



# weekly **worker**

**Endlessly plundering the earth's  
resources for the sake of profit,  
or cherishing nature's gifts?**

- Armed forces day
- Pensions con
- Turkey and Gaza
- For representation

No 824 Thursday July 1 2010

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## Obama's Afghan strategy in tatters





# LETTERS



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

## Long time ago

In the first of a two-part reply to my review of his book Mike Macnair devotes most of his attention to but one of my criticisms - the lack of a theory of socialism in the book ('Socialism is a form of class struggle' June 24). I assume that discussions of the question of parliament and of democracy will be in the follow-on article.

Mike makes the perfectly reasonable point that one wants to avoid the old sectarian practice of making a particular view of Russian history *de rigueur* for membership of a political party. It would plainly be foolish for a serious political party to make one's views on Lincoln or Napoleon a criterion for membership, and the same logic applies to one's views on slightly more recent Russian history. What I was mainly concerned with is where the theory of socialism, or a lack of it, impinges on contemporary policies.

Mike cites the precedent of Marx back in 1880 commenting approvingly on the fact that the programme of the French Workers Party contained only demands which had been spontaneously thrown up by the labour movement. But that was 130 years ago! A lot of water has gone under the bridge since 1880. Mass working class parties have grown up, come to power and, with varying degrees of success, tried to transform economies in a socialist direction. More relevantly still, these attempts have in many countries fallen back, with a revival of capitalist economics.

Mike would do better to focus on the 1980s and 1990s, the point at which the labour movement worldwide suffered an enormous ideological setback. It was a setback which, as it was occurring, seemed to me to have had no precedent since the defeat of Napoleon. In that setback the very idea of socialism as a distinct way of organising the economy was apparently discredited, and in consequence many erstwhile socialist parties abandoned socialism as a goal. They repositioned themselves as a 'democratic left' instead of a socialist left. My worry was that Mike's book was part of this broader trend - intellectually more sophisticated no doubt, but shading off into a purely democratic radicalism.

In a movement with a long history, changes in orientation can often be convincingly justified by appeal to precedent. If one wants to emphasise a purely democratic republican turn, then one focuses on what Lenin wrote at the very start of the 20th century when he was polemicising against the autocracy of the tsar. If one wants to downplay the need for socialism, one cites documents from the very birth of European social democracy. Lenin was not content with repeating demands which had arisen spontaneously from the labour movement: he advocated that social democrats explicitly introduce political demands which went beyond that.

Mike too is quite willing to be explicit when it comes to political objectives: a republic, proportional representation, etc. He is presumably going to reply to my earlier objection that these objectives were an outdated early 20th century view of democracy. But the point is that he is willing to introduce objectives that go beyond the spontaneous demands of the movement when he has the theory that lets him do so.

He is reticent about putting forward socialist economic objectives because he has no theory of socialist political economy. But without

a working class political economy there can be no political workers' movement. Without its own political economy, the working class can never be more than a resisting and oppositional voice: fight the cuts, fight anti-union laws - all the slogans of a failing oppositionism, with which the left is so familiar. Without its own political economy labour cannot advance policies to change the way the economy operates.

It is well known that Marx devoted a great part of his intellectual life to developing a critique of the then existing political economy of capital. In the process he provided an explanation and justification for contemporary struggles by the labour movement to limit the working day.

As the labour movement became more powerful, it began, from the 1920s on under Marxian and other socialist influence, to challenge the economic dominance of capital. In the process it needed a political economy that went beyond Marx's description and critique of Victorian capitalism.

People like Neurath, Feldman, Kalecki, Lange and Dickinson provided a body of ideas that could both guide socialist economic policy and provide a refutation of the ideologies put forward by early 20th century bourgeois economists. This ideological foundation allowed the movement to advance confidently to challenge the institutions of capitalist economy. It gave socialism an intellectual credibility that meant even orthodox economics textbooks treated it as a viable alternative system.

But by the 1980s the social democratic movements both in the east and the west were running into increasing difficulties with their attempts to run two rather different variants of socialist economic policy. In the political crises that ensued, both variants of socialism emerged without intellectual or political credibility. Party intellectuals and political leaders west and east gave up on the idea of socialism and concluded that there really was no alternative to the market. Given the late 20th century intellectual crisis of socialism, a crisis from which we are only gradually beginning to emerge, it is quite unrealistic of Mike to suggest that a revolutionary strategy is possible without an economic programme, or that you will leave it to the working class itself to come up with an economic programme.

To reconstitute a socialist movement capable of winning not just core working class support, but the support of a majority of the population, that movement is going to need very clear and convincing economic policies. It will need policies that are intellectually coherent, consistent and which appeal to the immediate interests of broad sections of the population. Without such policies there can be no credible socialist movement. And it does no good to focus primarily on constitutional issues. Unless people believe that there are other ways in which the economy could be run, they will not fight for purely constitutional objectives. Behind a bitter struggle for political liberty there is the desperation for a better material life.

There is much in Mike's article that is unexceptional. The distinction between pure modes of production and real social formations in which a variety of production relations coexists is uncontroversial. And, as I have said in earlier contributions to this paper, his identification of socialism with the dictatorship of the proletariat, with a period during which classes and class struggle continue, is pretty much the pure milk of Maoism. On the other hand, his vision of socialism as an economy in which a large class of independent producers and mittel-

stand capitalist entrepreneurs will co-exist with a socialised sector is more Dengist or Scandinavian in flavour. He also touches on something that was a great concern of the Maoists in the 60s and 70s - the power that educated experts have in a relatively ill-educated society. But I remain unconvinced by his rather forced attempt to equate skilled labour with a petty bourgeois status.

He refers to intellectual property, but this is not really relevant to the issues he is addressing. The USSR and until recently, China, did not recognise intellectual property rights (IPR) or patents. And even in the west, IPR is largely a concern for large companies and institutions rather than members of the middle class. The costs of patenting inventions and defending patents are generally beyond the reach of the self-employed. So it seems that his identification of what the Soviets called the intelligentsia with the classical petty proprietor is actually based on a concept borrowed from orthodox economics: 'human capital'. In orthodox economics this idea is meant to indicate that even wage workers are capital owners - they own their own 'human capital' in the form of skills.

As I see it, there are a number of problems with this approach. It is true that skilled workers are typically paid more than unskilled ones. But, though a skilled worker may earn more, that does not make them independent producers. They are still reliant on selling their labour-power to an employer. And unlike the peasant proprietor skilled workers or the intelligentsia were, in the USSR, products of the socialist economy itself. Its vast expansion of educational institutes turned out a highly educated workforce.

Taken at its face value, Mike is implying that the more scientifically and technically advanced a socialist economy becomes, the stronger will grow the petty bourgeoisie, and thus the more premature and futile will be the attempt to establish socialism. This is where his argument leads, but I suspect that he will not want to pursue it to this logical conclusion.

**Paul Cockshott**  
email

## Cuts war

The Liberal-Tories are always at war with the working class, alongside the bosses and their state ('War on the working class', June 24). But an intelligent strategy by the working class and its political representatives will recognise that these three forces are not the same and will attempt to utilise divisions within them.

In fact, I've written many times that, despite all the brouhaha over cuts, I do not believe that such a programme is in the interests of capital itself. It risks creating an unnecessary deep recession, which will harm the interests of capital during a period when it is coming out of recession. That is clearly the message being sent directly by US capital via Obama at the G8/G20 meeting. A number of other ideological representatives of capital, from Nouriel Roubini to George Soros, are making similar points about the lunacy of cutting before the recovery has gained traction. The other night, *Newsnight* featured economist Richard Koo, who related how such a policy in Japan in 1997 had been disastrous, killing the recovery for no benefit and delaying it for another 10 years.

I view the macho cuts policies being put forward by various right-wing politicians as rather like the war of words that they sometimes get into for public consumption to prove their credentials, but which

then take on a life of their own, rather as happened with the Falklands war. The proposals in the budget for 25% cuts are clearly nonsense and unachievable. Even Norman Lamont was reduced to describing them as "an ambition". Cuts that are unachievable and not in the interests of capital are unlikely to happen. The actual representatives of capital - the permanent state bureaucracy - will see to it that they are choked at birth or shortly afterwards, not only to protect the interests of capital, but also to protect its own immediate bureaucratic interests.

We shouldn't count on that. Still less should we see that state as being in some way on our side in this any more than in anything else. But we should utilise the division of interests. In so far as the state bureaucracy resists the cuts, we should support that, but not simply to defend the status quo. We should utilise the current situation to put forward a socialist vision of society - socialist solutions as alternatives for implementation here and now. To the extent that the Tories' proposals on cooperatives open a door to put forward such solutions based on workers' ownership and control, all the better.

Again the Liberal-Tories have said they want to enable *us* to say how the cuts should be made. We should take them at their word. If we organised labour movement conferences in each area and meetings in each workplace, on each street and in each neighbourhood to discuss the cuts, we could build up a powerful movement to present the government with an alternative programme to deal with the crisis, which, having asked for that, it would find difficult to reject.

I've put forward several ideas on my blog about how this could be done, and one simple suggestion on how the deficit could be paid for tomorrow. Given there is far more than £1 trillion of shares listed on the stock exchange, if every limited company was required to create new shares equal to 10% of its issued share capital and hand them over to the government, this would mean the government taking in over £100 billion in shares. It could sell these at the best times through the arms-length company it set up to deal with the similarly created bank shares. By taking this payment in new shares rather than cash, it does not impact on the profitability or cash flow of any company. It therefore does not alter its ability to pay wages or suppliers or to make investments. In so doing, it takes no money out of the economy, thereby maintaining economic growth.

If all the shares were sold at the same time, this would depress values by approximately 10%. But not all shares have to be sold at the same time. Additionally, share prices frequently move up or down by 10% over a relatively short period without any reason other than the feelings of investors. In fact, by protecting economic growth, it would be more likely that profitability and capital accumulation would rise, leading to rising rather than falling share prices.

But the Liberal-Tories will not pursue such a policy because, although it is economically rational and meets their supposed criterion of fairness, it represents - unlike all previous taxes on income or wealth - a direct attack on capital itself. It means essentially a direct transfer from capital to labour. But as a single, simple demand to raise, it has very great attractions for the labour movement to put forward.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Crazy agenda

Heather Downs claims that her defence of the arrest, prosecution and forced detention of two little boys are "arguments specifically in the interests of working class women" (Letters, June 24). Actually, it is not in the interests of anyone of any class. To try to link the progressive struggle of the suffragettes to the sexual repression of children just doesn't wash. 'Votes for women, jail for children' wasn't the demand, as I recall.

Let's return to the facts of the argument in hand and stop trying to throw handfuls of non-applicable historic sand in our eyes, can we? Heather describes the thoroughly inhuman designation of voluntary child sexual exploration as 'rape'. It's not rape. This is a silly designation invented by the Blair-Brown government as part of their moral panic against youth sexuality.

The boys were not guilty of doing anything criminal or anti-social at all. Neither, of course, was the girl, who did no more or less than they did. The fact that they were found guilty by the court is unimportant. It is a repressive and nonsensical charge, being found guilty of which doesn't add any legitimacy to it or guilt to them. Nor does it mean you've actually done anything wrong in the normal, accepted sense of what 'wrong' is. They were undressing, for god's sake - that's all. All three of them were voluntarily engaged in it. Nobody was forcing anyone to do anything. Simply because the boys had just turned 10 and she was eight, the law and the courts call it rape.

Heather chooses not to condemn such repressive nonsense, but to defend the arrest, the charge and the punishment. She cites George Lansbury's support of the suffragettes as equating to her support for the process of arresting and jailing the kids, and my opposition to this as equating to Quelch and Bax of the Social Democratic Federation opposing votes for women! But you can't shoehorn such dank, reactionary penal and social policy into some form of progressive historic tradition. It just won't fit.

What is gut-wrenching in Heather's last contribution is the assertion that these two little boys were engaged in "predatory sexual behaviour". Undressing? You show me yours and I'll show you mine? How is that predatory sexual behaviour? Unless one believes all sexual activity engaged in by the male species of any age with anyone is *ipso facto* "predatory", just by virtue of being advanced by a male. This viewpoint permeates some wings of middle class feminism and represents heterophobia or misandry.

