



weekly **worker**

Could the 'renegade' Karl Kautsky have influenced Lenin's 'April theses' in 1917?

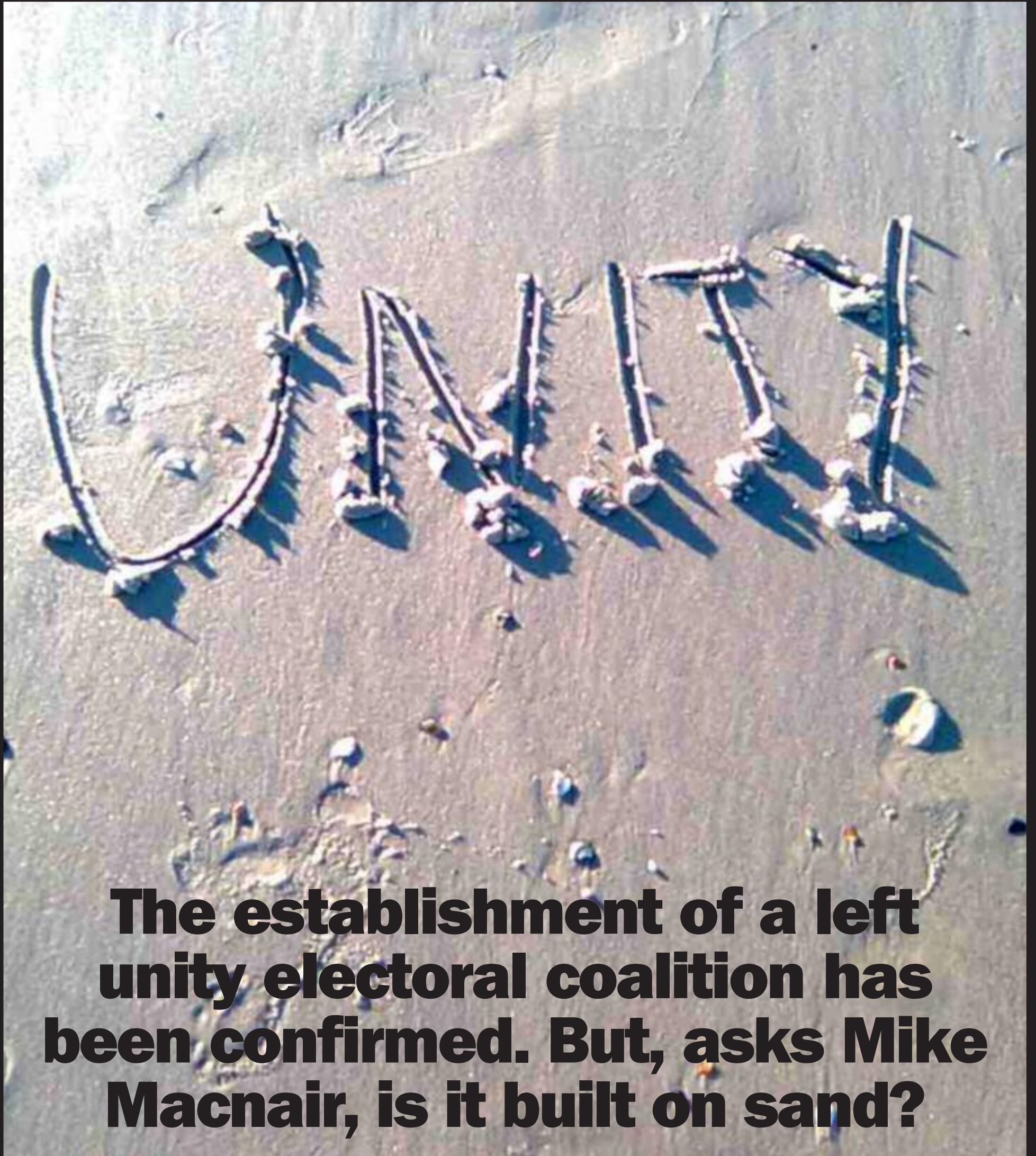
- SWP conference fix
- Debating long waves
- Galloway in Gaza
- Iran protests shift left

No 800 Thursday January 14 2010

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10



The establishment of a left unity electoral coalition has been confirmed. But, asks Mike Macnair, is it built on sand?

LETTERS



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

Decline

Arthur Bough is correct to remind readers that Marx does not argue that "capitalism drives down wages and living standards absolutely" (Letters, December 10). He rightly targets Stalinism for the notion that workers' standard of living could only go down in capitalism and that there is a tendency for the spending power of wages to decline over time.

However, he also argues that the idea of a declining capitalism is un-Marxist and undialectical. It is a form of Lassalle's doctrine of the 'iron law of wages'. By doing so, he confuses the concept of decline with Marx's law of the accumulation of misery and suggests misleadingly that Trotsky disagreed with Lenin on the relationship between imperialism and decline. This leads him to state that "capitalism ... is in a period of rapid advance", implying that the system is in a healthy, mature state and will decline at some unknown point in the future.

It is true that Soviet economists falsely associated decline with terminal crisis and absolute collapse. Arthur Bough rejects the concept because of this. If capitalism is not in terminal crisis and if it is not facing absolute collapse - which it isn't - then, he reasons, capitalism is not in decline and must be stronger than ever.

On the contrary, the concept of a decline of a mode of production is at the centre of Marx's dialectical method. Marx assumed that every entity has a birth, a maturation, decline and death. This includes class societies based on slavery, serfdom and wage-slavery. A declining mode of production coexists with forms transitional to the new form of production. Thus the transformation of rent into money and the commodification of land were transitional forms that preceded capitalism and were features of a declining feudalism.

Decline implies that the laws determining social relations within a mode of production do not function as efficiently as they once did. New contradictory forms of establishing stability, such as finance capital and imperialism, have emerged out of previous crises. Within a mature capitalism, stability is safeguarded by commodity fetishism and the industrial reserve army of labour. Force and the use of nationalism, sexism, racism and religion are not capital's preferred methods of control.

However, competition and the class struggle have resulted in forms that inhibit rather than advance the free operation of the law of value. These increase tendencies toward crisis and generate further attempts to stabilise the system. They have included a parasitic form of finance capital that extracts surplus value forcibly from labour-power in the developing world and destroys industrial manufacture in the developed world.

Decline is therefore decline of the law of value. On the side of exchange-value, finance capital tries to escape investment in industrial production. On the side of use-value, there is growth of bureaucracy and an extension of unproductive spheres of production, funded by state revenue. Underlying this there is a decline in abstract labour. The reduction of all forms of work to socially necessary labour time becomes more limited. Bureaucracy has arisen alongside more attempts to organise capitalism with non-market forms. Bureaucracy generates its own set of contradictions, such as pseudo-markets based on imaginary profits, combined with use-value-oriented targets.

Arthur Bough uses the evidence that

"capital used Keynesian methods" in the United States in the 1930s and "during the post-war boom" in order to discredit the left's "economic catastrophism". He blames this on the idea of decline. However, the evidence can be used just as plausibly to argue the opposite position. A greater socialisation of labour, bureaucracy and the expansion of arms manufacture during the cold war, plus the existence of a non-market sector in a part of the world where capitalism had been overthrown, were all aspects of attempts to organise and 'plan' the global economy. They were therefore consistent with a decline in the operation of the law of value.

Arthur Bough does not distinguish between the ideas of decay and decline. On the other hand, he refers to deindustrialisation and cheap, imported labour as making the lives of workers "very uncomfortable" for the next 15-20 years. He might also have mentioned an increasing reliance on harmful forms of use-value such as alcohol, drugs and prostitution; the extent of ethnic cleansing and genocide caused by nationalism; the waste of mass unemployment; the increasing use of unfree forms of production and consumption; and the profits made from weapons of mass destruction - these are aspects of decay caused by decline. These symptoms were present in embryo within a mature capitalism, but inessential to its efficient functioning. They are now ineradicable aspects of capitalism in decline. They also provide confirmation of Marx's law of the accumulation of misery.

The ideas in this letter are influenced by a reading of some of Hillel Ticktin's writings. Readers sceptical of them might like to study Ticktin for themselves. I would recommend his articles in *Critique* and in this paper, in particular his article 'Declining capitalism' (March 31 2005). They will find out that - contrary to Arthur Bough's assertion - the notion that capitalism is in long-term decline has absolutely nothing to do with Lassalle's 'iron law of wages'.

Paul B Smith
email

Gotha

Having naively considered myself for many years to have been a Marxist, imagine my surprise to wake up one morning to find I was a Lassallean!

Such is the charge levelled at me by Arthur Bough in a somewhat strange way (Letters, January 12). Comrade Bough argues that a call in one of my articles ('In another world', December 10) for the nationalisation of the banks - not just as a minimum demand, but an immediate demand that we make, for whatever reason, of the existing regime rather than as a task for a communist government - is the type of thing Marx lambasted the Eisenachers for signing up to in the 1875 Gotha programme of the German social democrats.

He links the immediate demand for the nationalisation of the banks to the trade-mark Lassallean fetish of state aid. He also repeats the criticism of Marx that the Eisenachers hid their "shame" behind the accessory clause, 'under the control of the masses'.

In some ways, comrade Bough's criticism is justified, as I was not sufficiently clear in the original article. Still, his criticism involves a couple of elementary confusions, which if applied across the board would barely allow us to act in the world at all.

The principal confusion is between the two types of demand above. To make an immediate demand for the nationalisation of the banks is to say that this is an objective need for the vast masses of society; the banks cannot keep us afloat whether under the control of private or state bureaucrats; if the state does not hand us this on a

silver plate, we should take it. It is an agitational and propagandistic statement about what needs to be done rather than what can be done.

Comrade Bough argues that, since the working class is in no position to force this on the state, and the state is not inclined to give it away, the demand is addressed to no-one and is pointless. But surely this goes for almost any demand. Comrade Bough has had endless run-ins with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty over their scab line on Iraq. But if we couldn't stop the war with two million people, what chance is there of imposing our timetable for withdrawal? The AWL actually use variants of this argument to defend their line (when they're desperate): the question of troop withdrawal is a question for the Americans and the Islamists, in which the working class has neither any stake nor any traction. It is their problem and not our business to raise 'abstract' demands for troop withdrawal.

To put the call for nationalisation in the minimum programme does no more than demand that the rest of the programme substantiate it. Our programme is one of radical democracy, to transform the state apparatus entirely. The Gotha programme includes a slate of democratic demands, but also a full paragraph on cooperative societies as nuclei of the future socialist society, demanding they be propped up by state aid. This, in the end, is a contradiction - it embodies two incompatible strategies for power: through state aid and through transforming the state.

We are simply not doing the same thing - the nationalisation of the banks can be under mass, democratic control if all of society is under mass, democratic control, surely?

James Turley
London

Pro-nuclear

I enjoyed Ben Lewis's report of the climate change demonstration, which I attended, but I must take issue with a couple of the immediate demands proposed by the comrade ('Blue wave needs red vision', December 10).

These are 'No to nuclear power' and 'No to biofuels', because blanket opposition to technology plays into the hands of the petty bourgeois moralism which Lewis correctly identifies as the dominant politics of the environmental movement. As Marxists we are always for the advancement of science, which at present is used for the purposes of capital, but could in the future be used to benefit humanity as a whole.

We would be unwise to side with reactionary 'deep greens' and others who oppose nuclear because it is 'dirty' or 'unnatural'. Of course, there is hardly any human industry which could not be labelled with those words, but Marxists are not idealists: we are materialists; and any technology must be assessed on its empirical benefits and drawbacks. These facts must be separated from the capitalist's use of technology, which pays little attention to consequences for human health and the environment.

Even taking into consideration the cost-cutting spur of the profit motive, existing nuclear reactors have performed safely for decades, producing huge amounts of energy from a small amount of uranium fuel (yes, there was Chernobyl - but it took the monstrously bureaucratic USSR to create such a disaster). The waste produced, which remains hazardous for tens of thousands of years, is a problem, but not one beyond the bounds of human ingenuity. Jettisoning it into space would not be a difficult feat technologically, but there is simply no motivation for the capitalists to do so.

Nuclear fission based on uranium

has its drawbacks, but blanket opposition to nuclear power also writes off other promising technologies like thorium fission and nuclear fusion. The latter is the reaction which powers the sun and could yield limitless, clean energy from a small amount of water fuel.

In the case of biofuels, the scientific case is clearer cut: growing crops to create fuel is hugely inefficient, uses vast tracts of land, and appears to have been pursued only because of state subsidies for 'green' technologies (though it turned out that growing fuel in this way does little to reduce CO₂ emissions). Nevertheless it is not the technology that we should oppose, but the capitalists' use of it - to prop up the system at the expense of the imperialised countries, and as an ideological weapon in the battle to appear green.

Communists should definitely engage with the 'green' movement and we have powerful arguments to bring to bear, but we should be wary of picking demands for the sake of agreement with other forces. Marxists oppose the destruction of the environment not because we believe humans have a transcendental responsibility for the planet, but because the majority of people, given a choice, would surely desire the presence of nature, for their own very human enjoyment.

Dave McAllister
email

Contempt

Comrade KRV Hari displays a philistine contempt for our ancient ancestors, which is common amongst those on the left who think technology is the true measure of man and progress (Letters, January 7).

In reality tribal people got to Australia a mere 50,000 years before captain Cook and Columbus found that tribal peoples had not only discovered America, but successfully occupied every possible ecological niche. Even as late as the 19th century European explorers in Australia and the Arctic were failing to master those environments till they learnt lessons from the locals. The comrade underestimates the technology of tribal people and grossly overestimates the innovativeness of class society.

A farmer transported from the Bronze Age to medieval India would have found one man, one cow and one wooden plough, scraping a precarious existence from a tiny plot of land. For ordinary people there was not that much technological change over thousands of years. In fact the majority of such change has occurred under capitalism and especially in our own lifetime.

Class society in fact puts limits on technological development when it starts to threaten ruling class interests. For instance, the ancient Greeks invented the steam engine, but why develop it when slaves do all the work? At this very moment our own ruling class is refusing point blank to apply already existing technology on a sufficient scale to solve the problem of global warming, even though they acknowledge that the problem may destroy their civilisation. All because it requires actions that undermine their class control.

As for the stone axe, it predates Homo sapiens by a considerable time and chimpanzees use sticks and stones in fights between groups. But who defines chimpanzees by their methods of warfare? The environment decides how many chimps can live in a given area and the only real solution is to move on.

Comrade Hari defines society as being based principally on the control and use of brute force. Rather like Eugen Dühring. In fact, while hunter-gatherers do have disputes between

groups which on occasion are resolved by violence, they do not have specialist armies or military technology. In the Stone Age the world was vast and the population tiny. Why fight when you can move on?

More fundamentally class society is not about resolving conflicts between tribes, but about the ability of a minority group to exploit the majority by means or threats of violence. This is the precise problem that ancient hominids had to solve in order to evolve into human beings. They had to find a way of incorporating the alpha male into society as an equal member or face extinction. This they did neither through tool use nor by eliminating the alpha males with weapons. Instead they used sex, symbolism, language, art, negotiation and ritual to produce a democratic society of equals.

Socialists do not reject technology or on occasion the use of violence, but if you want a democratic society of equals the answer lies in the culture of the majority. That is, the working class.

Phil Kent
London

Free speech

This week's conviction of five Muslim men who protested at a homecoming parade by soldiers from the Royal Anglian Regiment in Luton in March 2009 is a dangerous infringement of free speech and the right to protest. The five defendants were convicted under the Public Order Act of using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

I abhor everything they stand for, but defend their right to freedom of expression. Even though what they said was offensive to many people, their right to speak their mind is one of the hallmarks of a democratic society. They want to destroy our democracy and freedoms. I want to defend these values. If we silence and criminalise their views, we are little better than them.

Judge Carolyn Mellanby was wrong to rule that the people of Luton have a right to be protected against words they find insulting. There is no right to not be offended, since almost any idea can be offensive to someone. Many of the greatest thinkers in history have caused insult and offence, including Galileo Galilei and Charles Darwin.

The five convicted Islamists would like to censor us and put us on trial. We should not stoop to their level of intolerance. Democracy is superior to their proposed theocratic state and we need to prove it by demonstrating that we allow objectionable opinions and contest them by debate, not by repression and censorship.

Insult and offence are not sufficient grounds in a democratic society to criminalise words and actions. The criminalisation of insulting, abusive or offensive speech is wrong. The only words that should be criminalised are untrue defamations and threats of violence, such as falsely branding someone as a paedophile or inciting murder.

Some sections of the Public Order Act inhibit the right to free speech and the right to protest. They should be repealed. Just as I defended the right to free speech of the Christian homophobe, Harry Hammond, and opposed his conviction in 2002 for insulting the gay community, so I also defend the right of these Islamic fundamentalists to make their views heard, providing they don't incite violence.

The best way to respond to such fanatics is to expose and refute their hateful, bigoted opinions. Rational argument is more effective and ethical than using an authoritarian law to censor and suppress them.

Peter Tatchell
email

PCS

Winning members that Left Unity cannot reach



Mark Serwotka's re-election: no room for complacency

As readers will know, Mark Serwotka was re-elected as general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union in a result announced just before Christmas.

There were only two candidates: Serwotka himself (backed by the Socialist Party-dominated Left Unity PCS grouping, although his campaign leaflets never made this clear); and challenger Rob Bryson, a former member of the Socialist Workers Party now standing for the '4 the members' rightwing faction. Bryson had just a few weeks earlier challenged for assistant general secretary and came within 200 votes of defeating sitting candidate Chris Baugh (SP), so it was felt that he might also push comrade Serwotka close.

However, the more high-profile general secretary has an inbuilt advantage and Serwotka won by a fairly comfortable 37,000 votes to 21,000. But contrast this to the 200 branch nominations for Serwotka, while Bryson had only 16 (his own branch failed to endorse him!). This demonstrates the gulf between the views and preferences of the activists and those of the membership as a whole. The turnout of around one in six was rather higher than the usual one in nine (there are 300,000 PCS members).

The split from Left Unity, Independent Left, neither declared its support for Mark nor stood its own candidate. However, as the IL website seems to be out of action and the faction issued no leaflet to branches, I was unable to ascertain its reasoning.

What to conclude from these results? Left Unity is hyping up Serwotka's victory (he won by "a huge margin", it is claimed) as an

"endorsement of a left-led leadership" and evidence "that members recognise a strong union is required to fight on their behalf".

For my part I find it very disappointing that someone so well known as Mark, who speaks from so many public platforms defending public services, constantly strives for public sector unity and now feels we should be standing PCS candidates in parliamentary elections, could not pull in a much greater majority; it is a cause for concern that no fewer than 21,000 members were willing to vote for a nonentity who has no record of fighting for our members, is invisible at PCS national conferences and put out a thoroughly reactionary anti-left election address proposing no alternative strategy.

Left Unity boasts of being the largest left grouping of any union, yet there are tens of thousands of members it does not seem able to reach. What of the five out of six PCS members who could not be bothered marking their election paper and putting it into the pre-paid envelope?

Left Unity correctly asserts that, "whoever wins the next general election, the one thing we can be sure of is that we have to be prepared to battle to defend our interests" and adds: "and this result quite clearly demonstrates that members understand this". Supporters are urged to follow through the Serwotka victory by supporting the "Left Unity NEC slate" in the April-May national executive elections (in fact Left Unity is standing once more as part of the Democracy Alliance, alongside the non-socialist PCS Democrats) and to win the members to back the call for

industrial action in the forthcoming ballot against proposed cuts to redundancy terms.

