



weekly worker

**Defend Clare Solomon
against rightwing press
and its AWL outriders**

- New-old Laurie Penny
- CPB tensions mount
- German music bans
- Tommy Sheridan verdict

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Martin Smith: another one bites the dust



LETTERS



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

Low numbers

A rather interesting book *Master of the house: Stalin and his inner circle* was published in 2009 by Oleg V Khlevniuk, a senior research fellow at the state archive of the Russian Federation. This was part of the Yale Hoover series on Stalin, Stalinism and the cold war, so we can see where it is coming from. The book is based on meticulous research using previously unavailable documents in the Soviet archives and focuses on the inner workings, power struggles and personal rivalries within the politburo in the 1930s.

Although inevitably and inherently anti-Soviet, anti-Stalin and anti-communist, Khlevniuk's work is fascinating, as it no longer has cold war axes to grind and in its exhaustively detailed and relatively objective study and analysis of the evidence actually debunks a number of the key myths and conspiracy theories which appear to have been deliberately fabricated around the Stalin period, especially around the crucial class struggles in the 1930s.

Khlevniuk argues that all the evidence now confirms that the so-called "great terror of 1937-38" should be seen as a series of centralised, planned, mass operations, carried out on the basis of politburo decisions aimed at destroying "anti-Soviet elements" and "counterrevolutionary national contingents", and that the explicit and deliberate objective in the context of growing international tensions and the threat of imminent war from Germany and Japan was the liquidation of the fascist "fifth column". Khlevniuk states this was the reason why the majority of those arrested - around 700,000 - were shot.

Executions on that scale had not been seen before in the Soviet Union, nor since - ie, this was a highly exceptional period. 700,000 is certainly a lot and inevitably a number of innocent people died. But as a proportion of the total population, this is relatively very low, and certainly not justifying claims of a "war on the whole people". And, as we know, by the time of actual war, no fascist fifth column existed in the Soviet Union.

In analysing the victims of the mass operations, Khlevniuk shows that the vast majority were so-called "people of the past", "members of the pre-revolutionary elite (nobility, government officials, military officers and industrialists)", targeting those elements most irreconcilable to the regime and susceptible to involvement in counter-revolutionary and espionage activities.

Khlevniuk argues convincingly that by the time of the February 1934 17th Party Congress (the 'Congress of Victors') the Stalin team had emerged victorious and dominant from its five-year "struggle with society", had established that collectivisation and accelerated industrialisation were here to stay, and that even the most loosely organised party oppositions had been destroyed.

The end of 1933 saw a new period of genuine consolidation, moderation and liberalisation, and a deliberate desire by the regime to make peace with segments of the population who were "socially close". This involved the reorientation of many economic, social and punitive policies, including the extension of voting rights to many who had lost these as "alien elements" and steps which limited repressive measures and rehabilitated hundreds of thousands who had been tried in preceding years. Leaders of opposition groups, such as Zinoviev, Kamenev and Preobrazhensky, were readmitted to party membership.

Khlevniuk argues that the evidence shows the more moderate course was also shaped by foreign policy considerations - ie, in response to the growing threats of German fascism from the west and Japan in the east. As early as 1933, Stalin was seeking allies among the western democracies, to create mutual defence pacts with France and the United States in particular. To support these processes it was important to promote signals of "normalcy", "stability" and to "showcase the democratic achievements of Soviet power".

This meticulous and impressive study of Soviet politics and realities of power in the 1930s comprehensively debunks the cold war and Trotskyist conspiracy theory and mythology that the murder of Kirov and the subsequent mass operations of 1937-38 represented some form of bloody seizure of power, an internal coup d'état by a Stalin faction, and a subsequent terror war against the whole people, killing tens of millions, due to an insane blood-lust and/or to hold onto power.

On the contrary, Soviet power had largely been consolidated and the main battles won by 1933, the Stalin team were in unrivalled command, their opponents defeated and scattered, and the united, Stalin-led politburo was implementing a more moderate course to further strengthen and boost the standing and reputation of Soviet power internationally.

The numbers executed between 1937 and 1938 were in the hundreds of thousands, not the tens of millions beloved and peddled by cold war and anti-Soviet practitioners, and the great majority were guilty.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Distortion

Tony Clark credits me with the "gross-est falsification of Marxist history to date" (Letters, December 16). That's quite an accomplishment in a short letter to a newspaper!

Clark refuses to come to a sympathetic understanding of the Socialist Party of Great Britain's attitude to leadership. That's up to him. But for the rest of us it should be an easy matter to comprehend. The SPGB understands that working class people are quite capable of making up their own minds about their struggles and actions, and making their own decisions. Once workers have realised that they must take political action to end capitalism and establish socialism, then they will have to organise as a political party to do this for themselves. In other words, "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself."

This used to be a commonly understood Marxian socialist principle until Leninism came along and converted it into: 'The emancipation of the working class cannot possibly be the act of the working class itself, which is why we need a leadership of professional revolutionaries to act on its behalf.'

Call us old-fashioned, but we prefer the Marxian original to the Leninist distortion.

Stuart Watkins
SPGB

Witless leaders

The complaints of the many splinter groups of the left arise from disappointments and discouragements at their lack of results, despite their sincere and dedicated activism. One important factor is their feeling of being 'leaders' and 'professional revolutionaries'. The careerists and cadres are forever taking credit for organising the workers. It is as though they were taking credit for the rising of the sun, forgetting their basic Marxism that it is not ideas that make material conditions, but material condi-

tions that give rise to ideas.

Tony Clark and his ilk, instead of standing clearly for socialism, have aped official Labourism, seeking to influence non-socialist workers through tactical manipulation rather than convince them to change their minds. They argue that the 'united front' provides an opportunity for 'revolutionaries' to discuss and convert reformists and that the immediate aim of the 'united front' is to provide the most effective fighting organisation for both reformists and revolutionaries. Vanguardists accept the notion that the workers are incapable of developing socialist consciousness, and so the 'revolutionaries' have to work with reformists in order to influence them and draw off the active workers into their own ranks. That there is an 'uneven consciousness' among workers that necessitates the need for leaders and for an organisation that can bring it together with non-socialist workers in the name of immediate given ends, be those organisations trade unions or anti-cuts alliances.

The reality is that any sort of success involves hiding the disagreements between their constituent organisations, specifically about means and motives. They succeed by making demands that are supported by significant numbers of workers, meaning that any 'revolutionary' content will be buried into the need for immediate victory. As such, it is small 'c' conservative, taking political consciousness as it is found and seeking to manipulate rather than change it. Such a tactic, however, affords the 'left' an opportunity to extend their influence. As a tiny minority, they get to work with organisations which can more easily attract members and can thus be part of campaigns and struggles that reach out well beyond the tiny numbers of political activists in any given situation. But the relevant fact remains that, despite providing all this assistance, the 'revolutionaries' are incapable of taking these campaigns further than the bulk of the members are willing to accept.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, however, argue that minorities cannot simply take control of movements and mould and wield them to their own ends. Without agreement about what it is and where it is going, leaders and led will invariably split off in different directions. We say that since we are capable, as workers, of understanding and wanting socialism, we cannot see any reason why our fellow workers cannot do likewise. The job of socialists in the here and now is to openly and honestly state the case rather than trying to wheedle and manoeuvre to win a supposed 'influence' that is more illusory than real.

Marx believed that, as the workers gained more experience of the class struggle and the workings of capitalism, it would become more consciously socialist and democratically organised by the workers themselves. The emergence of socialist understanding out of the experience of the workers could thus be said to be 'spontaneous' in the sense that it would require no intervention by people outside the working class to bring it about. Socialist propaganda and agitation would indeed be necessary, but would come to be carried out by workers themselves, whose socialist ideas would have been derived from an interpretation of their class experience of capitalism. The end result would be an independent movement of the socialist-minded and democratically organised working class aimed at winning control of political power in order to abolish capitalism. As Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist manifesto*, "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

One of the great strengths of the SPGB is our opposition to leadership and our commitment to democratic

practices, so, whatever weaknesses or mistaken views we hold or get accused of by Tony Clarke, they cannot be imposed upon others with possible worse consequences. Can he claim the same for his own political pedigree?

The validity of the SPGB's ideas will either be accepted or rejected by discussion and debate, verified by actual concrete developments on the ground. The SPGB are not going to take the workers to where they neither know where they are going nor, most likely, want to go. This contrasts with those who seek to substitute the party for the class or who see the party as a vanguard which must undertake alone the task of leading the witless masses forward.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Irish solidarity

The Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group are having a Bloody Sunday anniversary meeting on January 31 to support political status for Irish Republican prisoners and it has come under threat from the far right.

Because we refuse to be intimidated by these threats, we have decided to appeal to the labour movement and to Unite Against Fascism for protection on the night. Martin Og Meehan of Republican Network for Unity is a confirmed speaker and other high-profile speakers have been invited.

We have long understood that it is only a matter of time before the far-right English Defence League and British National Party begins to attack meetings of the workers' movement and anti-imperialist solidarity groups. We must not let them gain confidence by a victory here.

The event is being held at 7pm on Monday January 31 in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Please contact us by emailing irpsgroup@gmail.com or by telephoning Gerry Downing on 07951 156588 to discuss what is needed and make arrangements for the night.

Gerry Downing
Secretary, IRPSG

Nuclear tinderbox

Jacob Richter's defence of the Iranian regime's 'right' to nuclear weapons is in fact a profoundly anti-working class position (Letters, December 9).

Marxists need to oppose any bourgeois state having such weapons of mass destruction, imperialist or otherwise. The language and discourse of 'rights' is not a trap we should fall into - particularly on the question of WMDs - otherwise we get into a form of cod liberalism which says, 'Doesn't Iran have the right to nukes?' and 'Doesn't Israel have the right to defend itself?' (the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's position). Both 'rights' are framed within the context of the world imperialist order - ie, not a very good starting point!

There is a bit of truth in his argument that mutually assured destruction acts as a disincentive to war between nuclear powers, at least in the medium term. But it means that, when war does happen - and, as Marxists, we know this to be inevitable - the chances of them being used are much increased. He is also guilty of glossing over the truth when he says that "Nuclear weapons are purely external deterrents". Do Hiroshima and Nagasaki ring any bells? In fact, they can be and have been used as offensive weapons when seen as a quicker option for the nation using them than a protracted air, sea and ground campaign.

I agree with him that any workers' state would immediately disavow use of such weapons (excepting very specific and far-fetched scenarios, like a counterrevolutionary US fleet steam-

ing towards Europe). But, if we would never wish to use them, why should we support reactionary governments like that of Iran having this capability? All it would be is a propaganda coup for Ahmadinejad, bolstering the position of his regime and making the Middle East even more of a tinderbox than it already is. As for the idea that those who favour disarmament have encouraged the development of the latest, gigantic conventional bombs by the US and Russia, this is nonsense. Both powers are always looking for ways to create more destruction.

Richter's demand that we also support Iran's right to currently non-existent electromagnetic and anti-matter weapons does, I'm afraid, seem to point to a rather childish attitude on this question - although this is not ultra-leftism, but rightism masquerading as support for self-determination. Ask people on the streets of Tehran what they think of Ahmadinejad having his finger on the button, and I can't imagine many being happy about the idea. Certainly the revolutionary left in Iran is opposed to nukes.

A far better defence against imperialist assault would be an armed and conscious people.

Laurie McCauley
email

Kurds protest

Opposition to the December 12 'protest law' imposed by the Kurdish coalition government (KRG) in the north east of Iraq offers a new chance for the Kurdish left and communists to come together and lead the people in united action, as they used to do. The thousand-strong march through Sulaimanyah city on December 18 has echoed around the region, leading to smaller local protests in other Kurdish towns and villages, and bigger protests can be expected.

Opposition fractions mustered 42 MPs to vote against the new law, but the dominant coalition of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) won a narrow victory with 52 votes, following a secret debate in the Kurdish parliament. Leaked documents show that people can only protest when they are "permitted to do so by the Kurdish police forces at least 48 hours before any sort of aggregation takes place in public areas". So the Kurdish public can only demonstrate, protest and rally when it is in the interests of the government, and when told to do so by the authorities.

The law was approved on December 12 by KRG president Masoud Barzani, general secretary of the PDK, despite a mass campaign across the region urging him not to implement this undemocratic measure. A national campaign, 'President - do not sign it', was set up by the 'December 12' group. This quickly expanded, receiving support from 15 other Kurdish civil society organisations and developed into a united front now called the Network to Defend Public Rights and Freedom. But the president ignored the public's demands.

The government claims that the law is there to "control anarchy", and it is "striving to get the public to follow the rule of law like other democratic countries in the world". In a sense they are right: in a 'democratic' country - like Britain - anti-trade union laws are used against the unions and the public. The Kurdish left and the Kurdistan Communist Party must use this comparison to expose the KRG as merely a puppet of imperialism, which is in power on behalf of international capital.

Zryan Mahmoud
Kurdistan Communist Party

STUDENTS

Old thinking and new bottles

Paul Greenaway asks what the liberal media see in Laurie Penny and explains why Alex Callinicos is talking sense

What the bourgeoisie fears above all is that the recent wave of student militancy will strengthen the left. Hence besides kettling, arresting and witch-hunting student militants we see attempts to confuse, divert and derail the student movement through promoting supposedly new, really radical ideas. Surely this is why the 23-year old Laurie Penny is being given generous amounts of space to express her views.

Despite being a fervent supporter of the student protestors she is viewed as useful by the liberal wing of the media. Thus she regularly writes for the *New Statesman* - having her own blog there - and often makes relatively lengthy contributions to the 'Comment is free' section of *The Guardian*. Indeed, her various political writings have been short-listed for the Orwell prize. Bearing all that in mind, some of her left critics are being extremely ungenerous - almost curmudgeonly - when they describe her as "mediocre" or "shallow". She is clearly a talented and energetic individual, but does have the great advantage of being very confused.

So, in *The Guardian* Penny colourfully writes: "It is highly significant that one of the first things this hydra-headed youth movement set out to achieve was the decapitation of its own official leadership. When Aaron Porter of the National Union of Students was seen to be 'dithering' over whether or not to support the protests, there were immediate calls for his resignation - and in subsequent weeks the NUS has proved itself worse than irrelevant as an organising force for demonstrations. Of course, the old left is not about to disappear completely. It is highly likely that even after a nuclear attack, the only remaining life-forms will be cockroaches and sour-faced vendors of the *Socialist Worker*. Stunningly, the paper is still being peddled at every demonstration to young cyber-activists, for whom the very concept of a newspaper is almost as outdated as the notion of ideological unity as a basis for action."

What we have here is classic 'new' old thinking. Old wine in new bottles. For Penny the real dividing line seems to be between spontaneity and social networking on the one side and "old left" newspaper sellers with their top-down, centralist, hierarchical approach on the other. Yet the 'law of the excluded middle' rears its head - ie, the 'principle' that for any proposition, either that proposition is true or its negation is.² Nothing else is possible. Life, especially political life, is reduced to a few simple magical answers that appear like a bolt from the blue. Hence activity that issues apparently from out of the ether is worshipped; activity produced by conscious organisation is decried.