The little girl engaged in a normal sexual game with two of her playmates. Then she felt guilty and thought her mam might find out, so she owned up but alleged the game was the boys' idea. That's all that happened here, or should have been. Sadly, the police were called and when the girl was interviewed she retold the story, adding that it was a joint and mutual game. The police then acted on the law as it stands, despite what was clearly a minute and harmless incident, and charged the two boys with 'rape'. The director of public prosecutions then went ahead with the whole circus of a trial and the trauma of national sensation and publicity and the impending jailing of the two boys. Is this really in the tradition of the suffragettes or any progressive movement or current?

Heather persists in calling the above non-events "sexual violence" and condemns those of us who are appalled by this whole dehumanising and crazy agenda as "sexist". Those who call for children to be accused, charged, prosecuted, jailed



and have their lives ruined for perfectly natural childhood behaviour are actually defending progress and equality, it seems.

I don't know what your vision of a just world would be, Heather, but I for one, sure as hell, don't want to live in it.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Swiss model

Just a comment on your article, 'Silence of the left' (*Weekly Worker* June 10). The thing with American-style gun laws is that they don't arm the working class: they arm the middle class. Like everything else, the ability to own a gun - especially guns with which you could feasibly take on the state if need be, what with body armour and all - is based largely on money.

I agree that the best model would be something based on the Swiss model, in which everyone over a certain age is issued with a gun, trained to use it and encouraged to take part in a militia system (although I think only the training should be compulsory - actual participation in the militia should be voluntary).

Ultimately it comes down to the balance of power - the only thing that makes it necessary to arm the working class is the fact that the state is armed, so we should only call for general gun ownership as a second preference to the destruction of all purpose-built weapons and the prohibition of their manufacture.

**Alan Stevenson**  
email

## United action

As the stall we ran on Saturday June 26 was our first in Leeds, I did not really think we would attract many people. However, the result turned out to be totally the opposite. We sold out of *Weekly Workers* - including some previous issues - and a number of political badges we displayed were also bought.

A good number who were passing by stopped and asked about our ideas and views in general. Also some wanted to know about Marxism and how the CPGB differs from other organisations.

I had long conversations with two people. First was a sociology student, who approached us with his friends and started asking about Marx and Marxism. It was obvious he was repeating what he had learnt on his college course. The discussion with him was about how Marx interpreted globalisation and we also exchanged ideas about Francis Fukuyama's idealist interpretations that the current global political reality itself has answered it all: ie, the banking crisis and also the coming to power of reformist, semi-socialist governments such as in Venezuela, Bolivia and other places, and the international rallying of the masses toward this ideology.

Then the discussion went on to capitalism as a system and how it cannot organise society economically and how it inevitably needs to invade and dominate other countries in order to expand and to get more resources only to increase the profit that as a system it seeks, no matter how costly that domination would be for the people - for example, the invasion of Iraq, which has cost the lives of nearly two million innocent people so far. The student seemed to be interested and I will be contacting him to see if he wants to join us in further discussions on socialism.

The other discussion I had was with a member of the Socialist Party, which I used to be a member of. I had met this comrade at a Committee for a Workers' International summer school in Belgium. I was arguing that the left needs a united Communist

Party, in which we can all democratically express our views and propose our strategy for common action against the common enemy. But the comrade did not agree on that and thought that we were fundamentally different from each other. Therefore we cannot work under one umbrella.

We also talked about the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and how they did not accept the CPGB. I pointed out that if the letters on this had not been published in the *Weekly Worker* then no-one on the left would have known about it. By the way, when Tusc refused the CPGB, that was the main thing which led me to leave the Socialist Party.

Overall, I think the stall was a great step forward for our ideas. We are thinking of displaying other leftwing organisations' meeting leaflets and newspapers over the coming weekends, to show how on the left we need united, democratic action in one Communist Party.

**Rozh Ahmad**  
Leeds

## Pissing in wind

As always, I was interested to read Peter Manson's report of the recent CPGB aggregate ('Labour Party and communist strategy', June 24). I was pleased to read that the CPGB has thrown in the towel and now sees the Labour Party as the only game in town.

The dreadful results for Tusc, the Socialist Labour Party, Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party and other left parties in the general election clearly show that nothing can be achieved outside Labour.

As someone who made the serious error of resigning from the Labour Party when Tony Blair became leader in 1994, I now see the error of my ways. I feel that I have wasted the last 16 years by - excuse my French - pissing in the wind. The late Ted Grant has been shown to have been correct all along. Peter Taaffe and the Socialist Party in England and Wales clearly have a lot to answer for in my decision to resign from Labour (and I am not alone). As a result, I now have an uphill struggle with my constituency Labour Party in regard

of my application to rejoin.

One interesting thing about all political parties, ranging from the Socialist Workers Party to the Tories, is that 95% of their members are either aged under 25 or over 45. This is due to three factors: the Thatcher counterrevolution; the defeat of the miners' strike; and the economic boom of the 20 years up to 2008.

Finally, I call on Mark Fischer to stop wasting his time by reporting on sect-like groups such as Tusc and the Socialist Party in England and Wales. His time would have been better spent reporting on the recent Compass conference, including the meeting held by the Labour Representation Committee.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Ultras

Although the vast majority of James Turley's article provides a refreshingly interesting analysis on the World Cup and football in its wider social context, I am disappointed that he unwittingly repeats the common cliché of directly linking ultras with football violence ('Reclaim the game', June 24).

His comment, that "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", appears to suggest that Ultra St Pauli are roughly the equivalent of Millwall's Bushwackers, Portsmouth's 6:57 Crew or Cardiff's Soul Crew, only with anti-fascist politics. This is clearly not the case.

Although members of Ultra St Pauli are occasionally involved in direct confrontations before and after matches, often for justifiable reasons, it is far too great a step to link them with football violence. Far more important to the group is the support given to the team and peaceful political activities, such as the policy of inviting asylum-seekers to attend games with the group as a show of solidarity.

**Gareth Jones**  
Chesterfield

## Summer Offensive

# Take note

I always try to impress on readers that the CPGB regards our annual fundraising drive - the Summer Offensive - as a chance for comrades to actually turned outwards, to politically engage with a wider audience.

Obviously, many comrades have set themselves ambitious personal targets for the cash they are trying to raise. Because of this, there may be a temptation on the part of some to retreat into a sort of self-denying purdah for the two-month duration of the campaign. This is in fact the exact opposite of what we want out of the Summer Offensive. The SO is a high point of the *political* work of the organisation during the year. We want our comrades out and about, talking to people about communism and the party. Definitely not sitting in a dark room, miserably contemplating that day's bowl of rice and glass of water. The political work of the SO can actually be *fun* ...

On Saturday June 26, for example, CPGBers in Leeds organised their first street work of the Summer Offensive 2010 on Briggate, a busy shopping street in Leeds. As Rozh Ahmad

reports in his letter (above), the comrades had actually run out of papers at the end of their three-hour stint. Other comrades around the country take note! With the application of some imagination, flair and a matt black spray can, you too could be fighting the punters off in your local shopping centre.

This week saw a solid pace being maintained after the fantastic start of the campaign last week. Another £1,550 was raised, bringing our running total to £6,101. One comrade is streaking ahead with a total that already stands at £1,230. Behind (quite a way behind him, actually) is the pack - most of whom are only just off the blocks in the race to reach their personal SO targets. In addition to the Leeds comrades, special mentions this week to JT for his £50 and to comrades SB (£15), PM (30) and RL (£10).

The Leeds comrades promise us pictures of their stall - which sounds a little on the Goth side, what with all that matt black and red net fabric. How about some socialist competition for the best dressed CPGB stall? ●

**Howard Roak**

# ACTION

## Communist Forums

**London:** CPGB fringe at Marxism, room B111, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1 (Russell Square tube).

**Saturday July 3, 5pm:** 'Green betrayal in Iran'.

**Speaker:** Yassamine 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](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.communiststudents.org.uk](http://www.communiststudents.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

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

**Tuesday July 6, 6.15pm:** Annual General Meeting and Felix Padel speaking on 'Mining and cultural genocide in India'.

[www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## Marxism 2010

**Thursday July 1 - Monday July 5,** SWP summer school.

Highlights include:

Slavoj Zizek on the idea of communism;

Tony Benn on democracy;

Martin Smith on fighting fascism;

István Mészáros on alternatives to parliamentarianism.

Debate 'Ideas to change the world' with speakers from all over the world, plus a wide range of cultural events.

Various venues in central London.

Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [info@marxismfestival.org.uk](mailto:info@marxismfestival.org.uk).

## Shrewsbury 24

**Saturday July 3, 10.30am:** March, assemble Abbey Foregate car park, Shrewsbury.

Speakers include Ricky Tomlinson and Bob Crow.

Followed by social event at the Unison club.

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network:

[info@shopstewards.net](mailto:info@shopstewards.net).

## Still no justice

**Saturday July 3, 4pm:** Vigil, High Wycombe police station, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe, Bucks.

Marking the second anniversary of the death of Habib 'Paps' Ullah while in police custody.

Organised by Justice for Habib 'Paps' Ullah:

[justiceforpaps@aim.com](mailto:justiceforpaps@aim.com).

## Hope and harmony

**Saturday July 3 and Sunday July 4:** Festival, Sefton Park and Greenbank Sports Academy, Greenbank Lane, Liverpool 17.

Sport, music, art and education; in memory of Anthony Walker, murdered in a racist attack.

Free entry.

Organised by the Anthony Walker Foundation: [info@anthonywalkerfoundation.com](mailto:info@anthonywalkerfoundation.com).

## Independence from the US

**Sunday July 4, 2pm:** Demonstration, RAF Menwith Hill, near Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

Speakers: Mark Thomas, Peter Tatchell.

Organised by Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases: [www.caab.org.uk](http://www.caab.org.uk).

## Break the blockade

**Tuesday July 8, 7pm:** Meeting, Harmony Hall, Truro Road, Walthamstow, London E17.

Gaza flotilla survivors and supporters speak out.

Organised by Waltham Forest Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Waltham Forest Stop the War Coalition: [info@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:info@palestinecampaign.org).

## No to franchising

**Saturday July 10, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Riverside Park, Huntingdon.

Stop the franchising of Hinchinbrooke Hospital to the private sector.

Organised by Huntingdon and St Neots Trades Union Council: [www.huntingdonandstneotstradescouncil.blogspot.com](http://www.huntingdonandstneotstradescouncil.blogspot.com).

## The next steps

**Saturday July 17, 10am - 5pm:** Conference, Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7.

Campaigning to end the Gaza siege.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

[info@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:info@palestinecampaign.org).

## CPGB wills

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



## IMPERIALISM

# Obama's Afghan strategy in tatters

The change of top military command in Afghanistan is not about personalities, writes **Peter Manson**

**L**ast week's sacking of general Stanley McChrystal signals the total failure of US strategy in Afghanistan. Barack Obama clearly no longer believes that the US can win and will not only push ahead with the winding down of the US presence in a year's time. His new commander, general David Petraeus, will front some kind of exit strategy that will leave the US with bases but with Afghans killing Afghans, instead of Afghans killing Americans.

On June 23 McChrystal "offered his resignation" - which was promptly accepted by Obama - following the publication of a lengthy article in *Rolling Stone* magazine by a reporter who had spent months alongside US troops in Afghanistan, including McChrystal and his senior aides.<sup>1</sup> They were portrayed as macho military men with a contemptuous disdain for politicians and diplomats - including Obama's closest advisors. Some commentators have claimed that their remarks were "insubordinate", although there seems to be no evidence of this, and McChrystal in particular was said to have shown "disrespect" for the French by allowing his resentment at having to attend a Paris function to be noted by the reporter.

It was the critical expression of disagreements that allegedly caused Obama to dismiss McChrystal: "I welcome the debate among my team," he said, "but I won't tolerate divisions." However, it was always going to be unlikely that a reporter given virtually unrestricted access to the top brass and Obama's Afghan "team" would not overhear strongly worded criticisms and witness "divisions". And surely a non-establishment publication in particular could not be expected to reject the publication of such gems. Apparently the idea was that a magazine read mainly by "young people" would help build support among youth for the armed forces if the situation was reported 'like it is'.

