

weekly
worker



Neoliberal ghosts and the art of brevity: CPGB Draft programme debate

- Manchester TUC
- Pope's state visit
- Lenin and freedom
- Turkey's constitution

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Diane Abbott and Labour's leadership election

Supportable or unsupportable?



LETTERS



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

White workers

Just when we thought writers in the *Weekly Worker* couldn't be any more out of touch with normal working people in Britain (what with Heather Down's scolding for the portrayal of those pleasure-crazy, sex-mad Muslim women in their full niqabs with their eyes made up and wearing nail varnish, the wanton hussies), now we have David Bates telling us there is no white working class.

Of course there isn't, David, we're all multicultural and multiracial and don't have skin colour differences. We're the workers of the world and we don't live anywhere, or belong anywhere; we don't have any particular link to any part of the world or part of a country and we all have exactly the same origins, have no roots, no culture and no ethnicity and no particular history. To try and suggest otherwise is racist or xenophobic.

Multiculturalism, non-fixed labour mobility, non-national or non-regional or non-cultural, rootless, aimless, amorphous labour - that's us. Rather that's the way the ruling class wants it to be, and for some bizarre reason, which figures that somehow this is a progressive project, the far left (so-called) now join them in this rationale, and become the left face for its all-pervasive, non-debatable 'logic'. You now share the same vision as our rulers and sing from the same hymn sheet. You remind me of the communists who during the war sided with the Emergency Powers Act and the war government to jail striking workers.

White isn't really white; in fact calling yourself white is quite reactionary, it seems. This notwithstanding the fact that every official document we have to fill in asks us to choose a skin-type designation and 'white', or 'white European' is the one most people on this island choose. Not that's it's a 'choice' - it's a simple matter of deciding if actually, and not by inclination, your skin is black, brown or 'white'. Of course, 'white' skin isn't actually white: it means non-black, non-dark, Caucasian. But David and everyone else knows exactly who we're talking about. Perhaps by denying that 'white' is white - the skin colour that is predominantly, and in some regions of the country overwhelmingly, the colour of the population - that colour will disappear. We will think of ourselves as no particular colour at all.

Of course 'the working class' has no colour, because it's a designation that applies to all colours. Correct, but do we say there is no black working class in Africa? If we looked at the Ulster situation, for years we argued with Militant over their obsession with the 'trade union solution' to the 'Ulster problem', because the working class, in the abstract, was the solution. But, although the working class *per se* is non-sectarian, it wasn't actually true in concrete terms, and the Protestant section was able to grab the bulk of the jobs and dominate all the unions with loyalist politics in support of that sectarian, pro-imperialist statelet. The class was split along cultural, political and linked religious traditions. So we really could talk about the Protestant working class - or more correctly the loyalist working class, even though technically the working class had no such division. But you'd have to be a nit-picking fool avoiding the problem to argue that position and not recognise the composition of the class on the ground. Don't, for

god's sake, try and tell us what we see before us doesn't in fact exist - we can see it, man.

The white working class is the majority component of the largely traditional areas of heavy industrial production and manufacture (or former production and manufacture, since part of the problem is they no longer exist and millions of workers stand on the scrapheap in burned-out communities). No, it was not exclusively white - it never has been exclusively anything and was always, since the industrial revolution and before, a mix of races and cultural sub-groups. But predominantly it was white Caucasian. It remains so. When workers talk about 'the white working class' they are simply describing the majority make-up across mines, mills, docks, steel, engineering, shipbuilding, and manufacture in general. It's not a prescriptive designation; it's not a sectarian designation: it's a factual one.

Now David Bates can pretend it doesn't exist, and many middle class multiculturalists who hated the traditional proletarian working class may wish they didn't exist and are happy to now eclipse us from memory and politics, but we're still here. If you don't know that, the British National Party, English Defence League and others sure as hell do. It is they who are making headway into traditional 'white working class' heartlands which were the bedrock of progressive working class politics and class struggle in Britain. No wonder you won't recognise us - you've been ignoring us for years and chasing from one politically correct bean feast to another, picking up any damn cause from across the globe but running a mile from the nearest working class bloke in a bar or family on a working class housing estate.

You will never in a million years win back confidence or authority from the British working class by such refracted and ill-considered nonsense and you certainly don't deserve to. The fact is the traditional British working class knows exactly who we are, but who the fuck are you? Do you know any more?

Willie Hunter
Berwick Upon Tweed

Disgusting

Yet another sexualised image graces the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. We have degenerated from sexually explicit eye make-up and nail varnish full of eastern promise to female children.

Jack Conrad's use of a curly-haired, big-eyed little girl on the front page and inside article shows you have learned nothing. She is clearly in a sexual pose, obviously pouting and inviting. You might have pixelated the image or blanked out her face, so as not to invite drooling paedophiles to build disgusting fantasies around this exploitative picture. Had you also included the three bears with this Goldilocks image, no doubt they'd have been presented naked!

Outraged
Tunbridge Wells

Pro-war

The article 'Vote preference one for Abbott ... and fuck warmongering ex-ministers' (September 9) points out that "she calls herself a socialist", before noting the largely ceremonial title the MP holds as secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group. It is a curious point, given that every single one of the Labour Party leadership candidates is a self-described 'socialist'. What we are to infer from this seems unclear.

What is clear is that Diane Abbott has consistently identified publicly as a pro-war candidate, raising questions about the kind of socialism that she could be said to advocate. Alex John presumes abstentionism from the leadership race results from "imagined political purity" rather than a disagreement with Abbott's support for the continued role of imperialism in the Middle East and the broader supportive role of 'legal' imperialist wars of which Abbott is a continued advocate. That Abbott has joined the ranks of president Obama in her support of phased withdrawal from Afghanistan seems a less than credible basis to support the candidate.

On the article's main point, the notion that support for Abbott's candidature implies a strengthening of the Labour and trade union left will come as some surprise to most of the actual left itself inside the Labour Party, who supported, and continue to support, alternative candidates and whom Abbott did not consult. The article rightly notes the importance of the strategic defeat of Labourism, but fails to make the point as to how strategic support for a candidate closely implicated in the party apparatus brings us any closer to this stated aim.

Richard Weinstein
email

Tirade

There are fundamental problems with Jack Conrad's tirade against Paul Cockshott in his recent article ('Goldilocks and the communist programme', September 9). My opinion of the tirade was expressed in - how shall we say? - more colourful and less generous language elsewhere but, for the sake of this letter, will be expressed more diplomatically.

Firstly, Jack forgot all about the remarks in Paul's articles and letters about the need for working class organisation at the European Union level. He went so far as to criticise the Communist Party of Greece for its nationalism, which is hardly an advocacy of 'socialism in one country', in today's terms.

Secondly, Jack exaggerates Paul's affiliation with the British and Irish Communist Organisation. In the latter's own words, he "joined with the explicit purpose of fomenting a split of those against the adoption of the 'British road' document put forward by Nina Stead. As [Jacob] said, COBI was heavily De Leonist rather than [Maoist], and also was influenced by Bordiga. The proposal for labour vouchers broadly fits in with a De Leonist or councilist background."

Thirdly, Jack's article actually reveals further that neither he or the CPGB as a whole do not subscribe to a long-term labour theory of *price*, any labour theory of value generally or even at least Nobuo Okishio's fundamental Marxian theorem. I have noted this before in past articles.

Jacob Richter
email

Workers' control

Our website (www.elnuevotopo.com) is hoping to translate some *Weekly Worker* articles into Spanish. Our comrades are based in El Salvador, but at this point they are a grouping of schools and classes in Marxism rather than a party. They are experimenting with machine translation, which has improved lately.

We are also going to begin publishing an interesting debate taking place in Venezuela on workers' control. There have been several attempts at workers' control in Venezuela but in some cases the

businesses have turned themselves into capitalist-type cooperatives. No-one is suggesting that workers' control is the solution, but the debate seems to be around whether it can be a diversion from or a necessary stage in the struggle for socialism. Of course, underneath is the debate as to whether Chávez is leading 'a socialist process' or diverting it.

A similar debate took place in Bolivia in the 1950s, when the tin mines were 'under workers' control'.
Earl Gilman
email

Long live Joe

An army expert once argued that the Red Army officer corps, whose origins came with Lenin's benediction and Lev Trotsky's methodological manner of thinking and management, was, for the most part, unprofessional throughout its existence and that this deficit of professional ability left it unable to defend itself during Stalin's terror purge, caused the failure to conquer Finland, had disastrous consequences in the first year of the German invasion of the USSR in 1941-42, and contributed to the large number of casualties throughout the war. Its unprofessional nature compounded the debacle of Afghanistan and was the most significant cause of the public's loss of faith when the military came under scrutiny during Mikhail Gorbachev's reform era in the mid-1980s.

The question that concerns me is, would Lev Trotsky have made it a professional army if he had been in power? When the military situation deteriorated, Stalin effectively took control of the army. This was the sort of power of leadership the revolution required to survive, but it was a challenge to Trotsky, who had created the Red Army with the help of so-called 'military experts' - ex-tsarist officers. Stalin distrusted these 'useful' renegades and shot them whenever possible.

Always take note that Lev Trotsky had all the chances to stand up for Stalin, but instead turned him into a foe. Given the foreboding of a counterrevolutionary coup d'état approaching and carried out by former tsarist officers, one cannot blame Joseph Stalin for arranging a

massive purge that overwrought the whole chain of command, from top to bottom.

He opposed Stalin impertinently on all issues. The former tsarist officers were a real menace, but still Lev mollycoddled them under the expedient that an army is in need of military specialists in order to make it professional. Brushing off Stalin's argument of political or ideological purity in the army, he insisted on contradicting him in all matters.

It might also be surmised that Trotsky had not anticipated a power struggle once Lenin died, despite Stalin's malicious moves to shuffle or remove his appointed generals and commissars. Lev did not take the necessary precautions. He was good in political posturing and manoeuvres. But he did not expect a bloodbath, with Stalin as the executor.

Stalin, then, knew better. Trotsky was turned into a political mediocrity who should have known what to do, given his Machiavellian instincts in the realm of Soviet politics and totalitarianism. He was not in touch with reality.

Despite heavy losses during the war against Finland and the German invasion, the Soviet army was indeed a professional army. It was able to defy all the odds and it came to equal the United States of America in the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles, etc. The Soviet army was the most feared among democratic-capitalist states. The invasion of Yemen, the arming of North Vietnam, etc, proved not only its military stamina, but also its capability to subvert any country it chose.

Today we have Trotskyites and Stalinists in our midst. They come from all walks of life. The only difference between the two contending factions is that the latter always succeed in dominating the leadership of all recognised communist parties of the world and their central organs. The Trotskyites are justifiably condemned and persecuted because they denied Joseph Stalin the chance to explain himself or rebut their allegations. Without Koba, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics would not have been a superpower. Long live Joseph Stalin!

Angel Formoso
email

Fighting fund

Selflessness

My appeal last week for 20 online readers to donate a fiver did not quite meet with the success I was relying on. True, three of you answered my plea, adding £15 to our September total (thanks to PL, NJ and FS). On top of that there was IT's £10, also made via PayPal. (This week there were 9,978 internet readers, by the way, so we seem to be edging back to 10,000 mark and hopefully beyond again.)

But, despite this less than overwhelming response, a number of regular supporters did us proud, boosting our running total by £347 and taking us to £577 for this month's fighting fund. But with half the month gone we are a bit down on where we ought to be, if we are to meet our £1,250 target for September.

My mailbag was healthier than usual, with big cheques from TR (£60) and MC (£50). The latter gift was actually a payment for translation work carried out by comrade Ben Lewis, which with

typical selflessness he asked to be sent directly to the *Weekly Worker*. Then there were cheques from CM (£35), JH (£30), GR (£25) and TT (£20), plus the normal batch of standing order gifts, which this week amounted to £102.

