

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly



worker



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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The moderate
extremist

LETTERS



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

Not astounding

In spite of all the evidence that I have put forward from Lars T Lih's study, *Lenin rediscovered*, in particular, Carl Simmons doggedly insists on asserting that Karl Kautsky, VI Lenin, Lars Lih and I hold the working class "in disdain" by arguing that "the working class is 'only capable of trade union consciousness' without the intervention of the intelligentsia from without" (Letters, March 13). The problem for him, however, is that none of us actually argue this, whether in *What is to be done?*, *Lenin rediscovered*, the letters pages of this paper or the passage from the CPGB's *Draft programme* I pointed him to by way of an explanation of how I understand the "from without" passage (and which he has revealingly ignored).

Like so many - too many - on the left today, comrade Simmons takes Lenin's "from without" passage to mean "the workers have to receive the message from intellectuals", because without these intellectuals the best they can achieve is trade union consciousness. But take a look at the offending Karl Kautsky passage quoted by Lenin. Kautsky maintains that "modern socialism" - ie, not socialism in general, but Marxism specifically - was invented by individual members of the intelligentsia (ie, Marx and Engels), who then communicate it to proletarians "who stand out due to their mental development" and who then "bring it into the class struggle" (that already exists "spontaneously" as a natural feature of class society), "where conditions allow". How could Kautsky, and thus Lenin, be any more clear that "bringing into the class struggle from elsewhere" - ie, merging socialism and the workers' movement - does not mean "workers have to get the message from intellectuals"?

In this understanding, intellectuals (particularly great ones) only come up with historical materialism, the theory of surplus value and so on, and everything else is due to proletarians telling other proletarians. This is just one of the many reasons for my "astounding claim" (why "astounding"?) that Trotsky's later account does not fit with the sources from the time. Lenin and Kautsky are simply making the point that a rounded Marxist outlook, a deep sense of history and so on, do not emerge spontaneously

in the elemental fight over wages and conditions that would occur in class society even if there was no such thing as Marxism. The fact that today "the works of Marx, Lenin and others [are] freely available on the internet" changes nothing in this regard, except for the fact that uploading material onto a website makes it much easier for us "social democrats" to bring the revolutionary Marxist message to the struggles of the workers' movement than it was for previous revolutionaries, using hand-operated printing presses or other such equipment. Unfortunately, Web 2.0 does not obviate the need for revolutionary political parties, programmes, theory and so on.

Two other points on Lenin and comrade Simmons. There is a difference between an unsuccessful or clumsy formulation of a valid point, and making an invalid point in the heat of polemic. Lenin, as we have seen in the exchange with comrade Simmons thus far, admitted to the former, but never to the latter. In the quotes I have provided, Lenin is simply stating that in taking on the economists he was making a point that needs to be seen in context. Nor did Lenin think that his readers were confused at the time, because everybody was stressing the "other side" of the argument - not least Martov and Plekhanov. Comrade Simmons and I actually agree on this latter point.

Doubtless with the aim of discrediting my argument by appealing to the lazier reader, comrade Simmons then rolls out the bugbear of Joseph Stalin. I would point readers to Lars Lih's discussion (pp657-58 of *Lenin rediscovered*) of what Stalin actually said about *WITBD* in 1905. Lih convincingly shows that Stalin did not think that intellectuals were needed to carry the revolutionary message and also that Lenin explicitly approved of the young Georgian activist's defence of *WITBD*. Trotsky had to explain this away by saying that Lenin actually did not mean what he was saying here, but was merely seeking to encourage a keen young supporter.

To conclude, maybe we can briefly put the history to one side. Could comrade Simmons perhaps explain just how, by effectively banning the public airing of political discussion within their organisation, comrade Peter Taaffe and the Socialist Party are exhibiting faith in the capacity of working class people to assimilate complex political ideas and the shades and nuances of Marxism? Is this not more in keeping with the approach of Stalin in the 1930s than that of 1905?

Ben Lewis
South Wales

Xenophobic

I cannot escape the conclusion that there exists a nasty xenophobic undertone to Dave Vincent's reply (Letters, March 13).

First, has Dave never heard of the Irish immigration to Scotland and in particular to the Lanarkshire coal pits? So the Lithuanians were indeed not the only immigrant population used as cheaper labour by the bosses. Indeed many encouraged the division and the bitter consequences are still felt today every time an Orange Walk takes place locally.

But, that aside, he writes: "[Lithuanians] joined unions in their own defence" (my emphasis). How's that for a jaundiced interpretation? The local union sought them out to join for everybody's mutual defence, Dave. He then goes on to claim that "many foreign workers coming here readily line up with the employers and Tories by denigrating the British unemployed as lazy and workshy". Perhaps some do, but I hazard to guess that they are heavily outnumbered by native-born who are just as ready to point the finger at those on the so-called 'Benefit Streets' as shirkers.

Many years ago I would hear seasoned trade unionists justify pay differentials between women and male workers by claiming they worked only for pin-money and stole jobs from those who had families to raise. Dave's argument proves to be little different from those against these earlier 'interlopers' into the labour market.

The plea that immigration controls should be imposed and certain foreigners excluded should have no place in a workers' movement that is calling upon the exploited of all the world to unite for their emancipation. Any policy for the exclusion of other suffering wage-slaves is more consistent with the attitudes of the callous capitalist class rather than of the movement whose proud boast it is that it stands uncompromisingly for the oppressed and downtrodden of all the world. Immigrants have just as good a right to enter this country as British workers have in exiting it.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain will not sacrifice principle and jeopardise our goal for some immediate advantage. We will not spurn fellow workers lured here by the glimmer of hope that their burdens may be lightened by the promise of some improvement in conditions. If revolutionary socialism does not stand unflinchingly and uncompromisingly for the working class and for the exploited of all lands, then it stands for none and its claim is a false pretence.

If the Socialist Party risk losing support because we refuse to call for the border gates to be closed in the faces of our own brothers and sisters, we will be none the weaker for spurning such tactics to acquire false friends. All the votes gained would do us little good if our party ceases to be a revolutionary party, yielding to public opinion to modify our principles for the sake of popularity and membership numbers.

In the centenary year of when other supposed socialists abandoned the workers' internationalism and embraced national chauvinism - with one group under HM Hyndman going as far to demonstrate their patriotic ardour by setting up a National 'Socialist' Party - we in the Socialist Party are the party of all workers, regardless of place of birth. We stand resolutely for world socialism and if this is too encompassing for some despite them paying lip-service to the claim - so be it. We shall leave them to their various national 'socialisms'.

"Marx didn't advocate open borders because at the time he wrote border controls didn't exist. So no-one can

definitively assert what he would have said then!" True enough (and fortunately for him nor was there any asylum-seekers legislation for political refugees), but Eleanor, his daughter, was particularly active in distributing the statement, "The voice of the aliens", which I recommended as a read.

I will end with a quote from it: "To punish the alien worker for the sin of the native capitalist is like the man who struck the boy because he was not strong enough to strike his father."

Alan Johnstone
Socialist Party of Great Britain

FI and Ukraine

In relation to the comments by Mike Martin and Lawrence Humphries (Letters, March 13), I wish to make it abundantly clear that "Fourth International" in my letter the previous week was intended to be a reference to what used to be known as the United Secretariat and not to their own organisations.

I admit I assumed that the use by the international tendency of which Socialist Resistance is the British section of the self-description, "International Committee of the Fourth International", in their statement on Ukraine meant that no other group now used the title that was once associated with the international tendency represented in Britain by first the Socialist Labour League and then the Workers Revolutionary Party. I apologise if I perpetuated a confusion generated, whether accidentally or deliberately, by the former USFI.

Lawrence knows me personally and also knows that I am well aware of Socialist Fight's position on Ukraine, which is based on an intransigently anti-fascist stance which I wholeheartedly share. However, I am not sure if to describe the former USFI as "Mandelites" is fair to the late Ernest Mandel, whose record in the resistance during World War II cannot be faulted - it is very hard for me to imagine that a revolutionary Jewish fighter against Nazism would have supported the former USFI's recent apologia for the latter-day followers of the Ukrainian fascist, Nazi collaborator and murderous anti-Semite, Stepan Bandera.

Finally, since the *Weekly Worker* does not claim to be what Jack Conrad still calls 'Trotskyite', I don't agree that it is the role of the editor to adjudicate between competing claims to be the Fourth International (or even its International Committee).

Toby Abse
London

Workers' wage?

Your tribute to Bob Crow was spoiled by the tart scolding that Crow faced a big contradiction, in that he "not only accepted such an inflated salary (£145,000), but attempted to justify it", and arguing that full-time union officials should be on the "average wage of the members" ('An intransigent fighter', March 13).

Four in five new jobs are in sectors averaging under £16,640 for a 40-hour week. Working full-time on the £6.31 hourly minimum wage would gross just £13,124 and the rise in part-time jobs shows millions of workers can't even earn that pittance (Office for National Statistics, 2014).

Is the *Weekly Worker* seriously arguing that union officials should not be paid the 'rate for the job' (ie, set by the membership and based on benchmarking for similar job roles), but salaries averaging under £16,640 per annum or less?

What is a legitimate expense? Will the editor advise on what clothing brand is acceptable to the workers? What car that an official drives? What lunch expense is to be swallowed?

What nonsense. Let us leave such window dressing to the Trots!

Those on the left should ensure that those they employ are paid transparently, in line with the market rate, and ensure best value for money for their members. Crow fulfilled all those requirements, along with many others who are proud that their efforts better the terms and conditions that ensure workers get more than the 'average'.

John Praven
Portsmouth

No scab

While the politics and analysis of *The Leninist* stand up rather well some 30 years later, I suppose it's inevitable factual inaccuracies sometimes occurred. Such is the case with the article, 'Three cardinal sins of opportunism' (republished in *Weekly Worker* March 13), which misrepresents the stance of the National Union of Mineworkers' Nottinghamshire area president, Ray Chadburn, during the strike.

In my recently published book on the strike in Nottinghamshire, *Look back in anger: the miners' strike in Nottinghamshire 30 years on*, I look closely at the role played by all four of the Notts full-time officials and it's clear you've done Chadburn a bit of a disservice. While he was certainly not part of the NUM's Broad Left and was perceived by many, with no little justification, to be a rightwinger, the fact is he was 100% behind the strike, which led to the Union of Democratic Miners locking him out of his office, sacking him and then trying to evict him and his family from their NUM-owned home.

Chadburn also staunchly and consistently defended his colleague, Henry Richardson, the pro-strike area general secretary, against the sustained campaign of victimisation orchestrated by scab-herders and later UDM architects Roy Lynk and David Prendergast. There is a great deal of Chadburn's record that bears criticism, but where the strike was concerned - despite his support for it being very much informed by both his lack of a fixed and consistent political ideology and his immersion in the murky deals and horse-trading of the professional trade union leader - he was firmly behind it and the striking Notts miners.

Harry Paterson
Nottingham

Bolibourgeoisie

In response to Daniel Harvey's two recent articles on Venezuela, there are a couple of issues I would like to point out.

First, the majority of Venezuela's adult population doesn't have a working class background. It is imperative that the Bolibourgeoisie be ousted and liquidated as a class, but also necessary to recognise the revolutionary pragmatism of seeing through via communitarian populist fronts the political ascension of national or socioeconomic 'patriotic' elements of the petty bourgeoisie - a sort of petit-Bolibourgeoisie - for the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie do form the majority of the country's adult population.

Turning to the violence, mainstream opposition has judged the *colectivos* to be "gangs" and "thugs", just because they do perform paramilitary or paramilitia functions, all the while ignoring their own hypocrisy when it comes to police brutality. However, they "[blur] the lines between partisan activism and community service", organise "bookshops, study groups, summer camps for children and coffee mornings for pensioners as genuine services to their communities" and run the odd "radio station, leftwing bookshop [...], internet cafe [or] veterinary

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clinic" (Reuters) in "[doubling] as neighbourhood organisations that run community improvement projects [and] as vigilante groups that intimidate political opponents" (*The Guardian*).

With a little more professional training in public safety, public order, and detective work, could the popular paramilitia character of the *colectivos* be an effective alternative to the bourgeois state's police apparatus?

Jacob Richter
email

Abused

I have read with interest the ongoing discussion of the age of consent. One thing that has been absent thus far (at least explicitly) is any contribution from someone who has been the victim of sexual abuse, where the age of consent was an issue. I'm in a position to make such a contribution - though, as will become evident, it is a little more complicated than that, in part because of how long ago the events took place, and my age at the time.

I was a gay teenager in the 80s at the height of the Aids crisis and clause 28-centered hysterical homophobia. This, as well as a quite unrelated trauma going on in my family, made it very difficult for me to come to terms with my emerging sexuality. This resulted in my being groomed and then sexually abused, in the sense of inappropriate touching by a lecturer in his 40s when I was an undergraduate.

I suspect that this happened for several reasons: I responded all too well to the initial sympathetic attention because of being unwilling to be open about my sexuality, and because of the situation at home; the age of consent for gay male sex was still 21, which, along with the generally homophobic atmosphere, made any open discussion of anything related to sex difficult for me; this was the first time that I was aware of any clearly gay man, who I had any degree of positive social reaction to, showing any interest in me; no doubt things would not have developed the way that they did if I had been straight. None of these excuses a man much older than me who was in a position of trust in a hierarchy exploiting my all too evident vulnerability for his own gratification.

A couple of years after the event I did indicate to the university authorities in broad terms what had happened, though the result was a fudge designed mostly to prevent anything similar happening in future with this particular individual (which was, as far as it went, a welcome outcome), rather than any attempt to address my individual welfare. I have yet to take any further official steps about the issue, and my mental health and psycho-sexual functioning remain somewhat impaired, despite extensive psychotherapy.

It seems to me that the thoughtful and considered views of Ian Donovan on this issue ('Don't abolish: reform', February 20) represent an attempt to plot a path between unhelpful levels of policing of young people's sexuality, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the CPGB *Draft programme's* current wording - "Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse" - which is completely inadequate.

Of course, vitally important in this whole debate is the bullet point that immediately follows the one on the age of consent. This reads: "The extensive provision of education and counselling facilities on all sexual matters, free from moralistic judgement, is an essential prerequisite to enable youth to develop themselves in all areas of sexuality and reproduction." Had this been in place both for me and for my abuser ...

