



weekly
worker

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political prisoners**

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Omar Suleiman threatens coup:
Workers need
revolution in
permanence**



LETTERS



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

Wrong shout

I'm sorry to say that, contrary to what Ben Lewis reports ('Keeping up the pressure', February 3), from the video displayed on *The Guardian* website the shout from a relatively small group of people following Aaron Porter away from the January 29 demonstration in Manchester, repeated quite frequently, was rather distinctly "You're a fucking Tory Jew", and not 'Tory too'. On one occasion there was "You're a filthy Tory Jew".

I don't think there were a lot of people shouting it, but certainly some people found it amusing, clever and enjoyable. I heard a discussion on the radio about the current acceptability amongst some people of the word 'Jew' as a general insult, similar to popular usage of 'gay'. It's just not enough to blame everything on the bad people of the media.

Matthew Caygill
email

Old insult

Perusing Ben Lewis's mildly interesting article on student protest, I was taken aback to read a reference to "even [my emphasis] old women and men waving their encouragement to demonstrators". Wow! Even the bus-pass generation making feeble arm movements of support. How inspiring!

Try replacing the word 'old' with 'black', 'Jewish', 'woman' or 'gay' to see just what offensive, patronising nonsense it is. Despite my advanced years I managed to walk at least part of the way on two student demos. I saw a great many people even older than myself taking part. Lots of us are retired lecturers and/or parents who are horrified and furious at what this corrupt government is doing to destroy educational opportunity. We may not be in the front line of the punch-ups, but we are with the students all the way.

And does the *Weekly Worker*, with its deep knowledge of the British labour movement, know that many of us are trade unionists? For example, the London UCU retired members branch has been present on all the main demos. Is this what the *Weekly Worker* means by a mass party - one where the older comrades stand on the sidelines and flap their arms?

Ian Birchall
email

For Chomsky

Our comrade Chris Knight appears to have completely lost the plot in his apparently never-ending critique of Noam Chomsky's work in linguistics.

Before commenting specifically on his latest three-page tirade in the *Weekly Worker*, perhaps we could recapitulate Chomsky's contributions, beginning with his review of Fred Skinner's *Verbal behaviour* (1957). Based on many years of research in behavioural psychology, Skinner had stated: "... the basic processes of verbal behaviour were now well understood ... the methods could be extended to human behaviour without serious modification". In his review, Chomsky argued that, although Skinner's insights from laboratory research might be genuine, they could only be superficially applied to human behaviour; behavioural prediction of a complex organism (like the human body/mind) requires knowledge of the internal structure of that organism - we need to know how it processes information received.

The nature-nurture debate has remained a central question in psychology since its beginnings in ancient times. Skinner argued from the point of view of his 'learning theory', working on the assumption that a child learns language by "operant conditioning": whenever infant babbling produces a sound remotely resembling a word, the child engenders positive reinforcement (a smile?) from an adult. From this reinforcement the child 'learns' the word. (To be fair to Skinner, it's not quite as simple as that.)

The implicit assumption from Chris Knight is that Skinner might be on the right track here ... 'language learning' is grounded on social interaction, nothing more. In fact, no child arrives in the world as a blank slate. It comes with a great number of innate reflexes, as every mother-to-be learns when attending her antenatal clinics. There are 'rooting' and 'sucking' reflexes: if the neonate is stroked on the cheek, it turns its head towards the stroke and will suck a proffered finger or nipple; the 'grasping' reflex, where a finger placed in its palm will be held (newborns can usually support their own weight at birth!); the 'swimming' reflex, where an infant placed face down in water, automatically paddles and kicks in a swimming pattern (many readers will have seen them 'in action' on TV adverts!). Most of these reflexes will have disappeared by the age of four to six months. Incredibly, a neonate, just 36 hours old, can 'imitate' a smile or frown from a parent facing them. Just stop for a while and consider the implication of these instances regarding neonates' perception of the world and propensity to cope with it. We cannot as yet explain how these innate actions originate, but we can surely hypothesise that we inherit rather more than we might have anticipated.

Chomsky's starting point was an attempt to explore the child's amazing ability to learn language. Three factors require explanation: (1) the ability of infants to attend specifically to speech elements in preference to all the other noises in the environment; (2) the ability of the child to master the complex language system in less than four years, at a time when other intellectual achievements are severely limited; (3) in spite of the enormous amount of speech they hear, much of it from ungrammatical and/or imperfect environments, children can construct meaningful sentences themselves, many of which they will not have previously heard. Irrespective of which particular language experienced, children learn it with equal ease (at the age of one week they can distinguish one language from another!). Furthermore, babies born deaf 'babble' in sign language in exactly the same way as their hearing contemporaries 'play' with the sounds they make; surely explainable only in terms of maturational underpinning?

