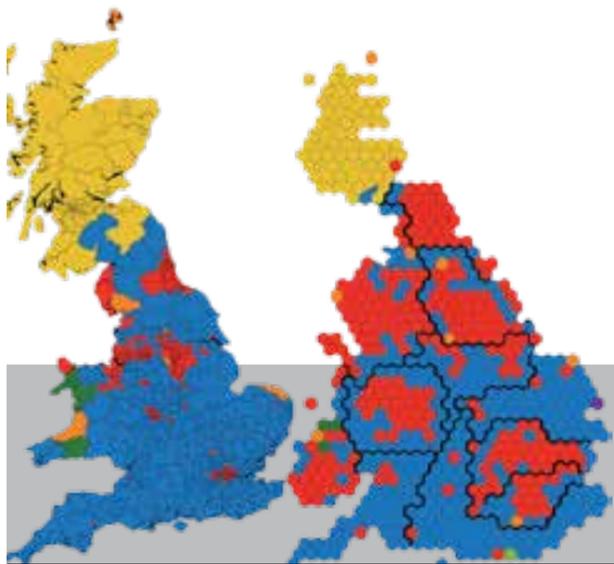


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker



England and Wales have not turned blue. It was Scotland that defeated Labour

- Letters and debate
- Blairite comeback
- China's growth slows
- US economy

No 1058 Thursday May 14 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

SOCIALISM WILL NOT REQUIRE INDUSTRIALISATION



LETTERS



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

Feet first

With regard to the CPGB's 'Notes for Action' email bulletin of May 1, you claim that "Russell Brand is clearly trying to find his political feet, with his new 'Trew Era' café run by recovering addicts, his support for housing protestors and so forth. But his political abstentionism and hatred for organised politics makes him just a little bit useless and his interview showed that he has no answers to capitalism's further descent into crisis."

How exactly does his help and support for recovering addicts and his active solidarity for women trying to hold onto their homes in the face of predatory capitalists, render him useless - or, as you more kindly express it, "just a little bit useless"? Or do you think he may be just a little bit useful after all? The tone suggests you do not, but I happen to think that those acts of support and solidarity are very useful and they are indeed so regarded by those very people to whom he has lent his support.

He has maintained also in his book and elsewhere that he doesn't have all the answers and that solutions have to be collective. Since he is, as you say, in the process of finding his political feet, he's hardly going to be a fully formed Marxist right from the off - or indeed a Marxist at all. There are, after all, other radical political traditions outside of Marxist-Leninist ones and very far from the dull and increasingly bankrupt parliamentary ones. As he has now misguidedly given his support to Miliband, perhaps he's coming round to the notion that organised politics, and of the neoliberal variety at that, may be the way to go, which would make him in time "just a little bit useless" and that would be a great pity. However, a recent interview with the *Huffington Post*, of which this is a short extract, suggests that he's not been blinded by the light of Labour, after all:

"My position will not have changed on May 8. I'll be doing my best to amplify movements I believe in, from housing, to trade unions, football fan campaigns, social enterprises, digital activism, student occupations, organic agriculture, crypto-currencies: the same things I'm doing today, the things I've been learning about for the last 18 months, since I said I don't vote on the telly.

"My recommendation that people vote Labour is an optimistic punt that the degeneration of Britain will be slowed down and the lives of the most vulnerable will be a little more bearable than they'd've been under the Tories.

"Nothing more ambitious than that." I don't think that that's the way to go, of course, but it will be interesting to see how far his political feet will take him in the future.

Fiona Harrington
London

Unpredictable

Mike Macnair writes: "At the very deep roots of capitalist society is the fact that this coordination is accomplished - imperfectly - through the money mechanism" ("Thinking the alternative", April 30).

Comrade Macnair implies that the comparative limitations of capitalism - the 'imperfections' of its mechanisms for social coordination - drive socialist consciousness. The opposed view - that of the entire Second International - is that capitalism will be overthrown internationally when it has broken down.

The masses will revolt when they must, when there is no other way, not when they have grown weary of the status quo. The aspiration to human

emancipation will surely play a large role, but not the determining role. The reasons humanity will be unwilling to take the leap to a socialist future when capitalism still contains possibilities isn't just a matter of psychology. The argument for communism is more difficult to win on an abstract plane than Mike seemingly imagines, because he considers the argument one-sidedly: he assumes that socialism won't have its own coordination problems or that socialism's coordination problems won't be as severe as capitalism's.

But this isn't a truth we truly know. Replacing markets with democracy doesn't automatically rid the process of social coordination of all 'imperfection'. And if we really had reason to believe that the masses will go communist by recognising that socialist coordination is inherently superior to capitalist coordination, we would discuss the mechanisms of socialist coordination more, to prove that any limitations can be overcome, and we would produce data estimating the gains. How will it be possible (to take just one of many examples of possible socialist coordination failure) to execute an economic plan in a truly democratic system, when changing social priorities and the dominance of changing factions leaves no guarantee for the stability of policy on which planning depends? We can personally have had experiences that incline us to optimism about solutions, but such optimism isn't a mass, international phenomenon. (The masses today are indeed weary, but they are not optimistic.)

The implications of the collapse view for propaganda (I leave aside for the moment the implications for strategy) are perhaps clearest in arguing the nature of the Soviet Union. Jack Conrad is worried that we must explain to the masses how Russia went wrong - to prove the same won't happen here. But this is something unprovable beforehand. Stalinism wasn't the predictable result of October, and the future socialist revolution will have consequences, some adverse, that prove unpredictable.

Stephen Diamond
USA

Still a subject

Bravo, Jack Conrad, for zeroing in on the subject-object relation, their interpenetration and alternation, as the key to the material dialectic ('Humans, nature and dialectics', May 7). In any relationship, as Lenin said, there is a 'who' and a 'whom' - or a 'who' and a 'what' - subject and object. They act on each other and change places, the subject becoming the object of the object and vice versa.

The species homo sapiens begins as an animal changed by its environment into an upright standing cousin of the ape, with hands differentiated from feet and the disappearance in the female of external evidence for fertility, anogenital swelling. The outcome is society, promiscuous or equal, according to point of view. In different environments, warm or cold, these game-seeking groups, through mental labour and dexterity, invent tools, the freezing of meat in pits and the kindling of fire. Through the surplus of energy created, the productive forces take off, creating hierarchical religion and class division. Nature becomes the object of the subject human, transforming pasture into desert and forests into agriculture. In time, the human subject becomes the object of a system - capitalism - which could destroy the very ecology of life itself. This nevertheless receives criticism and opposition from humans, proving themselves to be still a subject after all.

History, though neither smooth nor at a uniform rate, is change and development. We are not what we were.

Mike Belbin
email

Another England

Paul Demarty reminds us of the old adage: the louder the dogs bark, the less do they bite (Letters, May 7). He fails to convince me that the CPGB is not influenced by sectarian or non-political motives in backing their new friend, Kingsley Abrams, against the Labour Party candidate, now MP for Bermondsey, Neil Coyle. After all, the CPGB are card-carrying members of the Labour Party and not members of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Is this "vote-splitting" and "flagrant sabotage"?

Paul dismisses me as a "left nationalist" because Republican Socialists use the word "England" and not "Great Britain", when the latter is now nostalgia for the past. Paul's playground name-calling is like dismissing the CPGB as a "bunch of Stalinists". It is all good knockabout stuff, but not serious political science.

Paul says the CPGB has not blacklisted me. Good news. Let us agree that the CPGB support the Acts of Union and Republican Socialists reject them completely. The Tories, the Labour Party, Tusc and Left Unity are all on the unionist side of this debate. Now we see that unionism is the rock on which your beloved Labour Party has floundered.

A statement from the CPGB saying you did not support Republican Socialists because we are "anti-unionists" would be a valuable political fact. The CPGB could then say you back Tusc and Left Unity candidates because they are unionist parties. I would not complain about that, even though it is your big mistake. British unionism is degenerating into a cesspit of anti-Scottish English chauvinism. If I cannot persuade you to stop barking up the wrong tree, perhaps reality may dawn soon.

Real class politics is about leaving sectarian name-calling behind and getting down to concrete policies. Beyond anti-unionism is republicanism. You write articles claiming to be republican, but then when it comes to elections you give in and back parties like Her Majesty's Labour Party and Tusc. This is not serious working class republicanism.

Republican socialists used the election to call for Westminster to be closed down. Perhaps the CPGB want to keep it open for now and are avoiding the question? Next we raised the slogan of democratic revolution, which you don't support. Presumably you are backing democratic reform or the status quo, but are too shy to mention it? Then we claimed that "Another England is possible" and democratic revolution the means of achieving it. Only a nationalist would think this can't be applied in the rest of the world.

The CPGB accuses me of "vote splitting" and "sabotaging" Tusc by stealing 20 of their votes! The accusation that I sabotaged Kingsley Abrahams is no more worthy of consideration than the accusation that he and the CPGB sabotaged and split the Labour vote in Bermondsey. There were two socialist candidates in Peckham, where Tusc also stood. Nobody mentions this. There were nine candidates in Bermondsey, but only two socialists. The total socialist vote in Bermondsey was 162 and Tusc got 142 of them.

Paul says of myself: "Hopefully, he will not be a member of LU for much longer, though it is an organisation ill-designed for expelling people." He reminds us of the joint venture between Socialist Resistance and the CPGB, who fell out over the Green Party, but are at least united in trying to expel me. But he admits the LU constitution will have to be fitted up first.

I admit that supporting Scotland in Bermondsey in the middle of a Tory-inspired anti-Scotland campaign is

not a vote winner. Neither is speaking out against immigration controls. Furthermore Tusc was backed by the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party, Left Unity and the CPGB. Republican socialists have no party and no means of organising voter support. I would like to thank the RCN (Scotland), A World To Win, International Socialist Network (as was) and the Radical Independence Campaign (AGM) for their support or encouragement.

A low vote pales into insignificance against the fact that an anti-unionist candidate stood in London. No matter how low a vote you get, you should not be frightened to put your programme and policies directly to working class voters. Elections are not a time to hide. They are a time for 'cowards to flinch and traitors to sneer'. But we'll keep the republican and socialist flags flying here.

Steve Freeman

Republican Socialist Doing Politics Differently

Strategy ditched

In order to defend Lenin's democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry as the basis for explaining the events of 1905 and 1917, Jack Conrad defines this approach in terms of the dynamics of an uninterrupted revolution, whereby the democratic revolution would become the prelude to the socialist revolution ('Lenin's programme found vindication', April 23). In other words Conrad wants to define the approach of Lenin as being compatible with the perspective of Trotsky. He contends that Lenin shared Trotsky's conception of permanence or an uninterrupted character of the revolutionary process.

However, Lenin envisages the revolution being defined by stages which are a transition from a lower form of development to a higher. But only the realisation of the tasks of the lower stage will enable movement to the higher stage: "The democratic revolution is bourgeois in nature ... we Marxists should know that there is not, nor can there be, any other path to real freedom for the proletariat and peasantry than the path of bourgeois freedom and bourgeois progress. We must not forget that there is not, nor can there be at the present time, any other means of bringing socialism nearer, than complete political liberty, than a democratic republic, than the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" ("Two tactics of Social Democracy in the democratic revolution").

The point that Lenin is making is that only if the tasks of the democratic revolution, which is socially defined by the bourgeois stage, are carried out in the most progressive and principled manner will it be possible to realise movement to the next and higher stage of socialism. Hence it is vital that the tasks of the democratic revolution are carried out and the land is distributed to the peasantry. Proletarian hegemony of that revolution will ensure that advance towards socialism becomes possible: "... our slogan, a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, ... strives to make the utmost of the democratic revolution in order to attain the greatest success in the proletariat's further struggle for socialism."

In other words, the revolutionary process is characterised by distinct stages. The democratic revolution is a distinct stage because it has definite tasks that must be carried out if the advance to socialism is to occur. Hence the strategic mistake is to conflate the bourgeois democratic and socialist revolution, and it is for this reason that Lenin does not support the perspective of Trotsky - he differs in terms of the emphasis he provides to the importance of the democratic revolution and the

necessity to complete all the tasks of this stage. We can assume he would suggest that Trotsky is trying to 'leap over' aspects of the revolutionary process. But Lenin's standpoint does support the conception of an uninterrupted revolutionary process. He also agrees with Trotsky about the counterrevolutionary role of the bourgeoisie, who compromise with the tsarist monarchy. Instead of the Menshevik accommodation to the liberal bourgeoisie, Lenin advocates proletarian leadership of the democratic revolution.

Whilst it is true that Lenin did not immediately change his strategy concerning Russia with the outbreak of war, his emphasis on the importance of world proletarian revolution implied that his internal perspective may have to be changed accordingly: "... in all the advanced countries the war has placed on the order of the day the slogan of socialist revolution - a slogan that is the more urgent, the more heavily the burdens of war presses upon the shoulders of the proletariat ..." ('The war and Russian Social Democracy'). The implicit assumption is that the socialist revolution of the advanced capitalist countries will have an important effect on the character of the revolution in Russia. Lenin has not yet rejected his 1905 strategy, but he is aware of the importance of changing circumstances that suggest significant modifications.

In his article, 'The defeat of Russia and the revolutionary crisis', he comments: "... no individual solution of revolutionary [problems] is possible in any single country - the Russian bourgeois democratic revolution is now not only a prologue to, but an indivisible and integral part of, the socialist revolution in the west." This view suggests we must be prepared to change our original evaluation of the bourgeois democratic character of the Russian Revolution. Lenin accepts that a new characterisation is still premature, but modification of the analysis may be required because of the strategic importance of the world revolution.

