

# weekly **worker**



**Left unity: bureaucratic  
centralism and total  
ineffectiveness**

- Mossad and hypocrisy
- Greece and EU fightback
- Iran and nuclear power
- Personality politics

No 806 Thursday February 25 2010

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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of Trotsky:  
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demolishes  
Robert  
Service



# LETTERS



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

## Blank sheet

I welcome the updated draft of the CPGB's *Draft programme* (supplement, February 11) and look forward to the coming months of discussions on the purpose, method and outlook of a communist programme. The question of programme is a source of confusion among the far left, given the political sterile and dogmatic approach by so many esteemed leaderships. An open and frank discussion should be enlightening for everyone involved.

Sections 1 to 5 give a rounded out view of our epoch, a good action programme and explain the transition towards communism. I have issues though with the introductory text, with section 6 and with the party rules.

Reading the introductory text is quite frankly hilarious. It basically claims to be the same CPGB as the one established in 1920 and talks in all its grandeur, as if it still has a big membership. This is ludicrous. The current CPGB has at most 60 members and should behave as such. On this note, there is no mention whatsoever in the whole programme of leftist unity; it offers no strategy for unity, but acts as if it operates on a 'blank sheet'. This is sectarian behaviour.

Section 6 and the party rules are quite transparently the stinking legacy of Zinoviev-style top-down organisation, although it must be said that it makes explicit mention of the need for open discussion and the right for minorities to organise (in section 6, but not in the party rules), which is a certain improvement to many other existing far-left organisations, which treat dissent as a purely internal matter, of no concern to the rest of our class.

Maybe these rules were designed with the old Stalinist CPGB in mind, in which case such rules would undoubtedly be a progressive step forward? As such a consideration is no longer necessary, more thought should certainly be given to how we organise. We have a unique historical opportunity to start a new, radical democratic tradition regarding party organisation and, while the article wasn't specifically written for this purpose, Paul Cockshot's 'Democracy or oligarchy?' (October 8 2009) could serve as food for thought.

Another major lacking is a near-total absence on the matter of political education of the membership. Yes, there is a mention in the party rules that all members have "a right and a duty to study Marxism and develop the Party's political positions", but it offers no organisational structures for systematic political education, the offering of 'workshops' to educate communists in practical abilities (such as public speaking, organisational skills, accounting, etc) or the need to form a tendency for all members to become capable theoreticians in their specific field of interest or at least have the scientific method at heart. On this important matter, I agree with Paul Smith (Letters, February 18).

**Benjamin Hill**  
email

## Encouraging

As most readers of the *Weekly Worker* will already know, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the strident claim, made by journalists, politicians and others, that communism and Marxism had come to a definite end. Unfortunately this

poison has seeped right through society as a whole, including the working class. The fact has to be faced that, in many countries, the working class does not see communism as a viable alternative to capitalism. With this as background, it is encouraging that the CPGB has been able to set forth a draft programme.

However, the present writer feels that a number of comments need to be made. These are made in a comradely spirit.

The question of world revolution is raised in section 1.6. This is very positive. From this it can be deduced that a new Communist International is urgently needed. Unfortunately this real need is not mentioned in the programme. It is the duty of all communists, wherever they may be in the world, to build communist parties in their respective countries and at the same time contribute to the building of a new Communist International.

Readers should note that positive attempts to rebuild a worldwide communist organisation are now being carried out. Workers Power is building the League for a Fifth International. The Japan Revolutionary Communist League (of which the present writer is a supporter) has linked up with the International Leninist Trotskyist Fraction, composed of communist organisations in Latin America, USA and South Africa.

The programme correctly draws attention to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution (1. Our epoch). It also correctly points out that "In the late 1920s Stalin oversaw a counterrevolution within the revolution." However, this leaves much unsaid. For the degeneration of the Russian Revolution found its reflection in the degeneration of the Communist International as a whole. The manner in which the programme fails to mention the influence of the Comintern on the CPGB is a serious omission.

In the section on soviets (3.9. Councils of action) it is pointed out that "In any decisive clash of class against class, new forms of organisation which are higher, more general, more flexible than trade unions emerge ... Embracing and coordinating all who are in struggle, such organisations have the potential to become institutions of the future workers' state." This is indeed very positive. Councils of action, which arose in the British general strike of 1926 and which were mostly led by the young CPGB, are likely to arise again in Britain and elsewhere. The basic Marxist teaching that the class struggle must give rise to the dictatorship of the proletariat is given structure in the conception of councils of action or soviets.

It is likewise very positive that the programme should call for the creation of a workers' militia (3.10. Militia). This is of course closely linked to the concept of councils of action or soviets.

It is indeed unfortunate that, having given support to the establishment of councils of action and to a workers' militia, the programme (3.1.1. Winning the battle for democracy) proposes to keep the House of Commons and universal suffrage intact. Further, in calling for the disbanding of M15, M16 and special branch, it is made clear that the main body of the police should also be kept intact. There is no doubt that this section of the programme stands in sharp contradiction to the perfectly correct calls for councils of action and a workers' militia.

If the CPGB were ever to win a majority of seats in parliament

(which is very unlikely) the capitalist class would use the army to destroy it. As indeed happened in Chile in 1973. The capitalist state machine (army, police, prisons, etc) has to be smashed and replaced by a workers' state.

A further weak aspect is to be found in 3.10. Militia, where it calls for "officers to be elected ... in the [capitalist] state's armed bodies". This is dangerous nonsense. The function of the armed forces is to defend the capitalist class against its enemies - in the first place against the working class. It is a delusion to think that the capitalist class would ever allow the officers in its army to be elected.

One final point. All those studying the programme are urged to read or re-read Lenin's *Leftwing communism*. Here Lenin, writing about the young CPGB, stressed the vast superiority of soviets over parliament. He urged the British communists to fight to get into parliament in order to disrupt it from within in favour of soviets.

It is hoped that this will contribute to a comradely discussion.

**John Robinson**  
London

## Misquoted

Nick Rogers is quite wrong to draw an equal sign between the position put forward by Colin Fox and the Republican Communist Network's Allan Armstrong at the Republican Socialist Convention ('Debating with left nationalists', February 18).

For a start, Allan did not call for an alliance with the Scottish National Party in furtherance of the aim of Scottish independence. Indeed, Nick derides the call for the 'break-up of the UK state' out of the assumption that, in reality, the Scottish nationalists could realise this objective. But he also admits Allan's argument that they would not do so: in fact, the SNP favour a Catalunya or Quebec-style 'independence-lite'. And then Nick calls on workers to demand a European republic. That is, a European capitalist state, as opposed to the UK state (or, should I say, integrating that state into a larger one): a tighter-knit European Union.

Communists could only advocate the full integration of the EU on the understanding that this would facilitate the workers' movement uniting more effectively than the capitalist class can - and in a degree that our side could not do anyway. Is this plausible? I think not, and nor does it 'flow' merely from the organisation around the demand. Not only do US imperialism and sections of the bourgeoisies of individual states constantly advance the integration and expansion of the EU, but also in the past our movement threw up three (and tonnes of fourth) internationals outside of any such state bodies. The lack of real workers' unity across the continent, and indeed across different parts of the UK, is not a facet of our rulers' petty squabbles in Brussels.

Moreover, the mere fact that it would be the European working class demanding full union of our rulers would not thereby fill this with any social content nor advance our own organisation. Indeed, Nick writes that "the working class across Britain - and preferably across Europe [should raise] the demand for a European republic", which is hardly a strong advocacy that the working class could force this change on our own terms (my emphasis).

I did not say that I "could not see why unity with Europeans was more important than, say, with Bolivia,

where British multinationals were just as involved as in many European countries". Which Europeans are these? Who in Bolivia? Someone reading this might be misled to believe that I meant I think 'we' (the imperialist UK state) should be nicer to Evo Morales, whereas in fact I meant that 'we' (communists and the workers' movement) should not see the struggles of workers in developing countries as somehow lesser in importance, given that many are fighting multinationals tied to the UK state.

See you in Strasbourg.

**David Broder**  
The Commune

## Brits out

What right does Britain have to a colony in the South Atlantic 7,800 miles from London? Britain claims it has the right to defend 'self-determination', when this seems a convenient cover for British interests in the expansion of its capital. In keeping with this, the legislative assembly of the Falkland Islands announced on February 5 that it would oppose any Argentine firm exploring for oil in the territory.

The British, French, Dutch and United States governments have no business maintaining colonies in South America, or anywhere else on the globe. The Malvinas are properly Argentine territory and workers in Britain have no interest in maintaining the old empire's territorial claims that Labour and Tory governments have vigorously defended.

In this sense, the Falkland Islands are no different than returning Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, India to the Indians, or Ireland to the Irish. What seemingly complicates the matter is that there are virtually no Argentine nationals on the Falklands. The local residents vigorously support continued British control, much like the reactionary unionists of Northern Ireland.

Central America, South America and the Caribbean are dotted with direct colonial possessions of the US, Britain, the Netherlands and France. With the century-long occupation of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as examples, it is clear that the US has no genuine inclination toward the establishment of democracy or independence for the remaining subjugated nations of this region.

Administration after administration prattles on about democracy in countries with which it is interested in interfering. Yet the actions of the US government, whether those run by Democrats or Republicans, while courting figures like the Dalai Lama, are intractable in their overlord status in Puerto Rico. The disgusting example of Vieques, an island off the coast of Puerto Rico, comes to mind. The US has shelled the island for decades as a military training ground and refuses to clean up the dangerous waste, which includes carcinogenic pollutants and unexploded ordinance. This has led to absurdly high levels of cancer on Vieques.

Meanwhile, against this backdrop of unresolved colonialism, a new social power is emerging, the resurgent continental resistance to imperialism by Central and South American working people in recent years. A prime example of this is the movement that has thrust the Bolivian revolution in Venezuela to move sharply to the left in the direction of socialism. The spectre of social revolution is haunting the oligarchies of South America and the imperialists of the northern hemisphere. The crisis in the south Atlantic cannot be seen outside the context of one imperialist provocation against this process: the military build-up in Colombia against Venezuela, the US-backed separatist movements in Bo-

livia, the US-sponsored removal of president Zelaya in Honduras, and the influx of US and other imperialist troops in Haiti.

The overwhelming anti-imperialist sentiments of the Argentine working class could be ignited into mass action by the British provocation. Given the historic militancy of the working class in Argentina, which propelled hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets to demand relief from the government in response to the economic crisis of 2000-01, one president after another was forced to leave office. Consequently, the Kirchner government will have to act boldly if it is to stay in power.

However, the capitalist government of Argentina is tied hand and foot to the imperialists it is attempting to challenge. President Cristina Kirchner, whose political support includes businesses and bankers in large part dominated by British financial interests, may find it difficult to be successful with her government's diplomatic efforts or with an attempt at a semi-military blockade of the islands.

Argentina has long been dominated by British capitalism. The direct occupation of the Malvinas Islands by the British only serves to underscore the position of Argentina as a neo-colonial subject nation. A working class upsurge opposed to further British machinations would in all likelihood expose the country's subjugation at the hands of British imperialism and lay the blame squarely on the Argentine government's inability and or unwillingness to seize the islands.

Imperialism can be defeated and will be defeated only when workers politically unite and act independently of their own capitalist-controlled governments so as to lead their respective nations in taking successful actions in defence of the right of all countries to self-determination. One possible action that could be promoted would be to attempt to unite American, British and Argentine dockworkers with other South American port workers in refusing to load or unload shipments of oil equipment or military-related cargo to or from the Falklands. If the British and US workers do not take a stand in support of their Argentine brothers and sisters, that is no reason Argentines should wait. South American workers could demand a halt to all these type of shipments.

It is unlikely that, once pushed into independent political action, the working class will resume their subservient political role in Argentine politics. The question of working class power was raised in recent Argentine history when workers in 2000-02 took over many workplaces, the streets, the national plaza, highways and even towns.

As for the Falkland residents themselves, they too are unfortunate victims of British imperialism. Although many families have lived for generations on the islands, the illegitimacy of Britain's claim has been well known for over a century. Falkland laws against Argentine interests must be voided by the Falklanders themselves if they wish to be on the right side of history.

The Falklanders' parochial interests are secondary to the basic question of national self-determination and the sovereignty of Argentina. The Falklanders are not a separate nation from Britain. They are its colonists. Their fear of domination by Argentina is a foil for British economic interests. Britain's capitalist elite has little regard for its subjects when its economic interests are at stake. It did not grant the millions of



residents of Hong Kong the right to elect its own leaders when it was in its interests to secede the territory to China. Nor ultimately will it consider the interests of the residents of the Falklands equal to their own economic interests.

A victory in the Malvinas for the Argentine working people would be like a beacon for South and Central America's long and incomplete fight for territorial and political independence from imperialism.

**Adam Richmond**  
San Francisco

## Iraqi fiasco

Few words can describe the shining example of western democracy better than the fiasco that is the Iraqi elections, with over 500 candidates already banned by Ahmed Chalabi and the joke that is the election manifesto of the current prime minister, Nouri Saad Al-Maliki.

It is normally the case that politicians run from the fear of being associated with negative publicity, but, in the good old traditions of a puppet, Iraq's democracy in fact does the complete opposite, as its present speed of running into the arms of disaster parallels that of a car speeding into a brick wall.

Never before have I encountered a government whose election pledges are such an open incitement to violence and terrorism as the promises by the Iraqi PM to "prosecute the former regime" and "punish Ba'athists" and those associated with opposing the occupation, as well as planting more palm trees.

I would love to inform people in Britain that their taxes have helped to rid the world of dictatorship and fear and diminished the strength of organisations like al Qa'eda but, sadly, this government has spent billions of pounds establishing a regime that cannot provide basic amenities.

With the occupation of Iraq having been in place since 2003, it now looks as if the people of Iraq are going to have to wait until 2014 before the occupation government can 'promise' to give them an 'uninterrupted electricity supply'. With the pledge of a new sports stadium and 12 new hospitals, it appears as though progress may have finally arrived.

Only last year the United States handed over a brand new hospital to the Iraqi government, who had to close it by the end of the day because they could not provide it with electricity. But more astonishing was the fact that it had no staff. With the government rejecting United Nations calls to abolish the death penalty, coupled

with 'democratic' Iraq's appalling record on human rights, is it any surprise that over four million people have fled in terror?

