

weekly
worker



Third programme of Communist Party of Great Britain. Comments, suggestions and criticism wanted

- IMT divisions
- Oskar Lafontaine
- Lindsey German
- Student left unity

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Left unity should be a priority for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition



LETTERS



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

Moron Chomsky

Chris Knight's three-page article, 'Anti-Marxist myth of our time' (February 4), misrepresents and attacks Chomsky's inspirational theory of 'generative grammar' and his proposed 'innate' 'language acquisition device' (LAD) as a component of the human mind.

While it is true Chomsky's work assumes it is possible to investigate language without taking 'the meaning' behind spoken words into account and equally true ongoing research has tended *not* to support Chomsky, Knight's article, with its subtitle, "Noam Chomsky's 'scientific' fairy tales about language and its origins", and which repeatedly scoffs at Chomsky's "fables" ("cosmic ray shower", etc), not only fails to identify positive aspects of Chomsky's work, but must persuade the naive reader that Chomsky is a moron, not really worthy of serious consideration. Chomsky makes it clear his fables are not meant to be taken literally; Chris Knight accepts that, but his constant repetition could be designed to 'get the mud to stick'.

Chomsky's theory was grounded in the phenomenal ability of very young children to understand and use the specific, highly articulated principles underlying the structure of language. The 'universal grammar' (applicable, in general terms, to *all* human languages) must, he argues, be hypothesised as biologically inherited from earlier generations. The human species is distinguished from all other creatures, not by the faculties of thought or 'intelligence', but by their capacity for language. The crucial characteristic Chomsky identifies regarding this development in childhood (of which Chris Knight makes no mention) is the almost immediate creativity associated with the infant's language: by the age of five or six, children produce and understand an indefinitely large number of utterances they have not previously encountered; they are able to apply the appropriate grammatical rules from adult utterances to construct utterances they have never heard before.

Whatever may have been the cause/origin of 'the language organ' in some remote period of man's evolutionary development, a fact to be accounted for is that all human beings make use of the same physiological 'organ' in speech. It is at least conceivable they are genetically programmed to do so; if all human languages are strikingly similar in structure, surely it is natural to ask why this should be the case. While all languages fulfil similar functions in their various societies, and would be expected to influence the language structures universally, many universal features are not readily explained in this way. Chomsky's only conceivable explanation is the LAD facility.

Should Chomsky's LAD be accepted as a *working hypothesis* (it was never suggested as anything else), language is 'modularised', but cognitive development is not of marginal importance, as Chris Knight suggests Chomsky would claim.

We can only hypothesise why *Homo sapiens* alone evolved language; it is indeed the *only* major dividing point between us and our near relatives, the apes, the chimpanzees. Our minds seem very similar - a few hours watching our cousins interacting with one another, playing games (even 'let's pretend' games, as do human children) and telling lies (sign language studies) suggest that, had a

hypothesised 'mutation' been shared with the chimps, they would have matched us intellectually.

Chomsky a counterrevolutionary? His theory of language and his political stance are *not* contradictory. As Chris Knight tells us, Noam Chomsky appeared on the public scene in 1959 with his review of BF Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* (1957). Skinner is the leading representative of 'behavioural psychology', which tells us *all* human knowledge and belief, *all* patterns of thought and action are explainable as 'habits' acquired through 'conditioning', not qualitatively different from the process by which rats, in a 'Skinner box', learn to obtain food by pressing a bar.

Chomsky's attack on radical behaviourism demonstrated the impressive panoply of scientific verbiage and statistics was simply a camouflage, covering an inability to explain the 'creativity' of language as an outcome of 'conditioning'. Look at any of Chomsky's numerous books on 'political' topics and note the similar charge Chomsky makes against the 'social scientists', whose 'expert' advice is sought by big business and governments.

Chomsky's political involvements have always been based on the conviction that human beings differ from animals and machines - a fundamental difference, always deserving respect.

Bob Potter
email

Bonobo ideas

What about the bonobo? It was not mentioned in Chris Knight's article ('Sex and the human revolution', September 24). And, while we're at it, Palau - dwarfed humans? Any ideas?

Max Watts
email

Befuddled

The obscene situation in Haiti seems to have befuddled many comrades on the left into making unduly benign assessments of the role of US troops. That such illusions persist with a bloody slaughter still in progress in Afghanistan and a bloodier one drawing to a close in Iraq, both at the hands of the US and its allies, is somewhat bewildering.

Yet it is not out of character for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, whose hysterically defensive tone (understatement of the year so far) has long ineptly served to conceal *indefensible*, incipiently pro-imperialist positions. So Dan Katz writes on the AWL website (www.workersliberty.org), under the title 'Haiti, emergency aid and the left', and does not seem to understand Haiti or emergency aid at all. "Notorious Stalinist hack" Seumas Milne is castigated for objecting to US obstruction of Cuban medical aid - but no actual counterargument is offered to Milne's objection (except that there are US doctors on the ground - so no need to worry, then) beyond the aforementioned epithet and a predictable slew of others. Yes, the US has occupied Haiti for two decades; yes, international institutions dominated by the US caused its poverty.

Thankfully, the citizens of Haiti (and presumably Venezuela, Honduras, Cuba, Bolivia ...) can rest easy: "the US's relationship to its backyard ... has changed radically from what it was even in the 1970s and 80s." No more cold war means no more coups or assassinations. Except the US-backed, failed coup against Chávez in 2002. Or the ongoing (and quite real) attempts to destabilise Cuba. Or last year's US-backed coup against left-drifting populist Manuel Zelaya in Honduras. Or, come to think of it, the deposition of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, a left-populist leader of ... er ... Haiti.

Apart from that, it's all peaches and cream for sovereign political regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Katz, needless to say, doesn't think any of these events worth mentioning. Why would he? The natural conclusion would be that Obama wants some political return on his \$114 million.

At least the AWL doesn't appear to have fully cohered around this delusional line. Leading member Tom Unterrainer expresses misgivings via the comments facility on its website (stopping short of a 'troops out' line, naturally). It is difficult to see, however, what more evidence one needs to abandon belief in the fundamentally different nature of Barack Obama - his every move has been that of a career politician. He has sent a further 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan and he hides behind the state machine rather than picking a fight with even his most right-wing opponents.

Some people have uncritically swallowed the scare pieces about marauding thugs in Haiti, which ultimately amount to a drearily familiar sub-colonial ideology about animalistic savages. In fact, Haitians started spontaneously defending their neighbourhoods from those few who did try to take advantage of the crisis. Just how necessary all these soldiers are is revealed in the fact that most of them are currently simply involved in hauling aid around. You don't need an army to do that - so why has Obama sent one?

James Turley
London

Marxist fact

Jo Russell says that Marx and Engels's committed opposition to reactionary ideas on humanity and nature (eg, Malthusianism) may no longer be valid in today's world, in which the human population is significantly larger than in their time (Letters, February 4).

I would argue that their opposition to such reaction is still valid and that, in the case of their anti-Malthusianism at least, it is more valid now than ever before. We have never before in human history had a greater objective ability to provide a good standard of living to each human being on Earth. And yet the size of our population has never been greater. Marx and Engels have been proven right by history: there is no truth to the overpopulation scare-mongering that has existed in bourgeois thought for two centuries and which exists as an integral part of ideology today.

For Malthusians, it is not the way society is organised which is the problem - the problem is the existence of the masses themselves. One struggles to think of many positions more deeply conservative in their implications.

Marxism is indeed not a religion. It must always proceed from facts and be revised according to them. In this instance, however, the facts are very much on the side of Marxism's original founders.

Jeff Leese
email

Neo-Stalinism

Tony Clark (Letters January 28) may agree with Ted Hankin that "such matters as resource depletion, peak oil and environmental degradation did not exist for classical Marxism", but both are wrong. Agreed, it wasn't oil but the forests of Britain and Ireland that were being destroyed to produce charcoal to smelt iron. Marx and Engels castigated capitalism for its robbery, its creation of "deserts" and warned about nature's revenge (see *Anti-Dühring*).

By the 1860s the British bourgeoisie was debating 'peak coal' and what would happen to British manufacturing when it ran out. Marx wrote to En-

gels denouncing the "squandering" of ore, forests and coal. Unlike capitalists Marx and Engels never argued that the earth's resources were unlimited or that all that mattered was the immediate future. Abundance for Marx and Engels had to be achieved within the natural limits of the earth's resources. Both had a concept of humanity and the rest of nature that implied a relationship of mutual interdependence.

Malthus insisted that that there would never be enough food to feed the poor, so let them die. An attitude which directly influenced British government policies. Malthus was certainly convinced by the idea of resource depletion, even though it was actually the separation of the common people from the means of production, not inadequate food production, that causes starvation under capitalism. As is surely well known, both Marx and Engels extensively commented on the so-called problem of "overpopulation". Indeed Malthus and his dreadful theory was a constantly recurring theme in many of their written works.

During Marx's youth the decline in soil productivity was widely discussed by the bourgeoisie. Then came what might be called 'peak bone' and then 'peak guano'. Marx, however, did not look for technical solutions. He wrote about the exploitation of the countryside by the town and the necessity of repairing the metabolic rift between humanity and nature (see *Capital* Vol 3). The invention of chemical fertilisers substituted for bones robbed from the old battlefields of Europe and Chilean and Peruvian bird shit. But in actual fact industrial agriculture and agro-business continue to widen still further the metabolic rift between humanity and nature.

Engels' first book, *The condition of the working class in England* (1844), describes the disgusting environmental conditions in Manchester and their disastrous effects on working people. Marx lived in a London famous for its pea-soup fogs, everything was covered in soot and the Thames was a stinking, dead sewer fit only for rats. Marx certainly noticed this and produced many scathing comments about capital ruining both the worker and nature. Remember how difficult it was to find suitable army recruits in 1899 for the Boer War because the health of the population was so bad.

Peak oil isn't unique: it is symptomatic of what capitalism does all the time. It uses up nature's resources rapidly because it is driven by the need to accumulate for the sake of accumulation. The more efficient use of a resource makes it cheaper, leading to it being used more. A situation that might lead to relative depletion but also the search for substitutes and new technologies. Today it is nuclear energy, wind farms, shale oil and gas, bio-fuels, etc.

Price, not human well-being, decides what capitalists will choose to do. Price has caused capitalism problems since its inception, but it will not bring it to an end and make a green version of Stalinism popular, as comrade Clark seems to be saying. That requires conscious working class action and we will need an economic policy that works with nature, not against it. Not the neo-Malthusianism of neo-Stalinism.

Phil Kent
Haringey

Everything

It would be very helpful if some 'Marxists' would respond to Jo Russell's point that: "As far as I understand it - and I'm sure someone will correct me if I'm wrong - Marxism is a tool, a methodology for analysing, and drawing conclusions about, the reality of the material world; and from that, about how we can proceed to change ..."

This is well worth a reply because the

CPGB attempts to unite "Marxists as Marxists" in a party which will transform the working class from "nothing" to "everything". To unite only around a method of interpretation seems to contradict your position of wishing to unite the left around a few essential elements of a programme.

Some people may fully support those critical elements of a programme by their own careful analysis (or common sense), while the majority using Marxist methodology appear not to find them acceptable. Why wish to exclude sincere, thoughtful, working class individuals who may have good reason to see weaknesses and failings in the Marxist methodology? Is there a single individual in the CPGB who has any doubts that Marxism is the one and only acceptable way of thinking if the working class is to become "everything"?

Bob Harding
Norwich

Disservice

In the Socialist Party, of which I'm a member, we superseded Campaign to Defeat Fees last year with the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign, which originated outside of us and has trade union backing ('Sects and fronts go round in ever diminishing circles', February 4). CDF still exists on paper but, like International Socialist Resistance, operationally it's been folded entirely into YFJ.

So far we're the only political party backing YFJ, but in communications with YFJ nationally it's been made clear to me that we are supposed to broaden it as a campaign. In pursuit of this, we made overtures to the Young Greens (the Green Party's youth organisation) to affiliate; this went as far as the Young Greens' national committee, where things appear to have spluttered out, even though we'd offered them a seat on the steering committee. Their local youth organiser and I went over their platform and the YFJ platform together and we found absolutely no incompatibilities, so I can only suppose their *de facto* rejection comes from sectarianism.

We also tried to make similar arrangements locally with the Socialist Workers Party; they rejected our offer and instead took to their usual strategy of scheduling their own student events against ours. We've made contact with Cymru X, the Plaid Cymru youth organisation, at a low level, but nothing has developed from that so far other than their organiser's signature on one of our petitions.