A campaign among the members is certainly necessary: let us not forget that the NEC called off strike action over pay in November 2008, as the recession hit, having won the slimmest majority I can ever recall for industrial action in my 25 years as a branch secretary. I am not convinced members are more up for action now than they were then. My experience from meetings in October and November has been that, while members are shocked by the attacks on the current redundancy agreement, it took a lot of debate to win reluctant agreement that we have to fight to defend its terms.

The majority view was that any action should be called before rather than after the general election. But there are problems with this. Despite the victory of Leeds bin workers in overturning management attempts to impose swingeing pay cuts, we have recently seen overwhelming support by BA crews for a strike overturned by the courts and postal workers calling off their action before Christmas on their leadership's say-so. Gordon Brown has survived another bumbling coup attempt and Labour may now appear more united going into the general election. Will any union affiliated to the Labour Party now contemplate strike action before it takes place?

The PCS, of course, is not a Labour affiliate, but this is a pertinent question because, unlike over pensions and public sector pay, the proposed redundancy cuts seem to be directed only at PCS. If they succeed, obviously the rest of the public sector will be next, but this means there cannot be any wider public sector unity on this at the moment. PCS once again faces fighting alone.

If we win a strike ballot (and in my opinion, in view of the likely low turnout, we will need at least a two-to-one majority to make industrial action a worthwhile proposition), will PCS once again settle for a two-tier agreement favouring those in work over future workers (as it did over our pension scheme)?

Added to this is the equally pressing issue of the timing of the cuts in redundancy terms - this can only be because a wave of civil service redundancies is being planned by the treasury. Cut the cost of redundancy and you can fire more workers and offer more work up for privatisation.

All this has to be fought tooth and nail, but the key question is membership confidence, as opposed to membership demoralisation. How can this be achieved?

I will be at the SWP-organised Right to Work conference being held in Manchester on Saturday January 30 with four other members from my branch (Mark Serwotka is one of the guest speakers). I hope to be able to gauge the wider mood from the activists of the many unions who will be there. It only costs £5 to register and I would urge all *Weekly Worker* readers to attend ●

Dave Vincent

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sunday evenings. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.

January 17: John Bellamy Foster *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Rachel Carson's ecological critique'.

January 24: John Bellamy Foster *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Peak oil and energy imperialism'.

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; 07792 282830.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Oxford: Mondays. oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07730 682193;

sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, Spring term, 6.15-9pm: Evening course, 'An intensive study of mythology', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube).

January 19: Luc Steels, 'What experiments with robots can tell us about the origins of language'.

January 26: Keith Hart, 'A human economy for the 21st century'.

Climate and capitalism

Saturday January 23, 10.30am: Day school on ecology, capitalism and Marxism, Manchester Metropolitan University, John Dalton Building, Oxford Road, M1. Organised by Socialist Resistance and Green Left:

www.socialistresistance.org.

NPA and the left

Tuesday January 26, 6pm: Meeting, University of Manchester students union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Tina Purcell discusses the new anti-capitalist party in France. Organised by Manchester Communist Students: www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Blockade Brown

Thursday January 28 (time to be announced): Protest against Gordon Brown's Afghanistan war conference, Lancaster House, Stable Yard, St James, London SW1. Stop the War Coalition: 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. Registration: £10 (£6 unwaged). 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.

A woman's right

Saturday February 13, 12 noon: Annual general meeting of Abortion Rights, TUC Congress Centre, London, WC1. Membership: £20/£5.

Registration: £5/£2. www.abortionrights.org.uk.

Stop the Nazis

Saturday February 13, 9.30am to 5pm: Unite Against Fascism national conference, TUC Congress Centre, London, WC1. Registration: £25 organisations, £10 waged, £5 unwaged. www.uaf.org.uk.

Republican Socialist Convention

Saturday February 13, 12noon: Discussion on national question and general election, London South Bank University, Elephant and Castle, London. Sponsored by Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Alliance: www.socialistalliance.org.uk.

Iranian revolution

Saturday February 13, 2pm: Day school - 'Imperialism and the Iranian revolution', University of Manchester students union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Followed by fundraiser.

Organised by Hands Off the People of Iran: www.hopoi.org.

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 9.30am: £8/£4 unwaged, or send cheque payable to "London Irish Unity Conference" to PO Box 65845, London, EC1P 1LS. Hosted by Sinn Féin: 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.

SWP CONFERENCE

Left Platform trounced

Peter Manson reports on an overwhelming victory for Martin Smith and the central committee

As expected, the Left Platform faction of John Rees, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham was trounced at the Socialist Workers Party's annual conference, held over the weekend of January 8-10.

This was demonstrated most clearly at the end of the session on 'World in turmoil - the economic crisis, imperialism and resistance', where the central committee and the LP presented alternative 'commissions', outlining their rival perspectives (not that there is much between them). Out of more than 400 delegates, only 17 voted for comrades Rees, German and Nineham, while another nine abstained. There were only eight votes against the CC's 'commission' and six abstentions.

There are two reasons for this overwhelming victory for the leadership. Firstly, the unpopularity of John Rees in particular, whose deposing 18 months ago was widely welcomed in view of the comrade's perceived high-handed arrogance (by contrast there is a good deal of affection for Lindsey German). A year ago, many members saw the replacement of Rees and the establishment of the 'democracy commission' sop as a change for the better - a move towards an open, more tolerant regime. What is more, comrade Rees made the fatal mistake of condemning the democracy commission as going too far in the direction of liberalism!

It is true that the illusions of a section of the membership that the SWP was at last adopting a new, genuinely democratic culture have started to wear thin. Many can see that the new CC majority is merely using the same bureaucratic methods against the *ancien régime* as Rees and co used to employ against previous minorities. But there is no way they were going to vote him back in.

Secondly, the CC did all in its power to reduce the number of LP delegates to an absolute minimum. At many local aggregates a pro-CC slate was presented and leadership supporters argued against the nomination of any LP comrades at all, irrespective of their experience or proven record of work for the SWP. In one or two instances, aggregates voted to send fewer delegates than their entitlement rather than allow an LP comrade to attend conference.

While, contrary to some assertions, this did not involve a breach of the SWP's rules, it most certainly contravened the spirit of democracy that working class organisations ought to foster. We should strive to ensure that minorities are represented roughly in proportion to the support they enjoy. It is in our interest to have the arguments out, not seek to suppress them.

Of course, at the conference itself, the leadership made a show of allowing the Left Platform - the main LP leaders were all present - an opportunity to put forward its case. According to the internal *Party Notes*, "Conference backed the ... proposal [from the CC] to give them extended contributions in three sessions ... to enable them to put their alternative views across."¹

(As an aside, readers may have noticed that the new-look SWP website now carries "a version of" the weekly *Party Notes* - one considered fit for public consumption - although, as I write, the latest issue, distributed on Monday January 11, has yet to be uploaded.)

Socialist Worker devotes a good deal of space to the conference, but, unlike *Party Notes*, does not mention



John Rees: what next?

the one-hour discussion on the control commission report. During this session the Left Platform moved a motion opposing the expulsion of LP supporter Clare Solomon for 'factionalism'. The evidence against her was based almost entirely on emails exchanged between LP supporters - although comrade Solomon was also accused of having organised what appears to have been a perfectly harmless 'Mutiny' cultural evening for students at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The entire basis of this allegation seems to be that it was not specifically a pro-SWP event.

Incredibly, although SWP members who have been disciplined are entitled in theory to appeal to conference, comrade Solomon was not permitted to attend - on the grounds that she is no longer a member!

As another expelled LP comrade, Alex Snowden, has pointed out on comrade Solomon's blog, "Saying 'non-members cannot attend conference' isn't an adequate response. Every member I know has always naturally assumed that the phrase 'appealing at conference' means you can go along and present your case in person. It will be a revelation that it means nothing of the sort! In any case, why not? What are they so scared of? The proposal was merely that Clare attended the relevant one-hour session, not the whole conference."²

He is, of course, quite right. In fact the Left Platform, now it is on the re-

ceiving end of SWP control-freakery instead of dishing it out, frequently makes correct criticisms of this bureaucratic method. The fact that we in the CPGB point this out should not be confused for support for the LP's politics in its factional battle with the CC, as some disingenuous leadership fans claim. In reality the differences between them are those of nuance.

Party Notes says that the motion to overturn comrade Solomon's expulsion received 33 votes (she herself thinks it was 37, with 22 abstentions). Apparently she won sympathy as well as votes from way beyond the Left Platform - not least because the case against her was so paper-thin. It appears that many delegates regarded her as somewhat naive - Chris Nineham is said to have referred to her during the debate as a bit eccentric (or "wacky", according to one comrade), whereas, by contrast, the attitude towards comrade Snowden was, in the view of a CC supporter, "good riddance".

However, the case against the two comrades seems to be based on accusations such as "your [Alex Snowden's] sneering tone in the leaked emails" - where he advised comrade Solomon to "delay, delay, delay" until the pre-conference period (when temporary factions are allowed) before appearing before the CC. Only in the SWP is a "sneering tone" considered grounds for expulsion.

Another pro-leadership comrade, 'battersea', alleges on comrade Solomon's blog: "The 'Mutiny' event was

simply a marker to which (it was calculated) the 'middle ground' would flood, thereby proving the dullard, querulous, uncertain qualities of the leadership." This accusation seems to amount to saying that a successful, stimulating event must be factional, because it inevitably shows up the inadequacy of what the CC lays on.

But, not to worry, two former SWP members have weighed in on the side of the leadership. Andy Wilson writes: "I was expelled many years ago at German and Rees's insistence. My crime was to try to launch an independent cultural magazine, with members outside of the SWP. As Lindsey explained to me at the time, such independence is not allowed, and all such activity has to have the explicit support of the CC."

"Does anyone see the inconsistency here? It was a summary expulsion, and Lindsey, having initiated it, then chaired the control commission that confirmed it. And naturally I was not given the opportunity to defend myself at conference. Given this, I haven't the faintest idea why these people think the rules should suddenly be changed once it is their turn to be in the firing line."

Well, that's all right then, comrade Wilson. Presumably he now agrees that "to try to launch an independent cultural magazine [or cultural evening] with members outside of the SWP" without "the explicit support of the CC" is indeed an expellable offence. Whatever happened to the need for revolutionary initiative?

Another Andy (Andy Newman, writing on his *Socialist Unity* blog), while sympathising on a personal level with comrade Solomon, says in an article entitled 'Sometimes expulsions are justified' that you have to take into account "the context" of her vile crime: "The members of the SWP who carry forward the good work of the organisation are understandably wary of the idea of an interminable guerrilla war from a former clique in the leadership that might jeopardise the ability of their organisation to function effectively."³

You can't have members criticising each other now, can you?

Mind you, there is some debate over whether or not the leadership will now call a truce in its campaign to eliminate the Left Platform. On the one hand, there are signs that perhaps an accommodation will be arrived at with Rees and co. For example *Socialist Worker* goes out of its way to appear to concede one of the LP's main criticisms, when it reports that national secretary Martin Smith "argued that united front work was central, as did a number of delegates in the discussion".⁴ Then there was the "unanimous vote" on the CC's motion on imperialism and war (Stop the War Coalition is, of course, the LP's most favoured "united front" and it is good to hear that the CC and LP are in agreement on this key question).

Socialist Worker also reports that "Left Platform ... announced that it would dissolve at the end of conference, as the constitution requires."

However, on the other hand, *Party Notes* treads more carefully: "Now that the conference is over and the disagreements have been voted on, the Left Platform must disband. The SWP's constitution makes clear that permanent and secret factions are not allowed."

Then there are the dire warnings in the period just before conference that the criticism must cease, not to mention the scarcely veiled threats in *Pre-conference Bulletin* No3 to move against LP people in Sunderland, for instance. And will comrades Rees, German and co really agree to keep their heads down and work quietly within the SWP like the loyal members they are? It hardly seems likely.

In other decisions, conference re-elected the outgoing CC (with the exception of Viv Smith, who was not proposed for re-election). Its number was once more increased to 12, when Joseph Choonara, Amy Leather and Dan Mayer were added to the slate.

As we report elsewhere in this paper, conference also agreed to stand candidates as part of the new Trade Union and Socialist Coalition. However, it also resolved to "build 'Don't vote Nazi' campaigns" - ie, 'Vote anyone but BNP' - and "reaffirmed the SWP's commitment to 'no platform for fascists'".

A motion on Scotland was "overwhelmingly carried", whereby "in the current situation" the SWP would back a vote for separation in a referendum, even though "we reject the arguments that Scotland is an oppressed nation and that an independent Scotland would be more inclined to socialism".⁵ ●

Notes

1. *Party Notes* January 11.
2. <http://solomonsmindfield.blogspot.com/2010/01/my-expulsion-from-swp-has-been-ratified.html>, January 10.
3. www.socialistunity.com/?p=5119, January 12.
4. *Socialist Worker* January 16.
5. *Ibid.*

LEFT UNITY

Accentuate the positive

At last the establishment of a left unity electoral coalition has been confirmed by the highly secretive 'core group'. But, asks **Mike Macnair**, is this unity built on sand?

The name of the newly confirmed leftwing alliance to contest the general election is 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition' (Tusc) and a provisional programme has been issued. This resulted from secret talks between the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, the RMT union, Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity, the Alliance for Green Socialism and Indian Workers Association.

However, contrary to the hopes of its promoters, the RMT executive has decided not to back the project. Although general secretary Bob Crow will be at the forefront of the campaign and other union leaders, including Brian Caton of the Prison Officers Association, will also be centrally involved, the coalition, despite its name, will have no official union backing.

According to a statement on the website of SPEW's Committee for a Workers' International, "Places have been reserved on the committee for the core organisations which participated in No2EU, who will now decide on their involvement in the new coalition" (www.socialistworld.net/eng/2010/01/1302.html).

In other words, it is by no means certain that all the "core organisations" will take part. In fact the AGS has for one pulled out, because the agreed name, which I understand has already been registered, does not contain the word 'Green' or 'Environmental'. The IWA has not attended 'core group' meetings for months, and even the CPB did not attend the most recent meeting. Unlike 'No to the EU, Yes to democracy', which contested the June European Union elections, when the CPB called the shots and SPEW was forced to go along with the CPB's dire Europhobic British nationalism in No2EU, it seems that comrade Crow has this time leant more towards SPEW, and this is reflected in the provisional programme. In turn, this could re-ignite divisions on the CPB leadership, which previously caused it to pull out of 'core group' meetings until the decision was overturned.

In the December 31 *Morning Star* CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths only mentioned a possible left coalition at the very end of his article on the prospects for 2010. Setting a Labour victory as a high priority, he added that "it will also be vital that a range of left candidates, including Communist Party, Greens, Respect and socialist coalition ones *in carefully selected seats*, ensure that progressive, working class and anti-imperialist policies are put before millions of electors" (emphasis added).

SPEW, by contrast, is expected to stand a couple of dozen candidates, and the Socialist Workers Party hopes to stand six, including two in London, as part of the coalition. *Socialist Worker's* report of the SWP conference states: "The SWP is in negotiations with others on the left over the prospect of standing candidates in the election. In many places, the SWP will call for a vote for candidates to the left of Labour, including Solidarity in Scotland, Respect and individuals such as Dai Davies in Blaenau Gwent and the left Green Caroline Lucas. A debate developed over whether to call for a Labour vote where no other left candidate is standing. Confer-

ence agreed to arrange a longer discussion on the election at the next party council" (January 16).

The latest internal *Party Notes* is more specific, however: "Conference agreed that the SWP should be part of the new socialist and trade union coalition, backed by Bob Crow, Socialist Party, CPB and RMT branches that will stand in a few seats in the general election" (January 11).

It is quite clear then that the hopes of comrades like SPEW's Dave Nellist for a contest on the scale of the 2001 Socialist Alliance campaign (98 candidates) have been dashed. What is more, as this paper has pointed out, and as George Galloway said at the Respect annual conference in November, the extraordinarily dilatory secret proceedings of the 'core group' - when the major parties are already launching their election campaigns - pretty much guarantee that the coalition will have negligible electoral impact.

Positive

There are both positive and negative aspects of this news, though it is a bit of a stretch to identify the positives. There are three of these. First is the involvement of the SWP. If the SWP and SPEW actually get involved in serious joint work around a coalition for the general election, that would have a significant 'gravitational pull' towards broader and longer-term united action of the Marxist left - that is, towards a Communist Party.

The second positive element is that, once again according to the CWI, "Candidates from community campaigns, and other socialist organisations that have not been involved in the discussions to date, will also be able to stand under the Tusc banner. The coalition has agreed a core policy statement which prospective candidates will be asked to endorse. As a federal 'umbrella' organisation, however, coalition candidates and participating organisations will also be able to produce their own supporting material."

The CPGB wrote several weeks ago to the coalition asking to participate, but received no reply. Hopefully we will now receive a positive response to our proposal to finance our own candidates, who will stand on a communist platform, outlined in our "own supporting material". This would go some way to recognising that the organised left has a responsibility to unite its own forces to put "working class and anti-imperialist policies" before the electorate (to borrow Rob Griffiths' phrase); and that this responsibility is not dependent on the (illusory) possibility of creating a new 'broad workers' party': ie, a new Labour Party based on the trade unions. This would be a real, if small, step forward.

The third positive element is that the name and provisional programme are better, or at least less bad, than the No2EU platform from which this coalition originated. No2EU presented itself, in effect, as a labour movement version or left wing of the United Kingdom Independence Party. It also appeared as a left version of the right-populist campaign against 'parties', based on the MPs' expenses scandal, which was at its height at the time of the Euro elections. The name 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition' presents the alliance as an unambiguously working class and socialist

choice; and the programme is a pretty standard leftwing wish list, though as muddled as these wish lists usually are.

We in the CPGB want to see the largest and most effective possible leftwing challenge to New Labour in the next general election. Such a challenge is made if anything more urgent by the cabinet Blairites' use of the Hewitt-Hoon 'stalking horse' to extract concessions from Brown - namely promises of harder cuts and the presentation of Labour as a party of "aspiration": ie, of the managerial middle class.

Negative

The biggest negative element is the fact that after months of secret talks and with campaigning effectively underway (everyone knows the last possible date for the election is in early June), it has taken so long for a left contest to be confirmed; and it is still not clear which groups will participate.

This is a symptom of the same phenomenon as the secret talks themselves and the complete silence - not even a negative response - in response to our letter. Top-down, bureaucratic control-freakery, relying on secrecy. It was a major factor in the failure of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party; in SPEW's walk out from the Socialist Alliance and the SWP's subsequent destruction of it; and in the SWP's astonishing blunders with the Respect project.

At the end of the day election campaigns depend on mobilising people on the ground to leaflet, canvass and so on. And election campaigns are - as No2EU half understood - about democracy and people getting some small degree of control over their own future. The bureaucratic method is precisely demobilising and paralysing. With Tusc its probable effect will be a stillborn project like No2EU itself and like the SWP's Left Alternative.

The other negatives are in the provisional programme. Much of this is entirely worthy. Parts of it are utterly vague or incoherent: like "Invest to create and protect jobs, especially for young people." But there are two really fundamental weaknesses.

Europe

The first is the question of Europe. As I said on the positive side, at least we are rid of the dominant Eurosceptic tone of No2EU. But this reduces the programme's comments on Europe to two.

The first is on anti-union laws: "Repeat Thatcher's and the EU's anti-trade union laws." This is perfectly supportable, though inadequate: the anti-union laws are not just Thatcher's but were begun when the 1974-78 Wilson government incorporated large parts of Heath's (1970-74) anti-union laws in its own legislation. But it is entirely correct to demand repeal of the EU's anti-union laws. How? The answer is going to have to be common political action of the workers' movement across Europe.

