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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# New upsurge of protest in Iran: Entire regime is the target



## LETTERS



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

## Lassalleanism

I was disappointed to read the *Weekly Worker's* analysis of the economic crisis, and where we are within it ('The polemical alternative', December 3).

Of course, the *Weekly Worker* is not alone in the kind of catastrophism that was represented in the article. On the contrary, that kind of view is typical on the left. Some groups even talked about the 'recession' at the beginning of 2008, whilst the world economy was still growing quite strongly, and a full six months before the recession began, following the outbreak of the financial crisis, in the autumn!

It is rather sad then that you criticise Permanent Revolution for asking the question, 'Whatever happened to the great depression?', because, of all the left groups, they have been about the only one that has had anything approaching a correct analysis. As I wrote some months ago, even they wobbled in the depths of the crisis, in the face of a wall of doom-mongering. In fact, I think that your analysis, like most of that of the left, is based not on Marxism, but on Lassalleanism, just as much of the left's politics are based on Lassallean statist notions rather than on the anti-state positions of Marx.

Running through almost all of the left's economic analysis is the idea repeated in your article that capitalism is a system in decay: "Comrade Bridge pointed out that it was not just a question of capitalism's cyclical crises that ought to concern us, but the fact that it is a system in long-term decline." It is an idea that basically flows directly from Lassalle's 'iron law of wages' - the idea that if there is growth, if there is improvement in workers' conditions, it is necessarily suspect and has to be explained as not a real improvement, but some kind of mirage, the result of super-exploitation somewhere, and so on.

In fact, this is another hangover from Stalinism, which, as Mandel demonstrated, continually spoke in these terms. Soviet economists went through the most extreme panegyrics in trying to demonstrate that living standards in the west were really falling, when to even the most casual observer it was obvious that exactly the opposite was the truth! Yet it is common to read in the 'Where we stand' columns of even supposedly 'anti-Stalinist' organisations, comments such as 'Capitalism creates poverty', which, whilst relatively true, in absolute terms is fundamentally and palpably false. Not for nothing did Marx talk about the revolutionising role of capitalism, its rescuing millions from the idiocy of rural life, nor of its "civilising mission", in raising workers' standards of living, their access to leisure, education and culture, which were fundamental and necessary for workers to adequately develop the class-consciousness that would make them the new ruling class.

Rosdolsky trawled through every reference in Marx to wages, and in the several thousand there was just one that he found that could be interpreted as suggesting that capitalism drives down wages and living standards in absolute terms - ie, causes immiseration. But it is massively outweighed by all of his other comments to the contrary and, in particular, in his attacks on Lassalle and the notion of the iron law of wages. In the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, he reiterates that in a comment, which should serve as an indictment of all those who have followed in Lassalle's footsteps. He wrote: "It is as

if, among slaves who have at last got behind the secret of slavery and broken out in rebellion, a slave still in thrall to obsolete notions were to inscribe on the programme of the rebellion: 'Slavery must be abolished because the feeding of slaves in the system of slavery cannot exceed a certain low maximum'" ([www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch02.htm)).

The comments about China and India I found laughable, to be honest, but they are in the same vein. They are of the school which defines imperialism in terms of some kind of immutable relationship of dependency, which is highly unMarxist and undialectical.

Of course, Lenin and other Marxists at the beginning of the last century did not help matters by themselves declaring that the "imperialist" stage of capitalism was one of decay. But Trotsky advised his supporters to "learn to think". Rather than simply accepting Lenin's dictum, Trotsky's advice should be heeded.

On what possible rational basis can any serious economist describe capitalism as being in "long-term decline"? There is absolutely no basis at all. Far from it: since at least the end of World War II, capitalism has been in a phase of development that far exceeds its earlier stages. Not only has it created a world market in the true sense of the word, but it has opened up within that market the potential for a much freer movement of productive capital than existed before, when 'imperialism' was really a function of marauding merchant capital. It has harnessed science to production in ways that make the industrial revolution appear pitiful, and consequently it has expanded production and raised living standards way above anything that seemed possible in the 19th century. And, on the back of that, it has spread its preferred political regime for the accumulation of capital - bourgeois democracy - more widely than at any other time in history.

For Marxists to try to portray modern capitalism as in decay or long-term decline can only further damage the image of Marxism in the ideas of the working class.

The fact that you seized upon the events in Dubai to try to bolster your argument, and to attack Permanent Revolution, is symptomatic. But surely it is not Permanent Revolution who have been embarrassed by Dubai, but your own analysis, which blew the event up only to see it disappear as a 48-hour wonder, because in reality it was negligible in its economic importance. What is missing from your analysis is any consideration of the question of why capital used Keynesian methods in the US in the 1930s, but essentially nowhere else; why it used such methods during the post-war boom and why it used them now; and why, in contrast, it did not use such methods in the 1930s in Europe, nor in the second slump of the 1980s. The answer is that it used such methods in conditions of long-wave upswing, when sufficient surplus value existed to finance them, and when renewed growth would repay the expenditure, and did not during the periods of long-wave downswing in the 1930s and 1980s when such conditions did not exist. We are in a period of long-wave rise, not decline.

What is worse is that, in following this kind of economic catastrophism, the left fails to deal with the actual economic situation facing workers in western economies. The reality is that in a global market for commodities, including labour-power, and in which capital can move to where it can most effectively exploit available labour, the problem facing workers in the west is that the kind of frictions that enabled their relatively high wages of the past

are increasingly removed. No longer can they rely simply upon the fact that their labour-power is backed up by masses of capital, so that the higher productivity of labour affords higher wages. Workers in China and India area now increasingly equipped with even more effective machinery than workers in the west, and so on. No longer can workers in the west rely on the fact that it is difficult for capital to relocate entire factories. The experience at MG Rover demonstrated that and, as production increasingly moves to higher-tech industries, such relocation becomes even easier. Nor can they rely on the risks for capital in relocating, as the spread of bourgeois democracy and the capitalist state enforcing property laws for all capital operating within its borders creates the necessary conditions for its expansion and accumulation.

The second slump of the 1970s and 80s saw a process of deindustrialisation set in, which was limited, because, given the conjuncture, a more thorough restructuring of capital would have been devastating for western economies. But that process is symptomatic of this reality of the new world capitalist economy. A reality in which workers in the west will face increasing competition from workers in the east, and which will necessarily drive down wages and conditions in the west relative to those in the east. That is a simple matter of economics and no amount of state ownership, reformism, syndicalism or calls for more militancy can change it. To the extent that new areas of production, such as high-tech, or areas such as media and finance, which rely upon highly skilled, complex labour, in which the west retains some comparative advantage, are developed, some workers with the necessary skills can maintain their conditions, but for the rest the next 15-20 years will be very uncomfortable. Capital is already responding by bringing in cheap, imported labour to do the low-paid, low-status work remaining and which it finds the domestic workforce is currently not prepared to undertake.

The reality we face is one in which capitalism as a global system is in a period of rapid advance, but one which is full of contradictions. In the west we are likely to see a much more bifurcated workforce than in the past, and ordinary workers will see their relative position decline markedly.

Only a political solution can provide workers with a way forward. That political solution cannot flow from Lassalleanism.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Hegemonics

I listened with interest to the podcast of Mike Macnair's talk on imperialism at Hands Off the People of Iran's annual general meeting (<http://cpgb.podbean.com>).

It appears that he is developing his global hegemon theory to the point where imperialism seems to be moving in a cycle, implying that in the current period we are not essentially seeing a different form of imperialism from, say, the time when Britain was the global hegemon in the 19th century. Yet he is careful to distance himself from the idea that the coming period will necessarily see direct military conflict between imperialist powers, or a physical carve-up and colonisation of weaker parts of the globe by major imperialist rivals. Surely, though, if the current period is not characterised by those two things, what we are still calling 'imperialism' must be a very different form of imperialism from anything previously understood as such.

Macnair asserts that, since Vietnam, the United States has been unable to intervene to impose global order anywhere, and has only spread destruction through petty revenge attacks. But I'm not sure this argument entirely holds water. Some might question his inclusion of Yugoslavia on the list of regions where the US has spread only 'destruction'. Is the region really less stable than it was before 1999? Did the bombing of Serbia cause only 'destruction' or did it in fact effectively stop a far worse form of 'destruction' - that is, Milosevic's attempts at mass slaughter? The idea of imposing order through military intervention did not start with Iraq, as the US more or less achieved this very goal in the former Yugoslavia.

I think Macnair is moving towards the belief that China could be the long-term threat to the US's global hegemony. This is not necessarily wrong, but it is important to emphasise just how far away this is, not least because the wing of the US bourgeoisie that was so intent on talking up the Chinese 'threat' - the paranoid neo-cons - are increasingly sidelined, politically and intellectually, in the corridors of power. More interesting would be a discussion of how the British left is likely to react to the growing imperial ambitions of 'communist' China, and the line genuine proletarian internationalists should take.

**Sean Carter**  
South London

## Two papers

Regarding the recent article, 'The polemical alternative', ideally, the CPGB should have two papers and not one (December 3).

The current *Weekly Worker* has a mix of at least four things: "reporting on and polemicising against other sections of the left" (what ill-informed leftists would call 'gossip' and 'rumour'); the economy, as suggested by Yasmine Mather; 'speaking to the masses', à la *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist* and *Morning Star*; and political programme.

Right now, I see a bit of a deficiency in the area of political programme (albeit one acceptable for a newspaper of the current mix). To be sure, comrade Paul Cockshott has contributed his programmatic two cents on this core, and Arthur Bough has written about cooperatives in the past, but so many other aspects need to be covered.

The ideal is indeed two newspapers, à la *Vorwärts* and *Die Neue Zeit* of the pre-World War I Social Democratic Party of Germany. Clearly, one paper is more agitational, while the other educational. Put 'speaking to the masses' and both commentary and theory on the economy in the agitational newspaper, and both the 'gossip' and political programme in the educational newspaper. Some might argue that this is a broad, economic set-up, but I would cite the SPD precedent.

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## In theory

In practice, the *Weekly Worker* is a theoretical magazine in newspaper format.

I think it would be a major error to abandon the theoretical struggle, while the so-called 'left' repeats slogans or follows the latest charismatic leader. However, I think you should consider turning the *Weekly Worker* into a monthly theoretical publication and turn its resources into a genuine working class newspaper.

Many 'left' newspapers treat workers as morons - ie, workers = good, capitalists = bad. I believe a working

class newspaper that reflects the daily struggles should also be theoretical. Questions such as why labour unions are ineffective, why union bureaucrats sell out, why we need a different kind of unionism, and so on, are profoundly theoretical questions.

I think it is important not to preach to workers, with every article ending with the same politically correct slogans. We need to engage the working class in debate, interviewing workers and listening to them. We may have something to learn from the working class who are engaged always in small daily class struggles, though we also need to teach them what the schools and mass media refuse to teach.

**Earl Gilman**  
email

## Soviets and PR

Jacob Richter (Letters, December 3) pointed out that I was "confusing soviets with factory committees and other workplace committees" in my arguments in favour of the single transferable vote form of proportional representation (Letters, November 26).

However, according to Leon Trotsky in *The history of the Russian Revolution* (Vol I, chapter 22), the first congress of the soviets was made up of "820 delegates with a vote and 268 with a voice", representing "305 local soviets, 53 district and regional organisations at the front, the rear institutions of the army, and a few peasant organisations". He also pointed out that the rule on who could vote or speak - soviets representing at least 25,000 men (in those sexist times) or 10,000 men respectively were "none too strictly observed". Trotsky was perhaps being deliberately vague in pointing out the composition of the congress, recognising that the structures weren't as democratic as they should have been, with himself supporting "all power to the soviets" after Lenin had proposed this slogan.

