



weekly **worker**



George Osborne's cuts, cuts, cuts budget: attacking the welfare state

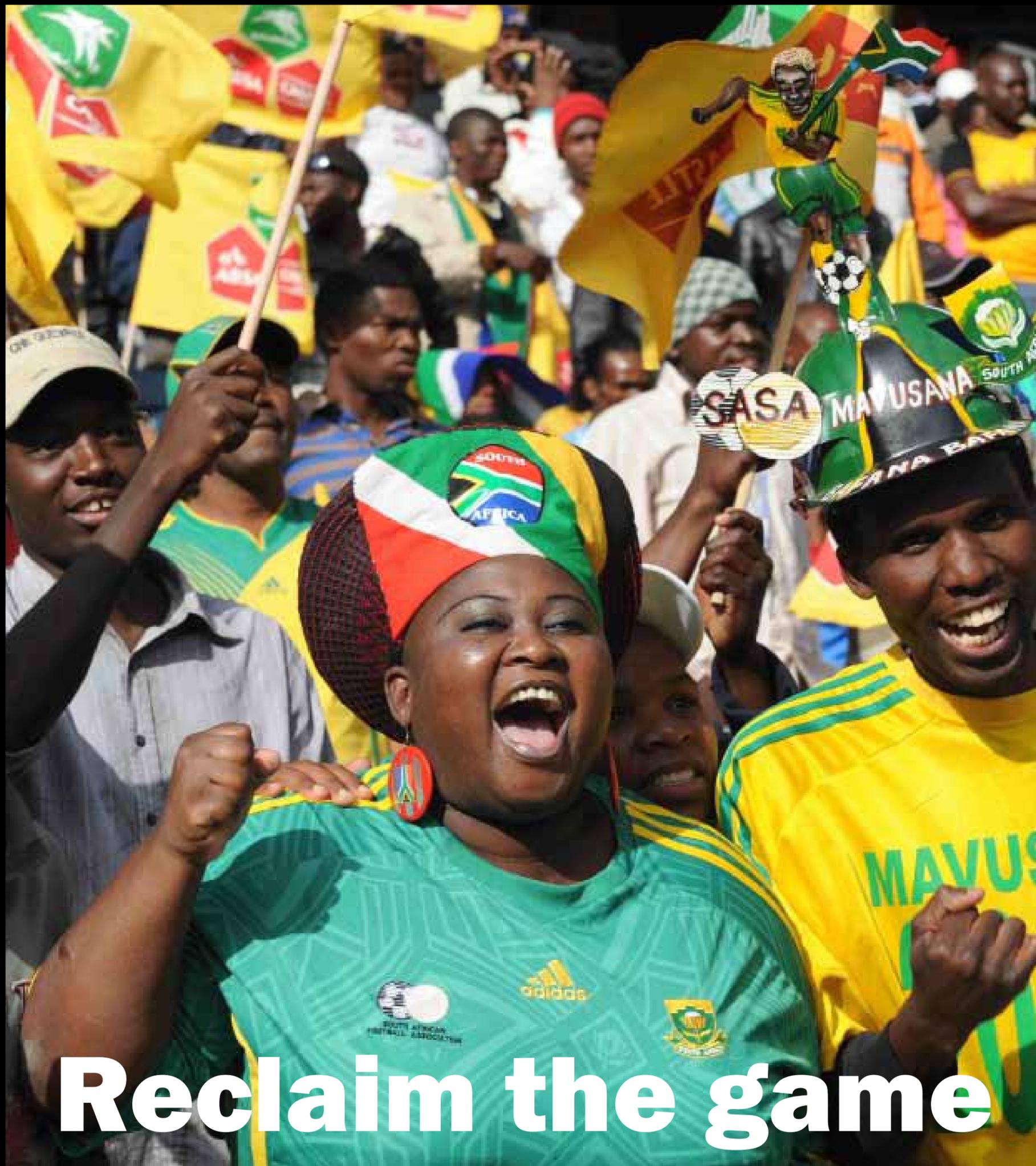
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Reclaim the game

LETTERS

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

Transitional

Trotsky "advances a battle plan for the proletariat - made conscious of its historic tasks with the assistance of a revolutionary party - to reconstruct society along fundamentally different (ie, socialist) lines", explains Hape Breitman of the International Bolshevik Tendency (Letters, June 17).

This is the stale old argument that socialist consciousness will develop out of the struggle for reforms within capitalism, so when workers realise they can't get the reforms they have been campaigning for they will turn to the 'cadres' of the Fourth International for leadership. The fact that it never happens and all that is achieved is the encouragement of reformist illusions amongst workers and disillusionment with the possibility of real radical change is totally missed by Breitman.

His case (and Trotsky's) can be summed up in the following: the working class has a reformist consciousness; it is the duty of the revolutionary party to be where the masses are; and, therefore, to be with the mass of the working class, we must advocate reforms. Furthermore, the working class is only reformist-minded; winning reformist battles will give the working class confidence so that they will go on to have a socialist revolution.

Thus, the working class will learn from its struggles, and will eventually come to realise that assuming power is the only way to meet its ends; the working class will realise, through the failure of reforms to meet its needs, the futility of reformism and capitalism, and will overthrow it; and the working class will come to trust the party that leads them to victory and, come a social crisis, they will follow it to revolution.

It all relies upon a notion of the inherently revolutionary nature of the working class and that, through the class struggle, this inherently revolutionary character will show itself - although it hasn't yet. It is also flawed because it shows no reason why, due to the failure of reform, the workers should turn to socialism. Why, since it was people calling themselves socialists who advocated the reforms, should they too become socialists and not turn against the idea, instead?

Moreover, under Trotsky's model of revolution, the only way the working class could come to socialist consciousness is through a revolution if made by the minority with themselves as its leaders. This explains about needing to be where the mass of the working class is. It is why a supposedly revolutionary party should be with the masses, rather than trying to get the masses to change their minds and be with it. They do not want workers to change their minds, merely to become followers. The efforts of parties like the IBT are not geared towards changing minds or raising revolutionary class-consciousness.

To remain socialist, a party must seek support solely on the basis of a socialist programme. History showed the fate of the social democratic parties, which, despite a formal commitment to socialism as an 'ultimate goal', admitted non-socialists to their ranks and sought non-socialist support for a reform programme of capitalism rather than a socialist programme. In order to maintain their non-socialist support, they were forced to drop all talk of socialism and become even more openly reformist.

Alan Johnstone

Socialist Party of Great Britain

No bridge

Hape Breitman criticises Tina Becker for her description of Trotsky's *Transitional programme* ('Danger of honest opportunism', June 3). But Becker's description is correct.

Hape believes that the *TP* is only reformist in the hands of those revolutionaries who wish to apply it in that way. This is wrong. Tina is right to point precisely to the historical setting in which the *Transitional programme* is located, or, more importantly, the setting that Trotsky and his comrades believed themselves to be in.

Tina is right that outside that setting - which is essentially a near revolutionary situation - the demands in the *Transitional programme* are, at best, nothing more than reforms and, at worst, meaningless or even reactionary. The whole point was that, under those revolutionary conditions, a working class mobilised to fight for these demands would move from simple reforms to a confrontation with the state itself. But it should be obvious from that perspective alone that in order for that to be the case the working class itself has already to be at a high state of mobilisation and class-consciousness. Taken on their own, the demands of the *Transitional programme* are indeed nothing more than reforms, which have more or less probability of being won, depending upon the situation. In Italy, the *scala mobile* was a sliding scale of wages that existed for years without moving the class-consciousness of Italian workers forward one jot. The same was true of the sliding scale of wages introduced by the Tory Heath government in Britain during the 1970s.

Take what Trotsky says himself about the demand in the *Transitional programme* for the nationalisation of the banks: "However, the statisation of the banks will produce these favourable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers."

But, as I said, this implies that before raising this demand there is a realistic prospect of workers at least struggling to seize power - ie, a revolutionary situation. We are clearly far from such a situation today and so raising such demands is at best reformist, and at worst utopian and reactionary. It essentially means, for example, at the moment giving left cover to the actions of the bourgeois state when they do carry out such nationalisation in the interests of capital.

Similarly, speaking of workers' control, Trotsky writes: "To break the resistance of the exploiters, the mass pressure of the proletariat is necessary." Again he is writing about conditions under which he believes that such mass pressure is a realistic prospect, not simply a pipe dream that will be somehow magically summoned up as a result of chanting a mantra of demands.

The same can be said about the workers' government. Who today would comprise this workers' government? Would it be New Labour? Would it be John McDonnell and Diane Abbott? Are there sufficient numbers even of 'left' MPs to comprise such a government? Or is this workers' government somehow going to arise again magically by raising transitional demands in the correct order? Will it be made up of representatives of the left sects? In that case, they would need to show they can win more support from the workers than the 75 votes achieved by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the recent general election!

No, the task of Marxists is not to simply treat old documents like the *Transitional programme* as though they were sacred texts, but to use the method of Marx and Engels to

understand the historical conditions we live in today, and to develop our programme and tactics accordingly. In 1938, Trotsky believed that capitalism was in its death agony, hence the *Transitional programme*. He was wrong. Capitalism is even less in its death agony today, and the revolutionary forces of the working class are much, much weaker than they were in 1938. Trying to apply the failed perspectives of that period today is ridiculous.

Transitional demands were described as being like a bridge that leads the working class from the reformist demands of the minimum programme to the revolutionary perspective of the maximum programme. The problem is that a bridge is only of use if there is a road to that bridge. Today not only is there no road to the bridge, but there is not even a path to a road to the bridge.

Arthur Bough
email

Own hands

Whether you like it or not, the euro is in meltdown. Now whether imperialism is dominant isn't the issue *per se*, because imperialism will be dominant until capitalism is overthrown globally. One doesn't put the cart before the horse.

We can't expect the world revolution to solve our immediate problems without raising concrete demands - not philosophical abstentionism, which is the professional stock trade of every Stalinist huckster. There is escape from imperialism and, with its land seizures of white-owned farms, Zimbabwe has shown that it has taken its destiny into its own hands and very soon it is going to take over white-owned mines.

Greece has to follow the Argentinian path of restoring its currency as a first step and cancelling all foreign debts overnight. This is what the situation demands now and all those who don't demand it want foreign creditors paid - ie, imperialism.

The fact is - and this is undisputable - that the organised forces of the Greek left (KKE and Syriza) are acting as props to the International Monetary Fund-European Union junta. They march workers like Humpty Dumpty up to the wall only to march them down again. They have no solution to the crisis other than repeating stereotypes about capitalist boom and bust and, whether in the EU or out of it, imperialism dominates. Despite the numbers on all the general strikes and demos, they have been unable to stop any measures. When the masses act on their own and stay on the streets, the left will probably re-emerge in their classic role as ministers of some coalition government, as they did in 1989.

But today there is a big class difference. The crisis ain't going on vacation. Club Med is bust. So is the euro. So is the left. What comes next will be determined by living social forces. This ain't a rerun of the 1930s. It will be much worse.

VN Gellis
email

Sexist clichés

Dave Douglass's response (Letters, June 17) to my letter (June 10) sadly uses the very clichés that I pointed out in the first place.

The labelling of arguments specifically in the interests of working class women as middle class diversions from the class struggle was already a well-worn rhetorical device when Harry Quelch and Hubert Bax of the Social Democratic Federation used it against the suffragettes. The

tactic culminated in the defeat of George Lansbury, who stood on a pro-suffrage platform and who East End dockers, therefore, did not support. The Tory candidate was duly elected. Loving your work, comrades.

Turning to the case of two 10-year-old boys found guilty of the attempted rape of an eight-year-old girl, I find it disturbing that so many of your contributors are so keen to defend the predatory sexual behaviour of men and boys, and are prepared to stoop to the level of the most reactionary elements to do so - eg, 'she changed her story', 'they believed that she had consented'. Why no mention of provocative clothes? Richard Littlejohn, your work here is done.

Close reading of my original letter will show that I said the state's response to sexual violence is inadequate. It does not follow that I support the tired libertarianism too often espoused by contributors to this paper. The analysis of gender and sexuality expressed is woefully undeveloped and inevitably results in the careless reliance on unchallenged sexism and homophobia.

Heather Downs
email

Budget attacks

In the June 22 'emergency budget', chancellor George Osborne claimed that everybody would have to take some of the pain, but the rich would take a bigger share of the burden than the poor. Indeed, the 'red book' gives figures for 2012-13 which purport to support this claim, but this is before most of the welfare cuts kick in and before child tax credits to the lowest paid are withdrawn. He's giving big handouts to business, and even the 'attacks' on the rich are more designed for public relations purposes than to raise revenue. The bank levy will raise a mere £2.4 billion.

The hard questions have been kicked into the long grass - the autumn pensions review, where the coalition government's committee chaired by Labour's John Hutton will report on how to massively cut the cost of public sector pensions in September. There will be a spending review report-back in October, which is when we'll get some idea what these 25% worth of cuts will be. That will be when the shit really does hit the fan.

Steve Wallis
Manchester

Summer Offensive

Fantastic start

A group of comrades were swapping anecdotes in the pub after the June 19 CPGGB aggregate and launch of our 25th Summer Offensive. The conversation drifted round to the rest of the left's rather odd attitude to our organisation's annual fundraising campaign and the lurid tales told in the past about the sources of our funds. To laughter, one comrade listed some of the more wacky explanations on offer over the years.

Apparently, our party leadership once instructed student comrades to give up their digs and sardine themselves into an industrial squat in Brixton. Jack Conrad was, in fact, a descendent of the novelist Joseph Conrad and was able to dip into the literary estate of his illustrious ancestor when the organisation was a little strapped for cash. Conrad also was said to own a nationwide chain of high street dry cleaners - that's Jack, not Joseph, of course.

Now all of these had a small nugget of truth secreted beneath the hillock of crap, the comrade explained. For example, it had to be conceded that Jack Conrad had once lived *above* a dry cleaners. The only accusation that had ever really flummoxed him was the rather gruesome notion that some of our people had sold their livers - although, it dawned on him as he spoke that "we did have a comrade who once advertised a *Hammond* organ for sale. Perhaps someone read it too quickly and saw 'human' ..."

Our comrades have been inventive and selfless over a quarter-century of SOs. But no-one has ever sold a body part, to my certain knowledge - their own or anyone else's. As we square up to the next two months of hard work to achieve our collective goal of £25k by August 14, rather less dramatic plans are being hatched by comrades to hit their personal targets. Of course, our people will to some extent be cutting back on personal consumption.

However, we try to make the two months of the SO an opportunity for comrades to turn outwards, to engage with the sympathising periphery our organisation and its paper has built around itself over the years.

So, in addition to World Cup sweepstakes and sponsored events of one sort and another, many comrades reading these words can expect a party mail-out plopping onto their doormats or into their in-box and perhaps a phone call from a CPGGBer looking to bring a little more post-emergency budget financial pain into their lives - but in a rather better cause, I'm sure comrades will agree.