Chomsky's hypothesis to answer these astounding feats was to suggest children are "wired" with an innate hypothesis-making ability - a "language acquisition device". They instinctively 'know' language is rule-governed and make a series of hypotheses underlying the speech they hear around them. All children are born equipped to learn grammar - all know that languages have similar features, use consonants, vowels, syllables, subject-predicate, nouns, verbs ... and children learn any language with equal ease. Given what we know of other biological, 'innate' abilities, I am mystified by the hostility of Chris Knight.

Knight objects to Chomsky's "fairy-tale hypotheses" for the ('primeval?') origins of these abilities, unshared with other species. How did the language learning capacity come about for the human mammal? None of us knows the answer. But it seems reasonable to hypothesise that, in the distant past, our ancestors acquired an upright posture (and bipedalism), associated with a descending larynx (it is situated much higher in the apes), producing the ability to make discrete "noises" required for the development of language. Probably, firstly, as a means of communication, eventually - as Trotsky's friend, Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, believed - language became a 'tool' for our intellectual development. (He researched the 'use' youngsters make of language for their thinking - by talking to themselves to help them solve problems.)

Chris keeps reminding us that Chomsky has no idea how these physiological changes came about - and "plays around" with "rays from outer space" or Platonic "souls". Today's researchers, working in the field of machine intelligence (where most of language research takes place), long ago left behind any possibility of 'self' or 'soul' entities in any literal sense; but Chris Knight is determined to attack the Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor on these theological grounds. Added to that, Chomsky keeps "changing his mind" (actually it has happened more frequently than Chris delineates), as if that, in itself, is a fault. That's what happens in real science, Chris!

My mind boggles at the thought that perhaps the day will come when Chris Knight decides to take Isaac Newton apart - another guy who kept modifying his views, combined with an obsession with theology. When he died, a third of Newton's books were works of a philosophical/theological nature - twice as many as any addressing the scientific questions for which he is most remembered. Elsewhere, 5,000 additional pages of handwritten notes were discovered, all relating to his attempts to 'decode the Bible' in order to discover the definitive date for the prophesied apocalypse. Although Isaac would not have been regarded as a 'Christian' by the church, then or now, he did believe the scriptures, whereas only Chris Knight regards Chomsky's "magic rays" as serious hypotheses.

Bob Potter
email

Class algebra

Although I agree with perhaps 80% of Eddie Ford's article, I disagree with a very important 20% of it ('Mubarak unleashes thugs', February 3).

An important question for tactics and strategy has to be a realistic assessment of the actual strength of the workers at the present time. Whilst I would agree that ultimately the ideal solution has to be a revolutionary overthrow by the workers and their allies, the question is, are they in a position to achieve that currently, and if not what is the consequence of raising such a demand here and now? Marx's and Engels' assessment under similar circumstances was that it was not appropriate to call for an insurrection by the workers, but rather to focus on developing the workers' organisations, etc, to propagandise within the working class around the fact that the workers had different interests to those of the capitalists, and on that basis to argue for the workers to prepare to defend themselves.

I think this kind of algebraic formula is better than simply raising the demand for a workers' insurrection at the moment. We

already see militia being established, we see city-wide committees being set up, and these form the basis of an alternative workers' state that can focus on defending the workers' interests. That has to go alongside the raising of economic demands, and the occupation of workplaces where the bosses threaten closure and so on, and conversion of these workplaces into worker co-ops.

On the basis of what appears to be the current balance of forces - ie, the inability at the moment of the workers to impose themselves on the movement (eg, we do not have widespread soviets, such as existed in 1917) - I also think it is wrong to raise demands about the make-up of any provisional government: only that socialists should have no part of it if it means working with the representatives of capital or other reactionaries. That leaves socialists free to criticise that government every time it acts against the interests of the masses, and facilitates the socialists gaining support on the back of it.

But I also believe that for now an 'orderly transition' is not just something that imperialism should welcome. Workers should welcome it too, because, although we should not support the scare tactics that Israel is using in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood, it would be naive of socialists not to learn the lessons of Iran, about how quickly a mass movement in conditions of chaos can be hijacked by an organised 'radical' force. I do not think that we should adopt the attitude that a Muslim Brotherhood regime would be in some way a lesser evil than the current one. It would not - it could be much worse, and we should attempt to do what we can to avoid it.

I also disagree with the line of argument implicit in your article, which is that the policy of imperialism is determined by what is in the interests of Israel. That is to make the tail wag the dog. The policy of US imperialism towards Israel is dictated by the fact that it is its only reliable long-term ally in the region. Its approach to other regimes is conditioned by that. The US and imperialism in general are not governed by what is in the interests of Israel, but what is in the interests of capital. In that respect, I disagree with the other implicit, and indeed not so implicit, aspect of your argument, which is that imperialism is not sincerely in favour of the establishment of bourgeois democracy.

