved. Very likely a call to merely reform the union would not have the necessary purchase, but that is not to say that a focus on European reform might not spark the necessary movement.

'Advantages'

Mick Hume and Derek Owen discuss this kind of approach in detail in their 1988 book,¹⁴ but, before considering what they have to say, let us review some other recent leftwing contributions to the debate.

For example, Colin Fox, writing in the *Morning Star*, asks:

So what are the perceived advantages of independence for working class Scots? The list is a long one. There would be no measures like the hated bedroom tax here after independence, no privatisation of Royal Mail, no more poll tax experimentation, no more blaming immigrants and claimants for an economic crisis caused by City bankers, no more Trident nuclear missiles stationed on the Clyde, no more Scottish soldiers sent to die in Iraq or Afghanistan and above all no more hated Tory governments. Scotland would, according to the latest OECD reports, be the eighth richest country in the world.¹⁵

James Foley and Pete Ramand take a similar line. They very much look forward to Scotland's departure from the UK:

We are excited by the prospect of breaking up Britain. A 'yes' vote would close a dark chapter of

Scottish history, and force all UK nations to confront our colonial past. It would end the fantasy of holding Europe down with nuclear force, rather than diplomacy. And it would weaken, beyond redemption, one of the most reactionary client regimes in world affairs. As internationalists, we welcome these prospects, and wish to persuade others across Britain that Scottish independence is the first step towards changing our unjust society.¹⁶

Readers will appreciate that this passage is long on rhetoric and short on ratiocination: *how* would a Scottish breakaway force us to confront our colonial past? UK Independence Party supporters would certainly continue to ignore the dark side of empire, and why should others be stimulated into questioning it by Scotland's departure? And what is this about holding down Europe by nuclear force as opposed to diplomacy? Don't the various treaties that constitute the European Union enshrine diplomacy as a mode of international social control as much as nuclear weaponry? And why should the most reactionary UK be weakened "beyond redemption" by a Scottish vote for independence? Could not the UK even then reinvent itself? (Admittedly, it would be easier to do this effectively if it was not a kingdom).

No matter. Once we Scots are 'oot o' the door', great progress can be made. Here the lure of the 'Nordic model' (Scandinavian-style social democracy) beckons.¹⁷ It will indeed be possible to go further. Foley and Ramand are enthusiastic about participatory democracy in Brazil:

Porto Alegre in Brazil has run a powerful experiment in participatory budgeting. Since the late 1980s, under the rule of the left-of-centre Workers Party (PT), spending decisions in the city have been made by neighbourhood assemblies. Thousands of citizens, rich and poor, take part in two dozen annual assemblies, where residents debate and vote for funding priorities, and choose representatives who meet weekly to carry out the wishes of the community. They could resolve, for instance, whether to prioritise fixing a road, building a bridge, or setting up a cooperative day care centre ... Similar experiments have been carried out in Venezuela,

Ecuador and India.¹⁸

Foley and Ramand argue for the extension of this principle into private economic enterprises: "Scotland should give workers the legal right to veto management decisions by a simple majority vote, and allow workers to assume control over companies as cooperatives."¹⁹

In fact more can be expected from a progressive Scottish state:

Caroline Lucas MP ... has led calls for a 'green new deal'. This would involve £50 billion government spending on green technology over five years, including building green council housing to stop another round of booming house-price inflation. A 'carbon army' would be trained to insulate homes, which would slash fuel and energy costs for the poorest in society.²⁰

How would such a radical/socialist-inclined Scotland deal with internal and external opposition to this project? Foley and Ramand quite rightly point to the need for "strong capital controls and restrictions on finance".²¹ They believe the example of Cuba shows that the battle to survive as an independent state could be won in these circumstances. Unfortunately, they do not elaborate, beyond assuring us of the necessity to build "broad extra-parliamentary social movements".²² That such movements would be necessary is undeniable, but what are the full lessons of the Cuban experience in this area? We are not instructed as to these.

All this is very appealing, but it is presented as a uniquely Scottish enterprise - indeed a version of 'socialism in one country' ('really existing'). Alas, the authors will probably not succeed in convincing a majority of their compatriots to support them: the likely beneficiaries of a 'yes' vote in the forthcoming referendum will almost certainly be the SNP, and there's the rub.

Rhetoric

The SNP deploys a degree of similar rhetoric to its leftwing rivals - eg, in relation to a new Scottish constitution - but its economic perspectives are doggedly pro-capitalist: this allegiance inevitably limits its ability to deliver what working class people in Scotland want in terms of improved living standards and rights.

Whatever else Alex Salmond might

be, he is undoubtedly a shrewd politician, and such a proclivity encourages a degree of opportunism which we have already seen demonstrated.²³ A notable instance is his continued close relationship with Rupert Murdoch, which seems to have survived the recent *News of the World* phone-hacking revelations. David Torrance reports that "even after the Milly Dowler hacking scandal prompted Murdoch to close down the *News of the World*, Salmond invited [Murdoch] to Bute House for tea, and played down the resulting Leveson inquiry in the first edition of the *Scottish Sun on Sunday*."²⁴

However, it is not so much the company he keeps and speaks up for that fosters mistrust but the proposals for increasing the economic leverage of an independent Scotland within the framework of the EU. A major plank of SNP policy is the proposal to operate an independently set rate of corporation tax, once independence is achieved. Iain Maclean and his co-authors offer useful information on this:

[Corporation tax] produces about 7% of Scottish tax revenue, but the debate has been principally about using it to promote economic growth. The comparison is made with Ireland, which has for many years had low corporation tax, to attract international companies. Much of the tax revenue which accrues to Ireland might otherwise have been collected in other countries. Companies will register their businesses in Ireland, and book profits there, even if associated economic activity is elsewhere. The Microsoft Corporation operates its worldwide business from centres in three low tax jurisdictions - Ireland, Puerto Rico and Singapore. These reduce its effective tax rate to 17.5% ... This tax reduction was entirely legal, and was facilitated by having different corporate tax rates in different countries.

A low rate of corporation tax can encourage companies to set up or relocate and, together with other policies, be used to try to promote economic growth. To take advantage of it, however, all that the company has to relocate is its taxable profit. This is relatively easy to do through accounting devices, so that profit is recognised in the lowest tax jurisdiction in which the company operates. If Scotland were able to set a lower corporation tax rate than the rest of the UK,

companies might be attracted to set up businesses in Scotland. There would also however be a strong incentive for them simply to recognise their profits in a company registered there, even if no economic activity were relocated in Scotland. The net result might be extra tax revenue in Scotland, but not as much as had been lost to the rest of the UK. It was this risk that led the Calman Commission to recommend against devolving corporation tax.²⁵

However, Gavin McCrone suggests an independent Scotland might well ruffle the feathers of other EU countries if it attempted to go down this road.²⁶

The corporation tax issue illustrates the potentially malign effect of an SNP referendum victory, leading to the emergence of yet another state entity within the EU (or outside), and a further move towards the Balkanisation of the continent, as transnational companies play off the various tax-raising regimes and promote a race to the bottom in the interests of profit maximisation, as opposed to welfare. Instead of a plethora of corporation tax rates within the EU, we really need one uniform rate, with the tax paid to a federal government responsible to the EU parliament, which would then be able to use the proceeds for the benefit of the less well advantaged areas and less well off individuals on the continent. But none of this features in the SNP's vision, or in the book by comrades Foley and Ramand, who, in this respect, fall short of the benchmark made earlier by Jim Sillars.