It comes as no shock that Britain should wish to be associated with another government like the one they helped to establish in Iraq, when neither are capable of recognising the facts about Iraq's occupation: the ethnic cleansing of Christians, five million orphans, the dramatic increase in poverty, post-traumatic stress disorder and the four million war widows, all created since 'liberation'. But, just like the empty promises made by the British government to the Iraqi people, these facts don't get a mention in Maliki's manifesto either.

**Hussein Al-alak**  
Iraq Solidarity Campaign

## Say sorry

A comment someone leaves in a comments block is not a "post", nor does it represent the views or opinions of the site editors, as Tony Greenstein seems to think (Letters, February 11).

Despite his repetitive, inflammatory accusations, the *Weekly Worker* has yet to show us any article whatsoever on the *Palestine Think Tank* website that can even remotely be described as Jew-hating or anti-Semitic.

If you fail to do so, and fail as well to provide an apology, it only indicates that you do not have any interest in substantiating your claim, and thus anything you claim can be false, misleading or erroneous.

**Mary Rizzo**  
www.palestinethinktank.com

## Unique oil

The issue of whether classical Marxism contains an ecological aspect is a long-running debate. In my January 28 letter, I went too far in saying that such matters as environmental degradation "did not exist" for classical Marxism. My oversight here has obviously given Phil Kent the opportunity to present classical Marxism as containing a fully developed ecology, based on a few isolated quotes from the classics, while withholding page numbers (Letters, February 11).

My letter, however, was not about the ecological status of Marxism, or even about resource depletion in general, or environmental degradation, but rather about the global peaking of oil production and the consequences which follow from this, which have already started, and has resulted

in the first peak oil economic crisis, when oil prices soared to \$147 per barrel in July 2008. This triggered a credit crisis because subprime mortgages borrowers defaulted, not being able to afford interest rates which were high in order control inflation.

For Phil Kent to argue that peak oil is not unique betrays a lack of awareness of the role of oil in maintaining industrial society at its present level of complexity. Peak oil may not be unique in the rather banal sense that extraction of all finite resources from nature will tend to peak and decline, but it is unique from an energy perspective. Kent, like most of the left, does not seem to be aware that the world is facing a looming energy crisis and what the implications of this crisis means, not only for capitalism but also for the socialist project. He seems to imagine that capitalism can make a painless transition to a new energy system and continue with business as usual, rather than the need for industrial society to power down, as oil supplies decline, because the present energy alternatives being touted do not come near to replicating the various and unique characteristics of oil.

If Kent can grasp the fact that industrial capitalism grew out of fossil fuels, structuring a whole way of life and a whole economic view based on their availability, he may just begin to appreciate the uniqueness of oil in our social order, and therefore the world significance of its historic peaking and coming decline. But I am not holding my breath.

By the way, Kent mentions gas, which can help substitute for declining oil, but he seems to be unaware that globally gas is set to peak only a few years after oil, and the depletion process of gas is not gradual, but sudden.

**Tony Clark**  
London

## Stand alone

The Socialist Party will be standing a candidate in Vauxhall, London, in the coming general election, just as we did in 2005.

We are standing on a straight socialist ticket, opposed to all the other candidates, including 'Workers Power' (or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, if they get the endorsement).

We do not support the idea of a 'new workers' party' - ie, a Labour Party mark two. That's been tried in the last century and failed, and would fail again because it is built not on support for socialism, but on leadership and reforms of capitalism.

Further information is available at <http://spgb.blogspot.com>.

**Adam Buick**  
Socialist Party of Great Britain

## Politically correct

Far be it for me to nit-pick the otherwise excellent review of my book *The wheel's still in spin* but rather let me take up the reviewer's suggestion about "editing and fact checking" ('When the sweets were taken away', February 18).

I was "at one stage" on the central committee of the Revolutionary Workers Party - and *not* the Workers Revolutionary Party (splitters!). Likewise, I was and still am a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, not the International Workers of the World.

It has been suggested to me that the text was correct on submission and somehow between submission and publication the mistakes got allowed through. Have no fear - it's all absolutely correct in the actual book.

**David Douglass**  
email

## Communist Forums

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

**February 28:** John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Marx's ecology in historical perspective' - continued.

**March 7:** John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Marx's theory of metabolic rift: classical foundations for environmental sociology'.

**Thursday March 4, 7.30pm:** 'One myth only?' - Chris Knight discusses the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who died in 2009 at the age of 100. Room B111, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies (between Malet Street and Thornhaugh Street), London WC1 (Russell Square tube).

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

Details: [oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com](mailto: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@communistsstudents.org.uk](mailto:ben@communistsstudents.org.uk); 07792 282830.

**Manchester:** Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester student union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. [www.communistsstudents.org.uk](http://www.communistsstudents.org.uk).

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

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

**March 2:** Chris Knight, 'Native America (Arapaho): the wives of the sun and moon'.

## Defend the right to protest

**Friday February 26, 9.30am:** Demonstrate to support Gaza protestors, Isleworth crown court, 36 Ridgeway Road TW7 (Osterley tube).

**Tuesday March 2, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, committee room 19, House of Commons, St Stephens entrance (allow time to clear security). Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP, George Galloway MP, Andrew Murray (STWC), Betty Hunter (Palestine Solidarity Campaign). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

## No blood for oil

Friday February 26, 4pm: Emergency picket, BP HQ, 1 St James Square, London SW1 (Piccadilly Circus tube). Protest against violent police attack on Colombian oilworkers. Organised by Colombia Solidarity Campaign: [info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk).

## 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](mailto:critique@eng.gla.ac.uk).

## Making it public

Saturday February 27, 11am to 4pm: conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Organised by Convention of the Left: [www.conventionofthelleft.org](http://www.conventionofthelleft.org).

## Voice of Iranian resistance

Monday March 1, 7.30pm: Poetry evening, Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2. With Esmail Khoi. Organised by Exiled Writers Ink: [www.exiledwriters.co.uk](http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk).

## Blood on Brown's hands

Friday March 5, 8.30am: Picket Iraq inquiry during Brown's evidence, Queen Elizabeth conference centre, Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, SW1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

## Defend Joe Glenton

Friday March 5, 9.30am: Demonstration, Military Court Centre, Merville Barracks, off Butt Road, Colchester. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768; [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

## Long march back

Saturday March 6 2010, 11.30 am: Conference to commemorate end of 1984-85 miners' strike, Bridge Hotel, Castle Garth, Newcastle Upon Tyne. With Bob Crow, NUM speakers, and David Douglass (author of *Ghost dancers*). With workers' book fair and evening social. Organised by David Douglass in conjunction with NUM and IWW, with support of Berwick Trades Council and local union branches. [djdouglass@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:djdouglass@hotmail.co.uk).

## International Women's Day

Sunday March 7, 12 noon: Demonstration in support of Iranian women's struggle, Iranian embassy, 16 Princes Gate, London SW7. Organised by Million Women Rise, Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, Iranian Youth Committee UK, Solidarity Council with Iranian People's Struggle, Hands off the People of Iran: [www.8mars.com](http://www.8mars.com).

## CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

## Fighting fund

# Help us out

Once again we need a last-minute spurt in contributions if we are to reach our £1,250 fighting fund target for the month.

With just four days to go, including the weekend, we are £262 short. We have £988, after some brilliant gifts over the last seven days, but the lacklustre start to the month has left us still lagging behind. That means we are now largely relying on some speedy credit/debit card donations via our website.

And we didn't have many of them this last week - just £10 each from LT and NB, plus a fiver added to her subscription from comrade WD. Three out of a total of 14,396 internet readers is not a high proportion. But we did get three

handy cheques in the post - £30 from DE, £25 from KG and £20 from WR. And RB also added a tenner to his sub.

Then, as usual, I had a number of those regular-as-clockwork standing order transfers (including this week a magnificent £230 from SK), all of which added £385 to our total for February. Thanks to all comrades for their generosity and devotion to the cause.

But we need that extra £262 by 12 noon on Monday March 1. Can you help us out? ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## ISRAEL

# Communist Party books



## ■ Which road?

The programmes of 'official communism' were designed to serve those in the workers' movement who had no interest in revolution, those who preferred compromise with capitalism rather than its destruction.

Jack Conrad also deals with the reformist programme of Peter Taaffe's group and lays the groundwork necessary for drafting a revolutionary programme.

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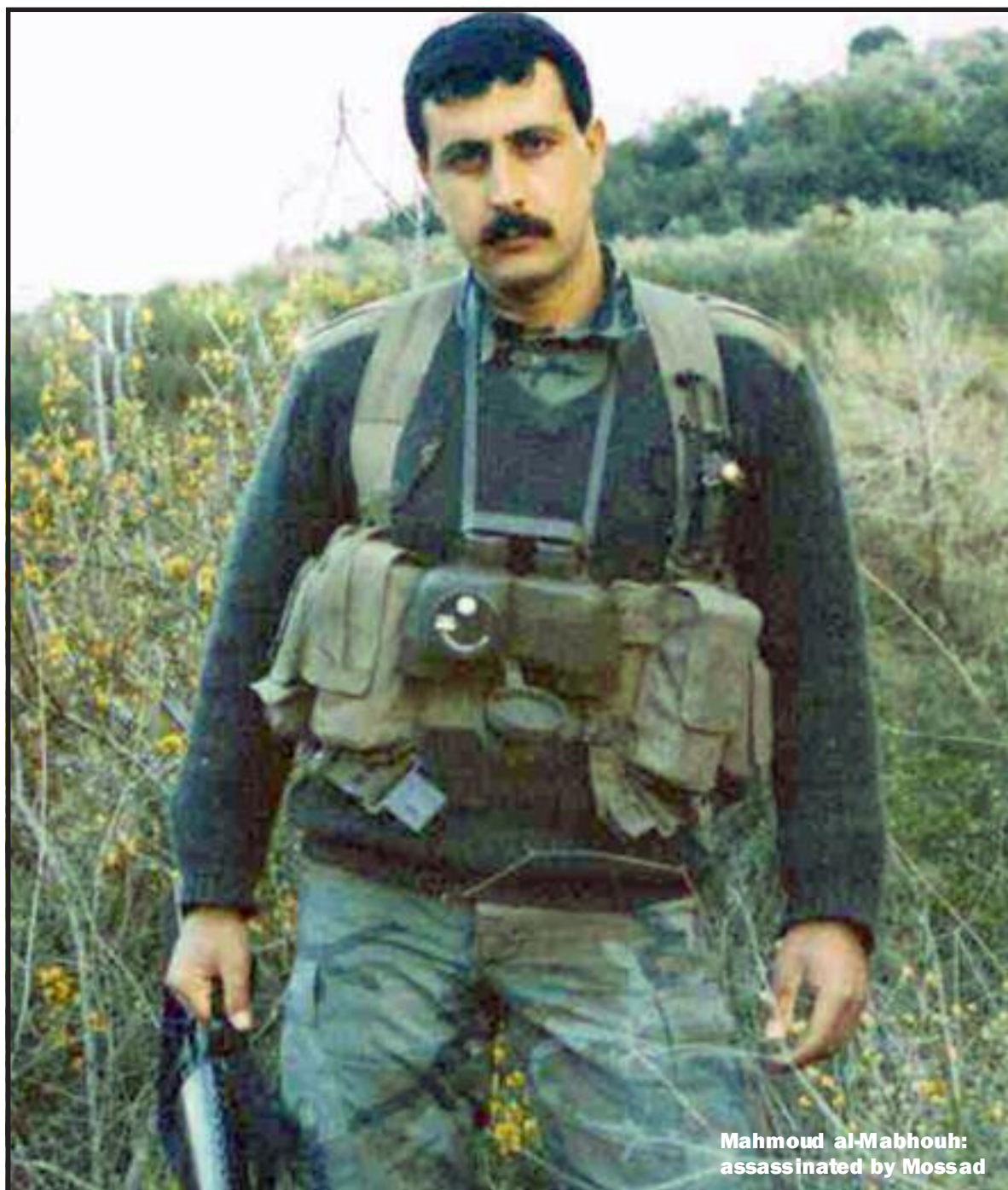
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**Mahmoud al-Mabhouh:  
assassinated by Mossad**

# By way of deception

Just suppose that Syria or Iran had sent a team of assassins on a mission to the Netherlands in order to kill a senior Israeli army officer. Members of the team had, in order to allay suspicions, used forged British, Irish and American passports to carry out this deed. Now imagine the reaction.

Clearly this would prove that both Syria and Iran are terrorist states. The forging of other states' passports would show that they have no respect for the sovereignty of others or the international rule of law. It would be necessary to consider sanctions against these rogue states and possibly a cruise missile strike against their capitals. A state that effectively steals the identity of foreign residents who live within its borders has breached the most basic of diplomatic conventions.

But, of course, it was not Syria or Iran, but Israel, which carried out the assassination and in any case it happened not in Europe, but in an Arab country. There is therefore no question of sanctions, let alone a military strike.

Fast-forward to British foreign secretary David Miliband, being interviewed last weekend. No, he did not want to make a comment. An inquiry was underway and he really did not wish to engage in hypothetical speculation. Could this be the same Miliband who supported the war in Iraq and sanctions against Iran, both of which were based on unproven assertions and false hypotheses? Because if there is one thing that Miliband, the British government's foremost exponent of torture, understands, it is that you do not punish your friends.

And Israel is certainly a friend, even if it sometimes behaves like an unruly teenager.

With the exception of Miliband, there is a unanimity of opinion that the operation to murder Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a senior Hamas commander, was carried out by Israel's external intelligence agency, Mossad, whose motto is 'By way of deception shalt thou wage war'. The six British passports which were forged correlate with British citizens living in Israel. Whether they knew of what was happening and 'loaned' their passports for the purposes of copying or are wholly innocent is immaterial - the finger is clearly pointed at Israel. And, whilst the Palestinian Authority has a clear interest in the assassination of Hamas operatives, it is only Israel that has the capacity to carry out such an operation.

Miliband's prevarications match his record over British intelligence collaboration with United States torture: of course we oppose it, but we are also opposed to anything being revealed about our collusion in the matter. The reality is that Israel has long had a green light to do this type of operation - with a rap across the knuckles being the only 'reprisal' (when its agents make a mess of things).