Your suggestion that bourgeois democratic Arab regimes would not be so compliant to the needs of capital is not born out elsewhere. I would argue that the development of bourgeois democracy in Brazil, for instance, has been massively in the interests of capital, as witnessed by the huge development of capitalism in that country. The same is true in many other countries in Latin America, and in Asia. Consequently, if bourgeois democratic regimes were established in Egypt and other Arab countries, this could also be massively in the interests of imperialism. Egypt is one of those countries identified as being in the 'second 11' of economies developing rapidly behind the 'BRICs' (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Indeed, it is that development and the contradictions it has thrown up which is partly behind the upsurge now. It is not at all clear that such regimes would pose any problems for the regional interests of imperialism. Yes, they might take a different attitude to Israel, but, as rapidly developing, economically significant bourgeois democracies, they could provide imperialism with a far better partner than Israel does now. That is probably one reason why

Israel is so hostile to the development of bourgeois democracy in Egypt. It is also probably why Hamas takes a similar view, apparently preventing workers in Gaza from coming out in demonstrations in support of Egyptian workers.

Arthur Bough
email

Real enemy

I would like to give balance to the comments attributed to Glyn Harries in the article, 'Practical Hackney' (*Weekly Worker* January 27).

Firstly, as far as I am aware, Hackney Trades Union Council and Hackney Unites are supportive of the Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services. Hackney TUC has publicised all of the alliance's meetings and events, and it is up to individual members of the TUC to join its campaigns as they see fit. Involvement with either does not preclude involvement in other campaigns. Secondly, it is not a matter of degrees of leftness, but rather differing ways of working. Hackney Unites has been in existence for longer than the current ConDem government. It was formed on the back of campaigns against the British National Party and aimed at addressing social justice in the borough on a community basis. (Perhaps this is where Glyn has got his impression of "Tory councillors" distributing leaflets, as we said at the time that anyone who was anti-BNP was welcome to join our campaign against them.)

Denis Lenihan
email

Tahrir Park

The vital importance of holding territory in a protest is demonstrated by Tahrir Square. This has never happened in recent protests in the UK on a scale so big. So how about turning Hyde Park into Tahrir Square on March 26-27?

I hereby officially and with great ceremony launch the 'Stay 4 1 Day' campaign to occupy the north end of Hyde Park overnight on March 26. Since about 500,000 will already be there for the rally, it is already occupied space - all it needs is a refusal to leave.

Any aggressive response by the police to clear the park would immediately be compared to Tahrir Square. When the bureaucrats say, 'Go home' and 'Get into your coaches', they should be greeted by chants of 'Stay, stay, stay!' and the takeover of the stage. This would reach out to people from all over who want to do something a bit more radical than the TUC, but aren't as yet up for street battles.

Of course, some people can't stay all night but could come back early in the morning. The sight of London waking up to occupied territory on Sunday March 27 would be new and galvanising. People elsewhere could occupy territory in solidarity in their own town centres. People staying overnight could bring tents, food, blankets and whatever else will be needed. If there are enough of us, we might simultaneously occupy Parliament Square and other key locations.

Stay 4 1 Day would need to go viral on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter; it would need flyers, stickers, badges. It worked in Egypt; it could work here. More details are to be worked out but I'm floating it now in the *Weekly Worker* to see what people think.

Suspend your disbelief, comrades, and bring Tahrir Square to Hyde Park on March 26.

Chris Knight
<http://battleofbritainmarch26.org>

ISRAEL

Fear of the masses

There is one thing that unites Israel, Hamas and Fatah, writes Tony Greenstein - opposition to the Egyptian revolution

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the wave of unrest sweeping the Arab world lies in the contortions and discomfort of imperialism's mouthpieces. No longer do we hear the US rhetoric about spreading democracy in the Middle East. Even the word 'freedom' has been laid to one side. Instead the buzz word is 'stability', that favourite excuse for fascism through the ages.

No sooner had Tunisian dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali been driven into exile by his people than the Egyptian dictator, Hosni Mubarak, was facing the wrath of his. But, whereas the Tunisian dictator was a minor imperialist client, Mubarak was one of the lynchpins of US interests in the Middle East, second only to Israel.

Egypt has the largest population and working class in the region. It receives the highest amount of US aid after Israel itself - approximately \$2.5 billion a year. Egypt is situated in a critically important strategic position, astride the Suez Canal. In former years, its importance lay in its situation on the route to India; now it is its proximity to the oil fields of Arabia.

It is therefore understandable that Obama and the US regime should appear like rabbits trapped in the headlights. What was originally a localised disturbance in a small north African country has rapidly spread to Egypt, and further afield to Jordan and Yemen. It is instructive to witness the contortions and obfuscation of imperialism and its allies.

One of the main arguments of its propagandists is that Israel is the Middle East's 'only democracy'. You could have been excused for thinking that the revolts against Mubarak would have caused the 'democrats' of Tel Aviv uncontained pleasure. After all they have repeatedly contrasted their own 'Jewish' democracy with the reign of terror of Arab tyrants. Someone who was unacquainted with Israel and Zionism, other than via its rhetoric, might have been forgiven for thinking that the least Israel's knesset could do was to pass by acclamation a resolution supporting the Egyptian demonstrators.

Of course, the reaction of the Israeli government was nothing of the kind. As prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu explained, "Our efforts have been intended to continue to preserve stability and security in our region ... the peace between Israel and Egypt has lasted for over three decades."

The Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, reported that the Israeli foreign ministry had issued a directive to embassies telling them to stress to their host countries the importance of Egypt's stability. But the reality has been that the 1978 Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt allowed Israel to turn its attention to the northern border with Lebanon and to concentrate on settlement on the West Bank and repressing the Palestinians.

President Shimon Peres, former Labour prime minister and 'dove', was even more fulsome in support of Mubarak: "Egypt's embattled leader, Hosni Mubarak, will always be remembered for preserving three decades of peace between the two nations ... Peres delivered an impassioned defence of Mubarak, crediting him with saving both Arab and Israeli lives by preventing war in the Middle East."

Indeed the stance of Netanyahu and the Zionist leadership, and its

failure to offer so much as word of support to the Egyptian protesters, has become positively embarrassing. Even the *Jerusalem Post*, a paper of the Zionist right, and its columnist, Shmuley Boteach, bemoaned how "Israel is missing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to support Arab freedom. While others cheer Hosni Mubarak's fall, Israel grows apprehensive." According to the aforementioned logic, "Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and it ought to be the region's foremost champion of human rights ... To now see Israel squander an historic opportunity to publicly champion Arab freedom out of fear for radicals like the Muslim Brotherhood or a repeat of Hamas's election in Gaza is deeply regrettable and counterproductive."

This, of course, is the official pretext. If Mubarak and his torture chambers and murderous police state go, then the Muslim Brotherhood may come to power and the peace treaty will be in jeopardy. In other words, because democracy means that most Arabs reject the abject humiliation of the Camp David accords, in which Egypt regained the Sinai desert, conquered in 1967, in return for an Israeli *carte blanche* in dealing with the Palestinians, it is essential to form an alliance with the brutal dictatorship of Mubarak. This the price of a peace agreement based on an acceptance of the dispossession and confiscation of Palestinian land.

But the gap between Israel's self-justificatory prose and reality has never been so marked. Because if Israel really was the Middle East's only democracy then it would have welcomed the Egyptian revolution. Instead there are rumours that Israel has offered to help the Egyptian police in their task of repression - no doubt using some of the chemical weapons that Israel has tested to perfection on the Palestinians. For the first time in 30 years Israel has allowed Egyptian troops into the Sinai.

But Israel is not the only power to face such dilemmas. This is true of the west's reaction as a whole. This is no orange revolution; nor is it an east European uprising against a Stalinist tyrant. As *The Observer's* parliamentary correspondent, Andrew Rawnsley, noted, "The west should cheer, not fear, this cry for freedom in Egypt." Not that Rawnsley is a man unversed in the subtleties of imperial foreign policy.

The position of the US has been particularly interesting. Caught on the horns of a dilemma, it could hardly condemn the protesters openly; nor, however, could it dissociate itself from a regime that has faithfully done its bidding. So Obama has been forced to support Mubarak remaining for the transition, whilst making it clear to him privately that it was necessary to replace him in order to guarantee a continuation of his regime. Vice-president Biden could not understand what Egyptians were protesting about! Hillary Clinton was left flustering. So US policy has been to back Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's appointed deputy and central to Egypt's relationship with the CIA. A man with responsibility for the secret police and torture.

But, for all its fake outrage over political Islam, it is interesting to see how Israeli leaders are at one with Hamas and the quisling Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. In Gaza and Ramallah, the respective regimes are

united in their hostility to the protests against Mubarak. Hamas leaders have long reached a tacit understanding on the tunnels under the border with Egypt, with all the resulting corruption involved. As for the Palestinian Authority and Abbas, they have had a close relationship with Mubarak - their partner, along with Israel, in enforcing the blockade on Gaza and attempting to replace Hamas with their own quisling brand of politics. Whereas Hamas has been unable to prevent demonstrations against Mubarak, the Palestinian Authority has gone out of its way to do so, threatening its organisers with torture.

The reaction of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, in both its secular and Islamic guises (Hamas and Fatah), is instructive. Both fear the Arab masses more than imperialism and Zionism. Whilst Abbas is an open collaborator and quisling, his forces trained by the US lieutenant general Keith Dayton in Jordan, Hamas too seeks a place in the sun. It wants to come in from the cold and reach a deal with imperialism. Unfortunately imperialism has no use for Hamas at present. It is noteworthy in this context how the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has also been lukewarm over the protests.

Socialists and anti-Zionists by contrast are clear. Without the liberation of the Arab east from the local allies of imperialism, without taking the oil resources of the region under democratic workers' control, there is no hope for the Palestinian masses in their struggle with Zionism. Both Hamas and Fatah fear this above all, which is why they fear the loss of Mubarak.