In other words, Lenin is arguing that the only principled standpoint is that of support for the world proletarian revolution. The Russian working class must adopt this approach if they are to understand that the major political demarcation is between those who capitulate to the interests of Russian imperialism and those who oppose this view in the name of proletarian internationalism. Only in these internationalist terms is support for bourgeois democratic revolution principled. This aim is connected to revolutionary defeatism: "... our party will preserve the slogan of 'Transform the imperialist war into a civil war' - ie, the slogan of the socialist revolution in the west" (*ibid*).

With this modified and flexible conception of bourgeois democratic revolution it is not surprising that Lenin could effectively alter his perspective following the February 1917 revolution. The point is he was already on the verge of rejecting the perspective of the continued importance of the bourgeois democratic stage after 1914. He only retained the standpoint of democratic revolution because it could be adapted to the primary importance of world socialist revolution.

The creation of the soviets in 1917 indicated that the strategy of democratic revolution had to be modified in accordance with the fact that the February revolution led to the intensification of class struggle. The social power of the working class carried out the bourgeois revolution in an unexpected manner, resulting in the political domination of the bourgeoisie. Hence the strategy of the Bolsheviks had to be altered accordingly. It was necessary to formally outline the

theoretical and practical proletarian character of the future revolution in Russia.

Jack Conrad can only claim that this situation corresponded to the continued importance of the conception of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in the form of dual power, or the acceptance of the political rule of the bourgeoisie, because of the compromises of the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary-led Petrograd Soviet: "Events had 'clothed' the old slogan. The soviets were real. The Bolsheviks ... had to deal with the concrete situation, where instead of coming to power, this 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' existed side by side with, and subordinate to, the weak government of the bourgeoisie."

The point is unintentionally made that the perspective of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had been realised in a reactionary manner and so had to be replaced by a different strategy. Conrad outlines this new strategy in terms of 'All power to the soviets', via the winning of a Bolshevik majority.

However, we should admit that Lenin made frequent calls for the Mensheviks and SRs to realise in practice the progressive nature of the perspective of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. In this manner it could have been possible to reconcile this strategy with soviet power. This invitation was never accepted, and so in practice the actions of opportunism refuted the possibility for democratic revolution via the ascendancy of the soviets. Instead of the expectations based on the old strategy, the soviets represented a potential workers' government, or an alternative to dual power and the domination of a bourgeois government. The strategic aim of realising a distinct bourgeois stage under the auspices of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry has been replaced by recognition of the closer connection of the period of democratic revolution with socialism.

The leadership of the workers within the soviets will develop an alliance with the poor peasants, and the peasants as a whole, in order to realise a democratic republic that will become the prelude to socialism: "With these two allies, the proletariat, utilising the peculiarities of the present transition situation, can and will proceed first to the achievement of a democratic republic and complete victory of the peasantry over the landlords ... and then to socialism, which alone can give the war-weary people peace, bread and freedom" (*Letters from afar*). Thus Lenin is now suggesting that the democratic republic will be organised under the auspices of the soviets, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. The bourgeois stage with its historical limitations has been replaced by this new dynamic formulation. In other words, the tasks of bourgeois democracy are no longer to be realised by the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, but instead are to be carried out by the soviet republic. The implication is that bourgeois democratic tasks are now connected more closely to the aims of socialism.

This new strategy does not mean that the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry has proved to be illusory. Instead it has been realised in terms of the reactionary accommodation of the Mensheviks and SRs within the soviet to the domination of the bourgeois Provisional Government. Hence this approach has proved in practice to be of limited value in relation to the revolutionary tasks of the working class: "The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry has already been realised, but in a highly original manner, and with a number of extremely important modifications ... it is essential to grasp the incontestable truth that a Marxist must take cognisance of real life, of

the true facts of reality, and not cling to a theory of yesterday" (*Letters on tactics*).

The prospect of the realisation of soviet power is an overcoming of the limitations of the class-compromise approach of the democratic dictatorship. In this manner the commune state carries out bourgeois democratic tasks like land reform and prepares the basis for movement to the socialist stage of the revolutionary process. Lenin is not suggesting that socialism is an immediate prospect connected to soviet power: instead he is implying that a workers' government in the form of the soviets, in alliance with the peasantry, carries out the tasks of the democratic revolution and realises measures of state intervention into the activity of the economy like nationalisation of the banks. But the character of the revolutionary process is not limited to the realisation of the stage of bourgeois democracy, because the above measures must be carried out under the auspices of soviet power: "Measures which do not in any way constitute the 'introduction' of socialism must be absolutely insisted on, and wherever possible carried out in a revolutionary way" (*Tasks of the proletariat in our revolution*).

The popular and democratic character of the soviet means that the limited measures it carries out, or actions which represent the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution, become the basis to advance the prospect of socialism. Hence we have a soviet administration that presides over a society that is not capitalist or socialist. It is not capitalist in the sense that the workers' government aims to undermine capitalism and instead make progress towards socialism, but the social formation is not yet socialist, in that an economy based on planning and workers' control has not been established. Thus the soviet republic is a transitional state based on the political rule of the workers and poor peasants, but it is still economically capitalist to the extent that the aims of socialism have not been realised. The state could be defined as state-capitalist, but one which is aiming for socialism.

This perspective actually requires the overthrow of the present form of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. The only principled expression of the workers and peasant alliance will be established by the realisation of

soviet power. Lenin is not agreeing with the perspective of permanent revolution, which he still considers as underestimating the importance of the peasantry in relation to the tasks of the future soviet government. But he has more disagreement with the advocates of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, because they cannot realise how it has been confirmed in an opportunist form.

This standpoint is connected to the lessons made in the revision to the party programme, which concludes that the possibility of a bourgeois republic being presided over by the proletariat and peasant alliance has been rendered anachronistic because of the importance of the expansion of imperialism and World War I. Hence the realisation of democratic tasks requires soviet power and the rejection of the view that the influence of the workers and peasants within a bourgeois system can bring about systematic progress and reform. Ultimately the conception of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was being rejected because it promoted reformist illusions about the possible transformation of the system without the necessity of revolution. Lenin outlined an alternative approach that connected the potential dominant role of the soviets with the necessity of revolution.

In this context his standpoint is compatible with Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution. Trotsky understood in 1905 the revolutionary significance of the soviets. They meant the prospect of the revolutionary transformation of society in the direction of socialism became a practical issue. In this manner, the approach of imminent proletarian revolution acquired its strategic dimensions.

This understanding was brilliantly recognised by Lenin in 1917. The prospect of 'All power to the soviets' rendered all previous strategies to the museum of antiques. Lenin became the most brilliant critic of the strategy of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry despite the defence made by Kamenev. Lenin was not defending the theory of permanent revolution: instead he was elaborating a unique strategy created by the new conditions of 1917.

Phil Sharpe
Nottingham

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 May 17, 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 2, chapter 2, section 1: 'The circuit of productive capital: simple reproduction' (continued). Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology
Tuesday May 19, 6.30pm: 'Becoming animal and becoming human' - a live show by Marcus Coates.
Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1.
Talks are free, but small donations welcome.
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:
<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

These dangerous women

Thursday May 14, 7.30pm: Evening of film, prose, poetry, music and discussion, New Cross Learning (formerly New Cross Library), 283-85 New Cross Road, London SE14. Introduced by Natalie Bennett, Green Party.
Organised by Lewisham Stop the War: www.lewishamstopwar.org.uk.

14 hours for 14 years

Saturday May 16, 8pm: Sponsored Guantánamo cage event and vigil, in front of National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2. All monies raised will go towards meeting the cost of the Shaker Aamer parliamentary group delegation to Washington and to aid the campaign for Shaker's freedom.
Organised by Save Shaker Aamer:
<https://twitter.com/SaveShakerSSAC>.

Commemorating the Nakba

Saturday May 16, 11am to 1pm: Protest commemorating the 67th anniversary, Old Market Square, Nottingham NG1.
Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

After the election

Tuesday May 19, 6.30pm: Meeting, Greek Cypriot centre, Britannia Road, North Finchley, London N12. 'What now for the fightback and socialists?'
Organised by Barnet Left Unity: www.leftunity.org.

Women's voices at work

Wednesday May 20, 9.30am to 4pm: TUC event, Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF99. For women trade unionists, politicians and academics to discuss how women can progress, influence and lead in their organisations. Free admission.
Organised by TUC:
www.tuc.org.uk/events/womens-voices-leading-wales-work-0.

Chagossian aid

Friday May 22, 12.30pm: Demonstration, outside 10 Downing Street, London SW1. For the return of the much abused islanders, forced from their lands by the UK state.
Organised by Revolutionary Socialism:
<https://revolutionarysocialismuk.wordpress.com>.

No more cuts

Tuesday May 26, 7.15pm: Post-election meeting, St Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1.
Organised by Teesside People's Assembly <http://teessidepa.tumblr.com>.

Democracy needs truth

Monday June 1, 6.30pm: International speakers tour in London, Birkbeck College (main building), room B35 (entrance on Torrington Square), London WC1. Speakers include: Daniel Ellsberg, Thomas Drake, Coleen Rowley, Norman Solomon, Justin Schlosberg.
Organised by Media Reform Coalition: www.mediareform.org.uk.

Confronting a world at war

Saturday June 6, 10am to 5pm: Stop the War Coalition AGM, TUC, Great Russell Street, London WC1.
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

End austerity

Saturday June 20, 12 noon: National rally, Bank of England, Queen Victoria Street, London EC4 (nearest tube: Bank). No more budget cuts.
Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Housing for people, not profit

Thursday July 3, 7.30pm: Meeting, Chestnuts Arts and Community Centre, 280 St Ann's Road, London N15. Speaker: Felicity Dowling.
Organised by Haringey Left Unity:
www.facebook.com/HaringeyLeftUnity.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday July 5 11am to 5pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Speakers include: Ronnie Draper (BFAWU), Steve Gillan (POA), Janice Godrich (PCS), Peter Pinkney (RMT). Delegate/visitor fee: £6.
Organised by NSSN: www.shopstewards.net.

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.



HANDS OFF THE PEOPLE OF IRAN

Explaining the chaos

Saturday May 30, 11am to 5pm
The Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1

The peoples of the Middle East and north Africa live with the hell engendered by imperialism, war and state collapse. Is this symptomatic of a system in decline? Is the US deliberately spreading disorder in the hope of benefiting from national and religious divisions? Is Israel still the favoured ally of the US? Can the left and working class movement revive?

Our school will explore these complex issues and discuss how consistent anti-imperialist activists in this country should respond.

Sessions

1. **Islamic State, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and negotiations with Iran.** Speaker: Yassamine Mather (chair, Hands Off the People of Iran)
2. **Inconsistencies of US strategy.** Speaker: Mike Macnair (Communist Party of Great Britain)
3. **Israel's future in light of changing US-Iran relations.** Speaker: Moshé Machover (Israeli socialist, co-founder of Matzpen)

PO Box 54631, London N16 8YE; office@hopoi.info; www.hopoi.org

ELECTION 2015

No swing to the right

One word explains Labour's defeat, writes **Eddie Ford** - Scotland

Almost everyone expected a hung parliament - including David Cameron, of course. Until, that is, the sensational exit poll¹ showing the Tories inching towards a parliamentary majority.

The ecstatic Tories picked up 331 seats on 36.9% of the vote, giving them a working majority of 15. This made Cameron the first prime minister since 1900 to be re-elected with a larger share of the popular vote (up 0.8%) and the only one since Margaret Thatcher to be re-elected with a greater number of seats (an extra 28). On 30.4% of the vote, Labour lost 24 seats - giving them a total of 232, its worst result since 1987.

As for the Liberal Democrats, this writer is pleased to note that they had an even more appalling night - cut down to a mere eight MPs with only 7.9% of the vote, their worst performance since 1970. Adding to the pain, the party lost nearly all of its big-hitters - though it is a shame that Nick Clegg did not go the same way as Vince Cable, Simon Hughes and Danny Alexander. Once again, the entire parliamentary party can just about fit into a London taxi cab, especially now that the unlamented Cyril Smith is no longer with us. William Hague got it exactly right with his comment about the newly formed coalition government five years ago - "I've just killed the Liberal Democrats". Yes, the Lib Dems got the blame for nearly everything, and the Tories basically got off scot-free. There is now talk of renaming the party the Liberals, though maybe they should think about 'New Liberal' - has quite a ring.

The most headline-worthy result, obviously enough, came from the Scottish National Party - scooping up 56 of the available 59 seats and getting 50% of the vote (or 4.7% UK-wide). It almost goes without saying that this is a staggering achievement; the last time any party in Scotland scored over 50% of the vote was in 1955, with the Tories getting 50.1%. Overall, the SNP gained 50 seats, overwhelmingly at the expense of Labour, and is now the *third* largest party in Westminster. More torture than consolation, the other main parties were left with only one seat each north of the border - Scottish Labour in Edinburgh, the Tories with the largely rural Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale and the Lib Dems in Orkney and Shetland, one of the smallest electorates of any UK parliamentary constituency. Another thing worth noting is that the 20-year-old Mhairi Black, who won Paisley and Renfrewshire, became the youngest ever MP since 1667.

The Green Party received its highest ever share of the national vote on 3.8%, holding on to its only seat in Brighton Pavilion with a significantly larger majority - thus Caroline Lucas, backed by Russell Brand, increased her vote share by 10.5% to give her a strong majority of 14.6%. In the same way, you could say that the UK Independence Party had a 'purple surge', ending up with 12.6% of the vote - a rise of 9.5%. But like the Greens Ukip was frustrated by the undemocratic 'first past the post' electoral system and still has only one MP, Douglas Carswell in Clacton, after Nigel Farage failed to win Thanet South. Between them the Greens and Ukip got 16.4% of the popular vote yet ended up with just two seats, a major act of disenfranchisement.