Tony Rees
email

Inhuman

The remitting of the Communist Platform section on the 'age of consent' in favour of a debate in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* is deeply problematic.

Do you seriously think anyone can express openly, publicly and fully a view on why the 'age of consent' is inhuman repression and should be abolished? Do we live in a country free of sexual repression and murderous hysteria about 'children', some of whom are in their late teens? It is impossible to debate this question without the heavy hand of the law coming down hard and attracting state surveillance, press intrusion, phone taps, detention, blacklisting, assault or murder. Only those repeating the 'child protection industry' mantra, and extending its tentacles and financial rackets, are allowed public expression of their views.

I do not understand Ian Donovan's problem with the wording of the CPGB policy ('Don't abolish: reform', February 20) - unless he simply believes the state has the right and duty to impose an artificial age at which people are 'capable' of giving consent, regardless of when it's actually given. The abolition of the British age of consent (because, of course, it's different around Europe and the world, and even in Scotland to an extent) does not mean abolition of laws on rape.

Consent will still have to be consent, and not the result of force, coercion, bribery or fear. It will still have to be voluntarily given. The protection Ian is looking for will be covered by that.

Vernon Jacks
email

Empowerment

There has been a useful exchange on the age of consent. Ian Donovan, for example, has expressed problems with this passage in the CPGB's *Draft programme*: "Abolish age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals to enter into sexual relations they choose, provided this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse."

In particular, comrade Donovan objects to the first sentence and instead proposes a system of positive proof of consent when someone over 16 enters into a sexual relationship with someone under 16. Whatever the exact details, it is clear that comrade Donovan, like us, actually advocates the abolition of the age-of-consent laws.

Let me explain our reasoning. We find it thoroughly objectionable that the state can criminalise young people when, say, one partner is 15 and the other is 17. Of course, such relationships are very common. Nevertheless, where there is a "marked discrepancy" between the ages then, yes, the idea of positive proof of consent is not a bad idea. Many European countries have 'close in age' exemptions. Eg, if the difference is less than three or four years, it is often deemed that there is no offence - Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia, etc.

Crucially, however, we seek to empower young people through democratising the school system, grants, education and counselling in sexual and relationship matters, etc.

It ought to be stressed that we in the CPGB do not approve of adults using their positions of power to persuade young people into having sex. Eg, while it should not be a criminal matter, sex between university students and teachers should be considered unprofessional - a sacking offence.

Jack Conrad
London

Pervert state

I am writing in disgust at the total disregard in Iraq for the rights of women and girls, whose lives are to

be further blighted by the proposal of the Ja'afari personal status law.

The proposed law, which is still to be voted on by Iraq's parliament, will legalise paedophilia by allowing the marriage of nine-year-old girls, will prevent women from leaving their homes without their husband's permission, and will also permit a husband the right of sexual gratification at his whim, in effect legalising rape. This law, if introduced, will also prevent a Muslim from marrying a non-Muslim. This will only add further tension to Iraq's already fractured social fabric, which has been pushed to its limits since the USA and UK introduced 'democracy' to that country.

What has horrified both myself and numerous others is the silence which has come from Britain's parliament, who, after all, were the first to decry the human rights abuses of Saddam Hussain, along with claiming that their invasion was to help champion the cause of women's rights in Iraq. It is grotesque, that the UK is failing to utilise its influence over the Iraqi government to reverse its plan to create the world's first pervert state, which, as most people are fully aware, was most generously funded by the US/UK taxpayer.

At the same time, the UK also need to have some clarity and inform us, the electorate, what Britain's political, military and diplomatic positions with the Iraqi government and its British-based institutions will be, should the US/UK-backed Iraqi government legalise both primary school-aged brides and rape.

Hussein Al-alak
Manchester

Coffees on me

"If comrade Persson can locate any 'curious sectarian' in this week's issue, then I will donate a tenner - 100 Swedish krona - to the Arbetarmakt fund and buy him a coffee when I next see him," writes Ben Lewis (Letters, February 20), in response to a lazy jab of mine, saying the *Weekly Worker* was dedicated to "curious sectarian" (February 6).

The polemical edge was supposed to be directed at the letter I was responding to, not the *Weekly Worker* or CPGB. Unlike coffee, petty annoyance is evidently best served cold. But I'm happy to correct myself, and I apologise to comrade Lewis for falling back all too easily on routine dismissal of this publication. I still do doubt your project, but leftwing debate and, indeed, your seriousness deserve equally serious criticism rather than tired clichés.

I'll keep hunting for "curious sectarian" - I actually do enjoy it. But I hereby accept defeat on this matter. Two sugars for our next *fika* (coffee break) - duly noted.

Svante Persson
Arbetarmakt, Sweden

Poet laureate

Just a short letter to wish the Communist Platform all the best at the coming Left Unity conference - a real inspiration to an old-timer like me. I enjoyed very much Jack Conrad's use of Brecht at the last gathering and in a similar vein I have penned these lines that will hopefully inspire your comrades in their Left Unity work:

Our Communist Platform's on the rise
Play a part and join the cry!
Our opponents, they lack some spine,
Encased in the reformist ball of twine.
Come now, comrades, conference calls.

Let's knock down some mighty walls!
Our time is coming, just you see.
The Communist Platform is a growing tree!

Mike Hunt
email

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 March 23: No forum.

Sunday March 30, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 27, 'Expropriation of the agricultural population from the land'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the science of mythology

Tuesday March 25, 6.15pm: 'A plains Indian myth: the wives of the sun and moon'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

88 Fleet Street, London EC4 (next to St Bride's church, 5 minutes walk from Blackfriars tube). Admission free, but donations appreciated. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Israeli apartheid: a beginner's guide

Friday March 21, 6.30pm: Educational, Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. Free event, but please reserve a ticket: www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/israeli-apartheid-a-beginners-guide-tickets-10510921449.

Organised by Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org.uk.

Mark Duggan and the injustice system

Friday March 21, 7pm: Public meeting with relatives of Mark Duggan and others, Kings College London Students Union, Macadam Building, The Strand, London WC2.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: www.defendtherighttoprotest.org.

New frontlines of war

Saturday March 22, 11am to 6pm: Anti-corporate event, Rich Mix, 35-47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1. Speakers from Nigeria, Colombia and Palestine.

Organised by War on Want: www.waronwant.org.

Revolution in South Africa

Saturday March 22, 7.30 pm: Public meeting, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Speakers include: Peter Banda, General Industries Workers Union of South Africa; Shaheen Khan, Bolshevik Study Circles, Latief Parker, *Critique*.

Organised by Socialist Fight: www.socialistfight.com.

Stand up to racism

Saturday March 22, 11am: March and rally to mark United Nations anti-racism day. Assemble Mandela statue, Parliament Square, London SW1, for march to rally in Trafalgar Square.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Socialists and Scottish independence

Tuesday March 25, 7pm: Debate: 'Should socialists campaign for Scottish independence?' Room 706, Adam Smith Building, University of Glasgow, Bute Gardens, Glasgow G12.

Organised by Glasgow Left Unity: www.leftunityglasgow.org.

Against austerity

Wednesday March 26, 7pm: Book launch, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. Richard Seymour introduces 'Against austerity: how we can fix the crisis they made?' £3 on the door, redeemable against any purchase.

Organised by Five Leaves bookshop: www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk.

No glory in World War I

Wednesday March 26, 7.30pm: Discussion, Malcolm X Centre, 141 City Rd, Bristol BS2. Speakers include Neil Faulkner.

Organised by No Glory in War: <http://noglory.org>.

The people vs austerity

Thursday March 27, 7pm: People's Assembly post-conference meeting, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Left Unity conference

Saturday March 29, 11am to 6pm (registration from 10am): National policy conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefield, Manchester M3. Registration: leftunity.org/manchester-conference-information-saturday-29th-march-2014. Organised by Left Unity: www.leftunity.org.

Welsh Labour Grassroots

Saturday March 29, 6pm: Meeting at Welsh Labour conference, Somerset Hotel, Llandudno.

Organised by Welsh Labour Grassroots: <http://welshlabourgrassroots.org>.

Education under occupation

Tuesday April 1, 6.30pm: Stories from West Bank and Gaza students. P21 Gallery, 21 Chalton Street, London NW1.

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

Socialist films

Sunday April 13, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Trisha Ziff's *The Mexican suitcase* (Mexico/Spain/US, 86 minutes) and Hugo Levien's *Who are the Angola 3?* (UK, 29 minutes).

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

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.

OBITUARY

The moderate extremist

Paul Demarty examines the legacy of a tireless champion of the Labour left

The death of Tony Benn, after a long illness, was announced on March 14, to cap off a cruel week for the British left: Bob Crow of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union had died earlier last week, and we had lost two of the most prominent avowed socialists in the country within three days.

If Crow was remarkable, in a period where trade union organisation was getting weaker everywhere, for substantially growing the RMT and winning battle after battle, Benn's claim to fame rests on his peculiar journey through that other mass contingent of the workers' movement: the Labour Party. Both men were castigated or patronised as 'relics'; Crow (in this view) was the last of the 1970s union militants, as it were, and Benn was a leftover from the 1980s, the Labour Party's wilderness decade.

But turn it around and it is a compliment. Leaving aside the micro-historical forces which allowed success, the RMT under Crow was not cowed, when most of his brothers and sisters were. In the Labour Party, the picture is even more stark: all manner of capitulated lefts are represented in the serried ranks of New Labour, and Ed Miliband's zombie version of the same. Benn was, up to his death, an irritating reminder that it was not only the hated Trotskyist groups who were capable of resisting the pull (although only up to a point); indeed, it was possible for serious people to travel in the opposite direction.

The technocrat

Anthony Wedgwood Benn was born in 1925, the son of a Liberal MP and a radical theologian. His father, William Wedgwood Benn, renounced the Liberals in 1928, joining the Labour Party, where he served as secretary of state for India in Ramsay MacDonald's 1929 government. Benn was thus a product of the establishment; both his grandfathers, also, had been Liberal MPs, and he was sent to that training ground for the offspring of establishment well-to-dos, Westminster School.

He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in 1943, where he met, among others, the rightwing Conservative, Enoch Powell, with whom he formed a lasting, if somewhat politically implausible, friendship; and after the war, continued an unremarkable journey in the footsteps of his father, completing a degree in politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford. He was elected to parliament in 1950, replacing Stafford Cripps in Bristol South East with the help of Anthony Crosland. Cripps was a peculiar individual - a quasi-Marxist Christian, traditionally on the left of the Labour Party, and no doubt Crosland (Benn's former Oxford tutor and a figure on the Labour right) saw his replacement, a bright and very young careerist, as a vast improvement.

So it initially proved: Benn supported Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour right's chosen champion, throughout his years as party leader, against the powerful Bevanite left. It was at the end of the Gaitskell era that Benn faced his first serious political battle. During the war, his father had been ennobled as the first Viscount of Stansgate. It was an act of grubby *Realpolitik* on the part of Winston Churchill; but, after Benn's older brother died in a wartime accident, it presented a problem. He would inherit the title - which he did not want at all - and find himself, under the law of the day, disqualified from the Commons.

After years of frustration, his time was up - William Wedgwood Benn died, and his thus ennobled son was booted from parliament. He stood in - and won - the resulting by-election, and his seat was given to Malcolm St Clair, who agreed to make way if Benn succeeded in overturning the law.

With help from all quarters - including a token donation from Churchill, who had gotten him into this mess - Benn succeeded. By the time he returned to Bristol South East, though, things were changing. Gaitskell was dead, replaced by Harold Wilson; and Labour's long years in the wilderness were about to end, as Harold Macmillan's government descended into chaos over the Profumo affair.

In Wilson's government - as postmaster general and minister for technology - Benn was emblematic of the technocratic post-war consensus. He oversaw the Post Office Tower, the Concorde project, and looked forward, in keeping with the spirit of the times, to rising prosperity driven by technological progress.

The radical

After Wilson's government fell in 1970, the rising tide of industrial militancy dominated British

politics. It seems to have carried Benn along with it. In 1971, he spoke at a rally for the Upper Clyde work-in in Glasgow, which was organised principally by communist militants. In 1973, he symbolically truncated his name from Anthony Wedgwood to Tony; he became the foremost Labour spokesperson in opposition to Britain's membership of the European Economic Community during the 1975 referendum campaign, which roughly divided the Labour Party on left-right lines.

While, as industry minister, he was complicit in incomes policies and other anti-working class measures, his technocratic outlook was gone. He supported the formation of workers' cooperatives, and in 1976 stood as a leftwing candidate in the snap leadership election. By the end of the decade, he was the *de facto* leader of Labour's left, putting his name to its flagship Alternative Economic Strategy (AES), and winning the support of forces ranging from Trotskyists to Eurocommunists. Bennism had become the reincarnation of the Bevanism he had spurned in his youth.

Bennism reached its apogee in the first years of the 80s, when a small mass movement within Labour propelled him to within a whisker of the deputy leadership. It collapsed almost immediately after, with the departure of the Gang of Four to form the Social Democratic Party and the disastrous 1983 election. Benn was heavily implicated in the Labour manifesto, the supposed 'longest suicide note in history', and lost his seat largely as a result of boundary changes. Neil Kinnock rapidly turned to the right, clamping down on the entrant groups with whom Benn had maintained cordial relations.

His largest external support base, the 'official' Communist Party, was well into its fratricidal death spiral; the Eurocommunist factions switched allegiance to Kinnock and even, in many cases, to the treacherous SDP (today part of the Liberal Democrats). This dynamic continued, spurred on considerably by the collapse of Stalinism and the liquidation of the 'official' CPGB ... until Tony Blair got the leadership. Benn's influence increasingly waned within Labour and, by the time he retired from parliament "to spend more time on politics", he had been rendered effectively harmless.

Democracy and autarky

Bennism itself was a curious hybrid - a leftwing populism that was not overtly nationalist, but incontrovertibly *national*. It relied on the idea that Britain could reach autarky, laying the basis for greater general prosperity and thus strengthening the position of the masses in relation to the powerful.

This exhibits less any

particular philosophical originality on Benn's part than the very considerable influence of the CPGB on the Labour and trade union left in the 1970s.

