

# weekly worker



**Lars T Lih dissects Lenin's most famous, but most misunderstood pamphlet, *What is to be done?***

- CPGB aggregate
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No 838

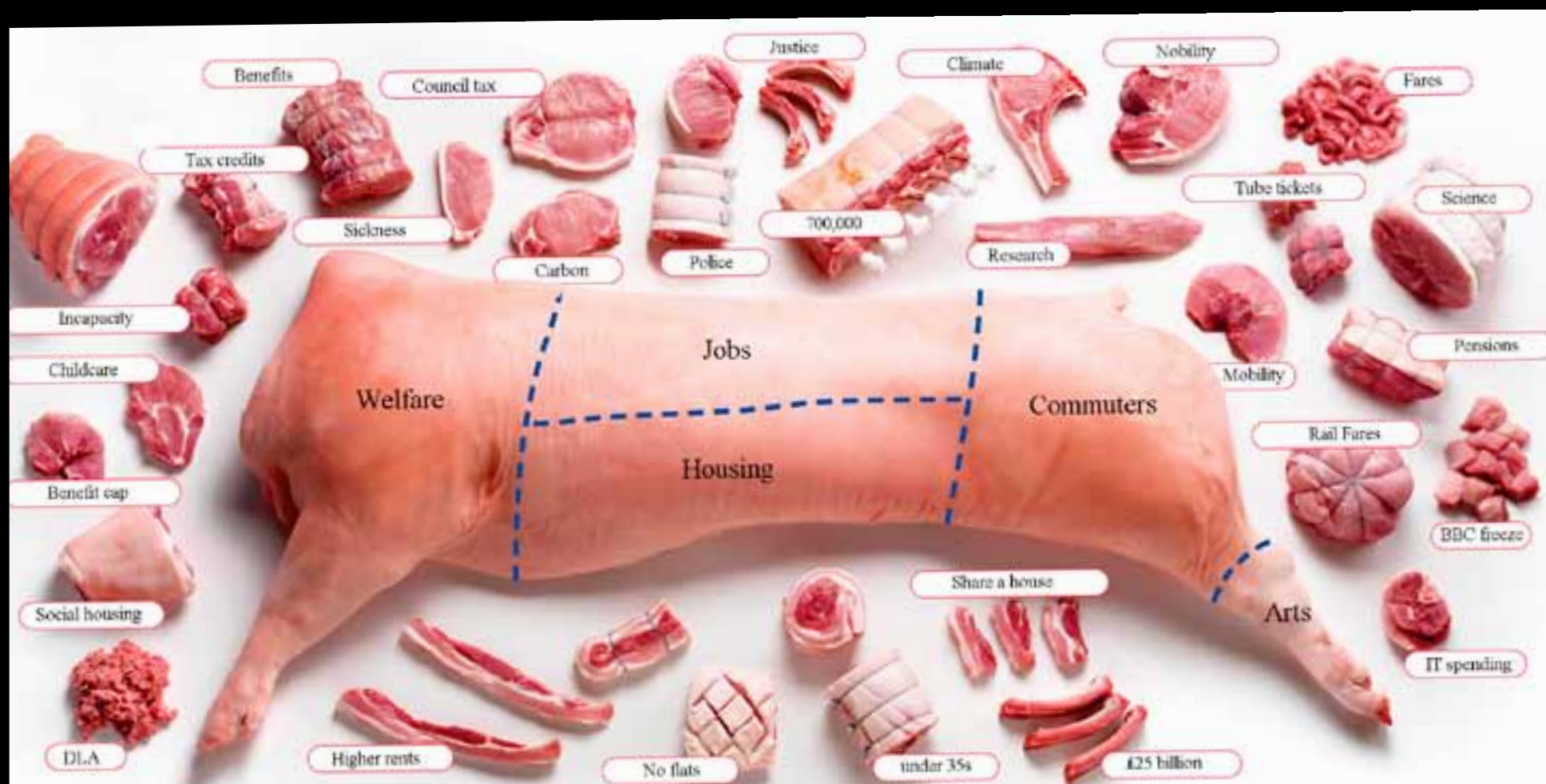
Thursday October 21 2010

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# LETTERS



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

## Religious right

There is much that I agree with in Mike Macnair's 'Disorientated establishment promotes Popomania' (September 23) - such as his take on the argument that ethics depend on religion as their foundation stone. This is a dogma much loved by the bigoted and blinkered.

I remember arguing on the internet with an American Christian fundamentalist with this view. My response was that he should look at the evidence as to where Christian ethics have led in America's bible belt, the deep south. Use of the death penalty against the poor and blacks, slavery and then the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the lynch mobs, to say nothing of its support for war and its equal opposition to things like welfare and any state-provided medical provision. And also the Protestant fundamentalist president of Guatemala, Rios Montt, who presided over the slaughter of over 100,000 Amerindians in the war against communism. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the religious pie leaves a lot to be desired! In fact, most of the barbarities in history have been sanctioned by 'ethical' religions or, as Dylan wrote, in every war god is on 'our' side.

Mike is correct, albeit for the wrong reasons, in saying that the role of anti-Semitism was far more critical to the Nazi project than romantic nationalism. A good example is the decline in fortunes of Nazi agriculture minister Richard Darre and his 'back to the earth' ideas, when he fell out with Hitler in 1942. Darre represented the romantic nationalism of the German peasant tilling out his land as the future of Germany, and anti-Semitism and 'blood and earth' racism was its ideological accompaniment. For Hitler, the achievement of *Lebensraum* in the east demanded a highly monopolistic capitalist economy with the industrial production of food, not a peasant food economy.

In theory, of course, the Nazi idea of the Jew as both capitalist and communist, as symbolised in the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, was indeed designed to have mass public appeal. But this was a failure. The role of anti-Semitism was as an integrative ideology within the Nazi party. It is not for nothing that in the years 1930-33, when the Nazi party sought to expand its vote, Hitler made virtually no speeches on the Jews and anti-Semitism. Even after 1933 very few such speeches were made, albeit for different reasons, the reaction abroad being one.

In particular, Ian Kershaw, in his books *The Hitler myth* and *Popular opinion and dissent in the Third Reich*, based on extensive research in Gestapo and Social Democratic files, is quite clear that the majority of the German civilian population, even in conservative Catholic Bavaria where the study was based, were not anti-Semitic in the Nazi sense and deplored in particular the Kryslnacht pogrom of November 1938. In his memorable phrase, "the road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference".

The anti-Semitism of the Catholic church, its Rome ghetto and its fixing of Jews as Christ killers undoubtedly played a part in the development of Nazi ideology, but this should not be overestimated. The Nazi party took the medieval religious and social myths about the Jews and fashioned them into a modern scientific doctrine of racial anti-Semitism. If anything, the worst offenders (and also the

best) among German churches were the Protestants. The Catholic Church went along, but never willingly, with Nazi anti-Semitism because of its anti-communism. This was what explained the refusal of cardinal Pacelli, who succeeded Pius XII as pope, to speak out at any stage against the extermination of the Jews. He feared undermining the war against the Soviet Union.

The role of anti-Semitism among the Nazi rank and file was, however, very important in maintaining the flame of their 'radical anti-capitalism'. A sharp difference should be maintained between religious and racial anti-Semitism. It was because of this difference that many Christian Jews, including in Germany itself, escaped murder. The only successful protests in Germany against the deportations to the death camps were those at Rosenstrasse in Berlin by the non-Jewish wives of those the Germans had seized. All were released on Goebbels' orders.

There are, of course, many criticisms that could be levelled at the Catholic church in the Holocaust but also a number of examples of where its initiatives saved thousands of Jews. It certainly saved more than the Zionist movement, which sat back and saw the rise of the Nazis as an opportunity with which to build a Jewish racial state after the war. Many thousands of Jews survived the war because they were sheltered in Catholic monasteries and convents.

Christian anti-Semitism and Nazi anti-Semitism were two very different creatures. The former was an outcome of the distorted class struggle of the peasantry. It was not genocidal. The latter was potentially genocidal from the start. That the Catholic church was never enamoured of blood racism, despite the collaboration and cowardice of the German church, was epitomised in Pius XI's encyclical of 1937, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, which, although not mentioning anti-Semitism, did condemn in clear and explicit terms the very concept of race.

Banned in Germany itself, *Mit Brennender Sorge* was primarily a product of the attacks on the Catholic church itself within Nazi Germany. The role of the church, its failure to speak out against anti-Semitism, the cowardice of its whole episcopate and the fact that bishop Galen could denounce in 1941 the euthanasia programme that killed thousands of mainly German children and adults, whilst saying nothing about the isolation, marking and later deportations of Germany's Jews, speaks volumes. It was no coincidence that the death camps were located not in the old reich, but in Poland or the incorporated territories.

The Holocaust and Nazi anti-Semitism cannot be laid at the door of the Catholic church, for all its faults - even if the pope displayed utter hypocrisy in the beatification of pastor Listenberg, who died after two years in a concentration camp, as he was being transported to Dachau (where over 2,500 Catholic priests were held) for having spoken out against the deportation of the Jews. Even in November 1943, 4,000 Berliners turned out for his funeral.

**Tony Greenstein**  
email

## Deportation

Peter Cohen proposes an interesting scheme for "the complete decolonisation of Palestine" (Letters, October 14). It consists of "the Zionist colonists going back to where they or their parents came from." Most ingenious.

Presumably these colonists will

have to await their turn for deportation until those of older colonies - including North America and Australia - have been similarly dealt with. Meanwhile, Peter Cohen will have ample time to ponder a few technical problems.

One such problem is exemplified by a working class couple I am acquainted with. Both are Israeli born. The wife's father was born in a part of Poland that has since been annexed to Russia; her mother was born in Iraq. The husband's mother was born and raised as a French citizen in Algeria, when Algeria was officially part of France; his father was born in the USSR in a town that is now in Azerbaijan. Presumably, the couple would have to separate. Peter Cohen will have to work out where each partner should be deported to. Then he will have to decide where the couple's children should be sent: Poland? Russia? Iraq? France? Algeria? Azerbaijan? He will also need to persuade or force the countries in question to serve as dumping grounds for these foreign deportees.

Of course, my friends and millions of their Hebrew compatriots will not peacefully accept being deported from what for most of them is the land of their birth. They will defend themselves and resist, using all the weapons at their disposal. But no doubt Peter Cohen will, in the interest of decolonisation, personally volunteer to muster and serve in the armed forces that will be needed to drown that resistance in blood.

I look forward to reading in the *Weekly Worker* further brilliant schemes for promoting the international unity of the working class.

**Moshé Machover**  
London

## Bring it on

As a supporter of the Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International in the UK, it is not often that I agree with the shortbread socialism of Eddie Ford. On the subject of child benefits, however, he seems to be thrusting his sporan in the right direction ('Tails and wagging dogs', October 7).

In the 1920s, unemployed workers were subject to a means test which involved an officer visiting the claimant's house, calculating the worth of the claimant's furniture and then stating that 'surplus' furniture (such as a sofa) was capital that could be sold. Benefits would therefore be denied (an even more savage arrangement was in place for the earlier workhouse system).

The proposal to axe child benefit would entail yet another invasion of privacy, as family finances come under scrutiny. Would you like the details of your financial affairs to be fully accessible to the capitalist state? Furthermore, cutting child benefit to upper middle class earners will save a paltry sum, especially if you consider the extra costs of policing it. It is a crass attempt at justifying a 'fairness' cover for the savage cuts in services, jobs and pensions that are to come.

Another justification for universal child benefit is that the benefit (excepting payments in the rare cases where fathers are given custody by the misanthropic courts) is paid directly to the mother. I personally know women who have used this money to save for a fund to enable them to leave an abusive husband. Others have, for example, used it to fund a bond for a new home.

Finally, the complexities of dealing with means testing will mean that many low paid and vulnerable people who do not have the benefits of a university education will end up not claiming. It is an established fact

that, the poorer you are, the more you don't take up your entitlement.

If Eddie is proposing an alliance between the middle classes and the workers to fight this (under the leadership of the working class, of course, not the leadership of the petty bourgeoisie, as the Pabloites would have it), then I say, bring it on.

**Gino Molinari**  
email

## Exchanges

Recent editions of the *Weekly Worker* have contained some fairly lively and informative exchanges between members of the CPGB, Communist Students and the Socialist Workers Party, which is very welcome (Letters, October 7 and 14).

Perhaps SWP students in Manchester are rattled by the existence of an on-campus 'rival' which combines anti-cuts activism with a commitment to open and critical Marxism like that practised by Communist Students. Who knows? Being so far away, I can only speculate. But this is indeed the kind of open debate that needs to be had on the Marxist left, particularly as the cuts bite and the coalition launches its wholesale attack on working class people.

Aside from the exact issues at stake, one theme seemed to stand out: the dynamic between theory and practice. Aine Bike, for example, criticises CPGB and CS comrades for not being active enough in "the actual class struggle" (October 14). I've heard others dismiss as 'talking shops' left groups and meetings which exist for no other reason than to tease out ideas and provide a platform for informed strategic and intellectual debate on the state of Marxism past, present and future. But the existence of such 'talking shops' is healthy in itself and such groups are vital to the existence of a movement which is rational and democratic.

By the same standard, however, I do agree with Aine Bike on one point: the active dedication of many SWP members - despite their uniformly blind and uncritical devotion to the party line - should not so easily be scorned. On this, I am personally happy to give credit where I think it is due. I have encountered people on the Marxist left, some associated with groups where open debate is celebrated as the very highest virtue, who display almost utter contempt for the struggles waged on picket lines by trade unionists and socialist activists, purely because such actions are not pre-empted by hours and hours of intellectual pontificating over their strategic value to the history of Marxism and communism.

That is why I enjoyed recent exchanges in the *Weekly Worker* involving CPGB and CS comrades in Manchester who, by the sounds of it, are doing great work in the struggle to unite theory and practice in an active and democratic communist politics.

**David Bates**  
email

## Biased prize

A few remarks to add to your interesting article, 'For services rendered' (October 14). In 1960, an earlier president of the African National Congress, Albert Lutuli, was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

When Henry Kissinger received the prize in 1973, it was to be shared with Le Duc Tho of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a key player in the Paris peace accords during the Vietnam war. To his credit, Le Duc Tho, recognising the cynical pairing of his name with Kissinger, refused to accept the award.

An earlier and significant refusal

was Jean-Paul Sartre, who was awarded the literature prize in 1960 and turned it down partly on the grounds that it had an imperialist bias.

**René Gimpel**  
email

## Timeless dogma

There are just a number of points I need to make about James Turley's response (Letters, October 7) to my letter (September 30). His little fling on the use of bourgeois sources is, of course, a sleight of hand: Marx and Lenin never shared the backward prejudices of their many bourgeois sources. On Cuba, however, the *Weekly Worker* and the Trotskyists do. And as for China - well, don't be so idle: our position is clear and in the public domain.