Link arms

Mick Hume and Derek Owen advanced a superior position many years ago: in the course of a historical investigation of Scottish radicalism they correctly stated that "Workers from the militant areas need to mobilise support from more moderate workers elsewhere."²⁷

The conclusion drawn by them was: "Our analysis of Scotland's economic crisis points towards the necessity to challenge British capitalism, and its strongest defender, the British state. To do that effectively, Scottish workers will have to link arms with the working class in England."²⁸ This would involve rejecting the nationalism of the SNP²⁹ and means that a focus on the UK and the EU is required, even if Scots have every right to proclaim themselves independent and to expect the rest of

us to respect such independence should they choose to claim it.

It seems appropriate that another Scottish socialist should have the last word:

The socialist revolution is a global event. As long as it remains isolated, it remains susceptible to counterrevolution, either from without or from within. That is why the international nature of the socialist revolution is a necessity, not a desirable or optional extra. Space has implications for time. 'Socialism in one country' was impossible in Russia; it will not be any more possible in Scotland. It will either have to be joined by revolutions elsewhere in the UK [and further afield - CG] or be crushed by internal or external reaction³⁰ ●

Notes

1. D Torrance *The battle for Britain: Scotland and the independence referendum* London 2013, p188.
2. C Bambery *A people's history of Scotland* London 2014, p270.
3. *Ibid* p291.
4. Quoted by D Torrance *The battle for Britain: Scotland and the independence referendum* London 2013, p185.
5. *Ibid* p190.
6. *Ibid* p160.
7. See C Bambery *A people's history of Scotland* London 2014, p162.
8. Foreword to G Gall *The political economy of Scotland* Cardiff 2005, pxii.
9. C Bambery *A people's history of Scotland* London 2014, p305.
10. J Sillars *Scotland: the case for optimism* Edinburgh 1986, p95. See also p156.
11. *Ibid* p188.
12. *Ibid* p191.
13. J Sillars *In place of fear II: a socialist programme for an independent Scotland* Glasgow 2014.
14. M Hume and D Owen *Is there a Scottish solution?* London 1988, pp39-78.
15. *Morning Star* February 11 2014.
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17. *Ibid* p63.
18. EO Wright *Envisioning real utopias* London 2010, p99.
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21. *Ibid* p107.
22. *Ibid* p108.
23. See *ibid* p75.
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25. I Maclean, J Gallagher and G Lodge *Scotland's choices: the referendum and what happens afterwards* Edinburgh 2013, p81.
26. G McCrone *Scottish independence: weighing up the economics* Edinburgh 2013, pp37-38.
27. M Hume and D Owen *Is there a Scottish solution?* London 1988, p76.
28. *Ibid* p96. See also p125.
29. See *ibid* p102.
30. N Davidson, 'Is there a Scottish road to socialism?', in G Gall (ed) *Is there a Scottish road to socialism?* Glasgow 2007, pp126-27.

Communist University 2014

A week of debate, controversy and comradeship

Saturday August 16

2.00pm Remembering WWI; Parvus and other lefts who supported the slaughter. **Mike Macnair.**
4.45pm Quotas and the struggle for socialism. **Yasmine Mather.**

Sunday August 17

10.00am Animal liberation. **Assoziation Dämmerung.**
2.00pm Kautsky, parliament and referenda. **Ben Lewis.**
4.45pm Communism in the 21st century. **Camilla Power.**

Monday August 18

10.00am The Alliance for Workers' Liberty and social imperialism. **Pat Smith.**
2.00pm Free speech and Left Unity **Jack Conrad.**
4.45pm WWI: Marx and Engels predicted it, but would they have taken sides? **Hillel Ticktin.**

Tuesday August 19

10.00am Being human: what chimpanzees can teach us. **Chris Knight.**
2.00pm Political economy: the falling rate of profit. **Michael Roberts.**
4.45pm WWI: a symptom of capitalist decline. **Hillel Ticktin.**

Wednesday August 20

10.00am 'Leftwing' communism: an infantile disorder? **David Broder.**
2.00pm Scottish referendum: what position should Marxists take? **Sandy McBurney.**
4.45pm Neoliberalism: a busted flush? **Marc Mulholland.**

Thursday August 21

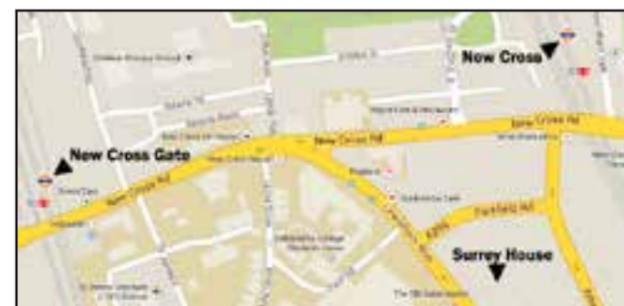
10.00am Can the Labour Party be transformed into a vehicle for socialism? **Stan Keable.**
2.00pm WWI: the successes, failure and significance of the Russian Revolution. **Hillel Ticktin.**
4.45pm After the Arab spring: a further Balkanisation of the Middle East? **Moshe Machover.**

Friday August 22

10.00am Bolsheviks and women: from liberation to prosecution. **Anne McShane.**
2.00pm Robots and artificial intelligence. **Yasmine Mather.**
4.45pm Safe spaces. **Mike Macnair.**

Saturday August 23

10.00am The USSR. **Jack Conrad.**
2.00pm The politics of lying. **Paul Demarty.**
4.45pm Assessment of school



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INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST NETWORK

Not waving, but dying

All the hype has come to nought, says **Daniel Harvey**

The International Socialist Network, which broke away from the Socialist Workers Party in 2013, has been in a process of seemingly terminal decline ever since it came into being. With Richard Seymour at the helm at first, it planned a major regroupment on the left, pulling in Socialist Resistance and the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, and then later the second SWP split, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century. Workers Power was involved too. The ISN also wanted to “reach out” to anarchist groups - Plan C, Solidarity Federation and even the Industrial Workers of the World.

At the time various members claimed that the new organisation could become the biggest on the left, ahead of the SWP. But the eclecticism was dazzling and there was a lot of hype. The near incessant rhetoric about overcoming the deficiencies of the rest of the left groups, only ever referred to as “sects”, whether that was deserved or not, has been constant.

Richard Seymour and the rest of the right wing then peeled off earlier this year over the infamous ‘racist chair’ controversy. In reality, a split was probably inevitable, as the politics of the tendency he represented had lost key decisions within the organisation and was unable to unite the ISN. Since then comrade Seymour has been denied membership of RS21, and basically seems to have left organised politics in pursuit of a media and publishing career.

The ACL, meanwhile, managed to abortively liquidate itself into the ISN (although its Manchester branch refused to go along with this) and now none other than Simon Hardy (ex-Workers Power, ex-ACI) is national secretary. The title sounds quite grand, but the steering committee he heads has little authority to do anything - although less than diplomatic comrades might remark that this hardly matters, because comrade Hardy’s politics are so indecisive anyway.