Obama stated that the appointment of Petraeus, the former commander in Iraq who was subsequently appointed head of the US central command, should not be read as "a change in policy". At first sight it might appear that way, since McChrystal worked under Petraeus in Iraq and was certainly putting into practice in Afghanistan what Petraeus had driven in Iraq - an increase in military numbers, combined with an attempt to win 'hearts and minds'. It was Petraeus who had championed the 'troop surge' in Iraq, which was credited with strengthening the US hand and allowing former 'insurgents' to be 'pacified' by incorporating them in the 'normal' political process. This in turn allowed US failure to be dressed up as a victory.

McChrystal was appointed in June 2009 to 'turn round' the war in Afghanistan. He demanded 40,000 extra troops and was eventually given 30,000 - which somewhat called into question Obama's commitment to start bringing home the troops by July 2011. In fact US troops have not yet reached their maximum projected number. Within the next few months they are set to rise by 4,000 to 98,000,



Another US soldier goes home

which will take the overall total of Nato personnel up to around 130,000 (the UK has the second biggest contingent of the 45 countries represented, with just under 10,000).

Hand in hand with the 'surge' came the policy enthusiastically promoted by McChrystal of "courageous restraint". In other words, US combat troops were under orders as far as possible to avoid the possibility of 'collateral damage' - the killing of civilians and the destruction of their property. According to US operational instructions, "destroying a home or property jeopardises the livelihood of an entire family - and creates more insurgents". Similarly, "large-scale operations to kill or capture militants carry a significant risk of causing civilian casualties and collateral damage". So troops had to display the necessary 'courage' to engage in operations where they faced greater risk than previously. They were not allowed to "engage the enemy" unless they could "positively identify" someone firing at them. Predictably, this did not do much for military morale. Troops also complained about the difficulties involved in calling for back-up air strikes under the new policy. Night raids were virtually banned.

Soldiers were also told to patrol only in those areas where they were "reasonably certain that you will not have to defend yourselves with lethal force" - *Rolling Stone* notes that such instructions are seen by troops as futile: what is the point in patrolling where you know you won't be at-

tacked? Why fight a war in a way that means you *cannot* win, at least in the military sense?

The *Sunday Telegraph* reporter on the ground observed the same sort of complaint. One soldier asked what they were expected to do when "in the middle of a fire fight you suddenly see a civilian or a child out in the open, who has been placed there by insurgents" (June 27). Of course, such a suggestion that 'the enemy' would not think twice about using a child as a 'human shield', craftily taking into account US engagement rules, is absurd. In fact imperialist propagandists have always claimed that 'the enemy' just does not 'fight fair' - for example, US forces in Vietnam alleged that the North Vietnamese insisted on placing anti-aircraft guns in populated areas, rather than out in the open, where they could be 'taken out' without killing civilians. It would have been even 'fairer' not to try to resist the blanket aerial bombardments at all, I suppose.

Nevertheless, it is understandable that troops object when they are told not to use all available means - in effect to put themselves in greater danger in order to reduce the danger faced by others. But this is besides the point. Yes, it is true that inflicting casualties on the population and destroying their homes will turn them against you. But were they ever on your side in the first place?

In reality, the attempt to nation-build - either in Iraq or Afghanistan was always a dead end. As retired US colonel Doug Macgregor asserts, it

is "beyond our capability to change, transform or fix Afghanistan". That is the cold calculation of the US military - although, of course, the political establishment would rather not tell you that they had been lying about that all along.

But it seems that general McChrystal had started to believe the lies and wanted to continue pursuing a politico-military strategy that would "fix" Afghanistan (in a way that an imperialist warrior like himself imagines the Afghans want it 'fixed'). That is why he had to go. It is not so much that Obama wants to return to the normal US way of waging war - with overbearing firepower, mass destruction and thousands of deaths. Rather he wants to *stop* waging it as soon as possible.

## Erosion

There has been a huge erosion of public support for the war after nine years - not least in view of the fact that, year on year, troops casualties have steadily *increased*. June 2010 has been the most costly in terms of military deaths in Afghanistan. Over 1,000 US troops have now died, while the British troop losses recently passed 300. Soldiers are being killed at a rate of one a day.

The imperialist occupation is clearly *not* winning and, the longer it goes on, the more evident that will become to just about everyone. So Petraeus has been brought in to 'do an Iraq'. That will involve stitching up a deal with the various Afghan political

factions - including, it goes without saying, the forces that the troops were sent in to root out and destroy in view of their threat to global security and their sheltering of Al Qa'eda terrorists: the Taliban.

David Kilcullen, one of Petraeus's advisors, said: "There is nothing wrong with talking to the enemy - that is how you win these things in the end" - "from a position of strength," he added. Tory MP and former army officer Adam Holloway does not pull his punches on this one: "The only way out of the mess we find ourselves in is to make political deals" - and that means direct negotiations with the Taliban ("moderate" or otherwise).

Asked on June 25 whether British troops would be home by the next general election, prime minister David Cameron said: "We can't be there for another five years, having been there for nine already." For his part, Labour's former foreign secretary and the front runner in the party leadership contest, David Miliband, issued a statement declaring that any peace deal "must include the vanquished as well as the victors". Which means "allowing space for discussion to bring people from the insurgency into Afghan society". After all, "removing the violence is not appeasement".

Yet more nonsense. The "victors" do not enter negotiations to strike a deal with the "vanquished". They demand unconditional surrender and impose their own terms for a settlement. But talks with the unvanquished Taliban have undoubtedly been going on for some time. 'Unreliable' Afghan allies like president Hamid Karzai have taken to referring to the Taliban as "Afghan brothers".

So does all this mean that the imperialists will just pull out and let the Taliban take over? Hardly. The Taliban were never in control of the whole country in the first place. A US withdrawal would, therefore, not hand over Afghanistan to one faction. There would be a *de facto* partition, similar to what has occurred in Iraq, with its separate areas effectively run by Sunni, Shia and Kurds.

Like Iraq, Afghanistan is a multinational state - with the difference that its sense of national identity is felt by a much smaller proportion of the population. Instead there is loyalty to a tribe, to a warlord - the Taliban, for example, enjoy mass support only in Pashtun areas. They could not be defeated short of the overthrow of the existing, class-based tribal order - and that, of course, was something the imperialists would not contemplate.

Also like Afghanistan, however, the imperialists, having wreaked their havoc and ruination, look set to retreat claiming victory, but leaving behind them a state that is *less* viable, a society that operates *less* effectively, than under even the previous regimes, reactionary though they were.

Some achievement! ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/17390/119236.



## ARMED FORCES

# State propaganda day

Jim Gilbert looks at the establishment's 'non-political' mobilisation behind the Afghanistan war effort

**A**rmed Forces Day was held on Saturday June 27 this year, the second time that it has been celebrated since its inception in 2009. Ostensibly the date was chosen as closest to the anniversary of the first investiture ceremony for the Victoria Cross, which was held on June 26 1857. Primarily, the day serves as a propaganda vehicle for the state.

Cardiff, which is home to the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Welsh at Maindy Barracks, hosted the main event. But there were also around 300 others in towns and cities around Britain and the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Next year the central event is due to be in Edinburgh.

While opposition to the war in Afghanistan may have so far seen fewer on the streets of Britain than over Iraq, tens of thousands have nonetheless demonstrated for troop withdrawal. But the organisation of overtly political marches or demonstrations is not usually the way of mainstream parties and their governments. Instead, by holding an annual event, backed financially and politically by the state, on this newly created Armed Forces Day, they have attempted to garner support for the Afghan war - and for imperialist adventures in general - by more oblique means.

Under the patriotic banner of supporting those thrust into harm's way - 'our' troops - the entire population is supposed to salute a military machine that is responsible for the deaths of thousands of Afghans and Iraqis, to name but two of the peoples recently fallen victim to British imperialism, as well as hundreds of servicemen and women - the overwhelming majority of whom are, of course, working class.

Set up by the ministry of defence, the Armed Forces Day website bit the propaganda bullet. Its opening page lauds the "current main UK military effort" in Afghanistan: "We are operating there successfully, with lots of other countries, to provide a more stable and secure Afghanistan to help ensure a safer Britain and world." This is, of course, beyond ar-

guable: it is palpable nonsense. Iraq shows us the kind of stability and security that is all too likely to be in store for Afghanistan under British and US ministrations.

But where were the crowds? Pride of place in *The Daily Telegraph* was a photo showing a maximum of 50 civilians at the military parade in Cardiff. This accompanied the assertion that, "A 50,000-strong crowd lined the route from Cardiff Castle to Cardiff Bay to watch *more than 200* march past..." (emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> Even town carnivals at this time of year usually have more than 200 marching. Other pictures from Cardiff show narrowed views of the crowd in Plas Roald Dahl and I have been unable to find any images of the large crowds claimed (50,000 appears to be the consensus).<sup>3</sup> But the attendance seems to have already been agreed in advance: before it even happened, Saturday's *Daily Express* told us: "Over 50,000 people are expected to join a national event in Cardiff..."<sup>4</sup> What an amazingly accurate prediction!

In the same article the *Telegraph* also reported: "In a private speech to troops and their families," secretary of state for defence Liam Fox said, 'Let's silence the negative voices that attack our armed forces, but gladly enjoy the security and freedom our armed forces provide.'" If he meant that those voices should be shamed into silence by sheer force of numbers, then the day was probably not as successful as he would have liked.

The *Telegraph* went on to quote Fox barking out xenophobic Victorian values: "While those

who criticise our armed forces have a right to do so in a democracy, we too, as the moral majority, have a right to take pride in the flag of our nation, an emblem of the freedom we hold dear as the true British patriots, and the freedom that most races, cultures and faiths will aspire to." Presumably these 'others' would aspire to it if only they could grasp what heady heights of cultivation and refinement British civilisation has reached.

Elsewhere, commemorations were far more modest. In the Royal Navy's own backyard of Portsmouth, for example, only 1,000 veterans and members of the public turned up for a free event in the Historic Dockyard, where entry normally costs £19.50. Indeed, many local newspapers failed to report attendance figures or even the events themselves, despite previously publicising them in their Armed Forces Day editions.

Scepticism about the occasion is not confined to the usual suspects on the left and among peaceniks. As one of the bloggers on the armed forces' website Army Rumour Service puts it, "Am I being cynical or is this a helpful diversion to draw focus away from the continued debacle in Afghanistan, chronic underfunding and an impending defence review, which we all know will be a series of capability cuts dressed up in a strategic reviews clothes? Let's not worry about anything serious: the masses love a good party."<sup>5</sup>

Some soldiers have taken courageous steps in making a stand against the war in Afghanistan. Lance corporal Joe Glenton of the Royal Logistic

Corps was put in a military prison after a farcical court martial for going absent without leave (awol); he argues that the war in Afghanistan is illegal under international law. At any one time, according to ministry of defence statistics, around 1,000 soldiers are considered long-term absentees<sup>6</sup>, or awol. To highlight the Glenton case and the political issues around it, Justice Not Vengeance recently organised a five-day walk from London to Colchester, where Joe Glenton is being held, concluding with a rally outside the prison on our day of publication, Thursday July 1.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the low turnout on Armed Forces Day, the fact that the bourgeoisie wanted the masses on the streets in the first place speaks volumes. Something has certainly rattled our rulers. It is pretty clear, of course, that polls for some time have pointed out the obvious slippage - nay, chasm - between the governments' official optimism about Afghanistan and public recognition of the truth. Most of the electorate sees the war in Afghanistan as unwinnable and thinks the troops should come home. There is little or no support for liberal imperialist notions such as nation-building.