We've done one or two events jointly with the Communist Party of Britain, on a local level, but nothing has advanced nationally. I hope there's some possibility of development there. Their youth work focuses more on further education, ours on higher education, so there is a natural synergy to be pursued.

The Socialist Labour Party has categorically refused to work jointly with us and my last reply from their youth organiser included the words, "Don't waste my time with things like this again" with regard to a joint mobilisation for an anti-far-right demonstration.

My offers of joint work with the Young Communists shortly after I started doing work as an organiser received no reply. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty simply isn't established in my area, so I can't comment on them.

My point is that YFJ is making an effort to reach out to other groups on the left, but, as always, it takes at least two to tango and the positive response simply is not there. I'm getting vague indications from the Socialist Party centre now, worryingly, that this situation is to be accepted and YFJ is to become just another of the alphabet soup of student front groups for the

left. For this to happen would be a disservice to the student community in general; but it would be a disservice not entirely of our making.

Youth organiser
email

Disrepute

The publication of the audit into MPs expense claims provides further evidence of the failings of our parliamentary system of government. Sir Thomas Legg's revelations have "brought parliament into disrepute", said former Labour MP and Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist. "We need a system that does not allow sleaze, a system where elected representatives are fully accountable."

In terms of expenses, MPs should behave as Dave Nellist did when he was an MP. He only took the average industrial wage, donating the rest of his salary back into the movement and to charity.

But there are many other reforms to the parliamentary system that are essential to restore public confidence. There needs to be a radical extension of democracy, including all representatives elected by proportional representation and subject to recall. Otherwise, political apathy will continue unabated and fewer people will vote, as the electorate grows even further apart from their political representatives.

Pete McLaren

Campaign for a New Workers' Party

Direct justice

I feel that your article 'Why we should not call for jailing of Tony Blair' (February 4) gave a simplistic response to those involved with the campaign to have Tony Blair arrested and, quite honestly, it also came across as being flippant in many areas.

Watching Blair rehash the old rhetoric at the Chilcot inquiry was like listening to a scratched record. We had to endure the same old garbage about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, the link to al Qa'eda and the other allegations relating to human rights abuses, which quite frankly reminded me of the Iraqi Communist Party in the 1980s.

The reason why no WMD were found was quite simply because there were none to begin with. Had the left shown a consistency of support for the anti-sanctions movement during the 1990s, they would have known that after the Gulf War, Iraq's purchasing power was put into the hands of the United Nations sanctions committee pursuant to resolution 661, which was based in New York, not Baghdad.

How was Saddam expected to build his arsenal of weapons when the 661 committee prevented items as basic as pencils from entering Iraq, simply because they contained graphite and, in the twisted logic of the US-UK, could "potentially be used for military purposes"? Did those opposed to Saddam fear that he would gas the Kurds with enriched baby powder milk or drop sanitary towels on the Marsh Arabs?

As for the allegations of human rights abuses, one of the main arguments used by those in favour of the occupation was that Saddam owned a human shredding machine that, it was claimed, he threw opponents into. This was even espoused by Blair's human rights envoy to Iraq, Ann Clwyd MP. Just like the government's claims about WMD and links to al Qa'eda, Ms Clwyd has failed to produce any evidence to back up her allegation.

The reliability of claims about the severity of human rights abuses is even more questionable when you consider some of the sources used to back up so-called 'intelligence'. Most notable is that of the leader of the Iraqi National Congress, Ahmed Chalabi, who, before taking up the mantle of being 'against Saddam', had brought down

the Petra Bank in Jordan, having embezzled its funds and being sentenced, *in absentia*, to 22 years' hard labour.

After being given asylum in Britain after the Gulf War, as only the British would to criminals and fraudsters, Chalabi and many of his kind smelled an opportunity and joined the Iraqi opposition, with the financial backing of nearly every intelligence agency in the western world. In 1996, he even went on to become the joint director of the Indict campaign, alongside Ann Clwyd.

Let's also not forget that it was the Kurdish people themselves who burnt down the Halabja monument in 2006, as people in the village were tired of politicians "cynically exploiting" the annual ceremony to those who died in the 1988 gas attack "while doing little to help local people during the rest of the year". Does this sound familiar?

Whilst you simply state that abuses have "continued under the occupation", for the Iraqi people the abuse is far more systematic than these simple words can muster. The mass murder of one million Iraqis, the creation of five million orphans and the destitution of millions of refugees, along with the forced unemployment of millions, under the banner of deBa'athification, is not even worthy of a trial at the Hague, but rather direct justice at the hands of the Iraqi people.

Hussein Al-alak

Iraq Solidarity Campaign

Anti-Semitic?

Mary Rizzo asks for an "online apology" and proof that she has published anti-Semitic posts on her *Palestine Think Tank* blog (Letters, February 4). Visit our site, she says; there is nothing anti-Semitic there.

Is Ms Rizzo denying that she posted Mark Weber's racist rubbish on January 5? It is true the article is no longer there, since she removed it. Has she forgotten that someone called Katzenfreund sent comments to her blog on January 18, pointing out that Weber is a prominent member of a neo-Nazi-organisation.

She replied the same day: "... I did not read the comment, actually, am not that interested ... although others might want to read it. But, seeing as how this indeed serves as fodder for those who want to use it to smear me or others, and those who were interested already saw it and had their fun with it, I will take the content out." But Ms Rizzo still has not explained why despite her 'moderation' she allowed in an article by a well-known neo-Nazi and then kept it up even after I had pointed it out to her well before the comment by Katzenfreund.

This is on a par with a series of similar 'mistakes', including her testimonial to the Radical Free Press website. Or maybe Mary has forgotten that she wrote on the Socialist Unity site: "The Radical Press presents thought-provoking and intelligent information and analysis. It is absolutely *not* anti-Semitic." Shortly after even Mary was forced to admit that the site specialises in such delightful topics as Jewish banking cartels, Jewish media monopoly, the Jewish porn industry and, of course, Jews behind the Bolshevik revolution.

And she saw nothing wrong with Gilad Atzmon's virulently anti-Semitic piece last June entitled 'Tribal Marxism for dummies', when Atzmon explained that "Jewish Marxism is very different from Marxism or socialism in general. While Marxism is a universal paradigm, its Jewish version is very different."

Although this too has now been deleted, it is not because of its anti-Semitism, but because of a falling out over other matters with Atzmon. When Mary Rizzo got over her political infatuation with him and got rid of him as a co-editor of *Palestine Think Tank*, it occurred to me that she might also

have begun to reject his racism and anti-Semitism. No such luck!

Tony Greenstein
email

End detention

Since February 5, we, the residents at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre, have been on a hunger strike involving over 84 women, who are protesting against the period of time spent in detention and the treatment they receive while being detained.

We are demanding the following:

- End the frustrations, the physical and mental torture at the centre.
- Allow enough time and make resources available to residents who need to fully present their cases.
- End all false allegations and misrepresentations by the UK Borders Agency regarding detainees in order to refuse bail or temporary admissions.
- Allow access to appropriate medical treatment and care, as in the community, and access to edible and well-cooked food, phones with good mobile connections, camera and recording facilities to back up cases.
- Stop the forceful removal and degrading system of deportation of detainees.
- Put the law into practice, including European rules governing standard of conditions of detention for migrants and asylum-seekers and the length of time in detention.
- Abolish detention for asylum-seeker and torture victims.
- Detention should be by a standard procedure prescribed by law, authorised by judicial authority and be subjected to periodic judicial reviews.
- End the detention of children and their mothers, rape survivors and other torture victims. End the detention of physically and mentally sick people and pregnant women.
- End the separation of children from their mothers, whether in detention or destitution.
- End the detention of women after serving time in prison.
- Abolish the fast-track system, in order to give asylum-seekers a fair chance with their application, while understanding the particular needs of victims of torture, and access to reliable legal representation which the fast-track system denies.
- End the repeat detention of women granted temporary admission, while reporting or signing after a short period out of detention.
- Set a maximum period of time allowed to detain women, which should be no longer than one month, while waiting a decision either from the UKBA or the courts.

There are alternatives to detention, as laid out by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 'The detention of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants in Europe', adopted on January 28 2010.

Please send messages of solidarity to WomenBehindTheWire@ncadc.org.uk and lobby your MPs, MEP and councillors, demanding our immediate release and an end to arbitrary detention.

Women Behind the Wire

Yarl's Wood IRC

Policy demands

Paul Cockshott writes of the term 'policy', as opposed to 'demand': "If you are an old Attlee or Benn-style social democrat, you are talking of what an elected government will do" (Letters, January 21).

I agree with the usage of 'policy' and especially 'policy alternative', but the additional usage of the word 'demand' serves to minimise any downturn in political support when bourgeois governments 'steal' from more leftwing platforms to secure their hold on power.

Jacob Richter

email

ACTION

Communist Forums

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

February 14: John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'A planetary defeat - the failure of global environmental reform'.

February 21: John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Marx's ecology in historical perspective'.

Thursday March 4, 7.30pm: Discussion, 'Claude Levi-Strauss and the Russian Revolution', venue to be confirmed.

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).

February 16: Chris Knight, 'Aboriginal Australian mythology: songlines, crocodiles and the origins of cooking fire'.

February 23: Chris Knight, 'When two sisters got swallowed by the Rainbow Snake'.

Solidarity with Yarl's Wood hunger strikers

Friday February 12, 2.30pm, Serco offices, 18-22 Hand Court (off High Holborn), London WC1. Organised by London Detainee Solidarity Network. Info: noborderslondon@riseup.net.

Stop prison expansion

Saturday February 13, 4pm: Follow-up strategy meeting, London Action Resource Centre, 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel, London E1. Organised by Communities of Resistance: www.co-re.org/joomla.

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, 11.45am: London South Bank University, London Road, SE1 (Elephant and Castle tube). Sponsored by Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party (international committee), Green Left, Labour Representation Committee.

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.

Right to Work report-backs

Manchester: Monday February 15, 7pm, Methodist Central Church, Oldham Street, M1.

Leeds: Tuesday February 16, 7pm, Swarthmore Centre, 2-7 Woodhouse Square, LS3.

Liverpool: Thursday February 25, 7pm, Institute Room, Friends Meeting House, School Lane, L1. righttoworkconference@gmail.com.

Remembering the past, rethinking the future

Saturday February 27, 12 noon: *Critique* seminar, London School of Economics, Columbia House, room B212, second floor, corner of Aldwych and Houghton Street, London WC2. Speakers: Mick Cox, Hillel Ticktin. Followed by celebrations for publication of issue 50. Organised by *Critique*: critique@eng.gla.ac.uk.

The left in Palestine

Saturday February 27, 9.30am to 6pm, Sunday February 28, 11am to 6pm: Weekend conference, School of Oriental and African Studies, London Brunei Gallery, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Speakers include John Rose, Ilan Pappé, Leila Khaled, Jamil Hilal, Jamal Juma, Moshé Machover, Gilbert Achcar, Muhammad Jaradat. £30 (£20 concessions, £40 organisations), including lunch and refreshments. Seats are limited - book in advance.

Organised by SOAS Palestine Society: www.soaspalsoc.org.

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.

TUSC

Left unity should be a top priority

Tusc poses the necessity of a Marxist party, not a Labour Party mark two, writes **Peter Manson**

The CPGB has written to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, asking to be part of the Tusc general election challenge (see opposite).

We would like to stand three or four candidates in constituencies to be determined in consultation with our coalition partners. The CPGB will finance and take full responsibility for the campaign in those constituencies, although we would not contest anywhere if we were not admitted into Tusc.

Whether or not we are allowed in, we will work to aid the election campaigns of, and give critical support to, Tusc candidates - as we will to the candidates of other leftwing working class groups and in particular to Labour candidates who are prepared to call for an unconditional and immediate withdrawal of all British troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, and who pledge to oppose all cuts in public services and benefits.

Following the withdrawal of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Alliance for Green Socialism, the Socialist Party in England and Wales is the only surviving 'core group' member from the alliance which contested the June 2009 European Union elections, 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy'.

Of course, RMT general secretary Bob Crow remained on board despite the lack of official backing from his union executive (in fact comrade Crow and his leftwing allies on the NEC did not put the question of RMT support for a leftwing general election challenge to the vote, since they knew they would not win). The union will give official national backing to current (mainly Labour) members of the RMT parliamentary group, but the NEC is also prepared to consider applications by local branches for permission to sponsor other candidates. Three RMT regional councils favour a leftwing contest and they could well help influence local branches to apply for such permission. The Carlisle RMT branch has already been given the go-ahead to support a Tusc candidate.

Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity, which backed No2EU, is also part of Tusc and will stand candidates in Scotland, while Dave Hill, a member of Socialist Resistance and the lead No2EU candidate in the South East, is the Tusc candidate in Brighton Kemptown (as a supporting organisation SR may provide other candidates).