But that did not distinguish Benn from any run-of-the-mill Labour Party reformist or CPGB fellow-traveller of his era. What did was the other element of his later leftwing existence - a passionate, if somewhat contradictory, belief in democracy, and in the correct proposition that only by the struggle of the masses can any measure of democracy be won. His leftward shift was animated by the glimpse he had of the enormous power arrayed against the working class during Wilson's first government: the entrenched privilege of the establishment, the economic power of big capital, the bureaucratic structures of Labour itself and the distortions of the capitalist media conspired against popular power.

"Compared to this, the pressure brought to bear in industrial disputes by the unions is minuscule," he wrote in 1988. "If the British people were ever to ask themselves what power they truly enjoyed under our political system, they would be amazed to discover how little it is, and some new Chartist agitation might be born and might quickly gather momentum." He called for the abolition of the Lords and the monarchy, and "a democratic, federal and secular commonwealth [of Britain]".¹

The left-libertarian science-fiction writer, Cory Doctorow, reminds us of a mischievous habit of Benn's - illegally placing memorial plaques to popular agitators and democratic heroes around the House of Commons. The most famous - in the broom cupboard, dedicated to suffragette Emily Wilding Davison - recounts the story of her activism and death under the king's horse, and concludes: "By such means was democracy won for the people of Britain".²

The contradictory character of his view of democracy comes in here - surely, in the light of the political and economic obstructions enumerated above, democracy *has not*, in fact, been "won for the people of Britain". Benn would not have argued that there was not some way yet to go, of course; but in other respects he was peculiarly *conservative*.

Like many Labour lefts, he fiercely defended the first-past-the-post electoral system, arguing that proportional representation favoured those who drew up the lists; but also because, in his view, a cardinal aspect of democracy was to have a representative at whatever level of government who was accountable to the voter. I have heard one particular anecdote from Benn several times over the years. In 1957, a constituent wrote to him along these lines: "Mr Benn, I have just heard that the Russians have sent a satellite into space. Is there any chance of a decent bus service in Bristol?" To whom should such a constituent address a complaint under a list system?

These arguments, though not unfounded, are ultimately false, and both for the same reason - the tacit assumption is that the mass of the population can never take control of the Labour Party, or indeed form a democratically organised socialist party of their own. Otherwise, the answer is not to defend first-past-the-post, but transform the Labour Party: so that those on its slates will be accountable *to members*. Benn and the Bennites fought for a more democratic Labour Party, but the flipside of the conservative attitude to electoral arrangements is inevitably that, at some level,

they were resigned to defeat.

Furthermore, we must accept - though from the opposite side - the criticism, made widely in the slightly condescending obituaries that clog up the bourgeois press, that the Bennite advocacy of national autarky is a fantasy. It is particularly fantastical in the British context, given our reliance on imported food to eat, and tax takings on financial services to pay the state's bills; but it is also obviously absurd on Benn's own account, given the power of corporations with global reach, of the International Monetary Fund, of the United States ...

There is a grain of truth in the rightwing myth that Thatcherism and the events of 1989-91 have taken socialism off the agenda for good - but what they have actually taken off the agenda is *socialism in a single country*. It is the socialism of the 'official communist' movement, but also the socialism of Benn. In this context, the AES - and its successors - equally appear as a kind of rearguard action, a defensive measure against a rapacious and powerful foe.

Counterpoint

Something of broader world history makes its way into every biography. In Benn's case, the biography serves as a kind of counterpoint. This paper's previous incarnation, *The Leninist*, decried the Bennite movement as a *threat* to the Communist Party - not because Benn was some Machiavelli, a malicious agent of capital, but because of Bennism's attraction to a wider constituency, most especially the Straight Leftists, Eurocommunists and Chaterites in the 'official' Communist Party.

While Benn moved to the left, the far left drifted to the right. They met and crossed paths in the 1980s. As Benn's age advanced, so did the left become more disoriented, until the point was reached where, in substantive practical politics, Benn and - say - the Socialist Workers Party were in more or less complete agreement, save for the Sunday-school revolutionism of the latter and disagreement over the matter of the Labour Party. (It is arguable that many members of Left Unity are some way to Benn's *right*.) Of Benn, as AJP Taylor quipped of himself, we might say that he held extreme views, but held them moderately. Of the SWP, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the larger part of LU, we must say the exact opposite.

There is much to admire in Tony Benn: he was a powerful speaker and advocate of the left, however flawed; his view of political change was in a certain sense broader and more inspiring, thanks to its democratic aspect, than the stodgy syndicalism of the Trotskyist groups to his left. He tried to *think*, which is a dying habit in our faddish, philistine era. But, above all, it is the most bitter-sweet virtue of all that will be remembered: the tenacity with which he held to his principles, as the crosswinds of history scattered his allies and plunged the British left into a generation of continuous defeats.

We can forget neither that moral and political courage nor the total and inevitable failure of Bennite politics (and its contemporary 'far-left' variants) to reverse that defeat ●

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Notes

1. T Benn *Out of the wilderness: diaries 1963-67* London 1988.
2. <http://boingboing.net/2014/03/14/tony-benn-secret-mounter-of-i.html>.



Tony Benn: from centre to left

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

Keep it broad, keep it safe

Peter Manson reports on the first national conference of the 'united front against austerity'

Around 800 people came to the first national conference of the People's Assembly Against Austerity on March 15. Set up by John Rees and Lindsey German of Counterfire, with the support of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and several union leaders, the PA was launched in June 2013 at an event attended by about 4,000.

But Saturday's meeting was a somewhat more businesslike affair than the launch. Usually when the left calls a rally under the name of whatever front, it declares it to be a "conference" and those attending "delegates". But in this instance "conference" just about fitted the bill and about half of those present were indeed delegated by local or national bodies - the rest being individual "observers" without the right to vote.

But in one respect this event was just like the others - it started half an hour after the advertised time, despite there being no fewer than 70 motions to discuss, as well as a number of other business matters. And things were further delayed by the tributes extended to Bob Crow and Tony Benn. We began by rising to give a one-minute standing ovation in their honour, and subsequently speeches were heard by Geoff Revell of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union in memory of comrade Crow, while comrade German spoke about Tony Benn.

Comrade Revell mixed his militancy ("When you fight us, we will resist! We will fight you!") with a reminder of "what it was like 30 years ago", when "We owned the gas, the water, the electricity!" But his speech was heartfelt and moving. Comrade German, for her part, said that by paying tribute to Tony Benn we are "dedicating ourselves to changing the world".

Before that we heard reports from Counterfire's Sam Fairbairn, who is the PA national secretary, and treasurer Nick McCarthy. Comrade Fairbairn thought that "we have started to win the argument as to whether or not cuts are necessary". He reported that "close to 100" local PA groups have been set up. Nationally the PA now employs two people full-time (but "on part-time wages") in an office kindly provided by the *Morning Star*. And comrade McCarthy informed the conference that the PA had been boosted by the fact that all "recurring donations" previously paid to the Coalition of Resistance had now been transferred to the PA. The COR was Counterfire's original attempt to form a broad anti-cuts organisation. But, like the Socialist Workers Party's Unite the Resistance and the National Shop Stewards Network anti-cuts campaign, it never got anywhere.

The debate on the motions was supposed to start at 11am, but, by the time all the preliminaries had been completed, it was 12.15 when the real business actually began. According to Dave Kellaway of Socialist Resistance, "The conference organisers did a fantastic job preparing the documentation and the agenda, so that it all ran extremely smoothly." Yes, all 70 motions were put to conference and the agenda was completed on time. But comrade Kellaway only tells half the story.

Motions

The organisers managed to get through the business thanks to the - shall we say - unusual methods they adopted. The motions were divided into several "themes" and, within each of these, one was declared to be the "main motion",



Can protest stop austerity?

while all the others were deemed to be "supplements". A speech was heard in favour of the so-called "main motion" and one of the "supplements" (chosen by lottery). If anyone wanted to oppose the "main motion", one speech would be heard, in which case the mover would have the right of reply, but in general there was no debate whatsoever. There was no right to speak against the "supplements". All the main motions were passed either overwhelmingly or unanimously and the supplements were thereby declared to be successful as well!

To give you an idea of the nature of these main motions, four were moved by the PA's existing leadership (the "signatories group"), plus one each by the CPB, Counterfire, Unite community branches, the Green Party and the National Union of Teachers. Speaking of the NUT, comrade Fairbairn told us that it had approached the PA about the latter's planned demonstration on June 21 and offered to act as joint organisers. Unlike the SWP, Counterfire is obviously seen as a trustworthy organisation by the union bureaucracy. As comrade Rees commented, we have not seen anything like the success of the PA "since the beginning of the Stop the War Coalition". I wonder who was behind that?

So some unions have got involved in local PAs, as have the CPB and SWP. While one or two SWPers managed to speak on the day, I got the impression there were only a couple of dozen of them present - less than both the CPB (there were several comments like "There's only one paper that will support us on a daily basis") and Counterfire. As for the Socialist Party in England and Wales, its comrades were certainly outside selling *The Socialist*, but they did not play any noticeable role in the hall.

Returning to the motions, some interesting ones were 'agreed'. For example, the supplement from Teesside PA stated that "capitalist enterprises should open the books and have their state subsidies ... ended, with those firms unable to survive on this basis being expropriated without compensation". Then there was the one proposed by the "People's Flotilla Against Austerity", which in part read: "1. ... the ruling elite needs to be overthrown in support of an egalitarian and socialist society with the eradication of a classist society.

"2. Narrow Boats offer an alternative and imaginative approach to direct action by proposing to block the canal system to further the cause of the fight against austerity."

The above is now PA policy. For the most part, however, it was straight-down-the-middle reformism. The very first main motion, for example, endorsed the CPB's People's Charter, with its call for a "fairer economy for a fairer Britain", a "secure and sustainable future" and all-round "fairness and justice".

Comrade Kellaway comments: "In current conditions none of the policies under these headings are acceptable to the capitalist market or to either New Labour or Tory governments. But there are plenty of links to the more radical Labour Party manifestos of the past and it provides a bridge to the level of existing class-consciousness." We "should be constructing alliances around the same sort of policies that were adopted at this meeting and not try to steer so far to the left on policy that we lose any access to the thousands involved in these movements". He might have been speaking for Counterfire, the SWP, SPEW, etc, as well. They all agree that 'breadth' is the key when it comes to opposing austerity (and anything else), rather than trying to win workers to the evident truths of Marxism.

And like Stop the War before it, the PA will not make any electoral recommendations. Teesside was prevailed upon to remit its motion, which sought to "endorse and support only candidates who commit themselves to opposing the austerity agenda" and, in their absence, perhaps look at "generating a candidate who could stand with the support of the People's Assembly". No chance.

The organisers had another trick up their sleeves when it came to those motions they did not want to see succeed. These were not called "supplements", but deemed to be "amendments". In fact they were not amending anything at all - if successful they would simply be added to the "main motion" promoted by the "signatories group", even if that produced a contradictory result. And, despite the best efforts of the organisers, one of the five "amendments" was passed.

The result was farcical. The "signatories" had proposed that the PA should become a membership organisation - "Individual membership

should be a minimum of £1 per month for the waged and free for the unwaged". But the speaker from West Yorkshire PA declared that the People's Assembly "shouldn't be a membership organisation", since, according to her "amendment", "a paid membership scheme will exclude some people". Rather, "Individual members will be encouraged to set up standing orders in favour of the local organisation", which "may distribute funds to the national organisation in response to requests for funding which are accompanied by a budget and costing".

This "amendment" was passed by 205 to 174 in the only vote that was actually counted all day. But then the "main motion" was agreed overwhelmingly too. In fact it was unamended - West Yorkshire's proposal was actually a stand-alone motion: it had not wanted to 'delete and replace' anything. The result? The PA is now committed to two mutually exclusive positions simultaneously.

New way

The result of this vote gives you an idea of the composition of the meeting - the majority were unaffiliated individuals, some no doubt former members of left groups, of the type who might be drawn to Occupy-type methods of organisation.

So you could see why the "signatories" trod carefully when it came to the "amendment" from Manchester PA in favour of "participatory democracy and consensus decision-making", which, stated the mover, would consider "ways of empowering those absent from the meeting". This was said to be "a new way of doing politics, as exemplified by Occupy and 15M [Spanish *indignados*]".

Romayne Phoenix of the Green Party was selected to speak against this on behalf of the "signatories committee", to the effect that we should not adopt Manchester's ideas "at this point". She mentioned accountability, but apparently this was only necessary "for this coming year". Comrade Rees later pointed out that in any case "consensus is how we work". For instance, we call a demonstration, but "if you don't support it you don't do it". But we do have to have a vote, he said.

The Manchester proposal clearly fell, although a substantial minority voted for it.

The SWP had succeeded in passing an identical motion for conference

at four different local PAs. It read: "Conference believes that, instead of accepting the demands of billionaire bosses such as Jim Ratcliffe of Ineos at Grangemouth, our unions need to resist attempts to make workers pay for the crisis." I hear that this had originally been part of a longer motion, but the "signatories group" transformed it into an "amendment" - a sure sign they were going to oppose it. In introducing the trade union "theme", chair Steve Turner (who just happens to be Unite assistant general secretary) warned us that the "amendment" would be controversial.

The comrade who introduced it reminded us that everyone had applauded a previous speaker who had said: "If you don't fight you can't win." Yet Grangemouth workers had been told not to fight, she said. Surely we should recognise that we suffered a setback at Grangemouth? Not what comrade Turner, Counterfire or the CPB wanted to hear.

The speaker from the "signatories" who opposed this said that the "amendment" was "aimed at my union, Unite". It was an "attack by people standing outside the workers' movement", she dishonestly claimed. Of course, since the motion had been declared an "amendment", there was no right of reply, and this slander went unchallenged. Only a few delegates voted in favour.

Rather less contentious was the CPB motion, moved by its general secretary, Rob Griffiths, who made a brief appearance just to do so. This motion was entitled 'Austerity is working' - it sought to "rebalance the economy in favour of big monopoly business". But in reality, "there is no need for any austerity". The motion also called for the PA to set up an enquiry "to investigate the European Union's role in the imposition of austerity".

The only opposition came from Steve Wallis of Manchester, whose contribution was difficult to make out, thanks to the awkward placing of the microphone below him. But I did hear the phrase, "socialist revolution". This allowed comrade Griffiths to come back in his "right of reply" to comment: "I know I came late, but I haven't heard that the socialist revolution has broken out." Comrade Wallis was the only delegate to vote against.