Seemingly the fashion these days, both Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg fell on their swords within hours, as did Nigel Farage - only to 'unresign' a few



Nicola Sturgeon: nearly a clean sweep

days later, when the party insisted he stay on as leader: after all, who else is there?

Scotland

Unable to control itself, the *Daily Mail* ran the triumphant headline, "The night England turned blue", and printed a map that did indeed depict England as a sea of blue - just a few isolated islands of red, in fact.² However, as geographers know, maps can lie. This map displayed the constituencies *geographically*, which by definition would result in far more blue, because of the much larger areas covered by Tory-held seats in the countryside.

But if, on the other hand, you were to show a map - as several other newspapers helpfully did - in which all the constituencies were identically sized squares, then you would paint a quite different picture: England and Wales together are still more or less evenly split between red and blue. In fact, it would seem that the May 7 general election represented the revenge of two-party politics - which refuses to die.

It is important to understand that Labour's popular vote did not collapse - it actually went up 1.4% compared to 2010. Indeed, in terms of the spread between the two main parties, Labour's share of the vote increased by more than the Tories' (the two main parties profiting from the collapse of the Lib Dems, of course) - albeit by only 0.6% - even if the Tories were ahead by 6.5% overall. In cosmopolitan greater London, for example, Labour won seven extra seats and increased its share by 7% - not too bad, though you cannot help but think that it should have done better.³

But the explanation for Labour's poor performance is straightforward - *Scotland*. Labour's mass eviction north of the border consigned it to a defeat. The SNP won hands-down because the working class rejected *en masse* the machine politics of the Labour Party, which arrogantly took Scotland for granted. An arrogance perfectly characterised by the Better Together campaign, which saw Labour get into bed with the Tories, as a scathing Alex Salmond pointed out as often as possible. Better Together, remember, was fronted by the oily

Blairite, Alastair Darling - who would not criticise his Tory colleagues on the grounds that party differences were "minor" compared to the wellbeing of the UK state. No wonder Labour was accused of being "red Tories". The party has now paid the price for its rotten loyalist deal with the Tories over the referendum - quite deservedly.

No, the reason for Labour's defeat has nothing to do with its supposedly wildly leftist programme - more its inability to retain its traditional support in Scotland because of its social *conservatism*, not radicalism. Yet now, obscenely, the Blairites and Labour rightwingers are queuing up to denounce Ed Miliband for abandoning the centre ground and moving too far to the left. Those whom the gods wish to destroy ...

Paradoxically or not, the SNP has become a powerful factor in Westminster politics. While in Scotland it represented the politics of (illusory) hope, in England it represented the politics of fear, thanks to Lynton Crosby, the Tory front bench and their allies in the media - which relentlessly banged on about the possibility of a "dangerous alliance" between the SNP and a minority Labour government. A vote for the latter was a vote for the former, raising the dreaded prospect of 'Scottish rule' over the overtaxed English and the looming prospect of Scottish independence. Hence the Tory campaign poster showing Ed Miliband in Alex Salmond's pocket.⁴ A propaganda line that obviously had an impact on conservative-minded voters south of the border.

Anyhow, Nicola Sturgeon is currently playing down talk of another referendum. But it is clear that another referendum is on the cards. She would be mad not to go for it. Just look at the potential hurdles facing David Cameron - namely Europe and the in-out referendum due for the end of 2017, if not earlier. It is not hard to imagine Sturgeon opposing any deal struck by Cameron, which could call into question Scotland's position in Europe - for example, new restrictions on EU immigration (assuming Cameron was able to get them) would not go down too well with some in Scotland with its stagnant population.

It is surely obvious that the SNP

leaders will be looking for *any* opportunity to push independence, and the occasion *will* come - the proposed new tax-raising powers will not make it less likely. Whatever the Tories come out with, in fact, will not be enough. Under such circumstances, it is not unfeasible that the SNP would declare UDI at some stage - maybe after it has swept the board in next year's Holyrood elections, which is all but guaranteed. You can almost hear the declaration now - we have a clear mandate from the Scottish people to carry out our historic mission. We will not be forgiven if we delay or prevaricate. Those on the left who thought a 'no' vote in the September 2014 referendum would see a welcome return to the economic politics of 'normal', or at least see the national question kicked into the long grass, were sadly deluded - the exact opposite is the case.

As the *Weekly Worker* has argued, the SNP has just secured the perfect result *in terms of its programme* - in its wildest dreams it could not have hoped for anything better. It now has a much larger presence in Westminster than expected and a Tory government - further fuelling the argument for independence.

Manoeuvres

Yes, tabloid euphoria aside, the Tory majority is very thin and it would not take too much for it to be eroded - the party has been hit in the past by both sex and financial scandals, for example. And there are problems with Cameron's programme. He has pledged to cut £12 billion in welfare, but in practice this will prove to be very difficult to implement - the Tories do have constituents to please, or at least not drive away.

The Tories will do everything possible to manoeuvre themselves into a better position for the next general election. Principally, this will take the form of boundary changes, which the Lib Dems sabotaged in revenge for being shafted over the hasty 2011 alternative vote referendum. Naturally, this would hugely benefit the Tories, bagging them about an extra 30 to 40 seats - possibly the vital difference. Needless to say, the Tories will drone on interminably about 'fairness' and 'equality' to justify a more even

population distribution between constituencies, but this is nonsense. Take inner London, for instance. A *lot* of people come and go fairly rapidly, meaning that a large proportion do not appear on the electoral rolls. In other words, there is bigger *discrepancy* between the actual population and those officially registered to vote than in the more rural areas - which tend to be Tory, of course. Here we have one more way in which the Tories will shift the goalposts in their favour - another one obviously being 'English votes for English laws'.

The fate of Ukip is unclear. By their very nature, populist parties need the wind in their sails in order to thrive. In terms of what they were expecting, Ukip activists and supporters must be disappointed by the result - far from gaining more MPs, they lost one. Any momentum that Ukip has generated could easily dissipate. Then again, maybe the build-up to the EU referendum could revitalise the party's fortunes, especially if it senses betrayal from the Tories. Traitors who have sold out yet again to the Brussels bureaucracy.

Interestingly, if the election had been conducted under the D'Hondt version of proportional representation that is used for European elections, then the result would have been like this: Tories 244 seats, Labour 201, Ukip 83, Lib Dems 52, SNP 31, Greens 25, Plaid Cymru 3, DUP 3, Sinn Féin 3, UUP 2, SDLP 2 and Alliance Party 1.⁵ Or, to put it another way, under the current electoral system it takes 100 times more votes to elect a Ukip MP than a Tory one - a clearly monstrous state of affairs.⁶ But there is not a chance in hell that the Tories will allow any reform to an electoral system that so clearly benefit them ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. Conducted by John Curtice, the UK's most prominent psephologist.
2. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3074293/The-night-England-turned-blue-Scotland-yellow-Lib-Dem-orange-virtually-wiped-map.html
3. <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/general-election-results-2015>
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/09/tory-election-poster-ed-miliband-pocket-snp-alex-salmond
5. www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32601281
6. www.electoral-reform.org.uk/blog/nail-coffin

LABOUR

Out come the Blairites

As the results rolled in the ghosts of New Labour began to rise. Charles Gradnitzer of Labour Party Marxists reports

Since the general election there has been a constant barrage of rightwing Labour figures talking about the party's failure to address middle class 'aspiration' and include 'wealth-creators' in its programme as part of a last-ditch effort to elect another Blairite leader and shift the party back to the right.

It is telling that these people have nothing to say about the electoral catastrophe in Scotland, the effect this has had on the English electorate, and the successes of the Left Platform MPs who publicly stood against austerity and won, some being returned to parliament with increased majorities. The rightwing Progress group is dead - one of its fringe meetings at the last Labour conference attracted only 15 people. Yet its spirit lives on.

Aspirational

On May 11 David Miliband gave an interview to the BBC in which he blamed the failure of Labour to secure a majority on its unwillingness to appeal to "aspirational" middle class voters.¹ This was a clear attempt to smear the left by rolling out the 'sensible' brother 'Red Ed' stabbed in the back in order to lead the Labour Party to electoral ruin. There was no other reason to interview David Miliband. Once he lost the leadership election, he resigned as an MP, abandoning his constituents, to earn six figures in America - perversely as the CEO of a charity dedicated to helping the victims of the very war he voted for in 2003.

On May 10, Peter Mandelson put it more bluntly, claiming that Labour had spent too much time saying the poor "hate the rich, ignoring completely the vast swathes of the population who exist in between."² On the same day Chuka Umunna spelled out exactly what was meant by an "aspirational voter" when he said: "there was not enough of an aspirational offer there... I don't think you can argue you are pro-business if you are always beating up on the terms and conditions of the people who make business work."³ But the most sick-making comment came from Ben Bradshaw, when he said Labour must "celebrate our entrepreneurs and wealth-creators and not leave the impression they are part of the problem."⁴

Ben Bradshaw's statement is both perverse and ironic. The "entrepreneurs" and the "wealth-creators" - or rather capital and the capitalists - are exactly the problem. It is widely accepted, even by the bourgeoisie itself, that the global economic crisis and recession was set in motion by the US subprime mortgage crisis. Moreover, the capitalist class is the problem because it violently perpetuates and maintains the very economic system that exploits the majority, all the while demanding that the working class pay for the crises that are intrinsic to capitalism itself.

It is ironic because Labour really has distanced itself from the actual "wealth-creators" - the working class - by repeatedly attacking the trade unions, weakening the union link and announcing that it would continue to punish workers with austerity, in a desperate attempt to court the capitalist class. On May 11 Mandelson spoke of the trade unions' "abuse and inappropriate" influence over the Labour Party.⁵ It was the unions themselves that voted to loosen the historic link with the Labour Party in 2014. However, in a sense Mandelson is right when he claims the unions abuse their influence in the Labour



Ed Miliband: no class war warrior

Party, but this is not in the interests of the left or the working class. Instead union officials act as the enforcers of the right's hegemony.

It is clear what the Blairites mean when they talk about appealing to "middle class aspiration" and "wealth-creators" - they are talking about capital. They want to finish their project of transforming Labour into a bourgeois party, ridding it of "trade union influence" and hoping working class voters will have nowhere else to turn.

Scotland and Ukip

The Blairites' silence over the electoral wipeout in Scotland is telling. Scottish Labour's credibility as a party that could represent the working class was seriously undermined by its engagement in the cross-class Better Together campaign in the run-up to the September 2014 referendum.

Labour was unable or unwilling to attack the Tories. In the August referendum debate between Alistair Darling and Alex Salmond, Darling was unable to respond to allegations that Labour were "in bed with the Tories" because they were. It also allowed Salmond to attack Labour from the left, promising to save the NHS and stop the welfare cuts if Scotland voted 'yes'. It was during this time that Labour began to be known in Scotland as the 'red Tories'. For the most part this moniker was probably well deserved, although in the case of Katy Clark and other the signatories of the Left Platform it was clearly untrue.

Another enormous mistake was the election of Jim Murphy as leader of Scottish Labour. This man is an unreconstructed Blairite. During his time as president of the National Union of Students he had one vice-president unconstitutionally suspended for simply attending Campaign for Free Education meetings, which opposed Labour's

introduction of tuition fees. His behaviour as NUS president was so bad there was even an early day motion submitted by Labour Party MPs condemning his "dictatorial" behaviour. The EDM was amended by Alex Salmond.⁶

Salmond and the rest of Scotland know exactly who and what Jim Murphy is and quite rightly found his claims that he would "end austerity in Scotland" absolutely risible. If he would not even oppose Labour policy when he was supposed to be representing the interests of students, how could he ever represent the interests of the Scottish working class?

With the SNP landslide an absolute certainty, the Conservatives mobilised a section of the electorate against Labour with well-alliterated scaremongering about an SNP-Labour "coalition of chaos" that would "break up and bankrupt Britain".⁷ This mobilisation is reflected in Labour's failure to capitalise on the Liberal Democrat collapse by taking marginal seats from the Tories. In many of them the Lib Dem collapse saw a swing to the UK Independence Party, whose national-chauvinist rhetoric Labour proved incapable of countering. Labour's anti-Ukip campaigning was couched in purely bourgeois terms about the economic benefits of EU membership and the net contribution of immigrants to the British economy.

Even when the party attempted to produce a policy that sounded as though it vaguely championed working class interests, such as the ban on "exploitative agencies", it still engaged in fear-mongering about foreigners stealing jobs and suppressing wages. But for the most part it tried to out-Ukip Ukip, selling "Controls on immigration" mugs for a fiver on the Labour website. Mugs with which the totally delusional Ed Balls promised to toast a Labour victory.

Left Platform

The success of the anti-austerity Left Platform Labour MPs in the election should give everybody pause for thought. Barring the Scottish signatories of the statement, who were doomed to failure thanks to the Better Together campaign, 92% of the platform's sitting MPs were re-elected.

John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn, Ian Mearns, Michael Meacher, Ian Lavery, Grahame Morris, and Kelvin Hopkins all secured majorities comfortably above 50% - Corbyn, McDonnell and Morris won more than

60%. John Cryer, an initial signatory of the platform, enjoyed a 15% swing, which secured him a 58% majority. For his part, Chris Williamson failed to win his seat by just 41 votes, but he did manage a 3.5% swing to Labour.