For these reasons the establishment called for parades: it is a device to encourage wider backing among the population for 'their' armed forces. Most people realised they were being sold a pup. However, that does not take us very far. What this relative failure highlights, however, is how limited is the strategy of the Stop the War Coalition. While STWC no doubt could manage greater turnouts against the war in Afghanistan under particular circumstances, what else can it do? Under its (now former) Socialist Workers Party leadership STWC has turned the movement against the war into a routine of two or three demonstrations a year. The comrades reject the possibility of winning the movement to a particular political strategy, as this would conflict with their popular frontism. What is important is attracting the largest

possible numbers and the broadest possible support - which, apparently, precludes the adoption of anything more than minimal agreed slogans appealing to the lowest common denominator.

Under the continuing regime of John Rees and Lindsey German (now *Counterfire*), STWC persists with this bankrupt, 'the broader, the better' policy. This completely blunts the message, since no politician of any stripe positively advocates the death of either troops or civilians or wants the inevitably negative political fallout that goes with it. After all, just a week ago prime minister David Cameron told us he wants the troops out of Afghanistan by the next general election, which could be in 2015.

The problem is that the UK is bound to the USA in this, as in so much else in foreign theatres, due to the special relationship of junior to senior imperialist power. Challenging the UK's involvement in the war in Afghanistan and calling for the *immediate and unconditional* withdrawal of British troops challenges the basis of this relationship, which is intimately bound up with the future of the City of London, employing one million, since that only exists as a prime world financial centre thanks to US acquiescence. As the 1960s Wilson government found when it failed to support the USA in Vietnam to the extent demanded, the UK's economic fragility can easily be exposed should the USA decide not to wrap it to its bosom.

However, campaigning to end not just this war, but war in general, means going a lot further than campaigning against the 'special relationship'. It means pointing the finger at the system of capital itself. But that is something that Rees, German and co have *never* done from an STWC platform, whether as SWP members or since. To do so would surely alienate anti-war campaigners who are wedded to capitalism, and where would that leave us? That is not to say that such elements should be excluded, but it is pretty obvious that running a popular front precludes the forceful propagation of socialism by its leaders. Yet war is a class question: it involves challenging the UK state from a standpoint of working class politics.

The left must ditch its class-collaborationist popular frontism and stand forthrightly for a sharply delineated working class fight against the war in Afghanistan ●

jim.gilbert@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. [www.armedforcesday.org.uk/Listing.aspx](http://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/Listing.aspx).
2. [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/armed-forces-day/7856440/Thousands-take-to-the-streets-to-mark-Armed-Forces-Day.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/armed-forces-day/7856440/Thousands-take-to-the-streets-to-mark-Armed-Forces-Day.html).
3. See for example, [www.walesonline.co.uk/cardiffonline/cardiff-news/2010/06/28/armed-forces-support-praised-91466-26738697](http://www.walesonline.co.uk/cardiffonline/cardiff-news/2010/06/28/armed-forces-support-praised-91466-26738697); or [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1289760/Troops-parade-cities-country-UK-honours-Armed-Forces-Day.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1289760/Troops-parade-cities-country-UK-honours-Armed-Forces-Day.html).
4. [www.express.co.uk/posts/view/183253/Armed-forces-honoured-across-UK](http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/183253/Armed-forces-honoured-across-UK).
5. [www.arrse.co.uk/Forums/viewtopic/p=3400107.html#3400107](http://www.arrse.co.uk/Forums/viewtopic/p=3400107.html#3400107).
6. [www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/apps/publications/pubViewFile.php?content=160&date=2010-06-24&type=pdf&PublishTime=09:30:00](http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/apps/publications/pubViewFile.php?content=160&date=2010-06-24&type=pdf&PublishTime=09:30:00).
7. [www.j-n-v.org](http://www.j-n-v.org).



Armed forces day: blatant propaganda



**TURKEY**

# Liberal Islamic AKP government at the crossroads

The AKP government milked the Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara as much as it could, writes **Esen Uslu**. But this international posturing is an attempt to divert attention from its domestic crisis



**Kurdish upsurge**

**D**omestic politics in Turkey has reached a new bottleneck. The 'democratic overture' policy of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which was adopted two years ago amid much phrasemongering but little content, is nearing the end of the road.

The AKP had proposed changing the constitution to give, among other things, parliament more control over the judiciary and allow military personnel to be tried more easily in civilian courts; but the government's built-in majority was insufficient to allow it to amend the constitution and it was obliged to put its proposals to a referendum.

AKP was hoping for a quick poll in July. However, the 'independent' electoral commission decided that an obscure law relating to elections applied also to referendums, and ruled that this one could not be held until

mid-September. You might ask, what is the importance of a few weeks? But the delay may make or break things during such a fragile time for Turkish politics.

Back in May, the nationalist-social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP) was rocked by the release of a secretly recorded video showing its leader, Deniz Baykal, engaged in a sexual liaison with his former secretary, now an MP. The position of this stalwart of the military-civilian bureaucracy became untenable and he was forced to resign by the people he had served so faithfully for so long.

However, his last act as leader of the CHP had been to bring a case for the annulment of the constitutional amendment before the Constitutional Court. According to the CHP, the amendment would breach the 'principle' of the 'separation of powers' by curbing the judiciary's ability to over-

turn parliamentary decisions, such as the vote in 2008 to remove the ban on the wearing of headscarves in state universities. It would also jeopardise the army's role as 'guardian of Turkish secularism' against the AKP's Islamist inroads.

Needless to say, the application to have the case heard before the September referendum was granted. That is how the law works in Turkey: if it benefits the civilian and military bureaucracy, everything is possible. Therefore, even before the amendment is put to a popular vote, the Constitutional Court can simply annul it - especially if a late public swing towards the AKP is detected.

Baykal was quickly replaced by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, an unassuming former bureaucrat turned politician, who was believed to be more likely to recover the CHP's lost votes, and form a coalition government with the

MHP (Nationalist Action Party, the remnants of infamous Grey Wolves paramilitary organisation) to get rid of the so-called 'democratising-liberalising' AKP government.

The new leader has impeccable credentials for pulling votes from different communities. Kılıçdaroğlu is a Kurd, but has never claimed Kurdishness as his identity; he is an Alevi, but he never lifted a finger for equal rights for the Alevi ethno-religious minority; and he is renowned for his impartial service as former head of the Social Insurance Institution - despite enrolling his baby grandson as a 'working man' under the social insurance scheme before a law changing retirement qualifications was passed, thus ensuring that his grandson will be able to retire about 10 years earlier than his peers. Truly the very best the dirty electoral politics of Turkey can come up with!

He was the ideal figurehead for the bureaucracy of the party, as well as for the military-civilian tutelage. And the lethargic CHP party machine suddenly began to act with renewed vigour after the Baykal wake-up call. The political vultures who had resigned from the CHP with a view to forming a rival party started to return to the nest. And a handful of independent MPs decided to come on board too.

Suddenly a referendum victory for the AKP is looking far from certain. If it goes ahead, a poor showing for the government would increase the pressure for an early election. Similarly an annulment of the constitutional amendment by the court would leave the AKP no way forward except through calling such an election. With the economic crisis still rampant and the CHP resurgent, that is not exactly what the AKP wants. However, its room for manoeuvre in domestic politics is very limited.

## International moves

Against this background of military-civilian bureaucrats preparing to oust the AKP government and replace it with a CHP-MHP coalition, the AKP decided to act boldly in the international arena. Two moves have created a furore, both of which were designed to cement politicised Islamists - seen as the natural popular base of the AKP, despite a recent offensive by new and more radical Islamists - behind the party.

The first gambit was to pursue, together with Brazil, an agreement with Iran, with Barack Obama's personal approval, regarding the exchange of enriched material for nuclear fuel. The offer was on the table last autumn, but did not come to fruition because of the intransigence of Iran. As the negotiations at the UN security council pointed to the imposition of new sanctions against Iran, Brazil and Turkey 'persuaded' Tehran to strike a last-minute deal. Supposedly Iran would transfer its enriched nuclear material to be stored in Turkey, and the international community would provide nuclear fuel for its research reactors.

But it was too late to win the international brownie points the AKP was seeking. Despite its press acclaiming Turkish diplomacy's 'outstanding success', the imperialist powers had already made up their minds to impose sanctions. Timing is everything in international politics, and suddenly suspicions were aroused about the intentions of the Turkish government. Was it trying to assist the 'international community' or trying to save the skins of the cornered Iranian Islamists? As the US state department railed against Turkey and Brazil, the Brazilian government



acted most undiplomatically in publishing a letter from Obama sanctioning their efforts. What is more, both Turkey and Brazil voted against new sanctions and suddenly Turkey was out of line with its Nato allies on this key issue.

However, defending Iran against the US, as well as persuading an intransigent Iranian regime to come to terms with a negotiated settlement, won quite important domestic support for the AKP government.

The second important step taken by Turkey in the international arena has been in relation to the increasing pressure on the Israeli government. The deterioration of Turkey's relations with Israel became apparent at the Devos meetings in January 2009, when prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made an impromptu attack on Israeli president Shimon Peres and stormed out. This followed the start of the Israeli offensive on Gaza in December 2008. The Turkish government had been trying to act as honest broker between Syria, Palestine and Israel, and Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert made a working visit to Turkey for talks with Erdoğan and president Abdullah Gul. But this was just a few days before the impending attack on Gaza and Olmert did not even hint at what was coming. Looking back at the official communiqué of that meeting, it is clear to what extent the Turkish government was duped by the Israelis.

The escalation in the worsening relations continued when Turkey barred Israel from participating in the annual 'Anatolian Eagle' air force exercises in June 2009 after five years of taking part. The Israelis delayed the delivery of a Heron unmanned aerial vehicle - much desired by the Turkish army for counterinsurgency operations in Kurdistan. The Israeli government also played silly games, such as seating the Turkish ambassador on a lower chair than others attending a function - and then making mocking propaganda out of it.

## Mavi Marmara

Then, of course, there was Israel's notorious May 31 attack on the Mavi Marmara, which was part of a flotilla of ships taking supplies to Gaza in a direct challenge to the Israeli blockade. In fact, although it had kept itself at arm's length, the Turkish government had taken steps to make the Mavi Marmara, a former state-owned ferry, available for purchase by an NGO specialising in 'humanitarian aid'. Obviously the purchase of a ship from a state-owned company could not easily be achieved without political clout, especially as its seaworthiness was in doubt.

The Islamist peace activists involved had only become pro-Palestine once Hamas gained ascendancy (albeit with overt and covert Israeli assistance). Before that only the Turkish left supported the Palestinians - and were branded "infidel terrorists" by the same Islamists. Also on the ship were moderate peace activists and international observers, selected mem-

bers of the Turkish Islamist press and committed Islamist blockade-busters, who were prepared to die if they were not successful in breaching the Israeli naval blockade.

What happened is well known. The Israeli navy and marines made a huge mess of their boarding operation. Some soldiers lowered from helicopters in the first-wave attack were given a beating, and the second wave opened fire from above, killing nine Turkish citizens and wounding more than 20 others. The ships were forced to dock in Israel, and everyone on board was arrested. The Turkish government moved swiftly to remove the wounded and arrested from Israeli hands, bringing them home on its own planes, and launched a sharp propaganda campaign against the Israeli government.

A few days after the incident more details started to emerge. For example, a few AKP MPs had been preparing to take part in the flotilla, but they quietly withdrew at the last minute. Their votes are too precious nowadays to lose in a blockade-busting operation. Although international criticism of Israel has tended to die down, the AKP government had gained international prestige in the Muslim world.

Israel's bloodthirsty aggression gave the AKP a chance to play the valiant victim, and the true friend of oppressed Muslims. The AKP milked it as much as it could in the hope of adding a few more points to its share of the vote in the expected referendum.

The Turkish government and military has relied on the Israeli 'defence industry', which has provided crucial technological know-how. The Israelis have upgraded ancient F4 Phantoms for the Turkish air force to 2020 Terminator standard and extended their service life to 2015 at least. Those planes have regularly been used in cross-border raids into Iraqi Kurdistan. The Israelis also modernised the Turkish army's M60 Patton tanks, providing them with new guns, fire control systems, engines and armour. Those tanks have also frequently been seen in the south-eastern corner of Turkey. I mentioned the Heron UAV above, and there are many other contracts.