Mabhouh was, by all accounts, heavily involved in the supply and delivery of Iranian weaponry to Hamas. But the story does not end there. In the article, 'Hamas official: PA deeply involved in Mabhouh hit', Israel's Yediot Aharanot reports that the quiescent Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and in particular its chief of security,

Mohammad Dahlan, were also heavily involved in providing logistical support for the operation.<sup>1</sup> Anwar Shheibar and Ahmad Hasnain, two members of the Fatah security forces in Gaza, have been deported from Jordan to Dubai because of their alleged involvement.

The operation was clearly well prepared, as a European headquarters in Vienna was specially set up to coordinate matters. It has also been reported that Nahro Massoud, a member of Hamas, has been arrested in Damascus in relation to the killing and the fear must be that the Hamas leadership is also heavily infiltrated.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, as Sinn Féin demonstrated with the revelations in 2003 that Alfredo Scappaticci (Steak Knife), head of its own counter-intelligence operation, was himself a British operative, none of this is new. Indeed, given the covert and secretive ways of the military wings of national liberation movements, it is probably inevitable. Even the Bolsheviks were not immune to this kind of operation.

The enemies of our rulers are expected to play by the book and respect the international conventions 'we' have drawn up. The west, however, is allowed to honour those very same conventions in the breach. And Israel? Well, it is fully signed up to the hypocrisy and double standards of western imperialism ●

**Tony Greenstein**

## Notes

1. [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3851209,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3851209,00.html). See also <http://warincontext.org/2010/02/18/the-dahlan-connection>; and <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/uae/crime/more-surprises-in-al-mabhouh-case-1.585279>.
2. *The Guardian* February 17.



## INTERVIEW

# Developing Marxist theory

The *Critique* journal is celebrating its 50th issue. Peter Manson spoke to its editor, Hillel Ticktin

**What would you say have been the achievements of *Critique* over its 50 issues?**

What we set out to do in 1973 was to initiate a serious theoretical study of the Soviet Union. That had been sorely lacking on the left, which had not undertaken a thorough examination based on Soviet experiences and material in Russian. Not having such experience to draw on and knowing very little about the detail of Soviet life, the left for the most part resorted to dogma.

**You mean notions of the USSR as some kind of deformed workers' state or an example of state capitalism?**

Yes, that's right. And we did succeed in breaking down this resistance to a more scientific approach and start to encourage the left to drop its dogmatism.

Other than that, we undertook to develop Marxist theory and apply it to current circumstances more generally. Obviously one journal cannot go very far, but that was our aim and I think we achieved some modest success.

Our first issue had a print run of over 2,500 and it sold out very quickly. We subsequently increased this to 5,000. During this time we continued to focus on the Soviet Union.

**When were you in the USSR yourself?**

The early 60s. Although I was critical of the Soviet Union before I went there, I was nowhere near as critical of it as I became. What I saw was in fact worse than what was being described by people either on the right or left - the great difficulties of everyday life, the atomisation, the awfulness of state control that went far beyond anything in Nazi Germany. I was also surprised by the extent of anti-Semitism.

I didn't know any Russian before I went to the USSR, but I took lessons in the language during my period as a PhD student in Moscow.

**How has *Critique's* role evolved over the years?**

Well, we began with the Soviet question and gradually changed in the direction of a more rounded Marxist journal. Clearly one's understanding of the Soviet Union was a key part of that.

From the beginning, *Critique* organised conferences - the latest is this Saturday. Our 1973 conference attracted 500 people, with Ernest Mandel, Ralph Miliband, myself and other speakers. Those events certainly had an impact.

At first we were probably naive. I wanted to be non-sectarian and embrace all the different views on the Marxist left. So we had, for example, members of the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party, Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review* and the International Marxist Group on the advisory board. Mandel was also on it. But this simply did not work.

The IS wanted *Critique* to carry articles elaborating its state-capitalist view of the Soviet Union and was unable to see beyond that. There was also a problem with the IMG. The people on the board were fine, but they did not really agree with the leaders of their organisation. A complication was that the journal had been founded by people in the Institute of Soviet Studies, but the IMG took a different approach.

It soon became clear that *Critique* had to be independent and even an

advisory board where representatives of the groups were present was a problem.

But we were certainly on friendly terms. Mandel and I had a debate in London - in 1978, I think - that went on all day. But people gradually dropped off the board and its nature changed, although Mandel remained on it.

**How do you see *Critique* developing?**

Originally the intention was for it to come out twice a year, but for a time it was nearer once a year. Now, however, it is published by Routledge and comes out quarterly.

The journal now has more space and we have a policy of publishing anything of sufficient quality within the Marxist tradition. The aim remains the same: to develop Marxist theory.

The features we have published around the question of capitalist crisis have been better than most published elsewhere. Most of what passes for 'analysis' in the media - and on the left - has been hopeless. There is no real explanation as to why crises take place - apart from pointing to the bubble, which does not explain anything.

The debate over the theory of crisis does, however, show that it is possible for there to be a number of different views within Marxism. In one sense there are more viewpoints within Marxism than outside it.

***Critique* has always adopted themes for exploration. In the last couple of years you have personally become involved in campaigning for a Marxist party. Do you think that the question of party might be a useful theme to explore today?**

To do that we would have to have writers of sufficient quality. The left is in a very poor state and is desperately in need of theory before a party can be formed ...

**... which is in itself a question of theory.**

As I say, it is not that easy to get good people to write. We could hope for the best and accept anything that comes, but I would want contributions of a high enough standard, which are not always that easy to get. So that would be a problem.

However, it might be useful to have an issue on that question. That more or less relates to the present situation - that is to say, the situation resulting from the crisis. It is fairly obvious that more people will look to socialism, but will not know how to get it. The attitude towards capitalism has clearly changed. We knew it does not work, but the present crisis has made that more obvious to many people, including those who are suffering badly as a result.

One would therefore expect a demand for change and so, yes, that puts the question of party on the agenda. That is linked to

the question of crisis - a long-term one, not merely cyclical, and one that will develop more and more powerfully.

As for themes more generally, the crisis will no doubt be an ongoing one. We have one theme per year and the current one is 'Marxism and freedom of expression', coinciding with our 50th issue. In 2011 we are planning to revisit the question of Stalinism - it just so happens that it will be 50 years since Khrushchev ordered the removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum in Red Square.

I was actually in Moscow in 1961 - the university department where I was based was opposite Red Square and the event created a tremendous stir at the time. I went there during the session of the 22nd Congress when Khrushchev made his speech and a whole lot of people had come to Red Square. They were milling around and actually speaking to each other about politics, which was quite different from anything that had happened for more

than 40 years.

1961 was undoubtedly an important moment, and so we in *Critique* are using the opportunity of the anniversary to look back at the whole question of Stalinism. This is particularly pertinent, since there has been something of a revival of Stalinist nostalgia

in Russia.

**Which says a lot about the failure of the international movement for socialism.**

Yes. Hopes in both the market and for a better society have been dashed. But a residual yearning for a socialist future remains. These are some of the issues we will be discussing at our February 27 conference ●

**Remembering the past, rethinking the future**

**Saturday February 27, 12**

**noon to 5pm: *Critique***

**seminar, London School of Economics, room B212, second floor, Columbia House, corner of Aldwych and Houghton Street, London WC1.**

**Speakers: Hillel Ticktin, Mick Cox. Followed by celebration of 50th issue.**

**Organised by *Critique*: critique.journal@yahoo.co.uk.**

Hillel Ticktin



## REVIEW

# In defence of Leon Trotsky

Hillel Ticktin demolishes Robert Service's much hyped *Trotsky: a biography* (Harvard University Press, 2009, pp600, £25)

**B**ob Service's book on Leon Trotsky has been very widely reviewed by left and right.

Perhaps one of the best reviews is by Paul Le Blanc ('Second assassination of Trotsky' *Links - International Journal of Socialist Renewal*: <http://links.org.au/node/1440>). He makes most of the points necessary in any competent overview: that the book has a scholarly apparatus, with many points that are useful and some that are new; that there is an element of sloppiness in a number of the assertions; and that Service appears to be driven by a political agenda, which is not dissimilar to that of the research institution where he did much of his work for this volume - the Hoover Institution, known for the rightwing views of its scholars.

Le Blanc deals with some of the assertions made over the radio and television: that this is the first full-scale biography of Trotsky, not written by a Trotskyist. That the Russian, Volkoganov, had written a critical biography some 10 years ago is well known, but Service excludes Russians in his written claim to authorship, though not when interviewed on Radio 4 in the UK. It is obvious nonsense and Le Blanc quotes the examples of Payne, Segal and Carmichael.

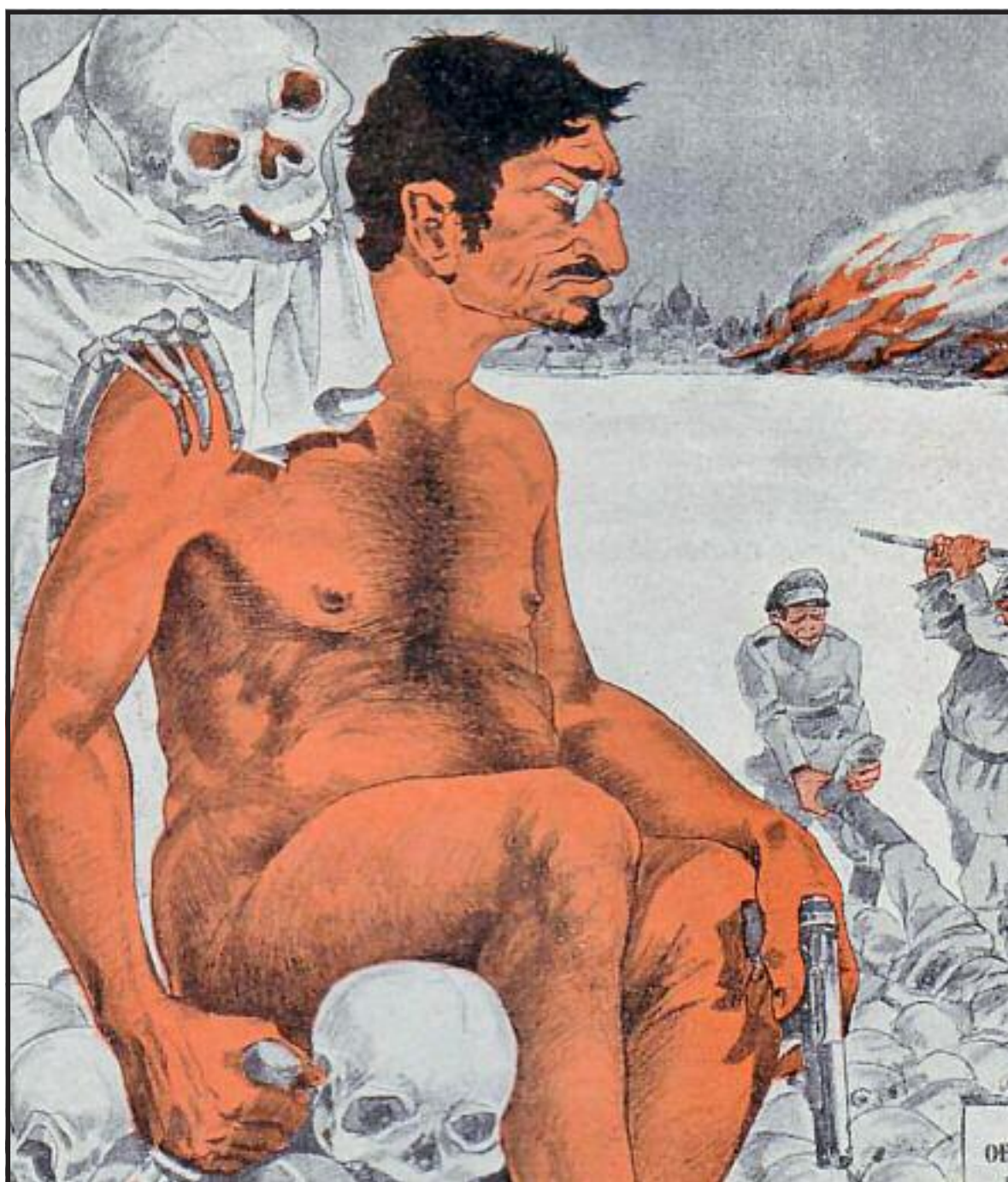
The book flows easily and keeps the attention of the reader. The reasons, however, are only partly to his credit. *Trotsky: a biography* is superficial. It has a scholarly form, but is not scholarly, whatever else it might be. Service makes assertion after assertion as to Trotsky's motivations, Trotsky's character, Trotsky's originality, his intellectual competence (not to speak of his ability as a lover) - all without sufficient reference or argumentation.

His fundamental thesis is stated at the beginning - that Trotsky belongs, along with Hitler and Stalin, among the great killers of all time. Trotsky, Service asserts, was a violent man. Secondly, he asserts that Trotsky made a career out of politics, but was a *poseur*, and an arrogant, cold, would-be leader.

His own description of Trotsky's history fails to support these theses. He shows how Trotsky turned down Lenin's offer to be prime minister, and various other prominent roles, and only reluctantly became the commissar for war. However, the one section of the book which is without the constant snide remark and which breaks with the popular Stalinist portrayal of Trotsky, as playing no role, is the section on the civil war, where Service makes clear in some detail that Trotsky built up the Red Army and was pivotal in its eventual victory. He makes even clearer Trotsky's bravery and his military prowess, citing his importance to the defence of Petrograd.

## Terrorism

However, he argues that Trotsky was part of Bolshevik brutality and terrorism. He points to the fact that Trotsky did not countermand Stalin's arbitrary executions in Petrograd. Given the bad blood between them, there is every reason to believe that Stalin might have disobeyed, as he had before, and so caused a crucial breach at a time when the Bolshevik situation was desperate. While this is only supposition, we cannot lay Stalin's actions at Trotsky's feet quite so



Perpetuating anti-communist myths

simply. More serious is Service's use of Trotsky's defence of terrorism in *Terrorism or communism*.