But we also have to cut through the 'people power' phraseology. The protesters in Egypt include both working class forces and bourgeois elements opposed to Mubarak but not Mubarakism. The present stalemate in Egypt cannot continue indefinitely and can go either of two ways. It can lead to a reinforcement of the regime under Suleiman, or its destruction. Only the second possibility can open the way to liberation, not just in Egypt, but regionally. For that to happen, the power of the Egyptian state needs to be broken and, with it, illusions in the Egyptian army. The army top brass are part of the problem, not the solution. They are the corrupt supporters of the Mubarak regime and its alliance with Israel, funded by US 'aid'. They have every interest in preserving the regime. Their hesitation to set the army on the masses is not due to their 'patriotic' role, but because they fear that the rank and file soldier will not obey orders.

The key element today is the organisation of working class forces and the creation of working class and opposition militias, plus an open call on the army to join the revolution and turn its guns on its officers. There is no other way to achieve the liberation of the Arab masses than through the destruction of the Egyptian regime. This is the fear of Obama, Netanyahu, Abbas and Hamas. As the 30-year-old political stalemate in the Arab world, under the pressure of the world economic crisis, begins to unfreeze, the determination of imperialism to replace one tyrant with another should be firmly resisted.

It is little wonder that Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's chief of staff, darkly warns that, as a result of the upsurge in Egypt, Israel must be prepared for a new war ●

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

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

Radical Anthropology Group

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

February 15: 'The social origins of language'. Speaker: Jean-Louis Dessalles.

Hands Off the People of Iran

Saturday February 12, 10am to 5pm: Annual conference, University Of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Launch of new campaign to fight for the freedom of Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners in Iran. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Ruben Markarian (Rahe Kargar). Plus discussion: 'WikiLeaks, whistleblowers and war' with Moshé Machover and Mike Macnair. Organised by Hopi: www.hopoi.org.

People's Convention Against Cuts

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.

Global day of action

Saturday February 12, 12 noon: Demonstration, Trafalgar Square, London. Stand in solidarity with the people of Egypt.

Spearheaded by Amnesty International and the International Trade Union Confederation.

Valentine's day rally

Monday February 14, 5pm: Rally, opposite Downing Street, London. 'Stop Valentine's Day massacre of our public services'. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, John McDonnell MP and Steve Hart (Unite).

Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

Hands off our homes

Tuesday February 15, 12 noon: Rally, Central Hall Westminster and mass lobby of parliament.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

Keep our NHS public

Wednesday February 16, 7pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Dr Jacky Davis, Wendy Savage and John Lister.

Organised by the Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

Organising against cuts

Saturday February 19, 10am: Day school, Falmer House, University of Sussex, Brighton. Speakers include: Pat Sikorski (RMT). Sessions include 'Anti-cuts economics' and 'Building anti-cuts groups in your area'.

Organised by Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition.

Everybody out!

Saturday and Sunday February 19 and 20, 10am: Conference, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. Celebrating LGBT trades union history. Followed by social and cabaret.

Organised by Manchester Trades Council: www.manchestertuc.org.

Keep the post public

Saturday February 19, 1pm: March - assemble Mail Centre, Padge Road, Beeston, Nottingham. Speakers include: Billy Hayes (CWU), Lilian Greenwood MP.

Organised by CWU and Nottingham Labour Party: 01159 518362.

Saturday February 26, 11am: March - assemble St Nicholas, Marks and Spencer, Aberdeen.

Organised by Grampian and Shetland CWU: 01224 870261.

Unite Against Fascism

Saturday February 26, 10.30am: Conference, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.org.uk.

Critique conference

Saturday February 26, 9am to 5pm: Conference, room H216, Connaught House, London School of Economics, London WC2 (nearest tube: Holborn). 'Stalinism and its destructive legacy'.

Speakers include: Mick Cox, Christos Memos, Chris Ford, Mike Macnair, Savas Matsas, Hillel Ticktin, Yasmine Mather.

Organised by Critique: www.critiquejournal.net.

Save our services

Wednesday March 9, 7.30pm: Meeting, Railway Institute, 2 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire. Speakers include: Clare Solomon (ULU president), Megan Dobney (Sertuc) and local union reps.

Organised by Hampshire TUC.

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.

EGYPT



Numbers have grown and grown

Revolution in permanence

As vice-president Omar Suleiman threatens an army coup, the workers needs to push the democratic revolution further and further, deeper and deeper, writes **Eddie Ford**

So far, the various attempts by the Egyptian regime - and imperialism - to impose 'stability' have ended in failure. Indeed, divisions at the top grow day by day, and not only in Egypt. On the one hand, US vice-president Joe Biden has demanded an "immediate" end to emergency laws and a "prompt, meaningful, peaceful and legitimate" transition. On the other, Omar Suleiman, the hated Egyptian vice-president and former secret police chief, warns demonstrators to go home or else face the threat of an army "coup".

But demonstrations and protests keep growing. Millions have come out in Cairo and other cities. Tahrir Square is now a parliament of the people. Fear is melting away and freedom has broken out. Meanwhile the working class has begun to move. Not only strikes, but sit-downs and occupations.

The masses want *real* regime change and democracy, not the old system left in power, albeit with some faces removed and the promise of constitutional reform somewhere down the line.