However, in the latest ISN internal bulletin he has come up with a few pointers as to where he thinks the group should be going.¹ Although his article is supposedly a joint piece with another comrade, Mark Boothroyd, it is all written in the first person. The first subheading is, “What’s the point of the IS Network?” A question many have been asking from the start. Comrade Hardy notes: “The IS Network hasn’t clearly elaborated what its point is.” Quite. He goes on: “Irrespective of what labels are used, the IS Network clearly needs a purpose.” Once again, you cannot help but agree. It needs “a clearly understandable *raison d’être* to mark it out from other left projects; otherwise it’s simply duplicating organisation and work - all tactics and no strategy - which ultimately is a waste of activists’ time and energy”.

None of this is exactly a ringing endorsement of the project in its current state. It is safe to say that if a leader of any other left organisation was making these kinds of statements to their members, we would assume it was pretty close to collapse. Anyhow, comrade Simon (and not forgetting comrade Mark) have got some ideas: “Our task is to rebuild working class organisation, whether in the form of trade unions, community organisations, mutual-aid organisations or campaign groups,” they say. Leaving aside the platitudinous nature of this statement, that sounds like an awful lot of work for such a tiny group to me.

But they do manage to recognise that they cannot do all of that on their own. They need to work in



ISN: for whom the bell tolls

“broader formations” like the People’s Assembly and Left Unity. The latter is marked out as a key site of intervention at present. We agree, but the question has to be, what politics do you fight for in a group like LU? “The IS Network can and should play a key role in cohering the radical and revolutionary left of the party,” says comrade Hardy - after all, “socialism is key”. So should the IS Network support the LU Communist Platform, refound the Socialist Platform or set up an entirely new tendency in Left Unity? We are not told.

That may seem quite bizarre, but the fact is the vast majority of the group want it to remain a loose network of activists, in which everyone can do their own thing. The advice from Kris Stewart may be extreme, but in a way is typical - “embrace the network,” and in that spirit he says “smash the steering committee”.² In view of such anarchistic sentiment, any attempt by anyone to come up with a line of march for the ISN will be just pissing in the wind. But Simon and Mark ultimately collapse back into the default mode of the declining left: seeing as actual politics is divisive and no-one takes it seriously any more, what the ISN really needs to be doing is building campaigns, and working to ensure Left Unity is primarily a campaigning organisation - on austerity, living wage, the bedroom tax ... No sign of “duplicating organisation and work” there.

In reality, what remains of the organisation has been doing no more than taking part in these sorts of ‘grassroots campaigns’ alongside Socialist Resistance and RS21. It is acknowledged in the bulletins by some that prospects for regroupment have mostly collapsed. SR is apparently no longer very interested in merging with the ISN - presumably it has become too mouldy-looking even for

Alan Thornett and co. At the same time, RS21 has coolly rebuffed all the increasingly desperate advances that have been coming out of the ISN.

So there will not be any regroupment this year - and it could be that some of the intended participants in a merged organisation will no longer be around by 2015. Even Workers Power has been looking decidedly sickly of late. Judging by the latest edition, *Workers Power* (dated “summer 2014”) looks like it could be reduced to a quarterly, and the organisation itself has not been very visible lately - even outside Marxism, where it has always had a stall previously.

SWP shadow

So all this leftwing flotsam and jetsam has predictably failed to come together on any kind of firm political basis. But now it could be that a lot of them, at least methodologically, are returning to the mother ship, the SWP. It has been said before in this paper many times, but the SWP splinters never really escaped the political shadow of their parent body. Their politics were basically the same, only with added moralism in relation to feminism and intersectionality, which supposedly are the key to explaining the SWP crisis that followed the attempted cover-up of allegations of rape and sexual harassment directed against ‘comrade Delta’. Now it seems this is taking on much more concrete forms in both the ISN and RS21.

In the former, the ‘leading intellectual’ is now - god help us - comrade Steve Freeman, who only a couple of weeks ago implied in our letters pages that those on the left who do not support a ‘yes’ in the Scottish referendum were colluding with MI5 and the British ruling class to save the union.³ Now he is leading the campaign for the ISN to take up

SWP-style separatism⁴ - the SWP and its splinters north of the border have collapsed wholesale into support for Scottish nationalism. Even some of the relatively more leftwing members, such as Paris Thomson and Javaad Alipoor, have gone along with him.

The same politics are in evidence in RS21. Neil Davidson gives a ringing endorsement of James Foley’s and Pete Ramond’s *Yes: the radical case for Scottish independence* in the *RS21* magazine. Comrade Freeman’s platform in Left Unity is called the Scottish Republic Yes tendency, and in the *ISN Bulletin* he says there is a three-way fight in the referendum between unionists, nationalists and republicans. For their part, Foley and Ramond put forward all sorts of radical proposals to be adopted by an independent Scotland (including a republic), but comrade Davidson asks in his review of their book, “Who’s going to implement them?” But then continues: “I understand why Foley and Ramond have not raised the issue here: to do so before the referendum would be divisive.”⁵ In other words, keep your mouths shut before the vote, comrades, because clearly a separate imperialist, neoliberal Scotland under the leadership of the SNP, which remains in Nato, and retains the pound and the monarchy, is worth maintaining a diplomatic silence for.

On the other hand, some comrades may be aware of the SWP’s latest cynical attempt at a ‘united front’, Stand Up To Ukip (Sutu), which is designed to keep its activists busy and distracted chasing some of the retired colonels in rhubarb and mustard ties around for bit, while the Delta scandal blows over. There seems to be some support for that political approach from Martin Ralph in the *ISN Bulletin*, as well as all over the website of RS21. Except that in both cases there appears to be a marked reluctance to even mention Sutu, presumably because aping the SWP is considered embarrassing. In the case of RS21 it seems almost mendacious, seeing as a whole section of its website is now dedicated to “Ukip Watch”.

Another SWPism that jumps out is Freeman’s insistence in the *ISN Bulletin* that Left Unity should be a “united front of a special type”, to use the phrase of John Rees in reference to Respect. For comrade Freeman the Communist Platform (and the Socialist Platform previously) are/were examples of “ultra-leftism” and “actually a form of economism (liberalism)”. Political illiteracy aside, a glance at either platform exposes this as ridiculous. Nonetheless I am sure some of those around comrade Hardy will tacitly support this position, whilst claiming to “cohere the radical and revolutionary left in the party” - a typical centrist manoeuvre in practice.

But really the political inheritance is given away most obviously in Ian Birchall’s article on Leninism in *RS21*. Birchall’s comments on Lenin himself are fairly generic at best, but he concludes:

That Lenin made the problem of organisation central is undeniable. But to reduce ‘Leninism’ to the truism, ‘We’ve got to get organised’, is a bit thin. And on the question of how we should be organised he was extremely flexible. The whole of Cliff’s study of Lenin is a sustained polemic against the myth of the Leninist party. There is no such thing; Lenin’s party varied

enormously in form according to circumstances.

Comrade Birchall praises Lars Lih, which is now more common on the left, as he “has enriched our understanding of Lenin”, but at the same time in a footnote states in a very Cliffite tone: “In my view, Lih overstates the continuities of Lenin, and does not bring out sufficiently his ability to learn from the class”.⁶

Here you have both sides of the bureaucratic economism of the SWP. On the one hand, we have Cliff’s practice, passed down to the succeeding generations, of undemocratic leadership, precisely justified on the basis of tactical flexibility, making hair-pin turns to keep up with ‘the flow of the class struggle’. This is what sent activists rushing from one hare-brained scheme to the next over the years, causing so many to eventually give up on politics altogether. But, on the other hand, you have the self-serving justification for this, supposedly ‘learning from the class’. But who interprets what the class wants? It was always Cliff, and then Harman, Rees, Callinicos, etc after him.