It seems that the majority of voters at that first congress, and perhaps later congresses, did not represent local soviets, as Jacob argued. I think my arguments about representatives of workplaces not being particularly proportional applied at the level of individual soviets rather than the overall soviet congresses. The soviets arose as ad hoc structures during periods of struggle and the rules were presumably different in different localities.

I am not convinced that Jacob's suggestion of "a revolutionary industrial union that from the outset caters to employed workers, unemployed workers, disabled workers, retired workers, and so on" establishing workers' councils alleviates my concerns. What sort of democratic structures would it have? And why should middle class people be disenfranchised?

In my view, it is particularly important that the system to elect the government of a socialist country is roughly proportional. If this is not the case, there would be massive opposition from ordinary working and middle class people who are disenfranchised or sympathise with those who are - and if Marxists are to the fore in creating the new government, it is likely that the structures would be skewed in favour of workers.

I note Moshé Machover's point (Letters, December 3) that STV is not entirely proportional, but, as I pointed out in my previous letter, neither is the regional list system used for the Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly. I have since been alerted by a member of the Democratic Labour Party of its proposal for a national 'top-up' system with (say) 250 constituencies and 250 top-up seats allocat-



ed to make it proportional, with a requirement for a party standing in a constituency having a full top-up list (rather than needing to raise a financial deposit, as at present). There would be no lower limit on the proportion of the vote required to get a candidate elected from the top-up list. This would be more proportional than STV, but would give massive power to party machines - and, although some parties could have very democratic structures, it'll be a fact of life that others won't.

Moshé made the very interesting suggestion of lottery-based elections in his essay 'Collective decision-making and supervision in a communist society', for which he provided a link in his letter. However, he admitted in the essay that it would only really be suitable under communism rather than in the early turbulent days of socialism after a revolution. In my opinion, the problem with this suggestion in such turbulent periods is that we need excellent representatives in parliament who are able to outthink our opponents and it would not be desirable for such potential MPs to be kept out by pure chance.

I now call myself "a socialist champion of free will" and I am more concerned that a free and open debate on how socialism would work takes place than that a particular electoral system is adopted.

**Steve Wallis**  
Manchester

## Out of context

The doctrine of socialism in a separate country (and the unviable social formation that emerged out of it) came into existence not as a "tactical outcome of uneven development", as Tony Clark states (Letters, December 3), but as a nationalist response to the contradiction between the market and planning in the former Soviet Union (FSU).

Internally, the Soviet bureaucratic elite faced the problem of how to extract a surplus from the peasantry and workers during the 1920s. It chose a non-market path based on the political and economic atomisation of workers. This led to forced collectivisation of the peasantry and the purges of the 1930s.

Externally, the elite used the Comintern as an agency for promoting the interests of the regime. A policy of attracting cross-class support for the FSU led workers' movements to defeat in Britain, China, Spain and Germany. Alliances with nationalist parties and leaders took priority over independent working class action throughout the world.

During the cold war, the FSU played an important role in stabilising capitalism and creating the conditions for continued accumulation. The anti-working class nature of the regime made Marxism and any socialist alternative to capitalism appear abhorrent. The influence communist parties held over trade unions made sure that workers' militancy would not take a revolutionary turn. Through its sponsorship of national liberation movements, the FSU helped create the new post-colonial ruling classes of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Given its wastefulness, inefficiency and inequality, it is surprising the FSU lasted as long as it did. Workers' atomisation made communication, self-organisation and democracy impossible. As a consequence, the elite could not plan, develop new productive forces or extract a surplus sufficient for it to form a coherent ruling class.

The FSU was neither capitalist nor socialist and its contradictory nature led to subsequent collapse and disintegration. Nationalism continues to dominate the politics of the region and since 1988, there have been 10 conflicts in parts of the FSU. These have resulted in over 300,000 deaths and

approximately three million people displaced through ethnic cleansing.

Those readers who follow Tony Clark's contributions to this newspaper and the replies of his critics will have noticed that understanding the nature of the FSU is not one of his concerns. On the contrary, his interest is persuading them to adopt the FSU as a model for the post-revolutionary society of the future. This involves discrediting Trotsky and Trotskyists. As such, his method is conventionally Stalinist. He quotes Lenin out of context in order to establish his authority against opponents.

In his latest letter, he describes Trotskyists as "totalitarian". The use of this epithet allies him with those rightwing journalists and academics who argue that a Trotskyist FSU would have been no different from a Stalinist one.

It is true that Trotsky's characterisation of the FSU as a workers' state was mistaken. It implied that nationalised property relations are necessarily progressive and that workers had a limited form of control over the regime. On the other hand - unlike Clark and some other writers for the *Weekly Worker* - Trotsky and his followers tried to apply Marx's method to the FSU and, therefore, held no illusions that it was a socialist society.

**Paul B Smith**  
Glasgow

## Stalinist

Comrade Willie Hunter's nationalist socialist beliefs owe their ideological heritage to the dark days of Stalin and his attempts at state building (Letters, November 26). Willie appears to be arguing for a policy of 'fortress Britain': draw up the drawbridge and all our problems will be solved; Britain can exist in glorious isolation.

As this paper tirelessly emphasises, capital is organised on a global basis. Working class politics too must at least be organised on a pan-European level. The best way for the British working class to defend itself and move forward is to recognise its common cause with all sections of the working class, no matter what their racial or ethnic background, for ultimately unity is strength.

To talk of border and immigration controls, defending the British state and doing some wretched backroom deal with the ruling class could only serve to weaken and isolate the British working class and lead the communist movement back down the national socialist cul-de-sac, where it has spent the last 80-odd years.

Finally with regard to comrade Rikki Reid's letter (November 26). Whilst comrade Reid has every right to criticise Sarah McDonald's article ('Nats and left take a beating', November 19), the language used shows a marked lack of respect for the dignity of all concerned.

**Colin McGhie**  
Glasgow

## Pepsi regrets

Protests by Change.org, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Outrage and others have persuaded PepsiCo to climb down and apologise, after it sponsored a concert in Uganda by 'murder music' singer Beenie Man, who encourages the killing of lesbians and gay men.

At his Ugandan concert on Saturday December 5, Beenie Man sang the song, 'Mi nah wallah', which includes a call to cut the throats of gay people. Uganda is notorious for homophobic violence and is currently considering introducing the death penalty for "aggravated" homosexuality and for "serial [gay] offenders".

Following protests, Pepsi ex-

pressed regret over their sponsorship of Beenie Man. In a statement to Change.org, PepsiCo said: "We are appalled by the performer's lyrics and find them repugnant. Our bottling partner in Uganda was not aware of the performer's views and never would have sponsored the concert with this knowledge ... Moving forward, we will work closely with our bottling partners to be more vigilant about the events associated with our brands."

We want to thank GLAAD and Change.org for their swift and effective lobbying of PepsiCo. Their efforts got a positive result.

David Allison of Outrage had written to PepsiCo: "We are shocked to learn that not only are you sponsoring the appearance of Beenie Man, the Jamaican dancehall music performer, but compounding the offence by sponsoring him in Uganda ... Uganda's government is currently proposing legislation calling for the imprisonment and execution of gay people."

"Backing a concert that includes a notorious homophobe in a country launching draconian legislation against people simply because of their sexual orientation is a singularly inept, not to say immoral ... We ask that you withdraw your sponsorship and reaffirm your support for human rights."

Beenie Man has a long history of inciting the murder of LGBT people. His hit tune, 'Bad man, chi man' (Bad man, queer man), instructs listeners to kill gay DJs and boasts that people would gladly go to jail for killing a queer. In another song, 'Damn', he sings: "I'm dreaming of a new Jamaica, come to execute all the queers." 'Han up deh' includes the lyrics: "Hang lesbians with a long piece of rope."

Beenie Man is also notorious for the track, 'Batty man fi dead' (Queers must be killed): "All faggots must be killed! If you fuck ass, then you get copper and lead [bullets]."

**Peter Tatchell**  
Outrage

## SWP turmoil

Just a few thoughts on the first two SWP *Pre-Conference Bulletins*.

1. It seems that the SWP is trying to launch the Right to Work Campaign *a la* 1970s-80s. However, it is early days - the RTW website is still very amateurish. But it seems that the campaign will become the main SWP front, with the prospect of joblessness meaning that unemployment will become like a dagger aimed at the heart of capitalism in the Anglo-Saxon countries.
2. The Stop the War Coalition seems to have been sidelined by the SWP as a means of silencing John Rees and Lindsey German.
3. Bulletin No1 (p35) - 'Stopping the BNP: do we just contain them' - explains that it is necessary to split the BNP members away from the cadres using the methods of the CPGB in the 1930s.

As John Bridge says on Podbean, it is necessary to go through the existing left, including the SWP and the Labour Left. And Lenin says: "Without revolutionary theory there cannot be a revolutionary party." The turmoil within the SWP may mean that its members are more willing to debate and cooperate with others on the left.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Modern Sassoon

Corporal Joe Glenton could be the modern-day Siegfried Sassoon. He is giving off a similar message 90 years later.

Do we never listen?  
**Bob Miller**  
Chelmsford

# ACTION

## Communist Forums

**London:** Sunday evenings. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.  
**December 13, 5.30pm:** 'Jesus and the politics of religion', Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, London WC1 (Kings Cross tube).

**December 20:** No forum.

**December 27:** No forum.

**January 3:** John Bellamy Foster *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Ecology - the moment of truth'.

**Oxford:** Study group, every Monday evening, studying David Harvey's *Limits to capital*.

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

**South Wales:** Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

## CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events:  
<http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

## Communist Students meetings

**London:** Every Wednesday, 7.30pm: Introduction to Marxism series, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1 (Russell Square tube).  
[ben@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:ben@communiststudents.org.uk); 07792 282830.

**Manchester:** Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.  
[www.comuniststudents.org.uk](http://www.comuniststudents.org.uk).

**Oxford:** Mondays. [oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com](mailto:oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com).

**Sheffield:** Every Sunday, 7pm. 07730 682193;  
[sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk)

## Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, until December 15, 6.45pm: Evening course, 'Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1.

**December 15:** 'A Christmas fairy tale: "The shoes that were danced to pieces"'. Speaker: Chris Knight.  
[www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## Human rights day

Thursday December 10, 1.30pm. Rally, Dale Farm, St Martin's Square, Basildon - defending Britain's largest gypsy site.  
Organised by No Borders: [noborderslondon@lists.riseup.net](mailto:noborderslondon@lists.riseup.net).

## Stop the War Christmas fundraiser

Friday December 11, 7pm: STWC benefit, Bishopgate Institute, 230 Bishopgate, London EC2. Art exhibition, poetry, music and food.  
Admission free.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Stop the EDL

Sunday December 13, 12 noon: Protest against anti-mosque demonstration by Stop the Islamisation of Europe and English Defence League. Outside Harrow Civic Centre, opposite Central Mosque, Station Road.  
Organised by Brent and Harrow Unite Against Fascism:  
[uafbrentandharrow@googlemail.com](mailto:uafbrentandharrow@googlemail.com).

## Free Joe Glenton

Wednesday December 16, 9.30am: Picket office of judge advocate general, 81 Chancery Lane, London WC22. Hearing to determine whether Joe Glenton will be released from prison while awaiting court martial.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Progressive London

Saturday January 30, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, 'Stop the right in 2010', Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Ken Livingstone, Jenny Jones (Green Party), Mike Tuffrey (Liberal Democrats), Kate Hudson (CND), Diane Abbott MP, George Galloway MP, Anas Altikriti. Sessions on 'Investment, not cuts', Trident, Afghanistan, Iraq, stopping the BNP, climate change, electoral reform, a progressive agenda for London.  
Registration: £10 (£6 unwaged). Send cheques, payable to 'Progressive London', to 20 Hanson Street, London W1W 6UF.  
[www.progressivelondon.org.uk](http://www.progressivelondon.org.uk).