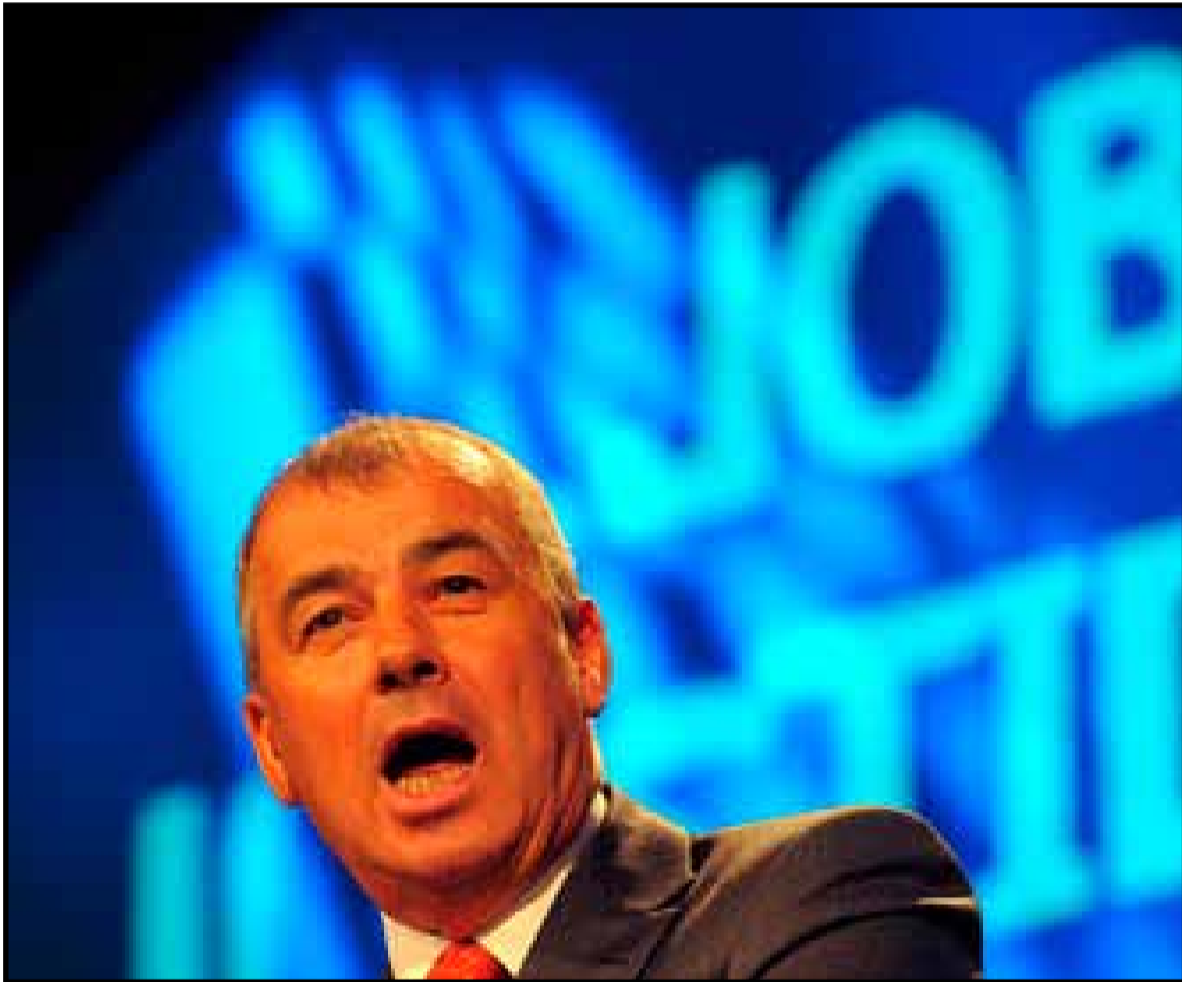
All good stuff, but once again I would like to appeal to those web readers. There are lots of people like comrade Lewis sacrificing both time and money to ensure you get your paper every week, but it would be nice if our financial situation was a little more secure. We need the full £1,250 every month, but it would be nice to build up some reserves to fall back on. That would help us no end.

So last week there were only three takers for the fiver challenge (plus one tenner). How many more will rise to it this week? ●

Robbie Rix

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

Build on TUC anti-cuts vote



Brendan Barber: action but nothing illegal

As readers will know, the Trades Union Congress, meeting in Manchester, has decided to back coordinated action between different unions in opposing coalition government cuts. Soon after the resolution - a composite in the name of all the major unions - was passed on September 13, Liberal Democrat business secretary Vince Cable took to the airwaves to declare that the government would not be moved by "threats" - perhaps overlooking the fact that it is thousands of public sector workers who are being threatened by his own government's plans to decimate public services. Saving him from flying shoes, an unwise invitation to Cable to speak at the TUC had already been withdrawn before delegates met.

The TUC decision to coordinate union campaigns and industrial action is to be welcomed. How, and in what spirit, that motion is implemented will be crucial, of course. Soon after it was passed, TUC and some individual union chiefs rather hastily tried to reassure the powers that be (ie, the state) that they do not intend to break the law - the anti-union laws prohibit 'secondary' solidarity action, so only separate, legal actions could legitimately be coordinated - timed to take place simultaneously, for example. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber hoped no-one thought there would be another winter of discontent: "I've certainly not called for civil disobedience. I don't find the idea attractive and I think it is counterproductive." Nevertheless, there is a will to fight. Brian Strutton, national secretary of the GMB, issued this warning: "We are largely prepared for national industrial action next month if this government won't listen."

Implementing this decision by the trade union leadership will be a task

for the whole movement. It will be up to union militants to flesh out and take forward a campaign that now has official backing. But, crucially, what aims will such action have? Will they simply be defensive or can they be coordinated *politically*?

Passed almost unanimously, the resolution declares: "Congress resolves that all TUC affiliates will urgently work together to build a broad solidarity alliance of unions and communities under threat and organise a national demonstration, lobby of parliament and national days of protest against the government austerity measures." To help do this, the resolution calls on the general council to "lead a coordinated campaign across the labour movement with other working class organisations and local communities for progressive means of ensuring the recovery and improving the public finances".

The motion also agreed to "consider" calling a convention of unions and public service users, and to support the European Trade Union Confederation day of action against austerity measures across the continent on September 29. But beyond September 29, which in Britain is unlikely to see more than the odd rally, there are no plans for further coordination. The motion states: "Congress sends solidarity to our comrades in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and elsewhere who are fighting the cuts and agrees there is an urgent need to establish a similarly wide-ranging united front of resistance against the attacks being carried out in the UK." Clearly a coordinated, joint struggle with workers in these and other countries across Europe is needed, and as soon as possible. But, of course, this also raises the question of international *political* coordination.

Only a few months ago four of those contending to be leader of the Labour Party were quite happy to endorse the 'fact' that cuts were needed - just not as speedily as the Tories have wanted to implement them. But the TUC did not, of course, call for support for the only anti-cuts candidate, Diane Abbott - after all, the leaderships of most affiliates are committed to Ed Miliband or one of the other cuts merchants.

Speaking at the TUC on the evening following the passing of the anti-cuts resolution, front runner David Miliband could not bring himself even to promise attendance at the TUC October 20 pre-spending review rally or its national demonstration next March - he had to be a "credible" leader, he said. While his brother, Ed, made noises against the *Tory* cuts, he stated his opposition to "civil disobedience" - ie, any strike action that fell foul of the anti-union laws. Abbott, for her part, having labelled all the others "princes of New Labour", said the party should "fight these cuts side by side with the trade unions". Former health secretary Andy Burnham unsurprisingly railed against the coalition's health white paper, but did not wish to be too closely identified with the unions - Labour must be both "pro-business and pro-trade unionist", he said.

Nevertheless, the TUC resolution, as well as breaking with the bourgeois 'slash and burn' consensus, had the merit of forcing all five candidates to pose more to the left. While the TUC chiefs are hardly promising mass rebellion, their anti-cuts resolution provides a locus to rally around, enabling the left once more to point to the failure of capitalism as a system and the need for socialism ●

Jim Gilbert

jim.gilbert@weeklyworker.org.uk

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: To be announced.

Manchester: www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

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

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology series - 'The human revolution'.

Tuesdays 6.45pm to 9pm, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

September 21: Chris Knight - 'Sleeping Beauty and other fairy tales'.

September 28: Chris Knight - 'Introduction to anthropology'.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

No victimisation

Saturday September 18, 1pm: March against sacking of PCS branch secretary Sam Buckley. Assemble Hastings Pier. Sam Buckley is the fifth union officer to be sacked from Hastings Child Support Agency since November 2007.

Organised by PCS: src@pcs.org.uk.

Open house for an open Gaza

Saturday September 18, 2pm to 11pm: Fundraising event, Cafe Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14. To support Viva Palestine convoy. Film, music, children's events, food and drink. Admission: £4.

Organised by Lewisham Peace, Justice and Solidarity: www.lewishamPeaceJusticeSolidarity.org.uk.

Stop the War

Sunday September 19, 6.15pm: Fringe meeting at Lib Dem national conference, Hilton Hotel, 3 Thomas Steers Way, Liverpool L1. With Chris Davies MEP, Joan Humphries (Military Families Against the War) and Lindsey German (STWC).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7801 2768.

Migrant rights

Monday September 20, 11pm: Meeting, Syndicate 3, Trades Union Congress, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Strategies for organising and uniting migrant workers.

Organised by Migrant Rights Network: info@migrantsrights.org.uk.

Hands off public services

Tuesday September 21, 7pm: Meeting, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2. Defending services in Tower Hamlets. Speakers include: Tony Benn, Matt Wrack (FBU), Helal Abbas (Leader, Tower Hamlets council).

Organised by Hands Off Our Public Services: 020 8521 2749.

Convention of the Left

Friday September 24, Saturday September 25: Conference - 'Building unity in the age of austerity', Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M1.

Friday, 6pm to 9pm: international struggles against the cuts agenda.

Saturday, 10am to 5pm: building alliances against the cuts.

Speakers include Gregor Gall (*Morning Star* writer), John McDonnell MP and Matt Wrack (FBU). Saturday lunch available; evening social.

Organised by Convention of the Left: www.conventionofthelleft.org.

Where next for CNWP?

Sunday September 26, 12 noon to 4pm: Extended steering committee meeting, University of London Students Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Open to all CNWP supporters. Voting restricted to members (join on the day). Capped pooled fare - £10. Motions to Dave Nellist by 10 am, Wednesday September 22.

Organised by Campaign for a New Workers' Party:

info@cnwp.org.uk.

School Students Against the War

Sunday September 26, 2pm: Conference, Marchmont Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1. 'Why the war in Afghanistan matters'. Organised by School Students Against the War: schoolstudents@stopwar.org.uk.

No persecution

Tuesday September 28, 7pm: Information night, LARC, 62 Fieldgate Road, Whitechapel, London E1. Speakers involved in gypsy and traveller struggles against state evictions.

Organised by London No Borders and No One is Illegal:

<http://london.noborders.org.uk>.

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.

PROGRAMME

Neoliberal ghosts and

Jack Conrad answers criticisms of the CPGB's *Draft programme* in the second of a three-part article

Our *Draft programme* has been criticised for being weak or wanting when it comes to neoliberalism. There are two main critics we have published in the *Weekly Worker*: Paul Cockshott and Nick Rogers.

Comrade Cockshott, coming from a thoroughly eclectic background - which includes the pro-imperialist, pro-Stalin, pro-loyalist British and Irish Communist Organisation - alleges that the CPGB has been intimidated, blinded, seduced by neoliberalism.

After all, according to the highly creative, not to say downright delusional, comrade, the CPGB's *Draft programme* proposes "no measures at all to abolish capitalism", baselessly criticises the "disaster" of bureaucratic socialism and seeks to "justify leaving the economy in private hands".¹

Intriguingly, having successfully conquered state power across the whole European continent, we are pictured as timorously relegating "progress beyond capitalism" to the "long-term future". That is, until communist parties hold power on a "worldwide scale". Using the same jaundiced approach, he patronisingly mocks the CPGB because the *Draft programme* claims that "unemployment is inevitable until capitalism is abolished" (or words to that effect). Don't we recall the Labour and Tory governments of the 1940s-60s and the policy of full employment?

Apparently, such propositions, real or imagined, are "testimony to the ideological power of neoliberal and neo-classical economics". So we have supposedly fallen under the spell of the grey consensus.

Then there is Nick Rogers. This CPGB comrade maintains that our *Draft programme's* treatment of the post-1970s turn towards financialisation by the "world capitalist class" - ie, what is often called neoliberalism - is either "parochial" or totally absent. However, in the course of his argument, he also dismisses the idea that British capitalism shows signs of relative weakness and that the entire capitalist system is in secular decline. Sadly, not essential laws and tendencies, but strike days, trade union membership, privatisations and other statistics are cited as evidence. Like comrade Cockshott, he too maintains that our *Draft programme* is "wrong" when it states that "unemployment is an inevitable by-product of capitalism."²

Internationalism

Let me disentangle these criticisms and answer them one by one.

Our *Draft programme* is quite emphatic: "Capitalism can only be superseded by the working class uniting itself internationally and rallying all who are oppressed" (section 4). There can be no transition to communism in one country. So, yes, we envisage a global process and one that might last several decades or more.

The world socialist revolution will begin first in this or that country. Perhaps a Brazil, a South Africa or an India. But the working class has to break out of narrow national confines (even if they happen to be of continental proportions). Power must be won in a "tranche of advanced countries" as quickly as possible, if the revolution is not to suffer "deformation or counterrevolution in one form or another" (section 1.6). Capitalism is a global system that can only be superseded globally. National roads are therefore completely illusory.

This explains the strategic



Neoliberalism hangs on, but is more like a ghost

emphasis placed by the CPGB on Europe.³ Though only constituting a tiny portion of the earth's land mass, because of Europe's economic strength, socialistic traditions and relatively high cultural level, winning the battle for democracy here would decisively tilt the global balance of power. And, far from passively sitting on its hands and waiting upon events, socialist Europe would energetically, boldly spread the flame of liberation. Assuredly, Europe would provide a beacon "for the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America", as they make or complete their own revolutions (section 3.6.1). And, once united in some kind of socialist federation, such a gigantic bloc would be able to confidently face down all threats. Meanwhile, the working class in North America have every reason to follow the example of their brothers and sisters in Europe. What Europeans decisively begin surely Americans will finally complete.

However, comrade Cockshott's main criterion for judging social progress is nationalisation. This, not the working class conquering state power, is what he means by "measures" to "abolish capitalism".

Leave aside our demand, under present-day capitalist conditions, for the nationalisation of "workplaces and industries" threatening "mass sackings", our demand for the nationalisation of "land, banks and financial institutions" and our demand for the nationalisation of "basic infrastructure such as public transport, electricity, gas and water supplies" (section 3.7). Needless to say, the socialist state inherits all nationalised sectors

of the economy from capitalism. However, universal nationalisation, forced collectivisation and flat-wage egalitarianism are ruled out by our *Draft programme* because "historic experience certainly shows that they lead to disaster" (section 4.3).

Comrade Cockshott bristles at this statement. Defensively, revealingly, he asks where universal nationalisation, forced collectivisation and flat-wage egalitarianism led to "disaster"? Eg, what disasters followed nationalisations in, say, "the UK or Czechoslovakia in the 1940s?"

