



weekly worker

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LETTERS



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

Hurt feelings

Ian Birchall is evidently upset at the brief critique of Tony Cliff's theory of 'bureaucratic state capitalism'. I included in my recent article ('Throwing babies out with the bathwater', April 17). He charges me with deliberately misrepresenting Cliff's views, though the motive for any such misrepresentation appears obscure. It seems that my nefarious activity is in the service of promoting a rival theory that I believe has greater coherence, proved capable of analysing the phenomenon of Stalinism and anticipated with some real accuracy the means of its final overthrow and destruction.

What is strange about comrade Birchall's letter is not his belief that I am mistaken, but the defensive tone of it. If I am wrong about Cliff, it would suffice to point out my errors with the relevant quotes and let Cliff speak for himself. It appears that comrade Birchall sees the issues raised by my critique as a matter of something akin to honour, not whether a particular understanding is right or wrong. This does suggest that comrade Birchall is not so confident of the correctness of Cliff's theory.

Regarding the law of value, he quotes some statements from Cliff's work that appear to show that he believed, contrary to my critique, that the law of value was primary in the 'state capitalist' USSR. For instance, Cliff's assertion that "even if the form of activity of the law of value in the Russian economy is very complicated and full of deep, internal contradictions, the law of value is nevertheless the central decisive factor in the movement of the Russian economy"; and furthermore that "The law of value is thus seen to be the arbiter of the Russian economic structure as soon as it is seen in the concrete historical situation of today - the anarchic world market."

The comrade seems to assert that a failure to take these statements at face value means an ignorance of Cliff's views. But I am sure that comrade Birchall is aware that I am far from the only person to have drawn this conclusion from Cliff's writings. Notwithstanding the reference to "the concrete historical situation of today" in Cliff's main work, as quoted above, when he actually tries to elaborate how the law of value was manifested in the Soviet economy, Cliff's reasoning often flatly contradicted these abstract statements.

Comrade Birchall himself quotes Cliff as saying that "if one examines the relations within the Russian economy, abstracting them from their relations with the world economy, one is bound to conclude that the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production, is not to be found in it." He links this with Cliff's analogy that Russian state capitalism was like 'one big factory' that paid its workers in kind. For comrade Birchall, Cliff was here engaging in a mere hypothesis or abstraction in order to illustrate one side of an idea.

Even if this were granted for argument's sake, however, when Cliff addresses the other side of this polarity it does not help comrade Birchall's case. Comrade Birchall again quotes Cliff: "Hitherto Russia's backwardness has ruled out any question of flooding foreign markets with Russian goods. On the other hand, Russian markets are kept from being flooded with foreign goods by the monopoly of foreign trade which only military might can smash. The combination of these two facts till now relegates the commercial struggle to a place of secondary importance,

and gives the military struggle pride of place."

It is telling, however, that the very next sentence, following on from this passage, in the most recent edition of *State capitalism in Russia* at least, is this: "Because international competition takes mainly a military form, the law of value expresses itself in its opposite: viz, a striving after use-values."

Cliff then goes on to elaborate: "But as competition with other countries is mainly military, the state as a consumer is interested in certain specific use-values, such as tanks, aeroplanes and so on. Value is the expression of competition between independent producers; Russia's competition with the rest of the world is expressed by the elevation of use-values into an end, serving the ultimate end of victory in the competition. Use-values, while being an end, still remain a means."

And more: "The fact that the Russian economy is directed towards the production of certain use-values does not make it a socialist economy, even though the latter would also be directed towards the production of (very different) use-values. On the contrary, the two are complete opposites. The increasing rate of exploitation, and the increasing subordination of the workers to the means of production in Russia, accompanied as it is by a great production of guns but not butter, leads to an intensification, not a lessening, of the oppression of the people" (citations are from *State capitalism in Russia*, as found on the Marxist Internet Archive: www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1955/statecap).

This much more concrete exposition of Cliff's theory starkly contrasts with his immediately following statement in the text, quoted earlier by comrade Birchall: "... the law of value is thus seen to be the arbiter of the Russian economic structure as soon as it is seen in the concrete historical situation of today - the anarchic world market." In fact it contradicts it, renders it an abstraction, a theoretical non-sequitur that serves only to underline Cliff's inconsistency and reluctance to openly break with the Marxist tradition in the manner of more consistent third-camp theorists like Shachtman. But that does not change the fact that in reality, insofar as it is concrete, Cliff put forward a third-system theory.

Cliff unconvincingly attempts to parry the conclusion that I drew in my article, that this is in effect "a non-socialist society in which the law of the determination of value by socially necessary labour time - the most fundamental law of capitalism - [has] been abolished", by pointing out that capitalist powers such as the USA and Nazi Germany had taken similar measures in wartime. However, he was not describing the USSR only in wartime, but rather its general mode of operation.

Since my article was only partly about Cliff vs Daum, I was not going to fill it up with extensive quotes from Cliff. But my interpretation of these matters is hardly unique. One aspect of this controversy, equally important and closely linked to the material above, is the question of whether labour-power was a commodity in the USSR. Cliff asserted that it was not in this passage, also from *State capitalism in Russia*:

"Oscillations in the market price of labour-power' take place in Russia, perhaps more so than in other countries. But here too the essence contradicts the form. We shall elaborate this point somewhat, as it will throw light on the central point we intend to prove, that in the economic relations within Russia itself, one cannot find the autonomy of economic activity, the source of the law of value, acting."

Notwithstanding comrade Birchall's vain caveat about the scope of matters

'within Russia itself', this gave rise to sufficient controversy that Duncan Hallas, in a debate with some of Cliff's most fervent devotees, was moved at one point to note: "If labour-power is not a commodity in the USSR, then there is no proletariat. Moreover, if labour-power is not a commodity, then there can be no wage labour/capital relationship and therefore no capital either. Therefore there can be no capitalism in any shape or form" (www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1980/xx/eurusoc.htm).

I do not have the space to go into this in more detail here, except to note that the assumption that underlies Cliff's view of the law of value is normative: the view that if a society is modified almost beyond recognition so that many of the forms of capitalism are done away with, then the law of value ceases to operate.

But the law of value is not something that only operates in pure conditions, nor is it a product of those pure conditions: it is a product of a level of historical development where a partial development of the productive forces coexists with material scarcity to force society to calculate its relations in terms of strict equivalence. If competition is superseded by monopoly, the law of value modifies its operation on the basis of the law of value itself. Likewise if capitalist economic forms are modified in the direction of state monopoly to the point that different capitals become one, competition is suppressed and even money is abolished, the law of value leads this to chronic economic stagnation, the collapse of growth and finally reversion to a less rigid capitalist model.

This can only be overcome by a working class regime consciously struggling to overcome scarcity through international revolution and a development of the productive forces on that basis. An initially socialist regime that gives up on that struggle inevitably becomes an instrument of the law of value: ie, an instrument of capital - notwithstanding its initial intentions and no matter how unusual its form from the point of view of a preconceived idea of what capital is.

Finally I would note that comrade Birchall dismisses the usefulness of 'predictive power' in Marxism with the statement that "Marxists, from Marx and Lenin onwards, have not been too hot at prediction". This is no doubt true about specific events: Marxism is not fortune-telling. But in terms of the analysis of complex phenomena using a materialist method, Marxists ought to be on strong ground. Not in anticipating events in detail, but rather in outlining the general shape of how a phenomenon like Stalinism is likely to develop through its own internal logic.

If an analysis, such as Daum's, can be shown to have anticipated events, then that does amount to real evidence that it might have been on the right track - as opposed to other analyses, whose conjectures were falsified by events. If comrade Birchall wants to dispute the actual evidence I provided, then I am willing to be corrected, but only by something that answers substance with better substance. Not by protestations of hurt feelings, however understandable they may be, given the lifelong commitment of those involved.

Ian Donovan
London

Thorny questions

In his review of *Clara Zetkin: national and international contexts*, Ben Lewis raises some important questions and makes a welcome commitment to begin the vital task of translating the central writings of Clara Zetkin ('Preached principle, promoted unity', April 24).

One of his central aims seems to

be the illustration of Zetkin's anti-feminism and her polemics against the bourgeois women's movement. While this is all true, it gives a far too one-sided view of her struggle. It has been shown by numerous historians (and from her own writings) that Zetkin, like Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand and all other communist advocates of women's liberation, faced a struggle on two fronts. They all fought just as strenuous a battle within their own parties for immediate demands, organisation, education and promotion of women and against persistent sexist and derogatory attitudes. Their struggle to win women to Marxism was consistently undermined by lack of support, inactivity and even blatant opposition from their own parties.

Zetkin was confronted by a specific problem in the early 1900s because of reluctance among the Social Democratic Party of Germany leadership to back a campaign for the equal right to vote. Opponents argued that women were not ready for this, as they were politically backward and likely to vote for rightwing parties. They could not be trusted. It was an impossible situation for Zetkin and her allies. How could she win women who were becoming politically aware to a party which did not advocate this demand? With the tenacious spirit described in the review, she used all efforts to win the argument, including her editorship of *Die Gleichheit*, the SPD's women's journal. In 1907 she secured a commitment from all parties of the Second International to include a call for universal suffrage in party programmes and materials.

Zetkin was a major influence on Kollontai and Armand also because of her advocacy of special women's departments within the party. Comrade Lewis refers to the 1920 *Guidelines for the communist women's movement*, which included the requirement that a party 'create special institutions' to recruit, organise and educate women. She headed such a section in the SPD and edited *Die Gleichheit* from 1892. Under Zetkin's influence and with her encouragement, Kollontai fought in vain for a similar body within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party from 1905. It was only in the aftermath of the revolution in 1919 that the Zhenotdel was set up - and then only after a mass conference of women had started the process themselves.

So, while Zetkin advocated unity in the class struggle, she also demanded separate organisation within the party - with permanent representation on the central committee. She believed that the party needed to take special measures in promoting women. She was a co-founder of a separate women's international - the International Socialist Women's Congress - which first met in 1907. Later she, Kollontai and others formed the Communist Women's Section within Comintern.

Finally, it is important to state that her politics on other questions was not divorced from her work on the woman question, as the reviewer seems to suggest. Under her editorship, *Die Gleichheit* placed itself at the heart of the left in the SDP and was a vociferous opponent of revisionism and social-imperialism. The meetings of the International Socialist Women's Congress from 1913 were scenes of fiery debates on war.

Delving back into Zetkin's work will provide much fascinating material - but it is only of real value if we tackle the many thorny questions that she and others faced. The history of the communist women's liberation movement is a very challenging one.

Anne McShane
email

Stigmatised

It is particularly disconcerting to find some on the left who stigmatise immigrants as the objective allies of capitalism and, as such, a threat to 'indigenous' workers, as Stephen Diamond does in his latest letter (April 24).

It is assumed that immigrant workers are immune to class conflict and incapable of class struggle. For sure, some because of their visa status are less able to resist oppression and are indeed more vulnerable to being blackmailed because of their illegality, but the majority of the immigrants are here perfectly lawfully and are exercising (to use Stephen's own phrase) "equal treatment for citizens as a bourgeois-democratic right". It is only when it is possible to prevent people from being played off against each other that immigrants cannot be used for wage-cutting or for worsening working conditions.

Nowhere has it been suggested that we should passively accept attacks on our pay and conditions. Nowhere has anyone condoned the use of scabs or strike-breakers. Instead, what has been pointed out from my very first letter is the necessity of organising via the trade unions by the working class themselves. A more successful strategy is not the one being proposed by Stephen of an entrenched 'them and us'. Rather, we should be urging our unions to devote a lot more of their resources to recruitment, which is not based on a moralist stance, but one of mutual self-interest - the original motivation that brought workers together in unions in the first place. Nowhere has it been suggested that this will be quick and easy. Unfortunately, many trade unionists have never been able to think or act beyond the proposition that migrant workers belong to the country they have left and therefore do not belong where they work.

We should, however, be very wary of any tactic that appeals to the state to introduce legislation, which would not only be futile, but prove possibly counterproductive. Workers will perceive more chance of its success by voting for the UK Independence Party.

It is not disputed that a labour shortage does cause wages to rise and thus puts workers in a comparatively stronger bargaining position. Naturally, employers will always seek to counteract such a situation by importing often cheaper, more compliant workers, which in turn intensifies competition among workers, and by fermenting xenophobia amongst workers fighting over crumbs in low-waged, unskilled jobs - the temptation to blame your unemployment or low wage level on foreign labour is strong. Nevertheless, the blame lies elsewhere and we all know where - in the bank balances of business, not in the pockets of some poor migrant seeking to eke out a living.

I cannot speak for the "open borderists [who] will never explain to workers why international revolution doesn't entail the immediate levelling of wages". But I will answer as a socialist who supports the abolition of the wages system and not its levelling. Marxian economics does not measure the level of exploitation by how high or low wages, are but by reference to the amount of surplus value produced, as compared with the amount of wages paid, whether high or low. By this measure the workers of the advanced countries are more exploited than those in less developed countries, despite their higher wages, because they produce more profits per worker.

But if I was pushed to take a position on levelling, it would be this one. In the week after the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster, I demand that all workers of the world receive the immediate levelling of health and safety laws, the

levelling of the value (and quality) of a person’s life. No-one is ‘relatively’ a lesser person than another.

Alan Johnstone
Socialist Party of Great Britain

Left vote

In the article largely about the local elections, Peter Manson writes: “... in the absence of a Labour anti-cuts candidate, then, of course, [small left groups’ candidates] too should be supported”. In respect of local elections, he might be forgiven for overlooking the SPGB standing in wards in Islington and Lambeth in London.

In respect of the Euro elections, the SPGB are standing 14 candidates in two regions: South East England and Wales. Not as many as the left-nationalist No2EU (46 candidates in 7 regions), but more than the other two parties mentioned, the Socialist Labour Party (four candidates in one region) and the Socialist Equality Party (eight candidates in one region) put together.

While unreciprocated support is often offered for Labour, unreciprocated support for the SPGB might demonstrate to workers how sincere calls for ‘unity’ from the left are (or are not), but the SPGB conception of ‘unity for socialism’ isn’t about yielding compromise.

I understand that “the CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee has yet to make a decision”, but, as historic US socialist Eugene Debs once said, “It is better to vote for what you want and not get it than to vote for what you don’t want and get it.”

Jon D White
SPGB

Sullied idea

In his letter of April 24, Susil Gupta says that using the term ‘Stalinism’ is wrong, as under Lenin or Trotsky the historical development of the Soviet Union would not have been any different from what generally happened under Stalin and his followers. He might be right, but the problem is that the Stalinists chose to designate the outcome of the proletarian revolution as ‘socialism’, even though it had taken place under circumstances most unfavourable to any kind of long-term proletarian rule, which would define ‘socialism’ in a Marxist sense.