The individual pledges from our comrades currently total £16,870 - which compares favourably with the £14k of initial pledges in the first week of the 2009 campaign. Similarly, the first week of this year's SO beats last year's equivalent period hands down. Our comrades and readers have donated £4,551 this year already, compared to £1,396 12 months ago. A fantastic start that bodes well for the campaign as a whole - in 2009 we were able to smash through our £25k target and forge on to over £28,000, despite the slower start. Perhaps £30k beckons this year, comrades?

Special mention goes to comrade PK for his donation of £1,000 in the form of a new computer and software for the party office. Particular thanks also go to comrades ST (£280), MM (£30), CG (£35), PS (£50) and WD (£50). In addition, well done to those comrades - BL in particular - who undertook a badge-making marathon to fulfil some large orders in double-quick time, raising £400 towards their various targets in the process.

Well over £4k in the first week of the 2010 SO, comrades! Can we keep up the pace and take another large chunk out of the total? Watch this space ...

Howard Roak

AGGREGATE

Labour Party and communist strategy

Is there space within Labour to struggle for democracy and a left revival? Peter Manson reports on the CPGB debate

The June 19 aggregate of CPGB members focused on the strategic question of the Labour Party and the attitude of communists to Labour and Labourism.

Comrade Jack Conrad opened the debate with a restatement of the CPGB belief that Labour, despite the overwhelming dominance of its bourgeois pole since Tony Blair and New Labour, remains a bourgeois workers' party. What is more, with its defeat in the general election and its replacement by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, we should expect a revival in the party's working class pole.

Already rightwing Labour leaders have responded to the coalition programme of deep, immediate cuts by posing left - stating their opposition on the grounds that it is the poor who will be hardest hit. As these cuts begin to have their effect on jobs, pay, working conditions and benefits, there is bound to be resistance from our class. The unions will surely organise days of action and protest strikes, and Labour leaders could well feature on the platforms of their demonstrations.

Comrade Conrad, looking back to the formation of the Labour Party, reminded the meeting that it was the product not only of the trade unions, but of the organised left, such as it was in 1900 - including the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation (later to become the British Socialist Party). Lenin supported Labour's affiliation to the Second International and, following the Russian Revolution, the party adopted the 'socialist' clause four both as "an anti-Bolshevik antidote" and "a concession to the left", said comrade Conrad.

With the foundation of the Communist Party in 1920, Lenin urged the CPGB to apply for affiliation to Labour - the CPGB's largest component, the BSP, had indeed been an affiliate, but the application of the CPGB was consistently rejected by the Labour right. Nevertheless, individual communists were Labour members and over the years many were elected as Labour councillors and MPs. The CPGB exerted a strong influence over the Labour left, not least through the *Sunday Worker* (circulation: 100,000) and the National Left Wing Movement, which enjoyed the backing of the most militant wards and constituency Labour parties.

Today, continued the comrade, Labour is "still fundamentally the same beast". The overwhelming majority of unions are still affiliated and class-conscious workers still regard it as their party - however grudging their support, they still turn out to vote for it, as was demonstrated at the election, when long queues formed unexpectedly in many working class areas (so much so that many were turned away, not able to vote).

Our view has always been that the Labour Party is a strategic question for the British revolution. Crucially the task for communists is to positively overcome Labourism. And so it remains today. Which is why the development of a strategic approach (as opposed to short-term tactics) is needed. Comrade Conrad

said that there was no reason in principle why the Labour Party could not play a positive role in the battle for socialism. But that would only happen if Labour was transformed into what it was originally designed to be. That is, a united front of the entire working class, with affiliations from trade unions, socialist societies, co-ops and political groups and parties. Hence the bar on political affiliations, not least from communists, had to be reversed - something that would be possible only through the democratisation of the entire labour movement, crucially the trade unions.

The comrade emphasised that he was talking about what needs to be fought for, not what would happen. It is inevitable that the pro-capitalist right will oppose democracy in the movement and will do its damndest to block any advance of the revolutionary left in the Labour Party. But if the revolutionary left was successful that would mean a decisive split with the pro-capitalist right. In that case the Labour Party would become a united front which had amongst its affiliates a mass Communist Party.

The last thing the CPGB envisaged was a "smash and grab raid" on Labour, said comrade Conrad. But we would do all we could to aid the struggle of the Labour left in its fight for party democracy. Such a struggle, if successfully waged, would open up a space for Marxism within the party. And we would certainly want to give every support to Labour Party Marxists if, for example, there was a move to set up an openly Marxist Labour Party publication.

While most CPGB comrades are agreed that Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party, Nick Rogers thought that its enthusiastic adoption of neoliberalism, plus its changed membership, had called that definition into question. Nevertheless, continued trade union affiliation clearly meant that Labour was still a site for struggle and in his view it remains a working class party. He agreed that the general election had seen a big increase in the Labour vote in working class areas, compared with the previous year's European poll.

However, comrade Rogers was puzzled by what seemed to him the "strategic perspective for propping up a mass Labour Party" that comrade Conrad was proposing. But he accepted that we need to engage more closely with Labour and described such an orientation as a "turn to mass work in a small way".

Comrade Yasmine Mather also thought that Labour's embrace of privatisation and the market marked a significant change. Nor could the support of capitalists like Rupert Murdoch and Alan Sugar be ignored, in the context of a decline in union funding. Comrade Mather said she could not believe the Labour leadership would allow any space for left comrades to argue for democracy.

On the other hand, Jim Gilbert asserted that Labour was most definitely a site for struggle, while Mike Macnair explained why he thought the 'bourgeois workers' party' description is still appropriate. For him it evoked not just a struggle between left and right, but constant movement and fluidity. For example, Labour in

opposition has to recapture its base, which means that the right has to start talking left - as it is already doing in claiming to oppose government cuts.

Comrade Macnair stressed that campaigning for Labour Party democracy was not a waste of time. A struggle to overturn the bans and proscriptions had the potential to transform Labour into what it has pretended to be - a party of the whole class.

Comrade Conrad intervened again to state, in response to comrade Rogers' point, that Labour could never be the main vehicle for socialism. But it could be a weapon in the struggle for working class power. He pointed out that the affiliation of unions to a Communist Party could never even be contemplated, yet communists need to develop an organised relationship with the unions. Why could this not come about in part through the Labour Party?

Comrade Rogers came back to say that in his opinion there was "no possibility" of Labour becoming a broad workers' party. In fact he wondered if to advocate such a thing was to argue for a "halfway house" - something that the CPGB has consistently opposed. But Stan Kelsey pointed out that we never seek to create halfway houses - we always fight for the kind of party workers need, a Communist Party. However, that certainly does not preclude intervening in them when they are created by life itself.

In parallel with this debate over strategy, questions of tactics were raised by comrades. As comrade Gilbert said, that was unavoidable. Tina Becker was the first to raise the need to intervene in the current leadership contest, particularly since there will be a left candidate, Diane Abbott, on the ballot paper. But comrade Mather described Abbott as a "leftist Blairite" and wondered how it would be possible for communists to support her candidature when she had a totally different view to ours not only on Labour democracy, but on the war in Afghanistan. James Turley suggested that our support for Abbott should be conditional - we should back her only if she came out for an immediate withdrawal of British troops.

Phil Kent's view was that there should be a "very big 'but'" if we say 'Vote Diane Abbott', but comrade Rogers thought that it was important to engage with sections of the Labour left who are backing her. This would give us an opportunity to develop our study of the Labour Party.

However, comrade Conrad pointed out that Abbott was trying to promote herself, not any left fightback inside Labour. While we should call for a vote for her, her campaign did not provide communists and Labour Party Marxists with a big opportunity at all. The leadership contest was an example of the right "adjusting to post-Brown". Comrade Macnair stated that our main concern should not be the immediate question of Diane Abbott, but our entire strategic orientation to Labour in view of that party's expected sharp move to the left.

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: CPGB fringe at Marxism, room B111, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1.

Saturday July 3, 5pm: 'Green betrayal in Iran'. Speaker: Yasmine Mather (chair, Hands Off the People of Iran).

Sunday July 4, 5pm: 'Bash the fash? The BNP, EDL and the tactical blunders of the left'. Speaker: Mike Macnair (CPGB).

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 features 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 June 29, 6.15pm: 'Revolution in Judea'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Tuesday July 6, 6.15pm: Annual General Meeting.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Defend state education

Thursday June 24, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, London SW1. Speakers include Christine Blower (NUT), Chris Keates (NASUWT), Christina McAnea (Unison).

Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: office@antiacademies.org.uk.

Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 26, 11am: Annual conference, South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes Kings Cross, St Pancras). To register send £5 to NSSN, PO Box 58262, London N1P 1ET, with your details, including workplace and union. Branch or workplace sponsorship requested - suggested minimum £20. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: info@shopstewards.net.

No to EDL

Saturday June 26, 1.30pm: Demonstration, outside Wembley Arena, Engineers Way, London HA9.

Tuesday June 29, Rally, Guildhall, Swansea.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.org.uk.

Stop Israeli demolitions

Sunday June 27, 3pm: Public meeting, St Mary's Church Polygon, St Mary's Road, Ealing, London W5. Salim and Arabiya Shawamreh tell their story of the repeated demolitions by the Israeli authorities.

Organised by West London Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Israeli Campaign against House Demolitions: psewestlondon@googlemail.com.

Afghanistan and Trident

Monday June 28, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London SW1. Scrap Trident, bring the troops home. Speakers: Jeremy Corbyn, Paul Flynn, Lindsey German, Andrew Murray, Kate Hudson, Military Families Against the War.

Organised by CND and Stop the War: 020 7801 2768.

Solidarity with Honduran people

Monday June 28, 4.30pm: Picket, Honduran embassy, 115 Gloucester Place, London W1 (nearest tubes: Baker Street, Marylebone) First anniversary of rightwing coup.

Organised by Latin American Workers Association: www.lawas.org.uk.

Right to Work

Monday June 28, 7pm: Meeting, Plowmans room, Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford. Speakers include Chris Bamberg, RTW national secretary. Organised by Right to Work: 07986 085162.

Louder than words

Tuesday June 29, 7pm: Meeting, Committee room 8, House of Commons. With women central to the six-week hunger strike at Yarl's Wood detention centre. Hosted by John McDonnell.

Organised by All African Women's Group and Black Women's Rape Action Project: 020 7482 2496.

Marxism 2010

Thursday July 1 - Monday July 5, SWP summer school. Various venues in central London. Debate 'Ideas to change the world' with speakers from all over the world, plus a wide range of cultural events. Organised by Socialist Workers Party: info@marxismfestival.org.uk.

Shrewsbury 24

Saturday July 3, 10.30am: March, assemble Abbey Foregate car park, Shrewsbury. Followed by social event at the Unison club. Speakers include Ricky Tomlinson and Bob Crow.

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: info@shopstewards.net.

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.

BUDGET

War on the working class

The 'nasty medicine' served up by George Osborne and the coalition government will provoke resistance and pull the Labour Party to the left, predicts **Eddie Ford**

When the capitalist economic-financial system went into near global meltdown, and catastrophe was only narrowly averted by frantic and massive state intervention, it was always going to be the working class that would have to pay the price. We would have to carry the can, not the capitalists and bankers - the supposed masters of the universe - who lost control of *their* system. Well, we are now getting our first glimpses of what the new age of austerity will be like - when, to use the words of David Cameron, the "rubber really hits the road".

So this week chancellor George Osborne delivered his first ever budget, widely described as a "defining moment" for the new coalition government and the country as a whole. He was the man, of course, who last year hypocritically declared that "we are all in this together" - unless you happen to be wealthy, that is. Like the 23 cabinet ministers who have assets and investments worth more than £1 million, who will hardly have to apply for a crisis loan from social security. Naturally, Osborne's "tough but fair" budget was anything but "fair" - representing an assault, albeit just the initial wave, on the jobs and living standards of the working class. Yes, the age of austerity is going to be extraordinarily nasty.

As predicted, the budget delivered an aggressive mix of anti-working class spending cuts and tax increases - all with the aim of 'balancing the books' by 2016. Hence, as from next January the main rate of VAT will rise from 17.5% to 20% - which, of course, will clobber ordinary workers and the poor, as will the £11 billion cut in overall welfare spending. This will include measures to freeze child benefit for three years, and curtail disability living allowance. Particularly vicious are a raft of proposals to crack down on housing benefit. Quite vindictively, after April 2013 the unemployed will see their benefit cut by 10% after 12 months of claiming Jobseekers Allowance - presumably on the basis that if you make the lazy bastards suffer even more, threaten them with potential homelessness, then that will 'incentivise' them to get off their backsides and find a (non-existent) job. Housing benefit will also be cut for people who are in larger homes than their family size officially "warrants".

Furthermore, from next year - excluding the state pension and pension credit - benefits, tax credits and public service pensions will rise in line with the consumer price index rather than the retail price index, which is generally higher. There will be a two-year pay freeze for public sector workers earning over £21,000, even if last year Osborne was talking about making it £18,000 - presumably a Liberal Democrat-brokered 'compromise'. The government will "accelerate" the increase in state pension age to 66 and Osborne also revealed - a real sting in the tail - that all government departments apart from health and international aid, which are ring-fenced, will face an average 25% cut in their budgets over the course of the parliament, the exact details to be determined by a sweeping "spending review" in the autumn.

George Osborne stated that the UK "can look to a brighter future", thanks to the budget, while even less



George Osborne: cuts, cuts, cuts

convincingly the Liberal Democrat chief secretary to the treasury, Danny Alexander, declared that proposals his party had previously denounced with righteous fury as a "Tory VAT bombshell" were a "necessary" response to the "big gap" in public finances the new government had inherited. Similarly, Vince Cable said his party had helped secure some "very big and progressive steps", such as raising tax thresholds for the lowest-paid and a £150 annual rise in child tax credits for the poorest families.

So, Lib Dem emollients and flummery aside - we have the expected cuts, cuts, cuts. But communists have to ask the basic question, why are they doing this? Indeed, some elements within the establishment think that an austerity drive under today's concrete conditions is tantamount to madness. After all, the UK has only *just* come out of recession officially - though more on a statistical technicality than in substance. The UK's 'growth' barely registers, having expanded at an average rate of 0.30% in the last quarter. In fact, according to the Global Economics Research unit, this "upturn in production may be short-lived, as it was the result of inventory adjustments and a rise in exports prompted by the weak pound". That is, rather than "trying to increase market share by lowering foreign currency prices", exporters instead "have been rebuilding their profit margins" and this - in connection with "weak growth" in Europe, which imports 50% of UK products - "may sooner or later erase the advantage of a lower exchange rate". Furthermore, as a result of the cuts, VAT increase, etc announced in the budget, "we should anticipate an additional drop in consumer spending, which in turn may make companies postpone investments and hiring and slow down the recovery".¹

Hence, it fundamentally goes against all post-war bourgeois orthodoxy - Keynesian economics, in a nutshell - to cut rather than

spend when attempting to crawl out of a recessionary hole. A state in debt is not the same as an individual in debt - quite the opposite. Rather states need urgently to spend, spend, spend in order to stimulate demand and avoid an even deeper recession: keep on spending, keep on investing, so they can eventually recover. And capitalist states have always borrowed to finance their spending and generate economic growth.