Well, we must remove Britain from this particular line of discussion. Unless I am badly mistaken the Attlee government did not preside over universal nationalisation, forced collectivisation or flat-wage egalitarianism. But, as the respected historian EH Carr notes, ideas about wage egalitarianism had to be quickly put on hold in Soviet Russia. Instead there was the reintroduction of "piece rates and other forms of discriminatory rewards as incentives to higher production."⁴ And from what I can gather similar observations can be made for the egalitarian experiments flagged and/or implemented by Che Guevara in Cuba and Mao's Cultural Revolution (though, of course, these two examples were ultra-leftist attempts at Stalinite mystification).

Not that I would rule out labour tokens and workers receiving equal rewards for equal time-work once socialism is fully established globally. But such a measure would also rest on a qualitative raising of the general cultural level of the population.

As to the history of universal nationalisation and forced collectivisation, I will do nothing more than point to the almost unprecedented suffering inflicted upon the peoples of

the USSR from the late 1920s onwards. We all know the hellish record: widespread starvation, plunging living standards, chronic economic inefficiency, crazy irrationality, mass terror, millions killed directly or indirectly by the state, endemic spying, social atomisation, a complete absence of democracy, etc. Needless to say, disassociating ourselves from this barbarism has nothing to do with associating ourselves with neoliberalism.

If all these horrors allowed Russia to "catch up" with and overtake the west, then perhaps Stalinists could claim a modicum of historic justification. But it did not. Backwardness came to backwardness. Stalinism proved to be a hugely costly road from a disintegrating feudal-capitalist hybrid to a disintegrating bureaucratic-capitalist hybrid. I feel no need to further elaborate, but suffice to say bureaucratic socialism in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, China, North Korea, Cambodia, etc were in human terms no less a disaster.

I agree with comrade Cockshott about one thing, however. He says 1989-91 was a disaster for the common people in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. Absolutely right. Nonetheless, this elite-triggered transition has historical roots which have to be traced back to the isolation of the Russian Revolution, Stalin's nationalist doctrine of socialism in one country and the 1928 counterrevolution within the revolution. And providing eloquent testimony to the true nature of Stalinism: nowhere did the masses resist the 1989-91 counterrevolution within the counterrevolution. Indeed capitalism was seen as infinitely

preferable to bureaucratic socialism.

State and capital

What of "leaving the economy in private hands"? Utter nonsense, of course. For at least a century the state and capital has become inextricably interwoven in advanced capitalist countries such as Britain. Nikolai Bukharin's article, 'Towards a theory of the imperialist state' (1915), being the seminal study of the phenomenon within the Marxist tradition.

And, as one would expect of a declining system, the state plays an ever greater role. Caesar Rome, the Byzantine empire, the Abbasid caliphate, China from the Sui dynasty, absolutist Europe are all parallels. Thatcherism, Reaganism, neoliberalism and privatisation have made not a jot of difference. State control of money, state debt, state armies, state taxation, state regulation, state bail-outs, state subsidies, state education and state orders are vital for the functioning and survival of the system.

Eg, according to *The Sunday Times* an estimated 49% of the UK economy consisted of state spending in 2008-09. And since the Labour Party came to power in 1997 those working in the public sector "increased by more than 500,000." In 1997, some 5.1 million were employed in the public sector. The figure for 2008 was 5.7 million.⁵ Obviously with privatisation, PFI and a much enlarged pseudo-market such figures only hint at the true scope of the state's role.

The socialist state inherits not only nationalised and state-controlled sectors of the economy from capitalism. If it had not already been done, a newly installed CPGB government would immediately extend that sector to include banking, finance and insurance and all natural monopolies. From this wide starting point, planning of the economy, already "posed by capitalist development itself", can begin in earnest (section 4.3).

However, alongside this state-organised, democratically planned, steadily expanding, sector of the economy, there also exists those manufacturing plants, haulage firms, building contractors, shops, farms and services provided by "small and medium capital and the petty bourgeoisie" (section 4.3).

We shall remove the sacred shield of limited liability, ruthlessly extend trade union and other such workers' rights, close tax loopholes, impose a genuinely progressive inheritance tax, but, simultaneously patiently encourage the formation and progress of cooperatives. The CPGB sees no advantage in universal nationalisation. Why take over the local fish and chip shop, flower stall, chemist and newsagent? We are quite content to dominate and slowly absorb these highly fragmented remnants of capitalism into the socialist commonwealth through *voluntary* agreement.

Division of labour

As an aside, comrade Cockshott loftily dismisses our wish to abolish the division of labour. Truly amazing for someone who calls himself a Marxist. He sneers at the authors of the *Draft programme* because they "loosely" speak of "eliminating the division of labour, as if this was either a necessary or desirable goal. Eliminate the division of labour and you eliminate civilised society. Without a division of labour we would regress to the Neolithic."⁶ Yes, that is exactly what he says.

Of course, as anyone familiar with

the art of brevity

the ABC of Marxism knows full well, what we mean by the “abolition of the division of labour” is not ending the breakdown of the work process into specific detailed tasks. What is referred to is the hierarchy of command, the elevation of mental over manual labour, the monopoly of skills exercised by professional specialists in fields such as computer programme design, bio-technology, statistical analysis, nano-engineering, medicine, administration, etc. That is why we are committed to electing and rotating managers, reducing necessary working hours, putting all important decisions to a democratic vote, massively expanding adult education and facilitating the regular changing of jobs (section 4.3). We want to overproduce specialists so that there will no longer be a select few who monopolise key skills.

In communist society there remains the breakdown of work into detailed specific tasks. But no individual would be trapped into a lifetime of being a hospital porter, a machinist or a teacher of German, “from which there is no escape”. Such a division of labour counterposes collective and individual interests and constitutes an alien power which oppresses people instead of being controlled by them. Hence under communism the socially rounded individual will one day write their novel, the next teach a foreign language, after that do their stint as an elected decision-maker, the following day work in the local hospital, etc. But, this individual never becomes a writer, a teacher, an administrator, a surgeon, etc.

Marx and Engels, whose *The German ideology* (1846), I have just paraphrased, go on to sum up their expectations about the division of labour: “in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow.”⁷ Manifestly nothing Neolithic about this truly desirable goal.

After the working class wins state power the CPGB envisages an evolutionary socialism, whereby, step by step, the working class takes over the running of all aspects of society, including, of course, the economy. The production of the means of production and the production of the means of consumption will become one giant enterprise. This will have the effect of abolishing private property and thus the entirely bourgeois distinction between politics and economics, proletarianising the whole population and thereby ending classes and class distinctions.

To begin with, however, the economy presided over by the working class and its party will be highly contradictory: there will be a socialised part and a part which consists of surviving capitalist elements.⁸ The aim is clear though: “slowly extend the socialised part of the economy so as to finally replace the market and the law of value with conscious planning and production for human need” (section 4.3).

Therefore, for what it is worth, claims that the CPGB proposes “no measures at all to abolish capitalism” are transparently bogus. The same goes for the suggestion that we would leave “the economy in private hands”.⁹ All we are left asking is why comrade Cockshott thinks he can get away with concocting such silly fabrications.

Unemployment

Finally, on the subject of comrade Cockshott and neoliberalism, let me deal with unemployment. As comrade Rogers raises the exact same criticism

in the exact same terms it will be a case of two birds and one stone. Here is what the first two paragraphs of our *Draft programme* say about unemployment under capitalism:

“Unemployment is an inevitable by-product of capitalism. Full employment can only be a temporary phenomenon in a system which reduces people to the mere possessors of the commodity, labour-power - that is, objects of exploitation.

“Especially in periods of crisis, millions cannot profitably be employed and are therefore discarded. Maintained at below subsistence levels, the unemployed increasingly constitute a permanently marginalised section of the population. Unemployment is not due to the policies or coloration of this or that government. The only way to eradicate unemployment is to end the system that causes it” (section 3.6).

To remind the reader, comrades Cockshott and Rogers quote the experience of the 1940s-60s economic boom and the policy of full employment. It may surprise the comrades, but we are well aware of this period in history. The *Draft programme* calls it the “social democratic settlement” - a thoroughly capitalist form of institutionalised concessions, which, despite that, in a “negative and perverted way ... anticipated and carried out some of the measures of socialism - cheap housing allocated according to a points system, healthcare based on need, free comprehensive education, an ethos of equality, etc” (section 2.1).

Clearly comrades Cockshott and Rogers believe that unemployment in due to the policies and coloration of “this or that government”. Of course, throughout the 1940s-60s Labour and Tory governments alike were committed to Keynesian macro-economic management that went hand in hand with the social democratic settlement. However, from the mid-1970s the ruling class in the core imperialist countries - crucially the United States and Britain - began to retreat from production and turn to financialisation. In Britain both main parties embraced monetarism and in the name of a fetishised market they pulled the plug on full employment in the attempt to roll back the social democratic settlement. It was not only Margaret Thatcher, Keith Joseph and John Major, but Jim Callaghan, Denis Healey and, of course, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Peter Mandelson.

However - and this is the point - that strategic shift happened because the social democratic settlement was no longer tenable. Integral to the attempt by capitalism to manage its secular decline the social democratic settlement caused the system to further malfunction. With full employment, council housing, a national health service and strong trade unions, profits were squeezed, working class militancy soared, wages doubled, management began to lose the ability to manage and people, especially the young, began to reject wage-slavery, the nine-to-five routine, the regimentation, stultification and drab tyranny of everyday life and gropingly, instinctively, joyfully sought out alternatives to capitalism.

Therefore the Keynesian strategy had to be abandoned. Put another way, “full employment” under capitalism “can only be a temporary phenomenon”. Perhaps comrade Cockshott fondly looks forward to a modern Clement Attlee and the election of an old-fashioned centre-right Labour government. Perhaps

comrade Rogers thinks that the balance of class forces can be tilted back and once again full employment imposed on the capitalist class. But if that were possible, why not use that renewed strength for winning a socialist society? A socialist society would doubtless be in a position to abolish unemployment virtually overnight, so comrade Cockshott is wrong to believe that unemployment is something we would resignedly tolerate.

Amend

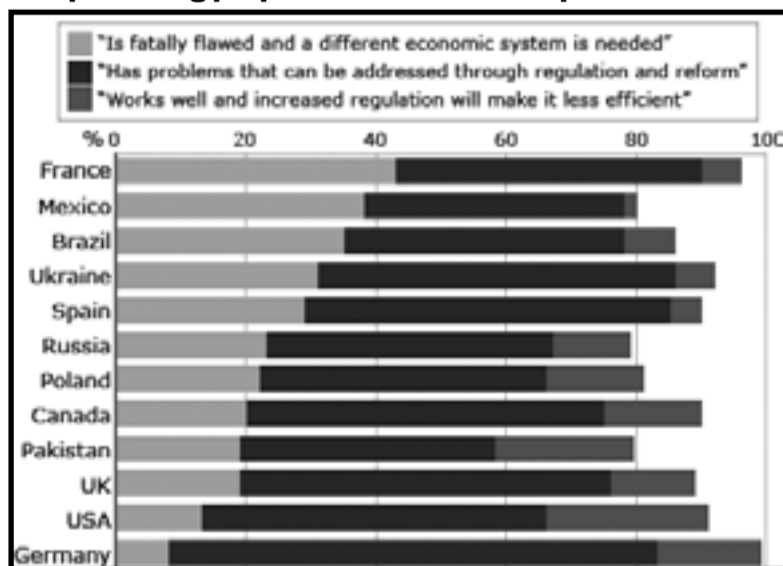
Comrade Rogers includes a thousand-word discussion on neoliberalism as part of his first double-page *Weekly Worker* articles on the CPGB *Draft programme*. What he has to say is not without merit. Far from it. He is definitely right, for example, when he says the working class needs to “understand the nature of the system which exploits and oppresses them”. In other words workers need Marxist consciousness if they are to come to power as a class.

But comrade Roger’s underlying agenda is pretty clear. Section one of our *Draft programme* ought to be amended with something closely resembling his contribution on neoliberalism.

The comrade protests that section one contains nothing about the “global anti-working class offensive of the last 30 years”. And where we do actually touch upon it in section two, when dealing with capitalism in Britain, he brushes it aside as “parochial”.

There is a problem. Neoliberalism as an ideology now looks “dated at best and a failure at worst”.¹⁰ Not only has there been nothing like this ongoing crisis since the 1930s: the financial meltdown of 2008 blew neoliberalism apart as a credible capitalist strategy. Of course, the ghost remains shuffling about on the stage. But everyone knows that it took truly massive government intervention to stop the entire capitalist system from going into meltdown. Given that this was a worldwide phenomenon, blaming the so-called profligacy of Gordon Brown fools very few people, very little of the time.

BBC poll asking people for their views on capitalism



Indisputably though, the Thatcherite dictum, “You can’t buck the market”, now stands exposed as a complete fraud. Hence Keynesianism has made something of an anaemic comeback. And not only with Barack Obama in the USA. Ed Balls, once Gordon Brown’s right-hand man, has abandoned prudence and discovered a sudden fondness for Keynes quotes.

Nonetheless, it is more than clear that the capitalist class has no viable solution. They are not going to opt for full-blown Keynesian reflation. The risks are far too high. But the same can

be said of Europe’s class-war cuts and the attempt to balance the books. This course runs the danger of triggering a double-dip recession. Definitely prolonged stagnation. The cuts will certainly provoke mass resistance. Even without the examples of Greece, Spain and France before us that was always eminently predictable.

The TUC and the trade union bureaucracy doubtless wants Grand old Duke of York demonstrations, strikes and protests. Manchester saw a deal of posturing. But when the working class begins to move, at it will, things could easily pass out of their control and just as easily pass out of the control of the capitalist class.