Any scholar reading Trotsky's chapter on terror in that book can recognise that the use of the word 'terror' is not the same as its use today, referring to such terrorist groups as the IRA or al Qaeda. In the introduction to that book, Trotsky explicitly condemns terror of the latter kind. He had done so much earlier, referring to anarchist groups. Trotsky is using 'terror', in the relevant chapter, in the sense of the Russian word *ushas*, which refers to fear and horror in the first instance. He is arguing that during a period of war, particularly a brutal civil war, fear is a necessary component. He is also saying that since war is war, people are killed and executed, particularly when the regime itself is at stake, and that the whites were particularly brutal themselves.

This cannot be gainsaid. Seventy thousand Jews, alone, were killed in pogroms instigated by the whites. White terror after the Paris Commune, and after 1905 showed what the alternative was. Since then we have witnessed the extreme brutality of the right and the extreme right in many instances - of which, in the post-war period, Greece, Argentina, Chile and, in the case of the British empire, Kenya are good instances. The brutality of the right does not justify the left doing the

same and one may hope that it will never happen again. That does not deal with the question, however.

The question that Trotsky posed was whether a war can be conducted as a socialist war, in which enthusiasm replaces hierarchy, and fear and persuasion takes the place of imprisonment and execution. To ask the question is to get the answer. Within capitalism, war is war and socialists can only modify its nature to a very limited degree. At that time, World War I was conducted under the tried and tested rules, which involved shooting deserters, instilling fear into subordinates and into the enemy. Trotsky accepted these rules as the only ones likely to be successful. No one calls this terrorism, though later generations might well do so.

In short, Bob Service has regurgitated the standard critique of Trotsky, which he has every right to do, but without the necessary scholarly discussion of the issue. Whatever one thinks of the issue itself, Service has totally failed to substantiate his argument that Trotsky was in the same league as Stalin and Hitler. Trotsky did not directly or indirectly order the killing of masses of people, although he did sanction executions and imprisonment. Had he or the Bolsheviks been of that mind, they would have lost the civil war itself.

Historical periods when millions

were killed, as under Stalin, were not induced just by one mad man, however brutal and powerful, but by the instability and irrationality of the system itself. Seven million died in the civil war, but one cannot attribute any substantial number to Trotsky himself, though one can point out that without external intervention a fraction of that number would have died.

The Bolsheviks won the civil war, to a considerable extent due to Trotsky's conduct of it, but the destruction, the massive loss of revolutionary personnel, combined with the exhaustion and inevitable disillusionment, effectively provided the basis of the subsequent Stalinist counter-revolution. The first stages of moving to socialism will always be difficult, but the conduct of a war using capitalist forms of hierarchy both for the army and for the population, in war communism, could only demoralise the population. This is why the left oppositions of the time - the military and workers' oppositions - were so militant in demanding change.

Ever since the issue has remained open. It is hard to see that Lenin and Trotsky were wrong in that the alternative would have been a repetition of the Paris Commune with its attendant horrific destruction by the right. They took a chance and changed the world. The success of the Russian Revolution, with all its defects, altered

the world forever, and it entered a long-drawn-out and bloody transition process. Service, of course, cannot see this, as his book is a pedestrian plod, bereft of ideas, but replete with snide remarks.

## Intellectual

At one level, this book is Hamlet without the prince. It tries to go through Trotsky's life on a number of planes, most particularly his personal life. There is even a chapter on his sexual affairs, including an intimate quote from a letter from Trotsky to his wife on that subject. As with every other aspect of Trotsky, Service discovers him to be self-centred in love too. While this might be salacious and draw people to read the book, it is irrelevant to understanding the man.

This is partly because Trotsky was above all an intellectual, who made crucial contributions to Marxism and to thought in general; partly also because Trotsky became the living embodiment of the Russian Revolution itself. Yet if Trotsky argued this or that or undertook a particular action, Service always manages to find an obnoxious interpretation. If he had done the reverse and always cast Trotsky's actions in a positive light, he could be accused of being an acolyte or a hagiographer. The point is that any scholar worth his salt would look at all sides and interpretations in order to consider reality. Clearly, however, that is not the purpose of the book.

In this connection, Service discovers that Trotsky was not an intellectual - or at least he was not in the least original and so there is no need to discuss his ideas, as there are none to discuss. If Service were himself a better educated intellectual, there could be debate, but he quite evidently understands as much about Marxism as Winston Churchill or Count Bismarck. Marxism is not easy to grasp, particularly at the present time, and for someone who rejects the whole theory it is probably impossible to understand its analytical power. It follows that such a person could not appreciate the development of Marxist thought. Unfortunately Service tries to tackle the issue by talking of Trotsky, philosophy and Sidney Hook, and of James Burnham and Max Shachtman, without giving the substance of the debate, or apparently being aware that Trotsky had written on Marxist philosophy a number of times in his life prior to this affair.

However, Marxism is above all a mode of political-economic analysis, used as a means of understanding the world, the better to change it. In this light, Trotsky's contributions were seminal. Amazingly, Service reduces the concept and theory of permanent revolution to the simplistic idea that the workers would take power in Russia. In fact, Marx had argued, after 1848, that the revolution became permanent only when the working class took power. The working class, as Marx put it, were in capitalism but not of capitalism. (One should note that Marx and Trotsky are talking about the collectivity, the class, and not the individual workers.) As a result, there is a permanent and persistent force destabilising the society, the result of which might lead to different kinds of upheavals and to different classes trying to take power, but only when the working class takes power does the society stabilise itself. This is arguing both that the political econom-



ic structure of the society is leading to revolution and that the working class is demanding revolution.

Trotsky took this concept and applied it to a part of the world subject to capitalism but without the political forms of capitalism and argued that there was no longer a possibility that there be any other successful upheavals, or attempts at revolution, other than those of the working class. The bourgeoisie were no longer prepared to fight for their own demands. Marx and Engels had got halfway there when they spoke of the German bourgeoisie no longer having a stomach for a fight. The bourgeoisie were afraid that they would let loose the tiger of socialist revolution and consequently they preferred to keep what privileges they had.

At one level, the background of the personnel who took power in the name of the working class was irrelevant (ie, they could be soldiers, or of peasant extraction), as long as they acted in the interests of the class. Similarly, in the English Revolution the class origin of the individuals in the Long Parliament was irrelevant to the class forces that they represented. Trotsky was right against Lenin's conception before 1917, because Lenin underestimated the necessary cowardice of the bourgeoisie and the short-termism of the peasantry. Trotsky's understanding undercut the issues, because permanent revolution was not an empiricist notion, but an inherent drive built into the structure of capitalism, which Trotsky had harnessed to the concept of a declining capitalism. The latter was something Lenin made his own, though only by 1917. It was, therefore, not surprising that Lenin agreed with Trotsky against his earlier self.

Permanent revolution applies to the period after 1917-22, in that Trotsky makes two important theoretical innovations. He argues that the social democratic betrayal of 1918-19 opened up a new period of transition between capitalism and socialism. He compares the present to the times of Machiavelli. Secondly, he argues that there had been a counterrevolution in the Soviet Union under Stalin, with a new social group taking power. Underlying it all, the dynamic of a new society pushing its way forward through the medium of the working class remains. The rejection of the exploited goes underground when it cannot express itself openly, and finds new ways of undermining the system. We are therefore living in a period of ever-present revolution, the world over. For Trotsky the revolution had to be systemic and therefore global - he was arguing that the revolution in permanence was itself global.

Others have pointed to Trotsky's conception of fascism as an important contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon. It is obvious that he was right to demand a united front - unlike the Stalinists, who actually united with Nazis in governing more than one German local state. His theory of fascism was directly contrary to that of Stalinism, which saw fascism/Nazism as the rule of the bourgeoisie by force. Instead he pointed out that it was the rule of the petty bourgeoisie - which the ruling class accepted for a time, though they did not like it. (The lives of two prominent German capitalists, Thyssen and Krupp, supports this thesis. Thyssen supported Hitler, but opposed his policies and escaped from Nazi Germany, only to end up in a concentration camp. Krupp opposed Hitler until he came to power.)

Trotsky's discussion of fascism is immediately relevant today, in that it makes clear that without Stalinism and a classic petty bourgeoisie it cannot repeat itself. Authoritarianism is another matter. The theory also points to the irrationalism of a capitalism in transition and in decline. This is fun-

damental to any understanding of the epoch as a whole. Trotsky developed a particular understanding of capitalism and connected it with a theory of long waves. I have discussed this in my book on Trotsky's ideas, but Service has no inkling of any of it.

## Loser?

It is curious that Bob Service should stoop to character assassination of the most trivial kind. He raises questions of morality in relation to Trotsky's relationship to his own family members. Thus he asks what kind of man would desert his wife and children in Siberia in order to escape, and then find another partner. He brings in the question of his Jewishness, his relationship to his father, etc - all of which are merely raised, leaving the reader wondering.

The problem here is that neither he nor we actually know much about these issues. If Trotsky's father was a revolutionary and taught his son how to organise, theorise or live underground, it would be important, but there is no evidence of anything of that kind. We are told that Trotsky played down his father's social position. The introduction of simplistic psychology into historical narrative is always unfortunate, but Service insists on discovering Trotsky personal faults, arrogance, stubborn belief in his own opinion, etc, as if they are undoubted, continuous and necessary traits of the character.

If Trotsky really was that arrogant it would have quickly ensured the defeat of the Red Army. What is arrogance? He was genuinely the most intellectually and organisationally capable of the Bolshevik leaders - Service makes this clear. Trotsky might well have been contemptuous of those with inflated opinions of themselves. Without a thorough study of his personality by sociologists and psychologists, it is pointless making such a remark, unless the author is intent on a process of systematic denigration.

It is a characteristic of bourgeois scholars that they see the left-right struggle in the 20s in terms of a direct fight, no holds barred, between Stalin and Trotsky. Service tries to argue that Trotsky was no politician and so was an inevitable loser. In fact, Trotsky yielded without any real fight. He was head of the army, he had the backing of Lenin and the Komsomol supported him. The genuine old Bolsheviks supported him. He could have taken power without much trouble. However, he argued that it had to be done democratically through the party and he lost in that arena. Since we know that the voting was falsified, and in any case Stalin had specially opened the party to a wide range of people, with little understanding of the issues, this made no sense.

Trotsky did not lose in any kind of battle: he never fought. He consciously decided that he should not take power in the circumstances. He justified it with the argument that Stalin was made, in what he became, by those who selected him, and he, Trotsky, would have been the same. So, when offered power by Antonov Ovsenko, chief commissar of the army, he rejected it. This issue is very poorly discussed by all scholars, to be fair to Service. However, he takes it up as proof that Trotsky was not a politician.

In American business parlance, part of present-day slang used by historians, Trotsky was a loser. But that is not how Trotsky or any Marxist would look at it. Trotsky did not want power for its own sake: he was a soldier of the revolution and, if it meant that he had to fight as part of an opposition to maintain the revolution, that is what had to be done. He accepted his fate. So much for arrogance.

In my view, with the hindsight of history, Trotsky was wrong. He ought to have taken power. Service, like Trot-

sky himself, thinks he would have been another Stalin, but that is impossible, if one understands the dynamic of the Soviet Union of the time. With the support that he had, Trotsky would have been able to maintain power for a sufficient time to alter the nature of the regime away from what it was becoming. If Trotsky had taken power, Nazism would not have succeeded, there would have been no world war, the purges would not have taken place, and it is possible that there would have been a revolution or a series of revolutions in Europe and Asia.

Even if no other revolution would have succeeded, and Trotsky would have died as Soviet ruler in 1953, world history would have been very different and almost certainly more advanced than at present. However, no-one could have imagined the utter barbarism to which the world was subjected from then onwards. It was the direct consequence of the Russian Revolution and its subsequent counterrevolution under Stalin. Trotsky clearly hoped that the Soviet left and the Soviet working class would take power and dismiss Stalin.

Unfortunately, Trotsky was not *sufficiently* arrogant in understanding that he had become the personification of the Russian Revolution itself and his dismissal symbolised the end of the revolution, but in the most objectively and subjectively debased and confusing way possible. The Soviet Union under Stalin was neither socialist nor capitalist, nor yet a transition to socialism. As a result, it was unviable, but like Frankenstein's monster it had no parent and no future. Its rulers behaved like mad people, caught in a mass of twisted tape in which they became ever more enmeshed. Cutting through the tape - short cuts, in other words - were constantly being tried and invariably made things worse.

## Dogma

Trotsky did not expect the USSR to last so long nor that it would come to an end so easily, so messily and so unsuccessfully. He did say that it could not last in its Stalinist form. He did not understand the nature of the Soviet Union that came into being in the 30s, but then nobody did or probably could have done so. He was always behind the curve of its degeneration. That, again, is understandable, in that he was an optimist, like all revolutionaries. Service tries to make these points but he gets lost in his own need to run Trotsky down.

It is unfortunate that some in the Trotskyist movement have taken his words as dogma. Trotsky was not himself dogmatic, for he is not clear whether the USSR was planned, says that the nature of the USSR is undetermined, and concedes that a social as well as a political revolution is required. Trotsky himself should not be lumbered with the simple formula that planning plus nationalisation makes for a workers' state, which has then to be critically defended. Service, however, appears as an upside-down dogmatic Trotskyist, as he tries to portray Trotsky as simply insisting on the concept of a workers' state, and always wanting to defend the USSR.

Trotsky's initial analysis of Stalinism has stood the test of time - as the seizure of power by the social layer controlling the bureaucracy. That gave them control of the surplus product. Marx, of course, talked of the form of the extraction of the surplus product being crucial. Trotsky was pointing to it, but he did not go any further. Once he lost his historic role, he was no longer in touch with history itself, and his pronouncements reflected that fact. Service, however, misunderstands Trotsky's analysis and tries to argue that he adopted a Menshevik analysis of the USSR, in order to claim

that he was unoriginal. This is simply not true. The standard Menshevik interpretation of the USSR was that it was state capitalist. The Mensheviks could not adopt Trotsky's position, as that would have meant they were wrong not to have supported the October revolution.