Other speakers proposing motions were Green Party leader Natalie Bennett, NUT general secretary Christine Blower and Lindsey German, whose anti-war contribution included the assertions that "Neoliberalism [not capitalism] and war go hand in hand"; and "The present crisis in Ukraine is all about Nato enlargement." A little bit simplistic, that one.

Finally, Andy Squires - a representative of Doncaster careworkers, who are resisting attempts by private contractor Care UK to slash their pay, holidays and sick leave - was given a standing ovation. As he returned to his seat there were chants of "The workers, united, will never be defeated". (A collection for the People's Assembly raised £1,673 - half of which will go to the Doncaster strikers.)

Unfortunately, however, if the workers are to be guided by the kind of politics on display at the PA, it seems very unlikely that they "will never be defeated" ●

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Notes

1. <http://socialistresistance.org/6071/peoples-assembly-delegate-conference-a-step-forward-in-the-anti-austerity-struggle>.

STRATEGY

Anti-imperialist illusions

What does the class-political independence of the proletariat mean in practice? Mike Macnair replies to Ian Donovan's allegations of 'third campism'

Last week we published Ian Donovan's response¹ to Daniel Harvey's report of the February 8 Communist Platform meeting.² Comrade Ian seeks to rerun aspects of the debates which took place in the CPGB in spring-summer 2004 about Iraq and the Respect project - debates that ended in an obscure way in the departure from the CPGB of Ian himself and, on the other extreme, of the comrades who went on to form the short-lived 'Red Party'.

There is nothing in itself wrong with re-debating such matters. They are, as Ian says, live issues, which continue to recur in different forms. And Ian's views on them are a variant on the common views of much of the far left - which makes it educative to see what is wrong with them.

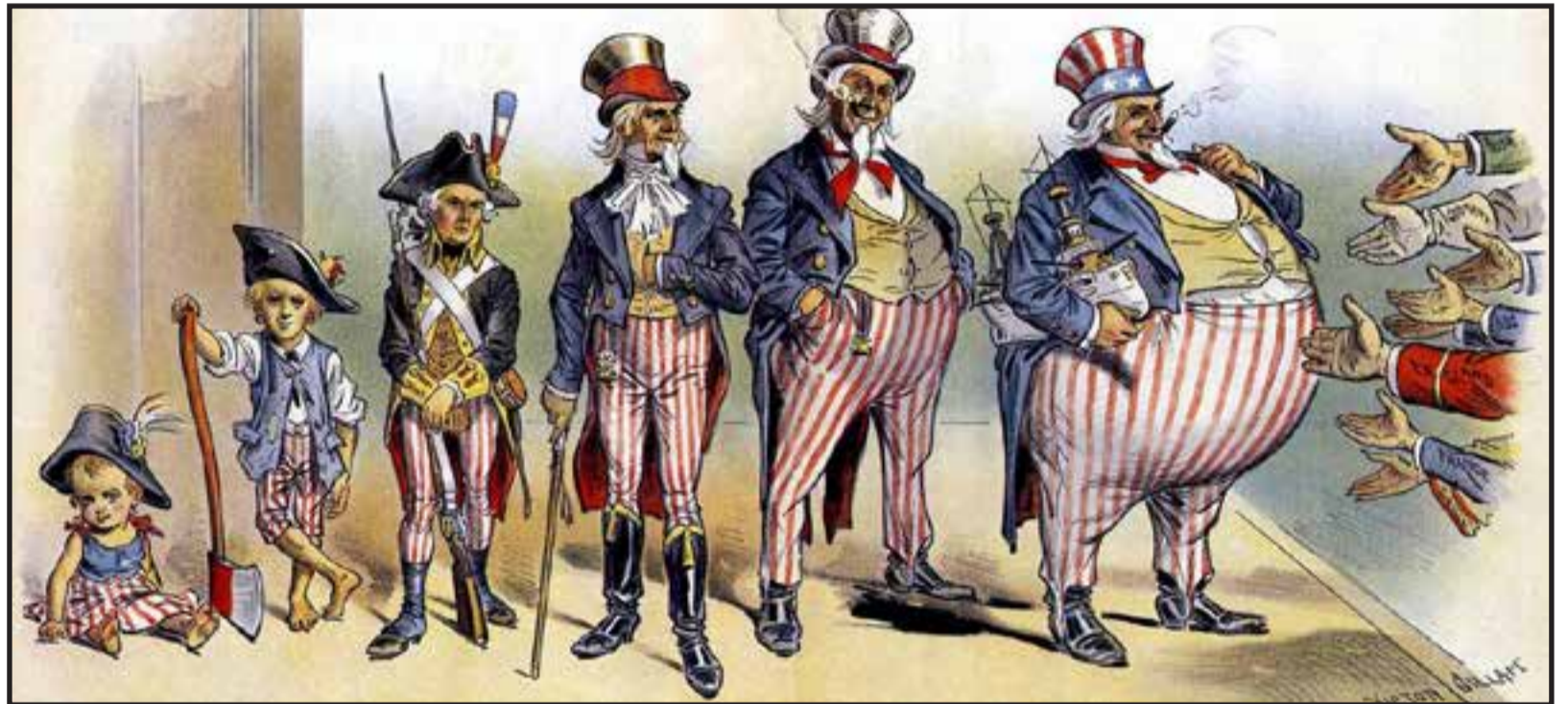
For the sake of clarity, however, it would be helpful if Ian were to pay attention in his polemic to the course of events since 2004, in relation to both Iraq and Respect (in relation to Respect he *does* refer to the CPGB's decision to call for a vote for the SWP's 'Left List' in the 2008 London elections, but gives it a false explanation³). Since a good deal of Ian's polemic is directed against what I as an individual wrote in 2004,⁴ his argument might also benefit from reference to the several articles I wrote on Iraq in the period 2004-08; to my polemic against the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on imperialism in July-August 2004; and to my various writings on imperialism and related issues since then - notably on revolutionary defeatism and revolutionary defencism in chapter 4 of my book, *Revolutionary strategy* (2008), and on imperialism as such in the introduction to *Karl Kautsky on colonialism* (2013).

I will not have space in this article to reprise in more than very general outline my arguments on the theory of imperialism - which, I should emphasise, are *not* CPGB official positions. Searching 'Mike Macnair imperialism' and 'Mike Macnair defeatism' on the CPGB website will produce the relevant material.

I am not going to address in detail, either, the question of Iraqi politics under the occupation. Comrades can read the articles mentioned above. I will say only that the Sadrist movement, which Ian in 2004 thought was a genuine Iraqi national leadership, was turned on and off like a tap by the Iranian regime in the following period (it was turned off for good in 2008 - Al-Sadr has this February announced his retirement from politics), and that the subsequent development has made completely transparent the sectarian character of the several Islamist trends in Iraq and the current Shia government.

Social pressure

At an early stage in his argument, comrade Ian says that my own and other comrades' opposition to including in the Communist Platform statement "positive references to the Russian Revolution and the Paris Commune as the two premier examples so far in history of specifically proletarian revolutionary events ... does not seem to me to be some sort of accident or quirk, but must represent at some level an adaptation to social pressure". I agree that this issue is not merely 'accidental'. The debate at the Communist Platform meeting is clearly reported by Daniel Harvey. My own view is that to single out the Paris Commune and October 1917 as what the platform 'stands on' - as distinct



US: born imperialist

from 'standing on' the whole history of the workers' movement, including these attempts - is to risk writing into our platform the modern far left's fetishism of the revolutionary moment at the expense of the preparatory tasks of workers' organisation and the struggle for a majority.⁵

But for Ian to explain this - which I agree is a real difference of substance and not just style - as "an adaptation to social pressure" is question-begging. Where an argument is plainly wrong (like marginalism in economics) or involves hypocrisy or self-contradiction (like the various sickening crap the media churn out about the various targets of US and UK foreign policy), the *persistence* of the argument has to be explained by its apologetic/ideological role ("social pressure"). Equally plainly, the fact that the Murdoch press says the sun rises in the east may be a reason for checking the truth of the claim, but is not at the end of the day a reason for disbelieving it. A great many issues fall between these two extremes, but as a general rule it is necessary *first* to show that a claim or argument is false before explaining it by "social pressure".⁶

Without this precondition, it would be equally valid for me to argue that Ian's position on imperialism reflects the "social pressure" of the global *weakness* of the workers' movement and the consequent ascendancy of various forms of petty bourgeois reaction as the only mass-scale apparent 'alternative' to capitalist triumphalism (not dissimilar arguments from the "social pressure" of Stalinism made by the 'anti-Pabloite' Trotskyists against the 'Pabloites' in the 1950s-70s). I do not make this argument; I think that Ian's position flows from his clinging to Comintern and Trotskyist political dogmas under conditions where their basis has been shown to be false by the course of events. But the argument would be *as valid* as Ian's argument - which is to say, *not valid*.

Two camps

Ian's fundamental objection to the approach which he attributes to the CPGB leadership is that we are "third campist". The problem is making sense of this sort of argument, first, in a world after the fall of the Soviet bloc, and second, coming from Ian, given that he proposed to add to the Communist Platform

aims the statement that "An isolated socialist government will either be crushed by capital or forced by material circumstances, despite the best of initial intentions, to become a surrogate capitalist force in its own right." This statement in effect characterises the Soviet regime as state-capitalist, not in the sense in which Lenin used the term in 'Left-wing' communism and elsewhere, but in the sense in which various lefts use it to take moral distance from Stalinism: for example, Walter Däum in his *Life and death of Stalinism*.⁷

But then the category of 'third campism' ceases to make sense. 'Third campism' as a political insult originated in Trotsky's *In defence of Marxism*, and was entirely framed by the characterisation of the USSR as *a part of the workers' movement* (like a trade union led by gangsters) or at least a conquest of the workers' movement (because of the nationalisations, state monopoly of foreign trade, and the plan). If the USSR *had become a capitalist state* by 1939, the Soviet-defencism Trotsky argued for would be no different from the German-defencism in World War I of the old Social Democratic Party of Germany right wing (and of Parvus and his co-thinkers).

Setting this issue on one side, we are, I think, in agreement that there are only two *fundamental* class 'camps' in modern society: that of the capitalist class, and that of the proletariat. Even here it is necessary, however, to enter a caveat. The famous passage of the *Communist manifesto* which Ian quotes said that "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat" (emphasis added).

The statement is one of *tendency*, not of a completed process. And in *The class struggles in France, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and very numerous other pieces of concrete political analysis, Marx recognised the existence and political significance of other classes and social strata: the landed aristocracy, the peasantry, the (urban) petty bourgeoisie and so on. Now, of course, globally the tendency to proletarianisation and therefore of the simplification of class antagonisms has progressed very substantially since Marx's time. But it is a complete illusion to suppose that the other

classes have ceased altogether to be economically or politically significant.

The real issue is that only the capitalist class and the proletariat are capable of *leading the society as a whole* towards anything but short-term disaster. Hence when, as in Iran after the 1979 revolution, a bloc of a pre-capitalist stratum (imams) with a section of the petty bourgeoisie (bazaari merchants) seizes political power, it inevitably creates not an actual reversion to the pre-capitalist form of 'Islamic society', but a form of capitalist class rule.

There are only two fundamental class camps. The question which this poses in relation to any political group or movement is whether this movement is part of the class camp of the proletariat or of the capitalist camp. For example, the mere fact that a group of capitalists is at odds with the currently dominant regime or the currently dominant capitals does not make this group part of the class camp of the proletariat. Nor does the fact that a group of capitalists is exploited by other capitalists - as, for example, Fords exploits its parts supply firms or Tesco exploits its smaller suppliers - make the small businesses in question part of the class camp of the proletariat.

Nor, even, does the question of social oppression. The existence of racism does not make the controllers of Tata Group part of the camp of the proletariat; nor does the existence of sexism make senior managerial women (like Sheryl Sandberg of *Lean in*) part of the class camp of the proletariat. These anodyne truths become transparent whenever any issue of *class* conflict, as opposed to conflict between different sections of the exploiting classes, is at stake.

How far do the various middle strata adhere to the class camp of the capitalist class or that of the proletariat? The answer depends on the underlying strength of the class camp of the proletariat as an attractive pole, as well as - *secondarily* - on the policy of the proletarian party. And in fact, the class camp of the proletariat is currently exceptionally weak politically. This is the price both of Stalinism - as visibly tyrannical, and as promoting the people's front policy and the idea of 'national roads to socialism' - and of its fall, as promoting the idea that socialism is infeasible and leads only to economic failure.

The effect of the absolute political

weakness of the proletarian class camp is precisely that such movements are *not* attracted to this class camp. They tend to assert that they offer a 'third camp' or 'third way' separate from capitalism and socialism. In the case of the Islamists in occupied Afghanistan or Iraq, this meant that they turned their guns *first* on women students, leftwingers, trade unionists and so on, *second* on their sectarian competitors, and only *third* on the occupiers. Given that there are only two fundamental class camps, the result is that they adhere to the class camp of the capitalist class even when they are fighting the currently dominant capitals and their states arms in hand. The Afghan Taliban is notoriously an agency of the Pakistani security apparatus; the Sadrists turned out to be immediately dependent on the Iranian regime; and so on.

This problem of the political weakness of the proletarian class camp is exacerbated because the majority of the organised left publicly offers to *rerun* Stalinism - either directly, as with pro-Stalin trends and Maoists, or by its own organisational methods, as in the Socialist Workers Party and so on.

The offer to rerun Stalinism also operates through the far left's version of 'anti-imperialism' as involving prettifying this or that regime which happens to be the current target of US and British imperialist policy - here mimicking the old cold war Soviet idea of the 'anti-imperialist camp'.⁸ We can perfectly well attack the sickening cynicism and hypocrisy of the imperialists' media attacks on Ba'athist, or Iranian clerical, or Putinite forms of repressive government, given their own support for the Saudi regime, and so on, *without* making it our job to suggest that the regimes attacked are something other than what they are. And the same is true of non-state movements, like the Sadrists and other sectarian, mosque-based militias in occupied Iraq.