No wonder a whole raft of Britain’s top economists have expressed the gravest reservations about George Osborne’s “age of austerity”. In the run-up to the May 2010 general election 60 of these modern witch doctors signed a joint letter to the *Financial Times* worriedly urging a policy of stimulating growth rather than imposing savage cuts.¹¹

Engels

However, none of this should be included in our *Draft programme*. At least not in my opinion. Writing a programme is not a science. It is an art. And part of that art is an appreciation of the necessity of keeping the whole thing as concise as possible. That means excluding everything that is non-essential, everything that is repetitive, everything that is wordy, everything that is passing.

Engels made a telling series of points in opening his *Critique of the Erfurt programme* (1891). The programme should *not* attempt to combine “two things that are uncombinable: a programme and a commentary on the programme”.¹² He proceeded to chide his German comrades for fearing that “a short, pointed exposition would not be intelligible enough”. Trying to make the programme an easy read, trying to avoid possible misinterpretations, trying to steer clear of difficult concepts, Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel and Karl Kautsky (the principal

not fear if some cannot, or will not, grasp what our *Draft programme* means by the “abolition of the division of labour”, or that unemployment is “inevitable” under capitalism, or that capitalism is in “decline”, etc.

Engels rightly thought that “verbal exposition at meetings” and “written commentaries in the press” would take care of “all that”. He offers some further programmatic advice. The “short, precise phrase”, “once understood”, “takes root in the memory”, and becomes a “slogan”. Something that never happens with “verbose explanations”.

Not that we should underestimate the ability of modern workers to quickly digest what factional opponents find impossibly enigmatic. Our class is in general highly educated, certainly compared to their parents and grandparents.

Unsurprisingly, not being masochists, a clear majority of the British population recoil from the Con-Lib programme of cuts.¹⁴ But how to fight back? A wide swathe of the working class has lost all faith in Labourism as an anti-capitalism. Where is the realistic alternative? When so-called ordinary people happen across one or another of the 57 varieties, they are quick to discover the inbuilt dishonesty, dreary narrowness, cynical control-freakery and complete uselessness of the sects. The Greens, Scottish and Welsh nats, Ukip and the BNP are obvious dead ends because of their explicit or implicit commitment to the continuation of an increasingly malfunctioning and unpopular capitalism. And have no doubt - it is unpopular.

A recent BBC global poll, published in November 2009, showed almost a quarter - 23% of those who responded - feel that capitalism “is fatally flawed.” The view of 43% in France, 38% in Mexico and 35% in Brazil. As can be seen from the bar chart, in Britain the figure stands just under the average, ie at about 20%. Certainly there is widespread support for “governments to distribute wealth more evenly”. A proposition backed by majorities in 22 of the 27 countries involved in the survey.¹⁵

Once people begin to decisively move - and surely they will - the anti-capitalist vanguard will experience few if any problems in comprehending, coming to grips with and making our *Draft programme* their own ●

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* March 18 2010.
2. *Weekly Worker* April 8 2010.
3. See my pamphlet *Remaking Europe* (London 2004) for a full treatment of our approach.
4. EH Carr *The Bolshevik revolution* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1976, p116.
5. <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/economics/article5581225.ece>.
6. *Weekly Worker* March 18 2010.
7. K Marx, F Engels *CIV* Vol 5, Moscow 1976, p47.
8. Evgeny Preobrazhensky (1886-1937) interestingly discusses the Soviet Union’s mixed economy in the 1920s. He produced a whole series of books and pamphlets, the most famous being his *New economics* (1926). Of course, the Soviet Union had a huge peasant sector as well as a capitalist and a state sector. In advanced countries such as Britain the working class will be in a far stronger position. Not least if our starting point was the European Union.
9. *Weekly Worker* March 18 2010.
10. Hillel Tictin *Critique* No46, 2008.
11. They pleaded that “for the good of the British people, the first priority must be to restore robust economic growth” (*Financial Times* February 19 2010).
12. I am sure readers will welcome our plan to produce a commentary on the *Draft programme*.
13. See J Conrad *Which road?* London 1991, p239.
14. A Populus/Times poll “showed that three-quarters of voters reject the speed and scale of cuts to the public sector” (*London Evening Standard* September 14 2010).
15. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8347409.stm>.

POLITICS

Debating the Labour lead

Opposition to the CPGB call to give a critical vote for Diane Abbott is based on leftist abstentionism, argues Peter Manson

The CPGB has been calling for a vote for Diane Abbott in the Labour leadership election, which closes in less than a week, on September 22. However, this call has been opposed by a number of CPGB comrades, whose statement we publish below.

Broadly the position of the Provisional Central Committee was set out last week by Alex John ('Vote preference one for Diane Abbott ... and fuck the warmongering ex-ministers', September 9). Comrade John points out that we are voting for Abbott - despite the "grave shortcomings and ambiguities in her record and current policies" - because she is a candidate clearly identified with the left and claiming to be a socialist, and the only one not closely associated with previous New Labour administrations. There is a pretty obvious line of demarcation between her and the other four.

Unfortunately, however, those comrades who oppose our line refuse to see it - or, if they do, they insist the distinction is insufficient to justify voting for Abbott. What is more, they misrepresent our reasons for wishing to do so, claiming we want to "gain favour with and build the Labour left", a section of which we propose "tailing". There is absolutely no basis for making this claim, either in what we have said or done. Communists consistently seek out allies, but we never disguise or water down our principles in order to "gain favour" with those allies. Nor do we cease to criticise them. We always fight for our own principled, working class politics - the very opposite of "tailing" the likes of the Labour left.

It is true that we want to gain a hearing on the Labour left. We think that this section of the party contains within it comrades with healthy, pro-working class and anti-capitalist instincts. They should be encouraged in their, at present, feeble attempts to launch a fightback against the pro-capitalist, New Labour wing of the party, while at the same time their reformist illusions need to be overcome through patient, long-term and serious joint work in defending

and promoting the interests of the working class.

The comrades state: "Some on the left consider a large vote for her would be a morale boost for the Labour left and workers in struggle, that she is somehow a pole of attraction for militant workers and socialists within the Labour Party. Nothing could be further from the truth." I do not know who is saying this, but it is not *that* far from the truth. I agree that Abbott herself cannot provide a "pole of attraction" - she is not attempting in any serious way to organise the Labour left and seems more interested in organising her own career. But it is correct to say that a big vote for her *would* provide a "morale boost" for the Labour left. It would demonstrate that the overtly pro-business wing *can* be challenged. If, for example, Abbott finished in third place - ahead of two of the warmongering ex-ministers - with a healthy share of the vote, this would demonstrate that the left cannot be written off as dead and buried.

It would also have wider repercussions within the movement. As workers begin to resist the coalition onslaught, union leaders will feel obliged at least to go through the motions of resisting it - left leaders like Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka will be looking for a more serious fightback. While the unions they lead are not affiliated to Labour, those that are will almost certainly reflect the increased militancy of their members in the way they act within the party. They could find themselves allying with the Labour left. It is also not beyond the bounds of possibility that militant workers, attracted by both the left-sounding phrases of Labour leaders in opposition and the increased confidence of the Labour left, will start to join the party and demand it begins to fight for working class interests.

While all this is far from certain, surely our comrades who rule out giving Abbott critical support will admit it is both possible and desirable. So, yes, we want to "build the Labour left" - but not in the sense the comrades mean: creating illusions in Labourite reformism. We want to engage with it so as to win the Labour left towards

the politics of Marxism. The larger and stronger the Labour left is, the bigger the pool for Marxists in the Labour Party to operate in.

But the comrades say, in relation to Abbott: "Her support amongst the union leadership and membership is minimal, with most unions backing the 'credible left' candidate, Ed Miliband." It is not true that her support among the union membership is minimal, with most unions backing the 'credible left' candidate, Ed Miliband. It is not true that her support among the union membership is "minimal" - according to the polls, there is a reasonable possibility that she will pick up a substantial number of their votes. It is true that many union bureaucrats are urging a vote for Ed Miliband - and some on the left are doing the same as the only realistic way of keeping out his brother.

But we are more ambitious than that. We are not interested in seeing the marginally less repulsive of the Milibands elected Labour leader. And it is completely mistaken to imply (or, in the case of some of the comrades, to assert) that there is no difference, or virtually no difference, between the policies of Ed Miliband and those of Abbott. One is a pro-cuts warmonger and the other is a (vacillating, inconsistent and unprincipled) opponent of imperialist war and anti-working class cutbacks.

Anti-war

In order to pretend that the opposite is the case, the comrades write: "In March 2009 Abbott demonstrated her lack of anti-war credentials by voting for a motion against an inquiry into the Iraq war, which contained the clause that the House of Commons 'recognises the heroic efforts of the British armed forces in Iraq, who have a continuing role'."

This is not quite right. On March 26 2009 there was a Conservative motion calling for an inquiry into the war to be *announced*. They wanted it to be "conducted by an independent committee of privy councillors". The argument was that troop numbers were about to be substantially reduced, so that there was no longer any "reasonable impediment" to an enquiry, which, both sides were agreed, should not go ahead if it might compromise ongoing military action.

A government *amendment* (not motion), for which Abbott voted, was for *delaying* such an announcement, in view of the troops' "continuing role". Both sides of the house were agreed on "the heroic efforts of the British armed forces" - the difference being that the Conservatives did not bother to insert such a phrase in their motion. Other left MPs, including John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn and Harry Cohen, voted with the Tories on the grounds that they wanted an enquiry sooner rather than later. I do not know why Abbott preferred the government's delaying amendment, but it is rather disingenuous to imply she did so because she *favours* the "continuing role" of British troops.

If you want to know Abbott's true, publicly stated position on the occupation of Afghanistan it is best to refer to her own website. On July 20 she posted a piece headed 'Diane calls for timetable for withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan'.

She begins by noting the remarks of soldiers in Afghanistan, who "have told me that we are now referred to as an army of occupation" and, she says, "no western army has won an army of occupation [sic] in Afghanistan for two centuries". That is because the "terrain makes it impossible for invaders to prevail against a determined Afghan resistance".

The whole intervention has been futile: not only have "we not brought peace to Afghanistan, but the opium trade is at record levels". As for the Afghan army, it is "corrupt, as are the police". While Nato troops should be withdrawn, "It may be that there is a need for a peacekeeping force in Afghanistan, but this should be a UN force, ideally led by Muslim troops."

Because of the occupation, "The Afghan people are suffering. The rate at which British troops in Afghanistan have been killed has nearly doubled in recent months and is proportionately far higher than our American counterparts. Our troops are enduring a horrifyingly high level of mutilation."

She concludes: "So I believe the time has come to set a timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan."¹

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *PM* programme on August 16, Abbott was asked if she would ever "send the country to war". She replied: "Well, if it was a legal war I might do. The problem with the Iraq war [was] it was widely judged to be illegal." As for Afghanistan, "It might have been legal ... in the very first place, but 10 years on, where is the legality for it?"

So are these the arguments of a pro-war, pro-occupation politician? To my mind it is quite absurd to claim such a thing. They are typical of the arguments of the Labour left historically, whenever it has opposed imperialist interventions. The war is illegal, it is unwinnable, it is counterproductive, it is "horrifyingly" violent. The money would be better spent on the NHS and the troops should be pulled out 'as soon as possible' - perhaps to be replaced by some idealised 'peacekeeping' force.

Of course, for communists these politics are dreadful. As left Labourites always have done, Abbott strives for 'respectability', to be 'reasonable' (in the eyes of bourgeois opinion). The result is that the anti-war argument is posed in a way that accepts bourgeois parameters. The case is made against *this particular war*, implying that other wars "might" be acceptable. What if the suffering was less horrifying (we could use 'smart' weapons)? What if the "terrain" was easier? What if the war was 'legal', if it was less costly and so would not divert funds from the NHS?

But what else do we expect from left Labourites? A principled, consistent, anti-imperialist, proletarian-internationalist approach? No, Labourism is by definition nationalistic and opportunistic, and left Labourites like Abbott will always seek accommodation with the labour bureaucracy and through this with the ruling class.

However, it is incorrect to crudely draw the conclusion from all this that Abbott "supports wars as long as they are 'legal' and the British army can win". She actually got herself into a bit of a pickle in the *PM* interview by desperately trying to fit Afghanistan into the 'illegal' template. Bereft of any

No vote for Abbott

Communists must base their support for social democratic candidates on whether it will have a positive effect on the struggles that we face today. Some members of the CPGB are making a tactical mistake and want us to back a candidate to gain favour with and build the Labour left.

These comrades wish our support to be unconditional, whilst our class is facing the biggest cuts since the 1930s; and facing chaos and violence across the globe, as US imperialism goes further to manage its relative decline. The capitalist crisis and the organising of resistance against the never-ending stream of attacks should be central to every action communists make. This is being overlooked by the comrades who propose tailing a section of the Labour left who have half-heartedly backed Abbott.

John McDonnell, for all

his faults, leads the Labour Representation Committee and is involved in supporting strikes and the struggles we face as a class, such as opposing the third runway at Heathrow. This stands in stark contrast to the path Diane Abbott has taken. You are more likely to catch Abbott on TV or supporting tube privatisation than on the picket line or voting to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. In March 2009 Abbott demonstrated her lack of anti-war credentials by voting for a motion against an inquiry into the Iraq war, which contained the clause that the House of Commons "recognises the heroic efforts of the British armed forces in Iraq, who have a continuing role". There is no candidate of struggle and no serious left candidate on the ballot paper.