Thus in this spirit of thinking the unthinkable, even if it has been said many times before, Penny glowingly informs us: "For these young protesters, the strategic factionalism of the old left is irrelevant. Creative, courageous and inspired by situationism and guerrilla tactics, they have a principled understanding of solidarity. For example, assembling fancy-dress flash mobs in Topshop to protest against corporate tax avoidance may seem frivolous, but this movement is dar-



Laurie Penny: Twitter

ing to do what no union or political party has yet contemplated - directly challenging the banks and business owners who caused this crisis."

Frankly, Penny is seriously mistaken. New technology, no matter how marvellous, or invading shops in fancy dress, no matter how enjoyable, is not going to seriously challenge capitalist rule. In her bold 'new' thinking and critique of the British far left she is - whether out of sheer inexperience or a definite ideological instinct - giving voice to a deep-seated anti-leadership, anti-organisation prejudice which (inevitably) exists in some parts of society. The most obvious example being the anarchists, fetishising essentially spontaneous political outbursts in the doubtlessly sincere belief that by such methods they can bypass the absolute necessity for mass organisation and democratic leadership and accountability. Such sentiments came to the fore after the November 10 student protests, with the trashing of the Tory HQ in Millbank Tower being hailed as a model that needs to be copied by the wider anti-cuts movement.

Naturally, communists perfectly understand the genuine frustration of activists like Penny - who come up against the bureaucracy and control-freakery of "old left" organisations like the SWP. Plenty of centralism, yes, but precious little democracy. To instinctively kick out against such deadening norms has an undeniably healthy side. Penny is quite right, of course, to castigate the SWP for its conception of "ideological unity" - which in reality means forbidding the open expression of contending viewpoints. Which is to say, the construction of an ideological-confessional sect, whereby all its members have to pretend to agree on a particular historical and theoretical interpretation of the Soviet Union, for instance (state capitalism).

That is truly a road to nowhere and one which we have consistently opposed, arguing for a party which not only permits the free and open expression of political differences and perspectives, but insists that it is a party member's duty to voice them - whether at meetings or in our press. Therefore communists can only sympathise with her follow-up comments in the *New Statesman*, where she posits: "This new wave of unrest is happening at a similar turning point in the history of communications technology. New groups can exchange information and change plans via Twitter and text mes-

sage in the middle of demonstrations. It's no longer about edicts delivered by an elite cadre and distributed to the masses, or policy voted on at national meetings and handed down by delegates. It's not the technology itself so much as the mentality fostered by that technology that is opening up new possibilities for resistance."³

But at the end of the day there are very real limitations to this kind of structurelessness. By its very nature, it tends towards minoritarian or secretive politics. And, logically, the more people are involved in deciding to do something that might be illegal, the more likely it is that they will get fingered by the state and its agents. Which in turn produces fragmentation and disillusionment. Ultimately then, structureless campaigns are almost by definition run by an unaccountable minority - whose inner debates and deliberations can never become the public property of the workers' movement. Meaning they can never truly educate, organise and agitate in a real, long-lasting political sense. Rather the crux for communists is this - what are the politics and organisational forms that will allow us to win?

To replace the aristocratic rule of capital obviously requires organisation. There is no way of getting round this. The only way to get things done is to organise - it is as simple as that. Regardless of whether it is doing the shopping, running a business or organising a revolution. So everyone organises - anarchists included. Logically then, the burning question is *how* we organise - not whether we do so.

From that perspective, which history has taught us to be the only correct and viable one, we can only conclude that Alex Callinicos of the SWP was more right than wrong in his commendably patient and considered reply to Penny's argumentation:

"The important question now is how the student movement can maintain its forward momentum - despite the passage of higher tuition fees through parliament - and invigorate much broader resistance to the coalition's austerity programme. Penny rightly welcomes the support that Len McCluskey, the new general secretary of Unite, has given the student movement. But his intervention underlines the fact that old political problems don't simply go away when a new movement emerges ...

"So how to bring together the fighting spirit and imagination of the students and the collective power of organised workers? This is the challenge that faces anyone who has been involved in the protests of the past few weeks. To address it, we need to discuss and work together, transcending, yes, the sectarian squabbles of the organised left, but also flattering delusions of absolute novelty."⁴

We sincerely hope that SWP as an organisation bucks the sectarian trend and starts to practise what comrade Callinicos preaches above.

Notes

1. *The Guardian* December 24.
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_excluded_middle.
3. www.newstatesman.com/blogs/laurie-penny/2010/12/deregulating-resistance.
4. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/26/student-protests-laurie-penny?showallcomments=true#comment-8939439.

ACTION

Communist Forums

London:

Sunday February 6: 'General strike - then what?' Proposed debate between CPGB and The Commune. Venue and time to be confirmed.

CPGB podcasts

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

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

Radical Anthropology Group

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

January 11: Chris Knight: 'Introducing Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*'.

No to war

Tuesday January 11, 7pm: Activists meeting, Village Restaurant, Alum Rock Road (corner Ellesmere Road), Birmingham B8. Organised by Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Guantanamo vigil

Tuesday January 11, 1pm: Silent vigil, Trafalgar Square (opposite National Portrait Gallery), to commemorate ninth anniversary of the opening of the detention and torture camp.

Organised by the London Guantanamo Campaign: london.gtmo@googlemail.com.

Defend legal aid

Wednesday January 12, 1pm: Lobby, Houses of Parliament. Organised by Justice for All: www.justice-for-all.org.uk.

Rebuild Labour

Saturday January 15, 10am-4.30pm: Labour Representation Committee AGM and conference, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube). Speakers include: Tony Benn, Christine Blower (NUT), Katy Clark MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, John McDonnell MP and Matt Wrack (FBU). Organised by the LRC: www.l-r-c.org.uk.

Ongoing Nakba

Saturday January 15, 10am: Conference, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Marking the beginning of Palestine Memorial Week 2011. Speakers include: Mustafa Barghouti (candidate for presidency), Dr Salman Abu Sitta (author *Atlas of Palestine*), Ben White (journalist and author), Dr Paul Larudee (co-founder Free Gaza Movement), Phyllis Starkey (former Labour MP) and Rawan Al Damin (film maker). Organised by Palestine Return Centre: www.prc.org.uk.

Rally for Gaza

Tuesday January 18, 7pm: Rally, Conway Hall, Holborn, London. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, CND, Stop the War, British Muslim Initiative, Friends of Al Aqsa, Palestine Forum in Britain and Viva Palestine: info@palestinecampaign.org.

Stop fees and cuts

Saturday January 22, 12 noon to 6pm: Conference, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1. Organised by National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts: againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com.

Manchester against the cuts

Saturday January 22, 10.30am: Conference, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Organised by Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils: 01706 913698.

Tusc and local elections

Saturday January 22, 3.30pm: Conference, St Pancras Community Centre, 30 Camden Street, London NW1. Speakers: Owen Herbert (RMT executive), Michael Lavalette (SWP councillor), Clive Heemsker (SP). Chair: Dave Nellist (SP councillor). Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.tusc.org.uk.

Rising against the cuts

Monday January 24, 5pm: Meeting, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Organised by Black Communities Rising Against the Cuts and South East TUC: info@tuc.org.uk

Right to Work

Saturday February 12, 11am to 5pm: National conference, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Unite those in and out of work and build resistance to the cuts. Organised by Right to Work: www.righttowork.org.uk.

Oppose the cuts

Saturday March 26: National demonstration against cuts in public services. Assemble 11am Victoria Embankment, and march to a rally in Hyde Park. Organised by the Trade Union Congress. www.tuc.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.

STUDENTS

Don't give in to the slurs

Eddie Ford defends Clare Solomon against the rightwing press and its AWL outriders

Without doubt, the British establishment has been seriously rattled by the student protests. The sudden explosion of militancy shattered the cosy consensus that no-one would fight back against ruling class attacks in phlegmatic Britain. Hence the November 10 attack on Millbank Tower and then the kicking given to the car carrying Prince Charles and Camilla have been given totemic status by an establishment baying for revenge.

A few days ago, on January 4, the police released CCTV footage of the latter incident. The stated intention was to "remind anybody involved in attacks of violence that we will investigate them" and "do everything in our power to bring them before a court". Anyone convicted, we are further told, "will have to face the consequences of having a criminal record" - which could have a "potential impact" on their future employment and travel.¹

Therefore, we should not be surprised by the fact that just before Christmas some sections of the rightwing media (maybe a festive treat for some of their readers) engaged in a brief, but nasty witch-hunt against someone prominently identified with the student resistance movement - Clare Solomon, a School of Oriental and African Studies student who last March was elected president of the University of London Union, representing over 100,000 students. In many people's eyes Solomon is the *de facto* NUS leader, given the scab behaviour of the actual NUS president, Aaron Porter, a shameless careerist who could not move fast enough to condemn the "despicable violence" of student protestors on November 10 and urged full "cooperation" with the police.

A Counterfire supporter, comrade Solomon is also, of course, an ex-SWP member who was rather dramatically expelled in March 2009 alongside Alex Snowden - both at the time being members of the Reesite Left Platform - for the heinous crime of "factional behaviour", an accusation that was largely based on 'evidence' obtained by the SWP central committee after allegedly hacking into email accounts. Neither were allowed to attend the SWP's January 2010 conference in order to present their case against expulsion. That despite the SWP constitution having provision for a conference appeal.

To her credit, she earned the enmity of the tabloids - and Jeremy Paxman - for her combative performance on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme after the November 10 protests. Comrade Solomon mounted a strident defence of the student movement against Porter and the Liberal Democrat deputy leader, Simon Hughes. Attacking the mendacious narrative being pushed by the media, of "feral mobs" of extremist students "hell-bent on violence", Solomon called for further resistance to the coalition government. In adopting such a forthright and principled stance, Solomon was clearly not playing by the rules of the game - something the rightwing press would not forget in a hurry.

Anti-Semitic?

Hence, almost inevitably, in December there was a flurry of lurid newspaper headlines which amounted to nothing more than a smear campaign against comrade Solomon. So, typically, we read about "calls for 'anti-Semitic' student leader to quit after Facebook message about Jews"² and so on. Such a campaign dovetails perfectly with the reconfigured ideology



Clare Solomon: apologetic

of the post-war bourgeoisie. Essential to the new national chauvinist ideology is the retrospective myth of World War II being a noble democratic crusade against fascism in order to 'save the Jews' from the Nazis. Therefore nowadays for the press to imply that someone is anti-Semitic is tantamount to an official declaration of anathematization.

Predictably, the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty rushed to join the reactionary chorus. An official statement written by Richard Gold was issued on December 29. It bluntly insisted that comrade Solomon had made a series of outrageous "anti-Semitic" comments, "for which there is no excuse."³

So what exactly were these outrageous "anti-Semitic" comments that place comrade Solomon beyond the pale? Well, we are dealing with postings on Facebook way back on May 1 but which were dredged up as part of an obvious - almost desperate - campaign to discredit the growing student resistance to coalition cuts. In particular, the *Daily Mail* quite self-evidently hoped to tarnish the entire student movement by associating it with Solomon's supposed anti-Semitism.

Of course, seeing how the original Facebook post and subsequent thread were deleted - somewhat foolishly - by Solomon herself, it is not possible to contextualise the remarks/debate as we would prefer. However, she posted the following comment in what appears to be a message supporting the boycott of Israel. Given the rank dishonesty of the rightwing bourgeois press it is a good idea to quote her in full: "Actually, there is no such thing as the 'Jewish race'. Yes, there is the Jewish religion, but not a Jewish people *per se*. Identity politics is a very fashionable argument at the moment. It questions the samenesses that group people together. I think you'll find that there is no one way of being Jewish. The view that Jews have been persecuted all throughout history is one that has been fabricated in the last 100 or so years to justify the persecution of Palestinians."

"Although history is obviously a little hard to revisit, it is wrong to write off all the places where Jews, Muslims and Christians (and other faiths/non-faiths) have lived together. I think you'll also find that *all* religions have had their oppressors - some worse than others, true - but to paint the picture that *all* Jews have *always* had to flee persecution is just plainly inaccurate."

For these words, no doubt hastily written like most postings on Facebook

and other such social networking sites - instant communication having its own pitfalls - hell and damnation was rained down on Solomon. Needless to say, the *Daily Mail* was pack-leader and scented blood, writing: "A radical student leader who dismissed the violent tuition fees protests as 'a few smashed windows' has been accused of making anti-Semitic comments on a social networking site. Mature student Clare Solomon, 37, president of the University of London Union, helped coordinate the protests - during which a car carrying Prince Charles and Camilla was attacked - and declared herself proud of the students."⁴

Craftily, the *Mail* goes on to quote Carly McKenzie, a campaigns officer for the Union of Jewish Students, in order to let her do its dirty work: "We have lost confidence in her ability to represent Jewish students. To claim that *Jewish suffering is a deliberate fabrication* goes beyond ignorance into real malice. Her remarks had nothing to do with principled opposition to Israel and everything to do with her disdain towards the Jewish people" (my emphasis). Lending weight to the smear, the Zionist *The Jewish Chronicle Online* reported that Solomon "claimed that the persecution of Jews had been *fabricated to justify attacks on Palestinians*" (my emphasis). The *JC* also darkly notes that her blog and Twitter pages contain a number of "anti-Israel posts" and "equate Israel with apartheid South Africa".⁵

The implication is clear. Not only is Solomon an "anti-Semite": she is some sort of crackpot holocaust-denier, like the crazier elements around the British National Party or Hamas. But what do you expect, as *The Express* puts it, of a "Marxist firebrand" like Solomon who was "thrown out of the ultra-left Socialist Workers Party because of her extremist views"?⁶ Far right, far left - all the same.

People-religion

This is clearly poisonous crap, and the left should unhesitatingly defend comrade Solomon. Indeed, looking at her 'incriminating' remarks we can only ask - what is the problem? So let us examine her first statement: "There is no such thing as the 'Jewish race'. Yes, there is the Jewish religion, but *not a Jewish people per se*" (my emphasis). Surely this is a fact. For Marxists there is no Jewish race or Jewish people - if by 'people' we mean a historically constituted nation. There has never been a 'Jewish nation' except in the wild imaginations of religious obscurantists and Zionists. But, yes, just as obviously, there is a Jewish/Judaic religion. However, given the existence of non-religious Jews, or "non-Jewish Jews" - a self-designatory term used by the Marxist scholar Isaac Deutscher, to name just one⁷ - those who subscribe to what can be broadly called orthodox or classical Marxism have tended to use the category of 'people-religion' to describe the Jews (another obvious example being the Sikhs). That is, the Jews were a people-religion under slave, Asiatic and feudal societies - heavily involved in commerce and then usury due to the simple fact that they were banned by law from holding public office and a whole range of other 'noble' professions. For the record, the theory of Jews in medieval Europe as a 'people-class' - essentially an alternative expression for 'people-religion' - originated with Karl Marx and was further elaborated in *The Jewish question: a Marxist interpretation*, by the Jewish Trotskyist, Abraham Leon, who later died in Auschwitz.

Then in turn, the Jews were, with the emergence of capitalist relations of production, thrust into the forefront of the revolutionary socialist and communist movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Bund (the General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia) was the first socialist workers' organisation in the tsarist empire. Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Jules Martov, Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Rosa Luxemburg (all prime examples of "non-Jewish Jews") represented the pinnacle of human, *cosmopolitan*, culture and the mass radicalisation of the Jewish population in Europe.

