



weekly
worker



**Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition:
government of the people, by
corruption, for the capitalists**

- Tusc and social weight
- Left results in full
- Iran executes Kurds
- Colour blind: review

No 817

Thursday May 13 2010

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

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Europe and the Greek contagion

**The crisis in Greece is bound up with the
global capitalist downturn. Instead of a
nationalist response there could be an
international fightback**



LETTERS



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

Sinking left

As the first Tory-Liberal coalition in over 90 years takes office in Britain, with New Labour facing a more serious crisis than many may yet realise, it is a good opportunity for the socialist left to take stock.

What the general election has demonstrated is that there is no limit to the depths to which the left can sink electorally. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, such as the continued weakness of working class resistance, as the court injunctions against the RMT union and British Airways strikers demonstrate. However, it would also be futile to ignore the toll that sectarianism on the left has taken. Indeed there were only two bright spots in the general election - the wiping out of the British National Party in Barking and its loss of council seats elsewhere; and the election as MP in my own constituency of Caroline Lucas, the left Green candidate.

Who could have believed that in the midst of a recession, with some 2.5 million unemployed, millions living in poverty, a public sector wage freeze, cuts in benefits and even wages the order of the day, that the socialist and Marxist left could become so irrelevant. As all three major capitalist parties agreed on the need to wield the axe over public spending, we had sustained rioting in Greece, whilst the bankers sought desperately to prop up the euro. Yet in Britain the voice of the socialist and Marxist left has barely registered with people.

The bare statistics make depressing reading. In 2001, the Socialist Alliance, which hardly reached the pinnacle of electoral success, stood 98 candidates and polled 57,553 votes, an average of 587 each. In 2010 the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition stood 42 candidates, who received 15,580 votes, an average of 371 votes: ie, 63% of the 2001 total. In 2001 three candidates, including Dave Nellist and Tommy Sheridan, saved their deposits. This time every election deposit was lost.

In Scotland the situation is even more dire. In 2001 the Scottish Socialist Party stood candidates in every one of the 72 constituencies. They polled 72,518 votes, an average of 1,007 per candidate. In 2010 Tusc in Scotland, including Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity, stood 10 candidates, obtaining a grand total of 3,523 votes, an average of 352 votes (1.05%). This was not only less than their English partners, but just 35% of the 2001 vote. The SSP fared even worse, also standing 10 candidates and garnering 3,157 votes, an average of 316 votes (0.84% each) or 31% of the 2001 vote.

From six MSPs in 2003 the SSP/Solidarity have managed to achieve votes that would have embarrassed Lord Sutch and his Monster Raving Loony Party. In Coventry the Socialist Party lost one of its two remaining councillors and even if you count, which I don't, Respect as a party of the left, it too suffered heavy defeats, including the loss of its only MP.

One might have hoped that even the worst sectarian bone-head, including members of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party leaderships, might have drawn at least some conclusions from these dire results. I suspect, however, that the only conclusion to be drawn will be that they should dig even deeper to get out of their hole. The tragedy

is that, the greater the failure, the greater is their persistence in following the road to oblivion. If the current situation is left to the existing 'parties', then there is no hope of any improvement in the strength of the left for the simple reason that they see as their main task the building of their own particular group, rather than a socialist movement.

And yet the task of consolidating the left should have been far from difficult. We had an election where the political positions of all three major political parties were identical. Savage cuts to rescue the political and economic system from the consequences of the bankers' speculation were common ground. Privatisation was taken for granted. Indeed on the only two issues where there were any differences between the parties, at least on paper, we had the spectacle of that pathetic representative of the rightwing Scottish Labour mafia, Gordon Brown, attacking Clegg for the 'madness' of his stance on Trident and asylum-seekers. Not that Clegg will keep to either of those positions now he is in coalition with the Tories.

Those who celebrate, rightly, the demise of the BNP electorally (though it is still not dead) should ponder that this may end up in the strengthening of the boot boys on the street in the form of the English Defence League. What we certainly don't want or need are the antics of the SWP/Unite Against Fascism in Brighton, who called a counter-demonstration to an EDL demonstration that never was. For a couple of years a group of lumpens had organised a St George's Day parade. It was a family affair and, although their politics are not ours, they clearly were not fascists. Because some EDLers announced they would come and join it, that was enough to cry 'Nazi'.

What is needed in Britain is a re-founding of the socialist and Marxist left and a single-minded determination to form an anti-capitalist party. It won't come from the trade unions, despite the wishful thinking of the SP, but a serious and determined venture could well get trade union support. Nor should one have any illusions about the residual loyalty of the working class to Labour. One could do worse than to re-found the Socialist Alliance with the declared intention of forming a new socialist party. Of course, this is likely to be derided as a 'halfway house', but it's better to start out on a journey than to stay at home. And it is often a good idea to stay somewhere overnight before arriving at one's destination!

What is certain is that there must never again be electoral alliances cobbled together at the last moment among groups who have evinced no interest in socialist unity (SWP) and which does absolutely nothing in the way of strengthening the socialist left. Such ventures simply weaken the left. In Brighton Kempton Tusc had an excellent candidate, Dave Hill, a former leader of the Labour group on East Sussex County Council. His campaign was innovative and he and others worked hard. But still he didn't gain even 200 votes.

There are no simple solutions to what are endemic problems of the British socialist left. But a serious debate on the socialist left is essential if challenging and overthrowing capitalism are ever going to be more than slogans.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Left out

The list of different manifestoes of the left did indeed make interesting

reading ('The left and the 2010 general election', May 6).

Granted, the sole Socialist Party of Great Britain candidate in Vauxhall received a predictably poor result, but what of all those leftists who offered up a plethora and cornucopia of improvements to capitalism? Let's not try to fool ourselves; they too were resoundingly rejected by the working class. So what should be the lesson learned? Revising those programmes, adding free beer and trips to Disneyland? Or is it the principled arguing for the alternative to capitalism - ie, world socialism?

Actually, the SPGB poses much the same question as Phil Kent does in his letter in the same edition of the paper: "Whatever happened to the positive belief that only communism will produce a world of peace, plenty and fully rounded human development?" - particularly if the working class are continually presented with a wishy-washy wish list of reforms and palliatives from the left rather than have the real solution to their problems propounded and explained as the one and only immediate demand.

Understandably, the fact that the SPGB programme is socialism and only socialism explains its omission from the above-mentioned party manifesto list.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Don't be fooled

Eddie Ford argues that the British National Party is no longer in the fascist camp because, "Rather than fighting for various precious programmatic shibboleths, fascism instead wants to capture the street and physically crush the organised left, using non-state fighting formations" ('Griffin's eclectic manifesto', April 29).

And in reply to Keith Rice's legitimate concern that Ford was lending respectability to the BNP by an ill-considered argument (Letters, April 22), Ford replies: "The point is, we must try to grasp what the BNP is now" (Letters, May 6).

A good starting point for those who want to try to grasp what the BNP is now is Dimitrov's observation that "The development of fascism, and the fascist dictatorship itself, assumes different forms in different countries, according to historical, social and economic conditions and to the national peculiarities and the international position of the given country" (G Dimitrov, 'Unity of the working class against fascism' *Selected works* Vol 2, 1935).

Dimitrov even explains, as if for the benefit of Eddie Ford, that where fascism is weak it poses as democratic and parliamentary. Of course, when fascism becomes strong and is in complete command of the state, they need not pretend any longer.

From this, it is reasonable to assume that it is the present weakness of British fascism which is behind organisations like the BNP posing as democratic and would-be parliamentarians. This has fooled no-one on the left or even in liberal bourgeois circles, apart from those with a hopelessly simplistic understanding of the political struggle.

British fascism is in a weak position and, if it is to make any headway, it must adapt to local conditions by posing as democratic. This in turn has led the less politically experienced and intuitive elements into believing that the BNP is no longer in the fascist camp. This argument may partly result from factional rivalry with the Socialist Workers Party.

In order to support this incorrect conclusion, those who believe this

resort to one-sided arguments which characterise fascism as possessing non-state fighting formations that are used to capture the streets and crush the organised left. This is not only anti-dialectical, but is also a travesty of historical experience. It is anti-dialectical because it uses one aspect of a phenomenon - ie, non-state fighting formations - to characterise fascism as a whole. The essence of fascism is the suppression of democracy and the labour movement. This goal is achieved only when the fascists have state power. Those who want to convince us that the BNP is no longer in the fascist camp want us to believe that its essence has changed.

The second point is the misrepresentation of history, combined with the implication that non-state fighting formations are the essence of fascism rather than an important aspect of fascism at a certain stage in the struggle against democracy and the working class. The truth is, these fighting formations are not the essence of fascism and have so far never succeeded in crushing the left and democracy. It is only after they have been given power by rightwing monopoly capitalist circles that the fascists succeeded in crushing the left and dismissing democracy, particularly if the left is being guided by fools.

All those who regard non-state fighting formations as constituting the essence of fascism must also logically argue that Hitler ceased being a fascist after he assumed power, when he no longer needed the non-state formations, and indeed brutally liquidated its leadership in the 'night of the long knives', and began to rely on the state power exclusively. Hitler's action demonstrated that these fighting formations were not the essence of fascism, but rather an important but disposable tool in the struggle for power.

Tony Clark
email

Village

It appears that Nick Rogers has caught the Meltdown infection and melted himself in the past year since his last report of Meltdown-inspired events at Canary Wharf in October 2008 ('Agitprop anarchism', May 6).

Remember, it was the Meltdown

Fighting fund

Newcomers

Following last week's good start to our May fighting fund, things have slowed up a little. But we are still on target to reach our £1,250 target.

For the first time in ages we clocked up more than 20,000 internet readers last week - there were 20,892 visitors to www.cpgb.org.uk - but only two of them decided to contribute to our fund. Thanks to GH and FJ for your £20 donations. Actually, make that three. The Irish website, *Forth*, has donated £30 in exchange for reproducing Chris Gray's excellent *Weekly Worker* series on ancient Rome from 2008.

Once again we can only speculate as to why the number of web readers has increased, virtually week by week, for the last couple of months - it is now way above the 15,000 we have been used to. Could be something to do with the general election - a hunch that

crew who organised the subsequent G20 Meltdown with the convergence of the four horsemen of the apocalypse at the Bank of England. Nick now gives a more favourable impression of the Election Meltdown events at Parliament Square on May Day compared with Laurie Smith's report of the May Day parade from Clerkenwell Green to Trafalgar Square, which, as Laurie said, raised more questions than answers.

At Parliament Square, there was a more enlightened atmosphere, including anarchists and leftists. And, yes, only a few *Socialist Worker* paper sellers, but the intent was there from Martin Smith to endorse the event. Yet this did not prevent Nick from easily distributing "a leaflet promoting a communist forum on 'Is this what democracy looks like?' The image of celebratory and besuited pigs in front of Big Ben appealed to the general anti-politician attitude."

Anyhow, there is a serious intent to the organised events leading to the dragging of the party leaders and their convergence and hanging at Parliament Square. It was to express the feeling of despair arising from the electoral process, and what most people would actually like to do with the politicians - as Meltdown did to the bankers last year. As Yasmine Mather says in the last issue of the *Weekly Worker*, "Elections are a good time to reassert some basic political ideas", which are vaguely similar to the political actions of Chris Knight's street theatre group, the Government of the Dead. She also points to a few examples similar to Meltdown, such as campaigning for a world with no borders and an end to the exploitation of private property.

Furthermore, there is the question of democracy, as the growing momentum of the Democracy Village at Parliament Square. As Nick points out, campaigning for democracy is "central to the task of communists". This has been the common theme of the three months of organising for those involved with the May Day event and after. Is this not communism in action?

The Democracy Village, and all that it entails, is no short cut; but democracy is in action at Parliament Square, and not just in print in the pages of a weekly paper.

Simon Wells
email

would perhaps be backed up by a drop back to the previous level now it is over.

While for whatever reason the web readership is volatile, the number of our regular supporters who donate by monthly standing order remains steady (and reliable!). Thanks this week to SF, GD and SWS, who pushed up our total by £82. We also received a £60 cheque from another extra-reliable comrade, TR, whose regular gifts are more than appreciated.

This week we received £212 to take our May total up to £580. But we need to accelerate just a little bit after this week's slowdown. If any of those new web newcomers like what they see ...

Robbie Rix

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

TUSC

So much for 'social weight'

The far left vote has gone from the tiny to the statistically insignificant, writes **Eddie Ford**

By any yardstick, the far left's electoral performance in the general election was bad - even by its already dismally low standards. The results speak for themselves. Or at least they should for anyone not made stupid by dogmatic sectarianism or leftist official optimism. Which is, that the left as currently constituted and orientated is going nowhere fast.

We in the CPGB do not say this with any sense of *Schadenfreude*. Rather, it is said with a mixture of sadness, frustration and hope. We are in the midst of a deep economic crisis. Unemployment is soaring. Social deprivation and gross inequality is endemic. An unpopular war in Afghanistan. A discredited political system held in wide contempt. With the working class now facing a Tory-Liberal coalition government committed to savage cuts and austerity. Yet the revolutionary left is irrelevant, if not on the verge of blinking into political non-existence.

It goes without saying that the CPGB is glad that the candidates backed by the Labour Representation Committee did relatively well, with comrades John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn getting re-elected with fairly handsome majorities. Good. But that still does not detract from the stubborn fact that the Labour left, just like the extra-Labour left, is in general decline - though there is always the possibility, far from certain, that a period of opposition status for Labour could act to revitalise its left wing. In reality, the only party that can claim to have made a genuine advance during the general election - seeing how all the mainstream parties lost rather than won last week - are the Greens, by notching up their first MP with Caroline Lucas. Yet this is no cause for celebration for communists, as the Green Party is thoroughly petty bourgeois and does not represent the interests of the working class - let alone socialism - in any way whatsoever.

