

weekly



worker



**John McDonnell's campaign
strangled by Labour NEC.
Demand a real contest**

- Coalition 'weakness'
- CPGB aggregate
- Panahi hunger strike
- Peter Heathfield

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Eurozone crisis:
no alternative
within capitalism**

LETTERS



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

Obstacles

Tony Clark is correct inasmuch as a simple empirical search for 'fighting formations' is not enough to conclude whether an organisation is fascist or not (Letters, May 13).

I do not share wholly the reticence of my CPGB comrades in calling the BNP fascist - my judgement is that the fascist past remains, inasmuch as the core cadre base of the BNP is still composed of hard-liners, whose commitment to the Griffinite electoral turn is limited to its usefulness in triggering the apocalyptic 'race war'. For these people, it is redundant to point out that they don't as of now constitute paramilitary fighting formations, any more than it is unMarxist of the CPGB not to start organising a workers' militia tomorrow afternoon. It is clearly a strategic aim with some traction in the BNP.

Exactly what's in Griffin's head, nobody knows - perhaps he genuinely is a 'reformed character', and now merely a bigoted 'lost Tory' toff rather than a bigoted partisan of neo-fascist esoterica. But it seems clear to me that there is an uneasy truce in the organisation, which may prove to be fragile in the future. What we can expect out of the BNP depends on innumerable variables, great (eg, the severity of the crisis) and small (eg, the strength of Griffin's grip on the BNP machine).

That said, if fighting formations are not the grand historical essence of fascism, we are entitled to ask comrade Clark exactly what is. After all, its various ideological trademarks - authoritarianism, racism, anti-Semitism - have always been present and correct in the Tory Party, and have had their days in both major American parties, at the very least. Organising autonomously from the state is something that distinguishes fascism from other enemies of the working class - it is something Clark needs to replace rather than just rubbish, which rather leaves the impression that fascism exists wherever somebody is called a fascist by somebody else.

I also take issue with the notion that this is a discussion with much practical relevance to what we do about the BNP. Yes, Dimitrov is right inasmuch as he says that fascism has different historical forms, and is perfectly able to reorient itself strategically (the BNP is a case in point, but one could find examples in the career of Hitler as well). Our strategic objective, however - and the only way to stop the growth of fascism with any success - is the rule of the working class.

We are concerned with fascism inasmuch as it presents an obstacle to that, and an obstacle it certainly is in times of social crisis. Right now, we have far more pressing obstacles - the persistent authoritarianism of the state apparatus, for a start. A migrant is more likely to be messed around by the immigration cops than BNP cadre these days. We should mobilise locally to defend minorities and migrants from attacks, of course, but it shouldn't matter whether the attacks fit some technical definition or other of fascism. We should concern ourselves with determining what threat is truly posed by the BNP in these historical circumstances, and responding to that threat sensibly. Conjuring up the baleful visage of Hitler whenever Griffin shows his face (although, with that haircut, he is asking for it) is itself an obstacle to this task.

James Turley
London

Pythonesque

I counted about 19 electoral groups or 'parties' of the socialist and Marxist left in the general election of May 6. How absurd. How Monty Pythonesque.

The Tory Party rallied behind its leadership and remains, so far, united. We will see if the Tory-Lib Dem coalition cracks, leading to another general election, in the weeks and months ahead. But the socialist and Marxist left will never command the respect and support of the working classes until it puts its own house in order and is capable of forming a stable, mature, consistent leadership in a unified party.

If sterling is attacked, as was Greece, there will be no protection in the euro zone for the British economy. Perhaps the Tories will yet go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund under terms worse than those inflicted on the Greek government? Worse still are ideas floated in the financial pages of the bourgeois (and ultra-left!) press that the solution is for the Greeks to default and leave the euro zone, and some in the bourgeois press then hint that a military junta would be the only other solution.

Perhaps the left is like the Italian left between the end of World War I and 1922. As Gramsci said, the failure to unite, following Mussolini's coup d'état in Italy, led to over 20 years of defeat (fascism and war). The left should beware of calling for the failure of the European Union and the euro zone, with no unified left across Europe, and when the goal is wide open for reaction to fill the vacuum.

The inability of the left to produce unity, its talent for splits and schisms, urgently needs to be studied and resolved. Specifically, we need to study the Italian and German left again, in the light of our own failure to make a breakthrough since the banking crisis became generalised after 2007, if we are to learn the lessons and not allow history to repeat itself, not just as farce, but as tragedy. The banks and the money markets must be tamed and rendered subject to workers' control and then, ultimately, a democratic, socialist, federal Europe.

Whilst the Labour Party has dragged its feet over constitutional and electoral reform, the "battle for democracy" (Marx) has yet to be won.

Henry Mitchell
London

Absurd

The article on Greece ('Europe and the Greek contagion', May 13) presents the Greek left as being anti-EU when, in reality, they are committed Europeans who stand candidates in all Euro-elections and take up seats in the European parliament.

Thirty-odd years of EU membership have brought Greece to the brink of bankruptcy. The Franco-German bloc, which runs the EU, presents itself as a benevolent charity, an Oxfam at large, that supports the small nations, develops them and integrates them into a higher, more developed standard. The exact opposite is the case.

Greece was deindustrialised in the last decade. A whole swathe of previously public sector companies has been privatised - eg, Telecoms, Olympic Airways, etc. Coupled with annual arms budgets in the region of \$7 billion annually going to the EU and the enforced investments of billions in the wider Balkan region, we have the small nation attempting to survive while two countries spend over 70% of the EU's budget - Germany and France.

Just as Latin America attempted enforced dollar parity on all the currencies, which ended in tears, so what has started in Greece will spread and bring down the euro, whether we like it or not. The idea, as presented in James Turley's article, that revolution has to be coordinated throughout Europe before it happens, is absurd and goes against the whole history of Europe.

VN Gellis
email

Coward

It is unusual to see an unsigned article in the *Weekly Worker* ('Workers' defence', May 13), but seeing the subject matter the cowardice of the writer might be understood.

The tragedy of the deaths of bank workers in Greece is the occasion for a declaration of war by the CPGB (PCC) against anarchism. No matter that no evidence need be provided to prove the guilt of the anarchist movement as a whole or even in detail for this crime. For your anonymous would-be Chekist, it is enough that we exist to condemn us.

I look forward with some interest to the next demonstration when I will expect to see the mass ranks of the CPGB (PCC) workers' defence squad ranged against a skinny white bloke with dreadlocks and a dog on a string.

Darren Redstar
email

Not racial

David Bates's review ('Integration and working class culture', May 13) of Dave Renton's book *Colour blind? Race and migration in north-east England since 1945* prompts me to read the book, which I haven't done yet, and I will look with interest at the section on Arab seamen in South Shields.

My own dabbling into this area of labour history research (in my unpublished work on the Liverpool waterfront, *The struggle for organisation 1850-1890*) led me to emphatically refute any notion that the South Shields riots in 1919 were "race riots" at all. David's piece states that they were and, presumably, either this is his own interpretation from the book or it is the author's overt conclusion.

The Arab seamen were members of the seafarers' National Minority Movement faction. They were more influenced and inclined towards communism and the CPGB than toward strong demonstrations of religion and Islam. H Wilson, the right-wing leader of the National Union of Seamen, was at that time dividing the union along race lines. In a time of declining work, he was making deals with reactionary ship-owners and merchants to employ only 'British union seamen'. However, the Yemenis to all intents and purposes were British union seamen (Aden being 'British' and seafarers from there having British passports). Indeed, they were among the union's strongest supporters since they were first introduced to work as stokers in the first steamships.

The regional union policy was to ship seamen in date order and seniority regardless of ethnicity, and no seafarer would sign on any ship or at the shipping office ahead of comrades whose turn it was, be they Arab or white. The Tyneside seamen, heavily represented by the local Geordie-Yemenis, mounted a picket line and lobby. When non-union white seamen made a rush to register, the riot started. It was class struggle, it was moderate against militant, it was communist seamen

against rightwing reactionary ones. It could not (unless this book proves me wrong) be called a 'race riot' by any stretch. Race played a part only insofar as the militants were predominantly Arab and they tended to be armed, and the scabs and police happened to be white. It was, however, not about colour or race.

The Communist Party had stated their intention that "South Shields shall be the eye of the storm" in the clash with Wilson. That port was heavily influenced by the hundreds upon hundreds of militant Arab seamen loyal to the National Minority Movement. It was inevitable that in the clash of class-consciousness and the struggle for the direction of the union, Arab seamen would feature strongly both numerically and in tenacity. However, that involvement doesn't make it a racial struggle as such or a race riot.

However, I live, learn and will read this new book with an open mind.

David Douglass
South Shields

Colonial relic

The conviction by a Malawian court of Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga on charges of homosexuality is the latest example of how, more than four decades after most African nations won their independence, the evils of colonialism continue to wreck lives. The two men face up to 14 years jail under laws that were imposed on the people of Malawi by the British colonisers in the 19th century. Before the British came and conquered Malawi, there were no laws against homosexuality. These laws are a foreign imposition. They are not African at all. Despite independence, these alien criminalisations were never repealed.

Today, the minds of many Malawians - and other Africans - remain colonised by the homophobic beliefs that were drummed into their forebears by the western missionaries who invaded their lands alongside the conquering imperial armies. The missionaries preached a harsh, intolerant Christianity, which has been so successfully internalised by many Africans that they now claim homophobia as their own culture and tradition.

While many African leaders decry homosexuality as a 'western disease' or a 'white man's import', the truth is very different. Prior to colonisation, many tribal societies and kingdoms had a more relaxed attitude to same-sex relations than the subsequent colonial occupiers. As Rudi C Bloys documented in his book *The geography of perversion*, the existence and, sometimes, toleration of same-sex acts was used by the colonising European nations to justify what they saw as their 'civilising' mission. To them, homosexuality among indigenous peoples was proof of their 'barbarity' and confirmation of western theories of racial superiority.

Homophobia in Africa is mostly a colonial imposition - but this is no excuse for these now independent nations to perpetuate colonial-era anti-gay laws and attitudes. It is time to finish the African liberation struggle by ending the persecution of gay Africans.

Peter Tatchell
London

Questions

With reference to the CPGB's *Draft programme* (February 11), are you saying that you oppose small businesses? And would you oppose, say, someone who was offered a supervisor's job?

I'm totally in favour of small business over big business. And I support cooperatives, but I think that you need supervisors and managers. I also think it's possible to nationalise a cooperative and have supervisors and managers and still have a union.

Where does the CPGB stand on the Taliban? I oppose these thugs. And I don't support Hamas either. Nor do I support the Real or the Continuity IRA.

Do you have a sister organisation in the United States?

Jimmy Harkin
Baltimore

Mimicking anarchism

Simon Wells is obviously a big fan of the Election Meltdown stunt organised in Parliament Square on May 1 (Letters, May 13). He says it is "communism in action" and a living example of "democracy". No wonder he does not like the critical remarks contained in our report by Nick Rogers.