However, this a complex theoretical and historical matter and to take issue or find faults with the 'people-religion' theory in no way indicates in and of itself a sinister political tendency, let alone provides *prima facie* proof of 'anti-Semitism'. Communists firmly believe that we should treat our political opponents and critics, in our polemics and debates, as fairly and *honestly* as possible - not launch inquisitions or heresy-hunts. Sadly, some on the British far left have a less than honourable history and tradition in this respect.

Now let us turn to Solomon's second statement: "The view that Jews have been persecuted all throughout history is one that has been fabricated in the last 100 or so years to justify the persecution of Palestinians ... but to paint the picture that *all* Jews have *always* had to flee persecution is just plainly inaccurate". Once again, for anyone of a rational frame of mind, this is just another factual observation. It was *Zionism*, a modern ideology, which invented the idea of the universalised persecution of Jews - a claim that was built on the grim realities of late medieval anti-Semitism and its wretched revival in tsarist Russia and then in 19th century Europe by ultra-rightist Catholicism - as exemplified by the Dreyfus case.⁸ But none of this detracts from the fact that for most of ancient and medieval history it was a *positive advantage* to be a Jew, which is precisely why the sect grew and grew - so that by "late feudalism Jews constituted a half-privileged, half-persecuted social caste", gaining a "prosperous living as intermediaries".⁹

In other words, all Solomon said was that Jews have not always been persecuted throughout *all* of history - ie, there were periods when they were not persecuted. The last "100 years" she refers to is the period during which the assorted Zionist myths have been developed - mainly against Marxist, secular and "non-Jewish Jews", of course. To put it even clearer still, what has been "fabricated" - by Zionism, of course - is the empirical and historical falsehood which claims that "Jews have been persecuted all throughout history": the myth of eternal Jewish suffering and oppression. Quite contrary to the implication peddled by the *Daily Mail*, *Jewish Chronicle*, etc, Solomon is obviously not saying that the genocidal persecution of Jewish people under the Nazis has been "fabricated" or that the Jews have never been persecuted - whether in the 20th century or any other century. Instead, it is the alleged universal persecution of Jews which Zionism has ruthlessly deployed in order to convince others that its colonial-settler project in Palestine was morally justified - or, at the very least, an unfortunate necessity, given the timeless suffering Jews have to bear.

Therefore it is clear that comrade Solomon is no anti-Semite. Rather, albeit in a clumsy and half-remembered

way, she was attempting to formulate the orthodox/classical Marxist position on the Jewish question - which is to oppose the pernicious notion that the Jews, as distinct from any other oppressed group, are transhistorically given to suffering oppression - in the same way that dogs are doomed to wag their tails. The more prosaic but less excitable truth is that comrade Solomon was plainly trying to defend the Palestinian struggle against Zionism. Yes, we can nit-pick about her wording, but we must defend her against the charge of racial/ethnic bigotry and anti-Semitism, because she is clearly innocent.

Regrettable

Of course, communists do have entirely *legitimate* reasons to criticise Clare Solomon. Though she is now in Counterfire, her SWP background mitigates against her having a fully democratic attitude towards the Israeli-Jewish nation - not due to anti-Semitism, but merely due to bad politics and bad theory. The SWP, like many others on the British far left, does not defend the right of the *Israeli-Jewish*, or Hebrew, people to self-determination. While communists have no truck with Zionism and condemn the colonial-settler state of Israel, we recognise that over the last 50 or 60 years a definite Israeli-Jewish nation has come into existence. *Time matters*. Israeli Jews speak the same language, inhabit the same territory, share the same culture and sense of identity. Therefore to call for Israel's abolition is unMarxist and objectively reactionary.

Regrettably, though perhaps understandably, it appears that instead of fighting her corner comrade Solomon has decided to beat a hasty retreat. She has apologised for her Facebook remarks in an unnecessarily contrite manner: "This badly worded comment was something that I wrote in haste on Facebook at a very busy period. I'm sorry for any misunderstandings caused by what I wrote. My position is that Jewish people have always been persecuted throughout history, nowhere more than during the holocaust, when six million were murdered by the Nazis. I am totally against anti-Semitism and any persecution and oppression of Jewish people, as I am against the oppression [of] people on the grounds of any race or religion."¹⁰

Unfortunately, comrade Solomon is running away from the argument. Of course, it is true that "Jewish people have always been persecuted throughout history": eg, Jewish slaves, peasants and workers. But it remains true that *all* Jewish people have *not* been persecuted throughout history. Semantics aside, she is in effect apologising to the very same *Daily Mail* that welcomed Hitler coming to power, enthusiastically backed Oswald Mosley - "Hurray for the Blackshirts!" - and campaigned against Jewish migrants in the 1930s, etc. A pity ●

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CPB

Haunted by ghosts

The death of Mary Rosser has opened up a can of worms. **Sammy Hollingworth** wonders why leading CPB members have such a strained relationship with the past

Robert Griffiths, the recently re-elected general secretary of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, sounds a worried man. Speaking to the organisation's new executive committee in November 2010 (following the CPB's bi-annual national congress the previous month), he said: "The next two years will be a supreme test for the Communist Party. If we are of no great use to the working class as it faces an historic struggle to hold on to the gains of the 20th century, then we should drop any ambition to play a leading role in the revolutionary transformation of society. This is no time for passengers on our executive committee. We need all EC members helping to take forward at least one specific aspect of party work in between meetings, and putting a high priority on supporting and mobilising for national party and *Morning Star* events."¹

The subtext of this passage is, of course, an EC and an organisation that is awash with passengers, who see the CPB as an occasional focus of their individual identity in the context of other, more pressing, tasks in the broader movement. This was expressed at the October congress by South London delegate Lorraine Douglas, who was quoted in the *Morning Star* as stating that many CPB members did good work in the labour movement, but little actual party work.² This is also an organisation that is not showing any signs of significant growth (in December 2009 it claimed 955 members - a slight fall from December 2008, when it had 967 recorded members³) and there have been no major announcements to suggest otherwise. This is all pretty much standard for seasoned CPB watchers and the organisation, barring a titanic cultural revolution in the short term, is bound to fail the "supreme test" set for it by comrade Griffiths. What will be more interesting is the political fall-out inside the CPB. Suggesting that the organisation should "drop any ambition to play a leading role in the revolutionary transformation of society" (ie, to disband itself, in other words) in the event of future failure is strong stuff for a body as terminally sluggish as the CPB and indicative of Griffiths's own frustration.

Somewhat surprisingly there has been no obvious political shift inside the CPB since the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in May 2010. One might have expected that,

with the likelihood of Labour shifting to the left and thus choking off space for what CPB 'modernisers' such as Griffiths like to call a "new mass party of labour", CPB 'traditionalists', wedded to the idea that the Labour Party is the only conceivable strategic route to a national, British, socialism, would have a strong hand and that the 'modernisers' might collapse back into that traditional stance. In fact, the 2010 congress did little more than re-elaborate the twin-track compromise arrived at the 2008 congress, where, in order to keep some kind of factional order, the CPB avoided putting all its eggs into either the Labour or "new mass party of labour" basket.

As Griffiths put it to the CPB EC in November 2010, "The Communist Party must engage more systematically with its trade union and Labour Party allies to challenge and defeat the New Labour trend ... But our party's 51st congress was also clear that horizons cannot be limited by the struggle in the Labour Party, however important that is. There are other significant forces on the left outside the Labour Party, in the labour movement, in the green, Welsh and Scottish national movements. We seek unity across the left, labour and progressive movements, while recognising that this will not always be possible in the case of many sectarian and ultra-left groups."⁴

Laboured

The arguments about "other significant forces on the left outside the Labour Party" were beginning to look a bit tired in 2008, let alone in 2010, when Griffiths is forced to enlist greens and nationalists to his cause. What it does suggest is that simple *reconciliation* between the CPB's loose factions is not an option and that differences that are pretty marginal on the surface are still being bandied about as part of the organisation's internal discourse. This can clearly be seen around the CPB's review of its programme, *Britain's road to socialism*, a draft of which was unveiled in July 2010 after being produced by Griffiths, Mary Davis and Gawain Little.

As Eddie Ford previously reported in the *Weekly Worker*: "Needless to say, this tension or confusion over the Labour Party - with it or against it? - makes its way into the 'updated' *BRS*, predictably enough. So it leaves open the possibility of 'reclaiming'

Labour - after all, never throw all your cards away. Thus the draft states that the 'potential exists to wage a broad-based, resolute fight to reclaim the party for social democratic and more leftwing policies'. However, 'should it prove too difficult to challenge New Labour with any real prospect of success', then the 'major sections of the trade union movement should meet together with their political allies to consider how to re-establish a mass party of labour' - which is to say, 'one which will represent the

interests of the working class and the people generally'.⁵

These conceptions have come under fire from 'traditionalists', most notably those in Scotland. Contrast the careful twin-track strategy elaborated by comrade Griffiths above with the blunt analysis given in the Scottish wing of the CPB's current educational lecture on the *BRS* (dated October 2010).

Formulated by comrade Jim Whyte, the speaker's notes make reference to calls for a new political party of the left and reply in the following terms: "Communists fully understand the frustration and share it. Who would not want a new mass-based party of the left? But we must separate wishful thinking from reality. The material conditions do not exist for the creation of such a party in Britain; and most importantly the trade unions for the most part have no intention of walking away from the Labour Party. Like it or not, the Labour Party continues to be the mass party of the working class and, come the next election, they still will be. In the years ahead what is needed is to build a mighty movement against this monopoly capitalist government, stop them in their tracks, and create the conditions in which the next Labour government is returned on a left manifesto."⁶

In private, Scottish 'traditionalists' have been heard to voice the opinion that sections of the new draft *BRS* are "toy-town Bolshevism". So now, it seems, both sides are playing for time and jockeying for position around implementing the new draft. Clearly talking in response to the rough reception accorded to the draft in some quarters, Griffiths told the CPB's EC: "There is no need to try to polarise the party over what is only the first draft, even before most comrades have had the opportunity to read and discuss it. This EC has been given the responsibility of conducting that inner-party discussion, which should be undertaken in an open and comradely way, without any return to the superficial labels and caricatures that misinformed previous debates."⁷ This is all a bit strange, considering that the draft has been available since July 2010. Surely most CPB members would have read it by November?

Characters such as Griffiths are part of a consistent strand inside the CPB that, despite seeing the organisation as the 'only show in town' as regards to British communism (and thus are prepared to mouth the majority of its shallow myths and orthodoxies), sees the group that split from the 'official' CPGB under the leadership of Mike Hicks and Mary Rosser in 1988, following the liquidation of the *Morning Star* as an 'official' CPGB publication under the editorship of Tony Chater, as flawed in some way. Cliquish, sectarian and undynamic in the extreme, the early incarnation of what was the *Morning Star's* CPB (ie, the 'party' was set up as the 'muscle' of a 'broad labour movement' publication) was in many respects a stillborn enterprise and even those comrades initially attracted to its political outlook were not enamoured by its divisive and unlamented former general secretary, Mike Hicks, who often sneered at the 'surrender' of individuals and factions who chose to join the CPB later on. Griffiths had to throw over his own public opposition to the

politics of what was then known as *The British road to socialism* (the 'official' CPGB's programme), after the breakaway CPB adopted its own version. While Griffiths is no longer the 'revolutionary oppositionist', he obviously has a more complex relationship to his organisation's politics than supporters of the 'traditionalist' pro-Labour wing.

Hicks was eventually ousted in 1998, and retaliated by having his supporters at the *Morning Star* sack the then editor, John Haylett, which led to the successful strike of *Star* journalists for Haylett's reinstatement. CPB members have been reliving this vicious factional war over the festive period, after Mike Hicks recently published an obituary for his wife, Mary Rosser, in *The Guardian* (after a previous notice in *Tribune*).

He said: "After 10 years, [Rosser] was one of almost 50% of executive committee members of the Communist Party of Britain who were virtually forced out of office and membership during a time of sharp political differences."⁸ Griffiths himself replied in the *Star* (December 30). While paying due respect to her role in "saving" the *Star* and founding the CPB, he said: "[Rosser], like [Hicks], lost office in elections that nobody has ever claimed were unfair, and by a substantial majority. No member of the CPB executive was forced out of party membership in 1998 or subsequently, neither virtually nor otherwise." Surrounding this response has been a host of internet allegations concerning Hicks's and Rosser's time (moving money from the CPB to the *Star*, forging minutes, factionalism and so on). None of this is very interesting or educational, but one thing does become clear: many CPB members have long and painful memories of these years and the so-called 're-establishment' of the Communist Party in the late 1980s and 1990s was not exactly drenched in joy.

Divisive

But then, this is not the first time these misgivings have been publicly voiced. Graham Stevenson is on the CPB's executive and political committee, and national organiser for transport for the T&G section of Unite. Tucked away on his personal website is a rambling, turgid document entitled 'The British Communist Party in the 1980s: revisionism, resistance and re-establishment'.⁹ Stevenson puts the CPB's so-called re-establishment congress of 1988 in single-quote marks, faithfully records the views of those oppositional comrades inside the 'official' CPGB who were opposed to the CPB split and notes the divisive nature of Hicks's leadership, leaving the reader in no doubt that Stevenson himself was opposed to the formation of the CPB at the time.