Robert Service, James D White, Ian Thatcher, Geoffrey Swain and various others over time have accused Trotsky of condemning socialism in one country, while practising it. The superficiality of such statements makes one wonder whether it is worth arguing the contrary case. Stalinists, of which Service is not one, have always argued that Lenin wanted to build socialism in the Soviet Union. However, there is no evidence of this, except such as Stalin forged or misinterpreted. The very act of taking power in one part of the world (the Soviet Union was not one country) did imply that the Bolsheviks were establishing a base, and like all bases it had to be built up, fortified, made liveable, etc. Treaties had to be entered into. That has nothing to do with socialism. In so far as such a base was helping the establishment of socialism over the world, even if it got wiped out and was rebuilt, one could talk in loose terms of building socialism. That is not the same thing as saying that socialism was being established in the USSR.

It is ridiculous to argue that the act of rebuilding the ruined Soviet Union in itself constituted a process of building socialism. Obviously the Bolsheviks could not rebuild it as a simple capitalist country either, and that was the tragedy, which facilitated Stalin's rise to power and Stalinism. It is worth noting that Trotsky explicitly criticised Preobrazhensky, the economic theorist of the left opposition and his close ally until he capitulated, for wobbling somewhat towards the concept of socialism in one country. Preobrazhensky repudiated this, showing the technical impossibility of economic reconstruction without aid. Trotsky, however, was criticising the new economics, but he could just as well have made the remarks of Preobrazhensky's fantasy of a Soviet Union which is successful alone but then reaches the limits of socialism in one country and takes on the world.

It is not surprising that those who do not understand Marxism also do not understand the meaning of socialism itself. Since both capitalism and socialism are global systems, only a global change is possible. It can begin anywhere, but it cannot sustain itself in any part of the world until socialism has established itself as an historically superior social system.

A superficial historian or writer will take words used at face value, without comparing them to conflicting statements, often made at the same time. This, indeed, is a major fault of this book, in that Service does not look for more than one source when using controversial quotes, and he does not try to dig deeper than that quote. As we know, individuals can say any number of things, or act in a series of ways, but it is the job of the historian to determine what idea or form of action lies at the core of their operation or their being, or if there is none.

## Hindsight

Trotsky saved Victor Chernov from the crowd in July 1917, but Service tells us that he only did it to avoid the left being victimised, and implicitly not because he was a decent human being. How does he know that? Could Trotsky really have been so calculating; and for that matter so convincing at the time, without including some common humanity in his speech?

There is almost no paragraph devoid of an undocumented snide remark, reflecting the author's sustained anti-Trotsky animus. This book

probably is unique in producing more personal criticisms of Trotsky than any other. Few of them make much sense, however. As indicated above, we are told that Trotsky decided on the career of a politician. Today when the word 'politician' conjures up images of corruption, betrayal of principles, men and women with views for all seasons, etc, it is an insult. However, no Marxist would ever see their devotion to the cause as a career. Politicians do have careers, but it is not a career to be a professional revolutionary, which condemns you to a life of perpetual begging, uncertainty and permanent insecurity. Clearly from the Service perspective Trotsky was an unsuccessful politician in that he lost to Stalin. He was a loser.

Service goes through the years of opposition to Stalin, but he does not seem to understand the nature of that opposition. He sees it as some form of semi-democratic debate. He does not ask why Trotsky bothered with it, since it was so much of a charade. If Trotsky took to reading books during meetings, why did he attend the meetings? Clearly Trotsky hoped that if he hung on, things would change for the better. He may have hoped against hope. The discussions among the left opposition of the time, in the secrecy of private walks or perhaps at home do not exist, but we do know that some at least were less optimistic and saw that the October revolution had suffered a defeat which, together with the betrayal of the social democrats, had opened up decades before socialism could advance again. Trotsky could not have been unaware of this viewpoint.

With hindsight we know that the situation was more critical for civilisation than anybody could have imagined, but no-one could have foreseen the future terrors of Stalinism and Nazism. The only criticism one could make of Trotsky is that he was not sufficiently 'arrogant'. He was the embodiment of the October revolution - not just as an historical figure, but as a living human being who had internalised its experience and acquired the necessary understanding - some might say wisdom - that went with it. He was honest and sincere through and through, and could never have been bought off, as Stalin was.

He ought to have trusted himself to have taken on the responsibilities thrown at him, first by Lenin as prime minister and then again by Lenin in his 'testament', or shortly before he died. The problem of the revolution was that there was no-one to compare with Lenin and Trotsky intellectually, organisationally and in all-round capability, so that Trotsky had no-one else to force his hand, once Lenin was dead. He underestimated Stalin and Stalinism, thinking that Bukharin and the bourgeoisie were the main enemy. While the ultimate opponent was the bourgeoisie, he turned out to be wrong about Bukharin as the primary opponent, partly because of Stalin himself, whose social base formed very quickly.

Trotsky sacrificed his life, all his manifold talents and abilities, to the cause of humanity. He made mistakes and misjudgements, as everyone must do, but humanity had made a giant leap forward at the time of the revolution. Even though we have been partially thrown back, the potential remains and capitalism continues to be fatally injured.

Revolutionaries are made; they are not born. Trotsky and Lenin acquired their understanding and their ability to help the revolutionary tide through involvement in the working class movement. Equally, when the tide moves out, the old leaders are left adrift, and they must necessarily lose some of their old surefootedness. But only a misanthrope will charge them with this or that misstep ●



## THE LEFT

# Bureaucratic centralism and ineffectiveness

The split of the John Rees-Lindsey German Left Platform from the Socialist Workers Party has generated a small round of discussion on the party question in the left blogosphere, writes **Mike Macnair**. But what is missing is a recognition of the need for Marxist unity

**T**he Left Platform split, amidst complaints of a new restrictiveness in the Socialist Workers Party's regime and a sectarian turn, is not that important in itself: a small number of comrades have taken a step away from partyism towards 'movementism'. Rees and German can hardly be regarded as principled actors in this affair, and their claim that the SWP's bureaucratic centralist regime has dramatically and qualitatively changed for the worse is obvious rubbish.

But even if the Left Platform split is unimportant, the question it poses is this. The SWP way of doing things is mirrored in rather less grotesque forms in the Socialist Party in England and Wales and in more grotesque forms in many smaller left groups. The recent substantial split in the International Marxist Tendency<sup>1</sup> and in recent years and on a smaller scale splits in Workers Power (Permanent Revolution) and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (the Commune) provide examples from a very long and lamentable history. Is there an alternative to this way of doing things?

## SWP and split

The basic bureaucratic centralist institutional forms of the SWP regime - ie, the central appointment of district organisers, the secret character of internal discussion and the ban on 'permanent factions' and 'factionalising' outside the pre-conference period - were adopted by the International Socialists-SWP under Tony Cliff in the 1970s. They were copied from the US Socialist Workers Party and the ideas of James P Cannon, and justified on the basis of 'Bolshevisation'.

Their adoption marked the end of a period of splits in the SWP which had given birth to Workers Fight (now AWL), Workers Power, the Revolutionary Communist Group (aka *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*), the short-lived Workers League (later International Socialist Alliance) and others. The new regime prevented big splits by pre-emptive expulsion of dissenters as soon as they attempted to contact other people or spread their ideas. In effect, the latest split is a merely the latest operation by the SWP Kremlin (central committee) to cut off debate before it really gets going, through provocations, to which the Left Platform have responded by walking out.

The culture which naturally goes along with these institutional forms is one of hiding differences in the central leadership from the membership, secrecy more generally, degradation of the education and political culture of the ranks (since education means developing the ability to make your own informed decisions), a top-down organisational approach, arrogance of the full-timers and permanent leaders and bullying of other members, a tendency to marginalise dissent by *ad hominem* smears on the dissenters, and, as a result, a growing dominance of a group-think which diverges further and further from engagement with reality.

In the external world the result of the

political degradation of internal life and education is that the organisation's existence and 'leading role' becomes its only real purpose: to be attained by bureaucratic top-down control of fronts and by bureaucratic alliances in which 'the party' can pose as 'the left' for internal consumption without actually fighting for any concrete political positions. The resulting control-freakery inevitably produces a gradual growth of cynicism, demoralisation and demobilisation among everyone involved who is not either an SWP member or employed as a trade union or party full-timer.

Rees and German were slightly junior to the original creators of the SWP's institutional forms and political culture, but they were full participants in its operation, and the Respect debacle - which centred on the personal role of John Rees - was in a sense the moment at which the unreal group-think came up against reality and its unreality was exposed.

A minority went over to George Galloway. The majority of the SWP, including the Left Platform, preferred to cling to the group-think idealisation of the role of their own organisation and its history. They could not deny that the outcome of Respect was a defeat for their project, but the only explanation they offered was Alex Callinicos's obviously false group-think idea that it represented a shift to the right by George Galloway - allegedly part of the same process as Bertinotti dragging Rifondazione Comunista into the Unione government coalition in Italy. Not even SWP members could wholly self-deceive to the extent of buying this as an explanation, and John Rees was the obvious scapegoat for the defeat. Since then, as Peter Manson explained in last week's paper, Rees and his supporters have been looking for a more or less dignified way out of the SWP.<sup>2</sup>

## Blogosphere

SWPers who have intervened in the blogosphere discussion argue that the negative aspects of the internal regime of the SWP have been overstated, Rees and German got what they deserved and so on. This is trivial. More importantly, they are driven to some extent to recognise the negatives. And they certainly recognise them in *other groups*. But they argue that we just have to put up with them - either as unfortunate consequences of objective dynamics, or as negative side-effects of the necessities of effective organisation.

At its most brutal this idea is expressed in Mark P's comment on Louis Proyect's blog: "... A problem with your line of argument, Louis, is that there has been no shortage of attempts to build socialist groups with less 'centralist' structures, including those that reject democratic centralism and those that keep the language but do regularly publish their internal debates. I am unaware of any of these groups being notably more successful in growing than, say, the British SWP. It's the ISO rather than Solidarity which has grown over the last decade."<sup>3</sup> Or, put another way (as I have

heard it said by SWPers), 'You can criticise our organisational methods when you're as big as we are.'

On the other hand, the SWP's critics have in common the belief that the character of the SWP regime and the endless splits flow from *sectarianism*. (We in CPGB share this view, but our interpretation of what sectarianism means is so different from the modern, standard leftwing interpretation of the word that the point needs to be flagged here before substantive discussion.)

The SWP's critics also commonly reject the idea of the 'Leninist van-

## Collective decision-making for collective action long antedates the 'Leninist combat party' form

guard party' in favour of something *both* politically broader *and* organisationally looser: an attempt to organise *the whole of the left*, not merely the whole of the *Marxist left*, or *the whole of the workers' movement* (but without the pro-capitalist right wing of that movement, which is assumed to be somehow outside it). And an attempt to do so on the basis of 'network' and less centralist forms of organisation.

The problem of this view is that what it leads to - under the conditions which have prevailed since the fall of the Soviet Union - is the abandonment of anything but *unorganised* commentary from the standpoint of Marxism. Because it insists on *broad* unity as a panacea for *Marxist* disunity and the bureaucratic rule in the groups, it refuses to confront the actual strategic political differences in the broad, mass workers' movement about the state, nationalism and political democracy. The result is the drag to the right - like Rifondazione.

If comrades were to look their line squarely in the face, it implies the policy of the Communist Party of the USA of promoting the 'left' in the US Democratic Party and promoting the Democrats against the Republicans; and in Britain, it implies an unorganised 'soft left' in the Labour Party (and ultimately the course of the British Eurocommunists, who liquidated their party to become hangers-on of ... Blairism).

## Bureaucratic centralism

There are, of course, arguments from Lenin, Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders in favour of the institutional forms of the 'Leninist combat party' - basically, arguments constructed in the early 1920s. At this time the Bolsheviks were engaged in building a state out of a peasant war against landlordism, and had to construct a

collective Bonaparte or 'man on horseback' to represent the peasants against the landlords by mastering the peasants' resistance to giving up their surplus.

Meanwhile, the 'centrist' leaders - Kautsky, Martov, the Austro-Marxists and so on - were using arguments for broad class unity and the defence of democracy, meaning the liberties of the pro-capitalist leaders of the broad workers' movement, against Bolshevik 'terrorism' and 'adventurism'. At the end of the day, these arguments boiled down to a policy of lending *political* support to the global war against Bolshevism and for the 'restoration of order', which the capitalist states were conducting and which capitalist politicians and media internationally, including the pro-capitalist leaders of the broad workers' movement, certainly understood as a 'hot war'.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the Bolshevik leaders produced arguments in favour of a violent military centralism, mitigated only by the congress, as the basis of party organisation. As the revolutionary movements in the west were defeated, the Bolsheviks also emphasised their own unique strengths as against the defeated western left. And in the process - beginning with Lenin's *Leftwing communism, an infantile disorder* - they constructed an almost completely fictional origin-myth, in which the military centralism created in 1919-21 was represented falsely as the direct continuity of Lenin's 1902 *What is to be done?* and the decisions taken in the 1903 split in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.<sup>5</sup> After Lenin's death, the historical myth was only emphasised and re-emphasised in the leadership's struggle against Trotsky and 'Trotskyism'.<sup>6</sup>

However, apart from 'orthodox Trotskyists' and 'Marxist-Leninists', defenders of bureaucratic centralism do not use these arguments. Some of the better educated SWPers are no doubt aware that the origin-myth has been disproved and that the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) down to 1919 functioned in ways totally unlike Tony Cliff's image of it and equally unlike the institutions and culture of the SWP and similar organisations, and therefore do not want to venture into these waters. Others simply have no real knowledge of the history of their own movement. Either way, the arguments they advance are practical ones about the present situation, rather than theoretical ones about the history of the movement or the inevitability of a future revolutionary crisis.