The Left Platform reconvened on May 12 to discuss what to do next. John McDonnell told the meeting that the next queen's speech would be the most reactionary the country had ever seen. He also pointed out that there would be no left candidate in the leadership election, given that a candidate now needs to be nominated by 35 MPs. An "unrealistic proposition" - especially now that the number of MPs that this paper considered worthy of critical support has been reduced to just 15. With there being no possibility for a left candidate, comrade McDonnell, both in the meeting and in an article for *The Guardian*, argued that Labour needed to "return to being a social movement aiming to transform our society" and "link up with the many other progressive social movements that people are increasingly forming"⁸

At the same meeting Ted Knight argued: "We've been marching. We've had the politics of protest and we've got a Tory government! We need to get people together - not to exchange horror stories, but to discuss how to take control of the economy, how to change society." The problem, however, lies in transforming such rhetoric into concrete proposals and a concrete strategy ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32697212.
2. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/10/miliband-made-terrible-mistake-in-ditching-new-labour-says-mandelson.
3. www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6ffcd0c-f6fd-11e4-99aa-00144feab7de.html.
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/09/alan-johnson-labour-aspirational-voters-tony-blair.
5. www.itv.com/news/update/2015-05-10/mandelson-labour-must-end-unhealthy-unions-dependence.
6. www.parliament.uk/edm/1995-96/991.
7. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/17/david-ferguson-labour-snp-coalition-of-chaos.
8. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/12/forget-leadership-contest-new-labour-roots-social-movement-supporters-save-party.

Fighting fund

Worried

Lots of Weekly Worker readers are continuing to feel the pinch. Take comrade RG, who writes: "I just wish I could help more, but times are hard!" But, despite facing redundancy, he still decided to write us a cheque for £50. That's commitment for you.

I don't know what FP's financial situation is, but she was another one who sent us a cheque - this time for £20. Then there were PayPal donations from DS (£18), GH (£15) and BH (£10), plus the £20 note handed to the editor by JM at last Sunday's London Communist Forum. And, last but not least, there was the usual batch of standing orders, this week totalling £120 - thanks to GD, SM, SWS, DV, AD and TR (the last named being one of those who recently answered our appeal for new SO donors).

All that came to £253, but I have to admit to being a little worried. Our May total now stands

at £610, with almost half the month gone. Yet our target is £1,750 by the end of the month - that represents the extra we generally need to find every month over and above what we get from sales and subscriptions. So we now need to step up the pace.

If you haven't yet contributed to our fighting fund, but would like to, there are plenty of easy ways to help us out. Apart from those already mentioned above, there is a very simple (and cost-free) one if you have an online bank account - make a transfer to the *Weekly Worker* using account number 00744310 and sort code 30-99-64.

Can you match RG's commitment ●

Robbie Rix

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

LEFT

One hundred and thirty-six candidates and every deposit lost

No way to build a fightback

Peter Manson comments on the left's results and its delusional self-justification

Whatever conclusions are drawn about the 2015 general election, one thing you can say is that it did not take us forward in terms of building working class combativity and effective organisation.

Let us look first of all at the support demonstrated for the left, beginning with the Labour left. Of the 38 Labour candidates for whom we urged support, 15 were elected or re-elected, including John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn, Michael Meacher, Diane Abbott, Ann Clwyd, Kelvin Hopkins and Ian Lavery. Unfortunately, however, four supportable Labour candidates, including Katy Clark in Ayrshire North and Arran, were among those swept away in the Scottish National Party landslide north of the border. Another sitting left MP, Chris Williamson, lost his marginal seat to the Tories in Derby North. In other words, the number of Labour MPs who can be said to represent, however partially and imperfectly, the working class pole within the bourgeois workers' party has been reduced even further.

What about the extra-Labour left? Well, the organisation standing the highest number of candidates was, of course, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - an electoral alliance between the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party that is sponsored by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. Tusc made great play of the fact that it was the "sixth largest party" contesting the general election - by which it meant that it had the sixth largest number of candidates: 138. That supposedly makes it "larger" than the SNP and Plaid Cymru. However, its total vote was a mere 36,904 - that may sound a lot, but, when you consider that the national turnout was just under 30.7 million, it represents a tiny proportion: not much more than one in every thousand. And it goes without saying that under "first past the post" you need concentrated support - if your tally does not reach five percent of the turnout in a given constituency, you lose your £500 deposit.

And all 138 Tusc candidates lost their deposit, just like all the other extra-Labour lefts apart from George Galloway (see below). The best Tusc result was that of SPEW's Dave Nellist, a former Labour MP for the now abolished Coventry South East constituency, who managed 3.9% (1,769 votes) in Coventry North West. Not far behind was the SWP's Jenny Sutton, who picked up 3.1% (1,324 votes) in Tottenham, but nobody else reached two percent and only 15 other Tusc candidates won more

than one percent support, the overall average being 0.6%.

Even under the most proportional of all possible electoral systems the Tusc vote would not have been enough to guarantee it parliamentary representation. If you divide the total turnout by the number of parliamentary seats (650) you arrive at a figure of 47,227 needed to elect a single MP. In other words, if members of parliament were elected totally proportionately using a party list system with no minimum threshold, then every 0.15% of the total vote would produce one of the 650 MPs. Well, the total vote for all left-of-Labour, working class candidates was 58,506 - more than one 650th, it is true, but in reality less than two votes for every 1,000 cast: hardly the basis of a mass working class party.

Seven of the 10 Left Unity candidates contesting stood under the Tusc banner and all of them - whether part of Tusc or not - scored similar votes. The best result was for Glyn Robbins, who picked up 949 votes (1.8%) in Bethnal Green and Bow. And it was a similar sad story for the rest of the left - Socialist Labour Party, Workers Revolutionary Party, Socialist Equality Party, Socialist Party of Great Britain, Class War ... Each of them, apart from the SLP (whose eight candidates in Wales all scored between one and two percent) averaged less than one percent.

The other exception was Respect, whose average for the four candidates it stood was disproportionately boosted by the 8,557 votes (21.2%) for George Galloway in Bradford West. But that was nothing to cheer about, because, of course, comrade Galloway was the sitting MP, having won a by-election in March 2012, but was this time easily defeated by Labour's Naseem Shah, who picked up more than twice his tally.

The results for every left candidate are available on the CPGB website.¹

Left reaction

So how has the left reacted to these results? Let us begin with Tusc itself. As you might expect from a purely electoral coalition, it has already started to wind down and, as I write, its website still does not carry its complete results. On May 9, with a few local election counts still to be announced (there were several hundred Tusc candidates for council elections), the website proudly announced that the coalition's total vote - combining all general election and local council

results - had exceeded 100,000.²

However, for some kind of commentary and assessment it is necessary to refer to the two main supporting organisations, and both SPEW and the SWP have been rather more forthcoming than Tusc itself. The SPEW website features an article by general secretary Peter Taaffe, which, after dealing with the new political situation following the re-election of the Tories, turns to Tusc. He begins: "Let the sceptics and the fainthearts dismiss our election results!"

Those who do so are ignoring the fact that "Tusc managed to assemble a serious national challenge with a splendid election broadcast, which attracted the attention and support of broad layers of workers ..." However, there then follow the usual excuses: not only did the mass media ignore Tusc, but it was "squeezed by the acceptance of 'lesser evilism' by many workers". In other words, lots of them would really have liked to vote Tusc, but they were more concerned with trying to keep out the Tories. Nevertheless, "Tusc has now 'arrived' as a recognised factor on the labour movement's national and local electoral map" (note the word "electoral").

Looking ahead, comrade Taaffe continues:

What conclusions will trade unionists and particularly the leadership of the unions draw from this? No doubt some on the right will seek to undermine Tusc, to play down the achievement of putting together a coalition of trade unionists and socialists to fight the election. Some national trade unions may seek to distance themselves from Tusc. But how much more powerful and attractive to voters would an alternative have been if the trade union leaders, particularly those on the left with their huge potential strength, had come behind an electoral alternative, modelled on Tusc?³

There is a further article from John McNally, who comments, in similar vein:

No doubt the sneering and snarling toward Tusc from within the labour and trade union movement will continue, but it is beginning to sound increasingly unconvincing and reminiscent of those who urged workers to stick with the Liberals

when the emerging Labour Party sought their support.⁴

So, while Tusc is just an "electoral alternative", it is also an example that the "trade union leaders, particularly those on the left", ought to follow in order to create a Labour Party mark II. How can they be so blind as to continue supporting the genuine article?! But for now, it is back to business as usual - don't forget the really important National Shop Stewards Network conference on July 4!

Similarly, in its post-election coverage the SWP is keen to stress its own role in assessing the new situation and building a fightback:

The Marxism 2015 event will be the place to thrash out debates about class, nationalism and the role of Labour ... The People's Assembly demonstration on June 20 is a chance for everyone appalled by the prospect of five more Tory years to get out onto the streets.⁵

Then there is Stand Up to Ukip - plenty to get excited about. *Socialist Worker* does, however, admit that Tusc's results were disappointing - indeed some of them were "poor". Despite that there are many positives to be taken from the Tusc campaign - or at least the SWP role within it. For example, "Jon Woods, Tusc candidate for Portsmouth North, increased the share of his vote since he last stood in 2010, despite an overall swing from Labour to the Tories." Comrade Woods is quoted as saying: "To increase the vote for Tusc amongst a big swing to the right is a real achievement." Understandably perhaps, *Socialist Worker* does not go into detail. After all, the 231 votes he won represented just 0.5%.

But the central point to grasp is that "Tusc used their campaigns to lay the groundwork for the fight against austerity after the election" and "The task now is to build on the networks established through the campaigning." To do what exactly? Once again we have the usual vague platitudes about left unity: "And the result of the election shows the need to fight for a more united leftwing alternative."

Everybody knows that neither the SWP nor SPEW will lift a finger to promote the "leftwing alternative" we really need - a single, united Marxist party. Instead they will continue

plugging their own organisation as the party-in-waiting - in between resuscitating Tusc every year, come election time.

SNP faction

Let me finish with a brief comment on the reaction to the general election north of the border, in the shape of Colin Fox, leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, which stood four candidates, with equally dismal results.

In his online article, Fox saluted the SNP-led "political revolution" that has just taken place in Scotland: "Like the 1989 fall of Ceausescu in Romania, a socially conservative and politically corrupt regime was swept away by an unprecedented and widespread demand for change." Admittedly, Fox and the SSP "remain unconvicted by the SNP's programme or its leadership's commitment to liberate working class people from the yoke of neoliberal free-market capitalism". In fact, "despite the May 7 revolution we are set to endure further austerity, privatisation, poverty wages, zero-hour contracts, a chronic shortage of affordable housing, appalling inequality, food banks, child poverty, people freezing to death in winter and the privatisation of public services."

Nevertheless, "The Scottish Socialist Party congratulates the SNP on their stunning victory on May 7. Nigh on eradicating Labour in Scotland in this way was no mean feat ... It is a remarkable and welcome achievement in any socialist's book."⁶

In our pre-election recommendations we commented: "No support for nationalists in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Nowadays the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity are merely external factions of the SNP."⁷ Say no more ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.cpgb.org.uk/may2015candidates.html.
2. www.tusc.org.uk/17092/09-05-2015/results-update-tusc-polls-a-thousand-plus-votes-in-over-twenty-councils.
3. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/20670/11-05-2015/fight-against-five-more-damned-years.
4. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/20673/12-05-2015/organising-resistance-against-tory-austerity-starts-now.
5. *Socialist Worker* May 12.
6. www.scottishsocialistparty.org/the-bitter-sweet-result-the-polls-missed-completely.
7. 'Gambling on a government - or bidding for an opposition' *Weekly Worker* April 30 2015.

UKIP

Dangerous delusions

Ukip is far from 'defeated', says Tina Becker - but that does not stop sections of the left talking nonsense

"Among a sombre set of results, it was wonderful to see Nigel Farage of the racist Ukip party defeated. He failed because Stand Up to Ukip and others campaigned against him."¹ It certainly must be quite wonderful to be able to delude yourself to the same degree as Charlie Kimber, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party.

But wait, his SWP comrade, Jo Cardwell, convenor of the SWP's SutU front, actually manages to top him: "Today [May 8] is an enormous victory for everyone who stood up to Farage's politics of scapegoating and division... Farage promised us that Ukip would create a political earthquake after the European elections. This has certainly not been the case, precisely because many working class people have seen through Ukip's lies. We are proud that Stand Up to Ukip have been able to galvanise anti-Ukip support up and down the country."²

Yes, anybody who did not wake up on May 8 celebrating an "enormous victory" clearly must have something wrong with them. I'll have what she's having.

Nigel Farage might have resigned for a split second as leader of Ukip after failing to win Thanet South (he got 16,026 votes compared to the Conservatives' Craig Mackinlay with 18,838). But Ukip's "defeat" saw its vote rocket to almost 3.9 million; from 3.1% in 2010 to 12.6% this time around. It came second in a staggering 118 constituencies.

True, in the European parliamentary elections of May 2014, the party polled just under 4.4 million votes, beating all the major parties. So maybe Stand Up to Ukip convinced those 450,000 people? That would be quite impressive. But not very likely. Ukip generally does much better in the European elections. In 2009, for example, almost 2.5 million people voted for it, but in the general elections a year later, this dropped to 919,000.

No, in reality it is chiefly the undemocratic British electoral system that stopped Ukip from playing a major role in parliament. The Electoral Reform Society has calculated that under a proportional voting system (in this case the D'Hondt method), Ukip would have won 83 seats. Other methods push this figure up to 99. The party required "more than 100 times as many votes for its lone elected MP than the Conservatives did for each of theirs"³.

Looking at some of the constituencies where Ukip came second, the London School of Economics writes that "hidden" English nationalist non-voters came out for the Tories, while some English nationalist Ukip voters switched to Cameron - all in response to the SNP-Labour threat. In a different election such folk may have swelled the ranks of Ukip.⁴ So the LSE seems to think it was Nicola Sturgeon, not SutU, that did it.

And politically, of course, Ukip has been far from "defeated". When it comes to neoliberalism, austerity, trade unions, workers' rights - you name it - Ukip's policies are pretty mainstream. As are the party's anti-immigration sentiments, although Nigel Farage presents them more crassly than David Cameron and Ed Miliband do (mind you, the latter's chiselled pledge for more "controls on immigration" onto his Moses tablet was pretty crass).