Voting for Diane Abbott will achieve nothing: she is not at the centre of organising resistance

to cuts and supports wars as long as they are 'legal' and the British army can win. Some on the left consider a large vote for her would be a morale boost for the Labour left and workers in struggle, that she is somehow a pole of attraction for militant workers and socialists within the Labour Party. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead of being active in fighting the Labour Party apparatus and supporting a democratic agenda, she has pursued a media career. She represents the section of the Labour Party that throughout its history, including the 13 years of Labour government, has consistently sought compromise over struggle and has led the working class to a dead-end reformism that is constantly moving to the right. Her support amongst the union leadership and membership is minimal, with

most unions backing the 'credible left' candidate, Ed Miliband. Abbott and her supporters have not used her campaign to fight for democracy in the Labour Party and have failed to raise working class policies on war, cuts, anti-trade union laws and democracy.

Abbott's candidacy is based on opportunism and, according to the same comrades who now want to back her, she is the pawn of the right wing who sabotaged McDonnell's attempt to stand for the leadership. Unlike a serious left candidate, she did not consult the Labour left and was not elected, let alone regarded as a leader within the Labour left. In looking at what real impact she will have for the political struggles within the Labour Party and the fights we are facing as a class, communists cannot call for a vote for Diane Abbott.

The left should have based

clear conditions on supporting any candidate in the Labour leadership election. Are they for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan? Are they against the cuts agenda? Based on Abbott's less than clear support for troops out now and her vague commitment to oppose cuts, those with a vote should either return a spoilt ballot or abstain ●

James Turley (London)
Mohsen Sabbagh (London)
John Sidwell (Wales)
Jamie Tedford (Sheffield)
Lee Rock (Sheffield)
Liam Conway (Manchester)
Caitriona Rylance (Manchester)
Chris Strafford (Manchester)
Maciej Zurowski (London)
Dave Isaacson (Milton Keynes)
Simon Wells (London)

Leadership contest

principled, working class principles, she seizes on any argument she can find against the *current* conflict, no matter how weak.

Anti-cuts

It is equally absurd to claim that Abbott is “pro-cuts”, as at least one signatory of the minority statement has. As with war, she frames her opposition to cuts in populist, ‘reasonable’ terms. Writing in the *Morning Star*, she states: “It is easy to rail against the proposed cuts in school building. But it is even easier for the government to point out ... that we too were planning billions of pounds of cuts”

“If the public sees that the labour movement leadership has the same underlying economic assumptions as the coalition government, they will not take what we have to say on the economy seriously ... Wringing our hands and disputing the timing of the cuts is not enough ... women and families should not pay the price for the irresponsibility of the bankers. We have to make the case for investment ...”

“We do not have to make cuts on this scale. And some economists argue that we do not need to make public-sector cuts at all.”

Once again, despite the snipe against “the bankers”, there is an underlying implication that “we” have a common interest in running the capitalist “economy”. But there can be no doubting Abbott’s genuine concern for

working class women in particular, just as there can be no doubting her opposition to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In fact, it seems that not all of the signatories to the ‘No vote for Abbott’ statement are prepared to dub Abbott “pro-war” and “pro-cuts”. So, alongside the false claim that Abbott “supports wars as long as they are ‘legal’ and the British army can win”, there is the rather more accurate assessment that she demonstrates a “less than clear support for troops out now”. Also more realistically, she is criticised for showing only a “vague commitment to oppose cuts” and for not being “at the centre of organising resistance” to them.

The comrades’ opposition to the CPGB leadership’s ‘Vote Abbott’ call is based on a healthy, but impatient desire to see the

creation of a principled, solidly working class movement of resistance to government attacks. They complain that our support for candidates like Abbott should not be unconditional, “whilst our class is facing the biggest cuts since the 1930s ...”

This is a typical leftist error. Leftism does not just mean “opposition to standing or voting in bourgeois elections”, to “trade unions” and to “working with and maybe within the Labour Party”, as comrade Chris Stafford has claimed. Nor does it necessarily mean considering Labour to be “a totally bourgeois party”. It means failing to deal with things as they are, not how we would like them to be. It means rejecting temporary alliances with unprincipled forces. It means an abstentionist unwillingness to associate with unreliable compromisers and tactically support or vote for people with whose politics we strongly disagree.

The comrades are clearly implying that unconditional but critical support for left Labourites cannot be considered when our class is facing such fierce attacks. Why not? It all depends on the circumstances and on what we are trying to achieve. And in these circumstances, as I have explained, we are trying to aid the development of a left opposition within Labour in order to win it to Marxist politics ●

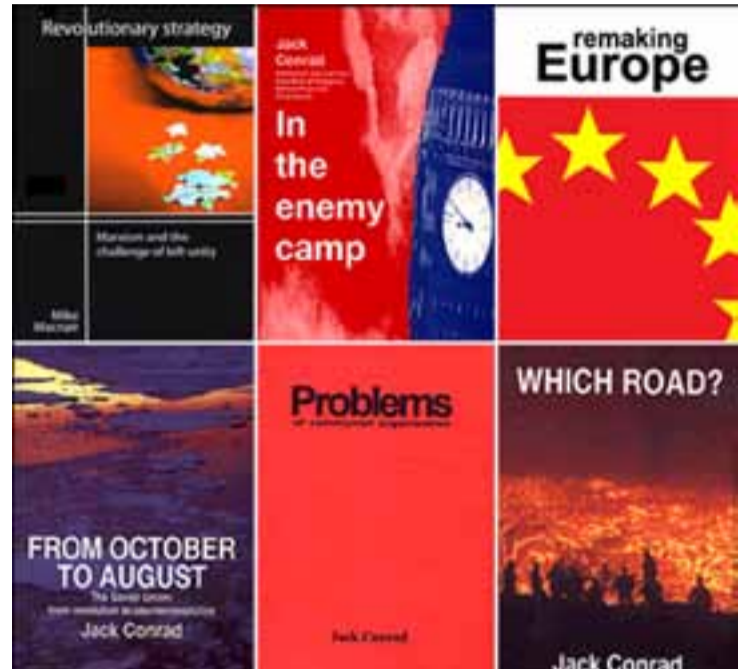
Notes

1. www.dianeabbott.org.uk/news/press/news.aspx?p=102617
2. *Morning Star* September 13.



Diane Abbott: a not untypical left Labourite

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HISTORY

Light and air of political freedom

North American scholar **Lars T Lih** explores the varying attitude of Marxists towards universal suffrage, freedom of the press and freedom of association

For me as a historian, one of the most important political facts about the history of Europe during the 19th century was that the most committed, the most orthodox and most dogmatic revolutionary Marxists were friends, in fact champions, of political freedom. But in the 20th century - especially if you see the 20th century as beginning in 1914 and ending in 1989 - one of the most important political facts was that the most committed, the most orthodox and most dogmatic revolutionary Marxists were not friends of political freedom, to put it mildly. There are all sorts of qualifications one can add here, but this is obviously the reputation that revolutionary Marxism has today.

It is even more striking that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin is, as I like to call him, the 'poster boy' for both these assertions. I am painting with broad brush-strokes here, so that you, the audience, can fill in the finer details, but what I am going to do is to draw out the contrast in Lenin himself.

This quote is from an article of his in *Iskra* (*The Spark*), the paper of Russian Social Democracy, in August 1903. He is laughing at the various attempts of the tsarist government to introduce worker reform and even representation: "... without political freedom, all forms of worker representation will remain pitiful frauds; the proletariat will remain as before in prison, without the light, air and space needed to conduct the struggle for its full liberation."

(That metaphor of light, space and air is a big one in the history of Bolshevism, and I could point out numerous references to it in various Marxists writings, but we shall return to that later.)

In contrast to this, here is a quote from 1919, from the founding congress of the Communist International. Of course, this is at the height of the civil war. Lenin says: "In capitalist usage, freedom of the press means freedom of the rich to bribe the press, freedom to use their wealth to shape and fabricate so-called public opinion. In this respect, too, the defenders of 'pure democracy' prove to be defenders of an utterly foul and venal system that gives the rich control over the mass media."¹

I like the rhetoric here! Even more striking is that in the same speech he also says: "Marxists have always maintained that, the more developed, the 'purer' democracy is, the more naked, acute and merciless the class struggle becomes, and the 'purer' the capitalist oppression and bourgeois dictatorship."²

What this sounds like is that Lenin is saying, 'Do not extend the institutions of the democratic republic or democracy, because you are just going to get more deceptions.' I imagine you can work out a way in which these contrasting statements are logically or dialectically compatible. But there is certainly a change in emphasis.

What I am going to do now is

to go through a brief history of the relationship between Marxism, revolutionary social democracy and political freedom. I love the following quotes and think that most of them should be better known than they actually are. They eloquently set out the reasons why Marxists thought political freedom to be so central to their political project, and why for them it was not simply something desirable, but was central to the whole logic of their political strategies. I also like them because they bring out another essential element - the emotional fervour behind political freedom.

In 1893, Karl Kautsky made the following claim: "Social democracy, the party of the class-aware proletariat, is by that very fact the most solid support of democratic aspirations. It is a much more reliable support than ... the non-socialist democrats themselves." Here Kautsky is making a claim (and I think this is backed up by most historical research) that in 19th century Europe the biggest supporters of democracy were the socialist parties. There is a reason for that, which can be summed up by saying that for the most part this democracy was a means to an end for such forces. But it was an absolutely necessary means to a vital end. So you can be much more committed to something you need desperately than is the case for somebody who thinks that political freedom is an end in itself and as such is willing to compromise here and there.

What is the basic logic of all this? It is the fact that the proletariat can only liberate *itself*, that it has a historical mission to organise itself to overthrow the state and introduce socialism, and that in order to do that it needs to have the freedom to organise and enlighten itself.

I am now going to quote an English scholar called John Ray, who was interested in economic thought and, as far as I know, was an anti-Marxist. In 1884 he wrote an academic treatment of Marx which I actually think is quite a good one. Unlike some of the

writings of Marxists themselves, I think his chapter on Marx brings out quite nicely the whole Marxist strategy and emphasis on political freedom of the press, assembly and so on.

But before I quote Ray, I quickly want to underline what I mean by 'political freedom'. It is not a term that is frequently used in today's language: we often talk of civil rights or democratic freedoms. 'Political freedom' was a term explicitly used at the time to mean freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of association and so on - all the freedoms you would need to start Marxist campaigns, get the message out and get the project rolling.

Ray said the following about Marx's view of what needed to be done: "Street insurrections, surprises, intrigues, *pronunciamientos* and so on might overturn a dynasty or oust a government ... but they are of no avail in a world attempting to introduce collective property or abolish wage labour - the next day people would just begin to work for hire or rent their farms as they did before. A social revolution needed other and larger preparation. It first needed the whole population thoroughly leavened with its principles.

"What was first to be done, therefore, was to educate and move public opinion, and in this the ordinary secret society [remember most socialists before Marx had organised in secret societies] went a little way. A secret propaganda might still be carried on [this is my main point about the Bolshevik underground during the *Iskra* period], but a public and open propaganda was more effectual and more suitable to the times. There never existed greater

facilities for such a movement, and today revolutionaries ought to make use of all means of communication and intercommunication which modern society allowed. No more secret societies and holes in corners. No more small risings and petty plots. But a great, broad organisation working in open day, and working restlessly with tongue and pen to stir the masses of all European countries to a common international revolution. In short,

Marx sought to introduce the large system of production into the small art of conspiracies."

According to Ray, then, Marx believed that in order to move forward on a national and hopefully on an international scale wide-ranging political freedoms are needed. To underline this point, let us take a quote from Marx himself in 1847, at a time when he is probably drafting the *Communist manifesto*, which appeared in early 1848. A lot of people, especially on the left, were saying 'to hell with political freedom' and saw no point in arguing for it - they viewed it as a way for the bourgeoisie to solve its own problems and something that would do nothing for the workers. Some conservatives also threw similar arguments at the liberal movement in Germany. One conservative critic at the time accused the liberal movement of "using the people as cannon-fodder" in order to achieve the freedoms that they, the liberals, wanted and needed, but did not benefit the workers.

Marx responded to this in the following way: "Does the Herr Consistorial Counsellor then believe that the proletariat, which is more and more adhering to the Communist Party, that the proletariat will be incapable of utilising the freedom of the press and the freedom of association? Let him read the English and French working men's newspapers, let him just attend some time a single Chartist meeting!"³ This is very eloquent from Marx, who at this time becomes increasingly interested in the means of communication and interaction, which can spread the message as far and wide as possible.

Now let us move onto the 1860s with a quote from Engels in his 'The Prussian military question and the German workers' party'. What he had to say here centred first of all on political freedom:

"Universal suffrage, freedom of the press, association and assembly, suspension of all special laws - there is nothing else that the proletariat needs to demand from the bourgeoisie. They cannot require that the bourgeoisie cease to be a bourgeoisie, but they certainly can require that it practise its own principles consistently [We could, of course, dispute whether these *are* the bourgeoisie's own principles]. But the proletariat will thereby acquire all the weapons it needs for its ultimate victory. With freedom of the press, the right of assembly and association, it will win universal suffrage. And with universal direct suffrage, in conjunction with the above tools of agitation, it will win everything else."⁴

So note here that the key thing - more important than universal suffrage or the democratic republic - is political freedom. That will allow you to push to get universal suffrage, which in turn is a con game unless you have the political freedom to utilise it.