Throughout his response, Turley cannot help his reactionary prejudices coming through: Cuban communists are Cuban 'communists' in quotes; and Cuban socialism is Cuban 'socialism'. But, in the *Weekly Worker*, that nonentity John McDonnell is always comrade McDonnell without quotes, the left in the Labour Party is always the left, never the 'left'. The inverted commas of disdain are most certainly applied with differing standards! And I do not see the *Weekly Worker* or James Turley supporting their comrade McDonnell as 'the rope supports the hanging man'. Does anyone else?

Turley complains that I accuse the *Weekly Worker* of ignoring Lenin on the basis of opportunism in the workers' movement, and then adds in parentheses: "actually, I disagree with Lenin, but that's another matter". But it is not! Lenin's materialist analysis of opportunism is not 'another matter': it is the essence of communist politics today. British Trotskyists reject it: Tony Cliff, of course, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the *Weekly Worker* replace it with idealist notions about 'reformism', which conveniently lead them into opportunist accommodation with the Labour Party.

Let us be clear: Lenin no more invented the notion of the labour aristocracy than Marx invented the concept of class. Both Marx and Engels had related the emergence of a privileged upper stratum of the working class to British capitalism's monopoly position in the second half of the 19th century. Bourgeois historians and political commentators of the time took the existence of this stratum as read. All Lenin did was to take the analysis of Marx and Engels a step further in the context of monopoly capitalism or imperialism, and those who reject Lenin's materialist position on the split in the working class in imperialist nations seem inevitably to go on to reject Lenin's analysis of imperialism as a whole (Tony Cliff of course, the AWL and the *Weekly Worker*).

Because the RCG shares Lenin's strategic conceptions, we can understand his tactical advice for what it is: tactical advice, not the timeless dogma that the *Weekly Worker* makes of it. The idea that 2010 is the same as 1920 - "Then as now Labour had bloodstained hands - and the communists were weak", as Turley puts it - is absurd. In 1920, Labour had yet to form a government, the defeats of the 1920s had yet to happen, the bans and proscriptions had yet to be imposed, while the communists actually amounted to something in the context of an international movement.

His notion of class is just self-serving. Yes, the fact that 60% of the Labour membership had a higher educational qualification in 1987, as opposed to 11% of the general population, tells us something about



the relatively privileged position of Labour Party members even a quarter of a century ago. Who can imagine that an Exeter University graduate is in the same boat as the machinist, hospital cleaner or shop worker? And his claim that “the vast majority of trade union members in the country had a say in who the Labour leader was” is more idleness. The readily available figures show it was just over 40% (2.75 million ballot papers issued; there are about 6.7 million trade unionists), of whom 9% actually participated in the election (247,000); and, of that 9%, only 10% voted for Dianne Abbott. Exactly where are all those Labour-supporting “class-conscious workers”?

Finally, Turley accuses me of overwhelming “moralism”, the dismissive term for morality favoured by the reactionary petty bourgeois left. Yes, when we call the Labour Party warmongering, imperialist and racist, we are making a moral judgement - and an objective statement of fact as well. It is, as you rightly sense, a different morality to yours.

**Robert Clough**  
 email

## Tea Party

Jim Creegan says he thinks I am having difficulty with the idea that the wrath of the Tea Partiers is aimed at politicians, not the ruling class for which they act (Letters, October 7). No, that’s not the case. Firstly, I’m sure that Jim would accept that in the US more than anywhere else it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the politicians and the class they represent. Most of them are multi-millionaires or billionaires. Secondly, in this instance, in attacking the ideas those politicians represent they *are* attacking the interests of the ruling class. Moreover, my main concern was the other point I made, which was Jim’s identification of the Tea Partiers *with* the interests of the ruling class.

In fact, in raising the issue of the state I think it is Jim who is confused. The state is not at all the governmental power. Whilst the state - which comprises its permanent bureaucracy, its bodies of armed men and its ideological institutions - *is* an instrument of class power, and represents the interests of the ruling class, the same is not true of the government. Allende’s government, for example, did not represent the interests of the Chilean ruling class. The nature of bourgeois democracy *does* mean, contrary to what Jim says, that even bourgeois parties are faced with the problem of being elected, and, therefore, are faced with other pressures than just being a mouthpiece for the ruling class. Indeed, that is the reason for the rightwing populism of parties in Europe at the moment, and the reason that the Republican establishment are having to respond to the challenge from the Tea Partiers.

I do not insist on a strict demarcation between the interests of the middle class and ruling class, but I do insist that there is no necessary coincidence between the two. Jim refers to the upward shift of income that has occurred since the 1970s. I am aware of that, and I am also aware of its causes located within the nature of the US economy. Alan Greenspan was also aware of it, and its causes too. In a number of his testimonies to Congress, he emphasised that the US had to address urgently its severe educational deficiencies, which failed to churn out sufficient people with the necessary skills and qualifications to fill those higher paid jobs, and which caused US capital a problem, not just from the deficiency, but as a result of the over-inflated salaries such a shortage of supply resulted in.

Jim speaks of the people in the top 1% of income earners, and says

these people are too rich to be called middle class. Even if Jim is right, it doesn’t matter, because the whole point of my argument was that it is the separation between the interests of small capital, the middle class, etc, as against the interests of big capital, which is the dominant section of the ruling class, that is important. In fact, Engels argued that by the end of the 19th century this big capital had essentially adopted the programme of social democracy. It was promoting a social democratic consensus as the best means to further its interests, including squeezing its smaller competitors by imposing upon them state regulations that provided minimum standards for workers that big capital could afford, but which undermined the profits of small capital.

That is why the reality of most of the 20th century is that it has been social democratic parties and their ilk which have been the real representatives of big capital, whereas conservative parties have been the representatives of small capital and the middle class. It’s not surprising that in the US the Democrats have been the party promoting the kind of state capitalist policies that big capital needs, while the Republicans, at least in rhetoric, have been the small staters.

Jim allows his confusion of government and state to once again cloud his understanding of the policies being pursued by that populist right in Europe. Jim tells us that this policy of austerity is the explicit programme of the American ruling class. But the Democrats are the political representatives of the US ruling class - or has Jim swallowed the propaganda of the Tea Partiers that Obama is a socialist? This is the same ruling class which only a year ago was demanding that the state grow to almost any size to bail out the banks and other sections of big capital! If it wanted a small state, 2008 was the perfect opportunity to have got one. Has Jim forgotten that it was not Obama that stepped in to bail out big capital, but Bush. Nor was that growth of the state just a response to the financial meltdown. The libertarians and Ron Paul were decrying the ‘socialism’ of Bush way back in 2002, as the size of the state expanded, along with the deficits.

The other bogeyman of the Tea Partiers - health reform - has also long been the cause of big capital, which has complained persistently about the huge burden it faced compared to its foreign competitors, who benefited from socialised systems. And it was not Obama who first responded to that, but Bush. Additionally, there is hardly an ideologist of the big bourgeoisie who is not arguing that austerity is the wrong course at the present time. In a forum hosted by the BBC last weekend Strauss-Kahn agreed with Joe Stiglitz that in those economies where fiscal stimulus was possible it should be employed. There is, of course, a difference between big capital seeing the advantages of a big state in providing economic and social stability and of being a rational means of providing those commodities, such as education and healthcare, vital for the reproduction of labour-power.

Contrary to what Jim says, I don’t think I was equating the Tea Party to European fascism. I thought I said it wasn’t the same, whilst likening it to the kind of rightwing populist movements of the early 20th century. The point I was making was that, in the absence of any credible solution provided by socialists, such populist movements can win support across a wide spectrum. Indeed, that is why parties like the Tories in Britain have adopted such policies to be elected even though they contradict the interests of big capital.

**Arthur Bough**  
 email

## Realisten

Jack Conrad wrote: “Lenin cited the Spartacists and the left wing of the Independent Social Democratic Party. And it is worth adding that, with the merger of these two organisations in October 1920, the resulting united Communist Party of Germany assumed genuinely mass proportions” (“‘Leftwing” communism’ *Weekly Worker* October 14).

In a blog series on internationals, Louis Proyect said: “The German Communist Party would have been much better off if the Comintern had simply left it alone.” I’ll go further than what he said or what Lenin wrote, considering that he didn’t truly appreciate Kautsky’s framework for what a revolutionary period was and what it wasn’t.

The German worker-class movement would have been better off if the ultra-left KPD hadn’t been formed in the first place - at the expense of “an outstanding role model for left politics today” that, through its own state within a state, “paid attention to the daily demands and needs of workers without yielding its claim to revolutionary, anti-capitalist politics” (to quote Die Linke’s Dietmar Bartsch).

*‘Leftwing’ communism* did not contain the one key suggestion that was needed to counter that infantile disorder that was German Spartacism: dissolve the KPD itself into a majority tendency of the USPD to counter the rightwing, SPD ass-kissing renegades in that party’s leadership.

Conrad conveniently forgets that the USPD had a centre tendency as well as a right and a left. This tendency, which was hostile to both the SPD and the Comintern, consisted of ‘Realisten’/‘Realos’ (yes, I am using Die Linke language here, but I distinguish between *real* Realo-ism and the pseudo-Realo-ism of the Die Linke right wing): Theodor Liebknecht, Arthur Crispian, Wilhelm Dittman, Georg Ledebour, Tony Sender, etc.

Internationally, this means that the Comintern itself should have folded into the International Working Union of Socialist Parties, the closest organisation to a proper third worker-class international (between communist left sectarianism and reformist labour internationals).

**Jacob Richter**  
 email

## Launch

I agree with Robbie Rix that my point about moving the *Weekly Worker* to a digital-only format is flawed (‘Another good week’, October 14). I often trawl through the main political websites in the UK and the US looking for a guide as to what politics holds for the future. My suggestion in last week’s *Weekly Worker* was one of the many conclusions I have come to by visiting these websites.

I have been an active Marxist since 1978, but all I can see is a swing to the right. The growth of the Tea Party movement in the US is a prime example of this. Leadership is sadly lacking amongst the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB, which has become obsessed with supporting Diane Abbott. Political organisations are not static entities. They either grow or they shrink. The PCC should have a balanced plan for the growth of the CPGB membership and also the readership of the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB website.

It is therefore good to hear from Robbie Rix that the launch of a new redesigned and modernised CPGB website is imminent. I would also like to see the return of the ‘Party notes’ column, which always orientated itself to the growth in CPGB membership.

**John Smith**  
 Cambridgeshire

# ACTION

### Communist Forums

**Leeds:** Using Jack Conrad’s *Remaking Europe* as a study guide:  
**Saturday Oct 23, 3.30pm** sharp: Amanda Dawn Bradford, Chair of Leeds Amnesty International, investigates chapter 4: ‘Europe versus America’.  
**Saturday Oct 30, 3.30pm** sharp: Jack Conrad - ‘Class politics, the euro and money’.  
 Call 07852 740799 for more information.

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact [info@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.comuniststudents.org.uk](http://www.comuniststudents.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesdays 6.45pm to 9pm**, St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).  
**October 26:** Noam Chomsky ‘Language and its origins’. Speaker: Chris Knight.  
**November 2:** ‘Hunters’ moon’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

### No cuts

**Saturday October 23 events:**  
**London**, 11am: Assemble Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, NW1. March to Congress House for TUC event. Called by the RMT, FBU, PCS, NUT and National Shop Stewards Network.  
**London**, 12 noon: Rally, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include Billy Hayes (CWU), Mick Shaw (FBU), Christine Blower (NUT), Hugh Lanning (PCS), Bob Crow (RMT), Steve Hart (Unite). Overspill: Bedford Square. Organised by South East Region TUC: [sertucevents@tuc.org.uk](mailto:sertucevents@tuc.org.uk).  
**Cardiff**, 12 noon: Assemble Cardiff City Hall. All-Wales march. Supported by Cardiff Trades Union Council, Swansea Trades Council, PCS, RMT, CWU, UCU and FBU.  
**Edinburgh**, 11am: Assemble East Street Market. Organised by the STUC.

### Progressive students

**Saturday October 23, 10am-6pm:** Conference, Birbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London. Speakers include Salma Yaqoob, Ken Livingstone, Diane Abbott MP. Organised by Progressive Students: [info@progressivestudents.co.uk](mailto:info@progressivestudents.co.uk).

### Stop the EDL

**Sunday October 24, 10.30am:** Demonstration, 26 Kensington High Street (nearest tube: High Street Kensington). Organised by Unite Against Fascism: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

### Defend public transport

**Tuesday October 26, 7pm:** Meeting, Stoke Newington library gallery. Organised by Hackney Public Transport Users Group: [HackneyPTUG@btinternet.com](mailto:HackneyPTUG@btinternet.com).

### Westminster says no

**Thursday October 28, 5pm:** Open evening to build anti-cuts campaign in Westminster and neighbouring areas, Douglas Houghton House, 231 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1. Organised by London and South East PCS and City of London and Westminster Trades Council: [www.pcs.org.uk/en/news\\_and\\_events](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events).

### Stop the cuts

**Saturday October 30, 12.30pm:** Meeting, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speakers include: Jeremy Dear (NUJ), Steve Gillan (POA), Joe Marino (BFAWU), John McDonnell MP and Mick Shaw (FBU). Organised by Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

### Women at the cutting edge

**Saturday October 30, 11am-5pm:** Conference, Regent Street Cinema, University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1. Organised by Feminist Fightback: [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk).

### Stop the War

**Saturday October 30, 10am:** Annual conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). Speakers include Tony Benn, Seumas Milne (*Guardian* journalist). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

### Anti-cuts coalition

**Tuesday November 2, 8pm:** Meeting, St John’s church hall, the Broadway, Crawley. Sponsored by North Sussex and East Surrey TUC: [d.ri@btinternet.com](mailto:d.ri@btinternet.com).

### Defend public services

**Saturday November 6, 10am:** Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1 (nearest tube: Tottenham Court Road). Organised by Sertuc: 020 7467 1220.

### Time to go

**Saturday November 20, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London. Speakers include: Tony Benn, Eric Joyce MP, Seumas Milne (*Guardian* journalist). Called by Stop the War Coalition, CND and British Muslim Initiative: 020 7801 2768.

### Coalition of Resistance

**Saturday November 27, 10am to 5pm:** National conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. £5/£3. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: [www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk).