Nevertheless, Hosni Mubarak

still insists he will stay in office until the September elections, not flee the country with his tail between his legs like Tunisia's Ben Ali. The storm can be weathered. Hence, according to the government, it has a "clear road map" for the "peaceful transfer of power" to ... itself (and a few tame stooges). Its threats go hand in hand with calls for "dialogue" and "national reconciliation", which have seen the regime enter into negotiations with assorted opposition groups. That includes the Muslim Brotherhood, which has so far proved itself to be rather timid and not at all radical. Having waited two days before involving itself in the mass demonstrations, it has been unable to assert leadership over the movement. Indeed, the MB has exposed its lack of consistency by first dismissing negotiations with the regime and then agreeing to them. Almost inevitably, they came to nothing - now the MB says it will give Mubarak a week to go.

Egypt's state media reported that Mubarak has ordered parliament and the country's highest appellate court to "re-examine" a lower court ruling - previously ignored - that

disqualified hundreds of ruling-party National Democratic Party MPs for campaign and ballot "irregularities". Mubarak's NDP won more than 83% of the 518 seats in the 2010 parliamentary elections and, if implemented, the ruling would in all likelihood lead to the dissolution of parliament and the holding of new elections. In another concessionary move, aimed at placating the protesters by ditching some of the most hated officials in the government, the judiciary is to start the questioning this week of three former ministers and a senior ruling party official, who were accused of corruption after they were dismissed - along with the entire cabinet - by Mubarak on January 28.

Integral to Mubarak's sham "transition plan" is the creation of three committees for "national dialogue". In the words of Suleiman, their responsibilities include "implementing the required amendments of the constitution" and investigating the clashes in Tahrir Square last week, with a view to referring the findings to the prosecutor-general. The criminal investigating the criminal.

Mubarak's NDP unleashed thousand of thugs - lumpens and out-of-uniform police - against the pro-democracy demonstrators. The death toll is now put at over 300. Nevertheless, the regime is making concession after concession. And, far from satisfying the masses, they breed courage and bring ever wider sections of the population into battle.

Take the announcement of a 15% increase in salaries and pensions for public sector workers, due to take effect from April - with the new finance minister, Samir Radwan, declaring that some 6.5 billion Egyptian pounds (\$960 million) will be allocated to cover the rise for the six million people on the public payroll. Workers, both public and private sector, are now demanding more, such more, as democratic and economic demands interweave and feed off each other.

In other words, the regime is crazily swinging from concession to repression and back to concession. No wonder US imperialism has lost faith in Mubarak's ability to hang on. The Obama administration fears that there will be not an "orderly" transition, but a full-blown

revolution that would inevitably affect the entire region - naturally including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and other valuable assets. So the US is desperately looking round for potential clients to lead a CIA-sponsored 'colour revolution'. Mohamed ElBaradei, Ayman Nour, Amr Moussa, Ahmad Zowail are options - but so too is Omar Suleiman and the Egyptian army. US defence secretary Robert Gates has pointedly praised the army for behaving in an "exemplary fashion" - declaring that it has made a "contribution to the evolution of democracy".

Bunkum, of course. The army top brass, with all its grotesque privileges, is completely bound up with the Mubarak regime - which is effectively a military-capitalist dictatorship. Yes, it is true that large swathes of Egyptian society have some sort of faith in it, whether because it is a conscript army or because it has its origins in the 1952 Officers Revolution that brought colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser to power. And, yes, the protesters in Tahrir Square have extensively fraternised with the soldiers. But it would be a dangerous illusion to

believe that the army would never move to crush the demonstrators if ordered to do so. True, it would be very unlikely that *those* soldiers stationed now in central Cairo would be used in such an operation. Rather forces from other regions of the country would be called in, as happened in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The danger of an army coup has to be taken seriously. In the end either revolution or counterrevolution will triumph. What began with Twitter will be resolved with guns. Hence the police must be disarmed and sent packing, sections of the army won and a popular militia formed.

Albeit tentatively that has already begun to happen. The police are often nowhere to be seen, people have formed citizen guards in various neighbourhoods, including those based on strikes at big workplaces, and, of course, in Tahrir Square demonstrators have built barricades and exchanged blow for blow, stone for stone, with Mubarak's thugs. The rank and file soldiers have become openly friendly with the demonstrators. Doubtless partly as a result, soldiers refused to move their tanks into the middle of Tahrir Square when faced with spontaneously formed human walls.

But clearly things need to go further. Workers, peasants, the urban petty bourgeoisie must form a popular militia. To begin with they must arm themselves with whatever comes to hand - sticks, knives and revolvers (the latter taken from the police). There is also the possibility of persuading soldiers to hand over weapons on the quiet.

By doing this the masses increase their chances of winning over sections of the army to the revolution - which in turn decreases the likelihood of the generals launching a coup. To advocate any form of pacifism under such conditions is positively suicidal and can only invite more violence, not less.