Therefore, confronted by such a dire and potentially demoralising situation - one that leads to more resignations and drop-outs from organised leftwing activity - communists and socialists are duty-bound to undertake a cool, sober assessment of the post-May 6 world. Not engage in spin or 'Marxist' make-believe. We are where we are, not where we would like to be. Which is up the creek without a strategic or programmatic paddle to grasp to take us in the right direction.

Engels famously remarked that you can compare election results to a thermometer, one capable of registering the political temperature amongst the working class. If that is the case, then the weather out there is near Arctic. Looking at the electoral statistics for the various left-of-Labour groups makes this more than clear. With very few exceptions every seat that had been contested by a far-left candidate in 2005 saw a marked decline in vote share on May 6. That is, most were not even able to reach the traditional 1%-2% range of votes that the non-mad or non-eccentric sections of the far left have normally and regularly received in the past. Or, to

put it even more brutally, the far-left votes have gone from the very small or tiny to the statistically insignificant. Needless to say, such an unprepossessing state of affairs should surely be a matter of grave concern to those committed - in some shape or form - to Marxism/communism and the project of universal human liberation. Surely time to embark on a round of ruthless self-criticism and debate?

Forget it. Indeed, the SWP's four-page election 'special' treats the disaster almost as if it was an irrelevancy, a trivial distraction from the 'real struggle' out on the streets. Instead, the comrades believe we "need to learn the lessons of resistance" from Greece as - sounding more like anarchists than Marxists - these Greek 'lessons' are "far more important than who won which seat" in the boring UK general election on May 6. In fact, quite fantastically, we are also told that, as "our rulers clash and argue" - the SWP special being written before the formation of the David Cameron/Nick Clegg government - "their side is weak": Hence it is "time for our side to be strong". At this particular juncture, the SWP stirringly declares



in an obvious bid to rouse the glum troops, "fighting back can be even more effective than usual".

So the near total left wipe-out at the general election was in fact a harbinger of victory - thank heavens for that! For many years, of course, the SWP impatiently, and in apparent total ignorance of the real communist tradition, dismissed any kind of election work by socialists as "electoralist" - before its comrades became equally opportunistic vote-chasers in the unpopular popular front that (barely) was Respect. And there is nothing to say that the SWP comrades cannot go full circle and become anarchistic 'anti-electoralists' again.

Of course, what the SWP comrades are doing - just like the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the rest - is shilly-shallying around the screamingly obvious fact that the left's deservedly atrocious electoral performance on May 6 exposes the fundamental *bankruptcy* of their whole political approach and methodology. Projects like Respect, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Campaign for a New Workers' Party, etc were doomed from the start for the simple reason that they were premised on the entirely erroneous notion that they were somehow acting as midwives for a new and 'real' Labour Party mark two. Accordingly it is the comrades' solemn task to guide history through its predetermined lines, which dictates that the *only* route to a 'mass workers' party' is through a reinvented and rewarmed Labourism - with the expectant 'revolutionaries'

naturally waiting in the wings as its extreme left, to burst forth like a 'Marxist' Superman at the right historical moment, as adjudged by the sect leaders (take your pick), and lead the surprised but delighted masses to revolution.

This essentially explains the thinking, if that is not too grand a term, behind the decision to prohibit the CPGB from standing its own candidates as part of the Tusc ticket because we have no "social weight" - no trade union general secretaries, no councillors, no MPs, etc. Unlike the comrades from SPEW, of course, with their mighty trade union machine behind them. With their leadership of whole communities, as reflected in numerous election results up and down the country. By contrast, the "shrill" losers of the CPGB/*Weekly Worker* would have been destined for a derisory return had we been allowed to stand under the Tusc umbrella - something under one percent, I would think.

But for SPEW the big time beckoned yet again - or so the story went. Which turned out to be a sick joke, with the joke being on the preening Tusc/SPEW leadership. How did the comrades who vaingloriously boasted about their "social weight" do on May 6? Of course, they got no more votes than past CPGB candidates who stood on a full, unambiguous, revolutionary programme - so SPEW's "social weight" turned out to be a complete chimera. The plain but unavoidable fact is that *none* of us have "social weight" or any real implantation within the working class - CPGB, SPEW, SWP ... Just face up to it, comrades.

So, yes, when compared to the CPGB, SPEW might have a relatively large number of union officials - who can exercise a degree of influence over their members, although this in turn is extremely limited, given the phenomenon of inordinate meetings, low turnouts in ballots, and so on. But, as things stand now, not one of these officials can translate such marginal influence into any sort of *political* leadership or movement. So in that sense, when all is said and done, both SPEW and the CPGB find themselves in an analogous position - equally as marginal, equally on the fringe.

Comrades, this is not good enough - we need a radical change of direction, if we are to avoid becoming left versions of the Monster Raving Loony Party, a permanent but irrelevant feature of the political landscape. We need to provide our class with a real, viable, socialist alternative. This is where the CPGB matters because, for all its small size, we have consistently fought for the *idea* of left unity, struggled for the unity of Marxists as *Marxists* - not fake social democrats or left Labourites, chasing after left union bureaucrats in the hope that they will give us a leg up.

Most of all, we in the CPGB matter because of our paper, the *Weekly Worker* - with its readership of between 15,000 and 20,000, and its unrivalled tradition and history of open debate. This is what we can offer to any post-Tusc formation: the project of left unity and *partyism* ●

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sunday June 5: 'Where next for the left?'

Details to be confirmed.

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

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

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

<http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology series, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

Tuesday May 18, 6.15pm: 'Social conventions, children's games and human uniqueness'. Speaker: Emily Wyman.

Tuesday May 25, 6.15pm: 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Berber house'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Tuesday June 1, 6.15pm: 'Stonehenge decoded'. Speaker: Lionel Sims.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

After the election

Saturday May 15, 10.30am to 3.30pm: conference, Join the Resistance! ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Admission free (donations welcome). No need to register.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Levellers Day

Saturday May 15, 10.30am to 7pm: Debate, music and entertainment, Warwick Hall Garden, Church Green, Burford, Oxfordshire.

Organised by the Levellers Day Committee: 1649@levellers.org.uk.

Nakba commemoration

Saturday May 15, 12 noon: Demonstration against Israel's violations of international law, opposite 10 Downing Street, London SW1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, British Muslim Initiative, Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament and Palestinian Forum in Britain;

www.palestinecampaign.org.

No more custody deaths

Saturday May 15, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Highfields Centre, 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester. Speakers, performances, stalls and workshops. Tickets £5, proceeds to family campaigns.

Organised by 4Wardever with Leicester Civil Rights Movement: <http://remembranceevent2010.eventbrite.com>.

Offside

Tuesday May 18, 6.30pm: special screening of jailed Iranian director Jafar Panahi's film, main hall, University of Manchester student union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

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

Where next for the unions?

Thursday May 20, 7pm: Meeting, Royal Station Hotel, Neville Street, Newcastle. Speakers include Bob Crow (RMT) Derek Cattell (North East Shop Stewards Network).

Organised by NESSN: merseyadvice@btconnect.com.

Fight for every job

Saturday May 22, 11am to 5pm: Emergency conference, Friends

Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Whoever wins,

organise solidarity. Speakers include Mark Serwotka, Jeremy

Corbyn. Organised by Right to Work: www.righttowork.ork.uk.

American radical

Tuesday May 25, 8.30pm: Film screening, Kenton Theatre, Henley on Thames. Portrait of the life and work of controversial Jewish professor Norman Finkelstein. Followed by Q&A session. Hosted by Jeremy

Harding, broadcaster and comedian. Organised by the Palestine

Solidarity Campaign. For more information: www.the-hiff.co.uk.

Trade unions and the law

Thursday May 27, 6.30pm: Discussion, Invision Suites 1and 2,

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1 (nearest tube

Tottenham Court Road). Reflections on the past and strategies for the

future. Lord Wedderburn QC and Jim Mortimer (former Labour Party

general secretary) in conversation with John Hendy QC. Organised by

the Labour Representation Committee: info@l-r-c.org.uk.

Denaby Miners Gala

Sunday May 30, 10.30am: March and wreath-laying in honour of

the 1984 strike, followed by speakers and live bands, Denaby main

cenotaph. Speakers include Rodney Bickerstaffe and Arthur Scargill.

More information: pinthepits@gmail.com.

Stop Islamophobia

Saturday June 5, 10am to 5pm: Conference - 'Defend the Muslim

community', Camden Centre, London WC1. £5 (£3 unwaged).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768. Supported

by British Muslim Initiative, NUJ, Unite, Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Islam Channel.

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.

GENERAL ELECTION 2010

Abysmal day for non-Labour left

The performance of non-Labour working class candidates on May 6 was woeful. **Peter Manson and John Masters** report on the candidates, the figures and the excuses

The performance of the far left in the general election was, to put it bluntly, abysmal. Votes cast for the 108 candidates who identified themselves as communist, socialist, workers, etc, on the ballot paper totalled 30,754 - about 324 votes per candidate. Compared to the previous general elections of the last two decades, fewer far-left candidates stood, and the return per constituency was at its lowest since 1992.

Factor in Respect, various independents and vaguely reformist types, such as People Before Profit and the Peace Party, and the total goes up to 85,559 votes for 135 candidates - a rather better, but still dismal 634 votes per candidate. But even these figures are grossly distorted by the inclusion of, in particular, three Respect candidates - Salma Yaqoob, George Galloway and Abjol Miah, who polled 28,932 votes between them, plus Dai Davies in Blaenau Gwent (whose vote slumped to 6,458, as he lost his seat back to Labour). These four alone easily outpolled all 108 of the far lefts put together.

Tusc debacle

The 'great red hope' for this election was the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an alliance of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Workers Party, Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity and some non-aligned lefts. Tusc stood 42 candidates, having barred smaller groups to its left, including the CPGP and Workers Power, using the excuse that we have insufficient "social weight". Well, now we know how much of that commodity SPEW *et al* enjoy, at least as far as it is reflected electorally - a stunning 370 votes per candidate, or 0.9% on average. In 2005 SPEW alone, standing as Socialist Alternative, averaged 1.6%, so its "modest, but very important, step" in the direction of a replacement Labour Party managed to do half as well as SPEW five years ago.

SPEW claims that Tusc is a big advance on the Socialist Alliance (which was made up overwhelmingly of comrades who would describe themselves as revolutionary socialists) despite the fact that in the 2001 general election the SA stood 98 candidates and got an average of 1.7%. The reason why Tusc is apparently so much better is because of its claimed trade union support (a number of union branches and some regions, plus the endorsement of 20 Tusc candidates by the RMT national executive).

Of course, according to SPEW's post-election statement, it is necessary to recognise "the early stage of development of this formation" and its "limited number of activists". However, "the most significant aspect of Tusc is that it has involved sections of militant trade unionists, and is therefore a real step towards independent working class representation". And guess what "made this possible"? Tusc's "federal, inclusive [sic] approach. All future developments will need to build on this method".

SPEW comes up with the usual excuses for Tusc's dreadful showing: it was "squeezed" by the close battle between the main parties, with many workers reluctantly voting Labour to try to keep out the Tories. Well, on this occasion there is certainly some truth in that, but did you know that "Everywhere Tusc candidates stood we had enthusiastic support - particu-



Caroline Lucas: Greens were only successful party

larly from young people and public sector workers"? And "Tusc election meetings were successful - with significant numbers of people coming along because they had picked up a leaflet and wanted to find out about a socialist alternative". But, despite "some creditable results", this "support was not generally reflected in the votes it received".

Who do they think they're fooling? The three examples of "credit-able results" given - for Dave Nellist (3.7% in Coventry North East), Tommy Sheridan (2.9% in Glasgow South West) and Jenny Sutton (2.6% in Tottenham) - all saw a sharp fall in the vote share in the constituency for the same or similar candidates compared to previous elections.

As for Tusc itself, as we write, it has yet to issue a statement on the election beyond: "Well done to everyone for an excellent campaign. Here are the results. A fuller analysis will be posted later" (May 7). That will be something to look forward to.

For its part the SWP was more modest in its claims. No doubt this reflected the far smaller amount of political capital it invested in the project than SPEW did: "In some areas, Tusc activists tapped into the anger with mainstream politicians and ran good campaigns. In areas like Tottenham, for example, Tusc supporters now know more people in the area and have a stronger basis to build activity against cuts and privatisation... Yet in most areas the vote was disappointing."²

Unlike SPEW, the SWP can at least bring itself to describe the result in this mildly negative way. And it is much more realistic than SPEW over what it thinks might have emerged from Tusc - getting to "know more people" and as a result achieving a "stronger basis" for local campaigning rather than moving towards the building of a Labour Party mark two. True, an unsigned article in the latest *Socialist Worker* concludes: "Tusc needs to be broadened. A national conference would help to democratise and widen the

process."³ But "broadened" in what way and to what end?

Charlie Kimber, writing in the same issue, correctly states: "... the radical left, and the audience that wants to resist the cuts, is far greater than the number who voted for parties to the left of Labour last week. There are millions of people - many of them who voted Labour - who support strikes, or who campaign against the Nazis, or are ready to defend education and the health service and local services. Mobilising those people for a fightback, and for socialist politics, is now vital."

But once again the form such organisation should take is not even hinted at. Does the SWP think the working class needs a new party to lead the resistance and if so what sort of party?