### 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.



## AGGREGATE

# Win Labour for the working class

Following a five-hour discussion on the CPGB's strategic orientation to the Labour Party, the October 16-17 membership aggregate endorsed the Provisional Central Committee's tactic of critical support for Diane Abbott in Labour's leadership election by a two to one majority. **Alex John** reports on the debate

**T**he PCC put two documents before the aggregate: 'Draft theses on the Labour Party' (see opposite) - not to be voted on, but to stimulate discussion over the coming period on the question of communists' strategic orientation to Labour; and a short motion on the recent LP leader election - "This aggregate endorses the decision of the PCC that the CPGB should call on Labour Party members and affiliated trade unionists to vote first preference for Diane Abbott and give no further preferences."

On the less important tactical question of critical support for Abbott, there seemed to be no movement. I cannot identify a single oppositionist who was won round to vote for the PCC motion - or vice versa. The opposition argued that the tactic was wrong: the line of demarcation between left and right should have been drawn to the left of Abbott. Although no-one argued directly against communists joining and working within Labour, this seemed to be the logic of some contributions.

However, the debate over the Abbott tactic seemed to reflect important differences which, hopefully, will be overcome during the forthcoming period of discussion on strategic orientation to Labour - the minority opposition tending to express a short-term approach as if the Labour Party were all but done for.

Speaking first, Jack Conrad accepted the criticism that the PCC had initially not made its support for Abbott explicit enough. He had thought Peter Manson's June 10 article, 'Use opportunity of Diane Abbott leadership bid', clear enough, but the explicit call to maximise her vote was missing. At our June 19 aggregate, the PCC had opened the discussion on strategy towards the Labour Party, and there appeared to be a consensus over supporting Abbott, although this question had not been specifically put before the membership.

### Uncontroversial

When nominations opened in the Labour leadership election on May 10 the CPGB's tactical position had been uncontroversial within the organisation. We were calling for the nomination of John McDonnell, chair of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and of the Labour Representation Committee. We also accepted as self-evidently appropriate his declaration that if his name did not reach the ballot paper, he would not give his support (and nor should we) to any of the other four candidates - Ed Balls, Andy Burnham, David Miliband and Ed Miliband. All had been ministers in the New Labour government.

However, when fellow SCG member Diane Abbott nominated herself, things became complicated. The PCC's initial reaction, said comrade Conrad, was "sabotage!" - speculating that Abbott might have been persuaded to spoil McDonnell's chances.

On May 27, under the headline 'Diane Abbott splits left', James Turley pointed out in this paper that not much "politically differentiates Abbott from her better-established rival ... Both are opposed to the government's programme of cuts, and would be opposed to a Labour government's programme of cuts; both opposed the Iraq war from the

outset, unlike Johnny-come-latelies like Ed Miliband ... In the absence of significant political disagreement, Abbott's campaign amounts to splitting the left-Labourite nominations and votes."

On June 9, McDonnell withdrew in favour of Abbott. Establishment rightwingers added their names - David Miliband, Harriet Harman, Jack Straw *et al* - and she became the right's preferred left candidate. Nevertheless, the PCC was unanimous in its tactical position: critical support for Diane Abbott - the bigger the Abbott vote, the more encouraging for the left - and no vote for the four ex-ministers. But the message failed to reach a number of members, until eventually they asked for clarification - and did not like the answer.

While Abbott was not our preferred candidate, comrade Conrad emphasised that we also have disagreements with comrade McDonnell. Our support for him also carried criticisms. The CPGB leftists, he said, were not taking the Labour Party seriously by arguing that Abbott is a warmonger and pro-cuts, when in fact she calls for cutting Trident and has signed up to Counterfire's Coalition of Resistance.

Comrade Conrad summarised the position of the most vocal oppositionist, Chris Strafford, as follows. After 13 years of New Labour government, the LP is hollowed out. Among the influx of tens of thousands of new members, at least 10,000 are ex-Liberal Democrat members or voters. With our small numbers, the best we could do with Labour is a smash and grab raid. Faced with unprecedented cuts, our main focus should be the movement against them.

In contrast the PCC, he said, asks: if there is an explosion of anger, what forms of organisation can ensure it is not dissipated? Yes, we must fight to unite the rival cuts movements, but crucially we need political organisation. The *Weekly Worker* 'Our history' column is saying to the left: What is the point of rival campaigns?

Learn the lessons of 1920. Organising the left in a Communist Party is an urgent necessity. The death of Labour has been announced many times - already in the 1920s and 30s. The International Socialists walked out of Wilson's Labour Party in the 1960s. So did the International Marxist Group, calling it a rotting corpse. But class parties do not die easily.

Just like the Tory Party, Labour is unlikely to disappear this side of a revolution. *Destroying* the Labour Party was the sectarian Comintern policy of 'third period' Stalinism. The Labour Party is, at least theoretically, winnable. If the trade unions can become "schools of communism", the bans and proscriptions can be lifted and the Labour Party can become a united front containing all factions of the working class, in which the communists can fight to become the majority. We should look to the example of the National Left Wing Movement, set up by the CPGB in 1926. However, the Labour Party is not "the only show in town" - we continue to take the extra-Labour left seriously. But there is no point in a mini-Labour Party mark two.

### Rejection

The first to oppose the PCC motion was comrade Turley - speaking "for myself". He pointed to the difficulties in attempting the PCC's strategic path. Labour "has an immune system, which does not distinguish between us and Militant". The Labour Party machine is "crushing the life out of the party". While the right needs to be 'responsible' and electable, the left is tied to that, and wants to use the state to win an ever more impoverished 'socialism', limited by 'keeping the Tories out'. Eg, Dennis Skinner backing David Miliband - 'the man the Tories fear most'. Difficulties indeed - but not inherently insurmountable, in my view, in the context of winning the working class for communism - also a big job.

Justifying his rejection of the PCC's motion, comrade Turley differentiated

between Abbott and McDonnell. She is a "media-personality type of politician, currying favour backstage", and is subject to influence from above. He, in contrast, travels the country visiting picket lines and attending meetings of activists - and is subject to influence from below. All true points, relevant for choosing between them, but not - in the light of James's comments on May 27 (above) - for rejecting the only left candidate.

Chris Strafford complained that the PCC did not make practical use of its backing for Abbott "to strengthen the struggles of the class", and did not organise interventions in Labour Party meetings. (This is largely true, except for those *Weekly Worker* supporters who are actively involved in their constituency parties, and did intervene in hustings. But, as Jack Conrad replied, our main form of activity at present is propaganda.) He claimed that the PCC "tried to prettify" her by failing to mention her support for British forces in Sierra Leone, and repeated his claim (refuted in detail by comrade Peter Manson) that she voted for the continuation of the war in Iraq. There was "no basis for voting for Abbott", said comrade Strafford.

Comrade Strafford opposed the strategic orientation to the Labour Party proposed in the PCC theses. Instead, he offered "a balanced approach": he was for communists joining the Labour Party, but the PCC theses "said nothing about what communists should do in the party". He opposed using the affiliation tactic, correctly proposed by Lenin in the 1920s, he said, to put Labour into government in order to destroy illusions in it. But 13 years of New Labour government has already destroyed illusions. The example of the National Left Wing Movement is irrelevant today, because neither our small organisation nor the disparate left groups can compare with the 1920s CPGB, nor is the situation comparable. The Russian Revolution was fresh in the memory, the CPGB was new and growing, and the Labour Party was the centre of working class activity. Gregory Zinoviev's united front tactic aimed to liquidate the Labour Party, not transform it.

Comrade Farzad declared that she did not oppose working in the Labour Party, as some comrades may have thought. But today there are major differences with the 1920s. Then the first socialist country was new and Lenin was recommending measures to weaken imperialism in any way possible. Today, the left inside Labour is a similar size to the left outside - but is more difficult to find. Some activists are in the radical left and in the Labour Party. Therefore we should work in both. The Labour shadow cabinet will support the cuts, so it is hard to envisage constituency Labour Parties fighting them. It will be difficult to go to people who are fundamentally social democrats and argue Marxist views.

Comrade Farzad opposed support for Abbott, saying this was a retreat from our earlier tactic of only backing anti-war candidates. War and immigration, she said, are "determining factors between revolution and reform, and 2003 equals 2010 in this respect" - an argument which in my view reduces flexible tactics to fixed dogma. The international left has difficulty understanding how the British left can be part of the imperialist Labour Party, she added. Nevertheless, she is

"not dismissing working in the Labour Party".

Mike Macnair argued that Labour in opposition tends to be driven to the left. In the coming months and years, political dynamics will produce an increased presence of the Labour left in proportion to the left groups outside Labour. Because of our small size, he said, at present we can do very little 'on the ground', and it is our literary intervention that is the most important part of our work. But that can be highly effective, so it is no use comrade Strafford arguing that we did nothing in practice to support Diane Abbott. However, we lack detailed information about the Labour Party and our main need at present is to learn in order to write about it more accurately. The theses, however, are "not about what our small group can do, but what a Communist Party *could* do". Our tactic was correct because "a reasonable vote for Abbott would have shown there is a left".

Similarly Nick Rogers argued that, in the Labour Party leadership election, the only way to mark the strength of the left was to maximise Abbott's vote. On the Greater London Council, Abbott had been a leftwinger when, under Livingstone's leadership, it was advantageous to be left. Later, in parliament, she could have moved to the right, like Paul Boateng, but did not. Her voting record shows that she has continually rebelled against the Labour whip, albeit not as consistently as Jeremy Corbyn and McDonnell. Abbott is "part of the 'awkward squad'", he said. "To deny she is part of the left is not to understand the nature of the Labour left".

Lee Rock, opposing the PCC motion, argued that the Labour left "does not exist at present", and that the Abbott campaign has done nothing to build it. Although Abbott's vote was stronger in the unions than in the constituencies, "most union votes for Abbott were not from Labour Party members". Emphasising the differences between her and McDonnell, comrade Rock said Abbott had supported tube privatisation and called for the replacement of imperialist troops in Afghanistan by "UN troops from Muslim countries". Where organising a class fightback was "bread and butter" for McDonnell, Abbott was "never seen on a picket line". Opposing the approach of the theses, comrade Rock argued that the Labour Party had already been tested and exposed by putting it into power.

Replying to the discussion, comrade Conrad insisted that Abbott was anti-war and anti-cuts, but our support for her had included sharp criticisms. The strategy presented in the theses was not designed to win short-term advantage: it was a long-term strategy aimed at driving out the pro-capitalist right and winning the Labour Party for socialism - but not predicting the outcome of that struggle. The vast majority of CPGBers in the early 1920s had been Labour Party members. The ineffective left groups had united in the Communist Party and become effective. The 1920s NLWM is the highest example of left unity in the Labour Party. Effectively it had the programme of the CPGB and fought under the slogan: 'Turn the Labour Party into a real Labour Party'.

The PCC motion to endorse its recommendation to support Diane Abbott in the leadership contest was carried by a majority of two to one ●





# Draft theses on the Labour Party



**Working class can do much better**

**1.** The Labour Party came onto the historical agenda only with the ending of Britain's industrial and commercial supremacy. Specifically the trade union bureaucracy turned towards building a Labour Party after the perceived failure of Lib-Labism. Under British conditions the formation of the Labour Party in 1900 marked a significant step forward. Albeit in a distorted and imperfect manner, it embodied the principle of working class political independence from the parties of the bourgeoisie.

2. Against strong objections from Henry Hyndman of the Socialist Democratic Federation, but supported by Karl Kautsky and Ilyich Lenin, the Labour Party was accepted into the Second, Socialist, International in 1908. That despite not being a proper socialist party and still tied to the Liberals in many ways.

3. The Labour leadership has from the beginning been dominated by reformism. There was never a golden age when Labour was truly Labour. Even when the aim of 'socialism' was formally adopted in 1918, it was conceived as a cynical ploy to divert sympathy for the Russian Revolution into safe channels. Needless to say, the Labour Party's version of socialism was antithetical to working class self-liberation. Rather it was a version of state capitalism. Capital would be bureaucratically nationalised and the mass of the population remain exploited wage-slaves.

4. Historically - in terms of membership, finances and electoral base - the Labour Party has largely relied on the working class. Politically, however, the Labour leadership acts in the spirit of the bourgeoisie and the interests of capital. Something ensured in no small measure by the intermediate social position occupied by the trade union bureaucracy, which has a material interest in the continuation of the system of capital. Lenin correctly characterised the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party". Despite Blairism, New Labour and the abandonment of the old clause four, the Labour Party must still be defined as a bourgeois workers' party.

5. Labour is a federal party. Affiliated trade unions, constituency parties, socialist societies, the Cooperative Party, Labour Students, a Westminster parliamentary party, a European parliamentary party, etc, making up its constituent parts. The original aim of the Labour Party was extraordinarily modest: the representation of working class opinion "by men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement".

6. Throughout its existence the Labour Party has been rent by left-right divisions. In part this reflects the contradiction between the working class base and the pro-capitalist leadership. In part there is a symbiotic relationship. Right reformism needs working class votes, but gains coherence through the serious business of trying to secure a parliamentary majority and forming a government. The trade union bureaucracy certainly wants a sympathetic government or one that is at least not overtly hostile. However, the capitalist state, legal system, media, money and corruption set the parameters of what is considered reliable, responsible and, in normal circumstances, electable.

7. By contrast left reformist figureheads are constantly drawn to the right, crucially because they too look towards forming a government, but this time, at least in verbal terms, in order to get hold of the existing capitalist state machine. Left reformists claim this is crucial if their version of bureaucratic socialism is to be realised. Meantime there is the business of gestures.

8. Left reformists tend to compromise with the right in the name of getting elected and are thereby doomed never to secure any lasting or meaningful control over the Labour Party machine, let alone the commanding heights of the parliamentary Labour Party. When left reformists are elected to the leadership they have little or no impact. Either they serve as a stopgap (George Lansbury), someone who maintains the loyalty of disillusioned or radicalised workers. That or they quickly become indistinguishable from the right wing (Ramsay MacDonald, Michael Foot, Neil Kinnock).

9. Overcoming Labourism is a central strategic task for communists in Britain. Toadying as loyal lieutenants to left Labourites, keeping one's 'true' politics under wraps, burying oneself in the bowels of the Labour Party and subordinating everything to staying in there till the glorious day when the class struggle transforms it into an instrument of socialism is naive at best. At worst it is downright treachery. On the other hand, to stand aloof from the Labour Party and its internal disputes and conflicts is as good as useless. A typical left sectarian pose.

10. In 1920 Lenin urged the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain not only to seek affiliation but work to put the Labour Party into government. This despite the Labour Party's dreadful record in

World War I and the presence of Labour ministers in Lloyd George's cabinet. Putting Labour into office would allow communists to expose the Labour leadership and win over the working class to communism. And, whether or not the Labour Party accepted the CPGB as an affiliate, there is, insisted Lenin, an enduring obligation to criticise all varieties of reformism.