There is a second interesting point that Engels makes at this

time. Remember, in 1905 the Russian movement was debating whether it was right for them to be carrying out a bourgeois revolution or not - and what kind of bourgeois revolution if we are carrying it out? This is what Engels had to say on this:

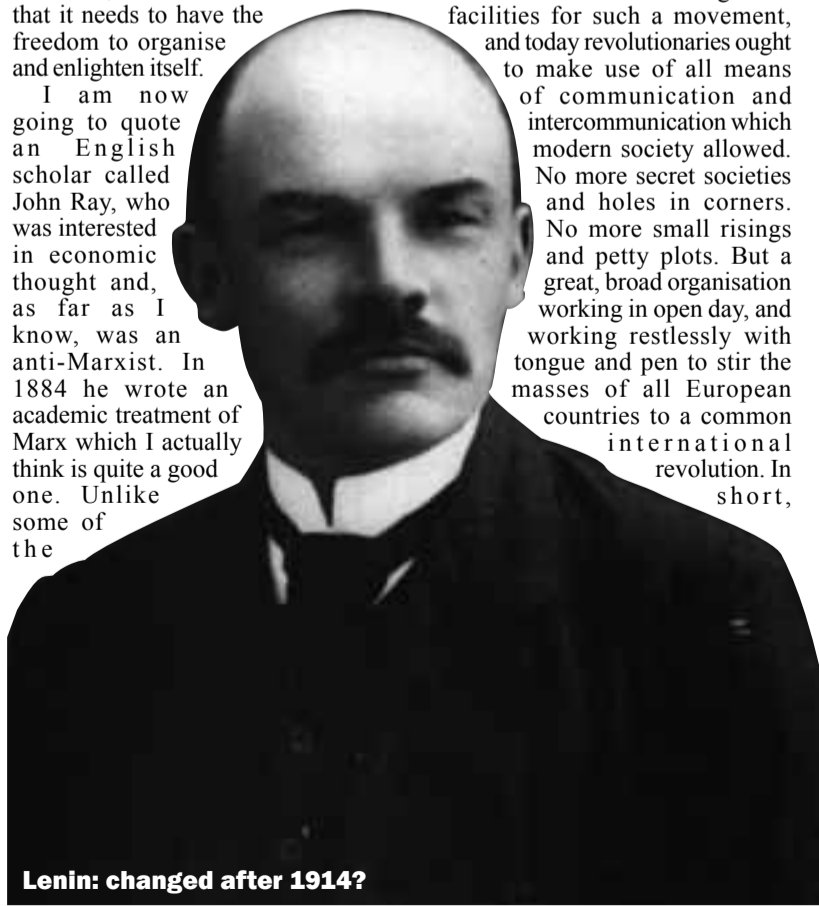
"Even if the worst came to the worst and the bourgeoisie was to scurry under the skirts of reaction for fear of the workers, and appeal to the power of those elements hostile to itself for protection against them - even then the workers' party would have no choice but, notwithstanding the bourgeoisie, to continue its campaign for bourgeois freedom, freedom of the press and rights of assembly and association which the bourgeoisie had betrayed. Without these freedoms it will be unable to move freely itself; in this struggle it is fighting to establish the environment necessary for its existence, for the air it needs to breathe."⁵ This is the earliest reference I have found to the 'light and air' metaphor I referred to earlier on.

Economism

I will now move on to the approach of Kautsky, as outlined in his seminal commentary on the Erfurt programme of German social democracy in 1891. I must apologise to those who feel I am quoting a fatalistic, mechanistic, non-dialectical guy like Kautsky! But Kautsky was important and this text in particular was of great importance to the Russian social democrats. This is from his commentary on programme, which became a textbook, or even a definitional charter of social democracy across Europe, especially Russia. He repeats here the logic of Marx and Engels:

"To bring these masses in contact with one other, to awaken their consciousness of the broad community of interests, to win them over for organisations protecting their interests [ie, it is not just about persuading people or changing their minds] this implies the possibility of speaking clearly to the broad masses. This implies freedom of the press. These freedoms have the greatest significance for the proletariat. They are among the conditions which make its life possible and to which it unconditionally owes its development. They are light and air for the proletariat. He who lets them wither or withholds them, he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them, that person is one of the proletariat's worst enemies."⁶

From this you can understand why being an economist was a mortal sin in Russian social democracy. Essentially it was to be labelled "one of the proletariat's worst enemies", who ignores one of the main factors that is essential to its development. As a matter of fact, the classical economists (not the ones Lenin was polemicising with in *What is to be done?*) were actually saying this. They were sceptical and pessimistic about the chances of political revolution - especially the worker leadership



Lenin: changed after 1914?

of it - and found it a rather utopian perspective. Additionally though, they did not actually think that such a revolution would be a good thing or worthwhile. YD Kuskova, who wrote *The credo* (a text battered by Lenin and indeed most others in the underground), writes: "It is utopian to think that the overthrow of the autocracy would cause the bourgeoisie to change the position of the workers. One must not expect anything from a constitution in Russia." Other economists made similar arguments along these lines.

The economists, then, were the ones who were most sceptical about political freedom. Historically we often think of them as those who wanted the workers to have more freedom to express themselves and so forth, or as the ones who were the most optimistic about the working class gaining consciousness and so on. But actually they were the most pessimistic about the possibility of the workers carrying out this great action.

Before we finally move on to Lenin I want to quote Julius Martov from a book he wrote in 1894. This is basically a statement of the *Iskra* editorial board when Martov and Lenin were on the same team together - ie, before the Bolshevik-Menshevik split. This particular book is also cited by Lenin as a must-read. I like this quote again because it brings out the logic most clearly - it gets across the idea that all of these people were saying the same thing over and over again:

"The liberation of the workers can only be the job of the workers themselves. In order to attain the final goal of the worker movement, which is socialism, it is necessary beforehand to enjoy broad political freedom, which is the one thing which will allow the proletariat to develop its strength and self-awareness to the extent needed to take social production into its own hands. Therefore, the task of the Russian worker party is to develop in the worker masses, in spite of all political constraints, an awareness of the necessity of attaining political struggle and to organise them for the struggle with the Russian autocracy."

You may recall that I describe Lenin's strategy in the early 1900s as "organising a party as much like the German SPD as possible under the Russian conditions of autocracy". This is an accurate summation of that approach - ie, overthrow the autocracy and enjoy the broad political freedoms to create such a party. We need these tools, this space, and when we do we will move ahead quickly.

In a text called *To the rural poor* (1903), Lenin neatly summarises his approach to the peasantry in a rather accessible manner. On top of this he explains why Marxists are for political freedom. I challenge you to find another book in the Marxist tradition that is so enthusiastic and table-pounding about the necessity of political freedom. The book's audience, as I have pointed out, is the peasantry and others in the *narod* (the people), who had not yet heard of the social democrats and their message. He says:

"Nobody will free the working man from poverty if he does not free himself. And to free themselves the workers of the whole country, the whole of Russia, must unite in one association, in one party. But millions of workers cannot unite if the autocratic police government bans all meetings, all workers' newspapers, and the election of workers' deputies. To unite they must have the right to form unions of every kind, must have freedom to associate; they must enjoy political freedom."⁷

He then highlights the international dimensions of social democracy and how the Russians wish to be a part of it, which is why they must overthrow the tsar. He says: "Workers of all

countries, unite! - during the past 50 years these words have circled the whole globe, are repeated at tens and hundreds of thousands of workers' meetings, and can be read in millions of social democratic pamphlets and newspapers in every language."

Further, he talks about Germany as an example (which he always does, of course), highlighting how in Germany the political freedoms there have enabled the SPD to become a real force and to develop strong links with the rural workers and poor.

I particularly like this quote too: "Of course, the bureaucrats suppress every book, every utterance that tells the truth about the people's poverty. The present pamphlet, too, has to be printed by the social democratic party secretly and circulated secretly: anyone who is found in possession of this pamphlet will make the acquaintance of courts and prisons. But the social democratic workers are not afraid of this: they print more and more, and give the people more and more truthful books to read. And no prisons, no persecution can halt the fight for the people's freedom!"⁸

This just about sums up Lenin and his approach back then. Indeed, he is not only looking to emulate the German model, but argues that, with political freedom, the Russian masses could actually proceed much more quickly and successfully towards socialism than the Germans: "When the Russian people have won political freedom, the work of uniting the working class, the cause of socialism, will advance much more rapidly, more rapidly than it is advancing among the German workers."⁹

I think I have hammered home the point here. Right up to 1914 you find Lenin making these basic points time and time again - and other Bolsheviks too. If you wanted to give a 'political freedom man of the year' award in this time then it could certainly go to Lenin.

We all see 1905 as a failed revolution, and, of course, it was. But it produced one of the biggest changes of that decade, in that it brought about a situation where people could get up and criticise the government and work in legal parties. This change simply would not have happened if the workers had not been involved in the struggle for political freedom. This in turn would not have happened if there had not been activists around who had been trying to convince them of the need for this struggle for over a decade.

Lenin saw that if he could get the party to get the workers to get the rest of the Russian people to overthrow the tsar then this could create a space, and this certainly happened.

Renegade Lenin

That is the one side of Lenin. We are now going to jump ahead to the other side of Lenin, which I have provocatively entitled 'Renegade Lenin' - you could argue that what he says later is some sort of betrayal of his own principles. He himself did not think so, but it is at least an argument.

What I want to do now is look at his statements after the revolution. We all know that there is a problem with political freedom after the revolution and I myself think that the objective reasons were enough to explain why political freedom was shut down. They are enough to explain the three processes that were going on at this time. The first one was the shutting down of the bourgeois parties and press - that happened right away. The second was more *ad hoc*, more unexpected and more improvised - the putting down of the socialist opposition. That went on for several years, and people such as Martov and other socialist critics were still standing up in national soviet congresses after the civil war and making criticisms. The third process concerned democracy

within the party, and that was the least expected, the most protracted and the one the Bolsheviks did not want to admit to.

I am sure we are all aware that within a few years arguments in favour of anything like the 19th century concept of political freedom were no longer to be heard in Russia. As I say, the objective reasons of the civil war, the intervention, the economic crisis, etc meant that there was not going to be any flourishing of political freedom. And indeed, right across eastern Europe there was nowhere where democracy was flourishing - it was all falling apart.

But that is not what we are discussing here. The Bolsheviks talked about this and came up with reasons, so it was doctrinal. It has not been thoroughly examined as of yet, and I am only going to scratch the surface in terms of some of the things they said. As we will see, some of what they said makes a certain amount of sense, but some of it we would certainly like to challenge.

Let us begin with a remarkable 1918 quotation from Nikolai Bukharin. People were challenging the Bolsheviks because back then they still remembered that the Bolsheviks had fought for the freedom of the press and so on. Now they were in power, were the Bolsheviks not being slightly hypocritical? Here is Bukharin's answer:

"The reason is very simple. The working class at that time was not yet powerful enough to storm the bourgeois fortress. It needed time to prepare, to gather strength, to enlighten the masses, to organise. It lacked, for instance, a press of its own uninfluenced by the capitalist class. But it could not come to the capitalists and their government and demand, 'Close your newspapers, messrs capitalists, and start newspapers for us workers.' They would be laughed at; it would be ridiculous to put such demands to capitalists. It would be equivalent to expecting the latter to cut their hands off with their own knife. Such demands are only made when a position is being taken by storm. Previously there was no such time. And that is why the working class (and our party) said: 'Long live freedom of the press' (the whole press, the bourgeois press included)"¹⁰

What he is basically saying here then is that they had lied! It reminds me of a lyric from a song I know: "How could you believe me when I told you that I love you, and you know I've been a liar all my life?" Great song!

Hal Draper commented on this one too: "Bukharin claimed that the movement had lied in the past and that he was telling the truth now. But, of course, such an absurd conspiracy had never existed. Bukharin was lying now - to cover up a 180-degree turn on his part. A movement that printed this drivel was discredited as much for the future as for the past."

Of course, I agree with Draper that Bukharin was talking into his hat here. However, there is something to it. As I have said before, the reason that people wanted freedom of the press was to get the message out to the people and carry out campaigns and strike action. But if that is what you need political freedom for, then maybe you no longer need it when you get to be in charge - maybe you do not want the competition from the bourgeoisie! It is as if somebody came to you with a whole lot of money and a police force, urging you to go out and run a series of campaigns. You might be tempted to take advantage of it.

The quote undercuts any later attempt of the communists to say, 'We want political freedom for ourselves and for you too!' He is telling everybody, ahead of time, that if you ever hear a communist party say that, then they are lying. I think

Bukharin soon twigged that this was not a good thing to be saying, so he stopped saying it. However, I think he still believed it.

At one of the Comintern congresses, Grigory Zinoviev - one of Lenin's closest comrades - picked up on this. He says: "As long as the bourgeoisie holds power, as long as it controls the press, education, parliament and art, a large part of the working class will be corrupted by the propaganda of the bourgeoisie and its agents and driven into the bourgeois camp." This is all quite reasonable. "But, as soon as there is freedom of the press for the working class, as soon as we gain control of the schools and the press, the day will come (and it is coming gradually) when large groups of the working class will come over to us until we have won a majority."¹¹

In one sense this is quite an optimistic outlook, and Zinoviev certainly thought that minority, vanguard rule by the party would be temporary and a majority would gradually be won over through campaigns and education. But what you see here is what I call 'state monopoly campaignism' - you are now in a position to run the sort of campaigns that the SPD were running, but without interference. Here the Bolsheviks are being what the SPD might have been if all restraints had been taken off.

What did the constitution of 1918 say on political freedom? It said there would be a temporary restriction on political rights, "until the disappearance of the objective possibilities of the exploitation of man by man" - so this is framed in a rather long-term perspective. The constitution also says that we will fight against "deep-rooted ideas, in accordance with which bourgeois rights and freedoms are regarded as inviolable". The temporary nature of these measures were stressed, but it does appear that the temporary period was perceived as being actually quite long.