Not automatic

However, the largest and most important newcomer is undoubtedly the Socialist Workers Party, which had been in long and difficult negotiations for several months. As Clive Heemskerck of SPEW puts it, "The admission of the SWP to the coalition was not automatic ..." ('Important step towards a new workers' party' *The Socialist* February 3).

He explains: "Tusc is a federal coalition, but each component, its candi-



Bob Crow: Tusc must appeal to the whole of the working class

dates and participating organisations, will be scrutinised, certainly by New Labour opponents inside the trade unions. With this in mind the record of the SWP was questioned.

"Bob Crow, reflecting the response of RMT militants as last year's Lindsey strike unfolded, immediately and rightly condemned those 'misrepresenting the strikers as xenophobic' ... The SWP, on the other hand, criticised the strikes as 'nationalist'.

"The SWP took a similar stance towards No2EU, the electoral body which was supported not just by the union tops, but a big majority of RMT activists. These and other political mistakes by the SWP will not make winning support for Tusc easier inside the RMT, and other unions too."

Comrade Heemskerck pointed out to the February 6 meeting of the Left Unity Liaison Committee that the RMT had donated a total of £68,000 to No2EU and therefore it was understandable, he said, that the RMT left, under pressure from the pro-Labour right, would say: "... and now you want us to endorse candidates who condemned No2EU as nationalist?"

In his February 3 article comrade Heemskerck gives a reason why SPEW itself was not exactly keen on having the SWP on board: "Moreover, there is also suspicion amongst many activists of the methods of the SWP when working in broad coalitions. The SWP rejected a federal approach in the Socialist Alliance, for example, using its weight of numbers to dominate, which compelled the Socialist Party to leave and led to the eventual demise of that organisation in 2003."

Let us leave to one side the reasons behind the SPEW walkout from the SA (there was no "compelled" about

it). It is true that the SWP is renowned for its control-freakery and usually succeeds in alienating many of its 'united front' partners for that reason. But majorities have rights, including the right to vote through the policies and actions they favour, and there is nothing undemocratic about this.

However, while the SWP has now been coopted onto the steering committee ("after assurances that they would accept the federal character of Tusc"), it has only one representative. Apart from the SWP and SPEW reps, the other steering committee members are: Bob Crow and Craig Johnson (RMT NEC); Brian Caton (Prison Officers Association general secretary); Chris Baugh and John McNally (Public and Commercial Services union NEC members), Nina Franklin (National Union of Teachers executive) and Nick Wrack (Respect - presumably with the approval of his party, which is not part of Tusc and is standing three general election candidates of its own).

Of course, comrades Caton, Baugh and McNally are all SPEW members, so there is no danger of the SWP calling the shots on the steering committee. Furthermore, it is to stand a maximum of six Tusc candidates out of the total of 50-plus likely to contest. In fact, it appears from the SWP's internal bulletin that the organisation will put up only five, not six, candidates, as only five constituencies are named: "We intend to stand in the following: Preston - Valerie Wise; Manchester - Karen Reissmann; Sheffield - Maxine Bowler; Cambridge - Tom Woodcock; Tottenham - tbc" (*Party Notes* February 2). While the Tottenham candidate is still to be confirmed, there is no mention at all of a Hackney seat, where the

SWP was also considering standing.

However, despite the SWP's minimal participation - by contrast the Tusc website has already confirmed the candidacies of 14 SPEW members (see www.tusc.org.uk/candidates.php) - comrade Heemskerck still feels obliged to construct a convoluted argument to justify the SWP's inclusion:

"On the other hand, it was argued, the SWP's record will not be known particularly to workers moving into struggle for the first time. They could be attracted to Tusc and would naturally want to see the widest possible unity. It is necessary not to do anything that could be a potential barrier to them. On balance then, it was felt that the potential drawbacks of the SWP's involvement could be overcome."

So, as well as trying to meet the wishes of left union bureaucrats like comrade Crow, SPEW is well aware that there will be a price to pay if it fails to take into account the desire to "see the widest possible unity" - and these factors are no doubt highly relevant for Tusc as it now considers the applications of the CPGB and other left groups to be part of the coalition.

Dishonest

For its part, the SWP breathes not a word of any of this in its own, completely dishonest reporting of Tusc's grudging admission of it into the coalition. According to SWP national secretary Martin Smith, "Tusc has so far drawn support from a number of union officials, the SWP, the Socialist Party ..." ('Tusc left coalition to stand in general election' *Socialist Worker* February 6).

Simon Basketter in the latest *Socialist Worker* talks up the SWP's part in the coalition even more: "... some

on the left, including the Socialist Workers Party, have formed a leftwing coalition to stand candidates". So not only was the SWP among the groups that "formed" the coalition: it is the only Tusc component deemed worthy of a mention in his article ('Who do you vote for?', February 13).

In many ways, it is surprising that the SWP is prepared to contest elections again, so soon after the spectacular failure of its Respect 'electoral united front'. But that is increasingly being blamed on John Rees and the Martin Smith-Alex Callinicos duumvirate are eager to smooth the departure of the whole of his Left Platform. Hence national secretary Martin Smith "acknowledged receipt" of Lindsey German's resignation with barely concealed pleasure.

The SWP is not only split, but is in search of a new strategy. According to comrade Smith, Tusc is "a small but important step in the creation of a new, trade union-backed, socialist coalition that can provide the alternative that people crave". Of course, Respect was specifically *not* a "socialist coalition". In those days people craved a different kind of alternative, obviously.

But how exactly will Tusc begin to "provide the alternative"? Comrade Smith mentions the possibility of it "pulling together a network of activists" bringing together "socialists, trade unionists, anti-war campaigners, students, pensioners, the new migrant communities, and all those who want to resist the cuts and attacks on our class". Also it could "begin the process of uniting the left" and "become a stepping stone towards a stronger and more rooted electoral organisation".

An awful lot of hopes invested in such a modest coalition - and expressed in such vague terms too. Surely the only organisation that could do all those things is a working class party. So does the SWP now favour "uniting the left" in such a party? Or is all this just a series of platitudes? A recent SWP national committee motion, tellingly perhaps, also describes Tusc as "a good investment for the future".

Objectively, however, comrade Smith is correct - despite himself. The *logic* of a coalition uniting the left does indeed point to a working class party. And, since the overwhelming majority of those coming together will not simply be "trade unionists", but in fact members of the existing left groups, the same logic ought to point more precisely to the formation of a party based on the politics they all claim to uphold - one with a revolutionary Marxist programme.

Apart from the CPGB, two other smaller left groups have also applied to join Tusc. Workers Power intends to stand a candidate in the London constituency of Vauxhall, whether or not it is admitted, and similarly the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will contest another London seat, Camberwell and Peckham. Both hope to stand under the Tusc umbrella. If all three groups are accepted, this would further underline the objective logic to-

wards a party based on the regroupment of the left.

Of course, like the SWP, the SPEW comrades do not see things in that way. SPEW is the most consistent advocate of a trade union-based 'broad party' - in effect a Labour Party mark two. While comrade Heemskerck paid lip service to "left regroupment" at the LULC meeting, he contended that Tusc is about "far more than left unity". There is a sense of "pushing forward towards working class representation at long last" and the fact that senior union leaders are involved means that Tusc is "on a higher plane than the Socialist Alliance".

That, of course, is the key element for SPEW. As comrade Heemskerck says in his February 3 article, "...the enthusiastic participation in Tusc in a personal capacity by leading trade unionists - in the RMT and other unions also - is highly significant. It is a clear signal that 'non-political' trade unionism will increasingly be seen as 'not an option' when the axe men are coming."

He writes: "For the Socialist Party the importance of Tusc lies above all in its potential as a catalyst in the trade unions, both in the structures and below, for the idea of working class political representation. It can also play a role in drawing together anti-cuts campaigns, environmental campaigners, anti-racist groups etc. It is,

however, only secondarily a vehicle for developing 'left unity': in other words, of socialist organisations collaborating for specific goals, or 'left regroupment' - the bringing together of different socialist groups into one organisation."

To say that SPEW considers left unity to be 'secondary' is an understatement. The comrades have no conception of us Marxists being able to give a lead to masses of workers in the here and now. Of course, we could only hope to do that if we actually began to proclaim the necessity of constructing the world we say we believe in.

Instead comrade Heemskerck unambiguously looks to the creation of a Labour-type party by sections of the unions in a process driven at first by a tiny minority of trade unionists: "A new mass political vehicle for workers, a new workers' party which could fill the present vacuum, will not necessarily develop through the official structures of the unions. It is certainly unlikely that a majority of the larger unions, at least nationally, would initially embrace a new party - in the same way that the biggest unions remained wedded to the Liberal Party in the early days of the Labour Representation Committee (the forerunner of the Labour Party)." Nevertheless, he sees Tusc as acting as a catalyst

for the creation of such a party.

Class independence

We in the CPGB see things differently. We do not believe there is any real momentum towards the establishment of another Labour Party within the unions, even among the minority of small unions to which comrade Heemskerck is looking. There is no space for a second Labour Party. We agree with comrade Basketter of the SWP that the formation led by Gordon Brown remains a "bourgeois workers' party" capable of being influenced by the union bureaucrats (at the moment they choose not to exert such influence).

In any case the Labour Party was never, and could never be, "a mass political vehicle for workers". A party that throughout its history has been tied body and soul to British imperialism can never truly represent workers' interests. It would be exactly the same if, by a miracle, the whole Labour Representation Committee process were to begin again.

We do need to unite - certainly in order to contest elections. But we should enter into such unity with the clear aim of creating a genuine party of our class - a party that insists on working class independence, thoroughgoing democracy and internationalism, as against the class-collaboration, bureaucratic control and sectionalism of the Labourite union tops ●

Tusc-CPGB correspondence

Tusc to CPGB

February 3 2010

Dear comrades

Thank you for your email expressing interest in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition general election challenge. The coalition steering committee met again recently and asked me to respond to your correspondence.

Our discussions on the election challenge have obviously included the points you raise on how to involve the widest layers of trade unionists alongside supportive socialist organisations and we will return to this matter at future meetings.

In the meantime, to help in these deliberations, it was felt it would be useful to ask organisations such as yourselves for some further information on how you feel you could contribute to the effort to try and present a working class alternative at the election.

Obviously this includes basic information about your organisation, such as how many members does it have. Further, have you got amongst your membership any national executive committee members of trade unions, who would be prepared to publicly declare (in a personal capacity as necessary) in support of a trade union and socialist election coalition challenge?

You may not be able to list the exact information, but again it would be useful to know approximately how many trade union section executive members, regional committee members or union branch officers you have as members who you think would also be prepared to add their names in support of a coalition.

It would also very much help our discussions to have some idea of the record of electoral support your organisation has achieved in the past. Have you already drawn up plans to stand candidates in the general election and, if so, could you tell us the seats that you are considering contesting?

And lastly, we would be interested to know what recommendation did your organisation give, if any, on how to vote in the 2009 European elections, and what your reasoning for your decision was.

Yours comradely
Clive Heemskerck

Socialist Party representative on the Tusc steering committee

CPGB to Tusc

February 10 2010

Comrades

Many thanks for your email of February 3.

Tusc can potentially make a contribution to the fight for principled left unity. This is why we welcome the new organisation, criticisms of its political platform notwithstanding.

The CPGB has a consistent record of fighting to overcome divisions on the left. This is why we have approached the Tusc steering committee to stand three of our comrades under the umbrella of the coalition in the forthcoming general election. This would be a small, but not insignificant, step in the direction of unity on the left, a move that is urgently needed, as our class faces up to the coming onslaught on our rights and conditions.

It is in this context that we would criticise the whole notion of asking groups (all groups, or an awkward few?) to meet a set of implicit quantitative conditions as a precondition of entry. This conveys a certain arrogance: sad to say no left group in Britain has anything approaching mass influence, let alone a mass membership. Organisationally we are all small.

Full membership of the CPGB is not counted in the thousands or the even the hundreds. Nor do we boast of trade union general secretaries or national executive committee members.

Of course, as with most left groups, our membership is exceedingly hard working, dedicated and self-sacrificing. We can certainly raise the money needed to run three or four general election candidates.

However, the main thing the CPGB would bring to Tusc is political *influence*. Our weekly paper is read by thousands of leftwingers in this country and beyond. If the CPGB were to be welcomed into the coalition this would send a tremendously positive message. Not only to the trade union officials but beyond to the entire working class. It would show that Tusc is serious unity initiative and will help build a real momentum.