11. The overthrow of capitalism and the transition to communism requires that the working class organises independently of the labour bureaucracy. However, a mass CPGB is impossible without the communist vanguard closely cooperating with and changing the outlook of the broadest sections of the working class, not least the membership and base of the Labour Party.

12. The Labour Party rejected CPGB affiliation in August 1920. Despite that the bulk of communists maintained individual membership. In 1922 two CPGB comrades were elected as Labour MPs - despite subsequent undemocratic rule changes barring communists from membership, standing as Labour candidates and even representing their trade union at Labour Party conference, the CPGB continued to exert a considerable influence. A swathe of Labour Party constituency organisations were openly pro-communist.

13. The CPGB was the main driving force behind the formation of the Left Wing Movement in 1926. Its *Sunday Worker*, largely financed by the CPGB and edited by CPGB member William Paul, attained a 100,000 circulation. Though there was an opportunist tendency to refrain from criticising leftwing Labour leaders and trade union officials, the NLM was a creative application of the united front tactic advocated by the Communist International. The NLM not only opposed the anti-communist witch-hunt in the Labour Party. It openly advocated many of the political positions of the CPGB, including the "overthrow of the capitalist class".

14. Even when it was dominated by Stalinism the CPGB continued to influence the Labour Party. The CPGB generated the theory and programme for much of the Labour left. It was responsible for many of its political actions. The 'official' CPGB also reinforced the reformism and nationalism of the Labour left. Eg, opposition to the European Union and demands for a British withdrawal.

15. Both the formation of the CPGB in 1920 and the NLM are highly relevant for today. Outside the Labour Party the revolutionary left is divided into

numerous confessional sects. That means duplication of effort, woeful amateurism, narrowness of vision and endless debilitating splits. The revolutionary left inside the Labour Party is hardly any better. It either fondly looks back to Stalinism, champions third world Bonapartes or hires itself out to left reformist figureheads. The unity of the revolutionary left on the basis of a Marxist programme and genuine democratic centralism would represent a tremendous advance. But the widest masses of the working class must still be won. Here prolonged communist work in the Labour Party and the trade unions is vital.

16. There is no contradiction between the fight for a mass Communist Party and the fight to transform the Labour Party, trade unions, cooperatives, etc.

17. Calls for a return of the old clause four are totally misplaced. Communists urge Labour Party members to organise on the basis of explicitly Marxist - as opposed to social democratic, Stalinite or third worldist - politics. Marxists in the Labour Party should openly advocate extreme democracy in society and throughout the labour movement, working class rule and international socialism.

18. The Labour Party can be made into a real party of labour. By that

we communists mean establishing the Labour Party as a united front for all pro-working class partisans and organisations. Undemocratic bans and proscriptions should be rescinded and all communist, revolutionary socialist and left groups encouraged to affiliate.

19. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries, but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.

20. Communists fight for all trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party, for all members of the trade unions to pay the political levy to the Labour Party and join the Labour Party as individual members.

21. The Labour Party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the PLP under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished. Chairs of the PLP, shadow ministers, etc, should be elected by and accountable to the national executive committee. Abolish the national policy forums. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestoes. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual Labour Party conference.

22. Make the annual conference into the supreme body of the Labour Party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes. Make Labour Party officials and shadow ministers report to the labour movement as servants.

23. Elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes Labour MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement.

24. Winning the Labour Party for democracy, the working class and Marxism necessarily involves a protracted struggle against the right wing. These careerists have no legitimate place in the labour movement. The pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist right must be driven out ●

## Fighting fund

### No time like now

**O**ur fighting fund had a big boost last week with the transfer of three large donations into our account: thank you, comrades AM (£100), MM (£70) and especially SK (a magnificent £230). To them were added more modest standing order donations from JD, RP, DW, SP and MKS totalling £45.

Meanwhile, I was sent two handy cheques from RG (whose £25 came without any covering note) and new reader RI, who sent us £20, having come across the *Weekly Worker* for the first time in a Liverpool bookshop: "Let's spread it around a bit more: eg, in more shops, in more destinations," he writes.

A nice sentiment, comrade, but the trouble is, there are very few bookshops willing to display leftwing publications. That's because there are very few leftwing bookshops, compared to a couple of decades ago. Mind you, if you come across a possible outlet where our

paper is not sold, please do let us know. We can always give it a try if the shop itself is prepared to take the *Weekly Worker*.

We received no online donations over the last seven days, despite the fact that our recent increase in readership to over 10,000 was maintained (we had 10,268 internet readers, to be precise). However, with over a week to go before the end of our October fund we have £1,141 already towards our £1,250 target. Good. We need to make up ground following some near misses earlier in the year.

If, like RI, you appreciate what you read in our pages but have not yet done as he has, there is never a better time than the present! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## AGGREGATE

# A programme to unite all Marxists

Peter Manson reports on the second day of the October 16-17 CPGB aggregate

The CPGB took a further step in the process of adopting a revised version of our *Draft programme* on the second day of last weekend's aggregate of members and supporters.

The meeting accepted without a vote the Provisional Central Committee's recommended procedure for agreeing the new draft. The PCC's proposed version has, of course, already been published,<sup>1</sup> and, in the absence of any alternative drafts being put forward, amendments to the PCC's version must be submitted by December 17, to be discussed at a programme conference to be held over the weekend of January 15-16 2011.

All this was outlined by CPGB national organiser Mark Fischer, who chaired the aggregate. He reminded comrades that, even after its adoption, the new draft would remain just that - a draft. The document is intended as the CPGB proposal to be put before a future founding congress of a Communist Party. We are absolutely clear that the current CPGB does not constitute such a party, which must be created by the coming together of the most advanced militants, most of whom are currently members of the various left groups.

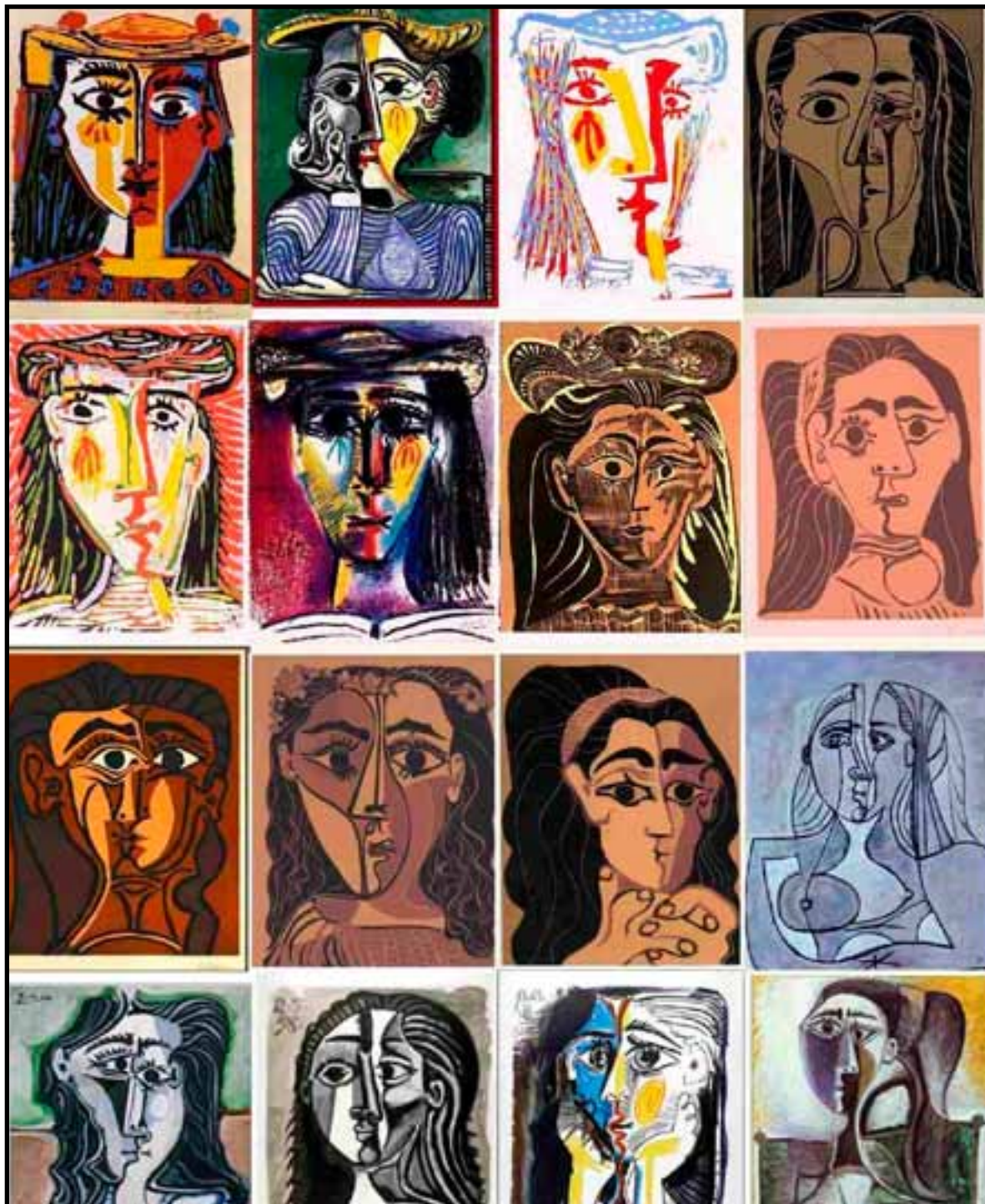
Comrade Fischer explained that the aggregate discussion was intended to further air differences so as to pave the way for the smooth running of the conference and there would obviously be no vote at the current meeting on the actual content of the *Draft programme*.

### Our epoch

Mike Macnair opened the first session, dealing with the first two sections of the PCC draft, 'Our epoch' and 'Capitalism in Britain'. He stated that a programme should embody a commitment to common action, but not to common theoretical interpretations. The *Draft programme* is "an outline, not a theoretical work". While the sections were certainly "improvable", he was against extending them to include a specific subsection on neoliberalism, as Nick Rogers had contended in a *Weekly Worker* article.<sup>2</sup> He thought this would mean adopting a tighter theoretical position than was appropriate and would imply that it should inform the likely action we should take over the coming period. But the next decade may not look like 1980-2008 at all.

Comrade Rogers himself spoke next and agreed that the programme was intended as a basis for action for a mass Communist Party, but he denied that his proposed subsection on neoliberalism was an attempt to imbue it with a particular take on political economy. However, neoliberalism has been a global trend, he said, and the consequent attacks on the working class will become fiercer. He also contended that the programme should be a "living document", which needed to reflect "where we are now", so we should not worry too much if it became necessary to amend sections that became out of date.

This was strongly contested by Jack Conrad, who insisted that the programme must not be "about now" - rather it should be intended as a guide to action for the foreseeable future. The programme must also be as brief as possible and should not attempt to "explain itself", he added. It is true that the average worker will not understand everything it contains, but it was the role of newspaper articles, pamphlets and books to fully elaborate on its contents. If anything, we should be aiming to pare the programme



The communist programme should not be about a single viewpoint

down further.

Comrade Chris Strafford added that a programme should most certainly not deal with specific and passing phenomena, while Tina Becker stressed it should be "shorter rather than longer" and Ben Lewis stated it was a document for revolution, which should stand the test of time.

Comrade Rogers came back to point out that our current draft is "already 10 times longer" than the Erfurt programme, so we should not "get too hung up about length". But he thought it was "nonsense" to say that a programme should stand the test of time for, say, 20 years. He also reiterated his call for a subsection on neoliberalism, which embodied the capitalist offensive against our class - a "trend within capitalism's decline itself".

In my contribution I wondered how real the difference between Nick Rogers and other comrades was on this point. After all, while he insisted that the programme could include transient details, the only example of an addition he was currently proposing related to a long-term trend.

I also took issue with James Turley, who had claimed that the statement, "The present epoch is characterised by the revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism" (section 1), is "not theoretically defensible" and resonant of the programme of the 'official communists'. There can be other outcomes than communism,

comrade Turley had said, pointing to capital's ability to destroy the environment and risk the future of humanity.

However, I, along with other comrades, believed that this point was more than covered in the section and in the programme as a whole and Stan Kelsey put the point succinctly: "An acorn produces an oak tree - unless you tread on it."

Replying to the debate, comrade Macnair emphasised the PCC view that the programme needed to deal with long-term questions and to avoid unnecessary divisions over points of theory amongst comrades. Taking into account comrade Rogers' views, he agreed that perhaps the decline of capitalism needs further elaboration in the first section.

### Minimum programme

Opening the discussion on section 3, 'Immediate demands', Ben Lewis stressed that the CPGB was unapologetic that its programme was divided into minimum and maximum sections. The minimum programme was not a reformist invention, but, despite the prejudices of the Trotskyist left, was rooted in the method of Karl Marx himself. The minimum programme - our immediate demands - was not about reforming capitalism, but about taking us from the present to the socialist revolution.

Comrade Lewis noted that in our view the draft has been greatly improved by promoting the question of democracy to the top of our list of demands. This had nothing to do with 'completing the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution' or any other such nonsense, but was about training the proletariat to become the ruling class. He contrasted our minimum-maximum programme with the 'transitional method' of dogmatic Trotskyists, which often does no more than defend what exists and elevates spontaneity above consciousness.

None of this was controversial for anyone who spoke and the subsequent discussion tended to focus on specific individual demands, with comrades raising criticisms and suggestions relating to particular phrases and bullet points.

The first concerned the dropping of the demand for the abolition of all religious schools, with Jim Gilbert calling for this to be retained in order to achieve the "secularisation of universal education" - the PCC draft merely calls for the withdrawal of "state funding, charitable status or tax breaks" (3.12). However, comrade Macnair said the banning of religious schools would be impractical, while Sarah Davies pointed to the particular difficulties and contradictions in Scotland. Phil Kent contended that the ending of the special status of religious schools would effectively mean universal state education sooner

rather than later.

Mohsen Sabbagh took issue with the fact that the draft called for compulsory education only up to the age of 16, whereas there are already moves to extend this to 18. But comrade Conrad explained that, from the age of 16, young people must be free to decide for themselves whether to stay at school or leave.

Another question that raised a good deal of discussion was the new subsection on the environment, with comrade Turley describing the call for towns and cities "full of trees, roof gardens, planted walls, allotments, wild parks and little farms" as "naive utopianism". This view was strongly opposed by several comrades, including Jack Conrad and Phil Kent, with Liaket Ali insisting that cities must be much better designed, incorporating open spaces.

Comrade Rogers briefly mentioned issues relating to nation and nationality and the minimum wage, but he also queried the assertion that the minimum programme, as well as taking us to the point of revolution, should be viewed as the immediate programme to be implemented by a workers' government. A workers' state might want to go further than putting into practice the demands we make on capital, he said.