Despite all this, the AKP government declared that unless an Israeli apology for its attack on the flotilla was forthcoming all military contracts would be terminated. It did not stop there. Liberal Islamist foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated his desire to take part in the *namaz* prayer service to be held by the victorious Islamic forces in the Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem, perched above the Temple Mount!

## Lost initiative

The AKP's 'democratic overture' consisted of multifaceted initiatives that it hoped would allow it to be seen as the healer of all Turkey's ills. Its 'Armenian initiative' ended with a shotgun-wedding-style signing of an agreement between Turkey and Armenia under US pressure. However, the agreement was not worth

the paper it was written on - internal opposition and Azerbaijani rejection of the settlement caused the AKP government to rescind it.

Its 'Alevi initiative' also came to nothing, since the constitutional amendments being proposed did not contain any concrete measures to deliver freedom of conscience and non-discrimination. The only sop to the Alevis was the state purchase of the Madimak Hotel, where 37 prominent Alevi artists and intellectuals were burned to death on July 2 1973. Even then, there was no commitment to convert it into a museum of remembrance, as the Alevi organisations have demanded.

The most drastic consequence of the failure of the 'democratic overture' policy was experienced in the AKP 'Kurdish initiative'. When the government invited guerrillas to come down from the mountains to take part in the electoral process, a group did so and were met with great jubilation by the Kurdish people. That was the extent of the AKP government's courage, and, facing a nationalist-fascist backlash, its resolve collapsed.

Since then the state, judiciary, police and army have maintained an offensive against the Kurdish freedom movement. The political party representing the Kurds was closed down, its leaders barred from participating in politics. More than 1,500 elected mayors, councillors and party officials were detained on charges of aiding and abetting terrorism. Almost the same number of minors were detained - charged, convicted and placed in adult jails for having thrown stones at the police during demonstrations, thus acting 'for and on behalf of' a terrorist organisation. And finally members of the peace group that came from the mountains were detained and charged because they were members of the PKK!

With the AKP's hypocritical face well and truly exposed, the unilateral ceasefire declared and maintained by the armed wing of the PKK was rescinded, and armed clashes started to be reported at the beginning of June. Since then many people have died and there is no end to the violence in sight.

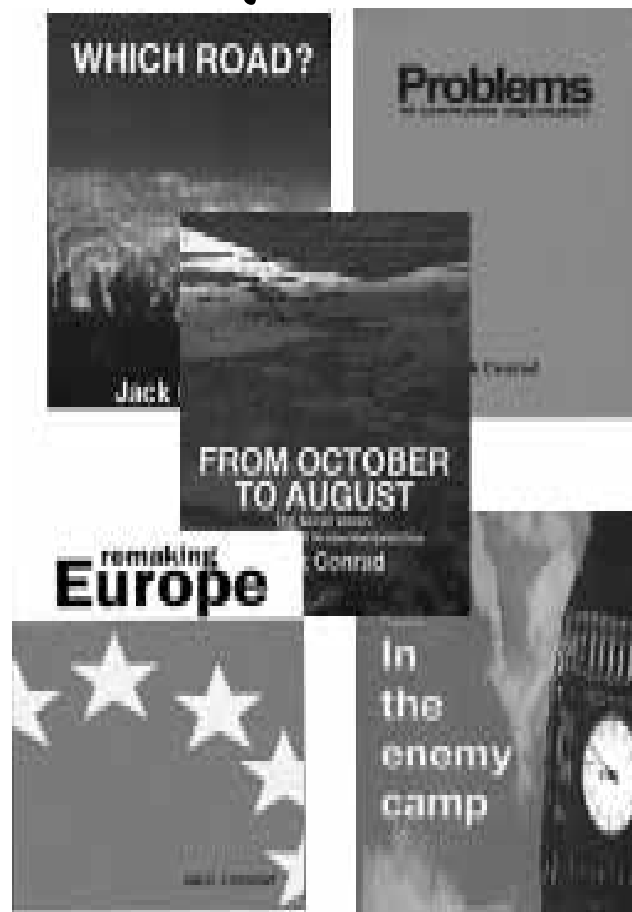
## Democracy or fascism

While Turkey has changed a lot over the last few decades, and climbed up a few rungs in the capitalist world order, the age-old reality has yet to change: liberal, social democratic solutions to the country's acute contradictions are ephemeral. However, those class-struggle contradictions have brought the alternatives into sharp relief: either fascism or democracy.

Not the kind of 'liberal democracy' where the people's wings are clipped, but a full democracy under the leadership of the working class, which means the overthrow of the present state and its paraphernalia. In that regard there is not much difference between liberal Islam, with its prayers at Al-Aksa Mosque, and the Turkish supremacism of so-called social democracy, with a government seeking to freeze liberalising measures and turn the clock back to a 'controlled democracy' under the tutelage of the military-civilian bureaucracy.

The left in Turkey must muster all its forces now to avert such a disaster. First, it must avoid acting as an appendage of, and providing a left-leaning fig leaf for, the nationalist social democrats. Second, it must aim to bring together all oppressed forces, including Kurds fighting for freedom and equal rights, Alevis struggling for religious freedoms and equality, and the working class, which is now facing one of the most prolonged crises in living memory. We are facing defeat unless we manage to conduct joint action for democracy ●

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## DEBATE

# Endlessly plundering the earth

Fighting for a sustainable planet requires fighting for anti-capitalist revolution, argues **Eddie Ford**

**R**egrettably, there has long been a tendency amongst some on the far left - and not necessarily just by devotees of the former, unlamented, Soviet bureaucracy - to essentially regard socialism as like capitalism with stilts on: big 'red' stilts, of course. The factories will be renamed after the great heroes and figures of the revolutionary movement and then go into hyper-drive. Productivity levels will rocket. Socialist GDP will shoot up. Targets will be smashed. Gleaming highways and motorways everywhere. Whether according to a two, five or 10-year plan, those socialist factories will be pumping out more and more stuff, things, so that everybody will get everything they could not acquire under the old capitalist order. Whether it be a car, power shower, mobile phone or the brand new hi-tech MarxPad available in 61 colours. In this way, the superiority of the 'new proletarian order' will be made manifest on earth.

Needless to say, under such a productivist schema, the planet and its resources exist purely to be located, stripped down and exploited in order to supply us with the raw materials necessary to realise the plan and achieve the required level of material-physical satisfaction. Nature is just there to be bent into shape and dominated at will - if not conquered and subdued. Legions of critics have falsely ascribed this so-called 'Prometheism' - itself a slur on the great revolutionary mythological figure of Prometheus, who defied the gods and brought light and fire to human beings - to Marxism itself, when in fact it represents a major *break* from Marx's own fundamentally ecological outlook.

This rather infantile productivist disorder was in evidence in two recent letters to the *Weekly Worker*, giving us prime examples of a certain 'macho' Marxism that needs to be politically defeated. Comrade Douglas Rankine takes strong objection to my comments that oil "like all other natural resources" should be "treated as a precious resource to be cherished and husbanded" - not as "some free gift to be frittered away".<sup>1</sup> For the comrade, this is "romanticism at its very worst" - was I crazily suggesting that we "leave it under sea" and "forget about it"? Rather, he writes, oil is there to be "discovered" and "utilised" - simple as that. Comrade Rankine also worries that I have fallen victim to "anti-capitalist dogma" and "swallowed the 'green' arguments about carbon usage and the warming of the planet".<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein, comrade Jeff Leese is dumbfounded by the idea that a socialist world would "consume far less electricity" - given that a large section of humanity has little or no access to electricity at all, as he correctly points out. A socialist world would actually consume "far greater supplies" of electricity, not less - it being a "highly developed and modern world focused on creating conditions of material abundance for all". Like comrade Rankine, he too thinks I am guilty of "adopting the reactionary petty bourgeois ideas of environmentalism", as espoused by the eco-warriors. In reality, he ventures, the problem with capitalism is that it "holds back industrial development" and "creates vast underconsumption". Instead, comrade Leese looks forward to a world - a "socialist society" - that will "unleash humanity's productive potential by increasing human mastery



**Damien Hurst's skull: profit and death**

and conscious command of nature".<sup>3</sup>

Both comrades are fundamentally mistaken, and dangerously so. For them, it seems, "abundance" is not to do with the rational, democratic, equitable allocation of the world's resources - which may well decide that extracting oil thousands of feet below the sea is an inefficient, unnecessary and potentially harmful use of labour time. Rather, if we are to believe the comrades, "abundance" is a grotesque game of 'catch up' involving incessant production so as to generate a Californian-style 'affluence' - no matter what the cost in terms of environmental degradation and destruction. Far from helping to "unleash" human potential, this form of "human mastery" will just re-introduce the alienating rule of things *over* people - as opposed to the other way round, which is the goal of the Marxist project of universal human liberation.

Capitalism is a destructive and wasteful mode of production and reproduction. It seeks only to make a profit, a quick buck - anywhere, anyhow and by any means necessary. Production for production's sake. Therefore the statement made by comrade Leese that capitalism "holds back industrial development" needs to be qualified. Left to itself, capitalism will 'industrialise' to the point of self-destruction, making the air unbreathable and the rivers dead with toxic sludge - if its servants think they can make a profit out of it. Conversely, and I presume this is what comrade Leese was getting at, capitalism will effectively leave underdeveloped whole areas of the globe where it estimates - no doubt quite rationally from its own narrow perspective - that no profit can reasonably be made. Hence much of the African continent has been left to rot, or 'de-industrialised', for the simple reason that capital has little or no interest in it: no decent return can be made.

This only highlights the need for democracy, and substantive equal-

ity, on a world scale - so that we can exercise emancipatory social control over our own life processes and collectively decide *what has to be done*. Doubtless this will involve massive industrial development in African, Asian and other so-called 'third world' economies. But will this take place regardless of the effect on nature because we have reached the point where "human mastery" or human "command of nature" has been achieved?

More to the point still, the vision - such as it is - offered up by the comrades is just downright *unsustainable*. The earth is not a bottomless goodie-bag to be plundered merrily for the rest of time. Unless managed rationally and carefully, the sweeties will eventually run out some time down the line - leaving us deep in the shit, as there is no planet B to escape to if things get too sticky back home. Clearly, capitalism's blind desire for profit threatens to devour the planet. But so does 'red' utopianism - or dystopianism, to be more accurate - which does not aim to do much more than emulate capitalism's inner productivist logic: accumulate, accumulate, comrades, for the good of the 'plan'.

So, yes, Marxism is environmentalist to its very core. Karl Marx fought to overcome the "metabolic rift" between humanity and nature, between town and country, which itself was a reflection - and product - of capitalist class rule over the workers, of dead labour over living labour. Indeed, any Marxist who is *not* an environmentalist - who is not fighting for a genuinely sustainable planet - is not a Marxist at all.

Comrade Rankine may think that I, or the *Weekly Worker*, have succumbed to "green" arguments - or shroud waving, as he might see it - about carbon consumption/usage and global warming. But facts are stubborn things. Thus, according to the American Energy Information Administration and the International Energy Agency - and there is no rea-

son to think that they are lying to us - worldwide energy consumption will on average continue to increase by 2% per year. An annual rise of 2% equals a doubling of energy consumption every 35 years. Therefore comrades like Douglas Rankine and Jeff Leese can stick their heads in the sand if they want - snarl angrily at the "reactionary petty bourgeois" environmentalists - but the problem will not go away. The energy hole will just get deeper. We are without doubt in the midst of a global environmental crisis of such enormity that the fabric of life of the entire planet is threatened, and with it the future of our human civilisation. Except for the refuseniks and recalcitrants - or climate "sceptics", as they like to grandly flatter themselves - this proposition is surely no longer controversial. All the environmental trends and warnings are there.

Almost for certain, the critical threshold of a 2°C (3.6°F) increase in average world temperature above the pre-industrial level will soon be crossed due to the steady and relentless build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere - as we have seen above. Yet, truly alarmingly, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is projecting increases in average global temperature of up to 5.8°C (10.4°F) or more by 2100. Climate warming at such a level will have calamitous implications for the world's ecosystems. Experiments at the International Rice Institute and elsewhere have led scientists to conclude that with each 1°C (1.8°F) increase in temperature, rice, wheat and corn yields could drop 10%.