But the real clincher is here: "... it had been the Communist Party congress of November 1995 that had first seen some immediate effects of a new mood sweeping the CPB. From the summer, many key people had moved into membership of the CPB as a result of the communist unity process. The grip of the Hicks leadership on the party was noticeably weakening. Mary Davies and Ivan Beavis were voted on to the EC despite not being on the recommended list. Those who had dominated the CPB, indeed who had pushed

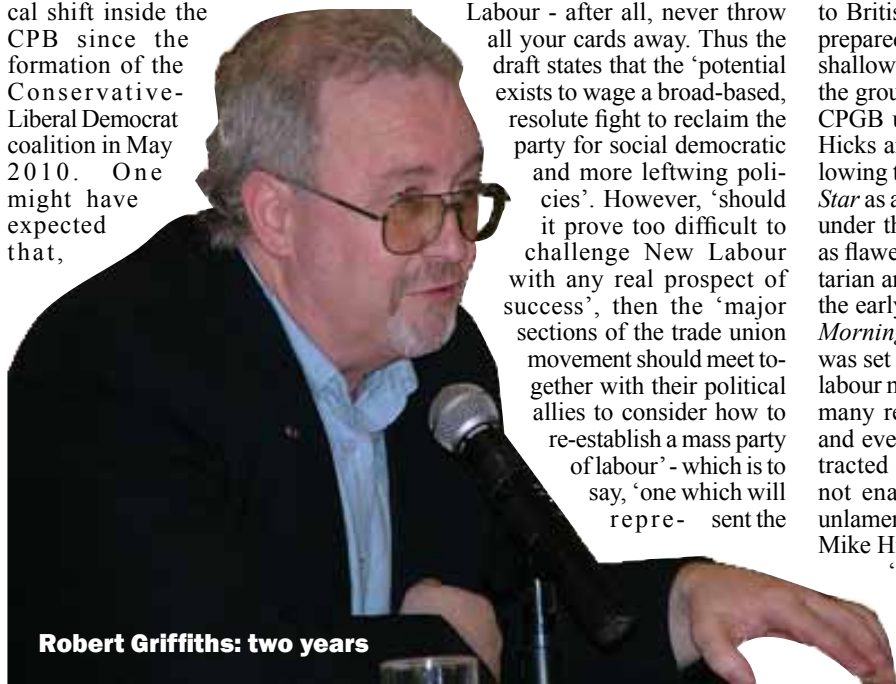
the precipitant strategy of breakaway in 1988, such as Tony Chater and the husband and wife team of Ron and Joan Bellamy, were outraged, the latter shouting out loud at the results: 'It's a faction - it's all Straight Left! Such insularity from reality was by no means an aberration and the next three years would be difficult. The Communist Party of Britain formally dates the re-emergence of a real Communist Party from 1988. Although some may quibble over the precision of this, what is for sure is that the 1995 congress had really marked this for certain. There were still problems to come and it had taken the best part of a decade to come through the process but, from this point, it could now be truly said that the Communist Party had been truly re-established."¹⁰

This is dangerous territory for the CPB. The organisation presents itself as the continuation of the 'official' CPGB. Thus, its congress of last October was deemed to be its "51st congress". Its members like to think of themselves as being in the same party as that run by Harry Pollitt and John Gollan. All nonsense, of course, but nonsense that has been agreeable to the Electoral Commission (which let the CPB have the 'Communist Party' name for elections) and some courts that have ruled in favour of the CPB in regard to wills and legacies left to the 'Communist Party'. But according to Stevenson, the CPB only became the true successor to the CPGB in 1995 after the writing was on the wall for Hicks (a truly bizarre, almost apolitical, method of deciding such issues), which does rather chronologically bust up the 'we are the continuation of the Communist Party' argument by eight years or so. Also, if, in 1988, we did not have the 'Communist Party' reborn, in what ways is the CPB working at a *qualitatively* higher level in 2011 than, say, 1990? What specific changes did this shift in 1995 usher in? By any reasoned analysis, the CPB is still lumbered with much the same 'official communist' baggage, has a shrinking membership and struggles to establish any kind of political profile, national or otherwise. Sure, the CPB has 'modernisers' working within it, but exactly how much has been modernised is a moot point.

The tortured nature of the CPB's formation represents a thoroughly toxic base for mapping out the organisation's future, whether that is the unwillingness of Rob Griffiths to resign himself to its traditional Labourite perspectives or the unwillingness of Graham Stevenson to admit that 'the Communist Party', or anything remotely close to it, was 're-established' in 1988 •

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Robert Griffiths: two years

SWP

Another one bites the dust

Even before SWP comrades gather in London for their annual conference, the central committee has sacked Martin Smith as national secretary and replaced him by Charlie Kimber. **Peter Manson** looks at an organisation in crisis

The leadership of the Socialist Workers Party must be hoping against hope that its January 7-9 annual conference will be totally different from last year's messy affair. Then conference was dominated by the factional battle between the Martin Smith-Alex Callinicos leadership and the right-moving opposition of deposed leader John Rees and his close allies, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham. Within months Rees and co, together with his entire Left Platform grouping, walked out of the SWP to form the Counterfire organisation.

After comrade Rees and the Respect debacle the central committee vowed, 'Never again'. However, the SWP is stumbling from crisis to crisis. Late last year a fraught central committee meeting moved to pre-empt mounting criticisms of the SWP's dismal performance under the new national secretary, Martin Smith. He was summarily removed from his post and as a consolation given token responsibility for industry and anti-fascism - a non-job. After all, Weyman Bennett continues in charge of anti-fascist work, while Michael Bradley retains the industry portfolio. The rather uninspiring Charlie Kimber - former *Socialist Worker* editor - is now *primus inter alia*, though many insiders consider Alex Callinicos the real power in the organisation. As a safe pair of hands, Judith Orr was hastily given charge of *Socialist Worker* - she is the first woman to edit the SWP's paper. The central committee reshuffle has left Hannah Dee in charge of students, Joseph Choonara overseeing finance, Amy Leather responsible for the national office and branches, Dan Mayer looking after appeals and Marxism, while Chris Bamberg has the thankless task of running the Right to Work campaign. Comrade Callinicos retains responsibility for international work and *International Socialism*.

So a classic palace coup ... and delegates will be expected not to question, not to challenge - just to acclaim the new order. Perhaps to ensure comrade Smith accepts his humiliating demotion quietly and is not tempted to rebel at conference unpleasant rumours have been circulated. They amount to character assassination. Eg, we at this paper have been sent allegations of sexual harassment and a central committee investigation. Frankly, we are not talking Gerry Healy, but of the kind of thing one hears in any fraught divorce case.

Anyway, instead of honestly debating the SWP's problems, failures and lack of direction under the leadership of comrade Smith, the central committee appears to view his sacking as a private matter. All thoroughly undemocratic ... but fully within the bureaucratic traditions of the SWP.

Having got the *real* business out of the way, the central committee is banking on running conference as a rally. The format is predictable: inspire

the troops to resist the government's austerity drive and yet another call to 'build the party'. The contempt for the membership was on full display at the district aggregates that elect conference delegates. Instead of confiding with the membership, the central committee majority ensured that they were little more than hyped-up pep talks. According to the organisation's internal weekly bulletin, "These meetings are an important opportunity to involve as many of our members in discussing our perspectives and response to the Tory assault. Each area should build these as SWP members' meetings - 'Seize the time: build the resistance'" (*Party Notes* December 8 - the full version, as opposed to what appears on the SWP website).

Internal bulletin

Last year's aggregates saw fierce battles to maximise factional delegates, with the Left Platform alleging foul play. The debate over perspectives and personalities that raged at conference was also carried at the aggregates and, most noticeably, in the three *Pre-conference bulletins*, known within the SWP as *Internal bulletins*, or *IBs*. Compared to 2009, the October, November and December 2010 bulletins have been not a little dull - certainly when it comes to the airing of the differences that one would expect within an organisation facing severe problems.

For instance, there is no mention whatsoever in any of the central committee's contributions in the *Internal bulletin* of last year's battle with comrade Rees and co. Nor for that matter is there any attempt to explain or account for the resignation of dozens of members. The leadership's attitude is: forget the past, look only to the immediate future and the opportunities that will surely come from feeding off the anti-cuts movement.

Even where the *IBs* do contain genuine exchanges of viewpoints, the format often makes it very difficult to ascertain who is saying what. The SWP's obsession with 'security' (ie, keeping *political* differences hidden) also leads to the refusal to publish the surname of any of the contributors. This means that it is impossible, except for those in the know, to link a particular opinion with an individual leader, which in turn means those individuals cannot be properly held to account.

Of course, there are contradictions. So we have "Michael (Preston)", who begins his contribution with: "As a local councillor ..."; or "Unjum from South London". For the minority who do not know who these comrades are, it takes five seconds on Google to identify Michael Lavalette or Unjum Mirza, the prominent RMT union activist.

In contribution after contribution, the central committee plugs away at the opportunity for the SWP that the

government assault provides: *IB* No3 (December) stresses that the key question is how to use it "to win a significant section of people moving into struggle to the need for a revolutionary transformation of the whole system and *build the SWP*" (my emphasis).

Fair enough on one level, except that there is no conception of the kind of organisation the working class needs - a mass, democratic Marxist party, to begin with uniting all the revolutionary left. Instead, the other left groups, whatever their size or influence, are viewed only as rivals, not potential partners, and are consequently ignored and implicitly written off.

So "Jonathan" from the *Socialist Worker* circulation department writes, also in No3: "The Vietnam solidarity protest in October 1968 saw the IS [International Socialists, forerunners of the SWP] grow by hundreds, while others on the left failed to increase in size. This was down to the sharpness of our message and its concrete application to the movement. Selling *Socialist Worker* can perform a similar function ..."

The CC itself urges: "We must become the detonators of resistance in every workplace, community and college" (*IB* No1, October); while in the following bulletin it is at its most hyperbolic: "There is no time to waste; it has to be action stations for the Socialist Workers Party ... "We don't have a moment to spare. Right to Work on a national and local level has to think big and act fast."

Following conference there will be a recruitment drive (as usual) and the SWP must "build strong and well-rooted branches". But "What do you do if your branch is small, stale and moribund?" asks the CC. Obviously, you should "locate your branch in and around your local university or FE college", where large numbers of students can be expected to revitalise it. According to "Christine" from the membership department, "our 'open door' recruitment strategy has translated directly into hundreds of students either joining or seriously thinking about joining" (No3).

I will return to the "open door" recruitment strategy" below. But, short of relocating, what else can comrades do? Well, "The only other way is to recruit your way out of the problem" (*IB* No2, November). Thanks a lot, comrades.

Clearly this is easier said than done, as Christine reveals: "In Preston, there has not been a branch or public sale for some time. Despite brilliant work by our socialist councillor ... we had not recruited anyone for a while. In the last three weeks before their UAF demo, only three comrades were around to build it on the ground." This certainly poses a number of questions about comrade Lavalette's role and influence, and indeed the manner in which he was elected (with the support of the local mosque).

Anti-cuts

The centrality of the SWP's 'recruit at all costs' strategy is directly reflected in the way it attempts to mobilise against the cuts. Not least through Right to Work, which the SWP "helped to initiate" in 2009. Wherever workers organise locally against the cuts, RTW must be there, the CC urges. "Of course, we should push for RTW speakers at all anti-cuts activities, and for affiliation to RTW of anti-cuts groups, but this isn't enough - *we have to build a separate RTW presence locally*" (my emphasis). Why? The reason is not stated, but the answer is clear enough. Because RTW is controlled by the SWP and is viewed as a recruiting conduit.

Nevertheless, the SWP has to go through the motions of calling for a united fightback: "RTW has issued an appeal for unity ... and *Socialist Worker* has argued and will continue to argue for a coming together of the campaigns" (No1). In fact, the CC pretends that the lack of unity is all down to RTW's rivals, the Coalition of Resistance and the National Shop Stewards Network: "... it is not possible for any particular organisation simply to proclaim itself the 'one true group' and expect everyone else to jump into line."

This pretence is continued in No2, where the CC states: "At the very least it's important to argue for coordination between existing campaigns, while recognising the People's Charter, NSSN and indeed RTW *have an independent existence and role*" (my emphasis). So what is this "at the very least" about, when the leadership is clearly opposed to a single anti-cuts campaign?

It has to be said, however, that the SWP does have its own particular take on the *type* of resistance organisation that is needed and we should be grateful to "Jess" from Lewisham for explaining in No3 how the SWP model was put into practice there. There are, she says, "Two models of how to build: a sectarian one and our one". She goes on: "While not forgetting the betrayals of Labour, or watering down our criticisms, we must go out of our way to seek unity with Labour Party members in action against the cuts."

So far, so good. But when Jess contrasts this with the "very sectarian" local anti-cuts group, whose comrades "refuse to work with any local councillor or MP who is not opposed to *all* local cuts", we begin to understand what she means. "The situation in Lewisham is complicated by the fact that we have a Labour council that is about to implement cuts of £60 million [They are now implemented - PM] ... But the fight ... is weakened when the anti-cuts movement fails to unite and find common cause with those Labour Party people who want to fight. We have to do this, even where those Labour Party people are not immedi-

ately opposed to all of the cuts."

What on earth is this all about? How, in current circumstances - where a successful campaign to save a library will mean the closure of a community centre instead - is it possible to "find common cause" with Labour councillors who unanimously voted through the cuts package? Giving such people a platform, as RTW did in Lewisham, means selling out the anti-cuts movement.

Richard from Essex (actually Richard Allday, author of 'Shell tanker drivers' strike - oil on troubled waters' *Socialist Review* July-August 2008, as his contribution makes clear) is one of the few remaining Reesites in the SWP. Nevertheless, he makes some useful points on the nature of RTW.

He had argued for some time for a "united front against the recession" and "This position was also argued at last year's conference, by the Left Platform, and roundly defeated." Despite that, a few weeks later RTW was launched (even the name had previously been suggested by comrades who were denounced at the time, he says).

Even though the CC was formally committed to a broad, inclusive campaign, the RTW steering committee is "overwhelmingly numerically dominated" by SWPers. "As far as I am aware ... there has not been a single meeting of the full steering committee since [January 2010] ... As far as I am aware, there is no mechanism whereby affiliated organisations are able to have any input into the campaign."

By contrast, says comrade Allday, the Left Platform/Counterfire comrades, who "argued passionately for the tactic of the broad united front against the recession ... have put their theory to the test" and it has proved successful: "Someone was right and someone was wrong."

Comrade Allday also complains about the "poisonous atmosphere", which caused the LP to think they were "no longer wanted in the organisation, and if they stayed they were likely to be 'set up' for expulsion." He continues: "... having been told myself that I was considered 'unreliable' and that I was 'being watched', I can understand why they might feel that way" (No3).

"Andy and Kieran" from London also criticise RTW - but this time from the left: "Right to Work ... is a fudge of an organisation ... It is described, in the same breath, as both a broad front and a rank-and-file organisation - these are not the same and, in fact, cut across each other."

The strategy of LP/Counterfire, the comrades write, was "to form a united front against an abstraction, a sort of Stop the Recession Coalition. If we accept the logic that united fronts can be set up against more or less anything, with no short-term strategy and no agreed long-term goals, we might as well propose a united front against

capitalism.” But “the Counterfire group ultimately broke with us because they sought to liquidate socialist organisation utterly into broad, movementist work and had grown weary of the encumbrment of the revolutionary party ...”

However, the two are scathing about the SWP leadership’s line: “It is sectarian to assume we should always be at the top table ... what we should do is ensure we are always the ones fighting for a perspective based around the self-emancipation of the working class ...” (No3).

United fronts

This brings me to a related topic - the SWP’s conception of the united front. In the words of the CC, “The policy of the united front will remain vital in the period ahead. The revolutionary left is far too small to play a decisive role in the battles to come” (No1).

But if, as “Andy and Kieran” point out, such bodies have “no short-term strategy and no agreed long-term goals”, what do we think they will produce? For example, during the anti-war upsurge, the two comrades state, “We built a vast alliance and had the attention of millions of people in the Stop the War Coalition, but, paradoxically, ended up missing opportunities to fight for a more radical position.” In fact, “searching for a radical wing ... was always subordinate to maintaining unity”.

Isolated oppositionists “Martin and Anne” (West London) go further in No3: “The mistake the party made with Stop the War”, as it has done in “all united front work”, was “actually to deprioritise the revolutionary party itself In short we dissolved ourselves into the movement”.

Climate Camp fan John (North London) reports on the “rejection [by climate activists] of the Stop the War Coalition’s model of activity characterised by large A-to-B marches followed by speeches” and STWC’s “inability ... to discuss (or even consider) other tactics” (No3). But, unlike the others, he fails to understand that the root of the matter is not the tactics adopted, but the *politics* that revolutionaries ought to promote within alliances.

In the trade unions, for example, alliances with left bureaucrats should be undertaken only for limited objectives and should not be viewed as an end in itself. The CC says: “We do seek a good working relation with left officials. But we are also clearly still prepared to raise criticisms, no matter how difficult it makes life for us ...”