Though the comrade is at pains to insist that Election Meltdown and the Democracy Village are "no short cut", I think that this is exactly the problem. Savage attacks, including £6 billion of swingeing cuts this year, are on the way. People will resist through protests and strikes, doubtless. And we should welcome every protest and every strike. But the main question before us as Marxists is to unite the left in the fight for a mass Marxist party which can coordinate working class activity not only in Britain, but throughout Europe at the very least. Acts of resistance, including colourful protests such as the May 1 Democracy Village, have their place. But they cannot challenge for state power.

And here is the rub. There are a number of problems with the Meltdown approach comrade Wells stoutly defends. While its organisers emphasise the corrupt nature of the May 6 general election farce, they abysmally fail to provide any vision of transforming the existing voting system into a means of emancipation. The implication is clear. At least to me. The mass of the population will continue to be fooled all of the time; that is, until the enlightened minority finally summons the will to topple capitalism. No doubt it will seize power in the name of the majority. But how? Through a military coup by soldiers sworn to serve the queen, instead of self-serving politicians?

I am sure the Democratic Village represented, at least partially, the deep anti-politics sentiment amongst the population in Britain. Anarchism has certainly undergone a minor revival over the last decade or so. And there can be no doubt that Marxists must not only talk to these people. We must win influence and in the last analysis leadership.

But that cannot be done by pandering to anti-politics politics or mimicking the anarchists. So it is all very well Simon approving of the CPGB's leaflet headlined, "Is this really what democracy looks like?", because the picture accompanying it appealed to the anarchists on May 1. But this rather misses the point. Surely, under present circumstances it is the job of Marxists to bring to the fore the vital importance of theory, programme, extreme democracy and organising our class into a political party.

Compared with the promises of 'revolution tomorrow' anarchism, I know that this course might appear stuffy, boring, long-termist ... and impossibly difficult. But that is how real, decisive change will come.

Phil Kent
Haringey

CPGB AGGREGATE

Preparing for new challenges

The May 15 aggregate of CPGB members discussed the situation following the general election. Comrades agreed that the period ahead was likely to be one where government attacks would be met by fierce resistance and that tactical flexibility would be more necessary than ever.

Mike Macnair introduced the debate, starting with his assessment of the world economy. Governments across Europe are determined to impose austerity on the working class through cuts and labour market 'reforms'. States are trying to convince capital that they are trustworthy debtors, and that the crisis would be paid for by the working class. There is a crisis in the euro zone, and Britain had been forced to participate in the Greek bail-out deal to the tune of £9.6 billion. But, with president Sarkozy having threatened to pull France out of the euro unless Germany led the way over Greece, it is clear that the EU faces huge difficulties.

As far as the money markets are concerned, the British government needs to make even deeper cuts than announced so far, but that did not actually appear to be the intention of the Con-Lib Dem coalition at the moment - it is hoping instead for a recovery in the US. There is confidence that the euro zone crisis can be contained, and that an independent pound would enable UK plc to ride the storm, by hanging on to the coat-tails of the US (at the expense of everyone else). But in fact the underlying situation is extremely unstable.

Turning to the election, comrade Macnair said the bourgeoisie's desire for a smooth Blair-to-Cameron transfer, with Brown as no-hoper caretaker, had not been quite fulfilled. The timing of the crisis had enabled Brown to gain kudos for his management of the economy, while Cameron's neoliberal orthodoxy had fallen flat on its face. The crisis had "rubbed the gloss" off Cameron's project, which helped the Liberal Democrats, but they did not see their high levels of support before the election translate into actual votes. Why? The media's obsession with the Lib Dems, combined with the fact that it eventually became clear that Clegg would join forces with Cameron, meant traditional Labour voters were dissuaded from switching and indeed, many more than expected turned out for Labour.

We now have a coalition government committed to cuts, and also certain political reforms. However, the alternative vote system is no more democratic than first-past-the-post. The Tories would be free to campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum, and comrade Macnair thought Labour would most likely do the same, to try and hasten the break-up of the coalition. A potentially more important change could be voted through parliament before any such referendum; reducing the number of MPs and equalising constituencies. Under the present FPTP system, this would leave Labour needing a massive swing to dislodge the Tories. The coalition would probably last long

enough to get most of the immediate cuts through, but the situation was complicated by the 55% issue, needing more than a simple majority in parliament to trigger a general election.

On the Labour Party leadership election, the comrade said that most class-conscious workers still see Labour as their party, and the bourgeoisie still do not fully trust it as a party of government. John McDonnell would not make the ballot, because many Labour lefts,

We have to be tactically astute in building alliances, while maintaining our programmatic critique of our allies

with the backing of Socialist Action and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, wanted a 'realistic' left candidate. The winner would definitely not be of the Labour left, but would probably be someone who had maintained a certain distance from the ruling clique during the Blair years. Ed Miliband, or whoever, could employ more left-sounding rhetoric, but it would be hard to escape Labour's attachment to the British constitution and the erosion of its base. The party will not be having an open debate about its future, because Labour MPs and the trade unions think it more important to put on a united face in order to be ready for another election.

Much of the left - excepting, perhaps, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales - would be likely to switch its focus to Labour. While the SWP can be expected to continue its fetishism with 'bash the fash' and the encouragement to 'do a Greece', SPEW will not engage with internal Labour battles for another reason: it has staked too much on Labour being dead, and is more likely to retreat into isolationism and building its own organisation. However, groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and International Socialist Group could easily rejoin Labour, comrade Macnair believed.

Crucially, left unity is in danger of being further depoliticised. The question posed instead would be that of 'uniting the resistance' (Labour Representation Committee) or 'uniting the movements' (SWP). Unity in action, but not in politics. Faced with this situation, the CPGB must continue its fight for a united Communist Party based on Marxist politics, with a democratic alternative to the bourgeois regime at its core. We have to up our engagement with the Labour left, and do so by posing the need for a break from Labourism and bureaucratic party organisation.

In the discussion, Peter Manson noted that sections of the left (eg,

John Rees on *Counterfire*) had thought a hung parliament and coalition government would automatically leave the bourgeoisie weak and be an advantage to the left. While the bourgeoisie is split into different parties, those parties barely differ on policy. Lee Rock questioned whether Labour would campaign against AV, given that, if the reduction of parliamentary seats was carried out, he thought Labour would need AV to have any hope of returning to power. Comrade Rock agreed we needed to up our intervention in the party, but pointed out that only one comrade had been assigned to the LRC conference that same day.

Yasmine Mather questioned comrade Macnair's assertion that the bourgeoisie still did not trust Labour, which had done well for the capitalists over the last 13 years. She wondered if Labour, in response to its defeat, might not shift to the right rather than the left - the recruitment of disaffected Lib Dems would indicate this was a possibility. John Bridge disagreed, saying that Labour would almost certainly move left; already leading figures like David Blunkett were talking about 'fighting outside elections'. We have to be tactically astute in building alliances, while maintaining our programmatic critique of our allies. Other comrades again raised the possibility of standing CPGB candidates if there was another election soon.

Replying, Macnair reminded comrades that we are not allowed to use 'CPGB' in elections, thanks to the electoral commission's undemocratic ruling. The idea that having CPGB and CPB candidates would confuse voters is simply not credible. Indeed the ruling is illegal in all likelihood. More importantly though, there had to be a clear aim in our standing for it to be worth comrades' time, money and effort. Turning to Labour, comrades had to judge conditions on the ground in order to decide the nature of their engagement - some constituencies would be a complete waste of time. But we have to be ready to make sharp tactical turns.

Reporting on this year's Summer Offensive fundraising drive, comrade Bridge said that the Provisional Central Committee was recommending a target of £25,000 in total. There is every reason for confidence. The *Weekly Worker* remains required reading on the left, but the difference now is that a greater proportion of our readers actively support its politics and are more willing to donate than ever.

Comrade Bridge also reported on preparations for Communist University, the CPGB's annual summer school. He listed probable speakers, including some old favourites as well as new faces. A range of suggestions for additional debates were proposed by comrades, not least on our new *Draft programme*, which is due to be finalised by the end of the year. 'Communists and elections' was also proposed. This is a live question, with the utter flop of left slates and the trend towards anarchism and movementism ●

Laurie Smith

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

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

Tuesday June 8, 6.15pm: 'Gender, power and asymmetry in the neolithic: West Kennet Avenue as a case study'. Speaker: Lionel Sims.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Hands Off Venezuela

Saturday May 22, 10am: Annual conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Free to HOV members. Join on the day (£7.50, £5 unwaged).

Organised by Hands of Venezuela: london@handsoffvenezuela.org.

Freethinkers

Saturday May 22, 10am to 5pm: Bookfair, Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by Freethought History Research Group: www.fhrg.bravehost.com/events.html.

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.org.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 1 and 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.

No to EDL

Saturday May 29, 12 noon: Demonstration, assembly point to be confirmed. Protest against the English Defence League.

Saturday June 5, 11am: March and rally, Roald Dahl Plass/Oval Basin (next to the Wales Millennium Centre), Cardiff Bay, Protest against the Welsh Defence League.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.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.

Speakers include: Anas Al-Tikriti (British Muslim Initiative), Moazzam Begg (former Guantanamo Bay prisoner), Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition), Kate Hudson (CND), Imran Khan (solicitor), Salma Yaqoob (Respect). £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.

Bradlaugh v Marx

Thursday June 10, 7pm: Public meeting, Bishopgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2 (opposite Liverpool Street station). Talk by Deborah Lavin, historian and writer. Organised the Socialist History Society: www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk.

25 years on

Saturday June 19, all day event: Conference, 'Reflection on the miners strike of 1984-85', Northern College, Wentworth Castle, Stainborough, Barnsley. Keep the memory of the strike alive and set the record straight. £15, including lunch and refreshments.

Organised by Northern College: 01226 776025.

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.

LABOUR

Only game in town

Mark Fischer was at the 'After the election ... Join the resistance' event

The speaker from the floor at the May 15 meeting who suggested that it would be preferable for John McDonnell MP *not* to appear on the ballot paper in the Labour leadership contest probably did not expect to receive a standing ovation. Quite apart from the fact that this 200-strong meeting was actually hosted by McDonnell's own Labour Representation Committee, the umbrella organisation that *is* effectively the left of the party, the whole mood of the meeting flowed in precisely the opposite direction. 'Frosty' probably best describes the way the suggestion was received.

The hapless comrade was clearly concerned that a McDonnell candidacy - which could not hope to win in current circumstances - would be perceived as a hard-left spoiler by elements in the soft-left/Compass marsh. The leading figure of that section of the party, Jon Cruddas MP, was at that stage still being spoken of as another possible leadership contender. Subsequently he has ruled himself out - bizarrely, in order to vacate the 'left' slot on the ballot paper for Ed Balls. Although at this conference the idea went down "like a turd in swimming pool", as one participant muttered to me, the fact is it has a pedigree on Labour's 'hard' left.