Even the most basic and cursory reading of Lenin, especially in *What is to be done?* (which Lars Lih discusses so brilliantly in his *magnum opus*, *Lenin rediscovered*), will show that this is utterly contrary to what he was advocating when polemicising against the backward, trade union-type consciousness of the Russian revolutionary left. Following the spontaneous actions of the class, rather than offering inspiring political leadership, was the opposite of what Lenin stood for.

But, using this method, you can justify almost everything. The ISN’s collapse into horizontalism and anti-partyism is all justified in the same broad terms of listening and learning, and living in ‘new times’, in the same way as the Eurocommunists led ‘official communism’ toward liquidationism in the 1980s. The result is always the same: more dead groups, more demoralisation, and more shrinkage of the organised left.

And it looks fairly safe to assume the IS Network is not long for this world. For its part, RS21 has kept a moderate level of organisation, so it may limp on a bit longer, but the comrades might as well rejoin the SWP before they collapse into political irrelevance themselves.

The fight for a positive Marxist programme cannot be bypassed. No amount of living wage campaigns, anti-Ukip protests or anti-austerity demonstrations can substitute for this. At the same time, fighting for Marxist politics means fighting for it inside existing ‘united fronts’, not creating such fronts yourself in order to tail people to your right.

Left Unity is not a united front, simply because it involves no *section* of the working class, but it does provide a site for that fight for Marxism. Those who agree with this perspective should join the Communist Platform forthwith ●

Notes

1. ‘Perspective for the IS Network’ *Summer Bulletin* No2.
2. ‘Thoughts on where the IS Network should be going’ *Summer Bulletin* No1.
3. *Letters Weekly Worker* July 10.
4. ‘Revolutionary Marxism and Left Unity’ *Summer Bulletin* No2.
5. ‘Yes, the radical case for independence’ *RS21* summer 2014.
6. I Birchall, ‘Lenin yes! Leninism no?’ *RS21* summer 2014.

TORIES

Cameron shuffles to the right

The Tory reshuffle sees David Cameron shoring up his right flank in the run-up to the 2015 general election, writes **Paul Demarty**

It is increasingly plain that we are in election season.

Labour is humming and hawing, unenthusiastically, about state railway franchises (how remarkable it is that the most bungled, obviously counterproductive privatisation in history should attract only such mild tinkering proposals from an opposition party - but still).

The Liberal Democrats are finding reasons to distance themselves from the Tories: Nick Clegg has suddenly noticed that the bedroom tax (not even Eric Pickles can bring himself to call it the 'spare room subsidy' any more) is resulting in people being unable to pay the rent. How's that for a surprise? Better still, Vince Cable has given up trying to sell off the student loan book, causing all kinds of chaos, although it is unknown whether there exists a capitalist stupid enough to buy a cache of debts that are singularly unlikely, in a time of plummeting graduate salaries and broad unemployment, ever to be repaid in full.

As for the Tories, they have made their intentions clear with their recent reshuffle. Make no mistake - the current cabinet, or at least its Tory component, is a war cabinet, designed for the run-in to next spring. Lynton Crosby, David Cameron's rottweiler polling guru, has his fingerprints all over it - and, while various scores are being settled, the general drift is to the right.

Euro-sceptic sops

Indeed, the essence of what is going on can be summarised in two names - Kenneth Clarke and Philip Hammond. Clarke, until last week, was by far the longest serving Tory frontbencher; in this parliament, he has served as minister of justice and recently without portfolio, as a high-level trade envoy.

He is now returning to the backbenches - apparently voluntarily, although we may presume that such moves are only voluntary up to a point. He does not fit the bill - economically a Thatcherite ultra, he nonetheless made unforgivable attacks on the efficacy of prison as justice minister, and - worst of all - is a copper-bottomed EU enthusiast (by Tory standards, at any rate). As somebody with highly lucrative commercial interests, he no doubt grasps fully what a British exit would mean.

Elsewhere, Philip Hammond has claimed the foreign office from William Hague, a step up from defence. He is a man whose Euro-scepticism has not always been quietened by collective cabinet responsibility - last year, he was happy to echo the words of Michael Gove (of whom more anon) to the effect that if there was an in-out

referendum on EU membership today on the basis of current treaty obligations, he would vote to leave. He was on more diplomatic form upon his promotion - "I don't think the way to enter a negotiation is to start issuing threats," he told the BBC. His refusal to disown his earlier remarks, however, can still be seen as a warning shot in the vague general direction of Brussels and Berlin.

Not that it will matter. If he remains in post after a hypothetical Tory victory next year, eyebrows will certainly be raised, and there are whispers of an already-planned job swap between himself and chancellor George Osborne in that case. This is a propaganda exercise - a modest sweet nothing for Tory voters switching to, or flirting with the UK Independence Party.

The other notable feature of the new arrivals is, precisely, their novelty. Of the four new cabinet ministers, two (Liz Truss and Nicky Morgan) won their seats at the last election; one (Stephen Crabb) in 2005; and the relatively seasoned Michael Fallon came in during 1997. On the way out, we have mentioned the veteran Clarke; William Hague has been demoted to leader of the house; and this is the first cabinet not to include a member of the Lords with a full ministerial portfolio for some time.

It is the triumph of innocence over experience - exactly the sort of cabinet an embattled party leader wants as he goes into an election fight. **R e l i a b l e
p e o p l e ;
p e o p l e w h o**

owe you their job; people unlikely to cause trouble.

Gove demoted

And so to the big loser of the reshuffle - erstwhile education secretary Michael Gove. We must, at the outset, scotch one particular egregious stupidity that is being put about - that somehow, Gove's departure is a success for the left. John Rees took immediately to Facebook to proclaim the demotion "a victory for social movement trade unionism", in a ridiculous statement later to appear on Counterfire's website:

It shows that a political campaign combining protest, street action, petitioning, marches and strikes can unseat the heir apparent of the Tory right. It's a vindication of the strategy for which the People's Assembly and the NUT and other unions have been arguing. No doubt NUT membership will increase as a result and, as everyone can see the confidence of activists in the movement has just risen a step or two.¹

One encounters, as a *Weekly Worker* journalist, all manner of wilful self-deception and implausible claiming of credit for wider events coming from leftwing quarters. We have to say that this one really takes the cake. No, John, the People's Assembly had nothing to do with it - nor did the National Union of Teachers. Can anyone seriously imagine that a 15,000-strong march - if we're being generous - which garnered almost zero media coverage, coupled with routine one-day walkouts from teachers, sufficiently put a scare into Cameron and Osborne that they ditched a cabinet minister over it? If it had, the pair have no business leading a Tory government; and, indeed, their government would have capsized years ago, in far choppier waters than it sails now.

Far from being defeated by his opponents, Gove is, in several ways, a victim of his own success. There is the matter of him rising to become, as Rees says, the "heir apparent of the Tory right" - a status he enjoys thanks to having been able to maintain an independent profile. This is partly a matter of his genuinely being a serious political figure in a cabinet jam-packed with cronies; and partly due to his former career at *The Times*, thanks to which he enjoys many media contacts and favourable press coverage.

