

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



Capital: the agony and the ecstasy. Michael Roberts warns of another slump

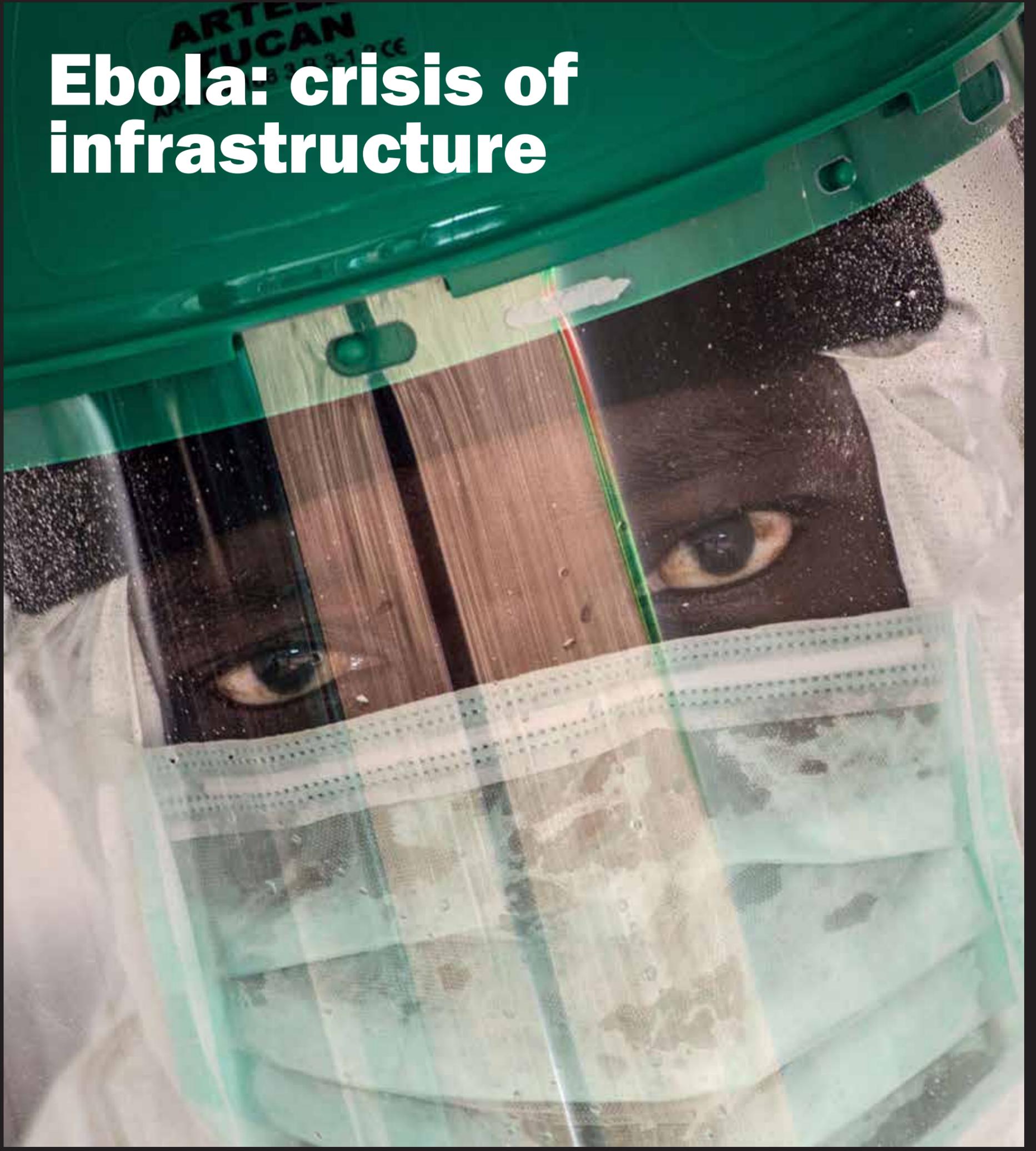
- Cameron's short-termism
- Church's gay wars
- AWL's social-imperialism
- Miners and Poland, 1984-85

No 1031 Thursday October 23 2014

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Ebola: crisis of infrastructure



LETTERS



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

Cosy world

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you for having arguably the best weekly leftwing newspaper in the UK by miles.

I came across the *Weekly Worker* during online research following the Scottish referendum and the need to find out more about socialist and leftwing ideas in the UK. I voted 'yes' and my first question to the *Weekly Worker* editing team would be: where, in the event of standing for a 'no' vote, is the Marxist-Leninist right to self-determination? Credit to Scots, regardless of the vote, for rediscovering citizen involvement in the cosy world of British politics.

Sadly, I must say, on the Scottish left the whole 'post-referendum' trauma is comical, with the attempt by every organisation to herd all pro-'yes' socialist campaigners on their own terms. Which means there will be no united Scottish 'left'.

As for the few mentions of my home country (Poland) in your paper, the main topics I've fished out already are 'Polish invasion of Soviet Russia' (please explain when such an event took place - as far as I am concerned, in 1920 Poland desperately tried to survive the expansion of the Soviet revolution, which, by the way, was already starting to eat its own children. After 128 years of Russian occupation, one has to understand that there was simply no difference for most of my compatriots between the tsarist regime and the revolution), and the name of turncoat socialist, Józef Piłsudski. To compare Piłsudski with a familiar name on these shores, in his prime time as socialist guerrilla master he was the Polish equivalent of Michael Collins, so credit where it is due, I am afraid (and I am far from being a fan of JP).

Could you, on the eve of their 100th anniversary, raise the less known subject of the short-lived worker/peasant republics created in what was the Polish part of imperial Russia during the revolution of 1905? Surely, the fact that at least three of them existed shows very well that not all was reactionary and backward amongst the Polish working class.

I would also like to read far more about the historical hotspot of the revolution in Ukraine/Russia and the current conflict over the economically vital areas in the east of the country. The fact that black/red fascist standards are raised once again by the grandchildren of Ukrainian insurgent army murderers is not being highlighted enough.

I wish you all the best in creating your valuable source of very well pointed information and useful conclusions about domestic/international politics, as well as historical events connected with the working class struggle.

Daniel Kowalczyk

Glasgow

Answers

I should like to answer, so far as I am able, the questions about the CPGB posed by Rupert Mallin (Letters, October 10), in the hope that answers from a non-member might carry some weight. I have immersed myself in the 'external' culture and political ideas of the organisation for the last year or so: reading the newspaper every week; now having read nearly all of their books; reading/watching a lot of the material on their website; attending some London Communist Forums; attending some of Communist University this year; having extensive email and Skype contact with a leading member to query aspects of the *Draft programme*. I have found all of this an invigorating educational experience, and feel highly motivated to defend the organisation.

To Rupert's specific questions:

- On membership figures, it is my understanding from conversations that the membership is less than 50. As to publishing paper sales, I imagine that the view may be taken that hits on the *Weekly Worker* website are more important: these are often given in Robbie Rix's 'Fighting fund' column.

- As to the nature of elections to the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB and other internal procedures, I admit that I do not know anything about them, and that I would quite like to, but I think that Rupert might find Jack Conrad's *Problems of communist organisation* (London 1993) instructive. The burden of this, I think, is that small organisations can be hampered by very rigid formal procedures only really appropriate to much bigger ones. Much of the CPGB's critique of Left Unity has been along these lines. Rupert may be, in effect, demanding that a small propaganda group behave as though it were already a mass Communist Party of tens of thousands. As the CPGB says in the second paragraph of its political platform, 'What we fight for', published every week in the *Weekly Worker*, "The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today." In any case, it is not as though there are no public accounts of party internal affairs: there are regular reports in the paper of members' aggregates.

- On joining, go here: www.cpgb.org.uk/home/about-the-cpgb/join-the-communist-party.

- On the CPGB's lack of anything comparable to the SWP's *Party Notes*, this may simply be a matter of person-power. They are small, and prioritise getting the *Weekly Worker* out every week, as far as I can see. But one can subscribe to an email bulletin as a non-member, though it has gone quiet recently - according to Peter Manson, the *WW* editor, it is due back soon: comrades temporarily assigned to other duties apparently. There are also the podcasts on the current political situation on the website.

I hope this letter goes some way to answering Rupert's questions, and that more is forthcoming from a CPGB member, correcting any of my misapprehensions if necessary.

Bronwen Parkinson
email

Not progressive

Moshé Machover's letter is disingenuous (October 16). Despite the abstract Marxist verbiage about the problematic nature of Jewish identities based on past oppression, I recall during the recent Israeli 'Protective Edge' Gaza massacre receiving several emails forwarded by him, promoting 'Jews for boycotting Israeli goods', etc. Actions speak louder than words.

His operative point is that "a progressive Jewish identity deployed against Zionist propaganda certainly plays a positive role". This is not 'identity' in general, but directly political - ie, identity politics. So he corroborates my critique, not refutes it.

Moreover, it is profoundly wrong. The main ideological weapon of Zionist racism is not formal racial segregation, but the notion of 'chosen-ness' and Jewish moral superiority based on past suffering. These Jewish-only groupings, in their most leftwing manifestation, no doubt consider they are being clever in trying to use the notion of Jewish moral superiority against the Zionists. But in doing so, they strengthen that very notion - the key ideological weapon of those they claim to be against.

The notion of an alternative 'progressive' national or communal identity opposed to a dominant oppressive one is just as suspect when applied to Jews as any other people. The view that Jewish (or any other) identity has something politically progressive in

it, outside the context of that people's struggle against oppression, can only pave the way for chauvinism.

Unfortunately, in the imperialist 'war on terror', directed mainly against Muslim peoples, Jewish chauvinism among Jews with authority on the left has become a serious problem. This is a knock-on from Israeli anti-Arab/Muslim bigotry and racism, and its hegemony among Jews in general, which exerts social pressure even upon very leftwing Jews.

It is particularly pernicious, since the earlier history of oppression and genocide against Jews in the first half of the 20th century gives rise to a guilty blindness on the left about this, which would not be the case with, say, British or American chauvinism, or white racism, etc.

A recent capitulation to this was the CPGB's conspicuous failure to condemn the violent assault by a fascist Jewish extremist against George Galloway, despite repeated urging by myself within the Communist Platform. This was a bigoted assault, directed not at Galloway for his (Scottish) origin, but for his views and social base among Muslims.

Machover then derided Galloway as similar to Enoch Powell, particularly over his outspoken remarks about making Bradford an "Israel-free zone". This implies some sort of equivalence between Galloway's oppressed social base and Powell's among white racists, and is thus a chauvinist position.

It is not difficult to discover that these are also widespread views among those promoting the 'progressive' Jewish identity that Machover defends. Which raises the question of how 'progressive' this alternative communal politics really is.

Ian Donovan

Communist Explorations

Leisure scabs

As most *Weekly Worker* readers will be aware, Unison called off at very short notice the local government strike action that it had planned for October 14. I have not had time to digest this yet politically, but something rather disturbing has emerged at work since.

Rumours are circulating that some colleagues who had planned to be on strike that day failed to come into work, even though the strike had been called off, and that this was because they had, for example, booked some sort of leisure event for that day and did not want to waste their ticket, and were thus regarding the day as unpaid leave, as it were.

While on an individual basis, this can be seen as putting two fingers up to management in a quasi-anarchist manner, it is behaviour that suggests that these comrades had never intended to take the strike action seriously from the outset. If I am on strike, I am on the picket line and attend any march/rally/demo held in conjunction with the strike. Doing anything else undermines the trade union movement and, by implication, the serious left more broadly, both in the eyes of the class enemy and in the eyes of those possibly winnable to the left, by implying that we are not serious. It is tantamount to scabbing.

It also has the potential to alienate colleagues whose work is more onerous on a cancelled strike day than it would have been on a normal day, to no useful collective political end; this to be clearly distinguished from life being more difficult for scabs on a strike day.

Tim Reid

London

Off-piste

In writing this letter on Chris Cutrone's critique of Mike Macnair's book *Revolutionary strategy* ('Democratic revolution and the contradiction of capital', October 16), I am fully aware that: (a) Mike is probably considering a reply himself; (b) comparing a full-

length book with a two-page article is potentially inherently unfair to the latter; and (c) that I am perhaps not the best qualified person to enter the debate, having only recently come to a serious engagement with issues of Marxist political strategy. Nevertheless, I thought it might be worth sharing how a comparison of the two has impressionistically struck a 'general reader'.

Macnair's approach has the following virtues that appear lacking in Cutrone's account: (a) it is relatively comprehensible; (b) it appears rooted in a close reading of concrete historical events (aka 'the materialist conception of history'), whereas Cutrone appears to wander off-piste into free-floating philosophising, bordering on the worst of post-modernism; (c) Macnair offers concrete proposals as to what the Marxist left should be doing in the here and now, whereas Cutrone appears to be promoting a deeply depressing view of the proletariat as still primarily the passive victim of history.

Sean Thurlough

London

In the open

A few comments if I may regarding last week's letters page.

First, I would like to thank Ben Lewis for his careful and considered points back to me. I accept and agree with them all. Yes, publishing the 'other side' can provoke useful and constructive thought and discussion and help develop the progressive alternative.

My mentor in the old CPGB, Max Adereth, used to tell us to read publications like *The Sunday Times* and *The Economist*, as these were spaces where members of the ruling class could speak openly to each other and work up an agreed strategic view.

I haven't really followed Max's advice in that regard, although the occasional dipping into such journals is a useful antidote to some of the wackier conspiracy theories and notions held on the so-called left. We do need to understand what members of the ruling class are really thinking and saying in order to be able to connect with the majority swathes of middle class and working class people, who frankly think we on the left are odd.

Second, John Smithee's annual review of the female sex worker market. I guess it is a tough job, but clearly Smithee feels he is the man to do it. But what is the point of this annual exercise? Smithee doesn't come out and advocate legalisation and protection of sex work; he just surveys the market and generates some meaningless and impressionistic statistics.

However, Smithee surely must know that female sex workers who charge (say) £100 an hour will only get to keep a small fraction of that money. Most goes to the semi-legitimate companies and 'firms' who organise sex work, provide transport and a certain degree of protection for the workers. I suspect this is the case for the vast majority of sex workers.

At the 'top' end, you will have a small minority of females servicing members of the ruling class who will earn and keep sums massively higher than Smithee's £100 benchmark. At the other, you will have another small minority who are so desperate and unprotected, they will 'pick up' customers at random and charge relatively small sums for some instant gratification services, but get to keep the money, before then quite often spending it to support alcohol and drug addiction.

I personally don't have an issue with paid sex work in a modern and civilised society. I think we should ensure women have maximum opportunities and options to earn livings in whatever ways they choose. The full force of the law and the state should be used to provide protection

against exploitation and abuse.

And society should provide accessible and effective treatment and other mental-health support for people who are addicted to substances and/or have suffered abuse and exploitation in their lives and are struggling to cope.