For example, at the May 2008 annual conference of *Labour Briefing*,

Richard Price - *LB* editorial board member and prominent London civil servants' union activist - put the case for a similar orientation. The choice was a stark one, he suggested. *LB* and others could "face left" to work with those outside the ranks of the party; or it could turn towards "the centre-left" (the trend in and around the Compass think tank plus MP Jon Cruddas were mentioned specifically by comrade Price, rather than just implied). "Let's be real," the comrade appealed. "Who are the forces around us in Labour?" The answer, he said, was to *LB*'s right in the shape of "the centre-left" composed of "thousands", while at best there were "hundreds to our left". The numbers for any other orientation just did not add up, he suggested. An alliance with the extra-Labour left was simply "unworkable", given the failure of all of their projects - "with the brief exception of the Scottish Socialist Party", the comrade conceded. Other comrades at the 2008 meeting who took up the same theme called for the left to break out of its "marginalisation" and look to a "new coalition" with the centre and those who had previously supported New Labour (*Weekly Worker* May 15 2008).

The firmness with which such ideas were rejected in May 2010 indicates a change in the mood on the left of the Labour Party. Although McDonnell was at pains to dampen down expectations of actually being able to stand in the leadership contest, there was no question

that there was not going to be a fight for him to do so. In fact, far more indicative of the confident mood of the gathering was the enthusiasm that greeted comrade McDonnell's blunt statement that - in the likely event of his being excluded from the ballot - we should "not support anyone". All the others would have "blood on their hands from Iraq" or be at least partly culpable in all sorts of reactionary policies.

This new-found confidence is not just wishful thinking. Three recent developments appear to have vindicated the stance of the Labour left over the preceding period, a time when all sorts of siren voices were calling on them to abandon the Labour Party ... in order to build a Labour Party mark two.

First, the relief that not only did Labour not suffer electoral meltdown, it was boosted in the days leading up to the election by a residual 'class loyalty' vote from working people appalled at the prospect of a Tory government: a stubborn allegiance, despite the fact that, as McDonnell put it, to general approval, the Labour Party actually "deserved to lose", given its record in government.

Second, Labour left MPs - particularly those directly associated with the LRC and those it backed - in general registered a smaller swing against them than most Labour candidates.

Third, and in stark contrast, the left outside Labour was annihilated on May 6, registering almost universally pathetic votes. The Labour left feels that life itself has proved it right against all those who have attempted to build some sort of viable electoral alternative outside the party. From numerous speakers throughout the day, we heard variations on the same theme. Like it or not, said Labour candidate for North West Hampshire, Sarah Evans, "Labour is what we have"; John Lewis from Gower constituency, South Wales, noted the "derisory votes" for the far left, and underlined that "the real fight is in the Labour Party"; other speakers from the floor cuttingly observed that if the likes of the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Party in England and Wales had not built anything seri-

ous in electoral terms over 13 years of a rightwing Labour government, "they have no chance in the future" - now "the pendulum has swung back" to those socialists who had opted to stick it out inside the party. "It's the only game in town," ex-Labour MP Christine Shawcroft said, with an air of finality.

Even Martin Thomas of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty was up for a "campaign inside the Labour Party", whose aims would include overturning the structural barriers to left influence erected by the right, and to "restore conference" to exert some measure of democratic control over the parliamentary party. The fact that the disorientated AWL has lurched back in this direction is indicative of the way the political wind now blows. After all, this was the organisation that at the 2007 LRC AGM put forward a stupid motion that would have seen the LRC embark on a suicidal policy of confrontation with the New Labour bureaucracy and which would have certainly led to its expulsion (see *Weekly Worker* November 22 2007). Gone now are the days when the group's newspaper could editorialise that working class political representation requires that "there has to be a functioning, living Labour Party. No such party exists any more. This is an enormous event ... The Labour Party is a stinking corpse!" (*Solidarity* April 10 2008).

The irony is, of course, that almost all of the sects that have beavered outside Labour to build ballot box alternatives have based these on the *political programme of left Labourism*, not the Marxism they profess to believe in. So, while the left of Labour may feel some quiet satisfaction that all of these attempts have ended in abject failure (it must

be said, there was no smugness or malicious pleasure at the rest of the left's idiocies on show at the May 15 conference), it too should take note.

The Labour left - just as replete with 'Marxists' as the groups outside the party - unsurprisingly peddles a variant of left Labourism. That was exactly what the so-called revolutionary left has insisted on doing via formations such as the Socialist Alliance, Respect, the Campaign for a New Workers' Party, etc. The Labour left is not united but, like its counterparts outside the party, is chronically divided into competing grouplets, often bitterly opposed to each other over what are, in essence, nuances of theory or history. It has often displayed none of the strengths and all of the weaknesses of those outside its ranks.

The hostility both share to *partyism* - the commitment to unite in a Marxist party - leaves them rudderless. So the suggestion from Tony Benn on May 15 that "new parties are not the answer", but instead we should go for "campaigns", was a recurring theme from many. Yet, as the dismal experience of left trends outside Labour shows, without a thorough and ruthless examination of the failures and absurdities of our programmatic method and inherited political culture, the left - in or out of Labour - is doomed to ultimate defeat.

In this context, it does not bode well that the 'facilitating' of the day's discussions was handed over to John Nicholson of the Convention of the Left - a comrade who insisted that the "style of contributions" to our debate should be universally "positive" and "without recriminations".

We need to be a tad harder on ourselves than that, I fear ●

John for leader

Labour activists are urging a speedy response to the NEC's deadline

As you may have heard, John McDonnell has announced his intention to stand for leader. In order to stand, candidates need to be nominated by 32 MPs. However, we only have until May 27 to get the number required. If you want a genuine leadership debate with a broad range of candidates, please support the letter which will be published in *The Guardian* on Monday.

Please email me your name, your CLP and/or trade union (if applicable), and any relevant positions as soon as you read the letter if you are in support.

Please also get in touch with your local Labour MP or any Labour MP you think is sympathetic and ask them to nominate John to allow a debate, however they then decide to vote. Nearly every MP has a generic email (surnameinitial@parliament.uk: eg, Gordon Brown would be 'browng@parliament.uk').

As a range of Labour Party members, councillors, NEC members, trade unionists, activists, community workers and campaigners, we are asking Labour MPs to nominate John McDonnell in order to allow a genuine debate about the future direction of our party.

We are concerned that a contest between candidates with broadly the same views will fail to deliver the wide-ranging policy debate Labour urgently needs following our defeat at the polls.

We welcome John McDonnell's commitment to a leadership debate based on the policies, not the personalities. We note John McDonnell's long-standing support for workers' rights, a peaceful foreign policy, publicly owned services, progressive taxation, an emergency council housing programme, a living wage and civil liberties. We also welcome his determination that working people must not be made to pay for a crisis that is not of their making, and his opposition to the Con-Dem cuts agenda that will devastate our communities. We want these policies to be given a platform in the leadership campaign.

That is why we ask MPs to nominate John McDonnell, regardless of how they will subsequently vote, in order to allow an inspirational, comradely debate about the future direction of our party and our country ●

John4Leader Campaign



Programme of renewal

What next for the Labour left? Mark Fischer spoke to **Graham Bash** of Labour Briefing



Needed: programme to differentiate membership from New Labour

What opportunities are there for the Labour left after Labour's general election defeat?

After 13 years of New Labour misrule, attacks on the working class and imperialist wars - developments that have strained almost to breaking point the relationship between the party on the one hand and the trade union movement and working class communities on the other - the vote for Labour on May 6 stood up amazingly well, even taking into account the five million votes we have lost since 1997.

In the Labour heartlands - places like Hackney, Islington, east London, Scotland, Merseyside - we polled well. To me, as I went round the polling stations on the day and saw the working class, the black and ethnic minorities queuing round the block to vote Labour, it was a moving experience. I was observing an *undeserved* class loyalty to the Labour Party.

There is an opportunity in this electoral defeat to build. But that depends on certain conditions. The first has already been realised - Labour was not wiped out at the ballot box. Secondly it did not go into a cuts government with the Lib Dems, which would have led to an electoral annihilation at the next general election.

The third condition is equally important. Labour *must* reconnect with its base. It will not be able to do that if it has a leadership that is no different in any fundamental way from the one that got us into this mess in the first place - but the Milibands and Ed Balls are all New Labour. Of course, it's not all about the leadership. It's also what we do in our individual wards, our communities and trade unions. But a New Labour leadership will be an obstacle to achieving a fundamental change of direction.

So there is room for the party to re-establish itself in working class communities, in the trade unions, but it has to be the party of *resistance*. The title of this post-election meeting - 'Join the resistance' - encapsulates what has to be done. We must build a genuinely rooted

party of resistance.

What's amazing is the residual loyalty of the working class to Labour *despite* its record.

Is it positive loyalty to the Labour Party, or more hatred of the Tories?

That's a good question. In fact, I think it's both. It's obvious that the vote for Labour was motivated by fear of the Tories. It had nowhere else to go in this election and, clearly, it will have nowhere else to go when the next election comes around. It has to be the Labour Party or it will be nothing.

There seems no realistic chance of John McDonnell getting onto the ballot paper for the leadership election. So the perception of most people will be that it is 'business as usual' at the top of the Labour Party ...

It might have been possible, if unlikely. It would have needed a mass campaign in the trade unions, in the various constituent parts of the labour movement, to put pressure on MPs to nominate him.

But the party membership is now facing a constitutional coup imposed by the leadership. The decision by Labour's national executive to end parliamentary nominations on May 27 is an outrageous attempt to ensure that party members have no say in who gets on the ballot paper and to restrict leadership candidates to those acceptable to the Labour establishment.

What sort of support is there for John McDonnell?

If he was on the ballot paper I think he would get a significant vote from the constituencies - his constituency support is clearly better than in the Parliamentary Labour Party. In the trade unions, that would depend on the pressure that could be exerted. It would be necessary to connect his campaign with the fight to renew the party, to make it a party of resistance and protest - not a party of attacks on the class, of increased levels of inequality and of imperialist wars.

On one level, it might seem odd that the left in the Labour Party is in a more

optimistic mood than the left outside it.

I couldn't really say. There are now opportunities for the Labour left and we cannot ignore the reality of the devastating electoral results other left organisations suffered.

It is really important not to have any illusions about the current state of the Labour left. It, and the party as a whole, needs renewing from top to bottom. Yes, it's in a better mood than those outside - not simply of defiance, but actually the realisation that an opportunity is opening up. This has to be seized or we will remain in the same terrible position we have been in for the last few years. Yes, there is a window of opportunity, but unless we take advantage of it nothing fundamental will change.

Yes, but conferences are all very well. What concrete measures need to come out of this event?