Official optimism

The SWP may be without answers and SPEW may have its head in the clouds, but, compared to the *Morning Star*, they are both the epitome of sober realism. The *Star* seems to have taken an editorial decision to go for official optimism *in extremis*. Its front page on May 8 delightedly announces: "Voters say no to a Tory government", while on pages 2-3 the main headline reads: "Red days as socialists gain"! These "red days" have come about because of the election of around 20 left Labour candidates, including Michael Meacher, Austin Mitchell and Diane Abbott. Page 4 informs readers that "Unions hail public's vote against cuts" and, reporting on the Communist Party of Britain's election campaign, declares: "Communists fly the red flag".

In fact, the six candidates standing for the *Star*'s CPB, despite the higher turnout than in 2005, experienced a drop of 65 votes in total, with its average falling from 187 to 176. Red days indeed.

What of the Scottish Socialist Party? The organisation that in 2001 contested all 72 Scottish seats and picked up 72,518 votes (3.3% of the total in Scotland), and in

2005 stood in 58 seats and averaged 2.6%, was last week reduced to a mere 3,157 votes (0.8%) in the 10 seats it managed to contest. Similarly Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party suffered a further decline. In a way it is a minor miracle that the ageing and increasingly deluded Scargill was able to cajole 23 of his tiny band of followers to contest yet another election well beyond the SLP's sell-by date, and they too averaged 0.8%.

As we have noted, Respect's vote was far and away the best among a sad bunch on the left. But it was not good enough to see George Galloway re-elected. True, that outcome was less likely once he switched from Bethnal Green and Bow to Poplar and Limehouse, but Abjol Miah's share of the vote in the former constituency was more than halved, compared to 2005.

Just as significantly for Respect, all but two of its sitting councillors were defeated. It was nearly wiped out in Tower Hamlets, despite picking up thousands of votes in the borough's local elections. The only surviving councillor there is Harun Miah, who came second in Shadwell. Ex-Respect councillors Oli Rahman, Rania Khan and Lutfa Begum were all re-elected for their new party: Labour. Respect also lost its single councillor in Newham, Abdul Karim Sheikh, who received just over a third of the vote for the Labour candidates.

But Salma Yaqoob was easily re-elected in Birmingham Sparkbrook, where the other two Respect councillors were not up for re-election. Yaqoob also polled 12,240 votes (over 25%) in the Birmingham Hall Green Westminster constituency, although even this percentage was a reduction compared to 2005.

So Respect now has no MPs and just four councillors (it once had 12 in Tower Hamlets alone). It seems likely that May 6 2010 will mark the beginning of the end for the whole 'unity coalition' project. The loss of Galloway in particular - together with his MP's office and facilities - is a big blow. Senior Respect figures like Nick Wrack have for some time been looking for a broader regroupment and comrade Wrack was particularly keen on Tusc and its predecessor, No2EU. The tendency to look beyond Respect will now undoubtedly be given added impetus.

SPEW too suffered devastating council losses. Its two councillors in Lewisham Telegraph Hill, Ian Page and Chris Flood, were defeated by the Labour candidates, who won more than twice as many votes as they did. In Coventry St Michael's, sitting councillor Rob Windsor - like comrades Page and Flood standing under SPEW's electoral name, Socialist Alternative - was also soundly beaten by Labour despite polling 29% (Labour won 48%). SPEW had been hoping to increase its council representation, standing a third candidate in Lewisham and contesting all 18 wards in Coventry. But, apart from comrade Windsor, they could only manage between 0.9% and 3.7%.

The other SPEW councillor to lose out was Jackie Grunsell, elected to Kirklees council in 2006 on a Save Huddersfield NHS ticket. Last time she won easily with 2,176 votes, but on May 6 this was slashed to 1,472 against 2,812 for Labour. In truth, SPEW was undone by the large increase in turnout resulting from the

local elections being held on the same day as the Westminster poll. One tiny consolation, however, is that its last remaining councillor, Dave Nellist, was saved by the fact that he does not come up for re-election in St Michael's until 2012.

As is only to be expected, SPEW, while not quite being able to match the *Star* when it comes to official optimism, is still able to find the positives in the Coventry result. Rob Windsor "got the highest ever vote for the Socialist Party in the ward... more than 500 up on last time he stood - and yet still lost the seat as a result of the higher turnout created by the general election. The large increase in our vote puts us in a strong position to come back and win the seat next year."⁴

Unity

But, as we have seen, the decline in SPEW's share of the vote has been ongoing and has reflected a similar drop across the whole left. The Alliance for Green Socialism, for example, went down from 395 per candidate to 263.

'Unity is strength' is a slogan you will see on many a trade union banner and ought to be regarded as a principle among socialists - which is why it was rotten to see left candidates fighting each other in some seats. In Camberwell and Peckham, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, SLP and Workers Revolutionary Party went head to head and achieved 1% of the vote between them - the biggest share going to the WRP, with the AWL bringing up the rear.

Manchester Central saw a similar three-way clash, this time between the WRP, SLP and Socialist Equality Party. Here the SLP got the upper hand, whilst the WRP and its sibling from the split in that branch of British Trotskyism came down to a difference of just five votes - WRP: 59; SEP: 54.

The least popular offering came from the Communist League, an organisation whose website does not mention that it was fighting the election - in fact it shows no sign of being updated since the year 2000. The CL recorded just 48 votes in Edinburgh South West.

While the further loss of "social weight" among the left groups may cause some to sneer and chuckle, in reality it is no laughing matter. The appalling results for the left reflect our profound collective weakness - and, it has to be said, a mind-numbing inability to chart the way ahead. As we have said, unity is strength, but not just any old unity.

At a time when the system of capital stands exposed as constantly susceptible to devastating crises and totally unable to meet humanity's basic needs, the left refuses to promote the Marxist alternative in organisational form. We have to take matters into our own hands: we, the Marxists, have to change our ways if we are to break out of our isolation.

It is now more urgent than ever that we learn from our mistakes in order to forge the main weapon we are lacking: a Communist Party ●

Notes

1. Statement, May 7: www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/9498/07-05-2010/election-results-tusc-stands-for-socialism-prepares-for-battles-ahead.
2. *Socialist Worker* post-election special, May 8.
3. *Socialist Worker* May 11.
4. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/9498/07-05-2010/election-results-tusc-stands-for-socialism-prepares-for-battles-ahead.

Left results: full breakdown

Leave aside their opportunist politics - candidates standing for left-of-Labour organisations managed to get results that barely register statistically

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Coventry NE	Dave Nellist	1,592	3.7%
Glasgow SW	Tommy Sheridan	931	2.9%
Tottenham	Jenny Sutton	1,057	2.6%
Salford	David Henry	738	1.8%
Sheffield Brightside	Maxine Bowler	656	1.7%
Lewisham Deptford	Ian Page	645	1.6%
Motherwell and Wishaw	Ray Gunnion	609	1.6%
Coventry S	Judy Griffiths	691	1.5%
Colne Valley	Jackie Grunsell	741	1.3%
Bootle	Pete Glover	472	1.1%
Dundee W	Jim McFarlane	357	1.0%
Glasgow N	Angela McCormick	287	1.0%
Carlisle	John Metcalfe	376	0.9%
Glasgow S	Brian Smith	351	0.9%
Manchester Gorton	Karen Reissman	337	0.9%
Coventry NW	Nikki Downes	370	0.8%
Huddersfield	Paul Cooney	319	0.8%
Cambridge	Martin Booth	362	0.7%
Edinburgh E	Gary Clark	274	0.7%
Gateshead	Elaine Brunskill	266	0.7%
Walthamstow	Nancy Taaffe	279	0.7%
Wythenshawe and Sale E	Lynn Worthington	268	0.7%
Glasgow NE	Graham Campbell	187	0.6%
Greenwich and Woolwich	Onay Kasab	267	0.6%
Liverpool Walton	Darren Ireland	195	0.6%
Brighton Kemptown	Dave Hill	194	0.5%
Edinburgh N and Leith	Willie Black	233	0.5%
Hull West and Hessle	Keith Gibson	150	0.5%
Swansea W	Rob Williams	179	0.5%
Wellingborough and Rushden	Paul Crofts	249	0.5%
Bristol E	Rachel Lynch	184	0.4%
Bristol S	Tom Baldwin	206	0.4%
Cross Central	Ross Saunders	162	0.4%
Doncaster N	Bill Rawcliffe	181	0.4%
Leicester W	Steve Score	157	0.4%
Midlothian	Willie Duncan	166	0.4%
Southampton Itchen	Tim Cutter	168	0.4%
Spelthorne	Paul Couchman	176	0.4%
Stoke Central	Matt Wright	133	0.4%
Inverness	George MacDonald	135	0.3%
Portsmouth N	Mick Tosh	154	0.3%
Redcar	Hannah Walter	127	0.3%

Total vote: 15,581 (42 candidates). Median: 0.7%.

Scottish Socialist Party

Glasgow E	Frances Curran	454	1.4%
Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch E	Willie O'Neil	476	1.2%
Glasgow Central	James Nesbitt	357	1.2%
Paisley and Renfrewshire S	Jimmy Kerr	375	0.9%
Aberdeen N	Ewan Robertson	268	0.7%
Edinburgh SW	Colin Fox	319	0.7%
Dundee E	Angela Gorrie	254	0.6%
Glasgow NE	Kevin McVey	179	0.6%
Livingston	Ally Hendry	242	0.5%
Paisley and Renfrewshire N	Chris Rollo	233	0.5%

Total vote: 3,157 (10 candidates). Median: 0.7%.

Respect

Birmingham Hall Green	Salma Yaqoob	12,240	25.1%
Poplar and Limehouse†	George Galloway	8,160	17.5%
Bethnal Green and Bow	Abjol Miah	8,532	16.8%
Bradford W	Arshad Ali	1,245	3.1%
Blackley and Broughton	Kay Phillips	996	2.9%
Oldham West and Royton	Shahid Miah	627	1.5%
Manchester Gorton	Mohammed Zulfikar	507	1.3%
Garston and Halewood	Diana Raby	268	0.6%
Brent Central	Abdi Duale	230	0.5%
Enfield Southgate	Samad Billoo	174	0.4%
Croydon N	Mohammed Shaikh	160	0.3%

Total vote: 33,139 (11 candidates). Median: 1.5%.

Socialist Labour Party

Liverpool West Derby	Kai Andersen	614	1.7%
Barnsley E	Ken Capstick	601	1.6%
Birmingham Perry Barr	John Tyrell	527	1.3%
Blaenau Gwent	Alyson O'Connell	381	1.2%
Pontypridd	Simon Parsons	456	1.2%
West Dumbartonshire	Katharine McGavigan	505	1.2%
St Helens N	Steve Whatham	483	1.1%
Barnsley Central	Terry Robinson	356	1.0%
Central Ayrshire	James McDaid	422	1.0%
Ayrshire N and Arran	Louise McDaid	449	1.0%
Wolverhampton NE	Shangara Singh Bhatoe	337	1.0%
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhyimey	Alan Coddell	195	0.6%
Glasgow NE	Jim Berrington	156	0.5%
Liverpool Wavertree	Kim Singleton	200	0.5%
Plymouth Moor View	David Marchesi	208	0.5%
South Derbyshire	Paul Liversuch	266	0.5%
Camberwell and Peckham	Margaret Sharkey	184	0.4%
Camborne and Redruth	Rob Hawkins	168	0.4%
Manchester Central	Ron Sinclair	153	0.4%
Newport E	Liz Screen	123	0.4%
Brighton Pavilion	Ian Fyvie	148	0.3%
Edinburgh N and Leith	David Jacobsen	141	0.3%
Plymouth Sutton and Devonport	Rob Hawkins	123	0.3%

Total vote: 7,196 (23 candidates). Median: 0.6%.

Alliance for Green Socialism

Leeds NE	Celia Foote	596	1.3%
Leeds E	Mike Davies	429	1.1%
Kensington†	Eddie Adams	197	0.6%
Vale of Clwyd	Mike Butler	127	0.4%
Leeds NW	Trevor Bavage	121	0.3%
Scarborough and Whitby	Juliet Boddington	111	0.2%

Total vote: 1,581 (6 candidates). Median: 0.5%.

Communist Party of Britain

Croydon N	Ben Stevenson	272	0.5%
Glasgow NW	Marc Livingstone	179	0.5%
Newcastle E†	Martin Levy	177	0.5%
Cardiff S and Penarth	Robert Griffiths	196	0.4%
Sheffield SE	Steve Andrew	139	0.3%
North Devon	Gerry Sables	96	0.2%

Total vote: 1,059 (six candidates). Median: 0.4%.

Unity for Peace and Socialism

Leicester E	Atvar Sadiq	494	1.0%
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Workers Revolutionary Party

Camberwell and Peckham	Joshua Ogunleye	211	0.5%
Streatham	Paul Lepper	117	0.3%
Enfield N	Anna Athow	96	0.2%
Feltham and Heston	Matt Linley	78	0.2%
Luton S	Frank Sweeney	75	0.2%
Norwich S	Gabriel Polley	102	0.2%
Streatham	Paul Lepper	117	0.2%
Manchester Central	Jonty Leff	59	0.1%

Total vote: 855 (eight candidates). Median: 0.2%.