If everybody's a racist ...

The SWP singles out Ukip for being "racist". This lazy claim might outrage its members enough to keep shouting abuse at Ukip supporters or organise protest stalls every Saturday, but it has little to do with



Down from two to one: but hardly defeated

the truth. In reality, Ukip's policies are extremely chauvinistic and there are no doubt a fair number of crackpot racists within its ranks - but that does not make the organisation as a whole or its policies racist.

According to Ukip's proposals for stricter border controls, for example, rich people would be very welcome to come and live in Britain - the colour of their skin does not matter, as long as they can afford to pay for private healthcare and send their children to a public school for the first five years. Similarly, David Cameron has just announced his plans to stop new migrants receiving benefits for four years. Those two are singing from the same hymn sheet.

Instead of shouting abuse, we should address the anti-migrant sentiment (what the SWP dubs "racism") in the population - which is, of course, not just limited to Ukip supporters. If you count Tory voters and the large proportion of Labour supporters who agree with the demand for "more controls on immigration", you are actually looking at the overwhelming majority in the population.

Chauvinism and anti-migrant sentiments are a seemingly logical reaction to the *bad* situation that many working class people find themselves in during a period of capitalism decline. A worker whose pay has been cut or who has just lost their job does not have to be racist to conclude that if there were fewer migrants the pressure on jobs and wages would be eased. The same goes for housing: you cannot find anywhere to live, yet London is being bought up by wealthy foreigners. This is not an irrational response -

though it is, of course, politically and economically naive.

In other words, some of the responses to mass immigration - including voting Ukip - are a *deflected form* of the class struggle. This leads some comrades on the left - for example, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - to the mistaken conclusion that we too should call for some (non-racist) border controls. After all, we don't want to put off those working class people, do we? So let's just pander to their existing consciousness. But they are wrong. The role of communists and revolutionary socialists is to advance tactics and strategies that will *unite* the working class, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Our role is to help people understand how capitalism works, why and how it creates haves and have-nots.

To its credit, the SWP does occasionally call for open borders - at least when it is not pandering to the right wing (real or imagined) of any "united fronts" it is currently involved in. SutU itself does not say anything on the subject of free movement or open borders. But by singling out Ukip as "the racists", it lets the chauvinistic Tories and Labour off the hook and, worse, helps to sow illusions in them. In reality, Stand Up to Ukip has achieved precious little, apart from making us laugh out loud in disbelief when we read its statements.

Allies-to-be

Funnily enough, the only one of Ukip's main policies that is *not* shared by the mainstream bourgeoisie is, unfortunately, whole-heartedly shared by the SWP and much of

the rest of the organised left. Both organisations will fight for a 'Brexit' in the forthcoming referendum on the continued membership of Britain in the European Union.

In December 2014 Sally Campbell admitted in *Socialist Review* that, "In Britain the only loud voices against the EU project at the moment belong to racists and the right wing. If and when a referendum on Britain's membership is announced the debates will be difficult and the left will have to think tactically about how to intervene."⁵

It seems though that her SWP comrades have no need to "think tactically", since they have been announcing for years, that "*Socialist Worker* is against the European Union and will argue to vote to leave it in any referendum"⁶.

Of course, there are instances where socialists might fight side by side with some rather distasteful contemporaries against the same enemy. But you really have to ask *why* the hard-core Tory right, the chauvinists of Ukip and Europhobic newspapers like *The Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* are campaigning for a Brexit.

'The EU is a bosses' club,' SWP comrades argue. But they fail to explain how a Britain outside the EU would be anything but another 'bosses' club' - but just much, much smaller. And without the troublesome legislation that is 'holding back' British businesses and things like the horrid European Court of Human Rights (where, for example, the 'hooded men' are currently taking their claim that they were tortured by the British government in Northern Ireland in the 1970s).

Communists have no illusions in the EU or its institutions. It is indeed a club run by and for the ruling class of Europe. But neither do we think that the working class would be better off if it were divided into ever smaller entities.

The left must break from national socialism - and the belief that what is bad for capitalism can only be good for us, and so the break-up of the EU must be desirable. This is a dangerous illusion. Capital exists on a global scale and can only be superseded at that level. The EU is the largest economic bloc on the planet and a revolution in Europe would probably see capitalism finished within a decade or less. To stand any chance of making a successful revolution, we need to constitute the working class as a conscious, *independent* class across Europe.

Concretely, we should not fall for either the 'yes' or 'no' choice in Cameron's 'simple' in-out referendum, however he might phrase the question. We say no to the capitalist EU bureaucracy *and* to British nationalism. Our call is for European working class unity around a programme for extreme democracy, socialism and communism ●

tina.becker@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.socialistworker.co.uk/art/40491/Labours+betrayals+let+Tories+back+in.
2. http://standuptoukip.org/?s=Europe.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32601281.
4. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/generalelection/the-shy-english-nationalists-who-won-it-for-the-tories-and-flummoxed-the-pollsters.
5. http://socialistreview.org.uk/397/european-bosses-club.
6. http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/29880/Bosses+EU+club+is+not+for+us.

PROGRAMME

Socialism will not require industrialisation

The transition to a new society is possible, argues Mike Macnair



Soviet Union prioritised increased production

This is the concluding part of what may seem to have been a rather disjointed series. In the first article (April 9) I argued briefly for the need for a strategic and general alternative to capitalism - a maximum programme. I criticised what seemed to be Chris Cutrone's approach to the issue, outlined the CPGB's version and asked whether this alternative is in fact posed to us.

In the second article I reviewed the arguments of Peter Hudis about what Karl Marx actually argued on this issue and those of Michal Polak responding to 'analytical Marxist' critiques of Marxism on it. In the third, I argued that the need for a strategic alternative to capitalism is, in fact, objectively posed for us today, because the present (meaning the recent past and the near future) is one in which capitalism *as such* - generalised commodity production or 'market plus state society' - is systematically *worsening* existing conditions for everyone outside the capitalist elite and their paid agents and subsidised allies. In this article I continue this argument, and go on to demonstrate that features of the present also show that beginning to construct such an alternative is *possible* for humanity today.

I stress that capitalism *as such* is worsening existing conditions, because, as Marx argued in *Capital* and other 'economic writings', the fundamental infernal dynamics of boom and bust and of polarisation between rich and poor grow *inherently* out of the fundamental dynamics of the practice of coordinating humans' common productive activities through private property (especially, private property in information) and money exchange.

And, as I argued in part three (and have in previous articles), market society, generalised commodity production, both by tending to disequilibrium and by requiring credit money, actually also requires the *strong* state and the *mercantilist* state. And it therefore also requires the infernal dynamics of imperialism and the inequality of nations - and of the rise, decline and fall of world-dominant powers, which provide the global reserve currency. It is these 'geopolitical economy' dynamics,

driving both the inability to act effectively to control human-induced climate change and the worsening tendency towards war, which overshadow the present.

Beyond money exchange

The ground of humanity's *immediate* problems is, then, the foundational features of capitalist economy. Money exchange enables 'calculation' (in the terms of Ludwig von Mises' argument in the inter-war 'socialist calculation debate'), and 'solves' Friedrich von Hayek's 'knowledge problem'. But it is precisely the features of money which make these effects possible, which veil our individual choices from each other and which today produce repeated crashes, immiseration and wars. They threaten us in the future with the *requirement* of a third world war to overcome the effects of the relative decline of the US and the gross overgrowth of capital values, and with a world potentially rendered uninhabitable by human-induced climate change.

To overcome these problems, then, requires us humans to get sufficiently beyond money exchange arrangements to limit the negative dynamics in respect of boom-bust, polarisation and 'geopolitical economy'. I say *sufficiently* and *limit* for two reasons. The first reason, which I gave in the third article, is that we should categorically reject the forced collectivisation of small private-property production in the light of the very negative Soviet experience. Given the continued existence of small property in important economic sectors (eg, in particular, agriculture!) the continued use of money exchange in relation to these sectors is unavoidable. It should be blindingly obvious that even a *global* 'dictatorship of the proletariat' will face this problem. Perhaps *especially* a global 'dictatorship of the proletariat' - since this will include large areas of the world in which peasant household-scale production in agriculture has never been superseded, and others in which (as in France) it has been artificially preserved.

The second reason is this. A return to 1950s-70s economic management is not feasible without the combination of the overthrow of the military and financial

power of the US *and* the creation of an equivalent to the USSR (one might hope for a less bad one ...). But the 1950s-70s regime *does* make clear that the subordination of finance capital and of middle class 'savers' and 'pensioners' through 'financial repression' can allow substantial *mitigation* of the tendencies to cyclical crashes and polarisation without *complete* supersession of the money system.¹

Further, the tendency to the cyclical return of crashes in particular appeared only after 1763: that is, well *before* the 'industrial revolution' of the rise to dominance of steam-driven industry; but also substantially *after* the creation of organised British financial markets (etc) in the 1690s. Rather, it developed at the point of the establishment of British world dominance (the third global defeat of absolutist France), at the point at which it became unambiguously clear that no restoration of feudalism was possible.² It is the *military (naval) world-dominance* of the leading capitalist state, then, producing control of the international element of the division of labour through shipping and shipping finance, which *enforces* 'rational choice' behaviour on other economic actors on a scale sufficient to produce the business cycle - and also enforces capitalist state mercantilism beyond the initial capitalist states themselves.

Hence, a global 'dictatorship of the proletariat' *could in principle* manage a 'mixed economy' (so as to drive it towards the full supersession of the money exchange system) without using forced collectivisation, and while dealing with the immediate threats to the species posed by the infernal dynamics of the money exchange system.

An aside. I place 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in quote marks here so as to allow direct cross-reference to the issue posed by Peter Hudis, and by Chris Cutrone in his April 16 letter: that is, that *in Marx's and Engels'* writing this 'dictatorship' is a Roman-style *dictatura*: a short revolutionary period of a year or two. Even if this was correct it would still be *possible*, as the CPGB does, and as Second International lefts did, to call this temporary regime 'socialism' for

the sake of shorthand. Having said this, in fact, I think that if we reject forced collectivisation, it follows that even a global 'dictatorship of the proletariat' *must* last for at least a generation - until the old generation of family farmers, etc die out and their kids choose to go for cooperative production.

Indeed, it is probable that a sufficiently substantial chunk of the world, including a part of the world in which the *local internal* dynamic is towards the supersession of capitalism (as well as the global dynamic being so), could do so: that is, a large chunk of the world which included western Europe or North America, as opposed to a chunk like the old 'socialist camp', which was characterised from the outset by a lower development of the forces and relations of production.

Transformed goals

To do so, however, entails transforming the goals, the incentive structures, the decision-making processes, and so on, of the part of our productive activities which capital has already socialised in its own way and which the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' now takes out of the capitalist/market incentive structures.

The goals are most fundamental. Plainly, they cannot be to maximise profit. Equally, they cannot be to maximise 'gross domestic product' - or to pursue 'growth' or maximise output more generally. The economists' 'efficiency' cannot be the goal, since 'Pareto efficiency' and all its various derivatives are merely code for random 'growth'.

The fundamental reason for these points is the climate change problem, since, in the first place, this *immediately* requires 'ex ante' planning (in advance) 'in natura': that is, of the particular physical goods to be produced, *on a global scale* - as, for example, by shifting at least urban transport and long-distance bulk goods from private cars and trucks to public transport. This is inconsistent with the *random* growth selected *ex post facto* by markets. And, secondly, the phenomenon of human-induced climate change implies absolute limits to random 'growth', given by the carrying capacity of the biosphere.

A side consequence of this circumstance is that in post-capitalist society the question of distributive principles is immediately posed and is not (as it is in class societies, and as Marx argued more generally that it is³) merely *given* by the order of production. When the organisation of production becomes consciously collective, the principles of distribution will no longer follow logically from it: there is collective consumption, but also individual consumption, and the nature of the distribution to individuals (beyond the bare minimum necessary to reproduce labour-power) does not follow directly from the logic of production.

Moreover, capitalism cycles between positive-sum games, which make inequalities tolerable and produce reformist versions of liberalism and technocratic progress ideologies, and negative-sum games, in which inequalities become increasingly intolerable; if there is not a development of *socialist* anti-capitalism, there will be a development of *reactionary* anti-capitalist utopias - whether petty-bourgeois individualist, religious or nationalist - and a tendency towards war. Natural limits to growth imply an economy planned to be permanently at or near a *zero-sum* game. The consequence is that questions of 'equity', 'fairness', or whatever you call it, in social goals, are *necessarily* posed more sharply than they are in boom periods of capitalism.

Equally, maximising *productivity* or its converse, minimising *socially* necessary labour time, cannot be the goal of the new economy. This is less obvious, since it would be possible to minimise socially necessary labour time while absolute output remained constant. There are two sides to the explanation. The first is that minimising socially necessary labour time in fact *requires* the money mechanism and all that goes with it. This is because, while a 'threshold' approach to social necessity is knowable *ex ante* by planning *in natura*, *minimising* socially necessary labour time requires calculability, which in turn requires money and markets, and is only knowable *ex post* (after the event) through this means, which takes us back to capitalism.

The second side is that it is *already* the case that "labour has become not only a means of life, but life's prime want" (*Critique of the Gotha programme* (CGP), section 1) because of the *existing* growth of the productivity of labour under capitalism. The point here is simple. Part of the reason we need to supersede capitalism is the growth of standing mass unemployment and 'underemployment' (growth of part time, zero-hours, etc contracts). But what has *not* (in the near past) resulted is the 'feast of Malthus': ie, mass starvation of the unemployed. In fact, famines have become less frequent even in 'underdeveloped' countries. The reason is that the global productivity of labour is now high enough comfortably to feed, house and clothe the world's population and to deal with local harvest failures: "labour has become not only a means of life". But unemployment and 'underemployment' mean, under this global capitalist regime, not richness in free time, but pauperisation, dependence and social exclusion. *Worthwhile* work has, therefore, indeed *already* "become ... life's prime want".