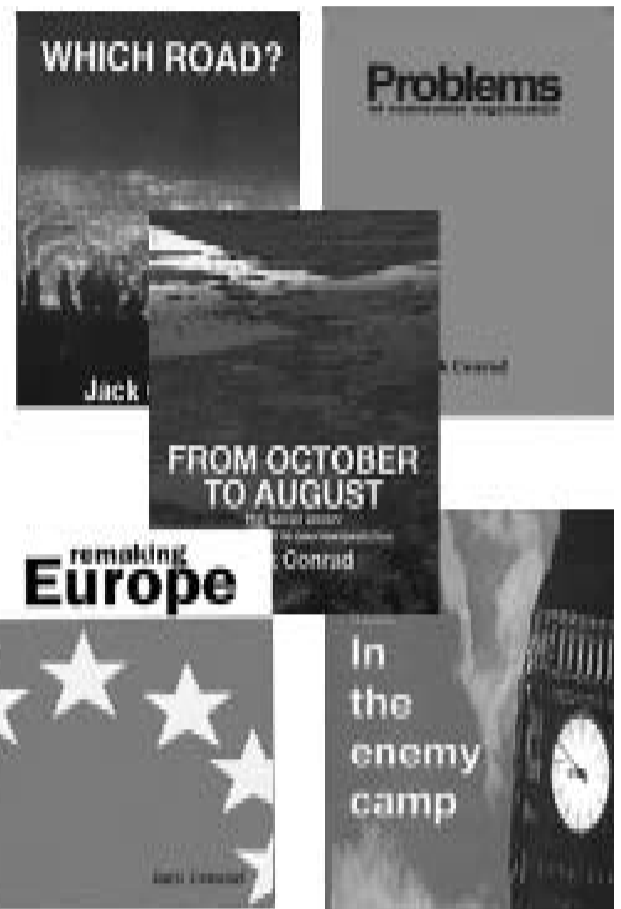
We need a basic programme of renewal for the Labour Party premised on the idea that the crisis is a crisis of the banks and the capitalist system, not of the working class. That means defence of public services, opposition to cuts, opposition to privatisation, opposition to hostility against migrant workers, opposition to imperialist wars, defence of civil liberties and so on.

In other words, we need a basic programme that differentiates the party from the New Labour leadership. Then we must reach out to those in struggle, to take concrete steps to support them.

It was interesting to hear people at this conference who were parliamentary candidates describing how they have been supporting their communities, their working class constituency in struggle against a Labour government. We need to do this much, much more, as the Tory-Lib Dem coalition steps up its attacks.

What we are facing are draconian attacks on our living standards. Good organisation is therefore important, but the key is reaching out beyond the ranks of the party and being part of the struggle ●

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LABOUR

McDonnell blocked by NEC bureaucrats

Despite the current ascendancy of the right, Labour is likely to see a shift to the left, argues Peter Manson

In a move designed to strangle John McDonnell's leadership campaign, Labour's national executive has decreed that nominations from MPs will close on Thursday May 27, just three days after they open. Voting is not due to begin until August 16 and the new leader will not be announced until the start of annual conference on September 25.

So why the rush to determine who will be on the ballot? According to acting leader Harriet Harman, this is supposed to ensure that an "open, engaging and energising" contest can commence immediately: "Over the next few months, up to four million people will have the chance to help shape Britain's progressive future by choosing the next leader of the Labour Party."

One snag, though. Only the 258 Labour MPs have the right to determine who can contest the leadership in the first place - in order to stand, any candidate must win the nominations of at least 12.5% of their number. In 2007, when Gordon Brown was elected unopposed, 45 MPs' nominations were required, but McDonnell could only muster 29 and the party machine achieved its desired coronation. However, there was a relatively long period between Tony Blair's announcement that he was stepping down and the close of nominations to elect his replacement. This allowed comrade McDonnell to campaign at numerous meetings around the country to try and win rank and file Labour members and trade unionists to demand that their local MP or union leadership endorse his nomination.

Because now there are far fewer Labour MPs, reducing the threshold for nominations to 33 (ie, 32 others apart from the candidate), some on the left have suggested that McDonnell might actually succeed in getting on the ballot paper this time. However, only 16 of those who nominated him in 2007 are still MPs and there are only three newly elected members who were backed by the Labour Representation Committee - which he chairs, of course. It is conceivable that 13 others will be prepared to sign his papers - even if they do so out of democratic instinct and end up voting for someone else. As McDonnell himself states, "I will seek to gain sufficient nominations to stand in the hope that Labour MPs will support an open and democratic election" (London LRC press release, May 18). But don't hold your breath.

The London LRC statement concludes: "Effectively this means that the whole process is biased towards the Labour hierarchy's favoured candidates, largely excluding the possibility of others coming forward to secure sufficient nominations. It also prevents rank and file party members having any say over the process. Labour MPs will have no real opportunity to consult their local parties and constituency parties will have no time to meet."

Even before the timetable was an-

nounced, McDonnell knew the odds were against him. At the May 15 LRC conference he told the *Weekly Worker*: "We're taking any prospect of myself being on the ballot paper pretty steady at the moment. Obviously, there are 32 nominations to get from individual MPs, which is a hurdle."

"At the same time, we are emphasising to people that it's the campaign that's important, not just the ballot. The key thing is the process of linking together in the Labour Party - and outside it - to forge a fighting alliance to resist the attacks coming from the coalition government."

He stressed: "Now, the Labour leadership campaign could be *part* of that: it could give us a platform to expose the attacks and agitate for a fightback, but I don't want to sow illusions. The most central element of our campaign in the future has got to be deep within working class communities and the movement."

Not even the soft-left populist, John Cruddas, who stood for deputy leader in 2007 and was widely believed to be aiming for the top job this time, will be on the leaders' ballot. He withdrew after being touted by front-runner David Miliband as his deputy - part of a "dream ticket". Cruddas admits that being Labour leader requires "certain qualities I do not possess". So that should rule him out as deputy leader too then.

Thus, if McDonnell does not make it onto the ballot paper, it could be the former schools secretary and close confidant of Gordon Brown, Ed Balls, who ends up as the most leftwing candidate. A number of union leaders are supporting him, just as they supported Brown last time. And former London mayor Ken Livingstone has also made it clear he backs Balls as the most realistic 'left' candidate.

As for former foreign secretary David Miliband, he is an out-and-out Blairite, who, rather than "re-creating New Labour", prefers to talk about building "Next Labour". As he has said of his late Marxist father, Ralph: "My oh my, he must be thinking, 'What did I do wrong?'" And commentators have speculated that he is likely to want to move the party towards even more reactionary positions on questions such as immigration and crime - which has led some to suggest that his brother, former energy secretary Ed Miliband, might be regarded by the unions and Labour left as more acceptable. However, in announcing his candidacy, he talked about migrants taking the jobs of British workers and helping to undercut wages. He also implied that perhaps Labour had been too soft on welfare 'scroungers'.

Left shift?

For the moment, then, the Labour right remains in complete control, able to marginalise the left still further through bureaucratic measures such as those agreed by the NEC for the leadership contest.

But for how long is this likely to remain the case? There are strong reasons why a shift to the left is likely. Whenever Labour has been beaten in an election, there is a tendency to move, however slightly, to the left. It is not only the luxury of opposition, but the pressure from the rank and file, trade union affiliates and the necessity of winning back the party's working class base.

Even the period of opposition from 1979 to 1992, which ended in a qualitative rightwing shift with the ascendancy of Tony Blair and New Labour, had followed that trend. It was only after the third successive defeat at the hands of the Tories that many Labour and union leaders bit their collective lip and backed Blair in the hope that at least he would make the party 'electable' again (after all nothing could be worse than the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher and John Major).

For Labour the move towards the left has to some degree reflected militant working class action, as workers resist Tory attacks on their pay, conditions, union rights and social services. In opposition, even rightwing Labour leaders accuse the Conservatives of having gone too far, of being too confrontational and so on.

There are two specific features of the current situation that will add weight to this tendency. First, there is a coalition between the other two mainstream parties, allowing Labour to pose as the "only progressive party", now that the Liberal Democrats - with their demands for democratic electoral reform and support for 'human rights' put on ice or watered down, in the name of tackling the budget deficit in the 'national interest' - have made themselves appear indistinguishable from the Tories.

This has already led to thousands of people applying to join the Labour Party - including, of course, disaffected Lib Dems who hate the Tories. But it seems probable that many left-inclined workers will have done so too, hoping that Labour will be as good as its "progressive" word under the new leader.

The second feature of the current political landscape that points to a Labour shift to the left is the fact that the working class is about to face the fiercest attack on its living standards and conditions since the 1920s and 30s. The further the government goes in its vicious cuts, the more widespread will be the resistance and the more workers' struggles will find general support throughout the population. When the unions call one-day protest demonstrations and marches, we are likely to see not just Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell on the platform, but Ed Miliband or Ed Balls.

Of course, these predictions are based on our assessment that Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party: while its leaders and practical policies are "thoroughly bourgeois", its membership is working class - not

least that of the affiliated trade unions. The trade union link means strong pressure on the Labour leadership, as union bureaucrats are at the very least forced to go through the motions of resisting the Tory-Lib Dem assault. And it still is the trade unions which hold the purse strings. The biggest slice of Labour finances comes from the political funds of affiliated trade unions.

Despite all the ravages suffered under Blair - the dropping of clause four and any pretence of aiming for socialism or even advancing working class interests, the hollowing out of party ward and constituency organisations, the gutting of conference - the union link has ensured that Labour's fundamental nature has not changed. On the one hand, it is a party supported by the trade union movement, which the mass of class-conscious workers identify with (although, of course, this has been markedly weakened under New Labour); on the other hand, Labour has always been the loyal servant of British imperialism.

SPEW confusion

But what about those on the left who claim that Labour's nature has been totally transformed? Those like the Socialist Party in England and Wales who say that it has become an unambiguously bourgeois party, just like the Tories and Lib Dems? How will they respond if the Labour left experiences a revival in its fortunes?

To her credit, SPEW deputy general secretary Hannah Sell has tackled the question in a recent article.¹

"Since the election," she writes, "some have argued that there is a possibility of shifting New Labour back to the left now that it is out of power." Not surprisingly SPEW does not "think this is on the agenda". Comrade Sell admits that there has been a "trickle" of people joining the Labour Party since the election, which she puts at "about 12 per constituency". Of course, that amounts to several thousand new recruits in a little over a week, so it is not that paltry.

"However, to stand a chance of reclaiming capitalist New Labour for the working class it would take a mass influx into the party - of trade unionists and young people - determined to rebuild the democratic structures which have long been destroyed." This, she says, has not happened in the case of "other ex-social democratic parties in Europe, which have not altered their capitalist character when out of power and have largely remained empty shells".

Rather, she claims, "new left formations" have sprung up, and it goes without saying that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - whose "excellent campaigns were not fully reflected in the votes we received" - represents "an important preparatory step towards such a formation" in Britain. That is

why any campaign to "reclaim the Labour Party" would be "a mistaken strategy". The unions should "stop funding New Labour and to begin to build a new party".

However, she continues, if SPEW's advice is ignored, "a serious campaign to reclaim New Labour by affiliated trade unions would be a huge step forward on the current policy of the majority of the union leaders of clinging to the coat-tails of the Brownites and the Blairites". Although SPEW does not think it could succeed, "were it to do so, we would turn towards such a development".

In fact comrade Sell has already come up with some policies for such a campaign: "It would ... be necessary to demand that the pro-capitalist and pro-war Blairites and Brownites be expelled from the party. Linked to this would be the rebuilding of democracy within the Labour Party, which is currently non-existent at national level."