Furthermore, the planet is facing global water shortages due to the drawing down of irreplaceable aquifers, which make up the bulk of the world's fresh water supplies. This poses a threat to global agriculture, which has become a bubble economy based on the unsustainable exploitation of groundwater. One in four people in the world today do not have access to safe water. Two-thirds of the world's major fish stocks are currently being

fished at or above their capacity. Over the last half-century, 90% of large predatory fish in the world's oceans have been eliminated. As for the species extinction rate, that is now the highest in 65 million years, with the prospect of cascading extinctions - as the last remnants of intact ecosystems are removed. The extinction rate is already, as with bird species, one hundred times more than the 'benchmark' or 'natural' rate. Meanwhile, scientists have pinpointed 25 'hot spots' - or breaking points - that account for 44% of all vascular plant species and 35% of all species in four vertebrate groups, while taking up only 1.4% of the world's total land surface. All of these ecologically vital areas are now threatened with imminent destruction due to human - or more exactly, capitalist - despoliation.

We have seen how past civilisations underwent sudden ecological collapse, like the Mayans or, most notably and spectacularly, the Easter Islanders - who deforested the entire island in order to glorify and appease their gods. There is now the very real danger, thanks to capitalism, that the entire world could end up as a giant Easter Island - overexploited to the point of catastrophe, even effective extinction. There are no technological solutions to the capitalist-ecological crisis, such as the crackpot idea of putting white islands in the sea, or launching giant satellite 'eyes' into the sky, in order to increase the reflection of sunlight back into space. Or the notion of taking CO2 out of the air with various carbon sequestration schemes; or fertilising the oceans with iron, so as to stimulate algal growth to absorb carbon. Nor will the electric car, for example, be our salvation. All this technological tinkering and quackery by capitalism offers no solution - only more fiddling while the planet burns.

In order to prevent a catastrophic climate change tipping point, the advanced capitalist countries will need *right now* to cut their carbon emissions to around zero, even achieve *negative* emissions - by drawing carbon out of the atmosphere through reforestation, sustainable land use and so on. But everything we know tells us that a carbon-free economy, a necessary transition if we are to survive and prosper as a human race, is simply not possible under the capitalist system, with its insatiable drive for growth and expansion. What we need to fight for instead is an anti-capitalist ecological revolution, one that aims for sustainable human development and proper protection of the planet.

As Karl Marx always argued, such a revolution would see the associated producers rationally regulate the human metabolic relation with nature: it would transform the way we view wealth and human development, by ending the alienation of human beings from nature and from each other. Imagine our planet populated by sustainable 'eco-communist' communities geared to the development of human needs and powers, rather than ones enslaved to the all-consuming drive to accumulate 'wealth' (ie, capital and profits).

In short, capitalism cannot save the earth - it is in fact contributing every hour of every day to its destruction - so capitalism itself must go ●

[eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk](mailto:eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk)

## Notes

1. 'Burning up planet Earth' *Weekly Worker* June 10.
2. Letters, June 17.
3. *Ibid*.



## STRATEGY



# Representation, not referendums

The basis of decision-making under the dictatorship of the proletariat is not the same as under communism, argues **Mike Macnair**

**L**ast week in the first part of my reply to Paul Cockshott, I argued that the nature of the transitions between social formations, and the continuing significance of the petty-proprietor class - including both the 'classic' petty-bourgeoisie and the employed middle class - meant that if the proletariat is to take political power in Europe in this period what will follow will still be a transitional form characterised by class conflicts between the proletariat and the petty proprietors.<sup>1</sup>

I concluded that 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 workers mobilising against 'their own' state.

To quote Marx's notes on Bakunin's *Statism and anarchy*, "the proletariat organised as ruling class" means merely "that the proletariat, instead of struggling sectionally against the economically privileged class, has attained a sufficient strength and organisation to employ general means of coercion in this struggle."<sup>2</sup>

In this part I move in the first place to a highly abstract issue: the problems of collective decision-making *in general* - and temporarily abstracting from class society. In fact, of course, we live *in* class society, we have done for some thousands of years and if capitalism were overthrown worldwide tomorrow we would still live in class society, albeit under working class rule, for at least a generation or two. So the things that can be said

about collective decision-making in a society without classes have to be very tentative. They can be partly, but only partly, drawn from decision-making *within ruling classes*, like Athenian slave-trader pirates and slave-owning artisans and farmers, as comrade Cockshott does. They can be partly, but also only partly, drawn from the positive and negative problems of decision-making in working class collective organisations.

It is necessary to go to this level of abstraction for two reasons. The first is that comrade Cockshott *de facto* does so. He says that communists should seek an 'Athenian' democracy, not a 'Roman' oligarchy. In a sense he is right. But to argue at this level necessarily abstracts from the political-economic and military foun-

dations of the Athenian *politeia* and the Roman *res publica*. The second and more fundamental reason is that class society is at the end of the day a *form of* organisation of collective social decision-making: the ruling class, and its individual members, make the collective decisions 'for' the rest of us.

### Collective decisions

Every society has to have modes of taking collective decisions. Some individual decisions affect the individual alone. Many others - especially those concerning production - necessarily impact on other people. The standard example is Garret Hardin's 'Tragedy of the commons': if every common-

er individually decides to put a few more beasts on the common, the common will be destroyed.<sup>3</sup> This is usually used as an argument for private property and against communism, but since some things - like highways, or property law - *must* be common in even the most individual property-rights set-up,<sup>4</sup> all it really proves is the necessity of social decision-making with a view to the common good.

Individual conscious thought and collective discussion leading to consensus or votes, and so on, are only a *sub-set* of decision-making mechanisms. Individual training and habits, collective traditions and customs, and formally adopted rules (like traffic regulations) are all decision rules. They are individual or collective 'default settings' in frequently encoun-



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tered choices: followed unless there are strong reasons to displace them. The delegation of decisions to individuals or sub-groups is also a kind of decision rule, for the society - or organised social groups, like parties and unions - considered as a whole.

Within this framework, private property in the means of production is a decision rule under which decisions affecting the common welfare are collectively delegated to the individual owner. Contrary to the fantasies of the libertarians, this delegation is in no society ever complete. On the contrary, private property produces as its inherent negation: the idea of the 'public', whether in the form of religious organisations, the political state or both; *limits on* private property; and 'takings' of private property for public purposes (like road-building).

The existence of ruling classes is even more clearly a decision rule which delegates decision-making power to members of the ruling class or to this class as a whole. The slaveowner directs the work of his slaves, the manorial landlord of his villeins, the capitalist of his employees. Moreover, the institutions of slavery, feudal rents, etc, and capitalist profits, fund a class elite which specialises in group *public* decision-making. Ruling classes do not, of course, usually emerge through a conscious decision of society as a whole to delegate decision-making power to them. Rather, their role in collective decision-making leads to them being seen as something more than simple thieves, and hence to them not being rapidly overthrown.

Private property and class do not arise by a conscious decision to allocate social decision-making power to property owners and ruling classes. But a formal and intentional delegation of decision-making power to an individual or group *on a permanent or renewable basis* creates what is in substance a private property right. The fact that it is not recognised in law as a property right and is not (directly) an inheritable one does not alter its character as a property right in substance.<sup>5</sup> It is this private-property character which forms the basis of the turf wars between bureaucrats which I referred to in last week's article. And it formed the interest of the Soviet bureaucracy in converting what they owned into *inheritable* property through the restoration of capitalism.

Capitalism is a sub-variant of the general phenomena of private property and class. It allocates social decision-making power to a ruling class, taking the particular form of the holders of accumulations of money (including in *money* a wide variety of debt claims). But, contrary to the various ideologies of neoclassical, Austrian, etc economics, the money regime does not dissolve class. The substructure of capitalism remains a class order, one in which social decision-making power is delegated to the capitalist class and its individual members.

## Communism

Communism is transhistorically attractive because the delegation of social decision-making power to a ruling elite, with a subordinate class excluded from social decision-making power, is in contradiction with the nature of the human species. Hence the recurrence of utopian communisms, from variants of early Christianity and Mazdakism, through various medieval heresies, to the 19th century utopian socialists.

Communism is *presently* posed, in a historical sense, for two reasons. The first is that capitalism tends to concentrate production to such an extent that private decision-making about productive activities produces systemically irrational results. This

irrationality is expressed most starkly in periodic economic crises, like the one now going on, in which *too much* material wealth and productivity produces impoverishment. Through the link between capital and the state (above) it is also expressed in increasingly destructive wars.

The second reason why communism is posed is that capitalism produces and constantly expands the proletariat - a class which, because it lacks property in the means of production, *needs* collective, as opposed to private, decision-making in order to defend its interests. In doing so, capitalism creates the underlying conditions for a society without private property and class.

It follows that communism will need decision-making mechanisms which form the basis for voluntary solidarity: mechanisms which do not exclude anyone from social decision-making. Communism *abandons* the default decision rules provided by private property and money. But its mechanisms will necessarily include *other* decision rules, which provide default decisions or which delegate decision-making power.

To recognise this it is only necessary to imagine the case of a decision to adopt, or not to adopt, a new bicycle design at a minor bicycle factory in a small town, whether this town is to be in northern England, southern India or any other location. It would be plainly irrational for this decision and the numberless similar decisions which arise every day to be taken collectively by the five billion-odd people in the world above the age of 15. This is true even if we assume universal literacy and net access and (trustworthy) instant electronic referendum. Global decisions will need to be of *rough frameworks*, which are then more closely specified by local decisions; 'local' here including both a range of geographical instances, from continent level down to village level, and a range of sectoral instances, from the level of global shipping, through continental rails and power grids, down to workplace levels.

A different form of the problem is that of narrowing the range of possible positions to the point at which a collective decision is possible. Comrade Cockshott and his co-author, Allin Cottrell, have demonstrated that von Mises' objection to socialism - that planning is impossible because of the complexity of the calculations involved - is false in the light of modern computing power.<sup>6</sup> However, the planning exercise proposed *presupposes* general choices of plan goals. Put another way, the planning exercise could contribute to narrowing the range of choices by excluding impossible combinations (like capitalist politicians' promises of both lower taxes and improved public services). But a range, very likely a large range, of different combinations of plan objects and means remain possible. To reach decisions for action among a large range of possibilities it is necessary to have means to narrow down the options.

The process of narrowing down options to get to the point where a decision is possible necessarily involves delegation arrangements. The problem is simply the natural limits of time and numbers. Consider our five billion people (above) deciding among (at a fairly conservative estimate) 850 different options for a global set of annual plan priorities...

Take, for example, the old and somewhat more democratic form of Labour Party conference: 650 constituency parties, 20-odd affiliated trade unions and various other affiliated organisations each had the right to submit a single motion to party conference. To enable a week-long conference to take place some means was necessary to reduce the number of these that went to the vote.

The means was in practice bureaucratic selection of agenda topics and 'compositing' of related motions. Procedural distinctions between motion and amendment, between counterposed motions and those that are not, and so on, play a similar role. I do not recommend the particular bureaucratic solutions traditional in the labour movement, but the problem is a real problem.

Comrade Cockshott argues that "If Macnair really wanted to follow the logic of the working class party being the most consistent advocate of democracy, what he should be demanding is:

- the replacement of all parliaments, councils, assemblies and quangos by juries drawn randomly from the population;
- the right of initiative and referendum, with taxes and the budget to be submitted to popular vote; declarations of war only by popular vote; ...<sup>7</sup>
- abolition of the judiciary and magistracy; juries to be supreme in courts; no loss of liberty without jury trial."

Under full global communism, I think that the first and third of these slogans would in principle be entirely correct; though the particular forms of decision-making organisation will, of course, be decided by future generations. The reason they would be correct is that communism involves the supersession of the 'social division of labour': ie, it ceases to be the case that people specialise for life in particular tasks, and in particular that some people specialise in decision-making tasks and others in doing what they are told.<sup>8</sup> Doing decision-making tasks for a period of time then becomes a tedious chore, which the individuals involved are obliged to do from time to time, like jury service.