Socialist Equality Party

Oxford E	David O'Sullivan	116	0.2%
Manchester Central	Robert Skelton	54	0.1%

Democratic Labour Party

Walsall North	Peter Smith	842	2.3%
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Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Camberwell and Peckham	Jill Mountford	75	0.2%
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Communist League

Hackney South and Shoreditch	Paul Davies	110	0.3%
Edinburgh SW	Caroline Bellamy	48	0.1%

Peace Party

Guildford	John Morris	280	0.5%
Horsham	Jim Duggan	253	0.5%
Woking	Julie Roxburgh	204	0.4%

People Before Profit

(no connection between candidates)			
Foyle	Eamonn McCann	2,936	7.7%
Lewisham E	George Hallam	332	0.8%

Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

South Shields	Roger Nettleship	91	0.2%
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Socialist Party of Great Britain

Vauxhall	Daniel Lambert	143	0.3%
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Workers Power

Vauxhall	Jeremy Drinkall	109	0.3%
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Direct Democracy (Communist) Party

Hackney South and Shoreditch	Nusret Sen	202	0.5%
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Left Independents

Blaenau Gwent	Dai Davies	6,458	20.0%
Northampton S	Tony Clarke	2,242	5.8%
Islwyn	Dave Rees	1,495	4.3%
Stockton N	Frank Cook	1,577	4.0%
Torfaen	Fred Wildgust	1,419	3.8%
Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford	Gareth Allen	1,183	2.6%
Stoke Central	Gary Elsbey	399	1.2%
Leeds Central	Dave Procter	409	1.1%
Stockton S	Yvonne Hossack	536	1.1%
Wakefield	Mark Harrop	439	1.0%
Bromsgrove	Mark France	336	0.7%
Bermondsey and Old Southwark	Steve Freeman	120	0.3%
Worcester	Peter Nielsen	129	0.3%

Labour left

LRC-backed Labour Party candidates

Hackney N and Stoke Newington	Diane Abbott*	25,553	55.0%
Islington N	Jeremy Corbyn*	24,276	54.5%
Hayes and Harlington	John McDonnell*	23,377	54.8%
Bolsover	Dennis Skinner*	21,994	50.0%
Luton N	Kelvin Hopkins*	21,192	49.3%
Ashton under Lyne	David Heyes*	18,604	48.4%
Ayrshire N and Arran	Katy Clark*	21,660	47.4%
Midlothian	David Hamilton*	18,449	47.7%
Wansbeck	Ian Lavery*	17,548	45.8%
Oldham W and Royton	Michael Meacher*	19,503	45.5%
Blyth Valley	Ronnie Campbell*	17,156	44.5%
Leyton and Wanstead	John Cryer*	17,511	43.6%
Llanelli	Nia Griffith*	15,916	42.5%
Batley and Spen	Mike Wood*	21,565	41.5%
Newport W	Paul Flynn*	16,389	41.3%
Stroud	David Drew	22,380	38.6%
Gower	Martin Caton*	16,016	38.4%
Halifax	Linda Riordan*	16,278	37.4%
Dundee E	Katrina Murray	13,529	33.3%
Great Grimsby	Austin Mitchell*	10,777	32.7%
Pendle	Gordon Prentice	13,927	30.9%
Kettering	Phil Sawford	14,153	29.9%
Clwyd W	Donna Hutton	9,414	24.7%
Bury St Edmunds	Kevin Hind	9,776	16.6%
Rutland and Melton	John Morgan	7,893	14.3%
Isle of Wight	Mark Chiverton	8,169	11.6%
Hampshire NW	Sarah Evans	6,980	13.1%
Tunbridge Wells	Gary Heather	5,448	10.8%
Yeovil	Lee Skevington	2,991	5.2%

Key

- * elected
- † boundary changes since 2005
- ° as Socialist Alternative in 2005
- as Scottish Socialist Party in 2005

ANALYSIS

Government of the people, by

David Cameron's deal with Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats puts in place the 'strong government' demanded by the capitalist class. The working class will now be attacked with a vengeance, writes **Mike Macnair**

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose - the more it changes, the more it's the same thing - is an appropriate metaphor for the May 2010 general election and its result: a Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition. It is necessary, however, to remember both sides of the tag: it really changes, but in changing becomes *more* the same thing.

The change from New Labour to Tory-Lib Dem government is quite real and the changes it portends are important. But it also remains the same thing: government by corruption and fraud in the interests of the capitalist class and in particular that of the world-dominant capitalist state, the USA.

And the changes which are likely to be made will make it *more* the same thing. This is not only true of the coming wave of cuts, which will increase unemployment and sharpen social inequality. It is also true of whatever 'constitutional reforms' are agreed: the common ground between Tories and Lib Dems will increase presidentialism in the constitution and raise the power of the advertising-funded media in the electoral process. By doing so, it will increase corruption, and reduce the real political choices open to electors to those between personalities.

The process has already begun in a small way with Brown's decision to stand down in order to enable the Labour leadership election to be conducted *before* the party conference. Within the Labour Party, the party is to be asked to choose between personalities, before (and as far as possible without) any serious discussion on the party's policies.

Meanwhile, the election showed that a fundamental feature of British politics had *not* changed. Faced with a choice between Tory and Labour governments (even if either might need support from the Lib Dems), Labour did not 'melt down'. New Labour suppresses the voice of the working class, and thereby canalises its political representation into support for a 'Labour' wing of the corrupt and careerist 'political class'. But the conflict of the classes remains fundamental to British politics.

Election outcome

After the first TV 'debate' Lib Dem support shot up in the opinion polls. By election day this surge had evaporated, though only a few polls picked this up: the Lib Dems gained around 850,000 votes, a 1% increase in its share, but suffered a net loss of seats held. Conversely, though Labour lost 962,000 votes and 6.2% of its share in a higher total turnout, the wilder predictions of Labour being put in third place, and so on, did not materialise. In the local elections Labour's position actually improved. In Scotland Labour increased its share, while in London its loss of support was considerably less severe than in other parts of England and Wales. The Conservatives gained around 1.9 million more votes, but their share only rose to 36.1%. As Socialist Action leader John Ross correctly pointed out on his blog, this is an actual decline relative to the last election the Tories *won*, and displays a long-term trend of declining votes for the Tories (and, less sharply, for Labour) since the 1950s. (Ross first identified this decline in 1983 in his book *Thatcher and friends*).¹



David Cameron and Nick Clegg: agree on cuts

Some of the votes have gone to parties further right. The UK Independence Party's tally went up by a third from around 600,000 in 2005 to 900,000, while the British National Party's more than doubled from around 200,000 to 550,000. The rise in absolute support represents only a small increase in share of the vote, but is nonetheless significant. It is concealed in much media coverage. In the case of the BNP this resulted from relief at its failure to make a breakthrough in Barking and its wipe-out in local government (resulting merely from increased turnout and votes for the 'mainstream' parties when local elections are held together with national elections). In the case of Ukip it invariably polls far better in Euro elections than in parliamentary ones.

Some commentators have identified the evaporation of 'Cleggstasy' as proof of the limited influence of the media on voters. This is very questionable (and usually self-serving). Only *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were backing the Lib Dems, while the Murdoch press and Sky, the *Daily Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Express* were all - as usual - backing the Tories, with the *Mirror* in its usual lukewarm fashion hanging onto its Labour readership. In initiating the TV 'leaders' debate' Cameron was promoting his - and Murdoch's - presidentialist constitutional agenda. Until the first 'debate' the Tories were running primarily to appeal to voters fed up with the New Labour government. The Lib Dem surge threatened this project, and the Tory media reoriented its campaigning. As rightwing (but hostile to the Tories) commentator Peter Hitchens, put it in the *Mail on Sunday* on April 24: "Huge tankers full of fresh slime fanned out across the nation from Cameron headquarters this weekend. The new slime, specially developed in laboratories, is formulated to be used against the Liberal Democrat leader, Nicholas Clegg. Mr Cameron and his aides are hoping that it will swamp Mr Clegg, though early experiments have not been encouraging. Existing stocks of slime were effective only against Gordon Brown, who is now so covered in effluent and slurry that there is no point in tipping any more of it over his baffled,

scowling head."

In fact, Hitchens was not quite right. The turning points towards the end of the campaign were two. The first was that sections of the media began to talk about the Lib Dems pushing Labour into third place, and (part of this) about Clegg's April 24 statement that "Labour is increasingly irrelevant" (*The Times* April 25). Vote Clegg, get Cameron; and this message, quite strongly promoted by the media, fairly clearly led to some increase in turnout among Labour's core voters to compensate for the losses elsewhere. It was this increase in 'core Labour' turnout which produced the scenes of voters turned away from the polling stations at 10pm in a number of inner-city constituencies.

The second turning point was Rupert Murdoch's April 28 'bigotgate' stunt, exploiting an opportunity provided by Brown's momentary carelessness. This enabled the Tories to appeal to widespread anti-immigration sentiment without having actually to campaign openly on the issue, as Michael Howard had. Howard's approach let Labour brand the Tories as racists; Murdoch's stunt let them get the benefits of appealing to chauvinism without the stigma. They were aided and abetted by Labour itself joining the attack on the Lib Dems' proposal for a one-off amnesty for illegal immigrants, as well as by Labour's own long-term promotion of national chauvinism (as Eddie Ford pointed out in last week's issue of this paper: 'They all scapegoat migrants', May 6). The result was to enable Cameron to claw back some anti-Labour votes from the Lib Dems.

The overall result is, then, a *narrow* change in the electoral map. The most the Tories have conceded to the Lib Dems on proportional representation is a referendum on the alternative vote system - in which the Conservatives (and their media) will be free to campaign for a 'no' vote. Most likely, this coalition government will prioritise carrying through cuts, but be short-lived and followed by a general election in the near term on the existing first-past-the-post basis; and this general election will be a disaster for the Lib Dems, who will attract the opprobrium of the

'cuts government' without having the stable social base that the Tories have in rural classes and Labour in the proletariat.

As I argued in the April 29 issue of this paper, though many media commentators favour the Lib Dems replacing Labour, this does not appear to be the view of the capitalist class as such; since the trade unions are still a considerable force, now is not the moment (from the capitalists' point of view) to take risks with their political integration. Whatever media commentators may have hoped for, this policy was reflected in the overall *editorial policy* of the media, which played to the Lib Dems' weaknesses to reduce the surge effect.

Austerity agenda

At the time of writing the outline policy agreed by the coalition partners has just been published (there is, of course, a good deal more yet to be settled between them).² The Lib Dems have agreed to the substance of the Tories' position of "accelerated" action to cut the budget deficit: there is to be an 'emergency budget' within 50 days, and £6 billion of spending cuts this year. Where the cuts will come from remains totally unclear, though the governor of the Bank of England has evidently seen some concrete proposals of which he approves.³

The negotiation has produced deferral of Tory plans to increase the inheritance tax threshold and Lib Dem plans to raise the income tax threshold; but the new government will abandon Labour's 1% rise in the 'national insurance contributions' variant of income tax on employees. The Lib Dems' 'mansion tax', never more than a populist gimmick, has been abandoned, and Lib Dem MPs are given a free vote on Cameron's 'tax break for marriage' gimmick. There will be a general rise in capital gains tax from 18% to something close to the income tax level with an exemption for 'entrepreneurial business activities' transactions.

The agreement thus continues the silence of the election campaign on the real scale of 'austerity measures' at issue, deferring the issues to the 'emergency budget' and to a full spending review, to report in the autumn. The new government's room for manoeuvre is pretty limited unless the parties' existing spending pledges on the NHS, pensions and (from the Tories) defence are to be dumped (which is possible). The most immediate targets are the unemployed and other welfare recipients. There are immediate commitments to simplified and extended workfare. Likely to follow are cuts in public sector pensions and - as Cameron flagged up during the election - the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, none of which are controlled by Tory allies, and the north of England.

Unemployment is reported (May 12) to have risen again to 2.51 million.⁴ Cuts will necessarily involve increased unemployment, and the first round already introduced by Labour is already doing so. Meanwhile, the *Financial Times* reports OECD figures that private sector wages "fell further behind inflation in Britain than anywhere in the industrialised world except Mexico, Turkey and Iceland".⁵ This inevitably makes public sector wages a target: Spain

has just imposed an across-the-board cut of 5% in public sector salaries. The working class is to pay for the crisis in pay cuts, unemployment and welfare cuts.

The big lie that is supposed to justify this policy is the claim that the deficit results from Gordon Brown's 'profligacy' after the 2001 general election. Perhaps this also explains the cuts agenda in Spain, which ran budget *surpluses* in 2005, 2006 and 2007? The reality is that the global market crises of 1997-98 ('east Asian', etc crises) and 2001 ('dot-com crash') were met by the US as well as Britain engaging in large-scale Keynesian soft-money and budgetary deficit policies, in order to avoid the crashes turning into something worse.

The agreement is completely silent on foreign policy except for the question of the EU. Here the Lib Dems have (unsurprisingly) been assured that Britain should remain an EU member; and have given (against their historical pro-Europeanism) commitments to Tory Euroscepticism on a range of fronts - most strikingly the requirement of a referendum before any further transfer of powers to the EU bodies. This will be of considerable practical significance, given the sovereign debt crisis affecting the euro and the consequent urgent need of the euro zone countries at least to increase budgetary and fiscal coordination.

Tory knee-jerk reactions and public chauvinism are appeased with a cap on non-EU immigration: practically insignificant, since the vast bulk of recent migration is from (and to) EU countries. There is no mention of the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan, any more than there was in the election campaign. The electors have bought this pig in a poke, but it is still too early to let the cat out.

Constitutional change

The agreement involves three elements of constitutional change. The first is 10 commitments on 'political reform' - some quite specific; others highly ambiguous and probably covering a Tory agenda. The second is the commitment to substantially privatise the school system, which will function to reduce local democracy and increase the political power of the Christian churches. The third is some much vaguer commitments on 'civil liberties'.

The No1 'political reform' commitment is for fixed-term five-year parliaments, starting with the present one. The legislation will presumably take the power of dissolution away from the crown and therefore from the prime minister. There will, however, be a get-out for a dissolution if it is agreed by 55% of the House of Commons. The resulting change is marginal: it will be necessary to get a dissolution resolution through the Commons, but a governing party or coalition should be able to do so. The idea of fixed-term parliaments is democratic, but the five-year length is undemocratic. What would seriously be a democratic improvement would be *one-year* parliaments, as demanded by the Chartists.