However, the Osborne budget signals the opposite approach - to drive down spending and dampen demand. To sit in your hole and just keep digging. So a sharp rise in the number of unemployed therefore means more spending on unemployment benefit and social security - money straight down the drain, in that respect. The unemployed have less ready cash, so obviously spend less. Therefore demand drops, which in turn means there is less incentive for capital to invest in production. The UK could spiral down into the much feared double-dip recession, making George Osborne's "tough" budget an exercise in suicide economics. And, of course, we have seen intimations of this downward spiral in Europe - not just in semi-basket-case economies like Greece or Portugal, but in a 'powerhouse' like Germany, which is now experiencing its own austerity drive.

In fact the budget was driven far more by a political agenda than an economic one. Clearly, the coalition government - and those it represents - sees a golden opportunity to roll back the welfare state and tilt the balance of class forces in favour of capital, the 'deficit crisis' making a perfect excuse for such an offensive. Hence, except for some paltry concessions here and there to those sections of the working class deemed to be the 'worthy poor', what we are confronted with is a naked attempt to shift the deficit burden onto the backs of the working class by ruthlessly driving down living standards. Work longer for less, retire later and poorer - if you

have a job at all, of course, as it is an absolute certainty that unemployment will sharply shoot up as a direct consequence of the approach outlined by Osborne.

Which will please *The Times*, to name but one rightwing rag. Last week it implored Osborne to restore the UK's "credibility with the markets" - by "going further" and "faster" with regards to cuts, meaning that the chancellor "needs to be ambitious with the nasty medicine he offers". For the *Times*, this logically meant that the "greater part of the burden" has to come from "spending cuts", not rises in taxation - therefore "tough action" is required on public sector pay, pensions and benefits, as part of the endeavour to "scale back the middle class welfare state" and set the UK on the glorious path to a "low tax economy".² Sections of the ruling class *resent* spending money on the working class and have said enough is enough. Osborne's budget represents this declaration of war, this desire for red-in-tooth-and-claw class revenge.

Now, the same *Times* editorial noted what it called Labour's "raucous opposition to everything" - ie, to the budget cuts in particular. Of course, when in government, the Labour Party was committed - to all intents and purposes - to the same basic programme as outlined by George Osborne. But, now enjoying the 'luxury of opposition', the Labour leadership is making loud anti-cuts noises. Thus Harriet Harman, acting Labour leader, described the budget as "reckless" - it would stifle economic growth, "throw people out of work" and "hit hardest those who can least afford it". Just as angrily, John Prescott condemned ex-Labour cabinet minister John Hutton - appointed by the coalition government to head a commission into public sector pensions - for being a "collaborator".

Indeed, senior Labour figures are now talking left. The language of resistance. Militancy. Even a whiff of political cordite in the air. Leadership candidate Ed Balls,

speaking on the BBC's Andrew Marr show, condemned "the callousness of the cuts which are being proposed" and the "unfairness" of the VAT rise, as well as the undermining of the recovery and jobs. Balls also slammed Osborne for turning to the likes of Norman Lamont, Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson - "the people who gave us the deflation and the unemployment of the 1980s".³

Needless to say, union leaders have reacted with anger. Unison general secretary Dave Prentis accused the coalition government of "declaring war" on public services, to the extent that the budget would "raise the spectre of breadline Britain" in some parts of the country. Public sector workers, Prentis spat, "will be shocked and angry that they are the innocent victims of job cuts and pay freezes". Prentis is quite right, of course. In reaction, it is inevitable there will be mass fightbacks, including strikes and demonstrations - with left bureaucrats like Prentis, Derek Simpson, Tony Woodley, Mark Serwotka, etc making fiery speeches from the podium denouncing the manifold evils of the Con-Lib government. And, of course, they could well be sharing a platform with the likes of Ed Balls, Harriet Harman and the Milibands - all presenting a new-found left face to the working class.

Herein lies the danger. If form is anything to go by, the comrades in the Socialist Party in England Wales and the Socialist Workers Party, for example, will act as loyal lieutenants of the trade union bureaucracy - which will lend them a spurious legitimacy. Which, of course, was precisely why the SWP's May 22 invasion of the talks between British Airways and Unite negotiators was such a spectacular, and idiotic, own goal. How did such a stunt - which saw a furious Tony Woodley shouting at the comrades - further the SWP's self-professed project of forming a 'united front' with brothers Prentis, Woodley, Simpson, etc?

It is not the role of the left to simply constitute itself as an adjunct of the union bureaucracy - no matter how left it might be posing at any one time. Nor is it our role just to be the most militant proponents of strike action - strikes in and of themselves are not enough - no matter how much we communists fight to build, support and give them direction. Look at Greece: call the general strike, then what? No, we need a strategy leading to an *alternative* society. First and foremost we need to fight for the only political vehicle that can take us there - a united Communist Party, guided by a principled Marxist programme.

As we have seen in the Netherlands and Belgium - which disastrously is on the verge of breaking apart - so far it has been the far right which has benefited from the economic crisis. But with the correct tactics and strategy - the right programme - it can be the revolutionary left in Britain and elsewhere which can take leadership of the struggles.

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Notes

1. www.tradingeconomics.com/Economics/GDP-Growth.aspx?Symbol=GBP.
2. *The Times* June 19.
3. For the full transcript, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/andrew_marr_show/8750245.stm.

WORLD CUP

Reclaim the game

A festival of sporting genius, or an incitement to chauvinism? James Turley looks at the contradictions of the football extravaganza

The world's eyes are on South Africa - and not because of Aids epidemics or the legacy of apartheid. The French nation is locked in mutual recrimination, the English narrowly avoiding the same fate by hanging on for a long-awaited victory against Slovenia, and the Americans euphoric after scoring a last-kick winner.

It can only be the latest FIFA football World Cup, which, as ever, has had far greater impact on mass consciousness than one would necessarily expect; it is, after all, only 22 grown men kicking a modern analogue for an inflated pig's bladder around the field. The front pages and the back pages of British newspapers now look awfully similar.

Millions around the world are glued to the television; they follow their own national teams with the pallor of high anxiety, and they watch the other major teams in the hope of seeing something 'magical' from the game's current crop of superstars - Fernando Torres and David Villa, the Spanish striking partnership; Lionel Messi, the young Argentine widely touted as the best player in the world; and others.

The general response of the left has been predictable - which is to say, woefully myopic. Typical in this regard is the Socialist Workers Party, whose regular 'What do socialists say?' (nothing of note, it often seems) last week turned its attention to the World Cup. Except that it was not the football it was mainly interested in: - the appearance of the St George's cross all over the country (showing more loyalty than England's mediocre performances strictly warrant) is the phenomenon of most concern to the comrades.

"Many people simply don't care about the event," writes the unnamed author. "For others, the sudden explosion of the England flag on cars, houses and in pubs is intimidating - because of the history of violence and racism associated with it." Well, excuse me, but I know and have heard of no-one making that association. Everyone in the real world seems to think it is connected to support for a national sports team.

Do not the many 'ordinary people' implicated in this 'intimidation' realise that it is a ploy to enlist their support for the nation-state? "Our rulers encourage nationalism in sport to foster a sense of national unity. They created international sporting competitions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to do just this." "Nationalism, however it is dressed up" - presumably inclusive of football strips - "draws us closer to our rulers and divides us from other workers" (*Socialist Worker* June 19).

It is worth reminding ourselves that *Socialist Worker* is nominally pitched at the broad masses; that its articles are written in the childish argot of *The Sun* or the *Mirror* (albeit without the latter's sense of humour). Ever more incomprehensible is the SWP's schoolma'amish finger-wagging over sporting events, which is presumably a turn-off not just for England supporters, but the many foreign nationals living and working here.

In cities like London, with substantial migrant communities, the English flag is far from the only one

bedecking cars and homes. These others are at least not accused of 'intimidation' - only the cross of St George is bloodstained enough for that - but they fall under a critique of nationalism so cumbersome and broad-brushed (not to say hypocritical) that nothing escapes.

It cannot be denied that the manufacturers and purveyors of national flags reliably make a killing every four years, and this competition is no exception. Regular as clockwork, the mainstream press laments the far-right associations of the English flag, and urges readers to fly it to show support to our sporting heroes, as well as showing two fingers to fascist versions of the national myth. What the *SW* piece misses is the small matter of, well, *football*.

It is easy enough to put the flag-waving in the context of national chauvinism. The issue is that international sporting competitions are not the only sporting competitions; the World Cup is timed so it does not clash with the majority of national club leagues, for a start, and, however many otherwise uninterested people are swept into football fever by current events in South Africa, the hundreds of thousands of regular football fans are mostly characterised by their attachment to a particular club. Club football dominates the sport's calendar, and indeed generates the bulk of its income.

If supporting England at football has certain things in common with supporting the plucky Brits in Afghanistan, then it also has a lot in common with the gleefully irrational loyalty that people feel towards their chosen clubs. To use an SWP-friendly example, an old BBC documentary on the rise of the British National Party featured an activist describing his friend's explanation of football support to his young son:

"Do we hate Pakis?" asked the father.

"Yeah!", replied the child.

"Do we know why?"

"No!"

"Well, it's the same with Blackburn Rovers."

That says an awful lot about racism, of course - but it also tells us a thing or two about football support. It presents itself as immutable - a voluntary but permanent commitment. It is openly irrational - and it interacts with political commitments without being in charge of them. It is also self-aware - nobody *really* thinks that their connection to the Manchester United starting 11 is in any way substantial, but that just cements the relationship with other fans.

It is sustained, rather, through

a whole cultural apparatus - from official kits to fanzines, from match-day attendance to the chants on the terraces. There is nothing about kicking a ball which in and of itself demands attention. It is given a significance in its presentation - in the form both of an industrial machine and an aesthetic spectacle.

This whole process is politically ambiguous. A simple survey of football clubs in Europe reveals many with openly rightwing cultures - Lazio in Italy, for instance - and others whose fans tend to be zealously leftwing - Livorno in Italy, St Pauli in Germany and so on. Football violence, on the continent in particular, often has an underlying political charge - the St Pauli ultras are militantly anti-fascist, in drastic contrast to some of their opponents.

That pattern is not so obvious at international level, barring certain tense regional clashes. But the problem remains: supporting England involves the *same* basic rituals as supporting Livorno - buying the kit, chanting in the stands ... Football nationalism is not a simple reflection of 'normal nationalism', but is tied up with football *as a sport*, and its whole associated culture - something supported by the fan in its own right, before any particular club or nation. (Indeed, the reactionary tendencies here alone are hardly limited to nationalism - sexism is equally obvious, for a start.)

So, as it happens, is the somewhat angsty opening round of games in the World Cup. While major contenders like Argentina and Brazil found their form, most of the first-round matches were marked by a dearth of goals, or much excitement of any kind. One of the teams most obviously paralysed on the big stage was England - as ever, the

club form of individual players has failed to translate into international success. The United States' draw with England, gifted to them by a cringe-worthy goalkeeping error, was ironically reported as a victory by Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post*; Algerians also celebrated their own nil-all draw with the three lions.

The background to this is the state of English football as a whole. The last few decades have seen the gentrification of the national leagues, especially the top-flight Premier League. The total dominance of Manchester United in the 1990s slowly called forth an elite layer of super-wealthy clubs; gate prices soared, and ever more space in the ground leased permanently to sponsors and investors.

Those clubs, and aspirant challengers, became outlets for the vast amount of excess cash generated by the financial boom that so spectacularly ended with the collapse or near collapse of major banks in the USA. Now that the financial system is in crisis, so are the contingent outlets for its fictional values. Manchester United are in debt up to their eyeballs; Liverpool, the previous alpha-male in the top flight, is in an even worse situation, with every major team in Europe keeping an eye on players they may be forced to sell. At both have the club's owners come to be widely despised among supporters at large.

Fans feel alienated from owners that increasingly run their clubs to please corporate vultures, taking mass support for granted. They feel alienated from grotesquely wealthy players treated as generic celebrities, and spoilt multi-billionaires who act like they own the place - because they do. The discontent is obvious - in contrast to the overmoneied premiership, the English Football League recorded its best total gate figures in years for the

2009-10 season, with refugees from the top-flight teams no doubt widely in evidence. The Championship, directly below the Premier League and above the Football League in the hierarchy, is the fourth most watched football division in Europe (at the ground, that is, rather than on TV). There too, however, football fans will find sadly familiar tales of financial stupidity and bureaucratic decay. Even the Labour Party caught wind of it: its election manifesto pledged to allow fan buyouts of football clubs.

As for the World Cup, the story is widely reported on the left - hosting the tournament is an enormous white elephant, taking billions from the public purse in a country noted for its monumental inequality. The stadia were constructed in many cases by evicting shanty dwellers in discomfitingly apartheid-like fashion. Even now, the population does not seem to get a look in. Again and again, viewers tune in to see empty seats framing the action - tickets are out of the financial reach of South African workers and unemployed, and even the travelling fan contingents are smaller than expected. Net tourism in South Africa, incredibly, is down compared to the same period last year.

What *should* socialists have to say about the World Cup? Only that it, and the bloated football industry at large, is a clear example of how the rule of capital ruins *everything*. Even in the boom-times of the 1990s, capitalism only delivered harassment and price hikes to supporters. Now, a financial albatross hangs over everyone, and attention inevitably drifts from the pitch to the boardrooms, where the mundane matters of success and failure are increasingly decided.

Football is a folk tradition, above all - no matter how many millions of other people's pounds go into buying Fernando Torres, it is a game that at its most basic level requires two goal markers, two players and a ball. It is low culture in the strict sense - a form deeply rooted in the popular masses; firstly peasants in medieval Europe, and today large sections of all classes. The game - all its clubs, leagues and competitions - needs to be in the hands of the players and the supporters, not philistine chairmen and faceless bureaucrats •

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John Terry: millionaire watched by millions

PROGRAMME

Socialism is a form of class struggle

Why can't the proletariat abolish capitalism immediately on taking power? The answer lies in the need for transition, argues **Mike Macnair**

This is a rather belated reply to Paul Cockshott's critique of my book *Revolutionary strategy*.¹ In spite of the lapse of time it is worth replying, because Cockshott's is in a certain sense the most serious and substantial criticism of the book so far offered. It has the great merit of (mostly) addressing my actual arguments, rather than simply assuming that I am a Kautskyite, as several reviewers have. Comrade Cockshott makes some serious and valid points about the question of democracy and concludes with a point with which I entirely agree: "to abolish the wages system we must first win the battle of democracy."

Comrade Cockshott makes, in substance, three general criticisms of my book. The first concerns its "the lack of a theory of socialism" - meaning both a theory of the USSR and similar regimes, and a theory of the economic forms we should be fighting for as the immediate replacement of capitalism. In this connection, he disagrees with my characterisation of bureaucrats, managers and so on, as a section of the social class of petty proprietors.

The second, which appears to be a small point but is actually much larger, concerns the theory of the *bourgeois* state: he says that my account of this misses the power to tax, the (connected) "monopoly of armed force" and the parliamentary form. A connected issue is that of the existence of an international *hierarchy* of capitalist states: he points to Sweden as a counter-example to the connection I make between the ability to grant reforms and state status in the global pecking order of states.