Here is Bukharin again, writing in *The ABC of communism* (1920), a programmatic commentary written with Yevgeni Preobrazhensky: "The bourgeoisie has masses of newspapers and can cheat the workers to its heart's content day after day; whereas the workers, notwithstanding their legal 'rights', have practically no press of their own." And then: "Essentially there is no freedom at all because it is impossible to put into practice."¹² This begs the question then: why were the Bolsheviks fighting so hard for political freedom over a long period of time if it was this useless?

One of Bukharin's contributions to this view in particular was the notion that revolution itself involves a vast crisis throughout the whole society: a period of breakdown before relative stability, and only then can you start to move forward. During this period of conflict and breakdown you can simply not afford political freedoms.

Because of this, often when the left talks about these problems they focus in on a particular episode. Often they focus on the banning of factions at the 10th Congress in 1921, where Lenin was panicked by the fact that the party was putting its own disunity on display, particularly around the trade union question. That is certainly a historic landmark, but I do not think you should put too much explanatory weight on it. We have a vast crisis going on anyway, and this step only concerned democracy inside the party. As far as I am concerned, you cannot have democracy in the party if you do not have political freedom outside it. The party will not allow it. It simply cannot work.

It is important to understand the significance of the anti-factions resolution, but I do think that people overstate it. Indeed, if you actually read those resolutions then they make

a good argument. They state that we are under siege, facing all sorts of problems, and there are a lot of people who will come into the party who oppose our project of socialism. After all, as we are the only party, where else can they go? We cannot simply dismiss this as a mistake - there were serious problems the Bolsheviks had to face.

I do not think they meant it or they had thought it through, but when they were looking back to the struggle for political freedom in bourgeois society they dismissed it as worthless. Then in the socialist society they looked at it and said that they simply could not afford it.

But what about the future? It was not so much the case of saying that they could not afford it, but that they saw no particular role or need for it. So if you look for where Lenin mentions political freedom in *State and revolution*, you will actually find nothing about it - except in two places. One where Lenin talks of public buildings not being for beggars, and in this following quote: "The commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception."¹³

Given the importance of political freedom in Lenin, this is something that needs explaining. It is always a problem when people say they are for freedom of speech, but not for the freedom to deceive, etc.

I am not trying to blame the Bolsheviks: I merely want to point out the clear change in outlook. However, in the longer term, this incoherence about political freedom was extremely damaging, perhaps fatal, to the project as a whole - not merely in the Soviet Union (where we all know what happened), but in western countries where the communist parties were perceived as hypocritical in the Bukharin sense. That is, they wanted political freedom for themselves, but as soon as they would get it then political freedom for others would cease.

The Bolsheviks never claimed that democracy and political freedom were undesirable - they are certainly in the Stalinist constitution of 1936. They did not mean anything then, of course, but they were there. And because they were there, because they were officially of value and because there was always access to Lenin's writings, they had the capacity to revive. And they did revive in various oppositional or reform movements.

So, although the picture is pretty bleak, you cannot say that the Bolsheviks ever said that they did not care for political freedom or that it was a bourgeois value. They claim close to it, but they never actually said it, and that was a good thing ●

This is an edited version of the opening made by Lars T Lih at Communist University 2010.

Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/comintern.htm.
2. *Ibid.*
3. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/09/12.htm.
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5. *Ibid.*
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7. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/rp/2.htm#v06zz99h-367.
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13. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterov/ch03.htm.

RELIGION

No to crude anti-Catholicism

Once on the outside, the Catholic church is now part of the British establishment. Eddie Ford looks at the relevance of the papal visit

September 16 saw Joseph Ratzinger, aka pope Benedict XVI, touch down in Edinburgh for a four-day state visit to the UK. The enormous symbolic and political implications are obvious, seeing how Ratzinger is the first pope to make an official appearance in England/Britain since the Reformation, and Vatican occupants were hardly regular visitors before that. Perhaps tellingly, there has only ever been one English pope - Adrian IV, or Nicholas Breakspear - who assumed office in December 1154 and almost immediately placed Rome under 'interdict' in order to suppress the Commune of Rome, which had attempted re-establish democracy along the lines of the old Roman republic¹. So maybe someone for an ultra-reactionary like pope Benedict to admire.

The centrepiece of Ratzinger's visit will be an open-air beatification mass on September 19 in Birmingham's Crofton Park for the 19th century Catholic cardinal, John Henry Newman - which is expected to be witnessed by hundreds of priests, bishops and cardinals and some 50,000 worshippers (though tickets are proving hard to give away). Doubtless millions more will follow the proceedings on television. Other highlights of the papal tour include an official dinner and reception at Holyrood House with the queen and a speech on the merits of 'civil society' at Westminster Hall.² For those interested in such things there will be a super-abundance of papal memorabilia to celebrate the historic event - such as an official 'papal visit' T-shirt (£18), an electronic flashing candle to hold aloft as if you were at a rock concert (£3) or even a baseball cap (£15) bearing the slogan of the newly beatified Cardinal Newman: "Heart speaks unto heart."³

Inevitably, Ratzinger is being met by various kinds of demonstrations and protests, albeit relatively small in number. These range from the victims of abusive paedophile priests, to the secularist 'Protest the Pope' movement - whose prominent supporters include Richard Dawkins and Peter Tatchell - to the self-proclaimed fundamentalists of the Free Presbyterian Church, whose motto is *Ardens sed virens* (burning but flourishing). The latter was founded in 1951 by Ian Paisley, the virulently sectarian defender of the Six Counties statelet. In a counter-symbolic move, Paisley and his supporters held a 'no popery here' meeting at the same church which John Knox - widely regarded as the founder of Scottish Protestantism - used to preach in the 16th century after returning from effective exile in Geneva, where he had penned such notorious tracts as *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*.

Needless to say, communists find plenty that is objectionable about Joseph Ratzinger - the natural successor to the reactionary John Paul II (his 'spiritual' mentor) and who before becoming pope was the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, previously known as the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition, and had been particularly energetic in taking "disciplinary measures" against the more outspoken Latin American liberation theologians for their "Marxist tendencies". Then there is Ratzinger's abominable homophobia - he claims that gays have a "more or less strong tendency

ordered towards an inherent moral evil" - and his deep-rooted attachment to the misogynist values of Catholic doctrine. Not to mention the ever simmering question of anti-Semitism, which in a theological form is, of course, embedded into foundational myths and teachings of Christianity itself, and from which Ratzinger seems unable to distance himself - hence the situation last year where he rescinded the excommunication *latae sententiae* placed upon bishop Richard Williamson, who amongst many odious things has denied the existence of Nazi gas chambers and declared *The protocols of the elders of Zion* to be authentic (he also opposes women wearing trousers or shorts, attending college/university or having a career).⁴

Costs

Hence broadly speaking, communists think is correct for organisations like Protest the Pope - and the secularist liberal left in general - to take offence at the fact that the British state is paying for the visit, which amounts to some £10-12 million (excluding policing). In effect, the Catholic church is being provided with a chance to make propaganda, such as the promotion to sainthood of cardinal Newman, at the taxpayer's expense. Therefore, as militant secularists, we in the CPGB find nothing objectionable as such in PTP's view that Ratzinger "should not be accorded the honour and recognition of a state visit"⁵ nor to its petition demanding that the government "disassociates" itself from the pope's "opposition to women's reproductive rights, gay equality, embryonic stem cell research and the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV"; and that David Cameron "express his disagreement with the pope's role in the cover-up of child sex abuse by Catholic clergy", etc.⁶

However, having said that, many of those vituperatively protesting against

the papal visit in the name of secularism - such as Richard Dawkins - are ill-advised. Communists in the UK are acutely aware, or at least should be, that for many centuries the ruling ideology of this country was deeply anti-Catholic. Indeed, Great Britain was forged as a nation - and defined itself - *against* Catholicism and the European Catholic powers, especially France. In turn, Catholics within Britain became the enemy within and were discriminated against accordingly. So, far from British identity being an essentially benign product resulting from a lengthy process involving the integration and homogenisation of the various disparate peoples comprising the UK - the 'official' version of events traditionally promoted in schools and near countless BBC documentaries - it was rather *superimposed* in through rivalry with 'the other' (ie, Catholic France, etc).

That is to say, a unifying British-Protestant entity only emerged through extended military and political conflict with France between 1689 and 1815 - with the constituent ethnic and national groups of English, Scots and Welsh forged into a nation as a result. Naturally, artists, satirists, writers, poets, etc were all drafted into this nation-building enterprise, playing their role in the *imagining* and then creation of what we now know as Great Britain. In particular, the Scots seized the opportunities of empire not afforded to them at home and this made a substantial contribution to a more patriotic Britain - a more 'British' empire, if you like. Yes, at this time, to be British meant to be Protestant and anti-Catholic.

Of course, this institutional sectarianism took an extra vicious twist in the 19th century with the wave of Irish migrants into Britain, leading to a poisonous revival of anti-Catholicism - analogous in some respects to the outbreak of medieval-type anti-Semitism that occurred in

tsarist Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Quite vilely, but true to form, the Tory Party sensed an opportunity to revive its political fortunes and played upon this rising anti-Catholicism/Irish sentiment for everything it was worth - which turned out to be quite a lot, managing to secure a significant electoral base amongst sections of the working class that lasted well into the 20th century. Furthermore, this widespread and potent anti-Irish chauvinism - an updated version of Britain's long running historical and ideological anti-Catholicism - had the effect of seriously undermining the working class movement. Just as Karl Marx warned and the Tory Party hoped.

This toxic sectarianism took a particularly sharp form in Scotland, where a powerful Orange order developed which pitted Protestant workers against Catholics, who mainly Irish in origin and experienced systematic discrimination and prejudice. This legacy of sectarianism still disfigures parts of Scotland today, whether in terms of the educational system or sporting activities - Rangers versus Celtic and so on.

Class

In other words, communists recognise the undeniable fact that xenophobic sectarian antagonism to 'foreign' Catholicism - and in turn resistance to anti-Catholic oppression - was how the class struggle often manifested itself in the concrete conditions of the UK/Britain, albeit in a negative or backward way. Therefore we in Britain have a duty to combat anti-Catholicism - which, even if motivated by subjectively progressive inclinations, can have the effect of demonising or marginalising ordinary Catholics.

After all, it is important to remember that up until very recent times to be a Catholic in Britain was to be an *outsider*. As Stephen Bates comments in *The Guardian*, when he was an altar boy at mass during the 1960s, to be a Catholic was to be part of a "group outside the mainstream of British life" - one that was "separate, slightly alien". For example, he writes, "as if to emphasise the distinctiveness", his parish church was "weirdly out of keeping with the rest of our suburban town" - an "enormous, garish, red-brick Italianate basilica complete with campanile and a large statue of Christ on the roof". Of course, Bates goes on to remind us, back then there were "no British Catholic role models". When John F Kennedy became president of the United States "we became ecstatic" - he was "young, personable, dynamic and Catholic".⁷

Now, of course, we have another wave of Catholic migrants and 'outsiders' - the Poles, who have also been the object of xenophobic chauvinism and scaremongering by the tabloid press. The new Irish. And another attempt to divide the working class along the lines of ethnicity/nationality and religion, thus demonstrating once again for communists our obligation to combat anti-Catholic bigotry.

But, self-evidently, times *have* changed. British political life and culture has reconfigured itself - quite radically in some ways. Revealingly, a recent edition of *The Tablet* - the Catholic weekly review magazine with a circulation of about 23,000 - published a list of 100 "influential Catholics", ranging from cabinet secretary Gus O'Donnell to the BBC's

Mark Thompson and Mark Damazer. The list also included Delia Smith, Danny Boyle, David Lodge, Peter Ackroyd, Hilary Mantel, Chris Patten, Mark Serwotka, Jack Dromey, Frank Skinner, Peter Kay, Adrian Chiles, Susan Boyle, Ant and Dec ...

Nor should we forget that when Iain Duncan Smith and Charles Kennedy respectively led the Tories and Liberal Democrats, and Tony Blair was prime minister, all three were Catholics (or on the way to becoming so). An occurrence that generated very little comment - in a way that would have been virtually unthinkable only a mere 30 years ago. Not even Ian Paisley jumped up and down about it.

In short, Catholics - who represent less than 10% of the UK population - are no longer outsiders and the Catholic church is now part of the British establishment. Proof enough lies in the fact that David Cameron recorded a video message welcoming the pope to Britain, describing it as a "unique opportunity to celebrate the enormous contribution that all our faith communities make to our society" and to "celebrate their role in helping to build a bigger and stronger society" - hoping that Ratzinger's "broader message can help challenge us to ask searching questions about our society and how we treat ourselves and each other".⁸ In pursuance of his 'big society', Cameron is delighted to be able to embrace Benedict XVI and the Catholic church in general.

And it is fairly easy to see why. The Church of England, the *established church* is fractured and dying on its feet - Sunday services are mostly woefully attended, a fact often decried by newspaper editorials and concerned bourgeois opinion. Under such conditions, the establishment is well aware of the continued pull of the Catholic church - which, compared to Anglicanism, seems vibrant and alive, even if on a world scale the Catholic church is beset with the child abuse scandal and is suffering from general decline (losing swathes of its congregations in the US, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, etc). Therefore, quite sensibly from its own point of view, the ruling class wants to bring the Catholic church fully on board, pulling it deeper into the establishment. That way, it can be more fully incorporated and - most centrally - use can be made of the Catholic church's relative largesse, especially when the government is about to embark on a savage campaign of cuts. Clearly, the coalition government needs bodies like the Catholic church to provide it with ideological back-up and also, to some degree or another, to help plug the gaps in society when the state withdraws social services and public provisions. So a win-win situation for both partners in the 'big society' dance, you would think ●

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TURKEY

Much ado about nothing

The result of the referendum is no victory for democracy, reports

Esen Uslu



AKP prime minister Recep Erdogan

Turkey is set for a “ground-breaking political transformation”, claimed *The Guardian*, after the September 12 referendum on a package of constitutional amendments. Voters had “backed a constitutional shake-up designed to tame its once mighty secular establishment” and the result represented “a stunning political triumph for Turkey’s prime minister” Recep Erdogan (September 13). For those of us who sweated through the exceptionally hot and humid summer watching the media circus that followed the politicians around the country, what *The Guardian* writes is every bit as much empty phraseology as the politicians’ own long-winded rhetoric.