## Effective campaigning

The first positive argument is that a centralised 'Leninist' party (or parties) is necessary to mobilising forces in broad mass campaigns. 'Christian h' comments on Louis Proyect's blog that "there's a reason why so many movements appear as fronts of democratic centralist groups: it's because those groups do have the organising power to get things done." 'Noel' on Andy Newman's Socialist Uni-

ty blog remarks, in relation to the London Social Forum, that "History might also tell you that to put on an event for 25,000 activists across Europe meant working with the GLA and Socialist Action, something none of us were expecting to be so, ah, fraught ... it was a choice between trying to deal with that as best we could or not doing it at all ... there was no way the 'opposition' could have done anything ..."; and 'Salman Mirza' says that "... the majority of calls, emails around things like UAF, volunteers needed for leafleting picket lines, stop the closures campaigns, etc are from the SWP".<sup>7</sup>

This line is a half-truth. The half that is true is important. Without means of collective decision-making for common action and an agreement that decisions for common action are binding, the multifarious efforts of individuals run into the ground. If there are 57 varieties of left groups in Britain, there are 570 varieties of single-issue campaigns, most of them creating absolutely negligible impact on national or local politics, and 5,700 varieties of leftwing 'independents' with even less collective impact.

The half that is untrue is equally important. Collective decision-making mechanisms for collective action long antedate the 'Leninist combat party' form. Single-issue campaigns go back at least as far as the campaign against the slave trade in the late 18th and early 19th century, trade unions emerged from the differentiation of the craft guild tradition between masters and employees over the same period, and so on.<sup>8</sup> It would be ridiculous to suggest that because these organisations and movements had no 'Leninist combat party' they were ineffective.

Also before the 'Leninist combat party' form emerged, pre-1914 France and Germany had broad-unity socialist parties. Britain had Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation, the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party, the impossibilist Socialist Party of Great Britain, and so on. In terms of the 'level of agreement on fundamentals required for practical common action' according to SWP supporters (and SPEW supporters) the pre-war British organisations look more like the British far left today. Guess which form was more effective for practical political campaigning: the British or the continental?

The reality is that the bureaucratic-centralist groups dominate decision-making in broader organisations *not* because the groups are indispensable to decision-making for campaigning, but because the groups form coherent minorities, while the 'independents' are scattered - the same mechanism which allows a single shareholder with, say, a 30% minority to dominate a corporation. The issue has been studied at a more general theoretical level by Moshé Machover.<sup>9</sup>

It follows that the strength of the bureaucratic-centralist left groups in broader organisations is *not* because bureaucratic centralism is actually essential to effective campaigning. It is merely an effect of the fact that the



bureaucratic-centralist groups are (currently) larger than any alternative form. The issue therefore has no independence of the argument I cited earlier - the simple point supporters of the SWP (and SPEW, and so on) argue, that their relatively large size proves the success of their organisational forms.

## Don't meddle with the big guys

At a certain level, if we take this argument seriously, it reduces to absurdity. None of the groups are anything like the size of the Labour Party or has achieved anything comparable to the gains it achieved for (sections of) the British working class. So it should follow that none of us (SWP included) has any right to criticise the organisational forms of the Labour Party. We can go further than that. The Tory Party is and always has been larger than the Labour Party. So ... The biggest organised international political organisation in the world is the Catholic church.<sup>10</sup> So perhaps the far left should adopt papal infallibility ...

Oops. It has. That was where we started, with the organisational forms of the SWP. In Cliff's lifetime these worked from the infallibility of *Tony Cliff*, backed up by the Vatican (the central apparatus) and the centrally appointed bishops (the district full-timers). Since his death it has worked from the infallibility of the central committee, which has to remain monolithic (hence the need to drive out Rees and German).

Louis Proyect in his post on the topic suggests that bureaucratic-centralist groups can get up to a few thousand members but then get stuck, unable to progress further to real mass influence. One of the commentators remarked that, if so, the advice to the far left should be to build groups like the SWP, but then break with their organisational forms when you get to a few thousand members ...

Comrade Proyect's argument is another half-truth. A few thousand is certainly the *usual* maximum size of such groups both globally at present and on average across the history of the workers' movement. But the Italian far-left groups in the 1970s got considerably bigger, and of these only Lotta Continua had a 'loose' structure. The Iranian Fedayeen at its height got up to tens of thousands - while retaining the structural and political forms of a far-left sect. And, of course, the fully-Stalinised 'official' communist parties were thoroughly bureaucratic-centralist, if - outside of the USSR itself - they were less inclined to pre-emptive suppression of dissent, leadership bullying, etc, than the SWP. But they were mostly (including the old CPGB) a lot bigger than any of the far-left groups. Hence (in part) Andy Newman's conversion to 'official communism'.

Moreover, what happens to far-left groups that get up into the mid-thousands is not usually to get stuck and stay there at that size for a prolonged period of time. Rather what happens is that they explode. Once you are up into the mid-thousands - let alone above - you repeatedly confront political questions for which the distinctive *theoretical* positions of Cliff-think, or Grant-think, or Moreno-think, or whatever, do not prepare you. What you need is a *summary political programme* identifying the organisation's *strategic, long-term* goals. This can both orient members facing new tactical choices and identify the common political ground that members share, even when they disagree about major political questions like bussing in Boston (which blew up the large US Maoist groups).<sup>11</sup>

The other aspect of the half-truth is that far-left groups commonly *start*

*out* with the intention to do better on the 'democracy front' than the 'official communist' parties. The International Socialists, the predecessor of the SWP, grew from around 200 in 1966-67 to around 1,500-2,000 (real members, not paper members) in the mid-1970s. It did so on the basis of a highly *open* organisational regime. I can personally remember ISers in 1974-75 criticising the excessive *centralism* of the International Marxist Group. More recently, the IMG has been their usual 'object lesson' of how allowing 'permanent factions' destroys an organisation. Bureaucratic centralism develops *with the growth of the full-time apparatus*.

This history - not the history of tactical nous or of 'real work in the class struggle' - is the real reason why the SWP is big. In the late 1940s there was a Trotskyist organisation in Britain called the Revolutionary Communist Party. It split into several fragments of varying sizes. By the mid-1960s the largest was Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League (later Workers Revolutionary Party). Second largest was Cliff's *Socialist Review* group. Third was Ted Grant's Revolutionary Socialist Group (Militant, the predecessor of today's Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal). The IMG was a micro-group of adherents of the European Fourth International. In the 1970s all the groups grew very dramatically, albeit unevenly; but the relation of forces *between them* did not change.

Since then the number of small groups has multiplied, and the relation of forces has changed. It has changed because the WRP imploded, the IMG broke into fragments (Socialist Action, Communist League, International Socialist Group) and Militant split and the Taaffe wing split again. It has not changed because of the relative success of the organisational forms of the SWP and similar organisations. Their size is no more than their inheritance of their long history, their organisational forms are no more than the (indirect) inheritance of Stalinism.

## We're splintered because we're small

A very widespread view both among supporters and critics of the SWP's regime is that these phenomena are regrettable, but result inevitably from the small size of the far-left groups and their isolation from the 'real mass movement'. Perhaps if the right means were adopted of integrating yourself in the broader mass movement the phenomena would be overcome. Perhaps (SWPers are apt to argue) we just have to wait out the current downturn in the class struggle and put up with it.

Both arguments are nonsense. In the first place, very few of the organised left groups are 'classic sectarians' who reject participation in trade unions and mass campaigns in favour of street-stall propaganda. Organise a broad campaign, demonstration or electoral coalition, organise a strike support group or network: most of us will be there (to the extent, of course, that we have the forces). Secondly, integration in the mass movement has *in no way* been an obstacle to sect-building: look at the multiple, competing left groups within the Labour Party (fewer now than there were, of course); look at the collisions between the projects of different groups in the trade unions.

Secondly, big upturns in the class struggle *do not* drive the left towards any more effective unity than it achieves already through campaigns, strike support activities, etc. The rising tide lifts all boats, as happened across Europe and in North and Latin America in the 1970s. If anything, the rise in the mass struggle tends to drive towards splits and the multiplication of groups, as all political choices be-

come sharper and more urgent.

Thirdly, at a time when the bourgeois press is dominated by allegations of Gordon Brown bullying Downing Street staff, it is ridiculous to suppose that bureaucratic centralism is a prerogative of small, marginal political groups. To repeat my characterisation of the SWP's culture above: hiding differences in the central leadership from the membership, secrecy more generally, degradation of the education and political culture of the ranks (since education means developing the ability to make your own informed decisions), a top-down organisational approach, arrogance of the full-timers and permanent leaders and bullying of other members, a tendency to marginalise dissent by *ad hominem* smears on the dissentients, and, as a result, a growing dominance of a group-think which diverges further and further from engagement with reality. Isn't this *also* a characterisation of New Labour (and, for that matter, of the Tories in Thatcher's later years)?

We are not splintered because we're small; we're small because we're splintered. The ability to construct unity in the parties of the Second International and - for Britain, the US and a few other places - in those of the Comintern - was not a result of a favourable objective situation:<sup>12</sup> the fa-

## Breaking with bureaucratic centralism and endless splits is not a problem of the objective situation

vourable objective situation can exist without producing unity. It was the result of a *will to unity*, of concrete decisions to fight for unity on the basis of definite political projects.

### What alternative?

The questions of the objective and subjective causes of bureaucratic centralism and unprincipled splits, and the argument that isolation from the mass movement is the real cause, leads naturally to the question of the alternatives offered by critics. Louis Proyect offers merely a negative critique of 'Zinovievism'. Other critics of the SWP's party regime offer a more or less common response, though the tactical details vary. What is needed is a *broad mass* party.

The theoretical basis of this proposal I have just criticised. It is 'We're splintered because we're small': the idea that the only way the *Marxist* left can unite is to unite with the *broader* left - whoever this broader left is be - trade union officials, Labour MPs, 'anti-imperialist' nationalists of one sort or another, greens, liberation theologians - take your pick.

Within this party 'revolutionaries' may form unorganised *trends* or even semi-organised *platforms*, but should not form 'democratic-centralist' groups, which tend to 'place the interests of their group above the interests of the movement as a whole'.

### Sectarianism

'Placing the interests of your group above the interests of the movement as a whole', according to these comrades, is the essence of sectarianism. Surprising as it may at first sight seem, supporters of the SWP *agree* with them ... and so would supporters of a great many ... sects.

The 'formal source' of this concept of 'sectarianism' is in the English version of the *Communist manifesto*. The passage is famous:

"In what relation do the communists

stand to the proletarians as a whole? The communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties.

"They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

"They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

"The communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only:

1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.

2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

In point 2, the reference to "the movement as a whole", the German Marx and Engels wrote was: "*dass sie in den verschiedenen Entwicklungsstufen, welche der Kampf zwischen Proletariat und Bourgeoisie durchläuft, stets das Interesse der Gesamtbewegung vertreten*". Here "the movement as a whole", the *Gesamtbewegung*, is the 'movement' in the sense of *historical process* as a whole, the dictatorship of the proletariat as the road to communism. It is not the 'movement' in the sense in which we speak of 'the workers' movement' or 'the trade union movement' in modern English.

Sectarianism and bureaucratic centralism are quite genuinely two sides of the same face. That face is not, however, separation from the mass movement or 'placing the interests of your group above the interests of the movement as a whole'. It is the *refusal to unite for common action at the maximum possible level at which unity is possible*. The essence is an unwillingness to be in a minority: either from majorities which drive out minorities by bureaucratic means for fear that they might just win if the discussion was allowed to go on, or from minorities which walk out in order to pursue their own projects free from the 'fetters' of working with the majority round common ground. Both factors seem to have been at work in the Left Platform split from the SWP.

### That was then

If the *Communist manifesto* supplies - falsely - the 'proof-text' for comrades' definition of 'sectarianism', the First International and a highly artificial interpretation of the Second supply the practice which is supposed to go along with this orientation: uniting with reformists (especially with trade union leaders) on a minimal political platform, in the hope that this will produce a mass party within which the 'revolutionaries' can fight for their ideas. The First International was just such a 'broad movement'. (The Second was not: the German Social Democratic Party began as a unification of *left groups on the basis of a formal programme*,<sup>13</sup> and only afterward acquired a trade union base; the French and Italian parties began as unifications, but the trade unions in those countries remained separate syndicalist organisations; and so on.)

But *something has changed since 1870*. It is a change analogous to that which took place during the rise of the capitalist class in the late medieval to early modern period. Then, the city communes - originally the bourgeoisie's instruments of class struggle against the feudal lords and kings - were captured through concessions and turned into *instruments* of the late-feudal absolutist state. From around 1870 the capitalist class and its state began to pursue the same policy in relation to the *trade unions*

and - more gradually, with stops and starts - in relation to the *broad workers' parties*. Extensions of the franchise, in Germany partial inclusion of the workers' organisations in social security arrangements, and so on ...

It is for this reason that the 'broad workers' party' idea fails. The capitalist class has integrated an element of the workers' organisations into its state arrangements. This fact finds political expression among the dominant section of the workers' leaders in nationalism, class-collaborationism, constitutional loyalism - and forms of top-down, bureaucratic control to force through pro-capitalist policies.

The result is that the 'broad workers' party' is doomed either to fail - because there *is already* a 'broad workers' party', like the Labour Party - or, if it succeeds, to recapitulate the path of the Labour Party to serving capital, as has happened to the Brazilian Workers Party. In neither case does it provide a road out of bureaucratic centralism and sectarianism.

The workers' movement is really faced with a fundamental *political* choice: between nationalism, class-collaborationism, constitutional loyalism and bureaucratic control on the one hand - represented by the *actual* mass workers' parties; and class-political independence, the international solidarity of the working class as a class, and radical democracy in the state and in the movement on the other - represented, most imperfectly, by the far left. The path of 'broad' unity with class-collaborationist and nationalist bureaucrats as a precondition for unity of the Marxists is therefore a path which unavoidably leads to the abandonment of Marxist politics (class independence, internationalism, democracy) to create or preserve a unity which is in reality under the dictation of the capitalist state.