As a commercial and interpersonal transaction, sex work should in principle be legalised. Far better to have it out in the open, and able to be regulated and all parties protected.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

Sniping

Ben Lewis makes useful points against Die Linke ('Models and humanitarian myths', October 16). At one point he reminds us that the *Weekly Worker* has long argued that Die Linke "has always been a car crash waiting to happen". He should really explain why CPGB calls on workers to vote for such a party.

He refers to Die Linke's 'Save Kobané' statement, quoting it from an article on the World Socialist Web Site, which has extensively covered the developments in Die Linke and set them against the background of increasing militarism in Germany. While acknowledging the useful information from WSWWS, he takes the opportunity to have a gratuitous swipe at what he calls 'Northites' - the equivalent of calling CPGBers 'Macnairites' or 'Conradistas' in their current manifestation. I believe that both the CPGB and the International Committee of the Fourth International have democratically elected leaderships, so perhaps we could dispense with such jibes.

He accuses the ICFI/WSWS of having a critique of left parties that is "rather schematically imposed on events". Anyone who has followed the daily publications of the WSWWS will know that the analysis is based on a whole period the evolution of a range of left forces (Die Linke, International Socialist Organisation and the patchwork quilt that is the misnamed United Secretariat of the Fourth International).

These organisations are left only in the sense of posturing or in the subjective imagination of some of their members. Their social composition and basic political formation tells a different tale. Analysing their development helps us to see the role they will play. Ben would have us wait to the very end before noticing the "car crash". By characterising Die Linke as a 'broad' party, he entertains the illusion that it can be won back to the side of the workers. The fact is that Die Linke and others do not start from an international working class perspective and are more or less doomed to adapt to various national characteristics.

These issues deserve a more orderly debate than one conducted via footnotes and ill-informed sniping.

Mike Martin

Sheffield

Confirmed

By chance I have just come across confirmation of the report about John Maclean and his opposition to World War I to which I referred in my review of Douglas Newton's book *The darkest days* ('How did it all happen?', October 9).

Harry McShane states: "When the First World War broke out, John was on holiday at Tarbert. Following Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons, he chalked the streets of Tarbert with the words, "Sir Edward Grey is a liar". On his return to Glasgow he spoke at Nelson's monument, Glasgow Green, and declared his opposition to the war. The British Socialist Party, the Independent Labour Party and even the Socialist Labour Party were all split at this stage, but John did not waiver" (<http://search.marxists.org/archive/mcshane/1958/10/maclean.html>).

Chris Gray

London

EBOLA

Crisis of infrastructure

Ahmad Ebrahimi examines the root cause of the Ebola epidemic

What has allowed an apparently insignificant virus like Ebola to evolve into a potentially global epidemic? First identified near the Ebola river in the Democratic Republic of Congo 38 years ago, it has been the source of a number of small outbreaks in countries of central and west Africa. All these either petered out or were brought under control after deaths counted in tens and occasionally hundreds. The largest previous epidemic was in Gulu district in the north of Uganda, with 425 infections and 224 deaths.¹ As I write, the fatalities for the current outbreak are officially approaching the 5,000 mark.

Viruses cannot reproduce themselves and need a living host in order to survive and propagate. Once inside a host, they hijack their cellular mechanisms to reproduce and multiply. They then need a mechanism to pass over to the next living organism. And human beings are not a natural host for Ebola (rather it is the fruit bat). Killing the host before the virus has time to reproduce and pass across to a new host is self-destructive. But that is what Ebola does, which is why humans do not provide for a successful environment. Contrast this with HIV, which does not kill its host for eight-10 productive years, before passing on its progeny (by sex or needles in this case).

Ebola can be controlled by nothing more imaginative than isolating all people who have been infected and exposed to infection. Since no treatment is currently available, the only medical management consists of providing palliative care to the infected persons - hydration, food and treating secondary infections. Patients who survive will be immune for at least 10 years, and probably more. And, of course, healthcare workers must also be protected from infection and steps must be taken to avoid cross-infection in hospital and healthcare settings. These precautions were effective in controlling all previous outbreaks, which fizzled out without causing too much devastation.

To explain the new epidemic which to date has infected more than 10,000 people, some have suggested a new mutation, although there is as yet no evidence for this. So to understand the underlying mechanisms for the current explosive spread of Ebola we need to look at the other cases over the last three decades for clues. All the more severe outbreaks occurred in areas of civil war (DRC, south Sudan, northern Uganda), where there were large population movements and huge numbers of refugees criss-crossing the porous borders. And all previous outbreaks, big or small, had taken place in countries bordering the DRC, where a civil war has been endemic. That is, until the current epidemic, which began in Guinea on the border with Liberia and Sierra Leone and rapidly spread into those two countries and beyond. Why?

Escaping control

I think there are three factors that set the scene for the current epidemic, which has allowed it to totally escape any control. During the 1980s, with the rolling out of neoliberal policies, the mantra of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation was the privatisation of all state-funded institutions, including healthcare. This was the precondition for any loans from the global banking system. The result was a devastating collapse of the already sparse and rudimentary healthcare facilities across Africa.



Spread of capitalism, spread of disease

The entire continent - already hit by a period of inter-state and civil wars, stoked by outside powers either directly or by proxy - was left exposed from a public health point of view. Wars in Katanga (Belgian Congo, now the DRC), Uganda, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Zaire, Nigeria, Namibia, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Chad, Somalia, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), Uganda and Western Sahara had displaced millions of people. When HIV passed from chimpanzees to humans in Cameroon some time in the early or mid-1900s and began its long march across central Africa and beyond, there was little by way of public health infrastructure to confront it.

Ebola crossed the species barrier after the civil wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Ivory Coast, and the involvement of the Guinean military had further uprooted entire communities. These civil wars were not merely over tribal rivalries, but were also about the scramble to mine and smuggle diamonds, in which outside firms and states were deeply and criminally involved. The current epidemic started in the border regions of Guinea and rapidly spread to the two neighbouring countries, uprooting communities and breaking down social cohesion.

Unsurprisingly the epidemic in west Africa has spread quickly to cities such as Freetown. This process was accelerated not only by the links between the countryside and the cities created by mass migration in the wake of civil wars, but also by the continent-wide increase in the mobility of labour, brought about by the global spread of capitalism. New arrivals into the shanty towns are huddled together in overcrowded accommodation. Moreover, the disproportionate adult deaths caused by those wars brought about a change in the extended family structure, with fewer and fewer adults caring for an ever-larger number of children and the elderly. The family, so to speak, was drawn closer together in the face of an increasingly hostile and unfamiliar world. This added to the overcrowding, and the increasing suspicion of outsiders. Hovering above these dramatic social changes is climate change and forest-logging. Together they altered the habitat of the fruit bat - which, as a result of mass poverty, became a convenient source of protein for humans. The stage was set for a 'perfect storm'.

Most diseases have a social dimension, and infectious diseases are essentially defined by social interactions.² Viewed from this angle, the current epidemic of Ebola in the region can be laid at the feet of the social upheavals, disruptions and breakdowns brought about by the global spread of capitalism and its latest offspring, neoliberal capitalism.

Response

Back in March the charity, Médecins Sans Frontières, warned that the Ebola epidemic was about to get out of control and called for immediate action. Its cries fell on deaf ears. It was something happening in 'far-off countries of which we know little', and which are not high on the list of capital's global priorities. Public opinion in the US only moved when two nurses became infected by a visiting Liberian. The United Nations target of \$1 billion to combat the epidemic has still not been reached.

One explanation given for the meagre international response is the danger to healthcare workers, and the fact that over 200 have already died as a result of being infected while treating victims. Yet a leading doctor from MSF, in a debate broadcast live on Al Jazeera TV on October 15, reminded us that MSF has over 3,000 healthcare workers battling Ebola and has suffered very few casualties. She pointed out that the enforcement of strict adherence to its guidelines was behind this success, which was achieved even in the difficult environments in which MSF has been forced to work.

As to the development of a treatment regime that can see off such epidemics, that is clearly a long way off. The sporadic and localised nature of Ebola outbreaks has meant that it has remained below the radar for all but a few dedicated virologists, etc. Such a disease in a poverty-stricken part of the world was never going to induce drug company investment in treatment or vaccine development. Yet for a disease that produces natural immunity in survivors, the chance of an effective vaccine is excellent - unlike HIV, which easily escapes the infected individual's immune surveillance. Both research for treatment and vaccination for such rare diseases falls on the state sector - not very likely at a time of global depression.

Yet the US military has the capacity to provide both the field hospitals and the personnel to provide health education and to isolate infected individuals.³ Cuba has shown how even a small country can mobilise resources to deal with this deadly epidemic. Pressure should be placed on rich countries to provide the personnel, to repair and boost the meagre local infrastructure and to come up with the necessary funds to control and push back the epidemic, both directly and through such effective organs as MSF ●

Notes

1. www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/history/chronology.html.
2. See 'Threat of social breakdown' Weekly Worker October 16 2014.
3. See www.bmj.com/content/bmj/349/bmj.g6151.full.pdf.

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 October 26, 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: Vol 1, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued). Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology
Tuesday October 28, 6.30pm: 'Out of Africa or multiregional evolution for modern humans - why is there still a debate?' Speaker: Chris Stringer.
Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome.
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Workers' cooperatives

Thursday October 23, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Govanhill Baths Community Trust, 99 Calder Street, Glasgow G42. Speaker: Joe Craig. Organised by Left Unity Glasgow South: <http://leftunity.org>.

Class Wargames

Friday October 24, 5pm until late: Book launch party, Red Gallery, 1-3 Rivington Street, London EC2. Richard Barbrook's *Class Wargames: ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism*. Collective games playing, screening of Ilze Black's *The game of war*, talks and music.
Organised by Class Wargames: www.classwargames.net.

100 years of war

Saturday October 25, 12 noon to 5pm: Conference, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2.
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

People's budget

Saturday October 25, 11am to 4pm: Conference, Bishop Street Methodist church, Town Hall Square, Leicester.
Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.tusc.org.uk.

North East People's Assembly

Saturday November 1, 11am: Anti-austerity event, Northern Stage, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1. Speeches, discussions and workshops, plus performance.
Organised by People's Assembly: www.facebook.com/events/606667399410102.

From world war to world revolution

Saturday November 1, 1pm: Meeting, Red Shed, 18 Vicarage St, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1, with Stephen Wood and author Dave Sherry. Free admission and light buffet.
Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk.

End the 'war on terror'

Wednesday November 5, 7pm: Pubic meeting, Unity Church Hall, 277a Upper Street, London N1. Speakers include John Rees and Explor Nani-Kofi.
Organised by North London Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

The British establishment

Thursday November 6, 7.30pm: Meeting, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Speaker: Owen Jones. Entry £9 (£7 concessions).
Hosted by the Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

'On the way home'

Thursday November 6 to Thursday November 20, 9am to 5pm: Exhibition, Rich Mix, 35-47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1. The work of Palestinian artist Munir Wakedour.
Organised by Arts Canteen: www.artscanteen.com.

Historical Materialism

Thursday November 6 to Sunday November 9, all day: 11th annual *HM* conference, 'How capitalism survives', Vernon Square Campus, School of Oriental and African Studies, Penton Rise, London WC1.
Organised by *Historical Materialism*: www.historicalmaterialism.org.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 8, 10am to 5pm: Annual general meeting, Friends House, small hall, Euston Road, London NW1.
Organised by Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.org.uk.

Socialist films

Sunday November 9, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Dylan Mohan Gray's *Fire in the blood* (India, 84 minutes) and Andrew Berekdar's *Cricklewood Craic* (UK, 8 minutes). Followed by discussion.
Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Left Unity

Saturday, November 15, 11am - Sunday November 16, 4pm: National conference, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1.
Organised by Left Unity: <http://leftunity.org>.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

TORIES

A dangerous game

David Cameron's appeasement of the Eurosceptic right could backfire dramatically, warns Paul Demarty

Not for the first time, we find ourselves wondering what the hell David Cameron thinks he's up to.

This time, it is the much-trailed and yet maddeningly vague 'plans' of his to impose a cap on European Union migrants coming into Britain. Such 'plans' are promised in the run-up to Christmas - after all, nothing spells festive cheer like a bit of empty chauvinistic posturing. Just what will these plans entail? Unilaterally breaking treaty obligations? Putting 'flexibility' over free movement, modestly, on the Brussels negotiating table in the run up to his 2017 in-out referendum? Let us wait to see what Santa brings.

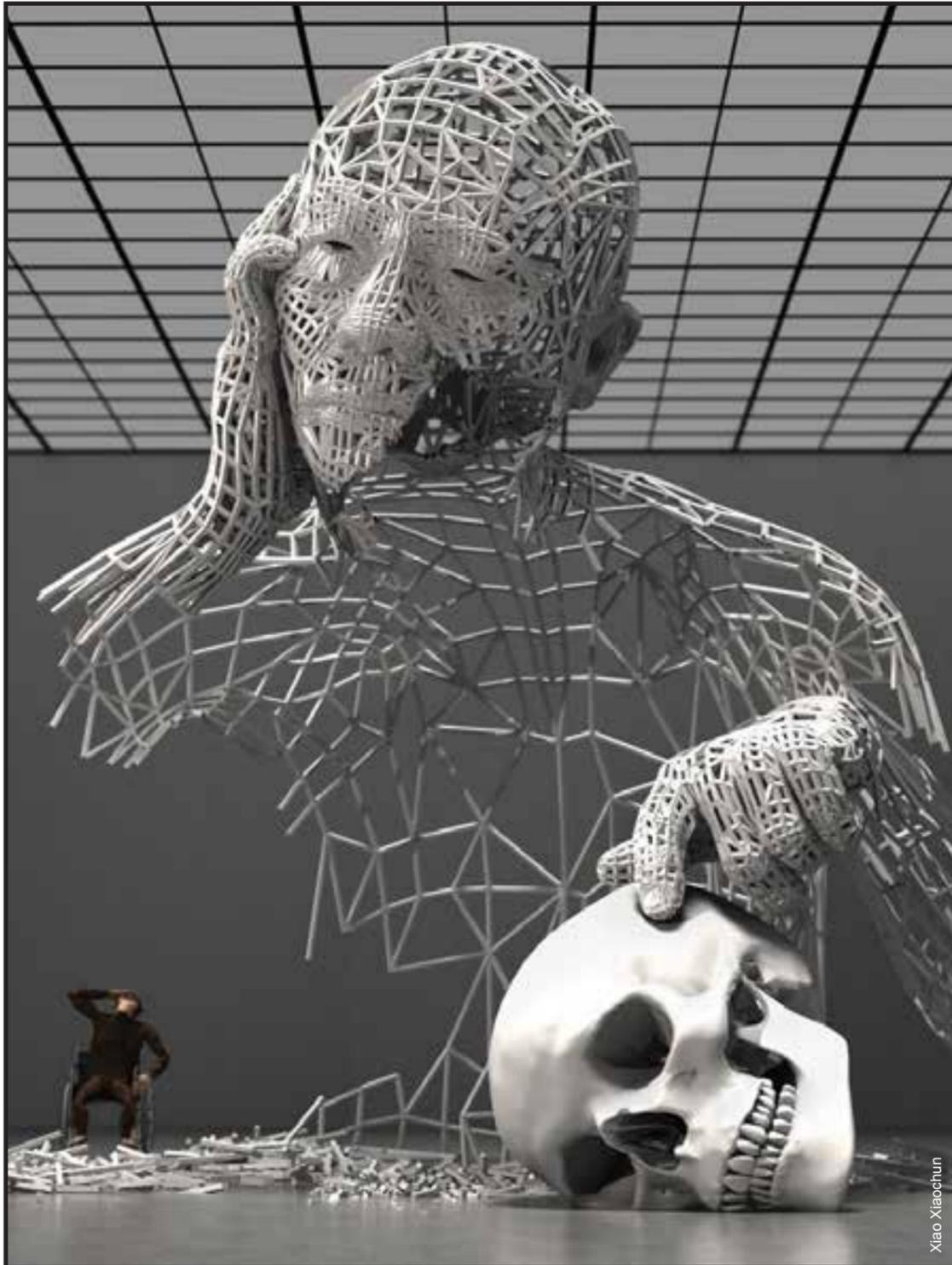
In truth, placing Cameron's name in the same sentence as the word 'plan' is an abuse of the English language. Cameron has forgotten entirely how to plan. He could not plan a piss-up in a *pissoir*. This is merely the latest in an ever more desperate series of political lurches on his part, this way and that, apparently motivated by nothing more historically significant than the news cycle. They say a week is a long time in politics; it is certainly long enough for Cameron to get a good bit of ducking and weaving in.