### Transition

Comrade Conrad introduced the debate on sections 4 and 5, 'Character of the revolution' and 'Transition to communism'.

He began by emphasising that communists would only enter government on the basis of fulfilling our minimum programme - we would not compromise on this point. However, unlike the anarchists, we insist that the state could not immediately be abolished - it was necessary both to defend the gains of the revolution and to discipline those who refused to comply with the democratic decisions of the majority.

Comrade Conrad discussed his difference with Mike Macnair over the use of the word 'socialism'. While comrade Macnair preferred 'period of working class rule', comrade Conrad insisted that there was no need to discard certain terms because they had been misused or regarded as discredited. We needed to win them back for the working class.

He also took issue with those who thought that the period immediately following the revolution should not be termed 'socialism', but the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. For him 'socialism' included not only the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is synonymous with the democratic republic, but the whole of the lower phase of communism.

The lack of time truncated the discussion on these sections. This was a pity, since differences - which could only be afforded a brief airing at the aggregate - had been revealed in *Weekly Worker* articles primarily between comrades Conrad, Macnair and Rogers.

However, there is no doubt that the debate will continue and all comrades - including those from both sides of the recent Labour leadership dispute - are determined to produce an exemplary document around which all Marxists can unite •

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### Notes

1. [www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article\\_id=1002562](http://www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1002562).

2. 'The road to working class revolution', April 8.



## CHILE

# Comradeship and populist demagoguery

The media circus surrounding the rescued Chilean miners obscures the reality of naked capitalist exploitation, writes **Eddie Ford**

**W**e are now more than familiar with the story of the 33 miners trapped 700 metres underground for 69 days in the San José copper-gold mine in Copiapó, northern Chile. How could we not be? An occupying army of some 2,000 journalists (about 61 for each miner) from over 40 different countries descended upon the area, determined to milk the story - or Hollywood-style drama, as it had now become - for everything it was worth: a ratings dream come true. There were continuous live feeds from the mine shaft, with tweeted and retweeted updates from Chilean officials - not to mention the hundreds of Facebook groups which sprang up in digital communion and solidarity with the miners and their families.

Of course, in the end there was the best possible outcome - and not just for the media. All 33 were rescued and brought to the surface, emerging from the Fénix 2 rescue capsule on October 13 - and handed a \$450 pair of designer-made sunglasses from the Californian-based manufacturer, Oakley. After the last trapped miner - the shift foreman, Luis Alberto Urzúa - was winched to the surface, the rescue workers held up a sign saying, "Misión cumplida, Chile" (Mission accomplished, Chile) to the estimated one billion people or more watching events on live television around the world. The 54-year-old Urzúa has now become an international celebrity, credited with providing the inspiration and organisation necessary to survive in such a situation - stuck with meagre resources deep inside a mine shaft located in the hellish Atacama Desert, possibly the driest place on the planet.

Needless to say, the vulgar and distasteful media circus surrounding the rescue has obscured one very basic fact - that these miners, just like other miners throughout the world, are the victims of naked capitalist exploitation by the mining companies. Indeed, this entire mineral-rich region of Chile is home to numerous predatory companies determined to make a profit come what may. And due to "budget constraints" - what a surprise - there are only three inspectors for the Atacama region's 884 mines (out of a grand total of 18 inspectors for the entire country). Capitalist heaven.

Inevitably, the result of such unfettered exploitation is that thousands of contract miners in the north of the country in small and medium-scale mining are forced to labour under *inhuman* conditions that endanger their lives on a daily, almost hour-by-hour, basis - for pitiful salaries. From this perspective, the San José disaster was no 'accident', but rather the result of the chronic and institutionalised negligence of the mining companies, transnational corporations, subcontractors and the government - all partners in crime chasing ever bigger profits.

The San José mine itself is owned by the San Esteban Mining Company, which has an appalling safety record - eight workers have died at the mine in 12 years and between 2004 and 2010 the company received 42 fines for breaching various safety regulations. Tellingly, the mine was actually shut down in 2007 when relatives of a miner who had died in an accident sued the company executives. However, the mine was reopened again in 2008 despite still failing to comply with the regulations. Why? Simple: because of the rising price of minerals on the world markets - creating an opportunity for Chile's mining bosses



**Joy and manipulation**

to make big bucks quickly. Naturally, the Chilean government acceded to the wishes of the San Esteban Mining Company.

Then again, the Chilean government is big business in the shape of its billionaire president, Sebastián Piñera - often described as 'Chile's Berlusconi'. Specialising in populist demagoguery peppered with generous references to god - presumably his backer as a self-proclaimed "Christian humanist" - Piñera made his fortune, like so many other of his ilk, in the aftermath of general Pinochet's CIA-assisted 1973 coup against Salvador Allende and his reformist Popular Unity government. Once Allende was dead, Pinochet unleashed a bloody wave of terror against anyone identified as leftwing or progressive - thus enabling him to launch his free-market experiment upon Chile under the guidance of the 'Chicago boys', eager young zealots trained at the University of Chicago by Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger (or at its effective offshoot, the economics department at the Catholic University of Chile).<sup>1</sup>

Under such favourable conditions - applauded as an "economic miracle" by Washington and Margaret Thatcher - Sebastián Piñera effortlessly rose through the ranks, as did his brother and former business partner, José, who had served as labour minister under Pinochet and has been described as "the world's foremost advocate of privatising public pension systems".<sup>2</sup> Piñera owns Chilevisión, a terrestrial TV channel broadcasting nationwide, which is about to be acquired by Time Warner in order to avoid a 'conflict of interests'. Between February and March of this year he sold 27% of his stake in LAN Airlines and he owns 13% of the Colo-Colo - Chile's most popular football team. His enormous personal wealth is mainly attributable (leaving aside his highly privileged background) to his key role in introducing credit cards to Chile in the late 1970s and his subsequent investments. During the presidential election campaign of 2009-10 he held raffles in order to dish out household appliances and promised the poor a one-off cash bonus - but this did not amount to electoral bribery, of course.

### Hypocrisy

This is the very same man who with sickening but understandable hypocrisy presented himself as the friend of miners when the Copiapó disaster occurred - a

ruthless billionaire suddenly singing the praises of workers earning a paltry £1,000 per month under life-threatening conditions for his fellow entrepreneurs in the mining industry. Still, Piñera rose to the occasion alright - taking maximum political advantage of the developing situation. He was at Copiapó right from the beginning and, most importantly, at the very end - making sure he shared the media limelight with Urzúa when he finally emerged, adorned in a patriotic T-shirt like all the other miners. He gave hourly press conferences. He spoke in fluent English to the international press. Dressed in a photogenic red windbreaker, he strode around the grounds ostentatiously slapping engineers on the back, while his wife, Cecilia Morel - by contrast, dressed in virginal white - hugged the miners' wives. Perfect TV.

The rescued miners became symbols of national unity - according to the story spun by Piñera. So in an on-location speech he invoked Chile's recent bicentennial celebrations and said the miners were symbols of "unity, hope and faith". He promised a "new deal" for the miners - and for other workers in the transport, fishing and construction industries - before going on to say that "never again in our country will we allow working in conditions so inhumane and so unsafe as happened in the San José mine and many other places in our country".

Piñera, of course, was not the only one who wanted to get in on the act. The moral high ground is always inviting. Evo Morales, the Bolivian president and leader of the Movement for Socialism, was scheduled to be on site for the rescue, since one of the entombed miners was a Bolivian (Carlos Mamani) - unfortunately for him and his image, he arrived too late. Both Hugo Chávez and Barack Obama, united for once, praised the rescue effort and passed on their best hopes to the miners. Later, while in London, Piñera met David Cameron and gave a rock from the San José mine as a gift to the queen - that well known friend of the working class. As for pope Benedict XVI, during the crisis he has sent each man a rosary - taken personally to the mine by the archbishop of Santiago, cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz Ossa (despite the fact that not all the miners were Catholic, although Benedict might be heartened by the news that two of the miners converted to Catholicism whilst trapped underground).

In a display of rectitude, Piñera

dismissed top officials of Chile's mining regulatory agency and the department is now being 'reorganised' in light of the accident. Eighteen mines were shut down in the days following the San José accident and a further 300 may well be ordered to close. San José mine's fate is unclear: it will remain in limbo for an extended period, as judicial processes are followed. Unsurprisingly, a lawsuit has been filed against the company and a judge has frozen \$2 million in assets - with a lawyer for several of the miners' families describing this as a refutation of the company's claims of not having enough money to even pay the miners their pittance of a wage.

Perhaps some of 'the 33' will now make a lucrative career out of interviews, book deals, film rights, merchandise, etc - or maybe not. Yet now that the mine is closed, whether temporarily or permanently, the remaining 265 workers and 200 subcontractors who were employed at the San José mine face *destitution* - not something the headlines care to emphasise. Some were able to make some money driving the journalists around and so on, but now that the circus has left town even that source of income has dried up - with no help from the government forthcoming.

Under Chilean law, the miners are supposed to receive a month's wages in severance pay for every year they have worked for the company and they were promised that money with their final pay cheque on October 8. But this payment has been delayed until at least December, whilst the official appraiser compiles his report-back to creditors on whether the mine should be declared bankrupt or not. In the words of Javier Castillo, the secretary of the union representing the San José miners: "We need money to put bread on the table now. December is a long way off, and even if I were to find a new job straight away, you don't get paid until you've worked there for at least a fortnight. What are we supposed to live off in the meantime?"<sup>3</sup>

However, under-secretary of social security Augusto Iglesias has already declared that it is not the government's job to pick up the bill or provide financial assistance to the miners - "due process" has to run its course. So much for Piñera's "new deal". In the meantime, according to Iglesias, the government is helping "where it can" - for instance, organising a jobs fair, which many of the region's main employers attended. Though he did have to admit that the event was less than successful, given that "many of the miners were not willing to move to other towns" - which, of course, "makes it more difficult to find work for them", as he explained. Get on your bike, Chilean-style - across the Atacama Desert. According to one of the San José (former) miners who went to Iglesias's jobs fair, the bosses there were only interested in taking advantage of the unemployed miners, offering *even lower* wages and *even worse* working conditions: "They wanted us to move far away, but wouldn't pay for our accommodation or even the travel expenses," he pointed out.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the San José miners have been well and truly abandoned - effectively left to starve. So back to capitalist business as usual then, now that the cameras have gone.

### Cut-throat

Obviously, the disgusting and cruel plight of the miners in Chile is just symptomatic of the mining

industry worldwide - a ruthless cut-throat business like any other. The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Unions (ICEM) calculates that there are over 12,000 *reported* miners' deaths a year, with 34 a year in Chile. Of course, the actual death count is much higher - the worst culprit being 'socialist' China. In the words of the ICEM: "The lack of democratic trade unions in China, where mining deaths far exceed those of other countries, is a key cause of its staggering number of fatalities. In 2009, China recorded 2,600 official fatalities in coal mines. Actual figures are unknown. Some NGOs have estimated mining fatalities in China as high as 10,000 per year."<sup>5</sup>

But, as the ICEM catalogues, major accidents during the last 10 months in Turkey have killed 59 miners - all of whom were totally unprotected by a trade union - and in Colombia, 73 non-union miners died in a huge explosion, mainly due to the lack of methane detectors and the inability of miners to refuse unsafe work. Then in the United States 29 non-union miners died in West Virginia because they had no power to demand even the most rudimentary protection at Massey Energy, one of the country's most notorious anti-union employers. And so on.

However, the good news that came out of northern Chile was the comradeship, discipline, cooperation and solidarity of the miners - even *The Independent* noticed that the "key to the miners' survival was their ability to put the common good before self-interest".<sup>6</sup> In that sense, the self-activity and self-organisation of the San José miners - real historical individuals, not the cardboard cut-out 'heroes' that the asinine media wanted to construct - provided us with a glimpse of incipient communism - of the society of the future, where the market or egotistical individualism played no role. Maybe general Pinochet's legacy is not so secure after all.

For the here and now, with regards to the San José disaster - and for the mining industry in general - the right to join a trade union is the bottom line. Communists certainly fight for health and safety inspectors to be elected by the workers. Companies should be forced to publish annual statistics related to all industrial and workplace accidents and *all* the costs of accidents to workers should be the sole responsibility of the company - or the government, if the company does not cough up. Irresponsible employers should be held criminally responsible and jailed if necessary. The workers themselves must control every aspect of mining operations ●

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### Notes

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago\\_boys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_boys).
2. B Lindsey *Against the dead hand: the uncertain struggle for global capitalism* New York 2002, p224. José Piñera is now a distinguished senior fellow at the Cato Institute - a libertarian think tank based in Washington; president of the International Center for Pension Reform, based in Santiago; senior fellow at the Italian think tank, Istituto Bruno Leoni, and member of the advisory board of the Vienna-based Educational Initiative for Central and Eastern Europe.
3. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11567213](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11567213).
4. *Ibid*.
5. [www.icem.org/en/5-Mining-DGOJP/4048-As-World-Watches-and-Waits-for-Rescue-of-Trapped-Chilean-Miners-What-Can-Prevent-Future-Disasters](http://www.icem.org/en/5-Mining-DGOJP/4048-As-World-Watches-and-Waits-for-Rescue-of-Trapped-Chilean-Miners-What-Can-Prevent-Future-Disasters).
6. *The Independent* October 14.



## LENIN

# Scotching the myths

Historian Lars T Lih dissects one of Lenin's most famous but most misunderstood pamphlets, *What is to be done?*

**W**hat is to be done? was written for the first time in Russian between the autumn of 1901 and spring of 1902. It was a success amongst the rather limited



number of people he was addressing: namely the people in the social democratic movement in Russia and interested parties. Of course, this audience was not sufficient to make it a real bestseller, but it did have an impact. When we look at the pamphlet today we want to have a sense of when, why and for whom he wrote it.

So, first, I am going to look at the basic task that Lenin and his comrades had set themselves. The reason for this is that he shared this task with other leaders in the movement, and even with some of the people he is arguing against. But, because he shares it, it is not actually set out in the book itself. It becomes background; because he assumes agreement on the basic task, he does not talk about it. We have to be aware of this.

Then I will look at the specific policy suggestions in the book, all aimed at the situation facing the Russian social democrats at that particular time and place. So, whatever meaning we want to draw from the text, we have to do so *through* the specific suggestions of the pamphlet at that time. Then I will look at the polemics that are in the first part of the book, probably the best known part and probably the most controversial. Then I will step back and take a look at some of the empirical evidence Lenin draws on in order to support his point of view and make it seem plausible.

Unfortunately, although the polemical part of the book is the best known, in my opinion it is not the most useful. The policy suggestions are also bound in time: the basic tasks are a little more long-standing in Lenin's time, but the empirical justifications, which one might assume are the most ephemeral element, are in my opinion the ones that reveal Lenin and his thinking the most. Let us see why this is the case.

