



weekly
worker 

**Supplement - Ancient Israel I:
Religion, class struggles and
revolution in ancient Judea**

- Church of England
- Young prisoners
- Northern Ireland
- Coops and capitalism

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**French
burqa
ban has
nothing
to do
with
women's
rights**



LETTERS



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

Alien force

Eddie Ford's otherwise interesting analysis of the case of Raoul Moat ends up nonetheless disappointing and incomplete ('Moat's paranoia and the community of women', July 15).

Eddie chooses to focus on Raoul's relations with his former partners (the same as the *Mirror* and the other tabloids), his sexism and apparent intense jealousies. From this Eddie leads on to an analysis of male chauvinism, the world-historic defeat of women and communistic, matriarchal societies with the rise of male-dominated private property and capitalism. All true, of course, but it was actually Raoul's relations with the police and the police relations with people like him that pushed him over the edge.

While sections of the left seem to recognise the response of black youth to the role of police on the streets of Toxteth or Moss Side, they are less understanding of the similar reactions of white youth in northern cities. Much of the north is still in a state of seething resentment at the police and the memories of their role in villages and cities across the north during the miners' strikes. The police are still an alien force, still seen as waging a non-stop war on impoverished and dispossessed pockets of the region and similar regions.

At the Durham Miners Gala a couple of weeks back, the Industrial Workers of the World had some mugs on their stall, one of which carried the famous picture of a miner in a police helmet face to face with a cop. It carried the title, 'Go on, pig, make my day'. One bloke came past and loudly shouted that we should all be locked up and banned for such an inappropriate image, given "what has just happened" (the shot cop). The crowd at once turned on him. "He should have had a bliddy machine gun instead of a shotgun" and "He didn't shoot enough of the bastards" were two of the memorable responses - and not just from young folk either.

Moat tells us from prison that it was the police action in having his youngest children taken away which was 'the final straw'. He had been picked up and arrested constantly for years, despite them only managing to charge and jail him once and that for a relatively minor and short-sentence offence. It was used as the reason to take his kids away. When his unfortunate latest partner decided to tell him her current boyfriend was a policeman, he really hadn't needed another reason to hate the police, but he found one.

The attack on the former partner was cruel and unwarranted, but many, many people in the north have identified with his anti-police campaign and not at all with any male chauvinist bullying. It is this reason why 24,000 people - mostly white, disempowered and alienated youth from the north - have signed his Facebook sympathy pages.

We are on a powder keg of unorganised hostility and resentment, which could break out into a bush fire at any time.

David Douglass
South Shields

Overt sexism

Dave Douglass really should read more carefully (Letters, July 15). He now argues that I quoted statistics on 'rape', as defined by the latest legislation. He still assumes (on the basis of no evidence) that I fully

support this legislation. I don't. "Need I point out," he asks, "that these statistics include all activities classed by the state as 'rape'? ... How else can we read this?"

Tell you what, Dave, it's easier than you think. No, you don't need to point it out, because I didn't use those figures. Here's how else you can read this. The statistics I used were compiled by Rape Crisis and Women's Aid. They refer to rape and other violence against women, as defined by the women who sustain these attacks and the women who do the research. The evidence is easily available on the internet.

Should you feel inclined to research the reasons why some men are violent to women, I'm sure your work will join the extensive list of similar studies conducted by 'socialist' men in their tireless struggle for gender equality. Can't find any? You don't say.

Those readers with good memories may recall this exchange started with my criticism of an edition of this paper (*Weekly Worker* June 3) containing several examples of overt sexism. Comrade Douglass's response has led to a continuing debate on his comments at the expense of any further discussion of the other points I raised concerning the overall political direction of this paper. Those issues still need to be addressed, so it appears I will have to return to this draining experience at some point in the future.

Heather Downs
email

Proxy hustings

Thursday July 15 saw the Labour Party leadership hustings in the Stevenage constituency and 80 party members made their way into the council chambers, of which five were under 30 and most of the rest of pensionable age. I went along in the hope of hearing the candidates put their case, but those hopes were soon dashed when it became apparent that none of them were going to attend in person and that their pitch would be presented by proxy.

Speaking for Ed Balls was the town's former MP, Barbara Follett, for Andy Burnham a local activist and for David Miliband Mary Creagh, MP for Wakefield. Diane Abbott's campaign was unable to send a representative and Ed Miliband's was awful. However a statement of Diane's position was read from the floor, and a supporter of Ed Miliband offered to make a short contribution on his behalf.

Barbara Follett, having waxed lyrical about Ed Ball's wonderful character and political bravery, emphasised his commitment to a 50-50 male-female split in his shadow cabinet, and to addressing the need for more social housing - an issue of pertinence in the town. The advocate for Andy Burnham centred his pitch on his being the "listening candidate", keen to involve the party members and to rehabilitate the word 'socialism' - or more precisely 'aspirational socialism'.

My previous perception of David Miliband was of a fairly bland and unsubstantial politician, touted for leadership more for his image than the content of his message. So Mary Creagh's speech came as a surprise, with its vaguely left-sounding rhetoric. David is, we were told, determined to end the charitable status of private schools and to defend the union link. Ed Miliband's supporter highlighted his ministerial abilities, negotiation skills and his good performances on the 24-hour news cycle.

Ken Follett, author and husband of Barbara, questioned David

Miliband's support for tuition fees from the floor. That he had done so was disputed, to the extent that I am none the wiser as to whether he did or didn't, before Barbara Follett finished the character attack that her husband had begun by claiming that David Miliband had not wanted to come to Stevenage during the election if it meant meeting voters rather than just party members - an example of political cowardice on his part, she suggested.

Apart from this, the debate never really took off - it certainly didn't reveal any major differences between the campaigns. Perhaps if Diane Abbott had managed to find someone to speak for her things would have been livelier.

We then moved to a vote to decide the CLP's endorsement. Under the preferential voting system Diane Abbott was the first to be eliminated - the fact that her case was not put must surely have had its effect. Next to go was Andy Burnham, followed by Ed Miliband. The final run-off scored the vote for the two remaining candidates as Ed Balls 36, David Miliband 38, the latter securing Stevenage's endorsement.

Glancing around during the voting, I noted that quite a few ballot papers had put Diane in last place. There is very little by way of a Labour left here.

Gary Salisbury
Stevenage

Marxism and art

Jim Gilbert is quite right in his critique of the coalition's arts funding restructure, but I feel there needs to be a further discussion on the direct implications for radical art, as well as the wider state of the arts in general ('Philistinism of cuts', July 15).

It is important to note that contemporary radical theatre presents itself mostly non-politically (unlike much of the great radical theatre of modernity - Brecht, for example), but its radical aesthetic has been formed out of a contemporary understanding of those modern dramatists. There is a direct lineage, therefore, from the Marxist aesthetics of Brecht to the postmodern aesthetics of the new radical theatre. Though the avant garde theatre now manifests itself as part of theories which reject politics - and are therefore mostly 'safe' for capitalism - it is historically linked with 'unsafe' political ideologies. Additionally, the very notion of the avant garde is directly contradictory to the interests of the established order, and therefore those who are now expected to fund the arts. Radical political work is now much less prominent in the theatre than ever before (in fact it is almost completely absent), but for those artists like myself who seek to reunite the radical aesthetic traditions with Marxist theory and ideology, the new funding system will make creating new work almost impossible.

In the main, the radical work most likely affected will be of a non-political nature, but, as discussed, it is of a highly political heritage. It is through these new (but historically informed) radical aesthetics that Marxism could and should rediscover a home in the theatre. If they cease to exist because of the funding changes, Marxists will find it even more difficult to express their politics via performance.

There are a number of reasons why radical political work has become increasingly obscure, many of which are obviously connected to the reasons why radical politics in general have become more obscure. It is my view, however, that there is a lack of dedication to the arts in contemporary Marxism. If we look back at the Marxist movements in the 20th

century, we find various examples of organisations (the Frankfurt School, situationists, etc) discussing and promoting aesthetics as an important part of both Marxist theory and action.

It is in light of the recent attack on the arts that Marxists should begin to develop a contemporary theory and vocabulary towards aesthetics, as well as a dedication to supporting radical work in order to both resurrect and preserve the Marxist artistic traditions, and help to develop a contemporary understanding of the relationship between socialism and art.

Josh Guiry
email

In or out?

The interview with Steve Gillan, general secretary of the POA (*Weekly Worker* July 16), was interesting and got me thinking about what we should accept as 'normal' trade unions.

Whilst generally agreeing with the view that prison officers, like cops, aren't 'workers in uniform', I wonder how we would arrive at a list of those we think are 'outside the workers' movement'? Jobs formerly undertaken by the police are now done by civilians: eg, prisoner escort; and, of course, there are police community support officers.

And then council workers are sometimes obliged to be, in effect, immigration officers and some department for work and pensions staff interview suspected 'benefit fraudsters' under caution. If trade union militants are fined for their activities, then bailiffs will sometimes seize their goods and some journalists may be obliged to write what they know are smears. The latter are certainly part of the workers' movement, but the former? I don't know.

I suspect it is a tactical question, and one where the line between those inside and outside will vary depending on circumstances.

Clive Power
Manchester

Not green

Comrade Jeff Leese no doubt knows precisely which modern environmentalists have views antithetical to Marx's theory, but I think he means the Greens (Letters, July 8).

He seems totally unaware of the long line of environmentalists who have based themselves on Marxism, taking as their starting point that capitalism strives to achieve perpetually increasing accumulation, but the Earth and its resources are finite. Capitalism inevitably damages the planet and its ability to sustain life.

David Ricardo commented, answering Malthus, that the reason the destitute were starving was not because there was no food for them to eat, but because they had no money to pay for it. In other words, many were wageless, unemployed wretches. The subtle subtext of Malthus is not about overpopulation, but about the cheapest way to maintain the reserve army of labour, which is an absolute necessity for the capitalists to discipline the working class. Malthus was satisfied with letting them starve to death. You have only to look at the millions trying to survive on less than two dollars a day to see that this is still capitalist policy. No-one at the time disputed that in theory the world's population could theoretically expand to the point that it could not be fed: merely that it hadn't - and, for that matter, it still hasn't. But it is a totally wrong way to approach the question of population.

Marx commented that every society has its own population dynamics. The massive rapid increase in popula-

tion is unique to capitalism, as is its need for a reserve army of labour. In Britain this army is pensioned off into relatively benign poverty and the rapid growth in population has ceased - even gone into reverse. Presumably if this policy was extended to the third world the same thing would happen. But this answer is only marginally better than Malthus's.

The answer lies in the population dynamics of communism. Where production is for need. The question to be answered is, therefore, what does human society need? This is, of course, a question that can only be fully answered in the future, but there are clues aplenty to be found in the present.

Radical anthropologists like Chris Knight argue that the modern human came into being as a communist and that our essential nature is to be a socially equal member of a community. Relationships, not property, are our greatest need. More time to socialise, less time spent accumulating property would make us happy. As for population, overexploited peasant families have a real material interest in maximising the number of their children (males at least), but under present-day advanced capitalism people tend to have less children because of market pressures. Under communism children would be humanity's most precious resource. Large families would, of course, be affordable, but my guess is that family size will be small, if only because it will mean quality time becomes quantity time too.

Marx was a scholar of ancient Greek, and the Athenian Greeks used the word 'idiot' to describe someone who deliberately cut themselves off from civil society. I think he was referring to the isolation of pre-capitalist rural life, not the stupidity of the peasants. Anyway he favoured a solution that ended the isolation of both. In part he was following the scientific theories of Justus von Liebig, who described the British agricultural system as being one of robbery both of the land and other country's resources. Von Liebig went on to create modern fertilisers, which from the point of view of capitalism saved the day. But the robbery goes on, in that the relationship between the urban population and the earth that supports it is still broken. Marx was looking for a social answer rather than a technological one to that problem.

Comrade Leese fears the power of nature and wants us to have exclusively technological methods of control over it. But Marx preferred social solutions where possible. Move people off the San Andreas Fault. Don't build housing estates on flood plains. Be prepared to compromise with nature. We never will have absolute power and under communism we will not have the commercial pressures that make so many of capitalism's projects irrational and arrogant.

Phil Kent
Haringey

EDL confusion

A comment on Mike Macnair's speech at the Marxism fringe on the left's tactics towards the far right ('Gerbils on a wheel', July 8).

I generally agree on the main point about the Socialist Workers Party's class-collaboration. It seems to me to be an absolute nonsense, given the level of threat of the far right and also the dominant ideology it reinforces regarding liberal democracy.