Universal decision-making by referendum with an unrestricted right of initiative would, however, be wrong even under full communism. The reason is that, completely irrespective of access and trustworthiness issues, it ignores the delegation problems - both of local decision-making and of narrowing the agenda for decision - discussed above. Imagine for a moment: you get up in the morning and log on, and find in your inbox 20 million referendum proposals to be read and voted on ...

Exactly the same problem affects a common far-left idea, that 'representatives', whether elected or selected at random, should be replaced by 'delegates' subject to imperative mandates in all their voting. If fully implemented in practice, the effect is that the meeting of the body at which the delegates vote is a complete waste of time: what has actually happened is a referendum with the voting taking place in the delegating bodies. Precisely because the effect is actually a referendum, there is only an illusion of delegation.

## Transitional forms

We do not leap instantly from capitalism to full communism. In the first part of this reply I emphasised the continuing presence of the petty bourgeoisie and the employed middle class after the immediate overthrow of capitalist rule.

Because the petty proprietors continue to exist, the immediate *abolition* of law and lawyers is not feasible. Comrade Cockshott's proposal for the supremacy of the jury - the old slogan, 'Juries judges both of law and fact', is sound as an immediate measure. But "abolition of the judiciary and magistracy" would amount to an attempt to immediately abolish law and lawyers. They would resurface in black-market form, as they did in revolutionary France.

There is a continuing class struggle between the proletariat and the small proprietors. This class struggle is somewhat different in charac-

ter from the 'classic' class struggle between proletarians and capitalists, which is driven by the obvious antagonism that wage cuts, longer hours and speed-up increase profits and *vice versa*. Rather the small proprietors have three interests opposed to those of the proletariat.

The first is an interest in obtaining an enlarged share of the social product relative to proletarians and to their competitors in the small-proprietor class (which is *partially*, but only partially, justified due to the higher costs of reproduction of skilled labour-power). This is reflected in conflict over the prices of products and services provided by members of the petty-proprietor class - in extreme forms the 'scissors crises' seen at various times in the USSR, China and Cuba. It is also reflected in managerial and bureaucratic self-dealing for special privileges.

The second is an interest in the exploitation of family labour with a view to accumulation, both to keep the small proprietor 'above' proletarians, and in competition with other small proprietors. This is ideologically reflected as patriarchalism, commitment to the subordination of women and of youth, and therefore opposed to the interest of the proletariat in solidarity across gender and age. It is as true of the managerial middle class as of rural small proprietors: this is seen every day in divorce-court battles over assets.

The third is an interest in retaining monopoly control of their tangible or intangible property and therefore excluding 'outsiders' of one sort or another both from competing access, and from decisions. This is expressed in one form in - for a couple of examples - village and small-town suspicion of 'incomers', and practising lawyers' hostility to any reform which might undermine their monopoly. It takes another form in - also examples - bureaucratic 'turf wars', and the dictatorship of the bureaucracy in the organisations of the workers' movement.

If petty-proprietor skill monopolies were not real, we could move immediately from capitalism to communism. But they are real, and because of this the proletariat is required not only to trade with small family producers, but also to *employ* the managerial middle class in the form of union, party, cooperative, state, etc officials.

The problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat is how to keep the officials in a state of subordination to the proletarian majority, and to use an appropriate combination of carrot and stick to force them to accept a gradual process of *socialisation* of their monopolised skills and information.

The *primary* measures of this class struggle are economic. They are general reduction of working hours, and increased availability of education (especially adult education) and retraining, in order to 'overproduce' holders of the skills monopolised by the managerial middle class, and other such measures.

The problem can also be tackled directly through *rotation of office*: that is, compulsory and short term limits, which require officials to stand down completely at the end of their period of office and return to their prior jobs or the normal labour market for a period of time before they are eligible again to stand for office.

Most fundamental, however, is the enforcement as far as practically possible of *transparency*. The reason is that, as I have already said, what the managerial middle class monopolises is precisely *access to information*.

This, in turn, requires that class-political struggle should itself take a transparent form. Under full communism, comrade Cockshott is correct that decision-makers should in principle be appointed by lot, like

jurors. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, however, it is in the interest of the proletariat that the class interest of the petty proprietors should be *openly* expressed in the form of political parties and factions - and therefore there has to be some form of elective, representative institutions for decision-making.

The alternative, as the experience of the USSR and its satellites and imitators makes clear, is not that the class interests of the petty proprietors go unrepresented. It is that, excluded from *open* representation, these interests are promoted in an obscure and subterranean way in secret-factional and clique struggles within the party and state apparatus. Precisely because this form of representation of petty-proprietor interests is obscure and subterranean, it actually subordinates proletarian interests to the interests of the managerial middle class.

## The capitalist state

Is this argument - that the dictatorship of the proletariat needs to employ elective, representative forms, in which the small proprietors are openly represented - 'parliamentarism' and therefore the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie? Comrade Cockshott argues that it is an 'aristocratic' or 'oligarchic' form, and this I have addressed above: it is a *transitional* form. But he also argues, in relation to the question of the nature of the *capitalist* state, that it is central to the bourgeois character of this state.

In my book *Revolutionary strategy* I write: "The inner secret of the capitalist state form is not bourgeois democracy. Rather it has three elements: 1. the rule of law - ie, the judicial power; 2. the deficit financing of the state through organised financial markets; and 3. the fact that capital rules, not through a single state, but through an international state system, of which each national state is merely a part."

Comrade Cockshott responds: "This seems a little idiosyncratic, particularly point 2. True, states often do use deficit financing, and indeed one can argue that the growth in the money supply necessary for the circuit M-C-M' can often occur this way. But why is deficit finance the key? Surely the power to tax is more important than that, and in particular the power to levy taxes in money rather than in kind. Along with this goes the right to issue money.

"... Why too does he miss out the monopoly of armed force held by the state, the existence of a standing army and salaried police? Why does he not mention the parliamentary state as the characteristic constitutional form of civil society?"

As to the "monopoly of armed force, the existence of a standing army and salaried police", on the one hand no state anywhere has *ever* had an actual monopoly of armed force, and in the US and Britain in the 19th century - surely capitalist states - the standing armies were trivial in size, and salaried police an innovation which dated considerably after the seizure of power by the capitalist class. The role of 'Pinkerton men' and other employer-hired goons in late 19th-early 20th century US strike-breaking provides one example among many of non-state organised armed force in capitalist states. Non-state organised armed auxiliaries of the capitalist class (not just fascist bands, though they are the most striking form) also surface wherever the class struggle attains a high level of intensity.

On the other hand, *every* state from Pharaonic Egypt and the ancient Mesopotamian empires onward, and including the feudal kingdoms, has disposed of a sufficient *preponderance* of organised armed force - an 'army in being' or the ability to as-



semble one - to allow it to extract surplus in the form of tax from the inhabitants of a territory and to prevent rival states, or predatory pastoralists or sea-raiders, from interfering with this surplus-extraction.

This is comrade Cockshott's second point - the state's power to tax. Military *preponderance* and *ability to assemble* an army are sufficient to support territorial coherence and the extraction of tax: witness - for example - the 'geld' of later Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England or the more elaborate tax operations of later medieval England: at none of these periods were there standing armies.

As comrade Cockshott says, and as he and his co-authors argue at more length in *Classical econophysics*, state taxation is the basis of money - and money is also a *prerequisite* of capitalism. But money long antedates capitalism: I do not suppose that comrade Cockshott and his co-authors would characterise Lydia in the 7th century BCE, and so on, as capitalist states.

Tax and the preponderance of armed force give us a *state*; they do not by any means give us a *capitalist* state. I suggest that states - after the very earliest temple-states - are created by new ruling classes (slaveowners, feudal lords, capitalists) in particular *forms* which tie them to the new ruling class. These forms are then the basis of the loyalty of the state officials to the state as an organisation. This loyalty allows the state to act coherently rather than collapsing into a mass of competing small-scale protection rackets (which is the fate of failed states).

My "idiosyncratic" summary account of the capitalist state form is, then, not designed to distinguish state from non-state societies, but to distinguish *capitalist* states from feudal or other pre-capitalist states and from the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As to deficit finance, it is true that pre-capitalist states can and do borrow - and default on their debts. The distinctive aspect of *capitalist* states is the creation of organised markets in a standing state debt and the hypothecation (mortgaging) of tax income in the first place to payment of the interest charges on this debt. The practice was invented in the interstitial-capitalist, medieval Italian city-states. It became a decisive feature of the form of the capitalist state with the late 16th century Dutch revolt and the aftermath of 1688 in England. Lending to the new state was initially and for some time afterwards an overtly political, as well as an economic, act.<sup>9</sup> The effect of this *standing* debt is that creditors become stakeholders in the state in the same sense that a company's 'stockholders' or 'debenture holders' of standing debt stock are stakeholders in the company. The standing debt and the financial market grown up around it is the core of the integration of the capitalist class as a ruling class, one which rules the state.

Intimately linked is the 'rule of law', which comrade Cockshott does not discuss. The standing debt requires that the 'first mortgage' of tax revenue to pay debt interest must be a 'credible commitment'. This credibility is given by the 'rule of law': the commitment that the state will act only by *making* rules which will be enforced in courts or *under* rules which will

be enforced in courts.<sup>10</sup> Feudal and antique states, whether based on personal monarchy or (some ancient cities) on the direct sovereignty of citizens or oligarchs, cannot give such commitments.

Finally and centrally, Comrade Cockshott says that I miss "the parliamentary state as the characteristic constitutional form of civil society". 'Civil society' is a slippery expression here. I assume that what comrade Cockshott means is *bourgeois* society, rather than the 'civil society' of non-state public discourse, clubs, groups, etc.<sup>11</sup> The reason for making this assumption is that the parliamentary constitution is a *state* form, not a non-state form, and parliament a component of the state order.

Having made this assumption, the answer is that, though the parliamentary state form is a *common* form of capitalist state, it is not a *necessary* form of capitalist rule. The 'rule of law state' requires a sharp conceptual separation of the acts of legislating (making rules for the future) adjudication (judging disputes as to the application of existing rules) and the executive power (other governmental decision-making). Such a separation is absent in Ottoman or Mughal *firman*, or in Tudor and early Stuart privy council and star chamber orders.

However, this conceptual separation does not require the US-style full personal separation of legislature, judiciary and executive. Witness 18th century England - certainly a 'rule of law state', but one where the lord chancellor was both minister and judge, and the House of Lords both ultimate court of appeal and part of the legislature.

The extreme form of this sort of unification is a capitalist military junta. In such state orders capital is still in command - mainly *via* the financial markets, but also via personal corruption of state officials. However, electoral representation is removed. The legislative acts of the junta are still formally marked off from their administrative acts, and the judicial system remains *formally* independent, though subject to certain political limits. Less extreme are pseudo-absolute empires, like the French 'Second Empire' of Napoleon III, Meiji Japan or Wilhelmine Germany, which had elected bodies, but with less powers than those of parliamentary regimes.

Once we recognise that these military and pseudo-absolute regimes are all still capitalist states and not pre-capitalist ones, it becomes clear that parliamentarism is not a *necessary* form of capitalist rule. Where capital or the state has pressing needs to avoid electoral representation or limit its effects, capital can perfectly well rule through military juntas and formally autocratic constitutions.

## Kautsky

Karl Kautsky argued in *Parliamentarism, plebiscites and socialism* (1893) that "the parliamentary form can be an arm which has been capable of serving and has served very varied classes and parties"; and that "We can already see that a really parliamentary regime can be the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat just as it has been that of the bourgeoisie".<sup>12</sup> It is clear enough that Kautsky's and his followers' attachment to parliamentary forms was critical to his opposition to the October revolution in Russia, and

to the hopeless roles of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany in the 1918-19 revolution in Germany, and the Austro-Marxists in the contemporary Austrian revolution - in both cases leading to the eventual victory of fascism.

But *parliamentary* forms are not the same thing as *representative* forms; and contrary to Kautsky, the *parliamentary* form is a form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. It is this because the elected parliament is *part merely* of the general form of rule-of-law constitutionalism. The parliament is purely a lawgiver, framed within an autonomous executive and an autonomous judiciary. Even within the role of lawgiver, the elected parliament is cramped by its dependence on the specialist lawyers in the parliamentary draftsman's office - required by the autonomy of the judicial power.