In the meantime, "McDonnell is almost certain to be the only candidate that stands in defence of workers' interests. Therefore, as Socialist Party members will argue, all affiliated trade unions, if they are serious about fighting to reclaim New Labour, should mandate their sponsored MPs to back him."

The contradictions are well and truly exposed. Leave aside the notion that Labour can be 'reclaimed' for the working class - it was never a workers' party in any genuine sense. But even to entertain the notion that such a working class fight is possible within the party surely calls into question SPEW's insistence that Labour is one of those "ex-social democratic parties", a straightforward bourgeois party like the Tories and Lib Dems.

Why does SPEW not rule out the possibility of a working class fightback within Labour altogether? Could such a development occur within the Conservative Party, for example? What is it about Labour that still marks it out as different from the Tories and Lib Dems? Those are the questions arising from comrade Sell's article that cry out to be answered.

We welcome the commitment to "turn towards" a pro-working class fight within Labour - not to mention the backing from SPEW for John McDonnell's campaign in the here and now. But what does this say about SPEW's belief in the possibility of creating a Labour Party mark two? Which union is seriously going to consider backing such a move under current circumstances? In fact, we are likely to see quite the opposite trend, with disaffiliated unions applying to rejoin and even SPEW's half-hearted allies like Bob Crow seriously rethinking their approach ●

Notes

1. "Time for the fight of our lives": www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/9537/14-05-2010/time-for-the-fight-of-our-lives.

COALITION

An enemy that should be treated seriously

Many comrades insist that the Con-Lib Dem government is a coalition of 'profound weakness and division' that will be easy to beat and thus almost automatically lead to advances by the left. **Eddie Ford** believes that this approach is complacent and profoundly mistaken

We in the CPGB have warned that a hung parliament, which for months looked the most likely outcome of the election, contained grave dangers for the working class. Far from being a sure sign of bourgeois weakness, it could represent an opportunity for the ruling class to form an 'emergency government' of all the bourgeois talents - or at least many of them.

Which is exactly what we got in the shape of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition. You could even argue, to push the point, that the Cleggameron government has some of the feel of a 'national unity' government about it - now that Frank 'Doctor Death' Field has become David Cameron's 'poverty tsar' - an appropriate term for Field, given his consistent history of extreme rightwing views (in Labourite terms).

Yet large sections of the non-Labour left, in the run-up to the May 6 election, told us that a hung parliament would actually favour the working class, that to one degree or another it would throw the ruling class into "crisis" and deal a strong hand to the left. Perhaps even enable us to deliver a fatal knock-out blow to the newly formed government itself, and thus create even more problems for the bourgeoisie. Revolution surely beckons.

Obviously, these were always fantasies - the 'optimism' of dogmatic fools. But, quite incredibly, we are still hearing the same nonsense now, despite the brutal, in-your-face fact that the non-Labour or far left was virtually wiped off the electoral map - the results could not have been more pathetic. Far from facing a weak and divided government, as dreamed about by the left, we are now facing a confident - almost cocksure - government committed to savage cuts and all-round attacks on the working class movement. British Airways workers can vouch for that.

However, in the topsy-turvy world of the Micawber-like revolutionary left, something will always turn up. There can only be one glorious advance after another. Well, those whom the gods wish to destroy ...

Let us start with the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Of course, our indefatigable SPEW comrades want us to believe that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ran an "excellent campaign" and received "enthusiastic support" - 0.7% of the vote, in fact.¹ And naturally we are still eagerly awaiting Tusc's official verdict and analysis of the election results. No hurry, comrades, no hurry.

Nothing seems to have changed in the SPEW cosmos, electoral humiliation or not. Failure or otherwise. Indeed, it seems to be more or less business as usual. Hence party boss Peter Taaffe - in a myopic piece written after May 6 but before the formation of the new coalition government - informed us that the "disorderly outcome" to the election, which is supposedly how "all" the main party leaders and big business see it, has "torpedoed" the bourgeoisie's "wish



Cameron and Clegg: no comedy act

for a 'stable government' that could proceed quickly to slash the government deficit" and generally attack the living standards of the masses.²

Subsequently it fell to comrade Taaffe's loyal lieutenant, Hannah Sell, to correct her master's badly misjudged argument. After all, not only do we have the Con-Lib Dem coalition, but the government of Cameron and Clegg looks stable, at least in the short term; and, equally to the point, it *is* committed to introducing immediate cuts. Comrade Sell quite rightly points out that this is bound to provoke resistance. Here is the silver lining to the attack on living standards and democratic right. Thus the comrade tells us that "we will see mass movements of the working class in opposition to the cuts" and that "such movements can force even strong governments to retreat" - which is true, of course.³

It *might* also be true that the "profound weakness and division of this 'government of losers' will be revealed" in the very near future. She writes: "Despite all the efforts of Clegg and Cameron to create a stable government, this weak and rickety coalition is likely to shatter under the pressure of events at a certain point, probably in response to mass movements of the working class."⁴

But coalition governments are not necessarily weak. They can successfully attack the working class and inflict defeats. Historically we have the example of the 1931 national government headed first by the Labour turncoat Ramsay MacDonald and then the Tory, Stanley Baldwin. Despite fierce opposition, it imposed swingeing cuts and presided over soaring unemployment. The working class fought back painfully and very slowly. It was only the economic upturn associated with prepa-

rations for World War II that revived trade union strength.

From a bourgeois point of view the outcome of May 6 was not that bad. Not as bad as comrade Taaffe imagined, that is for sure. The Con-Lib Dem coalition is certainly stronger than a minority Tory government would have been (or even a Tory government with a small majority). A Labour-led rainbow coalition would have been extraordinarily weak from a bourgeois point of view ... and that is why it was never really a starter.

As is well known, at least to readers of the *Weekly Worker*, comrade John Rees, the cardigan-clad former Socialist Workers Party firebrand - well, on a good day - also recommended the virtues of a hung parliament. His April 22 *Counterfire* article, in the words of the strap-line, "argues that a hung parliament could be an opportunity for the left because it will alter the balance between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics". Helpfully, his article was illustrated with a picture of a slightly anxious-looking David Cameron next to a menacing hangman's rope.⁵

Comrade Rees asked: "... would a cobbled together coalition or a government with a small majority be bad for the left?" He notes that the establishment "now faces a level of popular discontent not seen since the 1970s" and speculates that "perhaps extra-parliamentary politics will carry more weight under a weak government" - it is hard to see a government with such a slim parliamentary majority "withstanding a mass movement outside parliament in the way in which Tony Blair's massive majority protected him from the mass movement against the Iraq war".

His conclusion, then, is that a "weak government may alter the balance between parliamentary government and extra-parliamentary action

to the benefit of the latter" - that is, the left "could benefit from this fact". Sadly, the comrade's hopes have been cruelly dashed already - as have those of his *Counterfire* colleague and fellow ex-SWP leader Lindsey German, who ventured the thought that the "cobbled together coalition" has "little legitimacy".⁶ Well, comrade German, tell that to the ruling class or the establishment - they seem quite happy with it, and why shouldn't they be? The Cameron-Clegg coalition has an agreed programme of cuts and can survive till the point where 84 right wing Tory MPs abstain, or 41 Lib Dems vote with the opposition - which, to put it mildly, is unlikely to happen. So this looks like it could be a full-term government. In purely parliamentary terms the Con-Lib Dem government is strong, and though the Lib Dems could be in for a drubbing in 2015, there is no reason to believe that the Tories could not emerge with a clear majority of MPs if faced with a left-moving Labour Party.

As for the SWP, though more realistic than the *Counterfire* comrades, it too seems unable to fully confront the truth head on. So we read in *Socialist Worker* online that the ruling class "wanted a stable and strong government to ram through their austerity measures" - but "even now they have not got one".⁷ Rather the new government is "very nasty, but also very weak" - which "means we can beat it".⁸ Once again, the optimism is to be commended. But there is no sense of urgency that the left needs to radically reorganise if we are to beat the Cleggameron government.

Most of the left are equally complacent. The government is weak - and, after Cleggameronism, us. Stuart King, in his usual inimitable way, said as much on the Permanent Revolution website. Comrade King insisted that the election result "places the ruling class in a real hole". Why? Because they needed a "firm majority government" in order to "push through the swingeing attacks on the working class necessary to reassure the international capitalist markets". Instead the "schema is blown up" - smashed to smithereens. So now, according to the comrade, we have entered a "period of instability and weak minority governments", which is a "much better outcome for the working class than a stable anti-working class coalition". In a rousing finale, comrade King declared that "with a bit of luck we could be moving into a period of ruling class crisis".⁹

Permanent Revolution's parent, Workers Power, repeated the mantra. Thus we read: "There is a tremendous opportunity provided by the current situation, because of the political instability inherent in coalition rule and because the Tories lack any credible popular mandate for their austerity programme".¹⁰

But these comrades too are fooling themselves. There is nothing to indicate that political instability or crisis is "inherent" to coalition governments - let alone the actual

Cameron-Clegg government that stands before us. Equally dubious is the notion that the new government lacks *any* "credible" mandate for its policies and programme. Unfortunate though it is, the constant, propagandising stream of commentary about acting in the 'national interest' does have a certain popularity - if only on the level of 'Why don't you stop squabbling like schoolchildren and muck in together?' It is a common enough sentiment. In fact there is a danger that the first tranche of cuts could receive a definite level of support from the population.

Then we have the Labour entrists of the Granite Socialist Appeal, the British section of the International Marxist Tendency. Once again we discover that the election produced "precisely the opposite of what the ruling class wanted". Did it, comrades? Yes, the "ruling class was quite clear what it wanted and needed", but it did not get it and now there is a "crisis".¹⁰

Of course, communists would be the very last to deny that the world capitalist system as a whole is currently in deep crisis - as the *Weekly Worker* has extensively catalogued. And, yes, from a strictly electoral stance, none of the bourgeois parties won the general election: rather they all lost. But *politically* and ideologically the bourgeoisie and the establishment in Britain is very much in the driving seat. Self-evidently, the Tory-Lib Dem coalition could last for some time and appears to be exactly what it says on the tin - a strong and relatively stable government of the bourgeoisie. Rather it is the left that is in crisis - but it is currently in a state of denial about this all too obvious fact.

Now, it almost goes without saying that communists seek to take advantage of all the splits and divisions within the ruling class - hence the CPGB's insistence on studying and mastering high politics. But in order to make the left - both within and outside the Labour Party - into a real force that can manoeuvre and follow a plan that culminates in a working class government, we need to begin by looking at what is and stop dishing out leftist snake-oil, let alone rely on "luck". The working class will start to make its own luck once its advanced elements unite in a Marxist 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. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/9499/07-05-2010/electoral-deadlock-all-capitalist-parties-losers
3. www.socialistparty.org.uk/latest/9537/14-05-2010/time-for-the-fight-of-our-lives
4. www.counterfire.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4718&Itemid=54
5. www.counterfire.org/index.php/features/131/5162
6. www.swp.org.uk/after-elections-what-do-socialists-say
7. www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=21269
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10. www.marxist.com/britain-after-election-crisis-and-tasks-of-labour.htm

OBITUARY

Friend, comrade and occasional sparring partner

Peter Heathfield, March 2 1929-May 4 2010

It came as a great shock to many in the coalfields to hear that Peter Heathfield, the former general secretary of our National Union of Mineworkers, had died.