## Right to Work

Saturday January 30, 11.30am: Conference - 'Fight for every job'. Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1.  
Organised by Right to Work: [www.righttowork.org.uk](http://www.righttowork.org.uk).

## Putting Irish unity on the agenda

Saturday February 20, 10am to 5pm: Conference, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London, WC1. Plenaries, seminars and discussions.

Speakers include: Gerry Adams MP, Diane Abbott MP, Ken Livingstone, Salma Yaqoob.

Registration from 9.30am: £8 (£4 unwaged) or write to London Irish Unity Conference, PO Box 65845, London, EC1P 1LS. Cheques payable to 'London Irish Unity Conference'

Hosted by Sinn Féin: [londonconference@sinn-fein.ie](mailto:londonconference@sinn-fein.ie).

## 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.



## CLIMATE

# Copenhagen sets disastrous CO<sub>2</sub> targets

This week saw the beginning of the United Nations conference on climate change in Copenhagen. Of course, as readily admitted by Barack Obama - since the United States is the world's greatest offender in relation to the per capita emission of greenhouse gases amongst the big developed countries - no new 'post-Kyoto' binding agreement will come out of these talks. Rather, at best, the various leaders will come to a fluffy-bunny consensus that something has to be done - at the next set of talks, obviously.

However, far from 'saving the planet' - or at least making sanctimonious noises about it - it seems that the leaders of the rich countries are using Copenhagen as an opportunity to accrue yet more political-economic power and leverage over the developing and poor countries. So, according to the contents of a leaked document (the so-called Danish text) there has been a 'conference within a conference' of states deemed to be part of the "circle of commitment" - which includes the US, UK and Denmark. This "circle" seemingly aims to abandon the Kyoto Protocol altogether, sideline the UN's role and effectively hand over control of climate change finances to the World Bank.

Primarily, and if the document is to be believed - to date there have been no public or 'official' denials of its authenticity - the rich countries are scheming to allocate grossly unequal limits, or targets, for the per capita carbon emission rate that the developed and developing countries are supposed to adhere to by 2050. That is, an attempt to force developing countries to 'agree' to specific emission cuts and measures that were not part of the original UN agreement. So the rich countries would be permitted to 2.67 tonnes of carbon per person - yet the poorer countries would not be allowed to emit more than 1.44 tonnes. Furthermore, any possible monies to help developing countries combat global warming would be contingent upon their agreement to a whole range of actions decided in advance by this "circle".

In other words, the spirit of neo-colonialism - or carbon imperialism, if you like - appears to be alive and well in Copenhagen. Needless to say, communists are not in the slightest surprised by such undemocratic and elitist machinations, whether they eventually prove to be successful or not - they are only to be expected. Given that the rulers of the advanced capitalist countries have so much invested - in every sense of the term - in the status quo, they will not give up their privileges lightly: after all, centuries of global plunder have enriched the ruling class almost beyond measure.

Also, as we in the CPGB never tire of pointing out - as opposed to crusty 'official communists' and reformists/legalists like the Communist Party of Britain/Morning Star group - for all its democratic and internationalist pretensions, the UN is in essence no different from its League of Nations predecessor. Which is to say, in reality it is a "thieves' kitchen" - to use VI Lenin's apt description. And there is no honour, or commitment to radical and revolutionary change, amongst thieves.

But, having said all that, the turning of Copenhagen into either an emp-



Looking at failure

ty talking shop or even a rather squalid pork barrel affair - if indeed that is what transpires - is not to be welcomed. For the simple reason that global warming, and all its attendant dangers, does represent a potential environmental and ecological disaster - from which there might be no way back, technological fantasies and quackery aside. To deny this fact, or ignore the stack of painstakingly documented evidence, is at best a wilful and stupid self-deception.

Yet, of course, there are those who, for one reason or another, precisely refuse to recognise the grave threat posed by global warming. Yes, the climate change 'sceptics', as they like to call (or flatter) themselves - who have seen through the 'hoax' of anthropogenic climate change peddled by the 'liberal elite'. Which brings us to the recent incident of the leaked emails from the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia, which inevitably became dubbed 'Climategate'. Presumably timed as some sort of effort to 'sabotage' Copenhagen (though, of course, the conference looks likely to do a perfectly good job of that itself) and denigrate climate change science in general, persons so far unknown hacked into the CRU's webmail server and then proceeded to busily disseminate emails going back 13 years. Indeed, this 'theft' involved some 160 megabytes of data in total - consisting of more than 1,000 private emails and 3,000 other documents. In due course an anonymous statement posted from a Saudi Arabian IP address (no surprises there then) appeared on the "climate-sceptic" blog, *The Air Vent* - which defended hacking into the CRU on the grounds that climate science is "too important to be kept under wraps" and went on to describe the leaked, or stolen, material as "a random selection of correspondence, code and documents".<sup>1</sup>

However, closer inspection of the various documents strongly suggests that they were in fact carefully selected and edited - cherry-picked, if anything, in an obvious 'sting' to present the scientific work conducted at the CRU in the most unfavourable light possible. An uncharitable person would even think that there has been a deliberate attempt to distort and twist the hacked material, by ripping it out of proper context. For those with the time, or patience, all these various emails and documents - which are now part of the public domain, whether the CRU likes it or not - have been comprehensively catalogued (with a search engine to ease study) by *Opinion Times* - which claims to offer "news and opinions from a Conservative, Christian perspective".<sup>2</sup> *Opinion Times* has set up a special website where all the leaked CRU documents may be viewed.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, most of the correspondence is of a technical or mundane nature - mainly topics related to surface temperature records and assorted paleoclimatological issues, such as data analysis and details of scientific conferences. Hardly the drama of Watergate or the sort of stuff that normally gets the pulse racing. As the highly reputable *Real Climate* blog (which first alerted the CRU to the hacking operation) commented, in some ways it is what is *not* contained in these emails that is the most illuminating: "There is no evidence of any worldwide conspiracy, no mention of George Soros nefariously funding climate research, no grand plan to 'get rid of the MWP' [Medieval Warm Period], no admission that global warming is a hoax, no evidence of the falsifying of data, and no 'marching orders' from our socialist/communist/vegetarian overlords."<sup>4</sup>

In reality, the whipped-up controversy centred on a very small number of

emails - particularly those sent to or from the climatologist, Phil Jones - the head of the CRU - and Michael E Mann of Pennsylvania State University, one of the originators of the graph of temperature trends dubbed the 'hockey stick graph'.<sup>5</sup> This graph, it should be noted, is the subject of much longstanding ire from the 'sceptics'.

Anyway, the most attention - or excitement - has focused on an *excerpt* from the following November 16 1999 email from Jones, where he bullishly states: "I've just completed Mike's *Nature* trick of adding in the real temps to each series for the last 20 years (ie, from 1981 onwards) and from 1961 for Keith's to hide the decline."

These few words were enough to set the rightwing blogosphere alight. At long last, proof of the conspiracy by the insidious 'climatists' - gotcha! So, for example, the US *Truth or Fight* blog took this as evidence of the "way in which the bullets to shoot down American democracy were made in Britain". As the blog recounts, when the Environmental Protection Agency published its *Endangerment finding* report on greenhouse gases in April of this year, "almost every paragraph of the text" drew as its "main authority" the "jokers" from the CRU. Diabolically, as far as the blogger is concerned, this "authority" is being "invoked to overturn the principles of 1776 in the United States - with 'the Protocols of the Elders of Norwich' providing the justification for 'EPA tyranny'". The grim conclusion is that Obama - who "hates America" - is going to Copenhagen to "sell out American taxpayers to third world subsidy junkies", and indeed that the entire climate change conference is a "socialist, world government putsch": but do the American people have the "resolution to resist it?"<sup>6</sup>

Closer to home, James Delinpole - a rightwing blogger linked to *The*

*Daily Telegraph* - was rejoicing that the anthropogenic global warming "myth" has been "deliciously exposed" by the CRU "scandal" - accusing the unit of trying to foster a "scientific climate" in which anyone who expresses disagreements with the theory of anthropogenic global warming "can be written off as a crank". Delinpole goes on to warn us to expect "more and more hysterical" stories in the "mainstream media", and to see "ever-more-virulent campaigns conducted by eco-fascist activists" - like the "risible new advertising campaign by 'Plane Stupid' showing CGI polar bears falling from the sky and exploding because kind of, like, man, that's sort of what happens whenever you take another trip on an aeroplane."<sup>7</sup> And so on and so on.

Of course, the truth is much more prosaic. The "decline" mentioned by Jones in his email in fact refers to a decline in *tree ring metrics*, not temperature. As *Real Climate* calmly explains, the scientific document in question is the 1998 Mann, Bradley and Hughes *Nature* paper on the original multiproxy temperature reconstruction - and the "trick" in question is merely to plot the "instrumental records along with reconstruction, so that the context of the recent warming is clear". As for the actual "decline", *Real Climate* goes on to detail how it is "well known that Keith Briffa's maximum latewood tree ring density proxy diverges from the temperature records after 1960" (known as the "divergence problem") and "has been discussed in the literature since Briffa *et al* in *Nature* in 1998" (Vol 391 - pp678-82). That is, Mann's "trick" of combining proxy data had been corroborated by numerous statistical tests and matched thermometer readings taken over the past 150 years.<sup>8</sup>

Frankly, we should not be surprised that scientists resort to such "tricks" and statistical methodology. They are human, after all: not the super-rational, emotionless Vulcans in white coats - uncorrupted by bias or emotionalism - of myth and popular culture. Scientists, at the end of the day, are people who use scientific methodology despite their human imperfections and frailties in order to arrive at some relatively reasonable and accurate *approximation* of objectivity - or the truth.

Perhaps more the point, scientists have a thesis - and want financial backing and grants. Badly. Far from the topsy-turvy picture presented by rightwing climate sceptics like Delinpole - where the dangers of global warming have been massively exaggerated - the reality is, capitalist governments have absolutely no interesting in promoting the message that ecological catastrophe looms. Quite the opposite. We should not forget for a minute that the George Bush administration was the most irrational and authoritarian *anti-science* US government in modern times - withdrawing grants and generally choking the life out of scientific research and the scientific community as a whole. And in Saudi Arabia who gets the grant - the scientist highlighting the perils of anthropogenic global warming or the one denying it? Yes, you guessed it.



But over time governmental leaders are being reluctantly dragged into line by the overwhelming tide of scientific opinion, which naturally finds a reflection - in some shape or form - amongst those who job it is to advise and inform governments. Sometimes facts do speak for themselves. And if it takes drawing a graph *this way* - as opposed to that way - in order to secure some possible extra funding from an undecided government minister, then who in their right mind would do anything else?

We should have no truck with the global warming "sceptics" - many of whom are, yes, out-and-out cranks, oddballs and anti-communist fanatics. In fact, rather we should emphasise how the dangers of global warming have been *understated* - especially when you bear in mind that the major reports which have enjoyed high-profile publicity in the mass media are more often than not the products of lowest-common-denominator haggling: something that a large body of scientists with all manner of viewpoints and differences feel they can put their names to without too much embarrassment. The reality is that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are set to increase, not decrease - US gas-guzzling habits show no sign of abating, and China's projected 6% growth rate guarantees that yet more carbon will be pumped into the air. Life as we know it is endangered by the ethos of production for production's sake, the drive of capital to constantly expand surplus value.