On the other hand, turning us down on spurious arithmetical grounds would be seen as just another version of the Labour Party's

bans and proscriptions. Entirely the wrong message.

You ask about our record of electoral activity. The electoral record of the CPGB from 1920 until the opportunist liquidation in 1991 is well known. Since we took the name of our Party, our comrades have contested numerous national, local and European elections, starting with four candidates in the April 1992 general election. Overall, our results have been no worse than the standard left, non-Labour vote.

In the June 2009 European elections, the CPGB recommended a vote for any working class candidates prepared to openly commit to some basic principles of genuine internationalism and republican democracy. It was in this spirit that we approached No2EU candidates, despite our openly stated position that the organisation's platform was tainted with left nationalism. We oppose calls for British withdrawal from the European Union and the break-up of Britain. The working class must overcome capitalism on a global scale and towards that end are best be advised to fight for state power throughout the continent of Europe.

At the end of the day, we supported Labour and did not recommend a vote for any No2EU slate. We would have done so, had its lead candidates publicly committed to positions which ought not to be controversial for socialists - for working class unity on a European level; for a militant programme of democracy, not a return to the constitutional arrangements of the UK in 1972; for a practical, fighting unity with migrant workers as our *comrades* and against the poisonous notion of regarding them as simply the fallout of "social dumping".

From our point of view, the political platform of Tusc is more healthy than that of No2EU - an improvement that allows us to recommend an unconditional, though critical, vote for its slate as a whole and to seek to stand our own candidates under its banner.

We hope this has clarified things for you.

With communist greetings

Mark Fischer

On behalf of the Provisional Central Committee, Communist Party of Great Britain

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Oil-slick divisions

International Marxist Tendency has suffered a damaging split. Not a new phenomenon, notes James Turley

At the 2007 Barcelona world school of the International Marxist Tendency - a not in-substantial, relatively speaking, Trotskyist 'international' led primarily by its British section - spirits were as high as the grandiose title of such an event, held in a culturally iconic city (especially on the left), would imply. After days of discussion, apparently involving comrades from more countries than ever before, the IMT's *In Defence of Marxism* website reported that "the general feeling is one of a tendency that is going forward, growing in numbers and sections".¹

Now, however, the comrades have somewhat less to be cheerful about. In the last few weeks a long-running dispute between the IMT leadership and several national sections, overwhelmingly in the Spanish-speaking world, has apparently erupted into a full split, with the rebels calling themselves, with the left's usual lack of lexical originality, the *Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria* (CMR - Revolutionary Marxist Current), also the name of the Venezuelan group.

This follows another recent split, during which the IMT lost almost half its Pakistani section after a dispute with former national assembly member Manzoor Ahmed led to him and his allies leaving the organisation. The IMT did not even acknowledge it had broken with Manzoor for another six months. (Manzoor, for his part, claimed to have taken far more members than acknowledged by the IMT group, whom he accuses of bumping up conference attendance figures by inviting and counting NGO activists in large numbers.)

The Pakistani section was, and remains, by some distance the largest in the IMT, and all the lost sections this time round in all likelihood do not add up arithmetically to the number of departed comrades in Pakistan. Yet among them are those in Spain and Venezuela - both flagship sections, and both larger than the British group, Socialist Appeal.

Ted Grant

The IMT has its roots in the British Militant Tendency, which became in the 1980s the largest Trotskyist formation in Britain. Strongly committed to Labour Party entry - a strategy adopted by Militant earlier than its 1980s rivals, whose principal remnants today are the Mandeliste International Socialist Group, Ken Livingstone's former hired flunkies, Socialist Action, and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - Militant was by far the most successful in Labour entry's history (if you discount the CPGB's record in the 1920s and 30s). At its 1980s peak, Militant had around 5,000 members, three MPs and effective control of Liverpool city council.

This was all a little too much for the Labour right, whose rising star was former Tribune left MP Neil Kinnock. After assuming the party leadership in the wake of the catastrophic 1983 election showing, Kinnock bided his time until a budget crisis in Liverpool - the result of a battle between leftwing councils and the government of Margaret Thatcher, who wanted to bring them to heel - saw Militant issue redundancy notices to thousands of council workers. Seeing his chance, Kinnock moved to purge Militant and other entry groups from Labour's ranks.

His success was not total - by the 1990s, Militant still existed, and by



some counts had only seen 200 members expelled; but its movements were constricted far more severely in the new conditions. The majority - led by Peter Taaffe - initiated an 'open turn', declaring Labour a dead duck and reorganising themselves first as Militant Labour and then as the Socialist Party in England and Wales (SPEW's bureaucratic regime saw it lose whole swathes of its membership in the late 90s, including most of the Liverpool organisation and the Scottish section).

The factional struggle over this move was understandably intense in an organisation which by then had over 30 years' history as an entry group, and had formed its whole ideology and identity around this strategy. The minority leader was Ted Grant, a Trotskyist since the 1930s and the founding leader of Militant. His differences were announced to the wider world, as is the way with bureaucratic left organisations, not in his organisation's public press, but in a letter to *The Guardian* protesting the 'sectarian' drift of Militant's majority. Grant was expelled; his supporters regrouped around the new publication *Socialist Appeal*, founded in 1992, by whose name the group is generally known.

This split was reflected in the international support accumulated over the years - the Committee for a Workers' International had been founded in 1974, and remains one of the largest and widest-spread Trotskyist 'internationalists' to this day. Grant's side became the Committee for a Marxist International and then the IMT.

From the beginning, the IMT was a demographically peculiar group. Its earliest bit of good fortune came with the development of the Pakistan section, known as The Struggle and pur-

suing a course of long-term entry into the Pakistan People's Party, the mass bourgeois party associated with the Bhutto dynasty. Lal Khan, the Struggle's principal leader, had become closely acquainted with Grant ally Alan Woods, and brought his supporters into the IMT in the early 1990s. That meant an organisation dominated by a British section which was by all accounts tiny, yet featuring a several-thousand-strong subordinate group abroad. As time went on, the IMT grew substantially in Spain as well, and Grant and Woods became increasingly reliant on the human and financial resources of the hundreds of Spanish comrades.

Then history delivered unto Grant and Woods a messiah, in the form of a Venezuelan former junior army officer turned populist politician. Since Hugo Chávez's rise to power in that country, the IMT has become the most energetic Marxist cheerleaders of the 'Bolivarian revolution'. Unsurprisingly, as an increasingly popular Chávez cemented his power, a sympathising section of the IMT grew in strength and influence. Unsurprisingly also, it too soon outstripped the mothership in these terms. And, given the centrality of *Chávismo* to IMT propaganda, all comrades' eyes have been on Venezuela.

The split

Losing Spain and Venezuela, then, is an unmitigated disaster for Woods. Exactly how he managed to lose them is a rather more obscure matter. Numerous candidates for the political basis have been advanced - it was suggested, for example, that the rebels no longer believed China to be a 'deformed workers state', as per orthodox post-Trotsky Trotskyist dogma, but IMT comrades have hotly denied

that this was the splitting issue; the debate over China, such as it has surfaced publicly, does not apparently coincide with the organisational pattern of the split.

Other rumours suggested that the IMT's dedication to entry into what it calls the mass parties of the working class (and, in Pakistan, of the popular masses) was in question. This looks a more likely candidate, with a particular leadership document referred to widely on internet discussions criticising the Spaniards for being insufficiently energetic in pursuing "the need for organised entry work in the Spanish Communist Party; a better approach to the left leaders; mistakes made in organising the Spanish students strike last March, and in the approach to the one-day work stoppage in May in the Basque country." This paraphrase comes from a perceptive statement issued by former IMT comrades in America, centred on an e-list called *Learning from our Past*, a couple of weeks before the split was finalised.²

There is also the case of a statement, Venezuelan in origin, on the struggles in Iran. The IMT website apparently refused to publish it - I have not seen a translated version yet, but its title, 'Marxists must stand firm against Ahmadinejad', says it all.³ The IMT, it has to be said, came out with if anything too rosy an estimation of the protest movement that emerged last year in Iran - but one Hugo Chávez certainly did not, immediately congratulating Ahmadinejad on his victory in patently rigged elections. It was always unclear how Woods would square this circle - now, it seems, he has done it to the detriment of the Iranian masses. The IMT section in Iran, meanwhile, has not come out on either side - it is the only remaining IMT group linked on the CMR's website.

The real cause of the unrest, however, is different - as the statement from *Learning from our Past* makes clear. It is obvious, furthermore, that the CMR, like the IMT leadership, remains for the time being committed to both *Chávismo* and entryism - the political differences are those of nuance.⁴

In reality, the whole thing appears to be almost completely apolitical - the Spanish and Venezuelan sections have complained of persistent interference in their affairs by the international majority. This unrest reached its peak last year, when the international majority's supporting faction in Spain came into fierce conflict with the local leadership, getting accused of breaking the organisation's rules. Many comrades were expelled, although a split was averted at that point. A million tiny complaints and sallies from each side later, we can only conclude that the contradiction between the IMT's demographics and its structures has finally ruptured, with the Spanish and Venezuelan comrades finally rejecting their 'junior partner' status.

And why not? They are, after all, bigger - they are more powerful in their own countries, and provide both foot soldiers and prestige to even the runts of the IMT litter. It is patently ridiculous that in a supposedly 'democratic' organisation numerically and politically more significant sections are under orders from people who have effectively gerrymandered them out of their share of leadership representation. Trotskyist leader James P Cannon once quipped

that in any split there were two causes - the good reason and the real reason. This time around, the good reason is the real reason.

Furthermore, the IMT, despite its surreal, pre-Marxist fawning before petty bourgeois nationalist leaders in Latin America, is the most rhetorically urgent claimant to the mantle of Trotskyist orthodoxy on today's left (excluding the likes of the Spartacist League). The web address of *In Defence of Marxism* is www.marxist.com - naturally. This orthodoxy has had, it has to be said, the positive side effect that the IMT's politics - however wrong - are not philistine: dogmatists at least take their dogma seriously. Its main function, however, is to consecrate a 'Marxist' priesthood whose mandate comes from the Word and, thus, cannot be challenged by the earthly powers of the rank and file. The *Learning from our Past* comrades note an increasingly reverential cult of personality developing around Grant, who died in 2006. It is here, as everywhere else, an alibi for bureaucratic control. It was the entirely dogmatic attachment to entry work - applied in all IMT sections - which caused the problem in the first place when, predictably, this strategy produced vastly varying results in a complicated world.

In its fatal lopsidedness, the IMT poses in a peculiarly sharp way the problems of this style of 'international'-building. We have called this type of grouping an 'oil-slick international' in the past, and indeed the IMT has spread outwards from London over the world. An oil slick, furthermore, can stretch out until it is only a single molecule thick, and the IMT indeed has a particularly large swathe of tiny sections from Canada to Iran. Building organisations in a way that pays no attention to local conditions of necessity produces this unevenness - it just happens that, this time, the strategy was politically bankrupt at the centre and intermittently successful on the periphery. The oil spreads out not from London any more, but Barcelona.

International organisation is a burning necessity for our class. It is so important that it has to be done properly, on a sound basis - effective international unity grows out of serious national political organisations, bringing serious forces together. None of this can be done by opening 'foreign bureaus' in sundry states around the world - parasitic from the beginning on pretty ramshackle foreign support, these groups almost invariably fail to take off in any real sense.

The split in the IMT is an unorthodox take on a tale we have, depressingly, told many times in this paper - bungled unity, bureaucratic manoeuvring and a whole lot of hot air. It appears, at least, that some ex-IMTers are learning from their past on this one. Let us quote them again: "There is a natural inclination to look for fundamental differences in political principle behind such splits. Yet the question of democracy is itself a supremely political question." ●

Notes

1. www.marxist.com/2007-world-school-international-marxist-tendency.htm.
2. <http://weknowwhatup.blogspot.com/2010/01/comments-on-current-crisis-in.html>.
3. elmilitantevenezuela.org/content/view/6659/179.
4. For these rumours and others, see the perennial Leftist Trainspotters e-list: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/leftist_trainspotters.

GERMANY

Left in Die Linke loses its Bonaparte

The resignation of Oskar Lafontaine is a serious blow to the German left party. **Tina Becker reports**

Since Die Linke shook the German political scene by achieving a tremendous 11.9% in the national election of September 2009 (leading to the election of 76 of its members to parliament), it has been followed keenly by the German media. And in the last few months the party has provided them with plenty of ammunition.

The particular story currently occupying the minds of the bourgeois media started just after the elections, when Oskar Lafontaine announced that he did not want to continue as leader of Die Linke's parliamentary fraction (in addition to being the national co-chair of the party and its leader in the federal state of Saarland - both positions he wanted to retain at that time).