He has also been staggeringly successful at pushing through his core agenda, of privatising schools and making them more amenable to reactionary, anti-secular education. Comprehensives have become academies one after another; correspondingly, pay and conditions for teachers have stagnated at best.

The corollary of that agenda was decimating local education authorities; which led ultimately to the 'Trojan Horse' farce, whereby a supposed plot was uncovered among Birmingham-based Islamists to take over schools. We remain unconvinced that this plot actually exists; but it nonetheless revealed that schools in the Gove era are prone to chaos and can be engulfed, at least, by petty grudges.

A public spat between Gove and home secretary Theresa May followed, concerning who was at fault for 'extremism' taking over British schools, which presented Cameron and his clique with a choice.

B o t h

Gove and May were touted as potential successors to Cameron, so demoting either would have made cynical sense.

Gove was directly in the frame at least partly because the Trojan Horse business was plainly a result of his agenda, not of home office 'softness' on Islamic extremism. Also, however, there was advice from Lynton Crosby: while previous education secretaries have been pretty uniformly hated by teachers, Gove - thanks, again, to his *success* - has managed to alienate broad swathes of the electorate with school-age children. He was no longer anybody's idea of an asset. So he was demoted.

His replacement, Nicky Morgan, is hardly an improvement. She is a more-or-less loyal Cameroon, a hack, and a rightwing one at that - in a rare act of rebellion, she voted against Cameron's gay marriage bill, citing the feelings of her constituents as a reason (as political cowards invariably do). Her promotion, like many of the others, is about patronage: the multiplication of yes-persons in the cabinet. We feel, oddly, that we will come to miss Gove, the Gramsci-quoting orphan Tory boy, someone who looks like his own *Spitting image* puppet. The Tory agenda of privatising and hammering education will continue regardless - just driven by a Westminster clone from here on in.

Looking forward

Will all this work? The immediate signs are not positive for Cameron: poll ratings have dipped, perhaps because - while the general drift is to the right - the high-profile scalps of Gove and environment secretary Owen Paterson (an appellation as ridiculous, perhaps, as 'peace envoy Adolf Hitler') have irked a lot of backbench grumblers and hysterical newspaper columnists.

It may yet pay off, as the campaign heats up - no doubt Crosby has dirty jobs in mind for the new faces, and plenty of tricks up his sleeve. No governing party has increased its majority at an election in post-war history; but nor has any been unseated by an opposition with mid-term poll ratings as lukewarm as Labour's. A grubby, dispiriting campaign looms for all bourgeois parties. The left, as ever, will be nowhere ●

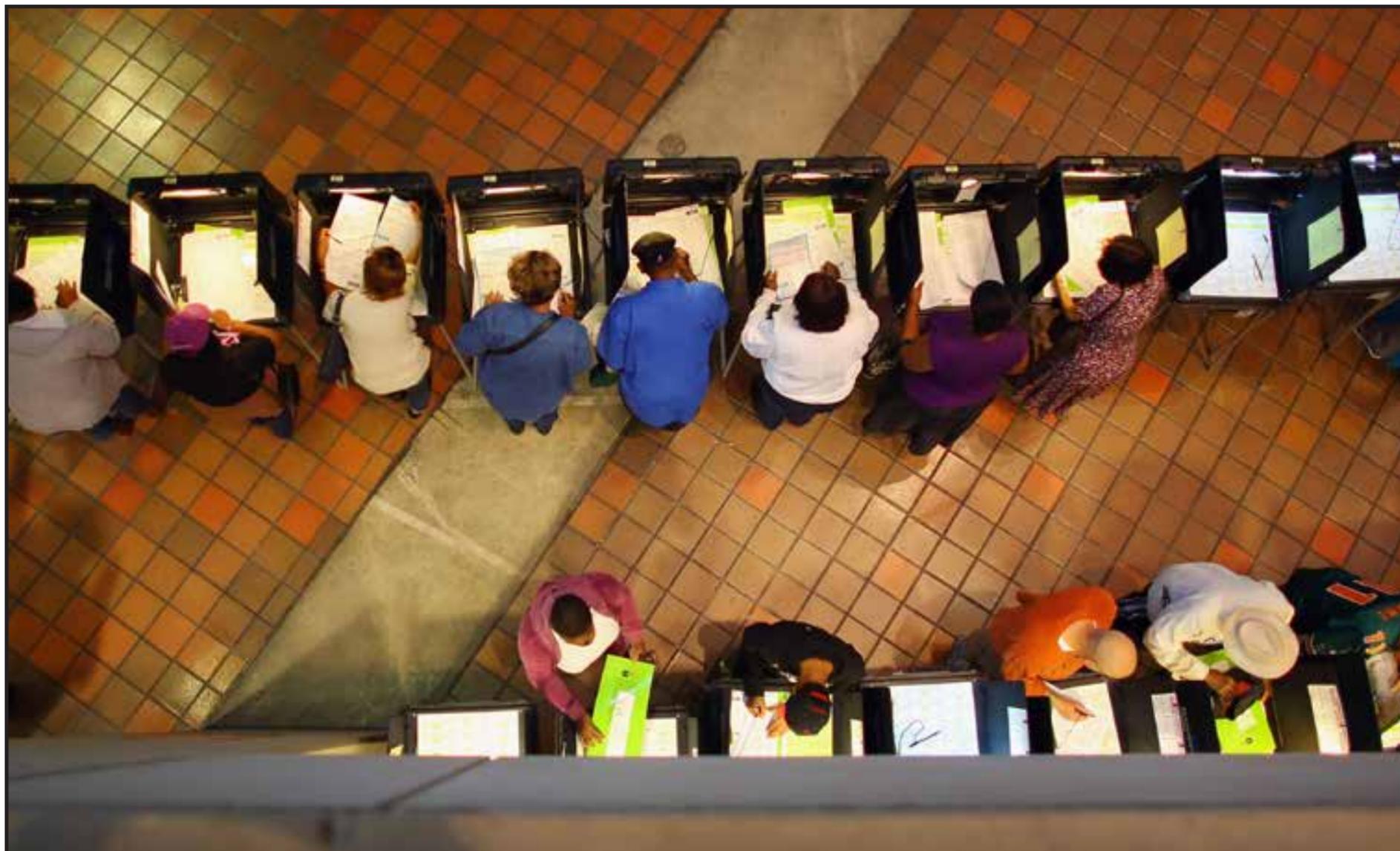
paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.counterfire.org/articles/opinion/17321-gove-s-last-lesson.