What was the basic task? In *To the rural poor*, a 1903 pamphlet he wrote to explain the outlook of Russian social democracy to a non-social democratic audience, Lenin writes a chapter entitled 'What do the social democrats want?' The first line of this chapter clearly sets out the answer: *political freedom*.<sup>1</sup> This was the heart of the matter, and what Russian social democracy was driving towards. This was not the ultimate task, but it was the immediate one. At that time and place for the Bolsheviks, this was the organising concept, so that when you saw banners at demonstrations in 1903 and 1904 they would boldly proclaim

'Long live political freedom!' Concretely this meant: down with the autocracy!

Political freedom is essentially what allows people to organise, to have a party with open campaigns to get the message out. It means freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of organisation, freedom to strike and so forth. In the early 20th century, some revolutionaries were very dismissive of political freedom, likening it to some sort of bourgeois fraud. Why, some said, would you want to overthrow the tsar when all this was likely to produce was the coming to power of some bourgeois liberals, whose papers could not even be read by the majority of the population anyway?

Marxism really was an exception to this, and challenged other socialisms and revolutionary views precisely on this basis. It argued that socialism required political freedom as its essential precondition. The reason for this, I think, is that if the working class has a historical mission to take power and introduce socialism then it has to understand this and be ready to take it on. At the very least, this understanding must be at a national level, which precludes mere rabble-rousing in local villages and towns and necessitates a national newspaper and other means of communication. In turn, these require political freedom. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Kautsky all refer to these freedoms as the "light and air" of the proletarian struggle.

In this sense the example of German social democracy, the SPD, is extremely informative. It was a very innovative party - the first to rely on day-to-day mass agitation and campaigns with people who did this professionally. In my book<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'campaignism' to sum up this approach: the idea of the permanent campaign to bring the message to the workers, to convince them and persuade them at all levels and in a number of ways. For example, SPD socialist choirs, cycling and walking clubs were very popular. So fighting for the freedoms to enable Russian social democrats to do such things was what Marxists at this time were arguing for - although others equated this to flimsy reforms.

The first generation of Russian revolutionaries in the 1860s and 1870s were very hostile to political freedom. For them what was necessary was overthrowing the tsar in order to bring about socialism immediately. Anything else was a sell-out and would simply bring the capitalists in. So it took a generation or so of working through the problems and trying out different ideas before they came to the conclusion that without political freedom you were not going to get the masses on your side and that starting a riot in this or that village was simply not enough. One of the martyr figures in this sense was Lenin's brother, Alexander, who tried to assassinate the tsar in 1887 and was killed. What was he trying to accomplish? He was a socialist who sacrificed his life for political freedom. He was of the opinion that they could only achieve a mass movement through overthrowing the tsar, and that before this point, by definition, there could not be a mass movement, so that the only way to create the conditions was through terrorism or other individual action of that kind.

Lenin later wrote that Russia

"suffered its way through to Marxism" - I think he had his brother in mind. What he means is that a whole generation had to work out the necessity of political freedom. Why was Lenin so taken when reading Kautsky's commentary on the *Erfurt programme* in the 1890s? Because he saw the SPD as a possible answer to his particular problem as a young revolutionary in Russia. Kautsky, using the "light and air" metaphor, says that anybody who downplays the significance of political freedom is doing the proletariat a grave disservice and that political freedom has to be at the top of the agenda. Representing a common position in the west, Kautsky also adds that the bourgeoisie cannot be counted upon to win political freedom - whether they were initially interested in it or not, they are losing that interest rapidly - and in countries where there is no political freedom it is not going to be the bourgeoisie that fights for it.

The SPD strategy, then, was to have the message propagated to the masses, but how was this possible under absolutism? The whole generation of revolutionaries in the 1890s tried to work out precisely how to apply this strategy to conditions of Russian absolutism. Given those conditions, this is obviously a paradox. But they did manage to figure out ways of doing it, such as local committees with threads that would connect them to the factory workers, who they would work alongside, and so forth.

## National party

But now let us fast-forward to 1900. There are local social democratic committees in many of the cities in Russia, and there is the notion that a national party is a good idea. There is also the increased militancy of Russian workers. Those working on the newspaper *Iskra* had the idea that their newspaper could act as a 'spark' for the combustible material:



that is, the militant working class movements. *Iskra's* mission was to take the party to the next step of getting national institutions and a national organisation.

*Iskra* had begun in late 1900, and had only been in existence for around a year when Lenin said, 'I'm going to write a small book in which I set forth our ideas on how to get from A to B': that is, from local committees to a national organisation that could help to bring about the overthrow of the tsar. Lenin also added that the discussion around economism was over and that he now intended to write a book without polemics. When you look at *What is to be done?* you obviously see

a lot of polemical stuff. But this has to do with factional developments that happened in the summer and autumn of 1901. It is important to look at the dates of the book in order to grasp that it was written in a real time and a real place and, the more concretely we can see the events and ideas Lenin is responding to, the better.

So, the book ended up being very polemical, and the polemics ended up being pushed to the front of the book, with the policy suggestions at the back. Thus many people tend to only remember the polemical aspects. What I am going to do is go through the book backwards, starting with chapter 5 and working back to the polemical parts later. Indeed, I think this is a good way to actually read the text in the first place.

Chapter 5 is about Lenin's idea of using a newspaper to move from local committees to a national organisation. But under a very repressive autocracy how is this possible? The dilemma is that in order to get the committees to come together you need a unity of outlook, but in order to have unity you need a national organisation. Lenin's way out of this was to say that we are a self-appointed group, not official in any way, but we are going to send a newspaper out to everybody, which is going to propagate some programmatic message that can unify the committees. One by one, we will persuade them to adopt our programme. Practically we are also going to unify them because they are going to be our collaborators on the paper - they are going to send us material for the paper, are going to help distribute and build it, and thus for the first time we social democrats are going to work together on a *national* project with a national voice and a national presence. In a year or so we will be in a position to call a party congress, and the party congress will already be ideologically unified, with *Iskra* then becoming the official party publication and the problem will be solved.

Of course, this emphasis on newspapers also comes from the SPD, which had hundreds of publications to get the message out. Throughout the book Lenin is looking to the experience of the SPD as a model. Lenin argues that, in contrast to the Germans, Russian social democracy almost has nothing in terms of getting the message out beyond leaflets and publications, so we have to use to the maximum what we have in order to get to the next step - the newspaper. I get the distinct impression that the strategic approach of the CPGB is rather like that of *Iskra*: that is, using a newspaper to get the message out and achieve unity based on that message.

Lenin is not talking about making suggestions and recommendations on party organisation *after* it has been constituted. He had his opinions on this, but he did not take up what sort of powers the central committee should have, he was not talking about discipline or local autonomy: he is merely talking about how to *get* a central committee together when one still does not exist.

The newspaper is also there to make people aware of each other. Again this goes back to the idea of combustible material. It is based on the assumption that there are hundreds of people out there who hate the tsar - not merely the workers for their particular reasons, but also the

nationalities, teachers, the *zemstvo* (local self-government institutions of the gentry), bureaucrats, capitalists and even landowners: all of them are just sick and tired of this incompetent bunch of tsarist thugs, but nobody dares to do anything because they fear they would be alone. After all, there is no mass force out there - it is all very well for everybody to complain, but unless there is something that they can join then this means next to nothing.

So the paper is going to have a national presence, make everybody aware of all the complaints of the Finns and other nationalities, the teachers who sign petitions and get arrested for it, and so on. Everybody will become aware of everybody else's dissatisfaction, and the paper will point out all the while that the workers are increasingly becoming a mass force who can put the task of overthrowing the tsar on the agenda and make it a real possibility.

## Professionalism

Chapter 4 is devoted to 'professionalism'. This is where the term 'professional revolutionary' crops up, which I advocate translating as 'revolutionary by trade'. I am not wedded to this term, and since 'professional revolutionary' is more common, I will stick to that.

I point out in my book that there are some connotations of 'professionalism' that have a whiff of elitism about them - specialists like doctors, lawyers and architects to whom we defer because they know best. This is not what was meant: it was something more akin to a worker knowing his own trade very well, and hence I translated the term differently. In any event, there is a connotation of professionalism which Lenin was seeking to bring out, as when we say, 'Let's be professional about this, comrades'.

Lenin is not using 'professionalism' to argue for less democracy and more elitism, but to combat what he saw as sloppy amateurism in the Russian movement. The special form of this which was most relevant to him at the time was local isolation. This is what drove him up the wall: people in Kiev not knowing what is going on in Moscow and not caring about it, the people in Krakow not knowing what is going on in Petersburg, etc. So Lenin is looking to tackle this inefficiency, which is why he used the word *kustar*, which means 'handicraftsman' or 'artisan'. What Lenin desires is a modern political factory with a division of labour with a nationwide market, whereas *kustar* implies somebody who, although individually quite skilled, is only making things for a local market in a rather inefficient manner. Lenin argues that we have to move beyond what I rather clumsily translate as 'artisanal limitations' to get a national organisation.

Where did he get this idea of an underground organisation? The argument I am going to make is taken from other Russian revolutionary writers of the time, because, although he alludes to it, I do not think it is his own idea. What Lenin is doing is bringing out the logic of the organisational schema that had been worked out in practice in the past decade or so. He is attempting to apply the SPD logic to Russian conditions, working this out empirically and presenting it to



be read in a book in a way that can inspire the movement and get them to take these tasks seriously with a professional division of labour.

Some of Lenin's critics - including the Mensheviks later on - were upset at what they saw as excessive specialisation: somebody doing the newsprint, somebody doing the distribution and so forth. They likened this to a soulless bureaucracy. But this criticism at least was a criticism of something Lenin was actually saying, which is not true of all of the criticisms he encountered.<sup>3</sup>

One of the things I like about what I have done in my book is to bring out the meaning of the word



*konspiratsiia*, which was used by those revolutionaries in the underground. That word is never translated as 'conspiracy' - if you read the earlier versions you will find that the term is usually translated as 'secrecy'. But what *konspiratsiia* means in the context of the Russian underground is the set of rules by which you do *not* get yourself arrested by the police, what I call the 'fine art of not getting arrested'. What we have here is a '*konspiratsiia* underground': that is, a 'conspiracy' which is not based on the usual logic associated with the word, but precisely the *opposite*: having an underground organisation that has *mass* roots through organising strikes, distributing literature and so on. *Konspiratsiia* is thus the opposite of conspiracy. A conspiracy means keeping information and knowledge within the small group, so that it can go and knock off somebody or lead a palace coup. *Konspiratsiia* is the opposite - it is about getting knowledge and ideas out to as many people as possible.

There is a little passage in *What is to be done?* where one of Lenin's critics says that there is no such thing as a secret strike. Lenin disagrees, arguing that, although a strike might not be secret to anybody in the town where it happens, people across the country might not know about it, so our task is to get that word out and let everybody know about it. But in order to do that we need people organising professionally in underground conditions in order to get the report, write it up, send it off to Geneva, where the paper is printed, and then smuggle it back into Russia again for distributing. This demands the logic of *konspiratsiia* - empirically worked-out rules for not getting arrested.

Let me emphasise something here: everybody in the underground accepted these basic ideas; these are not the controversial parts. The term 'professional revolutionary' was adopted by everybody in the Russian underground including the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries and even the liberal Constitutional Democrats in so far as they had an underground organisation. I often say that the least important thing about the term 'professional revolutionary' is that it was coined by Lenin. It is only used

in one chapter of *What is to be done?* and Lenin certainly does not claim to have invented it or come up with a new idea - it was in the air. He is simply arguing that the underground should take this professionalism seriously.

Just one more thing on this. There is no connection between the intelligentsia and the professional revolutionary, and if there is then this is one connection that is truly limited in time and space. Even as Lenin was writing, there was already a thorough 'workerisation' of this apparatus going on and it continued for the rest of the underground period.

To sum up on organisation, which links to strategy. What I think Lenin is trying to do here is to connect two things that seem to be opposites: mass organisation and underground. In commentary on this, Lenin is often accused of choosing the underground side over a mass organisation, but what is actually happening is that Lenin is trying to carry out the logic of the mass organisation as much as possible in underground conditions in order to overthrow the tsar. Lenin's basic position can thus be summed up as the following: let us have an organisation as much like the German SPD as possible so that we can overthrow the tsar. And, when we do, then we have the conditions for an organisation even better than the SPD.

## Agitation

Now we go to chapter 3, on agitation. The emphasis is on *political* agitation. Again, this is for a specific time and place, with Lenin arguing that now the time has come for a heavy emphasis on political agitation. One reason for this is that *Iskra* is now a national organisation and thus can focus on national political questions in a way that it could not do before.

To get a flavour of this discussion we should look at the passage where he talks about the move from economic agitation to political agitation. There were a number of organisations like *Rabochaya Mysl* (Workers' Thought) which had carried out economic agitation, and a number of organisations producing (sometimes quite long) leaflets, a very important form of agitation. So some local agitator from a committee - often known as an *intelligent* (not an intellectual, but somebody educated and thus able to read and write) would go to the workers and ask what was going on in the factory to then report on it, list their strike demands and then draw up a leaflet for agitation around these issues. If there was any room at the end then they would also write, 'By the way, you should overthrow the tsar'!

Lenin argues that when the underground carried out economic agitation previously, the workers had their story to tell, they went out and the local committees were overwhelmed. But Lenin also adds that people should not conclude from this that the workers are only interested in the economic: they care about political issues and in terms of their day-to-day lives they often come across political oppression more than economic oppression. He says:

"Why does the Russian worker show, in so limited a fashion, his revolutionary activeness in connection with the police bestial treatment of the people, the persecution of sectarians [that is, religious groups], the corporal punishment of peasants, the outrages of the censor, the torment of the soldiers, the persecution of the most harmless cultural undertakings and so forth?"<sup>4</sup> Lenin asks: is this because the workers only believe in economic questions? No, he replies, it is because the underground movement is not doing its job in getting the news of these outrages to the mass of the

people.

"We must blame ourselves for falling behind the movement of the masses, for we have not been able to organise indictments of these despicable things in a broad, clear and timely fashion." What he literally says is that we have to *throw* it out to the masses, and, if we do, they will respond.

If they can do it, Lenin argues, "the very simplest worker will understand, will feel that the dark force that mocks and oppresses the student, the peasant and the writer is the same that oppresses and weighs on him at every step of his life. When he does feel this, he will himself be filled with an overwhelming desire to respond. And he will know how to do it."

This is the sort of eloquent passage, by the way, which is missing if we concentrate too much on the polemics in the first two chapters. This is the essence of Lenin. Passages like this are truly exciting and deserve to be well known.