However, the CC goes on to warn of the “worst of all possible worlds” if we fail to build a rank-and-file movement: “We criticise the officials without doing the work to come into contact with the best elements of the rank and file. In other words, fall out with the ‘lefts’ without winning or expressing the anger of a new audience” (No3). The implication is that, in the absence of a rank-and-file movement, a “good working relation” ought to take priority.

Which is why there was such resistance from SWP comrades in Unite to the notion that rank-and-file candidate Jerry Hicks should be supported for general secretary, as opposed to left bureaucrat Len McCluskey, who was backed by the United Left within the union. Ten members of the SWP Unite fraction report: “The arguments for backing either candidate were finely balanced for most comrades. Should we support Len, along with comrades we were working with in the UL? Or do we threaten these carefully nurtured relationships by backing Jerry Hicks with a manifesto far closer to our own politics?”

“.... We debated the issue for a year. This was necessary to convince the vast majority of the fraction of the correct position.” However, “a minority of the fraction refused to support

the decision, but of even greater importance was the fact that the majority of comrades remain disengaged from the fraction” (No3).

State of the party

Despite evidence to the contrary throughout the bulletins, the CC boasts: “The party has grown in size and influence over the last year and its branches are stronger” (No1). I hate to think what Preston was like before.

The leadership writes: “The registered membership is 6,587. This is up on last year’s 6,417. In 2008 it stood at 6,155.” Of course, these figures are only ever allowed to go one way - up. But, if you read on, you will see that “over 1,000 members were recruited in 2008 and 2009, and 2010 looks to be heading for a similar figure”. So, although there have been 3,000 recruits over the last three years, the registered membership has increased by only 400.

This is particularly strange when you consider that “A registered member is a comrade who states that they wish to be a member of the organisation. Anyone who fails to pay subs or does not make contact to indicate they wish to continue to be a member after two years is removed from our registered members list and placed on our unregistered list of members” (*IB* No1, October 2009).

In other words, the figure includes all those who have filled in a membership application, whether or not they are ever seen or heard from again. But after two years such “members” are demoted to the status of “unregistered” and their details transferred to an out-of-date contact list. So you can see why there is such a high turnover - despite the leadership straining to maintain the annual rise (to be retained on the ‘registered’ list you only have to say you still want to be a member when a local comrade rings you up).

There is also a comment about “open recruitment” from Jonathan of the *SW* circulation department: “Comrades will have heard of the ‘net and spear’ approach. The spear relates to those immediate contacts we work with and the net is a more general milieu which we can attract towards us.” You have been warned - don’t get caught in the SWP “net”! However, the rise in the numbers ‘spear’ has not translated into an increase in membership subscriptions. Quite the opposite: “The registered membership that pays a regular sub to the organisation stands at 40%” (No1). The CC’s financial report in No3 goes into more detail despite the following rider: “Please note that, given the unfortunate propensity for these documents to circulate beyond our ranks, we have given most figures as percentages.”

The leadership notes: “The graph [there is no graph - PM] shows the decline in real (inflation-adjusted) subs income over the last 10 years. We have lost the equivalent of 40% ...” the explanation for this is that new recruits pay far less than the old hands (and presumably, since the greater stress on “open recruitment”, a higher percentage of “members” now pay nothing). “Overall, only about 40% of our registered members paid subs” at the end of 2010. In some areas the proportion is below 30%.

However, the CC is pleased to report that “During the past three years, this long-term decline [in income from subs] has been arrested.” Phew. Yet this does not mean the SWP’s finances are under control. Far from it: “From February 2010 to January 2011 we predict that the monthly deficit will average out at £2,406.” This is clearly unsustainable and we learn it is only managed in the short term by taking out loans and delaying the payment of bills.

The answer? We need to “persuade some of those who have cancelled

their subs at some point in the past to restart. This will involve a serious effort to contact members ...”

In *IB* No2 Dominic from Manchester suggests that the whole elaborate ‘registered membership’ pretence be dropped: “One of the problems we have currently is that there is a reluctance to take people off the membership list. I would like to propose that ... the party reintroduces, and actually uses, the concept of an unregistered member.” At the beginning of every year the “entire membership” should be “placed on the ‘joined but unregistered’ list”.

Dominic is aware that “One of the arguments against this idea is that people will be demoralised by the inevitable reduction in membership figures that this process will entail.” And the CC comes back in No3 to argue just that: “If we had done this last year, when we spoke to 33% of registered members, we would have reduced our registered membership below the number of people actually paying subs. Despite very serious efforts, there were just four districts (out of 45) in which the number of members we contacted reached the number giving money to the party.” It is a very strange revolutionary organisation that is unable even to *contact* a proportion of its subs-paying “members”.

But the CC mocks the very idea of membership commitment. It states that the subs drive at the start of the year should not be regarded as a “purge” to “whittle the membership down to the hard core of ultra-Leninists ... approaching the subs drive with a view to ‘sorting the wheat from the chaff’ is to start from a negative rather than positive perspective ...”

Jonathan from the circulation department claims that, like SWP membership, the readership of *Socialist Worker* continues to rise: “We sell an average of 9,800 copies ... a week” and there are “around 4,000 subscriptions”. What is more, “over the last four years sales have been on a steady increase” (No3). However, a later comment seems to contradict this: “... it is possible to substantially increase circulation over the next period ... to move from consolidation to expansion.” I thought readership “expansion” was already occurring.

Brian from Leeds gives a useful report of how the sad state of the membership is reflected in one locality: “Core membership, by which I mean those members regularly involved in branch meetings and wider district activity, is around 25% of the total.” There is a further 25%, comprising those “who pay subs and work with us”. The remaining 50%, “the ‘softer’ outer periphery”, are “essentially lapsed” (although they are not “uniformly inert” and some of them may actually pay subs).

Brian continues: “Overall, the quality of theoretical understanding in the organisation is quite poor. And, furthermore, there seems to be an attitude that education and other aspects of consolidation tend to be in conflict with ‘activism’ ... For example, when asked to explain in simple terms the labour theory of value, many leading comrades simply can’t.”

When he began setting up an education programme, Brian remarks that “there were those (usually more experienced members) who wished it well, while predicting its failure”. He advises: “Don’t take the excuse from older members that they know everything about a certain subject, so they need not attend. They are probably lying, but if they are such experts, they should be sharing their expertise with newer comrades.”

“Martin and Anne” (West London) ask: “How is it possible for a party like ours to be smaller after 10 years of political upturn than in the long years of political downturn?” They go on: “We are dogged with the twin

problems of weak organisation on the ground on the one hand and strong hierarchical tendencies on the other The rank and file have openly been called ‘foot soldiers’ and treated with condescension and/or contempt by our ‘officers’. If the ‘officers’ do attend the odd branch meetings it is in the manner of visiting royalty.”

As for the ‘revolving door membership’, “It is painful to see a new comrade enthusiastically proclaim that at long last they have found their political home, only to become disillusioned, say the opposite, reject the party and leave, sometimes just months later” (No1).

Democracy

Sophie from Kent is another one who complains about “hierarchical tendencies”. She writes: “Too often people who are revolutionary come into the party and get their gusto and zeal for revolutionary ways knocked out of them because they must look up to and defend the respected ones ...

“There have been times when the bureaucracy within the party has been used to quell legitimate complaints and also to counter revolutionary criticisms from comrades in order that the hierarchical structure and order be maintained” (No1). She fails to provide any examples, however.

For its part, the CC merely notes: “The party has benefited from the changes introduced after the report of the democracy commission. The party is more united” (No1). I suppose it is bound to be “more united” following the walkout of its only organised oppositional grouping, but the CC does not elaborate on how “democracy” has been enhanced.

John (Home Counties) focuses on one area where formal democracy has long been usurped by bureaucratic manipulation: party council, the delegate body that meets between conferences. Whereas, according to the SWP constitution, party council “has powers to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC”, the reality is that, like the pre-conference aggregate and conference itself, it has become a “mini-rally” (No3).

Apart from the one or two exceptions that I have mentioned, the healthy contest between competing ideas is almost completely lacking. The bureaucratic control of the leadership means that the CC is virtually unchallenged and the comments of people like Andy and Kieran or Martin and Anne appear more like ineffective sniping.

Principle

In the absence of either internal democracy, accountability or a consistent Marxist political approach, how can the leadership of a programmeless SWP persuade the members that they belong to an organisation that is both militant and principled?

The answer lies in a posturing ‘socialist morality’ and placing responsibility for it exclusively in the sphere of the individual. There are two illustrations of this in the bulletins concerning the example socialists are supposed to set in their attitude to two specific circumstances: voluntary redundancies and the role of supervisors.

In connection with voluntary redundancy (VR), the CC declares: “We are against all redundancies. We think that a VR is a job lost. These aren’t our jobs to sell and we should ‘fight for every job’. No SWP member can take a VR. There may be cases where there are extenuating circumstances. But any decision can only be made in conjunction with the SWP, disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who takes a VR” (No2).

Alan (South London) gives an example of what this means in practice in *IB* No3. He talks about a “distant party member” who was a “strong union

activist” and a former rep: “... they were suffering a nasty mix of ongoing victimisation by bullying and harassment; with a long-term, work-related personal injury to boot. So, not surprisingly, they were considering taking a life-changing opportunity that the substantial payout offered ... I said they couldn’t because they were a socialist ... in truth I felt like a right shit.” That’s because you were behaving like one, Alan.

The CC decrees a similar blanket ban on SWP members ever taking up any role that might be considered supervisory or managerial, irrespective of the circumstances. Foremen and supervisors “are directly involved in enforcing harsher working conditions and discipline and are often the ones responsible for firing workers ... You don’t become a foreman - to do so means you have crossed the line” (No3).

Admittedly, in some workplaces “there has been a blurring of the lines between management and worker.” So, “where you find yourself in a supervisory role you must not discipline your fellow workers or report them to managers”. The last instruction is fine as a general rule, but it surely contradicts the edict that simply taking on a supervisory role “means you have crossed the line”.

In any case this ignores the fact that there has been a whole history of supervisors and managers, especially in the lower tiers, acting like proletarians and taking militant action to advance their interest as employees - as people who sell their labour-power, in other words - against the capitalists and the state.

The leadership also ties itself in knots over the question, “Should socialists stand for union positions?” In relation to the role of shop stewards and the like, the answer is a clear-cut ‘yes’. But when it comes to full-time positions, this is a source of much agonising. On the one hand, full-timers risk being sucked into the bureaucracy; on the other, most SWP members of union executives have served the members well. The CC admits that this is a tactical question, “not one of principle”, but still feels the necessity to issue rather prescriptive guidelines: “Where possible, comrades should not take more than 50% facility time. It is important to try and maintain a connection with the shop floor.” In fairness the leadership does stress the centrality of accountability to ‘the party’, however (No3).

Lack of space means I am unable to comment on other interesting features of the bulletins, including the information that “In line with this general approach [of helping to reconstruct the international left in some rather ill-defined ‘new circumstances’], the SWP has also re-established normal relations with the International Socialist Organization ... in the United States.” The ISO had been expelled from the SWP’s International Socialist Tendency for its failure to adhere to the SWP line on the ‘new social movements’, so it seems that this was not such a question of principle after all.

Finally I will leave you with two central committee gems:

“The BNP and EDL have consistently denied any connection between their organisations. But this mutual disavowal hides the very deep links that lie between them. The development of the EDL took place in the context of last year’s European elections, which saw the BNP poll nearly a million votes ... Many of the people who organise the EDL are current or former EDL members” (No1).

“... in Respect ... revolutionaries and reformists were able to work together to build a principled alternative to New Labour’s neoliberalism and imperialism” (No3) ●

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GERMANY



Jailbirds, extremists and white power rock

Maciej Zurowski argues that state bans only serve the ruling class. There must be freedom ... even for bad music and offensive lyrics

Grandpa was *Sturmführer* of the SS - his grandson will be *Sturmführer* of the SS one day", went a chorus typical of Berlin's neo-Nazi rock group, Landser, whose rather nauseating songs recommended the murder of Jews, blacks, "Polaks", "gooks" and communists. In 2005, the group was classified as a "criminal organisation" and banned by the German federal court, its front man Michael Regener earning himself 40 months in prison for *Volksverhetzung*¹ and "distributing extreme rightwing propaganda".

Like most jailbirds, he came out a hardened rather than rehabilitated man. Continuing his music career with combos such as Die Lunikoff Verschwörung, Regener now wraps his messages in more skilfully law-dodging rhymes. What's more, he is always a welcome guest at events of the far-right National Democratic Party, which has extended a paternal helping hand to this "martyr of the national resistance". Regener's performances are sure to attract an additional bloc of bikers and skinheads to the organisation's rallies, adding some much needed spice to the otherwise stern atmosphere of petty bourgeois outrage.

That is the sad saga of Regener's life so far - a life that has been worthless because it was entirely dedicated to bringing a bit more chauvinism, pain and idiot hatred to a world that is already full of it. Perhaps Regener will manage to stay out of prison in future. But, as long as capitalism breeds

resentful degenerates with such efficiency, the class that threw Regener in jail will not be too hard pressed to find more examples to parade around and penalise.

Last year, for instance, 23 German far-right activists were arrested on suspicion of running Resistance Radio, an online radio station that broadcast neo-Nazi skinhead music, known to aficionados of the genre as 'white power rock' and often as 'RAC': rock against communism. "Music is deliberately used to recruit youths and young adults into the far-right scene," argued Jörg Zierke, the head of Germany's federal criminal office.

To those who have ever found themselves at the wrong end of a Dr Martens boot or baseball bat somewhere in Europe, there can be little doubt that the recruitment process has seen some success. Likewise, when one is exposed to footage of Sieg-Heiling crowds at white-power skinhead gigs, it can be tempting to brush aside the rational approach that one would extend to Marilyn Manson, death metal or gangsta rap records. But seeds only sprout if they fall on fertile ground. When neo-fascist organisations recruit thousands of youths - particularly in the eastern European countries that have undergone free-market shock therapy over the past two decades - it becomes hard for liberals to speak of isolated, psychologically unstable kids from broken homes.

The German government responds with bans, arrests and jail sentences. But it has not always been this way.

After all, white-power rock has been widely available in West Germany since 1984, when the Cologne based Rock-O-Rama label released the Skrewdriver album, *Hail the new dawn*.² The record kick-started a flood of British, American, French, Italian and German far-right skinhead rock releases on the former punk label. Albums of bands with names such as Brutal Attack, Legion 88, and No Remorse were the staple of many independent record outlets.

But with the exception of the comparatively harmless Böhse Onkelz album *Der Nette Mann*, which was restricted to those over 18 because it allegedly contained "national socialist slogans",³ rightwing skinhead records did not attract the attention of the German government in the 1980s. The Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons was far too busy removing leftist punk fare such as *Polizei/SA/SS* and *Deutschland*⁴ by Hamburg band Slime from the shelves.

Nationalist resurgence

In the early 90s, just after reunification, nationalist sentiments ran high, boosted by the belief that 'communism' had been defeated. Christian Democratic politicians routinely blamed asylum-seekers and "criminal foreigners" for all social ills, including those caused by the merciless plundering and privatisation of the annexed East German territories. Die Republikaner, a far-right populist party led

by former Waffen SS officer Franz Schönhuber, jumped on the chauvinist bandwagon and gained respectable election results.