However, on the other hand, communists have no intention of hitching our wagon to that of the greens - programmatically or organisationally. No 'green taxes' for us. At best, greens have a utopian - though doubtless sincere - ideal of a non-competitive or 'cottage' capitalism, and to that end a large number are involved in the petty bourgeois economy: natural food shops, small-scale organic farming, environmental consultancies, green marketing, green tourism and the such like. At worst though, 'deep' or reactionary greens have an overtly anti-human agenda - such as blaming ordinary people for the capitalist-created environmental mess, and then trying to get us to pay the price. And hypocritically lecturing workers about the unmitigated evils of flying off on holiday - before jetting away to the next environmental conference on the other side of the planet. Least of all those who want to resurrect the distinctly unwanted, and thoroughly unlamented, reverend Thomas Malthus - such as the former chair of the UK Ecology Party (now the Green Party), Jonathon Espie Porritt CBE, who wants to stop people placing an "unbearable burden" on the environment by "irresponsibly" having more than two children. To reach this misanthropic goal, Porritt, who chairs the government's sustainable development commission, insists that "curbing" population growth through contraception and abortion "must be at the heart" of policies to fight global warming.<sup>9</sup>

No, our flag remains red and pro-human. Only a communist world can create a *genuinely* sustainable economy and environment - one not a slave to the profit motive and production, production, production ●

**Eddie Ford**

# Blue wave needs red vision

On Saturday December 5, around 50,000 activists took part in the London 'blue wave' demonstration against climate change. Ben Lewis was there

**O**rganised by the Stop Climate Chaos campaign, the protest was conceived as a way of building up pressure on the great and the good assembled for the UN climate summit in Copenhagen. The event was probably the largest climate change demonstration that London has seen and it is estimated that another 8,000 marched in Glasgow on the same day.

The SCC is essentially a lobbying group that has brought together a number of different NGOs and charities ranging from Greenpeace, through Islamic Relief, to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It is campaigning for "practical action by the UK" (ie, the government) "to prevent global warming rising beyond the 2°C danger threshold" and "to provide poor countries with the resources they need to help them adapt to climate change and follow a low carbon development path".

These aims also found reflection in the demonstration itself. The official slogans were 'Quit dirty coal', 'Protect the poorest' and 'Act fair and fast'. The crowd was predominantly composed of the different charities, NGOs and religious organisations, as well as a fair smattering of Green Party and Liberal Democrat supporters. Although the usual left groups and campaigns were also out in force, they were well and truly outnumbered. What was particularly encouraging, however, was that so many young people were on the march. Although many had all sorts of odd ideas in their heads, they were open to discussing big political questions around ecology, capitalism and the alternatives to it. Indeed, some of the protestors had highlighted the inadequacies of the official slogans. The Co-op's placard originally read: 'I vote to stop climate change', but one had been amended to: 'I would vote to stop climate change, but none of the parties have any solutions!'

And this is the crux of the problem. At the end of the demonstration 'blue wave' supporters met with Gordon Brown, who later declared his support for the protest and the drive to a low-carbon economy. So, instead of exposing Brown's hypocrisy and his shameful record on the environment, what the protest has done, amidst quite a bit of press coverage, is to allow him to pose as a dedicated environmentalist in the run-up to Copenhagen.

Before

the mobilisation at Grosvenor Square, the Campaign Against Climate Change (CACC) organised a rally of a couple of thousand at Speakers Corner, prior to joining the bigger march. The CACC has slightly more radical (although at times misplaced) demands (and had to deliver them to 10 Downing Street rather than discuss them with Brown). They include: the declaration of a climate emergency; 10% emission cuts and a million 'green jobs' by the end of 2010; a ban on domestic flights; a 55mph speed limit; and the end of agrofuel.

As usual with these affairs, there was an enormous range of speakers, many of whom repeated the same points in a slightly different fashion. There were some noteworthy speeches though.

John McDonnell MP made a strong and impassioned intervention that highlighted the "hypocrisy and cant" of a British government that will go to Copenhagen paying lip service to emissions reductions, but which will then return and push ahead with the third runway at Heathrow: "We cannot stand by and allow capitalism to plunder our planet."

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson for energy and climate change, Simon Hughes, was in left-populist mode - firstly promoting his credentials as a cyclist ("Three Cheers for those who have cycled here today!"), and then sermonising on how "we have not understood how people have been exploiting the world" - the "greedy" who have been "putting the interests of the few before the many" and causing "the gap between the rich and the poor" to widen. He also called for "solidarity with people who have been on the receiving end" of this - particularly those in the global south.

A member of the band Seize the Day, which provided musical entertainment, spoke of her commitment to stop flying and thus reduce her carbon footprint, even though her sister was living in Australia. She explained

how difficult this was, but how she was doing her bit for future generations. There was real sincerity in her voice and her commitment was palpable. But to me it highlighted one of the political problems I encountered both in the slogans and amongst the demonstrators themselves.

There is a real danger that the question of climate change is reduced to one of moralism: individual solutions undertaken by decent, upstanding individuals who cycle everywhere, eat nice (and expensive) organic food produced locally and stick on another jumper instead of turning the heating up.

This underlines how, in the absence of a strong and politically viable left, 'green' and 'ecological' thought has become the property of the petty bourgeois economy ('buying local', organic food, the Green Party) and increasingly a bourgeoisie keen to pose 'green' in an attempt to boost profits (airlines offering an extra charge to plant a 'carbon offsetting' trees and other such nonsense).

The problem, which John McDonnell at least alluded to, is the system of capital itself, which treats nature not as a provider of human fulfilment that must be cherished, but as a cost-free source of wealth. The reason why, for example, workers choose to fly on their holidays is not because they are selfish, but because flying is the cheapest and quickest option for those with limited resources and limited time before they are forced to resume their wage-slavery.

This brings me to the second problem that I encountered on the demonstration, one epitomised by the slogan, 'Stop climate chaos'. This is purely negative, and there is no vision of a completely new relationship between human beings and nature - crucially in the way in which we organise social production.

If we understand climate change as a phenomenon resulting from the

skewed relationship between humanity and nature that is directly linked to the capitalist mode of production, then it becomes clear that we can not only *reverse* it: we can fundamentally alter our relationship with the environment and *restore* and *enhance* the riches of nature for future generations. To paraphrase the popular *Weekly Worker* headline at the demonstration, saving the planet *necessitates* fighting for a red world.

But that is not all we have to say. In addition to articulating this vision for a world based on production for need, not profit, communists must also advance immediate demands which cut against the wasteful logic of capital in the here and now. These can help to politically train and equip the proletariat with the ideas it needs to become the hegemonic class in the struggle for ecological sustainability and not simply an appendage of the petty bourgeois greens.

Against the destructive, wasteful and polluting logic of capital, communists immediately demand:

- Free urban public transport. Nationalise the land. Nationalise the banks. Nationalise the energy industry. Tax polluters. No to biofuels. No to nuclear power. Minimise carbon, methane and other such global warming gas outputs.

- For sustainable development. For the re-establishment of an intimate connection between town and country, agriculture and industry, and a rational distribution of the population. Work and domestic life should be brought closer together - concrete jungles, urban sprawl, huge farms and uninterrupted industrialised agriculture are profoundly alienating and inhuman.

- Towns and cities should be full of trees, roof gardens, planted walls, allotments, wild parks and little farms.

- Inshore seas must include wide non-fishing areas. The aim should be to fully restore marine life and thus create a sustainable fishing industry.

- Where feasible there should be the re-establishment of forests, natural floodplains, marshes, fens and heathland. Extensive wilderness areas should be created in the countryside, along with the reintroduction of the full array of native plants and animal species



**Blue in the face**

## Notes

1. <http://noconsensus.wordpress.com>.
2. [www.opiniontimes.com](http://www.opiniontimes.com).
3. [www.eastangliaemails.com/index.php](http://www.eastangliaemails.com/index.php).
4. [www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack](http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack).
5. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ockey\\_stick\\_graph](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ockey_stick_graph); and for the actual 'controversial' graph: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hockey\\_stick\\_chart\\_ipcc\\_large.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hockey_stick_chart_ipcc_large.jpg).
6. [www.thetruthorthefight.com/?p=1862](http://www.thetruthorthefight.com/?p=1862).
7. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/jamesdelingpole/100017393/climategate-the-final-nail-in-the-coffin-of-anthropogenic-global-warming>.
8. [www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack](http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/11/the-cru-hack).
9. [www.fmft.net/archives/003556.html](http://www.fmft.net/archives/003556.html).

**IRAN**

# Entire regime is the target

Opposition in Iran is no longer directed at supporting one section of the theocracy against the other. The days of the regime are numbered, say **Yassamine Mather** and **Chris Strafford**



**Militant students on the march in Tehran**

The 56th anniversary of the murder of three students by the shah's security forces during vice president Richard Nixon's visit to Tehran in 1953 may prove to be the last Students Day commemorated under the heel of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Hundreds of thousands of students, youth and workers took to the streets in protest against the regime and the barbaric repression meted out since the June elections. Though hard to confirm, the protests to mark Azar 16 (December 7 in the Iranian calendar) could be the largest since millions came out immediately after the rigged presidential poll. Demonstrations took place in Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Arak, Karaj, Orumieh, Kerman, Rasht, Shiraz, Ahvaz, Kermanshah and Hamedan and there have been reports of soldiers protesting at Qom airbase. People taking part in the various actions carried Iranian flags, but without the Islamic Republic's sign of Allah, showing that the movement is moving beyond the slogans of the 'reformists'.

In preparation for these demonstrations the regime formed lines of police, Bassij paramilitaries and Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) around the universities, squares and monuments in the major cities, and foreign correspondents were warned to stay away from all protests. The authorities put up long drapes outside the main gate of Tehran University (at least 20 metres long and three metres high) to

stop passers-by witnessing protests planned inside the campus. The government also attempted to limit internet access, with up to 50% of attempts failing to connect. However, the regime is simply unable to stop the flood of information that is now on hundreds of blogs, twitter and news sites. At one point the Bassij were seen frantically searching computer rooms at Tehran Polytechnic University in an attempt to stop pictures and videos coming out. Mobile phone networks were also shut down in central Tehran and restricted in other parts of the city, but still activists managed to spread news of the protests and relay information about road blocks and meet-up points. Once again the Iranian youth have shown the world that the state cannot keep a lid on protests and unrest.

Throughout the length and breadth of Iran students demonstrated. Even in small towns and cities far away from Tehran thousands took part. This was by far the biggest and most widespread student protest since the revolution in 1979. At Hamedan University, where there were heavy clashes between students and security forces, two students were thrown from the second floor by the Bassij - reports indicate that both sustained severe injuries. At Tehran Polytechnic University students broke down gates that the Bassij had locked to stop crowds outside the campus joining the student protestors. Students clashed with the police and managed

to repel them for a considerable time. They were shouting, "*Marg Bar Khamenei*" (Down with Khamenei!), as the focus of popular anger shifts from Ahmadinejad onto the supreme leader and the entire Islamic Republic. At hospitals in the capital police with dogs prevented injured people from entering, arresting and beating those who looked like protestors.

In Amir-Kabir University students were also savagely beaten by security forces, and a prominent student leader, Majid Tavakoli, was arrested. At the Medical College in Tehran, Bassij thugs attempted to break up a demonstration and viciously assaulted several students - there were reports of people being badly injured at this demonstration too. At Razi University in Kermanshah militia and police had a massive presence, but failed to stop the student demonstration. At Sanati University in Isfahan student protests were attacked by security forces. Professors at Beheshti University joined with the 2,000-strong protest, to scenes of massive cheering and chants of 'Death to the dictator'.

In Kurdistan students burned images of Ali Khamenei and the first supreme leader, Ruhollah Khomeini. Here the protests were particularly focused on the murder of socialist fighter Ehsan Fattahian, who was executed on November 11. School students have also taken part in the demonstrations - at a high school for girls in Tehran the students gathered outside the gates chanting slogans.