However, I am more interested in what appears to be your absolute insistence that the English Defence League is part of the state and organised by the state. I am not implying for one moment that the state does not involve itself within the work-

ers' movement, conjure up pretexts for military adventures, etc, but I and I'm sure many other comrades would like to know why and how you can be so certain on the question of the EDL.

For example, there are some sections, or perhaps merely individuals, of the anarchist movement which are putting forward arguments to debate the EDL. Recently some EDL members have been turning up to various anarchist/anti-fascist discussions professing their anti-racism and wishing to talk. There seems to be a lot of confusion over how to deal with them and also over the make-up of the EDL itself - for instance, the not so scientific 'A lot of them should be on our side' is coming from some quarters (roughly translated this implies that many are working class who just have picked the wrong side).

Richard Keane
email

AV confusion

Steve Cooke (Letters, July 15) correctly points out the misunderstanding about the mechanics of the alternative vote in Peter Manson's article ('Fighting for genuine PR', July 8). In my view, the discussion of electoral reform on the left is generally confused and also short-sighted.

I understand why most of the left, including the CPGB, supports the most proportional electoral system possible. As Peter explained, proportional representation would "allow the (admittedly meagre) support for socialists and communists to be reflected in parliament" (July 8). I have argued that this is an inadequate rationale for advocating a particular electoral system ('Electoral reform and communist strategy', May 27). It is also an admission of an extreme lack of ambition for a tradition that seeks to represent the working class - the majority of society. I propose that in campaigning for 'extreme democracy' we should raise democratic demands that "point directly towards the political structures that the working class requires to establish its political rule".

Moshé Machover believes that making essentially transitional demands of this type around democracy are inappropriate, as opposed to demands around economic issues ('Voting - present and future', June 24). In contrast to Moshé, I believe that the debate around democracy has the potential to most sharply expose the vulnerabilities of our capitalist rulers. Since the working class revolution is in the first instance a political act, the class struggle becomes most acute and most dangerous for the capitalist class when it focuses on constitutional and political issues.

Therefore, even under capitalism, we should raise demands for direct and participatory democracy. It is not a question (as Moshé suggests) of taking responsibility for administering the present order, but of creating the conditions in which that order can be overturned.

I think PR falls short of this. The question of recallability is key. Even were elections to be held annually, the right to recall representatives (for reasons of politics as well as corruption and laziness) is the only method that maximises the influence of electors. It is noticeable that Peter does not refer to this issue in his article. This is all the more striking an omission, given that the mainstream bourgeois parties are making proposals for a stunted, bureaucratic version for recalling MPs that we ought to challenge.

Any system of PR in which representatives are elected with minority support (an integral feature of PR) is incompatible with a system in which electors can freely remove representatives who do not enjoy their confidence - minority representatives could simply be recalled immediately after election.

The proposal made by Jim Moody for parties themselves to be allowed to recall representatives elected on the party list is not an arrangement that empowers the working class ('Accountable to their party', April 15). Even a democratic communist party should not seek to substitute itself for the electorate or working class as a whole. The right of recall should belong to those who have elected representatives in the first place.

Advocates of PR, such as Moshé, Peter and Arthur - in emphasising the deficiencies of any system of voting that is not PR - come close to suggesting that that it is impossible to devise a legitimate electoral system that can produce a single representative or delegate who has majority support. Or, indeed, any democratic method for choosing between a variety of complex options. Fortunately, working class organisations over the last 200 years - from early trade unions to the Paris Commune, to 20th century workers' councils - have managed to overcome the conundrum.

In fact AV is the system which most clearly mirrors the process by which most working class bodies have reached decisions - whether on strategy and tactics, or electing a delegate or officer. When forced to choose between more than two options where none has majority support, the least popular option is discarded and a new vote taken.

That is why I tend to support Peter's proposal that the CPGB advocate a 'yes' vote in a referendum on AV. However, the context will be everything. Contrary to Peter's understanding, the coalition proposal to equalise constituencies is less than democratic. Constituency sizes are to be based on current electoral rolls rather than population figures derived from census returns. In other words, the unregistered will not count towards determining the size of constituencies. Working class and poorer districts usually have lower levels of registration than the wealthier. The coalition proposal therefore contains an inbuilt anti-working class bias.

The most important aspect of a communist referendum campaign will not be the tactical one of how we vote on the options presented to us by our rulers, but how effectively we seize on the opportunity to advocate the full range of democratic demands. These would include the abolition of the entirely undemocratic elements of our constitution - the monarchy and the House of Lords - annual elections, MPs on a skilled worker's wage. And, possibly most important of all, the direct accountability that comes with the right of recall.

Nick Rogers
London

SWP tactics

This year's Marxism had a very different atmosphere from last year. At the previous festival, the prevailing mood was one of debate and discussion on the way forward, following the release of the SWP's 'Open letter to the left', which said: "We do not believe we have all the answers or a perfect prescription for a leftwing alternative. But we do believe we have to urgently start a debate and begin planning to come together."

But the purpose of this year's event was to consolidate the SWP around central committee tactics and slogans for the post-election period. As such, there was a sectarian attitude towards the rest of the left and meeting chairs tried hard to prevent other people from speaking, selling or distributing literature outside meetings.

The use of such severe demagoguery and unwillingness to engage with these debates in a serious way by party cadres shows both:

- The increasing visibility in today's world of the relevance of key

texts on party and programme by Lenin and Trotsky, and the political weakness of Cliffism on these core principles.

- The forcing of an end to the period of discussion relating to the tactical blunders of the last few years (Respect, Loftus and the CWU sell-out, failure to carry through the open letter).

Some SWPers in the north-west appear to be in open revolt against the SWP's reluctance to argue for Unite Against Fascism to confront the English Defence League. SWP members in the north-east are understandably concerned about party democracy after the expulsions and the mass exit of the Sunderland branch. Glasgow SWPers are concerned about stifling party structures, limiting in particular the spread of their rank and file *Shopworker* bulletin.

One of the meetings at Marxism relating to the new situation was presented by leading theoretician Alex Callinicos. It was designed to give a theoretical underpinning for the SWP's turn towards united fronts with Labour Party councillors and other forces in the mass of the workers' movement that refused to work with them previously. It was also clearly directed towards younger SWP members uncomfortable with orienting towards some of those forces who they had spent their political careers attacking.

The talk explained that, whilst revolutionaries strongly adhere to a set strategy - the need to overthrow the state through a revolution - tactics should be completely flexible and may even appear at first glance to run counter to strategy: ie, working with reformists. This is correct, but what Callinicos crucially did not explain was how tactics should be used to advance a strategic goal, so again a major theoretical weakness was exposed in the SWP's lack of a programme.

The reluctance of the TUC, Unison and Unite to call action against the crisis was criticised, but there were no real tactics proposed to pressure these more rightwing forces in the working class movement to take action. Forcing Labour councils to fight the cuts also did not feature.

Jim Padmore
email

Rabar must stay

Help us fight the forced repatriation of Rabar Hamad to Iraq, where both his parents were murdered. He has been told that as of August 5 he will be homeless and have no money.

Rabar is 16. He was forced to flee Iraq following the murder of both parents in an explosion targeted deliberately at his home. He arrived in the UK after a long journey, hidden near the wheel arch of a truck. On arrival, aged 15, he was age-assessed by a social worker as an adult and lived in a hostel for a year with no understanding of English and unable to properly feed himself. Following a tribunal hearing, he was then correctly age-assessed as a minor and placed in a children's home, where he has thrived.

However, Wigan social services failed to notify the home office of his change of address and he was judged to be an absconder. Because of the confusion, the home office have said all his evidence is unreliable. Anyone meeting Rabar would know he is not 20, as claimed. He is a sweet, kind and quiet boy with many friends at school. He is talented at football, having trialled for Fulham and Bury. He had almost no education before entering the UK, but he has made huge progress at school and is now working on GCSEs, including English. If he is returned to Iraq, his life would be in danger.

Please sign the online petition and send messages of support to Rabar. He is very depressed and needs your help.

Rabar Hamad Must Stay
rabarhamadmuststay@gmail.com

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: To be announced.

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

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlegmail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

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

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

Communist Students

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

Radical Anthropology Group

'Introduction to anthropology' series, Tuesdays 6pm-9pm, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

Begins September 21.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

National Network of Progressive and Socialist Parties

Saturday July 24, 1pm to 4pm: Conference, United Railway Club, Railway Terrace, Rugby. For left unity. By invite only, but observers welcome (£2).

Acting convenors: Pete McLaren (pete.mclaren@virgin.net); Nick Long (mudesa@tiscali.co.uk).

Time to go

Monday July 26, 7pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Speakers include: Joe Glenton (just released following his court martial for refusing to fight in Afghanistan), ex-soldier Ross Williams (jailed in 2008 for refusing to fight in Iraq), Jeremy Corbyn, Caroline Lucas, Mark Steel.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

National demo now

Monday July 26, 7pm: Meeting, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1. 'TUC must call a national demo now - as the first step towards a one-day strike'.

Organised by the London Shop Stewards Network: 020 8522 1156.

Defend our services

Wednesday July 28, 7.30pm: Meeting, Willesden Green Library Centre, 95 High Road, Willesden, London NW1. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Clara Osagiede (Right to Work campaign), Jerry Hicks (Unite), Ann O'Neill (Brent Mencap), BA cabin crew speaker. Chaired by Pete Firmin (CWU and president, Brent Trades Union Council).

Organised by Brent Trades Union Council: <http://brenttuc.org.uk>.

'Jewish character'

Wednesday July 28, 7pm: Seminar, House of Commons. The 'Jewish character' of the state of Israel, its meaning and significance, political discrimination and the condition of Arabs in Israel. Speakers: Haneen Zoubi, Dr Jamal Zahalka and Talab Al-Sana - Arab members of the Knesset.

Organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and hosted by the *Middle East Monitor*: events@memonitor.org.uk.

Combatants for peace

Thursday July 29, 7pm: Meeting, Amnesty International UK, The Human Rights Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. Israeli and Palestinian former combatants report on their joint struggle against the occupation and towards peace.

Speakers: Nour Shehadah and Chen Alon.

Organised by Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org.uk/combatants.

Irish republican solidarity

Saturday August 7, 2pm: Picket, ministry of justice, 102 Petty France, Westminster, London W1 (nearest tube: St James's Park).

To rally support for republican prisoners and expose the brutality of their treatment.

Saturday August 14, 4pm: Meeting, the Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, Camden, London NW1 (nearest tube Euston).

To discuss the way forward for the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group.

Organised by the IRPSG: 07951 156588.

Stuff your cuts

Sunday October 3, 12 noon: Demonstration, outside Tory Party conference, central Birmingham. Protest against being made to pay to pay for a crisis we did not cause.

Organised by Right to Work: 07986 085162.

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.

SECULARISM

French burqa ban has nothing to do with women's rights

The left in France has shown itself lacking, argues Peter Manson. We oppose state bans, just as we oppose the enforced veiling of women

The fact that only one French MP - a member of the rightwing UMP - voted against the ban on the burqa says it all.

On July 13, the bill prohibiting the "covering of the face in public" received the votes of 335 deputies. The bill does not specify Muslims or women, but everyone knows who the targets are - the less than 2,000 women in France who normally dress in the full-length burqa or niqab. After the law comes into force next year - it has yet to pass through the senate and may face a challenge in the constitutional court - those who continue to cover up will face a €150 fine and/or compulsory citizenship classes. Those who "force" a person to wear such attire could be looking at a €30,000 fine and a one-year jail sentence (the penalties will be even stiffer if a minor is made to cover their face).

So what happened to the left opposition in parliament? The Parti Communiste Français, Parti Socialiste and the Greens abstained - or rather they staged a boycott of the vote. Not because they could not bring themselves to be present when such an appalling attack on an oppressed minority was being adopted, but because they did not want to appear "pro-burqa" by voting against the bill. PCF parliamentary spokesperson Roland Muzeau said that the law had "nothing to do with defending women's rights" and would "stigmatise Muslims". But he led his troops out of the chamber all the same.

It is likely the PCF would have voted for the bill if it had been limited to people working in public services or shops - most, after all, voted for the 2004 ban on the wearing of the hijab by Muslim girls in state schools. As it was, one 'communist' deputy, the anti-migrant, anti-European Union nationalist, André Gerin, voted with the government. Gerin claims that to wear the burqa is to "renounce the republic".