The second is under the heading 'Solidarity, not war': "An independent foreign policy based on international solidarity - no more US poodle, no moves to a capitalist, militarist United States of Europe, no Lisbon Treaty". Opposition to the Lisbon Treaty is now politically meaningless; and the clearly anti-working class elements of the rejected 'European

constitution' were, in fact, already in the Maastricht (1992) and Nice (2001) treaties and the original Treaty of Rome (1957). "No more US poodle, no moves to a capitalist, militarist United States of Europe" is purely negative but unobjectionable.

The alternative offered is "an independent foreign policy based on international solidarity". This is, of course, a contradiction in terms: solidarity and independent policy are counterposed. But the larger question is: solidarity with whom? The Blairites, of course, claim to pursue a foreign policy "based on solidarity" - that is, the solidarity of the 'international community' or of 'the west'. Perhaps, like Andy Newman of the *Socialist Unity* website, our foreign policy should be based on solidarity of the 'anti-imperialists': ie, solidarity with the theocratic regime in Iran against the Iranian workers and students; or solidarity with the emergent proto-imperialism of the Chinese Stalinist regime against Chinese strikers, or Tibetan or East Turkestani protesters.

The real alternative is a foreign policy based on the solidarity of the international working class as a class. And this policy has positive implications for Europe. Yes, repeal the EU's anti-union laws - through common political action of the workers' movement across Europe. But the implications are much more extensive. Just imagine for a moment that Tusc actually stood in all seats and won the general election. To attempt to implement the left wish list of the provisional programme in Britain alone would merely crash the economy, bring in sanctions from other capitalist countries, and open the road to a far-right coup. But common action of the working class on the scale of Europe, in contrast, really could win the cherished goals of the left - and more.

Here the residual 'socialism in one country' of the programme - the heart of the CPB's ideas, of course - renders it wildly implausible. A programme based on the aim of common international political action of the working class could transform the wish list into real aspirations.

Democracy

The second fundamental weakness of the provisional programme is the question of democracy - despite the fact that the word 'democratic' is scattered throughout it. Thus the programme talks of public ownership of services and utilities "under democratic control", of education "under democratic local control" and of public ownership of the financial sector "under democratic control".

But when it comes to the issue of democracy as such, the heading 'Democracy, diversity and justice' says nothing about what the idea of "democratic control" implies. After commitments to anti-racism and to gender equality, we get "Defend our liberties and make police and security democratically accountable." - which Conservative shadow home secretary Chris Grayling could agree to. And then: "For a democratic socialist society run in the interests of people, not millionaires. For bringing into democratic public ownership the major companies and banks that dominate the economy, so that production and services can be planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the environment."

The British state claims to be a 'democracy' and to be 'democratic'. The reality is, of course, that it is not: it is "run in the interests of ... millionaires" (more exactly, of corporate capital). But how does this mechanism work? The answer, in part, is that Britain has a mercenary media (funded by advertising), a mercenary political class (career politicians dependent on large donations to keep their parties funded), a mercenary judicial system (through the 'free market' in lawyers' fees giving success in lawsuits, on average, to the parties who spend more on lawyers), a mercenary senior civil service (overpaid and expecting to retire early and take up jobs in business) - and a mercenary army. Hardly surprising, then, that the corporations can pay for the policies they want.

Going alongside this system of corruption and back-stopping it are the 'checks and balances' of the constitution: the judicial power on the one side, and autonomy of the 'executive power' on the other. The executive is headed by the plutocrat queen, head of state and holder of loyalty oaths from MPs, ministers, judges and army officers. It is generally entitled to act in private: Tony Blair is reported to have said the Freedom of Information Act was "the worst mistake his government had made" (*The Guardian* December 31 2005). Behind the screen of government privacy and official secrets lie the lobbying efforts of business and its representatives and the reminders of favours past and possible favours future.

Conversely, there are positive needs of democracy, if working people are to win the final say in social decision-making. We need far more information about decision-making processes. We need more freedom of speech and the press, now subject to the dominance of the corporate media monopolies. We need more frequent and freer elections - without the undemocratic system of party registration and the big parties' access to state funds and to media - on the basis of a more proportional system of representation. We need to restore power to local government, taking it away both from ministers and from judges. And so on.

Why has the Tusc provisional programme so little to say about the substance of democracy? The answer takes us back to the beginning of these negatives: the bureaucratic, top-down approach of the creators of this initiative itself. They may say they are for democratic control - but when they themselves are asked to act democratically, they think like leftwing versions of Sir Humphrey Appleby from *Yes Minister*.

No2EU meant by 'democracy' the restoration of the British *ancien régime* before 'we' joined the Common Market in 1972. It is hardly surprising that its successor coalition has little to say about what democracy actually means.

Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. If Tusc actually gets a serious election campaign underway in which SPEW, the SWP and CPGB actually work together, it will have a real, positive dynamic, however bad the core politics. At present, however, it looks as though the bad politics - especially around democracy and bureaucracy - will make Tusc yet another stillborn election-only initiative ●

IRAN

'Reformists' fear revolution

The attempt by the two wings of the Iranian regime to shelve their differences is unlikely to defuse the mass movement, writes Yasmine Mather

More than two weeks after the demonstrations of December 27 2009, the political repercussions of these events, and the reaction to the anger and radicalism of the protesters, continue. Clearly now no-one, from the government to the 'reformists', to the revolutionary opposition, has any doubt that the current protests are no longer about who should be the 'president' of the Islamic Republic, but represent a serious challenge to the very existence of the religious state.

Ashura is a day of mourning for Shia Muslims, as they commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the prophet Mohammed in 680AD. In December 2009 it coincided with the seventh day following the death of a clerical critic of the regime, ayatollah Montazeri. Throughout Iran hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets with slogans against the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, and calling for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. When security forces attacked, the crowds fought back. Tehran was "covered in thick smoke from fires and tear gas" and there was "hand-to-hand combat between security forces and the protesters," with reports of street battles in other major cities.¹ For the first time in the last 30 years, many women came out into the streets to join the demonstrations wearing no headscarves or hijabs.

At a number of locations in Tehran security forces were forced to retreat, as demonstrators burnt police vehicles and basij posts and erected barricades. There are videos showing instances where police and basij were captured and detained by demonstrators and three police stations in Tehran were briefly occupied. Demonstrators also attacked Bank Saderat in central Tehran, setting it on fire.

The government's reaction was predictable. Since December 27 basij and pasdaran (revolutionary guards) have been unleashed to impose further repression. Hundreds of people have been incarcerated. The summary arrest of leftwing and worker activists, the death sentences issued against left political prisoners, the sacking of workers already in prison are part of a deliberate attempt by the regime to impose an atmosphere of terror.

Ultra-conservative clerics have also called for the arrest and execution of 'reformist' leaders. In a speech on January 9 the supreme leader told government security forces and the judiciary to act decisively against "rioters and anti-government demonstrators".

Conservative divisions

Despite the bravado of Khamenei, there are clear signs that the demonstrations of December 27 have divided the conservatives further on how to respond to the protests. While supporters of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad openly call for more arrests and even the execution of political opponents, the 'principlist' faction² within parliament is preaching caution.

On January 9, a parliamentary committee publicly blamed Tehran's former prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, a close ally of Ahmadinejad, for the death of three prisoners arrested during anti-government protests in June 2009. The committee found that Mortazavi had authorised the imprisonment of 147 opposition supporters and 30 criminals in a cell measuring only 70 square metres in Kahrizak deten-



Demonstrators are increasingly fearless

tion centre. The inmates were frequently beaten and spent days without food or water during the summer.

Ali Motahhari, a prominent fundamentalist parliamentarian, told the weekly magazine *Iran Dokht*: "Under the current circumstances, moderates should be in charge of the country's affairs." He suggested Ahmadinejad should also be held accountable for the deaths in Kahrizak and for fuelling the post-election turmoil. Iranian state television is broadcasting debates between 'radical' and 'moderate' conservatives, in which Ahmadinejad is blamed by some for causing the crisis.

There are two reasons for this dramatic change in line:

1. The December 27 demonstrations were a turning point, in that both conservatives and 'reformists' came to realise how the anger and frustration of ordinary Iranians with the political and economic situation is taking revolutionary forms.

2. The principlists are responding to a number of 'proposals' by leading 'reformists' as a last attempt to save the Islamic Republic. Fearful of revolution, 'reformist' leaders from the June 2009 presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Moussavi to former president Mohammad Khatami have made conciliatory statements, and the moderate conservatives have responded positively to these approaches.

'Reformist' compromise

In a clear sign that 'reformists' have heard the cry of the revolution, Moussavi's initial response to the Ashura demonstrations was to distance himself from the protests, emphasising that neither he nor Mehdi Karubi had called for protests on that day. His statement on January 1 entitled 'Five stages to resolution' (of the crisis) was a signal to both his supporters and opponents that this was truly the last chance to save the Islamic regime from collapse.

Western reportage of the statement concentrated on his comment, "I am ready to sacrifice my life for reform." Of course, Iranians are well known for their love of 'martyrdom', from Ashura itself to the Fedayeen Islam in 1946,³ to the Marxist Fedayeen (1970s-80s). Iranians have been mesmerised by the Shia concept of martyrdom, inherited from Sassanide ideals, a

yearning to put their lives at risk for what they see as a 'revolutionary cause'. But Moussavi will no doubt go down in history as the first Iranian who is putting his life on the line for the cause of 'reform' and compromise!

His five-point plan is seen as a compromise because it does not challenge the legitimacy of the current president and "presents a way out of the current impasse" in order to save the Islamic Republic, basically demanding more freedom for the Islamic 'reformist' politicians, activists and press, as well as accountability of government forces, while reaffirming his allegiance to the constitution of the Islamic regime, as well as the existing "judicial and executive powers". The preamble to the proposal explains very well Moussavi's message to the supreme leader and the conservative faction: it is not too late to save the regime, but this could be our last chance.

It reads: "Today the situation of the country is like an immense roaring river, where massive floods and various events have led to its rising and then caused it to become silted. The solution to calm down this great river and clear its water is not possible in a quick and swift action. Thinking of these kinds of solutions that some should repent and some should make deals and there should be some give and take to solve this great problem is in practice going off the track ... I also believe that it is still not too late and our establishment has the power to accomplish this important task, should it have insight and a respectful and kind view toward all of the nation and its layers."

This statement was followed on January 4 by a '10-point proposal' from the self-appointed 'ideologues' in exile of Iran's Islamic 'reformist' movement: the former Pasdar, Akbar Ganji (nowadays introduced on BBC and CNN as a "human rights activist"), Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar, Abdolali Bazargan and Ataollah Mohajerani.⁴

Fearful that the Moussavi plan will be seen by many as too much of a compromise, the group of five call for the resignation of Ahmadinejad and fresh elections under the supervision of a newly established independent election commission to replace that of the Guardian Council. In the last few days both Khatami and another former president, Ali Akbar Rafsanjan-

ni, have publicly declared their support for the compromise, while condemning "radicals and rioters". Khatami went further than most, insulting demonstrators who called for the overthrow of the Islamic regime.

All in all, it has been a busy two and a half weeks for Iran's 'reformists', terrified by the radicalism of the demonstrators and desperate to save the clerical regime at all cost. Inevitably the reformist left, led by the Fedayeen Majority, is tailing the Moussavi-Khatami line. However, inside Iran there are signs that the leadership of the green movement is facing a serious crisis.

None of the proposals addresses the most basic democratic demand of the Iranian people: separation of state and religion. A widely distributed leaflet and web post inside Iran entitled "Who is the leader of the current protest movement in Iran?" refers to comments made by ayatollah Taleghani 31 years ago,⁵ at the height of the revolutionary movement. Taleghani, faced with a similar question, replied that it was the shah who led the protest movement because the repression he imposed and his inability to compromise caused it to move forward day by day. The leaflet concludes that the current force leading the movement is supreme leader Khamenei, who by his words and actions is fuelling the revolutionary fervour.

Working class response

In every event Iranians see real and imaginary parallels with the 1978-79 uprising that led to the shah's downfall. Last week the publication of Khamenei's alleged escape plans and the revelations that senior clerics had arranged to send their fortunes abroad to avoid sanctions and the consequences of an uprising reminded Iranians of January 1979, when the shah and his entourage were busy making similar arrangements.

The Iranian left is not immune to such nostalgia. Arguments about the 'principal contradiction' and 'stages of revolution' seem to dominate current debates. While some Maoists argue in favour of a 'democratic stage' of the revolution, citing the relative weakness of the organised working class, the Coordinating Committee for the Setting Up of Workers' Organisa-

tions (Comite Hahamhangi) points out that the dominant contradiction in Iran, a country where 70% of the population lives in urban areas, is between labour and capital. They point out that the level and depth of workers' struggles show radicalism and levels of organisation and that the Iranian working class is the only force capable of delivering radical democracy.

Leftwing organisations and their supporters are also discussing the lessons to be learnt from the Ashura demonstrations. Clearly sections of the police and soldiers are refusing to shoot at demonstrators and the issue of organising radical conscripts in order to divide and reduce the power of the state's repressive forces must be addressed. In some working class districts around Tehran and other major cities the organisation of neighbourhood shoras (councils) has started.

The current debates within the ruling circles have had no impact on the level of protests undertaken by workers and students. There are reports of strikes and demonstrations in one of Iran's largest industrial complexes, Isfahan's steel plant, where privatisation and contract employment have led to action by the workers. Leftwing oil workers/employees are reporting disillusionment with Moussavi and the 'reformist' camp amongst fellow workers and believe there is an opportunity to radicalise protests in this industry despite the fact that close control and repression has intensified over the recent period.

Last week a number of prominent labour activists, including Vahed bus worker Mansour Osslou, who are currently in prison (some incarcerated for over a year) were sacked from their jobs for 'failing to turn up at work', which prompted protests in Vahed depots and the Haft Tapeh sugar cane plant. In late December workers at the Lastic Alborz factory went on strike demanding payment of unpaid wages. This week workers have been holding protests at dozens of workplaces, including the Arak industrial complex, the Mazandaran textile factory, at the Polsadr metro construction and in Tonkabon.

Over the next few weeks Iranian workers will face major challenges. Even if the two main factions of the regime achieve a compromise, it will be unlikely to defuse the movement. In fact the conciliatory line of Moussavi and Khatami is certain to further reduce their influence amongst protesters. However, if the religious state is able to reunite, it will be more difficult to attend demonstrations, call strikes and hold sit-ins, etc.

Whatever happens, Iranian workers will need our solidarity more than ever. That is why Hands Off the People of Iran is currently planning a week of solidarity and fundraising actions in February - check the Hopi website for more details (www.hopoi.org) ●

Notes

1. *New York Times* December 29 2009.
2. One of the groups in the conservative faction of the Iranian parliament.
3. Fedayeen Islam was one of the first truly Islamic fundamentalist organisations in the Muslim world. It was founded in Iran by Navab Safavi in 1946 for the purpose of demanding strict application of the sharia and assassinating those it believed to be apostates and enemies of Islam.
4. <http://enduringamerica.com/2010/01/04/iran-five-expatriate-intellectuals-issue-the-demands-of-the-green-movement>.
5. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Taleghani.

SUPPLEMENT

Kautsky, Lenin and the 'April theses'

Could Karl Kautsky - the 'pope' turned 'renegade' of orthodox Marxism - have influenced Vladimir Ilych's 'April theses'? Here we print a Karl Kautsky article from April 1917, translated into English for the first time by Ben Lewis. It is introduced by Lars T Lih, a historian based in Canada, who has been at the forefront of re-examining the complex relationship between these two widely misunderstood figures of the 20th century workers' movement

The fall of the Russian tsar in March 1917 electrified public opinion everywhere, including socialist circles. In April 1917, Karl Kautsky published an article in his monthly journal *Die Neue Zeit*¹ that assessed the prospects of the Russian Revolution and its possible paths of development. Lenin read the article just prior to leaving Switzerland for Russia.

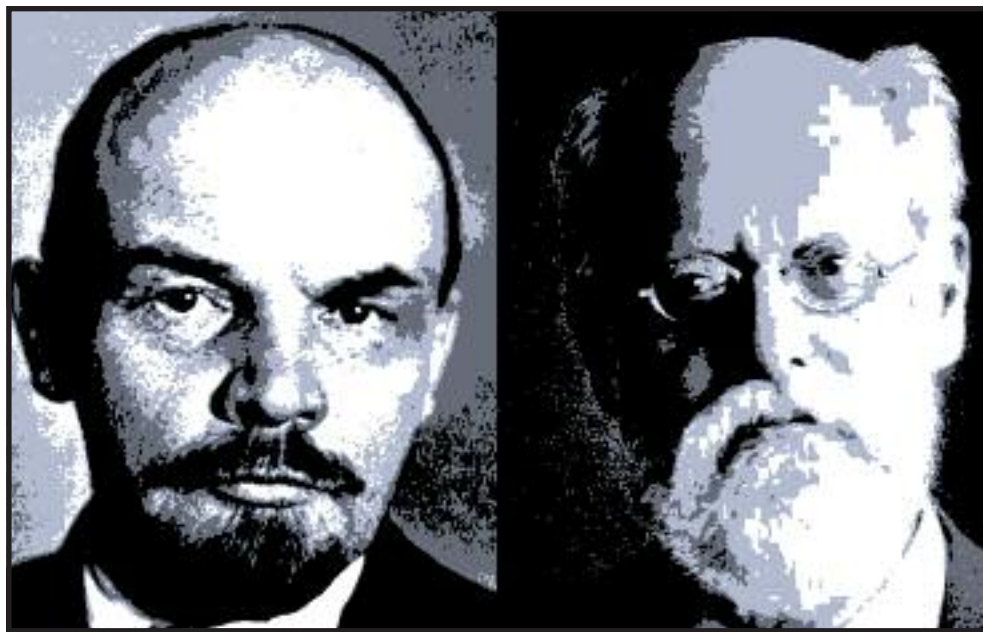
We are here publishing a full translation of this article, for two reasons. First, the immediate reaction to the Russian Revolution by the most prominent Marxist of his generation cannot fail to be of great historical interest. Kautsky had always been close to the Bolsheviks in his general assessment of revolutionary strategy in Russia, and his 1917 analysis of the Russian situation overlaps with the Bolshevik one to a large extent.

The second reason is that Kautsky's article may provide an answer to a long-standing historical mystery. In April 1917, Lenin made certain ideological innovations that seemed to come out of the blue. Historians have proposed various explanations, but none have been generally convincing. I believe that the key to the mystery lies in the impact of Kautsky's article on Lenin's outlook just at the crucial point in time when he needed to come up with a concrete political programme that could orient the activities of the Bolshevik Party in the new circumstances of 1917. I will outline the case for this assertion here, leaving the necessary full presentation to another time.

First, what exactly was new in Lenin's famous *April theses*? The following planks in Lenin's 1917 platform are *not* new: all power to the soviets, no support for the provisional government and the imperialist war, the necessity of a second stage of the revolution, in which the proletariat would take state power. These themes can all be found earlier - in particular, in theses published in October 1915. What *is* new is Lenin's insistence on taking 'steps toward socialism' in Russia, *prior to and independent of socialist revolution in western Europe*. This theme occurs for the first time in remarks jotted down in April 1917 - immediately after reading Kautsky's article. Of course, we cannot simply argue *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* ("with this, therefore because of this"). Nevertheless, this coincidence in time opens up a possibility that should be seriously examined.

A couple of preliminary remarks. The theme of 'steps toward socialism' is *not* equivalent to 'socialism in one country', as this slogan was understood in the mid-20s. Lenin is not making any assertion about the possibility of building full socialism in the absence of an international revolution. The metaphor of 'steps toward socialism' was meant to be modest: Russia can *begin* the long journey toward socialist transformation. Lenin undoubtedly still counted on European socialist revolution as the only way out of the global crisis of imperialist war.