There was heavy fighting across Tehran, with students at times getting the better of the security forces and militia. At Khaje-Nasir University Bassij carrying Hezbollah flags were attacked and thrown out by brave students. Outside Tehran University, in the streets approaching Enghelab Square and Valiasr Street security forces opened fire - it is not clear whether they were warning shots or aimed at the crowd, but some reports claim that students were shot. It seems that around Enghelab Square the Bassij abandoned their positions and vehicles, which were swiftly used to form burning barricades by the youth.

There were also reports of security forces refusing to attack demonstrators and at times accepting drinking water from students who were calling for them to join the protests. In another significant development, it is said that riot police actually turned against the Bassij who were attacking demonstrators. If this wavering from security forces and the stories of soldiers' demonstrations are confirmed, then this will certainly undermine the regime's confidence in its ability to suppress protests and may possibly signal an acceleration of its collapse.

Proving that the protests go far beyond the student movement, elderly women dodged bullets and tear gas to bring water, sandwiches and first aid to the student demonstrators. Some were set upon by militia. Wherever fighting was taking place, residents rushed to aid the students and

young workers and many formed voluntary medical groups, helping the injured into nearby homes and distributing water to crowds. Many workers joined the demonstrations after finishing work, swelling the numbers in central Tehran and other cities.

Many students posting on social networking sites have been asking, 'Where are the reformists?' The mass movement still mobilises behind the green of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's presidential campaign, yet it seems he has abandoned the movement he helped stir up. Students across Tehran chanted: "Mousavi is an excuse: the entire regime is the target" - the 'reformists' have been made acutely aware that the movement is now far beyond their control.

Protests continued into the evening, with sporadic clashes between demonstrators and police. The state news agency put the total of arrests at 204, though the number was probably higher - many students were taken to undisclosed locations and denied contact with their family.

On December 8, as students arrived at Tehran University, Bassij and Pasdaran were waiting. Soon there were fresh clashes and tear gas was fired not just into the crowds demonstrating outside, but also into the campus itself. Later the Bassij entered the university and encountered fierce resistance. That day there were several other clashes across the country, involving tens of thousands of students ●



# Green and red solidarity

Ben Lewis reports on the green movement protest outside the Iranian embassy in London and the positive reception Hopi received

On Monday December 7, Hands Off the People of Iran activists attended a demonstration outside the Iranian embassy to mark Students Day. It was particularly important for those outside Iran to express our solidarity because this year's commemorations in that country have highlighted a deepening radicalisation of the student movement, with demonstrations spreading beyond the campus and onto the streets.

It was encouraging that around 350 protesters attended what was a rather impressively prepared event in London. There were marquees, generators, a powerful PA system, a green laser lighting up the Iranian embassy and green glow sticks available on demand. But the demonstration reflected much of the confusion prevalent amongst Iranian exiles (the Hopi contingent was the only non-Iranian group that took part). This was to be expected, since it was organised by the Iranian Green Movement in London. Official chants and slogans were limited to opposing Ahmadinejad and Khomeini, rather than the Islamic Republic as a whole.

The statement on the website of the Iranian Green Movement ([www.londongreen.org/en/index.php](http://www.londongreen.org/en/index.php)) includes some supportable demands on freeing all political prisoners, freedom of the press and calling for public trials for those agents of the Islamic Republic who have committed crimes and tortured detainees (does that include leading 'reformists' like Mir-Hossein Mousavi?).

However, it has absolutely nothing to say on sanctions or war on Iran. Worse, it shows illusions in what the green movement claims is the "neutral" United Nations and its platitudinous Human Rights Declarations - calling for the UN to "over-see" a "free election" in Iran. Like

the sham elections in Iraq and Afghanistan, presumably ...

In order to challenge this perspective, a smaller 'red' demonstration had been organised right next to the green tents and marquees. It was vociferous and energetic in calling for opposition to both imperialism and the whole Islamic regime, as opposed to this or that individual mullah, but - presumably by mutual consent - they were physically separated from the main demonstration by steel barriers and a row of police. The noise of the 'green' PA often drowned out the more principled politics.

Hopi activists distributed a leaflet entitled 'Solidarity with the Iranian people, not Mousavi'. As well as outlining our internationalist, working class perspectives for Iran, the leaflet also carried a translation of the Iran Khodro car workers' statement on the political crisis in the country.

Given our clear message, we were expecting to be met with a rather frosty reception. However, comrades found that there was very little difference in the way we were received by the 'green' and 'red' parts of the demonstration. Almost everybody appreciated the solidarity we have shown and many wanted further information about Hopi. We leafleted and sold papers to both sections in an atmosphere which contrasted favourably to other occasions. Following the rigged presidential elections, our comrades' red flags were torn away by Mousavi supporters in Manchester, for example.

In view of this it was a little puzzling that the anti-regime left did not attempt to interact more directly with the 'greens' and those who hold illusions in Mousavi. Rather than mounting what was in effect a counter-demonstration, and being unable to make them-

selves heard, the 'red' section could have demanded speaking rights from the official organisers. The comrades were correct to retain their independent voice, however. We should not blur lines of principle. We should not encourage support for the theocrat Mousavi or seek to prettify his sordid record.

One Iranian comrade pointed

out that many of those now in the 'green' part of the demonstration were actually familiar faces from past leftwing actions - people who consider it their duty as 'Marxists' to uncritically tail Mousavi.

As the mass movement inside Iran grows in confidence and the regime's days appear increasingly numbered, the tasks of the solidarity movement remain the

same: a fight on two fronts - against imperialist designs on Iran, and for unequivocal support for the Iranian masses. This necessitates taking a clear stand both against imperialist sanctions and war and against Mousavi, a butcher of the Iranian left. Both have the blood of workers, the left, democrats and secularists on their hands ●



Hopi: demonstrating solidarity with latest upsurge

## Fighting fund

### Tongue in cheek

"OK, I'm now a Thursday donor," writes comrade LR in a message accompanying his online donation for £5. He was responding to my appeal last week for all those publication-day readers to get out their credit card while they are on our website, so his comment might be a bit tongue in cheek.

But it's very welcome for all that - and the same goes for the other web contributions. Thanks to KN (£30), WD (£10) and MZ (who donates £20 and commends us for our recent articles on prison and the Prison Officers Association). Nevertheless, these four comrades represent a drop in the ocean compared to the 15,040 internet readers of the *Weekly Worker* last week. (Talking of the internet, by the way, the recently formed Weekly Worker Readers Group on Facebook already has 234 members - take a look for yourself at [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2703341759](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2703341759).)

Over the last seven days I also received a total of £85 in standing order donations, plus a tenner added to comrade IT's resubscription. Then there's the £20 contribution from CPGB Provisional Central Committee member Mike Macnair, who lost a bet (that the Lisbon treaty would be ratified before the end of 2009) with fellow PCC member Jack Conrad! All that comes to £180 for the week and gives us a running total for December of £380. But we need £1,000 every month and, for the first time in a while, I am a bit concerned about the slow rate at which the total is increasing.

But I am sure I can rely on our readers to help us reach our full target - it is the season of good will, after all. (Now who's being tongue in cheek?) ●

Robbie Rix

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

## Statement by Iran Khodro car workers

Issued December 6, the day before the clashes

**Fellow workers and friends**  
During the last few days tens of workers, students and grieving mothers [a reference to mothers of young people killed following protest gatherings on December 4] have been arrested and sent to jail. Many of our colleagues and fellow workers are in prison.

Tens of students, who are our children and our allies, are incarcerated. Mothers have been held. The government is closing its eyes to reality and arresting anyone they

want. The country is under the grip of security forces and people do not even have the right to gather in a public park.

- In which country is it illegal to demand payment of unpaid wages?
- In which country is it forbidden to go to a park or to climb mountains?
- The regime has banned students from climbing in case they organise political meetings under the guise of mountaineering]
- What is the crime of our grieving mothers?

● In which country is it illegal to form workers' organisations?

Fellow workers, how dare they be so shameless? We must protest! The situation created by the government is unbearable. Freedom is a basic right for all human beings.

Long live freedom!

Translated and distributed by Hands Off the People of Iran: <http://hopoi.org>



**STUDENTS**

# Macho revanchism hides an ugly face

Men's societies in universities and colleges have nothing to do with promoting equality, argues **Chris Strafford**

**O**ver the last few years there has been a growing trend of reactionary moves against women's representation and the women's movement, and this has been reflected in universities and colleges.

A common argument now being put forward by everyone from the far right to a gaggle of peculiar libertarians is: 'Women have their own groups and student societies, so men should have them too'. This has resulted in the abolition, merging or downgrading of women's officers posts in student unions, to the extent that only eight universities now have a full-time women's officer in student unions that are largely dominated by men. Over the last few weeks 'Man Collective' (Oxford) and 'The Men's Society' (Manchester) have been accepted as recognised student societies, resulting in national media coverage. Right-wing commentators have dubbed this 'men's liberation', a supposed reaction to 'positive discrimination'.

These developments must be seen within the wider context of a growing macho revanchism and the recent attacks on women, such as through the Welfare Reform Bill, which essentially seeks to impoverish single mothers, new measures against sex workers, the continuing inequality in pay and life opportunities, not to mention the increasing trend to blame women for provoking sexual violence and rape, resulting in a low rate of convictions.

What some are saying is that it is men who are now oppressed - not because of class, ethnicity, sexuality or disability, but because the women's movement has 'gone too far' and now it is not misogyny, but misandry (discrimination against men), that is the problem. To back up this assertion a variety of different 'facts' are employed - male underachievement in education, higher rates of suicide, poor investment in male-only cancers ...

But these phenomena are produced by class oppression, not misandry. Schooling for the working class is still centred on creating a significant number of semi-skilled or unskilled workers. Most of my school friends never went to university and ended up working in shops, as labourers, on apprenticeships or spent months at a time on the dole. Suicides are undoubtedly higher amongst the working class - unemployment, poverty, alienation and the constant stresses of capitalist society drive individuals to despair. It is also obvious that workers with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses are less likely to survive than the rich. The NHS 'postcode lottery' is not actually random - life expectancy for men in working class areas of Glasgow is 28 years lower than those living in the lush suburbs.

Another common argument used by supporters of the 'male backlash' is that men need to discuss masculinity and to build a 'positive male identity'. even supposed communists like George Waterhouse of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain has been defending these groups, writing on Facebook: "The



**Nothing to be proud of**

main aim of the men's society is to counteract what we refer to as 'the fall of man'. Too long have we listened to that serpent and munched upon his proverbial apples."<sup>1</sup>

In the abstract there is little problem with men discussing masculinity. Indeed there have been men's caucuses doing that in order to aid the movement

for women's liberation in parallel with 'women's only' meetings. In other words, male debate may be useful and play a positive role in strengthening the women's movement. However, the new groups have been formed on a rather different basis.

To understand what they are about and where they are going we

need to know who is behind them. In Manchester we have been very successful in exposing them. For example, the founder of the new society is Ben Wild, a rightwing evangelical Christian. Whilst well spoken and polite, Ben thinks that 'straight pride' might be a good slogan for a men's society. Two of the Manchester com-

mittee belong to Conservative Future, the Tory Party's student organisation. Unsurprisingly it is Conservative students who have been at the forefront of attacks on women's officers posts.

But the Manchester committee also boasts a couple of individuals with links to the Orange Order, who have been quite happy to show their support for Ulster unionist extremists. After pointing this out we were threatened with libel action and violence, and the membership of such Facebook groups seems to have ended. The committee also includes a UK Independence Party supporter, who is notorious for choosing Goebbels as a favourite historical character!

All this may look like name-calling and silly student politics, but it is obvious that this group represents a coalescing of rightwing forces determined to undermine gains women have made over the last few decades. Their opponents have been labelled "feminist Nazi dykes", "lesbians" and that age-old favourite of rightwing idiots everywhere: "men-hating feminists".