Because he did not give any reason for wanting to step down, rumours were rife: the media branded him the "eternal resigner", who had again 'betrayed' the voters. After all, didn't he quit in 1999 after two years as Germany's finance minister? And didn't he at the same time resign his parliamentary seat and the chairmanship of the Social Democratic Party? The fact that this was preceded by a battle with then chancellor Gerhard Schröder over the introduction of a package of very unpopular, neoliberal measures known as *Agenda 2010*, apparently slipped the minds of the commentariat.

Then, in November, the news magazine *Focus* 'broke' the story (which was further expanded upon by the weekly *Der Spiegel*) that Lafontaine was having an affair with Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the Stalinite *Kommunistische Plattform* of Die Linke. His wife was apparently so furious that she demanded his immediate return to the Saarland, to which he agreed, according to the reports. But the day after publication of the article, Lafontaine finally broke his silence and explained that in fact he was actually suffering from prostrate cancer and needed an operation.

Then, while he was recuperating, Die Linke national secretary Dietmar Bartsch was 'outed' as having told *Der Spiegel* that Lafontaine was already thinking about resigning back in February 2009 - ie, before his cancer scare. A storm broke out in the party, most likely fuelled by the furious Lafontaine himself. Almost all regional party structures in the west of Germany sent protest letters to the party leadership (usefully copying in magazines like *Der Spiegel*), branding Bartsch disloyal and a burden to the party. Party members in the east of the country, however, vehemently defended Bartsch.

Although born in the west, Dietmar Bartsch is one of the few Germans who have moved to the east, rather than the other way around. Politically, he is very close to the east German *Realpolitiker* of the party. They are actively pursuing red-red government coalitions with the Social Democrats everywhere and on every level possible, to prove how 'responsible' Die Linke has become. A national red-red government coalition with the SPD at the next general election has been the openly expressed aim of many people in that wing of the party.

With the media gleefully reporting every twist and turn of the confrontation, Gregor Gysi, the 'wise old man' of Die Linke and with Lafontaine co-chair of the party, had to make a choice. And he decided to go with Lafontaine. While in the east, the vote for Die Linke (and its predecessor, the

Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) has remained stable at around 25%-30% for the last 10 years, Lafontaine's popularity in the west of the country has played a crucial part in securing the massive increase in the party's vote there.

In the west, the PDS was for a long time seen as not much more than just another loony fringe group. All that changed when in 2005 Lafontaine joined the newly emerging organisation, the WASG (Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit), which was made up of disappointed left social democrats and union officials. Without Lafontaine, it would have remained a small fringe group, like so many others. With Lafontaine at the helm, the PDS and the WASG merged in 2005, opening the way to the party's electoral success.

Clearly, Lafontaine had become indispensable for Die Linke. Gysi used a packed press conference at a party meeting in early January to announce that Bartsch - for many years one of his most loyal right-hand men - had acted "disloyally" and had ceased to enjoy the support of the leadership. Bartsch, deeply hurt, announced that he would not run for the post of party secretary again at the next congress in May. Gysi hoped that this was enough to convince Lafontaine to stay.

So Lafontaine had 'won'. But after a few days, he announced that because of his ill health, he would also resign his parliamentary seat and the party's chairmanship. He will continue to do some limited work for the party regionally, but he has departed from the national stage for now.

Left versus right

So what is really behind the confrontation? And what will the impact of Lafontaine's departure be? Much of the bourgeois media talked of a "deep personal dislike" between Bartsch and Lafontaine. This might be so, but it is hardly the point. Both are seasoned politicians who can rise above

such things.

Their fight is certainly over political outlook. The confrontation between them has been billed as a fight between the left and the right of the party and there is a certain amount of truth in that. But it is not the whole truth.

As one of the main spokespersons for the 'respectable' right wing, Bartsch has vigorously promoted the 'red-red' coalitions of Die Linke and the SPD in Berlin and the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where Die Linke has been in government for many years and where there have been draconian cuts and closures. But how could it be any different? As a minority in a bourgeois government, Die Linke is forced to manage capitalism, which especially in this period means cuts, cuts and cuts again. Subsequently, it lost a lot of support in those areas.

And now, after last year's general election, it also governs in the east German state of Brandenburg. Lafontaine has spoken out against the government contract that was drawn up between the SPD and Die Linke, which openly promised to drastically reduce "expenses in the public sector" - ie, make deep cuts in social provisions and sack hundreds of employees.

Lafontaine has definitely moved to the left since leaving the SPD. Of course, he is no revolutionary. But he

is certainly to the left of those power-hungry elements in the east. His are the typical Keynesian politics of the social democrats who have turned their backs on the right-marching SPD. Like many trade unionists and traditional SPD supporters, he believes in some kind of nationally restricted social welfare state. Back to the 1970s. That puts him on the left of German politics, although not so much in Die Linke, of course.

He was never against taking the party into ruling coalitions - quite the opposite. But he and his supporters kept formulating 'principles' or 'conditions' which would have to be met before they would agree to government participation. Putting conditions is generally not a bad tactic. However, as a *minority* in a capitalist government, Die Linke would always be forced to take responsibility for attacks on the working class. That is in the nature of the system.

The left rudderless

Because he is rather charismatic and enjoys a high level of popularity in the country, Lafontaine was adopted by the left within Die Linke as their own little Bonaparte. Especially by the *Kommunistische Plattform*, which dominates the party's *Antikapitalistische Linke* grouping, and the German section of the Socialist Workers Party, now grouped around the magazine *Marx21* and the *Sozialistische Linke* platform. Smelling breakthrough and the big time, they mostly kept their mouths shut, supporting Lafontaine almost uncritically.

Lafontaine had held on to his post long enough to force the party leadership to make a move against the *Realpolitik* of Bartsch and co. But it was nothing more than a *symbolic* move. It does not mean that 'the left' in the party has won. Quite the contrary. It has been left rudderless, because it gave Lafontaine so much leeway.

In a rather undemocratic procedure smacking of

its Stalinist heritage, the current party leadership tried to defuse the situation by publicly announcing its suggestions for the next leadership - four months before the membership will actually have a chance to vote on it at the party's May conference. Not surprisingly, most can be counted on the right of the party. There might be opposition to the leadership-in-waiting in May, but, having concentrated so much on Lafontaine, the left now has no serious contender to fall in behind.

In fact, Klaus Ernst, designated new co-chairman and previously a trade union official in IG Metall, is not only on the right: he has made himself a name in the party by being particularly bureaucratic and 'against the sectarians' - ie, against the left. For example, he has been leading the campaign to exclude members of *Sozialistische Alternative (SAV)*, the German section of the Committee for a Workers' International (run by Peter Taaffe and co in London). Of course, the CWI behaved stupidly in the past by forming organisations that stood against Die Linke in Berlin elections, thereby providing bureaucrats like Ernst with an open goal. When the CWI rival came to nothing, it tried to sneak back into the party, but was firmly and very publicly rebuffed. The Taaffeites made themselves look completely unprincipled when they tried to force their way back in via the bourgeois courts.

In an attempt to incorporate the left, Sarah Wagenknecht has been promoted to vice-chair designate. But she is a bit on the eccentric side, to put it mildly. She still defends the building of the Berlin wall as a "necessity" and continues to praise the "many good things" that existed in the German Democratic Republic. She can be useful in public debates and TV shows, because she can memorise tons of facts. But she has zero charisma. She is not going to be able to unite the left within Die Linke.

While Lafontaine's Keynesian programme should have been challenged more by the left, he certainly brought it closer together. He kept the lid on the pressure cooker. Hopefully, the left will now stop playing 'follow my leader' and finally start to formulate its own, independent working class programme around which to fight within Die Linke. The time is ideal for such a move, with the party about to start a debate precisely over programme. It still does not have one in fact - only various sets of 'programmatic points' and election platforms.

Die Linke's body politic is currently held together by a very thin skin. Is it fighting for socialism? If so, what is socialism? Was East Germany a socialist country? These are only some of the questions that have been bubbling under for many years.

The left could galvanise, I would guess, around 30-40% of the membership if it drew up a joint platform, which must include a clear commitment to oppose participation in all capitalist governments. Die Linke must concentrate on becoming the main opposition party - especially now that the SPD has been gradually moving to the left and could end up with similar wishy-washy positions. That would create a strong pull on Die Linke and the possibility of a good section of its voter base being sucked back towards the SPD.

Two social democratic parties in Germany is - at least - one too many ●



Oskar Lafontaine: resignation

IRAN

Left Platform lines up with Moussavi

The Reesites no longer peddle the line that Iran is a democratic country. But despite Lindsey German's resignation from the SWP, their support for the 'green movement', including the butcher Moussavi, shows that the comrades still have not learned what principled international solidarity is, says **Tina Becker**

On February 3 Campaign Iran organised a meeting in London to discuss 'Iran: what lies ahead? The movement, sanctions and the west'. The meeting was attended by about 60 people, many of them Iranians.

There were no profound differences in the initial contributions from the three platform speakers - professor of Iranian history Ali Ansari, university lecturer Ali Fathollah-Nejad and Lindsey German officially representing the Stop the War Coalition and at the time still a member of the Socialist Workers Party. After being instructed not to go to a Newcastle Stop the war meeting she quit the SWP "after 37 years" on February 10.

All three speakers agreed that sanctions, as well as any military measures against Iran, should be opposed. However, after a small group of very vocal Iranians in the audience put forward the view that "We have to support sanctions - we can't just sit around and do nothing", professor Ansari actually changed his mind in his closing remarks. "What if there is a massacre in Tehran? What if Moussavi calls for sanctions? Do we just say no? This is a difficult decision and we cannot simply stick with dogma."

It is typical of the Reesites to invite platform speakers who are politically on their right. It allows them to pose as the left. Lindsey German and her comrades had no trouble delivering the main arguments as to why socialists should oppose sanctions against Iran. In fact, SWP dissident Dominic Kavakeb actually repeated the earlier contribution of Ben Lewis (CPGB) almost word for word, when he stated: "The last thing the people on the streets of Tehran need is sanctions. The last thing they need is to worry about day-to-day survival when they're engaged in a fight with the regime." Not insignificantly his blog links with John Molyneux, Alex Snowden (Luna 17) and Clair Solomon (Solomon's Mindfield).

Comrade German was also very keen to show her support for the people on the streets of Tehran - contradicting, of course, what the SWP central committee has consistently stated until recently. She said that the Stop the War Coalition had not taken a position on the movement, but "I personally think people have a right to democratic protest. Our principle should be to be in solidarity with people who are facing serious repression. We should support the movement - that's my personal position." This has "practical ramifications for us today", as Tony Blair "referred to Iran 58 times" in his appearance at the Chilcot inquiry. This, linked to Barack Obama's recent announcement about the need for an anti-missile shield in Europe against the "emergent threat from Iran", meant "we are now closer to war than we were a few years ago".

A number of important points need to be made in response to this initial contribution of comrade German.

● Firstly, it is high time that the Stop the War Coalition *did* adopt an official position on such matters. It is not as if Lindsey and her comrades could not do anything about that - after all, the STWC is staffed by prominent Left Platform members and they previously allowed the STWC to act as an apologist for the Tehran regime and gave free rein to those who believe that president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is an "anti-imperialist" who should be supported. In the Campaign Iran meeting, incidentally, SWP Left Platform members said that Ahmadinejad was not an anti-imperialist. But in the STWC, they still promote a 'no comment' policy on such dictators and their anti-working class politics.

● In reality, of course, the steering committee of the STWC *did* take a position - namely, by refusing to let Hands Off the People of Iran affiliate. A decision that was backed up by the last two STWC annual conferences on the grounds that Hopi's policy of opposition to both imperialism and the theocracy was "divisive". But following last year's upsurge in Iran, with millions demonstrating against the regime, suddenly the Reesites have no problem with such 'divisiveness'. Comrade Kavakeb actually warned against the "false dichotomy" that "to support the regime is to be anti-western and to oppose the regime is to support the west". Of course, until recently, this is exactly the argument used against Hopi.

● It is to be welcomed that Left Platform members have finally recognised that there is "serious repression" in Iran. We should remember though that only just over a year ago, Campaign Iran speakers were still arguing that Iran was a democratic state - or at least, in the unforgettable words of Left Platform member Somaye Zadeh, was not a "repressive and undemocratic country" (see right).

● It is also to be welcomed that comrade German has discovered the "principle" of "solidarity" with people who are facing such repression. In the past, our calls for principled, active solidarity with the *people of Iran* were rebuffed, voted down and ridiculed. We were told not to interfere in Iranian politics and that we should not "tell the Iranian people what to do". In reality, the only solidarity that the STWC and the SWP were giving was solidarity with the *theocratic regime*, with Ahmadinejad and supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

So now there is a sea change. Or is there? What kind of solidarity does comrade German propose, and with whom?