The third criticism and the most elaborated in his article is that - like Kautsky - I buy into the parliamentary form. This, he argues, is a form of oligarchy; and the word *republic* means a Roman-style oligarchy, as opposed to what communists should be fighting for, which is an Athenian-style democracy.

There is a fourth, underlying theoretical issue which affects all these questions. This is about how to understand the historical *transitions* between different social formations: antiquity to feudalism, feudalism to capitalism, capitalism to communism. In my view humanity's experience of previous historical transitions should affect our understanding of the last of those listed, the historical transition now in process; and this understanding has implications for present programmatic proposals.

My response will be in two parts. Comrade Cockshott's first criticism, the "lack of a theory of socialism", is partially legitimate, but shows a misunderstanding of what the book is basically about. However, one of his points under this head - the question of the class character of the labour and Soviet bureaucracies - is a really important question. To respond to it demands addressing my fourth issue, the general nature of historical transitions between modes of production and social formations; then the question of the petty-proprietor class, and its general implications for proposals for post-capitalist economic order. From this follows the question why I call bureaucrats and managers 'petty proprietors of intellectual property', and the implications of this analysis for understanding the Soviet and similar regimes.

At this point it is necessary to return - in the second part - to comrade Cockshott's second point, the issue



Taking power in Europe: contradictory regime

of the nature of the capitalist state and the hierarchy of capitalist states. In this context and that of what has gone before it is finally possible to address the issue of *present* proposals for *political order* to replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Theory of socialism

Comrade Cockshott complains that my book is characterised by "a failure to have any positive theory of socialism. This lack of a theory of socialism is first evident in the non-treatment of the history of the USSR and China, and later in a failure to spell out what sort of economy the socialist movement should be fighting for."

It is quite true that the book has not much to say about the USSR and its satellites and imitators, less about their economic arrangements than their politics, and still less about "what sort of economy the socialist movement should be fighting for".

However, the reason for this is that I was not attempting in the book to write a general theory of everything. Rather, in the series of articles which formed the basis of the book, I was originally responding to the debate on strategy in the French *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*. This response developed into an attempt to discriminate the *minimum* elements of Marxist strategy which could form the basis of practical unity of the Marxists: as opposed, on the one hand, to sects formed on the basis of a theory of everything and, on the other, to 'broad left' formations which end up as tails of the social-liberals.

I am extremely cautious about creating a schema of "what sort of economy the socialist movement should be fighting for". There are two reasons for this. The first I argued in an article three years ago on the maximum-minimum form of programme.² The point was drawn from a letter of Marx to Sorge in 1880 on the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*, which appears to be the first use of "minimum programme".

Marx wrote: "With the exception of some trivialities ... the economic section of the very brief document consists solely of demands that have spontaneously arisen out of

the labour movement itself".³ Why did Marx insist on the 'economic section' consisting of "demands that have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself"? The answer is that this approach is counterposed to utopian schemes *about the nature of the organisation of the future communist society and about the transition* which were then current.

The essence of the 'Marxist' policy was that the working class needed to take political power, and for that purpose to struggle for the democratic republic - as opposed to the Proudhonists' fetishism of cooperatives, the Lassalleans' state-sponsored cooperatives, and the Bakuninists' fetishised general strike. Given that the proposal was that the working class take over the running of society, it was *the working class itself* which had to decide on economic and other policy priorities.

This was the approach of the First International: it was founded on a minimal set of claims about the need of the working class to organise, and the First International itself then discussed what concrete working class policy should be in relation to several areas.

We are obviously not in this situation today: there *are* mass working class trade unions, parties and so on, but they are controlled by bureaucracies loyal to the capitalist state. Hence Marxists are forced to organise independently of the pro-capitalist labour bureaucracy. So, while we cannot substitute for the decisions of the working class as a whole on how to reshape the economy, we are forced to put forward our own proposals for discussion in the workers' movement.

Within this framework, however, a second and less fundamental point remains. Today's splintered, self-identified Marxist left argues for the overthrow of capitalism. It does so in diverse ways, often ones which abandon Marx's and Engels' *class-political* conception in favour of popular frontism. But there are also entirely legitimate differences within the self-identified Marxist left about political economy issues. These affect the immediate economic implications of the overthrow of the capitalist power. My book is - as I said before

- about the potential *minimum basis* of Marxist unity: not about a global alternative on everything.

In relation to the USSR and its satellites and imitators, this same point about the book meant that I drew two, and only two, very basic lessons from their failure. The first lesson is that the proletariat needs to *take* power on a scale which can defeat a centralised imperialist financial and military blockade. I think that this point - that the proletariat needs to aim to take power on a continental scale, not in a single country which can be blockaded until it is forced to give in - is agreed with comrade Cockshott.

The second lesson is that - contrary to the ideas propagated by Lenin, Trotsky and others in 1918-21 - the proletariat needs political democracy if it is to control a state. I think this point is agreed, too, though we have significant differences on what is meant here by 'political democracy'.

Beyond this point, in my opinion a wide range of opinions as to the nature of the Soviet regime and its satellites and imitators is consistent with a common party affiliation. For example, I personally think that 'Cliff state capitalism' involves false conceptions of both classes and capitalism which are corrosive of the theoretical fundamentals of Marxism. But I would not dream of arguing that holding this theory is inconsistent with membership in a common party.

That said, the question of the bureaucracy is not just a matter of the fate of the USSR and its satellites and imitators. It also concerns the fate of the Second International and of the trade union movement, and is a burning question affecting the left today. The larger question of the class nature of the professional and managerial 'employed middle class', and the question of the place of the petty proprietors in general, also has major implications for what we should be fighting for as the immediate successor of capitalist rule.

Social transitions

In another polemic posted on the *Reality* home page he maintains, comrade Cockshott remarks that his view of historical materialism is influenced by the fact that he is by profession an engineer.⁴ I make no

criticism at all of this. Rather, I have to admit that my view of historical materialism is also affected by my profession: that is, that I am a 'lawyer legal historian'. This background means that I am not, as 'proper historians' mostly are, a 'period specialist'. I routinely work with the *longue durée* (long-term historical phenomena as distinct from the play of short-term events).

This background means that I have never been even slightly tempted by what is now the very common 'academic Marxist' view that pre-capitalist social formations of class rule, though very varied in superstructural forms, are all one at the base - 'tributary' - and do not develop the forces of production. This view is in reality simply flatly inconsistent with the evidence available both from archaeology and from surviving records of lawsuits, and so on.

The converse is that I also reject the view that capitalism is so different and inherits so little from pre-capitalist development that the phenomena of capitalism can be fully explained by the abstract laws of motion of capital developed in Marx's critique of political economy. Historical materialism - or at least the Mediterranean-European historical sequence from slaveowner urbanism, through feudalism, to capitalism - is essential to understanding 'real existing capitalism'.

The pure forms of the abstract dynamics of a society of slaveowners and slaves, or of landowners/clerics and serfs, or of capitalists and workers, are never found in any actual society. They are *abstractions* from the complexity of real, historical social orders, which are essential to grasping the fundamental dynamics of these social orders, not direct descriptions.

Firstly, what is found in the historical evidence is rising slave-based urbanism mixed with earlier social forms; declining slave-based urbanism mixed with proto-feudalism; rising feudalism mixed with survivals of slave-based urbanism; declining feudalism mixed with proto-capitalism; rising capitalism mixed with feudal survivals; and declining capitalism mixed with proto-communism. It is only at its apogee moment that a class regime looks close to its abstract conception; even then, the social order is one *dominated by* slavery, feudalism, capitalism ... not one purely characterised by these relations.⁵

This is because, secondly, petty family production for immediate consumption is a feature of all societies after hunter-gatherer 'primitive communism'. In the imperialist countries it is marginalised into the forms of supplementation of market provisioning through housework, vegetable gardens/allotments, and the ability of rural producers to take for consumption a portion of a product mainly intended for market for direct consumption.

Going along with this, gift exchange persists as an element of the organisation of production in class societies, and remains an important *social form* at the base even in the imperialist countries.⁶ And petty family commodity production for sale into localised markets is an important element of all societies having money or proto-money forms. Again, in those imperialist countries that have not artificially preserved small peasants and artisan food producers (eg,

Britain, US and the Netherlands, as opposed to France, Italy ...) it is a relatively marginal element.

Petty bourgeoisie

The objective, long-run tendency of capitalism is to marginalise petty family production, and this is a contrast with previous forms of class society. It is this tendency which forms the objective basis for both the *possibility* of communism and the *necessity* of communism. Capitalism actually socialises the means of production in its own way: dominance of corporate businesses, etc. It thus tends to render transparent the fact that these are *actually* common assets, worked by forms of cooperation between large numbers of workers, and the capitalists merely thieving managers pilfering from the collective till. This transparency appears precisely when basic or infrastructural firms are at risk of general bankruptcy - as with the banks in the 'credit crunch'.

However, this *long-term* tendency of capitalism is a long way from being completed. This is because of the global scale of the question: still hundreds of millions of Chinese and of Indian peasants, for example. It is also because of counter-tendencies within capitalist dynamics. Luxury and niche markets are occupied by petty bourgeois. And (especially in the countries of the periphery) severe unemployment leads to deproletarianisation, as people abandon hope of finding jobs and scrape a living from gardening, as petty pedlars, from theft, and so on. There is also in every imperialist country substantial state intervention to preserve and promote the middle classes as a political bulwark against the proletariat.

Britain is historically perhaps the country in which capitalist development has gone furthest. Yet there are above 4.5 million small businesses, so that the 'classic' petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists together amount to at least 14.5% of the working-age population. This leaves aside altogether for the moment the question of skills as intellectual property rights and the employed middle classes. For reasons of differences of fertility and mortality between classes, the percentage of children and youth of the petty bourgeoisie is lower, and the percentage of petty bourgeois of pensionable age is higher.

In addition, by virtue of the occupational pensions arrangements in this country, both retired 'classic' petty-bourgeois and retired members of the employed middle class and the upper (skilled) working class become *rentiers* living on the proceeds of savings and investments. Hence in terms of *social self-identification* the percentage of pensioners identifying as small *rentiers*, as opposed to identifying as retired workers, is considerably higher than the combined percentage of 'classic' petty bourgeois and of small *rentiers* in the working-age population.

This is a minority, but it is a non-trivial minority. And the 'classic' petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists together have practical control of significant segments of the means of production which have as yet *not* been concentrated and thereby 'socialised' by capitalist development. Though the businesses in question are largely interstitial, there is considerable potential for economic disruption - ie, the reduction of available use-values - if their owners were to take to sabotage, or even merely to abandon them, as a response to being expropriated or subjected to forced collectivisation.

Agriculture is on the edge of this sector. British 'family farmers' cannot be characterised as peasants or petty bourgeois, since agriculture is now characteristically operated by family

members with very small numbers of permanent workers, but very large amounts of capital in the form of land values, farm buildings and machinery. Only some forms of agriculture - particularly market gardening and fruit-farming - use substantial amounts of casual migrant labour in the harvest period. Again, however, the absence of concentration and the potential for serious economic disruption if a policy of simple expropriation or forced collectivisation were to be adopted is clear.

Once we go beyond Britain to continental Europe, there are in several countries substantial real peasantries and groups of artisan producers, so that the problem is sharper than it is in Britain.

The conclusion from these points is that, assuming the proletariat takes political power in the next 40-50 years, there will still be a substantial period of transition which falls between the complete overthrow of the global capitalist state system and the fully collective appropriation of the means of production (communism). This period of transition is properly the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, the class rule of the proletariat over the surviving petty bourgeoisie and small capital, in a contradictory economic order in which those means of production which the capitalists have already 'socialised' are collectively appropriated, but the participants in this collective appropriation have to *trade with* substantial groups of petty bourgeois and some small capitalists, who are *politically* subordinated to the proletarian majority.

The period can also be called for short-hand 'socialism', as we do in the CPGB *Draft programme*, provided it is clear that by 'socialism' we mean this transitional period of working class rule over other subsisting classes, and not a separate stage standing between the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism. 'Dictatorship of the proletariat' is in my opinion scientifically superior because it expresses the fact that the petty bourgeoisie and small capital continue to exist in this period, but are institutionally *subordinated* to the proletariat as a class.

Knowledge can be power

The same is true of the employed middle classes - and with sharper immediate political consequences. I characterise this group as a segment of the class of petty proprietors (or, traditionally but less scientifically, petty bourgeois): 'petty proprietors of intellectual property'. I argue that the state, corporate and labour (trade union, co-op, party and left group) bureaucracies - including the Soviet bureaucracy - are part of this class segment.

In the book I wrote of the USSR: "What happened instead was to render concrete the 1850s warnings of Marx and Engels against the premature seizure of power in Germany, which formed the basis of Kautsky's caution in the 1890s and 1900s. By choosing to represent the peasantry and other petty proprietors (especially state bureaucrats), the workers' party disabled itself from representing the working class, but instead became a sort of collective Bonaparte."

Comrade Cockshott responds: "... so long as petty peasant production existed, it created wings within the CPs which defended its interest: Bukharin, Gomulka, Deng. But these were just one wing, and in most cases they did not come out on top." And: "The crisis of the socialist system, Poland aside, was not generally precipitated by the demands of petty proprietors in agriculture, and the identification of state bureaucrats with petty proprietors is an unconvincing throwaway phrase, not justified by any argument."

I did not write about this issue at length in the book for the reasons given above. But I have written about it elsewhere: in a review of some books on intellectual property rights in 2003, as a small point in a reply to John Robinson's critique of the *Strategy* book in 2008, and most particularly in a review of David Priestland's *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation*, also in 2008, which formed part of a three-part reply to comrade Tony Clark's defence of Stalinism.⁷ Part of the last is worth repeating; but I would also refer readers to the whole series.

A substantial class of information and skills are part of the means of production. Going back to the stone age, knowing how knap flint gives you variety of tools once you can find a flint. Conversely, if someone gave me a capstan lathe, it would be - to me - a heap of junk, not a means of production, until I learned how to work it. Some 'managerial' skills, of coordinating the work of others, fall into this category: for example, in a car factory, if nobody works out how many screws need to be ordered from the supplier, the factory will run out of screws and cease production.

Capitalism *tends to* socialise information and skills - through general education, through publishing, through replacement of skills by machines and so on. But to the extent that information and skills are not socialised they are private property.

Large property in information takes the form of technical monopolies which receive technical rents (usually patents and other intellectual property rights; but there are also unpatented 'trade secrets' in many machines, which require 'reverse engineering' by skilled engineers to allow duplication of the machine). The tsarist empire specialised in exporting raw materials, mainly grain, in the hope of gaining access to Dutch and British, and later French, intellectual property in various forms. The USSR had to break its back exporting in 1928-31 in order to gain access to US intellectual property in the form of machines.⁸

Under capitalism, small private property in skills or information can in some cases be used to run a small business (like plumbers, dentists or practising lawyers). Similarly, a family farm (or peasant holding) does not just consist of land. It also involves movable capital (animals, etc) and a very wide range of skills. Adam Smith made the point that the farmer or farmworker needs *more* skills than the urban specialist artisan.⁹

In other cases, the collective monopoly of the skill held by a group of people allows them in wage bargaining to insist on some sort of premium over the wage. This premium can be in money; or it can be in better working conditions (white-collar workers), in partial freedom from managerial control, or in managerial control over others.