Some readers might feel that the idea of Kautsky influencing Lenin in any way, especially after 1914, is inherently implausible - even paradoxical. The standard story about Lenin and Kautsky goes something like this: Lenin did indeed regard Kautsky as a Marxist authority prior to 1914, although this was



probably due to a misunderstanding. But Kautsky's actions and articles after the outbreak of the war made the scales fall from Lenin's eyes, and he renounced Kautsky and 'Kautskyism'.

This standard story is wrong on one essential point: Lenin *never* renounced "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist" - the phrase used constantly by Lenin after the outbreak of war to refer to the pre-war Kautsky. On the contrary, Lenin continued to energetically affirm the Marxist credentials and insights of Kautsky's writings, especially up to and including 1909. Lenin ferociously attacked what he called *Kautskianstvo*, a term that he coined to sum up Kautsky's *behaviour* after 1914. But *Kautskianstvo* most explicitly did not mean 'the system of views set forth by Kautsky in his pre-war writings' - in fact, the most glaring feature of *Kautskianstvo* was precisely Kautsky's failure to live up to those views.

I have documented this point elsewhere. Here I will just assert that there is nothing paradoxical about Lenin being influenced by Kautsky, even in 1917, on issues other than such wartime controversies as the nature of imperialism and the need for a purified third international.

Let us now turn to Lenin's ideological scenarios prior to April 1917. Up to this point, Lenin had one revolutionary scenario for Russia and another for Europe: *democratic revolution* in Russia and *socialist revolution* in Europe. These two scenarios could be linked externally: democratic revolution in Russia might spark off socialist revolution in Europe, which in turn might open up socialist possibilities even in backward Russia. This kind of linkage can be seen in the theses of October 1915: "The task of the proletariat in Russia is to carry out the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia to the end, *in order* to ignite the socialist revolution in Europe" (Lenin's emphasis).

But, as the theses of October 1915 show, Lenin did not envision the possibility of Russia itself moving toward socialism prior to and independent of socialist revolution in Europe. True, a democratic revolution in Russia required proletarian state power - nevertheless, this proletarian state power

would set itself only democratic tasks. Why? The reasons can be found in an article Kautsky wrote in 1906 that had a title similar to that of his 1917 article: 'Prospects and driving forces of the Russian Revolution' (1906), as compared to 'Prospects of the Russian Revolution' (1917).

Kautsky's 1906 article was greatly valued by Lenin as an authoritative endorsement of basic Bolshevik strategy. Kautsky argued that the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of leading a thorough-going democratic revolution because it was too fearful of the inevitable result: namely, the growing power of the socialist proletariat. The workers were therefore the only class capable of leading a democratic revolution to the end - precisely *because* their ultimate goal was not democracy, but socialism. But in order to carry out this gigantic task of overthrowing the tsar the workers needed to win the loyalty of the revolutionary peasants away from the bourgeoisie.

Therefore, concluded Kautsky, the upcoming Russian Revolution had moved beyond the standard model of the bourgeois revolution in one important aspect: namely, the bourgeoisie itself would not - could not - be the leading class. But in another sense the Russian Revolution was still bourgeois: it would usher in an essentially bourgeois system, albeit a democratic one, because Russia was not ready for socialism. Kautsky proved this last point by applying two Marxist axioms to Russia in 1906. The first axiom was that socialism was impossible without an appropriate level of productive forces: "Socialism can only be built on the basis of large-scale enterprises, and it stands too much in contradiction to the conditions of small-scale enterprises for it to arise and maintain itself in a country with a overwhelming peasant majority."

The second axiom might be called the axiom of the class ally: "It will be impossible for social democracy to achieve victory solely based on the proletariat, without the support of another class, and therefore, as a victorious party, it cannot carry out its programme further than permitted by the interests of the class that supports the proletariat." This supportive

class ally was the peasantry and, since the peasants were not ready to support socialism and since, furthermore, the workers could only carry out socialist transformation in a fully democratic system, then it followed that socialism was not on the agenda in Russia in 1906 or for the foreseeable future. "The mutuality of interest between the industrial proletariat and the peasantry is the source of the revolutionary strength of Russian social democracy and of the possibility of its victory, but at the same time it is also the limit to the possible utilisation of that victory."

Lenin saw the Russian democratic revolution as a grandiose historical task that required heroic efforts from the proletariat and the revolutionary *narod*. But he also accepted without demur the argument that *socialist tasks* were out of the question for the time being. Kautsky's words in 1906 only repeat what Lenin already said in 1905 when he pointed to "the existence of that immense peasant and petty bourgeois population that is capable of supporting the democratic revolution, but is at present incapable of supporting the socialist revolution" (Lenin's famous comment from autumn 1905 that "we will not stop halfway", taken in context, is not evidence of any wavering on the issue of socialist transformation in Russia in the foreseeable future).

In his 1917 article, Kautsky took the same two axioms (forces of production, class ally) and applied them to Russia in 1917 - and came up this time with much more open-ended answers. Kautsky does not make definite predictions, but he warns against any automatic pessimism, against setting *a priori* limits to socialist development, given the new empirical realities of Russia in 1917. He thus opened the gateway for Lenin to come up with his own, more assertively optimistic applications of the same axioms. In a word, he gave Lenin permission to consider the possibility of steps toward socialism in Russia.

We are now ready to turn to Kautsky's article and note the passages that Lenin might have found to be significant. On two levels, Kautsky affirms the key propositions of what might be called the outlook of old Bolshevism. On the international level, he hints strongly that the Russian Revolution could lead to socialist revolution in Europe. His language is somewhat guarded and Aesopian in order to get past the censor, but the meaning is clear. He writes that "the international interdependence of state life for the peoples of Europe has already made too much progress for such a tremendous event as the transformation of the tsarist empire into a democratic republic to occur without repercussions for the other states". Among these repercussions is "a tremendous upswing in the political power of the working classes in the entire capitalist realm". This is coded language for 'socialist revolution'. Kautsky also brings out the responsibility of the German SPD to prevent German militarists from crushing the new revolution.

Kautsky then reaffirms the key propositions of the long-standing Bolshevik analysis of the domestic Russian situation. The Russian bourgeoisie would like to see tsarism removed, but it is so paralysed by fear of revolution that "tsarism had to first bring Russia to the brink of the abyss before the bourgeoisie could

oppose it more energetically - obeying necessity, not their own inner drive”.

Thus the Russian Revolution was to be a proletarian one from the very beginning, and Kautsky lists all the reasons why the Russian workers could play this leadership role: the advanced class-consciousness of the Russian workers, the “20th century knowledge” of their leaders, the preponderant social weight of the cities and the “decisive role” that the proletariat already enjoyed within them. Furthermore, the peasants were the natural ally of the socialist workers, since only the workers were prepared to satisfy the peasant demand for land. Once the peasants received the land, they will “oppose any counterrevolution that threatens them with the loss of their newly won soil”. Furthermore, the peasants were much more likely than previously to support democratic political reforms on the state level. Kautsky’s 1917 article thus contains a concise précis of old Bolshevik strategy.

But Kautsky goes on to open up new perspectives. How far can the Russian Revolution go in a socialist direction, even prior to and independent of any European revolution? To answer this question, Kautsky applies the same two Marxist axioms that he did in 1906, but comes up with different results.

The first axiom states that socialist transformation is possible only with the appropriate objective productive forces. Applying this axiom to Russia in 1917, Kautsky admits that “Russian capitalism [still] offers very little in terms of starting points [*Ansatzpunkte*] for socialist development”. Nevertheless, there is much that could be done, including nationalisation of large firms, railroads and mines; extensive economic regulation to protect workers; progressive taxation, and so on. But the significance of Kautsky’s remarks does not consist in his list of possible reforms, but rather the open-ended logic of his scenario, as set forth in the following crucial passage:

“One might call this a bourgeois programme of reform and not a workers’ programme of revolution. Whether it is one or the other

depends on quantity. Here too, when quantity is increased accordingly, it must transform into a new quality. It is in the nature of things that the proletariat will strive to use its revolutionary power in the direction I have outlined here as soon as it feels solid ground under its feet, and that in so doing it will meet the resistance of the capitalists and the large landowners. How much it will achieve depends on its relative power.”

The other axiom states that the proletariat cannot go further toward socialism than its main class ally - in this case, the peasantry. The question becomes: will the peasantry support the socialist proletariat, not only when it is carrying out democratic tasks, but when it moves on to socialist tasks? There is no definite answer to this question (continues Kautsky). Certainly “we must reckon on the possibility that they will become a conservative element as soon as their hunger for land is sated and their freedom of movement secured: enemies of any counterrevolution, but also of any further revolution”.

In 1906, this possibility was the only realistic one. But, as with socialist economic measures, Kautsky insists that we should now avoid taking a too narrow and pessimistic view of peasant support. Already in 1906, Kautsky wrote eloquently of the transformation of the Russian peasant “from a good-natured, sleepy, unreflective creature of habit into an energetic, restless and untiring fighter who strives toward something new and better”. In his 1917 article, Kautsky insists that the intervening decade has seen such sweeping further changes in peasant life that prediction of peasant behaviour is impossible:

“If one is able to roughly, if not exactly, place the tendencies and needs of the other classes in Russia in parallel with the phenomena of western Europe, this way of looking at the situation breaks down with the Russian peasant. His material circumstances and historical traditions are quite unique, and at the same time have been in the process of colossal change for three decades. The peasant is the ‘x’, the unknown variable, in the equation of the Russian Revolution. We are

still unable to insert a figure for it. And yet we know that this figure is the crucial one, the decisive one. For this reason, the Russian Revolution can and will spring tremendous surprises on us.”

Thus, for both fundamental questions, Kautsky refuses to set limits and tells us to be prepared for tremendous surprises. Over the course of 1917, Lenin proceeded to ask himself the same two questions and gradually came up with his own definite answers. Just for illustrative purposes, we will limit ourselves here to some striking verbal echoes that indicate the direct impact of Kautsky’s article. Both come from *Can the Bolsheviks retain state power?*, written in early October 1917.

For Lenin in 1917, the main *Ansatzpunkt*, or starting point, for socialist development for Russia was the “economic apparatus” of the banks and trusts. “This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed.” In expanding on this point, Lenin uses the same Hegelian tag as Kautsky did in a very similar context:

“The big banks are the ‘state apparatus’ which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready-made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what *capitalistically mutilates* this excellent apparatus, to make it *even bigger*, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality. A single state bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the *socialist* apparatus.”

In another part of the same pamphlet, Lenin responds to the charge that the workers are “isolated from the petty bourgeoisie”: in other words, that they will not have mass support if they move against the bourgeoisie. He points to peasant revolts then taking place and asserts that “it is difficult to imagine that in a capitalist country the proletariat should be so little isolated from the petty bourgeoisie - and, mark you, in a revolution *against the bourgeoisie* - as the proletariat now is in Russia.”

In other words: Kautsky, we now have the answer to your question. The peasants *will* support the workers in a revolution against the bourgeoisie. Full speed ahead!

Of course, these verbal echoes are hardly direct proof that Kautsky’s article had a large impact on Lenin. Nevertheless, they add weight to the strong circumstantial case for seeing Kautsky’s article as the catalyst for Lenin’s great innovations in his ideological outlook. The innovations are *not* at the level of the Marxist axioms themselves - Lenin as well as Kautsky continued to take these for granted. The innovations reveal themselves at the level of the *empirical* application of these axioms to Russia.

Kautsky’s April article also foreshadows the later clash between Lenin and himself. Kautsky insists that socialism is impossible without democracy, by which he means political freedoms such as right of assembly, of press, and so on. Of course, Lenin also emphasised the relation between democracy and socialism, but on a different plane. Lenin’s entire emphasis in 1917 is on mass participation in administration rather than on political freedoms. This emphasis stands in contrast to earlier old Bolshevism, for which political freedom was a central goal.

Many other candidates have been proposed for the catalyst for Lenin’s ideological innovations in 1917. Among those put forward are Hegel, Bukharin, the political writings of Marx and Engels, JA Hobson and, of course, Trotsky, but there are difficulties with each of these. Some observers have dispensed with specific catalysts and spoken either of Lenin’s cynicism or of an existential ‘rejection of Big Brother’. I have now put forth a new explanation: the role of catalyst was played by Kautsky’s article of April 1917, which showed Lenin how he could both remain loyal to central Marxist axioms *and* move forward to a socialist revolution in Russia without waiting for the international revolution.

To the end of his life, Lenin continued to ask these two questions: ‘What are the starting points for socialist development in Russia?’; and ‘Will the peasants follow the workers even when the workers move toward socialism?’ He never did find answers that completely satisfied him ●

Lars T Lih

Prospects of the Russian Revolution

Naturally, the first question that arose at the outbreak of the revolution in Russia was how it would affect the arrival of peace. We already dealt with this in an earlier article (‘The ice palace’ in No26 of the previous volume)². But, just as the violence of the current war goes far beyond that of the Russo-Japanese war, the current revolution also promises to revolutionise the Russian empire far more than that of 1905.

If the revolution holds its ground, then its effects will reach far beyond Russia and will see the beginning of a new epoch for the whole of Europe. For, in spite of all the nationalist fervour, the international interdependence of state life for the peoples of Europe has already made too much progress for such a tremendous event as the transformation of the tsarist empire into a democratic republic to occur without repercussions for the other states.

If democracy holds its ground in Russia, then both the Austrian and the Polish problems immediately acquire new facets. The idea of Polish independence and the preservation of Austria amongst the peoples living there drew their strength from the hatred and the fear instilled by the despotism of neighbouring Russia. This idea changes when it takes on the form of the united states of eastern Europe. With this, the Balkan problem becomes quite a different one too.

Domestic politics in the whole of Europe will be subject to even more profound change than the foreign politics of eastern Europe. The

necessary consequence of this is a tremendous upswing in the political power of the working classes in the entire capitalist realm.

But, of course, this all presupposes that the revolution holds its ground and does not succumb to a counterrevolution. The fate of the 1905 revolution, as well as that of 1848, elicits anxious doubt in some. Those of us not adhering to this perspective need to be clear about the prospects of the revolution.

Because it broke out in the middle of the war, the prospects of the revolution are first of all dependent on how the war continues and concludes, and not least on the individual warring powers’ stance on the revolution and whether they show themselves inclined to make an agreement with the revolution or to combat it. A military catastrophe for the Russian commonwealth could also become a catastrophe for the revolution. In this respect its prospects depend on the attitude of the warring states’ governments, but also on their social democratic parties - above all on that of the German party.

But is the revolution not already condemned to fail from the outset due to Russia’s economic backwardness?

In an article about the revolution on March 18, *Vorwärts*³ asked the question, “Has the Russian people’s situation improved through the revolution?” and it gave the following answer: “Time will tell! For the time being it has merely exchanged the rule of absolutism for that of the bourgeoisie!” One could just as well say, ‘What did the French people

achieve in their great revolution?’ Back then they merely “exchanged the rule of absolutism for that of the bourgeoisie”.

First of all, it is vulgar to compare the reign of absolutism with that of the bourgeoisie. Absolutism is a form of government. The bourgeoisie is a class which can rule under the most diverse forms of government. If we do not draw a nonsensical comparison between the existence of a form of government and the reign of a class, but if we instead compare different forms of government, then we arrive at this result: the Russian people have exchanged absolutism for democracy. Does such an exchange deserve the predicate “merely”? In the same article, *Vorwärts* even underlines how “we need democracy!”

Nor is it correct to say that “for the time being” we have the “rule of the bourgeoisie” in Russia. Rather, the bourgeoisie has taken a fairly helpless attitude toward the events by which it is being carried away. But this is, of course, a situation that cannot last for long. The consolidation of the new state formation’s conditions is closely related to answering the following question: the rule of the proletariat or the rule of the bourgeoisie?

There is no bourgeois revolution which would have taken place without the active participation of the proletariat. But in the first bourgeois revolutions from 1642 to 1848, the mass of the proletariat joined the revolutionary struggle without pronounced class-consciousness. Only in the course of revolutionary development - only after years in the first English revolution

and the great French revolution, and then only to a limited extent - did the proletariat begin to see its specific interests and gain specific understanding of state and society, as opposed to that of the bourgeoisie.

But, in comparison to previous bourgeois revolutions, the proletariat has now developed a sharply pronounced class-consciousness, and this has not been restricted to the most economically developed countries: it has also spread to the economically backward countries, just so long as they have attained a modern capitalism and a modern proletariat. The urban workers in Russia possess a strong class-consciousness, and their socialist leaders are armed with 20th century knowledge.

But this indicates that they join the revolution in strong opposition from the outset to any bourgeois rule; they do not develop this opposition only after the revolution is in progress.

At the same time, the hitherto existing form of government in Russia was such that it did not merely hugely inhibit proletarian development: equally it inhibited bourgeois development and led the state to ruin. Overthrowing absolutism was also urgently necessary for the bourgeoisie, but the violent overthrow of absolutism was not possible without the participation of the proletariat, which under the given circumstances instilled extreme fear in the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie thus offered the absolutist regime only the weakest opposition; tsarism had to first bring Russia to the brink of the abyss

before the bourgeoisie would oppose it more energetically - obeying necessity, not their own inner drive. But all the more was the revolution that eventually broke out a proletarian one from the very beginning.

Will it be able to maintain this character in the face of the empire's economic backwardness? And does a victory of bourgeois forces have to undo everything that the revolution has achieved?

These are the questions forcing themselves on us. Here, of course, we cannot prophesise or say with certainty whether the revolution will hold its ground or not. We can say nothing on this. But from the data available to us we can perhaps draw some conclusions in answering the question of whether the revolution is condemned to fail from the outset.

Socialism

Above all we must be clear about the tasks that arise for a revolutionary proletarian regime.

There are two things that the proletariat urgently needs: democracy and socialism. Democracy means extensive freedoms and political rights for the mass of the people and transforming the institutions of state and municipal administration into mere tools of the people. And then socialism, which means transforming private production for the market into social - ie, state, municipal or cooperative - production for the needs of society. Both require the proletariat in equal measure. Social production without democracy could become one of the most onerous shackles. Democracy without socialism does nothing to abate the proletariat's economic dependency.

Of the two great demands of the proletariat - the demand for democracy is not specific to it alone. Other classes can represent it too. Yet today it is, of course, the only class which - as the lowest of all classes - demands (and has to demand) it with the greatest energy in all circumstances and to the greatest extent.

On the other hand, the demand of socialism is its specific demand. All other classes' points of view are based on private production. For them, socialised factories are at most isolated implements of private production, not a general way of overcoming it.

The two demands also differ in that democracy can be attained with a single blow and can be realised where the mass of people has gained political interest - thus, everywhere where the mass of the people is demanding it - whereas socialism can never be attained at once and the extent that it can be realised is dependent on the level of capitalist development.

There can be no doubt that, as of yet, Russian capitalism offers very little in terms of starting points for socialist development. However, considerable steps could be taken in this spirit through the nationalisation of: large firms; railways - to the extent that they are not already (excluding Finland, the Russian empire's railways total more than 74,000 kilometres, and of that 54,000 kilometres are state-owned); the mines, above all the mining of coal, gold and oil; as well as large individual firms in heavy industry. Further, through state confiscation of the goods of the dethroned dynasty and the monasteries, through state acquisition of large land holdings and finally through giving over property to the towns - both to build cheaper and healthier housing and to produce food for their inhabitants.

For the time being, the main thing will have to be maintaining workers' interests in private production: extensive measures to protect the workers. Especially important amongst these is unemployment benefit and the provision of cheap food. Finally, the costs that fall to the state from these and other causes should be covered exclusively by progressive taxation on the property-owning classes.

One might call that a bourgeois programme of reform and not a workers' programme of revolution. Whether it is one or the other depends on quantity. Here too, when quantity is increased accordingly, it must transform into a new quality.