We should be clear that the repression in Iran has not *qualitatively* changed in recent years (though, of

course, with the increase in the movement's radicalism, existing repressive measures have been stepped up). Thousands of people have been fighting for more democracy for *many years*. Hundreds of activists within the most radical women's, workers' and students' organisations have been harassed, beaten, brutalised, jailed and killed. And not just since the rigged elections of June 2009.

But this is obviously not the kind of movement that the Left Platform wants to be in solidarity with. In fact, arriving at the February 3 meeting, we were castigated by comrade Kavakeb for Hopi's "sectarian position" towards "the green movement". In other words, for our attempt to actively support, raise funds and promote the most radical elements - the 'red' aspect of the multi-coloured melange of the protest movement. Those who have no illusions in Mir-Hossein Moussavi and other 'reformists' (all of whom are united in their effort to retain the theocracy).

In my contribution I reminded the meeting of the early 1980s, when - under the watch of Moussavi, who was then prime minister - thousands

of communists and leftwing opponents of the regime were jailed, killed or exiled. Still, comrade German refused to differentiate between different elements in the anti-Ahmadinejad movement or to say a single critical word about Moussavi. "The question is not, 'Do you support this or that part of the movement?'," she said. "People who see themselves in the tradition of Karl Marx should know that."

Marx considered himself the "extreme left wing" of the democracy movement of 1848, she correctly said. But she went on to falsely imply that he saw his role as uncritically supporting that movement. She also did not mention that back then the bourgeoisie was not the ruling class, as it is in Iran today, and that Marx was supporting the democracy in its fight against the remnants of feudalism. Later, he and Engels were very critical of the capitulation of the German bourgeoisie to the Junker class and the selling short of the movement for democracy.

Similarly, the poverty of the German line will undoubtedly be brought out to the full in the very near future. The

divisions in the green movement are bound to get a lot deeper very soon. In early January, Moussavi published his 'Five suggestions for reconciliation', in which he basically accepts the government of Ahmadinejad. And only last week, the 'reformist' cleric, Mehdi Karroubi, declared Ahmadinejad the rightful "leader of the government", to the dismay even of his own supporters.

While the 'leaders' of the green movement prioritise the defence of the Islamic Republic (while hoping to secure positions of power for themselves in the process), the people on the ground are likely to become ever more radicalised. Even the BBC reports that recent demonstrations have been dominated by calls to overthrow the *whole* regime - ie, the theocracy itself, which, of course, includes Moussavi and Karroubi.

So, while the Reesites have 'adjusted' their line in response to the mass movement on the streets of Iran, they have yet to draw the correct conclusions about the need for international solidarity, let alone consistent and principled anti-imperialism ●

A reminder

The disgraceful role of Campaign Iran

In 2005, the SWP joined forces with Casmii (Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran) to form Campaign Iran. Casmii's leading figure, Abbas Edalat, was used by the SWP to argue against Hands Off the People of Iran's policy of opposing both imperialism's war plans and the theocratic regime of Iran.

In various meetings organised by Campaign Iran, he assured the audience that there are "no forces in Iran who are fighting both against the threat of an imperialist intervention *and* the regime" (*Weekly Worker* April 26 2007). Arguing (successfully) against Hands Off the People of Iran's affiliation to the Stop the War Coalition in 2007, he told the STWC conference that you cannot condemn any move to invade Iran if you also tell "ordinary member of the public" that it is headed by a "vicious, repressive regime", as this would only "confuse" workers who were "already confused by the massive demonisation of Iran" (*Weekly Worker* November 1 2007).

He said Hopi should not be allowed to affiliate because its politics of opposition both to war *and* the regime was "divisive". A line that was then repeated by SWP members, not least those now sup-

porting the Left Platform - for example, when SWP delegates tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent the Public and Commercial Services union from affiliating to Hopi (see *Weekly Worker* May 29 2008).

Also speaking at the 2007 STWC conference was Somaye Zadeh, a member of the Left Platform and a steward at last week's Campaign Iran meeting in London. In October 2007, she moved the main motion on Iran, which was adopted at conference - clearly in response to Hands Off the People of Iran's motion for affiliation.

In her unforgettable speech, she outlined the "five lies" that were being spread against Iran, including "lie number five: Iran is a repressive and undemocratic country".

Yes, she said, "there are restrictions on who can stand in elections", but "both the current president [Ahmadinejad] and his predecessor Khatami were voted in with overwhelming popular support."

Yes, Ahmadinejad does not like homosexuals much, but "Iran does allow sex changes and in fact the average number of sex changes in Iran is seven times that in the whole of Europe".

Yes, "there are restrictions" against women, but "the literacy rate amongst women is 98%. And 64% of university students are women ... Iran has the

only squad of female firefighters anywhere in the Middle East. It has had a female champion race car driver."

Her extraordinary contribution, which was featured on the STWC's website until very recently, is still available on YouTube¹ and the *Weekly Worker* published the extracts of her outrageous speech.²

About a year ago, the SWP's central committee fell out with Abbas Edalat. Since then, there have been two Campaign Irans: the Left Platform's lot (campaigniran.wordpress.com) and Edalat's group, which also trades under the name of Casmii (www.campaigniran.org). For a taste of the latter's politics, go to its website, where you will find prominently featured on the home page an article entitled 'Analysis of multiple polls finds little evidence Iranian public sees government as illegitimate'.

At least those reactionaries stayed true to their line. The SWP, as so often, quietly changed its tune without ever justifying it or explaining why ●

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Hq5hKzx600.
2. *Weekly Worker* November 1 2007..

SUICIDE

Right to a dignified life - right to a dignified death

The comfort and self-respect of the incurably ill and the dying must be ensured, writes **Eddie Ford**

Terry Pratchett's February 1 TV Dimpleby lecture calling for "euthanasia tribunals" attracted 2.1 million viewers - some 15% of the total share - and drew more viewers than any other programme shown in the same BBC 1 time slot, not to mention pulling the biggest ever TV audience for that august annual event.

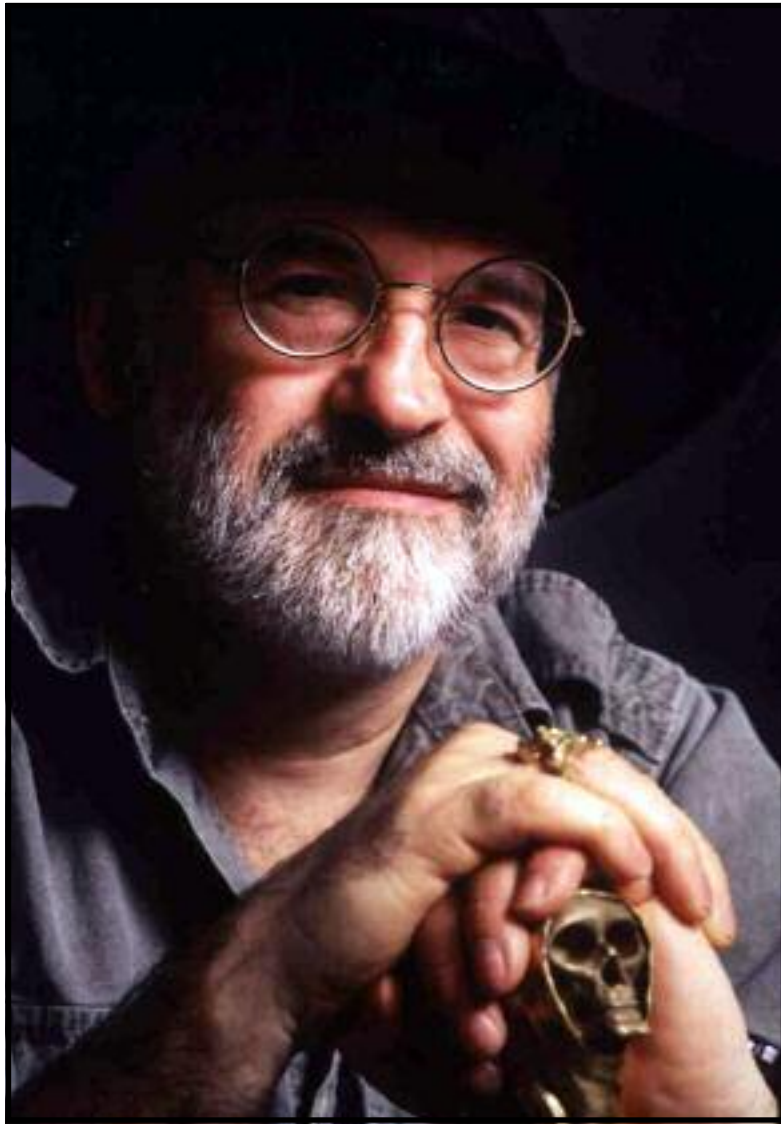
His 45-minute talk, entitled 'Shaking hands with death' - brilliantly read by the actor, Tony Robinson - sparked off a nationwide debate on 'assisted suicide' and such like. This topic has already featured heavily in the media following recent high-profile cases involving the 'mercy killing' of individuals with incurable, terminal or helplessly debilitating illnesses.

So we had the tragic incidences of Bridget Gilderdale and Frances Inglis. The latter injected her brain-damaged son - who could only communicate (possibly) by blinking and had to be fed through a tube in his stomach - with a lethal dose of heroin to release him from the "living hell" of his vegetative state: she was given a minimum of nine years in jail provoking cries of "Shame!" from her supportive relatives and friends in the public gallery. Gilderdale, on the other hand, was acquitted of attempted murder and given a 12-month conditional discharge after helping her daughter, Lynn, to end her life with a morphine overdose. In her online diary, Lynn wrote that she no longer wanted to "keep hanging on for that ever diminishing, non-existent hope that one day I will be well again" - and even though "[anti-depressant] drugs have stopped me from crying all the time", this "hasn't stopped me from my desire not be on this planet any more".¹

Pratchett is, of course, the phenomenally successful author of comic fantasy novels, particularly the Discworld series - set in a flat world (or slightly convex disc, to be more accurate) balanced on the backs of four elephants which, in turn, stand on the back of a giant turtle named Great A'Tuin, which swims slowly through space. So far 37 Discworld novels have been published and in total his books have sold more than 65 million copies, having being translated into 37 languages - making him into some sort of cultural icon. Pratchett also became the first ever novelist to deliver a Dimpleby lecture, normally reserved for the great and the good - bastions of the establishment - like prince Charles, dame Stella Rimington, Dr Rowan Williams, Bill Clinton, and so on.

Perhaps more to the point, Pratchett suffers from Alzheimer's disease - so in December 2007 he was diagnosed to have a very rare form of this so far incurable condition, called posterior cortical atrophy, in which areas at the back of the brain begin to shrivel. Not long after, in an article published in mid-2009, Pratchett expressed a desire to commit 'assisted suicide' - or 'assisted death', as he prefers to call it - before his disease progresses to a critical point. In February 2009 Pratchett made a two-part programme for the BBC entitled, *Living with Alzheimer's* - which attracted 4.3 million viewers.

In his BBC lecture from the Royal



Terry Pratchett: good life

College of Physicians in London, Pratchett said his proposed tribunal would be acting for the "good of society", as well as that of the applicant - allowing people to end their lives "at a time of their choosing". Of course, continued Pratchett, the tribunal would "ensure" that anyone before them was of "sound and informed mind", "firm of purpose", suffered from a "life-threatening and incurable disease" and not "under the influence of a third party. Furthermore, and crucially, the tribunal would also offer "protection to the medical profession" and he suggested that many GPs would come out in support of the "right to die" if they knew they were legally protected.

For Pratchett, "we should aim for a good and rich life" - one that is "well lived" - and at the end of it, to pass away in the "comfort of our own home" and in the "company of those who love us": to have a "death worth dying for". At the end of his lecture, in summary, the author hoped that he would "die peacefully with Thomas Tallis on my iPod before the disease takes me over" and declared: "If I knew that I could die at any time I wanted, then suddenly every day would be as precious as a million pounds. If I knew that I could die, I would live. My life, my death, my choice."²

As part of his campaign to legalise euthanasia, the author has championed the case of Debbie Purdy - who suffers from multiple sclerosis and publicly mounted a challenge to the

currently incapable of committing suicide for him or herself enlists the aid of an outside party in performing such an act, that party may be charged with conspiracy. This necessarily creates an illogical situation, where the act itself is not illegal, but assisting it most certainly is - which effectively means that in practice the 1961 act changed nothing for those incapable of ending their own lives unaided.