In this climate, it was not unusual for skinheads to sport Nationalistische Front⁵ patches at high school without causing much of a stir, and tapes of white-power bands were swapped in class. To run into serious trouble with the school headmaster, on the other hand, all you had to do was draw the red star and the Heckler and Koch machine gun logo of the Red Army Faction on your textbook.

A couple of years later, and all of a sudden newspapers and magazines were packed to the rafters with horror stories of racist bands. Third-rate combos like Störkraft were gaining national exposure through interviews in the magazine *Der Spiegel* and on prime-time TV talk shows. Every woman, man and child in the country knew their names. What had happened? If you were to believe the press and media, these bands bore direct responsibility for the latest wave of racist violence that was sweeping the country. Two teenagers from Mölln, so we were told, had been listening to white-power rock before firebombing a Turkish family home and killing two young children.

From August 22-26 1992, a mob of several hundred far-right hooligans and assorted local teenagers held an asylum-seeker refuge in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in the north east of Germany under siege. They smashed windows, entered the building wielding baseball bats, threw bricks and

Molotov cocktails. Parts were set on fire. The largely Vietnamese asylum-seekers were terrorised for four straight nights - it was a miracle that nobody died. While the police did precious little to stop the racists, citing lack of resources, they did, however, manage to arrest all the Anti-Fascist Action activists that had travelled to Rostock to intervene.

As it happened, the ruling Christian Democratic Party led by Helmut Kohl had been pushing for a change to article 16 of the German constitution: the right of asylum. All the CDU needed was a majority vote in parliament. When the Rostock pogrom erupted, the Christian Democrats were faster than lightning to link it to the asylum debate. And so, like clockwork, their proposal went through - officially to prevent further such events, the new policy made it more difficult to claim political asylum in Germany. Journalist Jochen Schmidt, who was held under siege alongside the asylum-seekers, believed it "at least possible" that a "controlled escalation of popular anger" was planned in the build-up to the Rostock pogrom, serving as a pretext to strengthen the arguments of the bourgeois right.⁶

Now that the job was done and the neo-Nazi fringe groups had served their purpose, the only cloud on the otherwise clear horizon was the fact that Germany's reputation abroad seemed at stake. The international press predictably milked the new wave of barbarous racism from the fatherland for what it was worth, and - shock, horror - even foreign investors

began to tut audibly. In short, it was time to regain the moral high ground.

That is when crocodile tears started to flow and heads began to roll. Plenty of far-right splinter groups such as the Nationalist Front and the Free Workers Party, which had been active since 1985 and 1979 respectively, were outlawed. Vanloads of neo-Nazi skinhead records, many of which had been widely available at independent record stores throughout the 80s, were confiscated against the backdrop of a well choreographed media uproar.

The Rock-O-Rama label - whose owner, Herbert Egoldt, had made a fortune ripping off dumb bonehead bands - was raided. And while they were at it, the police confiscated a couple of old punk records too: the 1981 Rock-O-Rama release *Jedem das seine* by Cotzbrocken did not have a lot to do with the far right, but if you can kill two birds with one stone, why not also ban releases that contain pro-Red Army Faction lyrics?⁷

‘Extremism’

The government parties called upon the entire population to join them in a huge national demonstration against “intolerance”, “violence”, and - you guessed it - “extremism”. Mirroring this narrative, which was as sentimental as it was cynical in implicitly lumping in the far left, was the former nationalist skinhead combo, Böhse Onkelz. Now a commercially successful heavy rock band, they spoke out against “rightwing and leftwing violence” in a press release.

Despite the token album bans, the white-power music scene remained alive and well. Bands such as Landser dodged the authorities by recording and releasing their music abroad, then smuggling the CDs back to Germany. While the preceding generation of bands was content to play crudely racist and nationalist songs and only occasionally referred to the Third Reich, the likes of Landser took the genre to new excesses by openly celebrating Hitler, the SS, concentration camps and genocide.

The Social Democratic Party-Green Party coalition that formed a government in 1998 could not have been more grateful for neo-Nazi bogeymen of this sort. Here was a cabinet whose chancellor had once been a left-leaning member of the Jusos⁸ and, as a young lawyer, had defended Red Army Faction terrorist Horst Mahler⁹. The Green Party represented the generation of 1968: former ultra-lefts and Maoists, often recruited from the Kommunistischer Bund,¹⁰ worked alongside eco-centrics, liberals, and assorted strands of the petty bourgeois centre-left.

Now duty-bound to administer capitalism, it was this government that approved of German military participation in the Kosovo war of 1999 - the tail end of a long and bloody conflict that had served to restructure the former Yugoslavia in the interests of international, and particularly German, capital. With politicians like foreign minister Joschka Fischer, in his youth a member of a group called Revolutionärer Kampf (Revolutionary Struggle), actively perpetuating the inhumane system they once opposed, there was but one way for them to present themselves as the forces of progress: by cracking down on neo-Nazis.

Following the firebombing of a Düsseldorf synagogue in 2000, chancellor Schröder called for a “revolt of the decent”. To Schröder, often sardonically dubbed *Genosse der Bosse* (comrade of the bosses) in the German press, the incident served as a useful device to rally the ‘decent’ majority behind what he called the ‘new centre’ - a business-friendly national consensus, in opposition to both “right and left extremism” and represented by the government coalition.

Suffice to say, whatever crimes German neo-Nazis committed - and

they committed many - paled in comparison to the atrocities inflicted upon the ex-Yugoslavian peoples by the new centre coalition of the “decent”. It is tempting to believe that the political mainstream has a vested interest in the existence of a certain level of neo-Nazi activity - especially when it comes in media-friendly Hollywood mode, with swastikas, skinheads, and a dangerous rock soundtrack.

Not only does the extreme right provide a welcome distraction from the crimes of the bourgeoisie; it also serves as a bogeyman that - unlike Islamic terrorism - can even drive sections of the left to accept the sacrifice of civil and political liberties. Angela Merkel’s current Christian Democratic government understands that as well as Schröder’s new centre did.

“In the struggle against rightwing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism,” trumpeted a press report on October 11 2010, “consumer protection minister Ilse Aigner (Christian Social Union) has encouraged social network providers to make use of their domiciliary rights and lock out Nazis.” In case this sounds fair enough to you, stick around for the small print: “Enemies of the constitution, whether left or right, should have no place on these platforms,” Aigner elaborated in a statement in *Die Zeit*,¹¹ the centre-left daily that founded the misleadingly named Net Against Nazis campaign.

Choosing the butcher

In a more rational world, every communist, socialist and radical democrat worth their salt would vigorously protest such sneaky attempts at abolishing the right of free communication and information. They might even point out that the CSU, the Bavarian establishment party that Ilse Eiger represents, is to all intents and purposes a party of the far right. But the second the word ‘Nazi’ reverberates around the room, all reason is thrown to the wind - even on the presumed left.

Nazis raus aus dem Internet (‘Nazis off the internet’) is the name of the Left Party’s own version of official ‘anti-fascism’, a campaign set up as early as 2000, when the core of the Left Party was still known as the PDS. “The internet must not continue to provide a platform for the Nazis’ propaganda and networking,” said the campaign’s web page in 2010, “so let’s continue to build pressure until web providers block such websites”.¹² Like turkeys voting for Christmas, the Left Party and the campaign’s supporters from the German Communist Party (DKP) and the Young Socialists in the SPD (Jusos) play right into the hands of Ilse Eiger and co. In a country that blocks and censors everything from Red Army Faction history websites to body modification online forums, the decision as to what is undesirable and what is not will not be assigned to the Left Party and the DKP.

Likewise, Left Party activists are regularly heard pleading with the state to ban ‘extremist’ demonstrations, such as the annual march through Dresden that sees thousands of far-right militants commemorate the 1945 Allied bombing. Last year, the city of Dresden banned the anti-fascist counter-demonstration instead, confiscating placards put up by *Nazifrei - eine Stadt stellt sich Quer*, a Unite Against Fascism-type popular front supported by the trade unions, Jusos, Greens and celebrities such as the punk rock band, Die Toten Hosen. Rico Gebhardt, chairman of Saxony’s Left Party, could not think of anything better to say than: “Consequently, the Nazi demonstration should have been banned too” - referring to a Federal Constitutional Court decree regarding “assemblies that may disrupt the public peace”.¹³

As a German rhyme goes, *Die allerdümmsten Kälber wählen ihren Metzger selber*: the stupidest calves choose their own butcher. In this respect, Left Party vice-chair Katina Schubert took the biscuit for suing the German version of Wikipedia for displaying “symbols of unconstitutional and banned organisations” such as the NSDAP’s swastika - she hoped to “force the providers to introduce political and ethical standards” to the online encyclopaedia.¹⁴

This, despite the fact that the Left Party itself is considered extremist and possibly unconstitutional by Angela Merkel’s government coalition. The Federal Administrative Court ruled in July 2010 that the German state security service, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, may continue to monitor the Left Party and its members, recommending that particular attention be paid to the Communist Platform and Marxist Forum factions.¹⁵

Perhaps the comrades in the Left Party are not aware that neighbouring Poland has just outlawed the open display of ‘extremist symbols’ such as the red star and the hammer and sickle.¹⁶ Maybe they have not heard how in 2006, Stuttgart’s punk mail order, Nix Gut, was banned from selling patches that displayed a crossed-out swastika - an extremist symbol, argued the state prosecutors. Perhaps it also escaped them that this year the government coalition decided to use the budget that had hitherto “only been used against the extreme right” to fight “all forms of extremism - ie, left extremism and Islamic extremism”, and paying particular attention to “red-painted fascists”.¹⁷

It is as if they did not know that despite all the jazz about fighting neo-Nazis, the most consistent opponents of the bourgeoisie will be hit the hardest. A cursory look at West German history would put them right. After all, anti-democratic endeavours dressed up as paternalistic do-gooderism have a long and unholy tradition in the Federal Republic.

As early as 1950, Adenauer prohibited public servants from belonging to 13 “extremist organisations”, using a decree known as the *Adenauer-Erlass*. In practice, it was targeted almost exclusively against the left. Several thousand members of the Communist Party (KPD) and groups such as the League of Anti-Fascists, a socialist organisation of concentration camp survivors, were interrogated and eventually sacked from their jobs.

Berufsverbote

The first political party to be banned in West Germany was the Sozialistische Reichspartei (Socialist Party of the Reich) in 1952, an organisation of stubborn Nazis that failed to adapt to the change of circumstances in 1945. The existence of such a party was seen as too embarrassing during the deNazification era. After all, West German Nazis had been given every opportunity to get on message, with the possibility of splendid careers as Christian Democratic politicians, employers and other such big shots.

Four years later, the ban sledgehammer hit the KPD - only 11 years after the Nazi ban had expired due to the demise of the Third Reich. The official reason given was that the KPD was “leftwing extremist” and its vision of a dictatorship of the proletariat incompatible with the new liberal-democratic order of West Germany. Having just emerged from an uneasy alliance with national socialism, the German capitalists represented by Adenauer desired a ‘political peace’ favourable to their new partners, the United States. To eliminate the up-pity KPD, whose campaign against West Germany’s joining Nato had found resonance with the war-weary population, was therefore their prime

objective.

Anti-communist witch-hunts, however, were by no means the preserve of the conservative right. In the early 1970s, none other than SPD chancellor Willy Brandt, also known as ‘red Willy’, revived the spirit of McCarthy and Adenauer. Brandt’s so-called *Radikalerlass* (anti-radical decree), which once again banned communists from the civil service and the teaching profession by implementing *Berufsverbote* (occupational bans), was the somewhat left-leaning chancellor’s bid for respectability. Officially a reaction to the terrorism of the Red Army Faction, in truth the decree was mainly enacted against members of the now reconstituted German Communist Party (DKP) - a legalistic, Khrushchevite party of peaceful coexistence, originally approved by Kiesinger’s CDU government as a safe alternative to the racier extra-parliamentary left of 1968.

Being the only European country beside fascist Spain and Portugal to enact such draconian laws against communists earned West Germany not only flattering comments abroad. Enter SPD chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the ‘hey presto’ man of the German chattering classes. “Cannons were used for shooting sparrows” was how Schmidt jovially referred to the *Berufsverbote* in hindsight. He did relax the decree to some extent. But that did not stop him from significantly expanding the legal and technological means of data collection to supervise political undesirables. Once again, the Red Army Faction served as a pretext - and once again, all radical left groups were targeted, including those that strongly disapproved of terrorism.

In the past, so-called anti-extremist decrees, bans and campaigns have been used for many different reasons. Applied against the far right, they have legitimised government machinations or served as a distraction. They have provided evidence of a government’s good intentions and cemented the state’s paternalistic role as protecting us from Evil. And, yes, they have even served leftwing organisations by fooling their supporters into thinking they are doing something useful.

But, as has been the case so many times in Germany and other countries, calls on the capitalist state or institutions to implement political censorship will eventually backfire against the left. Socialist Workers Party members who, in an eerie echo of the *Berufsverbote*, demand that BNP members be sacked from their jobs or barred from public service, are virtually serving up to the capitalists on a silver platter the weapons that will be used against us.

It took the working class decades of struggle to extract limited democratic rights from the bourgeoisie: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom to form political parties. As we have seen with the student demonstrations in London at the end of last year, the ruling class permanently attempts to further limit, and if it can, abolish these rights. Let us not help the ruling class in this endeavour. Let us not give up our rights without a fight. In short, let’s not be stupid, comrades.

As advocates of extreme democracy in every sphere, communists have no business assisting the capitalist state in banning the expression of political beliefs or withholding information from us. On the contrary, we support and applaud the widest possible dissemination of all information, including the opening of government archives and the release of state and company secrets. We vigorously oppose state and corporate censorship on the internet and in all other media.

As we have often argued in this paper, there are many tactics to counter fascism, and which one we use depends entirely on the circumstances. An argument in a pub or a debate on TV certainly requires

a different *ad hoc* response than, say, a situation where one is confronted with a raging fascist mob in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. Leftist punk poet Attila the Stockbroker put it very nicely in one of his songs: “If it takes a voice - shout the truth. If it takes a hand - hold them back. If it takes a fist - strike them down.” To call on the class enemy for help, however, is never a very good tactic for communists.