It is in the nature of things that the proletariat will strive to use its revolutionary power in the direction I have outlined here as soon as it feels solid ground under its feet, and that in so doing it will meet the resistance of the capitalists and the large landowners. How much it achieves will depend on its relative power.

Russia's economic backwardness will also manifest itself in the extent of proletarian power. Capitalism forms the preconditions of

socialism, not only insofar as it creates the material conditions for it, but also in that it creates the people who have an interest in bringing it into being: the proletariat.

Now, numerically speaking, the urban industrial proletariat in Russia is certainly still quite small. This can be elucidated from the negligibility of the urban population. In 1913, almost 150 million of the Russian empire's 174 million people lived in the country and only something over 24 million in the towns.

That said, precisely because of the state's backwardness, the lack of communications and the great intellectual isolation of the rural

currently holds.

Whether democracy will be upheld at all also depends on them.

Democracy

For the moment, democracy is still more important than the proletariat's economic elevation. No doubt it would soon helplessly hover in the air, were it not to quickly find the means to considerably improve the situation of the working masses, but this momentary outcome is not its most important one. Rather, this consists in democracy providing the basis for the possibility of the proletariat's

Whatever the new Russian state formation may currently offer the proletariat in material achievements and positions of power, this question takes second place to the significance of holding onto democracy. This is by far the most important aspect of today's Russian Revolution. The most energetic battles will be fought over this issue. We have to anticipate attempts at a counterrevolution. What are its prospects?

The lessons of revolution

We have to take into consideration that the revolution Russia is going through is the second within just a few years. But revolutions are strict masters. Every people coming into contact with them learns a tremendous amount; not just the ruled and exploited classes, but also the ruling classes.

The extraordinary political cunningness of the classes governing England is well known: their attentive study of the needs and demands of the working people; their ability, whilst stubbornly holding onto privileges and property they have gained through exploitation, to actually recognise when one of these can no longer be sustained, and to then sacrifice these or part of them in order to salvage their rule and exploitation as a whole. Thanks to these cunning politics, England's political development in the 19th century has been much more constant than on the continent. This cannot be ascribed either to racial characteristics or the higher intelligence of the English, but to the fact that - as a result of the attempt to violently suppress the people - it went through three revolutions earlier than others did in the capitalist epoch. The least thoroughgoing was the second of them: the removal of James II in the 'glorious revolution', which appeared 'glorious' to bourgeois thought precisely because it did not emanate from the mass of the people, but from a faction of the ruling classes. The two great popular uprisings - those of 1642-48 which led to the execution of Charles I in 1649 - were of a quite different nature, as were those revolutions in Britain's colonies in America, which began in 1774 and ended in 1783 with the recognition of their independence.

The English republic of the 17th and the American republic of the 18th century had a profound influence on the whole of the English people. They raised the confidence of England's subordinate classes as much as they taught the upper classes foresight and caution in opposing them.

For the second time in 12 years, Russia is now being taught the same lessons. They will definitely have an impact on Russia's upper as well as its lower classes similar to the impact of the English revolution on the English, and in this way these lessons have already raised a strong barrier against a counterrevolution.

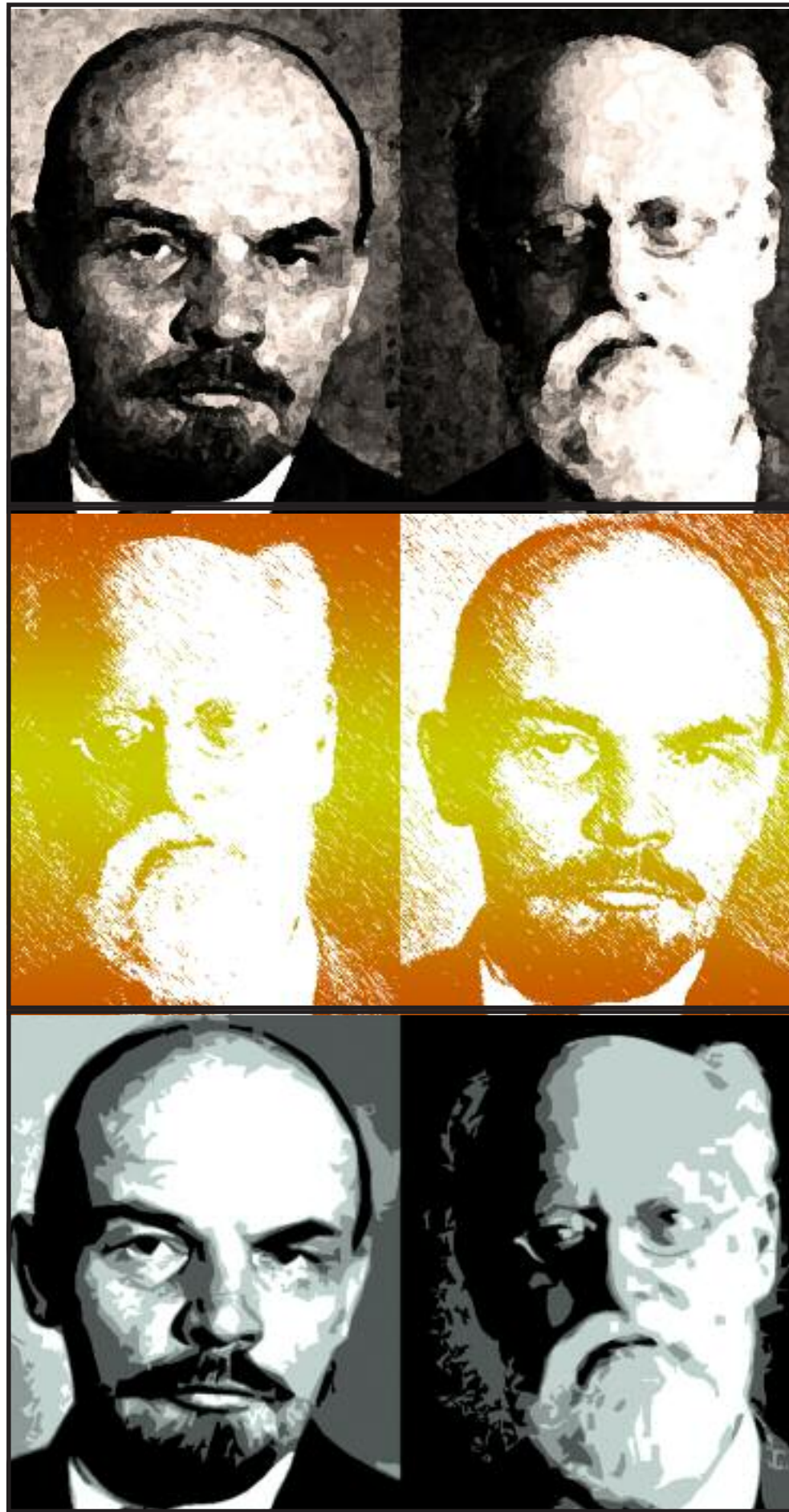
The army

Of course, this barrier cannot yet said to be insurmountable. The French ruling classes repeatedly received these same lessons since 1789, and yet that did not prevent a counterrevolution. This stems from the significance that the army had achieved there.

The strong and early imprints of the English revolutions alone would not have been sufficient to instil enough concern in the English ruling class to dismiss any attempt of a violent suppression of a strong popular movement if, on top of this, they had not also been lacking a large standing army.

After its revolution England one-sidedly developed its naval power, and the other European peoples put up with this because England was lacking any significant land power which could have been threatening to them on the continent. But a fleet can only be dangerous abroad, not at home.

On the other hand, the other great powers primarily developed their armies, and in so doing they created a means of building up their power not only abroad, but also at home - against their own people. Through this - as long as they were sure that the army would obey their command just as blindly as home as they did abroad - the governments of the continental powers were as good as invincible in the face of the rise of democracy. On the other hand, through this the government's position in the face of a popular uprising becomes untenable as soon as the military becomes unreliable or even goes over to the side of the masses. From the storming of the Bastille to the Paris Commune, the French people are victorious when the army vacillates.



population, the political weight of the latter, as compared with the urban population, is less than suggested by the quantitative relationship. This disparity can be observed in all states, but it is greater in undeveloped ones than it is in advanced ones. Today, Paris does not at all mean what it meant to France a hundred years ago. The political significance of Constantinople to Turkey is much greater than that of Berlin to Germany.

It is, however, in Russia's towns, especially the large ones, that the proletariat is today already playing a decisive role.

Indeed, the numerical predominance of the rural population is too great. They will decide whether and to what extent the proletariat will maintain the strong position it

permanent ascent.

Democracy is significant in this not merely in that it enables the proletariat to win positions of power. Although offering them no immediately obvious advantages in terms of *Realpolitik*, it is invaluable to the proletariat.

In order to liberate themselves, the workers not only need certain material preconditions at their disposal and to be numerically strong; they also have to become new people, endowed with the abilities that are required for the reorganisation of state and society. They only attain these abilities through class struggle, which requires democratic rights and freedoms if it is to be carried out by the masses ruling themselves and not conducted by secret committees.

SUPPLEMENT

The counterrevolution is victorious when the government is sure of its troops.

The same is true of Russia. Together with the high tide of mass strikes, the dissolution of Russia's armies following the defeats of Manchuria in 1905 saw the victory of the revolution. The counterrevolution set in as soon as the government had reliable troops in its grip.

Will it go that way this time too? Will the counterrevolutionary cliques once again succeed in winning over the army and defeating the revolution with its support? That is the vital question of this revolution. Fortunately, the situation is quite different to 1905. Although back then the revolutionaries managed to force the Tsar to climb down on the question of the constitution, they did not overthrow his regime. Thus, command over the army remained in his hands, and he could use it to concentrate the reliable elements of the army on the areas that were threatening his rule.

This time around, the revolutionaries have conquered executive power and preside over the army. Now a counterrevolution would at first not mean the government crushing the people, but the army leaders overthrowing the government in a *coup d'état*: what Napoleon I carried out on the 18th Brumaire. Were the war to continue and be enthusiastically fought by the army, then the situation could become favourable for a coup. This assumes that Russia's enemies would threaten to destroy its newly won freedom. Through this the army would, of course, be forged into a strong and united will.

Yet even this need not yet make the army into the tool of a Napoleon. Above all, where is this Napoleon to come from? The epoch of fairy-tale wars of suppression [*Niederschlagungskriege*] is over, not least that of the great advantages that have hitherto accrued to officers and even the common man from the spoils of victory.

The mentality of soldiers created by today's warfare is quite different to that of the Napoleonic armies, and for this reason Russia's armies will not lightly grant a general the overwhelming power necessary for him to carry out a coup.

We cannot forget, by the way, that even the powerful Napoleon never dared to lose sight of the revolutionary character of his army. He could make it subservient to his purposes by being the bearer of the revolution and destroying feudal, monarchical Europe. So using the army for counterrevolutionary purposes in Russia today is not as simple as it may first appear.

But what if one day the revolutionary government (which is predominantly in the grip of the bourgeoisie) were to become wary of proletarian influence and itself seek to get rid of it with the army's assistance? In June 1848 it was the revolutionary government itself that mobilised the army against the proletariat in Paris. This can certainly happen again.

But two things have to be borne in mind here. Firstly, due to the millions of new recruits it has rushed in, the Russian army in this war is much more of a people's army and much less of a standing army than that of the French conscription army in 1848 with its long terms of service. And also the classes of the population which the French army was recruiting from were not indifferent to what was happening. This is even truer of today's Russian army.

Here as elsewhere, however, we find that the class of the population which is decisive in the army is the peasantry. To this day, the peasantry is more strongly represented in the army than it is in the population. The peasant is considered to be the best soldier, the core of the army. When the peasantry makes up the large majority of the population, it completely determines the character of the army.

The peasants

Indeed, the mood of the common man runs parallel with that of the peasantry in the revolutionary epochs of both France and Russia.

Here we come to the third factor which has hitherto forced the English ruling classes to adopt more intelligent tactics towards the masses – tactics which have been less geared towards violent suppression than on the continent. For centuries in England a great counterweight in the face of the industrial proletariat – the peasants – has been lacking. It was the peasants who sealed the fate of the continental revolutions.

As long as feudal conditions predominate, the peasant has a tendency to identify with the urban democracy of the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this it is economic reasons that are decisive for him. He wishes to get rid of feudal burden and to take possession of feudal landed property. In order to achieve this he allies himself with the democrats of the cities – and has done so from the time of the great peasants' war to the great revolution.

On the other hand, modern democracy – which wishes to subordinate the government of the whole state to the people – is not initially so close to his heart. For a long time the illiterate, economically self-sufficient peasants of the individual villages and districts – devoid of constant communication with the big wide world and of an interest in or understanding of politics – placed little emphasis on state democracy. Local democracy was sufficient for parish politics.

In the French revolution the peasants joined with the revolutionaries of the cities in the struggle against the feudal lords and their paladins to reclaim the goods of the church and the émigrés. On the other hand, they left the struggle for state democracy almost completely to the cities. They formed a rampart against the counterrevolution, insofar as it threatened a restoration of feudal conditions. On the other hand, they left republican freedom in the lurch. Napoleon was their man. He protected the economic gains of the revolution and spurned its democratic gains in equal measure.

The peasant proved to be an energetic champion of the economic revolution, and a half-hearted friend of the democratic revolution. At this time, a third factor had already come to light. Where politics exercised the decisive influence on the price of foodstuffs, the peasant immediately showed the beginnings of direct hostility to the cities.

In general, this issue was not a prominent one in the times of the great revolution or for a few decades thereafter. The peasant's farming was for the large part based on his own consumption. He did not buy much and thus did not need to sell much if his taxes were low. Low taxes were more important to the peasant than the price of food. But when relations set in where the price of food acquires significance for him, and when at the same time politics become a means of reducing this price, a trenchant political contradiction looms between the cities and the peasants.

This became evident in 1793, when France was harried on all sides by enemy armies and cut off from foreign supplies. Democracy in the cities felt pressed into a policy of fixed prices, which the peasants revolted against, causing a cleavage in the unity of the revolutionary forces.

Back then this was a temporary affair, which disappeared with the superiority of the enemy armies. But, ever since, commodity production has developed quickly. The peasant produced less and less for his own consumption and increasingly for the market. If, simultaneously, industry developed to such an extent that food production in the country no longer sufficed to cover the industrial population's needs, then the pricing of food on the home market became greatly dependent on the type of trade policy. A great contradiction between the peasantry and democracy in the city emerged in the struggle around this policy, a contradiction that is now constant.

It is an anachronism if under such conditions a social democratic party still seeks to renew an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry inherited from past revolutionary times, and creates an agrarian programme for this purpose. In states where development has blossomed as much as specified here, the strength of the proletariat does not lie in an association with the peasantry, but in its own superior numbers. In the country it draws its strength from the fact that the class separation between the propertied and the propertyless sets in there too, even if in many cases this separation is weaker than in the cities. In countries that are as economically advanced as these, the fate of democracy no longer depends on the peasantry. This is quite different in a country like Russia. Here, the peasantry is the decisive factor. Nobody can yet say what the final outcome of this factor

will be, because in the last decade the Russian peasant has gone through a great process of transformation, the effects of which are not yet known.

The modern Russian peasant

Until the revolution of 1905 the Russian peasant's situation had much in common with the French peasant of 1789. Although the Russian peasant was rid of serfdom, he entered the realm of freedom in such poverty and ignorance that he was incapable of rational, intensive agriculture. His farm degenerated more and more, whilst his average land share decreased due to the quickly growing population. His most urgent need had become land – more land.

As long as illiteracy and insufficient communication made state power appear to him as something unachievable and intangible, he was less moved by democracy on the state level. The typical thinking was: 'Heaven is high, the tsar far away'.

Just as with the storming of the Bastille in 1789, when in 1905 the urban proletarians forced tsarism to its knees, this was the signal for revolutionary uprisings by the peasants, who demanded the property of the nobility and the church, and who recognised that they had to support the urban proletariat. But the isolation of the peasants was still too great for them to rise up as one all over the country. Just like in the peasants' war of 1525 in Germany, the peasant movement got bogged down and dissipated into local, incoherent upheavals, which were partly violently suppressed one after the other by troops who had remained loyal, and partly pacified by cunning promises. Thus the proletarian uprising in the cities was deprived of necessary support. It was defeated.

Yet for the nobility and absolutism the threat posed had been a terrible one. They understood the warning. On the one hand, they sought to provide a safe outlet for the peasant's hunger for land by promoting emigration to Siberia, and, on the other, they sought to render it meaningless by giving the peasants the opportunity to switch to intensive farming. To this end they employed methods such as the abolition of the remnants of village communism and promoted the immense cleavage of the rural population between the wealthy and the propertyless.

Absolutism hoped to use this in order to create a reactionary guard amongst the wealthy part of the population, or at least to paralyse the revolutionary tendencies of the rural population. The ascendance of this wealthy layer and the intensification of peasant farming were made easier by something absolutism could neither bring about nor foresee: the increase in the price of corn on the world market, which came about precisely after the first Russian Revolution of 1905.

At the moment we cannot foresee how these changes have penetrated and influenced the goals and thinking of the Russian peasantry. But we can be sure that they will not satisfy the peasant's hunger for land. They could only increase that of the proletarianised peasants. Whilst the wealthy peasant's hunger for land is not strong enough to drive him to revolution, it is strong enough to make exploiting an already completed revolution for this purpose appear attractive to him.

But if the peasants are granted land by the revolution, then this chains them to it and thus they will oppose any counterrevolution that threatens them with the loss of their newly won soil. Here is another point where the peasants find their closest allies in the socialists. The liberals (who have so many landowners in their ranks) will not very willingly satisfy the peasant's hunger for land – let alone the conservatives.

The peasants will no doubt support democracy at the state level with less intensity. Yet even here we should not look at things in too bleak a fashion. The spread of popular education and of the means of communication, of journalism and the mail system, is making progress everywhere and awakening the peasantry's interest in politics. Army conscription draws many into the town, and using the vote further animates its interest in politics.

The peasantry is still not so advanced in any European country as to seize the political initiative, but its interest in and understanding of political questions is expanding everywhere. And this means that the peasantry's interest in democratic rights and freedoms is growing – not just at the parish level, but at the state level – because they give it the possibility of throwing a weight onto the scale appropriate to its numbers.

All this leads us to expect that the peasants will remain faithful to the revolution in so far as it brings them economic advantages, and that equally they will not abandon democratic achievements, even if they should not be expected to champion these as enthusiastically and unanimously as the proletariat. The young republic's army will also be recruited from the peasantry and formed into the republic's protective barrier. In this sense the revolution has better prospects of stability than the French republics of 1792 and 1848.

But if we expect the new revolutionary regime to be well protected against a counterrevolution, the peasants to join it and remain faithful to it, then this by itself says nothing about how they will behave when it comes to a conflict within the regime between the bourgeois and proletarian elements. These are two quite different questions. A defeat of the proletariat does not yet need to mean the downfall of the republican form of government, as the history of post-1871 France shows us. On the other hand, the peasantry's dependence on the revolution does not mean that they will support a further revolutionary advance of the proletariat. We must reckon on the possibility that they will become a conservative element as soon as their hunger for land is satisfied and their freedom of movement secured: enemies of any counterrevolution, but also of any further revolution.

The jagged contradiction which has developed in western Europe in the course of the last few decades between agriculture and town, and between peasants and proletarians, will not need to come about in Russia, as it is one of the food-exporting countries. Its prices depend on the world market, are not determined by the domestic market and, as such, are for the most part independent of domestic policy. Therefore this stands out as the cause of a contradiction between the peasants and the proletarians. At least in normal times.