The classical petty bourgeois "self-exploit": that is, they and their family members often work longer hours for less reward than employed workers. They do so partly in the hope of making the breakthrough to getting rich - for most as illusory as buying lottery tickets. But also, and perhaps mainly, they prefer the (limited) *control* which "running their own business" gives them to the *subordination* of working for wages. This includes control over family members who help in the business - hence petty bourgeois patriarchy; it also involves the exclusion of others from decision-making.

The employed middle class share the classical petty bourgeois aspiration to 'make it big', in this case the hope of climbing the career pyramid to one of the few places at the top. They also share the preference for control over subordination. In their case, however, control is immediately exercised over

others - their subordinates. And what others are to be excluded from is access to information and decision-making. Bureaucrats and managers defend their 'turf' against all-comers. Marx commented on the point in the *Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*.¹⁰ The US government has found it expressed in the 'war on terror' in 'turf wars' between intelligence agencies.¹¹

The proletariat as a class can only defend its interests by collective organisation. If bureaucracy and management are not to be instantly abolished - ie, everyone to take their turn for a month or two as chief of general staff, national statistician and so on - the proletariat needs to *subordinate* the employed middle class to itself. To do so it requires freedom to organise *against* the officials, 'cadres', and so on.

Under capitalism, ownership/possession of information and skills is subordinate to ownership/possession of money liquidity. (This is, in fact, *also* true of ownership/possession both of land and of ships, machinery and so on).

If we take away the capitalist market when there has not already been extensive socialisation of intellectual property (and other small production), we take away with it the dynamic which tends to socialise intellectual property rights, etc. The possessors of small property then confront the rest of the society as monopolists. Unless they are coerced, they will refuse to work until they get what they want - whether it is money, working conditions or being in charge.

Russian Revolution

This is part of what happened to the Russian Revolution. The Russian revolutionaries thought in October 1917 that they were starting the European revolution. When the German workers had not come to their aid by February-March 1918, they were in a situation like cartoon characters who have walked off a cliff and suddenly notice that nothing is holding them up: the economy was collapsing because the possessors of specialist information - whether they were civil servants and army officers, technicians, managers or peasant farmers - were withholding their services from the general economy. To meet this problem the Bolsheviks used coercion (Cheka, hostage-taking and so on). But they *also* had to provide a carrot: and this carrot was concessions to the *spetsy*, which meant the end of workers' control and a return to the subordination of the working class to the managers.

They had also sucked most of the members of the Bolshevik Party into the new state apparatus. As of October 1917 the party had around 250,000 members, mostly workers. As of 1921 it had a slightly larger membership, but now two-thirds composed of state officials.¹² The 'cadres' had become a new section of the intelligentsia - petty private proprietors of information and skills.

Over 1918-21 the freedom of the working class to organise *against* the 'cadres' was taken away by successive bans on parties and then the ban on factions in the Communist Party. As long as formally illegal organising was still possible, the removal of power from the proletariat was not complete. Once the bans were actually carried into practical operation from the later 1920s and enforced by the new economic regime of the plans, nothing was possible but 'court intrigue' within the bureaucracy. Subsequent satellites and imitators of the Soviet regime copied *this* political order.

Of course - as comrade Cockshott says, citing J Arch Getty - sections of workers could mobilise behind one or another court clique and obtain at least temporary sectional gains by doing

so. The same was true in the Chinese 'cultural revolution'.¹³ But that is no more workers' *political power* than the similar ability of medieval peasants to play off parson against squire and so on was peasant political power.

Modern Europe

In modern Europe the level of capitalist socialisation of production is massively higher than in the early 20th century, and still more so than in Russia in 1917. The same is also true of the socialisation of information and skills. Literacy and some degree of formal education are pretty much general. Skills are made available through formal education and training more than by apprenticeship. Much is codified in books or available online.

Even so, however, we are not yet in a position - if capitalist rule was by a miracle overthrown tomorrow - to do without bureaucratic and managerial *spetsy* altogether: that is, for everyone to take their turn for a month or two as chief of general staff, national statistician and so on.

More immediately, there are many more people who are perfectly capable of doing managerial and bureaucratic jobs, of holding political leadership positions and so on than there are jobs for them to do. In the far left, the result is that people are less willing to defer for long periods to bureaucratic dictatorship. But the result is paradoxically negative: the endless splintering of the left groups and the cacophony of 'independent' voices. As long as we do not find ways to overcome this problem we will not even approach the ability to overthrow capitalism.

In sum. Suppose the working class takes power in Europe in the next period. The result will not be an immediate overcoming of class. It will be a *contradictory* regime. Though big capital will be collectivised, there will remain class conflict between the proletariat and what are now the middle classes: both the 'classic' petty bourgeoisie and small capital, and employed middle class. The political forms we fight for as the *immediate* alternative to capitalist rule have to be able to reflect that continuing class conflict and to allow the proletariat to organise for it - including against 'its own' state •

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Notes

1. P Cockshott, 'Democracy or oligarchy?' *Weekly Worker* October 8 2009. A slightly variant version is also available at <http://reality.gn.apc.org/polemic/notesonmncnair.pdf>.
2. 'For a minimum programme!' *Weekly Worker* August 30 2007.
3. Marx to Sorge, November 5 1880: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80_11_05.htm.
4. 'Historical materialism and the repudiation of subjectivism': <http://reality.gn.apc.org/polemic/op-phil.htm>.
5. The appropriate Marxist *method* for approaching class orders is thus that of GEM de Ste Croix *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* New York 1991.
6. M Mauss *The gift* (1923-24) London 2001; M Sahlins *Stone age economics* Chicago 1972; RM Titmuss *The gift relationship* New York 1972; F Adloff, S Mau, 'Giving social ties, reciprocity in modern society' (2006) 68 *European Journal of Sociology* 93-123. I do not mean to endorse the general theoretical *method* of any of these texts, but only to rely on the point of the existence and persistence of gift exchange.
7. 'A bridge too far' *Weekly Worker* December 18 2003; 'Against philosopher kings', December 11 2008; 'Bureaucracy and terror', September 11 2008 - to be read with 'Taking Stalinism seriously', September 4 2008, and 'Stalinist illusions exposed', September 18 2008.
8. See B Kagarlitsky *Empire of the periphery* London 2008.
9. A Smith *Wealth of nations* book 1, chapter 10, part 2: www.adamsmith.org/smith/won-b1-c10-pt-2.htm.
10. K Marx *Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right* Cambridge 1970, pp41-54.
11. Eg. 'Obama sacks intelligence chief after turf wars' *Financial Times* May 21 2010.
12. E Acton *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* London 1990, pp193-94, 207.
13. D Priestland *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation* Oxford 2007 (pp200-210) goes beyond Getty; cf also EJ Perry, Li Xun *Proletarian power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* Boulder 1997.

HISTORY

Homer's 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' in social and historical context

Chris Gray concludes his study of Homer's world-shaping epic. The full version will soon be available from the CPGB website in pamphlet form

As indicated in the first part of this article, Homer's poems are built up from formulaic phrases, set descriptions and stock themes reworded to suit the poet's immediate topic. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have a rich selection of formulaic phrases, or formulae if you prefer. Naturally enough, given the geography of Greece and the subject matter of the poems, the sea is a prime example as subject. Here are nine variations:

1 *polyphloisboio thalassēs* ("of the loud-roaring sea")¹

2 *eis hala dīan* ("into the divine sea")²

3 *thalassa te (w)ēkhēssa* ("and the sounding sea")³

4 *oinopa ponton* ("the wine-faced sea")⁴

5 *hygra keleutha* ("the watery ways")⁵

6 *poliēs halos* ("from out of the grey sea")⁶

7 *para thīna thalassēs euryporoio* ("along the shore of the far-flung sea")⁷

8 *thin' halos atrygetoio* ("the shore of the barren sea")⁸

9 *thalassēs halmyron hydōr* ("the sea's salt water")⁹

Speech is another unavoidable occasion for formulae: eg, the lines: *Tēn d' apameibomenos prosephē podas ōkys Akhilleus* ("Swift-footed Achilles spoke in answer to her")¹⁰; *kai min phōnēsas (w)epēa pteronta prosēuda* ("He spoke and addressed him with winged words");¹¹ and the unforgettable: *Atreidē, poion se (w) epōs phygen herkos odontōn?* ("Son of Atreus, what word has escaped the fence of your teeth?")¹²

The most memorable formulaic phrases are probably the one-liners: eg: *ēmos d' ērigeneia phanē rhododaktylos ēōs*, traditionally Englished as: "When early-born and rosy-fingered Dawn appeared".¹³ Fine, except that *rhododaktylos* has quite different associations from 'rosy-fingered', since *daktylos* means (1) finger and (2) a particular poetic foot - a long syllable followed by two shorts, and does not have the pejorative associations of the English word 'finger'.

A variant of this formula occurs at *Iliad* viii, 1: *ēōs min krokopeplos ekidnato pāsan ep' aian* ("Dawn the saffron-robed was spreading over the whole earth"). Which is paralleled in Shakespeare:

*But look, the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.*¹⁴

As noted above, *rhododaktylos ēōs* can be found in both poems, whereas the characteristic one line formula of the *Iliad* is probably: *doupēsēn de pesōn, arabēse de teukhe' ep' autōi* ("He fell with a thud, and his armour clanged about him").¹⁵

Homer clearly grasped the need for variety here, as witness: *hōs pesen, amphē de hoi brakhe teukhea poikila khalkōi* ("So he fell, and about him rang his armour inlaid with bronze").¹⁶

Two final examples come from the *Odyssey* and mark memorably the passage of time: viz: *all' hote dē etos ēlthe periplomenōn eniautōn* ("but when the year of [ie, in] the revolving years came round").¹⁷

And: *Dyseto t' hēlios, skioōnto te pāsai aguiāi* ("The sun set, and

darkness fell upon all the streets").¹⁸

Similes

The formulas are the stock-in-trade of the *aoidos* (singer), but Homer also makes use of the simile. Similes are particularly important in the *Iliad* because they are a means of enlivening what would otherwise be a very repetitive selection of battle encounters.

At its best the simile is a vehicle of realism, based on direct observation: eg, at *Iliad* iv, 482 a certain Simoeisios is struck on the right of his chest beside the nipple (*mazon*) by a spear which passes through his shoulder, and he falls in the dust *aigeiros hōs*, like a black poplar felled by a chariot-maker's iron axe - a fall characteristic of those struck on the head or chest.¹⁹ Similarly Ekhepolos, hit on the forehead, falls like a tower (*hōs hote pyrgos*)²⁰.

Sometimes the simile is quite elaborate and intricate: the Trojan Pandaros wounds Menelaos earlier in the same book iv with an arrow through his belt; the effects are concealed:

"As when some woman of Maeonia or Caria stains ivory with scarlet, to make a cheek piece for horses, and it lies in a treasure chamber, though many horsemen pray to wear it; but it lies there as a king's delight, both an ornament for his horse and a glory to its driver; even so, Menelaos, were your thighs stained blood, and your legs and your fair ankles beneath."²¹

The *Odyssey* with its greater variety in topics - Telemachos in search of news of Odysseus at Pylos and in Lakedaimon, Odysseus's wanderings, his return to Ithaca and the battle in the palace as climax - does not require such a wealth of similes in order to relieve the monotony, and there are indeed fewer of them, but the same ingenuity is evident: eg, at the beginning of book xx, where Odysseus, enraged at the thought of the activities of the suitors, some of whom have been sleeping with his serving-maids, plots his revenge:

"The thought made him snarl with fury, like a bitch that snarls and shows fight as she takes her stand above her helpless (tender) puppies when a stranger comes by."²²

He controls himself, but then the poet caps the description with a further simile of him tossing and turning in his bed in the palace portico:

"Just as a paunch stuffed with fat and blood is tossed this way and that in the blaze of the fire by a cook who wants to get it quickly roasted, so he twisted and turned from one side to the other."²³

A beautifully humorous simile, which some have seen as evidence of a woman's wit ... could be.

Plot control

Aristoteles - or, if you insist, Aristotle - made a basic point when he praised Homer for observing the principle of unity in the plots of both poems. The *Iliad* is really "the wrath of Achilles", as we have already noted. The relevant section of the *Poetics* ('Peri Poiētikēs') runs in translation:

"A plot is not unified, as some think, if built round an individual [only]. Any entity has innumerable features, not all of which cohere into a unity; likewise an individual performs many actions which yield no unitary action. So all those poets are clearly at fault who have composed



Fight over the body of Achilles

a Heracleid or Theseid, and similar poems: they think that, since Heracles was an individual, the plot [of his life] too must be unitary. But Homer, in keeping with his general superiority, evidently grasped well, whether by art or nature [*ētoi di tekhnēn ē dia physin*] this point too: for, though composing an *Odyssey*, he did not include every feature of the hero's life (eg, his wounding on Parnassus, or his feigned madness in the call to arms) [a reference to Odysseus's supposedly feigning madness in order to avoid having to take part in the expedition against Troy], where events lacked necessary or probable connections; but he structured the *Odyssey* round a unitary action of the kind I mean, and likewise with the *Iliad*. Just as, therefore, in the other mimetic arts a unitary mimesis [imitation of reality] has a unitary object, so, too, the plot, since it is mimesis of an action, should be of a unitary and indeed whole action; and the component events should be so structured that, if any is displaced or removed, the sense of the whole is disturbed and dislocated: since that whose presence or absence has no clear significance is not an integral part of the whole."²⁴

The philosopher explains what he means about the *Odyssey* a bit further on:

"The *Odyssey*'s story is not long: a man is away from home many years; he is watched by Poseidon, and isolated; moreover, affairs at home are such that his property is consumed by suitors, and his son conspired against; but he returns after shipwreck [*autos de aphikneitai kheimastheis*], allows some people to recognise him and launches an attack, which brings his own survival and his enemies' destruction. That is the essential core; the rest is episodes."²⁵

It was doubtless this integrated overall conception which gave rise to the excellently handled introduction and dramatic development process in book 1.²⁶

Fictional worlds

There are parallels and contrasts in the various devices used to diversify the content of both poems and hold the audience's attention anew, as we have already seen in the case of similes. Such examples include descriptions of activity on the part of the gods, and also the creation of offstage stories and fictional or idealised

depicted, representing the two poles of the life of the Greek *polis*: peace and war.