We were all too well aware he was seriously ill. Four years ago, he was present at the Jones-Green memorial lecture, paying tribute to all those miners who had died as fighters for the NUM. He was painfully thin, and explained that he had a wasting condition. His eyes still sparkled and he was as witty as ever, but Peter was a shadow of his former self. Still, we all hoped against hope he would pull through.

Peter was elected general secretary in January 1984 and took up office just days before the start of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. He was one of the triumvirate - Arthur Scargill, Mick McGahey and Peter Heathfield - and never swerved from his solid loyalty to the union, to the action it had undertaken and to Arthur personally.

He was a Derbyshire miner through and through, who had gone down the pit after leaving school, starting underground work at the Williamthorpe colliery. Like me, Peter had the good fortune of studying on the NUM's three-year day release course under the direction of Sheffield University's extramural department. It was a hotbed of the new militancy breaking through the living dead the union had become in the mid-60s.

It was the Derbyshire area of the NUM which fired the first shot in the declaration of war against the old leadership in 1969 with an unofficial rally in London and then a nationwide wildcat strike, which put militancy, and an alternative leadership, on the agenda. Without that movement, the crushing victories for the miners in 1972 and 74 would not have been possible.

In 1966, Peter, who was very active in the Labour Party and its re-emerging left wing, was elected to a full-time NUM post for the first time, became vice-president of the Derbyshire NUM in 1970 and Derbyshire area secretary in 1973. Some said he would be the left's runner for national president in 1981, while others thought this post was predestined to be Mick's. As it turned out, the 'left', and in the particular the CPGB, threw their support behind the younger Scargill.

In January 1984, Peter was elected general secretary of the NUM, taking over the post from the once dynamic Lawrence Daly, who had been in ill health for some time. Without Peter's steady hand on the tiller through those stormy days the conduct of the strike and its tenacity may have been much weaker. It was a classical case of 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man'.

Peter was a most forceful speaker, his body literally bounced on the stage with the power and emotion of his words; his body pulsed, his voice, arms and head like electric, his stomping making many a stage rock. His sweeping gestures flayed alive the scabs and police. I had shared many platforms with Peter over the years - not just for miners' events, but to mark the anti-apartheid struggle, our opposition to the Vietnam



Peter Heathfield: target of state black propaganda

war, our hostility to nuclear weapons. Peter was an old-style guts communist, who saw the workers coming to power through a Labour Party impelled by an independent, militant trade union movement.

He was 100% loyal to the strike, and 100% behind the strategy, which the members imposed on the union, especially over the vexed question of the ballot. Vexed as far as the media and rightwing critics were concerned, that is, not the rank and file. Even now, after his death they still get it wrong, *The Guardian* commenting in its obituary: "When the Conservative government announced its intention to close 20 pits, Heathfield backed Scargill from the start of the strike in March 1984, and, like his president, rejected a coalfield ballot. Yet everyone who knew Heathfield believed that he harboured inner doubts about Scargill's strategy" (May 4).

Of course, neither Peter nor Arthur rejected a ballot at all. The national executive made no recommendation on the question, and neither spoke either in support of or against any of the five resolutions on the floor of conference called to debate that very issue. Neither voted for or against any of the propositions (Arthur was in the chair), but why spoil a good folk myth with facts?

Following the strike and the years of confused repositioning and struggles for direction and democracy in the union, he and I often clashed over how to respond to the new situation. How to remain relevant to the rank and file, what we could hold onto

and what we had to let go. Peter and Arthur both felt that at pit level we were giving and repositioning too much. I believe they felt we were allowing the National Coal Board strategy of isolating the leadership to work, and we should have shut up shop and thrown away the keys until the NCB was prepared to recognise the union at national level and re-establish nationwide conciliation. On the other hand, we felt they had become remote and unrealistic - making impractical demands of a battle-scarred, exhausted army. Peter and I went toe to toe over the newly installed 'Doncaster option' bonus agreement, and later over Hatfield colliery's own pit payment scheme, which I felt he did not understand and he thought was breaking ranks. Some of this is explored in my current book on the period, *Ghost dancers* (published by Christie and available through Central Books), I hope sympathetically. Not that any of that broke our friendship or mutual regard and we spent a great deal of time rehashing and reviewing the whole post-strike period afterwards.

The most damning thing in Peter's life, however, was not the strike, nor even its defeat and the years of declining union power and influence which followed, but the scandalous slander unleashed by the media with their charges of financial irregularity. Worse than that, there were accusations of fiddling and double-dealing for personal gain. Peter, a man of immense pride and self-respect, principled to a fault, was mortally wound-

ed; he never recovered from the insult and injury. The charges were launched by sensational disclosures in the *Daily Mirror* and by Central Television in 1990.

Actually what they had discovered was an 'anti-personnel PR bomb' drawn up by the state's special 'counter-insurgency' forces. It was meant to go 'boom' in the final minutes before the expected miners' victory, rob us of our support among our own ranks and pull the rug on solidarity action across the union movement. As things turned out, it was not needed, since the sellout by the supervisors' union had tripped our impending victory at the post. But the device, the plot, the scandal was left in the field like an unexploded bomb, for the media to discover by accident.

They were too thick to realise what it was they had found - the greatest example of state interference, of state manipulation, in an industrial dispute and the media in the past century - and instead ran it as a 'fingers in the till', corrupt union official story.

Most people to this day still do not realise the scale of the state's set-up of these two men in an effort to break the strike. The NUM appointed an independent inquiry under the chairmanship of Gavin Lightman QC, which cleared both Scargill and Heathfield of all the main accusations. But Heathfield never forgave the NUM NEC for suspending him and Arthur and handing over the enquiry to the QC. He never overcame the impact of that particular kind of scandal. Despite speaking to adoring crowds at many rallies and meetings afterwards, despite being cleared of all charges, despite all the applause and backslapping, the accusation was enough to rob him of something deep and treasured.

He retired from the position of general secretary in 1992, and started a new life with his young partner, Sue Rolstone, having broken up with his first wife, the dynamic Betty, a founder-member of Women against Pit Closures and long-time communist activist, in 1989.

Peter was a thoughtful, intellectual, honest and loyal comrade. He had earned the right to a long and healthy retirement, but sadly he did not see much of that, spending years fighting off the legacy of that fearsome slander. Then to struggle with and finally be struck down by the gradually deteriorating condition he endured was a final and undeserved injustice. Peter was a giant in my book, a leader of the miners who can take his place among the biggest and best in our long history.

Peter's body in death will be donated to science in the hope of assisting his fellow workers, just as in life it was dedicated to their struggles for justice. As such, there will be no funeral. However, a commemoration will be held at 2pm on June 30 at the Chesterfield Miners' Welfare, Chester Street, Chesterfield S40 1DL.

Our sympathy goes out to Sue and his children, to Peter's family, friends and comrades. A great number of leading members of the socialist, communist and trade union movement are expected to give orations or just be present at the commemoration ●

David Douglass

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IRAN

Jafar Panahi stages hunger strike and demands freedom for all political prisoners

Ben Lewis reports on the campaign to free the outspoken film maker imprisoned by the Iranian regime

Activists in Hands Off the People of Iran have been informed that Jafar Panahi, the internationally acclaimed film maker who has been incarcerated for over two months, has begun a hunger strike in Evin prison.

This is the latest brave step by Panahi, who is increasingly becoming a symbol of resistance.

The solidarity he can generate is of grave cause concern for the Islamic Republic, despite its jails, armed thugs and reactionary militias. Panahi fully realises this, and he is using his standing to exert as much pressure on the regime as possible. He has refused offers of bail, saying that he will only accept it when all other political prisoners are released.

Like him, the overwhelming majority of these prisoners were arrested as part of the shocking wave of repression unleashed by the regime in response to the enormous protests on the streets of Iran following last June's rigged presidential elections.

As we have reported previously, Panahi has been subjected to rigorous interrogation in jail. The Evin

interrogators appear to be pursuing the tried and tested approach of bombarding him with the same questions over and over again in order to force inconsistencies in his answers, backing this up with the soul-destroying conditions and humiliating treatment for which Evin prison has become infamous.

Last Saturday the authorities kept all inmates in his wing of the prison outside their cells in the open air for the whole night. Next morning he was interrogated once more, this time being accused of secretly working on a film from his cell. He is particularly concerned about some of the new threats that have been made against his family.

There is clearly a lot of work for us in the solidarity movement. We must do what we can to publicise Jafar Panahi's brave stance, not least using his wonderfully human films. He - and indeed all the other political prisoners in Iran - cannot be allowed to suffer without an outcry. Hollywood directors Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola and Robert Redford have issued forthright statements demanding his release. At this week's 63rd Cannes Film Festival there were countless expressions of solidarity. One of the nine chairs for jury members remained empty in his honour. Given Panahi's reputation internationally, it is quite striking that his case has hitherto been subjected to what John McDonnell MP has described as a "media blackout" in Britain, and we must break through this.

Simultaneously, it is vital ensure that the brutal actions of the Iranian state and its callous treatment of dissenters and critical figures of all kinds should not in any way be misappropriated by the US or UK governments to cover their designs on Iran and the region more generally. At a time when the permanent members of the UN security council - US, UK, China, Russia and France - have agreed on new proposals for a fresh round of sanctions, and when the rightwing Israeli politicians hypocritically hark on about the danger of a "second holocaust", this is of the utmost importance.

Indeed, given that public opinion is not exactly welcoming the prospect of the further escalation of tension in the Middle East, one of the ways in which the imperialists may attempt to respond is to disingenuously latch on to the cause of Iran's political prisoners. So there is a danger that the political and cultural establishment in the US and UK could hijack Panahi's courageous stance for their own nefarious purposes. So we must redouble our campaign for the immediate and unconditional

release not only of Panahi, but of all political prisoners, and link this with implacable opposition to imperialist sanctions and threats of war. A fight on two fronts which Hopi has conducted since its inception.

Solidarity success

May 12 saw well over 100 people attend a solidarity screening at London's Soho Theatre of Panahi's best known film, *Offside*, jointly organised by Hopi and the Labour Representation Committee. The event was the first in a series of film showings and solidarity events across the country. The Manchester screening took place on May 18, and there will be a further one in Glasgow on May 21.

The event opened with Soho Theatre's artistic director, Lisa Goldman, providing a moving account of meeting Panahi in Iran. She was followed by John McDonnell, who outlined the significance of the campaign to free Panahi. "Every movement creates a symbol," he said. "In refusing bail until all other political prisoners are freed, Jafar is taking a courageous stance that we in Hopi wish to applaud and highlight." He emphasised the importance of Hopi's core principles - against war or sanctions on Iran; but no support for the theocracy and unequivocal solidarity with genuinely democratic struggles from below against its rule, especially those of the workers' movement.