Now, during the war, Russia has ceased to be a food-exporting country. The domestic market is the decisive factor in determining prices – in fact it is the only one. All ties to the world market have been cut. All relations with the world market turned off. This made the struggle for food prices a political question, and one which appears in the most direct and acrimonious form as a struggle for and against fixed prices, something which deeply stirs the working masses of town and country and which is capable of splitting them apart. This can result in a vicious conflict between the proletariat and the peasantry. But it can only be a momentary one. In times of peace this contradiction – which has been so influential in Russia – loses its material basis.

If one is able to roughly, if not exactly, place the tendencies and needs of the other classes in Russia in parallel with the same phenomena in western Europe, this way of looking at the situation breaks down with the Russian peasant. His material circumstances and historical traditions are quite unique, and at the same time have been in the process of colossal change for three decades.

The peasant is the 'x', the unknown variable, in the equation of the Russian Revolution. We are still unable to insert a figure for it. And yet we know that this figure is the crucial one, the decisive one. For this reason, the Russian Revolution can and will spring tremendous surprises on us.

But, just as in summer's struggle with winter, storms might thunder over our country without us having to fear that the streams could freeze over again, we may in spite of all possible vicissitudes confidently expect that the Russian people will henceforth know how to permanently fend off absolutism.

Come what may, we hope that the essential rights and freedoms of democracy – and with them the most secure basis for mass proletarian mobilisation and advance to the conquering of political power – are at least as well established in eastern Europe as they are in the west ●

Karl Kautsky

Notes

1. *Die Neue Zeit* (New Times) was a monthly magazine of German Social Democracy published between 1883 and 1923. Kautsky, who edited the magazine from its inception, handed over its editorship to the rightist Heinrich Cunow in October 1917. It was a hugely influential journal, which published key texts such as Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* and Engels's 'Criticism of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891'.
2. 'Der Eispalast' in *Die Neue Zeit*, March 1917
3. *Vorwärts* (Forward) was the central organ of the German Social Democratic Party published daily in Berlin from 1891 until 1933.

GAZA

Know your enemy

Tony Greenstein looks at the obstacles placed in the way of the pro-Gaza mobilisations by Egypt and Hamas

In the past two weeks, two large international mobilisations have sought to break the western media's silence regarding the siege of Gaza. I am no believer in conspiracy theories, but does anyone believe that if China were to lay siege to part of Tibet and refuse access for medicines and food, having just waged war against a civilian population, killing 1,400 of them, that there would be next to no publicity in the western media?

The Gaza Freedom Marchers arrived in Egypt intent on entering Gaza and bringing a message of solidarity to their inhabitants. Amongst them there were some 400 Americans. Likewise the second Viva Palestina convoy, with some 200 vehicles, containing medicines and other humanitarian relief.

Both initiatives ran up against the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak, a vicious police state, which is also a key American ally in the Middle East. In the name of defending Egyptian sovereignty, Mubarak's goons and police repeatedly attacked and harassed the marchers. All without so much as a word of protest from Obama, Brown or Sarkozy. Indeed the US embassy called upon the Egyptian police to protect them from their own nationals! This culminated on January 8 with the deportation of George Galloway MP and his aide, Ron McKay, as they crossed from Gaza.

When the convoy reached the Jordanian port of Aqaba, they expected to sail immediately down the straits to Egypt and then drive across to Rafah and Gaza. Instead Mubarak demanded they sail to Rafah from the Syrian port of Latakia. Why? To try and wear down members of the convoy. Finally on January 7, having been viciously attacked in Rafah by members of his security forces, with a number of members injured, the convoy was finally able to enter Gaza. Or at least about 150 vehicles were allowed to do so. Having no shame, Mubarak demanded that the remaining 50 vehicles be routed via Israel!

Likewise the Gaza Freedom Marchers were denied access to Rafah or Gaza, but eventually in an attempt to divide and rule 100 of them were given permission to go. As a result of a prolonged dispute within the ranks of the GFM less than 60 in the end chose to cross into Gaza, as Heddy Epstein, an 85-year-old survivor of the holocaust and one of the marchers, began a fast in protest.

And those who did in fact make the journey to Gaza found that it was very different from what they had been led to believe. Like Mubarak's regime in Egypt, Hamas too is afraid of its own people. The GFM were isolated from the people in civil society with whom they had planned the march in the first place.

Israeli journalist Amira Hass, writing in the Israeli liberal newspaper *Ha'aretz*, cited the experiences of the marchers in her article, 'Pro-Gaza activists under siege - imposed by Egypt and Hamas':

"At midnight, about 12 hours after leaving Cairo, we arrived at a hotel in Gaza. There the first surprise awaited us: a Hamas security official in civilian dress swooped down on a friend who had come to pick me up for a visit, announcing that guests could not stay in private homes.

"The story gradually became clear. The international organisers of the march coordinated it with civil socie-



George Galloway arrives

ty, various non-governmental organisations, which were also supposed to involve the Popular Committee to Break the Siege, a semi-official organisation affiliated with Hamas. Many European activists have long-standing connections with leftwing organisations in the Gaza Strip. Those organisations, especially the relatively large Popular Front, had organised lodging for several hundred guests in private homes. When the Hamas government heard this, it prohibited the move. 'For security reasons.' What else?

"Also 'for security reasons', apparently, on Thursday morning, the activists discovered a cordon of stern-faced, tough Hamas security men blocking them from leaving the hotel (which is owned by Hamas). The security officials accompanied the activists as they visited homes and organisations.

"During the march itself, when Gazans watching from the sidelines tried to speak with the visitors, the stern-faced security men blocked them. 'They didn't want us to speak to ordinary people,' one woman concluded."¹

Amira Hass, incidentally, is not a normal Israeli reporter. She is unique in having lived amongst those she has reported on, both in Gaza City and Ramallah. Her parents survived the Belsen-Bergen concentration camp and she was arrested and fined for having gone on a protest boat to Gaza when she re-entered Israel.

In the two weeks since the arrival of the Viva Palestina convoy and the Gaza Freedom Marchers, one thing has been abundantly clear. That the Palestinians do not simply face a Zionist enemy intent upon expelling them from the Greater Land of Israel. Their enemy includes imperialism in all its manifestations - from the Mubarak regime, the prostitute of the Nile, so abject is this regime in its servility to the west (for which it receives \$2 billion aid from the USA - the largest such subvention after Israel itself), to the Palestine Authority in Ramallah on the West Bank.

There would, of course, be no siege of Gaza, but for the complicity of the

Egyptian regime. Israel controls three of Gaza's borders, but the fourth is shared with Egypt, which has faithfully carried out the orders of Obama and Netanyahu.

Throughout the siege of Gaza one thing has been clear. And that has been the complete silence of Israel's Palestinian partners in the PA in Ramallah. Not a word has been spoken criticising the Egyptian regime's attack on the GFM or Viva Palestina. Quite the contrary. Mahmoud Abbas and his underlings completely approve of what Mubarak has done. Because the aim of these quislings is to oust Hamas, as the elected government in Gaza, and replace them with another quisling leadership.

In much the same way Abbas did not criticise the attack and invasion of Gaza in December 2008, so this corrupt group of gangsters did not breathe a word this time around either. There are those, not least the Socialist Action leadership of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, whose support for the 'national bourgeois leadership of oppressed peoples' is such that they cannot deign, in any circumstances, to criticise them. The idea that different classes amongst the oppressed might have different interests, which also impinge on the national struggle, is alien to these ex-socialists.

But although, in the best traditions of Stalinism, it is convenient to ignore the truth, one year ago it was staring you in the face. As Curtis Doebbler wrote in *Al Ahram*, the most prestigious newspaper in the Arab world, "From the Palestinian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva - where the UN's main human rights bodies sit - has come an ominous silence. The mission did not even respond to requests for any statement they might have made in relation to the situation in Gaza, and none could be publicly found a week into the Israeli aggression. A week into the worst aggression ever carried out against the Palestinian people in such a short period of time, there was no call for a special session of the Human Rights Council, no harsh condemnation of Israel's actions. The diplomats in Geneva were possibly busy enjoying

the holidays.

"... Informed observers within the UN have wondered out loud why the Palestinians have not pushed for quick general assembly action. Even the newest ambassadors to UN headquarters know that the US will block any action against Israel, as they have done in the past in relation to Israel's use of force against US assets."²

As Doebbler also noted, "According to a Lebanese newspaper, Abbas has ordered 2,000 Fatah militants to the border with Gaza, apparently with Israeli and Egyptian permission, to overrun the elected government of prime minister Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza." That is why the term 'quisling', when applied to Abbas and his cronies, is not inappropriate. The Palestine Authority is the fruit of the Oslo accords of 1993. The accords have, as I predicted, been a big disaster for the Palestinians. They replaced the Israeli military and police with those of Palestinians. But apart from that there has been little change.

Indeed it was an open secret that one of the reasons for the PA withdrawing its resolution to the UNHCR endorsing the Goldstone report was because of a tape which Israel threatened to disclose revealing that Abbas's closest aides had urged Israel to prolong the attack on Gaza last year.

It is also revealing that the Socialist Action leadership of PSC in Britain, on learning of the news of Abbas's actions, was not only mortified, but acted like rabbits caught in the headlights of a car. In the end they solved their dilemma by linking to an anti-Goldstone article in *Ha'aretz* - 'Israel to UN body: come to your senses on Goldstone report': "Israel on Thursday urged a key United Nations human rights body to 'come to its senses' and reject a controversial report accusing the Israel Defence Forces of war crimes during its military offensive in the Gaza Strip last winter"³

But there is one group of Palestinian 'supporters' who went one worse than PSC's leadership. The anti-Semitic Palestine Think Tank website, set up by Gilad Atzmon and Mary Rizzo, deplores these criticisms of an Arab regime. We should only criticise Jews

or Israel! We must pay heed to Arab national unity and like Socialist Action ignore class divisions. Indeed for failing to give due respect to the Egyptian dictator Viva Palestina should apologise to Mubarak! Never mind the iron wall that Mubarak's regime is building, courtesy of the US Corps of Engineers, to seal off Gaza entirely. Thus wrote Haitham Sabbah.⁴ Such is the logic of those who reject an anti-imperialist analysis of the situation in Palestine in favour of a racial one.

The question arises as to what strategy the Palestinian people should adopt. In the short term there is no doubt that they should heed the advice of the late professor Israel Shahak of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, a noted civil rights activist and anti-Zionist. A childhood survivor of the Warsaw ghetto and Belsen-Bergen, Shahak recalled the beginnings of the Jewish Resistance Organisation (ZOB) and how its first task was to eliminate the spies and collaborators with the Nazis:

"In late winter 1943, [in fact it was 1942] a well-known Jewish spy for the Nazis was killed by the Jewish resistance in one of the entrances of the double block of flats [in Leszno Street, Warsaw] which we then inhabited. This was a necessary part of the preparations for the Jewish revolt which followed not long afterward."⁵

Until the Palestinians eliminate the quisling regime that governs them there can be no liberation. But equally, although Hamas has managed to retain its independence, as opposed to abjectly surrendering like the Fatah leadership, it also seeks an agreement with Egypt and Israel. Behind its bombast about a unitary Islamic state stands its readiness to accept a two-state solution. As the Palestinian branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas also seeks to impose a repressive Islamic rule over the Palestinians, one of the most secular parts of the Arab people, not unlike that of their Iranian supporters.

The experiences of the GFM, in their own small way, demonstrate that Hamas does not trust ordinary Palestinians. We should only support Hamas (not because of, but despite, their politics), in so far as they oppose the attacks of Israel and its Arab partners, but without illusions as to their reactionary social and economic policies.

But the present attack on the Palestinians demonstrates, more clearly than anything else, that it is impossible to remove the rule of Zionism and the threat that it poses of 'transfer' from the entirety of Palestine, by relying on their own resources and support from the Arab states. It is only when revolution threatens the Arab sheikhs and kings, princes and presidents, as the junior partners of the USA, that Zionism, its regional ally, will also be forced to contemplate the abandonment of its policy of apartheid and 'transfer'.

The attacks on Viva Palestina and the GFM, in their own small way, demonstrate who are the enemies of the Palestinian people ●

Notes

1. *Ha'aretz* January 8 2010.
2. *Al Ahram* January 8-14 2009.
3. www.palestinecampaign.org/Index7b.asp?m_id=1&11_id=2&12_id=14&Content_ID=862.
4. <http://palestinethinktank.com>, December 29 2009.
5. www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/Docs/CX5019-LifeOfDeath.htm.

DEBATE

In defence of long waves

Arthur Bough replies to Mike Macnair on the nature and prospects of contemporary capitalism

I do not understand why in his *Weekly Worker* article Mike Macnair presents my position as being that long waves last for 50 years ('World politics, long waves and the decline of capitalism', January 7). Taken as an average, the long wave lasts 54 years, but Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratiev said the period could be as short as 40 and as long as 60 years. So the argument that the theory is undermined because a fairly fixed duration implies a certain amount of mechanical thinking falls away immediately.

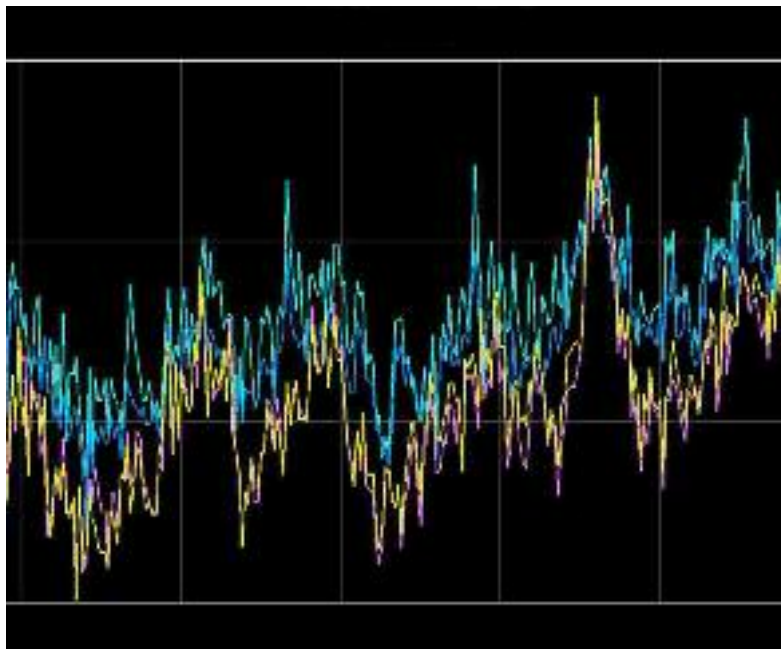
Kondratiev analysed actual movements in coming to this conclusion, and recognised that, precisely because the long wave results from a series of interconnecting, long-term processes, the interaction of those processes could not be precisely timed. It is also wrong to say, then, that he did not provide any causal explanation of the long wave. Also, Kondratiev based himself on more like 140 years rather than 100 years of data.

Marx looked at the possibility of such a long wave, as well as his work on the business cycle. He was particularly interested in the role played by very large capital investments such as building factories. I have set out on my blog a whole series of these features.¹ Some of these relate to the role of primary production. What is interesting, over the last cycle, is the degree to which long-wave theory was borne out by the movements of raw material prices. Whatever 'bubbles' arose during the downturn, from the mid-70s until 1999, it did not affect these prices, which continued to fall, and along with them investment in exploration and development. Similarly, even when interest rates have been rising since 1999, and even when states have been running budget surpluses, raw material and food prices have continued to rise sharply.

I differ from Permanent Revolution on the long wave in a number of respects. In fact, I disagree with PR's position generally, in respect of the prominence it gives to the role of the rate of profit. My position, as with Kondratiev, relates to basic structural shifts within the capitalist economy, of which changes in the rate of profit can be a reflection, but not a necessary determinant. I do not, therefore, place the same kind of importance as does PR on the events in eastern Europe, and nor do I place the beginning of the current long-wave boom at the beginning of the 90s, but instead in 1999. Last year, as the crisis erupted, I gave some statistics to back that up, detailing changes in global economic activity:

"Between 1980 and 1990 global trade rose from around \$4,000 billion to around \$6,000 billion, remaining flat until around 1994. Between 1994 and 2000 it rose from around \$6,000 billion to \$12,000 billion. But, the sharpest rise has most notably been since 2002 where it rose from around \$12,000 billion to around \$28,000 billion by 2007."²

In August of 2008 I predicted that the financial crisis was immediately about to erupt, and explained why. Within a couple of weeks, exactly what I had predicted happened.³ Mike is quite correct that predicting these short-term events has little to do with Marxist analysis. I got that right because I spend a lot of time watching CNBC television, reading financial reports and listening to market chatter. That enables me to arrive at an idea of what is going on in the financial



Still booming?

markets, and the economy generally, which I can fit into my conceptual framework.

But developing that framework is a function of having a correct Marxist methodology. And, as I wrote then, nothing in that crisis changed my view of the general economic situation we are in, which is that of a long-wave boom. Mike is right that the immediate future is of less significance, but it is his view of the bigger picture, of the era of "capitalist decline", which I most take issue with.

A long-wave boom does not imply that severe recessions or even depressions are not possible within it. A recession lasts around five-six quarters, with output falling around 10%, while a depression, lasts for around 10 quarters, with output falling by 25%-plus. The long-wave downturn that Kondratiev recognised as beginning in 1914-20 led to a period of slow growth, outside the US, during the 1920s, but there was no depression in the 1920s. This recession lasted for just four quarters. Of course, you can argue there will be a double dip and we will see who is right.

Even if the current situation were to become a depression, we would be talking about a period of 40 months' serious dislocation out of a period of boom lasting 20-30 years! It would have serious short-term consequences, but one consequence would be that, when it ended, the clear-out of inefficient capital it would bring with it would result in an even more vibrant recovery.

It is the bigger picture that is more important here, and something that revolutionaries failed to understand when the economic conjuncture changed after 1914. They believed that the kind of workers' advance that accompanied the long-wave boom from the late 1880s to 1914 would continue even when the fundamental economic conditions that gave rise to it had reversed. Revolutionaries are in danger of making a similar mistake now, but in the opposite direction.

I agree with comrade Macnair that the general catastrophism of much of the left is absurd. The revolutionary situations this left hopes for do not occur during periods of long-wave downturn, but at the point of conjuncture between the end of the boom and the commencement of the downturn. It is at this point that the workers' militancy, organisation and class-consciousness built up during the boom is at its height, but capital can no longer continue to make concessions. Workers have to turn from sim-

ple industrial struggle and reformism to more radical political solutions. Hobsbawm, in *Industry and Empire*, noted this same pattern in respect of long-wave rises and falls in the 19th century.

But what is also clear is that if the working class does not succeed in imposing itself, during this conjunctural period, then the force of material conditions imposes itself on both the workers' organisation and their consciousness. From the 1920s on, workers in Europe were on the back foot. From the 1980s onwards workers globally were on the back foot.

Decline?

I am not convinced by comrade Macnair's arguments that capitalism is in decline. I have more to say on this than there is room for here, and I will write a larger response on my blog.

Marxists usually base talk about a mode of production being in decline on whether it continues to raise the level of productivity or whether it has hit some necessary barrier to doing so. Mike provides no evidence that this is the case. A simple look at the world around us shows why. Since World War II, capitalism has revolutionised production even more than it did during the industrial revolution. It is doing so during the current period at an even greater pace. To claim that all we are seeing is a cheapening of products, due to low Chinese wages, flies in the face of all the evidence we have of the role of robotisation, of IT and of the microchip in general.