Ultimately, it is no use merely adopting reactive measures against fascism; the only long-term solution is to offer an alternative to the sick system that breeds it. Communists in the German Left Party must cease their advocacy of political censorship of “extremist” or “unconstitutional” groups, symbols and ideas. Instead, they ought to attack the hypocritical bourgeois construct of ‘extremism’ itself - a construct that tars those who aim to liberate all of humanity with the same brush as reactionary chauvinists. It is up to communists in the Left Party to take the lead in fighting for a mass Communist Party in Germany - not as a Stalinist, Trotskyist or Luxemburgist sect, but a real party of the working class, united around a revolutionary programme which, unlike that of the Left Party, fosters no illusions in ‘overcoming’ capitalism by constitutional means ●

Notes

1. Literally “incitement of the people”, though commonly used to mean “stirring up racial hatred” in German legislation. The ambiguity of the term, however, allows for various interpretations and can potentially be used to mean “incitement of the people” against individual politicians, capitalists and so on. It has been employed in the latter context for polemical purposes.
2. An obscurantist might want to include the German band, Ragnarock, which released a series of abysmal seven-inch singles beginning in 1979. The group was founded by National Democratic Party members who were unaware of any new developments in popular music since 1964, and their Hammond organ-driven ‘rock’ with lyrics about Rudolph Hess failed to recruit anybody.
3. The “national socialist slogans” the censors believed they heard were in reality football hooligan songs that spoke of “invading France” for the 1984 World Cup. The track ‘Deutschland’ was no more nauseatingly nationalist than any national anthem.
4. The latter song, whose chorus went “Germany must die so we can live”, contained lyrics that ‘defiled’ the colours of the German national flag. Much to the dismay of the band, which hailed from the anti-imperialist autonomist milieu, the track is now very popular with the pro-imperialist ‘anti-German’ movement.
5. The Nationalistische Front was a group that recruited almost exclusively among young skinheads and adhered to Strasserism.
6. While beleaguered by rightwing hooligans in the burning asylum-seeker building, Schmidt wrote a farewell letter to his wife - help just did not seem to be forthcoming despite the many pleas from within.
7. Why albums by an early 80s punk band known as OHL were confiscated during the same raid, on the other hand, is anyone’s guess. Regularly speaking out “against all extremism”, they should have been Helmut Kohl’s favourite group.
8. Jusos is an abbreviation for Jungsozialisten in der SPD, the Social Democratic Party of Germany’s youth league. It serves as an umbrella for young careerists, left Social Democrats and undercover Trotskyists.
9. Ironically, Mahler converted to neo-Nazism in the 2000s. Having decided that Germany was an “oppressed nation” that had to be defended against “foreign” capitalism from the “Zionist-controlled USA” when he was still a Maoist, his conversion to neo-Nazism was perhaps not really such a huge step.
10. The left-Maoist Kommunistischer Bund, while a typical product of the 1970s, stood out from the rest for its *Arbeiterkampf* paper, which, instead of hammering home a party line, featured plenty of controversy and debate.
11. www.fr-online.de/politik/nazis-sollen-draussen-bleiben/-/1472596/4735460/-/index.html.
12. www.nazis-raus-aus-dem-internet.de.
13. Die Linke press release: <http://die-linke.de/ne/presse/presseerklarungen/detail/archiv/2010/januar/zurueck/aus-den-laendern/artikel/zum-verbot-der-dresdner-nazi-demo>.
14. <http://die-linke.de/presse/presseerklarungen/detail/zurueck/aktuell/artikel/nazis-raus-aus-wikipedia>.
15. www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5824186,00.html.
16. www.foxnews.com/world/2009/11/27/poland-imposes-strict-ban-communist-symbols.
17. These statements can be found in a German-language article carried in the magazine *Analyse und Kritik*: <http://strassenausucker.blogspot.de/2010/01/27/total-extrem-extremismusbegriff-und-totalitarismustheorie>.

SCOTLAND

Scabs and vengeance

Lessons must be learnt from the whole Tommy Sheridan episode, writes Sarah McDonald

The verdict in the Tommy Sheridan case should be seen as a blow to the workers' movement and a victory for the long-running campaign against a prominent working class leader. On December 23 comrade Sheridan, former Scottish Socialist Party convenor and leader of the Solidarity breakaway, was found guilty of perjury by a majority verdict in Glasgow's high court. The jury found he had lied in his successful defamation action against News International after the *News of the World* published allegations about his sexual life. News International has a thoroughly reactionary agenda and the *NotW* is not merely a rag filled with celebrity scandal exposés. Tommy Sheridan's sex life provided it with the opportunity to bring him down.

If it had been possible to transport the Scottish left of the late 90s forward to the present day, comrades would doubtlessly find the experience quite unbelievable. For many who were part of the SSP, the last six years have been a time of political screw-ups on a grand scale and very public personal fallouts that have been both vitriolic and petty. No-one comes out of this one clean.

Sheridan's decision to sue the *News of the World* for defamation was stupid and irresponsible. Those who, all too eagerly, cooperated with the police and News International to bring Sheridan down should be condemned. But, he should not have labelled those on the SSP leadership "scabs" for telling the truth when they were forced to - after all, why would anyone perjure themselves over someone else's sex life?

The trial itself was unpleasant to follow: the hatred on public display from erstwhile comrades, the backstabbing and bickering, the bad-tempered courtroom exchanges, the implausible conspiracy theories concocted by Sheridan, the very public humiliation of comrades like Katrine Trolle, the sentimentality in Sheridan's speeches, using his wife, Gail, and his daughter to win sympathy. While, quite correctly, comrade Sheridan did make use of every opportunity to attack the *News of the World*, in the end the evidence was overwhelming - and the jury was clearly not sufficiently class-conscious to ignore it, as the one in the original defamation case had been.

According to *Scotland on Sunday*, comrade Sheridan's legal team are preparing an appeal.¹ There are various grounds for this, as discussed by blogger James Doleman,² who has provided by far the most complete reportage of the entire trial. Sheridan could appeal on the grounds that key emails pertinent to the case have been lost; that vital witnesses such as Fiona McGuire (a former activist with whom Sheridan was accused of having an affair) and Glenn Mulclaire (a private investigator who has been convicted of phone-hacking celebrities and who Sheridan believes hacked into his voicemail) were missing; or that the judge did not put enough emphasis in his summation to the jury on the possibility of a 'not proven' verdict (a peculiarity of Scottish law that, while not the same as 'innocent', usually leads to an acquittal).

In the meantime, the *News of the World* will seek to overturn the £200,000 damages award which followed the 2006 defamation case. Sheridan is due to be sentenced on January 26, and it could be as long as five years that he goes down for if he

does not win his appeal.

The perjury trial was a more difficult case to win than the 2006 defamation case. Comrade Sheridan had sacked his legal team then too, playing the 'one man against the system' card, relying on his oratorical skill, the lack of tangible evidence and his wife's testimony. This time, not so lucky. While a jury might persuade itself that all 16 of the former SSP comrades who testified that he admitted to visiting a swingers club at the infamous executive meeting of November 9 2004 had been lying, it must have been much more difficult to dismiss the evidence of their own ears provided by the so-called McNeillage tape. This, of course, was the video secretly recorded by the self-serving former friend and comrade of Sheridan's, George McNeillage, which the latter had despicably sold to the *News of the World* for £200,000 and was instrumental in the instigation of the perjury case in the first place. No, this time it was always going to be harder.

Conspiracy

Comrade Sheridan's implied allegation that the whole thing was either a joint conspiracy or separate, coincidental conspiracies by his former comrades, the *News of the World* and the police to bring him down was pretty far-fetched - though undoubtedly sections of the media and the state were out to get him (given how rife perjury is thought to be in the Scottish courts, how many cases of perjury are brought to trial?). And it is certainly true that some SSP executive members showed an obscene willingness - enthusiasm even - to collaborate with the police and see him convicted, although, of course, he *did* stupidly admit to the Cupids club visit to the entire EC. While his attempts to turn the tables by putting the *News of the World* in the dock would no doubt have struck a chord with some jurors, this was insufficient to outweigh their certainty that he had indeed lied.

The whole foolish affair is a sad outcome for someone who has played such an important role in the working class movement in Scotland. His dedication to the workers' cause, his militancy during the anti-poll tax campaign and his oratory won him huge admiration and support - and hatred from the class enemy.

The idea that, as Alan McCombes commented, Sheridan has "done more damage to the Scottish left than the *News of the World* and Margaret Thatcher combined" is way over the top. He did, however, play a pivotal role in the events that reduced the SSP from a potentially powerful (albeit left nationalist) force with six MSPs, numerous branches across Scotland and a significant layer of dedicated activists to the political joke that the organisation is today.

Of course, as everyone on the Scottish left knows, it did not have to be this way. There were so many mistakes made in relation to Sheridan that it is hard to know where to start. Most would begin in November 2004 with, what Colin Fox called the SSP's "9/11" meeting (held on November 9). That was when comrade Sheridan admitted, according to the overwhelming majority of those present, that some of the *NotW* allegations made against him were true, but "they can't prove it" - and he tried to convince the executive to back him in taking the *News of the World* to court. On BBC Scotland's documentary, *The rise and lies of*

Tommy Sheridan,³ Rosie Kane states that in the course of the meeting Sheridan had gone from appearing quite remorseful to reverting to his usual rhetorical mode, talking about the political capital the SSP could gain by taking on the *NotW*. According to comrade Kane, he expected everyone in the meeting to uncritically support what he was saying, as they usually did. Only, she said, this time they didn't.

This, in and of itself, is telling. Sheridan was used to being the public face of the SSP, and the majority was usually prepared to go along with him. Not this time. Here they were not looking at a matter of political principle, but at a court action over (partly true) allegations about his private life. The advice offered to Sheridan at this point was either to insist that his private life was exactly that - private - and refuse to comment on the allegations or to confess all. It is likely that, had he taken either of those options, then the whole thing would have blown over fairly quickly and with minimal damage to the movement.

The only really principled position, however, would have been to insist that people's private lives are their own, whatever shape or form that may take, and not buy into the bourgeois ideology that only committed, monogamous, heterosexual (preferably married) relationships are acceptable. Even George Galloway apparently advised Sheridan not to sue, as it would "open up his entire personal life".⁴

Alas, Tommy's ego would not allow him to follow this advice and he pursued his case against the wishes of his comrades. And here we see the SSP comrades' missed opportunity to nip this thing in the bud. It turns out that Alan McCombes had given a sworn affidavit to the *Herald* newspaper, to the effect that if Sheridan did not resign as SSP convenor then the party would tell all - using the bourgeois media as a leverage over a comrade is hardly the most principled approach to take.

While Sheridan did resign, he was clearly showing no signs of taking his comrades' advice to drop the action against News International and by this stage the writing was on the wall. The SSP should have told Sheridan that if he went ahead with his defamation case he would be expelled from the organisation. Once Sheridan had confessed to the executive, the SSP itself would be involved, whether it wanted to be or not.

As has been argued in this paper consistently by myself and others, the roots of this whole fiasco goes back much further than a small room in Glasgow in November 2004. They go well back into the 1990s with the anti-poll tax campaign and Scottish Militant Labour. The ego that is Sheridan was cultivated during those struggles and shaped as part of the creation of the SSP. The two were inextricably linked. There was no way in which the SSP could exist as before without the figure of Tommy Sheridan as its public face. Not only was the idealised identity of Sheridan as a working class hero, a militant fighter and firebrand socialist promoted by the SSP, but the leadership also conjured up the persona of a clean-living family man - trying to be the "Daniel O'Donnell of Scottish politics", as Alan McCombes said in court.

However, what comrade McCombes fails to acknowledge is that he and his other former Militant comrades were complicit in creating that identity. Sheridan's private life

was a far cry from that public persona and that made the allegations of affairs and group sex all the more damning. The desire to protect this clean-living image at all costs drove him to the politically suicidal decision to sue the *NotW*. The public persona peddled by the SSP would end up contributing to the situation where comrades were put in the impossible position of either having to lie under oath and risk prosecution over a matter that had nothing to do with advancing the cause of working class or tell the truth and effectively align themselves with the *NotW*.

Victory

After Sheridan's surprising victory against the *News of the World*, in which 11 SSP members gave evidence against him, it was clear that the SSP was heading for a split, and in September 2006 it happened. Sheridan left the SSP, followed by the Socialist Workers Party's members in Scotland, what remained of the Committee for a Workers' International's Scottish section and other individuals to form Solidarity, antagonistically self-branded as "Scotland's Socialist Movement". But the defamation trial and all of the unpleasantness and pettiness that it brought into the public domain cost the left its credibility and in the 2007 Scottish elections the left lost all its seats. In subsequent elections neither Solidarity nor the SSP have been capable of polling much more than one or two percent of the vote.

The anger and frustration stirred up by the events have taken their toll on comrades both sides of the divide and there remains a good deal of acrimony between former comrades. On winning his defamation case, Sheridan labelled six of his former comrades "scabs" in the *Daily Record*. In doing so, understandably, he upset a lot of people

- one of which was his old friend and best man, George McNeillage.

McNeillage's actions were surely the worst of any in this whole affair - demanding £250,000 for helping News International to nail Sheridan. Again, the SSP failed to take action. McNeillage should have been expelled for his blatant crossing of class lines (the significant financial gain making the whole thing even slimmer), but the leadership refused to take any action because it was "not in their culture".⁵ Commenting on the verdict the SSP claims: "we have no desire for vengeance" (December 12 2010). But they were by now out to get Sheridan and in effect condoned McNeillage.

There are many lessons that we can draw from this disaster. The left must end its obsession with chasing charismatic figures and instead use the talented, charismatic individuals within our ranks in a disciplined, effective way. Obviously, Sheridan himself should be held responsible. Not for his sexual activities (that is his own private matter), but for taking legal action to protect a façade, and for forcing others into that unenviable courtroom situation. But nothing could excuse the contemptible way in which some of them deliberately tried to put him behind bars in response to his "scabs" taunt.

Sheridan was targeted by the *News of the World* for his role as a working class leader - and that is why we side with him against News International, the police and the state, irrespective of his own foolishness and irresponsible behaviour ●

Notes

1. *The Scotsman* December 26.
2. <http://sheridantrial.blogspot.com/2010/12/grounds-for-appeal.html>.
3. *The rise and lies of Tommy Sheridan* BBC Scotland, Thursday December 23.
4. *The Herald* January 2.

Fighting fund

Best wishes

Thanks to those comrades who sent us their best wishes for 2011 - not least those who accompanied them with a donation!

We are confident that this year will see us make headway in getting across our central message - that our class can only advance in any real sense when it is armed with a united, democratic, Marxist party. We may be condemned as 'ultra-left' or 'sectarian' for pointing to this truth, but that will not deter us from continuing to stress it.

While many readers accept and approve of this message, there are others who are not yet convinced of its validity. Nevertheless they admire our openness, our willingness to engage with the ideas of others, and recognise our dedication to the cause of the working class. They know that the *Weekly Worker* is the place to debate out all the differences that divide the left. For that reason too, many comrades are prepared to support us financially.

That was the case in December, when a tremendous surge of goodwill took us over our £1,250 fighting fund target. The last part of the month saw a fantastic total

of £607 come in through standing orders, including £50 each from AM, RMB and JT, £70 from MM and £230 (!) from SK. We also received £180 through the post, including £35 from GD and £75 from TG - for our Summer Offensive, he said. A bit late, that one, comrade, but we'll take it nonetheless!

We ended the year with £1,273 received for our December fund - thanks to every one of our supporters. Let's hope we can now start 2011 as we mean to continue. After just a few days we already have £165 - entirely made up of standing orders coming in at the start of the month. Nothing as yet via PayPal though - despite the fact we had 9,483 visitors to our website last week (that may seem on the low side, but don't forget, there was no new issue of the *Weekly Worker* to read). We expect our readership figure will be rather higher next week! ●

Robbie Rix

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

REVIEW

Paradox of an anti-Stalinist

Philip Bounds **Orwell and Marxism: the political and cultural thinking of George Orwell** IB Tauris Publications, 2009, pp253, £46

Think of George Orwell and most of us are immediately drawn to classic popular literary works, such as *The road to Wigan Pier*, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. These works have stimulated debate throughout British (and world) literary and political circles, with Philip Bounds' *Orwell and Marxism* a further welcome contribution.