This latest wheeze shows all the signs of being a scrambled response to the UK Independence Party's successes in the recent by-elections in Clacton and in Heywood and Middleton. The Clacton result was widely expected; but Ukip's solid showing in the Greater Manchester seat is more ominous for Cameron. Heywood is *potentially* a swing seat at a general election, but the Tories and Liberal Democrats have historically split the anti-Labour vote. Between the collapse of the Lib Dems and Ukip's inroads into the Tory and (to a lesser extent) Labour votes, not to mention a dismal turnout, the far-right party was able to run Labour far closer than anyone has in the short history of the seat. In other words, Ukip could prevent the Tories taking marginals from Labour.

Cameron's priority, then, is to shore up enough of his core vote to scrape home next May. We say 'shore up' advisedly; many of those who have transferred their allegiance to Ukip already will be hard to win back. What is at issue is a deep process of disillusionment - 'traditional' Tory voters have had much to hate in this government, which - despite the assault on public services, benefits claimants and so on - has been committed to socially liberal measures, such as equal marriage rights, and has been unforgettably ambiguous on the EU.

Hence the latest tough talk on migration - and the mood in the corridors of Brussels may be gauged by the remarks of the outgoing EU Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, to the effect that the European Union will "never accept" an "arbitrary cap" on numbers of migrants; it would be "against a fundamental principle of the treaties". Barroso, being on the way out, is permitted more latitude to speak plainly than the average Eurocrat; but, as this is a matter of treaties, if any government in the EU objects - or its people should do so in a referendum - then Cameron's 'plan' is toast.

Hence also the scheme to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights; and, indeed, the bizarre aftermath of the Scottish referendum. Having thrown concessions to the nationalists in those desperate final days before the vote, Cameron found himself the target of a new wave of rightwing Tory and Ukip criticism - for giving the



Lack of strategic thinking threatens disaster

Scots 'extra rights' over and above the English. So he immediately tacked in that direction, threatening to tie further devolution to the 'solution' of the West Lothian question, thus wrecking the fragile Westminster consensus.

Though they do not seem to factor at all into Cameron's grubby electoral manoeuvres, the longer-term consequences of this for British capitalism are hardly insignificant. We have just had the release of details of the Bank of England's contingency plans for a Scottish 'yes' vote: immediately taking on the obligation to back Scottish currency for the duration of the transition, and printing hundreds of millions of pounds to shore up the financial sector north and south of the border. Mark Carney had to fly back from the G20 summit in Cairns to oversee these plans; George Osborne had to cancel his trip altogether. It is fair to say that severe turbulence was expected.

A mere breeze, surely, compared to the enormous uncertainty that would follow the withdrawal of Britain from the EU. Europe is by far the largest export market for UK goods; in order to keep this up, a post-EU Britain

would have to *maintain* the hated 'Brussels red tape' in order to keep that market open.

There are larger historical dynamics at work. The UK is in a nice position for a declining imperialist power - close to the US, but inside Europe, it can act as a vehicle for American interests inside the camp of its most significant potential global rival (with apologies to modern Sinophiles). Privileged access to all these markets allows Britain to act as the most significant offshore financial centre in the US world order; and, hated though it may be by large parts of the population, the banks and financial services industry is crucial to what prosperity Britain actually has. This is a safe place to stash (or launder) your money - be it in stocks or savings, or simply prime London real estate. (Such has been the fate of former hegemon states throughout the capitalist era.)

Markets are twitchy beasts - the first sign of uncertainty can trigger a serious drop in share prices. Withdrawing from Europe will certainly raise alarm bells and put the financial elite into a blind panic. The pound would go through the

floor as capital rushes off in search for a safer haven. With the City of London profoundly weakened the government tax take will shrink dramatically.

Thus we must call Cameron's referendum plan, from the point of view of the British bourgeoisie, the stupidest idea he has ever had. In the name of appeasing carping rightwingers in his own party and in Ukip, and increasing his chances of limping to a second term as prime minister, he has opened up the door to disaster. And, of course, he does not look like succeeding in his grubby aim. Farage has said it many times, 'We do not trust Cameron to play this referendum straight.' Doubters - including the two recent Tory-to-Ukip defectors, Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless - have expressed scepticism as to whether there are any circumstances in which Cameron would call for the British people to vote to leave Europe.

So Cameron has to make *more* concessions, which consist - as in the present case of a migration cap - of writing extravagant cheques against

future negotiations for 'reform' with European powers. That does not work either; indeed, it rather begs the question: 'So, David, if you do *not* get a migration cap, will you call for an EU exit?' Whatever he gives the Eurosceptic right, they will want more.

He is not in this hole *purely* as a result of his shallow careerism, or the short-termism of his polling gurus and electioneers. For capitalism to maintain consent to its rule, an image of common interest between the subordinate and dominant classes must be constructed; that image, in the UK, is based on British national chauvinism. Such ideological constructions do not have a direct, mechanical relationship with the class relations they represent, however; contradictions develop inevitably.

Anti-Europeanism has served as a valuable ideological proxy for decades; the bosses' hatred for health and safety can be externalised, in the pages of the *Daily Mail*, as 'Brussels red tape'. Allegiance with the bloody blunders of US imperialist policy, and the consequent domestic authoritarianism of the state, can equally be presented as the battle of 'British common sense' against the EU's naive commitment to 'human rights'. Now that things are getting uncomfortably serious on the EU front, however, the ruling class is stuck with the government it has got, and the media it has got: peddling and pandering to an irrational hatred of Europe.

Indeed, you would have to say that for the *City*, Ed Miliband is at this point a far safer bet: he, after all, has not committed to any disastrous referenda over Europe. We cannot seriously believe that any competent capitalist *actually believes* that Miliband is a patsy for the trade unions, or that it matters how he eats a bacon sandwich. Yet changing horses at this point, for the majority of that disorganised collective that is the capitalist class, is simply impossible.

The main means of communicating bourgeois interests in official politics - the media - is for the most part simply incapable of plausibly switching from the Tories to Labour, *least of all* on the issue of Cameron's irresponsible referendum, which has been demanded by all rightwing papers for years. The careerism that motivates Cameron's dangerous games, meanwhile, is equally a prop for capitalist rule, and can hardly be jettisoned at the drop of a hat.

The fact that the bourgeoisie has landed itself in a right old mess *should* be an opportunity for the left; alas, the opportunity is unlikely to be taken. The left has more or less swallowed whole the anti-EU line of the Eurosceptic right - the only difference being that, where the right sees a bunch of insufferable bureaucrats holding back entrepreneurial spirit, the left sees a 'capitalist club'. A lovely phrase - if only overthrowing capitalism was a matter of refusing membership of the right clubs ...

While withdrawal from the EU would be disastrous for British capitalism, that does not mean it would be advantageous for our side. Indeed, the economic dislocation that would result might make it *harder* to organise, as if it was not hard enough already. In this matter, as in many others, the left expects history to do us generous favours. But things do not work like that: without a *positive* vision of European revolution, we will forever cede ground on this decisive issue to the Ukips of this world ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

CHURCH

Infighting in the Vatican

Deep divisions over divorce and homosexuality were revealed by the recent synod, reports **Eddie Ford**

For the first time in nearly three decades, the Vatican over October 5-19 held an extraordinary synod on the theme of “pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelisation”.¹ Called by pope Francis I, aka Jorge Mario Bergoglio, to “continue the reflection and journey of the whole church”, 253 bishops and other participants engaged in the type of infighting between traditionalists and reformers that has not been seen since the Second Vatican Council.²

Controversy centred on the *Instrumentum laboris* (‘working instrument’), which itself represented a break with precedent, based as it was on a questionnaire sent globally to bishops’ conferences asking them to distribute it “immediately” and “as widely as possible”, so that “input from local sources” could be received and collated.³ Never before has the church hierarchy asked so directly for feedback and opinion from ordinary Catholics. The document included 39 questions on nine topics, including contraception, same-sex unions, cohabitation by unwed couples, divorce, and so on. Predictably, the specific issues that provoked most controversy concerned, firstly, whether to allow Catholics to receive the Eucharist (communion) after they have divorced and “invalidly” attempted remarriage; secondly, whether a “fraternal space” should be found in the church for gays; and, thirdly, how to pastorally approach those who are living in “irregular situations” - including Catholics who are invalidly married, as well as unmarried couples who are cohabitating.

You can see why the bureaucracy, or at least a section of it, has made this move. The Catholic church is by definition an inherently conservative body, but at the end of the day you have to keep people on board if you want to survive, let alone flourish. That can only mean bringing the church down to earth a bit. After all, even many bishops complain that the church’s own teachings on family and sexual matters are more or less impenetrable. The Vatican’s main document on sex, for instance, is the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical, issued in 1968 by Pope Paul VI (who not coincidentally was beatified on October 19 by Francis for his

“farsightedness and wisdom”). This reaffirms the church’s teaching from “time immemorial” on the sanctity of life, married love, responsible parenthood and artificial contraception - ie, continued rejection of most forms of birth control. But the document uses tortuously obscure theological language and argumentation, not to mention the 41 dense footnotes that reinforce the impression that it was written on another planet.⁴

Then we have the church’s punishing rules on divorce that prevent millions of devotees from receiving communion, yet it is a right granted to murderers or rapists, as long as they are lawfully married or single - a clearly unsustainable position that just generates resentment and unhappiness, and one that the Church of England sensibly abandoned. Showing the general line of march, Walter Kasper, a prominent German cardinal widely known in media circles as “the pope’s theologian”, has argued that Rome should look to the Eastern Orthodox church for guidance and allow some people who had remarried to do a “period of penance” that would eventually lift their ban on holy communion. He stressed that his proposed reform would preserve the “indissolubility” of marriage: it would merely involve taking a “more tolerant” attitude towards the person’s second, civil, marriage.

Consider too that more than half of American Catholics, just like in Britain, do not even consider homosexuality a sin any more - so why is the church hierarchy so obsessed about it? No wonder that younger, more progressively-minded Catholics in the US are no longer attending services. Pew Research data released this year found that regular American churchgoers tend to be older and less likely to support gays and lesbians, while younger Catholics attend church far less - and no fewer than 85% of those 18-to-29-year-olds say they support LGBT rights. Since the 1950s, self-reported regular US church attendance rates have dropped from 75% to now 39%.⁵

The same essentially goes for Italy, the supposed Catholic motherland. An extensive government survey conducted two years ago found that almost two-thirds felt homosexuals in

partnerships should have the same rights as married couples and a more recent poll this year suggested a majority of Italians now favoured the introduction of gay marriage - yet the Italian constitution still insists that the family is a “natural society founded on matrimony” and does not recognise same-sex unions - meaning that Italy is the only country in western Europe (disregarding freakish micro-states, such as Monaco) that does not grant legal status to same-sex unions. Even staunchly Catholic Malta now has same-sex civil partnerships.

In that sense, there may be some truth to the adage that the Roman Catholic church thinks in centuries and then introduces change almost overnight. There has been a definite shift in church orientation, especially symbolised by divorce. Francis’s predecessor, the former ‘head of the inquisition’, Benedict XVI (aka Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger), described homosexual relationships as “intrinsically disordered” and an “objective moral evil” in a 1986 Vatican document, when he was chief theological adviser to Pope John Paul II. Francis, on the other hand, told journalists last year: “If a person seeks god and has goodwill, then who am I to judge?” Significantly he is the first pontiff ever to use the word ‘gay’ in public rather than ‘homosexual’.

Yes, it is a bit surprising that it is Francis who seems to be pushing the reform agenda. He was selected for the top job by cardinals who had mostly been appointed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both ultra-reactionaries - and there is little doubt that the 76-year-old Francis was chosen last year precisely because of his age, the belief being he would dutifully uphold the status quo. A not unreasonable expectation, given that his six years as Jesuit leader in Argentina were characterised by a highly authoritarian and conservative outlook.

There are also the rumours that he cooperated with the 1976-83 military junta. But this merely demonstrates that not even the mighty Catholic church can ignore the more socially liberal consensus that has emerged, at least in the west, over the last 20 to 30 years. Indeed, in many respects, it is quite remarkable that the church has held out for so long.

Revolutionary?

The real infighting at the synod broke out when a *relatio post disceptationem* (‘bringing back’) or draft interim report was published on October 13.⁷ Some Vaticanologists and gay rights groups regarded it as a real change in the church’s stance and detected a voice that seemed to echo Francis’s earlier comment to journalists. Traditionalists were horrified though. Bishop Rogelio Livieres Plano, an Opus Dei member on the ultra-conservative wing, wrote that the church was facing the “danger of a great schism”.

Similarly, US cardinal Leo Raymond Burke told the *Catholic World Report* that the *relatio* “lacks a solid foundation” in the sacred scriptures and

magisterium (the Catholic teaching authority)⁸ and disapprovingly noted that it gives “the impression” of “inventing a totally new” and “revolutionary” teaching on marriage and the family. Burke is not some nobody from the backwaters, but the current prefect of the supreme tribunal of the apostolic signatura, the Vatican’s supreme court.⁹ He is a leading authority on doctrine, who vigorously opposes any move to relax the ban on remarried divorcees taking communion - having *openly* criticised Francis for allowing Kasper to “sow confusion” about church teachings on marriage and argued that a “clear affirmation” of Catholic doctrine was “long overdue”.