Our call for a popular militia is a fundamental *democratic* demand. It certainly appears in our CPGB *Draft programme*: we are for "the dissolution of the standing army

and the formation of a popular militia under democratic control". Needless to say, the demand for a popular militia is part and parcel of the orthodox Marxist tradition. Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Lenin and even Eduard Bernstein called for a popular militia.

Despite that, some have accused the *Weekly Worker* of advocating "popular frontism" or "stageism" - indeed, have *counterposed* the formation of a popular militia to that of a workers' militia. It is either one or the other, they say. Frankly, this is childish leftism. What ultimately lies behind such dichotomisation is a fear of entering into alliances with non-working class forces, of being 'contaminated' by the politics or ideology of other classes.

However, communists believe that workers' organisations are obliged not only to participate in the mass revolutionary upsurge for democracy, but to try and win *hegemony* over it. In which case, it makes sense for all the forces involved in the anti-Mubarak struggle to agree to common self-defence measures for as long as they are allies - even if only temporary ones. We need not unduly fear either the MB or bourgeois forces, such as the Nasserites or the New Wafd, dominating such bodies - the instincts of such parties is to oppose the arming of the people. Many of their supporters, however, but especially the millions who are at present attached to no political organisation, see the urgent need for self-defence.

There is no law which decrees that it is unprincipled for communists to take part in specific, limited actions for a common cause with other class forces - whether it be in a popular militia, organising demonstrations or anything else. However, what is unprincipled is to abandon or water down your programme/politics or criticisms of the other class forces involved in the temporary action or alliance. Which, of course, is exactly what the 'official communist' parties did in the 1930s, wretchedly subordinating working class interest to that of the so-called 'progressive'

or 'democratic' bourgeoisie - inventing an artificial stage of so-called progressive capitalism, which the working class had to pass through in order to get to socialism. We in the CPGB utterly reject such illusions, which can only end in defeat.

Despite the excitement of a mass uprising, the actual state of Egyptian society must be soberly assessed. The working class in Egypt does not exist as a class politically. This is only to be expected, given decades of repression and 'official communist' misleadership.

Hence the working class cannot come to power either today or tomorrow: this is not October 1917 in Russia or anything like it. Consequently, to demand that a 'workers' government' take over from the Mubarak regime might sound good, but it is empty posturing. Propaganda for working class power and socialism is vital, correct and necessary. But what is needed are the tactics and broad perspective of forming the working class into a party - a party that can win a majority of the Egyptian population and has a realistic possibility of spreading the flame of revolution.

Space is needed to enable workers to organise, educate and exert themselves. The first condition being freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom to form parties, trade unions, popular assemblies, militias, etc. For this to happen, the entire Mubarak regime must go - including the standing army, police, secret police, the NDP, the government-controlled media and so on. Aims broadly shared with those occupying Tahrir Square, even though the left forces are currently very weak and fragmented.

It would, of course, be unprincipled to enter into governmental alliances with the MB, liberals, Nasserites, etc. If the Muslim Brotherhood or the bourgeois anti-Mubarak forces in Tahrir Square enter into a post-Mubarak capitalist government - a very real possibility - then they are no longer secondary enemies with whom we have been engaged in a temporary alliance against the main enemy, but have become part of that main enemy.

Communists should certainly not advocate the calling of elections in Egypt at the moment - or in the near future. We are not for a new parliament or president, or a constituent assembly. With the regime - or most of it - still in place and given the history of modern Egypt, not only the last 30 years of Mubarak, that could only result in an anti-democratic farce (though if elections took place it might be tactically correct to participate in them).

Whatever post-Mubarak regime emerges, communists are against it - the workers' party, if one can be formed, must be a party of *extreme opposition*. Bluntly, the only government we want at the moment is a very weak, very unstable, very temporary one - a government whose ability to stifle or repress the nascent working class movement is severely limited. In other words, we are for the revolution in permanence - as Marx and Engels originally meant it.

The Egyptian revolution is part of a pan-Arab movement for national unity, which the working class must strive to shape and lead. Naturally, once in state power, our class would use the methods of revolutionary war to overthrow the sheikdoms and, crucially, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia - taking the wealth from the clutches of imperialism and putting it into the hands of the working class, peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie ●

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Fighting fund

Shell out

According to Labour leader Ed Miliband, the Tories are cutting "too far and too fast". Obviously he thinks they should reduce that £81 billion target a bit and extend the four-year implementation period by a few months. That would mean that collectively we would not be quite so much worse off.

At a time when even the voluntary sector - which David Cameron's 'big society' was supposed to boost - is crying blue murder, it's not surprising that the *Weekly Worker's* readers are feeling the pinch. Our supporters are overwhelmingly working class, so donating to our fighting fund often means making a real sacrifice. Nevertheless, that is what our readers are doing.

Over the last seven days I have received more pledges of new or increased standing order payments - thanks to DY, GD and GS, whose extra contributions will see our monthly total rise by £28. Of course, not all of those who have promised a new SO have actually delivered, so I am hoping all those comrades who have so far agreed to help out will be as good as their word.