No2 is a referendum on the replacement of FPTP by AV. The parties undertake to whip their members to vote for the referendum bill, but

corruption, for the capitalists

have agreed that they will be free to campaign as they please in the referendum. This commitment lets the Lib Dems say to their supporters that they have achieved a 'breakthrough' on voting reform. But, since AV is no more proportional than FPTP, it will be easy to campaign for a 'no' vote, and the effect will probably be to kick the issue into the long grass after the Lib Dems get hammered at the next general election.

Along with this referendum is the commitment to go for "fewer and more equal-sized constituencies": ie, fewer MPs, a Cameron panacea. The expectation is that this will reduce the (real) proportional overrepresentation of Labour, making it easier for Tories to win elections. It will also (as in the US) tend to squeeze third-party and other candidates. And since there is no suggestion of a place bill to reduce the number of ministers, it will increase government control of the House of Commons.

AV in no way represents the proportional representation communists seek for elections. If anything, it will tend to lead to more arbitrary outcomes and less differentiation between the mainstream parties. But, assuming the referendum goes ahead, my personal view is that the left should probably campaign for a 'yes' vote. The reason is that AV does at least allow electors to register a first preference for non-mainstream parties, even if this will rarely be reflected in the candidates actually elected, rather than being forced to choose between a 'protest' vote and a 'useful' vote. If, however, the choice is only 'yes' to AV plus a smaller House of Commons or 'no' to both, then 'no' would become the right answer because of the anti-democratic character of reducing the number of MPs.

No3 is Cameron's proposal for a tightly circumscribed 'right of recall', requiring both a conviction of an MP for 'serious wrongdoing' and a petition of 10% of the electors in the constituency. In practice, if this will be used for anything, it will be for witch-hunts of MPs disliked by the media proprietors - George Galloway, perhaps, would have been targeted.

No4 is to set up a committee to make recommendations for establishing an upper chamber elected on the basis of PR for "single long terms of office"; with, in the interim, appointments to the House of Lords based on the current party shares of the vote. The idea clearly involves squaring the circle: either the new house will be proportionally representative, or its members will serve for long terms of office. If they serve for long terms of office they will represent, not the views of the electorate, but the views of the electorate years before. A second chamber elected for long terms is as anti-democratic as the present appointed chamber; the democratic solution is abolition.

No5 is technical reforms of parliamentary procedure intended to give the Commons more formal control of its business. This is one of those cosmetic technical reforms which make no practical difference as long as the payroll vote, prime ministerial patronage and the whipping system remain in operation. No6 is 'speeding up' individual voter registration to tackle fraud in postal balloting.

No. 7 is "a commission to consider the 'West Lothian question'" (the right of Scots MPs to vote on English-only matters) and No8 the implementation of the Calman Commission proposals to hand the Scots parliament a poisoned chalice

of limited taxation powers. Both are designed to hammer Labour north of the border and the SNP.

No9 is a statutory register of lobbyists (the minimum necessary to even pretend to do something about the lobbying industry); "a detailed agreement on limiting donations and reforming party funding". The appearance is 'clean government'; the reality will be that the unions will be barred from major funding of the Labour Party, while Tory donors will still be able to split their donations between multiple front companies and other such devices to bring them in below the upper limit, and the Tories will continue to receive page after page of free advertising in the advertising-funded media.

No10 is "the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups", including "a full review of local government finance". This promise could have a wide range of meanings, but most probably will be interpreted as leaving the regressive uniform business rate in place, rendering council tax more regressive, and 'devolution' beyond elected local government to 'community groups' to prevent the shift back to Labour which is already beginning to have practical effect and to allow the rich suburbs, as in the US, to opt out of paying for services to the inner-city poor. There is no concrete commitment to reduce the scope of judicial review of local authorities or the powers of the minister under Thatcher's legislation (retained in substance by New Labour).

Stings in tails

The general commitment to privatise the school system belongs with this last commitment: part of the long-standing Tory agenda of getting away from the powerful local authorities, often run by Labour, which grew up from the late 19th century on. I place it in the category of constitutional changes both for this reason and because (as I said before) in practice it will deliver more political power to the Christian churches. The reason for this is that there is certainly no capital to be found in the budget for funding 'parent co-ops' setting up schools. But the capital and running costs of schools are high: the capital costs because the sites need to be accessible, which means high land values, and the building costs are substantial, the running costs because - however much teachers' pay is cut - schools are necessarily labour-intensive operations, unlike, for example, breweries. The subsidies which have been available to the current 'academies' are unlikely to be affordable.

If we ask who will be able to put up the necessary funds, the answer falls into two groups. Some US private-sector education providers may be willing to have a go at converting a few of the rural and suburban comprehensives into private schools. But far more important will be the churches, which already have large-scale educational operations and substantial charitable funds, and have already been involved in some academies.

The long-term practical effect will therefore be an increased institutional role of the churches in education and an increased linkage between church and state and ability of the churches to deliver sectarian politics. In other words, with this policy the Lib Dems have signed up to attempting to reverse the partial secularisation of British politics since 1945 and bringing to the main-

land the sectarian educational divide found in the Six Counties. The Tory sting is in the tail.

Stings in tails are also found in the third variety of constitutional reform, the 'civil liberties' measures. Or perhaps here the sting is in the head. The first measure proposed is "a Freedom or Great Repeal Bill": that is, an omnibus bill to repeal a large number of measures passed by Labour governments since 1997. What will be contained in this bill is perfectly unclear. But we can, perhaps, safely expect it to include at least the fox-hunting ban and substantial parts of health and safety legislation and other forms of employment regulation objected to by employers. We should not expect it to include the Terrorism Acts, which the Tories endorsed in opposition, or the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Acts, which were introduced by cross-party agreement.

There is one limited specific and positive commitment: the scrapping of the ID card scheme and associated matters. Beyond this, the commitments are extremely vague. For example, "the protection of historic freedoms through the defence of trial by jury" makes no actual commitment to reverse the legislation for the use of juryless trials either in criminal cases, or in libel cases. "The restoration of rights to non-violent protest" makes no commitment to reverse the decision in *Austin v Metropolitan Police Commissioner* (2009) or to restore the historic common law which denied the right of the police to detain any person except by way of limited powers of arrest. "The review of libel laws to protect freedom of speech" makes no concrete proposals on the matter - even to enact Jack Straw's minimalist regulation of libel costs. "Safeguards against the misuse of anti-terrorism legislation" supposedly already exist. And so on.

Oddest is "a new mechanism to prevent the proliferation of unnecessary new criminal offences". It is totally unclear what such a mechanism could be - except better scrutiny of government bills by the House of Commons, which demands a Place Act and a reduction of the powers of the central party offices over local constituency parties. Since the Tories and Lib Dems have entered this coalition - they say - because they agree Britain needs "strong government" in the present crisis, it is most unlikely that they actually believe in stronger scrutiny of government legislation by MPs.

The more it changes, the more it remains the same. If all the policies for constitutional change in the Tory-Lib Dem agreement are given some sort of effect, British politics will become more what it already is: government of the people, by corruption through the lawyers, the media and the professional politicians, for the capitalists. The state will continue to grow, as will its repressive operations, and it will become even more an instrument for sucking resources out of the poor to pay them to the rich.

Brown-out

On Monday May 10 the elections and the brief illusory hope that the Lib Dems might be prepared to form a 'rainbow coalition' with Labour and the nationalists claimed Gordon Brown's head, with a promise to act merely as a caretaker till a new leader could be elected. On Tuesday, when it became clear that the Tories and Lib Dems would reach agreement, he decided to go with immediate effect.

No doubt he would have had to go

anyhow: he has made too many enemies both on the Blairite right and on the left and centre-left of the party to survive a serious election defeat. Brown is to blame for the outcome in the sense that he is also equally to blame with Blair for the Blair years. Blair's and Brown's loyalty to Britain and to the existing form of the constitution disenfranchised the working class and created the conditions for a major loss of Labour support. Brown's illusions in the 'managed market' and the 'creativity' of the financiers, still on display in his 2007 Mansion House speech, cut Labour off from any critique of the bubble economy.

That said, to blame Labour's defeat solely on Brown is to play into the agenda of the Blairites and the advertising-funded media: that the media has a right to choose the leader of the Labour Party through spinning in favour of some candidates and - as Peter Hitchens put it - dumping slime on others.

The reality is that Labour was in deep electoral trouble when Tony Blair resigned, and that this is why Tony Blair resigned. Brown's supporters stitched up the party leader election partly because they hoped Brown could and would take the party back towards its centre-left traditions and working class base; and, conversely, because they feared - probably correctly - that an open election would allow Murdoch to put in a 'Blairite' candidate. For the first couple of months the project appeared to be working. Then, however, Cameron and Osborne, with emphatic support from most of the media, derailed Brown's plans for a snap general election by their fraudulent campaign around inheritance tax, based on pretending that it affected far more voters than is actually the case.

At this point it became clear that a Blair-Cameron succession was intended, with Brown merely to serve as a caretaker. The Tories and their press went on and on about Brown as an 'unelected prime minister' because he had not won a general election (it should be said that the same is true of Winston Churchill in 1940, and of a great many past PMs). The Blairites did the work of their media masters in launching endless (incompetent) coup plots against Brown. Things went from bad to worse for Labour and Brown and in summer 2008 it looked as if Labour was heading for catastrophic defeat.

Then came the crash, and for a while the wheels came off the Cameron-Osborne project. Capital desperately needed massive bail-outs and Cameron's and Osborne's first response was, like their US Republican mentors, to refuse them. Brown provided the bail-outs and was briefly hailed as a hero of the economy. As the economy has (seemed to) recover from the immediate credit crisis, however, capitalist support for the Tories and the 'economic orthodoxy' of cuts and making the working class pay has recovered with it. Tons of slime were dumped on Brown's head.

In this context, Labour's result in the general election is almost a creditable achievement. The party has retained second place in the polls as well as in seats. That second place rests in the last analysis on its ability to claim working class support, however attenuated the real political basis for this support has become. This was reflected in the fact that in many (not all) regions the candidates backed by the Labour Representation Committee, which retains more links to the idea of Labour as a workers'

party, outperformed Labour's regional average performance. It has happened with almost no positive support from the media - at most, the media offensive of the last part of the campaign indirectly served Labour.

What has kept Labour as a serious force in politics even in the midst of this defeat is the support of its core working class constituency. The problem facing the Labour Party, in view of the Con-Lib coalition, is therefore actually the problem facing the working class movement in general: how to reorganise and remobilise the working class in opposition to the capitalists' insistence that the working class must pay for their crisis, and that the media must control political representation. This problem of opposition already confronted the non-Labour left under New Labour, and the non-Labour left disastrously failed to address it through illusions both in old *Labourism* and in bureaucratic control.

The corresponding illusion now affecting the Labour Party is that the Tory-Lib Dem coalition will rapidly break down, issuing in an early general election which Labour can win: but only if the party operates another bureaucratic stitch-up to put a new (Blairite or Brownite) leader in place quickly without a fundamental discussion of policy.

The reality is that the coalition has a very clear parliamentary and electoral majority; the capitalists want 'strong government' and will back it through the media; and Cameron has made enough concessions to keep the Lib Dems onside until at least his political reforms - fewer MPs, larger constituencies, further visceration of democracy in local government and reduction of Scots votes - come into play. When they do, Labour will lose the advantages in *merely electoral arithmetic* which have enabled it to be sharply over-represented in parliament; and even if the cuts are dramatically unpopular and the Lib Dems are, as they almost certainly will be, hammered, Cameron will be able to win a Tory majority.

Communists seek to replace the Labour Party with a mass Communist Party. But that does not mean that we want to see the marginalisation of the Labour Party at the hands of the capitalists, or endless government by the immediate and direct agents of capital in the Tory and Lib Dem parties. If the Labour Party goes down the path of bureaucratic stitch-up to elect a new leader without serious discussion, that will inevitably be the result.

If Labour has a serious and open discussion, on the other hand, it will certainly have tankers of slime poured on it by the media. But it is possible that Labour or part of it might find the road back to the appearance, however distorted, of political representation of the working class, and through that road to develop the ability to win against the media and the capitalists.

If not, Labour will provide yet another example of *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: the names at the top of the party will change, but its commitment to the constitution will continue - and with it, its decline •

Notes

1. <http://ablog.typepad.com/keytrendsinglobalisation>, May 7.
2. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/8677933.stm.
3. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/10109518.stm>.
4. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/10109965.stm>.
5. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4cb3db7a-5d1b-11df-8373-00144feab49a.html.

IRAN

Execution to impose terror

Our response to the judicial murder of Kurds should not be to call for the Iranian regime to be hauled before a tribunal for 'crimes against humanity', writes **Yassamine Mather**. It should be to step up our solidarity

Four of the five political prisoners executed by the Islamic government in Iran in the early hours of Sunday May 9 came from Kurdistan and were accused of membership of the left nationalist group, the PJAK (an Iranian version of the PKK). The executed prisoners - Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heydarian, Farhad Vakili, Shirin Alamoouli and Mehdi Eslamian - all denied membership of "political organisations" and the PJAK issued a statement clarifying that none of those executed had any organisational links with it. Farzad Kamangar was a teacher and trade unionist who had been accused of "endangering national security" and "enmity against god".

Although Iran has other major Kurdish nationalist organisations, dissatisfaction with the pro-western policies of the other groups, which have collaborated with US plans for 'regime change', has swelled the ranks of the relatively unknown and younger PJAK.