The behaviour of the PCF even provoked a mildly worded rebuke from John Haylett in the *Morning Star*: "... the collective failure of the parliamentary left to take a firm, principled stance on the right of women to decide for themselves what they wear will serve as an encouragement for the government and the racist far-right Front National."

In May a similar law was passed in Belgium and there is a possibility of Spain following suit. In Britain Tory MP Philip Hollobone has tabled a private member's bill to the same end - although all such legislation could fall foul of EU 'human rights' stipulations. Actually there seems little possibility of anti-burqa laws in Britain at present - immigration minister Damian Green has declared such bans to be "rather unBritish".

That is not to say that the wave of Islamophobia that swept much of the west following 9/11 has now died down in Britain. You only have to look at recent polls. Back in January an Angus Reid poll found that more than 72% favoured banning the burqa in schools and universities, while the figure was even higher - 79% - for airports (as in France, the attack on a woman's right to cover herself has been linked to questions of 'security').

The same poll found that a substantial minority wanted the hijab banned too.

You cannot help feeling, however, that it all depends on the question asked. On the one hand, 67% agreed that garments that conceal a woman's face are "an affront to British values". On the other hand, 58% said the government should not be allowed to tell individuals what they can and cannot wear.² However, last week the January findings were confirmed in a YouGov poll, which reported that 67% would favour of a ban on wearing the burqa in public.

Left weaknesses

As well as enhancing 'security', the French law is being hyped up as a blow for 'women's equality'. While this sickening posing is too much for the French left to swallow, far from denouncing all such bans on principle, for the most part the comrades actually go along with them in practice.

Take Lutte Ouvrière. Its July 9 statement declared: "Of course, you might think that a law banning the burqa would be a point of support to help women and girls resist family pressures and Islamist currents which use religion as a political instrument ... But the present context - the security aspects tagged on by the government - goes in an opposing direction to that of the emancipation of those oppressed by reactionary religious symbols ... we will not mix our demands with those of political leaders whose aim is not women's emancipation, but a policy of concessions to anti-Muslim and security prejudices."³

You might also think that LO itself is numbered amongst those who believe a ban on the burqa would be a "point of support" for women who want to discard it. After all, that is exactly the argument LO used in support of the hijab ban in 2004 (which resulted in many Muslims removing their children from state schools, where the ban applies, to Catholic schools, where it does not).

In effect LO is saying that it is not the ban on the burqa *per se* that ought to be opposed - only the particular politicians who happen to be implementing it. You get the feeling that, if LO had any members in the national assembly, they too would have joined in the hypocritical left 'boycott', rather than voting against the bill. Note that, while LO pays lip service to opposing "anti-Muslim ... prejudices", it thinks the main oppression that needs to be combated is not the state's vicious assault on the rights of this minority, but that of "family pressures" and "Islamist currents".

In reality there is no contradiction in both opposing state attacks on freedom of expression (including the freedom of religious expression that the French and Belgian bans remove) and supporting a woman's right to choose for herself what to wear or not wear, free from patriarchal pressures. I would not for a moment wish to understate the dehumanising effect of imposing the burqa. It reinforces the notion that women may not assert themselves on an equal basis to men; that they should be regarded

as a man's possession, not even to be looked at by other males. The burqa is designed to prevent them from interacting as full members of society.

In this sense the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anti-capitalist Party) has a much more balanced position than LO. In a statement issued on April 24 it states: "While completely opposing this freedom-killing law, the NPA reaffirms its solidarity with women who struggle against all forms of oppression, such as the full-body veil. But it is first and foremost through fighting together for control over their own bodies that women will free themselves."⁴

Passing over the hint of women's separatism that the second sentence contains, I must say that the NPA is right to stress the "liberticidal" nature of the proposed law. The targeting of Muslims (not just the tiny minority whose women wear the burqa or niqab) is the *immediate* issue the left must mobilise against. In doing so we also fight for oppressed women. We demand that women have the *right* to wear the hijab, the burqa or the niqab. That cannot be separated from the right *not* to wear such garments and is totally different from advocating the 'right' of Muslim men to oblige 'their' women to dress according to male instructions. In fact, by posing the question in this way we seek to empower women to assert their freedom to choose.

Secularism

Why is the French left for the most part totally unable to see things in this way? The answer lies in the particular form its anti-clerical secularism has taken. Based on opposition to the all-pervading influence of the corrupt Catholic church, this Jacobin anti-clerical secularism was based on a thoroughgoing statism.

In actual fact the left's 'secularism' is an impostor. Secularism demands not state bans, but state *non-interference* in the citizen's religious or non-religious beliefs and

practices. The state must not accord privileges to a particular religion (as in the UK with the Church of England) nor discriminate against others. Genuine secularism insists on the equality of all in the eyes of the state, whatever their religion or lack of it. In other words, all citizens must be free to practise their beliefs - otherwise such 'equality' is totally meaningless.

While we insist on the state's neutrality, we communists are not neutral. We are convinced of the power of our Marxist, materialist world view, which is diametrically opposed to religious obfuscatory idealism. However, we also recognise the power of religious ideas - they cannot be banned out of existence. The prohibition of religious or religious-inspired practices and attire *is* possible. But it is almost always counterproductive, serving to drive religious believers deeper into the arms of the priests and imams.

The only religious practices that should be outlawed are those which are clearly harmful to others or are carried out against their will. Nor is the right to wear what you like an absolute. For example, we support the trade union demand that all workers on a building site must put on protective headgear, footwear and clothing. It is also clear that certain jobs - the teaching of young children or the welcoming of guests at a hotel - cannot in general be carried out satisfactorily by people who completely cover their face. It is reasonable to insist that those who do so may disqualify themselves from such jobs.

One-sided

It has to be said that, just as the PCF and LO view the question of the burqa ban in a hopelessly one-sided way, so too does the Socialist Workers Party. But in the SWP's case it is a question of championing religious rights at the expense of women's emancipation. The headline to Jim Wolfreys'

article in the latest *Socialist Worker*, 'French veil vote will boost Islamophobia', identifies pretty clearly where the SWP is putting its emphasis.

Comrade Wolfreys is correct to state that "Islamophobic legislation acts as a substitute for measures which the government has been unable to implement and deflects attention from its own shortcomings", including the latest corruption scandal. He also notes the weaknesses of French anti-clericalism and republican 'secularism': "Once a weapon against the wealth and privilege of the Catholic church, republican secularism has become a means of scapegoating France's oppressed Muslim minority."

He condemns the "myth" that "women have more freedom when the state tells them what they can wear". But he has nothing to say at all on women's oppression and whether Muslim women have a particular problem in this regard, contenting himself with dispelling another "myth": that "Muslim extremism is a greater problem than Islamophobia".⁵

Unlike comrade Wolfreys, the editorial in the same edition *does* take up the question of women's oppression - only to dismiss it as completely irrelevant: "How can this be a question of 'women's rights' when it begins from denying women the right to choose what they wear?" This, of course, is correct - the French establishment is completely hypocritical on this point. But the editorial ends by asserting: "The left should never buy into arguments that one religion or another plays a special role in oppressing women. We have to identify such propaganda for what it is - anti-Muslim racism and an attack on us all."

Why should we not "buy into" such arguments if they happen to be true? Look at the clerical states of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Do they not also deny "women the right to choose what they wear"? Do they not restrict women in all manner of ways - what job they may take up, what sexual relations they may enjoy, whose company they may keep? This is not to say that religion - still less "one religion" - is the *cause* of women's oppression. But it is surely undeniable that Islam has a "special role" in enforcing it - not only in such states, but also in many Muslim communities.

The job of socialists is not to turn a blind eye to such realities, but to strive to empower oppressed minorities, and oppressed women in particular. We do this to unite and strengthen the working class, to weaken the power of the state and the system of capital. And part of that fight involves breaking the grip of the mosque and the Muslim establishment over their flock ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. *Morning Star* July 17.
2. www.visioncritical.com/2010/01/most-britons-would-ban-burqa-in-public-places-airports-and-schools.
3. www.lutte-ouvriere-journal.org/?act=art&num=2188&id=10.
4. www.npa2009.org/content/communiqué-du-npa-contre-le-projet-de-loi-sarkozy-sur-la-burqa.
5. *Socialist Worker* July 24.



Freedom to wear or not to wear it

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Women bishops and secularism

Jim Gilbert examines the Anglican hierarchy's hypocrisy



Separation of church and state

What is it about priests - at whatever level of the Church of England, the state church - that means they should be men, not women? Nothing, for most Anglicans today. But, according to other devout Christians, bearing a male set of sex organs is essential to becoming a curate or a vicar, let alone a member of a church's hierarchy, such as a bishop or archbishop. And, of course, among a good number of traditionalists there is also concern how those sex organs are employed: for them, this must only be in monogamous, heterosexual fashion within marriage.¹

While campaigners against sexual discrimination in the Church of England gained majority congregational (lay) and priestly (clerical) support some years ago, a reactionary rearguard had been able to stave off a fuller victory until recently. The battle against homophobia has even further to go, of course.

Problems have arisen since women were allowed to become ordained as priests. But these are problems wholly to do with efforts of the Church of England's bureaucracy to keep the Anglican communion together worldwide. In essence, expediency has ruled, permitting women to become priests within the Church of England and North America, thanks to grassroots campaigning, while shying away and foot-dragging on the question of women getting to the higher echelons. That is why it has taken until now to get the church to begin the decision-making process to

pave the way for women to become bishops. It was not all over once the ordination of women was permitted.

As amended at the general synod² in York on July 10 and 12, an important draft canon law was laid down. It states in its first paragraphs that the synod shall be given powers "to make provision by canon for enabling a woman to be consecrated to the office of bishop if she otherwise satisfies the requirements of canon law as to the persons who may be consecrated as bishops".³ The measure now goes to the 43 dioceses for discussion at their individual synods and shall be decided finally in 2012. Diocesan synods can only suggest changes for the general synod to consider, but a majority of them (that is, at least 22) will need to approve it broadly or it will not proceed. Once the general synod gets its hands on the draft again in 2012, the three houses that comprise it must each agree to it by a two-thirds majority for the measure to become fully fledged canon law (if not, the whole process has to start over). If all these hurdles are overcome, the first Church of England woman bishop could be ordained as early as 2014.

Most importantly, for the church bureaucracy, is that the Church of England is accepted as the mother church of the worldwide, 77 million-strong Anglican communion. Trying to tread an illogical and clearly untenable middle line - between having women priests and *not* having them rise up the hierarchy as bishops - has proved impossible. The traditionalists are implacably against women's ordi-

nation, which is at least consistent and from their point of view logical. As things stand at the moment, of the 38 provinces of the Anglican communion, eight do not ordain women;⁴ of the rest, 25 so far only ordain women to the priesthood⁵ and four have consecrated women bishops,⁶ as has the extra-provincial diocese of Cuba.

Those within the Anglican communion in the USA have led the way on women's ordination: Dr Katharine Jefferts Schori was elected in 2006 as the first female presiding bishop in Episcopal Church history⁷. The US Episcopalians, with 2.4 million adherents, had also previously consecrated Gene Robinson, Anglicanism's first openly gay bishop, in 2003. On the other hand, intolerance in the Anglican communion is embodied in such as the most reverend Nicholas Okoh, archbishop of Nigeria, a country where being homosexual can get you 14 years in prison. And, with around 18 million members, the Church of Nigeria is the largest province in the Anglican communion, giving it some weight. Okoh this month applauded a priest who was "speaking out against the invading army of homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexual lifestyle under any guise".⁸ Decrying homosexuality as a western import, Okoh was also reported to be alarmed that western churches "had vowed to use their money to spread the homosexual lifestyle in African societies and churches".⁹ He seemed conveniently to have forgotten that Christianity itself was a western import into sub-Saharan Africa.