This is what has sullied the idea of socialism within the international working class up to this day and will probably do so for quite some time to come. So, when Gupta claims there was no reason to talk about the “revolution betrayed”, he is wrong. Indeed, he is also wrong when he says that Trotsky and others had put all the blame on an individual like Stalin. It was, on the contrary, Trotsky who argued that Stalinism was a result of socioeconomic backwardness and the Soviet Union’s isolation caused by the failure of the international proletarian revolution, especially in the most developed countries.

However, one should not ignore the fact that under Stalin terrible crimes were committed, which do not automatically flow from the need to engage in what might be called ‘primitive accumulation of capital’. It was the crimes against certain national minorities that proved important in enabling Hitler’s armies to penetrate deep into the Soviet Union in the first part of World War II. The pro-German tide was reversed when these same nationalities came to realise that the Nazis were at least as brutal as Stalin’s forces.

This is one of those historical facts that cannot simply be explained by the level of the productive forces in the Soviet Union. Personality is a factor to be taken into consideration in any materialist view of history.

Anton Holberg
Germany

Privileged

I should like to add one small point in connection with Eddie Ford’s excellent piece on Cameron’s ‘religious conversion’ (“Cameron decides to do god”, April 24).

I am frequently infuriated by Christians who bleat about their religion being marginalised in British public life. While unelected senior office-holders in one Christian organisation in this country have the right, simply because of the post they have in that organisation, to vote in the country’s legislature, the idea that Christianity is being marginalised in Britain’s public life is preposterous: rather, it has institutionalised political privilege.

Under the CPGB’s *Draft programme*, of course, this profoundly undemocratic situation would cease with the abolition of the House of Lords.

Tim Reid
London

Antidote

The best antidote to religion and other forms of superstition is involvement in the collective, democratic struggle for socialism itself. Of course, the party will obviously seek to free such comrades from their religious illusions. It is, however, primarily the unity that comes from revolutionary social practice, from the shared tasks and hardships of the struggle, that will do the job most effectively.

As long as it is expected that religious belief will/must vanish during party work or once socialism is established, religious or spiritual persons are still seen as second-class persons and *not* treated equally. We saw how in the socialist (or ‘socialist’) countries many people remained religious. You could say that, as that was not real socialism, this doesn’t mean anything - in real socialism, religion will disappear (and if not, we will violently remove it). On the other hand, we may begin to understand that a yearning for something higher than us, something eternal, may always be within many people, even in a classless

society - Marx might have been wrong to see religion only as a product of class society.

Perhaps it was the lack of the spiritual dimension which made it so easy for many communists to kill comrades with whom they had worked together closely for decades; the lack of love ... because love is nothing ‘rational’. Someone who starts out loving all creatures, and also ends up hating the capitalists and all who are responsible for destroying creation, will fight them. But someone who only hates - and doesn’t fight because he loves mankind - will never achieve that. If we are not more friendly and helpful than those of other political persuasions - better human beings - then things will never work out and a new society, a new type of man, will never be reached.

The revolutionary of the future must be a spiritual one. Just as he works to change society, so he must change his inner self. Change in society will not automatically change anyone deep inside - but *this* is necessary for permanent success. So spirituality must be seen as part of the socialist struggle, not its superstitious and esoteric enemy.

So socialist/communist organisations must represent more than people coming together to fight capitalism. They must be the cells of the future society we are struggling to achieve - including by our own behaviour and the way we treat people. This has nothing to do with the illusion of creating a socialist island within capitalist society. But it means stressing that the behaviour of each one of us is much more important than any party programme: if you are an asshole, you won’t sell even the best party programme. But if you are honest and authentic, and people feel that they can trust you, they will forgive your political mistakes.

Che once talked about the “exemplary behaviour of each revolutionary”, but meant this only in the sense of the heroic guerrilla struggle. We must clarify what this exemplary behaviour would look like in our simple daily lives.

Guenter Meisinger
Germany

Victimised rep

More than 30 people showed up at a protest to support victimised trade union rep and *Weekly Worker* supporter Lee Rock at the beginning of his employment tribunal in Sheffield.

Lee is the most well known and experienced trade union activist in the local department for work and pensions (DWP) and was sacked for “unsatisfactory attendance” in February last year. In normal language: he was off sick for 11 days over the 12 previous months, hitting the so-called “consideration point” for disciplinary action. If nothing else, his tribunal shows the draconian methods and rules that are now being brought into ‘modern’ workplaces.

Amongst Lee’s supporters demonstrating outside the tribunal were not just fellow members of his Sheffield branch of the Public and Commercial Services union, but also PCS members from other parts of the country, members of other unions and a couple of Left Unity comrades.

Around 15 of them filed into the tribunal room to show their support for comrade Rock - to the obvious bemusement of the judge. And to the equally obvious bemusement of those on the public benches, the judge then went on to adjourn after five minutes, as he and the two panel members had not actually read the case file. This might sound astonishing - after all, what are these people being paid for? But normal practice is for these sorts of employment tribunals to be settled out of court - ie, the employer pays

the sacked worker a certain sum to avoid the costs of hearing the case.

Not so in comrade Rock’s case. An initial (very low) offer of a financial settlement was withdrawn at the last minute. Clearly, this case has become something of a *cause célèbre* and his employer, the DWP, is hell-bent on setting an example.

As is stated on the national PCS website, “We are clear that Lee would not have been dismissed for his level of sickness if he was not a well-known rep. Our concerns are supported by the fact that his trade union activity was unnecessarily and inappropriately referred to in the recommendation for dismissal.”

Just after he was sacked, comrade Rock was banned from all DWP premises nationally, with no reason given. The report on the PCS website comments: “We have no knowledge of this having ever happened with another sickness-related dismissal.” Management also tried to prevent Lee from representing other union members, despite his pending tribunal - a clear breach of normal procedure. One PCS member who was denied representation by comrade Rock actually initiated her own employment tribunal on this precise matter - and won.

Comrade Rock’s case is scheduled to finish on May 1. Messages of support, sent to tina@cpgb.org.uk, will be passed on to comrade Rock.

Tina Becker

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday May 4, 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 33, ‘The modern theory of colonisation’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Remember the miners’ strike

Thursday May 1, 7:30pm: Debate, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. £9 (£7 concessions). Speakers: Seumas Milne, Arthur Scargill, Ewa Jasiewicz and Owen Jones. Chaired by Dawn Foster. Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Worker Cooperative weekend

Friday May 2 to Sunday May 4: Worker cooperators go camping, Lodge Hill Residential Centre, London Road, Pulborough, West Sussex. Organised by Cooperatives UK: john.atherton@uk.coop.

Story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs

Friday May 2, 8pm: Discussion, Nottingham Arts Theatre, George Street, Nottingham NG1. Organised by People’s Assembly Nottingham: www.facebook.com/PeoplesAssemblyNottingham.

May Day

Saturday May 3, 11am: Assemble Princess Square, Newcastle upon Tyne. March to City Stadium, Warwick Street for rally (12.15pm). Organised by Tyne and Wear May Day Committee: maydaycommittee@newcastle-tuc.org.uk.

Stand up to Ukip

Wednesday May 7, 6pm: Protest at meeting addressed by Nigel Farage, Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1. Organised by Stand up to Ukip: <http://standuptoukip.org>.

Protest in a digital age

Wednesday May 7, 7.30pm: Discussion of politics and social media, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. £9 (£7 concessions). Speakers include: Symon Hill, Jamie Bartlett, plus representatives from Occupy and UK Uncut. Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Unite the Resistance Scotland

Saturday May 10, 12 noon to 5pm: Trade unionists against austerity, Renfield St Stephens Church, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2. £5 waged, £3 unwaged. Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

Socialist films

Sunday May 11, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Iciar Bollain’s *Even the rain* (Spain, 104 minutes) and Hertfordshire Citizens Advice Bureaus’ *What is a scam?* (UK, 2 minutes). Followed by discussion. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Target British Gas

Monday May 12, 12 noon: Noisy protest at British Gas shareholders meeting, Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, Broad Sanctuary, London W1. Organised by Fuel Poverty Action: www.fuelpovertyaction.org.uk.

Wandsworth People’s Assembly

Tuesday May 13, 7pm: Launch meeting, PCS headquarters, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11. Organised by People’s Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Save our NHS!

Tuesday May 13, 7.30pm: Public meeting, HG Wells Centre, St Mark’s Road (off Masons Hill/High Street), Bromley, Kent. Organised by Disabled People Against the Cuts: www.dpac.uk.net.

Capitalism needs war

Sunday May 18, 11.30am to 5.30pm: Free school on World War I, 88 Fleet Street, London EC4. Sessions on: ‘World War I’s relevance today and why capitalism needs war’; ‘Mutinies, women’s protests and revolutions’; ‘Countering Cameron’s commemorations’; ‘Putin, Ukraine and war today?’ Organised by The Real WWI: www.therealww1.wordpress.com.

Benn’s alternative to austerity

Saturday May 31, 2pm: Meeting to celebrate Tony Benn’s vision for society, Brighton Community Centre, North Road, Brighton BN1. Speakers: Jeremy Corbyn MP; Nancy Platts, Labour candidate for Brighton Kemptown; Steve Yandell, RMT; Robb Johnson with protest songs. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.org.uk.

Unite against Fascism

Saturday June 14, 9.30pm to 5pm: National conference, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. £12/£6 concessions. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

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.

AGGREGATE

Left strategy and election tactics

Jim Moody reports on discussions at the April 27 aggregate of CPGB members

The two questions considered by the April aggregate concerned our involvement in the Left Unity project and important decisions on voting at the local and Euro elections that are to be held across Britain on May 22.

Left Unity

Mike Macnair opened on Left Unity by outlining our stance on its internal elections. We had not stood candidates just in order to fill a vacancy, but to put forward principled communist politics. If they were elected it would be on the basis of clear support for LU's Communist Platform, within which the CPGB is the major force. It was similar to our attitude to political work in branches, where our focus is on politics, not merely branch-building.

Comrade Macnair compared our work in LU with what we did in the Socialist Alliance, though without direct involvement in organisational matters; but it was radically different to how it had been in Respect, where we actively tried to split its base from the leadership. However, our orientation to LU recognises that it is yet another of the left's halfway-house projects with poor expectations.

Since the late 1970s European politics, especially in larger countries, has become more and more dominated by bourgeois and reactionary forces, as ever more right-moving governments succeed one another. Demoralisation encourages this spiral. David Cameron's coalition government is well to the right of Margaret Thatcher's, François Hollande's is to the right of the previous Socialist Party administration, Angela Merkel's is to the right of previous Christian Democrat governments.

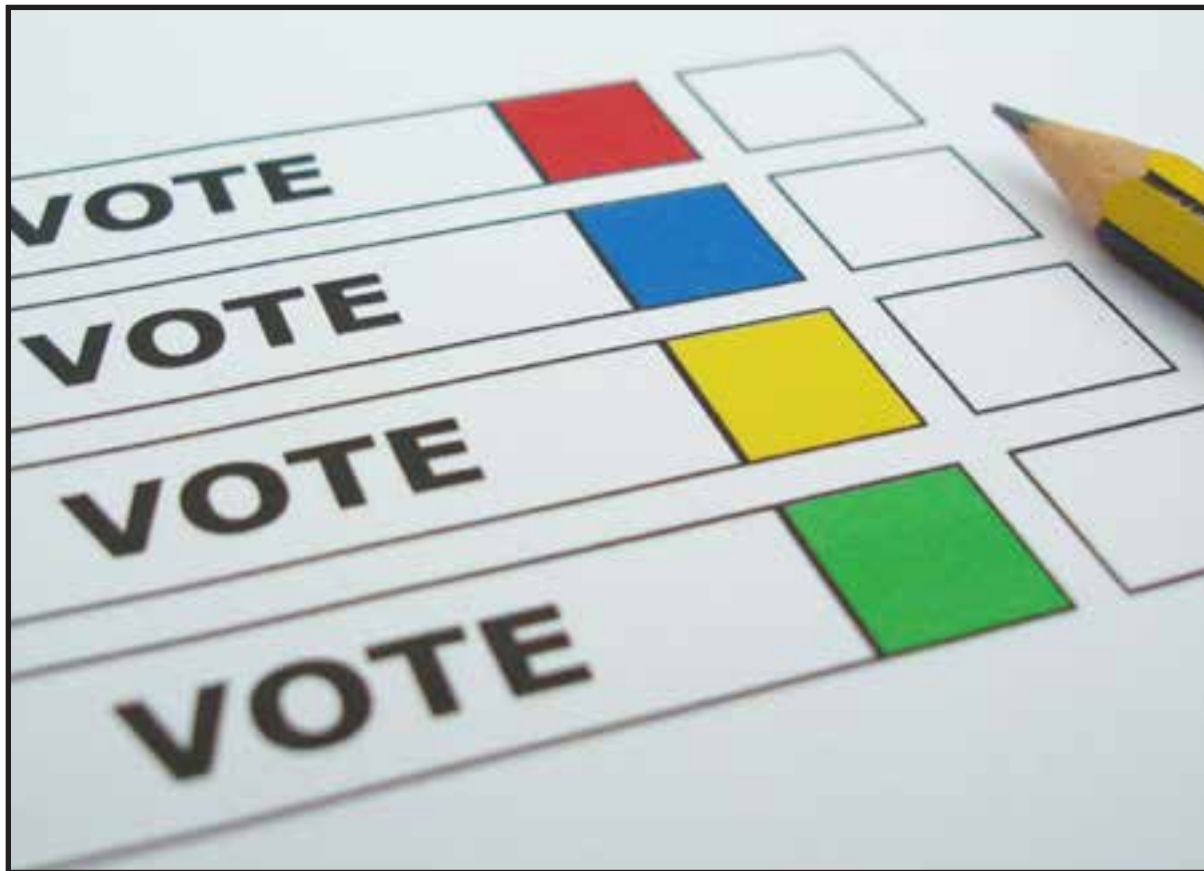
But the left is dominated by the bureaucratic model, in the trade unions as it is in social democratic parties, with its previous connection to the masses considerably reduced and the bourgeois media acting as a substitute.

So to what extent, comrade Macnair asked, does the LU break with the bureaucratic model? LU's founders, in rejecting the SWP model of internal organisation, believing it to be democratic centralism, have instead adopted the Labour Party model - leading to bureaucratic control and no real discussion. It was a 'rule of law' model rather than a democratic orientation.

LU's leadership - the likes of Kate Hudson, Andrew Burgin and Socialist Resistance - saw Labour's move to the right opening up a space that could be filled by a new left party "undelineated between reform and revolution", said comrade Macnair. They look to the example of 'new' parties in Europe that are not new at all: Die Linke was a rebranded ex-'official communist' party; the Parti de Gauche included the French Communist Party and an SP split; the Red-Green or Unity List (Denmark) came from the 'official' Eurocommunists in the 1980s; Left Bloc (Portugal) was a Trotskyist-Maoist lash-up; and Syriza had the Eurocommunist KKE (Interior) at its core. Votes from these 'new' formations had been declining measured against what communist parties achieved in the 1970s.