The passages in the *relatio* that most offended reactionaries like Burke was the suggestion that the Catholic church should be “welcoming homosexual persons”, and that “homosexual unions” could provide “precious support” to each other, despite the “moral problems” associated with them. Even worse - or so it seems - was the following idea: “Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community ... Are our communities capable of this, *accepting and valuing* their sexual orientation, without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony?” (my emphasis).

There was an immediate furore - this was beyond the pale. Conservative bishops loudly protested that the report had been “hijacked” by liberals added to the drafting committee at the last minute by Francis. In fact, a devious attempt was made by a faction of conservative, English-speaking bishops to *deliberately* muddy the waters by getting the synod secretariat to release a new English translation of the *relatio* that changed “welcoming homosexual persons” to “providing for homosexual persons”.¹⁰ Another alteration was that the phrase “partners”, an incendiary term that implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, became the much chillier “these persons”. Such was the uproar and confusion over the English ‘translation’ that a Vatican spokesperson was forced to confirm that the original version of the *relatio* was the only official document.

However, the conservatives managed to regain the upper hand, thanks to the Byzantine voting system, which requires that *every* paragraph (there are 62 in total) has to be voted on separately and needs a two-third majority to be included in the synod’s report.¹¹ We learnt from a Vatican official that voting numbers had been released at the behest of Francis, who wanted the process to be transparent - another break with precedent. Though still receiving more than 50% of the vote, the ‘revolutionary’ passages on gay relationships and divorced or “invalidly” remarried Catholics being readmitted to the Eucharist could not muster the necessary two-thirds majority and were therefore binned.

Hence the final report published on October 18 makes no mention of the “gifts and qualities” or the “precious support” offered by gays - just forget it. Instead, as an alternative, a paragraph entitled “Pastoral attention to people of homosexual orientation” - no more “welcoming” of gays - sternly reminds us that “no grounds whatsoever exist for assimilating or drawing analogies, however remote, between homosexual unions and god’s design for matrimony and the family”. There you have it. Nevertheless, it continues, “men and women with homosexual tendencies

should be accepted with respect and sensitivity” and generously adds that “unjust discrimination” against gays “is to be avoided”.

But even this decidedly less gay-friendly passage narrowly failed to gain two-thirds approval - there were 118 in favour and 62 against.¹² Because the actual names of the voting bishops were not released, however, it was unclear whether the paragraph’s failure to pass was actually due to a ‘protest vote’ by progressive bishops who had wanted to keep *more* of the original wording. The *only* paragraph that received unanimous support was a bland, motherhood-and-apple-pie passage confirming that the “wish for a family is still alive, especially among young people, and this motivates the church, expert in humanity and faithful to her mission, tirelessly and with profound conviction to announce the ‘gospel of the family’” - though it is worth noting that a paragraph condemning the linking of international financial aid to the introduction of laws that “institutionalise” same-sex marriage did manage to get a super-majority.

Upon hearing the outcome of the extraordinary synod, the New Ways Ministry, a US Catholic gay rights group, said it was “very disappointing” that the synod’s final report had not retained the “gracious welcome” to lesbians and gays that had briefly appeared in the *relatio* - though it did take hope from the synod’s “openness to discussion”: the struggle is only just beginning. Another group, Dignity USA, issued a statement regretting the fact that “doctrine won out over pastoral need”. As for Francis, arguably the loser at the synod, he displayed no disappointment - he welcomed the “animated discussions” that had just taken place and was glad there had been an honest fight rather than a “false and acquiescent peace”. He might have a point.

Of course, the New Ways Ministry is quite correct - the battle will be resumed very shortly. The final report is only a preparatory document for the larger synod that will take place next year. The Holy See press office made it clear that nothing in the report was either “accepted” or “rejected” - the paragraphs, or sentiments, that could not win a super-majority on this occasion “cannot be considered as dismissed”.

So the Catholic church will have to continue its struggle to catch up with the 20th century ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

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5. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/11/25/no-clear-pope-francis-effect-among-u-s-catholics.
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Unrecognised

ECONOMY

Agony and the ecstasy

The current growth of the UK economy is unsustainable, says **Michael Roberts**. Indeed, there is a danger of another slump

Last week, the Bank of England's chief economist, Andy Haldane, put the cat among the pigeons with his speech on the British economy.¹ Andy was 'off message' compared to the story painted by his boss, the useless, confusing and grotesquely overpaid Mark Carney.² For months, Carney has been going around hinting that the BoE would hike interest rates soon because the UK economy was booming and he wanted to control the racy property market and avoid rising inflation (instead, inflation is now slowing fast).

In contrast, Haldane said that he was "gloomier" about the prospects for the economy than he was a few months ago and thinks that rates will have to stay lower for longer. Haldane described the state of the British economy as having 'twin peaks' of both agony and ecstasy.

The ecstasy part of it was that the UK economy is currently the fastest-growing of the top G7 capitalist economies, with unemployment falling to just (!) 6% of the total workforce, with annual inflation down.

Complacency

Using these figures, chancellor George Osborne cannot stop boasting of the success of the government's policies. And Janan Ganesh in the *Financial Times* was moved to complain about all the moaning and "miserablism" around. Ganesh told us moaners:

The country is now richer, freer, more roundly envied. Yet all talk is of decline... We should be ecstatic about Britain. Here is a country that responds to a secessionist threat to its existence by holding a free and fair referendum. It has evolved an economic model that is more hospitable to business than much of Europe and kinder to the poor than America. It cuts public spending year on year without any civil disorder to speak of. Crime is falling. Unemployment is at six percent. The politicians are small-time, but basically honourable. The capital city is a miracle of the modern world.

Thank god, goes on Ganesh, that Britain is no longer like the terrible 1970s, when

we could hardly govern ourselves, much less look France and Germany in the eye as economic equals... when Britain really was run by elites: the troika of big business, organised labour and government, whose shambling corporatism eventually forced the world's first industrial nation to send for the International Monetary Fund. The country is now richer, freer, more roundly envied... Britain is a successful nation that does not know it - an enclave of stability and progress.³

This is the voice of a complacent member of the establishment (see Owen Jones's new book⁴), writing from an office in the Pearson building, and no doubt comfortably a member of the top 1% of income earners. There is no mention at all of the agony side of the British economic 'recovery' since the end of the deepest slump since the 1930s.

We keep hearing that national income is higher than at the pre-crisis peak of the first quarter of 2008. However, in the meantime the British



Rich grow ever richer

population has grown by 3.5 million (from 60.5 million to 64 million), so in per capita terms, UK national income is still 3.4% less than it was six years ago. And this is even before we talk about the highly uneven nature of the recovery, in which real wages have fallen, while people at the top have increased their share of wealth and income.

On wages, Haldane was brutally honest:

Growth in real wages has been negative for all but three of the past 74 months. The cumulative fall in real wages since their pre-recession peak is around 10%. As best we can tell, the length and depth of this fall is unprecedented since at least the mid-1800s! This has been a jobs-rich, but pay-poor, recovery.⁵

Haldane has constructed what he called his "agony index": a simple index of real wages, real interest rates and productivity growth. This shows that the British people and the economy have been in "agony" for the longest time since the 1800s, with the exception of world wars and the early 1970s. Yes, the 1970s may have been bad, as Ganesh argues, but the pain did not last as long as it has in the last seven years.

Blairite loyalist Alan Milburn - a former Trotskyist, but now sitting on the boards of large private equity firms - was appointed by the Tory-led government to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. The commission has now reported that the target to reduce child poverty by half by 2020 will not be met. The current government had "discredited existing

child poverty targets and failed to put in place new ones", creating an "unholy mess". Milburn concluded: "It does seem that Britain is on the brink of becoming a permanently divided nation."

According to the commission's report, "absolute child poverty increased by 300,000 between 2010-11 and 2012-13" and "independent experts expect child poverty to increase significantly over the next few years". In addition, "working poverty after housing costs is rising". The report says 1.4 million children are now in "relative poverty" due to the effects of rising rents and mortgage costs since 2010. It adds that 20% of Scottish children and 24% of Welsh children live in absolute poverty.⁶

But back to the ecstasy - for the richest in our nation. The country's five richest families now own more wealth than the poorest 20% of the population, according to Oxfam. A handful of the super-rich, headed by the Duke of Westminster, have more money and financial assets than 12.6 million Britons put together.⁷ The poorest 20% in the UK have wealth totalling £28.1 billion - an average of £2,230 each. The five top UK entries - the family of the Duke of Westminster, David and Simon Reuben, the Hinduja brothers, the Cadogan family and Sports Direct retail boss Mike Ashley - between them have property, savings and other assets worth £28.2 billion.

And this wealth gap is widening as a result of the ability of the better off to capture the lion's share of the proceeds of growth. Since the mid-1990s, the incomes of the top 0.1% have grown by £461 a week, or £24,000 a year. By

contrast, the bottom 90% have seen a real-terms increase of only £2.82 a week or £147 a year.

For the first time more working households are in poverty than non-working ones and the number of children living below the poverty line could increase by 800,000 by 2020.⁸ None of this is mentioned by Janesh Ganesh.

Profligacy and austerity

The Tory-Liberal Democrat government continues to apply policies of 'austerity' - ie, cuts in government spending, welfare and public services - along with the steady privatisation of the NHS and state education. Both PM Cameron and deputy PM Clegg trot out the spin that they 'inherited' a huge deficit and public debt created by the previous Labour government, and the austerity and low growth of the past few years was necessary in order to correct this.

This is a nonsense analysis. Yes, Britain's annual deficit on government spending over revenues rocketed from 2007 and the public debt-to-GDP ratio rose. However, this was not due to Labour 'profligacy', but to the global financial collapse and the bailing out of the banks with government borrowing, and the subsequent decline in tax revenues and rise in welfare spending as a result of the ensuing great recession.

This all seems to be erased from history. I remember the then chancellor of the exchequer, Alastair Darling, coming on TV in 2008, staring like a rabbit caught in car headlights and telling us of a financial meltdown that

was the worst thing to hit the economy for over 60 years. He said it needed emergency action by the government to help the banks. Darling, more recently the 'saviour' of Scotland, was soon accompanied by that other saviour of Scotland, Gordon Brown, then PM, who told parliament that he had 'saved the world' (whoops, he meant the rotten banks) by forcing through a merger of two of them, Lloyds and the Bank of Scotland, and financing it with billions of government cash (to be borrowed from the banks themselves!).

A recent IMF report has outlined the scale of direct government support for the financial system after 2007 in Europe and the US.⁹ The bailout of the banks alone has cost the British people over 10% of GDP and less than half of it has been recovered from bank repayments. Indeed, Andrew Haldane, the man at the Bank of England responsible for banking stability before becoming chief economist, has calculated that the major British banks have only taken a hit equivalent to 1/20th of low-end estimates of what the banks ought to pay for all the damage they did.¹⁰

Now the current BoE deputy governor for financial stability, Sir John Cunliffe, has highlighted that banker pay has not fallen nearly as much as bank profits, especially in the UK. Top bankers are still raking it in. Shareholders (including the taxpayer in the two biggest banks) are getting just 2p in dividends for every pound paid to top staff!¹¹

And, remember, the banking crash was so damaging because successive British governments relaxed controls and regulations over what banks could

do in what was called 'light touch' regulation. This is what Gordon Brown said in June 2007, just before the great crash broke:

Over the 10 years that I have had the privilege of addressing you as chancellor, I have been able year by year to record how the City of London has risen by your efforts, ingenuity and creativity to become a new world leader ... So I congratulate you, Lord Mayor and the City of London, on these remarkable achievements, an era that history will record as the beginning of a new golden age for the City of London.¹²

Just a few months later, then leader of the opposition David Cameron spoke at the London School of Economics: "The world economy [is] more stable than for a generation ... Our hugely sophisticated financial markets match funds with ideas better than ever before."¹³

Current shadow chancellor Ed Balls wrote in the *FT* in the mid-1990s about 'neoclassical endogenous growth theory': namely that modern economies could now grow steadily without any shocks or crashes towards ecstasy.¹⁴ As City minister under Tony Blair, he advocated 'light touch' regulation of the finance sector.

Mainly because the UK economy grew between 1997 and 2007, Labour actually kept the government budget in balance over its first six years in office between 1997 and 2002, and ran only a small deficit between 2003 and 2007. Welfare spending rose only in line with GDP growth. The dramatic climb in the budget deficit from then to the average of 10.7% in 2009-10 was a consequence of the recession caused by the financial crisis.

The recession reduced government revenue by the equivalent of 2.4% points of GDP - from 42.1% to 39.7%. And it raised social spending (social benefit plus health spending) by the equivalent of 3.2% of GDP compared with its 2008 level (from 21.8% to 24%). So the recession triggered a fall in tax revenue and rise in social spending totalling 5.6% points of GDP.¹⁵

Weak recovery

But let us return to now. The irony is that cutting wages and slashing public spending - the 'twin peaks' of the coalition government's economic policy - have not succeeded either in restoring sustained long-term growth or in 'correcting' public finances.

In March, the government predicted that the budget deficit would shrink by about £12 billion in the current fiscal year. Instead, it is widening. Government spending exceeded revenue by £10 billion in September. This leaves the shortfall in the first six months of the current fiscal year at £55 billion - 5% more than in the same period of 2013.

The reason is much weaker tax revenue than expected, because the extra employment is in low-paying jobs, part-time work replacing some full-time jobs and above all in self-employment. Self-employment accounts for one-third of the 1.75 million jobs created since early 2010, as people hit by the recession turned to working for themselves in jobs from taxi-driving to carpentry. And the proportion of self-employed workers reporting incomes below the tax-free threshold has jumped to 35%, from 21% before the financial crisis.

As nominal wages are barely growing, fewer people are moving into higher-rate tax bands. In March, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast average incomes would grow 2.4% this year. Instead the latest quarterly figures show they rose by just 0.7%. Together, taxes on income and national-insurance contributions account for almost half of government revenue. Osborne had been predicting

about 7% more income tax this year. Between April and August, it fell 0.8%!

The coalition government is way short of its target to 'balance the books' by the end of 2018, a target that has been slipping back anyway. Meanwhile the gross government debt ratio inexorably rises towards 100% of GDP - a level not seen since the war debt levels of 1945.

And yet the Conservatives have announced more tax cuts for the rich if they win the election next year. But they cannot square the circle of cutting taxes and maintaining public services, even if they reduce welfare spending to zero!

Yet the government continues to crow that its policies of austerity have worked. Even some Keynesians seem convinced that the economy is turning around for good. Arch-Keynesian Simon Wren-Lewis from Oxford University attacked those who continued to doubt the economic recovery:

What about the counter-argument that the recovery is not real, or not sustainable? In some ways this rhetoric is worse than the 'austerity works' line: it is also wrong, but it is much less likely to succeed as rhetoric. The rhetoric will not work because, despite the unequal and uneven nature of the recovery, many people do feel more optimistic now than two years ago.¹⁶

Wren-Lewis goes on:

It is much better for critics of the government to focus on the 'wasted years' of 2010-12, and on the fall in median incomes over the last five years. If they want economic issues for today and tomorrow, focus on inequality.