The city at peace features dancing at a wedding and an assembly of the people for the purpose of resolving a dispute about the honour-price of a slain man (*heineka poinēs andros apoktamenou*),³¹ emphasising the need for the suppression of blood feuds - in all 18 lines. The city at war is under siege by an army on either side of it.³² The besieged refuse to take this lying down, but send out a force in ambush, and battle is joined.³³

Next we have ploughed land, where the ploughmen are rewarded with a cup of wine after they have successfully ploughed a whole field, followed by a king's estate (*temenos basileion*) being harvested: the harvest is followed by a communal feast with the sacrifice of an ox, in the king's presence. The inclusion of this scene suggests that Homer himself was composing in a period when monarchy was still the established norm. Towards the middle of the 8th century BCE royal rule began to give way to aristocratic rule³⁴ and the king became either one magistrate among others, as at Athens, Argos and Corinth, or a priest (Ephesos, Naxos, Miletos).

"All aristocracies were oligarchical, rule being vested in the few, but the degree of oligarchy varied. In the narrowest aristocracies a monopoly of office was secured by the family in which the hereditary kingship had been vested. At Corinth, for instance, the Bacchiadae [the ruling clan] were descended ... from a distinguished king of Corinth, Bacchis. The immediate successors of Bacchis were kings, but from c747 the Bacchiadae ruled as a group, electing from itself an eponymous official of the year probably entitled *basileus* and intermarrying entirely within its own branches."³⁵

This view has been challenged by Robert Drews.³⁶ Whatever the truth of the matter, however, there was clearly a trend towards diversification of political offices running parallel with the development of the city-state. What the common people thought of these changes is probably impossible to determine, but the Boiotian peasant poet, Hesiod, exhorts the 'kings' (and by implication the aristocracy as a whole) to deal justly and resolve disputes fairly (the tone is reminiscent of the English mediaeval poet, William Langland):

"Bear this in mind, kings, and straighten your discourses, you gift-eaters, and put crooked judgements quite out of your minds."³⁷

Following the description of the *temenos* we have a vineyard bearing black grapes, then a herd of cattle - unfortunately these are attacked by lions, then (briefly) a sheepfold, and finally a dance of young people. Note the total absence of any reference to commerce.

All in all, a beautiful conception of an idealised city - presumably it finds a place in the *Iliad* as a picture of what the Greeks were supposedly fighting for. But then, if that is so, it is hard to view the Trojans as fighting for anything different.

The land of the Phaiakians (or Phaeacians in their Latinised English form) can also be seen as a kind of utopia - it has its miraculous aspects

worlds. Examples of the latter are the famous Shield of Achilles, forged for him by the smith-god Hephaistos in the *Iliad* and the land and court of the Phaiakians (Phaeacians) in the *Odyssey*.

The Shield of Achilles is in a sense the *pièce de résistance* of the *Iliad* - certainly a *tour de force*. I cannot believe that the celebrated Homer himself was not its author, and, if so, that may be an argument for accepting a relatively late date for Homer within the approximate 950-750 BCE bracket. The shield, even though it is described as a *sakos mega*²⁷ - ie, a traditional Mycenaean-style body shield - must surely have been round, because: "On it he [Hephaistos] set also the great might of Ocean River around the outermost rim of the strongly made shield."²⁸

More relevantly, it has been claimed that the design of the shield fits the "later geometric and early orientalisising" period of Greek art:

"Some shields and some silver and bronze bowls with ornamentation comparable ... are known from this period [two references follow] ... Both shields and bowls are round, with pictorial designs appearing in concentric bands. There can be no doubt that this is the sort of thing Homer had in mind, although his description of the scenes on the shield far surpasses anything these human artists could achieve. The technique of metal inlay, however, which Hephaistos uses, adding colour to the pictures on the shield, is not contemporary with Homer but must go back to the Mycenaean Age [more references]."²⁹

"We must ... imagine a round shield, with the designs symmetrically placed in concentric rings, the sun, moon and stars evidently being on the boss at the centre, and the river Ocean forming the rim of the shield, as the Ocean itself was thought to run round the perimeter of the world. A possible distribution of the figures is suggested below."³⁰

So we have sun and moon and certain stars - Pleiades, Hyades, Orion and the Bear or Wagon (Hamaxan) "that circles ever in its place, and watches Orion, and alone has no part in the baths of Ocean [ie, it never disappears over the horizon in these northern latitudes]."

These decorate the shield's central boss. Surrounding them, two cities are

- but the treatment is rather more ironic than one of simple praise, and coverage is greater than that of the shield, extending to the whole narrative of books vi, vii and viii of the *Odyssey*.

There has been some speculation that the Phaiakians, via etymology, have some connexion with the realm of the dead: "Welcker observed that the word *phaiax* is derived from *phaios*, 'grey', 'dusky', and so was led to the conclusion that the Phaiakians were at bottom no other than the dark Ferryman of the Dead, familiar personages in folklore. They convey the slumbering Odysseus after all his labours and wanderings ... back to his earthly home in Ithaca."³⁸

In contrast, Samuel Butler argued that the Phaiakians were actual Greek settlers at a place called Drepanē (modern Trapani) in western Sicily, a part of the island which the Greek colonisers failed to hold because it was too close to Carthage, which proceeded to establish its domain over the extreme west of the island. (The traditional date for the foundation of Carthage - Qart Khadascht, the New City - is 814 BCE). Butler studied charts and did his best to argue the case for this particular location, but it must be said that he does not show his working in the way that Robert Bittlestone does in arguing in detail for the Paliki peninsula of Cephalonia (ancient Kephallonia) as the true Ithaca of the *Odyssey*.³⁹ Butler could be right about Drepane, but the hypothesis remains unproven.

In any case, such speculation is really a minor concern. Much more interesting is the organisation of the Phaiakian realm itself. What stands out is the prominence of women in its direction. Alkinoos is the nominal ruler, but his daughter Nausikaa, who meets Odysseus in sensational circumstances while she is out by the seashore overseeing the washing of the palace's linen, makes clear that it is Queen Aretē (Aretē means 'Virtue') who wears the trousers, and indeed that is what we find as the poem unfolds.

Princess Nausikaa emphasises the far-away, withdrawn nature of the Phaiakian realm, its 'other-worldly' status: "We dwell far off in the surging [stormy] sea, the most distant, nor does any other mortal have dealings with us."⁴⁰

She and her attendants preside over the transformation of Odysseus from a naked, shipwrecked mariner into a presentable guest, and she goes on to direct him to her father's estate (*patros emou temenos*), allowing her own party time to return ahead. Her detailed instructions indicate quite clearly that it is the queen to whom he must appeal for help:

"Go quickly through the great hall, till you come to my mother; she sits at the hearth, in the light of the fire, spinning the sea-purple wool on the distaff, a wonder to behold, leaning against a pillar, and her serving-maids sit behind her. There too my father's throne leans against the same pillar, and on it he sits and drinks his wine like an immortal. *Pass him by*, and clasp my mother's knees in supplication, that you may quickly see and rejoice in the day of your homecoming, even if from far away. If she thinks kindly towards you in her heart, there is then hope that you will see your friends and regain your well-built house in your native land."⁴¹

Odysseus goes to the Phaiakian palace, which is described in detail in vii, 81-132 - not forgetting the 50 slave women who grind grain or weave fabrics, since "As much as the Phaiakian men are skilled above all others at speeding a swift ship on the sea, so are the women cunning workers at the loom; for Athene has given them above all others knowledge of beautiful handiwork, and excellent faculties."⁴²

We get the idea that the Phaiakian

community is a partnership between the sexes, even if the women (despite queen Aretē's exalted status) are in an inferior position. But truly the Phaiakians are close kin to the gods - *agkithēoi gegaasin*⁴³ - and their ships have the speed of computers: "their ships are swift as a bird or a thought"⁴⁴

What is more, their fruit crop never fails: "The fruit of these [their trees] does not perish or fail, winter or summer, year on year, but always the west wind, as it blows, quickens some fruits and ripens others."⁴⁵

There is yet more: the Phaiakian ships have a system which allows them to operate by automatic pilot: "For the Phaiakians have no steersmen, nor do they use rudders such as other ships have, but the ships know by themselves the intentions and minds of men, and they know the cities and rich fields of humans, and they pass over the gulf of the sea very quickly, concealed in mist and cloud, with no fear of damage or wreck."⁴⁶

The whole set-up seems altogether too good to be true, and the poet seems to know this, for he (she?) gets in a satirical side-swipe at Alkinoos by making him interrupt Odysseus's story of his adventures so that he may persuade him to stay another day beyond the time agreed - *after* his queen has already suggested this very course of action.

Alkinoos declares: "But let our guest, despite his longing to return, therefore nonetheless remain until tomorrow, when I shall make our gift to him complete. His conveyance shall be the men's concern, all of them, but of me especially: for mine is the power in the land."⁴⁷

We have here an ironic echo of a famous passage in the *Iliad*, the speech of Hektor to Andromakhe, where he says: "But go into the house and busy yourself with your own tasks, the loom and the distaff, and tell your handmaids to set to work; war will be the concern of men, all those who live in Ilios, and mine especially."⁴⁸

This is actually the second instance in the *Odyssey* where our attention has been drawn to these verses: right at the beginning, in book I, Telemakhos picks up the same theme when voicing his "declaration of independence" from his mother. Penelopeia, upset by Phemios's recital of the Akhaians' return (*Akhaiōn noston*), calls on him to stop, but Telemakhos intervenes, telling her not to be angry with the minstrel, whose tale is a popular one. Then he tells her to mind her own female business in almost an exact replica of Hektor's words, ending with: "Story-telling will be the concern of men, and mine especially, for I am master here."⁴⁹

Just as Telemakhos's remarks reveal a great deal about his situation, so Alkinoos's concern for the conveyance (*pompē*) of Odysseus homewards reveal him as somewhat ... pompous ... and possibly hard up (see below).

Humour in the epics

Another virtue of the poems is their humour. In the *Iliad* the principal sources are the Olympian gods and the old warrior, Nestor, who is not backward at coming forward with a recital of his exploits as a young man whenever the occasion arises.

It is difficult for us, reared in a Judaeo-Christian tradition - and it must be just as difficult for devout Muslims - to envisage a situation where divine beings ostensibly behave in an all too human fashion, but such is the Mount Olympos portrayed by the *Iliad* poet. Akhilleus's divine mother, Thetis, accedes to her son's request to get Zeus to help the Trojans, and so remind the Greeks that they stand in need of help from their foremost fighter; Zeus undertakes to do it, but

is immediately confronted by his wife Hera (Herē), who accuses him of plotting with some immortal. Zeus gets angry and threatens violence. The gods become anxious, and the smith-god Hephaistos, who is Hera's son, tries to persuade his mother to mollify the king of the gods:

"Then the gods of heaven were troubled in Zeus's palace, and among them Hephaistos, the famed craftsman, was first to speak, to please his mother, the white-armed Hera: 'This will be ruinous work, unendurable, if you two wrangle over mortals like this, and set the gods in tumult; nor will there be any joy in the excellent feast, since evil prevails.'"⁵⁰

As Samuel Butler puts it brilliantly, "a god will not be able to get his dinner in peace."⁵¹

Hephaistos defuses the situation by serving all the gods and goddesses wine: "And unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods, as they saw Hephaistos bustling about in the palace (or, as the Loeb translator puts it, "puffing through the palace").⁵² A gem, is it not?"

Nestor, "the clear-voiced orator from Pylos" (*ligyn Pylion agorētēn*) is another of Homer's favourite characters. He gives good advice at two points: namely, that the Akhaians should build a wall and a trench to protect their ships and that, since Achilles refuses to fight, Patroklos should put on Achilles's armour and pretend to be him. Nonetheless Homer gets as much comic mileage as he can out of Nestor: not only is he given to reciting the exploits of his prime at the drop of a hat, but there is also a piece of comic business involving Nestor in book viii, when the Trojans mount a strong attack, forcing all the foremost Greek leaders to retreat ... except Nestor.

"Then neither Idomeneus dared remain, nor Agamemnon, nor yet the two Aiantes, attendants of Ares; only Nestor of Gerenia remained, the guardian of the Akhaians, and he not willingly, but his horse was wounded, since the noble Alexander, husband of fair-haired Helen, had struck him with an arrow."⁵³

Incidentally, this passage bears out the contention of Drews that chariots were vulnerable to archery, if the archers could get within range.

Some of the humour in the *Odyssey* we have already had occasion to notice: viz the likening of Odysseus tossing and turning on his bed to a piece of meat being roasted on a fire⁵⁴ and Alkinoos's role as king of the Phaiakians. Samuel Butler indicates a possibility that Alkinoos's generosity has landed him in difficulties; according to him, what with "topping like an immortal god, swaggering at large, and open-handed hospitality, it is plain and by no means surprising that Alcinoos is out at elbows."⁵⁵

What Butler does not emphasise, however, is that, if this is the case, it is not an insuperable problem. The common people will stump up the necessary wherewithal: "But come now, let us give him a great tripod and a cauldron, each man of us, and we in turn will gather the cost from among the people and repay ourselves, for it would be hard for one to give so freely, without requital."⁵⁶

It should perhaps be stressed that all the gift-giving in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* happens in the expectation that, when the roles are reversed and the giver is visiting the recipient of the gift, he or she will get something in return, as in the *Odyssey*, where the goddess, Athene, disguised as the Taphian leader, Mentēs, thanks Telemakhos for his offer of a gift, but asks him to give it to him when he returns: "It shall bring you its worth in return."⁵⁷

Another example of humour in the *Odyssey* is the question frequently asked in the poem of visitors to Ithaca - eg, by Telemakhos of the supposed

Mentes in the opening book: "But, come, tell me truly who you are and where you come from. What city are you from? What sort of ship did you come on? How did the sailors bring you to Ithaca? Who did they claim to be? For I don't suppose you came here on foot."⁵⁸

The repetition of this last line must surely have moved the Ithacan audience to hoots of laughter.

Last but not least in this survey of Homer's humour, we note the encounter with Polyphēmos, where Odysseus cunningly tells the giant that his name is Outis - 'No man' or 'No one'. This stands him in good stead when Polyphēmos calls out to his fellow giants for help with the immortal words: "No man is killing me by guile and not by force."⁵⁹

They tell him there is no problem, saying, in effect, 'Well, if that's all, we can go back to bed now.'

Homer's compassion

The poems depict a society which is certainly not free of acts of barbarism, but what stands out, at least in the *Iliad* - and even in the *Odyssey*, one could argue (Odysseus shows compassion for Penelope at the end, by ceasing to be angry with her) - is the poet's fundamental humanity.