During the whole post-war period there had always been space to the left of social democracy. So LU was in danger of writing off older working class parties, even though they could not be changed in any major way.

The timing for LU's establishment was poor, concluded comrade Macnair: thanks to urban working



Little choice

class mobilisation, media-backed plans to drive Labour into third place in the 2010 general election failed. And, while Ed Miliband gestures to the right, he also gestures to the left on zero hours contracts. All this meant that under the Tory-led coalition LU is unlikely to gain purchase. It had no spinal core and lacked clarity; its individual leaders and participating groups had meagre forces. Meetings of LU's transitional national council have been chaotic, its officers' group is weak. Branch's tasks were unclear and chances of a successful 2015 election campaign poor.

Conference success

In discussion, Jack Conrad thought that more examination of LU's conference was required. It seemed that the left was determined to continue to make mistakes time and again, usually condemning the latest left experiment as 'too leftwing'. Redefining its own name, Socialist Resistance *resists socialism* as LU's most coherent rightwing element. We continually tried to raise left projects above sub-political levels. Glad to be labelled the "extreme left" of LU by Andrew Neale on *The Daily Politics*, we were the rational, real left and must strengthen and build the Communist Platform into an effective force.

In her contribution, Yassamine Mather reminded comrades that the CP democracy motion had failed at LU conference and others had not been debated at all. But LU was more incompetence than conspiracy - which on occasion had worked to our benefit. However, the LU national council was largely irrelevant, more of an advisory body. Prioritising political arguments, particularly in the branches, was the only way forward.

At conference the CP made a good impact, Sarah McDonald noted. The Communist Platform and Crouch End's motions on the European Union, passed at the LU policy conference, recognised the need for the working class to act on a European level. And she was surprised at the majority for our EU motion. Seeing how narrowly the motion on Scotland was defeated and looking

at SR's Scottish Socialist Party-style, naive sentimentality on the question, tackling SR in the branches should be easy.

Moshé Machover, a guest at the aggregate, saw Syriza's prestige behind the passing of the EU motion. At his LU branch, members were always looking for local campaigns to join, neglecting politics. We should not alienate potential allies in LU unnecessarily, aiming to emerge from LU stronger if it collapsed.

Peter Manson also thought the CP made a good impression at conference. Even CP motions that did not pass had achieved reasonably good minority votes and comrade Mather had been elected to the NC. But he warned against "going native" in LU. We had to put forward politics on all occasions, including on internal democracy. Paul Demarty wanted candidates for still-empty positions following LU conference to be asked difficult questions, but were hustings even being proposed?

Comrade Macnair concluded that LU lacked organisational confidence and questioned its ability to survive through good and bad times. To make a project such as LU live you had to work at it for a long time. So we in the CP must point out the real risks that others in LU were not prepared to look at. We had to focus on the limits of what was possible.

May 22 elections

In the second part of the aggregate, Peter Manson introduced a discussion on the forthcoming local and EU elections, remembering always that voting is a tactical question. Previously the default position of most of the left had been to vote Labour unless there was a working class alternative; now, it had the opposite view. Our position was to ask what would advance the cause of the working class.

Turning first to the local elections in England and Wales, comrade Manson advocated critical support to Labour candidates only if they were against austerity, opposing all cuts. He noted that several councillors had defected leftwards or been suspended by the Labour Party because of their refusal to vote for cuts and it was quite possible that a small minority of the 4,000

Labour candidates on May 22 would share their views. So we advocated giving votes to anti-cuts Labour candidates (if they did not get expelled in the interim), but there should be no blanket Labour vote.

Turning to the candidates to the left of Labour, comrade Manson said that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition had reversed its previous policy of insisting that groups or individuals contesting elections under its umbrella must have "social weight" (it previously excluded the CPGB on this basis) and this time had aimed for as many local election candidates as possible, partly to meet the BBC's 'fair coverage' criterion. It had managed to get 561 candidates. Even though Tusc's weak platform for the local elections only covered cuts and austerity, we should vote critically for its candidates. Those standing for other left groups, not least LU, should also be supported.

Moving on to the European elections, comrade Manson stated that 'No to the EU, Yes to Workers' Rights' was unsupportable: it was overtly nationalist and now called specifically for Britain to leave the European Union, regarding the free movement of labour as a plot by the EU to undercut wages. In the 2009 EU elections because of the specific circumstances we had called for a blanket vote for Labour, but he did not see any reason for repeating that recommendation in 2014. His personal view was that we should call for voters to spoil their ballots on May 22.

In the discussion, comrade Machover labelled the second part of No2EU's name - 'Yes to Workers' Rights' - a corrupt and dishonest slogan. It was, after all, precisely the UK that worked within the EU to prevent workers' rights being advanced. He identified three approaches: "sincere voting", for the candidate or party closest to you without betraying principles; "tactical voting" (eg, 'Keep the Tories out'); and "strategic voting" - looking beyond the present (eg, voting for candidates to the left of Labour in order to pull that party to the left).

For comrade Macnair, voting for Tusc and LU was part of our strategic aim of pushing the general shape of

politics leftwards. We should consider critically supporting some Labour candidates, even in the EU elections, on the basis of examining their politics. Stan Kelsey reported that the Labour Representation Committee was sticking to voting Labour as the only alternative to the coalition.

Another guest at the aggregate, Ian Donovan, agreed with the idea of supporting selected Labour candidates and those of Tusc - though he pointed out that in a small number of cases Tusc should be preferred over and above a Labour anti-cuts candidate: if such a candidate stood against Dave Nellist in Coventry, for example, we should back comrade Nellist, who might have a chance of being elected. He was also against voting for No2EU in the European poll, but queried the blanket support for Labour candidates last time. Comrade Demarty reminded comrades he had been in a minority opposing a Labour vote in 2009, but he too now wanted to examine which Labour candidates might be worth supporting.

Comrade Mather generally opposed a vote for Labour candidates - Ed Miliband's opposition to zero hours contracts was no move to the left, she said. And she saw no benefit in searching for unlikely candidates opposing cuts in the local elections. LU might scare Labour that it could not take its voters on the left for granted.

Comrade Conrad reiterated Labour Party Marxists' demand, presented to the LRC AGM, that those Labour candidates standing on workers' rights should be supported, for Labour remained a site of struggle. He proposed two motions to clarify our view of elections (see below), emphasising that we were trying to equip the working class with an organisation that could eventually take power. So what we said mattered. We had to break workers from merely choosing between two evils. Forming the working class into a Communist Party was the crucial question. But we recognised that Labour was still a bourgeois workers' party, so we should look at Labour candidates and question them locally. He refuted the idea that Tusc was qualitatively superior, as it was merely committed to a Labour Party mark two; it had boasted that the Rail Maritime and Transport union was able to veto its decisions.

In his reply comrade Manson agreed that, if it came down to a choice between a Dave Nellist and an anti-cuts Labour candidate, we should call for a vote for the former. But in general it was important to recognise the importance of the fight within Labour by supporting anti-cuts Labour candidates. He reiterated his opposition to supporting Labour across the board ●

Two resolutions

Immediately following the discussion of local and EU elections, the aggregate passed the following two resolutions *nem con*:

1. In the forthcoming local elections, this aggregate of CPGB members urges voters to:

(a) vote for Labour Party anti-cuts candidates;

(b) in their absence, vote Left Unity, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and other such candidates.

2. In the forthcoming EU elections, this aggregate of CPGB members urges voters to:

(a) seek out Labour Party candidates who are prepared to stand on a principled internationalist position on the EU, such as the Left Unity policy agreed at its March 29 conference;

(b) vote Socialist Party of Great Britain and Socialist Equality Party where they are standing.

ELECTIONS

Trying to vote internationalist

Peter Manson outlines how to approach the May 22 EU elections

At our April 27 aggregate of CPGB members, we agreed our policy towards the May 22 local and European Union elections. In relation to the council elections in England and Wales, the recommendations of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, outlined in my article last week¹, were endorsed. In other words, vote for any Labour anti-cuts candidates who have managed to get through the selection process and, in their absence, offer critical support to leftwing groups - primarily the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Left Unity.

When it came to the EU elections, however, the PCC had not yet made any recommendation, and so the aggregate decided to adopt a policy on the day. While this did not commit to voting for any of the Labour lists, it did invite comrades to check whether any of them may be supportable. If, for example, any of the lists has one or more candidates whose approach to the whole question of the EU is similar to the policy agreed at Left Unity's policy conference in March (see box), then we should consider voting for that list.

A full report of the discussion at our aggregate appears on the opposite page. However, let me explain our thinking here. Unlike many on the left - most notably the Socialist Party in England and Wales - we do not consider Labour to be just another bourgeois party. Thanks mainly to the union link, union funding and union votes, it remains a bourgeois workers' party - albeit one where the bourgeois pole is very much in the ascendancy.

This fact does not lead us to automatically vote Labour - it never has done. The attitude of communists to elections is a matter of tactics - and different tactics are necessarily applied according to the specific circumstances. For example, five years ago, in the 2009 Euro elections, we called for a Labour vote everywhere. That was the only time our CPGB has ever recommended such a blanket vote and we did so because of the particular conditions. Following the MPs' expenses scandal there had arisen what we termed a

kind of "anti-politics politics" - 'They're all the same, so why bother voting at all?'

But the main parties are *not* all the same - Labour remains different from the others in that it still expresses, in however restricted and perverted a form, the notion of *working class* representation. And, especially since there was no other supportable working class formation contesting in 2009, we were right to use the Euro elections to emphasise that point.

Vote Labour if ...

Of course, the conditions of 2009 no longer apply. But there is still a point to be made about Labour. *If* any of its candidates were to express a pro-working class, internationalist vision for a different Europe - one that stands in sharp contradistinction to the current EU of big capital and the banks - then we would be well advised to support such candidates in the current climate of Europhobic British nationalism.

We are well aware, obviously, that the EU elections are held under the party list system, where it is not possible to vote for some candidates

on a given list but not others. Nevertheless, *if* a Labour list contained even one supportable candidate, then voters, in our view, should consider voting for that list - the advantage of electing just one pro-working class internationalist might well outweigh the undesirability of voting at the same time for a bunch of pro-capitalist careerists. I keep stressing the word 'if' because I am not so foolish as to believe it a certainty that any such supportable candidate will have found themselves amongst the 73 Labour members contesting on May 22. We should not, however, dismiss that possibility outright. Nevertheless, I have taken a

quick look at the record and platform of the lead Labour candidate in each of the seven British regions and you will not be surprised to learn that none of them come anywhere near matching our criteria.

Whenever possible, Labour aims to select a sitting MEP to top its list and, as you might expect, these are very much part of its bureaucratic machine. So, for instance, Glenis Willnott, Labour's number one in the East Midlands, is leader of the European Parliamentary Labour Party, while Claude Moraes (London) is her deputy. Moraes is also spokesperson for the centre-left Socialists and Democrats group of MEPs, to which Labour is affiliated.

Derek Vaughan (Wales) is proud of his work on the EU parliamentary committee on budgets: "I'm pleased that I have been able

to ensure Wales receives more funding from the EU from 2014-20," he writes. In fact, thanks to his hard work, people in Wales have gained at the expense of those elsewhere: they will receive "£70 per person per year more from the EU than what they put in" over the next six years.²

Neena Gill (West Midlands) is another one who boasts of her participation on the EU committee on budgets in the years up to 2009. In that year she lost her seat, but, as the most senior and reliable bureaucrat amongst the candidates, this time she tops the Labour list and is sure to be re-elected.

Richard Howitt, top candidate in the East of England, has been a member of Labour's national policy forum since 1994, while Linda McAvan (Yorkshire and the Humber) was voted Britain's European Woman of the Year in 2002 for her "efforts to engage women in the future of Europe".³

Scotland's David Martin seems to be mainly concerned with animal welfare, but Anneliese Dodds (South East) believes that "our economy is international and European" and, as the south east is "reliant on exports to the EU", we must support membership of the EU as currently constituted, no matter what.⁴ Judith Kirton-Darling (North East) expresses similar sentiments: "Over 140,000 north-east jobs are dependent on EU trade. We have safer workplaces, equal pay and four weeks' paid holidays as a result of being in the EU."⁵

The South West is the only region with no sitting Labour MEP and here Clare Moody tops the list. This Unite official describes herself as a "Europhile" who is proud to be a "communicator and campaigner".⁶ Theresa Griffin (North West) is the only Labour number one with a vaguely left-of-centre approach. She too has a record as a union official and stresses how much she wants to "kick out" her namesake, Nick Griffin

of the British National Party, who is a sitting MEP in the region, of course. But there is nothing on her website to suggest that she would come near meeting our criteria for support.

Left candidates

As readers will know, the left group standing the most candidates in the Euro election is 'No to the EU, Yes to Workers' Rights'. Whereas in 2009 No2EU stood in all 11 regions, this time it could only manage seven. As I explained in a previous article,⁷ its British nationalism and opposition to the free movement of labour - which, if anything, are even more overt this time around - rules No2EU out even for critical support.

No2EU finally announced its candidates at the beginning of this week - several days after nominations closed on April 24. In three of the regions its lead candidate is a member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and they are: No2EU convenor and ultra-nationalist Brian Denny (East of England); CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths (Wales); and international secretary John Foster (Scotland). In another two regions the lead candidate is a member of Socialist Party in England and Wales: Dave Nellist (West Midlands) and Roger Bannister (North West). In addition, the Rail, Maritime and Transport union area president for Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, Trevor Howard, tops the No2EU list in Yorkshire and the Humber, while Edward Dempsey, who I must admit is unknown to me, heads the list of London candidates.

The aggregate of CPGB members agreed that No2EU offers no positive alternative to Labour - quite the opposite. And that also applies to what remains of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. In 2009 the SLP scabbled together a full slate of candidates in every region

SPEW and CPB: No2EU vomit

(admittedly thanks to SLP members managing to persuade their partners or other family members to join them as candidates). This time around, it is contesting only in Wales.

The following statements on its website demonstrates not only the abysmal ignorance of the SLP, but, more to the point, its attempt to dismiss No2EU as *insufficiently* nationalist: "... once again we see the emergence of temporary alliances on the so-called 'left', with their predominately single-issue politics and wishy-washy slogans, giving, at best, insipid opposition to Britain's role within the EU. This opportunistic, half-hearted opposition is clustering around groups such as Socialist Alliance [sic], Tusc and No2EU."

It goes on: "As a party we are against the uncontrolled movement of labour and capital ... The single-issue parties of the so-called 'left', on the other hand, are against any restrictions on movement of labour within the EU and, as we have seen, this is depressing British wages."⁸

The CPGB, therefore, recommends no vote for either No2EU or the SLP. Comrades in Wales should cast a critical vote for the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which is also contesting in the South East; while those in the North West should vote for the Socialist Equality Party, which is standing in only one region ●

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Notes

1. 'Vote Tusc, vote left', April 24.
2. www.derekvaughanmep.org.uk/uploads/ee289b60-3bf9-cc54-cdaa-c8caeb44b908.pdf.
3. www.lindamcavanmep.org.uk/about-linda.
4. www.anneliesedodds.org.uk/we_should_be_proud_of_the_south_east_s_international_economy.
5. www.labournorth.com/strong-committed-and-one-nation-labour-mep-candidates-for-the-no.
6. www.clare4mep.co.uk/why-i-support-clare.html.
7. 'Back into our shells?', April 10.
8. www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk/news.html.