That is one side of Lenin - political agitation for and to the worker, who is ready, willing and raring to go with political agitation. We are moving into the 'end game' in terms of overthrowing the tsar, and this is what is going to happen.

Along with political agitation is the idea of going "to all classes". Lenin says, we should also, to the extent possible, send the message "to all classes". I am a little vague as to what Lenin exactly had in mind here, because when he wrote the book the Russian social democrats were in a particular situation - they were the only organised underground party around at that time. The populist Socialist Revolutionaries had not got themselves together nor had the Liberals. But these parties were in formation and looking to represent specific interests in society.

The call has two sides to it. Firstly, the workers should have a view of the entire social situation and not simply restrict themselves to working class problems. Secondly, many of the other classes have a political interest in overthrowing the tsar and they should be made aware of the idea



that revolutionary change and the overthrow of the tsar is possible, and when they realise this, they will help us, our party, because we are the main force working against the tsar. This is the part of Lenin's argument that became out of date pretty quickly.

A lot of what he is saying here is that the social democrats can get help from such people through whistle-blowing, the publication of scandalous documents, even down to a respectable doctor or lawyer offering a professional revolutionary a room for the night. This is an anticipation of the so-called hegemony strategy. However, I think that *What is to be done?* does not get to the centre of Lenin's strategy as a whole because this involves the peasant question and leading the peasantry, issues which became vital only during and after 1905.

## Polemics

The polemics are in the first two chapters. Why are they there? Well, another émigré group, *Rabochee Delo* (Workers' Cause), which had been previously hostile to the *Iskra* group, decided to get together with it. They had a unity congress in September 1901, but this fell apart and both sides left screaming at each other. Then the *Rabochee Delo* side opened up a big polemic against the *Iskra* group, with Georgi Plekhanov and Julius Martov countering for *Iskra*. Lenin also weighed in, but the *pièce de résistance* of this polemical exchange was supposed to be Lenin's book. So in his letters written before *What is to be done?* was published he often talks about finishing his book against *Rabochee Delo*. Perhaps rather unfortunately, this becomes one of the main missions of this book, whereas initially it was intended not to be polemical, as I outlined above.

He wrote it at top speed, almost entirely referring to articles published in the autumn of 1901 - that is, pieces that were hot off the press. This is also true of the famous Kautsky quote<sup>5</sup> Lenin uses in the polemic, which he throws in from Kautsky's journal *Die Neue Zeit* before picking up his own argument once more and carrying on.

My conclusion is that *What is to be done?* is not a good place to get Lenin's theoretical or programmatic outlook. Partly because it has been used in this way, it has led to such distortions by figures both on the far left and in the academy. One reason why it is not a good source for Lenin's overall view is that it is a passing polemic. Of course, you can extract quite a bit from a polemic in terms of a general picture, but this was one polemic with one set of people. He is often using *their* own terms in a rather sarcastic manner, which is not the same thing as setting up an argument with his own ideas and terms. He and his supporters all more or less admitted that he did not formulate his ideas very well.

I do not mean by this that he thought that he 'went too far' in this polemic. He said something different: namely that he had not expressed himself very well. He claimed that what he wanted to say was perfectly uncontroversial and orthodox, but if he had not expressed himself clearly, well, then he apologised. Obviously he does not stress this too much, but you can find him and others making the same point. Lenin's defenders tend to say that everybody liked this book, but that when the Mensheviks turned against Lenin they examined it with a microscope in the hope of finding defective formulations. The implication is that they actually did find vulnerable formulations, and that they deliberately used verbal problems to make Lenin look silly.

*What is to be done?* is also not programmatic in that it is not aimed at something global that sets out one's whole scenario, as opposed to discussing one issue which is pertinent at one time. Moreover, many of the views in the book were held in common between him and his readers, so he did not go into them, and finally the book did not say anything on peasant policy, a view which was vital to him at the time.

So for all these reasons, I would actually suggest reading his short 1903 book *To the rural poor* to get a better view of his general outlook.

I am somewhat dismissing the polemical side of things, so let me emphasise: he did not say that workers could not obtain proper class-consciousness, that only intellectuals make good revolutionaries, that only professional revolutionaries should be party members, that the party should be a tightly-knit conspiratorial elite and - in this book anyway - he did not advocate a high level of

centralisation or discipline. What he did say was that the party has a job - to get the message out and to organise. And if we do a good job of it then the workers will respond and be interested, and so will the people more generally. Bring it, and they will come!

Finally, what sort of justifications did he give in asserting that this would be possible? After all, it is a strangely



ambitious project: on the one hand, there is the mighty tsar, and on the other there are a bunch of émigré revolutionaries sitting around in cafes who think they can overthrow the tsar. How is this possible? You can only think it possible if you make a whole series of optimistic assumptions: that the workers are ready to go, that there are dedicated revolutionaries around who are willing to get arrested and then be replaced by others, that the paper will arrive and be understood by the workers (*Iskra* had very small print with a dense message - there was no dumbing down) and so on. There are a whole series of optimistic assumptions here needed to make Lenin's outlook plausible. He was highly confident that, if everything was in place organisationally, these assumptions could come to fruition. There are many echoes of these themes throughout Lenin's writings.<sup>6</sup>

He consistently uses words like 'miracle'. My favourite passage in the book is the following one: "You boast that you are practical, but you fail to see what every Russian practical worker knows: namely, the miracles that the energy, not only of a circle, but even of an individual person is able to perform in the revolutionary cause."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the word 'miracle' is a common one in Lenin, and what we find again and again in Lenin throughout his whole writing - the optimistic assumptions about revolutionary consciousness and what can be achieved ●

**This is an edited version of the opening given by Lars T Lih at the Communist University in August 2010**

## Notes

1. <http://marxistsfr.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/rp/2.htm#v06zz99h-367>.
2. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done' in context* Brill 2006.
3. In my book, I argue that in 1904 Rosa Luxemburg in particular ('Organisational questions of Russian social democracy') presents a caricatured form of Lenin's arguments.
4. Translation from LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done' in context* Brill 2006, p738.
5. "Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously" (<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm>).
6. See my essay, 'We must dream (echoes of *What is to be done?*)' for more information. Available at: <http://go2.wordpress.com/?id=725X1342&site=cpbg.wordpress.com&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcpbg.files.wordpress.com%2F2010%2F07%2Fwe-must-dream-echoes-of-witbd.doc&sref=http%3A%2F%2Fcpbg.wordpress.com%2F2010%2F07%2F23%2Freading-list-for-cu%2F>.
7. <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iv.htm>.



## OUR HISTORY

# Two open letters

The sectarian opponents of the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920 state their case

A flurry of opposition was sparked by the announcement of the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group<sup>1</sup> that they were to form a single Communist Party at a unity convention on July 31 1920.

The disaggregating sectarian rump of the Socialist Labour Party and the increasingly befuddled Workers' Socialist Federation of the charismatic and erratic Sylvia Pankhurst began to define them-

selves by pig-headed opposition to the tide of history.

Both sects had previously been part of the unity negotiations, but now - alienated from the whole process - the logic of events posed a stark choice. Either break from sectarianism or take a harder and harder political stance against unity, as it deepened and moves to achieve it gathered pace.

The SLP, for instance, had set its face against communist unity because the BSP had

refused to agree that the future CPGB must never - as a matter of iron principle - seek affiliation to the Labour Party. The WSF concurred, but had an additional shibboleth - the granite commitment to boycott the bourgeois parliament in every conceivable circumstance.

The two open letters below express the views of these anti-unity organisations. In a way, they complement each other, though they are rather different.

First, we have the pompous prose of the 'Open letter to SLP members' from the group's leader, James Clunie. (Contrast Clunie's windy rhetoric with the calm, no-nonsense and businesslike statements of the BSP executive committee, in particular its rejoinder to the Amsterdam sub-bureau of the Communist International's leftist intervention.<sup>2</sup>)

Second, there was the rather more politically coherent

'Open letter to the delegates of the Unity Convention' from the mischievously misnamed Communist Party (British Section of the Third International). This was, in fact, neither a Communist Party nor the British section of the Third International. The title was actually the *nom de guerre* that the WSF had claimed for itself after June 19 1920 in a dishonest - and slightly sad - attempt to upstage the soon-to-be-formed CPGB.

## To the SLP

*The Socialist No22, Vol 14, June 3 1920*

### Comrades

False impressions bring disastrous results when they are given free play, because herein the building up of the past is surrendered with all its strength and possibilities, thereby courting disaster, to the seeming consolidation forms that are evolving into actual existence. Such a position confronts you, comrades, at this present moment.

I refer in particular to the question of unity. And might I say frankly at this point that the question of unity does not embrace what my or your feelings are in respect of comrades Clarke, Paul, etc.<sup>3</sup> Personally, they may be admirable fellows, but policy and comradeship are not a dual character ...

The vindication of the continued existence of the SLP, just as it has been up to now, will be its correct analysis and interpretation of the

economic, social and political forces which are bound to impress upon us the practicability of suiting our policy to harmonise with our outlook. At the moment the elements *do not* exist for unity. Hence only by *compromise* can we have a united (?) Communist Party. Such a party would continue to contain within itself the very conflicting factions that today, before its formation, compels the need for compromise in order to bring it into being. A party such as the proposed new Communist Party is not a practical proposition, because the vital question to the SLP is the cardinal cause of disagreement. No number of conferences or national conventions can settle that question. Unity is not a question of window-dressing, talk and advertisement. It is principle as expressed in policy. Above all remember, comrades, that *cheap* phrases or popular names or subsidised delegations do not even

possess the rudiments of principle and unity. A real strong man is he who can stand alone in the belief that his conduct is correct.

It is not a matter of personality, but belief. And do we not find in such a case that belief shows the character of the man when he adheres true to his reading of a situation because it is in the interests of revolution ... I say, down with all the self-imposed leaders! Give us men - good, sound, stanch and true, solid in organisation, united in purpose, clear in objective, then we may have unity - not before. Have we not learned that the really great Lenin, who, to his immortal credit, always thinks in terms of revolution, has on many occasions occupied the glorious position of Ibsen's great man by standing alone in his reading of situations, in determining tactics and policy.<sup>4</sup> *With him the ideal is the ultimate, the practical and the present problem.* Here we find expressed real

strength, unity, solid revolutionary purpose.

Comrades of the SLP, yours is a problem of a similar character to those which have been solved many times by the ingenious and great president of the Russian republic. If we are content to follow men in preference to principles then we are weak and lack revolutionary character. If we are able to take action consistent with our beliefs, then we will insist on the *will of the party* without in any way violating the first essentials of comradeship. The political situation is of such a character in this country that a strong body like the SLP is absolutely essential to safeguard the revolutionary development of the working class movement.

Real revolutionary unity is the combination of the working class. Mass action is meaningless without that form of strength and consciousness. The only logical form

of unity - namely, the combination of parties or individuals having a common line of action - seems to me inevitable, just as the proposed united (?) Communist Party cannot mean anything else but nominal fusion. If the question of Labour Party affiliation is the vital question, then the very existence of the SLP is the proper answer. The SLP branch which is not decided on this matter does not appreciate where it stands. And I am sure that the loyal SLP does appreciably know its party purpose and function. Know thyself. All wisdom centres there.<sup>5</sup> ...

One more attempt at disintegration, no doubt, will soon be made, but our former wisdom will again show itself, and the SLP will continue to live even in greater strength until the real unity of the revolutionary period shows itself.

**James Clunie**

## To the delegates of the Unity Convention

*The Workers' Dreadnought July 31 1920*

### Dear comrade

Some of you may naturally ask why we are not represented at the Unity Conference. For this reason. It is useless to say that the differences between ourselves and those who have summoned the Unity Conference are purely tactical, and that, therefore, we ought to sink our differences and unite with them.

Tactical differences, when sufficiently vital, become differences of principle, rendering united action impossible.

*We refuse to run candidates for parliament* because:

1. That tactic entails grave dangers of the movement lapsing into reformism;
2. Any attempt to use the parliamentary system encourages among the workers the delusion that leaders can fight their battles for them. Not leadership, but *mass action is essential*, now that the last struggle is approaching;
3. What we want is not class talk, but class war;
4. Under present conditions in this country, any participation in parliamentism confuses the

issue of the class struggle, wastes the energies of the revolutionary workers and delays full adhesion to the soviet system;

5. Today parliament is nothing but an instrument of bourgeois domination, a warder-off of revolution, a safety valve through which the revolutionary urge escapes in wind. Today parliament cannot be the arena of the revolutionary struggle;

6. Parliamentism as a form of government has never secured, and can never secure, self-government by the masses.

*We reject affiliation to the Labour Party* because:

1. In constitution and actual working the Labour Party is a committee of leaders who divert the revolutionary will of the workers into parliamentary and reformist channels;
2. The trade union leaders of parliamentarians who control the

Labour Party have, through their bourgeois associations, acquired a middle class mentality which inevitably makes them support the tactics of class collaboration in place of the tactics of class war;

3. The Labour Party is based on parliamentary bourgeois democracy, whereas the Communist Party is out for *working class dictatorship* ...

Comrade, this party has been formed in the firm conviction that in Britain today there is a higher proportion of revolutionaries than existed in France of 1789. We do not believe that our immediate task is to make communists, but rather to organise on uncompromising lines those who already hold communist views. This is not to say that the work of communist propaganda is not likewise of supreme importance. But, pending the revolutionary crisis, what is needed is not

construction, but destruction. We must destroy bourgeois ideas and values, bourgeois morality, the bourgeois standards which create the mental and moral slavery of the proletariat.

In so far as we have constructive work before the revolution, this can only be to establish independent proletarian standards and ideals. Hence our uncompromising programme. We will have nothing to do either with bourgeois or with social democratic parties, organisations and institutions. We call upon all genuinely Bolshevik groups and individuals to rally to the standard we have raised, to share in the up-building of our party, to join with us in the spearhead of the revolution.

Yours for revolutionary communism

**The national organising council**

### Notes

1. *Weekly Worker*, September 30 2010.
2. *Weekly Worker*, September 23 2010.
3. The reference is to those SLPers who had broken with the sectarian leadership of their organisation. In particular William Paul, who, along with Arthur MacManus and Tom Bell, had originally composed

the SLP's negotiating team in the unity discussions, but from April 1920 had effectively turned their backs on the internal politics of the SLP to form the Communist Unity Group. While this helped break the deadlock between the participating organisations, it is arguable that a more rigorous engagement in the SLP's increasingly fraught internal life could have seen more of its comrades won to the soon-to-be-born CPGB - see *Weekly Worker* September 30 2010.