Yes, as this article has done so far. But that does not mean we have to accept the view that all is now fine and dandy with the British economy.

Although manufacturing output is growing at its fastest for five years, it is still shy of its peak in 2008 before the great recession hit the UK economy. Despite a large devaluation of sterling as a response to the financial crash, exports have not made much progress and the UK's deficit on trade with the rest of the world remains very high. The UK's government budget deficit is still the highest among the G7 economies. As for the message that the UK economy is heading for 3%-plus real growth this year and next, the real joker in the pack is that, just as in the US, the capitalist sector is not investing.

The UK economy has delivered one of the weakest recoveries since the end of the great recession in this 'recovery' phase.¹⁷ The UK's real GDP has only just got back to its pre-slump peak in 2007. Yet all the other G7 economies (except Italy) have passed that benchmark.

And if you look at GDP per head of population, the UK record is even worse, with the UK lagging behind the euro zone average and still nowhere near restoring the pre-recession position. What that tells you is that the UK economy has only expanded because of a big influx of immigrants into the country. It is population, not productivity, that is growing.

Two studies have shown that increased net immigration into the UK since the great recession has added to real GDP growth and if the government carries out its plans to cut net immigration by 50%, it would reduce GDP per head.¹⁸ Immigration is boosting the British economy, although a rising population leaves problems of overcrowding of public facilities (including schools, hospitals, roads), the limited supply of housing and strain on natural resources (for example, water). But that is an issue for higher government investment and

services and a public-sector housing programme.

Productivity puzzle

As for productivity, output per hour in the UK was 17% below the average for the rest of the major G7 industrialised economies in 2013 - the widest productivity gap since 1992. On an output-per-worker basis, UK productivity was 19% below the average for the rest of the G7 in 2013.¹⁹

And it is getting worse. UK output per hour fell slightly in 2013 compared with 2012, contrasting with an increase of 1% across the rest of the G7. UK productivity levels are about the same as in 2007, but 15% below where they ought to be if pre-crisis productivity growth had continued.

And productivity growth matters if overall economic growth is to be sustained. Real GDP growth is a combination of employment growth and productivity growth (output per worker). Employment growth in the UK, even with wholesale immigration maintained, is unlikely to be higher than 1% a year. So to achieve sustained 3% real GDP growth (the minimum necessary to get unemployment down further), reduce the budget deficit and government debt, and start to raise real incomes, productivity growth must be at least 2% a year. But instead it is falling.

Why has British productivity been so bad? It has been a combination of the growth of low value-added self-employment (taxi-drivers, cleaners, odd-jobbers, etc), low-skilled part-time, temporary and full-time jobs (Asda, McDonalds, Starbucks, etc). The ranks of workers in 'time-related underemployment' - doing fewer hours than they wish due to a lack of availability of work - have swollen dramatically. Between 1999 and 2006, only about 1.9% of workers were in such a position; by 2012-13 the figure was 8%.

One of the features of the employment market in the UK in this 'boom' has been the huge rise in self-employed workers. The number of firms with fewer than 10 employees has swelled by 550,000 since 2008. Meanwhile, in mid-2013 there were 5.7 million people working in the public sector, only 18.8% of total employment, the lowest since records began in 1999. Indeed, the self-employed will outnumber those working in the public sector in four years, once the government has completed its slashing of public-sector jobs and services.

Self-employment's share of total work, whose historical norm (1984-2007) was 12.6%, now stands at an unprecedented 15%. With no evidence of a sudden burst of entrepreneurial energy among Britons, we may conclude that many are in self-employment out of necessity or even desperation. Even though surveys show that most newly self-employed people say it is their preference, the fact that these workers have experienced a far greater collapse in earnings than employees - 20% against 6% between 2006-07 and 2011-12, according to the Resolution Foundation²⁰ - suggests that they have few alternatives.

The rightwing editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Allister Heath, tells us that this is really good news for the economy:

This is clearly a golden age for entrepreneurship, especially in London, but there is more to it than that. Self-employment surged 17% over the past five years and is still rising; while at first the increase was made up of people who preferred to work as consultants rather than being forced to sign on to the dole, many of the more recent entrants appear happy with the choice. In the past, recoveries in the labour market were driven by increased demand for workers; today, it is just as much a case of a better, more

flexible and more entrepreneurial supply creating its own demand.²¹

Heath goes on to tell us that 'zero-hours contracts' and a choice between self-employment, working on call and part-time work shows how 'flexible' the UK labour market has become, thanks to deregulation and the weakening of the unions under Thatcher and Blair: "We need to build on this flexibility."

Really? Actually, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor statistics show that the proportion of new entrepreneurs in the UK driven by valuable opportunities has fallen - from a high of 61% in 2006 to 43% in 2012. And Office for National Statistics figures show that a falling number of self-employed people hire other workers, suggesting that the rise in self-employment is not translating into new, thriving businesses. Researchers at the University of Warwick found that, in less prosperous areas of the UK, policies to increase firm formation had a negative impact on long-term employment, as those who started new companies had low skills, few other options and poor market prospects.

What is really behind the increase in self-employed is not 'entrepreneurial spirit', but the loss of benefits and the ability of self-employed to claim tax credits under the government 'welfare reforms'. As Richard Murphy at Tax Research has pointed out, the self-employed now account for 15% of the workforce, but 19% of working tax credit claimants. In other words, those working for themselves are more likely to be claiming tax credits than those in employment. The self-employed are earning less than they did before the slump. In 2007-08, 4.9 million self-employed earned £88.4 billion, but in 2011-12, 5.5 million self-employed earned £80.6 billion. Indeed, the Resolution Foundation found that self-employed weekly earnings are 20% lower than they were in 2006-07, while employee earnings have fallen by just 6%. As a result, the typical self-employed person now earns 40% less than the typical employed person.²²

Low investment

What Haldane did not say in his 'twin peaks' speech was why there had been such a fall in real wages and a rise in his "agony index". It is because, rather than increase investment to raise productivity, British capital has opted to squeeze wages and cut costs to try and restore profitability. You see, contrary to the view of neoclassical and Keynesian economics alike, productivity and profitability are not the same thing - indeed they are often contradictory.

Including all investment (in property, business and government), the UK's investment ratio remains the lowest of all major capitalist economies.

Before the global financial crash broke in 2007-08, I wrote in my book, *The great recession*, that, because the UK was essentially a 'rentier' economy - ie, relying increasingly on earnings from rent (property), interest (often from abroad) and foreign capital flows - it would suffer the most from any global crash and take the longest to recover. So it has proved. The BoE shows that the financial services sector, which contributed up to nearly 10% of UK GDP in 2009 - much more than even the US financial sector - has dropped 30% to under 7% of GDP.

With the finance sector in the doldrums, the UK economy needed a boost from somewhere else. The answer from the government has been to fuel a new property boom with cheap and subsidised mortgages. Property prices exploded in central London and this spread to the rest of the country - they are now rising in double-digit rates. But there has been no corresponding increase in business investment, which remained a drag on

growth in the UK economy in 2013.

Investment by the capitalist sector is not recovering and British businesses are failing to raise their share in world export markets.

Instead, companies have opted to squeeze wages. This has boosted the rate of exploitation (and raised levels of inequality). But it has failed to raise UK profitability much.²³ The underlying 'health' of British capitalism, at least in its productive sectors, remains frail.

Indeed, the peak in the 2000s for profitability was in 2007, at 14.2%. But even after the huge credit boom, profitability was below the 1997 peak of 14.5%. The decline from 1997 to a low in the depth of the great recession (2009) was 10.9%, down 21%. It is now 11.9%, or up 10% from that level. But it is still 18% below 1997.

The current 'fast' growth of the UK economy is not sustainable without much increased investment. But the government has cut public investment to the bone and the capitalist sector is not investing because profitability is poor.

The way to raise profits is by new labour-shedding technology that increases productivity and lowers costs. But British capital is reluctant to invest when it is still burdened with spare capacity in old technology and corporate debt. That needs to be liquidated first - in another slump.

There is more agony to come ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

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18. <http://niesr.ac.uk/blog/long-term-economic-impacts-reducing-migration#VEd77rVe8U>. Lisenkova and others look at two scenarios: net migration of 200,000 and a lower migration scenario, which assumes that net migration is reduced by around 50% - close to David Cameron's migration target of less than 100,000. They find that by 2060 GDP per capita would be 2.7% lower under the lower migration scenario (www.civitas.org.uk/immigration/LSI). Rowthorn suggests that, given a set of assumptions about employment rates and labour productivity, GDP per capita is 3% higher in 2087 with high migration than with very low migration.
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AWL

Those who side with imperialism

Patrick Smith exposes spurious justifications and disastrous results

In 2013 I resigned from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty following the publication of Sean Matgamna's 'Marxism and religion' article and subsequently became a member of the CPGB. Since then I have spent some time reflecting on my experience and clarifying my ideas.

In particular I have been considering social-imperialism: what it is and how it has changed over time. In that light I would like to discuss the AWL's positions on various conflicts, its heterodox theory of imperialism and capitalist development, and why it is wrong.

Social-imperialism

Throughout history, the systematic violence and coercion that maintains the current imperialist world order has been justified by various ideas. Prior to World War I the big idea was that the imperialist nations were bringing civilisation to the uncivilised. In the late 20th century it was bringing democracy to totalitarian states. More recently it has been about preventing genocide or mass murder.

The ideas that justify imperialism are always noble. Who but an uncaring intransigent could oppose spreading civilisation and all that it brings to those unfortunate enough not to have developed it themselves? Who could oppose bringing democracy to those trampled under the heel of authoritarianism? Who could oppose the only thing capable of preventing a genocide?

It is within this context that social-imperialism occurs. These questions tend to dominate the arguments put forward by the AWL, for example - US imperialism is seen as preventing massacres or bringing stability. The AWL has developed its own theory, of course, to justify its positions, but in its day-to-day literature and slogans it is the 'common sense' bourgeois ideas that lurk beneath the surface.

This is not unique to the AWL. Both Ernest Belfort Bax and Eduard Bernstein accepted the thinking of the day that imperialism drew "barbarian" or "savage" peoples towards civilisation. But they differed over whether this was historically progressive and chose a side accordingly.

Bernstein thought that capitalist social relations had to be spread across the world as a precondition for socialism. He therefore did not oppose colonial conquest in circumstances where he thought the people being colonised were "incapable", as he put it, of "civilisation" by themselves. He did, however, support the struggle against imperialism, where he felt it was interfering and holding back the development of peoples, or where progressive classes were rebelling against their suppression by reactionary classes.

Bax took the opposite view and unconditionally supported the right of indigenous peoples to resist colonial conquest. He thought that capitalism was on the verge of collapse and imperialism was an attempt to delay this. By halting capitalist expansion, he thought socialists would bring about the *Zusammenbruch* (collapse) and usher in an era of socialism. He thought the "barbarian" or "uncivilised" peoples should be allowed to develop on their own and saw their subjection to "the squalor of modern civilisation" as unnecessary to the achievement of socialism. To this end he actually proposed to the 1896 London Congress of the Second International that socialists ought to arm, train and drill indigenous people, so that they might defeat colonial forces.

During the debate between the two, Bernstein wrote:



Libya: a failed state ruled by rival militias

Races who are hostile to or incapable of civilisation cannot claim our sympathy ... We will condemn and oppose certain methods of subjugating savages. But we will not condemn the idea that savages must be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilisation.¹

Those who know the AWL will recognise the logic. Here, for example, are Clive Bradley's thoughts on Libya and Muammar Gaddafi: "We can be vigilant against whatever political steps the western powers take, but what issue of principle should make us demonstrate against [western military intervention]?"² So he opposes and condemns certain imperialist methods, but does not think it a principle to oppose imperialism *per se*.

In the same article quoted above, Bernstein also wrote:

Not every rising of conquered races against their conquerors is a struggle for emancipation. Africa harbours tribes who adjudge to themselves the right of trading in slaves, and who can only be prevented from this sort of thing by the civilised nations of Europe. Their risings against the latter do not interest us - nay, will have us, in given cases, as opponents.

Again, we see an interesting parallel with the AWL. In 2004 the same Clive Bradley drafted the following motion:

The 'resistance' to US/UK occupation [of Iraq] is reactionary. As things stand, the occupation cannot accurately be called 'colonial'. The conflict is more one between the globocop of the empire of capital and local mafias and gangs.

Another senior AWLer, Mark Osborn, writes: "If the US destroys the bases used by Syria's military to massacre its own citizens, you will not find the AWL on the streets protesting. The main enemy is Assad, not America."³ And on September 7 2011, Sacha Ismail comments: "... nothing was going to save the Libyan revolution except outside intervention."⁴

In each of these quotes we find elements of Bernstein's logic.

I will concentrate in this article on Kosova and Libya - I was an AWL member during the Libyan civil war and never opposed the organisation's position. As for Kosova, I did not come up with a satisfactory answer when

asked about it during the pre-conference period before I left.

What I want to address with these examples are two specific things. The first is the propaganda, which tends to grossly exaggerate the threat posed by whoever imperialism or Nato has in its sights. The second is the claim that intervention helps the situation, when in fact it tends to make things worse - in the case of Libya, it produced a 'failed state', where the violence still continues, long after the fall of Gaddafi.

I found that one of the hardest arguments to oppose is the claim that these people - Albanians in Kosova, the labour movement in Iraq, the uprising in Benghazi, and so on - these people are about to be murdered, and the only thing that might stop this is 'humanitarian intervention'. So 'who are we to oppose this?' - or, more commonly, 'Should our opposition to intervention be the main demand?' The implication being that if you still oppose western intervention then you are a heartless monster, blinded by your "kitsch-left" anti-imperialist blinkers.

Kosova

In 1999 politicians and journalists 'knew' exactly what the Serbs were doing in Kosova - just as they 'knew' Iraq possessed 'weapons of mass destruction' in 2003. Bill Clinton, then US president, talked of "deliberate, systematic efforts at ethnic cleansing and genocide". US defence secretary William Cohen claimed: "We've now seen about 100,000 military-aged men missing ... They may have been murdered." And in March 1999, Nato began bombing Serbia to stop all this.

I cannot refer to what the AWL said prior to the bombing because it is not available online or in any of the publications I have. But I can say that the general narrative of the AWL now is that the Nato bombing campaign prevented a genocide - Kosova is often used as an example of a model "humanitarian intervention". For example, in 2011 AWL guru Sean Matgamna writes: "... in 1999 the Nato powers undertook a police action to stop a Serbian drive to massacre and drive out the Albanian population of Kosova" - an action socialists should support, because the "Serbian regime was engaged in an attempt at genocide".⁵

In 1999, at the Socialist Workers Party's Marxism event, the AWL produced a flier that claimed:

the Kosova Liberation Army

emerged as a ramshackle rural militia for self-defence. The KLA had won mass support, but in the autumn of 1998 it was routed by Serb forces ... The west became alarmed - and not because Milošević was mistreating the Kosovars, but because the Serb state was using so much terror and brutality it was threatening the stability of the whole region.