Left Unity's resolution

The following resolution was passed at Left Unity's policy conference and represents a good reference point to judge candidates in the EU elections

Left Unity opposes all programmes and demands for a British withdrawal from the European Union. By the same measure we oppose the EU of commissioners, corruption and capital. However, as the political, bureaucratic and economic elite has created the reality of a confederal EU, the working class should take it, not the narrow limits of the nation-state, as its decisive point of departure.

The constituent national parts of the EU exhibit a definite commonality due to geography, culture, history, economics and politics. Put another way, the EU is not an empire kept together by force. Nor is it just a trading bloc. Far from capitalism pushing through what is objectively necessary - the unity of Europe - on the contrary capitalism has held back European unification.

For the working class that

necessitates organising at an EU level: campaigns, trade unions, cooperatives, for the levelling up of working conditions and wages across Europe to the best status quo currently in force, and the fight for extreme democracy.

Left Unity wants not a quasi-democratic, confederal EU, but a united Europe under the rule of the working class.

- Power to the European parliament. Replace the EU commission by an executive democratically responsible to the parliament. Abolish the Council of Ministers.
- For a democratically controlled European Central Bank.
- Towards indivisible European unity.
- For the free movement of people. Against all immigration controls

Naturally, to the degree the working class extends its power over the EU it will exercise attraction for the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Such a bloc would be able to face down all threats and quickly spread the flame of universal liberation ●



COPYRIGHT



Copyright laws are theft

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for the masses

Joseph Kessel calls for the works of the founding fathers of scientific socialism to become the ‘property’ of the workers’ movement as a whole, not the subject of bourgeois copyright laws

At one of the many demonstrations against the tripling of student fees that took place a few years ago, a picture was snapped of a young woman in front of the University of London Union bearing a home-made placard. It read: “Where’s Karl Marx when we need him most?” The point this comrade was making immediately hit home and accordingly the picture has done the rounds on various far-left websites and publications: in times of economic crisis and austerity, what better figure to turn to than the great theorist of capitalism’s inherent tendency to crisis and social dislocation?

In 2014, this slogan is pertinent in a very different context. Indeed, it may well be time for the student comrade to dust off her placard and for others to fashion similar ones. Why? Well, at a time when “we need them” (and their scientific method) most, it is looking increasingly likely that Marx’s and Engels’ English-language *Collected works* (*MECW*), 10 of the 50 volumes of which are usefully featured on the Marxist Internet Archive (www.marxists.org), will be removed from that site by the time this article hits the press. A travesty.

If you are some kind of lefty, an academic or even a humanities student hunting an Antonio Gramsci quote on cultural hegemony in the early hours of the morning, then you will have most definitely used the MIA at some point.

The MIA’s monthly hits, I am told, are counted in the tens of *millions*. Based entirely on the selfless voluntary work of a small, yet gradually expanding, body of transcribers, coders, translators and archivists, the MIA includes material in more or less every language you can think of from a wide range of Marxist thinkers and activists with varying backgrounds: thus there is a Paul Lafargue archive, a Tony Cliff archive and a Joseph Stalin archive. Thanks to the MIA, a simple Google search places many of the works of such people at the disposal of millions across the world. A real service to our movement.

Logic

In its relatively short history, the MIA has not exactly been devoid of problems and challenges to its work. In rather more gung-ho attempts to remove the ideas of Marx, Engels and others from the public domain, the MIA website has been subject to a number of ‘spike’ attacks with the aim of bringing down its entire archive. I have heard that some of these attacks have been linked to a certain East-Asian state, whose ruling party still has the temerity to call itself ‘communist’ ...

This latest controversy potentially sticks in the throat somewhat more, however. For here we are not dealing with a ruling group of Stalino-capitalists, but a self-proclaimed “radical” and “independent” publisher, Lawrence and Wishart, using the utter sham of capitalist copyright laws (or,

as they are more pretentiously known, ‘intellectual property rights’) to issue an ultimatum to MIA: if the material from the first 10 volumes is not removed by the end of April, then the MIA will receive a letter from those faithful custodians of the working class movement: lawyers attempting to make a lot of cash from the legacy of Marx and Engels.

If only because of this story’s deeply ironic twist, it is gaining some international coverage beyond the forces of the left. Good. The *New York Times* is apparently going to feature an article on May 1 and even some in the ‘techie’ world have chipped in to point out the certain spuriousness when ‘leftwingers’ drown out Marx and Engels in the name of copyright.¹ In a purported attempt to keep its enterprise financially viable, L&W has placed bourgeois property rights above the works of two men whose lives embodied the struggle to overcome such rights.

Those with first-hand experience of the politics of L&W may not be so surprised at its latest turn. Founded during the popular front era of the Communist International in 1936 as a merger between Martin Lawrence, the Communist Party of Great Britain’s press, and the liberal anti-fascist Wishart Ltd, L&W has always been closely tied to the fate of the ‘official communist’ movement as a whole: ie, slow and painful death by “a thousand opportunist cuts”, as

the *Weekly Worker*’s forerunner, *The Leninist*, aptly put it. As such the publisher’s history embodies some of that movement’s strengths (for this author, at least, publishing much of the flawed yet nonetheless outstanding output of the CPGB Historians Group) and nearly all of its weaknesses.

So it is that by the 1970s L&W was a key player in the rise of Eurocommunism and its factional struggle to dominate and thoroughly ‘bourgeoisify’ the forlorn CPGB. (In one of L&W’s statements on the Marx-Engels copyright furore, it talks of its origins in the “communist/Eurocommunist tradition”: an oxymoron if ever there was one.) In the 1980s this tendency then came to embrace “the cultural turn” in politics and increasingly distanced itself from Marxism and (purportedly ‘outdated’) parties informed by such perspectives. As is well known, following the collapse of the official CPGB, some figures from this grouping ended up as Blairite toadies. L&W has not (yet) gone that far: to its credit it was involved - amongst several other projects - in the sterling work of collating, translating, annotating, introducing and publishing the 50-volume *MECW* in collaboration with the former Soviet Union’s Progress Publishers and the New-York based International Publishers, an undertaking that lasted no less than 30 years, from 1975 through to 2005.

It was in 2005 that this story has its beginnings with both parties

arriving at an informal agreement that the *MECW* could be featured on the MIA site as long as links to the published material were maintained throughout. After all, given the three-way cooperation on the project (and the fact that Progress Publishers went the same way as the Soviet Union), it could even be argued that L&W claims to copyright were not exactly cut and dried in the first place.

So what has changed since 2005? Well, there is an obvious sense in which decisions on the L&W board are being shaped by circumstances outside it. After all, from the standpoint of many in and around L&W, if Marxism is now really little more than a chapter of *history* - what exactly is the problem with attempting to keep one’s head above water from the copyright on such classical writings by working on a ‘digital edition’ of the *MECW* aimed primarily at library subscriptions, rather than make them freely available online?

Of course, L&W can certainly be taken at its word when it claims that the outfit is run “on a shoestring”. The enormous technological changes of the past, combined with the downturn in working class politics more generally, have conspired to make life very tough for print outfits. Even much larger, thoroughly capitalist companies rely on revenue from copyright and advertising. For all their differences, there is a sense in which L&W and indeed all radical publishers are coming to resemble the MIA: that is to say, they are mainly based on volunteer/

underpaid/overworked labour.

The workers' movement is currently suffering from a shortage of even the most basic means of self-defence and organisation, let alone educational associations, extensive libraries, study groups, publishing enterprises, etc: something that even the increasingly emaciated 'official communist' parties were able to provide on some level in the past. Around 30 years ago the very people associated with the "Eurocommunist tradition" were assuring us that communist parties, and Marxism as the political economy of the working class, had to be junked in favour of manifold fads and non-working class dead-ends (identity politics, ecologism and suchlike). So perhaps, decades on, threatening to deploy the bourgeois state's courts and judges against the online presence of the *MECW* under the pretext of intellectual property rights is merely the culmination of a longer-term process.

Politics has its own logic. Yes, at present this is, as comrade David Walters of MIA reminds us, 'merely' a matter of deleting 1,662 files from the Marx/Engels archive - "a small percentage" of the *MECW* and an even smaller percentage of MIA as a whole. Yet, given that copyrighted material from outfits like International Publishers and L&W also covers at least sections of the writings of VI Lenin and others, this decision sets a dangerous precedent for other aspects of our class's past. In light of the L&W move, how will International Publishers (or other publishers) react regarding the material over which they hold copyright? L&W itself has history on this very matter, intervening to ensure that certain translations of Antonio Gramsci's writings were removed from the MIA.²

Campaign of abuse

The online exchange between MIA and L&W sparked by the latter's ultimatum has been notable for two main things: the evasive responses of L&W and the *restraint* on the part of MIA. It can be assumed that with the Damoclesian sword of prospective legal battles and financial costs looming over them, the MIA comrades have merely emphasised the facts of the case and avoided polemic (given that the *very livelihoods* of some of these hard-working activist comrades and their families are under threat here, this is in part understandable).

Yet others on the left have reacted strongly and L&W has been forced onto the defensive. The nature of its responses on the matter bears the typical slipperiness of the soft left. L&W talks of a "campaign of abuse" (what about the "abuse" of the legacy of Marx and Engels?) directed against it merely for demanding that "copyright be respected". Someone pass me a bucket. Predictably, desperately, L&W urges its growing number of detractors to concentrate their fire on the large capitalist enterprises that make a killing from copyright enforcement and so on. Yet this misses the obvious elephant in the room: any self-proclaimed "radical" should oppose intellectual property rights as a basic principle, not try to mimic on a small scale the crass anti-democratic (and therefore anti-working class) restrictions on free information enforced by capitalist enterprises.

Speaking to the US *Chronicle of Higher Education*, MIA stalwart Andy Blunden rightly expressed his fears about the ramifications that such a narrow-minded fielding of bourgeois property rights may have for "the ordinary Joe": that is to say, somebody without access to a well-stocked university or library and not being in a position to easily access the work of Marx and Engels above and beyond classics such as *Capital*, *The communist manifesto* and so on (these have been issued in different translations by various publishers, and

as such can continue to be featured on MIA.) While on occasion the *MECW* can be bought for much less second-hand, the individual volumes can retail for as much as £50. Not easy to come by, not easy to store and not easy to search through. The MIA is the ideal home for *all* of these volumes and can only serve to strengthen and deepen current Marxist writing and research.

Even from the point of view of what the American Marxist, Scott McClellan, deems a "purely capitalist enterprise"³ (which L&W is obviously not, as things currently stand), this decision is still breathtakingly counterproductive. At the time of writing, 4,746 activists have already signed an online petition: 'No copyright for Marx-Engels *Collected works*'. So should you.⁴ Many of the signatories will be the very writers, journalists, peer reviewers, translators on which any "radical publisher" depends, many of whom will perform such work *gratis* or for very little out of a commitment to 'the cause'. You can imagine a possible future scenario where one such figure is asked to review a piece for one of the journals published by L&W: 'Who publishes it?' 'Oh, you mean the people who forced the *MECW* off the web, right? No thanks.'

If L&W's doubtless overworked and underpaid personnel wish to strengthen L&W's finances, then maybe conspiring to establish their organisation's reputation as a *scab outfit* which threatens activists in the workers' movement with the courts might not be exactly the most prudent way of going about things. L&W thinks that it would commit "institutional suicide" by allowing the *MECW* to remain freely available online, but its actions smack precisely of self-destruction. The only likely immediate result of its decision is that the disputed material will continue to exist in various forms on the web (is L&W so naive as to think this stuff will not be available on various mirrors/torrents almost *overnight*?) and L&W's name will rightly be dragged through the mud - the millions logging onto the front page of MIA every month will be repeatedly reminded of its shenanigans.

Moreover, there is evidence that having free material online can at least help to offset the undeniable tendency towards the decline in sales and revenue that the web is indisputably bringing its wake. After all, MIA has proved itself to be more than reasonable when it comes to *referencing* the sources of the material it uses,⁵ whether it be a newspaper like the *Weekly Worker* or a leftwing publishing house: this allows those who are willing/able to actually go and purchase an original copy of the relevant publication. Surely this would be a possible solution and preferable to completely alienating your potential readership?

L&W is at pains to stress that the works will remain in the public domain and paid for by public money. But these are mere weasel words. Copyright laws hit each and every one of us on an almost daily basis and restrict access to the world's intellectual and cultural heritage. Such laws are precisely aimed at undermining any notion of knowledge as a 'public' good. As MIA correctly states in its response to L&W, "It is not public access. This is the opposite of the general trend toward making things available for free on the internet." Moreover, not only is L&W not content with demanding that the first 10 volumes be removed - it is also insisting that even the MIA's painstakingly-compiled index of the entire *MECW* be removed from the web. This index is of infinite value - even to those consulting the many volumes of *MECW* in a library.

Defend MIA

Of MIA, comrade Blunden says: "It's down to our readers really to defend us". And defend it we must: not that

people will need the *Weekly Worker* to tell them that. Social media has been abuzz with lefties expressing their justified outrage at the move (one potentially positive upshot of all this is that MIA is getting a lot more publicity and support). It is indeed incumbent upon the left to kick up a fuss on this question and create an imaginative and vibrant campaign in support of MIA and against 'intellectual property rights' as a whole.

Communists - genuine communists - are unequivocal on this matter. Contra the Marx biographer, professor Jonathan Sperber, this stand-off does not represent a Hegelian "tragedy": ie, a "conflict over two rights",⁶ where both MIA and L&W have equally legitimate claims. As consistent democrats, communists have no truck with copyright laws or (so-called) intellectual property rights, whether these pertain to the greats of our own movement or Adolf Hitler, whether they are deployed by small publishers or large.

The revolutionary spirit of the works of Marx and Engels must remain at the centre of an international workers' movement that is programmatically adrift and in serious disarray. In an increasingly Anglophone world, having not just the first 10 volumes of the *MECW*, but the whole project, online in English means that a student in Nigeria, a pensioner in New York or a garment worker in Delhi can easily access the ideas of Marx and Engels. Communists aim to forge a movement which thinks on its feet and which enjoys a deeply political culture and historical understanding: socialism and the self-liberation of the class demand nothing less. That is why the open and free exchange of information trumps other considerations.

Copyright is not part of the 'answer'. We should be looking to develop our *own* activity, organisation and publishing muscle, not 'playing the game' of the market or the capitalist state - something negatively borne out by the whole sorry history of Eurocommunism itself, of course. When looking to the future of our class, what we have in mind are enterprises more along the lines of MIA than L&W.