Kautsky in *Parliamentarism* takes these limitations for granted. Indeed, he positively endorses them. His case against legislation by referendum is partly based on real decision difficulties, but equally strongly on the importance of the lawyers' 'technical assistance' in drafting. He thinks the role of 'technical assistance', the growth of the state bureaucracy and the separate judicial power are results of the general extension of the division of labour, necessary in any 'modern state'. He is a positive advocate of the 'rule of law'.<sup>13</sup>

To advocate or defend the rule of law is to support the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The same is not true of the advocacy of elected representative institutions in general.

Representative institutions do not on their own amount to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In *Revolutionary Strategy* I produced a short list of proposals. I went on to say that "There are certainly other aspects; more in the CPGB's *Draft programme*. These are merely points that are particularly salient to me when writing." Comrade Cockshott, like several other reviewers of the book, ignored this sentence. The redraft version of the *Draft programme* in my opinion strengthens what we have to say about the minimum political programme and the dictatorship of the proletariat. No doubt these proposals could be improved further. Comrade Cockshott's 'Athenian' argument for an immediate shift to juries in place of elected bodies and for plebiscites would in my opinion weaken them ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. 'Socialism is a form of class struggle' *Weekly Worker* June 24.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm.
3. (1968) 162 *Science* pp1243-1248. There is a massive literature on the issue, not relevant to my present point.
4. C Rose *Property and persuasion* Boulder 1994, p20 and chapters 2 and 5, makes this point within the framework of acceptance in general of pro-private-property arguments.
5. See 'A bridge too far' *Weekly Worker* December 18 2003; cf also 'The procedural is political', November 15 2007.
6. 'Computers and economic democracy': www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~wpc/reports/quito.pdf; also 'Mises, Kantorovich and economic computation': http://mpira.uni-muenchen.de/6063/1/MPRA\_paper\_6063.pdf.
7. I have omitted the third point in the list: "full political rights, including the right to elect officers in the armed forces;" because I agree with it without reservation (it is already in the CPGB *Draft programme*).
8. More exactly the social *specialisation of function*. The division of labour, properly so called, will undoubtedly continue: we will not all be doing identical tasks at any one time. But 'social division of labour' is, though not fully scientifically accurate, the conventional expression for the lifelong specialisation I have described in the text.
9. Netherlands: MC 't Hart *The making of a bourgeois state* Manchester 1993; England: BG Carruthers *City of capital* Princeton 1996.
10. Some evidence for financial market views of the issue of judicial independence in D Klerman, PG Mahoney, 'The value of judicial independence: evidence from 18th century England' (2005) 7 *American Law and Economics Review* 1-27.
11. 'Bürgerliche Gesellschaft' - the expression usually translated as 'civil society' in Hegel and Marx. It is true that in the *Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right* Marx interprets 'civil society' to mean the non-state part of the society, but in doing so he departs some way from Hegel's argument - and, I think, makes a mistake. More in my article, 'Law and state as holes in Marxist theory' (2006) 34 *Critique* 211-236.
12. K Kautsky *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart 1893) cited here from the French translation, *Parlementarisme et socialisme* (Paris 1900), pp147, 165.
13. Chapter 8 (decision difficulties); chapter 9, especially pp94, 98 (drafting and technical assistance); p113 (division of labour); pp102-04 (rule of law).

# 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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**For the  
right to  
retire at 60**

## Pension con job

**A**s the furore over George Osborne's bloodthirsty 'emergency budget' continues, a clear area of controversy is the proposed rise in the state pension age.

Gordon Brown's Labour government had already projected an increase, to be implemented over the years 2024-46, of the official retirement age to 68 for both men and women. Towards this end, from April this year the retirement age for women has been raised from 60 to 61 and was due to reach the male age of 65 in 2020. This is nominally in line with the demographic trends of an ageing population. Now work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith, in line with the desire to decimate Britain's public spending, has sped up the timetable - men will see their retirement age increase from 65 to 66 in 2016.

So, though this particular change will only come into play after the end of this government, it is clear that the political establishment as a whole is engaged in a rolling back of the welfare state. To state the obvious, the raising of the pension age is not just an attack on the elderly, but an attack on people who are now young too (there is, after all, talk going around of pushing the retirement age up to 70 in the years ahead). And, alas, this is only part of the story.

As a 'sweetener', the ruling coalition has agreed to restore the earnings link to the state pension. This is certainly a demand that peppers any number of left reformist programmes. The economic situation, however, basically renders it a dead letter. Real wages are likely to fall - which means that the existing link to inflation will cover any increase in wages anyway. But state pensioners are at least no worse off than they were under the old regime - the basic rate will rise by the largest of earnings, prices or a 2.5% minimum.

At the moment, the grand total for a single person is a whopping £97.65 per week - so far short of a living income, it is closer to an insult than a pension. With prices increasing by 3.7% or 5.3%, depending on which measure you use (wonder which one Osborne has in mind), this figure will in practice stagnate until the much-anticipated economic recovery - and that is before you take into account the rise in VAT. The utterly tokenistic character of concessions 'won' by Nick Clegg and his Liberal Democrat colleagues from biliously Tory policies is plain to all - their poll ratings are already dropping rapidly, and there are the first signs of disquiet on the Lib Dem benches in the Commons as well.

Labour, of course, is in the business of scoring the political open goals - with such socialist firebrands as, er, Yvette Cooper attacking cuts "nastier" than those of Maggie Thatcher. This level of mendacity really does give the luxury of opposition a bad name - not only are the Tories simply building on decades of damage, including under Labour, when it comes to pensions; but

Labour *promised* more severe cuts than the Thatcher years in the leaders' debates! Surely Cooper should be congratulating Osborne for fulfilling New Labour policy?

Alongside the matter of pensions is the related question of the compulsory retirement age. The coalition wants to effectively abolish it - people, it is argued, should be free to stay in work with all the usual legal protections until they see fit to leave. Indeed, there is nothing particularly progressive about forcing people to retire - for many employers, it has been used to conveniently get rid of people in jobs where it is generally possible to work into old age (for instance, academics: left intellectuals Terry Eagleton and Sheila Rowbotham were summarily ditched by Manchester University during a cost-cutting drive two years ago).

But again, the context of the change reveals it as something of a con job. Part of the impetus behind the present round of auto-cannibalistic cuts (not the only part) is to clear out concessions to the working class. Raising the retirement age makes people more reliant on their employers, rather than less - a 65-year-old is unlikely to want to live off a state pension and whatever benefits he or she can cobble together, and the door is open for employers

to cajole workers to work until they drop. People should have the right, but more importantly the material ability, to retire *when they are ready*.

More broadly in contemporary culture, capitalists expect ever more work out of us. The advent of mobile phones and electronic communications means that once time-consuming tasks are done in seconds - but Marx reminds us that no 'labour-saving' device ever saved a minute's labour, and the consequence is that work increasingly seems never to stop - it continues long after nominal working hours are over. For some capitalists, it is convenient to be able to curtail working *life* - for others, it will be convenient to extend it.

One need only re-examine Marx's writing on the struggle over the working day to find out what lurks behind the benevolent gift of the option of more years of work - in the 19th century, bourgeois ideologues wasted no time opposing limits to the working day as infringements of the 'freedom'

of workers to work as much as they pleased. At its most obscene, this situation meant that children were claimed to be free and happy volunteers to 14-hour stints in a flax mill.

Contrary to the caricatures peddled by some at the looper end of anarchism, Marxists do not valorise 'good, honest work' in any way. We do not think there is any virtue in working yourself to death - labour is there to re-

produce life, not the other way round. That is not the state of affairs under capitalism. The ageing population is not, as it is sometimes implied to be, a 'demographic time bomb' of some sort, and we are thereby heading for a situation where there are simply too few people in work to support the total population. The productivity of labour has tended to increase, albeit in a pattern that suits the ruling class; there is more than enough production to go around.

Capitalism simply undoes all those technical advances by squandering the material wealth it produces - and the wealth it inherits from nature. It is the worst of all possible worlds - quite apart from pensioners, whose removal from the workplace is partly a matter of the individual's life cycle, capitalism demands unemployment - but those in employment have to work themselves to the bone to compensate; meanwhile, waste and duplication of effort abounds in the anarchy of the marketplace.

The flagrant irrationality of all this is concealed and compounded by ideology - the dour ethics of Calvinist Christianity have long been noted to underwrite in some sense the expansion of industrial capitalism, but there are no end of alternatives, religious or secular, to this masochistic dogma. Self-help manuals abound to inculcate the personal habits of non-specific 'successful' people, and all remind the reader that genius is 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration (a rather generous assessment of the usefulness of such tomes). We are persistently told Horatio Alger stories - Alger peddled endless novels to the American public in the late 19th century charting the rise of humble urchins to a comfortably inane bourgeois existence. It was all there for the taking - provided you worked to a lunatic intensity.

As a result of all this, the matter of pensions has to tie in with the issue of work as such. Retirement proves such a vexed issue only because, for

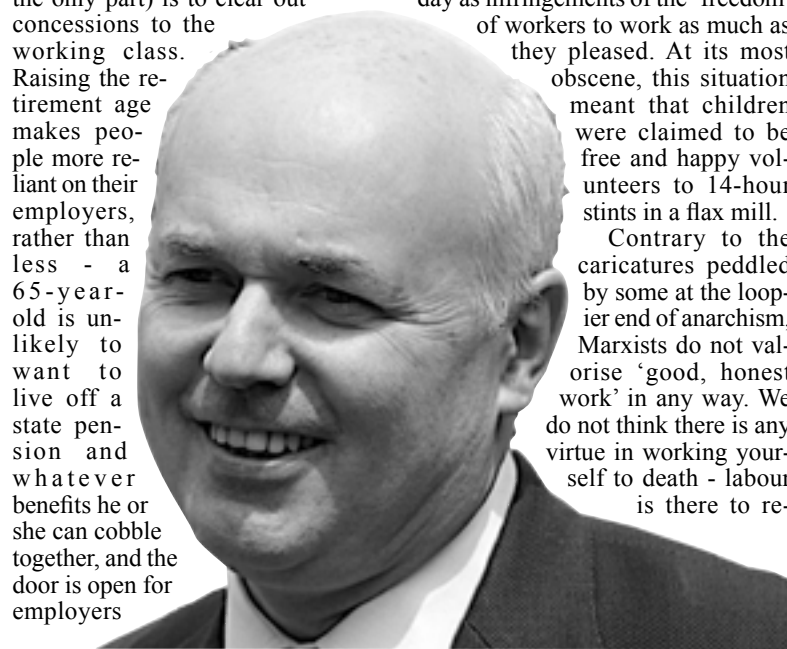
the majority of people, it is something they come very much to look forward to. In the 1990s, American journalist Barbara Ehrenreich spent a year, in the manner of George Orwell, living close to the headline in mundane unskilled jobs, producing a book - *Nickel and dimed* - about the experience. Her point was that this work is precisely 'mind-numbing' - it eats up the time and energy necessary to read, to socialise, to think. Paul Lafargue, son-in-law of Marx, went further in his short essay, 'The right to be lazy': "In capitalist society work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy."

We need to propose a radically different kind of working life - one where more people work substantially fewer hours (for a start, the working week should be reduced to a 35 hour maximum); one where people are free to spend time out of work to study, whether vocationally or not; one where there is - heaven forbid - the opportunity for people simply to *relax*. Jobs themselves should not be designed to squeeze every last drop of sweat from workers, but to produce in line with what society democratically decides it needs - and wherever possible to be genuinely fulfilling activities in their own right.

Working life should end in material comfort. The age of retirement should be *lowered* to 60 (55 for those in unpleasant or dangerous occupations). But this should be voluntary - there should be no compulsory retirement on the basis of age. Pensioners should receive an income based not on what capital claims it can afford, linked to inflation or anything else, but what they actually require to live well - materially and culturally. Pensions need to be set at the level of the minimum wage, which itself needs to be raised substantially to reflect the true value of labour-power ●

**James Turley**

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk



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