The PJAK claims that half of its members are women and that it supports women's rights. It has been involved in many military confrontations with Iran's security forces in Kurdistan. It claims its guerrillas fight inside Iran, and reports suggest that in August 2007 it managed to destroy an Iranian military helicopter that was conducting a forward operation of bombardment by Iranian forces. It has adopted many of the political ideas and military strategies of the PKK.

On April 24 2009, PJAK rebels attacked a police station in Kermanshah province. According to Iranian government sources, a number of policemen and eight rebels were killed in a fierce gun battle. Iran responded a week later by attacking Kurdish villages in the border area of Panjwin inside Iraq using helicopter gunships.

In April 2006, US congressman Dennis Kucinich sent a letter to George W Bush in which he wrote that the US is likely to be supporting and coordinating the PJAK, since it operates and is based in Iraqi territory, under the control of the Kurdistan regional government. In November 2006, journalist Seymour Hersh, writing in *The New Yorker*, supported this claim, stating that the US military and the Israelis are giving the group equipment, training and targeting information in order to create internal pressures in Iran. The accusations seem unlikely, given the PJAK's membership of the PKK-led Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (KCK). However, even if the accusations are correct, members and supporters of this organisation join it precisely because of its leftwing politics and its claims of opposition to imperialist powers, rather than aligning themselves with the longer established, bourgeois nationalist parties.

The mass protests of 2009 and 2010 were all expressions of the opposition by Iran's youth to the Islamic regime. However, in Kurdistan province that opposition is even stronger. The region known as Iranian Kurdistan includes the greater parts of the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam, with an estimated population of six to seven million mainly Sunnis. It has a long history of rebellion against the central government, going back to the Sassanid era.

In modern times, Kurds have re-

belled on a number of occasions. During World War I, the weakness of the Qajar dynasty encouraged Kurdish tribal chiefs to take control of large sections of the province. In 1922, Reza Khan (the shah's father and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty), sent his army to quash Kurdish rebellion. During the first years of the Pahlavi rule, Reza Shah pursued a crude policy of forcing Kurdish chiefs into exile, while confiscating their land and property.

At the start of World War II, Reza Shah showed open sympathies to Nazi Germany, prompting an invasion of Iran by Allied troops in September 1941. In the Kurdish regions, the Persian army was defeated and their ammunition seized by Kurds. With support from the Soviet Union, a Kurdish state was created in the city of Mahabad in 1946, but it lasted less than a year - the withdrawal of the occupying Soviet forces allowed the shah's army to defeat the separatists. However, despite its short history the Mahabad republic played a significant role in radicalisation of Kurdish youth and their dream of a socialist Kurdistan.

Another wave of nationalism followed the fall of the shah in February 1979, and Iran's first supreme religious leader, ayatollah Khomeini, declared a jihad against 'Kurdistan'. In the spring of 1980, government forces under the command of president Bani Sadr attacked the cities of Mahabad, Sanandaj, Pawe and Marivan. Entire villages and towns were destroyed to force the Kurds into submission. Ayatollah Khalkhali, also known as the 'hanging judge', sentenced thousands of men to execution after summary trials while Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps fought to re-establish government control in the entire region. However, the central government did not fully succeed in the countryside and, as the Islamic state consolidated its power, arresting socialists and communists. Organisations of the Iranian left took refuge in Kurdistan, many spending most of the 1980s in that region.

In February 1999, Kurdish nationalists took to the streets in several cities against the government of president Khatami and in support of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. These protests were violently suppressed by government forces and at least 20 people were killed.

In November 2009 Iran's Islamic Republic executed Ehsan Fattahian, a Kurdish political activist charged with being an "enemy of god" because of his political activities in support of Kurdish national rights. He was a member of Komala, one of the main political organisations active in Iranian Kurdistan since the 1960s, some of whose founding members had Maoist tendencies. When the Islamic regime took power, Komala participated in the first parliamentary elections. However, fearing Komala or leftwing victories in some of Kurdish seats, the regime cancelled the elections and sent in the military in the summer of 1979 to put down the 'Kurdish rebellion'. Leftwing Kurdish political organisations, including Komala, were declared illegal.

In 1983, together with an Iranian socialist group, Unity of Communist Militants, Komala formed the Communist Party of Iran. In 1991, political differences with the UCM leadership led to a split, with the lat-

ter forming the Worker-communist Party of Iran. In 2004 there was a further split in the Communist Party of Iran, with the more nationalist faction led by Mohtadi deciding to re-launch Komala.

Mohatdi now considers himself a "revolutionary liberal".¹ He has met American officials over the last few years at the state department and other government agencies² and many consider that the group has shifted to the right since the split with the CPI. Komala remains one of four major Kurdish parties organising in Kurdistan. Most activists of the organisation are unaware of the relationship of Mohtadi and other Komala leaders with the US.

Clearly Ehsan Fattahian, who had spent many years in prison, could not be held responsible for Mohtadi's actions. In the same way Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heydarian, Farhad Vakili, Shirin Alamoouli and Mehdi Eslamian are innocent victims of an Islamic regime that uses execution as a means of imposing terror at a time when protesters are preparing themselves for demonstrations commemorating the events of last summer.

Kurdish and Iranian political groups have called for a one-day general strike in Kurdistan on Thursday May 13 in protest at the executions and students have also showed their outrage, organising a spontaneous

protest when Ahmadinejad visited Shahid Beheshti University on May 10. The mild disapproval of the executions expressed by 'reformist' leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who merely expressed his concern that the Islamic state's legal procedures may not have been followed, left everyone, including some of his supporters, bewildered. The executions of these young Kurds will only increase the hatred felt towards the central government.

Ironically, earlier this month, no doubt at the urging of a politically correct adviser, Iran's supreme leader, ayatollah Khomeini, issued an order forbidding the mimicking by Iranians of the accent of Kurds, Turks and other peoples when they speak Persian. It is fitting for our time that the ruler of a government responsible for the death of so many innocent Kurds - victims of air raids, helicopter gunships, military attacks and executions - should claim to be concerned by the hurt they might feel if their accent is mocked.

Following these executions, another call has been made by supporters of the many splinter groups originating from Fedayeen (Minority) for a tribunal of Iran's leaders for 'crimes against humanity'. Although I share their outrage, the reality is, we live in a world where major western 'democracies' - the US, UK, France,

Italy and so on - are themselves guilty of appalling crimes committed in the name of their 'war on terror'. The execution of political opponents by Israel, the US and its occupation allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention torture, waterboarding and the rest, are the order of the day. In such circumstance any 'human rights' tribunal in the west directed against Iran's Islamic leaders would be grossly hypocritical.

I cannot speak for those executed this week, but I am sure the Fedayeen comrades I knew personally who lost their lives in executions or in the dungeons of the Islamic republic would want all of us to concentrate our efforts on supporting the important struggles of the Iranian working class against the regime and against capitalism rather than calling on the west to put this or that religious politician, judge or executioner on trial. There must be no illusions in western liberal democracy. Pinning our hopes on human rights lawyers and do-gooders will only hinder our activities in support of the ideals for which so many of our comrades lost their lives in Kurdistan and the rest of Iran ●

Notes

1. www.komala.org/english/eindex.htm
2. www.nysun.com/foreign/kurdish-iranian-opposition-leader-seeks-clear/54772

A message from death row

Farzad Kamangar's last letter: 'Is it possible to teach and be silent?'



Once upon a time, there was a mother fish who laid 10,000 eggs. Only one little black fish survived. He lives in a stream with his mother.

One day the little fish said to his mother, "I want to go away from here." The mother asked, "Where to?" The little fish replied, "I want to go see where the stream ends."

[*Little Black Fish* is the title of a short story for children, written in 1967 by dissident teacher Samad Behrangi. The book, banned under the shah's regime, tells the story of a little fish who defies the rules of his community to embark on a journey to discover the sea.]

Hello, cellmates. Hello, fellow sufferers!

I know you well: you are the teacher, the neighbour to the stars of Khavaran [the cemetery in eastern Tehran where many political dissidents were executed during the 1980s and buried in mass, unmarked graves], the classmates of dozens whose essays were attached to their legal cases, the teacher of students whose crime was their humane thoughts. I know you well: you are colleagues of Samad and Ali Khan.

You remember me too, right?

It is me, the one chained in Evin prison.

It is me, the quiet student who sits behind the broken school benches and longs to see the sea while in a remote village in Kurdistan. It is me, who like you, told the tales of Samad to his students; but in the heart of the Shahoo Mountains [in Kurdistan].

It is me who loves to take on the role of the little black fish. It is me, your comrade on death row.

Now, the valleys and mountains are behind him and the river passes through a plain field. From the left and the right side, other rivers have joined in and the river now is filled with more water. The little fish enjoyed the abundance of water ... the little fish wanted to go to the bottom of the river. He was able to swim as much as he wanted and not bump into anything.

Suddenly, he spotted a large group of fish. There were 10,000 of them, one of whom told the little black fish, "Welcome to the sea, comrade!"

My jailed colleagues! Is it possible to sit behind the same desk as Samad, look into the eyes of the children of this land, and still remain silent?

Is it possible to be a teacher and not show the path to the sea to the little fish of the country? What difference does it make if they come from Aras [a river in north-western Iran, Azerbaijan], Karoon [a river in south-western Iran, Khuzestan], Sirvan [a river in Kurdistan], or Sarbaz Rood [a river in the Sistan and Baluchestan region]? What difference does it make when the sea is a mutual destiny, to be united as one? The sun is our guide. Let our

reward be prison, that is fine!

Is it possible to carry the heavy burden of being a teacher and be responsible for spreading the seeds of knowledge and still be silent? Is it possible to see the lumps in the throats of the students and witness their thin and malnourished faces and keep quiet?

Is it possible to be in the year of no justice and fairness and fail to teach the H for Hope and E for Equality, even if such teachings land you in Evin prison or result in your death?

I cannot imagine being a teacher in the land of Samad, Khan Ali, and Ezzati and not join the eternity of Aras [Samad Behrangi drowned in the river in 1968]. I cannot imagine witnessing the pain and poverty of the people of this land and fail to give our hearts to the river and the sea, to roar and to inundate.

I know that one day this harsh and uneven road will be paved for teachers and the suffering you endured will be a badge of honour, so everyone can see that a teacher is a teacher, even if his or her path is blocked by the selection process, prison and execution. The little black fish and not the heron bestows honour on the teacher.

The Little Fish calmly swam in the sea and thought: Facing death is not hard for me, nor is it regrettable. Suddenly the heron swooped down and grabbed the little fish.

Grandma Fish finished her story and told her 12,000 children and grandchildren that it was time for bed. 11,999 little fish said good night and went to bed. The grandmother went to sleep as well. One little red fish was not able to sleep. That fish was deep in thought ●

REVIEW

Integration and working class culture

Dave Renton *Colour blind? Race and migration in north-east England since 1945* University of Sunderland Press, 2008, pp286, £10.95

For over half a century, immigration has rarely been far from the top of the political agenda in the UK. In a culture which places such emphasis on ideas of national pride and superiority, this should perhaps come as no surprise - after all, it is no coincidence that the discourse of 'border controls' often draws directly upon British history in its invocation of invasions, conquests and the defence of Britain's national frontiers against the barbarous foreign hordes. But what is the story on the ground? In *Colour blind?* Dave Renton sets out to examine the responses of working class communities in the north-east of England to the arrival of newcomers from other parts of the UK and far beyond.

Appropriately for a book about the north-east, Renton's emphasis is firmly on class - namely, the making and remaking of a working class which absorbs workers from a huge array of cultures and nations and moulds them into a hybridised mass of people - many of whom share a common local and regional identity, with a staunchly working class underpinning. The process is not always straightforward, and the class dimension not always obvious, but the message is clear: integration is best achieved when it comes from below, as ordinary people the world over come to share the same friends, workplaces and eventually the same accents.

As Renton observes, "In so far as the region has been open to migrants, this welcome has been decisively shaped by existing cultures of occupation and class" (p215). Indeed, this focus on the importance of class lends *Colour blind?* an insight often missing in studies of migration and settlement, many of which concede too much ground to what Renton describes as 'identity politics' and the reproduction of 'racialised' thinking. It is here that Renton's background in Marxist studies of fascism and anti-fascism comes into its own, as he is able to demonstrate how bonds of friendship and class solidarity have historically been able to cut across the divisions of 'race', ethnicity and religion in some of the UK's former industrial heartlands.

The key contention of the book is that the warmth and hospitality for which the north-east is supposedly renowned stems from its distinct class character, with a predominantly industrial and coastal economy, giving birth to a population which was made up of predominantly skilled and semi-skilled manual workers. This in turn spawned a culture, Renton argues, which was largely receptive to incoming workers, regardless of their faith, nationality or skin colour, provided they were willing to demonstrate the same strongly working class virtues as the established population. The north-east was a place where, according to regional historian David Bean, working class virtues were the norm - honesty, kindness, humour and durability were to be found in the very fabric of north-east society.

Lest this sounds overly romantic, Renton is sufficiently vigilant to question whether the notion of 'north-east exceptionalism' is in fact a myth or reality. As is so often the case, what the author seems to suggest is that it is a partial truth, largely dependent on underlying structural factors. Indeed, it is argued that the decay of heavy industry and the declining influence of the organised working class "reduced the social basis for welcome", diminishing the layer of activists willing to intervene in class-based community campaigns and destroying many of the bonds of solidarity enjoyed by workers of different nationalities in north-east communities: "Unemployment and underemployment," comments Renton, "were hardly likely to encourage feelings of solidarity towards new arrivals."