It is hugely ironic and utterly deplorable that the *MECW* collection - something that the Change.org petition correctly deems "an essential part of the shared knowledge and resources of the international workers' movement" - will be removed from MIA on May Day: International Workers' Day, 2014 ●

Notes

1. 'Capitalism fells communism in Marx-Engels copyright flap': <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2014/04/capitalism-fells-communism-in-marx-engels-copyright-flap>. I am sure that our friends in the world of technology will be more than *au fait* with how to get hold of the erased works online - not that this paper would encourage them to do so, of course. Regarding the MIA, this is actually not the first case of a so-called 'radical publisher' heinously pocketing copyright revenue from the works of great Marxist thinkers: the American Socialist Workers Party (not to be confused with its namesake on these shores) would surely find it nigh on impossible to exist were it not for the copyright from none other than Leon Trotsky's texts, which it proprietorially prevents from being reproduced on the MIA.
2. See the introductory note on the page devoted to Antonio Gramsci: www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/index.htm.
3. <http://socialistworker.org/2014/04/28/taking-marx-away>.
4. You can sign up to the petition here: www.change.org/petitions/lawrence-wishart-no-copy-right-for-marx-engels-collected-works. The site also usefully features the exchange between L&W and the MIA, an overview of articles that have been written on the issue and explanations from the signatories on why this issue is so important.
5. Until recent developments, at least, *MECW* documents on the MIA site had links to the various places that the material can be bought as a hard copy, but also the 'Intelix' digitalised version of the MIA. This CD will set you back a cool one thousand dollars.
6. A quote suitably modified by Marx in chapter 10 of *Capital* Vol 1: "Between equal rights, force decides". Many thanks to the MIA for quickly providing this reference to a writer in a slight hurry to submit an article (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-cl/index.htm).

Safe spaces cotton wool



Felicity Dowling: the more she writes, the worse it gets

Sheffield Left Unity now starts every branch meeting with a political opening. At its last gathering, we had a useful discussion on the proposed 'safe spaces document'. Despite the quite varied political viewpoints of members present, everybody agreed with the assessment that this document might come from a well-meaning place, but that its execution is a shambles: the draft is overly long, overly complex and overly bureaucratic.

In my introduction on the subject, I expressed the view that this document is an attempt to deal with the fallout from the crisis in the Socialist Workers Party, but that the author, Felicity Dowling, and her supporters have unfortunately learnt completely the wrong lessons from it. Instead of recognising that one of the main reasons for the severity of the crisis is the SWP's lack of transparency, democracy and the gagging of the membership, comrade Dowling's proposals would actually lead to a curtailing of democracy and an increase in bureaucracy in Left Unity.

I pointed to some of the rather daft and patronising stipulations in the document: for instance, "it will be clarified at the start of each debate what hand signals will be used to indicate you want to speak" (p6); and "Tolerance of other habits and norms will be expected - for example, the youth and elders might make more noise" (p6). Every branch of 20 members is supposed to set up a "safe space committee".

There are also plenty of examples of the proposed curtailing of debate: "Venom," we read, "should be reserved as far as possible for those who would

destroy our organisation and our political actions" (p7); Referring to online discussions, "sexist, racist, oppressive comments or comments otherwise inappropriate within the remit of the safe spaces policy may be deleted or edited, when necessary" (p10); "If a member of an oppressed group requests that you change your use of language, be respectful and change your use of language" (p7).

This not only divides us up into different groups of "oppressed": it risks creating a hierarchy of oppression. The question, as always, is: who decides? Who has the final say on what is "venom"? Like most other such policies, this document would not empower rank and file members, but those running branches, appeals committees, the national organisation - in short, the bureaucracy. They are also an ideal instrument for witch-hunts against 'troublemakers'.

Comrades in Sheffield agreed that safe spaces as a concept ignores material reality. The world is a tough place. If we wrap ourselves up in cotton wool, if we are more prissy about PC language than the surrounding society, we leave our comrades less able to engage with the general cut and thrust of political argument in the workplace and the media. We end up infantilising ourselves, rather than preparing ourselves to take on the bourgeoisie.

After the debate, the acting chair (a former Labour Party member) suggested that we write a letter to the Left Unity national council, requesting that the document be replaced with a much shorter code of conduct. This was unanimously agreed ●

Tina Becker

IRAN

Political legacy of hostage crisis

The 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran had nothing to do with ‘anti-imperialism’, argues **Yassamine Mather**

As Iran’s negotiations with the 5+1 powers approach their final stage, two claims by the conservative factions of the Islamic regime have added to the controversy surrounding them, both inside and outside Iran. These are, firstly, that the country has yet to see any return from Iranian funds released in the last five months in the United States; and, secondly, that the limited relief in sanctions, promised as part of the interim deal, has not materialised.

The deal, signed in November 2013, stipulated that in exchange for Iran’s compliance with imperialist demands to cut back on its nuclear programme the US would release \$4 billion of the country’s \$100 billion assets currently frozen in the US, and some sanctions would be lifted.

According to the UN’s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran has diluted half of its higher-grade enriched uranium stockpile and limited its enrichment of uranium to no more than the “low levels” (maybe 5%) agreed in November 2013. The interim deal ends on July 20 and, unless the two sides can reach a final, long-term agreement that would allow a gradual lifting of all nuclear-related financial penalties and sanctions, more of the same will be imposed and the Iranian economy will face further difficulties. All this will inevitably entail a political fallout, jeopardising the future of Iranian president Hassan Rowhani and his government.

In Iran, Hossein Naghabi, an influential member of the national security and foreign commission of the majles (Iran’s parliament), claimed that so far Iran “has not managed to get one dollar” from funds unfrozen by the Obama administration. In April the fifth instalment was released - the first payment, representing \$550 million in unfrozen oil revenue, was transferred from a Japanese

bank to the Banque de Commerce et de Placements in Switzerland on February 3, but apparently this has not been transferred to Iran.

Some banking officials have blamed Iran’s slowness in setting up payment instructions for this, while others claim Iran must clarify how the funds will be used before they are released. The truth is probably more straightforward. Most western banks are reluctant to release any funds to Iran, fearing penalties imposed by the US administration. In addition US banks avoid any direct transactions with Iran, as there are a number of legal rulings whose effect is to block the transfer of funds to Iran’s central bank.

On April 6, the *Wall Street Journal* concluded: “The reason Iran is having difficulty tapping the unfrozen revenue is that banks remain fearful they could violate tight US financial sanctions, especially while the outcome of talks on a final nuclear deal remains uncertain. If financial institutions flout sanctions, they could be shut out of the US banking system, which clears dollar transactions, or face huge fines.”

One reason why Iran’s unfrozen funds have to travel via European banks are the various litigations against Iran preventing the direct transfer of funds from the US. In 2007, for instance, a US district judge ordered Iran to pay more than \$2.6 billion to relatives of 241 soldiers killed in the 1983 bombing of the barracks in Beirut.

Some European banks have already paid the penalty for financial transactions with Iran in 2014: for example, Clearstream, a Deutsche Boerse AG (DB1) unit based in Luxembourg, agreed in January to pay \$152 million in settlement of civil claims that it violated sanctions. The US is now seeking “property owned by, or held for the benefit

of, the Islamic Republic of Iran or any of its instrumentalities, including but not limited to Bank Markazi, by Clearstream Banking SA or any of its subsidiaries,” according to a March 27 federal grand jury subpoena filed by prosecutors in New York.

This is all related to the lingering saga of US embassy staff taken hostage in Tehran in 1979 and later Hezbollah’s bombing of a US naval base in Lebanon, as well as hostages taken

by Hezbollah in early 1980s.

Hostage crisis

In November 1979, a group of Islamist students took over the US embassy compound in Tehran, allegedly protesting because the erstwhile shah was receiving medical treatment in America. Contrary to what sections of the Iranian left and most of the international left have claimed, this takeover and the subsequent hostage crises in Lebanon had little to do with anti-imperialism. As far as Iran’s new rulers were concerned, taking western hostages was part of a plan to divert attention from rising workers’ protests, to consolidate the power of the new religious state and divert attention from its growing repressiveness.

The hostages were released after a secret deal between the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, and Iran’s Islamic clerics, helping Reagan defeat the incumbent Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, in 1980. This deal paved the way for another secret Iran-US agreement, known as Irangate, when US hostages taken by the pro-Iran Hezbollah in Lebanon were released as part of an elaborate deal. This was the ‘Iran contra affair’, where hostages were exchanged for Israeli weapons, to help Iran fight its ‘anti-western’ war against Iraq. Iran paid for these weapons by depositing funds into Swiss accounts belonging to the Nicaraguan anti-Sandinista ‘contras’, as well as by shipping oil to Israel.

According to the Jaffe Institute for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, Israel’s arms sales to Iran during this period totalled \$500 million,¹ and *Time* magazine reported that throughout 1981 and 1982 “the Israelis reportedly set up Swiss bank accounts to handle the financial end of the deals”.² In addition to Israeli arms, according to the report of the US Congressional committee investigating the Iran-contra affair of November 1987, “the sale of US arms to Iran through Israel began in the summer of 1985, after receiving the approval of president Reagan”.³

Senior Iranian clerics and state officials were directly involved. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is believed to have given his personal approval, while ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani and his immediate family were part of the intricate negotiations with the Reagan administration’s representatives, Oliver North and Robert Macfarlane.

At the end of the day, Iran’s clerics were completely discredited - they were said to be ‘fighting imperialism’, yet they struck a deal that benefited the US, Israel and the Nicaraguan contras! US support for Israel and the Maronites in Lebanon remained unaffected, but the Iranian people are still paying for the foolish gestures of their leaders - the resulting legal cases are affecting Iran’s financial deals and political relations more than three decades after the event.

And since early March Iran has been at odds with the Obama administration over the appointment of Hamid Aboutalebi as its United Nations envoy. The US press has been full of reports linking him to the student militants who overran that Tehran embassy in 1979, and the administration promptly denied him a visa to enter the US, meaning he cannot gain access to the UN headquarters in

New York. According to the 1947 agreement, the US is generally expected to grant visas to all officials sent to New York to represent their state. However, clearly UN-US agreements are open to ‘interpretation’ by the world’s hegemonic power.

Iran’s foreign ministry and Aboutalebi himself have denied he was among the hostage-takers, claiming that he merely acted as a translator for them on two occasions. Ironically, however, many of the ‘radical’ students involved in the 1979 embassy incident are currently associated with the ‘reformist’ factions of the regime and the inner circles of president Rowhani. One or two can be found among bourgeois liberal critiques of the regime who are currently in exile. For his part, Aboutalebi is a political adviser to Rowhani, and has previously held ambassadorial posts in Rome, Brussels and Canberra.

However, in the US the issue of the visa has proved once again the durability of the events of 1979-80 in the US psyche. An editorial in *The Washington Times* sums it up: “Americans of a certain age will not forget their bitter anger at watching 52 countrymen paraded, bound and blindfolded, through the streets of Tehran, nor the endless anxiety felt while the American diplomats were held prisoner for 444 days” (April 7).

Last month Republican Doug Lambart sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives calling for a ban on visas to UN diplomats who have conducted “terrorist activities”. He declared that Americans’ “conscience” could not allow Aboutalebi to enter the US. And Obama signed into law a measure that would bar entry to any UN ambassador whom the US says has engaged in “terrorist activity”. The US president said: “I share the Congress’s concern that individuals who have engaged in such activity may use the cover of diplomacy to gain access to our nation.”

Of course, Irangate has recently been highlighted again, as a film produced and distributed by a cultural appendage of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Shafaq Media, entitled *I am Rowhani*, claims the current Iranian president played a crucial role in the Irangate scandal, allegedly meeting North and MacFarlane, and has remained an advocate of negotiations with the United States since that time.

These two events - the failure of Iran to have its assets returned following the interim nuclear deal, and its inability to appoint a UN envoy of its choice - are reminders of the legacy of acts wrongly dubbed ‘anti-imperialist’. A description contradicted by shameless secret deals, as in the case of Irangate, or in complete surrender, as in the U-turn regarding its nuclear programme. Many on the international left have acted as cheerleaders for this type of Islamic anti-western adventurism, but the reality is that such acts have nothing to do with fighting imperialism.

Internal challenges

Last year, during the presidential election campaign, Rowhani promised an improvement in Iran’s economic situation as a consequence of the new ‘moderation in foreign policy’ (one of his election slogans). So far, however, Iranians have seen little benefit from the political events of the last few months. According to government statistics, the rate of inflation has fallen from 40% to 35%, but wages have only gone up by a fraction of this and everyone’s purchasing power

is considerably reduced. The fall in the rate of inflation has mainly been achieved by raising interest rates and stabilising the foreign exchange rate following the nose-dive taken by the rial in 2012.

Many subsidies, including for petrol, have been removed. In late April the price of petrol rose by 42% and no doubt this will lead to further price rises. The ending of subsidies, a process initiated by the previous president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is causing anger at a time of economic hardship. Rowhani’s ministers have blamed corruption and mismanagement during Ahmadinejad’s presidency for the country’s dismal economic situation. However, almost a year after this government came to office, no-one believes the situation is solely due to the mistakes of the previous administration.

The issue of unpaid wages remains a major problem and on May 1 Iranian workers plan to participate in numerous illegal demonstrations and gatherings up and down the country to protest not only about the systematic non-payment of wages, but about low pay and the state’s support for the capitalists and their suppression of workers’ rights.