The principle of the new society which can even *begin* to escape the infernal dynamics of current capitalism is therefore in the first place the principle of human need, as Marx argued is the *long-term* aspiration of communism, "as it has developed on its own foundations".

In fact, it is utterly banal that the left today defends or fights for the provision

of healthcare and education according to need, not rationed by money or by contribution even in unmodified labour time.⁴ It is equally banal that the left defends or fights for the provision of *additional* resources to people affected by disabilities of one sort or another over and above those available to people who do not have these specific needs (and the allocation of additional resources to making public buildings, transportation systems, etc accessible to such people).

Again, the US is becoming a “trailer park nation”,⁵ the UK “generation rent”,⁶ the Tories promise to *increase* ‘market’ rationing of housing by extending ‘right to buy’ in the remaining council housing and introducing it to expropriate charitable housing associations has been universally condemned, including by *The Daily Telegraph*, as likely to *worsen* the housing crisis and increase the likelihood of a new financial crash.⁷ The question of planning to provide housing in response to need is *presently* posed - perhaps not everywhere, but certainly in the most ‘developed’ capitalist countries.

In short, 140 years after the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, the image of the first phase of communism in that text turns out to assume *more* persistence of capitalist incentive structures into socialism than *today under capitalist rule*.

Developmental ‘socialism’

From the *CGP* image of the “communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges” came the idea of ‘socialism’ as a *developmental regime*, which would contain structural incentives to increase output and productivity - and hence which looked to a *future* of an abundance sufficient to eliminate all human disputes, which would be the long-term point at which ‘full communism’ was posed.

It is worth making the side point that this issue illustrates the uselessness of the ‘Engels vulgarised Marx’ paradigm: since the idea of a first phase of communism, or a socialism, containing systemic ‘developmental regime’ incentives, is Marx’s error in *CGP*.

It is an entirely understandable error - if capitalism had, in Britain at least, *reached its apogee and begun to enter into decline* (like slave-owner urbanism around 0 BCE/CE or European feudalism around 1200 CE) But capitalism was nowhere near reaching its limits, which have *begun* to appear in the late 20th century.⁸ Hence the shape of what would replace capitalism - probably, in fact, a *contradictory combination* of persisting markets for small producers with large-scale production having aims of human development - was a great deal less visible than now.

Outside *CGP*, there is a good deal of evidence that Marx was aware of this problem. For instance, in the afterword to the 1873 second German edition of *Capital*, Marx observed that “the Paris *Revue Positiviste* reproaches me in that, on the one hand, I treat economics metaphysically and, on the other hand - imagine! - confine myself to the mere critical analysis of actual facts, instead of writing recipes (Comtist ones?) for the cook-shops of the future”.⁹

After Stalinism, of course, we cannot avoid saying more about “recipes for the cook-shops of the future” than Marx and his contemporaries had to; but also, both because of capitalist development and because of the (deformed) Soviet experience itself, we have more that we *can* say about such “recipes” on the basis of “critical analysis of actual facts”.

From the idea of a developmental socialism, in turn, came the idea (sketchily adumbrated by Lenin in

casual comments in 1919-22) that socialist development, increasing output and productivity *more* than capitalism, could allow a backward country to ‘overtake’ more advanced ones.

In reality, no such overtaking took place. Though the large-scale wartime technology transfer from the western Allies in 1941-45 and from occupied Germany in 1945-48 gave the USSR a major boost, for the bulk of the period 1921-1991 the USSR was playing catch-up with the ‘west’ - and always running as far behind as the tsarist empire had been behind in 1914.¹⁰ Even among capitalist states, the UK overtook the Netherlands as the latter declined into dominance of financial capital in the 1700s, and the US similarly overtook the UK. But, as 1914-45 showed, France never succeeded in overtaking the UK (whether it has done so even now is debatable), and Germany and Japan *did not* succeed in overtaking the US - and have not done so even now in spite of US financialisation reaching levels analogous to the later 19th century UK.

The idea of socialism as a developmental regime, and the incentive structures which went along with the attempt to go for overtaking the west in the USSR and its satellites and imitators, supported the notion that the USSR *et al* could be considered ‘state-capitalist’ because the regime was still *aiming* to extract a surplus product for the purposes of reinvestment and growth.

But in reality, contrary to the ‘Brenner thesis’ and similar views, *pre-capitalist* societies as well as capitalist ones also contain incentives to reinvest part of the social surplus product, leading to increased productivity: as, for example, in medieval road and bridge building, wind and water mills.¹¹ Thus the primary *theoretical* problem with the theory of state capitalism, as I already indicated in the second article in this series, is that it fails to distinguish between capitalism and *pre-capitalist* social orders. Its main *predictive* problem is related: that it also completely fails to account for the inability of the industrial labour force in the ‘socialist’ countries to create permanent organisations against the Stalinist bureaucracy (unlike workers under very repressive capitalist regimes), and the widespread illusions of the ‘southern’ and parts of the ‘western’ working class movement in the ‘socialist camp’ until the last stages of the latter’s collapse.

The aspect of the regimes which looked ‘socialist’ was, in fact, precisely the aspect which was *non-‘developmental’* in their dynamics: the existence of (limited) forms of welfarism, together with the tendency of managers to hoard labour, blunting capitalist incentives and leading - as Hillel Ticktin has argued - to *failure* to follow capitalist developmental dynamics.¹² There is no reason to suppose that a genuine communism (first-phase or other) will have an inherent developmental dynamic or incentives: on the contrary, all ‘development’ will become purely a matter of conscious choices.

With this discussion of the appropriation of the ‘developmental’ aspect of the *CGP* image of the first phase of communism, I have partly moved from the question of the *need* for alternative social goals to those of capitalism, into the question - posed, in reality, by the Stalinist experience - of whether a move towards such alternative goals is *possible*. My initial point was that elements of the ‘maximum programme’ are posed in immediate conditions, and that ‘developmental socialism’ was a false conception. Unavoidably, this led into whether ‘state capitalism’ is a useful interpretation of Stalinism. But there are elements of the argument which are also about the nature of the communist goal.

Hierarchy and expertise

To repeat an argument I made in 2008

(albeit parts of what I say in this series are inconsistent with and intended to correct my arguments in that series). ‘Need’ is a slippery word, which can have an expansive or a restrictive sense.¹³ The expansive sense requires Marx’s interpretation of ‘production for need’: ie, a society with very high productivity, in which the division of labour is overcome. But suppose we adopt the restrictive sense, and say simply that people need food, clothes, housing, access to transport and communication, education, health services and public health measures, and so on. These *basic* needs are very extensively unsatisfied in the capitalist world. On the other hand, a great deal of what is currently offered for sale in the capitalist market cannot be said to be things we need in the most expansive sense of the word. They may, indeed, be things we *need not to have*: for example, cigarettes, urban 4x4s, and instruments and techniques of torture.

Within the restrictive sense of ‘need’, however, there remain unavoidable choices. To give a large-scale example: suppose that we overthrew capitalist rule worldwide. We would have to make choices about priorities. What is the relative priority between improving transport infrastructure, education or health services? What is the relative priority between improving healthcare for the old in Britain, and improving basic-level healthcare in Latin America? Either choice will be a decision to use production for need: profit would not enter into the question. But the choice will nonetheless have to be faced.

How will the choices be made? The CPGB’s approach is to say that we will have to make them *democratically*; that that is the only way in which *the working class* can effectively take decisions. Hence (among other reasons) our very strong emphasis on the struggle for extreme democracy as the centre of our political programme.

But the majority tradition of the 20th century left, including the Stalinists, was that the choices should be made by ‘experts’. It makes no difference whether these ‘experts’ are to be technical experts or ‘cadres’ (political ‘experts’): they have still been taken away from the people ultimately affected. A trivial example, dating back to the 1970s: a local council decided it would be beneficial to council tenants to live in an architect-designed block; the expert architect designed the block with amber windows; tenant complaints (they wanted clear windows) were unavailing. It is an accumulation of petty ‘expert’ stupidities of this sort, together with real cuts in public expenditure leading to reduced repairs, etc, which undermined mass support for council housing and opened the *political* way for the Tory ‘right to buy’ legislation. *Bureaucratic* ‘collective’ decision-making is so unattractive as to make pro-capitalist ideologues’ offer of increased *individual* decision-making - part of what Tony Clark called ‘consumerism’ - look attractive.

The Soviet and eastern European regimes were, and the Chinese, Vietnamese and North Korean regimes remain, much more extreme examples of this problem: *the broad masses* are denied the right to make decisions, and the result is bureaucratic stupidities which do not conform to people’s actual needs.

The result was not production for human need at all. In the Stalin-era USSR, all other needs were subordinated to the needs of the state for *arms* production: hence the priority accorded to heavy industry. It is grotesque to imagine that the Marx who in 1871 characterised the Paris Commune as “a revolution against the state itself, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life”¹⁴ would have thought that the USSR was an example of ‘production

for need’.

Resentment about subordination to decisions arbitrarily taken by ‘experts’ is partly because of the bad results of the decisions. But it is also, in fact, *an aspect of human basic needs*. Status inequality is, independent of absolute wealth or poverty, a cause of ill-health.¹⁵ Since the phenomenon is independent of absolute wealth or poverty, hierarchical relations of decision-making in which some people are permanently subordinated to others are implicated in this problem just as much as monetary income inequality. In addition, of course, permanent relations of domination and subordination will tend to produce income inequality, since the decision-makers will tend to favour themselves: as already appeared in the USSR in 1922 with the creation of special material privileges for ‘cadres’.¹⁶

Production genuinely aimed at the basic human need for health would therefore involve ‘republican equality’: ie, the end of permanent relations of domination and subordination between humans.¹⁷ This goal, in turn, involves - as Marx points out in *CGP* - the end of “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour”.

Presently posed?

To argue what I have just argued is to propose that the supersession of *decision-making by experts* is presently posed within the ‘large-scale production sector’. To put the point another way, this is a transition *beyond meritocracy* or *beyond equality of opportunity* - not to a flat egalitarianism (equal doses of penicillin for all, to give an exceptionally stupid example), but rather a transition to *rotational employment* and in particular to term limits, which require the ‘experts’ after a term in post to do ‘grunt level’ jobs for a while - the architect to do some portering, as Engels put it in the *Anti-Dühring* passage quoted in the first article in this series.

Is a turn in this direction presently possible? In fact, it is reasonably clear that it is, for precisely the reasons, referred to above, for *not* treating maximising productivity as a goal of socialism. The point is that the *present* productivity of labour is so high that *present* society - while imposing long hours on those who are in full-time work - can afford to support many millions globally either in pauperised idleness, or in make-work jobs or positively undesirable activities (much of ‘financial services’ ...). Existing society also ‘overproduces’ literate and educated people, and *has the potential resources* to educate and train many more; for many more people to move from one job, to education or training, to another job, and so on.

Moreover, the transition from production and society being dependent on specialist information held in individuals’ heads alone to such information being available through one or another form of information technology is already in progress. This technical process is reflected in modern discontents about ‘intellectual property rights’; about privacy; and about state secrets and freedom of information. Through this transition, capital socialises information in its own way, expropriating the middle class petty proprietors of information - as it has in the past expropriated commons from peasants and local monopolies and jurisdictions from small artisans.¹⁸ In the process, it both makes possible the restoration of the old individualism grounded on small property *and* makes more possible steps beyond “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour”.

Again, these points reflect the development of capitalism way beyond the point it had reached even in the ‘advanced’ countries in 1875 or 1918

- let alone backward Russia, where the peasantry could be symbolised by the sickle, obsolete in western Europe since the late middle ages.

Is this perspective - beyond meritocracy, beyond privacy, beyond occupational specialisation - genuinely emancipatory? In spite of the intensity with which today’s society valorises occupational specialisation, and therefore the foreignness to *modern* eyes of the renaissance idea of the ‘universal man’ (*l’uomo universale*), which descended to Marx as ‘species-being’, it is.

It is not about the restoration of a pre-capitalist world or even - except in a limited sense - of hunter-gatherer ‘primitive communism’, which involved a *gendered* division of labour. It is not an anarchist perspective, in which human fulfilment comes from solitary choices, but one in which human fulfilment comes from creative individual contributions to a *transparently* collective social life. It is a truly radical alternative - in a way in which neither dreams of a return to the post-war boom, nor fantasies of the *umma*, the congregation or the nation, nor the ‘difference feminism’ which fetishises motherhood is radical.