This was a theme British-Iranian comic Shappi Khorsandi took up in her opening remarks to the audience, explaining that is why she "loved" Hopi. *Offside* was certainly a big hit with the audience: stormy applause followed its closing credits. At the end a message of thanks was read out from Panahi's family.

PCS welcome

Hopi activists have been present this week at the Public and Commercial Services union conference in Brighton and our stall has had a very good response from delegates. PCS has been affiliated to Hopi since 2008 and the annual conference is always a good time to meet PCS militants new and old. Gratifyingly, the response we had from the delegates this year was particularly warm. We distributed some 400 information bulletins on the Jafar Panahi campaign and have already received over 50 signed postcards, which will be sent off in a special batch to Panahi's family in Iran. We also raised funds for our campaigning work by selling numerous 'No to war; no to theocracy' badges and copies of Panahi's films ●



Jafar Panahi: we must redouble our campaign

ECONOMY

No alternative within

What does the bail-out of Greece mean for international capital? **Hillel Ticktin** spoke to Yassamine Mather



Eurozone in crisis

The BBC and *Financial Times* have commented that the Greek bail-out amounts to a short-term fix to buy time. The bulk of the package includes guarantees which they hope will ensure the euro will not collapse. The government debt of Greece alone amounts to over €250 billion or some 125% of its GDP, and what they have done is to convince the markets that the line will be held.

In February German chancellor Angela Merkel refused to intervene. If she had continued with that refusal, the situation would have become untenable. The sovereign debt crisis then got to the point where it could

threaten Greece, Portugal, Spain, possibly Italy, Ireland and ultimately even Britain. The slide towards that was obvious right from the beginning. Most bourgeois commentators were saying that it would never be allowed to slide to that level, but it did. For that reason the Social Democrats in Germany criticised Angela Merkel.

The press in Britain was appalling. It tried to imply that the Social Democrats were some kind of extreme nationalists, who hated the Greeks and thought they were just lazy. But if you listen to what the Social Democrats were actually saying, it was not that at all. It is inter-

esting that the British press were deliberately trying to foster anti-Greek and anti-German attitudes. The upshot of this has been that the euro zone powers let the Greek situation slide up to the point where there was no alternative: the euro and ultimately the capitalist system itself were under threat, so obviously there had to be a bail-out.

The second point is: what is the market? You constantly hear this nonsense, about how you cannot buck the market - but the market is not some inhuman, cosmic system that nobody can do anything about. It is just a section of the capitalist class deciding what to do with their

money. Obviously if they think that Greece is going bankrupt, then they are going to withdraw their capital if possible. That is a completely rational approach and the idea that there is some sort of impersonal agency involved is nonsense.

It is also true that you can actually influence the people who control investment - they are really the same people who are influencing governments. In fact it is not thousands of individual capitalists either, it is a relatively small number of banks, funds and so on, which are moving money in and out. It is perfectly possible to consider where they are going and come to a deal with them.

Why was Latvia bailed out so easily last year, while there was reluctance to act on Greece? Latvia was a total basket case. It was, and in a sense still is, in tremendous trouble economically. That largely arose from the simple fact that the population of Latvia was able to borrow money in foreign currency at low interest rates, particularly from Sweden, Austria and to a degree Italy. With the downturn they could not repay. If the Latvians devalued the currency, it would become even more difficult for them to repay. This was a problem for the Swedish and Austrian banks. Latvia systematically refused to devalue because it wanted to join the euro and wanted to show its economy to be capable of undergoing the transition. The country was really teetering, as Greece is now, on the brink of total bankruptcy.

In February 2009 the International Monetary Fund got the relevant banks together and insisted there should be a bail-out. €78 billion was put aside for the Baltic countries, particularly Latvia. The way it is described in the *Financial Times* is that it was the banks were almost forced to do that. It was done secretly and reported afterwards. With Greece, however, it was all in the open.

What was really going on? The answer is that Merkel wanted to use Greece as a test case for dealing with the working class. She wanted to see cuts introduced in order to defeat the working class. There is no other way to understand it - if that was not the case, then why wait so long? Merkel did not act immediately, because the ruling class in Germany - and, it appears, important sections of the world's ruling class - wanted to go for austerity, for control. You can see that happening in Britain by default, as it were, as a direct result of this ultimate bail-out. The condition which the Germans imposed was that of austerity throughout. France has now accepted this too. The euro zone, as a direct result of this package, has signed up to the German austerity policy. It will now experience a low or negative growth rate. Consequently for Britain the chances of being able to export more to the euro zone are considerably reduced.

Where next?

The possibility of Britain going the way of Greece is unlikely. As part of the deal announced by the EU the United States provided dollars to various countries and there is either a tacit or an explicit deal between the United States and Britain. It would be highly dangerous for the capitalist class to simply demand a whole series of cuts in Britain, which is still an imperialist power, despite being called a small country. This would lead to the working class beginning

to act, which would be an ominous example for the world from the capitalists' point of view.

The other aspect is that it is difficult to see a financial crisis arising in Britain, with money leaving the country and so forth. The bonds held are a long-term debt - investors sometimes have to wait 12 years or more before stocks pay out. Secondly, a large part of the debt is held in Britain itself, so it is not a balance of payments issue. On top of which there are still huge funds coming into Britain, partly because of this crisis. The Greek bourgeoisie is putting its money into Britain and British housing, hence, in part, the rising prices in London.

In the case of the other countries, it is different. In Ireland, austerity measures have not worked. Its huge budgetary gap remains and this will not change if all they rely on is austerity. If you cut the standard of living of the population and therefore production goes down, tax returns will also go down and so the gap increases. That is obvious and will happen in every country which simply goes for austerity, which is the point which has been made in relation to Greece. It is simply not enough to continue cutting. It does not work and will not work in Greece either, which is why they need to do something else.

In relation to Spain and Portugal, the problems involved are not just those of a fiscal deficit. As with Greece, it is also a balance of payments problem. One of the problems is that such countries are 'uncompetitive on the international market', as they put it. What they mean is that wages have been going up. In other words, the bourgeoisie has not been sufficiently strong to suppress the working class and has had to make concessions. Consequently wages have been rising in relative terms and the products of such countries have become uncompetitive on the world market or within the euro (previously they could devalue, but now they cannot).

They can borrow and the euro zone sector will effectively fund them for a time, but that cannot continue for ever. This is obvious in the case of Spain, but Italy's economy is even bigger and has been in trouble for a long time. Its debt is over 100% of GDP and has been like that for years. Italy has managed to hold out up to now and in part that is because of its very rightwing government. A leftwing government would not be trusted and there would be immediate trouble. Italy may not be in trouble immediately, but it will be. In the long run the question is then whether the euro zone could hold up at all. That is not at all clear.

Deficit

The exclusive focus on the deficit is a totally crazy policy. You cannot simply cut public services and raise taxes and expect to end the deficit. There has to be growth - this has been pointed out time and again by Keynesian economists. The only way to get rid of the deficit is through a sufficiently rapid growth and allowing inflation to come into play. That is what happened in the past.

It is not just Lord Skidelsky pointing this out. The *Financial Times* itself and a number of commentators, such as Sam Brittan, who after all, is in no sense social democratic, have said the same. Brittan wrote back in autumn 2009 that it is crazy to cut, which is true. So one has to ask what

capitalism

is going on. Why are they cutting in the euro zone and why are they cutting here? Why is the Republican Party so firmly against expansion, but insisting on severe cuts?

It looks as though they are either taking the opportunity to try and defeat the working class - an attempt that is clearly happening in Greece. Or they are doing it as a defensive measure - afraid that in the present circumstances there is going to be a rise in working class activity. That is what it looks like. The other possibility some people put forward is that they are just stupid: having adopted monetarism or the ideology of Thatcherism, they really believe in it. They really think that the only way to maintain control is to screw the economy down - therefore they have to cut the fiscal deficit. In other words it is pure ideology - in fact not even ideology, which needs a point of contact with reality. If they are really not thinking of a direct contest with the working class, one can only say that they are mad.

But can they defeat the working class? Well, they are not doing so in Greece quite obviously. Are they likely to beat the working class anywhere? It is highly unlikely. The usual way that they control the working class is through a mixture of repression and concessions, but here there are no concessions - just straight repression. So they are not going to win: I cannot see it. Even most people on the side of the bourgeoisie would probably say they could not win in the end.

So are they trying to commit suicide? On the one hand, they have bailed out Greece, which from the point of the system looks all right; on the other hand, they are imposing austerity everywhere. So where on earth will that lead, apart from downhill? It may be awful for the left in the coming period, with wages going down and unemployment rising, etc. People's personal circumstances could be considerably worse. But if you look at what is likely to happen politically, people are going to move to the left. They are already doing so and are bound to move further to the left - logically there is no other way to go.

Crisis

As I have written in *Critique*, one has to analyse the downturn from three angles. There are the periodical upturns and downturns; there is the strategy of the ruling class; and then there is the crisis of the capitalist system itself.

Firstly, the upturns and downturns, which have gone on for over 300 years. There is a certain automaticity about it, whereby companies sell off or destroy their stocks, reduce their ability to produce, dismiss workers and so raise their profits. We are not in the 19th century, in spite of the stupid rhetoric about small and medium-sized companies. The companies which dominate the economy are large - monopolies, oligopolies or whatever else you want to call them: simply large, dominant firms. Quite obviously their profits will rise; they have risen, sometimes by enormous amounts. Logically it is what you would expect to happen.

So there is something of an upturn depending on the country, but the upturn is relatively weak, because the capitalist class cannot see much of a future, as things stand. Obviously if unemployment is high and wages are static or declining, demand is going to be low, which is what they expected.

But behind it all they are still stuck with exactly the same reason why the crisis occurred: that is to say, an enormous surplus of capital. It has existed now for decades, getting bigger, bigger and still bigger. At the time the crash occurred in 1970 it was somewhere in the region of \$18 trillion just being held as liquid assets; that is on top of the \$110 trillion being held by hedge funds, pension funds,

insurance companies, private equity and so on. So the enormous amount of money in the system dwarfs entirely the crisis of Greece. The banks hold more than all the countries' deficits combined, so these crises could be dealt with easily in theory. The problem remains the huge level of surplus capital looking for investment. The banks are only offering half a percent interest, which is a joke - if you are lucky you may get two percent. In Britain that is below the rate of inflation, so in real terms you lose your money. But there is no obvious place to invest.

Why is this the case? The answer goes back to the strategy that has been adopted - the strategy of finance capital. This means deliberate disinvestment from industry, switching to the holding of money as money, which is then used for investment in order to get quick returns. There is no interest in investing for the long term. To a degree the money went to the third world - originally to south-east Asia - and that was not successful. Then there was the dot-com boom, but that collapsed; then derivatives, which also collapsed. There is nowhere for that capital to go - except back into industry.

There is a certain move for going back to industry: Mandelson has been pushing that in Britain. He had the crazy idea of linking universities to industry. It was the profitability of everything that counted, so universities had to become profitable and science would be subjected to that. This idea will no doubt be taken up by the Tories - albeit perhaps not in such a crass way - but it cannot work, of course.