Over in east Africa, Kenya's archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi has consecrated as bishops several US Anglican priests who split from the Episcopal Church over its toleration of homosexuality; this was despite his being asked not to do so by Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury and overall big cheese in the Anglican communion. To add to Williams's misery, only a week before general synod voted for the draft canon law to permit women bishops, Dr Jeffrey John, celibate gay dean of St Albans, was rejected as prospective bishop of Southwark. His name being leaked beforehand, ensuring conservatives in the church hierarchy were able to stop his appointment, "seven years after he was forced to stand down as the prospec-

tive bishop of Reading following a previous outcry by conservative evangelicals against John's sexuality".¹⁰

However, African Anglican opinion is not an unmitigated reactionary stew. In southern Africa, for example, the issue of women priests is under active consideration: "The right reverend Robert Mumbi, bishop of Luapula and president of the Zambian Anglican Council, reports that calls for a change to the provincial constitution allowing dioceses to ordain women clergy have been made by lay leaders in the province."¹¹

Meanwhile, the Vatican is moving to gain adherents from the Anglican camp. Roman Catholic HQ issued a list of grave crimes - in part to be seen to be doing something about the recent paedophilia scandals. Included in the list was the crime of "ordination of women"; much to the delight of its own intransigents and the fury of Roman Catholic reformers, who object to the ordination of women priests being equated with child abuse.¹²

As recently as July 10, so *The Daily Telegraph* reports, "A group of 70 disgruntled clergy met with a Catholic bishop ... to discuss plans to defect to the Roman Catholic church and hundreds are said to be poised for an exodus to Rome." Of course, while the long-established Anglo-Catholic contingent among Anglicans could be well catered for within Roman Catholicism, including even married priests, the same cannot be said for evangelical dissidents who object equally to godless gayness and to humans who are not men taking church services.

Idiocy amongst such reactionaries basking in the glow of their prejudices is rife. Many if not all pick bits out of the *Bible* to justify their opposition to women priests and homosexuality. But the weird 'purity' laws of the Old Testament could easily be interpreted to justify almost anything. One example is the god-driven, Nazi-like programme of genocide carried out by Saul, who gets a clear instruction via Samuel direct from heaven: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."¹³ When Saul fails to kill the animals, though he dutifully killed all the Amalek people, down to the last "infant and suckling", godly anger

follows and Saul loses his kingship. Are such lessons to be followed today, pope Pius XII aside?

Those trying to find biblical justification for men-only priesthoods are continually grasping at straws. Some even suggest that because the 12 apostles who followed Jesus were all men, so present-day priests should be too. After all, as one Canadian religious website puts it, the original disciples "probably shared nine factors in common. They were: bearded, dark-skinned, Aramaic-speaking, married, male, Jewish, residents of Palestine, without much formal education, and the parent of one or more children."¹⁴ So why pick only one - being male - to determine who can become a priest?

Although facing pretty much an uphill battle at the moment, the movement for women priests among Roman Catholics is far from dead. Despite the threat that anyone who disagrees with the pope is considered to be no longer in 'full communion' (one step away from excommunication), even though on this question he is not considered infallible, the Women Can Be Priests organisation has assembled an impressive list of Roman Catholic scholars in favour of the ordination of women.¹⁵

These and other Christians have the right to believe and worship as they wish and, if that means reforming or splitting their churches, then that is up to them. As communists we have no desire to line up with one religious sect against another. Our aim is to involve religious believers in the fight to fulfil the communist programme by mobilising them in the wider political and economic struggles of the working class. Naturally, that includes the fight for democracy and secularism, and it is under that heading that we demand that the state church in the UK, the Church of England, be disestablished and its wealth taken from it. Buildings that it needs to function religiously can be retained, of courses, but all its other assets must be given up ●

jim.gilbert@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. For a historical view on the religion-sex interface, see 'Sex as sacrament' in R Taylor *Sex in history*: www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/taylorgr/sxhst/chap12.htm.
2. The general synod, the governing body of the Church of England, is made up of three houses: bishops, clergy and laity, meeting as one body. Measures have to pass in each house to become part of canon law, which thereby becomes automatically part of UK law.
3. www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/uploads/gsl708a-amended.html.
4. Central Africa, Jerusalem and the Middle East, Melanesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, South East Asia, and Tanzania.
5. Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Central America, England, Hong Kong, North India, South India, Indian Ocean, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Scotland, Southern Africa, the Sudan, Uganda, Wales, West Africa and the West Indies.
6. Episcopal Church, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
7. www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_76174_ENG_HTML.htm.
8. See Church of Nigeria website: www.anglican-nig.org/main.php?k_j=12&d=428&p_t=index.php?
9. www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2010/jul/10071605.html.
10. www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jul/08/rowan-williams-gay-bishop.
11. www.religiousintelligence.org/churchnewspaper/news/women-priests-on-the-agenda-for-central-africa.
12. www.csmmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0716/Vatican-stirs-storm-on-women-priests-in-clarifying-law-on-clergy-abuse.
13. 1 Samuel 15-3, *The Holy Bible* revised version, London 1898.
14. Women as clergy: The continuing debate, www.religioustolerance.org/femclrg7.htm.
15. www.womenpriests.org/scholars.asp.

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PRISON



Institutionalised child abuse

Kenneth 'Revolution' Clarke has justified the official document authorising the brutal 'control' methods meted out to young offenders, notes **Eddie Ford**

We have, of course, been promised a "rehabilitation revolution" by Kenneth Clarke, secretary of state for justice. Part of this "revolution" includes "radical" plans to increase private sector involvement in the penal system, which, according to Clarke, will see companies receiving "payment by results" - with success or not being defined, apparently, by whether former inmates reconvict within the first few years of leaving prison.

Needless to say, various privately run prisons and 'correction centres' have long been big business in the United States. Indeed, they underpin virtually the whole economy of many rural areas, whether it be from business supplying the prisons or the prisoners acting as free labour - modern-day slaves. Not insignificantly, the US has the largest prison population and reoffending rate in the world.

Well, perhaps we have just caught a glimpse of what this private sector "revolution" might actually look like. After a five-year struggle led by the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA), a manual published five years ago by the prison service has finally seen the light of day under the Freedom of Information Act. Upon its original publication in 2005, the 119-page *Physical control in care* - purportedly drawn up to deal with "unruly children" in custody - was immediately classified as a "restricted" government document and up until a few weeks ago the government was fighting tooth and nail against allowing its publication, even though the information commissioner had ruled that the public interest in this matter was so "grave" that the manual should be quickly released. In the end though, the ministry of justice - or more exactly, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) - backed down and last week the details appeared in *The Observer*.

What emerges is an absolutely horrific picture of the life endured by young offenders incarcerated in secure training centres (STCs) - "purpose-built" facilities for young offenders between the ages of 12 and 17 run by private firms under government contracts. In other words, what you and me call prisons - even if that word is never mentioned in the official literature. When first proposed by Michael 'prison works' Howard in 1994, the entire idea was heavily criticised by none other than Tony Blair for being a "sham" - on the grounds that

the Tories were happy to "weaken the provisions in local communities" on the one hand while, on the other, claiming that building the new STCs will somehow help prevent juvenile crime. The New Labour tune changed upon getting elected in 1997, when the STCs quickly became part of the new government's determination to please the tabloids and get "tough on crime" - though most definitely not on the "causes of crime".

The first STC was eventually built in 1998. In the words of the YJB, they are for "vulnerable young people" who are sentenced to custody or remanded to secure accommodation: that is, young people deemed too vulnerable or damaged to be put into 'mainstream' young offender institutions. We are further told that these STCs, of which there are four so far, provide a "secure environment", whereby young offenders can be "educated and rehabilitated" and that the "regimes" are "constructive and education-focused" - with the "trainees" undergoing, or being subjected to, intensive education "25 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year".¹

In reality, as we now know, many of these already "vulnerable young people" inside the STCs became the victims of systematic and quite deliberate physical abuse - making *Physical control in care* read more like a sadist's charter than a dispassionate guide to "restraint" and "self-defence", with the STCs representing a hellish form of state-sanctioned institutionalised child abuse.

The measures and techniques recommended by the manual, and actually deployed to one degree or another within the STCs, include the "use of an inverted knuckle into the trainee's sternum", which you then "drive inward and upward" - whilst you "continue to carry alternate elbow strikes to the young person's ribs until a release is achieved". Or, if you are so inclined, you can "drive straight fingers into the young person's face" and then "quickly drive the straightened fingers of the same hand downwards into the young person's groin area". The document also describes how you need to force children to "adopt a kneeling position" if you want to clamp steel handcuffs on them, not to mention holding a "child's forehead to the floor with another hand on the back of the neck" - which is the process by which a staff member "takes control of the head". If required, the

guide additionally outlines the effectiveness of "raking shoes" down the shins or the "nose distraction" technique - which is, delivering sharp blows to the nose. Charmingly, STC staff members were given nicknames like "mauler", "crusher" and "clubber", with the young people who had been restrained the most times referred to as the "winners".

Yes, points out Physical control in care, such techniques risk giving children and young offenders a "fracture to the skull" - perhaps even resulting in "temporary or permanent blindness caused by rupture to eyeball or detached retina" or inducing "asphyxia". In one passage explaining how to administer a "head-hold" on children, we are told that "if breathing is compromised the situation ceases to be a restraint" and instead "becomes a medical emergency". However, so we are dutifully informed by the ministry of justice, "staff need to be able to intervene effectively" in order to guarantee compliance with "reasonable requests or direct orders". Kenneth Clarke himself responded by saying that the "very careful guidance" supplied by documents like Physical control in care was kept under constant review, but that "unarmed staff" needed to be able to "control" youngsters in STCs and elsewhere.

Predictably, such brutal techniques and practices have resulted in fatalities. Hence Gareth Myatt, aged 15, died in 2004 while being held down by three staff at Rainsbrook STC in Warwickshire - choking to death on his own vomit. In the same year, 14-year-old Adam Rickwood hanged himself at the Hassockfield STC in County Durham - despite the fact that he had been known to suffer from suicidal tendencies before entering the institution. Last year a judge ruled that the staff who had 'restrained' Rickwood shortly before his death had used "unlawful force".

Furthermore, we discover that in the 12 months up to March 2009, such "restraint" was used 1,776 times in the STCs - leading Al Aynsley-Green, the former children's commissioner for England and emeritus professor of child health at University College London, to comment that they are "just part of a brutal system" when it comes to the treatment of young offenders. Similarly, Carolyn Willow, the CRA's national co-ordinator, lambasted government ministers for believing that children as young as 12 could "get so out of control so of-

ten, that staff should be taught how to ram their knuckles into their rib cages" - wondering whether we would permit paediatricians, teachers, children's home staff, etc to be "trained in how to deliberately hurt and humiliate children". While in the view of Deborah Coles, co-director of the charity, Inquest - which campaigns on the issue of contentious deaths in custody - the STC deaths emanated from a "culture of obfuscation, secrecy and complacency", while "dangerous, unlawful and ultimately lethal practices continued unchecked". All in all, 29 children have died in custody during the last 17 years.

Grotesquely, as we have seen, private companies are making money from the misery, oppression and violence that are routinely found in penal institutions like the STCs. According to the prison officers' union, the POA, privately run prisons and detention centres now comprise 10% of the total prison estate, which is a "higher percentage than any other country".² Two of the most prominent profiteers in this trade being Serco and G4S, formerly Group 4 Securicor, whose corporate tag-line boasts that their policies are "derived from the principles of childcare best practice" and "reflect the 'every child matters' agenda". As for Serco, listed on the FTSE 100 Index, it has its greedy fingers in just about every corporate pie going and has been described by *The Guardian* as "probably the biggest company you've never heard of" - its global empire incorporating various sectors, including transport, defence, aviation, health, education, leisure, etc. Serco's chief executive, Christopher Rajendran Hyman, is a Pentecostal Christian from South Africa: a self-professed "evangelical" whose whole life is "driven by god".³

Of course, the 'god-driven' Serco also runs Hassockfield STC - where Adam Rickwood was killed - and the notorious Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre, which has an inglorious history of brutality. Throughout its operational period there have been a number of hunger strikes, protests and riots by the detainees - unprepared to meekly acquiesce to the vindictive and humiliating treatment visited upon them by the staff and administration. In September 2005 Manuel Bravo from Angola was driven to the point of madness by the callous Yarl's Wood regime and killed himself while being held in detention with his 13-year-old

son. And in April 2009, Al Aynsley-Green published a report which stated that children held in Yarl's Wood were being denied urgent medical treatment, handled violently and "left at risk" of serious harm - chronicling how children were transported in caged vans, "stained with urine and vomit", and watched by opposite sex staff as they dress and undress.⁴

The most recent outbreak of resistance was in February of this year, which saw over 70 women start a hunger strike in protest at being separated from their children and against the appalling conditions, the grossly inadequate health and legal provisions and the extraordinarily long periods of detainment - up to 15 months or more. In response, the guards locked the women in an airless corridor so as to isolate them from the other inmates.⁵

Here we are confronted with the grim reality that is the marketisation and privatisation of 'justice' - so much for Ken Clarke's heralded "rehabilitation revolution". PFI involvement in the prison system has not only been used as a weapon against workers and their unions, but has led, and under Clarke will continue to lead, to even further slippage in the treatment of prisoners and young offenders. Prisons should not be for profit or the sadistic entertainment of the jailers. We call for an end to the barbarism of physical restraint and totally support the demand made by Green MP Caroline Lucas that there should be an "explicit ban" on the use of all forms of corporal and physical punishment in STCs, secure children's homes, young offender institutions, etc.