In response to these moves students across the country have begun mobilising to counter the influence of men's groups. At Goldsmiths University a move to accept the 'Gentleman's Club' was defeated by a meeting of students. In Manchester supporters of Communist Students, the Socialist Worker Student Society, the Commune and the Anarchist Federation have met to discuss a plan of action for the new term. We are intent on winning the argument on campus. Those of us based in Manchester are looking to link up with other groups in order to present a united response to these attacks ●

## Notes

1. <http://th-th.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=75303762887&topic=8079>.

# Jesus the communist

**O**n December 8, Jack Conrad of the CPGB spoke on 'Jesus: prophet, son of god, or revolutionary?' at the School of Oriental and African Studies, addressing a meeting organised by Communist Students. It was attended by around 25 people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Comrade Conrad argued that in all probability Jesus was a real historical figure, and could well have presented himself and his prophetic mission in terms of being the 'son of David': ie, of the legitimate royal line of ancient Israel. That is what two gospels of the *Bible* detail.

A convincing account of Jesus and his mission can be constructed. Jesus would have urged the non-payment of taxes to the Romans and class retribution. Not compliance and turning the other cheek. Comrade Conrad referenced Jesus's repeated attacks on the rich and his championing of the

poor. The rich were told to give away their wealth or face everlasting damnation. In god's kingdom Jesus envisaged a type of communism, a monarchical communism - "not of production, but consumption".

Israel in the 1st century was riven with profound class contradictions and subversive anti-Roman leaders, guerrilla groups and salvatory parties had the active support of the masses. Given the times, all demands for national freedom and class retribution were cloaked in religious terms, references and doctrines. Jesus was part of the popular revolutionary movement against Roman rule which culminated in the great Jewish revolt from 66-70.

Jesus himself banked on god's intervention and 12 legions of angels to deliver Israel from the Roman yoke. He clearly failed. Executed by the Roman authorities - there would have been no buying Jewish mob de-

manding his crucifixion - what is remarkable about Jesus is that his followers were able to convince themselves that he lived on and was just about to return.

The ability of the Roman empire to turn Jesus into his opposite should not surprise us. Ruling classes, especially in conditions of decline, often compromise or buy off opposition movements and make them their own. Christianity became the official religion of the empire under Constantine and he took a leading role in fashioning a theology which preached meek acceptance of exploitation and state power.

In the discussion afterwards, several Christians disputed parts of what comrade Conrad had said. One stated that there was often an "arrogant" attitude on the left towards those of a religious bent. Tina Becker of the CPGB argued that Marxists would be foolish to adopt an attitude like that

of atheist Richard Dawkins. He could truly be described as arrogant and actually failed to understand why religion is still such a powerful force in society. We must have a more nuanced analysis than "it's all rubbish", and be ready to engage with the many people who hold religious beliefs.

The talk on Jesus was filmed and will be available to watch on the CS website soon. Communist Students are now registered as a society at SOAS and our London branch meetings are moving to this more central location. At next week's meeting - the last of this year - we will be giving a short introduction to the politics of CS for the benefit of new students, and discussing our plans for 2010. All are welcome ●

**Laurie McCauley**

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REVIEW

# Not explaining the crisis

Chris Harman *Zombie capitalism: global crisis and the relevance of Marx* Bookmarks, 2009, pp401, £16.99

Ever even heard of the Okishio theorem? Understand the maths behind it? Could you outline the temporal single system interpretation to a workmate after a couple of bevvies? If not, don't beat yourself up about it.

Marxist economics is increasingly becoming a specialised terrain, with perhaps only a handful of academics truly on top of recondite developments in the field. Even for those with some undergraduate-level training in mainstream economics, it can be hard work to keep up. That must be counted an ironic fate for an analysis intended by its founder to become the common-sense explanation of capitalism for hundreds of millions of working class people.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no one, single, up-to-date volume that convincingly puts across this set of ideas in a manner accessible to the average activist. Chris Harman - who died only last month in Cairo, aged 66 - presumably intended what will be his last ever book to fill this very real gap.

To some extent *Zombie capitalism* pulls off what it was designed to do. But that has to be said with a couple of major qualifications. For a start, the work is 100% grounded within the so-called 'IS tradition' of the British Socialist Workers Party and its predecessor, the International Socialists.

Sure, all revolutionary socialists defend their ideas against allcomers. But, in so doing, Harman builds on an intellectual framework that no other current on the international revolutionary left will find satisfactory. What is being offered is not a broad introduction to Marxist economics, but a quite specific introduction to one possible take on Marxist economists.

Secondly, and more importantly, the central argument of the book - that capitalism has been stagnant in recent decades, thanks to a long-term trend for the rate of profit to fall - is at best too simplistic, and may even be just plain wrong.

Let us quickly look at some of the other literature. There is much by Marx himself, and every socialist should make an effort to read it. His pamphlets *Wage labour and capital* and *Wages, price and profit* should be comprehensible to most educated people. *Capital* is a three-volume masterpiece, but is not exactly an airport novel in terms of readability.

However, capitalism has changed hugely since 1883, and prevalent economic theory has moved with it. There are entirely new questions Marxists must answer. It says much that the text still touted as the standard way in to more contemporary issues is Paul Sweezy's *The theory of capitalist development: principles of Marxian political economy*, first published in 1942. Manifold theoretical flaws notwithstanding, it does cover many of the key debates up until that point, and in a well-written manner. But 1942 was an awfully long time ago.

Ernest Mandel's 1962 effort, *Marxist economic theory* - a strong influence on me when I first became involved with the far left - scores over Sweezy in terms of depth. But it too can represent heavy going, and again, it is obviously outdated.

What is needed now is a new version of John Harrison's *Marxist economics for socialists*, which is comparatively recent - if that can be said of a book penned in 1978 - and aimed squarely at beginners. It is pretty basic and thank-



Chris Harman: old text for new

fully slim, but in this instance, more is less. Somebody should reprint it.

This brings me to the output of Harman, who until his passing stood all but alone as an Anglophone populariser of Marxist economics. His last substantial venture in this respect was *Explaining the crisis: a Marxist reappraisal* (1984). Indeed, it is probably fair to describe *Zombie capitalism* as an updated and expanded version of that earlier book. There is considerable overlap in terms of content, so I will skip the critique here.

If you do buy Harman's latest effort, what do you get for your money? (Oh, and on the subject of money, it is over £4 cheaper on Amazon than it is in the Bookmarks shop.) Well, almost two-thirds of what you are shelling out for is a crash course in Marxist economics, as understood by the IS tradition. You may, or may not, have heard it all before.

We kick off with a rapid-fire run-through on the nature of commodities, use-value and exchange-value, the labour theory of value, exploitation, surplus value, accumulation and competition, and the rate of profit. While this material will not challenge anybody with a pre-existing understanding of Marxism, I suspect that the pace of the exposition alone would make it quite hard for someone coming across these concepts for the first time.

After that, there comes a summary of the mainstream objections to these concepts, which are swiftly rejected, followed by explanation of capitalism's crisis-prone character. This, for Harman, is based on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; everything after this point is by way of a series of footnotes.

Such a position has clear advantages if you are trying to come up with a line for an outfit like the SWP. It is a one-size-fits-all stance that can rapidly be picked up by the averagely bright middle cadre, and relentlessly hammered home at every opportunity.

Marx, of course, did postulate what has become known in the jargon as the TRPF. But a tendency is only a

tendency; Marx himself listed numerous countervailing tendencies, which can and often do completely counteract any fall in profitability. These include increasing working time, cutting wages and productivity gains in the consumer goods sector.

What Harman has to show is that TRPF analyses can validly be erected as a monocausal reason for the gyrations of capitalism since Marx's death. He may just about be able to get away with it, but only because Marx nowhere lays out his own developed theory of capitalist crisis.

As many other writers have pointed out, Marx points to numerous other considerations. One alternative argument within Marxism is known as 'underconsumptionism', which is the claim that crisis can be driven by a shortage of effective demand on the part of the working class. Other writers have looked to the lack of balance between production and demand in the output of consumer goods and the output of capital goods, a stance dubbed 'disproportionality'.

The common mistake of proponents of all three positions is that they arbitrarily separate factors that are organically linked in capitalist production itself. As Marx himself explicitly stated, an explanation of capitalist crisis must take into account both problems resulting from the TRPF and those of the realisation of surplus value.

To understand what is going on in capitalism at any one time, you need to know a heck of a lot more than what is happening to the rate of profit. As Mandel puts it, "The capitalist mode of production is both generalised commodity production and production for profit by firms operating independently of one another. It cannot be the one without the other."

"It is both a system oriented towards the production of a growing mass of surplus value (of surplus labour) and a system in which the real appropriation of this surplus value is dependent on the possibility of actually selling commodities, which contain this surplus value, at their produc-

tion prices (returning the average rate of profit) or at prices permitting the realisation of super-profits. Any other interpretation of the capitalist mode of production dispels one of the intrinsic structural characteristics without which it would no longer be capitalist" (E Mandel *The second slump: a Marxist analysis of recession in the 70s* London 1978, p166).

TRPF can also be challenged empirically. Inconveniently for us, economic statistics are not collected by Marxist categories. It is by no means clear that the rate of profit has consistently fallen in the long term. There are plenty of calculations available, from far-left sources and investment banks alike, that in the 2000s the rate of profit was moving upwards. Such a critique is particularly associated with Permanent Revolution, the British-based orthodox Trotskyist group, and I tend to sympathise with it. But the debate is beyond verification unless the two sides can agree a methodology.

Now back to the rest of the book. The opening decades of the last century, of course, saw the replacement of the free-market capitalism of Marx's day by the new phase of imperialism, as theorised by a number of leading Marxists of the time. That much is uncontroversial on the far left.

But chapter four presents the SWP's idiosyncratic line on this debate, based on an over-literal reading of Hilferding and Bukharin, from which much else about its politics flows. Insistence that the state and capital have - at least in all major countries on the world stage - fused into single 'state capitalist trusts' is essential to the bulk of SWP theory, not least Cliff's arguments about state capitalism and Kidron's notion of the permanent arms economy. This is another case of conflating an undoubted tendency with concrete reality.

Multinational capital can and does have relationships with many states. Harman seemingly wants to pretend that globalisation did not happen, because it does not fit his predetermined framework. The wilder claims

that we now live in a borderless world for capital, so fashionable only a decade ago, clearly were exaggerated. But the last period undeniably did open major new possibilities for capital on a global scale.

For the IS tradition, economic change in the former Stalinist states was a straightforward shift from one form of capitalism to another. But the rest of the Marxist left looks at the same picture and sees a massive ingress of cut-price labour-power - and vast quantities of accumulated dead labour - now available for capitalist exploitation for the first time, with all that implies for the organic composition of capital.

Part two of *Zombie capitalism* gives us a potted history of the major economic trends of the mid-20th century, including the great depression, the long boom and the return to instability from the early 1970s. Again, these chapters will be useful for some, but those who have heard the arguments before might as well skim-read these pages. So far, so *Explaining the crisis*.

The real meat of *Zombie capitalism* comes in part three, which examines the current capitalist downturn. Harman traces the rise of finance as "privatised Keynesianism" - the felicitous phrase was coined by Riccardo Bellofiore - and its role as the driver behind the debt bubble in the lead-up to the events of the last two years. In SWP terms, the permanent arms economy was supplemented by a temporary debt economy.

Harman hedges his bets on the immediate outlook, in one paragraph reminding readers darkly that "the system was only able to recover from the crisis of the inter-war years after a massive destruction of value through the worst slump capitalism has ever known followed by the worst war".

In the next, he leaves himself some wriggle room, insisting that he is not predicting endless slump. Future bubbles and periods of rapid growth are described as likely, if only as a prelude to further crises. "And the consequences will not only be economic," he contends in the final sentence of the book's key chapter. Meaning what, exactly?