In this condition of weakness, the *primary* task of the proletariat is to re-establish its own class-political independence and thereby to revive its organisations and their political weight. Without prioritising this task and achieving it at least to some degree, the question of winning over sections of the intermediate strata to the side of the class camp of the proletariat through adroit policy may be a *future* task, but is simply *not posed* as an immediate task. To the extent that a policy of inter-

class alliances is used as an argument against the Marxist class policy and for a 'people's' movement, and hence against proletarian class-political independence, the problem is not just one of running before we can walk. It guarantees that it will continue to be the case that the intermediate strata and movements based on them will adhere to the class camp of the capitalist class.

National rights

Ian argues in effect that national, religious, etc movements which are currently resisting immediate attack by US imperialism are part of the class camp of the proletariat. I deny it. Ian's argument for their being part of the class camp of the proletariat consists in a single point: "insofar as they resist the domination of 'their' population by an imperialist/colonialist occupation force, in that narrow sphere they are fighting against oppression, and that aspect of their actions deserves support, just as it would if it were being carried out by more superficially attractive, 'democratic' bourgeois forces. Neutrality on such struggles is a capitulation to the demonisation of the oppressed by political agents of the oppressor, and can only undermine the authority of communists among the oppressed."

I am not arguing and have never argued that communists in imperialist countries should promote "neutrality on such struggles". I argued, going back to the 2004 debate on Iraq, that communists in the UK had as their primary task to fight to get British troops out of Iraq, using any means necessary, and that this *did not* imply either prettifying the people who were at that moment fighting US and British troops, or abandoning efforts to build solidarity with those pitifully weak forces that were attempting to build a working class movement in Iraq. In other words, however objectionable the politics of the Sadrists and the other sectarian militia - or, for that matter, of the Ba'athist regime overthrown by the invasion - the US and UK *still* had no business in Iraq and should get out.

I argued that it was a complete illusion to suppose that giving political solidarity to the Sadrists because they were at that moment fighting US and British forces, or more generally calling for 'victory to the resistance,' would in any way strengthen the practical anti-imperialist task of fighting in this country to get British troops withdrawn. The political solidarity hypothetically offered to 'the resistance' by Ian, and by the British SWP, was in any case no more than a token moral gesture. Going way back to the US movement against the Vietnam war, the Vietnamese Communist Party, in spite of being Stalinist, took seriously those in the US anti-war movement who fought to build a mass campaign, but took much less seriously those who sought to insist the anti-war movement should be based on the slogan, 'Victory to the NLF', as a political marker of their 'anti-imperialism'.

Underlying this, however, is a more fundamental issue. Is the mere fact that a movement is "fighting against oppression" sufficient to make them part of the class camp of the proletariat? The answer is quite plainly that it is not. Take, for example, the decision of the Ottoman empire to enter World War I on the German side. It is pretty obvious that the motive of this decision was the quite real oppression experienced by the Turks under the regime of the Ottoman Debt Administration, the capitulations, extraterritoriality of British and French nationals, and so on.⁹ Nonetheless, it would be absurd to represent this fact as making the Young Turk regime in 1914 part of the class camp of the proletariat.

Ian presents his argument in terms of the "duty to defend the right to self-determination of dependent countries targeted ... by imperialism". The implications are clearest in his (defeated) amendment to commit the

Communist Platform to opposing the attempts of imperialist states to "enforce an effective monopoly" in weapons of mass destruction - ie, Ian proposes we adopt what Charlie Pottins has called the 'mullahs' bomb' line. The analysis of politics in terms of duties to defend rights here is a disastrous political error.

A series of examples. The German state in the 1960s-70s included substantial numbers of former Nazis, criminals from the point of view of the proletariat (and from that of the Weimar constitution and its criminal law). This did not imply that the tactic of the Red Army Fraction of (among other 'urban guerrilla' activities) attempting to execute such persons was in the objective interest of the proletariat. The British state has no right to hold the territories it holds in the South Atlantic. Nonetheless, the decision of the Argentinian military junta to invade these territories in 1982 was substantially operatively identical to the decision of a left activist who is persuaded by a police provocateur to plant bombs: though there was a 'right', attempting to exercise this 'right' was against both Argentinian national interests and those of the proletariat. The same is true of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime's decision to invade the equally illegitimate Kuwait statelet in 1990.

The efforts of the Iranian clerical regime to attain nuclear capability in the face of the opposition of the US have the same general character: an understandable but mistaken response to provocations, which has disastrous effects for national interests and in particular for the interests of the proletariat as a class. In all these cases the argument that leads immediately from rights to duties produces politically stupid conduct.

Anti-imperialist united front

Ian's argument, like other Trotskyist, Maoist and left 'official' communist variants of the same argument, conflates two issues.

The first is an old traditional argument of Marxism, Engels' claim in his 1847 speech on Poland, that "a nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations", or Marx's argument in the 1870 resolution of the First International's general council on Ireland that "a nation that enslaves another forges its own chains".¹⁰ This is an argument about the politics of the oppressor country, and it requires the workers' movement in the oppressor country to oppose its 'own' government's oppression of another country. It is entirely correct: class-political independence of the proletariat requires rejection of identification with your 'own' state's claim to control the affairs of other countries. However, this argument does not require of the workers' movement in the oppressed country, or of international organisations of the working class, any particular attitude to the local nationalists or other opponents of the national oppression.

The second argument is a strategic line adopted by the early Communist International: that of the 'anti-imperialist united front'. The documents can be found in the history section of the Marxists Internet Archive, in relation to the 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East and of the Second, Third and Fourth Congresses.

The strategic conception here was to replicate both within oppressed countries, and on a world scale, the *smychka* or worker-peasant alliance. This had allowed the Bolsheviks, by their commitment to the expropriation of the landlords and peasant land redistribution, to win power, stabilise their hold on that power in autumn 1917 and eventually win the civil war of 1917-21. On a global scale, the 'anti-imperialist united front' implied a limited positive alliance with the colonial nationalists - implemented, for

example, in Soviet collaboration with the early development of the Turkish regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and in Chinese relations between the early Communist Party and the Kuomintang.

The early Comintern resolutions insisted on the local communists, in spite of this limited positive alliance, maintaining class-political independence in relation to the nationalists. This turned out in practice to be easier said than done; and this lesson - that it is easier said than done for the workers' movement to combine partial support for cross-class nationalism with class-political independence - has been repeated over and over again in the period since the 1920s.

The plausibility of the strategic line of the 'anti-imperialist united front' depended on the theoretical diagnosis that imperialism was the 'highest stage of capitalism', which was common in the Second International and expressed most clearly in Lenin's pamphlet of the same name. In this theory, capitalism initially developed on a national scale, but the overproduction of capital and consequent falling rate of profit led to financialisation, monopolies, tariff barriers and the export of capital to colonised countries. As the phenomenon became generalised in the late 19th century, capitalism ran up against its limits. Hence, objectively, the national struggles of the colonised countries immediately posed the question of socialist revolution: there was no possibility of oppressed countries joining the ranks of the imperialist powers (notwithstanding that Japan had, after the Meiji restoration of 1867-68 and in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95, done just that). The objective dynamics therefore posed the question of the 'anti-imperialist united front', and the danger - stressed by earlier Marxists - of the workers' movement losing class independence by falling in behind bourgeois or petty bourgeois revolutionaries could be treated as a subordinate problem.

As I have already indicated, in my view this strategic orientation was a mistake: there is an objective conflict between partial support for cross-class nationalism, even of oppressed nations, and the working class developing its own class-political independence. The case is *a fortiori* where what is involved is not 'modernising' nationalism, but political leadership by some pre-capitalist exploiting group on the basis of utopian-ideological claims to restore a lost past. The fact that the Stalinists turned cross-class nationalism into 'official communist' dogma in the forms of the 'people's front', 'national roads to socialism' and the 'anti-imperialist camp' no doubt exacerbated the problem, but did not create it (indeed, the Russian *smychka* itself proved in the 1920s to pose acute political and economic problems).

Organisations of Trotskyist origin - even large ones like the Bolivian Partido Obrero Revolucionario in the 1950s and the Sri Lankan Lanka Sama Samaja Party in the same period and into the 1960s - have proved to be as unable to negotiate the problem as 'official' communist and Maoist ones.

Part of the problem is that nationalism precludes the strategic possibility of actually defeating the operations of imperialism, which are globally coordinated and backed by a monopoly of military high-tech (as Ian mentions in relation to 'weapons of mass destruction'). The successes of radical nationalism in the cold war period were, in fact, made possible by the global role of the USSR - even if the radical anti-imperialist left tended to regard the USSR as an unreliable 'rearguard'. Hugo Chávez's 'Bolivarianism' had the ideological strength that it offered at least in theory a continental perspective; but the Chávistas have made no real attempt to make anything of this perspective.

The underlying justification for the

positive 'anti-imperialist united front' was the theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. This was a defensible theory at the time of World War I and indeed at that of World War II, but was nonetheless wrong. There was no national stage of capitalist development: the British capitalist state came into the world in 1688-89 as an imperialist entity operating on a global scale, and the French revolutionary regime was instantly compelled in the 1790s to operate on the same global scale. The problem which produced World Wars I and II was not capitalism reaching its absolute limits and the 'closure of the world' - Trotsky's "death agony of capitalism" - but the decline and 'death agony' of the British empire and the British-led world order. Once the reins had been handed over to the USA, a new period of capitalist expansion could, and did, develop.

The corollary of this point is that it is *not* true that the objective dynamics of national struggles against imperialist oppression necessarily and immediately pose the question of workers' power and socialism. Formal decolonisation can take place and did take place very extensively after 1945. While for most 'decolonised' countries this meant only a transition to 'semi-colonial' status (like Latin America in the 19th century), it did nonetheless involve the removal of immediate, political, colonial subordination, and in that sense 'self-determination'. Lenin correctly emphasised in 1916 the importance of this limited political self-determination, against the 'imperialist-economists' (Pyatakov and so on), and the Poles, who denied its significance in a world economically dominated by the great imperialist powers.

In some cases (for example, South Korea and Taiwan) US geopolitics led to actual capitalist development: as subordinate US allies, but not more subordinate than, for example, Greece. China is in transition from a Stalinist regime to the beginnings of an imperialist one (witness its operations in Africa and Latin America). And so on.

Although its theoretical foundations were unsound, the 'anti-imperialist united front' continued to have real plausibility as long as the Soviet Union survived. When the Soviet Union fell, with it fell the connection of the nationalists to the left. The Trotskyists, Maoists and left 'official communists', and comrade Ian, have just not caught up yet. (They have similarly not caught up yet with another major change in politics. Before 1989, the imperialist centres were deeply allergic to 'revolution,' and put a lot of effort into promoting Fabian gradualism, against which the 'revolutionary left' perforce defined itself. Since 1989, the imperialists are happy to see 'revolutions', including, where appropriate, mass street mobilisations and so on, as long as these revolutions are to introduce neoliberal models against nationalists).

With the basis of its plausibility as strategy gone, the 'anti-imperialist united front' remains as a sort of moral 'tic' of fragments of the far left. The moralistic character is very visible in Ian's 'rights'-based arguments. The effect is, contrary to his claim that communists can take the lead in the anti-colonial movement on this basis, to make the workers' movement in the oppressed country entirely hostage to the particular tactical choices of the nationalists (or imams, or warlords, or whatever) so that it becomes for Ian and other adherents of the view (John Rees, for example) a moral or political obligation to *tail-end* these forces.

Those on the left who can see that this moral 'tic' has no progressive political content have tended to fall into the opposite and worse error - that of prettifying and 'refusing to oppose' the actions of the 'democratic' imperialists, our 'own' included: for example the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. In reality,

even if the 'anti-imperialist united front' was always founded on a mistake, it is *still* true that "a nation that enslaves another forges its own chains". Class-political independence requires overt opposition to these operations.

Respect

With the core of the argument addressed, I can be much briefer on Respect. This was certainly not a 'popular front' in the sense that an important wing of the British ruling class was involved. Rather, it was - and several of us made the point at the time - an 'unpopular front' of the same style as the fronts set up by the 'official' Communist Party in the 1930s and later with a few red clergymen, oddball aristos and other political flotsam and jetsam. The reality was that outside its local base in inner east London it had almost no purchase, and was entirely dependent on the SWP.

The initial response of CPGB was to attempt to participate in and build Respect, while at the same time drawing certain clear political lines against its leadership - that is, again, mainly, the SWP. But it was very clear that the project was politically aimed at becoming a people's front or 'rainbow coalition' project - unsurprising, given George Galloway's character as a pretty much unreconstructed Stalinist with an Arab nationalist overlay, and the evolution of the SWP towards 'official communist' ideas. Moreover, even from the first, the SWP's bureaucratic control of the project and attempt to exclude political discussion by avoiding 'boring old meetings' meant that it was actually very difficult to build Respect.

Hence, while in the 2004 Euro elections we simply called for a vote for Respect candidates, in the 2005 general election we tried to project a line of class-political independence by calling for votes for those Respect candidates we could identify as in some sense workers' candidates - Galloway included - and *not* for those like Anas al-Tikriti and Yvonne Ridley, who did not in any sense represent a political project for the working class as a class. This line - and not the idea of 'reactionary anti-imperialism' - informed our decision to call for a vote for the SWP's Left List in 2008.

The underlying guiding principle is the same as in the question of the 'anti-imperialist united front' and the supposed moral obligation to give token support to those 'actually fighting': that the proletariat needs to recover and organise around class-political independence if it is ever to get back the level of political weight which will allow it to win over the middle strata of society and take power. This is a really fundamental political lesson of the victories and defeats of the last century ●

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Notes

1. 'Not a matter of style', March 13.
2. 'Solid basis for intervention', February 13.
3. P Manson, 'Rival Respects go head to head in London' *Weekly Worker* March 20 2008.
4. At that time in opposition to the majority line of CPGB, as can be seen from leading articles in this paper from the same period.
5. In addition, I pointed out in the meeting that for 21st century communists to say we 'stand on' these particular events is a little like imagining the bourgeois revolutionaries of the 17th and 18th centuries asserting that they 'stood on' the failed attempts of the medieval Italian city-states: identifying ourselves with a history of failure, rather than confronting the reasons for the failure.
6. CF G Carchedi *Behind the crisis* (Chicago 2012) and my review, 'What drives capital's global crises?' *Weekly Worker* May 23 2013.
7. I use Daum as an example because Ian has said informally that he finds this approach potentially usable; but, as far as the politics is concerned, the example could equally be Martov, Ciliga, Cliff or many others.
8. Cf more recently Ahmadiyeh in 2009: 'Iran's election results mark a big victory for the entire anti-imperialist camp' (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/01/content_11636229.htm).
9. M Birdal *The political economy of Ottoman public debt* London 2010; M Aksakal *The Ottoman road to war* Cambridge 2011.
10. Engels on Poland: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/12/09.htm#engels. General Council resolution on Ireland, generally accepted to be drafted by Marx: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/03/28.htm.