Communists also call for the immediate closing down of inhuman institutions like the Yarl's Wood centre, a chilling monument to capitalist oppression. Those who have presided over such institutions, all the while spouting the 'British values' of 'freedom' and 'tolerance', have a lot to answer for. We must not let them forget ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/Custody/Securetrainingcentres.
2. www.poauk.org.uk/index.php?prisons-are-not-for-profit.
3. *The Guardian* February 24 2006.
4. *The Independent* April 26 2009.
5. See <http://visionon.tv/yarlswood>.

IRELAND

Sinn Féin turns on protestors

The protests and riots which last week marked the annual marching season in Northern Ireland prompted an indignant outburst from the Irish media, both north and south.

The *Irish Times* and the *Belfast Telegraph* alike raged against what were portrayed as malevolent and shadowy forces behind the protests. Dissident republicans, many of them 'outsiders', were said to have hijacked the opposition to the July 12 orange marches.

The Greater Ardoyne Residents Campaign (GARC) held a sit-down protest aimed at preventing the Orange Order from marching down Ardoyne Road. The Parades Commission had given the go-ahead for the march despite the clear opposition of local residents. Local Sinn Féin MLA Gerry Kelly himself admitted in a statement that the violence which followed on Monday night was "brought about by the insistence of the Orange Order to march through three nationalist areas as an add-on to their main parade and the decision of the Parades Commission to facilitate them in this".¹

However, he then went on to target the GARC, the Republican Network for Unity (RNU) and the republican socialist group, Éirígí, for provoking disorder by participating in the sit-down. He was outraged that a "peaceful and dignified protest" by more sensible republicans on the sidelines of the morning march had been prevented from protesting against the return parade. He railed against the defiance shown by dissident republicans, who represented on the day little more than "anti-social" elements.

It did not matter to him that the GARC - which had actually organised a demonstration of several hundred peaceful protestors - had made a call for calm both before and after Monday's protest. Or that the RNU strongly condemned and dissociated itself from the rioting that took place later that evening and on subsequent days. While Kelly is mildly critical of the Police Service of Northern Ireland for opening fire on the demonstration with plastic bullets, he reserves his venom for those who decided to confront the police.

As the PSNI forced the sit-down protest off the Ardoyne Road and escorted the Orange parade through the gathering crowds, all hell broke loose. Footage of the event shows hundreds of armoured vehicles and riot police.² The police presence was immense - the confrontation had been expected and the state was determined not to give in to oppositionists. In its aftermath, encouraged by Sinn Féin and Social

Democratic and Labour Party condemnations of protest organisers, the police promised mass arrests. They claim that law-abiding locals have given them mobile phone footage, which will lead to hundreds of criminal prosecutions. There have also been calls for the prosecution of the parents of children who threw stones at the police. At the very least visits to families from social workers are expected, as the local state directs it attention to the harassment and intimidation of protestors.

Of course, protests and demonstrations around July 12 are nothing new. The Orange Order's triumphalist marching season has always provoked intense scenes of confrontation. Reports of conflicts stretch right back to the 1800s, with the Belfast riots of 1857 and 1886 being particularly bloody occasions. More recently, the summer months of 1969 were also intensely violent, with a huge crackdown on the civil rights movement. As recently as 2005, 50 police officers were said to have been injured following an attack by nationalists after they had led an orange march through a Catholic area. The fighting has always involved confrontation, as it did last week, with heavily armed state forces. The police have always - again like last week - been there to protect the 'grandmasters' of the Orange Lodge, who insist on their traditional walk of supremacy through Catholic areas.

In the 1990s Breandán MacCionnaith was a leading member of Sinn Féin. He was a councillor for Craigavon district council from 1997-2001. He was also a prominent member of the Garvaghy Road Residents Association. He played a central role in the sit-down protests that became the focus of major stand-offs between the Orange Order, police and nationalists in that decade. Garvaghy Road protestors encountered police violence, loyalist attacks and intimidation. These were followed by nights of rioting by nationalist youth throughout Northern Ireland. Such was the crisis and controversy, that legislation was passed in 1998 to establish the Parades Commission and, despite annual applications since then, the Orange Order has consistently been refused permission to march down Garvaghy Road.

Today the same Breandán MacCionnaith is still involved in opposition to July 12 marches through nationalist areas. He was in fact one of the leading protestors in the Ardoyne Road stand-off. But now he is the general secretary of Éirígí, having split with Sinn Féin after the special conference in 2007, which voted to support the PSNI. Éirígí, which was

formed in 2006, says it stands for a democratic socialist republic of Ireland. It accepts the present ceasefire, believing that now is not the time for an insurrectionary struggle and says it has no armed wing. However, it does argue for a mass movement - the word Éirígí meaning 'arise'. It has attracted many disillusioned Sinn Féin members, particularly the younger section of the party. In the north the problem has been Sinn Féin's role in the Stormont parliament and in particular its support for the PSNI. In the south its membership has grown, particularly in Dublin, following the 2007 general election when Sinn Féin showed itself to be closer to Fianna Fáil in many of its policies than to the grassroots radicalism traditionally associated with it.

Obviously Éirígí is a thorn in the side of Sinn Féin. It stands for principles which it says Sinn Féin has sold out on. However, there are ongoing arguments within Sinn Féin, arguments that seem likely to lead to additional splits, as Sinn Féin becomes yet more entrenched in the running of the Northern Ireland statelet.

The leadership has clearly decided to go in hard against dissidents. Martin McGuinness, speaking on Sunday at the annual school of the current affairs magazine *Magill*, launched a strong attack on all militarist and "criminal elements" that threaten to derail the peace process. He rounded on the Ardoyne protest, "where it is widely believed that many of those who sat on the road wearing T-shirts describing themselves as, 'residents, not dissidents', told those anxious for a riot, many of them children, to do so only after they had left the road".⁴ Elsewhere there has been condemnations of rioters by Sinn Féin representatives, with a number of press releases issued calling for 'law and order'.

The implication is clear - the PSNI must be supported against such elements and all those that confront the state. With hundreds of riot police out in force in Belfast over the week, there seemed little to distinguish them from the latter-day Royal Ulster Constabulary. Except that this time Sinn Féin is on the other side of the barricades ●

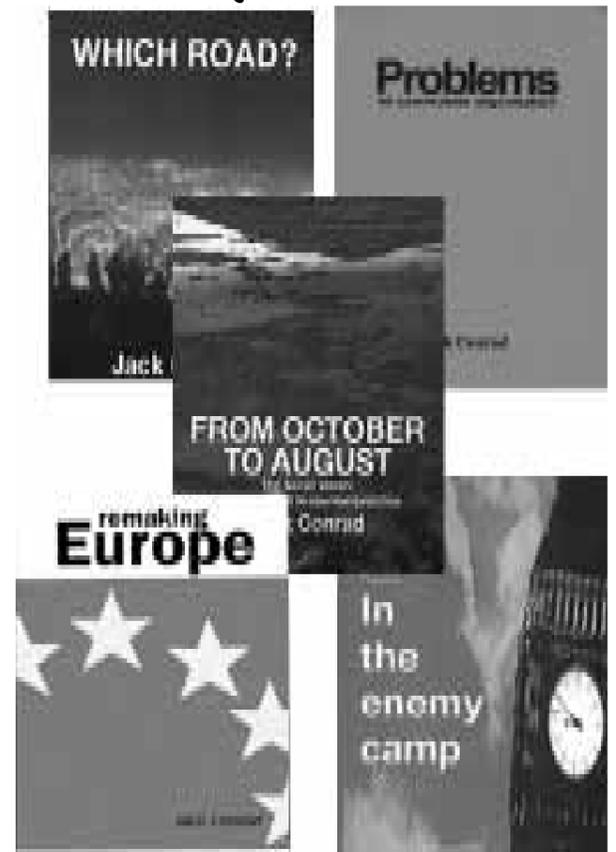
Anne Mc Shane

anne.mcshane@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.sinnfein.ie/contents/18920.
2. www.youtube.com/verify_age?next_url=http%3A//www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3D1iXDd0h12T1%26feature%3Dplayer_embedded.
3. www.eirigi.org.
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REVIEW

Co-ops against capitalism

Nicole Robertson *The co-operative movement and communities in Britain, 1914-60* Ashgate, 2010, pp268, £55

For today's generation, growing up in a world dominated by Tesco, it's impossible to understand how important the Co-op was in working class life. When I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, the Co-op was ubiquitous. I grew up in a small mining village. The high street was two or three hundred yards in length, but in that short distance, there were two Co-op shops: a grocery, and a butcher. Half a mile away, in the next small settlement, there was another Co-op store, combining both grocery and butchery. The only other stores were the corner shops, which amounted to nothing more than the front room of a terraced house, and several small shops selling clothes, sweets and tobacco, and a fishmonger. But it was the Co-op which formed the centre of everyone's shopping experience.

It was not just shopping. Our coal was delivered by a Co-op coalman and our milk by a Co-op milkman. The Co-op even had its own money - milk was paid for with blue, plastic 'milk cheques'. Every so often, the Co-op laundry collected my father's greasy overalls to be cleaned. At the end of the 50s or very early 60s, just after the village cinema closed down, the Co-op took over the premises, and established a supermarket, which was a retailing innovation at the time.

In the towns adjoining the village, there were larger Co-op stores, which sold drapery, or furniture and electrical goods, as they started to become available. There was even a separate Co-op TV and electrical repair store. For most of the 1950s, I had a lot of second-hand clothes, but, on the occasions I can remember being taken to buy new clothes, it was up to the main Co-op emporium. When my sister left school, she went to work in the offices of the North Midland Co-op, which had its headquarters a couple of miles away. It's this history of the Co-op - its heyday - and its impact on working-class lives that Robertson's book details.

The co-operative community

The book focuses on retailing. It deals with the co-op as a movement, including its political and educational activities, intended by its leaders as a means of establishing a co-operative community, but it is perhaps an indication of the failure of that goal that these other activities are refracted through the lens of the retail business. The idea of community goes back to Owen, who envisaged a system of communes exchanging with each other. The utopian followers of Owen framed this in terms of dropping out of capitalist society, but, in fact, the co-op developed necessarily within capitalism, whilst presenting an alternative to it.

Robertson sets out several things necessary, such as playing fields, public buildings, churches, schools, shops, etc. The co-op provided almost all these things. She provides a powerful image on p30:

"The new town centre has some fine shops bearing nationally known names, but Co-operative House is the largest and most prominent. At night, the word 'Co-operative' in white neon lights can be seen from a good distance away. There is also a clock similarly illuminated. The pleasant mass of Co-operative House dominates the centre of this brave new town."¹

We should not underestimate the degree to which these visual symbols

affect us.

For nearly all the period under review, there was no welfare state. The co-op effectively was the welfare state, the difference being that it was the creation of workers themselves rather than the creation of capitalists - contrary to myth, the welfare state is largely the brainchild of Tory Neville Chamberlain² - but, as with the other such creations, remains capable of being reformed, democratised and brought under their control.

The co-operative movement has been largely ignored by the labour movement and historians. In my own study of co-ops, I noted that fact, and gave some suggestions as to why that is. The labour movement has been based on the statist ideologies of Lassalle and Fabianism.³ And for historians, it is always the heroic event or the history of institutions that make more attractive subjects than the gradual social processes going on within society. As Robertson also suggests, the Co-op focus on the consumer (often a woman) rather than the producer (often seen as a man) partly explains it.

There has been some work done on the role socialist organisations played in providing alternative culture and lifestyles for workers. Some work has been done, for instance, in relation to organisations such as the Plebs League, and the establishment of the National Co-operative Film Archives has enabled further research in this area. Further work by feminists is opening up other areas, such as that of the Co-operative Women's Guild.

It is difficult to speak of a single co-op history; the individual societies were vastly different, ranging from a few thousand, up to the largest like the London Co-op, which had 1.2 million members in 1957.

There is a wealth of evidence in the book of workers creating their own alternatives from the ground up. Marx spoke about the few willing hands who established the co-operative factories, providing a lesson indeed.⁴ It was no less ordinary workers who established by their own efforts co-op societies that grew and prospered. By the mid 20th century there were 12.5 million co-op members.