There are two major examples of this in the *Iliad*. The first is Hektor's speech in book vi, which we have already touched on; there is much more to it than the part which is guded in the *Odyssey*. Hektor knows that Troy will eventually fall, and its people will either be killed or pass into exile:

"For I know this well in heart and mind: the day will come when sacred Ilios will fall, and Priam, and the people of Priam of the good ashen spear. But not so much does the grief the Trojans shall have move me, neither Hecabe's own, nor king Priam's, nor that of my brothers, many and noble, who will fall in the dust at the hands of their foes, as does your grief, when some bronze-clad Akhaian will lead you away weeping and rob you of your day of freedom. Then perhaps in Argos you will weave at another woman's bidding, or carry water from Messeis or Hypereia, most unwillingly, with strong necessity laid on you. And someone will say, as he sees you shedding tears, 'That is the wife of Hektor, who was pre-eminent in battle of all the horse-taming Trojans, when they fought around Ilios.' So he will say, and for you there will be fresh grief for your lack of a man like me to ward off the day of bondage."⁶⁰

The second instance is the climax of the poem. Priam visits Achilles, asking for the body of his son, Hektor, for burial. Priam asks Achilles to remember his own father, Peleus, and then compare his fate with Priam's - Priam already having lost many sons in the fight for Troy. The appeal works:

"So he spoke, and roused the desire in Achilles to weep for his father ... So the two of them remembered - the one remembered man-slaying Hektor and wept loudly, collapsed at Achilles' feet, but Achilles wept for his own father, and then again for Patroklos; and the sound of their lamentations rose up through the house."⁶¹

Thus moved, Achilles accepts the ransom Priam has brought for the body and lets him have it back, and the poem ends with the simple, dignified funeral rites for Hektor, which the Trojans perform.⁶²

By way of a conclusion I offer two judgements by two eminent scholars.

Moses Finley: "The genius of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* does not lie primarily [my emphasis - CG] in the individual pieces, or even in the language, for that was all a common stock of materials available to any bard in quantity. The pre-eminence of a Homer lies in the scale on which

he worked; in the elegance and structural coherence of his complex narrative; in the virtuosity with which he varied the repeated, typical scenes; in his feeling for tone and tempo, his interruptions and retardations, his long similes without parallel in the history of literature - in short, in the freshness with which he both invented and manipulated what he had inherited. Paradoxically, the greater the mass of accumulated materials, the greater the poet's freedom, given a desire and the ability to exercise it.

"Through his genius, a Homer could create a remarkably coherent world, on the one hand different in details, and even in some essentials, from what older bards had passed on to him, and on the other hand still within the fixed path of bardic tradition, retaining a large part of that traditional world."⁶³

Finally Joachim Latacz: "The Greeks have looked upon Homer as not only their first, but their greatest poet. The history of the reception of both works justifies this. The extent, duration and intensity of this reception have no parallel. Greeks, Romans and the European modern age have all fed on Homer, learnt from him, used him to develop their own poetry and poetic studies, imitated him, sought to outdo him and to shake him off - and admired him. Poetry which lacks substantial quality can have no such reception."⁶⁴

Notes

- Iliad* i, 34.
- Iliad* i, 141.
- Iliad* i, 157.
- Iliad* i, 350; ii, 613; *Odyssey* ii, 421.
- Iliad* i, 312.
- Iliad* xiii, 352.
- Odyssey* iv, 432.
- Odyssey* viii, 49.
- Odyssey* xv, 294.
- Iliad* i, 201.
- Eg. *Iliad* ii, 7.
- Iliad* iv, 350.
- Eg. *Iliad* i, 477 = *Odyssey* iv, 306.
- Hamlet* act 1, scene 2.
- Eg. *Iliad* iv, 504.
- Iliad* xiii, 181.
- Odyssey* i, 16.
- Odyssey* ii, 388.
- See MM Willcock *A companion to the Iliad* Chicago 1976, p52.
- Iliad* iv 462.
- Iliad* iv, 141-47 - Menelaos is here addressed directly to get a short syllable for metrical purposes at the end of his name.
- Odyssey* xx, 14-16.
- Odyssey* xx, 25-28.
- Aristotle *Poetics* (Loeb translation), pp57-59.
- Ibid* p91.
- See Denys Page's description in *The Homeric Odyssey*, Oxford 1935, pp59-60.
- Iliad* xviii, 478.
- Iliad* 607-08.
- MM Willcock *A companion to the Iliad* Chicago 1976, p209.
- Ibid* p210.
- Iliad* ii, 498-99.
- Iliad* ii, 509-10.
- Iliad* ii, 504-540, 36 lines in total.
- JB Bury *History of Greece* London 1959, p75; NGL Hammond *History of Greece* London 1959, pp142-45.
- NGL Hammond *History of Greece* London 1959, p143.
- R Drews *Basileus* New Haven 1983, p143.
- Erga kai Hemera* 263-64.
- JAK Thomson *Studies in the Odyssey* London 1914, p96.
- See S Butler *Odysseus unbound* Cambridge 2005.
- Odyssey* vi, 204-05.
- Odyssey* vi, 304-15.
- Odyssey* vii, 108-11.
- Odyssey* v, 35.
- Odyssey* vii, 36.
- Odyssey* vii, 117-19.
- Odyssey* viii, 557-563.
- Odyssey* xi, 350-53.
- Iliad* vi, 490-93.
- Odyssey* i, 358-9.
- Odyssey* i, 570-6.
- AC Fifield *The humour of Homer and other essays* London 1913, p67.
- Odyssey* i, 599-600.
- Odyssey* viii, 78-82.
- Odyssey* xx, 25-28.
- Butler 1913, p94.
- Odyssey* xiii, 13-15.
- Odyssey* i, 318.
- Odyssey* i, 220-27.
- Odyssey* ix, 408.
- Iliad* vi, 447-463.
- Iliad* xxiv, 507, 509-12. The reasons why Achilles wept for his father we learn further on at lines 534-42.
- Iliad* xxiv, 788-804.
- M Finley *The world of Odysseus* New York 2002, p22.
- J Latacz *Troy and Homer* Oxford 2004, pp152-53.

DEBATE

Voting - present and future

The electoral system we demand under bourgeois rule is not connected to the forms of democratic decision-making we advocate for the future communist society, argues **Moshé Machover**

I am grateful to Comrade Nick Rogers for his thoughtful and detailed article, 'Electoral reform and communist strategy',¹ in which he responds to my contributions on voting and democratic decision-making. These contributions include an article, 'Proportional representation and Brown's opportunist ploy',² and letters³ published in the *Weekly Worker*, as well as an essay, 'Collective decision-making and supervision in a communist society', unpublished in print but available online.⁴

This is a highly important topic, hitherto sadly neglected in the Marxist literature; so I am glad of the opportunity provided by Nick's article to resume the discussion.

Transitionality

The title of Nick's article would suggest that it is mainly concerned with electoral reform possible or proposed under the present social order, within a bourgeois parliamentary state (so-called bourgeois democracy), and the position towards this issue that communists ought to adopt. But the subtitle, added by the editor of *Weekly Worker*, tells a different story: "Nick Rogers discusses the democratic forms appropriate to the rule of the working class". The editor was quite right to add this subtitle, because this is really what Nick's article is mostly about. In fact he attempts to address both issues: voting in bourgeois parliamentary elections; and democratic forms of decision-making under socialism. He starts with the former, but is mostly concerned with the latter; and he sometimes conflates the two, as though they were intimately and logically connected, both aspects of the same topic: voting systems.

In my *Weekly Worker* article, I argued that under a bourgeois parliamentary state, the electoral system that best suits the interests of the working class and the political needs of the radical socialist left - especially where it is numerically and organisationally weak and struggling to make its voice heard - is proportional representation (PR), particularly in its most consistent form, the list system. In his opening remarks Nick responds:

"The working class must provide answers that enable it to amass the weaponry to defend and advance social conditions. It must provide answers that explain why there is an alternative to a malfunctioning capitalist economy. However, most important are the answers we provide to the questions posed around the political system and democracy. It is these that have the potential to crack open the fortress of capitalist state power.

"In this article I want to challenge the default position of much of the left ... in support of proportional representation. I believe that PR leads us away from the kind of participatory, direct democracy that should inform our political and democratic demands."

The reasoning behind this is that the electoral system we advocate now, in a bourgeois parliamentary state, supposedly ought somehow to lead or point us towards participatory, direct democracy. I am sure Nick does not believe that participatory direct democracy is remotely possible under capitalism. So what he is implying is that the kind of electoral system we advocate or support at present, in a bourgeois parliamentary state, ought to point towards or foreshadow the

kind of democratic decision-making that will only become possible following a socialist revolution.

Later in his article he makes this clear:

"PR might as well qualify as 'transitional' on the grounds that it has the potential to gain the left group advocating it a representative or two - and that step would supposedly be a step towards the political big time.

"The democratic demands of communists should point directly towards the political structures that the working class requires to establish its political rule. It is far from clear that proportional representation meets this ambitious standard."

Here Nick is applying a general logic of revolutionary socialist strategy: demands for reform must be "transitional" in the sense that, while raised for the here and now, they at the same time prefigure what would become possible in a post-revolutionary society.⁵

A well known and very useful application of this idea of transitionality is in relation to the so-called welfare state. In fighting to defend and extend public provision of services such as healthcare, pensions and education, we socialists make demands directed at the bourgeois state; but at the same time we are pointing towards the huge expansion of public provision that would become possible following the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production. Here there is a clear connection between immediate demands and their extrapolation, on a much grander scale, to a future society.

But the logic of transitionality is not applicable to every issue: in my opinion it is a conceptual error to apply it - as Nick does - to parliamentary voting systems. This is because, as far as radical socialists are concerned, the main aim of parliamentary electoral reform that we ought to advocate under a bourgeois state is totally different from, and in some senses even contrary to, the function of voting systems that will become necessary and possible in a communist society. There is fundamental disconnection between the two; and positing transitionality between them leads to confusion.

In a bourgeois state, radical socialists are, as a matter of principle, a force of opposition. We participate in parliaments and parliamentary elections not in order to take part in managing the state and ruling society. Participation in government, if offered to us, must be refused: it is a honey trap. We must reject any responsibility for running the present order. We use parliaments and parliamentary elections as a forum enabling us to reach the widest possible audience among the working class and its potential allies, and project our

propaganda against the existing mode of production and state.

In contrast, voting in a socialist society will be a means of exercising the broadest participation and responsibility of the masses in running society and in making decisions on all social affairs - including those that are at present classed as 'economic' and are governed by the tyranny of private property and the anarchy of blind 'market forces'.

So there is no reason to insist that immediate demands for electoral reform should foreshadow or point towards participatory direct democracy.

In order to avoid conflation of these two quite distinct topics, I have deliberately addressed them separately: my *Weekly Worker* article confined itself to immediate demands for electoral reform; and my essay on collective decision-making addressed only voting in a communist commonwealth.

Of course, there are some very general principles common to immediate demands regarding voting in bourgeois parliamentary elections, as well as to projected democratic decision-making in a future socialist or communist society. They include majoritarianism and universal equal suffrage. But these general principles do not determine the precise voting system to be used.

Let me also add that the logic of transitionality is very appropriate, and can fruitfully be applied, to decision-making - and in particular to voting systems - in present-day workers' organisations such as trade unions, shop-stewards committees and workers' parties. It is right to insist that the way these class organisations are run and the mechanisms used within them for decision-making ought to prefigure a future socialist society.

Labour left

In what follows I will address Nick's arguments regarding electoral reform in a bourgeois parliamentary state, especially as it would apply to the Westminster parliament. I will leave for a later occasion my response to his critique of my essay on decision-making in a communist society - which, as I have pointed out, is a very different topic.

Nick claims: "The prospect held out by PR of perpetual coalition government has always threatened to reinforce the dominance of the Labour right and give to parties of the political centre the power of veto over pro-working class policies."

What this argument ignores is the fact that it is precisely the *absence* of PR that has served to keep the Labour left imprisoned inside the Labour Party ('old' and 'new'), where it is dominated by the right. If the Labour left were to split and break loose of the right's stranglehold, then under the present first-past-the-post (FPTP) system it would find it very difficult to win any seats in the Westminster parliament. For these left reformists, it would be almost tantamount to political suicide. Under PR this disincentive would largely disappear, as experience in Germany and several other countries has shown.

Nick goes on to say: "A 'Labour

government committed to a socialist programme' becomes even more improbable under a system of PR. And conspiracy theorists see the introduction of PR across continental Europe after World War II - often at the behest of the two Anglo-Saxon powers - as a device to keep large, self-confident communist parties from forming governments."

This may or may not be true. But why should we worry about it? Do we really believe in a Labour government committed to a socialist programme? Do we think that states governed by large, self-confident Stalinist parties are so wonderful? What we ought to care about is giving an *oppositional* parliamentary voice to the radical left, which PR is most likely to achieve.

Further, Nick observes: "In recent years the [FPTP] electoral system ... has skewed general election results in favour of the Labour Party - the most recent election included. In part this reflects the lower registration and lower turnout of the registered amongst the poorest members of our society. FPTP in effect compensates for the political disengagement of the poor."

Right. But this fraudulent 'compensation' is a strong argument against FPTP and in favour of PR, which would provide the working class and its potential allies, the poorest members of our society, with an option of voting that is not a futile waste of time and shoe leather, walking to the poll to cast an ineffectual ballot, but give a parliamentary voice to their angry grievances.

Recallability

As I mentioned, the greater part of Nick's article is concerned with decision-making in a workers' democracy, which is an evanescent form of state, or in a communist society. But towards the end of his article he addresses an issue that is arguably also relevant to parliamentary elections in a bourgeois state: recallability and accountability of elected representatives. He correctly observes that under PR recallability is at best highly problematic.

In fact, this is also true for district representation (DR) systems, in which each geographically determined constituency elects one representative - or a small number, as under the single transferable vote system (STV). Under any DR electoral system, if there are more than two candidates it is always possible that a winner of the election is not the top preference of an absolute majority of the voters. Even worse, under many DR systems - including the alternative vote (AV, which is to be proposed in the referendum promised by the present UK ruling coalition), STV, and the Borda count system (used in Eurovision song contests)⁶ - a candidate who loses the election may be a 'Condorcet winner': namely, a candidate who would beat by an absolute majority any other candidate - including the actual winner(s) - given a simple choice between the two. So it would be possible, and indeed quite probable, that just after winning an election fair and square according to the rules of any DR system, the winner could be immediately recalled by a majority vote of his or her constituents.

In my opinion, recallability is not really applicable to parliamentary representatives, except in cases of gross malpractice. Recallability does make sense in the context in which it was originally discussed

by socialists: a workers' state, and specifically a structure of councils (soviets).⁷ A delegate (rather than a representative!) is elected by a grassroots collective to speak for it in a council, or by a council to speak for it in a higher-tier council. S/he is specifically mandated to vote for or against a proposed motion, according to the majority view among her or his electors. If s/he refuses or fails to act as instructed, s/he can be recalled.

In a parliamentary context, a feasible mechanism that comes close to recallability has an excellent radical English pedigree: frequent elections. The Chartists demanded annual parliaments - it is the only one of their six demands that has yet to be achieved. Since the process of recalling MPs and replacing them in by-elections (if it were at all feasible) would not last much less than a year, it would be almost pointless if general elections were held annually or even biennially.

Contrary to what Nick seems to believe, PR does not necessarily tend to reinforce the power of a party's central leadership. For one thing, if a party's list of candidates does not allow adequate representation to a minority faction within the party, then this provides that faction with a powerful incentive to split and present its own separate list. Second, a party with robust inner democracy will conduct a primary election process, involving all its members and possibly also close supporters, to nominate its list of parliamentary candidates.

In this context, Nick makes a strange assertion: "In fact, any system of PR - focused as it is on party representation and the basis on which governments will be formed - tends to strengthen the power of the executive and undermine the legislative role of assemblies. It is not compatible with direct, participatory democracy."