Breaking with bureaucratic centralism and endless splits is not a problem of changing the objective situation of the left. It is a problem of changing its *subjective ideas about organisation* and its political culture. If we achieve unity of the Marxist left our *ideas* will begin to impact on the broader left. If we do not achieve the unity of the Marxist left and an end to bureaucratic centralism, the result will be endless further splintering and even more pronounced ineffectiveness ●

### Notes

1. See 'Oil slick divisions', February 11.
2. 'Left Platform throws in the towel', February 18.
3. <http://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2010/02/17/lindsey-german-resigns-from-the-swp>.
4. A Read *The world on fire: 1919 and the battle with Bolshevism* (London 2008) tells the story from an anti-communist, journalistic perspective, but effectively brings out this point.
5. Lars T Lih *Lenin rediscovered* (Leiden 2006) is the most recent and most systematic discussion.
6. Trotsky's *The Third International after Lenin* and *The Stalin school of falsification* narrate this part of the process. The result is tendency among some Trotskyist critics of SWP-style bureaucratic centralism to blame this set of practices simply on Grigory Zinoviev - when any study of Lenin's *Collected works* for the period or of Trotsky's own *How the revolution armed* shows that both men played a central role in the development of the new party order.
7. [www.socialistunity.com/?p=5289](http://www.socialistunity.com/?p=5289); comments 201, 208.
8. Slave trade: A Hochschild *Bury the chains* (New York 2005) and M Macnair, 'Abolition and working class solidarity' *Weekly Worker* March 15 2007; trade unions: RA Leeson *Travelling brothers* (London 1979).
9. DS Felsenthal, MMachover *The measurement of voting power* (Cheltenham 1998); and on decision-making in communist society see [www.zcommunications.org/collective-decision-making-and-supervision-in-a-communist-society-by-moshe-machover](http://www.zcommunications.org/collective-decision-making-and-supervision-in-a-communist-society-by-moshe-machover) (2009).
10. A point made in one of his posts by 'Splintered Sunrise': <http://splinteredsunrise.wordpress.com>.
11. M Elbaum *Revolution in the air* (London 2002).
12. Except in the limited sense that the 1875 Gotha unification of the German socialists came at the right time to catch the massive expansion of the German working class at the same period.
13. For all the faults of the Gotha programme, criticised by Marx and Engels, it was well to the left of the programmes on offer by the British left as the basis of unity today.



## IRAN

# Two wrongs don't make a right

**Yassamine Mather** looks at the politics, hypocrisy and dangers of Ahmadinejad's nuclear programme

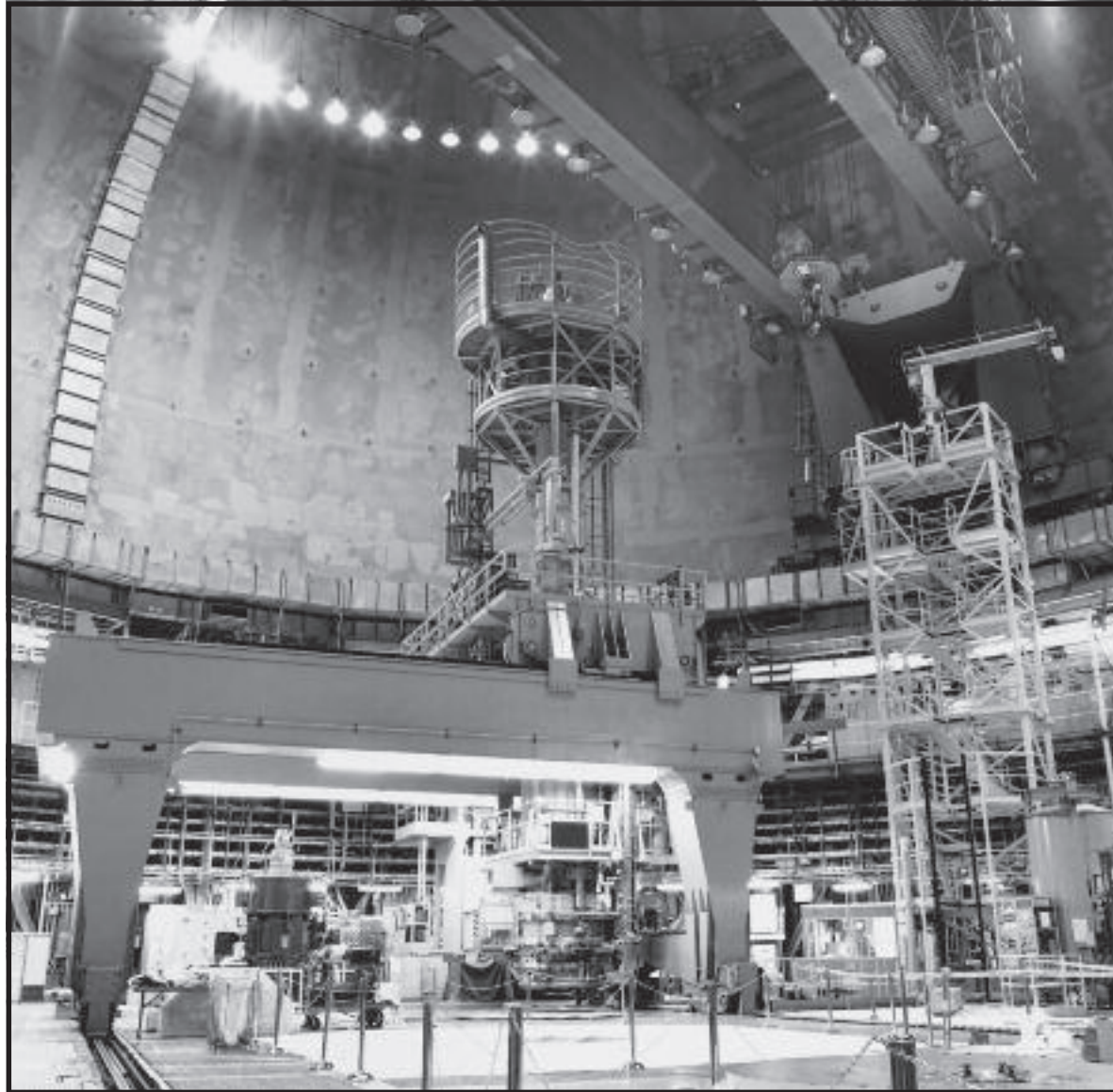
**T**here seems to be no end to the confrontation between western governments and Iran's Islamic regime over the nuclear issue.

In the latest phase of the continuing saga, on February 23, a day after the announcement by the head of Iran's nuclear programme that the country will build two new uranium enrichment facilities, Iran wrote to the International Atomic Energy Agency claiming that it is ready to hand over the bulk of its stockpile in a simultaneous exchange for fuel rods for its research reactor, adding that the exchange must take place on Iranian soil. This falls short of the demands by the so-called 'five plus one' (United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany). They had demanded that Iran's enriched uranium is first processed and then converted into fuel rods in Russia and France, returning the enriched fuel rods to Iran within a year.

Of course there are clear reasons why both sides need the confrontation to continue. For the US it is a question of asserting its authority in the Middle East and reducing Iran's own political influence in the region - an influence which, ironically, has been considerably strengthened by the establishment of the Shia occupation government in Iraq and the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Barack Obama will not bomb Iran's nuclear installations for the same reasons that George W Bush did not do so: partly because such a raid could not hope to stop the Iranian nuclear programme for more than a few months, and partly because Iran threatens retaliation against Israel and US troops, via its allies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Lebanon, not to mention the fact that such an attack might lead to a rise in the price of oil.

For the Iranian government, besieged by protesters in all its major cities, the continued threat of war and the imposition of further sanctions is a godsend. It can use sanctions as an excuse for the disastrous economic situation, for further attacks on workers' wages and for accusing all its opponents of being agents of foreign powers and increasing repression against the opposition as part of 'measures to strengthen national defence' in its war against US and UK.

The latest IAEA report, published on February 19, was the first to be produced under the new IAEA director, general Yukiya Amano, who re-



**Atomic energy: both sides need confrontation**

placed former chief Mohamed ElBaradei last year. The report's tone and its conclusion differ considerably from those produced under ElBaradei.

Last week's document implies the agency suspects Tehran might already be trying to develop a nuclear warhead and has begun enriching uranium to higher levels, theoretically bringing it closer to what is required for an atomic bomb. In addition, a worrying section of the report states: "On February 14 2010, Iran, in the presence of agency inspectors, moved approximately 1,950 kg of low enriched UF<sub>6</sub> [uranium hexafluoride] is a chemical compound consisting of one atom of uranium combined with six atoms of fluorine] from FEP [fuel enrichment plant] to the PFEP [pilot fuel enrichment plant] feed sta-

tion. The agency inspectors sealed the cylinder containing the material to the feed station."

If it is true that Iran has moved 94% of its enriched uranium from underground, one could argue that this is a deliberate provocation added to president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's order for uranium to be enriched to 20%. Such a provocation would aim to encourage Israeli military attacks in a desperate attempt to cling to power. Clearly Israel and more recently Saudi Arabia do not seem to share US reservations about such military action. Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak is in the US this week for 'talks on halting Iran's nuclear drive', prompting this headline in the *Washington Post*: "Prepare for war with Iran - in case Israel strikes". Israel's prime min-

ister, Binyamin Netanyahu, has also renewed his call for the 'international community' to impose an oil embargo on Iran, if necessary without UN security council approval.

When Israeli leaders further inflame the hysteria over Iran's nuclear industry they are without doubt being two-faced. Israel refuses to sign up to the nuclear proliferation treaty (NPT) and therefore is not obliged to report on its own arsenal of nuclear weapons or allow the inspection of its nuclear facilities. Most analysts agree that it has up to 400 nuclear warheads. Israel refuses to confirm or deny this. With that in mind, on September 18 2009, IAEA agreed a resolution which "expresses concern about the Israeli nuclear capabilities, and calls upon Israel to

accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards ..."

That is why attempts by the US and the European Union to stop Iran obtaining nuclear technology are hypocritical. IAEA's protocols which are supposed to prevent nuclear proliferation are a one way street. Countries which possess sufficient nuclear weaponry to destroy the world several times over (and are continuing to add to their arsenals) are laying down the law to others - or some of them. The US and its EU allies have for decades refused to even admit that Israel has nuclear weapons.

Ironically Iran's current status as the regional 'threat' is itself a direct consequence of the US-UK invasion of Iraq and the coming to power of a Shia, pro-Iran government in Baghdad. The recent pronouncements by the US and Israeli governments regarding Iran's nuclear programme are more to do with Iran's influence in the region, its close relations with the Maleki government in Iraq and the consequences of such influence in the forthcoming 'elections' in that country. That is why anti-war activists must condemn constant threats of military action against Iran and oppose sanctions.

However, two wrongs don't make a right and just because the US is opposed to Iran's nuclear policy, the left inside and outside Iran cannot take an opportunist position of defending nuclear proliferation in Iran while opposing it in the rest of the world. In embarking on an unprecedented programme of privatisation, accompanied by systematic non-payment of workers' wages, including in the state sector, Iran's rulers have constantly blamed financial difficulties. Many in Iran are questioning the wisdom of spending astronomical sums purchasing nuclear technology (often on the black market) by a regime that claims to be so short of funds.

Any support by the anti-war movement for the current rulers in Iran will be in direct opposition to the views of ordinary Iranians who are victims of the repressive policies of this regime, and to millions of Iranian workers who are victims of a corrupt Islamic government's privatisation policies. We must show our solidarity by supporting the majority of Iran's population, its workers, and dispossessed - against international capital, against the warmongers, but also against the repressive Islamist regime ●

## Hopi week of action

### London

Friday February 22 saw a successful gig in Stoke Newington, north London, organised by Hands Off the People of Iran. Boredom Riots, Egg Timer and Technosapien entertained a merry crowd and helped us raise over £110 for Workers Fund Iran.

The next day, Hopi comrades organised a solidarity stall in Trafalgar Square together with comrades from the March 8 Women's Organisation (Iran-Afghanistan). Together we gave out Hopi postcards, talked to many people about current developments in Iran and publicised the March 7 International Women's Day march which Hopi is co-sponsoring. We are hoping to make the stalls a weekly occurrence and to organise monthly gigs.

If you would like to help organise this vital solidarity work, then get in touch via [office@hopi.org](mailto:office@hopi.org).

**Ben Lewis**

### Cardiff

On Saturday February 20 comrades in Cardiff were on the streets to support the Hopi week of action. Among the normal glut of evangelists and chain store promotional campaigns on Queen Street, comrades with Hopi leaflets, petitions, badges and a collection can made a surprisingly positive impact.

On a busy shopping day, with most people making a beeline for the supermarket or fashion outlet, cash was raised for the campaign, constructive talks were had and many signatures

were collected in support of Hopi's principled approach.

After a promising day, plans are now in place to continue with more regular work in both Cardiff and Swansea.

**Dani Thomas**

### Cork

Hopi Ireland held two successful events last week to commemorate the 1979 revolution and build solidarity with the Iranian democratic and working class movement.

On Saturday February 13 activists held a street stall in Cork. We distributed literature and signed up dozens of new supporters. Then on Friday February 19 we had a film night with a showing of *Persepolis* and some first-hand accounts from Iranian activists.

Nasim, who took part in the 2009 demonstrations in Iran, spoke of the bravery of the people who took to the streets. She described the shock of those around her as state forces opened fire, indiscriminately killing and arresting activists. Many ordinary protesters now face serious charges of anti-state activity for taking part. A significant number are still in prison and most have no money for lawyers to represent them. Nasim said she was determined to do all she could to bring the situation in Iran to the attention of workers in the west.

Another activist, Parvaneh, had visited Iran recently. She described a very highly charged atmosphere. People are frightened, but also very angry. They want an immediate end

to the theocratic regime and its replacement by a secular and democratic state. She bemoaned the lack of organisation on the ground and said that people are desperate for real leadership against the regime.

There were a number of questions and contributions and the event helped give an insight into the living struggle in Iran. We also raised €50 for Workers Fund Iran, to assist prisoners and their families.

Hopi in Cork has other activities in the pipeline. We will be taking part in International Women's Day events on March 8 and are also planning more film nights and street stalls.

To get involved, contact me at [anne@hopi.info](mailto:anne@hopi.info), or on 086 234 3238 or via [www.hopi-ireland.org](http://www.hopi-ireland.org).

**Anne McShane**



## GREECE

# Crisis poses EU workers' unity



**Fighting unconnected national battles?**

**T**he global economic crisis has had a particularly profound impact on Greece, leading to mass working class action against the European Union-imposed 'growth and stability programme' assault on living standards.

A one-day general strike on Wednesday February 24, organised by the General Confederation of Greek Labour (GSEE), the All-Workers Militant Front (PAME), plus the Civil Servants Trade Unions (ADEDY), saw over two million workers walk out in protest against the savage wage cuts and tax rises demanded by the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok).