Michael Gove: his fall was not due to the left

REVIEW**Voting: can be made into a powerful weapon**

The Bolsheviks' success and the 'revolutionary' fear of electoralism

August A Nimtz **Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905: the ballot, the streets - or both** Palgrave Macmillan 2014, pp241, £62.50

August A Nimtz **Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October revolution of 1917: the ballot, the streets - or both** Palgrave Macmillan 2014, pp296, £62.50

Left Unity's self-identified 'revolutionaries' are concerned that the party may fall a victim to 'electoralism'. Thus Simon Hardy (formerly of Workers Power and then the Anti-Capitalist Initiative) argued in May 2013:

Left Unity must avoid this fate by focussing most of its energy and activist time on actual resistance to the cuts, to neoliberalism and the austerity offensive. The first time people come across Left Unity members should be on the picket line, the protest and direct action campaigns, not door knocking for an election ... If we do well in the campaigns, if we make a name for ourselves as serious and dedicated activists supporting every strike and building every protest, then and only then can we build the credibility we need to turn that support into votes. In other words, the elections are a secondary area of work that flows from our general activism.¹

Ellen Bates of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty argued following the November 2013 founding

conference: "Some local groups are building healthy local campaigns and unity initiatives. They will need to assert themselves to prevent what looks like a probable rightward and electoralist drift by Left Unity."²

Mark B and Simon H (him again) in the 'Perspectives document' in the *International Socialist Network Bulletin* No2 (summer 2014) argue: "We have to resist any attempts to pull LU onto a trajectory of electoralism."³

A supporter of last year's Socialist Platform in LU, John Tummon, writes this week on the LU site:

I must admit I am a reluctant participant in electoral work and regard it as a subsidiary activity, at best, to be considered tactically and never as a strategy; I have worried about the electoralism that seemed implicit in Left Unity at its inception, but joined because it was not yet clearly the point of the party. That is still the case, but if it does become formally regarded as the most important activity of the organisation, I will leave LU at that point.⁴

This idea is frankly silly. A comment under the name of 'Redshift' on Simon Hardy's article on the Left Unity site knocked at least one nail on the head: "I'm sorry, but the whole 'electoralism is bad' argument is daft and is part of the reason the far left struggle. You end up failing to understand how you effectively communicate with normal, depoliticised people ..."⁵

If the two volumes of August A Nimtz's study of Lenin's electoral policy - and its roots in the electoral policy of Marx and Engels - were on sale at a price affordable by activists, they might be a very useful corrective to this silly idea which appears common among the self-identified 'revolutionaries' - or at least those who come out of the Socialist Workers Party or groups (like Workers Power or the AWL) which passed through the SWP and are committed to the dogma of 'socialism from below'.

But then again, it might not: many of these ex-'Leninist' 'revolutionaries' have reacted against the miniature Stalinism of the SWP and similar groups they have left, toward an illusory 'horizontalism', which is at the end of the day no more than a variant of anarchism. Hence, showing that

Lenin always took electoral and parliamentary work seriously as an important priority of Bolshevism - even when it was conducted under extreme difficulties of illegality and anti-democratic electoral structures - might cut no ice with them. Maybe even Nimtz's demonstration, in chapter 1 of his first volume, of *Marx's and Engels'* attention to electoral and parliamentary politics would not persuade our ex-Trotskyist, born-again neo-Bakuninists to abandon their 'programmatic flexibility, tactical intransigence'.

Nimtz's overall argument is summarised in the preface: the book in its two volumes "makes four arguments":

The first is that no-one did more to utilise the electoral and parliamentary arenas for revolutionary ends than Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov - Lenin. The second is that Lenin's position on the 'streets' versus the 'ballot box' - no it wasn't either/or - was squarely rooted in the politics of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Third, the historic split in international Marxism between communism

and social democracy was long in place before the guns of August 1914 exploded, owing in large part to two very different conceptions of how Marxists should comport themselves in the electoral/parliamentary arenas - with Lenin on one side and what would become 20th-century social democracy on the other side. The last claim is that the head-start programme the founders of the modern communist movement gave Lenin on electoral politics goes a long way toward explaining why the Bolsheviks, rather than any other political current, were hegemonic in October 1917 (pviii).

This argument is developed through chronological chapters. In volume 1, chapter 1 is on 'What Marx and Engels bequeathed', chapter 2 on 'Revolutionary continuity: Lenin's politics prior to 1905', chapter 3 on 1905 and the first duma of 1906, and chapter 4 on the second duma of 1907. Three appendixes contain some relevant documents from the Marx-Engels *Collected works* and Lenin's *Collected works*, and the volume

What we fight for

concludes with 'A critical review of the relevant literature'. Volume 2 has three substantive chapters: 'Legal and illegal work: the third duma' (1907-12); "To prepare for a new Russian revolution": the fourth duma' (1912-14); and 'The "Great War", 1917 and beyond'; and a conclusion. Then there are seven appendices, mostly from Lenin's *Collected works* - the last (appendix I) is on the 1920 theses of the second Congress of the Comintern on *The communist parties and parliamentarism*; and, finally, 'A critical review of the relevant literature'.

Essential key

Nimtz certainly successfully shows just how much careful attention Lenin devoted to elections, electoral tactics and advice to the 'labour' representatives in the dumas (even going beyond social democrats in advising 'labour' representatives in a broader sense).

He is also clearly and unambiguously right that the Bolsheviks' attention to electoral and parliamentary issues, their electoral success in 1912 and the conduct of their elected representatives down to their sedition trial in early 1915 are an essential key to understanding the strength of the Bolsheviks in 1917. It cannot be repeated too many times: Bolshevism in 1917 was *not* a far-left groupuscule which 'made it big' under revolutionary conditions. It was a faction-party with *majority* support in the Russian urban working class (itself, admittedly, a minority in the peasant-dominated society), which was temporarily knocked back by repression in 1914-16 - but even so had 20,000 or more members in February 1917, a high figure after two and a half years of acute repression.

Nimtz also plausibly argues that in 1917 - that is, between February and the constituent assembly elections in November - a substantial part of the Bolsheviks' political work consisted of election campaigning (for the soviets; for municipal councils, and so on) and that Lenin's 'thermometer' for the ripeness of the situation for a second revolution was - precisely - election results. (Not, on the other hand, numbers on street demonstrations - a test which would have led the Bolsheviks to wreck themselves in the July days by failing to hold the Petrograd masses back for the provinces to keep up; or days of strike action, which declined somewhat after July.)

Other aspects of the argument are somewhat less persuasive. Nimtz's framing narrative is, broadly, that of the US Socialist Workers Party, which broke in the 1980s from 'orthodox' Trotskyism in the direction of left 'official communism' (with a 'Cuban' twist to it). This is obtrusive in the treatment of Marx and Engels in volume 1, chapter 1, as well as in chapter 2: 'Revolutionary continuity: Lenin's politics prior to 1905' ('revolutionary continuity' is a slippery concept and all too often the legitimating idea of a sect); and in the account of 1917 in volume 2, chapter 3. For an example from the latter, the dissolution of the constituent assembly is explained by preference in principle for soviet government; Trotsky and others at the time explained it as the result of the old party lists used, resulting in the Right SRs being overrepresented and the Left SRs underrepresented, so that the constituent assembly was unrepresentative on its own electoral terms. Trotsky's account better explains why the dissolution passed off without serious mass opposition, only becoming a 'scandal' *within Russia* after the treaty of Brest-

Litovsk destroyed the majority which made the October revolution.