UKRAINE

West and Putin up the ante

Mainstream hypocrisy takes some beating, writes Eddie Ford

As expected, the March 16 referendum in Crimea saw a clear vote to join the Russian Federation. The Crimean authorities claim there was a 96.8% 'yes' vote on a turnout of 83% - even though ethnic Russians make up only around 60% of the population and you might have expected most ethnic Ukrainians (24%) and Tartars (12%) would abstain, since there was no option on the ballot paper to maintain the status quo.

This led some pundits to prattle on about a "North Korean-style" election result - the obvious implication being that the whole thing was fixed from above. Yet it is clear that there is a majority in Crimea who want union with Russia and voted for it with some genuine enthusiasm, not because of a sinister conspiracy - though it goes without saying that the Kremlin ensured it got the result it wanted.

Across the spectrum, reporting on the crisis has been abysmal. Take the *Financial Times* for instance, which is supposed to be a serious paper - and in many regards it is. Yet, when it comes to Ukraine, pro-Russian demonstrators are always said to be "thugs" or part of a "mob", with a number of reports ludicrously suggesting that many - if not most - of the protesters have actually been ferried in from Russia and are being paid with Moscow gold. An allegation, unsurprisingly, that has been repeated by the supposed 'third campists' of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - who tell us that there have been "small" pro-Russian demonstrations in some cities in eastern Ukraine and "plausible" reports that they were "boosted" by people bussed in from Russia.¹

Come on, pull the other one. These demonstrations clearly have a mass, popular character - regardless of the machinations of the Russian secret services. Anyhow, what about the Maidan demonstrations in Kiev, which had a fairly obvious CIA-directed input - were all of those people thugs or paid? We all know that there were plenty of thuggish elements in Independence Square - fascist thugs at that. But to claim that the majority of Ukrainian nationalists are paid by the CIA would be just as absurd as saying that the majority of pro-Russian demonstrators are paid by the Kremlin.

It is no wonder that demonstrations in Russian-majority cities and towns have become increasingly militant and angry. Ethnic Russians in Ukraine tend to be poorer than their compatriots and indeed Ukraine is one of the poorest countries in Europe, with a nominal per capita income in 2012 of £2,329, less than that of Jamaica, Tunisia or Paraguay. Meanwhile the new government in Kiev is kow-towing to the oligarchs - appointing them as provincial governors in eastern Ukraine, for instance.

Perhaps exemplifying liberal imperialist opinion is Timothy Garton Ash in the pages of *The Guardian*. He writes about "pro-Russian groups now working to produce chaos, disorientation and violence in cities such as Donetsk and Kharkiv" - all "actively supported" by Moscow (March 18). Therefore, he argues, the west must "also up the ante" by making sure the Ukrainian authorities "have the money to pay the bills right now" and, more importantly still, by threatening Moscow with sanctions "far worse than those currently imposed" because what Putin has done "threatens the foundations of the international order" - something very precious to the bourgeoisie, of course. But it is not very difficult to grasp the mentality of the Russians, or see how

this crisis started to escalate. Just look at the demonstrations in Independence Square, staffed and policed by ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist organisations like Spilna Sprava (Common Cause), Right Sector, Svoboda, etc - many carrying pictures of Stepan Bandera, founder of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and anti-Semitic Nazi collaborator.² You get the message. Or just look at the first bills fielded by the new parliament - ie, stripping Russian of its official language status or moving to ban the Communist Party of Ukraine. You definitely get the message. We are dealing here with a resurgent Ukrainian nationalism which defines itself *against* Russians - something easily understood in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Hypocrisy

We are not vicarious Russian nationalists or Putin apologists. But it is a simple statement of fact that ethnic divisions in Ukraine have got a lot deeper over the last year. Nor are we saying that the referendum in Crimea was the perfect model of electoral probity - no-one can be that naive.

Yet double standards abound. Some people, both on the left and right, insist that the referendum was in itself 'illegitimate'. But the implication is not just that Crimea had no legal right to organise such a referendum, but that Crimeans have no right under any circumstances to vote to join Russia. Similarly, on what basis was the previous administration of Viktor Yanukovich any *less* 'legitimate' (or corrupt) than today's government headed by the dubious Oleksandr Turchynov? After all, Yanukovich was elected in a *reasonably* free and fair election, and, of course, his 'home' constituency was the Russophone population - who felt disenfranchised and alienated by his sudden removal from office, despite the fact that only a day earlier he had come to an 'agreement' with the opposition that he should remain in office until at least December.

Anyhow, on March 17 Russian and Crimean leaders signed the treaty formally absorbing the peninsula into the Russian Federation. Within the coming months Crimea will switch to the rouble, introduce Moscow time and the Russian visa system - not to mention the nationalisation of all Ukrainian state property, including the major oil and gas companies.³

In a grandstanding speech at the Kremlin the next day, Putin told Russia's parliament that Crimea had "always been part of Russia" and in signing the treaty he was righting a "historical injustice" - adding that he did "not want to be welcomed in Sevastopol by Nato sailors". Here, of course, was the real reason for Moscow's intervention. Quite clearly, the US and EU had a plan to remove Ukraine from the Russian sphere of influence and take it into the orbit of the west - just as they attempted in 2008 in Georgia. But there was no way Moscow would tolerate having Nato troops right on its long southern borders or lose its Black Sea access to the Mediterranean. Hence on both occasions there was a predictably swift and decisive response - in the case of Georgia carving out two Moscow-loyal enclaves and in Ukraine incorporating Crimea - albeit with a high level of support amongst the local population.

In response, the US and the EU imposed sanctions on various high-level officials from Russia and Ukraine deemed responsible for provoking the crisis - with the White House saying these sanctions would be "expanded". As for US vice-president Joe Biden, during a visit to Poland and the Baltic

states aimed at providing assurances about US/Nato security guarantees, he declared that Putin and Russia now stood alone and "naked before the world" - guilty of "international aggression" in their "land grab".

Well, when it comes to Ukraine, western hypocrisy takes some beating. We do recall a certain 'legitimate' state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Or how about the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia? Yet the west actively *welcomed* the break-up of these states - a fact referenced by Putin in his Kremlin speech, when he said it was ludicrous to claim that the recognition of Kosova by the west as an independent country did not set a precedent or had a claim to uniqueness. But, he stated, "we are being told that we are breaking the norms of international law" - western politicians, he went on, "call something white today and black tomorrow". Only now, when it comes to Crimea, have they "remembered that international law exists".

All sorts of states have been broken up in the past or had their borders drastically redrawn, but if it served the imperialist interests of the west it was no crime - or "land grab". Nevertheless, communists are not worshippers of bourgeois or international law - let alone so-called national sovereignty. We are *internationalists* first and foremost. Nations, countries and states are not eternal and timeless - to claim otherwise would be reactionary, nationalist crap. Nations come into being under definite historical circumstances, then at some stage disappear or wither away. Communists, being *consistent* democrats, do not view Ukraine - or indeed any other country - as the incarnation of some sort of unbreakable unity or the 'national spirit'. Even the sacred United Kingdom, blessed by god, will cease to exist one day.

In fact, what about the Scottish referendum? There is no constitutional requirement for one, Britain being a weird constitutional monarchy, where prime ministers wield the royal prerogative. Thus David Cameron could just say, 'Sorry, Scotland

remains part of the UK in perpetuity'. If so where would be the 'legitimacy' for a referendum on independence? The answer is more than obvious. When it comes down to it, it is just not a good idea to keep people in a country (or union) they do not want to be in. So give them an agreed exit. This is essentially what happened in Crimea and it hard to see any *fundamental* difference with Scotland.

Russians out?

Therefore, the CPGB does not agree with the slogan, 'Russia out' - as touted by the AWL, to name one left organisation. It is not good enough. Yes, we go along with the idea of a free and fair referendum for Crimea - though it is a done deal now anyway. The very real danger, however, is that you can end up as an apologist for the west, which is how the AWL appears. Echoing the sentiments of its apparent sister organisation in Ukraine, Left Opposition⁴, an editorial in *Solidarity*, apart from calling for "Russian troops out!", emphasised how "we solidarise with the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination, and with the protests against Russia's invasion and intervention made by the left in Russia" (March 12).

But this is a one-sided position which implicitly sides with the west's anti-Russian drive, especially when you bear in mind the same editorial merely attacks the "Ukrainian chauvinism" of the new government of Kiev. But what about the fascists and Banderaites? Or the aggressive role played by imperialism in this crisis - which the editorial massively downplays, observing that the US is "most reluctant to intervene militarily" and that the EU powers "will not do so without US involvement" - which could almost be a note of regret. However, the next issue of *Solidarity* makes the AWL's pro-imperialist viewpoint more than clear - for which we should be grateful in some respects, given its notorious slipperiness. "Independence for Ukraine!" the front page proclaims

- showing a picture of demonstrators waving both CND symbols and the Ukrainian national flag - and the inside editorial bluntly states: "If it comes to a war between Russia and Ukraine, we are on the side of Ukraine - including of the Ukrainian armed forces, if they fight against Russian domination" (March 17) - which by logical extension means support for western powers that lend support to the Ukrainian government, whether military or otherwise. It seems that the AWL has now become Russophobic.

Showing how dangerous things have become, Ukraine has mobilised a National Guard of some 60,000 and the government has authorised troops to fire in "self-defence". Further increasing tensions, a spokesperson for the Ukraine military said on March 18 that one of its officers had been killed in an attack on a base in the Crimean capital of Simferopol - at the same time, pro-Kremlin authorities reported that a member of their own forces had also been killed in the same incident. Ominously, the acting interim prime minister of Ukraine, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, told an emergency meeting that the conflict is "shifting from a political to a military stage". Not that the west wants a military showdown with Russia. But, the more the crisis drags on, and the more belligerent US officials become, the greater the possibility that an 'unexpected situation' might occur - leading to a hot war of some shape and size ●

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Notes

1. www.workersliberty.org/story/2014/03/11/ukraine-russian-troops-out.
2. In 1944, Bandera moved the headquarters of the OUN(B) to Berlin - Germany supplying it with arms and equipment to use behind Soviet lines, also training its members in terrorist techniques and intelligence gathering.
3. www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/03/17/355058/crimea-nationalizes-ukraine-property.
4. Which issued an appalling 10-point 'plan for social change', saying, for example, that Ukraine "should follow the example of Iceland" and that there should be "reductions" in spending on the security apparatus of the state (www.criticatoc.ro/leftist/manifesto-left-opposition-in-ukraine).



Pro-unity crowds

MIGRATION

Other side of border controls

Ben Lewis notes a tragic subplot in the mysterious disappearance of flight MH370

Over the last two weeks there has been extensive media coverage of the Boeing 777 plane that vanished on March 8 during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, presumably killing all of its predominantly Chinese passengers in the process.

The ins and outs of the flight's path, the military radar technology used to detect air traffic, possible incompetence on the part of the Malaysian authorities and so on have all been rigorously scrutinised. Some of the grieving families are now even considering hunger strikes in protest at the time it is taking to locate the missing aircraft. The question may be feeding into political disputes as well: several governments in the region have been particularly damning about the inadequacies of the search and some have even drawn links between the flight's pilot and a prominent leader of the Malaysian opposition, Anwar Ibrahim.

Throughout the coverage there have been a number of twists and turns, and the plot continues to thicken. Several possible explanations and conspiracy theories are being cooked up. In this article I merely wish to concentrate on one political issue that came to light in the coverage of the missing passengers. It is one that has also proved controversial in the *Weekly Worker's* letters pages¹: namely, that of the free movement of people across the globe.

Terrorists

A few days after the disappearance, it was discovered that two young Iranian men, Pouria Nour Mohammadi and Mohammadreza Delavar, had boarded the flight using stolen passports. This revelation rapidly found its way into many international media outlets. After all, there is little that feeds on and exploits the fears and prejudices of the western world more than such a story: terrorism, Iranians, missing flights ...

Indeed, it was obviously music to the ears of those who remain intransigently opposed to the recent (tetchy and limited, yet real) rapprochement between Iran and the US, with obvious attempts to make as much political capital out of it as possible. Thus even on March 16 (that is, long after Interpol had refuted any terrorism link) the *Israeli Times* ran with the headline: 'Ex El-Al expert: Iran likely involved in MH 370'. The former security chief of the Israeli airline, Isaac Yeffet, was quoted as saying: "My guess is based upon the stolen passports, and I believe Iran was involved ... They hijacked the aircraft and they landed it in a place that nobody can see or find it."² Many of those commenting on the article seem to infer from this that these young Iranians are simply waiting for the right moment to carry out the jihadist will of ayatollah Khamenei. Presumably it is only a matter of time before the two will fly their fiendishly well-concealed Boeing 777 into a building in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem ... Doubtless other such 'explanations' have been offered by the Saudis or the US neocons.

However, even before Interpol scotched stories of 'terrorist links', and before one of the boys' friends in Kuala Lumpur had appeared on the BBC and elsewhere to explain that he was not a terrorist and was simply seeking asylum in Europe, many familiar with the rigmarole of Iranian asylum politics would have instantly questioned the link being drawn.

After all, especially since the repression meted out by the Iranian



Controls criminalise

regime following the disputed presidential election of 2009, many Iranians - youngsters in particular - have been seeking to leave Iran and gain asylum in Europe at all costs. Not all of them are left or liberal politicians. Some simply want to start a different life for whatever reason. In doing so they often risk life and limb: even if these people actually possess an Iranian passport (something that is more or less impossible for young men who have not completed their military service) it is extremely difficult to simply travel, for example, straight from Tehran to Berlin or London because of restrictions on immigration in the form of complex, bureaucratic and arbitrary visa systems. One way around this is a student or marriage visa, although this can also prove to be a real struggle.