Nevertheless, there have been many examples of largely successful integration throughout the region's history. Middlesbrough, for example, is a relatively young town which practically owes its existence to immigration, as workers from all over the UK, Ireland and the world flocked to the area for jobs in the 'frontier' town's emerging ironworks in the 19th century. By 1871, one in five males on Teesside were Irish-born. There were periodic tensions between the different communities: Renton tells of how divisions between English and Irish ironworkers, fuelled by opportunistic employers, often resulted in both sides losing out, particularly in the 'Great Strike' of 1866 when differential pay cuts were imposed on both. Other historians point out that within a few generations the Irish in the north-east were very well integrated and, as Roger Cooter comments, "The proof for this must surely rest with the social, economic and political advancement of the Irish themselves" (p60).

Elsewhere, miner and trade unionist Jack Lawson remembers Bolden Colliery, near Sunderland, as "a typical example of the way in which the county of Durham had become a sort of social melting pot, owing to the rapid development of the coalfield during the 19th century" - one where a dozen different accents, dialects and languages eventually gave way to a common culture and a Mackem/Geordie lilt. The idea of a "melting pot" is not one that many people would necessarily associate with County Durham, where only 1.2% of the population belong to an ethnic minority, according to the 2001 census (compared with 2.4% in the rest of the north-east and 8.7% in England and Wales). But Lawson's testimony is enlightening, for it reminds us that immigration is not always about crossing national borders, and also that migration fuels and is fuelled by rapid capitalist expansion and retraction.

Indeed, the story of migration and resettlement is woven into the history of the working class. As the numerous examples in *Colour blind?* show, it makes no sense from a rational Marxist perspective for some

sections of the class to call for others to be expelled once expansion slows down, or to call for the capitalist state to throw up borders to keep newcomers out. The organisation of migrants into cultures and formations that emphasise the emancipatory potential of working class unity is what holds the key to successful integration - and to the struggle for improved quality of life for all, migrant and host alike. One example of this comes from as far back as 1866, when hundreds of seamen struck for higher wages in ports along the River Tyne. It was a strike in which black seamen were heavily involved, prompting one journalist to observe: "Whatever may be the feeling of the people of America or elsewhere against colour, it is not participated in by our tars, who walk arm in arm with the coloured men" (p34).

Yet the question of class and cultural identity is a complex one. To what extent do people consider themselves as *workers* rather than principally or exclusively as English, Poles, Pakistanis, Muslims, Hindus, Catholics or any of the myriad identities at play? The struggle to reinforce class identity as a means of cutting across ethnic and communal divisions is a recurring theme in the history of the north-east. Renton quotes a British-Indian youth, who says of his father: "He sort of wants to keep me Indian, you know, which I don't like. I would like to think that I've got no nationality, you know, I'm just a human being" (p128). As Renton points out, narrow and communal identities - including white and British - have been all too easily reproduced down the generations, particularly from the 1980s onwards with the breaking up of the industrial proletariat and the onset of 'identity politics'. Renton does not explore this debate in too much detail, although much has been written elsewhere about the role of identity politics and official, state-sanctioned multiculturalism in maintaining structural inequality and disadvantage.¹

Often when migrant groups cling to old identities in their totality it is in response to the hostility they face from the wider community. Hence the formation of the first self-mobilised community organisations in the 1950s and 1960s, long before 'race relations' legislation was implemented as a means of preventing discrimination against newcomers. As Renton explains, "One way to understand the process is as one of repeated attempts at state-building. While the economic functions of the state were provided from within north-east society (or from within Britain as a whole), the cultural and representative institutions of the region were frequently closed to new migrants ... New arrivals in the region established religious, cultural, welfare and educational organisations, feeling that existing provisions were inadequate for them" (p80).

As time went on, however, these organisations came to be seen by the British establishment as a key means of managing troublesome minorities as part of a project in which anti-

racism was gutted of any meaningful political content. The official policy of multiculturalism was formulated by governments from the 1980s onwards as a response to the persisting racial inequalities highlighted by anti-racist campaigners and to the 'racial' violence which broke out in British inner cities during the same period. This form of multiculturalism - which saw government and local authority funding directed to the aforementioned voluntary cultural organisations - not only ignored the economic, cultural and institutionally racist dimensions of existing inequalities, but actually fostered their entrenchment, including the patriarchal chauvinism of unelected 'community leaders' patronised by the state.

Although Renton only alludes to the fact, other writers have described this as a form of 'internal colonialism' actively fostered by the British ruling class. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, for example, have noted that the first generation of British 'race relations experts' received their training in the colonies of the British empire, where "they ruled through a stratum of local leaders and chieftains without too much intervention in the 'internal affairs' of those they ruled."² This was eventually reflected in the race relations institutions and practices implemented by British governments in the post-war era. Umberto Melotti has characterised the form of multiculturalism practised in Britain - which he refers to as "uneven pluralism" - as a particularist, ethnocentric extension of British colonial policy.³

It is the long-established Yemeni community of South Shields on Tyneside, which offers perhaps the most fascinating example of these different processes at work. Renton tells of how journalists visiting the area in the mid-20th century marvelled at the extent to which the migrants and their descendants had adapted to north-east culture and spoke in 'broad Tyneside' accents: "They dressed, sounded and increasingly behaved like white Geordies" (p13). However, Renton does perhaps over-estimate the extent to which South Shields migrants were assimilated at the cost of maintaining their own Arabic and Islamic traditions - not mentioned in the book, for example, is legendary visit in the 1970s of boxer Mohammed Ali - a figure whose political radicalism and proudly dissident Islamic identity struck a chord with the Tyneside working class, particularly its Arabic population.

The Yemenis' integration was by no means an entirely smooth process. Settlement of the seafarers began in the 1890s and by 1918 Renton reports that there may have been up to 600 Arabs working out of North and South Shields. The Yemenis faced hostility early on, but nevertheless embraced aspects of English popular culture (for example, dances) and many married local women. In 1919, though, there were 'race riots' in South Shields involving Yemeni and white sailors - triggered, naturally, over an industrial dispute in which

racism was deployed as a means of dividing a potentially united workforce.

These early decades of the 20th century also provide an early glimpse of what was to become a more pressing issue later on in the century with regards to the mobilisation of class and religion in the struggles for migrants' rights: "A decade later," writes Renton, "the Yemeni population of South Shields seems to have been divided between two different strategies to achieve success." A significant minority of Yemenis in Shields identified with the Minority Movement, a CPGB-led organisation within the sailors' union. On the other hand, the moderate and generally pro-government Western Islamic Association argued the case that the community's principal need was the building of a mosque and the provision of more religious education (pp49-51). Although religious and class identities are by no means mutually exclusive, for socialists the fusion of class politics with religious politics can be problematic, to say the least, and the mobilisation of religious identities for political purposes can jeopardise the struggle for workers' rights - as we have seen so often on the left in recent years.

All in all, in *Colour blind?* Renton has offered a concise, coherent and well-researched history of migration to the north-east, which adopts a class-based approach to the history of anti-racism and integration in the region. What conclusions can be drawn from the study? "The idea that the people of the north-east were always welcoming is no more plausible than its gloomier opposite, the idea that they were always hostile," says Renton (p58). But if migrants did generally face less hostility than in other parts of the country - which is very possibly the case - it can confidently be said that this is largely attributable to its strongly industrial working class culture.

One lesson that we can draw from this is how important it is that the hegemonic struggle over the meaning of terms such as 'integration' and 'community cohesion' is won by forces that fill such concepts with progressive content - against, for example, the narrow bourgeois meaning given them by the establishment. We are for a grassroots integration that acknowledges no borders and strives to unite workers of all cultures in a radical political culture that is diverse but absolutely committed to the principles of workers' rights, radical democracy and anti-racism. Only this can overcome communal division and the structural inequality it maintains ●

David Bates

Notes

1. See, for example, A Sivanandan *Catching history on the wing: race, culture and globalisation* London 2008.
2. F Anthias, N Yuval-Davis *Racialised boundaries: race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle* London 1992, p158.
3. See U Melotti, 'International migration in Europe: social projects and political cultures' in T Modood, P Werbner (eds) *The politics of multiculturalism in the new Europe: racism, identity, community* London 1997.

EURO CRISIS



KKE militants: part of the solution

Europe and the Greek contagion

The crisis in Greece is bound up with the global capitalist downturn. Instead of a nationalist response there could be an international fightback, writes **James Turley**

After eight months of increasingly fervid speculation, the European Union has finalised a bail-out package for struggling Eurozone economies.

And for all the strenuous denials from Berlin and Brussels that such economies - first and foremost, Greece - would not be rescued, the package that has been announced is substantial: firstly, €110 billion to bail out Greece; secondly, €500 billion from EU member-states, all told, and an additional €250 billion from the International Monetary Fund as an emergency reserve for everywhere else.

This is, by all accounts, a spectacular turnaround. The core EU nations have long enjoyed a global competitive advantage through the wide space created by Europe's open market. Germany in particular sustains a massive industrial base, selling to countries like France (10.2%), US (6.7%), Netherlands (6.7%), UK (6.6%), Italy (6.3%), Austria (6%), China (4.5%), Switzerland (4.4%). When the crisis started to bite at the borders of Europe, Germany, France and the rest were equally keen on insulating themselves from the ill effects. The Greek government was told to take the begging bowl to the IMF - and sharpen its already punishing austerity measures.

Alas, for Angela Merkel, the Greek 'contagion' could not be so easily quarantined - after all, Greece is in the euro zone, and will be for the foreseeable future, so Greek problems are also European problems.

Any disaster in Greece immediately poses the question: *who is next?* At which point, the list of EU candidates facing the possibility of their own sovereign debt crisis is growing: eg, Portugal, Spain and Italy.

Exactly how much money rides on the comparatively modest Greek economy at the moment became abundantly clear on May 6, when - with speculation over the Greek situation reaching fever pitch - the Dow Jones plunged 9% in half an hour. The immediate trigger for that collapse is believed to be an error at one particular bank, which erroneously saw an automated transfer of \$16 billion (rather than million) worth of shares. Given the increasingly common use of automated trading on the world's stock markets, however, it is significant that a computer glitch could have such harmful effects just *now*. Market turbulence continued the next day, where the London stock exchange fell significantly - bad news from the continent exacerbated by the inconclusive outcome of the general election.

And so it was that, on Friday May 7, the Bundestag approved its share of the Greek bail-out package, effectively making it a reality. The German government nodded through this enormously unpopular message only two days ahead of an important regional election - another index of the intense capitalist pressure EU states are under to sort this mess out.

Domino effect

This unlikely scenario is the effect of a number of mechanisms. Firstly,

the background to the Greek crisis is the accumulation of significant levels of state debt, which was hidden using fraudulent (ie, astute) accounting practices at the time of Greece's entry into the euro. Euro zone rules stipulate that government budget deficits must not exceed 3.2% and national debt not exceed 60% of GDP; the Greek government, with the collusion of US investment bank Goldman Sachs, hid enough of its bad figures to sneak in. Debt, of course, has to be paid for in interest. As recession bit, tax takings dropped - and financing government borrowing became more and more difficult as interest rates soared. In the case of Greece to 20% and even 38% as the country was rated as a basket case.

Secondly, there is the pervasive influence of financial speculation. With the invention of the credit default swap, one of the many dubious derivatives, it became possible - in theory and, before long, in practice - to profit from the failure of debtors to meet their payments. The flipside to this process is that buying these derivatives in great numbers reflects badly on that country's financial stability, and so the activity of speculators is a self-fulfilling prophecy. At the moment, betting on the collapse of national economies is an alarmingly easy way to make a quick buck.

Throw in the international dimensions of the crisis, and you have a potential domino effect - a Greek default, followed by a Portuguese default, and so on ... which could

ultimately lead to a run on the euro. In that respect, it was obvious from the start that the Greek bail-out was not going to be enough - the Greek crisis would not have been half the headache for the international bourgeoisie if it was not simply one aspect of a serious structural crisis in the euro zone. Much more was clearly needed - and the new package appears to have stabilised the markets somewhat.

However much of this bail-out money is actually needed, it is only a temporary solution. That debt has not been paid off, but simply shifted around - the core EU economies, meanwhile, are not in a position to keep pouring money out of their own coffers. The Greek deal, then, has a lot of strings attached; principally, Greek prime minister George Papandreou is expected to make budget cuts of an order shocking even to bourgeois commentators.

Exactly how successive rounds of summits and talks continue to find yet more limbs of the Greek economy to amputate is a matter of some speculation; but so, for once, is the question of whether the operation is even possible. On one level, the concern is an orthodox economic one - with austerity measures so harsh, and the cash going straight to creditors, how exactly is the economy ever to recover?

The other side to the trepidation of the bourgeois class is: can *this* Greek government successfully impose this on *this* Greek population? Papandreou has been locked into pursuing austerity measures

ever since he acceded to power last October - and he is already facing mass resistance. Though the largest union federations, the private sector General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the public sector General Confederation of Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY), both supported the election of his Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) mass pressure, in no small part channelled through the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), has forced the trade union bureaucracy to organise a string of general strikes. The latest, on May 5, coincided with the EU's discussions over the Greek bail-out package. As I write, more protests are planned for this week, with events around the European bail-out fund gathering pace.

The resistance

That the international bourgeoisie doubts Papandreou's ability to defeat the anti-austerity struggles - at least with this latest prescription for social carnage - testifies above all to the well organised and well disciplined character of the Greek workers' movement. The KKE has not suffered quite so severe decomposition as its more illustrious fraternal parties elsewhere; it remains a significant political force in the unions, and has marshalled that influence into a sustained campaign against what is, after all, a social democratic government. Though it remains an 'official communist' party, and therefore intellectually hamstrung, with the Kremlin no longer issuing orders it is

now able to act on its own initiative.