An increasingly unpopular government is resorting to the kind of repression Iranians have periodically experienced. Last week political prisoners were attacked in Evin prison and subjected to beatings and humiliating treatment - many suffered severe injuries. Relatives who were able to visit later have reported that some prisoners could hardly speak and others had obvious bruises. In a letter smuggled out of Evin, political prisoner Emad Bahavar wrote: “They made us stand in a row facing the wall in ward 350’s corridors while being handcuffed and blindfolded. They started to beat us up from behind. You could hear a whining noise. Outside the ward’s gate, the guards stood like a tunnel and forced us to go through it before taking us onto a minibus. You could see blood on the way and inside the minibus.”⁴

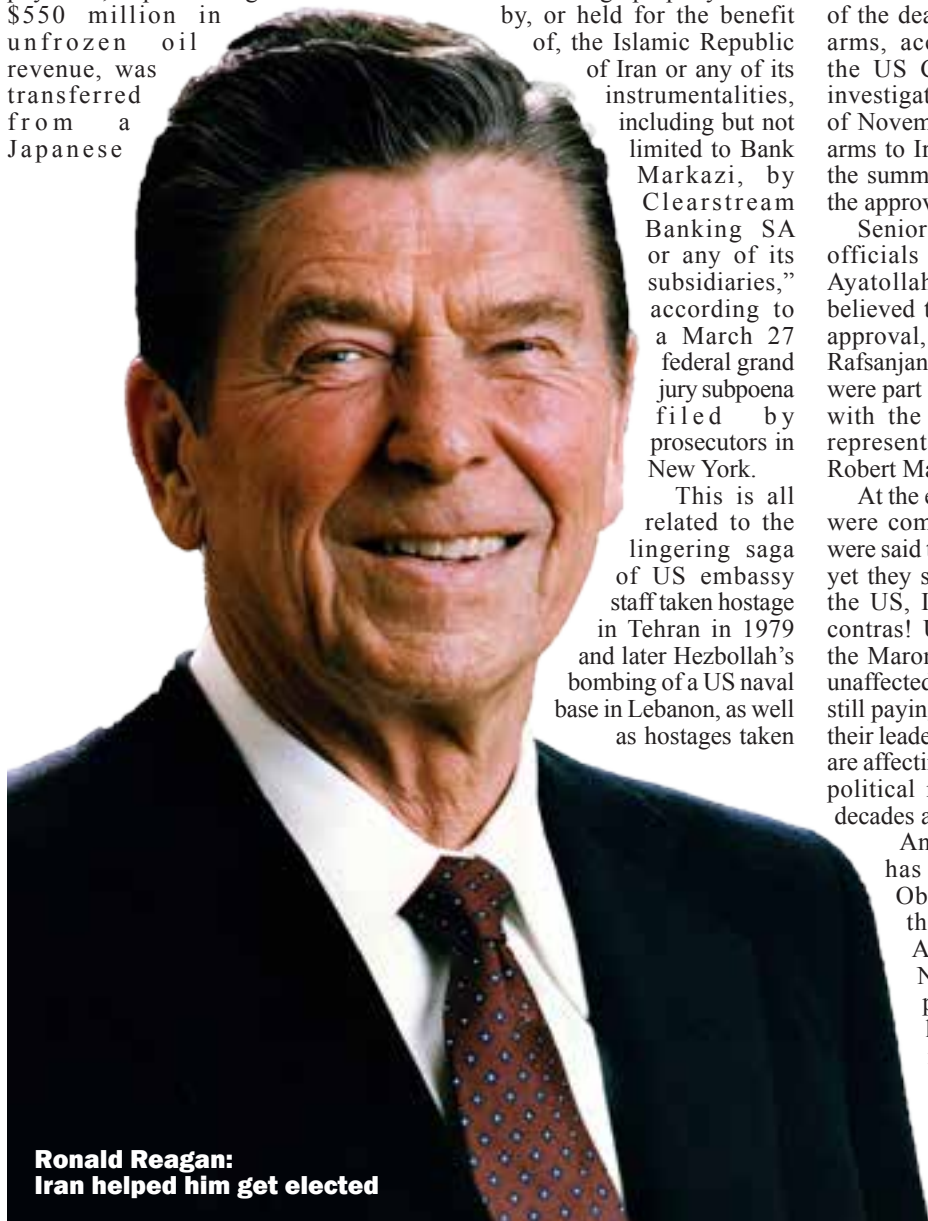
Some Rowhani supporters have claimed this incident resulted from a plot by conservative elements in the security services to embarrass the ‘reformist’ government. The reality is that, even if this is true, the government’s response was contradictory and too little, too late. The head of Iran’s prison services, Gholam-Hossein Esmaili, appeared at a press conference to deny the attacks - he blamed the BBC and Voice of America for exaggerating what had been a routine search of prisoners. Yet by the end of the week he was dismissed from his post. Government claims that his new position as a local prosecutor was a promotion did not wash with either the internal or external media.

Rowhani has never made any promises regarding ‘human rights’. However, he said he needed six months to strike a deal regarding Iran’s nuclear facilities and to turn round the economy. Judging by events of the last few weeks, it is doubtful he will achieve much before the first anniversary of the presidential elections that brought him to power in June 2013 ●

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Notes

1. J Marshall, P Dale Scott and J Hunter *The Iran contra connection: secret teams and covert operations in the Reagan era* Boston 1987, p169.
2. *Time* December 8 1986.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran-Israel_relation
4. *The Guardian* April 22.



Ronald Reagan:
Iran helped him get elected

ARMENIA

Ottoman genocide remembered

Last week saw the 99th anniversary of the first detentions which led to the *Meds Yeghern* slaughter. Esen Uslu explains how a 'Turkish' state was created out of the Ottoman empire

On April 24 1915, the creaking state machinery of the Ottoman empire was set in motion to round up and detain 250 prominent Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul. It was the signal for the start of what is known in Armenian as the *Meds Yeghern* (Great Calamity).

The slaughter sparked by those arrests was actually just one of many atrocities committed against the Armenian population of the Ottoman empire, perpetrated under the approving gaze of the state. However, what was unprecedented about these particular events was that they were based on a high degree of planning and organisation following a quarter of a century of 'theoretical' preparation. Mass detentions and the ransacking of Armenian property were the prelude to the forced expulsion of the Armenian population from where they had lived for centuries, and it was accompanied by mass killings before and during the vicious 'death marches'.

Every year on April 24 Armenians around the world commemorate the victims of the genocide, and 2014 is no exception. Yet Turkey refuses to accept that any such atrocities were even committed, and its co-conspirators in the west seem happy to provide the necessary fig leaves to cover up this denial. This year, prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a statement through the government's website, catching many people by surprise. The statement has the usual denials of genocide, and refuses to accept the responsibility of the Turkish state, but also makes some liberal noises about shared grief, directed at international public opinion. I expect there will be more words of sympathy over the coming months.

Decline

The 19th century was a century of national uprisings and defeat after defeat for the Ottoman empire - especially at the hands of the armies of the Russian empire. Lost territories frequently meant the expulsion of populations, and, following the occupation of Crimea in 1783, thousands of Muslims in the Balkan countries and the territories on the northern shores of the Black Sea and Caucasus migrated to Istanbul and Anatolia.

In the first half of the century Greece had been lost and the Russian empire had reached the present-day north-eastern borders of Turkey. Further losses of territories in the Balkans and the Arab lands seemed unstoppable. Wave after wave of Balkan Muslims, Crimean Tatars and Caucasian peoples were forced to migrate, continually altering the population distribution of the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman administration deliberately settled them in areas where large sections of the population were non-Muslim.

In the late 1820s the Armenian population of the eastern borders of the Ottoman empire, having been pushed out by the Ottomans and pulled in by the Russians, emigrated *en masse*. In the second half of the century a massive migration of Caucasian peoples took place. In an agreement signed in 1860, Russia agreed to allow Caucasian Muslims to emigrate to Ottoman lands, provided they did not settle near the border regions. It is often said that the Russo-Ottoman wars of the century were also 'population wars'. As a result of the emigration of non-Muslims and immigration of Muslims, the proportion of Muslims in the Ottoman empire rose from 60% in 1820 to 76% in 1890, according to



Turkish state: founded on blood and murder

official figures.

However, the population movements of the 19th century were just the prelude. The changing mix was accompanied by the compulsory settlement of nomadic tribes - some Turkmens, but mainly Kurdish. Consequently the population in some parts of the core of the Ottoman empire was of a variegated type that had not been seen before - and there was no 'melting pot' to assimilate them.

Response

What was to become the mainstay of Turkish nationalism in the early 20th century was the Committee of Union and Progress. CUP could be traced back to the Ottoman Unity Association, established mainly by young professional soldiers in 1889 on the foundations laid by liberal intellectuals known as the 'Young Turks' in the mid-19th century. But CUP quickly became notorious for its rabid nationalism and ruthless methods.

However, the ideological groundwork for Turkish nationalism can also be traced to a different source. In 1883, during the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, a German Junker, Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, was appointed to oversee the officers' school of the Ottoman army, following a request from the government. His remit was to make the Ottoman military a force capable of resisting the Russians and he remained in that post for 15 years. Eventually he was given the title of general and was known in the Ottoman army as 'Goltz Pasha'.

By the time he had returned to Germany, almost one third of the officer corps of the Ottoman army had been trained under a Germanised military education system. And Goltz Pasha continued to exert an influence over the young officers of the Ottoman army through the books he published in Germany. Eventually he was made a field marshal and actually died while commanding Ottoman troops resisting British advances in Iraq.

While Goltz modernised the curriculum of the cadet school, he also published articles about the political future of the Ottomans. One of his articles - written in 1897, translated into Turkish and published in Cairo - was 'Strengths and weaknesses of the grand state' (ie, the Ottoman empire). The article advocated a more compact and powerful state machine to replace the existing cumbersome formation.

Referring to the plight of the new

immigrant population, the article advised more 'efficient' measures to be adopted in relation to the settlement of migrants, including compulsory military service for the male youth of Caucasian immigrants. Goltz directed attention to the desirability of further conquests in the periphery of a compact Ottoman state: upper Albania, the Druze Mountains, the Dersim and Hakkari regions of Kurdistan, and the environs of Mosul, Kirkuk, Baghdad and Basra. This list makes for sobering reading, since sovereignty over those areas is still being contested by various powers.

Goltz Pasha also published an influential book: *Der Volk in Waffen* (*The nation in arms*, 1883), which was translated into Turkish in 1884. It became something of a handbook for every Turkish officer cadet and intellectual, its main theme being the notion of a 'modern army'. The book provided an outline of the new, ultra-nationalistic, Turkish militarism. The titles of journals published by CUP during this period are quite revealing: Bayonet, Arms, Cannon, Rifle and Dagger. Militarist youth associations and even a children's army were founded by CUP.

While the state started to improve military capability in Anatolia through drawing up modernised maps, improving the telegraphy network, building bridges, roads, railroads and fortified strongholds, etc, the ideological outline of the action that would ensue against the 'internal enemies' - ie, the non-Muslim population - was also laid.

In an influential pamphlet published by Ahmet Rıza, a leading member of CUP, the Christian subjects of the Ottoman empire were clearly targeted. The pamphlet, entitled *Duty and responsibility: the soldier*, was written in the spirit of Goltz Pasha, even if he would not have agreed with its Islamism. It alleged that in previous wars Christian subjects of the Ottoman empire had served as foreign agents - providing grain for external forces, destroying bridges, setting alight depots, etc. They had proved to be the 'enemy within'.

A reference to two well-known figures of the early 20th century would be sufficient to establish the militaristic and rabid nature of Turkish nationalism in that era. In 1904 Yusuf Akçura published an article entitled 'Three modes of politics', in which he described Turkism, Islamism and Ottomanism as the three available ideological options for Turkish intellectuals and concluded that only Turkism represented a real opportunity

to sustain the Ottoman state, albeit in a new form. The assimilation of non-Turkish Muslims would drive forward the process.

There was, of course, vocal opposition from the establishment, which saw Turkification as a grave danger and tried to uphold the principle of a multi-nation state under the constitutional dominance of the sultan. This opposition remained strong until the 1912 defeat in the Balkan wars. That was when Ziya Gökalp, a Kurd from Diyarbakır, published an article entitled 'Becoming Turkish, Islamic and modern', which would breach the walls of the opposition through its defence of a pseudo-national Ottoman state and calls for the establishment of a "contemporary Islamic Turkishness" as a vehicle for survival.

Coup

Leading members of CUP attacked the 'Sublime Porte', the seat of government in Istanbul, in early 1913, killing the minister of war and forcing the grand vizier to resign. The coup opened up a period of unstable governments and ineffectual parliaments, while CUP wielded the real power.

Gone were the days of the 1908 reforms, when CUP cooperated with Armenian and Greek representatives in parliament. The promise of a liberal constitution was also forgotten. A new era of militarism and warmongering was accompanied by dictatorial rule. CUP remained the only legal political organisation.

A rebellion against the CUP by Islamists in the army, who favoured the absolute rule of the sultan, had acted as a trigger for the massacre of Armenians and Assyrians in the Adana region in 1909. CUP did nothing to stop the massacre - indeed afterwards it hanged 124 Muslims and seven Armenians following the court martial of government and military officers.

After the Adana massacre, the Dashnaksutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) decided to cooperate with CUP. An agreement was signed whereby the two would work together for a unity constitution in opposition to any talk of Armenian independence. Even an Armenian minister was appointed.

However, the CUP coup put an end to all hopes for cooperation between Turkish nationalists and non-Muslim minorities. Consequently the nationalists established the secret Special Organisation, which began to plan the elimination of the non-Muslim population of Anatolia through forced deportation and massacre.

At the start of World War I CUP asked the Armenians of Turkey to assist them in capturing Transcaucasia by rebelling against the Russian empire. And one of the opening acts of the war in the east was the Ottoman attack on Russia. The struggle ended at Sarikamishin in utter defeat at the hands of the Russian army, amongst whose ranks were Armenian volunteers. Alarm bells were ringing.

In April 1914, when the Ottoman army tried to conscript soldiers from the Armenian town of Van, an uprising took place. The resisting Armenians maintained their defences until May 31, when the Russian army entered the region and Ottoman troops retreated.

Armenians serving in the Ottoman army were disarmed. So-called labour battalions were formed in early 1915 and all non-Muslim troops were transferred to them - shortly afterwards those 'battalions' were to be devastated by mass executions.

Deportation

After the first wave of arrests, an influential Armenian politician, Krikor Zohrab, was still working to stop further atrocities. He was quite well acquainted with Talat Pasha, a member of CUP's leading triumvirate, and they occasionally met to play contract bridge at the Cercle d'Orient, the famous Ottoman club for establishment figures and the wealthy.

On May 20 he played bridge with Talat Pasha for the last time. As he was leaving the club, Pasha came up to him and kissed his cheeks. It was to be Talat's farewell, since he had signed the arrest warrant and Zohrab was apprehended in the early hours of the following morning. He was killed on route to Diyarbakır by members of the Special Organisation.

The main target of the massacre that began in April 1915 was the Armenian population all over Anatolia. More than a million were slaughtered. Their confiscated wealth formed the basis of primitive capital accumulation on the part of the new Anatolian Turkish bourgeoisie. Many thousands, including children and women, were force-marched to Deyr Zor, a desert city in Syria - the weak, sick and young were abandoned to their death on the route. From amongst those who survived the present-day diaspora was formed.

During the initial stages of the liberation war, the Kemalists denounced these atrocities in order to gain the west's approval. However, as the outcome of war became apparent, all pretence was set aside. The Kemalist regime was unambiguously following the path laid out by CUP nationalists: a unified Turkish nation and a unified state Islam.

That path led to further massacres committed against the remaining Armenians, Greek Orthodox Christians, Jews and Kurds. Their slaughter underlies the creation and development of modern Turkey. The continuing process saw the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox population from Istanbul in 1964, while the recent Kurdish massacres and deportations are quite well documented.

The denial of the Armenian genocide became the mainstay of the Turkish state's foreign policy. Until, that is, the actions of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia in the late 1970s and early 80s helped bring the issue to the fore once more. Meanwhile Turkey was busy fighting off the Kurdish rebellion, occupying northern Cyprus, where it also engaged in population transfers, and crushing the first wave of proletarian revolt. As the centenary of the genocide approaches, nothing much has changed in official policy despite the liberal rhetoric.