In 1999, Lucy Clement compares the Kosova war to the holocaust:

It's 1943. We're at a socialist meeting. For two years the Nazis have been killing Jews. They've organised the slaughter into a modern industry. Trains from all over Europe deliver cattle truck-loads of Jews to the death factories. British imperialism, at war with Germany, decides to do what Jewish groups have been asking for. They bomb the rail approach to Auschwitz. And more - they systematically bomb railway lines across Germany. Back to our meeting. The speaker stands up: 'Comrades, there is one thing above all we must say tonight. Stop bombing German railways! Stop this bloody war!'

I think it is fair to say that the AWL's narrative of events is that Serbia was engaged in a genocide against Kosova and that the Nato intervention stopped it. To the point where the Nato campaign is compared to the bombing of the train lines to Auschwitz.

However, Nato intervention actually escalated the violence and created a humanitarian crisis. Prior to the bombing the United Nations Human Rights Council reported no refugee problem. Three days into the bombing it noted that 4,000 had fled Kosova. Within weeks it was estimated that more than 350,000 had fled since the bombing began.⁷

In a Nato report following the war it was stated that 2,000 people had been killed on all sides prior to the bombing. British defence secretary George Robertson (later to become Nato general secretary) stated in the House of Commons that, up to mid-January 1999, "The Kosovo Liberation Army was responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than the Serbian authorities had been." Finally, the House of Commons foreign affairs committee concluded: "It is likely that the Nato bombing did cause a change in the character of the assault upon the Kosovo Albanians. What had been an anti-insurgency campaign - albeit a brutal and counterproductive one - became a mass organised campaign to kill Kosovo Albanians and drive them from the country."⁸

None of this is to say that nationalism, in particular Serbian nationalism, was not a problem during the break-up of Yugoslavia; nor is it to say that there was no ethnic cleansing - the worst example being the Serb massacre of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica. But it is to say that the invocation of the holocaust and claims of genocide were used as a pretext for war - one which the AWL repeated.

Libya

In March 2011, Sean Matgamna bombarded us with a long list of rhetorical questions in an article entitled 'Why we should not denounce intervention in Libya'. Matgamna claims that the Nato no-fly zone is "likely to ... produce desirable results" and that this "limited police action has prevented, for now at least, the immediate full-scale massacre that colonel Gaddafi threatened to inflict on his opponents."⁹

Then, in an article entitled 'No illusions in west, but "anti-intervention" opposition is abandoning rebels', Clive Bradley calls Gaddafi "bloodthirsty"

and claims that intervention is "the one thing which might prevent untold slaughter, prevent Gaddafi's immediate bloody victory", which would be a crushing defeat for the Arab spring. He concludes that "a terrible defeat in Libya" would sap the self-confidence of the Libyan working class much more than "a temporary acceptance of western assistance".¹⁰

In May 2011, Martyn Hudson writes an article entitled 'Libyan rebels fight for life'. In this he claims that pro-Gaddafi militias continue to target "journalists, bloggers and paramedics" and goes on to accuse them of perpetrating "widespread rape and mass murder". He also claims that the "pro-tyrant left" have downplayed this and branded the uprising reactionary, whereas "it is clear that the rebels form a genuine citizens' army" who aim to create "an open civil society" with a "multi-party government". He concludes by comparing the Transitional National Council to the Petrograd Soviet, noting that, much like the Petrograd Commune of 1919, "free Libya fights for its very existence".¹¹

So there are three claims here:

● Gaddafi was about to commit mass murder or genocide against the civilian population of the east.

● The no-fly zone imposed by Nato was a one-off "police action" intended to stop the aforementioned massacre.

● The uprising was a coherent democratic revolution with the goal of establishing a multi-party democracy.

With regard to the first point, reports during the first seven days of the uprising claimed that Gaddafi's forces had killed over 2,000 people in Benghazi and more than 1,000 in Tripoli. These exaggerated the figures by a factor of more than 10. The actual death toll across Libya for that entire period was 233, according to a later review by Human Rights Watch. The highest figure I have seen is 640, a quarter of which were Gaddafi's forces.

Moreover, Gaddafi did not perpetrate a "bloodbath" in any of the cities that his forces recaptured from rebels prior to Nato intervention. For instance in Misrata 949 people were wounded and 257 people were killed out of a population of 400,000, but that was during the rebellion itself.

None of this is to prettify Gaddafi, but to establish that once again the threat of mass murder was grossly exaggerated in order to drum up support for intervention. Or, as Eddie Ford has noted, "Communists, it goes without saying, opposed the Gaddafi regime. But we reject the west's anti-Gaddafi propaganda."¹²

It is also false to claim that this was a "one-off police action" designed to prevent an immediate massacre. The purpose was clearly regime change. That is why the regime's retreating forces were bombed and there was an attempt to assassinate Gaddafi by targeting his house.

Finally, while the uprising was directed against the authoritarian rule of Gaddafi, it was hardly coherent.

This brings us to post-Gaddafi Libya and what the AWL had to say about the situation. The motion on the Middle East proposed in Discussion Bulletin No307 (prior to the AWL conference in 2013) claims that "the overthrow of Gaddafi with the help of Nato intervention has produced a rightwing regime that nonetheless has elements of a functioning bourgeois democracy". It goes on to claim that "There have been pogroms and repression against black Libyans and against migrants, numerous human rights violations by the government and various militias, and the country is fragmenting and could break up further. Nonetheless, the situation is qualitatively better than under Gaddafi."

While advocating stark distrust of Nato, we were right not to denounce flat-out the Nato intervention, which prevented the crushing of the rebellion.”

When I asked how any of this was qualitatively better than under Gaddafi in a pre-conference meeting, Sacha Ismail pointed out that the motion says that “there have been some strikes”.

On every count the AWL has been wrong. The intervention was not ‘humanitarian’ and it did not bring any sort of stability. It escalated rather than stopped the violence, which in turn produced a failed state that has fractured along tribal lines, run by dozens of warring militias vying for control of Libya’s oil.

In both Serbia and Libya - and you can add other examples, such as Iraq and Afghanistan - imperialist intervention has made the situation worse.

There is an apocryphal story about the Caledonian chieftain, Calgacus, in Tacitus’s *The Agricola*. Shortly before the battle of Mons Graupius in AD83 he makes an observation about the nature of the Roman empire in a speech to his troops: “To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and, where they make a desert, they call it peace.”

While the Roman empire was a product of a different time and mode of production, I think this observation - that the Romans simply laid waste to areas and declared it a success - could be made of many of the places in which western intervention has occurred: Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and so on. These countries have been or were to some extent destroyed, yet the myth of imperialism as a force capable of successful regime change, nation-building or humanitarian intervention still persists. The biggest proponent of these illusions on the left being the AWL.

Ultra-imperialism

There is a formulation used by the AWL, which dates back to the days of *Socialist Organiser*, about having “no trust in Nato”. For example, as far back as 1992 Sean Matgamna writes:

There is growing demand for western intervention to bring an end to the fighting ... Should socialists ‘defend Serbia’ from ‘imperialist aggression?’ If there is western military intervention it will be a police action to avert chaos on the borders of the immensely powerful European community: it will be a limited police action. As socialists and anti-imperialists, we have no confidence in the western capitalist powers: we warn against relying on Nato or US intervention. But in the name of what alternative would we denounce and condemn, and demand an immediate end to, a limited police action by the big powers?¹³

When AWL leaders say that they “don’t make opposition to one-off police actions [their] main demand” while still “advocating a stark distrust of Nato” and noting that the US or whoever intervenes in “their own, imperialist or capitalist interests”, we need to remember what *they* mean by imperialism and why they distrust it. It is their heterodox theory of imperialism that informs those statements. It also explains why they are so nonchalant about the imperialism of the west, but exhibit an hysterical, almost unhinged, opposition to Iranian, Iraqi, Russian and Chinese state actions.

In the mid- to late 90s Martin Thomas developed a theory based on a rethinking of Kautsky’s “ultra-imperialism”. There are three parts to his theory that need covering. The first is the history and development of the capitalist state and its place in the world market until the mid-20th century. The second is the development of “ultra-imperialism”. The third is the state of world affairs today and what that means for socialist strategy.

These comments are based on the article, ‘Marxism and imperialism’,

which Thomas wrote in *Workers’ Liberty* No28 (1996) and republished with some amendments in 2001; and his introduction to Kautsky’s *Socialism and colonial policy*, his introduction to Kautsky’s ‘Ultra-imperialism’ and his critique of Negri and the SWP - all from *Workers’ Liberty* No2/3.

State and market

In his introduction to ‘Ultra-imperialism’, Thomas writes:

Some leftists have used ‘imperialism’ as a shapeless hold-all word to refer to advanced capitalism whenever they wanted to express special hostility to it, thus putting themselves in a posture of indicting advanced capitalism because it is advanced rather than for being capitalist.

I start with this to illustrate Thomas’s conception of the state, which is at any given point on one rung of the ladder of capitalist development competing with other states on the world market. This understanding of capitalist and imperialist development is largely the same as that of Lenin and the early Kautsky. The only difference being an additional stage of development - that of “ultra-imperialism”, policed by the “globocop” hyper-imperialist state, or hyper-power. In *WL28* Thomas writes:

The nation-state was the first framework for capitalist development. As capitalism develops, it outgrows the nation-states, greedily takes the whole world as its arena, and becomes more closely tied up with and reliant on those states ... The world economy is therefore an arena not only of competition between capitalists, but also of competition between capitalist states.

This starts with ‘old-style’ exploitation colonies that draw profit from the crude plunder of resources from the colonised country: for example, Latin America under Spanish and Portuguese rule and India in the early stages of British colonial rule.

We then see the emergence of settler colonies, or what Kautsky called “work colonies”, where the European settlers became the new working class rather than exploiting the local workforce. This sort of colonialism brought capitalist progress with it, but often led to repression and the destruction of the natives. Though Kautsky notes that this was “not an unavoidable result”.

This is then followed by a period of “the imperialism of free trade” under British hegemony. This is explained by Kautsky as being the result of the industrial revolution in Britain, causing the ascendancy of industrial capital, and the liberal, free-trade policy of Manchesterism, which was advantageous to Britain.

This lasts from the beginning of the 19th century until we reach the late 1870s-early 1880s, where we see a new exploitative colonialism or “high imperialism”, which is regarded as a new phenomenon. Martin writes:

Before, imperial powers had often been content to limit themselves to plunder and only marginal trade in their colonies ... earlier in the 19th century, the industrial and empire-establishing pioneer, Britain, had been able to range wide through free trade, but it was now seeing its industry fast outstripped by Germany and the USA.

This is explained as the result of national industry becoming dominated by cartels. The high-finance and industrial cartels caused the state to “drive out internationally in search of opportunities for investment, of markets for manufactured goods, and of sources of raw materials”. Colonial rule was needed to safeguard investments and supply the force necessary for capitalist development.

This produced a competitive scramble for new territories, the growth of militarism, and thus the conditions for World War I. After which the pattern of “high imperialism” continued and in some respects was intensified. The world became more sharply divided into trade blocs and empires. Germany, stripped of its colonies and some of its territory, and subjected to crippling reparations, drove for revenge against the old empires and spheres of influence, creating the conditions for World War II.

Hyper-imperialism

We come, then, to the final development of “ultra-imperialism” in Thomas’s theory. “It is a cousin of the ‘ultra-imperialism’ sketched by Kautsky, rather than a direct embodiment of it,” he writes. It is more a system of collaboration and negotiation keystoneed by the “globocop” hyper-imperialist role of the USA than the ‘moderate’ give-and-take agreement between more-or-less equals, which Kautsky foresaw.

After World War II the world was divided into two camps: one led by the USA, the other by the USSR. In the western camp, something pretty much like Kautsky’s “ultra-imperialism” did emerge. It was constructed, after two world wars, within one “camp” of a bigger-than-ever arms race between two camps, and under the hegemony of a sort of hyper-imperialism: the USA.

Western powers avoided or limited the costs of arms-racing by hitching themselves to the US. The US was *able* to carry the military costs because of its economic superiority, and *willing* to do so in order to police a world, or half-world, of free-ish trade, in which its huge corporations and banks could prosper better than in the old world of trade blocs and rival empires.

According to the theory, the collapse of the Soviet Union brings us to the situation today where ultra-imperialism has extended to cover almost the whole globe. The situation is one in which the world is made up of politically independent bourgeois states integrated into the world market and acting to make their territory a safe and workable area for capital accumulation.

The US hyper-power acts as a “globocop” and intervenes militarily for two reasons.

The first is to maintain a smooth network of capitalist states covering the globe in order to make them safe areas for capital accumulation. Thomas writes:

Since the early 1990s, the USA has generally preferred to sustain bourgeois democracies (of a sort, and on condition, of course, that they accept the rules of the world market, which generally they do out of the self-interest of the local bourgeoisie).

Although he acknowledges that the US is perfectly happy to support dictatorships and so on if they play ball. And it also intervenes militarily when the actions of sub- or paleo-imperialist states bring them into conflict with it.

Because the world is a system of politically independent states, and not an empire of the US or a cartel of the big powers, there are also sub-imperialist powers, such as India, Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria, which maintain a regional hegemony. In addition to this there are “paleo-imperialist” states. These are states which are engaged in regional conquests of the type we saw in the period of “high imperialism”, the prefix ‘paleo’ signifying an earlier or previous form.

Not all military ventures by paleo-imperialist powers bring them into conflict with the US or Nato. Thomas notes “Indonesia in East Timor, Turkey in Cyprus and Morocco in the Western Sahara” as examples of paleo-imperialism being endorsed by the big powers. However, sometimes, as in Serbia in Kosovo, or Iraq in Kuwait, the US acts against the paleo-imperialist power.

So there we have it: the world is a system of economically interdependent, but politically independent, states at

various stages of capitalist development. A situation policed by the US hyper-power in the interest of creating stability, a precondition for capital accumulation.

This brings us back to the AWL’s position on “anti-imperialism”. When it says the US intervenes in humanitarian crises in its own interests, those interests are the stability of the region, which in turn is in the interests of global capital.

Thus, the occupation of Iraq was seen as bringing some level of stability, which is why the AWL refused to call for ‘troops out’. Or, as Sacha Ismail put it in 2006,

Of course, the occupation does not exist to protect the labour movement in any sense. But it is nonetheless true that, as against the ‘resistance’ and the gangsters, its rule and that of its sponsored government provide some very limited space for the labour movement to exist.¹⁴

As I have said, Martin Thomas believes that the left opposes US imperialism because it is advanced, and he goes on to add: “Paleo-imperialism does not cease to be reactionary when it comes into conflict with a bigger power, any more than a small capitalist exploiter is converted into a philanthropist by a competitive tussle with a big corporation.”