The point is that there is a clear tendency to realise that there must be a move back to industry. There has already been a limited amount of investment in China; another example is that of General Electric in the United States, whose latest report notes that investment in finance capital has not been doing too well, and more or less concludes that the company will have to go back to industry. You can expect a certain shove in that direction.

Finance capital

The strategy of finance capital has now failed, along with its political arm - economic liberalism. It continues like a zombie, but as a policy it has failed. The capitalists will have to find something else - but they are muddled and do not know

where they are going.

A switch to industry, however, would not provide returns immediately. They would not come for five, 10, or even 20 years. That is why it not easy to switch from finance capital to industrial capital, just like that. The only way it would happen is if the state begins the process. It is being discussed in the United States, but you have to be utopian to believe that Obama will go all the way through with it. In the US there is talk of big investments in the railways and a high-speed rail link. (According to *Scientific American* most of what is being considered is just an inferior version of what exists in Britain. Although it would provide some sort of outlet for investment, it is peculiar that the most advanced and dominant country in the world wants to invest in backward technology.)

But it is not clear to me that even this will happen, given where the situation is in the US. The Republicans are opposed to state intervention, and even if some such investment was let through, it would not be enough to start the process. The capitalist class is not prepared to reflate. That would mean full employment, and the working class would start to exercise its power and demand control. This unwillingness to reflate means that any industrial expansion will be limited and they are stuck with finance capital - which is unable to achieve sufficient returns.

From this point of view capital is in a difficult situation. I do not want to say that capitalism's situation is terminal, however desirable that would be. It will not end automatically. It is in decline, but that will only be terminal when the objective and subjective elements come together. The subjective elements are not yet there.

What can be done?

The predatory, parasitic and inhuman strategy that relies on finance capital has come to a dead end - but we have now come to a point where capitalism cannot solve its own problems. The only alternative rests with the working class. It needs its own political strategy pursued by its own parties. The social democratic and so-called socialist parties will either get absorbed into other parties, disintegrate or become even more openly pro-capitalist, if that is possible. There is no alternative but to move left ●

Fighting fund

Not so paltry

Comrade ELS admits to being "one of those weekly online readers who never normally cough up" in a comment accompanying her "paltry" and "overdue" £10 donation received via our PayPal facility at www.cpgb.org.uk.

No need to sound so guilty, comrade. You were one of 17,332 internet readers of the *Weekly Worker* last week and if you are culpable of previous omissions there are lots of others too! Of course, that readership figure is quite a bit down on the previous week's 20,000-plus for our general election issue, but it is still quite a bit higher than the 15,000 or so we had been averaging before.

Mind you, there were two other internet donors last week - comrade WD, who tells me that her £10 gift should be viewed as a top-up in addition to her monthly standing order; and £20 from JW of the *Forth* website in Ireland. And, talking of standing orders, they added up to £105

over the last seven days - thanks to JD, DW, SP, MKS and MM.

Just one cheque came via the post last week - but it was a rather handy £50 from PJ, who says he is more than pleased with last week's post-election coverage. Altogether we received an extra £195, which takes our total for May up to £775. But time is rapidly running out, with just 10 days left to raise the remaining £500 we could do with to reach our £1,250 target.

And we definitely need to raise the full amount - not least because our printing costs have (temporarily, we hope) gone up by £200 a month. So are there any more guilty web readers out there who fancy coming up with a paltry donation or two? ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party associate member

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The new bullshit

David Cameron's 'new politics' are a degraded version of the old, argues James Turley

David Cameron has spent much of his tenure as Conservative Party leader being touted as the Tories' answer to Tony Blair.

This has always been a bit of a rightwing fantasy. Cameron is not nearly as slick a populist as Blair - and, sure enough, faced with Gordon Brown's exhausted Labour government, he did not manage to romp home with a landslide victory on May 6, instead scoring something of a technical knock-out by securing support from the Liberal Democrats.

One thing they do very much have in common, however, is a fondness for vacuous, feel-good jargon. Blair had his 'stakeholder society'; Cameron has the 'big society'. Blair had New Labour - and Cameron has New Politics. Behind Blair's sound bites there lay the slow-motion self-immolation of the Labour right wing, at least as a trend with a distinctive political project; and behind Cameron's there is something similar - a cosmetic rebranding effort, the PR spin on what is very likely to be a brutal, slash-and-burn administration.

That is not to say that this phraseology is itself 'apolitical' - just that its users are. In fact, this kind of opportunist gimmickry has a venerable history and a small but important role in surreptitiously framing political questions in public discourse.

The 'new politics'

Jargon of this type is often pretty ephemeral - it has only been a couple of weeks since the election, and already public references to the 'big society' are dwindling. The 'new politics', however, is everywhere; it is the catchphrase of the administration, and Cameron and Clegg would like us to think that they really believe it.

So what is it? The first issue here is - what was the 'old politics'? In this narrative, it is nothing less than the archetypal Westminster scene: the red team versus the blue team, castigating each other's policies and voting records, casting aspersions on each other's leading figures, with every sally met with brays of approval and protest. The old politics, whatever its overall merit, certainly is not for the faint-hearted. It is a bear-pit, and the fights are conducted according to archaic rituals and rules that seem to have more in common with *Gormenghast* than a 21st century legislative body.

The 'new politics' is a different beast altogether, we are told. A *Guardian* editorial, with the fingerprints of that rag's odious ex-Euro-communist assistant editor, Martin Kettle, all over it, was really quite taken with Cameron's and Clegg's joint press conference announcing their coalition: "For a country reared on confrontational them-or-us yah-boo politics, the sight of the two youthful leaders swapping jokes at their lecterns, as their two

parties stopped pummelling and started to embrace one another, was astonishing. And, yes, uplifting too" (May 13). The 'new politics' will be collaborative rather than combative; politicians will put aside their 'tribalism' in favour of the 'national interest'.

Not everyone is as doe-eyed as the sycophantic *Guardian*, of course - and there are ample sources of scepticism as regards this brave new dawn of British politics. For a start, it is difficult to shake the feeling of *déjà vu*. Cameron has been at this game before - when he was elected party leader, he loudly announced that the days of fruitless hostility in Commons debates were over. This charm offensive, needless to say, was short-lived - and soon the barbs were flying again. What is politically paralysing in one situation is useful in another, of course; and it is not difficult to see why this particular bit of Cameron rhetoric has been exhumed just when the Tories have entered a coalition with the Lib Dems. It is no more stable this time, since Cameron's politics feed ultimately off the biliously reactionary Tory press, not a milieu given to taking prisoners.

As for the Liberal Democrats, this kind of bridge-building rhetoric is all but orthodoxy. Charles Kennedy was only one of many Lib Dem leaders to admonish politicians thus: "Stop the 'yah-boo' and when you agree with an opponent, say so". Once again, it makes an awful lot of sense for an organisation whose entire electoral strategy involves poaching floating voters away from both Labour and the Tories - it has no interest in seeming to outflank either of the other parties. Equally, however, it has to preserve its distinctive political brand; it schizophrenically alternates between often radical-sounding (and, at the local level, normally utterly unscrupu-

lous) attacks on the bigger parties in opposition on the one hand, and total pliancy in coalition government on the other. Overall, then, the 'new politics' is only likely to be good for one parliamentary term - especially given the fact that no Labour faction has an interest in playing nicely with the government.

Anti-democratic

The bigger question is whether this kind of cross-party consensus is actually as civilised as it is claimed. One would perhaps naively have thought that, however morally upright it is to cooperate, the key matter was what politicians were cooperating on. The Clegg-Cameron 'consensus' is not a pretty sight - brutal attacks on the

The problem with pointless hostility is not that it is hostile, but that it is pointless

public sector and working class at large, combined with 'political reform' that further entrenches the grip of the main parties. Even if, however, they were committed to the best programme in the world, there would be a minor issue - it is fundamentally anti-democratic.

The separate existence of political parties implies that they have something different to say - it is in this disguise that they go to the electorate. Now they have the 'mandate' they need, the Tories and Lib Dems get on with doing whatever the hell they want (or, more accurately, whatever the bourgeoisie wants). The 'new politics' does not mean that political differences are being put aside so

much that they have outlived their usefulness. The jocular, matey style of that press conference in fact underlines this - when Cameron and Clegg laughed off the former's description of the latter as his "favourite joke", they basically laughed off their own election campaigns.

It should not be denied, of course, that the cut and thrust of political debate in the Commons is pretty meagre these days, as the political differences between the major parties have shrivelled. 'Prime minister's questions' has long degenerated into gloating and counter-gloating over administrative blunders. To the casual observer, it looks and sounds like nothing more than a room full of antagonistic hooray Henriets engaged in cheap point-scoring. There are, it is true, important contradictions played out, in part, in this parliamentary process - the battles between different sectional interests of capital, and the persistent chafing of those interests with those of the labour bureaucracy. These are not struggles than can be played out openly, however, and so they surface as idiotic semi-debates.

Talk of 'new politics', then, does at least reflect a dissatisfaction with the redundant squabbles at the despatch box. People genuinely are sick of this jostling for position, and there is a desire for more meaningful engagement with political ideas. Last year's expenses scandal painted a vivid picture of a parliament which, behind allegedly principled disputes, was united in pursuing petty corruption, and therefore showed the differences between the parties in a very unflattering perspective.

However, if real political differences were visible in the legislature, its debates would be a lot less banal, but also a lot more hostile. The problem with pointless hostility is not that it is hostile, but that it is pointless. 'New politics' is not even a pseudo-solution to this problem - it is sim-

ply the continuation of phoney war by other means, this time with the underlying solidarity of the political class in abstraction from its supposed allegiances being sold as a plus point. It is not completely convincing.

In fact, behind a lot of this jargon there are the common aspirations of the masses, or at least their common frustration with the lumbering machinery of everyday life. The 'big society', with its veneration of the voluntary sector and 'private' organisations engaged in philanthropic work, stakes its appeal on the common hatred of petty state bureaucrats, and the aspiration to achieve some kind of control over one's own existence.

That is a fine and noble urge - but, as with the 'new politics', Cameron and the Tories do not have a hope in hell of fulfilling it, nor any particular will to do so. To the extent that this programme pans out at all - and, like any other state initiative, it will be a little expensive for the current situation - it will reveal only that a charity or a church can have bureaucracies as unresponsive and soulless as the state's; meanwhile, a whole new layer of *state* bureaucrats will be necessary to make sure it actually works out - as well as substantial subsidies to private organisations in order to induce them to deliver basically unprofitable social welfare provisions.

These obstacles are not creatures of Cameron's mendacity, but capitalism's long-term decline, which renders it increasingly unable to carry out the basic tasks of its own reproduction without the heavy-handed intervention of the bureaucratic state. Control over our destiny can only be consciously exercised collectively; democracy, meanwhile, is impossible in the absence of a clear conflict of political lines, inside and outside parliament. The 'new politics' is the old bullshit repackaged - we must fight for genuine democracy in all spheres of life ●

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