However, the mood of Turkish progressives is changing. During recent years, the genocide has been commemorated in Taksim Square, in front of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace at Sultanahmet, where Armenian progressives were detained on April 24 1915, and at Beyazit Square before the gates of Istanbul University, where 15 members of Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, led by Matteos Sarkissian ('comrade Paramaz'), were hanged on June 15 1915.

A democracy programme where citizenship is not defined by nationality or religion is now becoming more and more attractive in Turkey. Today every progressive bows before the victims of the genocide, and pledges to resist any further atrocity committed in their name ●

UKIP

Part of mainstream chauvinist consensus

Getting jittery, the Tory machine and large sections of the media are attacking the ‘unBritish’ Ukip. Eddie Ford is not surprised

Nigel Farage must be treating himself to a few extra pints at his local, given that the tide seems to be still running in favour of the United Kingdom Independence Party. According to a YouGov poll conducted on April 25, Ukip is on course to come first in the European elections on May 22.¹ It recorded 31% support, three points ahead of Labour, while the Conservatives are way behind on 19% and the Liberal Democrats are lagging further on 9%.

Another poll on personal ratings by *The Observer/Opinium* showed similar results. Farage came top with a net tally of 0% - ie, 34% approved of the Ukip leader's performance whilst 34% disapproved. As for David Cameron, his rating has improved slightly from -11% to -8%, but Ed Miliband's has fallen from -20% to -22% - and Nick Clegg is languishing on -42%: nobody likes him. Interestingly, a survey by Open Europe appears to confirm this swing towards Ukip and other Eurosceptic parties across the European Union.² OE believes that anti-EU parties could win more than 30% of the vote across the continent - up from the 24.9% they recorded in 2009 - thereby possibly accounting for up to 218 of the 751 seats. Obviously, as OE points out, this ‘bloc’ is highly diffuse, ranging from “mainstream” governing parties to “neo-fascists” - whilst the share of parties identified as “critical reformers” (like the Tories) could fall from 53 to 39 seats. Meaning overall that if voter turnout is 43%, roughly the same as in 2009, then 74.4% will have voted against the EU, for radical change or just not bothered to vote at all.

Anyhow, whatever the exact results of the coming elections, rightwing populism is in the clear ascendancy. Even if Ukip does not come first, it will come a *very* good second - worrying the pro-establishment parties. This is certainly the fear, albeit from opposite ends of the telescope, of both Peter Hain and Lord Tebbit - the former Tory chairman affectionately known as the ‘Chingford skinhead’. He expected Ukip to “make history” on May 22 by becoming the first party other than Labour or the Conservatives to win a UK-wide election since World War 1. In his opinion, which has some merit, his party is still paying the price for Cameron's famous remarks eight years ago on LBC radio about Ukip supporters being “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists”. For his part, Hain gloomily warned that the “political class” needs to “wake up” to the fact that Ukip is successfully capitalising on a very real “anti-politics” sentiment - though he did believe that Labour could still win, but that it would be “very hard”, requiring the party as a whole to get out there and motivate its voters.

Full of confidence, Farage now thinks that his party has firmly secured a large number of votes from former Conservative supporters in the south of the country and is now targeting Labour voters in the north - hoping to goad Miliband into promising an EU referendum. Farage also appeared to have another stroke of luck on April 29 with the resignation of the Tory MP for Newark, Patrick Mercer - who had taken thousands of pounds from a fake lobbying firm representing “Fijian business interests”, having boasted that he came “cheap” at £1,000 a day. Unsurprisingly, the Ukip leader seriously considered standing in the by-election - especially as it would strengthen his case to be included in the general election television



Nigel Farage: all together against outsiders

debates if he was actually elected as a Westminster MP. In the end though, wisely or not, he decided that standing would act as a massive distraction from the far more important business of winning the European elections - especially as he has no connection with the area. Instead, he promised Ukip would “throw the kitchen sink” at the by-election and field a “strong” local candidate.

Discredit

Ukip's growing popularity helps to explain the current wave of attacks against the organisation, with the well-oiled Tory machine in particular - and large sections of the media - doing almost everything they can to discredit Farage's merry band of Little England nationalists. Of course, the very nature of the organisation - the incarnation of crankiness - makes their job a hell of a lot easier.

Thus the recent headlines about Ukip's racist candidates, the liberal press especially taking a delight in such stories. Firstly we had the now suspended and supposed ‘poster boy’, Andre Lampitt - the Zimbabwean-born builder and council candidate for Merton, south London, who appeared unnamed in a Ukip election broadcast and is now expected to be airbrushed out of any future showings. In a series of Tweets (his account appears to have been removed) he claimed that Ed Miliband was “not a real Brit”, but rather Polish,³ advised Africans to “kill themselves off”, stated that Islam is an “evil” religion, that Nigerians are “bad people” and that people who lived on benefits for over a year should be “excluded from society”, as “they’re just lazy” - and so boringly on.

There was an even bigger uproar over the remarks made about Lenny Henry by a contender for Enfield council, William Henwood - quite inevitably, given that the comedian is held in such high esteem by the establishment. Responding to a speech by Henry, in which he complained that ethnic minorities were underrepresented on British television, Henwood promptly Tweeted that he “should emigrate to a black country” - after all, he “does not have to live with whites” (let alone marry one, he could have added). Trying to defend himself, but only digging himself into a deeper

hole, he innocently told the BBC that “if black people come to this country and don’t like mixing with white people why are they here?” Absolutely nothing offensive or bigoted about that.

Automatic and instant condemnation rained down on the idiot from all quarters - Henwood, who subsequently resigned from Ukip, was beyond the pale. Perhaps the most forthright was Jeremy Hunt, the Tory health secretary. He stated that Henwood's comments were “absolutely disgusting”, as Lenny Henry is “as British as you and I are”. Indeed, he went on, though Ukip positions itself as a patriotic party, there is something “very unBritish” about it - rather, he continued, we want to live in a country where “all parts” of the political spectrum “avoid that kind of rhetoric”. Backing up her former colleague, Louise Mensch, ex-Tory MP for Crosby, wrote in *The Sun* that “clown prince Nigel” was “to blame for Ukip falling on its face” - despite the polls saying otherwise (April 27).

We now have a cross-party campaign aiming to gun down the insurgent Ukip, led by the former Labour immigration minister, Barbara Roche. She wants Ukip “exposed” for what it is: a party guilty of practising a form of “Euracism” - she argues that the party is deploying the “same” language and tactics used by “openly racist” parties like the BNP, but targeting migrants from within the EU instead of Africans and Asians. The new anti-Ukip campaign is naturally supported by the all-party Migration Matters Trust - a body co-sponsored by the Conservative, Nadim Zahawi, and by the Liberal Democrat deputy leader in the Lords, Lord Dholakia.

Neil Hamilton, the Ukip deputy chairman and former Tory MP for Tatton who was downed by the first cash-for-questions scandal, stepped forward to respond to the avalanche of criticism - if not demonisation. He issued a statement about Henwood saying: “This is a council candidate whom you would never have heard but for all the social media archaeologists that are employed by Labour, the Liberal party and the Tories to try and track down any unknown Ukip member or activist who may have said something unpleasant on social media.” He also commented that Ukip attracts “decent” and “non-racist” former

BNP voters who feel “swamped” by immigrants and thus had voted BNP in the past “out of desperation”. That is, most working class BNP voters are not driven by neo-Nazi or racist *ideology* - a silly and ultimately patronising idea, though popular amongst certain writers for *The Guardian*. Feeling alienated, they want to hit back at the governing parties for having abandoned them - and who can blame them?

Frankly, Hamilton has a point - the mainstream parties *are* out to strangle Ukip, by fair means or foul. Yes, the Tory right may be using Ukip to try and force the Conservative leadership to adopt an outright anti-EU stance, but that is obviously not in the interests of British big capital and therefore not what Cameron *et al* want to do. Of course, the Tories represent an alliance of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie - thus the leadership frequently appeals to petty bourgeois prejudices of all sorts, including over the EU; which is why Cameron is (eventually) going for a referendum. But the scathing Tory attacks on Ukip hint of desperation - and hypocrisy. In 1978, Margaret Thatcher herself talked about how the British people are “afraid” that the country might be “swamped by people with a different culture” - undercutting electoral support for the then resurgent National Front. What goes around comes around. The right is now in revolt.

Stand up

These latest incidents also confirm once again the all-pervasive nature of official anti-racism - anathematisation awaits any individual or organisation that is even *perceived* to be racist. Whatever the Socialist Workers Party may insist, Ukip is *not* a racist organisation in terms of its formal programme (insofar as it has one) or the outlook of the leadership - even if a minority of its members, including council candidates, do have racist prejudices. Then again, you can say the same thing about the Tories - yet to accuse David ‘call me Dave’ Cameron a racist would be absurd. He fully subscribes, like the overwhelming majority of his colleagues on both sides of parliament, to the reconfigured post-World War II bourgeois ideology - and mythology - of the heroic British underdog fighting a

noble, democratic crusade against the alien menace of fascism/Nazism under the brilliant leadership of that greatest ever Briton, Winston Churchill. Hence Hunt's comments about the “unBritish” nature of the views expressed by William Henwood.

At the end of the day Ukip's shrill, loud, anti-immigrant message does not *fundamentally* differ from the mainstream national chauvinist consensus, which combines bourgeois or institutional anti-racism with British nationalism. Ukip just has a more extreme or virulent petty bourgeois version, spiced through with a visceral hatred for the ‘politically correct’, same-sex marrying, metropolitan liberal elite and feckless ‘scroungers’ - whether they be migrants or not.

Equally, there is no reason to disbelieve Ukip when it says it is a “non-racist” party. Nigel Farage genuinely wants Britons, including previous immigrants and their descendants, to unite around the union jack against non-British outsiders - Poles, Romanians, Bulgarians, etc. One big happy family. Just like Gordon Brown, Farage wants British jobs for British workers, regardless of whether they are called Smith or Patel - and anyone who does not like that, such as Lampitt or Henwood, will get their marching orders.

And now we have the SWP's ludicrous new front, called Stand Up to Ukip.⁴ Wretchedly, almost giving a bad name to popular frontism, we are informed that it wants “people of goodwill” to come together and say no to Ukip's “racism” - “regardless of our differing views on Europe or other political issues”. Presumably that includes all those in the Tory Party “disgusted” by Ukip or those like No2EU who want Britain to withdraw from the EU into splendid isolation - just as Ukip does. Worried that Ukip's “racist scapegoating” will have an “impact on mainstream politics” and create a “fertile breeding ground” for fascist organisations such as the English Defence League and the BNP (hovering as it is on 0% in the opinion polls), the SWP urges us to stand up for “our multicultural society”. Not a hint, needless to say, of any independent *working class* politics - just tailing the liberalistic, anti-racist/anti-fascist consensus.

Furthermore, we read in the SWP's *Party Notes* that, although it does not call for the no-platforming of Ukip, as it is not a “fascist” organisation, the SWP does believe in “challenging racist politicians” and “protesting outside their meetings”, using the material produced by Stand up to Ukip. Therefore the SWP urges comrades everywhere to work with the “broadest possible range of people” to show “public opposition” against Ukip - “go into your town or city centre and leaflet and petition” (April 22). Don't question, just do it.

In other words, a disastrous rerun of the ‘strategy’ peddled in the past by that other SWP front, Unite Against Fascism - which moralistically instructed workers, “Don't vote Nazi!” Only this time with the word ‘Nazi’ crossed out and replaced with ‘Ukip’. Good thinking, comrades ●

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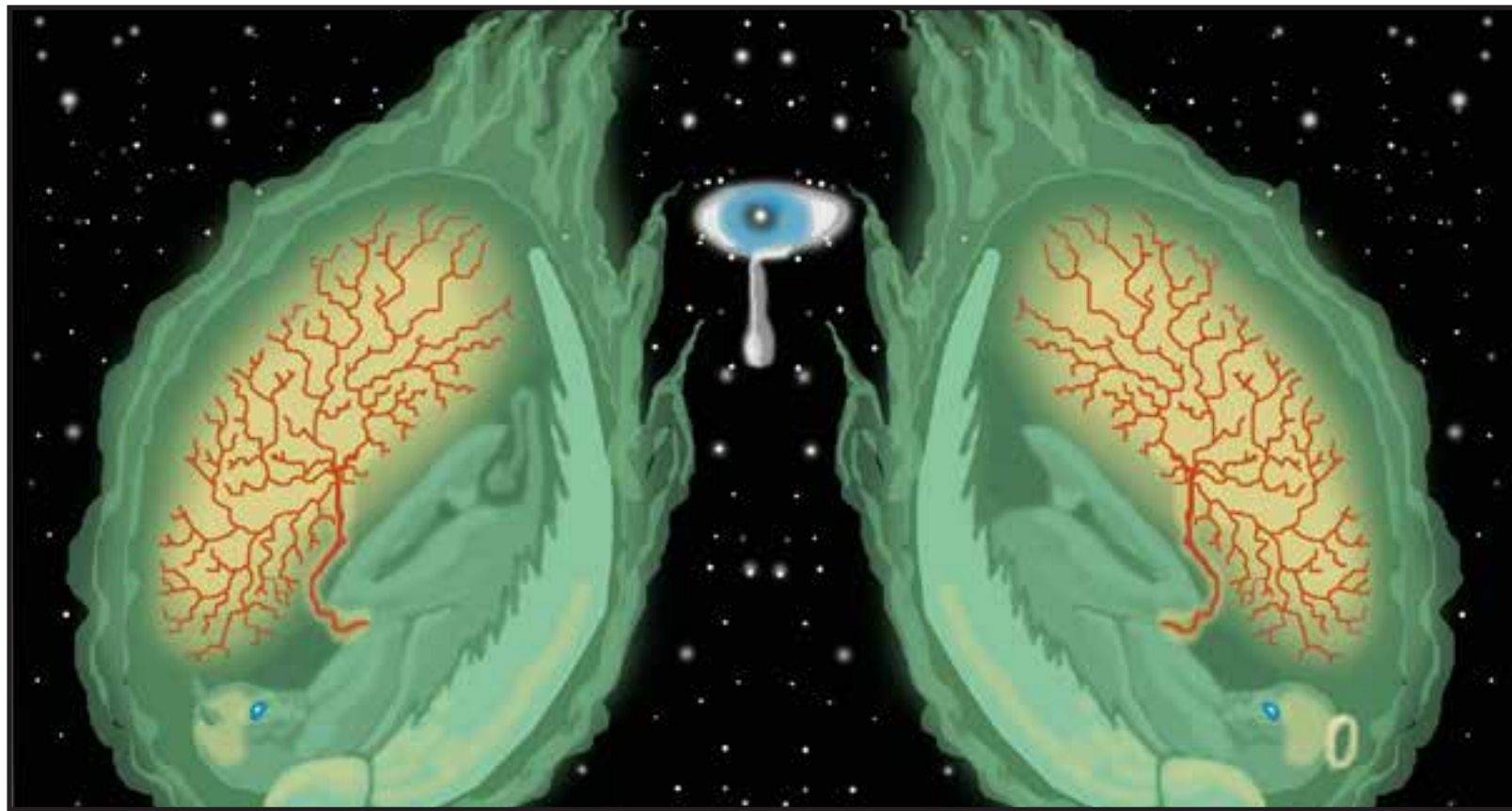
Notes

1. <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/04/25/ukip-move-first-place-euro-elections>.
2. *The Guardian* April 28.
3. Actually, Ed Miliband was born in Camden - his mother was the daughter of relatively wealthy Jewish parents from Poland, whilst his father, Ralph, was born in Belgium to working class parents who had grown up in the impoverished Jewish quarter of Warsaw.
4. <http://standuptoukip.org>.