In the case of Debbie Purdy, she 'officially' asked the courts whether her husband would face prosecution and hence a possible 14-year jail sentence if he helped her travel to the now famous Dignitas clinic in Zurich. This is a fully legal institution that helps people with severe physical and terminal illness to die in relative peace and comfort, so long as they are deemed to be of "sound judgement" and fulfil the specifications and strictures required by the federal supreme court of Switzerland. As yet, no family member of the 92 Britons who have gone abroad for an assisted suicide has been prosecuted - but some have been charged and have had to wait for months before hearing the prosecution has been withdrawn.

Naturally, Purdy does not want her husband to go through such gruelling psychological and emotional torture. Indeed, her counsel argued the director of public prosecutions was "infringing on her human rights" by failing to clarify how the 1961 Suicide Act might or might not be enforced in this example. And in September 2009 the law lords finally ruled that the director of public prosecutions *must* issue Purdy with "guidance" - that is, she had the "right to know" if her husband would be prosecuted if he helped her to travel to Zurich to commit suicide. Accordingly, the UK government is due this spring to publish these guidelines on the law surrounding assisted suicide.

Immediately prior to Pratchett's Dimpleby lecture, in a "pure coincidence" according to the BBC, there was an edition of its 'flagship' current affairs programme, *Panorama*, which also debated the issue of 'assisted suicide'. The show featured a poll conducted by ComRes, which surveyed 1,010 adults by telephone between January 8-10 - with the data being "weighted" so as to be "representative demographically" of all the UK's adults. It was discovered that 73% said yes to the question - "Should a family member or close friend be allowed by law to help them end their life without fear of prosecution?"

Similarly, when asked if they thought a "medical professional" should be legally allowed to help patients end their lives, 74% of people replied in the affirmative. But when questioned about helping a person to die who is suffering from an "incurable and painful illness or condition from which they will *not* die", then 49% opposed such an intervention.⁴ Furthermore, a recent *Daily Telegraph* poll revealed that four out of five people believe relatives should be allowed to help terminally ill loved ones end their own lives - while three quarters of those polled by YouGov said the law should be amended to allow assisted suicide.

Clearly then, majority public opinion is firmly against the current suicide laws in this country. In fact, you can say with reasonable confidence that most people are positively *for* 'assisted suicide' - that is, support the 'right to die'. We in the CPGB fully share this healthy, pro-human sentiment, having absolutely no *moral* objections or problems with suicide: with someone wanting to end their life, especially if they have been subjected to a long and cruel process of humiliating - maybe even dehumanising - physical and mental suffering.

Obviously, this is not "Nazism" - as often stupidly, and hysterically, claimed by many 'pro-lifers' and religious fanatics. Rather, it is a recognition that the *quality* of life - dignity - is just as important as its quantity, or duration. Everyone should have the greatest possible degree of conscious choice when it comes to the manner of their dying, as Terry Pratchett correctly says, just as they should have control over their own life process. Unavoidably, in some highly stressful circumstances this might mean allowing spouses and/or doctors to make that choice on their behalf - like with Terri Schiavo in Florida who was diagnosed as being in a persistent vegetative state for several years and who became a grotesque *cause célèbre* for the parasitical Christian right, eventually dying in 2005 after the local court ordered her to be disconnected her from the life support system.⁵

Unlike moralists like George Galloway and the catholic church, we support voluntary euthanasia, or the 'right to die'. As our draft programme insists, "The comfort and dignity of the dying must be ensured at all times. Euthanasia and disposal of the body after death should be carried out according to the wishes of the individual" - though it should be noted that this 'immediate demand' appears under the 'Pensioners and the elderly' heading, when obviously it is a general demand, applicable to all, old or otherwise.

Communists therefore concur with the demands of Dignity in Dying, formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, which are: "Our vision is for everyone to be guaranteed choice and dignity at the end of their life, to help take away the fear of the process of dying. Palliative care and medical treatment should be patient-led and include a legal right to maximum pain control, to help ease suffering. We want end-of-life decision-making to be open and honest, and firmly under the control of the patient. We want people with terminal illnesses to be able to ask for medical help to die within proper legal safeguards, to remove the conditions which give rise to unchecked euthanasia and 'mercy killings'.⁷⁶

In short, communists support the right to choose when and how one's life ends ●

Notes

1. *The Mirror* January 27.
2. *The Guardian* February 2.
3. www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx?activeTextDocId=1132509.
4. http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_8487000/8487768.stm.
5. See *Weekly Worker* March 31 2005.
6. www.dignityindying.org.uk.

STUDENTS

Motherhood and apple pie

Laurie McCauley reports on last Saturday's surprisingly positive conference of leftwing student activists



Student politics: war and imperialism must not be left out in the cold

Over 100 student activists gathered on Saturday February 6 for the Convention Against Cuts and Fees. Hosted by University College London Students for Free Education and given the green light by both the Socialist Workers Party's and Alliance for Workers' Liberty's student fronts, the convention was the first time the left has had such a get-together since the student coordination organised by Workers Power last April, which saw a similar number of activists gather.¹

As well as the AWL and SWP, WP's youth group, Revolution, Communist Students and a fair number of independent activists were present. It was good to see more than the 'usual suspects' - ie, the student sections of the far left - but the new faces from last year had mostly vanished. Despite talk of the need for unity, the left's sectarianism prevented the coordination cohering anything in organisational terms, meaning that this year's event was starting from scratch again.

Given that, the turnout was quite surprising. Clearly campus campaigns over funding and course cuts had brought people along, just as the wave of occupations over the Gaza invasion last year made the student coordination possible. The left wasted that opportunity to organise and further politicise student activists, and CS members were expecting the same again: the groups were likely to fish for a few green recruits but oppose any talk of organisational unity. We were to be pleasantly surprised in this regard, as the first speaker in the opening plenary, unaffiliated UCL student Joana Pinto began her talk by agreeing with the call made by CS in an article on our website two days earlier,² for the convention to produce a national organisation and elect some sort of steering committee.

Further, in the discussion members of both WP and the AWL performed

an about-turn and were arguing that, yes, we did need unity. After an intervention by a CS member comrade Pinto confirmed that motions would definitely be allowed - another improvement on last year, when the majority at the coordination had voted not to debate politics, only puerile 'action points'. The SWP, present once again under its Another Education is Possible banner, did not appear to have pushed the event amongst its periphery and was represented by a core of mostly loyal members. SWP interventions were aimed at scuppering the formation of any new organisation. Evidently the SWP does not want a competitor to AEIP, and its actions on the day were entirely motivated by this narrow, sectarian outlook.

CS's proposal for open talks about a united left slate in the NUS elections came under vociferous attack from Hanif and another SWP comrade, who said that in elections you needed all sorts of policies, but there were "different opinions" in the room on topics outside of free education, like war and Islamophobia. A lame excuse. The SWP would prefer a stitch-up between left luminaries in a Euston pub, and had already approached National Union of Students officers Daf Adley and Bellavia Ribeiro-Addy about standing a slate. CS calls for an open and democratic process were ignored.³ Their arguments did not pass muster with the convention though, which proceeded to endorse our motion, albeit by a narrow margin, with many abstentions. Now we must make sure the steering group follows through on this commitment.

Last year's shameless attempt by Education Not for Sale to maintain a diplomatic silence on the question of imperialism was attempted once again. No-one wants to lose ENS, which is essentially no different than the other student fronts. Yet the AWL, which effectively controls

ENS, is infamous for its scab line on imperialism, refusing to call for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq because they are 'more progressive' than reactionary Islamist groups.

The other groups' terrified avoidance of big politics, and their desire to unite solely around the question of free education, ensured that imperialism and war were missing from the timetable, and conspicuously absent from the proposed 'statement of intent' drafted by the organising committee. Motions being allowed though, CS and the Commune agreed a joint amendment calling for opposition to imperialism, international solidarity and the immediate withdrawal of troops from the Middle East. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this was passed by a large majority.

In between plenaries the conference split up to attend bland workshops such as 'Busting myths, fighting cuts' and 'Working with trade unions on and off campus'. Information and skill-sharing is, of course, useful, but is something any student movement worth its salt would be doing on all campuses. After lunch the conference was split up into regional workshops, which seemed achingly pointless, given that comrades can meet regionally any time, and many had probably travelled together that very day. A national conference should be an opportunity to discuss what strategy we need to achieve our aims, and to deepen the politicisation of radicalised students. It was an opportunity to create what is vitally needed: a national student movement to fight the attacks.

The convention did elect a steering committee from the regional meetings. This is a positive step forward, but the politics of this new formation must be deepened - there is the question not just of what we are against (the AWL's Dan Randall, in opposing our Marxist platform, said we should be "anti-capitalist" and no more) but also what

we are *for*. Effective unity has to be based on a clear political vision.

What sort of unity? Both the AWL and WP want to 'keep it broad' and play down their Marxist politics in order to 'build the movement'. No-one is opposed to organising with and fighting alongside non-Marxists in common struggles, and CS welcomes the small steps conference did take toward putting together some structures. Our point was that, if the people in that room had argued and voted for the politics they believe in, we would now have a Marxist organisation, at least formally, not a loose anti-cuts network.

In the final session, CS put forward an alternative platform to that drafted by the convention organisers. Theirs demanded free education, with a nod to solidarity with education workers, but conspicuously avoided the question of imperialism (no doubt to keep the pro-Zionist and increasingly deranged AWL from storming out). Our platform put forward the politics of Marxism. The convention (now campaign) is *not* a united front. A 'united front' is for orthodox Marxism an alliance, made from below or above, between revolutionaries and reformists, whose aim is actually to further the immediate interests of the working class. For us it is a means to win those influenced by reformism to the politics of revolution.

I am short-sighted, but I do not think even I would have failed to notice the presence of significant numbers of students who were not self-proclaimed revolutionaries. Maybe I missed the bit where the courageous Marxist minority got up amidst heckling reformists to argue that free education was insufficient and that we needed working class unity in a revolutionary organisation to fight for a communist society. Actually, I did argue that myself, but was surrounded by dozens of quiet and rather bashful looking far leftists. Yes, there were new faces - but only a few, and no date was set for another conference. If setting up united fronts is the task Marxists have set themselves, their performance so far suggests they should not give up the day job.

It is, unfortunately, only worsening objective conditions which are

waking the student left up to the need for unity. Nevertheless, a growing awareness of this and the minimal structures which came out of the conference are a step in the right direction. But if we are to build an effective alternative to the system, the student movement must make political debate a priority.

Free and open discussion is the only way to win the best politics and achieve the most effective unity. Not just sharing tips on the effectiveness of this or that tactic, or 'Trade union work', which are the sort of talks we can have any time in local groups or on the internet, but debating the critical questions facing the left today - questions of principle and strategy.

One of the ironies of the day was that, after voting down CS's Marxist platform, conference proceeded to adopt several 'motherhood and apple pie' motions - not only opposing Islamophobia, but supporting workers' struggles, etc. Instead of a coherent platform which puts the blame on the *system* and clearly identifies the international working class as the agency of change, we have a list of statements against every single bad *symptom*. To take Marxist politics out of the equation is actually to burden the student movement with a huge handicap.

Our analysis enables us to expose the workings of the system and explain why capitalism can never willingly grant us a decent education. It points to the militant and united action necessary to take on the state, the impossibility of a fully human existence for the working class under capitalism, and the possibility of socialism. The working class needs these politics if it is to mount a united and effective fightback against cuts and not be led down blind alleys by the trade union bureaucracy.

If it is not the right time for Marxism now, comrades, when exactly *will* it be? ●

Notes

1. For our report of the coordination, see <http://communiststudents.org.uk/2009/04/keeping-it-broad-backfires>.
2. <http://communiststudents.org.uk/2010/02/convention-against-fees-and-cuts-we-need-openness-and-democracy>.
3. <http://communiststudents.org.uk/2010/02/letter-to-aqip-and-ens-on-left-unity>.

Fighting fund

Supplement our income

For the third time in the space of a few weeks the *Weekly Worker* carries a pull-out supplement. We believe our *Draft programme* is of central importance for the entire left and we call upon all sincere communists and revolutionary socialists to engage with its content.

But supplements cost money - not only for extra printing, but in postal charges too - this week they are almost twice as high as usual. That is why we would ask all readers and supporters to help us meet those extra costs by sending in a donation to our fighting fund.

This week four comrades did just that. TR sent his usual £60 cheque, while both JU (£25) and SC (£20) also contributed generously. Then there was comrade PB, who added a fiver to his resubscription.

Over the last seven days I have received exactly £100 in standing order gifts - thanks to all concerned. But there were no donations via our website, I'm afraid - despite the fact that no fewer than 15,354 readers logged on to cpgb.org.uk.