Chapter 12 comprises a bolted-on nod to environmental concerns, perhaps reflecting the SWP's only recently discarded obsession with 'the movements'. They are presented as a new set of limits to capital, and some of the points raised are moderately interesting. But chapters 13 and 14 are there to rally the troops. The working class can put a stop to capitalism, we are reassured. But most of us knew that anyway.

What to make of the work as a whole? *Zombie capitalism* is an honest attempt to argue an internally coherent set of ideas, and nobody is complaining about that. It is as good as any roughly equivalent title, better than some and as close to well written as the subject matter allows.

The practical conclusions - whatever the basis on which they are reached - are ones that any socialist would be able to support, if at a high level of generality; yes, we do need a better system to replace capitalism. But we did not need to read a 350-page book to tell us that. In short, the book is disappointing, rather than actually bad. The space is still there for some author to do a better job ●

David Osler



## REVIEW

# Anarchist bombs and working class struggle

Louis Adamic **Dynamite: the story of class violence in America** AK Press, 2009, pp352, £13



Haymarket, Chicago: police outrage

**A**K are to be highly congratulated for bringing out this book. It was first published in 1931, with a revised edition in 1934, republished 1958 and abridged back into availability in 1984.

I suspect it is one which will greatly inform and surprise your average British leftist - possibly even quite a few American ones too. It describes the huge influence of anarchist working class leaders, and the centrality of armed resistance to the American labour movement from the turn of the 19th century to the end of the 1930s: "Thenceforth [following the electoral defeats of the Socialist Labor Party in 1885] Anarchism was definitely a growing movement in Chicago. The active membership of the anarchist clubs perhaps never exceeded 3,000 - surely a small number in a community of 850,000 - but among the leaders were picturesque, intense men ... they talked much of 'the revolution', dynamite, human rights, justice, firearms, liberty, arson and received much sensational publicity" (p44).

The book highlights two early formations and influences of the move-

ment - the Western Federation of Miners, for instance, hugely powerful and dynamic, which spawned the later Industrial Workers of the World, and provided some of those memorable leaders. The readiness of this movement to respond to violence with violence is rooted in the merciless oppression of the miners and other trade unionists both at work and on the streets - often slaughtered *en masse* by police, troops and other hired thugs: "Most of the violence in the class struggle in the United States was perpetrated by organised capitalist interests, acting largely through their agents in the government ... these massacres, frame-ups, judicial murders are not going unavenged. The underdog in America is getting his vengeance" (pviii).

Not that the IWW, for example, had violence as a policy means to an end: its tactics were primarily those of mass action and the mass picket and boycott. Where it engaged in violence, it was purely defensive. It did though, advance the tactic of sabotage - this was moved up several points by the ironworkers union,

which sought to undo any work undertaken by non-union or scab labour. Dynamiting structures which the employers had prided themselves in having built without recognising or hiring union workers.

But armed struggle can be a double-edged sword. Its tactical legitimacy can be robbed by unintended casualties, especially those on your own side. So it was that the 1910 bombing of the anti-union *Los Angeles Times*, when several workers were killed, turned into a spectacular debacle, which the employers might only have prayed for. A huge international and domestic campaign had been built around the proposition that the building had been badly built, that the explosion was caused by a gas leak and that the dynamic union men banged up had been patently framed. At the 11th hour, however, the McNamara brothers confessed to the bombing and not only pulled the rug from under the defence, but set back the confidence of the whole working class movement and the spirit of the previously pugnacious American Federation of Labor.

One of the influential organisations of the period covered by the book was the Noble Order Of The Knights of Labor, founded in 1869 by a Philadelphia garment cutter Uriah S Stephens and six of his fellow craftsmen. The Knights engaged much of the ancient Masonic rituals - the uniforms, high-sounding titles, elaborate signs and passwords of the guilds and early craft unions. They aspired to something more than simple 'trade unionism': a moral crusade, the 'dignity' of labour, a kind of socialistic humanitarianism. Initially the Knights were highly successful, having recruited over a million members by May 1886, but they promised far more than they ever delivered. When the chips were down they conceded the rights of capital and looked with great disfavour on strikes. Their first foothold in Britain was rapidly dislodged when they scabbed a local dockers strike in Liverpool and disappeared almost overnight.

The author concludes that anything the Knights ever achieved was in spite of its leaders, local union affiliates having taken up strikes, sometimes mass strikes, in the face of the

objective conditions on the ground. But the conditions for 'something more' than simple trade unionism were laid by the Knights perhaps, and the ground was fertile for the later emergence of the IWW.

The book contained surprises for me, despite previously having considered myself quite well informed on this period. The section on the Molly Maguires, for example, demonstrates that, far from Hollywood legend, they were in fact a very numerous tendency among the miners: "There were then several thousand Molly Maguire lodges in Pennsylvania with a central executive body" (p17). Acts of violence against blacklegs and occasionally employers had been a feature of the coal communities this side of the Atlantic for a century, but what was different about the Mollies is that there really was a Molly Maguire - fresh from libertarian, republican and anti-capitalist struggle in Ireland, she migrated across the ocean with a strong following and took up roots in the States, particularly in the coalfields of Pennsylvania.

"She was a barbaric and picturesque



character. She blackened her face and under her petticoat carried a pistol strapped to each of her stout legs. Her special aversions were landlords, their agents, bailiffs and process servers, and her expression of hatred was limited to beating them up or murdering them ... she was the head of the so-called Free Soil Party, whose banner was her red petticoat" (p13). For a time parts of Ireland were dominated by her and the resistance of 'her boys'.

The Mollies so dominated Irish mining labour that bosses tried to exclude them from employment. "... but they all died by violence. If a superintendent dared to come forward in support of his mining boss against the Molly, he too became a marked man and eventually was beaten up or assassinated" (p15).

We are told that the secret Molly society also led open 'associations' of miners - and struggles like the 'long strike' of 1874-75. The Mollies themselves had their peak around that time. We are told mine bosses and enemies of the miners were "falling dead week after week". Coal trains and mines were sabotaged. After the long strike, a concerted state effort using traitors, infiltrators and the infamous Pinkerton 'detectives' (gun thugs), was launched. A key figure who went undercover and put the finger on the leaders was fellow Irishman James McParland. In subsequent years 10 Mollies were executed and 14 given long prison terms. As an efficient terrorist labour organisation the Mollies were broken, but their inspiration was deeply embedded in the ranks of radical American labour.

The book describes the great labour riots of 1877, which grow from the Baltimore and Ohio railroad strikes against wage cuts and longer hours. The militia is mobilised and comes over to the workers. The strike spreads across the country.

"For three days the riots continue in Baltimore. The strikers, who were practically leaderless, were joined by thousands of labourers and mechanics out of work, as well as by the entire criminal class if the city ... A large number of men in various other occupations, who had recently suffered reductions in wages, were in a sullen mood. They welcomed what they thought was an attempt on the part of the railroad men to right a common wrong. They aided the rioters ...

"In Cumberland, Maryland the militia killed 10 workmen and wounded twice that number ...

"Mobs rendered furious by the deadly fire of the military surged about the city, sacking stores for arms and food. For a time it seemed that the rioters, albeit leaderless, would gain the upper hand over the authorities ...

"... riots occurred elsewhere in Pennsylvania. At Reading 13 were killed and over 20 wounded in a single day" (pp24-25).

Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith in their *Chicago - a history of its reputation* say: "Twenty thousand men, police and citizens, were under arms. Squads of householders shouldered rifles and patrolled the residence districts. [At one time] 50 different mobs were clashing with militiamen and volunteer 'specials'. Saloons were closed. Citizens brought rifles and horses to City Hall ... At the Chicago Burlington and Quincy roundhouses on Western Sixteenth Street, locomotives were destroyed and volleys fired. A pitched battle was fought at the viaduct between Halstead and Archer Avenues. Terror had the businessmen by the throat, and ... they demanded 5,000 militiamen to put down 'the ragged Commune wretches' ..." (quoted on p26).

Then a battalion of the US regulars commanded by lieutenant-colonel Frederick D Grant (son of Ulysses) arrived in Chicago and the strike was broken. The author speculates as to what would have become of this near national insurgency if there had been a systematic leadership behind - someone like Bakunin.

The most radical American city in the 1870s and 80s was Chicago. The Socialist Labor Party was rooted in its culture: "They were acquainted with the Marxist ideas, but they also read Hegel, Kropotkin, Bakunin, Alexander Herzen and Spenser. In addition to the SLP, they were organising

in the so-called 'revolutionary clubs', meeting in secret halls and beginning to despair of starting 'a revolution in the minds of the people' ... In 1881 a national convention of revolutionary clubs was held in Chicago and the Revolutionary Socialist Party came into existence, competing with the SLP ... There was loose talk of violence, dynamite and assassination, but the party as a whole dangled self-consciously between Marxism and nihilism, between theory and action" (p33).

"The anarchists at first viewed the eight-hour movement with scorn, insisting that it was useless to demand anything from the capitalists; the thing was to arm the working class and 'take over the whole damn system and change it'. But the movement became the all-absorbing topic of the proletariat; they - Parsons, Spies, Schwab, Fielden and other ultra-radical orators and publicists - joined their talents, soon became the outstanding, if not the most popular, agitators of the cause" (p46). This in turn caused the rightwing, pro-employer press to brand the whole eight-hour movement as anarchist-inspired and un-American, the work of 'foreigners'.

In Chicago, the anarchists were clearly the decisive and influential movement, the black flag appearing alongside the red flag: "More than a thousand of the so-called Lehrund-Wehr Vereine drilled with rifles in secret halls and practised shooting in the woods" (p47). The strikers and those laid off during one severe winter paraded, gaunt and ragged, with red and black flags, but the police dispersed them using utmost force. On Christmas day 1887 the anarchists organised a march through the avenues of the rich.

In April 1886 the Chicago-based *Die Arbeiter Zeitung*, the world's first anarchist paper, proclaimed: "The police and soldiers. must be met by armed armies of workers ... Arms are more necessary in our time than anything else. Whoever has no money should sell his watch, if he has one, and buy firearms ..." (p49).

A general strike for the eight-hour day was called for May 1. On May 3 locked-out McCormick workers held a mass meeting near the works. When the scabs emerged from the factory, a pitched battle ensued. The police arrived and opened fire on the crowds, killing several men and wounding many more.

The notorious Haymarket massacre took place in Haymarket Square, Chicago, on May 4 1896 after thousands had gathered in support of striking railroad workers-. Most of the demonstration had passed off peacefully and, as the rain continued to fall, the crowd had all but dispersed when the police turned up to disperse the dwindling ranks, the captain with his sword drawn. There was a blinding flash, as a bomb was thrown into the police ranks. Police started shooting into the crowd and into each other - 67 police were injured and seven killed (nobody knows how many casualties there were among the workers, but it was estimated three times those of the police).

This led to an intense period of police repression and 12 anarchists, socialists and communists were rounded up. Eight were charged with murder, seven were hanged and another given 15 years for having financial interests in the *Zeitung*. This was one of many ruthless employers' offensives using judicial murders (the 1927 frame-up of Sacco and Vanzette - those 'anarchist bastards' - is perhaps the most well known), but 'guilty' class fighters were also targeted for execution or life sentences.

Sam Gompers, president of the AFL, denounced the violence of the 'Haymarket anarchists' with great vehemence, but following the repression and the savage anti-working class employers' offensive, the use of dynamite became a definite tactic - used purely as a weapon of trade unionism rather than anti-capitalism. A whole army of professional sluggers, gunmen, arsonists and saboteurs were recruited, but often such professional hit men ended up going into business for themselves (it was this that spawned the criminal 'rackets' of the 1930s - though oddly the racketeers, perhaps mindful of their class roots, remained largely anti-capitalist and pro-labour in their actions, albeit for entirely selfish, self-gain motives).