The St Cuthberts Co-op in Edinburgh was established in 1859 by joiners and cabinetmakers. By 1960, it had over 100,000 members, 80 grocery stores, 75 bakeries, 28 fruit shops and nine tailors, and was involved in activities from dairies to wallpaper shops. The Leicester Co-op was established in 1860 by seven weavers. By the 1950s it had over 80,000 members and a branch in every one of the 400 square miles it covered. The Birmingham Industrial Co-op was set up in 1881 by 25 mainly railway workers. By 1960, it had almost 400,000 members. The London Co-op was formed by mergers in 1920-21 of the Stratford Co-op, established by railwaymen, the Edmonton Co-op established by tramwaymen, and the West London Co-op, again established by railwaymen.

The Co-op was innovative. In 1942, it pioneered

the first self-service store in Britain. It was able to use its centralised buying, and its own production to an extent that, at the beginning of the last century, it threatened the existing department stores. Even in architecture it created its own style of art deco buildings.

And it was natural that from the start they should have more of a role than just being a shop. Robertson quotes the services provided from aid given to members during times of hardship (such as sickness and unemployment) to an array of needs for special occasions, such as wedding day. Robertson details how, prior to the welfare state, the Co-op provided extensive welfare support for its members. It set up funds to cover hardship and illness to cover medical costs, and convalescence, and such funds continued to be provided even when times were hard, and not just to members.

The Co-op provided sports facilities for its workers. It led the way in introducing paid holidays for workers, and in introducing the 48-hour week when most other workers were working a 50-60 hour week. It had funds for its workers to cover long periods of illness, and to cover the costs of their convalescence. Even after the NHS was established, the Co-op continued to provide its members with medical equipment, for example. Similar welfare support covered death, and in areas like South Wales community projects to relieve distress caused by colliery closures. It was able to provide support through credit, even though this contradicted the original principles of the Rochdale Pioneers, who had opposed credit because they did not want to encourage workers to get into debt. Workers settled their accounts when they were paid, not when they shopped. But, as with credit unions, members were not allowed to simply continue to run up debts. Their debts were discussed, and they were advised on reducing them.

Yet there was a gap between the vision of the leadership and activists, and the concerns of the majority of members. The leadership and Owenite organisations had a view of increasingly self-sufficient co-operative communities developing and of education, etc resulting in growing numbers of co-op operators. It never happened.

The majority were happy to remain passive beneficiaries of the Co-op - consumers of the

what it had to offer rather than activists, as with the trade unions or Labour Party. This is inevitable from a view of socialism that emphasises the idea that workers can have things done for them, provided to them, rather than that workers have to be actively involved in providing for themselves. And the Co-ops did provide for almost every need. They became involved in hairdressing, sweet shops, fish and chip shops, jewellers, opticians, funeral directors, coal dealers and pharmacies in the inter-war years. After the war, they expanded further into removal services, wallpaper shops, dry cleaning, and electrical goods.

The aim was to create an "integrated economy from bakers shop to flour mill, from tea table to tea plantation".⁵ But this entailed an inevitable contradiction. The interests of consumers were paramount. The protection and fair treatment of those it employed was part of its ethos, but its employees remained wage-workers. What confronted them was still capital. That it was capital owned by other workers did not change the fundamental social relation of labour to capital in the way it is changed where the workers themselves own their means of production.

This is a problem that a socialist society would face. Where the means of production are owned by the state, each group of workers is confronted, so long as commodity production continues, by capital, and their relation to it remains that of wage-workers. That it is a workers' state owning the capital would not change that relation. The fundamental economic relation would be that of state capitalism. This is why Engels says he and Marx envisaged that co-operatives would play a major role for a prolonged period, with the state acting only as a holding company retaining the deeds, so that property could not be privatised, rather than exercising active ownership and control.⁶

Consumers' co-ops do have a role to play. It is possible producer co-ops might use monopoly power to make monopoly profits. Consumer co-ops can act as commissioning agents to counterbalance such power, and at the same time formalise connections between workers as producers and consumers. One of the areas where this is probably important is in the provision of services such as welfare.

A strong point illustrated by Robertson is the co-op's natural tendency to internationalism. That is so not just because of its concept of 'community', but also because the same economic forces that drive capital to expand, and create deeper and more extensive links, operate on co-operative property too. As early as the 1850s the Co-op had extensive international links, through which it learned the latest technology and techniques. Co-operators from around the globe came to the Co-op College at Stanford Hall, and that helped to reinforce the ideology of internationalism.

The Co-op and the fight against capital

Robertson shows how World War I was important for

the Co-op. It pressed for food rationing, and set up its own systems prior to the government doing so. In the aftermath there was widespread profiteering, and price-fixing, causing rapidly rising prices. This set the Co-op model in stark contrast to capitalist business. A cartoon in *Co-operative News* of December 14 1918 showed a co-operative St George killing a capitalist dragon with the caption, "The people's co-operative fight with the capitalistic menace". And that difference had been shown in the standing committee on trusts' *Report on the soap industry* (1921), which concluded that there had been widespread profiteering by the soap manufacturers, whilst "The Co-operative Wholesale Society has generally taken the lower of the two costs, which is the exact reverse of what other soap makers have done."

The Co-op played an important role in the Workers National Committee set up in 1914, providing it with figures for food and other prices. The London Co-operative Society also worked with the London Trades Council and Labour Party to form the London Food Vigilance Committee, which set up committees in 30 districts and organised a 50,000-strong demonstration in Hyde Park. Such activities show how the transitional demand for a sliding scale of wages could be practically implemented.

But it was important for another reason. When the government did introduce rationing, the Co-op was discriminated against by the private traders who controlled the quotas. Lloyd George brought influential businessmen into government, but the Co-op was excluded. The competition against capitalist property meant it must inevitably have to engage in politics. In May 1917, the Co-op congress made that decision. A focus was excess profits duty, which classed the 'divi' - the dividend Co-ops paid to their members/customers - as profits, even though the increases in divi were due to rising prices.

The bosses and government had no difficulty seeing the Co-op as part of the labour movement, even if sometimes it appeared the trade unions did not. In 1919, fearing a miners' strike, Lloyd George wrote to Bonar Law: "The miners I happen to know are relying upon the co-operative stores to feed them. The great co-operative supplies are outside the mining areas. They ought not to be removed. Once the strike begins, it is imperative that the state should win. Failure to do so would inevitably lead to a soviet republic."⁷

During the 1919 railway strike co-ops supplied food to the strikers. The shopworkers union in 1921 devised a plan to get supplies to members of the Triple Alliance, in case of a strike, via a national strike food committee, made up of the alliance, the co-operative movement and its employees. Co-op societies would be urged to move stocks lying at railways and in warehouses, "so that stores can be in our hands before the government commandeers the larger accumulation of supplies". In case of shortages, committees would rely on the wartime experience of co-ops in organising rationing.

The unions did not often reciprocate. They continued to place their funds in capitalist banks, and when the General Strike was underway, the Co-op was given no dispensation. As it encouraged its workers to join unions, it was in fact harder hit than private re-



Robert Owen: idea of 'community'

tailors, who opposed unions and used scab labour. Yet retail societies contributed £48,000 to national appeals, food and clothing worth £131,000 was handed over, and trade union credit of nearly half a million pounds was extended. It was alleged that £400,000 was transferred from the USSR to the Miners' Federation, through the Co-operative Wholesale Society.

When the Tories attempted to prevent a repeat by introducing the Trades Dispute and Trades Union Bill in 1927, the central board of the Co-operative Union noted that "capitalist interests that have demanded this bill from the government are the same business and political interests that are striving to hamper the legitimate development of co-operation" and called upon "all co-operators to assist the trade unions in every possible way to defeat this reactionary measure".⁸

In the 1930s the Co-op Union organised support for the National Unemployed Workers Movement and the hunger marches, even though they were ignored at a national level by the trades unions and Labour Party.

But the Co-op had to compete with other retailers. When it was strong it could lead the way. The more capitalist retailers grew, however, the more it had to adopt similar practices to them. So worried was it that its workers would use their own membership to dominate the boards and raise wages that it introduced rules to prevent them having full voting rights. But it was precisely becoming worker-owned and -controlled that could have saved them. It was the employees who could have the new ideas and dynamism that would have provided the competitive edge.

It is also necessary to understand that trade union bureaucrats have an incentive to oppose co-ops. Trade unions are there to bargain within capitalism, and it is from that role that the bureaucrats earn their living. The whole point of a worker-owned co-op is to establish non-capitalist property, and thereby to end the system of wages and wage bargaining. The function of the union bureaucrat disappears.

A similar problem existed with the Labour Party, for the same reason. Labour was set up to bargain for better conditions within capitalism. Although the Co-op Party had close links with Labour, there was always a friction based on that different ideology. Moreover, Labour basically thought that the Co-op should just hand over its money.

The difference was highlighted with the 1945 government. The Co-op always felt that Labour governments did nothing to promote the co-op movement or ideals. They were excluded from the Economic Planning Board. The idea of social, as opposed to state, ownership divided the two, and the aspect of democratic control implicit in Co-op ideals played no part in Labour's ideas about nationalisation. That was marked when the Co-op colliery was transferred from workers' hands into the hands of the capitalist state, as part of the nationalisation of mines, and similar threats were raised against the Co-op's industrial insurance business. As Peter Gurney puts it, it led Co-op leaders to believe "their own distinctive form of economic organisation would be snuffed out because of Labour's preference for bureaucratic and statist alternatives".⁹

In the same way that Marx describes how capital traps workers - and, the more affluent they become, the more trapped they are, dependent on it for the continuation of those wages - so this dependence on the capitalist state reproduced that relation, whether it was as employees of it or as effective serfs dependent on welfare.

That is why Marx, in the programme of the First International argued for direct taxes: "Because indirect taxes conceal from an individual

what he is paying to the state, whereas a direct tax is undisguised, unsophisticated and not to be misunderstood by the meanest capacity. Direct taxation prompts therefore every individual to control the governing powers, while indirect taxation destroys all tendency to self-government."¹⁰

The co-op and an alternative culture

Robertson deals at length with the way in which the Co-op attempted to promote the idea of community through its work in other areas, such as education, sport and leisure. The extent of all these was dependent upon the size and success of the retail society in the area, which funded the activity.

Again, it was the nature of a consumer Co-op which limited the potential for this activity. The vast majority of members did not participate in Co-op democracy, and were mainly just interested in low prices and the divi rather than Co-op philosophy. Most of the store managers shared that outlook, and, as already pointed out, the workers in the stores had no reason to view their position as much different from that of any other worker.

The Socialist Workers' Sports International was formed in 1920 with the aim of educating "a new and healthy generation which will propagate socialism, fight capitalist exploitation, fight against war, fight for peace of the world and for the political, economic and cultural emancipation of the working class".¹¹ The co-operative movement was encouraged "to use sporting activities as part of its ideological advancement, arguing that 'by the provision of adequate sports facilities and the stimulating of sports participation the movement can hasten forward the Co-operative Commonwealth'" (p79).

The Co-op initially organised sports activities for its workers, not members. That changed in 1948, when it was agreed that the newly formed National Co-operative Sports Association should also be for members. As with many aspects of Co-op activity, there was no uniformity. Many of the smaller societies provided no facilities at all. An argument against extending facilities to members had been the logistical problem of catering for so many people over wide areas.

The answer was to focus on specific groups, particularly the young, who it wanted to socialise into its community. Whilst annual events such as Co-operators Day and International Co-operators Week provided family events, which demonstrated that the Co-op was a central part of working class communities, emphasis was placed on youth events. This was linked to Education. The Co-operative Educator argued that activities on Co-op-owned playing fields showed that the Co-op was more than just a trading concern.¹²

From 1923, the annual Summer Carnival was designated International Co-operators Day, and continued to draw large crowds into the 1960s and 70s.

At a time when holidays were becoming common for workers, societies organised outings, buying their own transport. Some bought country estates, which were leased to the Workers Travel Association as holiday homes. The larger stores played a part too, because they increasingly had space set aside for eating, drinking and socialising, both during shopping and for evening activities. The Co-op halls were central to working class life - hired out not just for weddings, funerals and dances, but to trade unions and other labour movement organisations. Turnbull and Southern describe them as "an alternative working class power base to the local middle class establishment."¹³

In 1950, the Birmingham Co-op Dairy attracted 3,000 to its Sports Day. The society only employed 7,000. However, as Robertson points out, in Britain it faced much more competition from commercial leisure than in the rest of Europe. The reasons for participation were no doubt different from the motivations of the leadership and activists, just as was the case in regard to consuming other goods and services. With rising affluence, and the growth of consumerism in the 1950s, the Co-op found it was losing young people to these commercial providers.