So we have just £371 towards our £1,250 target, which means we are well behind where we ought to be, especially considering that this is a short month.

So come on, comrades. Help us cover our extra costs. Now more than ever we need to make the full target every month ●

Robbie Rix

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PSC

Socialist Action relegates solidarity

Tony Greenstein gives his view of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign annual conference

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2010 annual conference will be seen as a watershed. In recent years Socialist Action and the Communist League have achieved a vice-like grip over the organisation, politically and administratively. And in order to ensure that remains the case, an agreement has been reached between PSC trade union officer Bernard Regan and various junior members of the trade union bureaucracy. The price of the deal is the exclusion of anti-Zionist politics from PSC in exchange for trade union money.

One of the fruits of this partnership is the importation of the worst undemocratic practices of the trade union bureaucracy. The key debate at the AGM was over whether to call for the breaking of links with Israel's settler 'trade union', Histadrut. This is a 'union' which was founded on the principle of Jewish labour: ie, the expulsion of Arab labour.

Last year, when the matter was debated, Regan maintained that the disagreement between himself and the supporters of breaking the links with Histadrut were tactical, not principled. This year Regan was at least honest about his and Socialist Action's position. Histadrut's loss of its position as the second largest employer in Israel, most of its industry having been privatised, meant that it was a different creature.

It is true that *quantitatively* Histadrut is but a shadow of its former self. Membership has plummeted to some 700,000, a loss of a million workers. It has shed most of its Arab members, since it no longer runs Kupat Holim, Israel's health service. But this is not a change of substance. If anything it has become a more genuinely racist settler union for Israeli Jewish workers. Its labour councils continue to call for the deportation of migrant labour and the replacement of Arab with Jewish labour to reduce (Jewish) unemployment. Histadrut is still stealing a percentage of the wage of Palestinian workers in Israel. In short, its *Zionist* character has not changed.

But TUC leaders are notorious for not wanting to upset the applecart. They are member of the International Trade Unions Confederation, as is Histadrut. They do not want to introduce the politics of solidarity into relations with other trade union bureaucracies. So in exchange for money from unions like Unison and a 'boycott' campaign by the TUC, which so far consists of postcards from PSC and the TUC to MPs, PSC will refrain from mentioning the word 'Histadrut'.

The fact that all Palestinian grassroots organisations support boycotting Histadrut is irrelevant. What is at stake is the subsidisation of Socialist Action and besides that Histadrut is a minor matter, even if it does involve scabbing on Palestinian workers inside Israel.

Apart from the motion from Brighton PSC calling for the cutting of links with Histadrut, conference also heard another one from two trade union executive members - John McGee of the Fire Brigades Union and Kevin Courtney of the National Union of Teachers - which merely congratulated the PSC executive for winning its position at TUC Congress. Apparently a pointless motion, but it had its purpose.

Hugh Lanning, deputy general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union, chaired conference. He did not seem to be a well person and this seemed to compound his already bureaucratic ailments.

When it came to putting both motions to the vote, Lanning decided to engage in a traditional bit of fixing, ruling that if the uncontroversial motion 2 was passed motion 3 would fall. This was a quite outrageous manoeuvre, but challenging the chair requires a two-thirds majority and in the event PSC conference demonstrated its normal deference by voting against the challenge by 138 votes to 89.

And in a remarkable example of how PSC's Socialist Action leadership is tied to a bourgeois solution of the Palestinian question, an amendment from Roland Rance and myself condemning the apartheid treatment of the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the attempts to substitute Jewish for Arab workers was opposed by the executive. They sought remittance. What this signals is that in their attempt to tie their fortunes to a Palestinian Bantustan, PSC has abandoned the Palestinian diaspora and Palestinians inside Israel itself.

PSC refuses to utter one word of criticism of the Vichy-style Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and extended an invitation to its representative in London, professor Manuel Hassassian, to speak to the conference. The PA, whose security forces are trained by the United States in Jordan under general Dayton, in reality supported Israel's attack on Gaza last year as a means of deposing its rival, Hamas. Its Marshall Pétain, president Mahmoud Abbas, only last week endorsed the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak's iron wall on the southern border of Gaza, built by the United States and intended to complete the siege of Gaza. That was the real reason the PA withdrew a motion endorsing the Goldstone report at the UN. To criticise Abbas would mean accepting that the whole of the Oslo process has been a disaster for the Palestinians and that what we now face is a one-state solution. The question is what type of one-state solution.

In order to prevent discussion wherever possible, the agenda was stuffed with speakers including clapped-out bureaucrat Rodney Bickerstaffe, ex-general secretary of Unison, who for some reason needed to be introduced by Victoria Britain. Some, like the main speaker, Mustafa Barghouti, who contested the Palestinian Authority presidency in 2005, were extremely interesting, as was Mark Serwotka's description of his visit to Palestine. But the intention to waste as much time as possible was crystal-clear.

The only other debate was over students. The main executive motion was from Fiona Edwards, PSC's new student officer, who just happens to be the key activist in the fast declining Student Broad Left front of Socialist Action. She took over from Bryony Shanks, SBL's failed candidate in last year's NUS elections, and, making up a triumvirate, there is Ruqqayah Collector, SBL's last member of NUS executive.

Our amendment pointed out that the Zionist Union of Jewish Students has virtually a monopoly over NUS policy on Palestine, with NUS supporting Israel's attack on Gaza. All mention of Action Palestine, the main group behind the occupation of colleges and universities last year, was omitted from SA's history of the student movement. Instead we were accused of 'red-baiting' and McCarthyism for pointing out that SA is a secretive freemasons-style group that operates politically in order to obtain jobs and perks for its members.

I thought that the victims of McCarthyism fought for the rights of labour, against racism and US imperialism. But apparently the sacrifices of the Rosenbergs and Pete Seeger are as nothing compared to Fiona Edwards and Socialist Action. If you dare to tell the truth you are a 'red-baiter'! No doubt it is a form of witch-hunting to point out that all three of the last staff appointments in PSC have been to members of SA. It took a member from West Midlands PSC to point out that the conference was a sea of grey with barely no young faces. The contrast between the vacuous rhetoric of Fiona Edwards and the reality of Conway Hall could not have been more marked.

PSC has effectively subcontracted its work to the student wing of Socialist Action. And, given that SBL is almost non-existent today, that is not a very smart thing to do. After the conference ended, a woman approached me to say that Socialist Action was doing the same in Venezuelan Solidarity Campaign.

Socialist Action's method is to talk up any successes and gloss over any failures. After the demise of the Livingstone regime there is an urgent need for organisations which can supply jobs and office facilities to SA. To the executive, getting a motion passed by the TUC was "superb". In fact the FBU motion calling for a boycott of Israeli goods was overridden by a TUC general council statement that called for a boycott only of settler produce. Even the most minor of victories is inflated out of all proportion.

But what really rattled Fiona Edwards was that her attempt to claim credit for the occupations by students last year was undermined by the fact that she *opposed* the occupation at Sheffield University. We were able to prove this because we managed to obtain a leaflet from Communist Students attacking her for just this! And so we had the spectacle of SA's leading student activist opposing an occupation in support of Gaza in her college and then lying to PSC AGM about her role.

As an antidote to apathy, we have the repetition by general secretary Betty Hunter of the fatuous slogan that PSC is building a mass anti-apartheid movement. Socialist Action and their Communist League associates could never build such a movement because it would threaten their own grip on the organisation. Because of the low political consciousness of most of those in attendance and their willingness to defer to those in control, there is only one officer now who is not part of the ruling bloc: vice-chair Kamal Hawwash.

SA's grip on PSC has resulted in the growth of alternative groups such as the newly established Boycott Israel Network. Even local groups such as the School of Oriental and African Studies Palestinian Society are able to organise events like the Left in Palestine conference, which are of far more interest than anything PSC is capable of doing.

I suspect that these groups will grow and PSC will become little more than the plaything of Socialist Action and a parliamentary lobby group. Despite the rhetoric about the only issue being that of Palestinian self-determination, it is clear that Socialist Action and its Communist League associates see the Palestinian question primarily in terms of the survival of their own groups •

Tony Greenstein

What we fight for

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

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.

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

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

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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

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Symptom of democratic deficit

Amid hopes that it was all going to go away by now, the scandal of their expenses scams continues. In the latest development, three Labour MPs and a Tory lord are facing criminal prosecution.

Last week, MPs David Chaytor, Jim Devine and Elliot Morley and a member of the House of Lords, Paul White (alias Lord Hanningfield), were each charged under section 17 of the Theft Act on several counts relating to false accounting in their parliamentary expenses. The maximum sentence if found guilty is seven years in prison.

On February 8, after the disreputable Commons trio moved to exculpate themselves by claiming parliamentary immunity from these criminal charges, the Labour Party formally suspended them from membership and withdrew the whip. They were already barred from standing again as Labour candidates last year. It looks likely that the latest Labour leadership move was a response to Tory badgering.

This is against the background of the House of Commons Members Estimate Committee report issued last week containing Sir Thomas Legg's Additional Costs Allowance Review. This called for over half the membership of the House of Commons, 392 MPs in all, to pay back more than a million pounds in total. Legg recommended that just over £1.3 million should be repaid by MPs, but in the end appeals heard by Sir Paul Kennedy reduced this to £1.12 million. In concluding his review Legg notes: "The total cost of this review from its commencement to the submission of this report has been approximately £1.16 million."

Clearly, Legg's review was not cost-effective. But then, it was really only intended to serve a political purpose: mollifying enraged public opinion. From comments most readers will have heard, public flogging would be too good.

In fact, this recent review has been carried out in a Westminster bubble, as if the merry parliamentary money-making engaged in by a high proportion of MPs was no business of those who voted them in. Merely three MPs are to be tried; the 389 others were deemed to have 'overclaimed within the rules'. They were milking a system under which members were encouraged to claim (in confidence) for all manner of expenses as a substitute for salary hikes that would have outraged voters.

And if George Galloway is anything to go by, there is a long way to go before even those who consider themselves socialist are at all convinced of the need for elected representatives to be just that - representatives: in other words, they should not be treated as worthier than or superior to their constituents and rewarded accordingly. The Respect MP, speaking on BBC1's *Question time* on February 4, suggested that there should be far fewer, but more highly paid MPs. Apparently, their quality would thereby magically improve.

Galloway, of course, rejects any suggestion that MPs should receive only the average wage of a skilled



Should not be a career ladder

worker. He happily trousers the £64,766 currently dished out, but thinks it is insufficient. But representation ought not to be regarded as a well remunerated career choice, with an enhanced income that distances an MP from electors and which none will want to take up unless their special talents are suitably recognised. It ought to be regarded as the highest honour to be called upon to serve one's constituents.

This is a deeply democratic question. From the time of the Paris Commune, over 100 years ago, working class organisations have demanded that elected representatives be paid no more than a skilled worker's wage, and that they should be recallable. Why? Not because they should live in poverty, but because those representing working class voters in par-

liamentary need to be reminded continually how their constituents live and what *their* interests are.

The same principle applies to trade union representatives, but the problem is, both parliamentarians and union officials have come to expect greater comfort and relative enrichment as their due. Having got where they are on the backs of their supporters, they often consider they have 'made it'. Incomes and expenses commensurate with managers and small-scale owners of capital are a corrosive and corrupting influence. Working class MPs and union bureaucrats start to see themselves as above and beyond those who elected them.

So what is needed? Well, it is surely not simply policing MPs' expenses claims more thoroughly. Nor is it just a question of how MPs are paid, but

the entire democratic deficit inherent in the constitutional monarchy system, of which the furore over MPs' expenses is just a symptom.

First, there should be a unicameral parliament. The House of Lords must go and no replacement 'upper house' countenanced: such chambers function as a check and balance against democratic pressure from the people. We want no monarch, but a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales.

Second, parliaments must be elected annually. This would put a stop to the ability of the government to set the election date according to party political advantage and enable us to call MPs to account more easily. Even so, MPs must be subject to recall at any time.

Third, as stated above, MPs' salaries must be equivalent to the wage

of a skilled worker. In the meantime, communist and socialist candidates must pledge to take only this amount, plus legitimate expenses, if elected, with the excess surrendered to the party.

These, no doubt among other democratic demands, should be uncontested among the left and are feasible even under capitalism. The fact that the bourgeoisie will never propose such demands itself gives the lie to the idea, sometimes current within a lazy-minded left, that the 'natural' capitalist form of government is 'bourgeois democracy'. Every democratic initiative has come from mass action, every democratic right has been granted in the teeth of capitalist opposition and can never be regarded as permanent ●

Jim Moody

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