We must look back to February-March to recall the events causing the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government to embark once more upon the road to amend the constitution. Public prosecutors charged several retired and serving military officers with plotting to stage a military takeover. The Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (SCJP) attempted to block the proceedings by various means. Previously the constitutional court had dubbed the AKP a party of religious revivalism, but stopped short of banning it in the name of ‘secularism’.

The government decided to introduce a mini-package of constitutional reforms aiming to change the composition of the SCJP and other parts of judiciary, which were now mounting a last-ditch defence of the ‘legacy of Atatürk’ - ie, the nationalist-militarist founding ideology of the Turkish state - by blocking any attempt to try in the civilian courts the would-be junta poised to stage a coup. The government also wanted to prevent the constitutional court banning political parties deemed to threaten the existence and continuity of the Kemalist state.

The AKP attempted to sweeten the package by including long promised reforms to harmonise Turkish law with that of the European Union by including provisions on data protection, positive discrimination for women and the disabled, and children’s rights. The sop to the left was the proposal to remove the infamous article 15 of the 1982 constitution, granting immunity from prosecution to all members of the former junta.

The AKP also tried to portray the amendment on the banning political parties as a move favourable to the Kurds - Kurdish parties have been banned one after the other, despite winning elections outright in several provinces. If the amendment was passed, the chief prosecutor would have to seek permission from the Grand National Assembly before initiating a court case

against any political party.

The initial reaction of both the so-called ‘social democratic’ Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP - the infamous Grey Wolves) was to refuse to cooperate in parliament. They said they would reverse their opposition if the AKP withdrew the amendments limiting the powers of the constitutional court, which the AKP declined to do.

By contrast, the initial reaction of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was to declare it would be flexible. However, during the process, the attitude of the government as well as the state to the Kurdish movement hardened considerably after the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) ended its long truce. The BDP reacted by refusing to take part in the parliamentary debate.

The critical moment came with the annual meeting of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) that decides the promotion and retirement of the top brass. The generals provoked a crisis by insisting on the promotion of those in their ranks known to be closely associated with members of the junta facing trial. The government retaliated by threatening to arrest scores of high-ranking officers, including the general expected to become the new commander of land forces. In the end the military buckled and the government succeeded in promoting its preferred officers and forcing others to take mandatory retirement on the grounds of age.

The government’s success at the SMC was repeated at the annual meeting of the SCJP, when its representatives declined to participate. As a result the prosecutors and panel of judges dealing with the junta cases remained in place and could not be changed until after the referendum. The success of the government in dealing with its rivals in the military and judiciary provided it with a major boost in popularity prior to the referendum campaign.

In addition, the AKP leadership offered a number of concessions to various forces. To woo the Alevi Kurds it accused the CHP of responsibility for the Dersim massacres of the 1930s - official Turkish histories had previously talked of deaths resulting from state operations against terrorists. To woo the left it denounced the tortures of the 1980-82 military junta. Even the PKK was persuaded to declare another unilateral ceasefire for Ramadan until September 20 on the promise of further concessions. The AKP also milked the grievances of the 1970s rightwing militants who had suffered in junta jails.

The attitude of the left to the referendum varied enormously. The nationalist legal Communist Party (TKP) and the Labour Party (EMEP) formed a ‘no’ coalition with some other groups, including Alevi organisations which have traditionally taken their lead from the CHP.

A smaller section of the left ran a campaign under the slogan, “It is not sufficient, but yes!”, while supporting the BDP boycott in Kurdish regions. Another section cooperated closely with Kurdish organisations trying to build a boycott front in Turkey proper, especially in the principal cities.

The position of the nationalist left that locked itself in with the CHP and its anti-AKP stance needs no comment. However, in my estimation, both the ‘not sufficient, but yes’ factions and those supporting a boycott failed to put forward a clear programme for democracy in order to utilise the heightened political perceptions of large sections of working people. By failing to do so they rendered their campaigns futile.

The Kurdish BDP ran a better campaign, calling for “democratic autonomy” with one eye on the general election due in late May or early June next year. The boycott was intended as a bargaining chip, since all the polls suggested strong support for the constitutional amendments in Kurdish towns and villages. The BDP was hoping for a promise, or at least an indication, that the AKP would meet some of its demands, in return for which a ‘yes’ vote would be switched on. Even the jailed PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, waited until the last possible moment before endorsing the boycott.

However, the government believed it already had sufficient support to win the referendum, and opted not to alienate its core supporters by flirting with the Kurds. Therefore, while keeping open the possibility of a deal until the last moment, in the end it declined to take the bait.

The referendum produced a 58% ‘yes’ majority. However, closer inspection indicates that the turnout was 77%, which means that 11 million out of 49 million registered electors declined to take part and only 44% of those entitled to vote supported the government. This is the result that *The Guardian* hailed a “stunning political triumph”.

Kurdistan displayed very strong support for the BDP boycott call. The turnout was less than 40% in the core provinces and in Hakkari it was as low as 8%. Those who ignored the boycott call overwhelmingly voted ‘yes’. All this led some to conclude that in Kurdistan there were only two parties: the AKP and BDP. The rest have evaporated in the heat of armed conflict, the only exception being in Tunceli province (formerly Dersim), where the Alevi Kurds (Zaza) have a substantial presence. Here participation was 66%, and there was an overwhelming ‘no’ vote.

The constitutional amendments were not ground-breaking nor did they extend Turkey’s limited democracy. The old provisions for electing high court judges were not democratic, but the new provisions are not democratic either. None of the amendments make life easier for the working class. So for *The Guardian* to beat the drum for amendments that “would drastically curtail the judiciary and make the armed forces subservient to civilian rule” is nothing but grand deception.

The only important outcome of the referendum is that the classical alignment of forces has changed dramatically, affecting the military and civilian tutelage over politics and the conservative bourgeoisie’s roots in political Islam. And the Kurdish freedom movement has definitely proved its capabilities in the ballot box. That combination might open up some new opportunities for the working class and Kurdish movements ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**News
International:
a state within a
state**

Strike back against the empire

The *News of the World's* phone-tapping scandal continues to develop - revealing new aspects of the Murdoch empire's power at every turn.

Now a number of MPs have used the reach of Rupert Murdoch's News International as an excuse for the fact that some of its key figures were not subpoenaed over their role in the scandal, which has seen a plethora of people in public life - from princes to politicians, to professional footballers - highlighted as potential victims of *News of the World* spying on their mobile phone voicemails.

Two MPs on the culture, media and sport parliamentary subcommittee - not a matter of any small interest to the present furor, which stretches into all three areas of expertise - have suggested that Murdoch people used threats, explicit and implicit, against its members. Liberal Democrat Adrian Price recalls reading an autobiography by a News International executive: "That is what we do. We go out and destroy people's lives." Understandably, perhaps, Price - and many others, according to *The Financial Times* - was reluctant to tread too close to the toes of Murdoch and his minions, refusing to subpoena Rebekah Wade (now Brooks), editor of *The Sun* and a senior figure in Murdoch's organisation (September 11).

Andy Coulson, *News of the World* editor at the time of the known phone hackings, remains apparently secure in his new job as David Cameron's chief spin-doctor. Yet he will be worried - his protestations of ignorance with regard to the unsavoury activities of his employees have become ever less convincing. After the implication of senior police figures in the Met's apparently lackadaisical approach to the case, now members of parliament are freely insinuating that they have been browbeaten by News International into laying off Rebekah Brooks.

How long can Coulson hope to keep his name out of it? The one *News of the World* hack to fall so far is none other than its then royal editor, Clive Goodman. Given the absurd amount of space dedicated by the rag to monarchical tittle-tattle, this cannot be a minor position. It is fairly well established, moreover, that the practice of hacking voicemail accounts was used in other sections of the Murdoch newsroom. Is the buck really to stop with Goodman and his equivalents on the *News of the Screws* staff - presumably accused of arriving at the same nefarious act in separate moments of ingenuity?

It would be far from surprising that such methods were endemic throughout the sensationalist tabloid media as a whole. Such papers act as a kind of idiotic parody of the classic muckraking journalism of an earlier epoch; where the latter offered salacious details of obscene labour conditions and municipal corruption, the tabloids offer stories of the misdemeanours of celebrities great and small - including, where convenient, politicians and royals.

It is notable that only the left-of-centre (in bourgeois terms) broadsheets in this country - *The Guardian* and *The*



Rupert Murdoch: anti-communist to the core

Independent, as well as *The Financial Times* - have really run with this story. A certain amount of reportage pops up elsewhere - but *The Guardian* did most of the initial investigative legwork on the story. According to *Private Eye*, even *The Guardian* held back on important details when the affair went before the aforementioned browbeaten Commons select committee, in order to avoid 'all-out war' with News International.

Who is this man who has governments, senior police officers and his media rivals running scared? Murdoch was born into journalism - but has always favoured the business end of the practice. He inherited his first newspaper in 1952, based in Adelaide. Since then, his rise to stupendous wealth and notoriety has been steady and apparently unstoppable. He acquired *The Sun*, a broadsheet successor to the semi-official Labour Party paper, the *Daily Herald*, and quickly transformed it into the biliously reactionary tabloid gossip sheet it is today.

Having bought *The Times*, a pretty prestigious addition to a British media portfolio by any measure, he

proceeded to provide enthusiastic support to Margaret Thatcher throughout her time in government. This support was not simply limited to approving journalistic coverage. In the 1980s, Murdoch's growing business was instrumental in crushing the Wapping print unions - a key industrial battle. Around about this time, also, he moved into satellite television, and he remains the chief beneficiary of pay TV in the UK, with revenue streams outstripping all competitors - including the BBC's £3billion-odd licence fee funding.

Murdoch has never missed a trick in his life. When he felt government pressure on his increasingly monopolistic business practices, he used his growing political influence to defuse it. That is not the limit of his political ambition, though - Murdoch fancies himself as a kingmaker in electoral situations, especially in Britain. When, against many expectations, the Tories prevailed over Neil Kinnock's Labour Party in 1992, his flagship tabloid legendarily declared: "It's *The Sun* wot won it!" This is, of course, something of an exaggeration.

Yet it remains true that no party has been successful in an election for 30 years without the support of the Murdoch press. The drip-drip of memoirs from leading New Labour figures, as well as various spin-doctors, suggests that the price for Murdoch's support was high. Lance Price, a No10 spin-doctor during Blair's first term, argued that no major political decision could be made by the government without the approval of three men - Gordon Brown, John Prescott and Rupert Murdoch. When the latter threw his full support behind the Iraq war, trumpeting the prime minister's and George W Bush's belligerence and vilifying the French "worm", Jacques Chirac, no doubt it made Blair's imperialist ambitions that much easier to fulfil (Murdoch openly suggested that the war was necessary because 'we need the oil' - although not in *The Sun*, of course).

And, of course, Andy Coulson was able to proceed directly from the phone-tapping scandal to David Cameron's inner circle - not a feat likely to be achieved by a *Guardian* editor (perhaps Cameron considered the ethically dubious activities of *Screws* journalists to count as valuable work experience for the even dirtier game of bourgeois politics).

That is the carrot - now to the stick. We know the somewhat bloodthirsty tone of the Murdoch tabloids when dealing with their foes. If you are not in their good books, you should be prepared for some pretty wild abuse. What the *News of the World's* activities also suggest, very strongly, is a systematic ability on the part of the Murdoch organisation to do character assassinations. The practice of voicemail hacking seems pretty widespread - and we can only guess at other means of generating scandal stories.

It is quite plausible then, that if - for example - you are a detective in the Met investigating legally dubious activities at the *News of the Screws*, and you are being a little more intransigent than is helpful, then *The Sun* and so forth may well try to dish the dirt on you. The timidity of the police - as

well as unnamed informants for a *New York Times* piece which reignited the controversy - suggest that this kind of thing does take place.

It was the Scottish wing of the *News of the World*, meanwhile, that began publishing details of Tommy Sheridan's private life in 2004. He, ill-advisedly, took News International to court for defamation - which resulted in a pyrrhic victory, destroying the Scottish Socialist Party as a substantial organisation and drawing himself into a perjury charge, still yet to be heard in court. Given Murdoch's visceral anti-leftism and union-busting tendencies, it is not imprudent to imagine his lackeys gathering material on Bob Crow or Mark Serwotka.

It is transparent that his empire needs to be destroyed. News International is far from the only media conglomerate to have bought substantial political influence, even in Britain alone - yet it is by far the most powerful. Murdoch's papers account for 37% of total newspaper circulation. By some projections, his empire will be in receipt of half the total revenue from television in the next 10 years. The Murdoch papers, in particular, represent a hugely influential bulwark against almost any political argument that can be called progressive or democratic.

Yet journalists are not generally the most reactionary bunch. The political initiative flows from above. It would not be necessary to shut down or ban the Murdoch papers - just to destroy Murdoch's control over them, and place the papers in the hands of the journalists and printworkers. More generally, as I argued last week, the capitalist press is primarily funded by large-scale advertising subsidy rather than circulation, which necessarily has the effect of shifting politics to the right. To cut this link would require the press to fund itself from its readership base - removing the congenital advantage it enjoys over, for example, the left press, funded in this way because we have no choice ●

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