The Rochdale Pioneers established a library and reading room above their premises and, from 1852, a proportion of the surplus was devoted to education. It was the only education available for workers in the 19th century. Even in the 20th century it remained important. The education committee of the Birmingham Society wrote: "We realise that without trading, our educational work could not be done, but there is another side to co-operation. The movement stands for human betterment. We seek to provide food for the mind."¹⁴

Again it depended on the size of local societies, and again the spread of a consumerist attitude - this time the consumption of education provided by the capitalist state - undermined co-operative education, just as it undermined other forms of independent working class education. Ownership and control passed from the workers to the capitalist state. Where the churches took advantage of state education to finance their own schools, the Co-op did not. It did not see itself as an alternative to state capitalist education, but as an adjunct to it.

Marx and the First International had been wholly opposed to the idea of state education. Marx described it as "wholly objectionable". The only role for the state, they argued, was in setting general guidelines. In a speech to the International Workingmen's Association in 1869, Marx spoke of the system in Massachusetts, where the establishment of education was the responsibility of townships. He seems to have favoured this idea as a means of keeping the government out, but argued the need for national standards and inspection, as with the Factory Acts.¹⁵ The IWA in its programme tied education to the employment of children, and argued that the cost of the education should be defrayed out of the products of that labour.

Marx was also totally opposed to the instruction of children in schools in anything that could be open to class interpretation: "Nothing could be introduced either in primary, or higher schools that admitted of party and class interpretation. Only subjects such as the physical sciences, grammar, etc were fit matter for schools. The rules of grammar, for instance, could not differ, whether explained by a religious Tory or a free thinker."

Everything else they would learn from adults as part of their daily lives at work. That is they would learn the lessons of class struggle from adult workers. From this perspective co-operative education tied to worker-owned co-operative production makes sense, particularly as Marx argued the need to tie education to productive activity, which he saw as being vital to raise working class children way above the level of the children of the bourgeoisie.

The determination of Co-op educators was exemplified in London during the war: "For a period we were stunned by the avalanche of human misery and, with homes, classrooms and meeting places destroyed, the hard work of many, many years seemed to have come to an inglorious end. But, within a few weeks, there arose from the ashes new life, new

hopes, and with commendable courage, Guild Youth branches, choirs and classes began to re-form. The need for co-operative education is greater now than ever before; we must 'Build for tomorrow'."¹⁶

The Co-op Union maintained education for members in the forces, devising correspondence courses for members and employees alike, and subjects included the co-op internationalist alternative to war. The problem was the lesson that a consumer Co-op gave in practice: that by owning capital and employing workers it was possible to acquire goods and services cheaply, and to make a surplus. That was a lesson capitalists had learned long before. This is one reason that Marx and the First International had argued: "We recommend to the working men to embark in co-operative production rather than in co-operative stores. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system; the former attacks its groundwork."¹⁷

They were not the only organisation doing that. From the early part of the century there had been a movement for independent working class education that sprang from the Plebs League and developed into the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC). They stood for no compromise with bourgeois education, and against the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), which had been set up by sections of the liberal bourgeoisie to head off rising working class self-education, just as the emerging welfare state acted, as Marx put it, to destroy "all tendency to self-government"¹⁸ - which is why he had demanded that the state keep its hands off the Workers' Friendly Societies set up for that purpose.

State education was indoctrinating the workers' children; the WEA sought to do the same thing with adult workers. Nevertheless, a continual struggle existed to win the TUC for independent working class education against the ability of the WEA to offer 'professional' lecturers, and considerably more resources. The Co-op worked with both the NCLC and WEA, though many activists believed that this undermined the Co-op's own ideas.

As early as the 1930s the Co-op was also providing specific education for women. The Co-operative Women's Guild helped members develop a range of skills. George Barnsby describes it as "a school of democratic action and empowerment for working class women, starting typically with a young, timid, inexperienced housewife and taking her through confidence-building stages until many were capable of speaking before mass national audiences and taking national and even international positions within the co-operative and labour movement."¹⁹

Peter Gurney says that by 1930 the revolutionary potential of the Co-op had gone. In the post-war period, the rise of consumerism, and the greater strength and competitiveness of increasingly large stores, meant that the basic model of the consumer co-operative was undermined.

The weakness of Robertson's book is that, although as a history it reveals some of the problems and weaknesses of consumer co-operatives, it does not really discuss the lessons or solutions. I have tried to do that as part of this review. One of the usual criticisms of the statist left against co-ops is that they cannot compete with private capital. The co-op clearly did. Established by small groups of workers in the most unfavourable conditions, the retail co-ops grew to dominate the retail space and acquired millions of members. And they expanded into production and wholesaling. Even today, the Co-op is the biggest farmer in Britain.

Globally, the number of co-ops has

continued to grow over the last century, and they employ more people than multinationals, as well as dominating production or distribution for certain products in a number of countries. In Britain, however, the retail Co-ops lost their dominating position. But for a socialist to account for that simply by saying that it was due to the rise of consumerism is inadequate. The question would be, why could the Co-op not adapt to cater for that consumerism?

In part, I think the rise and fall of the retail co-ops is similar to the rise and fall of the USSR. The economy of the USSR grew extremely rapidly, when the things it had to do were quite straightforward. It began to fail when it went past that stage, and had to accomplish more complex tasks, particularly responding to consumer needs. Partly that was due to its continued primitiveness, partly to the attempt to prematurely plan a complex economy, partly to the lack of democratic workers' control of production.

The co-op was established initially to deal with the problems of the adulteration of workers' food and profiteering. By supplying good-quality products at low prices, it met workers' basic needs and grew rapidly. In the absence of a welfare state it was able to succeed in providing some measure of worker-owned services in education and welfare. Its success in basic food retailing enabled it to expand into other retail areas.

But there was no requirement for the members of a consumers' co-op to involve themselves in its running. They did not do so, and this enabled the management to increasingly exercise control as a bureaucracy. In a producer co-op, there are decisions that workers have to make every day, and so a culture of involvement, and democracy develops automatically. To the extent that such a co-op has to operate in a market, the individual workers as owners have a vested interest in ensuring that its production meets consumers' needs, and that production is carried out efficiently. Again there is a necessary involvement of workers in participating in management and decision-making within their company. The retail co-ops prevented their own workers from exercising that role.

A wider history needs to look at the experience of other forms of co-operatives, in particular the worker-owned producer co-ops. At least in this book there is some discussion of workers' self-organisation, whether it be in relation to co-operatives, or in relation to independent workers' education. That is a beginning ●

Arthur Bough

Notes

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OUR HISTORY



Unity in a single party

To mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain, we begin here a series of reprints of key documents from the pre-history and early years of our party

Our Communist Party was founded over the weekend of July 31-August 1 1920. Viewed scientifically, there is no question that the establishment of this party of class war was the highest organisational/political achievement of the working class movement in this country. In its own way it matches in importance other such pinnacles of the class struggle as the London Corresponding Society, Chartism and the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, the cooperative movement and the Labour Party.

The comrades who gathered that summer were much more than a group of dedicated individual militants. They represented a key layer of workers in Britain, the advanced section itself, which was attempting to assimilate the lessons of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution and form an organisation designed to do more than operate within the parameters of capitalism. The Communist Party was made for revolution.

Over two generations, the

CPGB brought together some of the best, most militant, most disciplined workers in the country. Its history therefore - the good as well as the bad - is the history of the politically advanced section of the proletariat and its struggle for socialism. Although relatively small in numbers, its organic social roots in the working class and its international contacts allowed it to supply a proletarian general staff in all crucial class battles from 1920 till well into the 1970s.

So, to dismiss the history of the CPGB is to dismiss the lessons of the National Minority Movement, the 1926 General Strike, the National Unemployed Workers Movement - and the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, which led the fight in the late 1960s and early 70s to defeat first Wilson's, then Heath's, anti-union legislation and successfully initiated mass political strikes to secure the release of the Pentonville Five.

Our organisation is not the

only one claiming the heritage of the Communist Party of 1920 on its 90th anniversary. Besides the 57 varieties of Maoism and Trotskyism, there is, of course, that wretched *Morning Star* support group, the Communist Party of Britain - a Stalinist split from the 'official' CPGB in 1988. Its pitch for the franchise lauds the party's history of "working class militancy in Britain" and "a steely commitment to internationalism". The CPB's own "steely commitment" to 'internationalism' can be judged by the fact that its Brian Denny motivated and mainly authored the social chauvinist programme for the No2EU electoral front, an amalgam of the CPB, Solidarity in Scotland, the Alliance for Green Socialism and the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which effectively constituted itself as the left wing of the UK Independence Party.

The same goes for "working class militancy". The CPB boasts of its fraternal relations with the red-brown Communist

Party of the Russian Federation and the Communist Party of China. It also regularly provides a platform for official representatives of the South African Communist Party - some of whose leading members play ministerial roles in the *bourgeois* government in Pretoria, have fronted the state's privatisation of public services, have protected profit rates against workers' demands for improved wages and conditions, have spoken out against strikes in the name of the 'national interest', have sent in the police to break up workers' protests and have actually headed the South African state's secret intelligence services.

Unlike today's remnants of 'official communism', those who came together to form our party were revolutionaries. And revolutionaries who, even before they became fully aware of the politics of Bolshevism and the 1917 revolution, were conducting an open ideological struggle against precisely the sort of social chauvinism and opportunism that sects such as

the CPB reek of today.

Obviously, outstanding militants such as CPGBers William Paul, Willie Gallagher, Harry Pollitt and Tom Bell did not begin their political life on day one of the new party. They had histories as members of - often warring - political sects. The most important of these - the British Socialist Party - was to provide the bulk of members for the newly formed CPGB in 1920. But the documents we reprint here and in future issues show that a vital part of the *political preparation* for this qualitative change entailed a ferocious ideological battle, which culminated in the coming together of comrades into a single party.

In February 1916, against the backdrop of the terrible slaughter of World War I, the BSP left launched *The Call*. This unofficial publication's trenchant opposition to the inter-imperialist carnage stood in stark contrast to the party's official publication, *Justice*, which was dominated by the social chauvinist, HM Hyndman ●

Awakening

The Call No1, editorial, February 24 1916

The dominant note of *The Call* will be that the socialists of all the countries at war, as well as those which still maintain a precarious neutrality, should urge upon the working class the wisdom and claims of peace. Believing that the present struggle serves no progressive purpose, we shall support and encourage every desire and effort to re-establish international relations between the working class of the countries now at war ...

The Call has been founded, and will be controlled by, members of the BSP, who as Social Democrats feel the necessity for acting in agreement with the traditions of the party. No other course is open, since *Justice*, though nominally the official organ of the party, has throughout the past 12 months advocated a policy of jingoism and reaction, in international as well as national questions, which is entirely and utterly opposed to the decisions of the divisional conference held in February 1915 - a fact which has occasioned grave misunderstanding of the party's position, at home and abroad.

We shall urge that the Easter conference adopt an unambiguous position on the war and state with precision the attitude of the party towards the ruling class in Great Britain. We hold that the exploiter and the exploited are as opposed in war as they are in peace. While the governments of Europe fear the awakening of the people, already increasing numbers of workers in every warring country are calling on their comrades abroad to cooperate in ending the carnage and laceration caused by this mad folly ●

Enthusiasm

The Call No 5, editorial, April 20 1916

We feel we can say truthfully that the history of the BSP records nothing at all comparable with the enthusiasm awakened by the publication of *The Call*. Energy has taken the place of lethargy; inspiration and a desire to be up and doing have dissipated the pessimism that was sapping the vitality of the party. Many branches and a host of members, deceived as to the views of the majority by the attitude of *Justice* and contemplating secession as the only course possible in their imagined isolation, found in *The Call* a common rallying point. Others who had already left have returned, full of new hope and determination.

The success of *The Call* is magnificent evidence that the definite and uncompromising advocacy of

international social democracy still retains its power to inspire, and we await the decisions of the forthcoming annual conference at Manchester, full of hope and confidence in the success of the cause for which we stand ●

Long live the revolution!

The Call No50, March22 1917: Supporters of The Call did indeed win at the Manchester conference. Hyndman and his social-chauvinist followers were expelled - he went on to form the ominously but accurately named National Socialist Party. Henceforth The Call was to be the organ of the executive committee of the BSP and it was in this capacity that it greeted the February revolution in Russia

A political earthquake has shaken the foundations of the material and moral order of things created by the war ... the patriotic gentlemen in this and other countries, including Germany, have hastened to proclaim that the revolution in Russia has been promoted by an ardent desire of the Russian people to win the war and that - to quote one of the Petrograd correspondents of one of our dailies - "not a single cry against the war has been heard anywhere during the whole course of events" of the historical days.