And it is now truly posed for us by capitalism’s own development ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

- See, for example, DL Rigby and MJ Webber *The golden age illusion: rethinking post-war capitalism* New York 1996; CM Reinhart and M Belen Sbrancia, ‘The liquidation of government debt’ (2011): www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2011/res22/pdf/crbs.pdf.
- J Hoppit, ‘Financial crises in 18th century England’ *Economic History Review* No39, pp39-58 (1986) draws the necessary distinction between financial panics driven by wars and similar events, and cyclical crises, and identifies the cycle becoming regular at this period.
- K Marx *Critique of the Gotha programme* section 1: “Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves ...” (and the following passage).
- ‘Even’ unmodified labour time - because this is an *a fortiori* to us rejecting market rationing: ie, contribution in average socially necessary labour time (money).
- See, for instance, www.ozy.com/true-story/trailer-park-nation-the-great- eviction/40029.
- See www.generationrent.org/policies.
- Eg, “Extending the right to buy is economically illiterate and morally wrong” *The Daily Telegraph* April 14 2015; ‘Right to buy extension “would hit borrowing and could push landlords to insolvency”’ *Inside Housing* April 15 2015.
- The point is argued in forms which should be acceptable to the most Hegelian Marxist in I Mészáros *Beyond capital* New York 1994.
- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-cl/p3.htm. ‘Comtist’ from Auguste Comte, 1798-1857, social-evolutionist philosopher influenced by the ‘utopian socialist’, Saint-Simon, and founder of the ‘positivist’ doctrine which the *Revue positiviste* defended.
- See B Kagarlitsky *Empire of the periphery* London 2007 and my review of this in *Weekly Worker* April 1 and 8 2009; see also my polemic with Tony Clark *Weekly Worker* September 4, 11 and 18 2008.
- Eg, roads etc: A Cooper *Bridges, law and power in medieval England* Woodbridge 2006; P Spufford *Power and profit: the merchant in medieval Europe* London 2006; wind and water mills: SA Walton (ed) *Wind and water in the Middle Ages* Tempe 2006.
- Origins of the crisis in the USSR* London 1992.
- Cf my review of I Fraser *Hegel, Marx: the concept of need* (Edinburgh 1998): ‘Hegelian pitfalls’ *Weekly Worker* July 31 2003; and also Norman Geras’s (in my opinion unsatisfactory) discussion of Marx’s formula, in ‘The controversy about Marx and justice’ (1989): www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/geras.htm.
- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/drafts/ch01.htm.
- R Wilkinson *The impact of inequality: how to make sick societies healthier* (2005 - outline summary at www.nationalestatechurches.org/Wilkinson%20Conf%2006.pdf).
- Podsheldolkin, ‘The origins of the Stalinist bureaucracy - some new historical facts’; www.revolutionary-history.co.uk/supplem/podsheld.htm.
- For the use of ‘republican equality’ here, compare P Pettit *Republicanism* (Oxford 1997), though Pettit’s policy prescriptions are in substance social democratic. Compare also Marx’s comment in ‘Instructions for delegates of the provisional general council’ (1866): “We acknowledge the cooperative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show that the present pauperising and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers”: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1866/08/instructions.htm.
- M Macnair, ‘A bridge too far’ *Weekly Worker* December 18 2003.

CHINA

Heading for a crash?

Michael Roberts comments on the speculation surrounding China's latest growth figures

Last weekend, the People's Bank of China announced a cut in its benchmark interest rate to just over 5%. This was the third rate cut since last November. The government is clearly worried that the powerhouse Chinese economy is slowing down so much that it is threatening its ability to provide enough jobs and incomes for the people still flooding in to the teeming cities. A failure to deliver on growth and jobs would put into jeopardy the rule of the Chinese elite.

China's economy is now growing at its slowest rate since the end of the global financial crisis and the great recession in 2009. On official figures, first-quarter growth has slowed to 7% year on year from 7.3% last quarter, and most unofficial estimates reckon growth is really even slower. And it used to be a benchmark that China had to grow at 8% a year to absorb the expansion of the labour force from rural areas into the factories and cities. For behind China's impressive economic rise has been the biggest human migration in history. By 2013, some 269 million rural residents had become migrant workers in cities, offering cheap labour and sustaining urban growth.

The slowdown is particularly visible in the industrial sectors. Value-added industrial output, a measure of manufacturing production, has hit financial-crisis levels. Industrial production grew by 5.6% year on year in March - far short of economists' expectations of 6.9%.

And the consumption of goods has also slowed. Retail sales rose 10.2% in March. That sounds a lot by the standards of the major capitalist economies, but it is a slower rate than during the financial crisis.

Above all, the crucial driver of growth - fixed-asset investment, which measures money put into big projects and factories - rose 13.5% year on year, down from a peak of 30% back in 2009, if still at a higher rate than in the early 2000s.

The slowdown is partly a result of the sluggish recovery in the world economy in Europe, Japan and the US - the main destinations for Chinese exports. But it is also the result of a deliberate policy by the government to rein in a huge property bubble that has ensued since 2009. This was driven by low interest rates, huge savings held by richer Chinese and local governments borrowing or selling land to build homes and cities for the burgeoning urban population.

Chinese banks searching for profit and corrupt local government officials have engaged in a massive property bubble. The result of this has been a rise in debt, both in the public sector concealed from the books by local governments and among property developers. Debt is now 282% of GDP, according to McKinsey - a higher rate than in the US.¹

With the property market now being reined in, richer Chinese have switched their speculation into the stock market. The Chinese stock market has exploded. But it has done this before. Between 2005 and 2007 it rose 800%, only to collapse during the global financial crash. This time it is up only 200% - it may have further to go.

China's property and stock market bubbles show that the great expansion in industry and investment over the last 10 years has not been equally shared. During that time inequality of income and wealth has risen more than in any other major economy and China now has a Gini coefficient (a measure of inequality) over 40 - as high as in



Growth slowing down

the US and higher than most major capitalist economies.

There is massive offshore evasion of tax and the hoarding of secret bank accounts by China's super-rich - yet again revealed in the leaked reports about the 'Chinese princelings', among others. More than a dozen family members of China's top political and military leaders are making use of offshore companies based in the British Virgin Islands, leaked financial documents have revealed. The brother-in-law of China's current president, Xi Jinping, as well as the son and son-in-law of former premier Wen Jiabao are among the political relations making use of these offshore havens.²

Indeed, while the world marvels at the rise of Chinese stock prices, money is quietly leaving the country at the fastest pace in at least a decade. Louis Kuijs, Royal Bank of Scotland's chief China economist, estimates that China lost \$300 billion in financial outflows in the six months through March. Deltec International, a Bahamas investment firm, puts the figure even higher. This expresses the fear of the Chinese elite over the anti-corruption campaign being waged by the Communist Party leaders and also the fear of foreign investors that the credit bubbles will burst and China will have a 'hard landing' similar to that in 2008 for 'western capitalism'.

With \$3.73 trillion in reserves, China is in no danger of running out of money. But mainstream economics is confused about which way the Chinese economy is going. Some media and economists reckon that China is heading towards a major crisis or slump brought on by 'overinvestment', a reversal of a credit-fuelled property bubble and a spiralling of hidden bad debts in the banking system. On the other hand, some economists reckon that the Chinese authorities will be able to engineer a 'soft landing' through the easing of credit and financing of the writing-off of debt from cash reserves built up over past years.

Capitalism?

Behind this debate on the immediate

future also lies a debate on whether China can continue to grow fast through investment in industry, infrastructure and more exports, or will need to switch to a consumer-led economy that imports more and supplies goods to a 'rising middle-class' like advanced capitalist economies supposedly do. Mainstream economics reckons that this cannot be done without developing a more 'market-based' economy - ie, capitalism - because the 'complexity' of a consumer society can only work under capitalism and not under 'heavy-handed' central planning of government and state industries.

In my view, this misunderstands the nature of the Chinese economic beats. Looking at the decisions of the recent Chinese Communist Party's Third Plenum explains things better.³ The plenum issued a detailed statement on what the elite has agreed to do about China over the next five to 10 years.⁴ It did not commit to anything like 'free market' capitalism. At best, it agreed to a few limited steps towards the development of market forces in banking (more competition for the state-owned banks) and in agriculture (some commercial property transactions), vague talk about 'liberalisation' of capital controls and currency trading down the road; a few more 'free trade zones' for foreign companies to ply their trade; and allowing foreign companies to operate in more service sectors. And, of course, there is going to be a very limited relaxation of the terrible one-child policy for families and the control of the movement from rural areas of people into the cities (*hukou*) by allowing more free movement into smaller cities.

But that is it. Two things stood out that did not happen. There was no change in the general philosophy of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and thus the maintenance of the dominance of the state sector. The pro-capitalist elements in the Chinese elite have pushed for the implementation of the proposals in the large World Bank report on China.⁵ The bank's first and

foremost demand for 'reform' was the privatisation of the state enterprises. The Third Plenum made no move in that direction whatsoever. The other clear message was that there would be no more democracy, such as giving control of even local legal systems and decisions to the people. On the contrary, the leadership is setting up even more repressive state security services to monitor and control the population and curb any dissidence.

So there is nothing really in the aims and policy proposals agreed by the Chinese political elite that changes the nature of Chinese economic, social and political model. The majority in the leadership will continue with an economic model that is dominated by state corporations, but directed at all levels by the communist cadres. Markets will not rule and the law of value will not dominate prices, labour incomes or domestic trade. Of course, the law of value does operate in China, but mainly through foreign trade, capital flows (investment) and currency movements, but even here it is under strict limits, with only gradual moves to relax those limits.

Can the elite continue with this 'halfway house' without provoking either a crisis and slump that will force them to follow the 'capitalist road', as the World Bank and the pro-capitalist elements want? Will the elite face an eruption from below, as the fast-growing, working class, urban population starts to flex its muscles for a say in running society?

Well, I think not - at least not yet. The International Monetary Fund seems to think that China's trend growth rate is declining gradually to only about 6.3% by about 2019. Others are more pessimistic. The US Conference Board forecast this week that trend growth after 2020 would be only 4% a year. But even these forecasts recognise that China will continue to grow around 7% in annual real GDP terms for at least another five years. The working population is still growing, although it will peak around 2020; there are still hundreds of millions of rural workers and peasants to be incorporated into

the industrial machine; and China is increasingly sucking up as much of the world's raw materials as it needs to sustain its expansion.

John Ross of Shanghai University has pointed out that China's industrial growth remains truly staggering:

On World Bank data China's industrial production in 2007 was only 60% of the US level, whereas by 2011 it was 121%. Therefore in only a six-year period China has moved from its industrial production being less than two thirds of the US to overtaking the US by a substantial margin. In six years China's industrial output almost doubled, while industrial production in the US, Europe and Japan has not even regained pre-crisis levels.⁶

The great Chinese economic 'miracle' is not exhausted quite yet ●

Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>.

Notes

1. The McKinsey Institute, 'Debt and (not much) deleveraging', February 2015.
2. This is the latest revelation from 'Offshore Secrets', a two-year reporting effort led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which obtained more than 200 gigabytes of leaked financial data from two companies in the British Virgin Islands, and shared the information with *The Guardian* and other international news outlets. The documents also disclose the central role of major western banks and accountancy firms, including PricewaterhouseCoopers, Credit Suisse and UBS in this offshore world, acting as middlemen in the establishing of companies. Between \$1 trillion and \$4 trillion in untraced assets have left China since 2000, according to estimates (www.icij.org/offshore/leaked-records-reveal-offshore-holdings-chinas-elite).
3. http://wiki.china.org.cn/wiki/index.php/Third_Plenum.
4. <http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/11/15/ccp-central-committee-resolution-concerning-some-major-issues-in-comprehensively-deepening-reform>.
5. World Bank *China 2030*: www.worldbank.org/en/news/2012/02/27/china-2030-executive-summary.
6. <http://ablog.typepad.com/keytrendingglobalisation/2013/09/china-has-overtaken-the-us.htm>.

USA

Facing up to stagnation

The latest US figures are indicative of a continuing problem, writes Yassamine Mather

After all the hype about economic recovery in the United States, quarterly data relating to the rate of growth, deficit and productivity are ringing alarm bells throughout the world.

In March 2015, the US recorded its biggest monthly trade deficit since the 2008 global financial crisis, fuelling concerns that the economic contraction in the first three months of the year might signal more serious problems. The deficit recorded for goods and services rose to \$51.4 billion, which was up 41% compared to the \$35.9 billion recorded only a month earlier. Exports rose by less than one percent, while imports grew 7.7% on the back of increased consumer demand for cars and mobile phones. According to the *Financial Times*,

Labour productivity fell an annual 1.9% in the first three months of the year, while unit labour costs rose sharply, official figures showed on Wednesday. The output per hour figures came as the country's gross domestic product barely grew during the quarter, even as it added an average of nearly 200,000 jobs a month ... the figures confirm a longer-run trend of slowing productivity that is alarming policy-makers and complicating Federal Reserve decision-making.¹

Figures released by the US treasury show the rate of growth from the first quarter of this year to be 0.2%, dashing any hopes of a rise in interest rates. In fact interest rates have barely moved above zero for more than six years, emphasising the fact that this has been the weakest recovery from recession in the last 50 years. And the problems are not limited to the US. According to the Office of National Statistics, the rate of growth fell to 0.3% in the UK - the slowest quarterly growth for two years.

Last week predictions by the International Monetary Fund that China's growth would not exceed 6% by 2017, following news of another fall in the country's rate of growth to 7% in the first quarter of 2015, will also affect the US and world economy.² What is more, the awaited economic miracle of emerging markets is not materialising. Countries in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere are especially dependent on commodities production and they have been falling one by one into recession, or at best stagnation - an inevitable consequence of global underconsumption.

The US administration and sections of the media have blamed cold weather for the poor figures. However, with the exception of the construction industry it is difficult to see how the weather played such a crucial role. The reality is that retail sales, business investment and housing development have all been weak, pointing to a slowdown. The fact that the growth in consumer spending dropped to 1.9% in the first quarter, down from 4.4% in late 2014 and the weakest for a year, is a far more significant contributor. The fall in the

price of crude oil has also affected investment in the US oil and gas sector, and impacted on banks involved in major loans to the oil sector.

Another important contributing factor has been the decline in the export of US goods, mainly manufactured products - a consequence of a sharp rise in the dollar since autumn 2014. Now that there is no possibility of an interest rate rise, it is likely the US treasury will try to bring down the value of the dollar. The problem is that most major economies are playing a similar game, with monetary injections or quantitative easing leading to 'competitive devaluations' of various currencies. But, far from solving any country's economic problem, this only serves to delay the inevitable crisis. A cheaper dollar can only help for a short time before unofficial, undeclared European or Chinese devaluation of their respective currencies negates it. The world economy is contracting and finance capital's solutions are making the situation worse.