4. Plekhanov, the 'father of Russian Marxism', wrote this of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906): "In petty bourgeois society, men whose 'spirits' are driven to 'revolt' must necessarily be exceptions to the general rule. Very often such men proudly regard themselves

as aristocrats, and they do resemble aristocrats in two respects: they are superior spiritually, just as the aristocracy is superior socially because of its privileged position; and their interests are so remote from - even inimical to - the interests of the majority that they are as far removed from the latter as is the aristocracy. The only difference is that the real historical aristocracy dominated society during its heyday; while the intellectual aristocracy [has] practically no influence upon the petty bourgeois society of which it is a product. Having no social power, these spiritual 'aristocrats' remain isolated individuals, and in compensation, devote themselves all the more zealously to the cultivation of their personality.

"Their social environment makes individualists of them, and then they make a virtue of necessity. They make a cult of individualism, believing that what is really a result of their isolation in petty bourgeois society is an indication of their personal strength. As crusaders against triviality and mediocrity, these men often appear as pathetic individuals of broken spirit. But truly magnificent figures are to be found among them - certainly Ibsen" ([www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1908/xx/ibsen.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1908/xx/ibsen.htm)).

5. The quote is from Edward Young (1683-1765), an English poet and dramatist best remembered for the blank verse poem, 'Night thoughts'.





REVIEW

Equal pay feel-good

Nigel Cole (director) *Made in Dagenham*, 2010, general release



Fictional but true

**R**eluctant working class hero/heroine stands up for self and others and finds own voice, with lots of laughs along the way. Sound familiar? *Made in Dagenham* has plenty of things to recommend it, but breaking new cinematic ground is not one of them. Instead, in its characters and plot line, it sticks a bit too firmly to well-trodden Brit-flick territory. This time, the working class heroine is Rita O’Grady (Sally Hawkins), one of 187 women sewing machinists at the Ford’s Dagenham plant who went out on strike for three weeks in 1968. Initially they wanted a regrading from unskilled to semi-skilled, but soon they were demanding equal pay with male workers. The strike was a milestone in the events that ultimately led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act two years later. The film shows Rita’s evolution from a tongue-tied mother unable to stand up to her son’s bullying teacher, to a shop steward ably arguing her case with a government minister. Thankfully, Hawkins puts a lot more subtlety and nuance into acting the part than the script itself contains, and comes up with a sympathetic, believable character, who convincingly oscillates between bold and vulnerable, as she, indeed, finds her voice. The strength and brightness of the film lie very much in Hawkins’ depiction of Rita. While the cast is strong enough, most of the characterisation is pretty much off the peg, even cartoonish at times. It is worth noting that the main female characters are some decades younger, and considerably more glamorous, than the real Dagenham women, who appear in archive footage, as the credits roll. A reminder that women over a certain age still struggle to be seen, never mind heard, in some quarters, not least the movie industry. This is not the only area where the film departs from the facts. Disappointingly, touches that seem authentic - like the women stripping to their underwear to cope with the heat in the workshop, causing Bob Hoskins’ Albert many blushes - never actually happened. And why Dagenham, rather than Merseyside, where 195 Ford machinists came out at the same time? There is a brief shot of Rita addressing a crowd there, but

otherwise this aspect of the strike is glossed over entirely. But let us not nit-pick over details - although inspired by fact, this is a work of fiction, not a documentary. As for the enemy - a pair of civil servant buffoons; cold scheming bosses; corrupt union officials in bed with the management - all provide obvious hate-figures and several good laughs. But they also allow the film to make a serious point - the Dagenham women are struggling on two fronts. First as members of the working class, being squeezed by a ruthless corporation. And secondly as women, when, as the advertising says, “It’s a man’s world” - a world that is depicted as fundamentally sexist at all levels of society. It is impossible not to take Rita’s side, as she leads the strikers in challenging it. One of the best scenes is when she, with her friend Connie (Geraldine James), is expected to sit quietly and nod while her union rep stitches them up in negotiations with the management. “Who knows what the girls are thinking?” he says. “We have no idea what’s in their heads.” But he soon finds out. The role that the unions had in the strike has been debated, but what is certain is that they were not universally behind the women’s claim. In fact there is only one male character who is entirely sympathetic to the equal pay cause: shop steward Albert. Indeed it is he who persuades Rita to demand equal pay. Bob Hoskins plays the role with considerable warmth (he is, as he always is, mainly Bob Hoskins - but he does it so well). Otherwise, the huge majority of the workforce at the plant - ie, the men - give little or no support for the strike. The sullen response of the men is easier to understand when seen from the perspective of poor, perplexed Eddie (Daniel Mays), Rita’s husband, who gives an insight into the consternation of all those decent, hard-working husbands who genuinely could not understand why their wives should not earn less than them in the workplace, and should not spend their time at home as unpaid domestic servants. As Rita’s involvement in the strike takes her away from the usual domestic grind, Eddie is forced to step into the role of ‘mother’. Cue a number of utterly predictable scenes of Eddie struggling with

the washing-up, burning the kids’ dinner and begging for a clean shirt. Still, they are well done, and rendered more amusing by Mays’ finely tuned depiction of long-suffering perplexity. Miranda Richardson puts in a fine performance as a spiky Barbara Castle, secretary of state for employment in Harold Wilson’s government. She is a strong supporter of equal pay - in principle. In office, however, principles are put under pressure, as she attempts to curb the strength of the unions and mollify the employers at Ford (whose ludicrous argument against increasing the pay of a tiny minority of their workforce recalls more recent squabbles over the minimum wage). So, when the strikers are called to Whitehall to meet with Castle, she persuades them to settle for a pay rise that brings them closer to the male rate, but still falls well short of it. They lose their original demand for a regrading. This is hardly a huge victory, so the mood of celebration that brings the movie to a close, as Castle announces the end of the dispute, might appear out of place. And it would be, if it were not for the fact that the Dagenham machinists’ strike was the key event that led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970. Even though there are still difficulties in implementing it in practice, the act can only be viewed as a huge landmark for women’s rights - it outlawed the universally accepted pay inequality that had been a fact of working women’s lives since waged labour began. Such concessions are never won without being fought for, and without such legislation it is unlikely that many women today would be on the same rate as men. This surely justifies the upbeat ending. And it is a feel-good movie for other reasons too. *Made in Dagenham* might not depict every single fact as it happened, but it still has truth in it. Does it convey the sense of solidarity and support between the strikers? Yes, absolutely. Does it get the audience wholeheartedly on the women’s side? You bet. Do the speeches inspire? Yes, they do. Will it make its viewers think more positively about industrial action? Let’s hope so. We’re going to need it ●
 Amanda MacLean

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 all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
- All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

Become a Communist Party associate member

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Town/city \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postcode \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX



# weekly worker

## Forge a political anti-cuts movement

# Osborne the butcher

George Osborne's much hyped spending review turned out to be every bit as draconian as we all expected. Under the absurd pretext of the vital necessity to tackle the budget deficit as a matter of the utmost urgency, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition is seizing the opportunity to launch a full-scale assault on workers' jobs and conditions, on public services and on benefits in order to claw back the working class gains of the last half-century, weaken trade union organisation and significantly shift the balance of power in favour of capital.

The Tories say they expect to slash public sector jobs by almost 490,000, but the figure could be as high as 700,000, according to some estimates. And readers will know the details of the vicious attacks on sickness and other welfare benefits, council rents, higher education, transport subsidies and leisure, to name but a few. And the state pension age is to go up sooner than expected, on the recommendation of Labour turncoat John Hutton. All this follows hot on the heels of the review of defence spending (cut by 8%), which contains some priceless nuggets of fiscal stupidity - £5 billion is to be spent on new aircraft carriers ... but there is no money to fit them out with planes.<sup>1</sup> If the pet projects of the military-industrial complex can be axed, no-one should be surprised at what is in store for workers' jobs, benefits and services.

The next few years, then, are likely to be a brutal experience. It is to be expected that people will act, however ineffectively, to defend public services on which they rely - after all, as bureaucratised as, say, the benefits system is, it is the difference between life (generously defined) and death for a great many people. The same is true of the NHS (day-to-day spending has been more or less maintained, but much needed capital projects have been junked) and so on.

What sort of resistance can we expect? Unfortunately, as I have reported for this paper previously,<sup>2</sup> the number of pretenders to leadership of 'the fightback' is growing. Rather than honestly attempting to hammer out a common strategy, the various fragments of the left - true to form - prefer to conjure 'broad' front organisations out of thin air. The three top dogs at the present time are Right to Work, the Coalition of Resistance against Cuts and Privatisation and the National Shop Stewards Network. They are dominated by the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and the Socialist Party in England and Wales respectively.

Right to Work and the NSSN are likely to clash regularly - after all, they are principally fighting for the same constituency of trade union officialdom. The NSSN, in fact, is quite misleadingly named, as its policies and practices are generally targeted at keeping things safe for the Socialist Party's approved functionaries, though full-timers can participate only as observers.

The CRCP, meanwhile, has

something of late Eurocommunism about it - a grand umbrella group, supported by numerous leftie personalities (the perennial Tony Benn is the main figurehead), with a 'bishops to brickies' model of building broad support. In this capacity, it has something of a pull on some SWP comrades even now. Several members have resigned in Norwich, citing the failure of RTW to "tap into the huge levels of anger against the class nature of the austerity measures (around bankers' bonuses, etc)"<sup>3</sup>. Rather absurdly, they believe that the CRCP has. (So, presumably, has George Osborne, whose spending review includes a number of swipes at banks - and at the last government for dealing with them rather too timidly.) It is a pretty childish resignation, as these things go, but it does demonstrate that the SWP has lost much of its movement-building sheen, even in the minds of many of its own members.

Of the three left organisations, SPEW does at least sometimes acknowledge the existence of its rivals, a change from the systematic blanking of 'the sects' it employed during its days as the Militant Tendency. A statement on its website<sup>4</sup> makes an extended argument for its strategy (and its front, the NSSN), as against that of Counterfire and the CRCP, which - though disingenuous in places - is in fact relatively illuminating.

The SWP comes in for much criticism regarding the methods by which it builds its 'united fronts', the key example being the Stop the War Coalition. SPEW criticises the manner in which the SWP (when, before John Rees and Lindsey German defected to Counterfire, it more clearly ran the roost) tended to foist policy on STWC - an example given is the SWP decision to allow the Liberal Democrat leader to speak at the February 15 2003 mass demonstration in London. Against objections from many affiliated left organisations, "the SWP and their allies bulldozed the decision through

the committee to allow a platform to the Liberal Democrats - without any public criticisms of them - before hundreds of thousands" (in fact, millions). "This burnished the 'anti-war' credentials of Charles Kennedy and the Lib Dems ... [and] undoubtedly helped to build up their 'radical' image".

"Such mistakes," the author correctly concludes, "can only be avoided in this battle if hard questions are asked about the character of the coming struggle, the best programme to defeat all the cuts, and the kind of organisations that are needed."

Counterfire is criticised for effectively taking over this method - and indeed, such is to be expected, since its members broke off from the SWP precisely in defence of the STWC method of front-building. This time around, naturally, it is not Lib Dems playing the role of Greeks bearing gifts, but Labour grandees, with whose names the CRCP's support base is liberally peppered. Such people, suggests SPEW, are compromised by their support for the last Labour government's own programme of cuts. Serious united work with Labour figures should be conditional on their rejection of "smaller cuts over a longer period, as advocated by Labour-in-opposition against the big axe and swingine cuts of the Con-Dem government".

Apart from its mere existence as the only halfway serious critical document to be produced by one anti-cuts front about the others, there are two important points raised by SPEW's statement. The first is that the programmatic basis for anti-cuts work in the coming period is of cardinal importance. It is something that should not need to be said - but this is the SWP and its offspring we are talking about here, for whom programme is purely and simply a dead weight and a distraction from provoking people into action - *any* action.

The other is the looming matter of the Labour Party - that organisation will be looking to encourage public

dissatisfaction with government policy, but also to coopt it to its own ends. We know well enough that those ends are not exactly socialism - or even consistent opposition to cuts. The manner in which the far left deals with this problem is a matter of great significance.

Unfortunately, SPEW does not have the answers to the problems it raises. The NSSN does not even really have a programme at this point; just a vapid founding statement pledging "to offer support to TUC-affiliated trade unions in their campaigns and industrial disputes" and to "existing workplace committees and trades councils" - as well as non-interference in "established organisation and recruitment activity [and] in the internal affairs and elections of TUC-affiliated trade unions". (Shop stewards, it seems, are all very well until they try to replace SPEW's favourite bureaucrats.) If the NSSN did have a programme, we can very well predict what would be in it - apart from a denunciation of any and all cuts, a shopping list of left-Keynesian demands, without so much as a hint of an alternative society.

On the Labour Party, SPEW has a chequered history which is likely, at this point in the political cycle, to plunge it into confusion. Having been the largest, most successful and most dogmatic Labour entry group from the 1950s onwards, ongoing witch-hunts on the part of the Labour machine provoked the majority of Militant members to turn to work outside the party in the early 90s.

Unfortunately, they insisted on over-theorising this turn. Having made an orientation to Labour into the defining difference between authentic revolutionaries and petty bourgeois charlatans, they could only sell open work to the membership on the basis that Labour had qualitatively transformed itself into a common-or-garden bourgeois party.

Thirteen years of Labour government papered over the cracks in this theory, as it always does. Now that Labour is in opposition, however,

there is a good chance it will shift to the left - in some ways, it already has. There will certainly not be any votes to be picked up by defending spending cuts when their impact really begins to be felt. The likes of the Socialist Party, meanwhile, will have to accept that there will be more than a few rogue Labour councillors prepared to talk a good talk on cuts.

As a matter of some urgency, the different cuts campaigns should move towards unity. They should do this not in the manner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, with influential individuals cooking up a deal behind closed doors and presenting it to the befuddled masses, but democratically, with decisions taken transparently on the key matters of controversy.

Paramount here is the Labour Party. The far left has to walk a tightrope on this point - we must face up to the reality of work with opportunist, left-talking Labourites (unlike the Socialist Party), but without suspending criticism (like Counterfire and the CRCP).

Beyond that, we have to ask what our aims are in this period. Yes, we want to defend the basic living standards of millions from the Tory hatchet-men - but for this project to meet with any kind of lasting success, the left has to get out of the rut it is in - we must make a serious case to the wider vanguard for leaving capitalism behind for good, and building something better. That, in the end, is the best way to prevent this discontent from being squandered by the Labour Party on interminable and infantile ranting about 'bankers' bonuses' ●

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## Notes

1. *Financial Times* October 19.
2. 'Divided we stand' *Weekly Worker* October 7.
3. <http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com/2010/10/norwich-swp-resignations.html>.
4. <http://socialistparty.org.uk/articles/10358/05-10-2010/building-the-struggle-against-cuts>.

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