From the route taken by the two young Iranians, it would appear that they actually *did* initially possess Iranian passports, and as such were able to fly from Iran to Malaysia, where entry does not depend on a visa. Here, however, things get a little more complex. As with the prohibition of drugs, the banning of the free movement of people gives internationally operating smugglers and gangs disproportionate power and influence over the 'commodity' of refugees. Many Gatsbys will have emerged from this particular 'trade'. Most probably, the two Iranians had already established contact with their smugglers back in Iran, who arranged for the fake passports (stolen from Thailand in this case, apparently) to be given to them in Malaysia - all in return for a suitable fee, probably amounting to thousands of dollars. In a process that can then take quite some time, the local smugglers will have arranged a flight at a time when one of their contacts in passport control was on duty, who would have waived them through.

The men were then headed for Germany via Beijing - one was to be met by his mother in Frankfurt, where she lives, and another was to go on to Copenhagen, to settle either

in Denmark or nearby Sweden. Depending on the local laws of the country where Iranians travelling illegally to Europe arrive, they either ditch the fake passport before attempting to claim asylum, or risk getting through immigration with it. In Britain, for example, the latter would be a very unwise move, as travelling with a fake passport is a crime that invariably leads to a prison sentence: in other countries it is treated less severely.

Refugees

While the two Iranian men appear to have ultimately met a tragic fate, the underlying tragedy here is the system of border controls itself - a system that forces human beings to go to the most desperate lengths to escape grinding poverty, repression, political persecution, the tragedy of war, famine and so on.

Although it seems that the two Iranian men were sadly unable to realise their aim of moving to Europe, in terms of their attempts to get here they were actually quite *fortunate*, in that their route through Asia - apparently a new way for people seeking to get here - appears to have been relatively smooth: they appear to have had Iranian passports and the necessary money to purchase flight tickets (always the most expensive way of travelling) and the connections to get hold of fake papers. As is always the case when it comes to getting around the strictures of the law, money, state contacts (as with the citizenship request of David Cameron's nanny!) and international contacts make everything easier.

Yet it is obviously the case that the overwhelming majority of those who are *forced* into fleeing their countries can often barely scrape together the means to get by, let alone pay smugglers and so on. More often than not they find themselves in a situation of fraught isolation and have to cobble together *everything* they possess. Desperate times call for desperate measures and these refugees are often thrown into the hands of criminal

gangs out to make as much money as possible in the quickest possible time. It is difficult to tell just how many find themselves on the move in today's world, yet obviously, given the millions of people displaced by the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and the recent social turmoil and civil war in Syria, etc, we are dealing with an enormous figure.

And these numbers reflect the dynamics of the imperialist pecking order itself. Not only do the most oppressed and war-torn countries throw up the most refugees: those from such countries tend to be treated worse by the smugglers too. Thus even within a single group of smuggled people Iranians, for example, will *tend* to be treated better than Afghans.

However, while there are quite rightly campaigns for Syrian refugees to be let into Britain and so on, some of which have even resonated with establishment politicians, the anti-human system of border controls in and of itself does not even get a mention.

Smugglers

So the two Iranian passengers on flight MH370, or those looking to leave Iran more generally, represent just the tip of an iceberg.

Comrades working in Hands Off the People of Iran will recall some of the truly horrific experiences that young Iranian student activists have had to go through when fleeing the regime's repressive crackdown. Many of these comrades did not have passports and thus tended to be smuggled across the Turkish border and then on into Europe. This cost them a lot of time, money and on occasion nearly their lives as well. Given that the smugglers are not exactly running some kind of charity, they are hardly too concerned for the welfare of their charges. Some comrades report how they almost suffocated in the back of a packed lorry travelling across eastern Europe. Others talk of smugglers stripping them of all their possessions, including most of their clothes, in the Turkish countryside, seeing them almost freeze to death as a result. Two other comrades recall the horror of having a gun pulled on them in a car driven by smugglers, who were more interested in their laptops, cash and other possessions than keeping them alive. Just hearing such stories makes one think about what millions of other people go through.

Of course, the approach of European states towards people deemed 'illegals' is not exactly welcoming either: refugees have often been greeted by solitary confinement, hours without food or drink, long interrogations, prison sentences and so on. It is necessary to point out that

if we on the left accept and defend the repulsive system of border controls (whether in the form of the 'non-racist' version championed by the recently deceased Bob Crow or the so-called 'points system' favoured by those like George Galloway MP) then we are also implicitly accepting and defending both the *logic* of a capitalist system that compels the overwhelming majority of the world's population to eke out a bare existence in the most degrading possible way *and* the fact that restrictions on the free movement of people drives them into the arms of gangs and profiteers. That a toothbrush produced in Asia has more 'right' to freely move around the world than a human being says a lot about the deep irrationality of the system of capital, where relationships between humans appear as relationships between things.

Our movement internationally must unequivocally champion the right of people to settle, work and live wherever they wish - not because this is some kind of magic wand that will do away with the evils of capitalism overnight, but because, only when equipped with such a global vision for society as a whole, as opposed to narrow national sectionalism, can our class begin to become hegemonic and thus capable of challenging the rule of capital.

Of course, that was the position of the Socialist International. As comrade Jack Conrad has helpfully pointed out in a recent CPGB political report,³ the 1907 Stuttgart Congress voted against restrictions on migrants and urged trade unions to organise without distinction of race or nationality.

It is undeniable that, all things being equal, the capitalist use and regulation of immigration primarily serves the accumulation of capital, which is to say that it has a tendency to drive down wages and undermine working conditions.⁴ That is hardly surprising for any Marxist. Yet the task of communists is to question and combat bourgeois 'normality' and organise our class internationally against the logic of capital accumulation - not against the likes of the two young Iranians who seem to have met with a tragic fate on flight MH370 ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. See in particular the letters from Dave Vincent in *Weekly Worker* February 27 and March 13.
2. www.timesofisrael.com/ex-el-al-expert-iran-likely-involved-in-mh-370.
3. http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts/march-16-2014-cpbg-political-report.
4. Moreover, it is not particularly helpful to our cause to deny outright that this is the case, as does *Socialist Worker* ('Tories try to bury report that busts racist myth', March 11).

Voting in LU elections

The Communist Platform is standing the following candidates for the Left Unity national council (directly elected section). We recommend that in this single-transferable-vote ballot members voted for candidates in the order stated below. You have until March 24 to cast your vote. All LU members should have been sent instructions on how to vote, so if you have not received such an email please contact the LU office.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Yasmine Mather | 8. James Turley |
| 2. Jack Conrad | 9. Tina Becker |
| 3. Moshé Machover | 10. Sarah McDonald |
| 4. Ian Donovan | 11. Emily Orford |
| 5. Mike Macnair | 12. Dan Gray |
| 6. Lee Rock | 13. Maciej Zurowski |
| 7. Peter Manson | 14. Robert Eagleton |

Communist Platform is recommending that the 15th preference is given to Pete McLaren. We are also calling for vote for Dave Stockton in the London regional section and Tim Nelson for trade union officer.

ITALY

Electoral reform and Greek gifts

While the new premier seems destined to disappoint, sections of the left have joined forces in a lash-up that looks set to leave workers cold. **Toby Abse** reports

Prime minister Matteo Renzi has from the very beginning of his tenure sought to present himself as a man of action capable of breaking through previous logjams in the Italian political system. He also claims that he will transform the European Union and persuade Angela Merkel to relax the fiscal compact placing rigid limits on Italy's budget deficit. Whilst like some previous Italian prime ministers he has found common ground with the French president in terms of a European economic outlook, getting the German chancellor to abandon her deflationary European austerity strategy seems an impossible goal. I am citing this as another indication of his probably inflated evaluation of his own capacity to sweep aside structural obstacles, but not one I will be focusing on in this article.

His proposed electoral reform - the 'Italicum', which I have referred to in a fair degree of detail in an earlier article¹ - has made some progress, but its passage through the Chamber of Deputies by 365 votes to 156 with one abstention on March 12 does not by any means mark the end of the story, despite Renzi's unconcealed hunger for instant results and immediate triumphs. In the Chamber of Deputies Renzi's centre-left Partito Democratico (PD) has a clear majority and, since the Italicum is essentially a deal between Renzi and Silvio Berlusconi, the combined weight of the PD and Berlusconi's Forza Italia was quite sufficient to ensure that in the end the bill went through, regardless of any minor rebellions within the PD or objections from smaller parties.²

The biggest problem for Renzi will be in the Senate, not the Chamber of Deputies. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the bizarre regional majority premiums - under which the Senate was elected in February 2013, when the old Porcellum (Pig Law) was still in force - mean that the PD has no majority in the upper house. So it is far more dependent on the good will of other parties, like Angelino Alfano's Nuovo Centrodestra (New Centre Right - NCD), which split away from Berlusconi during Enrico Letta's administration. The NCD, which felt sidelined by Renzi's deal with Berlusconi, is not happy with the Italicum as it stands.

Secondly, it is Renzi's intention to replace the elected Senate with a new second chamber - an unelected Assemblée delle Autonomie, which would consist of unpaid representatives of municipalities, metropolitan cities and regions - in other words mayors and regional presidents doing a second job in their spare time.³ Whilst it could be argued from a leftwing perspective that a monocameral system which abolished the second chamber altogether might be an improvement on what has been often described as the 'perfect bicameral system' created by Italy's 1948 constitution, an unelected second chamber is a regressive step, even if under Renzi's plan a government would no longer have to



Alexis Tsipras: growing personality cult

secure a vote of confidence from it. In short it is an undemocratic scheme with as little intrinsic merit as Nick Clegg's failed attempt at reforming the British House of Lords.

Regardless of its merits or lack of them, it is self-evident that the current members of the Senate will have no enthusiasm for this scheme, even if party discipline might compel some of them to give it public endorsement - turkeys do not vote for Christmas! Whilst a few current senators might perhaps subsequently resume their careers in the Chamber of Deputies, most of them would have to say a lasting farewell to a well-paid post with ample expenses, as well as the social prestige and media profile that goes with senate membership. This hostility, whether overt or latent, to their own abolition, might well make the senators more liable to delay or modify Renzi's electoral reform of the lower chamber.

Renzi is also in a bit of a double bind as to whether to go in for electoral or constitutional reform as his first objective. If he prioritises getting the Italicum through the Senate, the potential danger from his point of view would be that, in the aftermath of the electoral reform of the lower chamber, the smaller parties might precipitate a general election before the Senate is abolished. As matters stand, the judgement of the Consulta (constitutional court) which outlawed the Pig Law in December 2013 created a new electoral system for the Senate - a purely proportional system without any majority premium for the largest party or coalition, albeit one with an undemocratic 4% threshold. This arrangement would mean that even if smaller parties represented in the current parliament found themselves excluded from the new lower chamber by the workings of the Italicum, they would still stand a good chance of preserving some representation in a continuing Senate elected under a proportional system and in all probability would wreck the chances of the PD or any other party being able to form a single party government with a majority in both chambers.

If, on the other hand, Renzi

prioritises his attempt at major constitutional, as opposed to merely electoral, reform by seeking to abolish the Senate before the Italicum completes its passage through the current upper house, he potentially risks complete failure on both fronts - the senators could in effect filibuster over the Italicum by prolonged discussion of numerous amendments, resist their own abolition, bring down Renzi's government and precipitate a general election in which both chambers would be elected by a purely proportional system, albeit one with an undemocratic 4% threshold. Regardless of which party or parties won such an election, Renzi's national political career might end before his 40th birthday and the former Florentine mayor might have to return to provincial obscurity.

Left challenge

Whether or not the Italicum is enacted or the Senate is abolished, the one certainty in terms of Italian electoral politics is that there will be a nationwide test of the competing parties at the European elections on Sunday May 25.

There will be a challenge to the PD from the left in the form of the Lista Tsipras (officially called L'altra Europa con Tsipras - Another Europe With Tsipras). This list is a combination of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC), Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) and various intellectuals and self-proclaimed representatives of civil society, some of whom took the initiative in setting up the project. Alexis Tsipras, the leader of Greece's radical left party, Syriza, and the candidate of the European Left Party for the presidency of the European Commission, has unsurprisingly given his blessing to the list that bears his name and visited Italy in order to bring this very heterogeneous collection of forces closer together.

Whether it will be able to cross the 4% threshold (now applicable in Italy for European as well as national elections as a result of earlier collusion - in 2008 - between the PD under Walter Veltroni and Berlusconi's Popolo della

Libertà against the radical left) remains to be seen. Its failure to include in its name any of the obvious words that might give the mass of voters some clue as to where it stands in the political spectrum - words like 'communist', 'socialist', 'workers' or even 'left' - was, to say the least, a very bad start. Most working class voters do not read esoteric journals like the political/philosophical *MicroMega*, whose editors played quite a role in initiating the project, or even the increasingly misleadingly subtitled "communist daily", *Il Manifesto*, whose small and declining readership is essentially made up of 'red professors' and the like and whose current editor is also a supporter of the project.

Whilst the Lista Tsipras may mark some temporary and partial reconciliation between SEL's Nichi Vendola and the PRC's Paolo Ferrero - bitter enemies since the July 2008 congress of the PRC, which precipitated the subsequent split by Vendola's right wing of the PRC, the main component of the future SEL - it does not even represent unity amongst the forces associated with the Italian communist tradition. The Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (PdCI) is not part of it - the PdCI, closer to the more pro-Moscow current within the old 'official communist' PCI, had already quarrelled with the PRC for a second time and put an end to the Federazione della Sinistra between the two communist parties. This was an alliance that once seemed to prefigure a reversal of their 1998 split - a reversal in the name of a common communist identity in opposition to the social democratic turn of Vendola's SEL.

Nor does the Lista Tsipras include Marco Ferrando's Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori - although there is as yet no sign of an independent electoral intervention by these hard-line Trotskyists, who have stood in recent Italian general elections. The same applies to Ferrando's erstwhile comrades and now bitter rivals in the Partito di Alternativa Comunista (PdAC), who stood in one region in the 2013 general election

and called for abstention rather than a critical vote for those rivals in all the others. Meanwhile, Sinistra Critica, the Italian section of the Fourth International,⁴ split into two fragments in the course of 2013.