For the first two chapters, the problems are twofold. The first is the schematic focus on the issue of 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. This is understandable, given the role of 1848 in Marx's and Engels' thought, and Nimtz's aim of focusing on continuity between Marx and Engels and Lenin. But it is far from exhausting Marx's and Engels' comments on electoral matters: even my own very superficial look at the issue in this paper in 2011 covers ground not touched upon by Nimtz's account.⁶

The second problem, equally one of schematism and 'orthodoxy', is that Nimtz digs up all the usual 'official communist' and Trotskyist proof-texts for Marx's and Engels' criticisms of the German socialists, leaving out, naturally enough, positive comments, and 'flattens' the political differences between the Social Democratic Party of Germany's (SPD) coalitionist right wing - who really *were* what would become 20th-century social democracy after 1914 - and its various lefts (very notably, August Bebel). Lenin's point, which Lars T Lih has emphasised, that Karl Kautsky after 1914 *broke with what he had previously written*, is submerged in the 'manifest destiny' of the SPD to become a reformist party, while Lenin is 'saved' from this fate by his reliance on an inheritance, beginning in his earliest thought, from Marx and Engels.

It is particularly unfortunate that Nimtz's two volumes are so expensive, because, while the study would be (potentially) seriously useful to far-left readers, the volumes are priced as books aimed at university libraries; and it is not obvious that this is a significant contribution to the *academic* literature on the history of Bolshevism, in spite of the fact that the two 'critical reviews' of the relevant literature are largely addressed to differences with academic 'Leninologists'.

Nimtz relies entirely on the Marx-Engels *Collected works* and Lenin's *Collected works*, and other Anglophone sources and literature. On this basis it is certainly possible to criticise certain far-left orthodoxies, and some of the cruder versions of the academic 'Lenin led to Stalin' narrative of Lenin, the 'elitist' (and so on). But the 'Mega 2' second edition of Marx's and Engels' complete works in German certainly adds to available information on their political activities and correspondence (as well as being the notorious result of 'decompiling' Engels' editions of *Capital* Vols 2 and 3), as can be seen in Jonathan Sperber's (non-Marxist) *Karl Marx: a 19th century life*.⁷

On Russian language sources the problem is more severe, since much has become available since the fall of Stalinism which was either unavailable or merely practically inaccessible. Lars T Lih's work in *Lenin rediscovered* and since⁸ demonstrates the importance of Russian-language materials for understanding the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and its Bolshevik faction, and placing the particular arguments found in Lenin's *Collected works* in context; this leaves aside the issue of the Stalinist editorial spin of the editors of the *Collected works* and things left out.

The problem of German-language texts is posed again by Nimtz's argument - elaborated in his 2009 critique of Lih⁹ and present in the structure of *Lenin's electoral strategy* - that Lenin took his ideas on electoral policy directly from Marx and Engels, and was therefore

able to 'see the weaknesses' in the SPD, which led in due course to August 1914. This argument rests on a standard 'cold war' narrative of the history of the SPD, in the 'official communist' or Trotskyist variant. There is (relatively recent) Anglophone literature which calls this narrative into question, and in a certain sense the fact that a serious opposition developed to the wartime right, and that the German Communist Party (KPD) was able to win a large part of the 'independents' in 1920, is evidence against the 'cold war' narrative; but it is perhaps easier to see how much it misses out if the German-language primary sources (like the articles in the *Neue Zeit* or the stenographic *Protokolle* of the SPD's party congresses) are consulted.

Political action

To return, again, to the weaknesses of volume 1, chapter 1 - and with this to the problem of the LU 'revolutionaries'. Karl Marx wrote a letter to Friedrich Bolte in New York in November 1871 explaining criticisms of the Proudhonist, Lassallean and Bakuninist opponents of working class political action (which Nimtz, as far as I can see, does not cite). At the end of the letter, he wrote:

NB as to political movement: The political movement of the working class has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class, and for this it is naturally necessary that a previous organisation of the working class, itself arising from their economic struggles, should have been developed up to a certain point.

On the other hand, however, every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc, is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force an eight-hour day, etc, law is a political movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement - that is to say, a movement of the class - with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion. If these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are themselves equally a means of the development of this organisation.

Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power - ie, the political power of the ruling classes - it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against and a hostile attitude towards the policy of the ruling classes. Otherwise it will remain a plaything in their hands, as the September revolution in France showed, and as is also proved up to a certain point by the game messrs Gladstone and co are bringing off in England even up to the present time.¹⁰

My point is that this argument of Marx's for working class political action - parties, election campaigns and parliamentary action where possible - is by no means either merely connected with the idea of

'bourgeois democratic revolution' (in which case "the game messrs Gladstone and co are bringing off in England" would be irrelevant), nor merely as a thermometer of the state of class-consciousness. It is about the working class constituting itself as an independent political actor. It is an absolutely fundamental point, which is also fundamental to Lenin's arguments (in *What is to be done?* and elsewhere).

To get beyond capitalism, the working class has to *rule* the society and address all its problems: to play the central coordinating role that the capitalist class (especially its financial sector) and its hired governments play under capitalism. In order to reach the point of challenging for power, the working class needs to *learn to rule*. And it can only do this by thinking *beyond* the immediate concerns which may impel people to strike or demonstrate, and by *challenging* capitalist leadership where it is possible to do this. Elections and parliaments are one of the places where such a challenge is possible and where a "political movement - that is to say, a movement of the class - with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion", is possible.

Electoral activity is not easy in a world where most political communication is swamped by advertising. But it is completely indispensable to any struggle for working class power and socialism. Our ex-Trotskyist, born-again neo-Bakuninists would not make Left Unity more revolutionary by counterposing 'activism' to 'electoralism'. They merely make the activists a "plaything in [the] hands" of bourgeois professional politicians: in the present case, anti-austerity campaigning without politics leads merely to the inexorable conclusion: vote Miliband to get rid of Cameron ●

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Notes

1. <http://leftunity.org/left-unity-class-struggle-resistance-and-elections>.
2. 'Future unclear for Left Unity': www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/12/03/future-unclear-left-unity.
3. Available at <http://internationalistnetwork.org/index.php/downloads/467-is-network-bulletin-2>.
4. 'Take democracy back!': <http://leftunity.org/take-democracy-back>, July 21 2014.
5. For the benefit of potential dismissive responses to my use of this quote: the *Weekly Worker* is *deliberately* addressed to the existing left, not to broad masses. The problem with the 'agitational' writing of the 'activism, activism' people is that they do not understand the difference, and as a result address *the left* (readers of their papers) with liberal-outrage banalities, and the broad masses of 'ordinary people' with too many standard leftwing assumptions about what they will believe.
6. 'Principles to shape tactics' *Weekly Worker* April 20 2011.
7. Mega 2: see www.iisg.nl/imes. Sperber: New York 2013. Decompiling *Capital* Vols 2 and 3: see, for example, E Dussel *Towards an unknown Marx: a commentary on the manuscripts of 1861-63* London 2001. The problem does not seem to be that Nimtz does not read German (he cites Kautsky's *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie* Dietz 1893 (p73 and note 75, albeit following a citation in Lenin, and without - as can be seen there and at p56 - a clear idea of Kautsky's arguments). Nor is he unaware of Mega 2, which he cites too in his *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America: the 'absolute democracy' or 'defiled republic'* (Lanham 2003); for instance, chapter 1, note 31. The point of using *MECW* is presumably to facilitate access to his sources by his readers.
8. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered* (Leiden 2005) and more recent articles, including several in this paper. I do not mean by 'and since' to play down the significance of Lih's *earlier* work on Soviet politics; we are concerned *here* with the issue of understanding the politics of Bolshevism *before* and *down* to the revolution.
9. 'A return to Lenin - but without Marx and Engels?' *Science and Society* No73, 2009, pp452-73.
10. www.marxists.org.uk/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_11_23.htm.