Three reasons

All of this is wrong for three reasons. The first is that it imagines that there has been a non-imperialist capitalism, where capitalism develops in one country before expanding beyond the borders of the nation-state. The second is that it conceives of the world as an anarchy of politically independent states, which differ only in military strength and levels of capitalist development. The third is that it fails to recognise that US or Nato interventions are destructive and tend to produce failed states, rather than bourgeois democracies or even any level of stability.

As Mike Macnair has pointed out, capitalism *emerges* as an international phenomenon and as a systematic international division of labour.

The Genoese and Venetian proto-capitalist city-states established plantation colonies in Cyprus and the Atlantic Islands, to which they exported capital for the production of sugar and naval exclaves in foreign countries in order to create a shipping and warehousing monopoly.

The Dutch republic continued these patterns and added to them the subordination of weaker feudal states, such as Poland and Russia, through the use of loans to pay for arms and infrastructure. In turn the serf labour of these countries was used to provide raw agricultural materials to Dutch cities.

British imperialism brings with it settler-colonies in North America, along with the use of naval exclaves in India and south Asia, the use of loans for arms and infrastructure in Latin America.

The point is that “high imperialism”, “the imperialism of free trade” and “semi-colonialism” are actually features of the international development of capitalism starting - almost - with the very first capitalist city-states, rather than stages of development after capitalism has reached the internal limits of the nation-state.

As capitalism develops, it needs credit money for the capitalist economy to function. In order to have credit money the state has to be able to enforce the debt. In order to avoid debtors moving themselves or their assets out of the reach of the state, it has to act in a mercantilist fashion in order to provide benefits for its capitals and prevent debt-dodging.

The demand to enable credit money on the international scale, while at the same time avoiding a world state which would make discrimination against other capitals, mercantilism and hence credit money impossible, capitalism demands the formation of a systematic hierarchy

of states, headed by the hegemon. The hegemon is, in the first instance, the top military power, but this inevitably leads to its currency becoming the global reserve currency.

The material productivity of the hegemon is undermined by its status as global reserve currency because of the increased military demand on the state, but also because it tends to increase investment in financial operations relative to production. After a while the decline in domestic productivity means that this capacity can no longer support its military through the tribute it obtains from its ability to skim the surplus from international financial transactions.

After this the hegemon is driven to repeated displays of power in order to retain its status, which persists as long as the state can preserve its global strategic balance.

Not only does this understanding take into account the actual history of the international development of capitalism, but it also explains, in a way that Martin Thomas and other AWLers ignore, the apparent irrationality of America’s destructive interventions.

Take Iran, which abolished its \$60 billion fuel and food subsidies programme at the request of the International Monetary Fund. Indeed it was praised by the IMF for reducing domestic fuel consumption, thereby allowing it to sell those assets abroad. Yet America imposes sanctions. Major shipping companies still refuse to send tankers there for fear of being fined; many banks refuse to deal with Tehran because doing so would mean they lose access to US markets.

If America really were engaged in making the “entire globe” a safe space for capital accumulation, it would not be imposing sanctions against one of the most IMF-compliant countries in the world.

Conclusion

All this convinces me that the AWL theory of “ultra-imperialism” is wrong. Yet it is that theory which drives the AWL to adopt social-imperialist positions. It accepts the propaganda about the threat of “genocide”, which features strongly in the AWL’s slogans and positions. It concludes that in general imperialist intervention is on balance progressive.

This in turn leads the AWL to reject defeatism - the need to campaign for the defeat of imperialism. On the contrary, the AWL believes that we are living through a period of “ultra-imperialism”, in which the US hyper-power is not necessarily the ‘worst option’ when it comes into conflict with “paleo-” or “sub-”-imperialisms.

The result is that, in framing the debate in such a way as to support - or ‘not oppose’ - the ‘least worst’ of two capitalist options, the AWL does not approach the question from an independent working class perspective.

And, of course, by refusing to oppose imperialist intervention the AWL ends up justifying the right of the imperialists to exert political control and domination over others, who are denied the right to political independence - the antithesis of democracy.

Approaching the question from an independent working class perspective and being consistent democrats means opposing all imperialist schemes and adventures ●

Notes

1. *Neue Zeit* October 14 1896.
2. *Solidarity* March 23 2011
3. *Solidarity* June 13 2012.
4. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/09/07/libyan-revolution-issues-marxists
5. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/03/23/debate-1-why-we-should-not-denounce-intervention-libya
6. *Workers’ Liberty* June 1999.
7. See *New York Times* April 5 1999.
8. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmfaif/28/2810.htm
9. *Solidarity* March 23 2011.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Solidarity* May 4 2011.
12. *Weekly Worker* August 7 2014.
13. *Socialist Organiser* No529.
14. www.workersliberty.org/node/7400

MINERS 1984-85

Lech Wałęsa and Thatcher, the wise and brave woman

The Leninist tendency in the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1980s and early 90s had a number of distinctive political features that marked it out from other trends on the left of the party. While

The Leninist used the term 'bureaucratic socialism' to refer to the regimes in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, it did so in the literal sense: ie, a form of socialism that was bureaucratic, rather than a society that

was neither capitalist nor socialist. Nevertheless, the forerunner of the *Weekly Worker* was highly critical of those regimes, eventually calling for a "political revolution" to overthrow them.

During the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 this contradiction was highlighted by the continued export of Polish coal to the UK, thus undermining the National Union of Mineworkers' action. In this October 1984

polemic, William Hughes countered the arguments of Ernie Trory, a prominent member of the Stalinist New Communist Party, who had come out in defence of the Polish 'communists' in the previous issue's letters page.

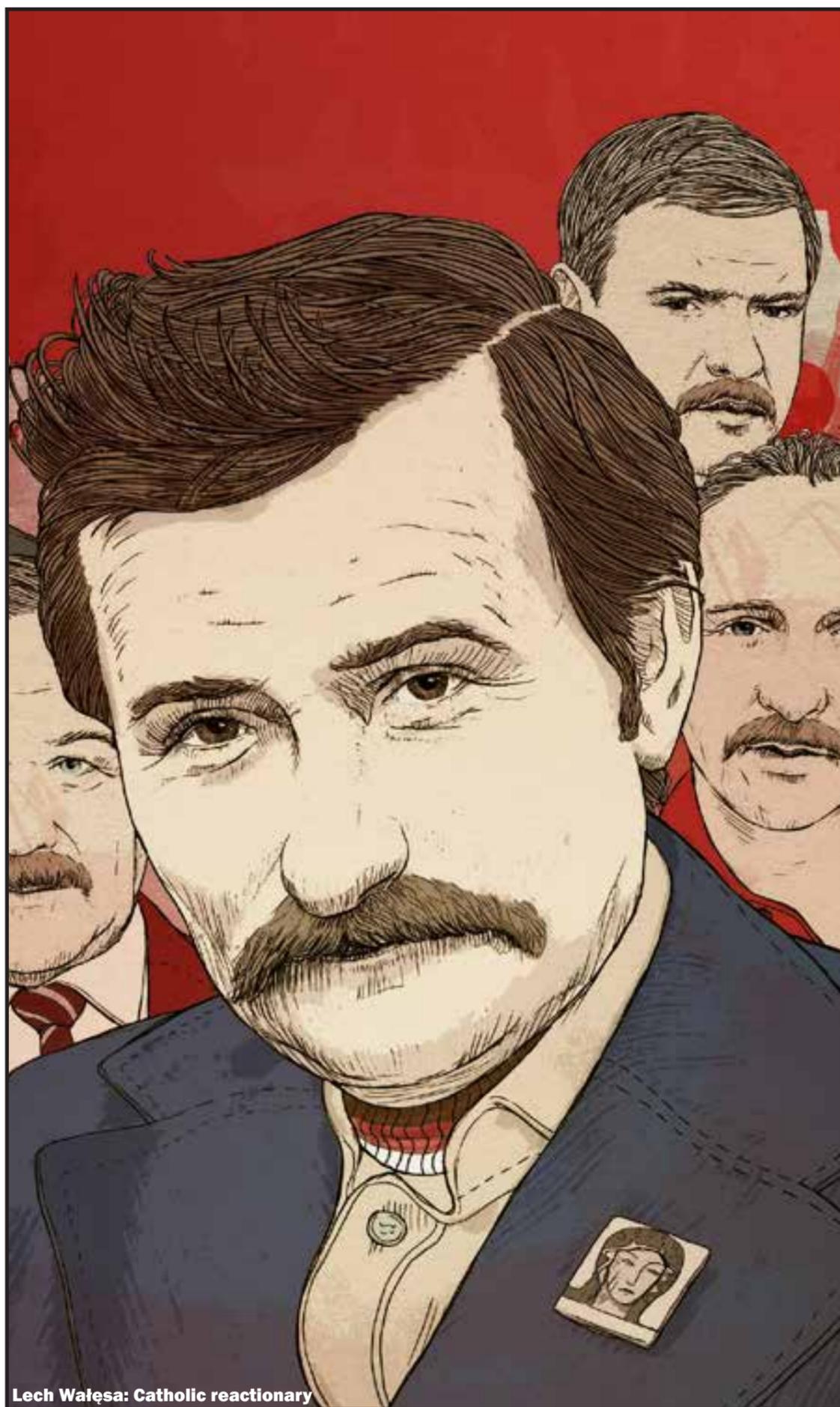
Why does Poland scab?

At a meeting held to celebrate International Miners Day in Lens, northern France, at the beginning of last month, leaders of the Polish miners' union pledged that they would return to Poland and fight for an end to the export of coal to Britain during the miners' strike. The Leninists of the Communist Party of Great Britain welcome this development, even though, quite frankly, it is long overdue. The export of Polish coal to Britain while the miners are slugging it out with the Tories was a *crime* against internationalism, and *The Leninist* has repeatedly made calls from these pages for Polish communists to end this dirty trade.

The statements of the Polish miners' trade union that they plan to return to Poland and push for the ending of this trade is very welcome - if it is more than a throwaway gesture on the part of some Polish trade union functionary, if it represents a shift of the position of the Polish United Workers Party itself. Something in all frankness we must doubt, if reports in the *Financial Times* of September 24 are to be believed. Apparently the Polish authorities, far from stopping the export of coal to Britain, have pushed up their deliveries far in excess of the limits agreed with Arthur Scargill soon after the miners' strike began in March.

Despite our profound criticisms of the Polish party's position, we have never suggested, of course, that our Polish comrades' actions were motivated by anything other than a genuine desire to defend and consolidate socialism in Poland against black counterrevolution. What we *have* argued, however, is that the actions of the Polish communists revealed the tragic dilemma of centrists everywhere, in that they characteristically sought short-term, economic remedies to what are essentially *political* problems. Although these difficulties may manifest themselves in the sphere of the Polish economy, their roots actually lie in the critical ideological crisis that grips the vanguard of the Polish working class - the Polish United Workers Party.

Leading Polish economists estimated in August 1983 that it would take until 1986 to restore production to the levels of 1978 or 1979, themselves years of widespread shortages. However, recent setbacks in the export markets for Polish goods must have ruined even this cautious forecast. In the first half of this year, sales of Polish plant and equipment abroad fell to around 20% of hard-currency earnings for that period, which was only 32% of the export target set by the government. This is very bad news indeed for Poland. Last year alone engineering goods made up one quarter of the \$5.6 billion earned



Lech Wałęsa: Catholic reactionary

in hard currency.

Similarly, output in the key Polish industrial sector of shipbuilding is down from the 1970s. In one of the country's three major shipbuilding works, for example, the Warski yard in Szczecin in north-west Poland, 30% of machinery is standing idle. This enforced idleness is partly the result of a skilled labour shortage and partly because of weak western demand for the type of ships that Poland specialises in. Although for the moment the order books are full, this is accounted for mostly by orders from the Soviet Union. The last time the Warski yard, for example, signed an order with a western customer was in 1982. Hard-currency sales of other Polish industrial specialities, such as sulphuric acid plants, cement plants and sugar mills, have also been severely curtailed, as 'third world' countries, previously their main market, have slashed their imports under the impact of the world recession.

Poland has therefore had to shift its export emphasis away from these 'solid' sources of hard currency towards less stable and rich ones, such as energy and raw materials. The *Financial Times* of August 13 1984 noted:

Poland is being forced to rely more than ever for its export earnings on sales abroad of coal, sulphur, copper, silver and lead, although prices are weak and the hard currency returns do not match the increased sales. Plummeting orders from developing countries have caused the bottom nearly to fall out of Poland's hard-currency sales of engineering products.

Thus, while in 1983 total exports of Polish coal to western capitalist states was just 17.6 million tonnes, the first six months alone of this year saw some 13.8 million tonnes of Polish coal going west. The British miners' strike must therefore have seemed to our Polish comrades too good a chance to miss and, as we have reported,¹ the Polish authorities shamefully responded by not only doubling the export of coal to Britain since the beginning of the year, but also by sending trade representatives to Britain in order to consolidate a more long-term 'foot in the door' of the ravaged British coal industry.

In our previous issue Ernie Trory of the New Communist Party attempted to defend these actions of our Polish comrades.² The substance of his defence seemed to be his inane observation that "governments deal with governments" and thus it was totally incorrect of us, he claimed, to call on our Polish comrades to fight for support for the British miners. Instead, according to Trory,

we should have called on the Polish trade unions to organise solidarity. Although this comrade's arguments have doubtless been seized on by centrists everywhere in order to get the Polish 'government' off the hook, Trory, with his knowledge of the socialist countries, must know as well as we do how empty and meaningless his arguments are.

The first point to note is the position of the party inside the Polish unions. It is hardly one amongst a number of competing political groups. Similarly, what relationship exists between the party and the 'government' in Poland? Trory knows as well as us that any distinctions which can be made are, in a real sense, purely formal. That is precisely why at the end of our last article on Polish coal we suggested that comrades protest to the Polish party and call on it to fulfil its vanguard, internationalist duty. We demanded that the party in Poland used its strategic position both in the new Polish trade unions and in the state apparatus to fight for international class solidarity.

Did Trory and his ilk really object to our call for communists in Poland to lead Polish trade unionists into solidarity actions with miners in Britain? He actually gasped in horror that we suggested that our comrades in Poland get the Polish 'government' to break the international contracts signed with capitalist states that were being used to sabotage the miners' strike. He thus graphically illustrated the conservative nature of all centrist currents both in the Communist Party and those once in it like Trory. In their blockheaded attempts to defend Polish socialism, they in fact commit crimes against and endanger the very system they are trying to protect. For if these people really insist that the Polish 'government' should act just like any other 'government', then it will be Trory and the people who think like him who will bear the awesome responsibility for when the Polish 'government' comes to be seen by militant striking miners as no different, and certainly no better, than strike-breaking capitalist government anywhere in the world.