There were a few clashes with riot police and some banks were attacked by anarchist groups. But in the main Greek workers acted with exemplary discipline and where possible avoided unnecessary and unhelpful violence. They also ensured that hospitals and other such services maintained a skeleton staff.

Significantly, Wednesday's general strike coincided with a visit by high-powered delegations from the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They were in Athens to assess whether the government of George Papandreou is fully committed to forcing through the cuts they are demanding. With a €300 billion debt, the Greek government faces the real possibility that international money markets will not take up the full tranche of its much delayed 10-year bond issue. This has already sent jitters throughout the financial system and pushed the euro zone to the brink of crisis. Tellingly Fitch Ratings lowered its long-term rating of the four biggest Greek banks to a triple-B. Greece is seen as an unsafe bet and politically unstable.

Pasok was elected in a snap general election in October 2009, defeating the outgoing conservative New Democracy party by a huge majority. But Papandreou was forced to ditch his election pledges when it was revealed that the budget deficit amounted to no less than 12.7% of gross domestic product at the end of 2009 - more than four times the 3% limit set by the EU. The country was staring at bankruptcy and Papandreou claimed he had no alternative but to impose draconian austerity measures. Like all social democrat parties in office, Pasok saw no other way than to load the resulting crisis onto the backs of Greece's working class.

The February 24 action follows a strike of tens of thousands on February 10, which was initiated by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). According to the KKE, this was a means of putting pressure on the "employer-led and yellow trade unionism

that control the confederations of workers in the private (GSEE) and public sector (ADEDY)". ADEDY eventually backed the February 10 strike and called a rally in the centre of Athens.

But what strategy and tactics does the left propose? The KKE, which has 21 MPs, has been talking very militant, calling on union leaders to take the fight to "the government along with the employers, the EU, and the parties of the plutocracy that urge the working class to make the 'sacrifices' that the EU and the government demand". But it goes without saying that the 'official communists' have no conception of taking the struggle beyond the confines of Greece by attempting to link up working class resistance to EU-coordinated attacks across the continent. They cannot see beyond Greek 'solutions'.

Although the KKE helped found Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology, or SYN) as an electoral front in the late 1980s, it left shortly after. Synaspismos now consists of erstwhile supporters of the extinct Eurocommunist splinter, KKE (Interior), plus assorted leftists. Synaspismos president Alexis Tsipras expressed a partial truth recently: "The problem that the Greek economy is facing today is not a Greek problem. It is a European problem. It has to do with the way the European Union is constructed. Today, Greece is being faced - heading the list - like a guinea pig for the profiteering market forces. Tomorrow it could be Spain, Portugal and who knows which other country in the place Greece is today."

He went on to say: "The international financial crisis did not start either in Greece or in Spain. Those who created it want to use it as an opportunity for an even greater redistribution of wealth to the benefit of the powerful circles."

Synaspismos is now part of the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), which has 13 MPs, with Tsipras as its parliamentary leader. Apart from Synaspismos, Syriza comprises nine other smaller far-left and ecological parties and groups, including the Socialist Internationalist Organisation, which is part of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International.

On the day before the February 24 general strike, Syriza secretariat member Gianh Mpania said that scrapping the Pasok government's 'stability programme' would only be achieved by "a wide alliance of social and political forces". And further: "No pretext of real differences of vision, strategy and tactics between the forces of the left can allow them to stay out of such common fronts. Such absence will lead to isolation of those that choose it. Syriza will take the initiative for the promotion of this

common front."

As to the way forward in Greece and beyond, "The challenge by the forces of neoliberalism is pan-European. Correspondingly this should also be the answer of the forces of the working movement and left. We need to constitute a rival to capitalist globalisation and aggressive neoliberalism ... The coordination of objectives and action by the European left constitutes today the big priority of our efforts. Syriza is already taking initiatives in this direction. A new, promotional internationalism for our times is necessary and feasible."

The Greek CWI itself calls for "not only 24-hour, but 48-hour" strikes, which hardly seems bold, to say the least. However, while it suggests a role for the Pasok-supported trade union centre, it also points to the EU-wide situation: "GSEE has a responsibility in current conditions to address the working movements (and not the governments!) in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Ireland, which are in a situation as terrible as our own working movement, as a first step for the construction of pan-European front against capital and its political representatives."

The Socialist Workers Party's Greek franchise, also called Socialist Workers Party (SEK), wants the GSEE and ADEDY to call a "permanent strike". Not only must the union leaders be forced to organise fresh action, but there must be an "escalation of mobilisations with longer strikes, coordinated and organised by workers from below. Take the fight in our hands with general assemblies, strike committees ... We can send the message to our brothers in all Europe that the workers in Greece ... are here - alive and kicking." But that is all there seems to be in the special issue of SEK's journal about the essential pan-European working class dimension that is required. It gives the distinct impression of pandering to Greek nationalism in the workers' movement.

The SEK is part of Antarsya, or 'mutiny', which was founded in March last year by 10 organisations from the Radical Left Front and United Anti-Capitalist Left, including the Greek section of the Fourth International, OKDE-Spartakos. Sadly, coming together in Antarsya does not seem to have produced an internationalist workers' agenda for the proposed mutiny.

In its most recent pronouncement, which strongly supports the strike on February 24, this coalition wants withdrawal from the EU and all its works: "Disobedience/rupture with the EU-EMU ... No future exists for workers in the framework of EMU, EU, and sovereign policy." Antarsya looks "Towards a declaration of war against the EU, the forces of capital, and the Pasok/New Democracy/Popular Orthodox Rally black front ... the widest fightback for the defence and enlargement of rights, the overthrow of the stability programme, and governmental policy, and a rupture with the policies of the EU."

Although its statement concludes with a stirring "Make the capitalists pay for capital's crisis", there is absolutely no perspective that workers throughout Europe ought to be in this fight together. No, instead we should all withdraw from the EU and fight our separate, unconnected, nationally based battles. ●

**Jim Moody**

### Notes

1. <http://inter.kke.gr/News/2010news/2010-02-strike>.
2. Madrid press conference, February 18.
3. [www.syriza.gr/press/anakoinoseis/omilia-g-mpania-melos-grammateas-toy-syriza](http://www.syriza.gr/press/anakoinoseis/omilia-g-mpania-melos-grammateas-toy-syriza).
4. *Xekinima* February 2010 [www.xekinima.org](http://www.xekinima.org).
5. *Working Solidarity* issue 905: [www.wsek-ist.gr](http://www.wsek-ist.gr).
6. [www.antarsya.org](http://www.antarsya.org).

## 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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# weekly worker

**Warm  
personality,  
foul temper**

## Storms and teacups

Both the media and bourgeois politicians want us to concentrate on personal strengths and weaknesses. But that is not the main issue, argues **James Turley**

**T**he British election season is heating up, in more ways than one.

Firstly, and most prominently displayed in the last week, the dirty tricks are getting dirtier. Gordon Brown has become the subject of bullying allegations once again; this time, wielding the hatchet is Blairite journalist Andrew Rawnsley, *The Observer's* most prominent Westminster writer.

In an instalment of a new book serialised in that paper (February 21), Rawnsley alleges that Brown is prone to fits of temper, which occasionally results in physical violence against underlings. Much has been made of one particular story, in which a lowly typist frustrated Brown so much that he allegedly upended her out of her chair and sat down at the keyboard himself. Rawnsley also alleges that Gus O'Donnell, the cabinet secretary, was alerted to these complaints, and issued a formal warning to the prime minister about his behaviour.

The government immediately moved to issue denials. Peter Mandelson, the career politician's career politician, flatly denied any bullying at No10, saying that Brown was merely very demanding - of others, but particularly of himself. Mandelson did not seem overly concerned at what he at first regarded as a "storm in a teacup" - and indeed why should he be? Despite the big names involved, these revelations are hardly earth-shattering; for a start, it is well-known already, particularly in those sections of the media able to closely follow Westminster, that Brown has a short fuse under pressure. Revelations from former insiders already litter the bookshelves.

The new and specific allegations from Rawnsley are, for the most part, unsourced, as per the oleaginous shmoosier's *modus operandi*. They also date from the period after Brown flip-flopped over the autumn 2007 election that never was; in other words, a time when Downing Street was more or less in a state of siege, from which the government - following the economic collapse and a million other things - has still yet to recover.

So why has this resurfaced? The answer is partly to do with a woman called Christine Pratt, who - with her husband - runs an anti-bullying charity and helpline. She went public, telling the BBC's *Daily politics* TV show on February 22 that "three or four" people had phoned the helpline relating to conditions at 10 Downing Street. Though she made it clear that these complaints and communications had not been linked to Brown, she apparently took umbrage at Mandelson's fairly categorical denial of any wrongdoing in the PM's office.

Pratt's exposure has backfired on her to a considerable extent - apoplectic reactions from Labour figures were followed by the resignation of key trustees of her charity, including hard-

right Tory MP Anne Widdecombe. From there, it was merely a race to the obvious line that she had acted like a "prat" (the winner, in the event, was key New Labour reactionary Phil Woolas). Pratt insists that she is not politically motivated; but her evidence for this is merely that her charity is funded largely by business and not at all by the state, and that she is not personally a member of the Tories, which should not reassure us too much as to her pristine motives. Certainly, the further allegations from her side enabled the Tory and Liberal Democrat leaders to offer guarded condemnations.

The other side to this explosion, however, is the complete bungling of the issue by Labour. Firstly, we should note that Rawnsley's book has been expected for some time. The *Mail on Sunday* made a meal out of it last month (January 31). Members of Labour's inner-circle would have known about it even earlier.

Yet this was the time they chose to rebrand the puritanical son-of-the-manse, Gordon Brown, as a compelling human individual, with far more depth and substance than the superficial nice-guy antics of David ('call me Dave') Cameron. So badly prepared were Labour for these allegations that it arranged a one-hour interview with narcissistic media suit Piers Morgan, in which this all-new human side would come out fully. The initial media reaction included some surprisingly positive comments, contrasting, for example, Brown's performance with the stiff, socially awkward persona that comes over on more formal occasions. Many were impressed, in spite of themselves, at Alastair Campbell's media training programme; whatever Gordon Brown looked like on that show, he did not look like ... well, Gordon Brown.

This was broadcast a week before Rawnsley's book was to begin serialisation (and *after* its most sensational charges had been broken by the *Mail on Sunday*). The phrase 'hostage to fortune' does not quite cover the screening of this sycophantic interview a week before Brown's hot head was inevitably going to hit headlines - if only in *The Observer*.

It has become usual to open articles with the sentence, 'It has been another bad week for Gordon Brown.' This time, however, in spite of all this, it is not clear that it has been. A *Guardian/ICM* poll, published on February 22 and conducted over the days before the *Observer* piece and after the Morgan interview, recorded another drop in the Tory lead. As things stand, a hung parliament is perhaps more likely than a Tory outright victory; David Cameron, meanwhile, has been made to look a bit stupid as he reverses positions on the economy, and shadow chancellor George Osborne is tied up in a family scandal involving the exchange of prescription medicines for sex. Brown's chances are still pretty dire, but they are better than they have been for over a year.

A hung parliament would be no use to Brown, who would be immediately replaced. A weak Tory majority - or minority government - would probably do more damage to the Tories, however. Having based the appeal to Conservative Party grassroots on *immediate* public sector cuts, it remains to be seen whether such cuts are even possible; should Cameron succeed, they will greatly increase the likelihood of a second economic downturn, at any rate, which would scupper any minority government in moments.

The bad news for Brown is that the poll finds no evidence that the Morgan interview has made any contribu-

tion whatever to this reversal. Even this cloud has a silver lining, however, as many people unconcerned with Brown's personal virtues are unlikely to be too concerned about his vices either.

Exactly how this will all pan out for him is singularly unclear. It is possible that there *will* be a dip in poll ratings, after all; though the opposition parties are actually fairly reluctant to come out in strong terms on what are at the end of the day unsourced allegations, we should not underestimate the capability of a flailing Labour government in profound decay once again to pick at the scab until it becomes infected. Every time these allegations come out, it seems, there is a Blairite with a finger in it somewhere - before Rawnsley there was former Labour general secretary Peter Watts and Blair spin doctor Lance Price. Not too surprising, since they would have all the good gossip ...

All the sound and fury in the world, however, will not disclose a meaningful political difference between New Labour and the Conservatives at the coming election. Labour offers a less pressing timetable for budget cuts - but such things, as we have noted, are more or less imposed on governments anyway. David Cameron cannot substantiate his guff about the 'broken society' without talking like the very old-fashioned sort of Tory he really is. Gordon Brown simply lurches in whatever direction allows him to cling onto power. Both have every interest in bigging up their personalities (but neither really appears to have one of those, either).

That personality does not appear to have made much difference, despite its prominence, is not a huge surprise. Extended appeals to charismatic personal trust ring a little hollow when the headlines are still periodically domi-

nated by fallout from the MPs' expenses scandal. The battle between the PR man and the bureaucrat is not some clash of demigods interesting to the general public in itself. Left-leaning voters appreciate the values Brown attempts to sell them - intellectual and moral seriousness, an appreciation of people's hardships and so on - only when they are not in stark contradiction with what he actually manages to pony up. If voters are told that Brown has a good moral compass, but observe a government which clearly has no purpose beyond increasingly desperate self-perpetuation, they will reject the personal appeal as so much irrelevant spin - and rightly so.

So how much is there left to play for in this election season? The Tories are, of course, still clear front-runners. Labour hopes of a successful fight-back are fairly lean - they have begun to come back before, and then collapsed again, so the directionless New Labour project seems to have lost its ability to build on gains in any positive way. Alistair Darling's stunning remarks on Sky TV about how Downing Street had "unleashed the forces of Hell" against him in 2008 being a case in point. For Labour to get a working majority at this stage would be almost miraculous; a hung parliament is likely, but would not favour Labour, as there is little in it for the Liberal Democrats to prop up a dying regime.

Whoever wins, however, may well come to think of it as a Pyrrhic victory. Short of some uncharacteristic good news from the City of London (or the city of Kabul), the new government will inherit an economic and political situation largely beyond its control - especially a weak, minority or coalition government.

The abiding lesson: bourgeois politics is running out of answers ●

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