So it has a strategic policy for the working class - a great "people's front" of "the workers, the self-employed, the craftsmen, the small tradesmen, the small and medium-sized farmers, the young people". It is all these folks' "patriotic duty" to build "our own Greece".¹ Given the source, the nationalism is hardly surprising, and a substantial portion of the blame goes to the EU in the KKE's view. This is a line shared to an extent with groups to its left, which tend also to be flatly opposed to the EU. Antarsya, a coalition of "anti-capitalists" including the Greek sections of the Fourth International (Usec) and the British Socialist Workers Party-dominated International Socialist Tendency, campaigns for an "anti-capitalist exit" from the European Union.

Both arguments are tempered with nods in the direction of internationalism - that the KKE unfurled two huge banners at the top of the Acropolis, reading (in English) "Peoples of Europe - rise up" signals the party's (rather muted) awareness that the Greek crisis is not just a matter for Greeks; meanwhile, Antarsya welcomes "the proposal for coordinated action of solidarity and against the cuts on a European level by forces of the anti-capitalist left and the movements".²

The problem is that these two things are flatly counterposed. Firstly, a successful revolution in Europe - that would last longer than months - would have to be a *European* revolution, covering the whole continent. This, in the last analysis, has nothing to do with the EU - it was true in Marx's time as much as it is true of ours. It does not matter how successful defensive struggles in Greece become; there comes a point where the government has been rebuffed in all its efforts and thereby the question of power is posed, and the Greek workers will be *objectively* faced with the task of constructing a society in their own interests.

An isolated country - Greece, Britain or any other - would face only wrack and ruin if it attempted to defend workers' rule under conditions of capitalist boycott and resistance and the large-scale flight of capital. Starting the revolution in one place or another then hoping for it to spread elsewhere is a strategy doomed to failure - the revolution can only be a coordinated seizure of power, building upon substantial international organisation.

In this respect, the EU has imposed a certain unity on its member-states - unity of a degree and kind amenable to the capitalist class, of course, but unity of a sort. Our problem with the current set-up, which pitches smaller economies in a radically unequal relationship with the core countries, is not that it is too much unity, but *not enough* - that is, the core powers attempt to have their cake and eat it, exploiting the structural imbalance of the EU's institutions to profit from the economic links, while retaining an effective stranglehold on political power.

Seizing on the EU as a particularly egregious agent of the capitalist offensive in several countries, the European left has all too readily fallen into advocating models of an "anti-capitalist exit", which are chimeras. The only anti-capitalism capable of superseding capitalism - that is, communism - demands the ever closer unity of peoples. Anti-EU leftism is, at best, a crab-scuttle sideways in relation to this strategic objective rather than a stride towards it; in reality, it can only encourage illusions in 'national roads' to socialism, and is thus a step backward.

The European capitalist class has, in effect, two roads open ahead of it. The first is to restrict membership of the euro to the countries highest up the pecking order in the EU - those in particular who can keep up with Germany. Hardly an attractive option - a great deal of political capital, not to say capital proper, is invested in the current set-up, and paring down the euro zone is not likely to be a painless process for anybody concerned. The second is to centralise economic decision-making, and tighten fiscal controls over member-economies. This amounts, in practice, to handing over even more power to the core countries, and is un-

derstandably a hard political sell - both in countries like Greece, which do not appear to have much to gain from continued euro membership in the next decade at least (apart from sustained austerity measures comparable to the crippling regime of reparations imposed on Germany after World War I), and in Germany itself, where the capitalist media often portray Greeks and others as leeches on German prosperity. The bail-out fund, of course, is a move in the latter direction.

The job of the workers' movement is not to choose between these non-solutions - but to press its own policy for the radical reorganisation of society on a continental scale. Dutiful statements of solidarity are not sufficient expressions of internationalism - what is needed is the firmest possible

political unity in the battle to replace capitalism with socialism. We should fight for genuine democracy on the terrain of the EU alongside the terrain of our national politics, which are every bit as rigged against us as the Brussels bureaucracy. Against the mendacious advocacy of unity by capitalist states fighting for position in the global pecking order, we fight for an indivisible Europe under the rule of the working class - as a key step towards the overthrow of capitalism throughout the world ●

Notes

1. <http://inter.kke.gr/News/2010news/2010-05-05-strike>.
2. www.antarsya.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=310:communiquedantarsya-answer-antarsya-to-npa-and-swp&catid=62:2009-05-03-17-02-46&Itemid=119.



Nihilist violence helps right

Workers' defence

A less encouraging aspect of last week's Greek general strike was the violence on an accompanying demonstration, which eventually saw three people die of smoke inhalation after a bank was firebombed in Athens. The incident has largely been blamed on radical 'youth' elements of the protests, although we should not necessarily take that accusation as good coin.

Whoever threw the fateful petrol bomb may not have known that the bank was occupied, or that the building had only a handful of fire extinguishers to fight a conflagration (as opposed to enormous amounts of flammable material), or that nobody on site had been trained to manage such an emergency. Many would not have expected people to be working in the bank, as such attacks are not uncommon on recent large demonstrations in Greece, and it is more usual for banks to bring down the shutters if they are on the route. All these things are the responsibility of the bank's owners, who apparently have a bad health and safety reputation even among their competitors.

As we have noted, meanwhile, the identity of the individuals responsible, and their political affiliations, is not certain at this point. A worrying phenomenon in recent Greek history - but the oldest trick in the book where capitalism, in however limited a way, is on the defensive - is for state agencies or far-right groups to execute these kinds of attack. For the far right they are ostensibly carried out as part of their own political programme (the old equation of high finance with Jewry, among other things), but in reality they are directed against the left. Far-rightists certainly were present on the protest, and were getting unruly in the immediate vicinity of the crime. This seems to be the interpretation of the KKE, which refers to the deaths consistently as a "provocation".

That this argument arises at all, however - whether this outrage is a 'sincere' act of anti-capitalist protest or a sinister provocation - indicates the effects of

such events on the movement as a whole. They are severely damaging, giving the right wing an excuse to excoriate protestors and stake a claim to the moral high ground (given the role of the police, an utterly hypocritical claim). It makes it easier for the state to claim 'extraordinary' repressive powers (as Papandreou currently intends to, in order to fight the strike wave).

Workers engaged in this level of struggle need their own defence corps, to steward protests and pickets, and to defend them from attacks by police and fascist goons. Yet we need also to defend ourselves from indiscipline and dangerous stunts. The strength of the working class lies not in its ability to generate random bomb attacks, but in its organisation - that is the difference between ourselves as a class capable of imposing an agenda on society and ourselves as a set of individuals in possession only of our ability to toil.

These aimless firebomb 'spectaculars' - not so much anarchistic as nihilistic in character - stem from a disaffection with mass organisation, which is thoroughly understandable, given the state of the working class movement over the last few decades; an unappetising choice between the crippled 'official' parties and myriad dogmatic sects. It is a dissatisfaction which manifests itself equally in the fetishism of 'non-violent direct action' and its more sinister guerrilla-fantast cousin. The former is summed up in Douglas Adams's verdict of the human race - "mostly harmless." At worst, the latter's contribution to the movement is indistinguishable from the activity of state or fascist *provocateurs*. Only serious political organisation can give meaning to 'direct actions' or violent confrontation (in a violent world, sadly necessary).

Needless to say, any authoritarian inroads into the rights of self-organisation in Greece arising from this outrage should be vociferously opposed - equally, however, the argument for self-defence and *against* anarchistic violence must be won within the movement itself ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a
Communist Party
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Address _____

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

weekly worker

Left nat candidates humiliated

Scottish myth blown away

While Britain as a whole awoke on the morning of Friday May 7 to the prospect of a Tory-led hung parliament, the Scottish Labour Party had what has been considered a relative victory. Across England, and to an extent in Wales, Labour lost ground to the Tories, but in Scotland the result was exactly the same as in the 2005 general election. The Tories, who had hoped to win seats in Perthshire and East Renfrewshire, made no gains whatsoever. Scottish National Party supporters rallied tactically behind the Labour candidates to try to keep David Cameron out of No10. This left the Tories only holding on to their one seat in Dumfriesshire - Clydesdale and Tweeddale.

Labour's support actually went up overall in Scotland by 2.5% on 2005, whereas the Tories' 16.7% is around half the Scottish support they had back in the general election of 1979. According to the *Sunday Herald* political editor Tom Gordon, Labour had already started planning to switch its focus from Westminster to Holyrood for next year's Scottish parliamentary election, after it began to become clear that Labour would be unlikely to stay in power in the UK as a whole.

Should Labour beat the nationalists at Holyrood in 2011, this would "give Labour a higher profile and the credibility of a £30 billion budget with which to attack the Tories", with Holyrood serving a "base camp" for the journey back to Westminster (May 9).

Another victory for Scottish Labour from this election was in winning back two seats that had been lost in by-elections since 2005. Crucially, Margaret Curran (MSP for Baillieston) regained the traditionally working class constituency of Glasgow East. The SNP had taken it from Labour in a 2008 by-election, a result that SNP leader Alex Salmond referred to as "ground-breaking". In fact, his party broke very little ground in the urban lowlands this time around. With the exception of Dundee East, the SNP's victories were in rural areas, where levels of class-consciousness are lower than in industrial centres.

It is largely in more affluent and/or rural areas too where the Liberal Democrats have won seats. While their impact on the election on the whole was not anywhere near what had been predicted, their result in Scotland was poor indeed. The Lib Dems actually lost out, compared to their 2005 result - so much for the 'Clegg effect'. Meanwhile, as David Cameron's deputy prime minister, Clegg could be in for real opposition from his party further down the line. Cameron has, as expected, made one of the 11 Lib Dem MPs from north of the border Scottish secretary rather than his one Scottish Tory MP. Danny Alexander, MP for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathpey, enthusiastically accepted the appointment - this despite the fact that the Lib Dems went into the election with a manifesto committing them to abolish the entire department. Incidentally, Alexander is considered



Alex Salmond: SNP loses ground

to be on the right of his party and is widely credited for brokering the coalition agreement with the Tories in his role as Clegg's chief of staff.

Depending on what happens in the Scottish parliament election, Lib Dem MSPs could end up forming a governing coalition with Labour in Holyrood that is opposed to the Tories in Westminster, while their party nationally backs up that same government.

The SNP, while increasing its share of the vote in certain areas, did not do well, as mentioned above, winning little support in Scotland's central belt. Salmond, who had set an unrealistic goal of 20 seats, saw his party reduced to a meagre six. To an extent, the SNP's poor result could

be down to the fact that this was a UK general election and therefore the nationalists seemed less relevant to many. The main reason for the SNP's lack of success, however, was that people backed the Labour Party out of fear of a Tory government.

It is very clear from the Scottish results that the Tories have almost no support in Scotland and in view of this Salmond had said he was not prepared for SNP MPs to work with the Tories in Westminster, calling instead for Labour and the Lib Dems to work with the 'Celtic block' of Scottish and Welsh nationalists and others to form a 'rainbow coalition'. Should this ever have come to pass (and it looked surprisingly possible on the night of Monday May 10),

this would ironically have led to SNP MPs voting on matters in a UK parliament that affect only England (such as education).

It will be interesting to see how the differences in voting patterns in Scotland compared to the rest of the country will affect national antagonisms. The fact that the working class in Scotland will suffer at the hands of a government it did not elect might divert opposition in a nationalist direction. Equally, it could have the effect of rekindling working class loyalty to the Labour Party, harking back to when SNP candidates were regarded as 'tartan Tories' attempting to take seats from Labour. Oddly, at the moment the Scottish media seem to be putting across an odd mixture of both elements: on the one hand, a feeling of general disgruntlement, seeing Scotland as a national underdog likely to be on the receiving end of cuts from a party with no mandate; on the other, there is a newfound affection for Gordon Brown, portrayed as the tragic victim cum local Scots hero.

So, with the prospect of the national question flaring up on the back of this election, it is important that we take a principled position - one that opposes nationalism and separatism and promotes the unity of the working class. We must also recognise that there are national antagonisms that will not magically disappear. This, of course, is something the left has failed to do both north and south of the border to date. The Scottish left has embraced separatism out of pure opportunism or - worse yet - by identifying ideologically with the nationalist movement. All the while, UK-wide organisations like the Socialist Workers Party take a more schizophrenic view; not wanting to separate along national lines, but not wanting *not* to either - both apparently on principle...

In my view the best way to address the national question, as things currently stand in Britain, is to link it to the struggle for democracy by calling for a federal republic: advocating unity, while recognising the

right to secession. Not because federalism is the desired end point, but because it addresses the question in a principled way, in the here and now, and it raises consciousness by calling for the working class to fight on constitutional matters, on matters of democracy and high politics.

Returning to the general election, how did the left in Scotland fare? Well, its performance in Scotland more or less mirrored that of the left across the country. In a word, badly. The Scottish Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition both scored just under 1% overall in the 10 seats they each contested. Tommy Sheridan, standing for Tusc along with other Solidarity comrades, was the most successful, but even he was reduced to 2.9% in Glasgow South West. The fact he has a perjury trial hanging over his head following his successful defamation case against the *News of the World* is not irrelevant, of course.

However, irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the Sheridan case, gone are the days when the Scottish left could boast of its vast superiority over its English counterparts, with talk of how well the SSP brought comrades from different trends together and how much better the left in Scotland did at the ballot box (not that much, truth be told). Of course, this sanctimonious crap was cited as good reason for Scotland to go it alone. The truth - and we have to be realistic about it - is that the situation is bad across the country.

If we are to defend ourselves against a Tory-led government in a harsh economic climate then the workers' movement needs to get its act together. The left has to end the divisions along national lines, just as much as along sect lines. Revolutionary groups should give up the facade of electoral fronts with politics designed to appeal to the masses, but in reality appeal to no-one. There is a need to form a single, united party with a revolutionary programme north and south of the border ●

Sarah McDonald

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