Some of the more idiotic sects on the fringe of the British revolutionary movement have accused *The Leninist* of aping the type of condemnations of the Polish party that have filled the pages of the Trotskyite press. Such claims in fact tell us far more about the people who make them than about *The Leninist*. And so, for the benefit of those who uphold their brain death as evidence of their 'pro-Sovietism', we will point out a few important differences. We presented our criticisms of the Polish party in the spirit



Going to war against Thatcher ... and against apologists for scabbing

of the world movement to which we belong. We criticised our fellow communists not as a trend outside and opposed to the international workers' movement, but as an integral part of it.

The same obviously cannot be said of the Trotskyites. Their denunciations of the Polish party were not intended to strengthen and aid communists in Poland, but, on the contrary, to give succour to the scab, yellow 'union', Solidarność. Of course, they have had a problem in this. Scargill was brave enough to stand up against the 'united front' that the Trotskyites formed with the bourgeoisie in order to cheer on counterrevolution in Poland when he correctly branded Solidarność as "anti-socialist".

Over the recent period, however, the Trot press has been buzzing with the news that the Solidarność underground has passed resolutions in support of the British miners. For example, the particularly unpleasant Trot organisation, *Socialist Organiser*,³ a group which

openly confesses that it finds 'free' capitalist countries preferable to the 'totalitarian' east, gleefully contrasted Solidarność's supposed stand in favour of the miners to the strike-breaking of the Polish government. The voice of Solidarność, they claimed, was the voice of "condemnation of the Polish government for helping Thatcher".

They went on to quote from a Solidarność resolution: "The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner. British miner! ... in the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in the position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain that we are in solidarity with you."⁴

This resolution apparently came from an inter-factory network of the Mazowsze region which includes Warsaw and surrounding towns. But just how much credence should we give to this resolution or others like it? It is not entirely unexpected that Solidarność supporters in Poland would assure their audience that they approve of the miners' strike. After all, it would hardly be good public relations to say they were against it. Also, in reality it is now simply Trotskyite wishful thinking to imply that Solidarność is still alive as a secular organisation with roots in the Polish working class.

In actual fact, Solidarność now exists for the most part either as small grouplets of pro-imperialist intellectuals or is organised in the orbit of the Catholic church. Thus there is quite a neat division of labour inside the Polish church - its upper echelons emphasise 'dialogue' and 'compromise' with the government, while, beneath its protective cassock, the militant anti-communist priests work away to undermine socialism from within: "... at the same time as the church continues its dialogue with the government, tacit understanding exists between church leaders and the militant priests that the essential ideas of Solidarity are to survive under church protection, even after the organisation has been eradicated."⁵

A good example of the "essential ideas" of Solidarność are preached, for

instance, by Father Jerzy Popiełuszko of Warsaw. At an August 13 1983 memorial mass in Gdansk to celebrate the start of the 1980 strike in the Lenin shipyard, Father Popiełuszko spoke to an overflowing church: "Maria (ie, the Virgin Mary) was there to help us battle the Bolshevik tide in 1920 ... Maria, you are with us in war and peace. Pray for us, for those in jail. Give the people a victory."⁶

This charming little invocation of reaction in the forms of mysticism and the semi-fascist Pilsudski is the real "voice" of Solidarność and fully vindicates Scargill's "anti-socialist" definition.

So does this ugly, scab organisation really 'support' the British miners? Hardly. While the 'underground' in Poland predictably passes 'lefty' solidarity messages for the consumption of western Trotskyites, Solidarność's real position on the strike was given by an altogether more authoritative figure: one Mr Lech Wałęsa. Interviewed in the *Sunday Mirror* of July 29, Wałęsa had nothing but praise for the government's handling of the strike: "With such a wise and brave woman (ie, Thatcher), Britain will find a solution to the strike."⁷

True, the "wise and brave woman" plans to 'solve' the strike by smashing it. The opposite perspective - that of a workers' victory - seems to worry Mr Wałęsa: "I disagree with any violence. The workers should demand the maximum, but not at the risk of bankrupting the employer". Wałęsa's concern for the solvency of British capitalism is touching - though it is a pity he did not show as much concern for the state of Polish socialism.

So we have a suggestion for our Trotskyite friends. Instead of trying to squeeze blood from a stone as far as Solidarność and the British miners are concerned, why not start to feature the real messages and actions of solidarity, such as those from the Soviet unions and other genuine workers' organisations around the world?

Will Trory and his co-thinkers now sycophantically 'welcome' the call from the Polish miners' union that they will fight to black coal exports to Britain? Our various centrist opponents have argued that *The Leninist* was somehow undermining socialism in Poland by our criticism. In reply, we refer them to the remarks of that well-known 'anti-Soviet', Lenin:

There is one, and only one, kind of internationalism and that is - working whole-heartedly for the development of the revolutionary movement and the revolutionary struggle in one's own country, and supporting ... this struggle, this and only this line, in every country without exception.⁷

Where that line is unforthcoming, it is our duty to criticise, not only for the advancement of workers' struggles in this country, but precisely to consolidate the material conquests that our class has made internationally. Our criticism is, at the end of the day, the best possible defence of Polish socialism ●

William Hughes
October 1984

Notes

1. *The Leninist* August 1984.
2. *The Leninist* September 1984. The prime mover in the 1977 formation of the New Communist Party was CPGB member Sid French and his Surrey district power base - with 700 or so founding members it was the largest split in the CPGB to that date. The NCP was a left Stalinist and - despite some left leaning positions on issues such as Ireland, for instance - it quickly settled into a routine of recycling trade union press releases, the latest policy twists of the bureaucracy and auto-pro-Labourism.
3. Today, the equally unpleasant Alliance for Workers' Liberty.
4. From a resolution by Underground Solidarność in Mazowsze region. Quoted in *Socialist Organiser*, No. 191, August 9 1984.
5. *Financial Times* August 26 1983.
6. Quoted in *Ibid*.
7. Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p74.

What we fight for

- 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.

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Fighting fund

The goods

We are edging ever nearer to our £1,500 monthly fighting fund target for October, thanks to the nice round total of £400 that we received in donations this week. That takes us to £1,139, which leaves us a further £361 to get in a week. That's definitely more than possible, although there's no room for complacency!

There were quite a few small donations amongst that £400, but no less than £305 of it came from just two comrades - SK and MM - in the shape of their regular standing orders. Also worthy of note were a £20 cheque from JD and a further £20 from DK via PayPal. Although DK was one of 1,227 online readers in Britain, once again it was the United States that recorded the highest total from any

one country (1,358). I also noted an increased tally from Germany - 81 isn't a huge number, but that's more readers than from any other country in continental Europe. I put it down to that incisive article on Die Linke we featured from Ben Lewis last week.

To be honest, I don't mind where our donors live, so long as they come up with the goods. And, as I say, 'the goods' over the next seven days means £361. I'll tell you what - if 36 of our readers cough up a tenner, I'll throw in the other pound myself! Any offers? ●

Robbie Rix

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

weekly worker

**Fightback
needs
political
answers**

Boost to confidence

Looking to a Labour government for salvation is a hopeless perspective, argues Peter Manson

The large numbers attending the Trades Union Congress's 'Britain needs a pay rise' demonstration in London, along with similar marches in Glasgow and Belfast, came as a pleasant surprise to this writer at least. The figure claimed for the October 18 London event was 90,000, and the total mobilised across the UK was something approaching 100,000.

The high turnout will have given a much-needed boost to the morale of thousands of militants belonging to the various participating unions, mostly representing public-sector workers, across the country. True, many branches and regions were unable to persuade anything more than a small minority to take part - there are stories of coaches having to be cancelled - and just as many will have been disappointed by the less than total support given to last week's strikes. But the effort that those militants, including local full-timers, put into the mobilisation did pay off. The whole event was uplifting.

There was certainly a positive spirit: chants, slogans, whistling and honking, plus the banners, balloons and general paraphernalia provided by the trade unions. Then there was the music - most noteworthy was the 20-strong Rail, Maritime and Transport union brass band along the route. It is reassuring that such aspects of working class culture and organisation are still going strong within at least some parts of our movement.

Platitudes

So you can say that, while the numbers could have been many times more, the demonstrations did succeed in their main aim of raising morale. But what about the other purpose of such events - to put on a show of strength aimed at the ruling class? Well, at least this time the media took notice, with all the national newspapers reporting the marches. But, while the mobilisation certainly demonstrated the *potential* for concerted working class opposition to the current assault on our wages, conditions and collective rights, unfortunately the bourgeoisie will not exactly be trembling in its boots, given the majority of the platform speeches in Hyde Park.

Take outgoing TUC president Lesley Mercer, who told us that Britain is "the eighth richest country in the world, in a growing economy", where corporate profits are increasing. So, although we should all be better off as a result, regrettably Britain is "becoming an increasingly divided society". Ed Miliband's 'one nation' is not being realised. But "it does not have to be this way," said Mercer, and we can "change things for the better". Exactly how and by what means was left unspoken, however.

University and College Union president Sally Hunt, in similar vein, said that we need "not just a pay rise", but "real change". Such "real change" would give us a "country which loves everyone, irrespective of their colour or sexuality". She added: "That's why we're in trade unions." Of the court action that prevented last week's UCU



And the band played on

strike, she said it was a "crying shame" - not exactly the most accurate expression to describe such an outrageous attack on our ability to resist attacks.

After these less than inspiring speeches, we were treated to a couple of videos which demonstrated the trade union bureaucracy's interpretation of proletarian internationalism. First Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, and then Bernadette Ségol, who holds the same post in the European Trade Union Confederation, proclaimed their solidarity by respectively announcing: "The world needs a pay rise" and "Europe needs a pay rise".

Following this interlude, however, leaders of the big battalions came to the microphone. At least Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, and Billy Hayes of the Communication Workers Union proposed an alternative politics - of sorts. Brother McCluskey said it was wrong to blame workers for the "collapse caused by casino capitalism". There was no excuse for the Conservative-led attacks: "Another five years of Tory government would eradicate every social gain".

But "there is an alternative to the Tory misery," he went on. Britain needs "a Labour Party that offers a socialist alternative." In answer to his own question, "Where's the money coming from?", he answered: "Pay your taxes, you greedy bastards!" He did end by saying that the answer lies in

"people's power and the working class movement", but clearly this is a mere platitudinous phrase. Delivery can only come from on high, in the shape of a Labour government. Hopefully one that delivers McCluskey's version of "a socialist alternative", but I am sure that, for all his noises about the possibility of withdrawing support, in May 2015 the Unite leader will still call for a vote for a Labour leadership that will promise rather less than that. Nevertheless, his speech was greeted by huge applause from the thousands gathered around the stage.

Continuing in this vein, brother Hayes reiterated that, yes, we want the coalition out, but we "don't want austerity-lite". Labour must "break with austerity", he said. He also held up last week's strikes, especially those of healthworkers, as an example and proudly declared: "Not one postal or telecommunication worker crossed your picket line." Once again this display of militancy produced great cheers.

Speaking of those strikes, Dave Prentis of Unison - which was among the unions that called off the October 14 walkout by local government workers on the eve of the action, following a last-minute 'new proposal' from the employer - said that the latest pay offer was "not good". If his union members voted to reject it, "we will take sustained action".

This begged the question: why was the strike abandoned if Prentis thinks the offer is so bad? Was he outvoted

on Unison's leadership or persuaded by McCluskey and the GMB's Paul Kenny (who are clearly to his left)? Or did he feel there was no alternative for legal reasons? The latter possibilities do not seem very convincing. And neither was Prentis's conclusion: if, however, "we don't win a pay rise this year, we know what we've got to do next year: get this government out." Not even the pretence of making demands on Labour from him.

For her part, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady felt it was her duty to gee up the assembled thousands: "What do we want?" she shouted and they dutifully responded to her prompt: "A pay rise!" That led her to conclude: "This is what solidarity feels like!" We have to "tell the politicians and the bosses, we've had enough!" she continued. "I'll tell you what: they've picked on the wrong ones here." Nice noises, Frances, but once again I found the threatened retaliation in response to coalition attacks rather lacking: "They'll pay the price in the ballot box!"

What vehicle?

The final batch of platform speeches included those from the two most leftwing union general secretaries: Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union and Mark Serwotka of the Public and Commercial Services union. Comrade Wrack spoke of the "ruling class agenda", part of which was to "transfer resources from the majority to the minority". Those resources are "in the wrong hands" and "the blame lies with big business, the billionaires and their system". We should "take over the railways and run them as a public service". He repeated the sentence twice, but inserting first "banks" and then "utilities" instead of "railways". He ended with a call to "build a movement you've never seen before".

All well and good, but the question comrade Wrack never publicly addresses is, what is the vehicle necessary to produce such a majority-led transformation? Should the FBU join with other unions in a fight within the Labour Party to make it fit for purpose? Perhaps the unions should set up an alternative workers' party - a Labour Party mark two? Or do we need a single organisation of Marxists to lead our class?

Comrade Serwotka insisted the unions should make it clear to Labour politicians that "we won't accept pay cuts", whoever is wielding the axe. In fact, "We want a £10 minimum wage" now, not £8 in 2020. But he then asked

a very pertinent question: "How are we going to realise these demands?" But his solution was confined within the trade union/direct action template: "Unless we take militant action, they won't give us what we need." However, "if we all went on strike together..." In other words, we should "join up all the struggles - the occupations, the marches, the demonstrations". He concluded: "Let's march together, let's strike together."

Yet again there was an enthusiastic and noisy response.

It was gratifying that so many people remained to listen to all the speeches: together with two musical interludes, the rally lasted around two hours, but I would say that a good half of those on the demonstration remained to the end.

But what did they get from the experience? On the tube afterwards I got chatting to half a dozen members of the Royal College of Midwives, which had taken part in its first ever strike on October 13 - "RCM official picket" was stamped on their placards. The whole strike/demonstration experience had obviously been a new one for all of them. When I asked what they thought of the day, they said, "Very good", but in response to my question about the quality of the platform speeches, one said, "I didn't really listen." She added: "I don't think we'll get the one percent."

In other words, as you might expect, a confused and uncertain response to their first participation in a working class action. But who can help dissipate the confusion and provide some clarity, some basic understanding of the predicament we find ourselves in, and the means of escaping from it?

It was interesting that the speakers were almost entirely union representatives. There was nobody from the Labour Party on the platform and, although the Green Party had people on the demonstration handing out anti-austerity leaflets, there was no discernible Labour presence. Unlike in July 2012, Miliband decided to stay away.

Hardly surprising really. The Labour leader thinks his best course of action is to do nothing and watch the Tories dig themselves further into a hole over the European Union. He will certainly not blow his claim to 'responsible government' by committing himself to anything more than a gesture or two in the direction of "working people".

So, yes, October 18 was a display of unity, but can it be built upon? ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

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