He questions whether there has been any real increase in global production, but the simple evidence of our eyes is enough to demonstrate it. Even compared with 1999, there is not only consumption of more of the things we were consuming then, but the additional consumption of vast ranges of use-values that simply did not exist then. In China, millions of new workers have been created, who now have an urban lifestyle, consuming vast quantities of these use-values. More than 30% of China's production goes to its home market. China has already surpassed the US to become the world's largest car market, and at the rate that Chinese living standards are rising, it will soon be the biggest market for pretty much everything else. It is not low wages that explains that, but actual production of all those use-values.

Mike's comments about unemployment are puzzling. He repeats the allegations of the Tory press about people on incapacity benefit not being

sick. The fact is that there are advantages for the state in having people on job seeker's allowance rather than incapacity benefit, and repeated attempts to tighten qualification for IB have all failed to reduce numbers significantly. Whilst pointing to such "hidden unemployment", as proof that the economy is not really growing, he fails to mention that more than two million workers had to be imported into this economy to fill vacancies! Nor were these all the low-paid, low-status jobs he refers to.

Not long ago, before Polish plumbers arrived, the media was running stories about teachers giving up their jobs to earn much more as a plumber or another skilled job. Many have come in as nurses, who now will require a degree qualification. Whilst there has been a growth of "burger-flippers", a look at the City shows a huge growth in high-valued labour too. Similarly, a look at the explosion of science parks around the country's increasing number of universities demonstrates a similar increase in demand for complex labour.

As I have demonstrated, these types of employment, using complex labour, act to raise the rate of profit.⁴ As Britain, the US and other developed economies move even more to a high-tech economy, such jobs will increase even more. In part, this process has been held back, precisely because of the means by which the US and UK dealt with the period of decline.⁵ In the US in particular, the power of huge monopolies like General Motors meant that the process of deindustrialisation and globalisation did not take place as thoroughly as it might have done. That is why disproportions arose that have left pockets of overcapacity in some of these old industries where the rate of profit is low rather than that capital being invested in new, high-profit-rate industries. But the current crisis has forced that process onwards, as the bankruptcy and restructuring of GM, etc demonstrated.

Nor is it clear why Mike thinks that any new global upswing is dependent upon the US losing its position as the leading global military power. In the 19th century (and into the 20th) Britain remained by far the leading military power, but its economic supremacy had disappeared by the last quarter of the 19th century. That military supremacy did not prevent the long-wave boom of that period, nor even the grab for colonies. What really brought the question of military power into question was, in fact, the end of that long-wave boom - the end of the conditions which allowed inter-capitalist rivalry to remain within the context of economic competition.

We see an almost identical situation today: although the US is developing its global military strategy (its move into the '-stans' of central Asia, etc) and although China is building up its military capability, competition remains at the economic level of who can buy up access to resources in Latin America, Asia and increasingly Africa. As with the period at the end of the 19th century, that is possible so long as economic activity, and the global amount of surplus value, continues to rise substantially. Once that ends, those relations can only be achieved through military and political power. That is why I believe that the conjuncture at the end of this long-wave boom is crucial to man's continued existence, and why the period up to then is crucial for Marxists to prepare the working class ac-

cordingly.⁶

Comrade Macnair's argument seems to speak against the point he is trying to make. He refers to the profits of the financial sector, and to the unproductive sector of the economy, whilst questioning whether the rate of profit in the productive sector has risen. But, as he says, the profits of the unproductive sector of the economy only arise because they share in the total surplus value created in the productive sector. By that token, if this unproductive sector had not drained such a large amount of surplus value, then the rate of profit in the productive sector would have been that much greater!

Rising role?

Comrade Macnair talks about defining the declining role of a mode of production in terms of the rising role that a new mode of production assumes: eg, how capitalism gradually grew within feudalism. But, in that case, he should demonstrate how capitalism's decline is being mirrored by a rise of 'socialistic' production. He does no such thing.

I have referred in the past to the fact that we see a cycle of growth of co-operatives in a spurt every 20 years.⁷ I have not compared that cycle to the long-wave cycle, but it would not be too much of a stretch to see the secular rise of the cooperative sector over the last 100 years or so as being related, as in the example he refers to of the growth and continuation of the Argentinian co-ops. This suggests that workers do tend to respond automatically to the economic crises of capital during such periods by looking towards 'socialistic' production.

But we have to be careful here. Capitalism developed rapidly because it was able to utilise an existing individualism - every peasant is a potential capitalist. The drive to increase individual wealth provides a straightforward incentive to accumulate capital. That is not true of cooperative production. It is not immediately apparent that each individual worker can advance their position by cooperating with other workers. On the contrary, the very working of capitalism infuses the opposite mentality into the workers' consciousness. That is why even fusing workers together into effective trade unions is fraught with problems.

It tends only to be when workers face some immediate crisis, such as the closure of their plant, that they look to such an option as a cooperative. This tends to be the worst of all times to do so and if things remain at that, all that results is a capitalist enterprise owned by workers.

In fact, the development of this 'socialistic' mode of production within capitalism can only arise on the basis of a conscious effort by workers collectively to develop it - and that requires the lead and organisation of a mass workers party to bring it about, in the way that Marx and the First International sought to do ●

Notes

- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2008/06/kondratievs-long-waves.html>
- World Trade Organisation Thomson Datastream
- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2008/07/severe-financial-warning.html>
- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2007/12/tendency-for-rate-of-profit-to-rise.html>
- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2009/03/crisis-out-of-all-disproportion.html>
- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2008/08/third-world-war.html>
- <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2009/03/co-op-facts.html>

WEEKLY WORKER



Web of possibility

As this paper attains another milestone, **Mark Fischer** looks at its prospects and changing relationship with the internet

The 800th edition of the *Weekly Worker* is a useful staging post to review the progress of our paper, the organisation that sustains it and the general state of the left milieu we operate in.

The CPGB aggregate on January 23 has two important agenda items related to this - a discussion on our political perspectives for 2010 and beyond, plus plans for our new, revamped website and its relationship to our weekly paper. So all comrades in and around our organisation will get a chance to have their tuppence-worth in this vital discussion. In this brief article however, I will concentrate on some of the strengths and weaknesses of our paper - although, of course, I must make references to our opponents on the left to illustrate certain points.

The last time we wrote an overview like this, the author, editor Peter Manson, noted: "... nowadays most readers come by way of the internet - the ratio of electronic to print readers is around 20 to one." A redesign was in the offing and the role of the site in our work would grow, the comrade continued. But while our print and electronic profiles were not in contradiction, the print version would provide "the primary fuel or raw material" for the web (*Weekly Worker* December 18 2008).

This changing relationship between our printed weekly publication and the web is the key one for comrades to get their head around. It has prompted one leading comrade to dub the paper version of the *Weekly Worker* a "calling card". Clearly, that relationship is evolving. Take, for example, the three traditional purposes of a party's central organ - to educate, agitate and organise.

The fact that our paper is overwhelmingly read on the internet means its educational role - complemented by the archive of back issues and other websites we may link to or reference - also takes place mostly in cyberspace. Related to this, we note that the young comrades who have come towards us (and other groups on the left in recent years) have tended to be self-taught, if a little eclectically sometimes, in Marxism and on the left itself via the web.

The physical production of the *Weekly Worker* certainly imposes a collective discipline on the team that

works on and supports it, anticipating in skeletal form a Communist Party in that sense. But the vast bulk of our organising work in the wider sense of the term - campaigning, building actions and party events, mobilising solidarity - is undertaken online, not simply on our website, but via social networking sites such as Facebook. Ditto agitation, particularly on the Hands Off the People of Iran website, of course.

The problem of the interrelationship of print and new media is hardly unique to us. Mainstream bourgeois papers are struggling to adapt. The sites of the revolutionary left are almost uniformly dull, amateur and barely worth visiting twice, unless - like myself and some unfortunate MI5 officers out there, I presume - it's your job. And no wonder. They produce dull newspapers, retailing dull politics, which find expression in their dull online presences.

Of course, our interim *Weekly Worker* site itself is pretty ropey at the moment. We have been slow to reinstate a full version after the attack that brought down our old one in June of last year. Partially, this has been the usual tale of inefficiencies and clashing work priorities. But we have also tried to take the opportunity to attempt a systematic think through of what we need from our site, how the strengths of this paper can be translated into - and enhanced by - a revamped online facility. Let us revisit the 'holy trinity' again with this in mind.

Educate: Our paper takes its readers seriously. Week after week, we could fill our paper with dark tales of greedy bankers, the myriad sins of New Labour and puffs for what a top idea socialism is. More of the same tedious tripe you will find in the bulk of the rest of the left, in other words. The fact that we often give over our pages to longer articles that demand more of our readers is a reflection of our attitude to the working class itself. As a future ruling class, it must master high politics and be adept in questions of theory. The dumbed-down papers of the revolutionary left express their genuine attitude to the chances for working class self-rule - that the nice-but-dim proles just aren't up to it ...

But we educate - that is, seek to impart ideas we believe to be true and fight those we think are wrong and harmful - in other ways as well.

This paper wages an open polemical war of extermination against all species of opportunism - economism, Respect-type popular frontism, Campaign for a New Workers' Party halfway-housism, social imperialism, national socialism, etc.

A 12-page paper format is obviously more limited than the internet, where we can supplement this combative material with hyperlinks to previous *WW* articles or different websites, videos of related openings from our own schools or other courses, podcasts, etc. This will require us organising the material on our site in a far more systematic fashion, to provide comrades not simply with search facilities to find particular words or phrases, or the presentation of the papers in a chronological order (both of which will continue to be available, obviously). In addition, the site's architecture will actively recommend important articles and features to readers as they click on particular topics.

We are also looking at the facilities for allowing readers to make comments on and discuss articles and topics featured on the site - with the caveat that we are wary of simply opening ourselves up to the hordes of antagonistic trolls out there with a grudge against the CPGB. However, the letters page of the *Weekly Worker* is one of its strongest features, we believe, and we must look to replicate it online.

From the time our political tendency began to publish in 1981, we have encouraged our readers to write critically and they have responded enthusiastically. We have no problem in filling a letters page every week - often it is two. We give them prominence on the inside front page, in contrast other leftwing publications that either have no letters (compelling evidence of their nature as dead publications, talking to no-one) or tuck them towards the back. We feature them upfront because we want engagement, the accountability of our writers and press and a grown-up dialogue with our readers. Our new website must look to strengthen and expand that dialogue.

Organise: The web must become a means to build campaigns, events and mobilisations politically, not simply logistically. We will have sufficient flexibility in the new site to present background readings, relevant theoretical material and brief-

ings to clue comrades up on why our organisation is prioritising this campaign or that initiative - that is, why you should get involved, not just the when and where.

Agitate: A weekly newspaper cannot hope to compete with the immediacy of the web when it comes to reportage, or covering breaking events. Sites that have grown up around us over the past few years of work - that of Hopi, Communist Students and numerous comrades' blogs - have taken this role. With due consideration to editorial overview, we will make more of this sort of material on the party site and, again, link it with material that will explain in more depth the significance of what we are featuring.

Clearly, this is a period of transition for our paper, for our website and the CPGB itself. The left's window of opportunity in the field of elections has been reduced. The unelectability of the Conservatives until relatively recently and the consequent absence of any fear about 'splitting the anti-Tory vote' created the space for a united left - if it

had been so inclined - to patiently begin to build support in wider society for the ideas of Marxism. Consistent readers of our paper over the years will be aware that instead the opportunity was frittered away in hopeless attempts to fool workers at the ballot box with warmed-over social democracy or left populism and finally trash-canned by the poisonously opportunist dash for the big time in the form of the pop-frontist Respect.

It has been this paper that has documented this debacle, criticised and fought the backtracking every inch of the way and, now that our class needs clarity and vision to successfully fight the attacks looming on it from whatever stripe of government faces it after the looming general election, has consistently drawn the lessons for the movement. This is the method of this publication and its consequent incalculable worth to the fight for a Marxist party worthy of the name.

We urge you to support it and to get involved in the discussion on its future role ●

Fighting fund

A lot to find

In view of a number of increased costs incurred by the *Weekly Worker* over the recent period, we have decided to raise our monthly target to £1,250.

This extra £250 is, admittedly, in excess of the additional costs, but if we can reach that target on a regular basis this will allow us, for example, to publish more supplements, such as the excellent new Kautsky translation and commentary carried in this issue.

And I must confess to a certain confidence in being able to do so. After all, for most of 2009 we easily reached the £1,000 we were aiming for, mostly thanks to the level of standing orders we have won from our growing band of supporters. Some of them have been relatively modest, such as JS's £5, which came through this week. But JS is a student, so it is still a lot for him to find.

The standing orders transferred into the *Weekly Worker* account over the last seven days amount to £182, which means our total for January stands at £432. Unusually, however, we received not a single donation either through the post or via the website - despite the fact that the number of visitors to cpgb.org.uk is once again on the rise (last week there were 16,406 of them).

So let me appeal to those online readers once more: how about showing your appreciation for all the good things in this paper, not least this week's fascinating supplement? ●

Robbie Rix

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

REVIEWS

Delusion, distractions, dialectic

James Cameron (director) *Avatar* general release

James Cameron first came to prominence as a superior special effects and action writer-director with *Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*. He went on to acquire even more fame with *Titanic*, combining the highest movie budget of all time with a frosting of social concern and romance, a love transcending anti-Irish snobbery on the notorious ocean liner. His latest film, *Avatar*, has been promoted as employing the very boldest use of 3D imagery, while providing a profound allegory of mineral imperialism and colonial violence. In other words, it is more than an X-Box game, though even Cameron probably would not deny the influence.

The story is set in 2954 on the distant planet of Pandora. Into its orbit arrives a space ship of the mining company, Resources Development Administration. From Earth, they are in pursuit of a rare mineral called Unobtainium. As well as RDA staff, the ship contains a group of scientific researchers and an army of mercenaries: it is the East India Company in space.

The planet's only inhabitants are taller and slimmer than the visitors. They are the Na'vi - agile, blue-skinned and saucer-eyed; a cross between native Americans, with the occasional African plait, and Giacometti sculptures. Earthlings, or 'sky dwellers', cannot breathe in Pandora's atmosphere, the planet's fauna and flora being especially luxuriant: humans must wear oxygen masks. Therefore, a small team of scientists and soldiers sent to the surface must go as avatars: that is, Na'vi bodies created for them by mixing human and Pandoran DNA. These are then operated by their minds while their human bodies lie prone back at base.

Members of the team include paraplegic ex-US marine Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and head researcher Dr Grace Augustine, played by Sigourney Weaver, bringing with her reminders of Ripley from the first three *Alien* films. In the event, Sully is the first to make contact with the Na'vi. The tribe are not fooled about his provenance, for he does not seem to know that much about their culture. Along with the spectator, he is slowly educated into their approach to the world, mainly by Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), whose parents are the Na'vi's chieftain and high priest.

Sully's job though is to report back to the RDA mother ship, in particular to the hawkish colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang) and the impatient RDA bureaucrat Parker Selfridge (Giovanni Ribisi). When Sully concludes that the Na'vi are not going to give up their mineral-rich land, especially the bit under their huge magic tree, an invasion of Pandora begins. The scene is set for Sully to side with the Na'vi and halt the invasion, either by an appeal to negotiation or by battle in nature-shaking 3D.

Anyone who is reminded already of various westerns, or indeed the war in Iraq, should not feel they are reading too much into the story: the allusions are hard to miss, from blue 'redskins' to a war for precious minerals. Beyond the CGI/computer game action then, how far does the story go politically?

This is neither an irrelevant nor impertinent question, as the movie does make grand philosophical claims along the way. The Na'vi are not just another hollering Apache clone: their relationship with nature has been thoroughly thought out and is presented

for our admiration. Though like many things presented for our admiration in these centrist times, from equal opportunity programmes to Barack Obama, it stops short of coming to grips with the problem.

No development

This is not to say that no-one will get anything from it. As an article in *The Times* suggested, children may take a firm commitment to a sustainable Earth away from the battles between mining company and indigenous people. Some of the battles are not bad either, especially the all too symbolic one between colonel Quaritch in a big robot suit and the fleet-footed Sully and Neytiri, using bows and arrows.

3D may now be another brush to add to the cinematic paint box of colour, sound and wide screen. For this viewer, the new gadget is not only impressive when showing vast, animated vistas or swooping bird-dragons. There is really no replacement for human actors, prettiness apart. In fact, there were times when the CGI figures of the rake-like Na'vi began to pall and I would have preferred to see a bit more chunky human substance.

The story, however, falls down on plot detail, especially character development and context. Sully's journey from undercover agent to Na'vi guerrilla is vaguely sketched. His initial motivation seems to be an aim to achieve surgery on his legs when he returns. Though this is a goal that someone else offers him (the colonel) not a desire he voices for himself. Stepping out on Pandora in his avatar form, Sully seems only loosely engaged with the mission. Getting lost in the forest, he bumps into the Na'vi and then jocularly imbibes their ways.

Of course, the motivation of figures in an electronic game does not matter that much: it is usually kill or be killed. On screen, however, the turn from secret agent to guerrilla fighter is too lightly done: Quaritch calls him a traitor, but he never seemed that involved anyway. But, having turned, he joins with the Na'vi and effectively becomes their leader, bonding with land, animals and people in a united consciousness - and for all that, a very American figure: the leader who appears from nowhere and becomes a saviour in war and peace; a tall, blue Washington, Lincoln or Obama.

What is more, though, it is easy to identify the west with the mining company and its mercenaries (not, you note, government soldiers). All the usual excuses are absent. This is not a mining mission to 'save Earth' from mineral famine, so it is not being done on behalf of the participants' families: the Na'vi are not presented as a threat to all we hold dear - and where is the accusation that they have some kind of terrible WMD? Though in fact they do - an invisible force coming up from the land and the magic tree itself. The RDA are venial and brutish; just so, but if children and other spectators cheer the soulful locals with their comfortable spirituality, how does that prepare anyone when they hear our rulers condemning the greed of Iran or, for that matter, China?

Any face-saving plan to negotiate is not discussed: the bad guys are ready to thump the natives from the word go. Dr Augustine's team and Sully seem to be going along with this, by being part of the mission, but are then shocked

when it happens. Did they think it was all just a research project? This is vague; there is no definite conflict here between the mission's principles and the participants who change their minds.

Age of delusion

This very fuzziness does not, I believe, result from sloppy film making - not with the meticulous Cameron. It is intrinsic to keeping the spectator away from awkward questions. Sully and the science team are detached as characters from the whole mineral grab. They do not identify themselves with the actual mission. Here is a model of detachment - we can stay within our private projects and ignore the general purposes of the state and capital - 'we just work there'.

Of course, this disengagement is a delusion: unless we protest and conduct some kind of opposition struggle, these things are in fact done 'in our name'. There is no going along just for the ride. Mother Courage in Bertolt Brecht's play of the same name is a character who thinks she can keep herself and her children safe from a war, out of which she in fact makes her living. The play exposes her deluded cunning, her self-destructive self-interest.

Sully, however, does not seem to make any decision for his first course of action at all: he is an 'ordinary Joe' who finds himself acting the spy. It is not even his profession, like James Bond. When he rejects his side, he is rejecting something he only vaguely accepted in the first place. He just starts fighting for the Good against the Bad.

A minor point? But this means he is not shown coming out of a delusion: he does not grow in consciousness, rejecting a deluded self-interest ('my legs', my life on Earth), realising that he has been used. We are given no example, even in simple terms, of a character's development, of a 'consciousness-raising' process. Nor is the status of the mining mission an issue debated, even briefly: eg, 'Unobtainium will save our families on Earth. We can't allow these local people to stand in the way of progress and our survival.' Rather the choice against the RDA operation is easy and simple.