This interpretation and these assurances are about as true as the statement with which *The Times*, that dear old subsidised friend of the autocracy, began on Friday its account: "After a brief revolution born of the united forces of the duma and the army", etc. The real truth of the matter is that the revolution was begun and carried out with the utmost success by the masses of the people themselves against the previous exhortations of the duma, who had feared nothing so much as a revolution, that it was the masses who, ever since Thursday, had been fraternising with, and gaining over to their side, troops and that it was not until Monday that the liberals and the radicals of the duma appeared on the scene.

So much for the revolution "born of the united forces of the duma and the army". As for the sentiments animating the people, it is significant that not a single correspondent has as yet ventured to report any fact of a positive character - a demonstration, a meeting, a manifesto - showing that these sentiments are warlike; that the utmost length to which they have as yet dared proceed in this direction is exemplified by the vague

and purely negative phrase quoted above, and that neither the proclamation of the provisional government nor any other act of the new regime has as yet contained any reference to the war.

... those whose knowledge of Russian affairs is of an earlier date than March 16, who have had some acquaintance with the frame of mind of the Russian masses in town and country on the eve of the outbreak, know well that the war had lost all hold over the minds of the people at large, that the red flag which was planted, to the accompaniment of the revolutionary labour 'Marseillaise', on all public buildings in Petrograd and Moscow, was not at all the war banner of what people are pleased to call 'patriotism', and fully expect to learn that the cry, 'Down with the autocracy!', was everywhere coupled with the cry, 'Down with the war!'

The very swiftness and completeness of the revolution shows how little was the hold of the autocracy and bureaucracy over the mind of the nation, and how profound is the historical guilt of those - the liberals and radicals - in Russia who betrayed the revolution 12 years ago and who since then have never ceased fighting strenuously against its ideas. It is one of the sweetest acts of revenge on the part of dame history that now these very gentlemen have had to swallow the entire revolutionary programme down to the articles about a constituent assembly and the organisation of a national militia in the place of the police, which ever since 1905 had been to them anathema maranatha ...

The Russian liberals ... have been compelled to agree to the programme of the revolution, but there can be little doubt that they would dearly like to wriggle out of their pledges, to restore some sort of a monarchy with a strong, centralised and armed power, and would, if needs be, not hesitate to introduce a military dictatorship under some grand duke, like Nicolas Nikolayevich, against the revolutionary people.

The Russian Revolution announces with mighty clarion call the rebirth of the International - an International bleeding from a thousand wounds, almost expiring, but now redeemed by the daring and victorious proletariat of Russia. For can anyone imagine that its thundering echoes will not set the blood coursing quicker in the veins of the suffering proletariat in other countries, will not recall old, almost forgotten, but still slumbering and glorious memories in the minds of socialists all the world over, will not reveal to them, as by a flash of vivifying lightning, the way out of the tragic impasse into which they have allowed themselves to be driven by the sinister forces of capitalist society, will not instil in their breasts a new courage, will not break the mesmeric spell in which they have been held by the tenors and by the false ideas of the last two years and half?

Mr Henderson and his 'pals' have hastened to telegraph to Petrograd their good wishes in the forthcoming good fight against the "despotism of Germany".¹ They have sent their telegram to the wrong address, and their message is wholly unauthorised. The masses of the people think otherwise, and they, too, will feel ere long the powerful rustling of the wings of the angel of the revolution. We, who have fought our battles hitherto as a small minority, will now derive fresh courage from the example set by the Russian people. The first tremendous breach in the walls of the enemy has been made; the hour is close at hand when we, too, in this country, will plant the red flag on the grave of reaction and shout, 'Long live the revolution! Long live the International!' ●

Note

1. Arthur Henderson (September 13 1863 - October 20 1935) served three short terms as leader of the Labour Party - 1908-10, 1914-17 and 1931-32. In 1916, under the Liberal prime minister, David Lloyd George, he became a member of the war cabinet as a minister without portfolio. As is the norm for imperialist warmongers, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1934.

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.**

Summer Offensive

Large chunk

With just over three weeks to go in our annual fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive, we now have £11,733 towards our £25,000 target.

Obviously that still leaves us a long way to go - £13,267, to be precise. But past experience has shown that a large chunk of the cash we need is raised just before or during Communist University, our week-long summer school which runs this year from August 8 to 15. We traditionally end the Summer Offensive on the final evening of CU with a celebratory meal.

Anyway, we are continuing to make good progress, with another £1,666 coming in this week. That includes some large donations, amongst which pride of place goes to our Turkish comrades in the TKP, who contributed a magnificent £500. There were other big contributions too - from SK (£230), AM (£160), PM (£96), MM (£70) and MZ (£52). Then there are the numerous smaller ones (such as the tenner from comrade DN) - which are essential if we are to get

anywhere near our target.

Included in the above is cash donated specifically to the *Weekly Worker*. While, of course, it is used for the paper, it counts towards the overall total raised by our friends, comrades and supporters. This week, for instance, there was the £70 mentioned above from MM.

It is easy to take the *Weekly Worker* for granted - last week there were 11,685 readers, for instance - but regular followers of a certain Robbie Rix will know that it could not survive without the money donated by a proportion (at present far too small) of those internet readers.

If you want to help boost the paper, or play your part in reaching the SO target, please do so quickly, as we enter the last part of the campaign ●

Robbie Rix

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**Cameron's
'Big Society'
lie**

Old cuts, new packaging

With all the furore over the waves of public sector cuts, you could be forgiven for missing David Cameron's 'big idea' completely.

The Big Society, as he insists on calling it, was rather drowned out on the doorstep in May - not least because it was not remotely clear exactly what Cameron's proposals were. It seemed rather to be a piece of Blairoid fluff - feel-good spin in an election which saw the masses choose between executioners.

In the wake of the election - and the formation of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition - this buzz phrase was largely shelved, in favour of the similarly vapid 'new politics'.¹ Now, all of a sudden, the Big Society is back. David Cameron made a prestige trip to Liverpool to launch it as government policy, and the commentariat is once again in a frenzy over the whole thing.

What is on the table? The Big Society's pitch is simple: too much of social life in Britain is reliant on the largesse of central government and the Whitehall bureaucracy. Instead, community groups should be able to direct the provision of their public services. Cameron's 'free schools' programme - which would see groups of parents allowed to start up a school of their own, arranging contracts with 'education providers' and so on - is the classic Big Society policy; but in Liverpool the esteemed PM added post offices, libraries and other services to the list - all are deemed ripe for a little civic activism. Four 'vanguard' areas - including, of course, Liverpool - are to be cultivated more directly by the government.

Unlike previously, Cameron now has an answer - if you can call it that - to the toughest question: where is the money going to come from? This does not look like the kind of government which will dole out lots of cash to try out the latest experiments; indeed, the Tories' central message to voters was precisely that there was no money. Why make so much noise about cutting a deficit and then throw public money at cosy community initiatives?

Cameron, however, claims to have a plan. A Big Society bank is to be created - it will provide funds for various fuzzily defined 'community projects', including business start-ups. Its funds are to come from the use of dormant bank accounts - those that have not been touched and whose owners have not been in contact with the bank for 15 years - whose proceeds will be an estimated £80 million.

It is a figure which looks large from an individual standpoint - but is a mere drop in the ocean, compared to the budget for public services as a whole. The NHS alone eats up around £100 billion a year, and so those dormant bank accounts would perhaps suffice to run a provincial health centre - for one year, at least. More likely, it will fund a handful of businesses and prestige projects.

If this scheme is to take off, then - and both Cameron and his Lib Dem puppy dog, Nick Clegg, seem to want it (though Clegg calls it semi-convincingly the 'liberal society',

of course) - it is going to need two things: substantial participation from the private sector and (ultimately) large sums of public money. It does not take much imagination to work out the most likely sources of private cash - voluntary organisations, and especially churches. That was already clear from Blair's academy schools, which were snapped up in many cases by odious religious reactionaries, such as the evangelical Christian and former used car salesman, Peter Vardy.

It is clear what the appeal is for the government - it provides an, if not pain-free, at least publicly marketable way to get expensive public service provisions off the government's books. Though, in reality, privatisation has never saved a government a dime, it provides opportunities for books to be cooked and circles to be squared.

Its appeal to people at large is a different matter. Cameron's figures do not fail to add up because - as, perhaps, with his barely competent education secretary Michael Gove - he is unintelligent; like most reform swindles, the Big Society has a pull because it is based on wellchosen lies.

People certainly do feel alienated from the top layers of the state bureaucracy and the political system. Public services - however important they are as gains for the working class

- really are bureaucratised monstrosities, unresponsive to local initiative and utterly dependent on the machinations of Westminster. Teachers are hamstrung by an education system entirely directed at measuring performance in quantitative terms; the NHS, after three decades of piecemeal privatisation, is incomprehensibly complex and permanently leaks public money. All public sector workers are looking at potential pay cuts, while millions get sucked into white-elephant IT contracts and the like.

The state bureaucracy is ineffective and intrusive - and people know it. Cameron, like Thatcher before him, has astutely seized on this feeling of disdain. While Thatcher's line of attack was basically individualist,

Cameron has in some ways gone further by adding a Blairite communitarian angle. A relatively leftwing *Guardian* correspondent, of all people, provides a perfect illustration of this appeal - citing the Zapatistas and the situationist concept of *détournement*,
A l e x

Andrews argues that the Big Society programmes could be used to build some kind of "dual power" at the municipal level for battles against "forces that created that situation and destroyed their communities in the first place - ultimately, the system of capitalism itself".²

Andrews is clearly not one of the far left's great strategic thinkers. Yet he has unwittingly hit on a key political lesson that many otherwise more serious leftwingers simply fail to pick up - that having your life substantially directed by the state is in itself a turn-off for the general population, and so Tory snake-oil of the Big Society type has a certain utopian attraction. The post-war consensus, which saw successive governments direct a large portfolio of nationalised industries and public services, effectively grafted welfare provision onto a rigged political system that divested people of any real control.

Thatcher, meanwhile, may have declared war on Butskellism and other relics of the defunct post-war long boom - but a consistent undercurrent of her political activity was the undermining of local democracy. It is not hard to see why - in the face of a hostile national government, Labour-controlled municipalities veered left, and the attacks on local government formed a key part of an infamous class offensive. For all her bluster about rolling back the state, Thatcher made it her mission to destroy all centres of political power that she and her allies did not control (ie, all bar Westminster and Whitehall). New Labour continued mostly on the same path (devolution in Scotland and Wales is an anomaly in this process).

The bottom line is that, in 2010, David Cameron can make in substance the same appeals against the depredations of the nanny state - and it can work all over again, in the sense that it can find an echo among, and sell cuts to, sections of the population (principally the petty bourgeoisie, but also layers of workers) key to Tory success. It will *not*

'work', I need hardly point out, in the sense of delivering the slightest improvement in services. When the £80 million runs out, it will have to be replaced; in the meantime, people will have to be recruited to oversee the whole project. The state will grow larger again. Britain will not be transformed by the Big Society, but rather ravaged by the cuts for which it is the alibi.

The left must fight to expose this fraud, and we should expect it to do so - the 'usual suspects', as well as unlikely comrades in arms such as Ed Miliband, who has been on the media warpath over the issue already. Yet that is not enough - Cameron, after all, has given us a utopia of sorts which (he tells us) will persist long after the cuts have scarred over.

When our side rises in defence of public services, however, we rarely get anything like an image of a more liberated society. This is true of Miliband, for whom the technocratic politics of New Labour (and its key progenitor, Thatcher) are not only acceptable, but a natural working environment; and it is also true of the Socialist Workers Party and others, whose grand plan for society (as far as the great unwashed are concerned) seems to be spending less on killing foreign populations and more on the NHS.

This is a line designed to smooth over differences between political trends, rather than to give anyone much to vote for or sign up to as an activist. Marxists have a 'bigger society' than David Cameron, which, after all, will benefit not the masses, but a handful of carpetbagger capitalists looking for schools and post offices on the cheap. It is time that we made the case for our alternative rather than simply defending what we have ●

James Turley

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. See 'The new bullshit' *Weekly Worker* May 20.
2. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/20/big-society-empower-communities.



David Cameron: a spoonful of sugar

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