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

weekly worker

**Socialism is
working class rule,
not nationalisation**

National socialist illusions

Labour's plans for the part-nationalisation of the rail network have caused confusion over at the *Morning Star*, writes Peter Manson

There was not a little hype following the Labour Party's three-day national policy forum in Milton Keynes last week.

The NPF had apparently decided upon a "a fundamental rethinking of the basic assumptions around which social democracy has been built for 30 years", according to Jon Cruddas, head of Labour's policy review. In fact he described the forum as "a turning point in the history of the Labour Party", no less.

So what were these monumental decisions that will obviously impact on government policy if Labour wins next year's general election? After all, the 200-strong NPF considered thousands of policy proposals and amendments in those three days - a supposedly much better form of 'democracy' than old-fashioned votes at annual conference. Judging by Cruddas's comments, some of them must have been really radical.

For example, if elected, Labour will scrupulously abide by Conservative-Liberal Democrat plans for current spending, although it *may* amend details of the coalition's capital spending projects. In other words, the age of austerity looks set to continue, despite a move by a tiny minority of delegates to abandon the current trajectory through an emergency post-election budget. Only 14 voted in favour, while 125 solemnly upheld the leadership plans to change nothing.

You see, "this Conservative-led government's failure to balance the books in this parliament means we will have to make difficult decisions after the next election", in the words of shadow chancellor Ed Balls. Yes, it must be very "difficult" to change nothing - and then claim you are rewriting history. And Balls has clearly picked up on the coalition style - blame it all on the mess left behind by the last lot.

However, it would be wrong to infer from this that Labour's policies are identical to those of the coalition parties. Ed Miliband's plan is, on the one hand, to emphasise for the sake of the rightwing media and the 'middle ground' that his party is totally trustworthy and responsible. On the other hand, he aims to appeal to Labour's traditional working class constituency through minor changes, such as taking powers to limit gas and electricity prices and, as confirmed by the NPF, to partly renationalise the rail network.

By 'partly' I mean that Labour will set up a publicly owned rail operator to compete against private franchises on a "level playing field". In other words, a state-capitalist firm that will bid to run parts of the fragmented network. A token nod in the direction of the left, within the parameters of 'responsible government' - it will not even increase current-account spending.

Betrayal?

So you might think that those on the left - not least the 'official communists' of the *Morning Star* - would condemn these plans as a cowardly attempt to avoid simply renationalising the entire rail network.



Illusions in the 'golden age' of British Rail

In fact the *Star* seemed to get its lines crossed in its coverage - with two diametrically opposed positions featuring in its coverage of the NPF in the same issue! Journalist Conrad Landin, who wrote the front-page story, seemed to view the outcome on rail policy as entirely positive, since he began his article: "Transport campaigners hailed the 'beginning of the end' for rail franchising yesterday after winning major concessions at Labour's national policy forum" (July 21).

The "major concessions" - an unattributed phrase that appears twice in the article - seemed to amount to the commitment, in Miliband's words, to "end the presumption against the public sector", to conduct a "review" of the franchise system and to possibly remove fare-setting powers from individual companies. Comrade Landin quoted Manuel Cortes, general secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, who rather optimistically declared that any "objective review of franchising will lead to the public train operator taking on lines as franchises expire". Brother Cortes concluded: "Make no mistake: franchising has been given its last rites."

However, tucked away near the end of the story, which continued on an inside page, was the opinion of Mick Cash, acting general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. The RMT is, of course, the major

rail union, which dwarfs the TSSA, but, since it is no longer affiliated to Labour, it was not represented at the NPF - leaving the negotiations on the rail matters to the likes of Cortes. Brother Cash had a rather different take compared to the TSSA (and compared to comrade Landin, obviously). He was quoted as saying: "We're crystal-clear - we need full, immediate nationalisation. Anything short of this is a cop-out."

And the *Star*'s leader-writer clearly agreed with brother Cash: "Trade union representatives who allowed themselves to be browbeaten into accepting the dog's breakfast approved by the policy forum may well believe that it marks the 'beginning of the end' for rail franchising. But they should ask themselves why, if that is the case, the party leadership didn't simply propose an end to the franchising system."

The editorial continues: "Allowing public-sector bodies to bid against the privateers is no solution." Indeed, "The system is rotten. It has failed and the only thing to do is to get rid of it." Those like Cortes (and, presumably, Landin) are guilty of "wishful thinking" and "the battle for a publicly owned rail network must continue".

Interestingly, the *Star*'s 'official communist', national socialist line on 'public ownership' had featured in another editorial on the rail network at the beginning of the month. This editorial, which was entitled 'State-owned - just not by us', was commenting

on the running of the railways under the coalition. The government wants to sideline the state-owned Directly Operated Railways, established by the previous Labour government, which "has made such a success of running the East Coast mainline". Meanwhile, the rest of the network is in the hands of 'undesirables' and this process is continuing (July 5).

For example, "On July 4 the franchise for the Docklands Light Railway in London was awarded to the French company, Keolis, which already has an interest in four other franchises in Britain." However, Keolis is not a simple, straightforward example of 'private enterprise': "The irony is that the majority shareholding in Keolis is held by SNCF, the French state-owned rail corporation." (Commenting on this in an article two weeks later, Mick Cash claimed that awarding the franchise to Keolis will mean that "fares in London will subsidise fares in Paris" - *Morning Star* July 19-20).

The editorial also pointed out that "three other rail passenger franchises in Britain are currently operated solely or jointly by Abellio, the international arm of the state-owned near-monopoly, Dutch Railways, while most of our rail freight is now carried by DB Schenker, a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, which is owned by the German government".

So 'we' allow "our" rail freight to

be run by foreigners. What is more, the same applies to "our railway network" as a whole: "In other words, substantial parts of our railway network are already back in some form of public ownership - except that it's French, Dutch or German, while British public ownership is squeezed out."

Socialistic?

From all this, one can conclude the following: state ownership *per se* is a 'good thing' - provided, of course, the state in question controls and administers the territory where its companies operate. So it is highly desirable for, say, the German state to run even *part* of an industry at home (the whole lot would be far better, of course), but, once state-owned companies spread their tentacles abroad, that suddenly becomes totally undesirable.

What we are talking about in connection to the rail industry is actually state-owned *capitalist* companies that compete with each other and with private firms. Why should it be regarded as more acceptable if they only do so within a particular national territory?

The whole discussion exposes the national socialist illusion for what it is. Nationalisation, or 'public ownership', is not inherently progressive, let alone socialistic. In the past it has routinely been used all over the world to *strengthen* overall capitalist control. In fact, we in the CPGB contend: "From the point of view of world revolution, programmes for wholesale nationalisation are today objectively reactionary", since they aim to break up transnational operations into unworkable national units.¹

Yes, amongst our immediate demands - ie, those we make here and now, under capitalism - are calls for the nationalisation of, among other things, "basic infrastructure", which obviously includes the rail network. But such calls are made to further working class interests under the current order, not because we believe them to be a step towards socialism.

Socialism is the *political rule* of the working class - the transition to the classless, moneyless, *stateless*, society known as communism ●

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Notes

1. Section 3.7, CPGB Draft programme: www.cpgb.org.uk/home/about-the-cpgb/draft-programme/3.-immediate-demands.

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