Throughout the recent election campaign, Labour faced accusations that it created the economic crisis of 2008 - the Conservative argument that Labour's 'irresponsible' economic public expenditure programme led to debt and crisis has been repeated ad nauseam by the mass media. This lie was scarcely challenged by the "pro-business" Labour leadership, which employed defensive arguments and promised to stick to Tory austerity policies, albeit with a lighter touch. Economists of the right and left agree that the economic crisis of 2008, which threatened the large financial institutions with collapse, was prevented by the bailout by governments. Following the crisis the policies of Gordon Brown were no different from those of Republican president, George W Bush.

Continued crisis

There are fundamental reasons why capitalism in general and US capitalism in particular seems incapable of emerging from stagnation. The turn to finance capital, in the 1970s, was primarily aimed at weakening the working class in advanced capitalist countries - reducing public-sector costs through privatisation, the introduction of an internal market and the contracting out of government services and activities. All this was accompanied by the imposition of IMF/World Bank market conditions on all loans to the 'third world' - a policy that has had devastating consequences in the countries of the periphery.

Finance capital's short-termist nature means it is necessarily unproductive, parasitic and therefore dependent on value from the productive sector. Ismael Hossein Zadeh sums up the situation as follows:

A recent report by the Federal Reserve Bank shows that, while aggregate national wealth in the US rose by \$1.49 trillion during



Alarm bells

the first quarter of 2014, the real economy (as measured by GDP) actually contracted by one percent - according to the department of commerce, the decline in GDP was actually 2.9% ... In a similar report, the *Financial Times* recently noted that household wealth as a whole is up 43% since the depths of the economic slump in 2008, despite the slow or non-existent recovery in the labour market and an actual decline in median household income, down 7.6% since 2008.³

In other words, the financial sector has benefited from an unprecedented rate of growth, while all other sectors continue to face the possibility of stagnation. Even before the collapse of the price of oil and the subsequent crisis in banks associated with toxic loans to the oil sector, a shift of income away from the working class and the growth of real returns to the capitalist class had created the basis for another crisis. The levels of unemployment and underemployment are constantly rising. In the 'third world', this has become a serious problem, leading to mass migration even at the risk of losing one's life. In the 'first world', every attempt is made to hide the real figures, through the use of terms such as 'economically inactive' - the true number of unemployed is distorted, as e-contracts, temporary and at times unpaid work in endless 'job creation' schemes hide the severity of the problem.

While 25 million Americans are unemployed or working only part-time when they want and need full-time jobs, corporate America has a cash hoard of more than \$2 trillion, which it refuses to invest in new production. Instead it is happy to pay interest for saving accounts, as well as using capital in speculative trade and stock buybacks - all profitable activities in the short term.

In fact the Dow Jones and the US stock market is doing well. However, the majority of the population are worse off, as real income has dropped

thanks to declining or stagnant wages. For 70% of the workforce, inflation-adjusted hourly wages are still lower than they were in 2007. According to economic editor John Whitefoot,

If you're rich, 2015 will probably be another year of celebratory wealth creation. If, on the other hand, you're not, 2015 will feel an awful lot like 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2009. Wall Street and the US government will tell you the economy is doing well, but it won't feel like it. In fact, according to a national survey, 70% of Americans believe the US economy is permanently damaged, while 84% do not believe the economy has improved since the recession ended in 2009.⁴

It is this level of inequality at a time of stagnation that worries the more far-sighted sections of capital, be it in articles in the financial journals or the attention given to Thomas Piketty's book, *Capital in the 21st century*.

In fact Piketty's concerns about the problems caused by inequality and the danger it represents for the future of capitalism have been picked up by sections of the capitalist class. Piketty deals with inequality of wealth rather than capital and this determines that his solutions are reformist. That is why the book has supporters amongst those who want to *save* capitalism.

Of course they are right to say that the levels of austerity and inequality we are facing have reduced the basic power of consumption, producing stagnation, and as a result of that capitalism is in trouble. The problem is that, because result is confused with cause, they have no solution to the current economic chaos. Inequality is a consequence of capitalist exploitation, a consequence of extracting surplus value. It cannot be dealt with unless one addresses the root cause ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. *Financial Times* May 6 2015.
2. In December 2014 China officially became the world's largest economy in terms of goods and services, overtaking the United States, which had held the position since 1872. According to the IMF, the Chinese economy was worth \$17.6 trillion compared with \$17.4 trillion for the USA. However, the same year was also marked by China's weakest rate of growth in 24 years - it fell from 7.7% in 2013 to 7.4%. Clearly its economic position should be judged in relation to its population of 1.36 billion.
3. www.counterpunch.org/2014/05/23/monetary-policy-as-class-warfare-revisited.
4. www.profitconfidential.com/economic-analysis/economic-outlook-for-2015.

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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

Communist University 2015

Saturday August 15 - Saturday August 22 (inclusive)
Goldsmiths University, Surrey House, 80 Lewisham Way, New Cross, London SE14 6PB

A week of provocative and stimulating debate hosted by the CPGB

Confirmed speakers include: Mike Macnair, Hillel Ticktin, Ian Birchall, Yassamine Mather, Kevin Bean, Marc Mulholland, James Heartfield, Jack Conrad, Chris Knight, Michael Roberts, Paul Demarty, Salman Shaheen.

Details of the agenda and fees for the school will be available on the CPGB website soon. To receive email updates for this year's CU, sign up to the CPGB's *Notes for Action* at www.cpgb.org.uk.

weekly worker

**We want
to liberate
humanity**

Aspiring to what?

Blairites are flying the flag for 'aspiration' - a subject about which they know nothing, argues **Paul Demarty**

*They've got the whole world in their house
They've got the whole wide world in their house
They've got the whole world in their house
To see the new conservatory
(Half Man Half Biscuit, 'Paintball's coming home')*

There is nothing more obnoxious than a Blairite who smells blood; and so it has proven. Since Ed Miliband's political hara-kiri, slick southern yuppies have been popping up daily amid a sustained, press-backed campaign to correct Miliband's errors - viz, his enthusiastic lurch towards blood-and-fire, class-struggle socialism. No, I don't remember that either, dear reader: but Blairites are strikingly assiduous when it comes to decrying any suggestion that working class people, or even "working families", ought to be the proper target of a Labour manifesto; for them, as for Tea Party ideologues, such dangerous notions are *prima facie* evidence of communist sympathies.

The list of rogues gets longer every day: Alan Johnson, Exeter MP Ben Bradshaw - a lone speck of red on the political map of west England in a sea of blue - and, of course, the big man himself, Tony Blair, have trotted out this little narrative. Potential leaders Chuka Umunna, Tristram Hunt and David Lammy have likewise talked up the 'centre ground'. Alan Sugar, celebrity adviser to Gordon Brown and long-time business mediocrity, has resigned from the party over its alleged leftward lurch.

Bradshaw wants to "celebrate our entrepreneurs and wealth-creators and not leave the impression they are part of the problem", so we can have more runaway successes like Sugar. But it is Johnson who brought in the biggest of Blairite catchphrases: "We can no longer relate to [voters] as a party of aspiration. And that was one of the big successes that won us three elections."

Reclaiming this, apparently, is the road to success in places like Thanet and Hastings. Hunt agrees, blathering on about "Waitrose couples". Andy Burnham is - god help us - shaping up to be the 'left' candidate in the coming contest, but even he ran for the same post in 2010 on a platform of "aspirational socialism".

Though it is not the subject of this article, it ought to be pointed out up front that this explanation for Labour's defeat is utter balderdash; Labour lost this election mostly in Scotland, making overall gains elsewhere. A huge part of its safe-seat heartland was amputated overnight. North of the border, moreover, Labour is utterly discredited because of the Blairites, and crucially their unholy alliance with the Tories during the referendum campaign; guff about "wealth-creators" might fly on Fleet Street, but it is likely a harder sell in the Gorbals.

Hastings and Thanet, if they really are so important, have seen major advances for the UK Independence



Middle class values: rat race

Party, whose voters would have been especially vulnerable to the chauvinist hysteria over a potential deal between Labour and the Scottish nationalists, rather than suffering for a freeze in energy prices or mansion tax. In any case, Labour's vote held up better than the Tories' in both Thanet constituencies (though not Hastings).

All of this begs the question: what exactly is this aspiration everyone is so obsessed with? Like everything else, it is a code-word for class for those who do not wish very much to talk about class. Hunt is perhaps the exemplary figure here: a biographer of Friedrich Engels, he probably knows what he is refusing to talk about. Writes Hunt, in an op-ed for *The Guardian*:

History shows us that combining empathy and entrepreneurialism is how Labour succeeds in office. That is how Labour rebuilt Britain after the second world war ... Our language has to endorse business and enterprise, but also champion a sense of national identity which in many parts of the country feels undervalued ... In short, a Labour programme built around

both wealth creation and cultural affirmation (May 11).

Hunt's piece as a whole sees him pettifogging around the opposition he talks about here: "wealth-creators", those who "aspire to climb life's ladder"; and those "left behind" by globalisation, who feel "dislocated". By the latter, he means the traditional working class Labour core vote; by the former, he means capitalists.

Or does he? There are a lot of rungs on 'life's ladder', after all, and if he wishes to rehabilitate the Blair years, he presumably (and indeed explicitly) concurs with Johnson: Blair won in middle England, not among capitalists (of which there are few) but the ill-defined middle class. It is, as he said elsewhere, about "Waitrose couples" - presumably today's equivalent of 'Mondeo man' and innumerable other psephological fictions.

The ideology of 'aspiration', in fact, is one which erases the difference between middle class supermarket preferences and ownership of the means of production. We are at the mercy of a purely notional teleology, where that packet of organic rhubarb is on an unbroken continuum that passes through owning a first, then

a second home, to some distant point of fabulous personal success.

People under the spell of this ideology "aspire to climb life's ladder" as individuals (or, as Thatcher would put it, "individuals and their families"). Between their condition and that of Steve Jobs (or even Alan Sugar), there stands only an awful lot of bootstrap-pulling and personal graft. It is, needless to say, a fiction: in the case of the classic petty bourgeoisie, the aspirant individual - and his or her family - have to put a lot of effort into running merely to stand still. For the managerial and professional layers, meanwhile, the simple fact remains that there is not a huge amount of room at the top, and thus likewise a great deal of running on the spot.

'Shy Tories'

The result of this is one of two mindsets - both essentially Tory. The first is simply *explicit Toryism* - resentment of taxation, of spending on the 'workshy', of public-sector workers and their gold-plated pensions at our expense; in short, the small-minded politics of the *Daily Mail*, aggressively cultivated by the latter and other papers, and pandered to by politicians when it suits them.

The second is that phenomenon much talked about in the last week, the 'shy Tory': people who cruelly embarrassed the pollsters by misrepresenting their own voting intentions. We must say that shy Tories' responsibility for facepalms at YouGov is, as yet, unproven. Yet the phenomenon is real: those whose political instinct is that a Tory vote is somehow dirty, shameful; but who find their wallets dragging them onto the right-hand path.

There is quite a real material basis for it. In short, among the many spoils of national government is considerable control over exactly which localities bear the brunt of cuts; one's own party's safe seats can enjoy greater protection than those of the enemy. This process is starting extraordinarily rapidly this term: the *Manchester Evening News* notes that Greater Manchester's spending power (an aggregate of council tax takings and central government grants) will fall by £28 million, while Surrey's will rise by £27 million (May 11). Those in Surrey might find themselves taking it into account when they vote - even in spite of themselves.

There is also the matter of wider political priorities: for example, in

spite of the bedroom tax, the last Tory government did not make a serious dent in the housing benefit bill. Nor would we expect them to, for housing benefit is an ingenious method for turning welfare into a state subsidy for private landlords - easily won to a Tory perspective, shy or otherwise. Shy Tories are right to be coy - politics conducted at this level becomes indirect corruption.

The most glaring flaw in the ideology of 'aspiration', however, has more directly to do with Waitrose, but is made especially clear in the negative, by Tristram Hunt's treatment of the working class. He is plain: since working class votes are bleeding to Ukip (another fiction for the most part, but bear with me) and the SNP, Labour must present a compelling sense of national sentiment. The middle class (and the bourgeoisie proper) are thus cosmopolitan, mobile, fluid; the working class is static, localist, tribal and backward.

The historic truth - which Hunt, the historian, ignores - is quite the opposite. The working class movement is not a force of conservatism (except when derailed by the likes of him), but of progress; indeed, of *aspiration* in a truer, more noble sense than is employed by philistine Blairites.

The ultimate proof of that is its intimate connection, not extinguished despite innumerable defeats, with the politics of socialism: a standpoint from which every advance of the class appears as a step, however small, toward a society free from poverty, in which the full creative capacity of humankind can be unleashed.

Yet there is, as it were, a trickle-down effect, exemplified by the tiny initiatives collective organisations of the class have organised for their members; we think of the workers educational societies, for whom knowledge was not (as it is in the modern technocratic university) merely a necessary acquisition on the way to a degree and a white-collar career, but a matter of power and dignity.

This is a very different definition of aspiration than that pushed by Hunt and his odious Blairite *confrères*. Of the two, ours is the only definition that is not a travesty of humanity. Some would like us to 'aspire' to a mock-Tudor semi in Hampton Wick, with a Smeg fridge full of Waitrose tomatoes; we aspire to the liberation of all humanity ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

**New UK subscribers offer:
3 months for £10**

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX

Name: _____
Address: _____
Tel: _____
Email: _____
Sub: £/€ _____
Donation: £/€ _____

Standing order

To _____ Bank plc _____
Branch address _____
Post code _____ Account name _____
Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete) Date _____
Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____
Address _____