There are at least two fallacies in this assertion. First, the allegation that PR tends to "strengthen the power of the executive and undermine the legislative role of assemblies" is simply incorrect. Some of the western bourgeois states in which the executive wields greatest power *vis-à-vis* the legislature have the most disproportionate electoral systems. A prime example of this is the UK.

Second, as I have explained, the demand for a PR system in a bourgeois state is in any case not designed for direct, participatory democracy.

On the other hand, as I have argued in my essay on decision-making in a communist society, in such a society there will be a feasible form of PR which, while allowing proportional party representation, is definitely *not* focused on it, but gives ample opportunity to independent candidates. I will not pursue this point here, but leave it for another occasion.

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* May 27.
2. *Weekly Worker* April 1 2010.
3. *Weekly Worker* Letters, November 12 2009; December 3 2009; April 29 2010.
4. www.zcommunications.org/FCKFiles/image/Machover_socdem5.pdf.
5. Note that this meaning of 'transitional' may not be the same as several other meanings of this term, as used by various Trotskyist sects.
6. Borda's system is not only non-majoritarian, as it may not elect a Condorcet winner, but is also one of the most easily manipulable voting systems (as the Eurosong contests amply illustrate). When Condorcet pointed this out, Borda's response was: "My scheme is only intended for honest men".
7. It was practised by the Paris Commune. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by Marx in *The Civil War in France* and seconded by Lenin in *State and revolution*.



THE LEFT

Tusc agrees to limp on

The Socialist Party in England and Wales still pretends its electoral coalition will spawn a new workers' party, reports **Mark Fischer**



Clive Heemskerck: aiming for a "bourgeois workers' party"

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, whose unadvertised conference held on June 12 basically agreed that it should "continue in existence" and "remain registered with the electoral commission", according to the document circulated for the occasion. However, Tusc does not look long for this world.

Sure, the general secretary of the RMT union, Bob Crow, addressed the gathering and its main component, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, talks Tusc up as "a coalition involving leaders of the most militant trade unions in Britain today" (*The Socialist* June 16), but in reality it consists of just SPEW, a half-hearted Socialist Workers Party and a handful of others. The union leaders *The Socialist* talks about are mainly SPEW members, and comrade Crow is not exactly confident his union will agree to back it in future elections: "I'm looking forward to having the argument with those who say the unions shouldn't be involved with election campaigns that get small votes," he told the June 12 conference.

Jenny Sutton, Tusc general election candidate for Tottenham, was one of the 30 or so comrades who attended. She told us that she and the other independents at the conference were all agreed that the coalition *should* have a future, as it was important that there should be an "electoral challenge to the left of Labour". But this is a big problem. If the formation remains just a "loose coalition" acting as an "electoral umbrella" under which (carefully vetted) organisations and individuals contest the odd election, it will be viewed, quite rightly, as completely unviable.

Although comrade Sutton added that there had been "no disputes" at the gathering, the fact that the non-aligned comrades present felt it necessary to emphasise that Tusc should be "as open

and inclusive as possible" seems to us to stand as an implicit criticism of SPEW and to a lesser extent the SWP. Ludicrously, attendance was by invitation only, with SPEW ensuring that potentially awkward customers were not even informed that it was happening.

Our organisation only became aware of it through the non-SPEW Tusc candidate in Wellingborough who sent out details via his e-list, including to a group of CPGB comrades who had worked in his election campaign. We applied for observer status (nothing more - we had not, after all, been allowed to join Tusc) and on June 10 leading SPEW comrade and Tusc front man Clive Heemskerck phoned to explain why we were not to be allowed to attend the event in any capacity.

The gist of the comrade's argument was this:

- First, the meeting was exclusively for "Tusc candidates and campaign organisers". In fact, this represented a shift in the attendance criteria. We know of non-aligned comrades who were initially invited to the meeting because of their work on the ground in the election campaign, not because they held some position as a 'campaign organiser'.

- It was slightly perverse that we even expected to come in the first place - after all, CPGB leadership meetings and aggregates were not open to him, comrade Heemskerck observed. This was dumb, I told him - he was not comparing like with like. In addition, if he and SPEW had participated in the work of an important campaign we were involved in, such as Hands Off the People of Iran, or had recommended an unconditional vote for and work with CPGB candidates in some national election, then an application for observer status from SPEW at a meeting that was deciding the fate of the campaign

or future electoral challenges would be seriously considered at the very least.

However, that extremely unlikely scenario of convergence aside, Tusc was an electoral *campaign* for which the CPGB had recommended an unconditional vote and for which - where we were allowed - we had actually grafted. There was no question of our demanding delegate status or votes. We had simply applied to *observe* - what was the problem?

- It was surprising that we were actually still interested in the project at all, as comrade Heemskerck assumed the CPGB would be "throwing all your resources behind Diane Abbott's campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party" - a reference to our front page and an article in the newly published *Weekly Worker*. The comrade's snide remark revealed two things. First, the rather infantile attitude SPEW has to developments in the Labour Party, spawned by its shallow and palpably false assertion that this is now simply a bourgeois organisation no different in substance to the Tories. Second, that - despite the fact that this edition of the paper had only been online for an hour or so that Thursday - the comrade had already looked it over. Indeed, in the course of our argument, he confessed to "reading you very carefully". Also - it seems - promptly.

As we are an organisation routinely dismissed by the likes of comrade Heemskerck as 'irrelevant', one wonders why? As we admitted when we applied to join Tusc in the first place, like the rest of the left the CPGB has absolutely minimal "social weight" - the foolish criterion set by SPEW to exclude potentially troublesome left organisations smaller than itself. Our 'weight' consists of being a *serious trend of thought in the workers' movement*, articulated through a widely read newspaper.

- He thought that we were not actually interested in a campaign for a new mass workers' party in general. I corrected him - we most certainly are. At its core, this is precisely what our organisation was in many ways. The difference is that we are clear the only genuine workers' party is a *Marxist* party. Ah, he came back, but he and the Socialist Party in England and Wales were campaigning through initiatives like Tusc for a "new *bourgeois* workers' party" (a remarkable admission). So, other than opportunities for mischief-making, why our continued interest?

I emphasised that our organisation was well aware that the road to a Marxist party might have to meander through many twists and turns and be fought for in all sorts of unconducive arenas before it was won. This explains our continued active engagement with the *already existing* bourgeois workers' party - something he had referenced with his throwaway comment about Abbott.

As the conversation drew to a close, a thought occurred to me. Had the decision to deny the CPGB observer status actually been taken by the Tusc steering committee? Er, no, it hadn't, Clive conceded after some evasion. He agreed to circulate our request to the committee - a tacit admission that the initial decision to exclude us had been taken by SPEW alone.

This underlines the importance of the concern of non-aligned comrades at the June 12 meeting, as reported to us by Jenny Sutton. To remind comrade Heemskerck, they were "keen that Tusc should be as open and inclusive as possible".

An autumn Tusc conference is being mooted, although there are no detailed plans yet. We hope the SPEW comrades maximise its chances of success by ensuring the conference (if it actually happens) is "open and inclusive" - in stark contrast to how the project has been run so far.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Bloody Sunday: Cameron's apology excuses UK state

Truth still hidden

The findings of the Saville inquiry into the Bloody Sunday killings of 14 unarmed civilians caused barely a ripple across the British establishment last week - despite the blame for the 1972 massacre being placed squarely on soldiers of the British occupying army in Ireland.

The long awaited publication of the Saville report¹ - after 12 years of evidence, 'investigation' and legal analysis, costing just under £200 million in total - found that the shooting of civil rights demonstrators by the Parachute Regiment in Derry was, in the words of prime minister David Cameron, "unjustified and unjustifiable".

The report was delivered to the government in March, but not published until June 15. This was apparently due to security issues and concerns that the identity of military witnesses could be 'compromised' if the document was not carefully checked before being released. Officials from the home office and defence ministry, plus solicitors from the treasury, were called in to inspect it first. It is no coincidence that treasury solicitors represented the soldiers at the inquiry - and the ministry of defence was of course their employer. In the meantime mainstream politicians, civil service mandarins and the military top brass were fine-tuning their responses.

David Cameron delivered his prime ministerial and very carefully worded apology the same day as the report was published. A nauseating and hypocritical response from a man who in a separate speech in the same week made clear his full support for her majesty's armed forces in all their repressive global misadventures. He like Tony Blair before him - who apologised in 1997 for the British government's role in the 1845-52 Irish potato famine - used weasel words to express the regret and humility of British imperialism. Apologies out of the way, we are told that it is now time to move on. All part of the Good Friday process.

But the report contained nothing to cause the state undue concern - not least because it was released so long after the events, whose main details have long been public knowledge. Contrary to the expectations of some, there were no shocking findings. The establishment has not been rocked as a result. While we did see the formal admission for the first time that the victims had been unarmed, this was hardly news. Some things just had to be acknowledged - a mere 38 years too late. That the killings were "unjustifiable" had never been in any doubt - except for the entire UK state, at the time intent on a blatant cover-up, and its sycophantic apologists in most of the British media. In reality the testimony of those present, with the exception of the paratroopers themselves, was absolutely conclusive.

On January 30 1972 Derry was swarming with media. They had flocked there to report on a mass civil rights protest, called specifically to oppose internment without trial and

the ill-treatment of political prisoners in Long Kesh concentration camp. Ten thousand people turned out to march, with no expectation of what was to come. As the state forces moved in, the news footage captured clearly the shocked and panicked faces of demonstrators as the paras opened fire on them. Young men and women running in fright from the scene. Many of the victims shot in the back. The cameras showed soldiers continuing to shoot at rescuers waving white handkerchiefs, as they attempted to reach the wounded and dying. The fact that ambulances were prevented from reaching the scene is also well documented. Bloody Sunday represented the unleashing of state violence against the mass movement. The fact that it took 12 years for Saville to confirm as much is much more of an insult than it is vindication.

The original Widgery report, hastily put together in 1972, was obviously a blatant whitewash. It is also clear that the soldiers who gave evidence to Widgery had been carefully coached and prepared by senior army officers before doing so. Their accounts were manufactured and coordinated in order to alibi the killers and blame the victims. The aim was to justify an increased armed presence in Northern Ireland and the stepping up of repressive measures. Peaceful demonstrators were dubbed dangerous armed gunmen who posed a threat that demanded a rapid defensive response. Absolutely sickening.

And while Saville's official exoneration of the victims may give comfort to their relatives, the report is hardly a satisfactory analysis of what went on. Its conclusions tell us that the blame for the killings lay exclusively with the ordinary paratroopers and their commander, Derek Wilford. There was a loss of control and gross disobedience of orders by Wilford - long since retired and disappeared from view. But even a cursory examination of the facts shows that these conclusions are an attempt to simply scapegoat those on the ground, while protecting the upper echelons.

Leading military officials, who masterminded and oversaw the deployment of the paras and the subsequent cover-up, are let off the hook by Saville. One such was major general Robert Ford, commander of the land forces. It was he who actually commissioned the Bloody Sunday 'battle plan' and ordered the paras to carry it out. The plan, codenamed Operation Forecast, was designed to deal with those most prominent in the civil rights protests. He himself had stated on January 7 1972 that the only way to achieve 'law and order' was to shoot selected Derry "young hooligans". This document was before the inquiry, but Saville still managed to exonerate Ford from any responsibility. On Bloody Sunday itself (as the report describes) he stood at the edge of the Bogside and shouted, "Go on, the paras", as they rushed passed him towards Rossville Street, where they inflicted their carnage.

Another leading military commander, Sir Michael Jackson, who later went on to become British army chief of staff from 2003 to 2006, assisted in compiling a 'shot list', which was the basis of the cover-up. This list purported to show that the soldiers had fired at "gunmen" within the Rossville Street area - something that was exposed as a complete fabrication. A colleague of Jackson's, major Ted Loden, told the inquiry that he had taken statements and plotted the trajectories of the bullets in the aftermath of the shootings. But a number of the documents that he purportedly prepared, including interviews with military commanders and the intelligence officer, were actually in Jackson's handwriting. Loden could not provide an explanation for this and Jackson said he could not remember what happened. Maybe he had simply transcribed it? He said he was sorry, but he just could not assist the inquiry - his memory had simply failed him. Saville, faced with such obvious duplicity, still refused to implicate Jackson, and the army establishment

he represented, in any wrongdoing.

The backdrop of army killings and brutality that preceded January 30 was also excluded from the inquiry. Just six months before Bloody Sunday, 11 unarmed civilians had been shot over several days by soldiers in Ballymurphy. There were regular reports of attacks and intimidation of Catholics. The British army, which had initially been greeted by the population as protectors against the sectarian forces of the Northern Ireland statelet, the so-called 'B Specials' and the Royal Ulster Constabulary - were now also seen as the enemy. Internment without trial was in operation and many civil rights protestors were subjected to torture under interrogation. It was a situation not unlike that faced by protestors in Iran today - and all of this within the United Kingdom.

Bloody Sunday was certainly not an isolated event. But it was a watershed. It changed the civil rights movement into a national struggle. The real face of British imperialism had been revealed and there was no going back. The whole of Northern Ireland exploded into flames and the republican movement was reborn.

Bernadette McAliskey was on the platform at the Bloody Sunday demonstration. In a recent article she describes how, as she witnessed the events, her disbelief gave way to fear and anger. Finally she was angry only with herself for her naivety, as the realisation dawned that the British state is perfectly capable of using terror as a political weapon. This was the nature of the imperialist presence in Ireland.

McAliskey describes how, as Bernadette Devlin MP, she was prevented from giving her eyewitness account in parliament, while home secretary Reginald Maudling was allowed to lie and blame the protestors for their own deaths. She says: "In what was considered a gross overreaction and disgracefully violent behavior, I crossed the floor of the house and hit him."² To this very day

when I think of this young woman defiantly taking to the floor of the Commons to physically confront the lying hypocrite, Maudling, I feel total admiration for her passion and bravery.

Today, of course, we have a very different reality. We have the inheritors of that anti-imperialist struggle in direct compromise negotiations with the same state. The inquiry itself was a concession to Sinn Féin and the Irish government as part of the negotiations that led to the 1998 Good Friday settlement. But there was never any chance that its terms of reference would be anything but the most narrowly restrictive. While the British government accepted 12 years ago that the inquiry's conclusions would finally have to admit the killings had been "unjustified", the bigger story would not be told. The involvement of senior politicians and military figures in directing operations would not be investigated. Neither would the surrounding circumstances, background and reasons behind the demonstrations and deployment of the army. It was obviously part of a policy to violently and brutally suppress the people's movement. Why else would the British state put the army - and the paratroopers at that - onto the streets if that was not its intention?

The whole costly exercise has served to excuse the British state from any wrongdoing and to conceal the real meaning and impact of Bloody Sunday. However, calls for the prosecution of individual paras are unrealistic and also avoid the essential point. These soldiers were acting as part of a state determined to suppress a mass movement. They were under orders. It is the state that should be in the dock, not the individuals on the ground.

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Notes

- www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org
- www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/15/bloody-sunday-british-government-soldiers.

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