REVIEW

Parallel universes

Ajay Close **Trust** Tippermuir Books Ltd, 2014, pp355, £9.99



Same and different

I confess to not being a reader of fiction, but Ajay Close, who is the author of two previous novels and a play, fair blew me away with this book. Not that this is sheer fiction: like *GB84* and others this book is bedded in truth and a good deal of insight.

It is about two parallel social universes, which overlap and intersect like ships in the night, with almost subliminal consciousness of the other's existence or meaning. One is the embattled pit community of Faxerley Colliery, as first it stands its ground as a private mine caught in the great struggles of 1984-85, and in the subsequent years survives the titanic changes following the Great Strike. The other is the distant universe of banking, the stock exchange, finance companies and in particular hedge funds and speculation. I say 'distant' in the sense of social standing, since in one way the fortune of one is tied up with that of the other - unseen hands manipulate the basic values underpinning workers' lives.

There is something of the basic tale of *Brassed off* here - plain men and women, and their communities, fighting the enemy that seems to be before them, while underneath and above unseen forces move silently, pulling fortunes this way and that. I have to say that, while I thought *Brassed off* was very well observed, this book takes the scenario far, far deeper into the depths of the world of money speculation, market manipulation and the gross criminality of high finance, ripping into people's lives without so much as a nod in their direction, let alone any sign of conscience. *Trust* would make an excellent film or TV drama.

What struck me most about this book was the author's mastery of the culture and language of both worlds. First that of the mine:

"The colliery offices smelled of plasterboard and stale cigars. A copy of *Women's Realm* on the desk beside the golf-ball typewriter ... The colliery manager extended a puffy hand, with a signet ring embedded in the third finger ... 'It's a geological lottery, this game. Some seams it comes off like shit off a shovel; some it's not worth the bother ... Their top seam's under bunter sandstone, which is gassy, water-bearing and bloody hard. All we've got

to worry about's magnesium limestone and Mottershaw shale. We use drill and blast method ... The machinery they've got makes us look like something out of the Stone Age, but, ton for ton we're a damn site more profitable ... What you've got to bear in mind is, we're all the same coalfield, but it's not the same quality coal.'"

Then in the other world: "You were dealing in sub-prime mortgages ... a leg-up for poor black families in East Louis, who couldn't get a foot on the property ladder. And for others on the very bottom rung, paying crippling rates of interest on their credit cards and car loans. When those debts were consolidated into a second mortgage, the interest rate dropped by half ... You've never been to East St Louis. Nor have I. We can't say who's going to default. There's a *risk* - a bigger risk than with a mortgage in Manhattan - so they pay a rate of interest reflecting that. And the investors buying packages of that debt receive a higher rate of return ...

"... someone had the idea: why not sell parcels of mortgage debt? You're a bank. You've got squillions of these things on your books ... You sell them on, you get your money now, do something else with it ... the mortgage bonds that didn't sell because they were rated as too risky, until someone had the idea of slicing them and mixing them up to spread the risk ... Someone came up with the idea of a synthetic financial product ... It would perform exactly the same way, only instead of the *actual* loans or slices of those loans, which would *actually* pay out, it had a swap. Basically an insurance policy. Investors in the shadow gambled on loans ... being repaid. Investors in the swap reckoned there was likely to be a certain percentage of default. The two bets cancelled each other out, so there was no need for any of it to show on the bank's books ... nothing on the balance sheet ... Fiendish isn't it?"

The book goes into reams of exposure and exposition like this, which explains a lot about how the 'other world' works - or spectacularly does not.

And we find strand upon strand of conflicting and overlapping social interaction and conflict. Class on class, sexism, patriarchy, painful human relations and social postures, power

guises, how the game is played between men and women in both worlds, and between worlds, and between women within and outwith their classes and social standings. Some of this is quite biting and sharp as a blade:

"At parties when Lexa was asked what she did for a living, she always said, 'I work in Cambusdyke' ... On her first visit she'd had to drive on to the pavement to avoid a three-piece suite on fire in the middle of the road. Cambusdyke was known for recreational arson and the stoning of the firemen who arrived to extinguish these blazes. Millions had been spent on a brand-new school, health studio, café and community complex ... and 12 state-of-the-art, vandal-proof bus shelters, none of which had survived ... And still Cambusdyke led Scotland in heart disease, hepatitis B, registered heroin use, unemployment, mental illness and a type of facial scarring known as the Cambusdyke smile."

"... The waiter unfolded Lexa's napkin with a matador flourish and spread it across her lap. She looked around at their fellow diners. A couple

of custom-tailored cowboys (Haulage contractors? Landfill millionaires?), but mostly middle class managers ... treating their secretaries or girlfriends on expenses. There was a good deal of cleavage on show in various shades of toffee and buttermilk and tanning-shop orange, all of it expensively wrapped."

Apart from the sheer brilliance of the dialogue, there is the winding, inter-threading plot, which I will not, of course, reveal. Firstly the struggle for the pit in the strike and big politics, then the scramble to find a buyer in the 90s - save the pit, save the community. It is at this point the story gets dark, and well-intentioned roads to hell are devised. For the pit itself held a secret, which would steal the pride of survival - if survival it is.

Waxing lyrical over this book, not least by quoting from it endlessly, would be over-indulgent. Better you treat yourself to a ghost train of a ride through the haunted streets of the coal communities, on the one hand, and the nauseating, self-indulgent world of bankers and speculators, on the other ●

David Douglass

Fighting fund Conspiracy

Events have conspired to prevent me announcing both the final total raised for our April fighting fund and the number of online readers we had last week.

The first failure resulted from a combination of the tube strike and omission on our part, meaning that our mail has not been collected since before the weekend - all those cheques that can't be included in the total. But never mind: we can always adjust the final tally retrospectively next week.

The second failure arose from a technical fault, which meant I couldn't log on to the *Weekly Worker* statistics page. Oh well. But the total of readers has been hovering around 12,000 per week for what seems like months now and I've got no reason to suspect this week has been any different.

But I can tell you about what's come in via standing orders and PayPal. There were eight SOs, ranging from £5 to £75 - thanks (in ascending order) to CC, JM, RL, DC, PJ, PM, DS and JT. To that we can add three online donations from PG (£25), FD (£10) and TT (£6).

So the provisional total for this week - excluding all those dozens of cheques, of course! - is £231, and the tally for April is £1,427. That's just £73 short of the £1,500 we need. But I hope to be able to tell you that failure has been miraculously transformed into success next week ●

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.

Playing happy families

The protracted regroupment talks between Socialist Resistance, the International Socialist Network and others continue; as does their political confusion, writes **Paul Demarty**

The saga of ‘revolutionary regroupment’ proceeds. On April 28, comrades from various small far-left organisations attended a day-long conference to discuss the terms of closer unity between them. The groups concerned - Socialist Resistance, the International Socialist Network, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, the Anti-Capitalist Initiative and Workers Power - are, taken as a whole, a rather motley crew. The most obvious point of unity between them is that all are ostensibly revolutionary components of the Left Unity proto-party and, as such, the attendance on the day - which reports put at between 100 and 200 - is significant. Were the forces present to ‘regroup’, they would amount undoubtedly to the largest single component within LU.

Of course, things are unlikely to pan out exactly like that - for many reasons. If the forces involved can be adequately described as ‘diverse’, that is mainly because Workers Power rather sticks out like a sore thumb among the assembled company. It is, after all, a rather run-of-the-mill orthodox Trotskyist grouplet, albeit of unorthodox origins in the International Socialists. They believe in the transitional programme, the ‘degenerated workers’ state’ theory of the Soviet Union, the ‘fighting propaganda group’ organisational model, in which internal disagreements are barred from public expression (with some comical results over the years).

Compare their negotiating partners: the ISN and RS21 are both splits from the Socialist Workers Party, emerging from its recent period of crisis. The split issue in both cases was the bungled investigation into rape allegations against Martin Smith; beyond that, it has been rather difficult to work out what *either* stands for in any cohesive sense. Their overriding priority has been to keep busy, rather than to settle accounts with their parent organisation; dispiritingly, many in the ISN have borrowed the presently modish discourse of ‘intersectionality’ to deal with the matter (of which more anon), although RS21 seems more sceptical.

Socialist Resistance, on the other hand, is *some* kind of Trotskyist group. It remains affiliated to the Fourth International, at least. Nowadays, however, it keeps Trotsky firmly out of sight. The organisation describes itself as “ecosocialist, feminist and revolutionary”, but in practice is firmly committed to pulling Left Unity as far to the right as it can.

Thus one attendee, who describes himself as broadly sympathetic to SR, complains that the April 28 event, waggishly hash-tagged as “Trotcon” on social media, was often dominated by arguments between WP and SR on various fronts of disagreement. The opening session of the day, on trade union work, was fought out mainly between the

broad-left strategy of SR and the rank-and-file at the core of WP’s politics, with other contributions hedged somewhere between the two. On the matter of LU, frictions again emerged between those who wanted to build a broad alternative to Labour and those, principally WP, who wanted it to adopt a transitional ‘action programme’.

The third session, on feminism, again saw WP as the main dissenting voice against the onward march of ‘intersectionality’ (although they are in agreement on many of the practical concerns of left feminists - the importance of ‘autonomous’ organisations and so forth - and operate women’s and men’s caucuses at their own meetings). WP, again, would presumably have been the firmest critics of the Ukrainian Maidan movement, which its comrades consider fascist, in the last debate of the day.

Can it work?

One might wonder, then, exactly what WP was doing there at all. Not from its point of view - like all propaganda groups, the CPGB included, WP seeks to win people to its vision of what an effective mass movement will look like. This ‘regroupment’, however, is invite only. We wrote to the organisations concerned several times, and received either polite rejections or silence. All things being equal, and given the political character of the other groups involved, you would have expected WP to get the same treatment.

That would certainly be preferable for Socialist Resistance, which never wanted WP on board. Yet the ISN has insisted on it, likely because its own left wing has found much of interest in the rank-and-file that, 40 years ago, characterised the IS and the SWP, and thus has a certain measure of common ground with WP (Tim Nelson of the ISN contributed an article to Workers Power’s

eponymous paper on the subject).

On the whole, we may assume that - to put it mildly - there is insufficient practical political agreement between Socialist Resistance and Workers Power for regroupment to be possible, barring on a geological timescale. Taking WP out of the equation, however, we face a more subtle problem, which is that none of the others really know what they think *as organisations* rather than individuals.

Certainly many present on Saturday would have found odd Workers Power’s habit of fighting for a definite political line rather than just free-associating their personal opinions. One overhears, at LU conferences, people expressing bewilderment that CPGB members vote as a bloc, and do so as visibly as possible. Not being under binding discipline has the appeal of the easy life, and your correspondent can attest that carrying out an action you believe to be misguided is a frustrating affair.

In the absence of anything like a common line among the ranks of the ISN, RS21 and ACI, however, we must ask exactly what degree of unity is at all possible between the three, given that they are hardly united organisations themselves, but discrete scars of factional battles past. In the case of the ACI, the matter is most clear. Since its formation, we have described its predominant politics as liquidationist - a diagnosis apparently confirmed when the ACI liquidated into the ISN recently. Except, that is, for a couple of branches which continue to fly the tattered standard; after all, a liquidationist organisation cannot really expect all its components to follow suit, if they would rather continue to do their own thing.

You would naturally expect SR to set the terms going forward, but SR has been utterly rudderless for decades. Its faddish espousal of

every passing trend on the left leaves us sceptical of its ability to provide a strong lead for the more diffuse organisations in its orbit. Starting the third millennium as the International Socialist Group, it joined the Socialist Alliance, before fronting the SWP’s plot to shut it down and initiate Respect. When the SWP ditched Respect, it briefly stayed, ‘regrouping’ with a few individuals as Socialist Resistance, before splitting on the fatuous non-issue of George Galloway’s candidacy in a Scottish election.

Now, of course, there is Left Unity - which is once again touted by SR as the best thing since sliced bread. Its history, however, ought to give us a clue as to what is going on here - a whole series of shallow regroupments on the basis of short-term tactical considerations, with more substantial political disagreements smoothed over with diplomatic language, only to erupt again when people disagree about tactics.

On the tactical menu today is Left Unity - and, secondarily, an orientation to the ‘intersectional’ types. The latter you would expect to make this an exceptionally fragile regroupment even by SR’s dismal standards. Attendees at ‘Trotcon’ saw no problem with leavening their Marxism with a little intersectionality theory; and, indeed, there is no reason why bourgeois intellectual enterprises should not teach us a thing or two. Marx’s own career is a testament to that.

In the case of ‘intersectionality’, there are two problems, however. The first is a matter of straightforward incompatibility. Marxism is a *realism* - it proposes that the world external to the individual can be apprehended accurately both through the examination of empirical evidence and the work of theory. Intersectionality inherits from its postmodern formation the notion that this is impossible, and that one’s viewpoint

is invariably overdetermined by one’s gender, skin colour and so forth. Thus it is epistemologically *anti-realist*. It is one thing to cite Paul Krugman’s statistics in support of a Marxist analysis, but quite another to combine two entirely antagonistic epistemologies.

The second problem is that the theory, however illuminating, does not matter a damn to ‘actually existing intersectionality’: the view that racism, sexism and so on are generated by impersonal structures of oppression, which is ostensibly the whole point, is denied in practice by the mob-handed harassment of individuals on social media that substitutes for political engagement among the intersectional crew. It is utterly instrumentalised in the service of identifying people as racist, with wildly varying accuracy. We remember all too well the recent split in the ISN, on the matter of whether race was admissible as raw material for sadomasochistic imagery. ‘Regroupment’ with intersectionalists predetermines a split the moment the Chapman Brothers have another exhibition on.

Its appeal to the ‘softies’ at Trotcon - beyond appearing spuriously new and trendy - is that it is an *alibi*: an arbitrary theoretical justification for the anti-sexist, anti-racist workaday activism on which the comrades believe they will build unity - ‘in struggle’, as the cliché goes. We note that the women’s question was the only matter on the agenda of unavoidably *strategic* importance (even the trade unions are more easily discussed as a matter of tactics); and also the one place where theory was conveniently delegated to an alien tradition. Until comrades begin to think more than a month in advance for more than an hour at a time, serious unity will elude them ●

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This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____