This vagueness about involvement, about the kind of justifications imperialism can use, even if ineffectively, makes this work typical of our time. For the age of credit bubbles and the Big Heat Up is the age of delusion, of a detachment which is self-destroying. Capitalism in decline (see Mike Macnair, 'World politics, long waves and the decline of capitalism', January 7) actively promotes delusion, including self-delusion: for example, the delusion of aspirational careerists who create 'crunches' and risk a resentful backlash. Delusion also prospers through distraction by the turnover in gadgets, especially the internet with its wealth of social and political possibilities (which are, however, increasingly succumbing to the old relations of production, such as advertising, censorship and copyright).

This is an epoch too of sanctimonious and dangerous bullshit, the banning of 'offensive speech' and rhetorical 'we can' notions of individual mastery over the world. With the Copenhagen summit we had a recognition of the steep rise in global warming these last 50 frantic, free-market years, but the only result was an empty declaration and a few millions to 'cap'

the effects on the poor world. In this epoch of warm rhetoric and global warming, capitalism is not only its own gravedigger, as Marx prophesied, but a grave-provider for the world, in the ultimate self-destruction: wasting your own planet.

To compensate for these destructive short-term profits, the exploited are bought off, with credit in the developed world and handouts to the developing. These, however, are panicked strategies, which may postpone, but not prevent, economic and ecological disaster for everybody. This is the ultimate self-delusion.

Procedure of science

The opposite of self-delusion is conscious problem-solving: full consciousness in action. But if Marxists claim a correct method (dialectics), how come they do not always agree on things? Are we looking to be united by a philosopher-leader like Jake Sully?

The issue of how we acquire knowledge is not academic. Surely, if we had a science, doesn't that mean there would be one single answer to questions, proved and demonstrable, with which we could command against delusion?

Of course, we can put such differences between Marxists down to a divergence of social viewpoints, of culture or national location. Yet perhaps there is something in the dialectical method itself that makes disagreement possible. The question then is, can we have this divergence while possessing some political unity? Does a Marxist intellectual style inevitably lead to splits and sectarianism, except on very basic issues where Marxists can even unite with liberals and social democrats?

It is in the *Grundrisse: foundations of the critique of political economy* that Marx outlines the dialectical method:

"It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete ... thus to begin in economics, with, for example, the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production.

"However, on closer examination this proves false. The population proves an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest: eg, wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc ...

"Thus if I were to begin with the population, this would turn out to be a chaotic conception of the whole. I would then ... move analytically toward ever simpler concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as a chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations" (K Marx *Grundrisse* New York 1973, pp100-01).

That which is presumed to be real and concrete then - the population, people working and living - turns out to be abstract, empty, chaotic. Applying a range of concepts from a particular tradition - the Marxist tradition - leads you to the essence of social existence - class relationships, self-destructive tendencies of expanding capital - the most basic determinations

and relations. These are then applied back to chaotic appearances: the concrete. You start with the unexplained and end with the same phenomena as the effects of an essential, invisible process.

The main objection then is, how is this invisible essence, this abstraction, demonstrable? In his *Marxism for and against* (New York 1980), Robert L Heilbroner raises this question, going on to refer to some of Marx's 'pronouncements'. The examples he gives are the tendency of capital to agglomerate in large monopolies and the tendency of the population to be reduced to proletarian (that is, non-capital-operating) status. These tendencies, he states, have been vindicated by history. Dialectical understanding, then, begins with the empirical and ends there too.

Physical and biological science takes a similar journey - you cannot see or feel Einstein's concept of space-time or natural selection or indeed geometry, only their effects. The ideas themselves are abstractions. Rather, we relate these concepts, as underlying structures and mechanisms, to effects in the concrete world.

Physical scientists disagree too. Albert Einstein himself resisted for a long time the 'big bang' theory of an expanding universe. In fact, he invented phenomena that contradicted the idea, using the notion of antigravity or 'dark matter' to explain the same phenomena. He later admitted this answer was a fudge after Hubble put forward the likelihood that it was space itself that was expanding, a hypothesis based on Einstein's general relativity theory.

Of course, Thomas Kuhn has argued in the *Logic of scientific revolutions* that professional scientists do not just genuflect before equations. Some older scientists never accept a new paradigm and even path-breakers like Einstein can resist for a period.

As the media remind us, global warming itself is the subject of a debate. One perhaps stimulated by the oil industry and its promoters, like George W Bush, but putting forward arguments nevertheless to challenge the prediction that the 'steep rise' is human-originated. These challenges can be answered: that is, the proposals that there is data that shows there is no steep rise in warming or that activity on the sun is to blame. The rise in warming has been particularly steady in the last 50 years and, though once there did seem to be a correlation with sunspots, activity on the sun has calmed down since 1980, even as the rise in warming has continued. Something like 80% of those now working in the field accept the prognosis of a steep rise in the Earth's temperature. Not all though: disagreement is part of the process and there is no unanimity, no certainty in the case - only a high degree of likelihood, making for a convincing consensus.

Conscious change and dialectical study require debate which has a procedure: an etiquette of research and consensus. If debate - as democratic centralism - is not part of our organisations, they have no claim to wisdom. In the age of delusion and distraction, we need more than supreme leaders and a united, holy people. We need a developing, self-conscious project, involving contributions from many in discovering practical, whole solutions ●

Mike Belbin

Old myth exposed

John Charlton **Don't you hear the H bombs thunder? Youth and politics on Tyneside in the late 50s and early 60s** Merlin, 2009, pp202, £14.95

John Charlton has put together a most fascinating social history of the 50s and 60s 'movement' on Tyneside, in a book published by North East Labour History.

I put 'movement' in quote marks because it is perhaps hard for current political activists to envisage what that was. We speak of the labour movement and we know what that is, such as it remains. However, 'the movement' in the era of late 50s and 60s was a milieu of people, across a set of progressive agendas and cultural attitudes. With its various wings, each with its own core and periphery, it was hard to pin down - and there were also loose orbiting cultures and folk on the fringes of enlightened and progressive attitudes, who could also be included as part of this wider 'movement'. It is a constellation now almost gone, or at least this particular aspect of it.

This was the generation which preceded my own and at its margin overlapped with it. Having written an autobiographical history of our own contribution (*Geordies wa mental* London 2008) to politics and rebellion on Tyneside, I believe that John's book puts in place another big piece of the historic jigsaw. For me it was a bit like discovering *The Hobbit* after having read *Lord of the Rings*. The movement we picked up on had been established by an earlier intervention.

The book takes its title from the passionate Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament anthem, *The H bombs thunder*. It focuses on the anti-bomb struggle in the north of England and the wider left political movement centred at that time in the youth of the Labour Party. Something like the all-consuming passion of climate change campaigners, convinced that the imminent end of civilisation is upon us, infused us then. Only at that time it was the conviction - almost a certainty - that we had no time left to scrap the atomic bomb before it scrapped us all. We were on the very brink of annihilation; we had to pull political leaders back from the brink by destroying nuclear weaponry - Britain's first, as far as we were concerned. 'Britain led on slavery; we can do so again' was one of the unilateralist slogans which struck a cord.

After the Labour League of Youth and before the founding of the Young Socialists, there was no Labour youth organisation. Into this vacuum came the 59 Society. For three or four years, it recruited a remarkable group of people. The warring factions of Trotskyism - the Socialist Labour League and the forerunners of the International Socialists - would cut their political teeth here. Militant and the Revolutionary Socialist League did not, it seems, play a prominent part in this period, though in my day they would dominate the Labour Party Young Socialists, as the LPYS was reformed and renamed after the mass expulsions of the earlier dissident young wing, heavily 'contaminated' by Healy's cadres. They, of course, claimed the name and much of the former organisation the Young



CND peaked in 1963

Socialists as the youth wing of the SLL, and then the Workers Revolutionary Party, as it was to become.

The anti-apartheid movement and the CND were the twin focus for the left in the region and probably in the country. Into these also intervened the members of the Young Communist League, who had quite a presence on Tyneside at the time.

What John has written here is not just an autobiographical review of the movement: it goes deeper and further, into a sort of collective biography of many of the leading characters of the time. Some are notable by their absence, however - Stan Wilkes, the oldest YCLer in the business, for one; Bob Vincent, the Fitzpatrick brothers, Dixie Deans, Tom Kilburn and many other prominent YCL activists; Ralph Robertson, and Tony Jackson from the anarchist and free verse movement. John admits that he was not able to contact everyone, but nonetheless makes a decent job with those he tracked down.

His book takes us beyond biography, going back into the parents' generation, delving into the class politics of the inter-war years in the region, and points up the sharp influences upon the emerging youth generation of the 50s and early 60s. John's fellow 59ers are provided the opportunity to talk about their formative influences and the direction their politics were to take.

It is quite chastening really. It made me feel quite guilty about the strongly sectarian attitudes I had struck up against many of these comrades as they emerged into the IS, and later the Socialist Workers Party, or the SLL and WRP. It is rather a revelation, to see the backgrounds, personal tragedies and formative conditions, which forged many of the characters I was to encounter and re-encounter over a generation of struggle. By far and away the bulk of that early team, although they moved on from the region, stayed in anti-capitalist struggle and stayed on the left in one form or another.

Obviously John's view of 'the movement' is coloured by his own involvement and perception of it, and particularly as a leading member of the IS and SWP. He put the peak of anti-bomb campaigning a little earlier than I would have, probably because the IS itself had stopped being so heavily

engaged in it.

I think John misses a central reason for the decline of the purely anti-bomb movement, in that people had graduated through it, into more overt pro communist/anarchist/socialist struggle and organisations rather than just the platform CND had provided. The left entered the anti-bomb movement, apart from as a principle in itself, as a means of recruiting people to socialist organisation and perspectives. Once the bulk of activists started to make the connection between anti-capitalism and the bomb directly, it was no longer tactically necessary to be so preoccupied with CND as such. The movement had moved beyond the bomb.

For me the final political death knell for the CND as a mass movement was 1968. I believe it peaked, or certainly its mass marches peaked, in 1963, (not 62, as John suggests) with something of the order of 100,000 on the Easter march (not 30,000, as John claims). Vietnam proved decisive - the horror of that war, coupled with widespread support for the socialist aspirations of the National Liberation Front, demonstrated that being against just the atomic bomb was not enough.

It did something further, in that it broke the pacifist consensus, which had marked the early 50s and 60s peace movement. Armed struggle was justified, and violence on demonstrations was too. While Tariq Ali and the leadership of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign came to Grosvenor Square to occupy the US embassy, the party I was with from Tyneside and Doncaster came to burn it down (one comrade even brought a box of firefighters for the purpose).

John's history, to be fair, aims at concluding in 62, so perhaps events subsequent to that were not covered, but, without wishing to nitpick, John puts the decline too early in my view. I also believe the 'movement' as a whole did not in fact decline: it moved into different territory. In one way this is demonstrated in John's work - in his 'Where have all the marchers gone?' chapter he is able to show how all of the early activists of the 59 Society, and those of my own age and peer group which followed, continued in political struggle, prominently in the unions and in parties of the left.

I found the whole book a heartening read. Very informative and an essential modern history of the political left and peace movement on Tyneside. It certainly goes to disprove the hoary old myth that young people grow out of their radicalism and become conservative in middle age. This team did not: the old YCLers, the Trots and the anarchists are still largely around. If not strutting their stuff any more, they are at least still committed to a socialist world, if now less certain of the route or imminent success than we used to be ●

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.

Become a Communist Party associate member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly worker

More than
corruption
revealed

Trouble at the top

The shaky political regime in Northern Ireland is reeling from political scandal. And what a scandal it is - with inter-generational sex, dirty money and mental illness involved, and at the heart of the right-wing establishment in the province as well. It is the stuff of soap operas.

Of course, the scandal centres on Peter Robinson and his wife, Iris. He was, until January 11, when he stood aside, Northern Ireland's first minister and leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, the province's largest loyalist party with strong links to Protestant churches, in particular the Free Presbyterians. Iris Robinson was both a United Kingdom MP and a member of the Northern Ireland assembly (she announced late last year her retirement from politics and she has since been expelled from the DUP).

Known as 'swish family Robinson', the couple were reported last year to have received £571,939.41 in salaries and expenses, with an additional £150,000 going to four family members. Both are notoriously rightwing. In the late 1980s Peter Robinson was one of the founders of Ulster Resistance, a short-lived paramilitary organisation with links to murder gangs such as the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. Iris Robinson is a born-again Christian, a strong advocate of the Iraq war and like her husband an out-and-out homophobe. In 2008 she caused outrage after branding homosexuality an "abomination". Iris Robinson famously recommended that gay people should get psychiatric help. Denying that she was prejudiced she told an interviewer that "just as a murderer can be redeemed by the blood of Christ, so can a homosexual".

Peter Robinson gave a press conference on January 6, in which he revealed that his wife had had an extramarital affair in 2008, and later attempted suicide. Iris Robinson was 57 at the outset of the affair; her lover, Kirk McCambley, was only 19, and grieving for the loss of his father, a personal friend of the Robinsons.

The lurid scandal was a common talking point; however, it did not truly blow up until two days later, when an investigative piece by the BBC's *Spotlight* programme alleged that Iris Robinson, quite apart from conducting this affair, had arranged two loans of £25,000 from local property developers, so that McCambley could renovate and open a restaurant. Fred Fraser, who is now dead, was one of the richest developers in the province; Ken Campbell, has enjoyed substantial support from Iris Robinson, who lobbied on his behalf in favour of lucrative developments in her constituency at roughly the same time that the loans were being sought.

The restaurant, meanwhile, was owned by Castlereagh council, a dilapidated lock-keeper's cottage with a cafe attached. The tendering process, then, involved seeking the approval of local government - something Iris Robinson could provide

some traction on. McCambley picked up the permission, and promptly did up the cafe. It has been a success story, turning over £250,000 in its first year, and McCambley was honoured in a competition for young entrepreneurs. All went swimmingly.

All, that is, except the sexual relationship between himself and Robinson, which disintegrated towards the end of 2008. Robinson changed her mind about the money, which she had previously offered to McCambley in return for a £5,000 cut. Now she wanted all of it back, though half was to go to a local church.

According to the BBC, and the DUP leader himself, the first Peter Robinson knew about his wife's affair was last March, when she attempted suicide. In the aftermath, she confessed to the affair, as well as the tangled financial arrangements involved (though he denies knowledge of this, the *Spotlight* programme alleges otherwise). The Robinsons attempted to pay back the money in secret, and apparently succeeded - but the resignation of a key aide and close confidant to Iris, former RAF chaplain Selwyn Black, provided the BBC with a sensational scoop in an attempt to draw a line under his own intimate involvement in the scandal.

The timing could not have been worse for the DUP. The set-up in Northern Ireland is presently a power-sharing deal between the DUP and the least likely of allies - Sinn Féin, the political incarnation of the Provisional IRA and the most powerful nationalist/republican force in the province. Winning the 2007 election, the DUP nabbed the top job of first minister, which went to former leader Ian Paisley before he handed the torch on to Robinson.

The common project which allows such divergent political formations to pursue such an alliance is, necessarily, one whose premises neither party accepts - the hammering out of a relatively stable, peaceful political set-up

that will neither disenfranchise Catholics and other predominantly nationalist/republican sections to the point of rebellion, nor cut too drastically into the inherited privileges of the Protestant/unionist/British-Irish side (and preserve the hegemony of the British state, of course).

It makes sense in the same perverse way that the Party of Order, which united staunchly monarchist supporters of rival royal houses, was able to administrate the Second French Republic. At present, no Northern Irish political arrangement can survive without the participation of the DUP and Sinn Féin. The eclipse of the more 'moderate' Ulster Unionist Party by the hard-line DUP, as well as that of the 'moderate' nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party by Sinn Féin, indicates the extent to which deep divisions persist in Northern Irish society, and indeed have become aggravated, as the peace process has hit obstacles. The solution, according to Tony Blair, is devolution - the trademark New Labour method of ducking the national question.

Most devolution details, incredibly, are now dealt with - with the exception of the police. Sinn Féin formally abandoned its boycott of the Northern Irish police in 2007. Yet a long and gory history of police collusion and participation in anti-Catholic and anti-republican attacks - most infamously the murder of Pat Finucane, Bobby Sands' solicitor, which the British state has now acknowledged took place with the involvement of the Royal Ulster Constabulary - means progress is slow-going on this point. Now, the DUP is in disarray. On top of his wife's expulsion from the party, Peter Robinson has handed power over to Arlene Foster for the next six weeks, as he attempts to 'clear his name'. If the BBC's allegations are upheld, he will find this difficult in the extreme - the assembly's ministerial code of conduct requires that

he immediately inform the authorities of legal infringements of which he is aware, infringements in this case which he has allegedly chosen to cover up.

In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin is in the ascendant. It overtook the SDLP in terms of Westminster seats in 2001, and gained another MP in 2005. It is the second largest party in the NI assembly behind the DUP. Most alarmingly for loyalists, Sinn Féin topped the poll in the 2009 European parliament elections, both in terms of the final result and first preferences. There is a general election coming up, and, should more allegations surface between now and then, the DUP could lose votes to the UUP and the balance of power could shift considerably, with the slim possibility that Sinn Féin will be the largest party among the Northern Irish delegation to Westminster.

Of course, it may not all go so well for the nationalists. A general election success, even if it were to come about, would bring out contradictions in Sinn Féin's politics. Its MPs still refuse to take their seats, but this would surely come up for re-examination; meanwhile, unusually propitious political conditions would provide an incentive to speed up the discussions on devolution, so an assembly election can be called (the current assembly is formally a 'transitional' body, and it is unclear under what conditions or what timescale an election can be called to it). All of this could lead to disaffection among the more 'traditionalist' elements of Sinn Féin, and potentially a split.

Whatever the fortunes of Sinn Féin, it is probably safe to say that the left will not do well out of this. A worthy article, from the Irish Socialist Party, the Irish section of the Committee for a Workers' International, places the focus squarely on the sordid relationship not between Iris Robinson and Kirk McCambley, but that between Robinson, Fred Fraser and Ken Campbell.

For comrade Gary Mulcahy, the author, the scandal is important because it "has unearthed ... how out of touch the political establishment is [and] the extremely close relationship between them and wealthy business people." He adds: "The parties in the assembly executive are responsible for procuring huge public contracts to private companies with a guaranteed profit. Their policies of privatisation, even if not directly linked to bribes or 'donations', reward the rich at the expense of working people."¹

Firstly, there is the bleeding obvious problem that the "extremely close relationship" between politicians and capitalists is ... well, bleeding obvious. This scandal has unearthed precisely nothing - especially given the revelations from over the Irish sea about MPs' expenses. To the extent that this earlier scandal had an impact on political parties in Northern Ireland, the evidence of the European elections shows the vote going no further to the left than the now thoroughly institutionalised Sinn Féin. The problem is not that the broad masses are unaware that bourgeois politicians are venal, cynical and corrupt - the problem is that this awareness amounts to nothing if the working class does not recognise the need to politically struggle against bourgeois politics and the state, and that there is no left group well enough organised or politically armed to direct this struggle.

Corruption is criticised in strictly moralistic terms; on the other side, the SP comrades assure us that their "representatives [will] live only on a workers' wage and are fully committed to fighting for the rights of working class people." That is very honourable of them, of course, and in line with the ethics of the workers' movement - but where is the systematic critique of Stormont politics? ●

James Turley

Notes

1. www.socialistworld.net/eng/2010/01/1102.html.

Subscribe
here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum £10 every 3 months ... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing
order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/€28	£50/€55	£200/€220
Europe	£30/€33	£60/€66	£240/€264
Rest of world	£60/€66	£120/€132	£480/€528
New UK subscribers offer:			
3 months for £5			

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:

Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

TOTAL £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc, _____

Branch Address _____

Postcode _____

Re Account Name _____

Sortcode _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 0744310, sort

code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*

until further notice, commencing on _____.

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

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____