From 1906 to 1916 the IWW dominated the labour movement in America and was involved in some of the most bitter, open fights - physical, social, political and ideological - between capital and labour: "In its battles it was frequently opposed - not only by the capitalists and the authorities, but also by the AF of L, which a few times went so far as to furnish strike-breakers in wobbly strikes" (p118).

The book comes with a critical foreword by Jon Bekken - associate professor of communications at Albright College in Reading PA, and former general secretary-treasurer of the IWW - which I for one did not find particularly helpful. He is critical of the absence of 'black struggles' in the book, although this is, as far as I can see, a branch of the more generalised class struggle than the author focused on. The employers, in order to divide less organised African-Americans from other groups with strong trade union traditions, exploited racial and cultural differences, and the author did mention this where it was notable. As Adamic himself says, "*Dynamite* was never meant to be anything more than an attempt at telling the story of the evolution of violence in the class struggle in America, which, of course, is but one phase of the history of our labour and our radical or revolutionary movement's stirrings and upheavals" (p1).

Bekken is also critical of the author for being "bleakly pessimistic about the possibilities for American workers to successfully organise to build a new society" (pix). But this is hardly surprising, given that the book is written from the standpoint of the 1930s, after generations of wilful repression, unrestrained violence, gangsterism, world war and recession. It was a period of heroic and selfless class war waged by the American working class, but hundreds were injured, killed, starved and jailed, and these struggles saw numerous defeats and were met at almost every turn by anti-union drives and sell-outs by union leaders on the make and on the take.

But all is not hopeless: the author records the experience of mass, sometimes successful, movements, which organise millions and from time to time push back the frontiers of control. Adamic contends that employers and the lawmakers did not have it all their own way and the working class, through the medium of dynamite plus organisation, gave back as good as they got. Speaking with hindsight, Bekken tells us: "... the labour movement was on the eve of a resurgence that left it institutionally much stronger, but ultimately entrenched a business union vision that left organised labour further isolated from the broader working class than it ever was in the period Adamic writes about" (pxiii).

I would suggest Bekken is quite wrong when he concludes that the use of dynamite is individual struggle rather than collective class struggle. The book clearly demonstrates that this violent reaction and offensive on behalf of the class is a direct ancillary and aspect of mass organisation and class-consciousness.

The postscript provided by Bekken brings the reality of class struggle in the US home. In his final years, Louis Adamic had become sympathetic to Tito and the Yugoslav partisans, and wrote *The eagle and the roots*, contrasting a free and vigorous Yugoslavia to US McCarthyism and repression. In 1951 Adamic was found dead with a bullet in his head in a burning farmhouse, along with a rifle across his lap and a newspaper clipping accusing him of being a Soviet spy. The coroner concluded that he had committed suicide, although few agreed (piv).

A book of this scope and dynamism, with hugely exciting chapters of working class resistance leaping out from almost every page, contains too much for this brief review. I could easily fill the paper with random cuts from its chapters. It is perhaps easier to recommend you purchase it. I have been unable to put it down since I got it, and find it a great inspiration and highly informative.

In challenging many assumptions about the American labour and progressive movement it should become a classic work of reference ●

**David Douglass**

# What we fight for

■ **Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.**

■ **The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but 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 have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.**

■ **Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars 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'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.**

■ **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. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.**

■ **The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.**

■ **Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.**

■ **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.**

■ **All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.**

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**Nationalise the  
banks under  
workers' control**

## In another world

Alistair Darling's pre-budget report includes a 'supertax' on bankers' bonuses. James Turley calls for more

The bankers are at it again. In spite of their new status as national hate-figures and pariahs, which has even extended - if only in words - to the political establishment, the rapid approach of the festive season has once again seen the leading figures in the financial industry awarding themselves obscene sums of money as bonus payments.

Particularly vexatious from the point of view of bourgeois politics, once again, is the Royal Bank of Scotland. RBS is 70% state-owned, after the financial crisis provoked an enormous and very public rescue effort from the Labour government. Needless to say, this did not have anything to do with Gordon Brown looking through his Lenin and being suddenly energised about bank nationalisation; it was a direct response to a catastrophic failure of the banking sector in general and RBS in particular.

In response to this litany of disaster, RBS has apparently decided to award bonuses totalling £1.5 billion, to be distributed among hundreds of its investment bureaucrats (and, yes, that would be the very same investment division whose full insertion into the trade in dodgy derivatives was the direct cause of the parlous state of the institution today). The exact details are unclear, as RBS has not made any official announcements; yet several executives have not only failed to deny even the more lurid rumours, but have publicly defended the decision. If equally distributed among all RBS's employees, it would come in a shade under £9,000 - about half to two-thirds of the basic starting salary. Between the likely 500 or so recipients, it is £3 million each - good news for Edinburgh's cocaine dealers, if not for the rest of us.

The primary argument made by RBS people in defence of their bulging wallets is a return to profitability after the dark days of 2008, when the fall of Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers in the US triggered a global financial crash and left even the most firmly established banks seriously shaken. RBS, obviously, was not among the latter - it recorded one-year losses of a staggering £41 billion. This year, apparently, it has all been sunshine and lollipops - a modest (by boom standards) profit of £6 billion is used to justify the enormous bonus package.

Whether the best imaginable destination for this money is the pockets of the already very wealthy is one problem which simply does not enter into the consideration of this increasingly eccentric arm of international capital. There is a more immediate problem with this justification, however - the books have been fairly nakedly cooked. RBS sneakily changed the way it records profit and loss, dividing its investments into 'core' and 'non-core'. The core investments, of course, are the profitable ones - the 'non-core' ones are those that the bank aims to offload. By weighting its accounting in favour of 'core' investments, RBS is fraudulently representing itself as far more

profitable and healthy a concern than it actually is. Robert Peston, the BBC's economics pin-up, notes that, with a wave of the magic accountancy wand, first-quarter losses of £160 million were transformed into a juicy £3.6 billion.<sup>1</sup> The audacity of the thing is almost admirable.

It is also one step too far for HM government though. As expected, Alistair Darling's pre-budget report included a one-year-only 'supertax' on bankers' bonuses. Details remain unclear at this point in time - and with financial policy the devil truly is in the details, which will be pulled apart and raked over by legions of lawyers and accountants with an eye for the smallest loophole. This fact, we should remember, was frequently cited by Tony Blair as the main argument against increasing the top tax rate to pay for little things like free education. Now even the City minister, Lord Myners, appears to have an appetite for the fight.

He was drawn into the fray after the banks caught wind of the proposed supertax. It provoked widespread opposition in the city - the British Bankers Association called the measures "populist, political and penal". These people should probably invest some of those millions in a dictionary and look up the word 'government', whose job it is to be "political".

"Populist" implies that Labour grandees are stirring up anti-banker sentiment in a demagogic fashion, when really they are being pulled along reluctantly by a very powerful and well-rooted popular sentiment that exists independent of them. Given that both they and the bankers are under the impression that we live in a 'democracy', it is difficult to find fault with that - in a real democracy, we would be able to fire MPs who wavered on the issue faster than you can say 'Fred the Shred'. As for "penal", anyone would think banking executives were being loaded onto a box-car to Siberia rather than having their £3 million Christmas bonus skimmed by the treasury.

Even this petulant complaint pales against another suggestion, attributed to Bill Dodwell, a senior bureaucrat at accountancy firm Deloitte - "We have had calls from bankers asking about what action they might take under the Human Rights Act. There's never been a precedent."<sup>2</sup> Just as well for the more level-headed guardians of bourgeois society - a 'precedent' that declared the state's ability to collect taxes illegal would be the shortest imaginable distance between today's Britain and the total collapse of the entire political and economic order (in favour of generalised chaos, needless to say, not socialism).

When arguing 'rationally' for a position abhorrent to almost every political and moral compass from *Daily Mail* Toryism to *Class War* anarchism fails, it is good practice to resort to threats. Finance capitalists are prone to respond to any attempt to clip their wings by threatening to fly the nest. If the City of London does not gratefully accept every twist of the financial markets and nod through fat bonus cheques, then the bankers will find somewhere that will. "It's a bit like the transfer market in football," Stuart Fraser, head of policy at City of London Corporation told *The Independent*. "The talent will simply go."<sup>3</sup>

This is not the first time bankers and their allies have compared themselves to football stars - it is perfectly fitting that the only comparison they can find is with people who have become extraordinarily wealthy by being exceptionally good at kicking a pig's bladder around a field. In reality, however, these threats often turn out to be empty; there is not much of a percentage in abandoning one of the world's financial centres. Finance capitalism, though transparently international, is not (as its defenders and reactionary detractors often argue) 'supra-national' - ie, entirely unconnected to the vicissitudes of the system of states.

This is in fact made perfectly clear by the course of the crisis - it broke

out first in America and the UK, the two busiest hubs of financial activity in the world, but brought many more peripheral countries to the brink. The City and Wall Street will remain important enough to attract 'talent' - until a serious and as much military-political as economic shift transfers global hegemony to some other power bloc (a possibility that does not look exactly imminent). Where are all these bankers going to go? Dubai?

Myners has called their bluff. "The board of directors of RBS has apparently threatened to resign if they don't get the bonuses that they want," he told the House of Lords, "but I think that's rather a silly line for them to adopt and actually a very unpatriotic one and I think the nation finds that act indeed shameful." The bankers should pay attention - if there's one man who knows about avoiding tax, it is Myners, who used to be part-time chairman of Aspen Insurance Holdings, a company based in Bermuda which, according to *The Times*, avoided more than £100 million a year in tax.<sup>4</sup>

It is important not to approach this question in a moralistic fashion - though the almost total incompetence of the bankers in gauging public opinion somewhat invites it. These are not peculiarly corrupt or sociopathic individuals - their dubious consciousness stems from their living in a wholly different world from the rest of us. For a book exploring the great chasm between rich and poor in Britain, Polly Toynbee and David Walker assembled a focus group of bankers, who were shocked to discover that the average wage was less than £200,000 a year (it is about a tenth of that), and that over 90% of us are on less than £40,000. For these people, a not insubstantial wage of 40k is unimaginable poverty.

Rather, we have to confront the political issues involved. There can be no question - the nationalisation of the banks is an immediate economic measure which should be high up the agen-

da for any Communist Party. Nationalisation is not a panacea in itself, as is obvious from these developments at RBS. A nationalisation that puts the banking system under the democratic control of the masses, however, is a necessary measure for revolutionaries.

It is an immediate demand for now simply because it is the masses who suffer from the fraudulent machinations of high finance - it is our savings which get wiped out, our homes which get foreclosed. We have the right to demand that our livelihoods are not contingent on the health of 'casino capitalism'.

It is also a *minimum* demand for a future proletarian regime. The reason is simple - even the most comprehensively successful revolution will not be able to abolish capitalism *in toto* overnight. What the revolution has to achieve is the transfer of political power from one class to another, and a corresponding transformation in the state apparatus - the necessary preconditions for building any kind of socialism that is not a new Khmer Rouge. For as long as vestiges of commodity production remain, that production will require some kind of a credit system. Financial capitalism is categorically *not* simply parasitic - it is unproductive, true, but that is a technical distinction within Marxism rather than a moral one. Credit is equivalent to lubricant, and keeps the machinery of commodity production going. And it is not simply production - there will be consumer-level banking functions to be carried out as well.

Meanwhile, as long as capitalist rule is maintained, this necessary and vital part of it will be doomed to plunge the system into chaos time and again ●

### Notes

1. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8399048.stm>.
2. *The Guardian* December 7.
3. *The Independent* December 8.
4. *The Times* March 22.

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