The majority of the candidates of the Lista Tsipras are not members of the PRC, SEL or any other political party and it is by no means clear what criteria were followed in drawing up the lists in any of the large regional constituencies into which Italy is divided for European elections. Sadly, this opaque method of candidate selection has already led to internal quarrelling and, according to the centre-right daily *Corriere della Sera*, the internationally famous Sicilian crime novelist, Andrea Camilleri, and Paolo Flores d'Arcais, the main editor of *MicroMega*,⁵ both of whom played an absolutely key role in the early days of the project, have disavowed it.⁶ Camilleri was reportedly very unhappy about the candidacy of Luca Casarini, a former autonomist who became a celebrity of the European Social Forums a decade or so ago and has a somewhat chequered record with the criminal justice system that probably does not endear him to an author whose novels have a detective as a hero.

Whilst an emphasis on 'civil society' might have made some sense at the time of Tangentopoli (1992-94), when there seemed to be a sharp divide between the corrupt politicians and the mass of the Italian population, the two-decade-long experience of the persistent consensus for Berlusconi should by now have destroyed such illusions. This evident attempt to play to the 'anti-political' gallery in order to win votes away from the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement) of Beppe Grillo may well yet yield fewer dividends than a principled return to a more militant class-struggle politics (combined with a name with a clearer association with the labour movement) might have done.⁷

Notes

1. See 'Back into the centre of politics' *Weekly Worker* February 6.
2. There had been 35 hours of debate and 123 votes on various clauses and amendments. The most bitter divisions occurred over an attempt to ensure gender parity in party lists by making it a legal requirement to alternate men and women, so that lists would be man-woman-man-woman or woman-man-woman-man, rather than, for example, merely having an equal number of both sexes. The official line of the PD was to support this, but Renzi was pretty half-hearted about it, knowing that Berlusconi opposed. Even some Forza Italia women were in favour and on a secret ballot this amendment was defeated, with the figures clearly indicating that a large number of PD deputies, presumably male ones, had voted against.
3. Since Renzi for some months prior to his capture of the premiership had regarded the Florentine mayorality as something he could do in his spare time whilst ruthlessly pursuing national office, it is perhaps not surprising that he has such a flippant approach to the conflict of interest involved in undertaking two sets of responsibilities simultaneously.
4. Here I am referring to what used to be known as the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, the international tendency of which Socialist Resistance is the British section.
5. In the 1970s Paolo Flores d'Arcais was a leading member of the USFI's Italian section and contributed an illuminating article on Italy's 'organic crisis' to the *New Left Review*, but in more recent times he could be described as a sort of intransigently anti-Berlusconian radical liberal.
6. His brother, Marcello Flores, is a historian who has produced important work on the history of the PCI amongst other topics.
7. I have seen an eloquent appeal to these two men from Tsipras himself on the internet, but have no idea if they have relented as a result of it.
8. It is probably worth remarking that the leftwing list centred around the PRC standing in the Livornese local elections, also taking place on May 25, has been given the label, Per il Lavoro (For Labour), and incorporates the hammer and sickle in its symbol. I assume the PRC may well have adopted similar tactics in other industrial cities where such local elections are taking place this year.

Preparing for policy conference

National meeting of Left Unity's Communist Platform
Sunday March 23, 12.30pm
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1
All CP members and supporters welcome
<http://communistplatform.org.uk>

REVIEW



Martin Jenkinson

Miners 1984: in the thick of it

Inspirational collection

Martin Jenkinson, Mark Metcalf, Mark Harvey **Images of the past: the miners' strike** Pen and Sword Books, pp216, £14.99

To mark the 30th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike several new books have hit the shelves (Seumas Milne's republication of *The enemy within* seems to be simply an attempt to capture the renewed interest in the subject rather than add anything new - or revise any of his myopic views on Arthur Scargill).

The first of these, *Images of*

the past: the miners' strike, poses a problem, in that it is essentially a photographic collection. A picture speaks a thousand words (and in the case of Martin Jenkinson probably a lot more), so mere verbal description will never capture the magnificence and strength of his work. The book - and many of the exhibitions of photos which accompanied its

launch, as well as many of the big commemorations - was put together by Justine, his daughter, and wife, Edwina, in tribute to him. Helping to present and edit the work, adding his artistic photo professionalism, is Mark Harvey, manager of iD8 Photography, with his 20 years' experience in labour movement, trade union and documentary photography.

Martin Jenkinson's formal union role was as the official photojournalist for *The Miner* and *Yorkshire Miner*, but his wider role as a radical freelance photographer for the labour movement at large was almost unparalleled. An active trade unionist in his own right and member of the National Union of Journalists national executive, he covered protests, demonstrations, conferences and strikes, and all and every platform where the working class in its multiple aspects made its political voice heard. He built up over the years a massive collection, a photo library whose imagery lights up the texts of labour movement and trade union history, even already vibrant texts of struggle and hope. Ever prepared to allow his work to be used to illustrate articles, he would express his disquiet to me after photos that had gradually been absorbed into my own collections and albums emerged years later uncredited, or at times credited to me!

One thing was certain: with the exception of the photojournalists from *News Line*, Martin would be almost alone shooting from within our ranks rather than from behind police lines. He was in the thick of the 1984-85 strike where the fighting raged and his safety could be in serious jeopardy. The bulk of this work deals with the scenes from the picket lines, the occupied villages, the food halls, the families and the communities through that bitter 12 months. Martin uses striking black and white images; close up, personal and deeply moving.

They are monuments to his art and his commitment to the working class.

Accompanying the collection is a strong historical and political narrative of the strike by Mark Metcalf. The downside in a book of this nature is that it comes without sources and footnotes - not the author's choice, but those of the publishers, whose topical history genre requires 'easy reading' styles. Mark has greatly benefited in his work from the critical reviews of earlier books by authors who tripped themselves up with basic mistakes and, in the case of some academic and journalistic works, complete factual inaccuracies.

Mark makes only one such inaccuracy worthy of mention. Around the vexed subject of Orgreave, not so much in relation to the vindictive, murderous assault by the police, but the cause of the debacle. Mark says the steelworkers at Scunthorpe wanted coke to produce steel and when this was refused unilaterally crossed the picket lines to get it. This is not true. Their request for union-sanctioned coke was made to stop the linings of the vast furnaces collapsing, thus wiping out the plant. The *quid pro quo* was that they would not produce steel from the start of the strike and did not do so. It was only when Arthur decided more or less unilaterally to stop all such safety exemptions that Bill Sirs, general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Federation, got his long-term wish - ISTC members were told to adopt a 'fuck 'em' attitude and abandon the 'no steel' policy, running their lorries through our lines at Orgreave and into scab history.

This is a small, but fundamental mistake, which in no way detracts from the otherwise solid presentation of the facts and inspirational collection of photos. It is a great tribute to Martin and his work, and a monument to the militant working class themes he presents ●

David Douglass

Fighting fund

Budget deficit

George Osborne has to admit it: Britain's economy is smaller than it was in 2008. His much vaunted recovery will go hand in hand with austerity till 2018-19 at least. An eloquent argument for class struggle and building not another confessional sect, not a protest party, not a vague left-of-Labour party, but a mass Communist Party. And that, of course, is exactly what this paper is designed to achieve.

While we have no powers of taxation we do have a monthly £1,500 target for donations. Thankfully our readers are more than willing to help. "Keep up the good work" is a message that frequently accompanies donations to this paper. But in the case of comrade SG it comes at the end of an eloquent tribute to our "commitment to Marxism", "opposition to opportunism" and "dedication" in producing, "week in, week out", such a "quality paper".

Even better, the cheque slipped inside SG's note was for £100! Talk about putting your money

where your mouth is. Thanks for those kind words, comrade - and for showing your own "commitment" in that way.

SG's cheque was one of three received in the post this week. Thanks also to HJ (£25) and to PK for the tenner added to his subscription. But there were no donations made via our website this week - despite the fact that no fewer than 11,850 people read our paper online.

But we did get the usual batch of standing order contributions - thank you, MM, DW, SP and JD, whose SOs added up to £135. So we received £270 in all over the last seven days, taking our March fighting fund running total up to £826. But there are only 10 days to go to raise almost £700.

Anyone else fancy helping us to meet our budget deficit?

Robbie Rix

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

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.

weekly worker

**Army
intervention
cannot be
discounted**

On its last legs

Erdoğan's government is rapidly losing control, writes **Esen Uslu**. But the opposition seems in no shape to take advantage

The AKP government under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which has been in office for more than 10 years in Turkey, has passed its sell-by date, but is still desperately holding on. The problem for the bourgeoisie is how to replace it without suffering further damage, as Erdoğan and his henchmen thrash about.

The government was regarded as a water-tight coalition of several Islamist tendencies (plus some liberal and centre-right groups). One of the better organised of such tendencies has been Gülen Jamaat - or, as it likes to be known, 'the Service'. It was formed around the Islamist preacher and educationalist, Fetullah Gülen (hence the name) or Hodja Effendi, as his followers call him.

According to recently revealed records of illegal phone tapping, the Erdoğan wing of the party gave special privileges to the Gülen Jamaat, including illegitimate access to the security and intelligence services, police and courts. As a result its people were placed in critical positions of power.

Coalition split

So long as it was spearheading the struggle to overthrow traditional military tutelage, the influence of Gülen Jamaat grew. However, once it overreached itself and turned its attention towards the problem of how to maintain political Islam's hold on power after Erdoğan, the coalition split and everything started to come out into the open.

Matters came to a head when the sons of four cabinet ministers were arrested for corruption, heavily implicating their parents. It became apparent that the corruption was linked to sanctions-busting in relation to Iran, involving gold traded for Iranian natural gas. It seems that corruption went to the heart of the government, with allegations of billions paid in bribes and illegal arms exports to conflict zones. Despite all Erdoğan's efforts, he could not resist the pressure to let go of four cabinet ministers, who were among his closest associates for many years. He had gone to great lengths, involving a change in the law, to protect them from prosecution.

His response has been to attack his former coalition partner, Gülen Jamaat, referring to its involvement in "the parallel state". He also attempted to sort out the police bureaucracy: the number of senior officers transferred from one post to another has been almost impossible to follow. Some have been moved four or five times since mid-December, and several now find themselves suspended. Erdoğan turned on the judiciary too. The body overseeing the appointment of judges and prosecutors was replaced. The special counter-terrorism courts went too. Their pending cases transferred to ordinary criminal courts. In so doing, he sidelined judges and prosecutors thought to have had connections with



Recep Erdoğan: will his party ditch him?

Gülen Jamaat, replacing them with his own men.

Desperately needing new allies, he softened his stance on the military. He got legislation through that practically ended the trials against senior military figures and released many of the top brass who were awaiting their appeals against conviction. However, Erdoğan ensured that the thousands of Kurdish prisoners would not benefit from the legislation. He tried to appeal to the nationalist-statist centre ground, while putting the Kurdish 'peace process' on hold.

The government's fall from grace actually started a couple of years ago when Erdoğan tried to challenge traditional family-based finance-capital groups, such as Doğan Holding, and Koç Holding, whose actions were seen as beyond the control of the Islamists. Traditionally Turkish finance-capital groups have thrived in the 'greenhouse of the state', enjoying ample credit facilities, guaranteed

markets, state tenders, etc.

At first Erdoğan seemed to give in to pressure from the European Union for a competitive tendering law. But that law has been amended so many times by various rider clauses that it now has more holes than a Swiss cheese. The government tried to maintain its traditional tutelage over finance capital by withholding contracts, awarding them instead to the 'Anatolian tigers' - those newer groupings heavily tinged by Islamism.

However, some of the traditional finance-capital groups have grown so large that they are virtually immune from such pressures. So the government sought other means of control: unwarranted examination of books, fines for tax avoidance and similar actions. On one occasion the government opted to suddenly terminate a tendered contract for the building of a warship.

A similar operation against media groups has resulted in a situation

where several newspapers now run the same story concocted in the AKP's media kitchens under virtually the same headline. Anyone stepping out of line is severely punished: many journalists have been sacked and are now pariahs.

None of this was good news for the 'international community' - an unstable government in an unstable region is the last thing US imperialism wants. And, on top of all this, the Syrian war was pulling the government towards the Salafi cause, and against the Shias and Alawis of the region. That shift had a major impact in the internal politics of Turkey, since the Alevis of Anatolia closely identify themselves with the Alawi Syrians, and the fear of a renewed wave of sectarian violence pushed Turkey's Alevis into a more vocal opposition.

The attempt to ease the situation with regard to the Kurdish uprising in Turkey, with a view to improving relations with Iraqi Kurdistan, and expectations of exporting Kurdish oil through a new pipeline beyond the control of Arab Iraq, resulted in a deterioration in Turkey's relations with the oil industry's seven sisters, as well as the US and UK. Meanwhile, the gas field opened up off the coast of Cyprus became a new bone of contention with the Greek Cypriots, Israelis and the US.

The destabilisation of the northern shores of the Black Sea (Ukraine, Crimea and Russia) has added to the tensions in the Caucasus region and brought about a quite dangerous situation. An Islamist government meddling in the affairs of minorities in the region has become a fact, and the situation seems more and more out of control.

We may safely say that the AKP government is rapidly losing friends in the international arena. However, the instability of the region may still

create opportunities for the Islamists to find a new lease of life.

Repression

The extent of popular opposition to the AKP government became apparent during last year's events centred on Gezi Park in Istanbul. After a brief lull during the summer, the opposition was back on the streets as students returned to college.

They were met with brutal force. Tear gas, water cannon and baton charges became the daily routine in all the big cities. Mobile phones, the internet, Twitter and Facebook became the media for organising demonstrations, and they were targeted: the government passed legislation enabling it to lawfully record all tweets, messages and voice recordings, and use them as evidence, and allowing it to block internet communications. And state oppression now has an auxiliary: the AKP's paramilitary Islamist militia is visibly involved, attacking demonstrators under the direction of the police.

As the local elections to be held at the end of this month approach, the opposition is stepping up the tempo with an eye on the presidential contest scheduled for July. While there has been no obvious move from within the AKP to get rid of Erdoğan, that is still a possibility - the outcome of the local elections could intensify the uncertainty. But the electoral opposition is not the same as the opposition on the street, and it does not seem capable of ousting the AKP - the next general election is to be held in 2015.

Traditionally in such impasses in Turkish politics the army has intervened. However, for the moment the military seems content with the more passive role assigned to it after the well-publicised trials involving its leading figures. That, of course, does not mean that a new military intervention is ruled out. So it seems to me that we are in for a bumpy ride ●

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