Broadly speaking, Orwell's politics are commonly identified as having two particular traits. Firstly, there was his hatred of capitalism. Influenced by his research into the effects of Britain's economic slump on working class communities in Leeds, Sheffield and Wigan during the 1930s, Orwell became convinced that capitalism had "run its course", as Bounds puts it, and that "the industrial derelicts, the misery of the unemployed, the ghastly housing conditions and the pervasive atmosphere of quiet despair" that it produced needed to be ended (p20). Then there was Orwell's perspective on the system that he believed was necessary to replace capitalism. Defining his socialism as one that emphasised a full and decentralised democracy in order to ensure that "ordinary people's innate creativity and decency can come into force", Orwell's experiences in the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) during the Spanish civil war meant that his socialism was also based upon a hatred of 'official communism'. Indeed, much of the last years of Orwell's life was taken up with denouncing Stalinism and totalitarianism - to the point that the period when *Animal Farm* and *1984* were published (1945 and 1949 respectively), his "loathing" (p27) for the USSR saw him take up a position in the Labour government's Information Research Department - an organisation dedicated to churning out anti-communist propaganda during the cold war.

One of the main attractions about Bounds' work, though, is that it comprehensively captures not only Orwell's perspective of capitalism during the period throughout which he was one of Britain's most prolific and respected literary commentators, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the central paradox that lay within his theoretical, political and cultural proclamations on his socialism during this time. From the mid-1930s until his death in 1950, as an arch-critic of Stalinism, Orwell was more than aware of the impact Soviet 'communism' was having on the theory and practice of the world communist movement, includ-

ing in Britain. Indeed, as Bounds writes, although there was "no truth" in the claim that communists operating within or around the ranks of the CPGB were merely "Moscow stooges", many, if not all, of the party's early political 'lines' were decided by Comintern and Stalin's firm bureaucratic grip on it (p7). With this in mind, it was hardly surprising that Orwell's anti-Stalinism manifested itself in attacks on those in and around the ranks of the CPGB.

However, the basis for such attacks often originated in and was shaped by an ideological engagement with them. Various individuals in the British communist movement may "have done more than anyone else to portray Orwell as a sort of Tory fifth-columnist in the camp of the working class" (p6), as a consequence of his attacks upon them (and on Soviet politics generally), but that did not prevent his work from containing "striking parallels" with "those of the young literary intellectuals who were either members of, or closely associated with, the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1930s and 1940s", the author argues. In fact, such individuals were among Orwell's "biggest influences", he asserts (p6).

Orwell and Marxism details why this was the case. Concentrating on his novels subsequent to Orwell's socialist 'conversion' after the Spanish civil war, as well as probing his work as a broadcaster and producer at the BBC, Bounds examines his political writings prior to and during the time when he was literary editor for *Tribune* and dissects the many pamphlets the man wrote popularising literary forms. He highlights the complexities and contradictions within Orwell's politics, reveals the influences and ideas that shaped those politics and highlights the efforts he undertook in order to counter Stalinist influence.

On one level, we are shown how Orwell's interpretation of the role of popular culture, for example, epitomised in comics such as *Gem* and *Magnet*, whilst frequently differing from those of communist writers at the time, often mirrored them: Orwell's writings may well have contained "very different conclusions" to writers from the CPGB about how the ruling class disseminates ideology, Bounds argues, but they also contained themes "already launched by those individuals" (p64). On another level, when responding to communist writers about their proclamations on British literary greats such as Dickens and Swift, Orwell may well have warned about the "dangers of excessive partisanship" (p86) by such writers and of an ideology that suggested the main criterion for judging a book was "whether or not it reflected the current line of the Communist Party" (p85). But he also used their ideas as a starting point with which to advance his own. Indeed, throughout Bounds' book, the writings of Christopher Hill and Arthur L Morton, let

alone the other 20 or so prominent communist literary critics Orwell refers to in his work, provide him with much more than simple ideological target practice.

Although not the main purpose of Bounds' work, by default the book also outlines some of the more controversial politics the CPGB pursued subsequent to its formation in 1920. Perhaps because of his long and close relationship with the Communist Party of Britain, Bounds himself never explicitly proclaims his own thoughts on such politics, leaving readers to deduce that he is sympathetic to much of 'official' communism's interpretation of the CPGB's perspectives at the time. Thus, while outlining the influence Comintern had on the party and its united front approach during the 1920s, as well as on its *Class against class* perspective at the turn of that decade, Bounds, prompted by the writings and thoughts of Orwell, probes and places into sharp focus the various concepts about English radicalism, modernism, fascism and, of course, totalitarianism existing throughout the 1930s and 1940s. But any serious critique of popular frontism - the main perspective that drove the CPGB from 1935 is absent.

The consequences of this approach are twofold. On the one hand, when looking at the question of totalitarianism, for example, we are told (quite correctly) of the need not "simply to denounce" such a system but to seek to understand it (p137). The 'why' and the 'how' of Stalin's Russia, as well as Hitler's Germany, are probed to this end. Indeed, practically all of Orwell's ideas on the issue of totalitarianism - from his musings about its psychological basis and its interrelationship with those people "with dictatorial ambitions" (p140) to his belief that behaviour control and threats to the freedom of speech in Britain could be "ascribed to the excessive prestige of communism" - are examined, brought to the fore and thus developed, as they are compared to and contrasted with those of the CPGB.

Good. On the other hand, however, when looking at Orwell's and the CPGB's politics during the period throughout World War II, the reluctance to critique the pro-war effort both were engaged in (often for different political reasons), is problematic. By the latter part of the 1930s, the CPGB had fully subscribed to the policy Georgi Dimitrov insisted was the only way to defeat fascism - uniting all anti-fascists into nationally based popular fronts. Orwell had attacked this approach, even though he "profoundly misunderstood it" (p141). But Bounds is reluctant to critique the ideology outright himself - surely a profound mistake, given that Orwell's alternative was hardly *that* ideologically distinct or superior. He relied on the radical history and traditions of the "English people", believing that "leftwingers", under the correct social circumstances, only had to take "patriotism to their hearts" for a capitalist government to be replaced by "an authentically socialist one" (p26).

Despite this, however, *Orwell and Marxism* is a comprehensively researched piece of work. As a result, it is a valuable asset for anyone wishing to get to grips with the politics of George Orwell and a useful tool for assessing those issues prominent within the communist movement throughout his most prolific and productive years ●

Gareth Evans

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 and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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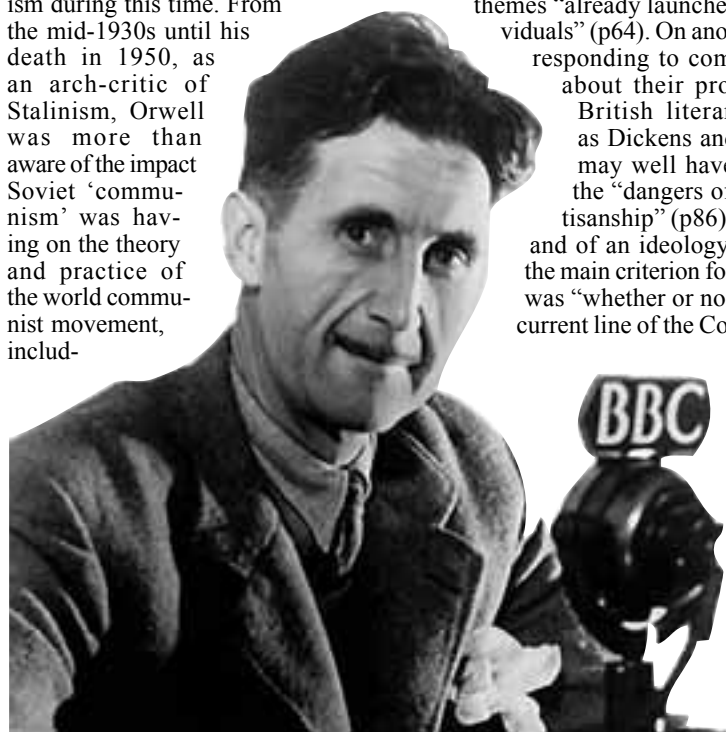
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**Left
nowhere
to be seen**

Plenty of choice, but no choice

James Turley looks at the unappetising range of candidates in Oldham East and Saddleworth

The background to the January 13 Oldham East and Saddleworth by-election is well-known - Phil Woolas, a particularly odious reactionary even by New Labour standards, scraped home in the seat by a margin of 103 votes last May, only to be stripped of it when it emerged that his campaign involved knowing lies about the personal character of his Liberal Democrat opponent, Elwyn Watkins.

Watkins is once again the Lib Dem candidate - but circumstances have robbed him of what would otherwise be a relatively easy ride, given Woolas's actions. The electors of Oldham East - that rarest of things, a three-way-swing constituency - will have to decide if punishing the local Labour apparatchiks is more important than punishing the incumbent government, which includes the Lib Dems, of course.

As such, this election offers a peculiarly direct snapshot of the dynamics in British politics as a whole. Woolas may be a special case, but the memory of 13 years of New Labour weighs on the masses all over the country. Labour is confident that they are in with a good chance of keeping the seat, despite everything, by riding the anger which has begun to focus on the coalition government.

Even the date has proven controversial. Ed Miliband complains that January 13 falls in the Christmas holidays - thousands of students, he says, will be disenfranchised. It is obvious who will benefit from that - and indeed, in a break from parliamentary tradition, it is the Liberal Democrats who set the date rather than Labour, the party that lost an MP. Still, it is not hard to imagine thousands of students returning early to punish Nick Clegg.

Speculation is rife, however, that Watkins may be getting a covert helping hand from his party's coalition partners. The Tories have been persistently accused of soft-peddalling their own campaign. *The Guardian* claims that a number of Conservative cabinet ministers admit in private that they would prefer Watkins to win "as a precursor to a wider election pact in 2015" (December 28). It will take more than swift denials from Millbank and a visit from David Cameron to dispel these rumours. Indeed, one wonders what the point is of two candidates contesting a seat on effectively the same programme.

As for the Labour candidate, it is no surprise that the would-be successor to Phil Woolas is hardly a leftwing firebrand. Debbie Abrams' campaign website features the usual array of New Labour platitudes, scolding the government for selling "local people" short and making the "wrong cuts at the wrong time".

We should be grateful, at least, that British National Party leader Nick Griffin has pulled out of the contest, mercifully sparing us the farcical sideshow of Nazi-chasing that usually follows him around. The BNP has instead chosen to live up to stereotype by running Derek Adams, a former pub landlord. Adams garnered a respectable showing in May in a nearby constituency; here, his prospects are hard to measure.

On the one hand, the far-right vote is split three ways between himself, the UK Independence Party and the English Democrats. On the other, none of the main parties are going into this vote with a clean record. Labour has Woolas; the Lib Dems are the coalition fall-guys. Even the Tories, meanwhile, have begun to fall foul of the bloodhounds in the reactionary press. *The Mail on Sunday* led with the luxurious Christmas exploits of leading government ministers and asked rhetorically, "Are we all in this together?" (January 2).

Still, as with many developments in bourgeois politics these days, the Tories have the least to lose here. It is the Lib Dems who find themselves on the line in the first instance - a proper kicking in this election will not exactly bolster the faltering ranks, and the risk is real that they will slip from being within 103 votes of the seat in May to a dismal third place in January. At Labour HQ, meanwhile, staffers will be anxiously watching to see whether the Miliband era can produce electoral success. If he fails, the remaining rump of disgruntled Blairites in parliament are clearly not above rocking the boat.

Even the BNP will feel under pres-

sure. The electoral turn it took under the stewardship of Nick Griffin brought many successes; but recently those successes have brought new problems of their own. From Griffin's public roasting on *Question time* to the persistent irritation of court battles over admissions criteria, the embarrassments are piling up. Meanwhile, the English Defence League has been muscling in on the football casual scene, though it has yet to run candidates. Throw in the appropriately dictatorial rule of the petty fuhrer Griffin, propped up by cronies (who often turn out to be embarrassments themselves), and the scene is set for a split.

The presence of three candidates from the far right, along with painfully establishment-friendly hopefuls from the main parties, does highlight a certain absence - where is the left? Perhaps some Unite Against Fascism foot soldiers will make it to the constituency to screech hysterically about the BNP; but no political formation currently exists that can put up a deposit and run a credible campaign, at a time when an alternative vision to the bourgeois parties - and the grievance-mongers of the far right - is most sorely needed.

The various self-styled parties and miscellaneous groupuscules on the British left are divided. Because they are divided, they are weak; they may maintain a modest base of support in several major cities, but none operate on a scale that will support a serious organisation on the ground in - for example - Oldham.

One might perhaps have hoped for anti-cuts candidates, either from a local group or a national one. Yet the largest of the national campaigns, the

Coalition of Resistance against Cuts and Privatisation, is by its nature a hodge-podge of different forces, including many who have no stomach for putting even mild pressure on Labour candidates to take a harder line against cuts - let alone standing candidates independently. Its competitors include the more or less directionless Socialist Workers Party-dominated Right to Work campaign; and the National Shop Stewards Network, which is in disarray now that the Socialist Party in England and Wales has pushed it into being more explicitly a politically campaigning organisation, from which it can vie for influence in the anti-cuts movement. Neither, needless to say, is in rude health.

SPEW and the SWP at least managed to cobble together a front for the general election last year. But the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is not destined to last, despite the fact that SPEW is encouraging "local groups, trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigns" to stand candidates in the May local elections under the Tusc banner. The SWP - now looking to pile its resources into RTW and recruitment - is not exactly prioritising Tusc, if indeed it intends to continue to support it at all.

The left's inability to mount a credible election campaign is hardly surprising. It spent the first decade of this century attempting quick fixes. The relentless pursuit of one objective - attracting disaffected Labourites on the basis of reheated Labourism - has repeatedly failed, and the glimmers of promise that arose from this futile quest all lie in ruins today. The Socialist Labour Party had effectively been destroyed by the turn of the century; the Socialist

Alliance, which for a time united most of the major fragments of the far left, if a little uneasily, was forcibly wound up by the SWP to make room for Respect. The latter split, inevitably, when contradictions between the SWP and its partners ruptured spectacularly, and is now dwindling to nothing.

North of the border, the Scottish Socialist Party has gone from being a serious organisation with six MSPs to a pathetic, utterly marginal, nationalist ginger group, in what may be the most undignified political and organisational collapse we have seen since the Workers Revolutionary Party's implosion in the 1980s. Tusc is merely an acutely farcical iteration of the same pattern.

If the Marxist left united in a truly substantial way - around a Marxist programme, even an inadequate one - we would see our prospects improve markedly. All we would have to leave behind is that which should be abandoned in any case - the aversion to democracy characteristic of sect organisations; the quasi-feudal right for Peter Taaffe or Charlie Kimber to have his word turned into action without interference; the inability to act as a disciplined minority.

Overcoming these sectarian barriers in a democratic fashion would mean we would have a serious shot at forming a fighting organisation, capable of competing for leadership of the growing resistance to government cuts. It would also mean that the people of Oldham would have something better to vote for than a Blair babe from central casting, two government hatchet men and a fascist publican ●

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