This week the total that arrived in our bank account in regular payments amounted to exactly £100, and I also received cheques from CK (£50), RG (£25), KL (£20) and BN (£10). So our total increased by £205 - up to £461 in all, towards our monthly target of £1,250. A long way to go obviously.

Readers may have noticed that I haven't mentioned any donations received via our website. That's because there weren't any. This despite a clear increase in our online readership last week to 14,329. Excellent. But we need a good few of those people to show their appreciation and get out that little piece of plastic.

There are two and a half weeks remaining to raise the £800 we still need and I could do with some of those internet comrades to come out of their shells ●

Robbie Rix

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

DEBATE

Dismissing the po

Two comrades take issue with the CPGB's perspectives of transforming the Labour Party into a real party of labour. Though they take different immediate approaches, **Dave Vincent** and **Gerry Downing** come to the same essential conclusion. The Labour Party has nothing positive to contribute to the struggle for working class power and socialism



Ramsay MacDonald: no champion of working class interests

So we should all join Labour?

Having read the three exchanges concerning the affiliation of Communist Students to the Labour Representation Committee in *Weekly Worker* January 13, I was then gobsmacked at the sneering complacency of Stan Keable's own diatribe the following week, in which he reports on the LRC's AGM and advocates the tired, old, worn-out line of 'Join Labour and turn it left' ('Cuts and rebuilding', January 20).

Of course, the fact Labour did so well in the Oldham and Saddleworth by-election has Labourites all excited that the party looks electable again so soon. Such people are not allies of those wanting to fight the coalition government's cuts. For these Labourite working class betrayers why build for a strike (harms Labour's electoral chances) or go on a demonstration - unless there is a Labour MP addressing the crowd on the need to vote Labour?

On the one hand, there is a disunited left - although, as Lee Rock's report on the Coalition of Resistance's national council meeting in the same issue states, COR does seem better than the Socialist Workers Party's Right to Work at bringing the left together ('Good turnout, timid politics', January 20). On the other hand, there is the 'Join Labour and turn it left' brigade - a combination of young people who do not know any better and many

an old Labourite who should know better in a classic case of the triumph of hope over experience.

I provide my perspective on this as someone who did not go to grammar school or university, went into office work at age 16, and now at 52 am a busy Public and Commercial Services union lay rep (branch secretary for 26 years now). I started out with rightwing views, was educated to move to socialism by the left in what was then the Civil and Public Services Association and remain an independent socialist.

I was in the SWP in the 1990s and, having stood it for a few years, left because of the complete lack of internal democracy. I joined Left Unity in PCS, but eventually left because I cannot accept its yearly pact with the PCS Democrats and the stifling Socialist Party control of Left Unity, the national executive and conference - though PCS under SP control is way better than when it was under the control of the right.

I never joined Labour because by the time I had had my union political education I could see, thanks to the expulsion of Militant, that the party was not the place for socialists. I have voted Labour now and again, but with no illusions. I will vote Green if there is no left alternative, but not Labour.

I have some awareness of the theories about entryism (not least thanks

to Mike Macnair's recent contributions in the *Weekly Worker*) and the arguments of Lenin, Trotsky and lots of others on this. I am no academic though - just a working class militant who has been affected by the Labour Party's betrayals in government.

As has been said, the attitude to the Labour Party and the relationship and role of socialists and revolutionaries to it is an old argument. We have the dismissive sneering of those in the Labour Party that the left outside cannot get decent votes. Well, that depends, doesn't it? The Scottish Socialist Party had six MSPs for a time and Respect had one MP before the usual left splits. I wonder where the Socialist Alliance would be today if it had stayed together. Their policies of MPs on a worker's wage and recallability are even more relevant today in the wake of the electorate's disgust over the MPs' expenses scandal.

When I and 70 others were at the inaugural anti-cuts meeting in our town where were the 'decades of membership' local Labour Party stalwarts? At a Labour Party meeting the same night, trying to ensure their branch did not become pro-cuts! When they had the choice of supporting people gathering to decide what to do about the coalition government's cuts, Labour members put a local internal party squabble above uniting with non-Labour Party people.

Whatever the result of that internal branch struggle, can it change their official party's line of supporting cuts - but just over a longer timescale than the coalition government's? Anyone would think this was the 1930s rather than just 12 months after the end of a Labour government elected 13 years earlier on a landslide.

In government

We saw all trade union strikes condemned under Blair and Brown. Now 'Red Ed' Miliband has recently condemned any idea of unions uniting in strikes against the cuts to bring the coalition government down. This from a man whose election depended on those unions affiliated to the Labour Party and who made a pitch for the votes of workers during the leadership contest.

The gap between the rich and poor widened more under New Labour than it did under the Tory governments before them - fact. We have seen the Labour Party in government take Britain into war in Iraq despite the largest ever demonstration in British history. That dwarfed the anti-Vietnam protests of the 1960s. How many Labour MPs voted for war?

We saw none of the privatised utilities brought back into public ownership - in fact we saw more privatisations - despite the pledges made

against by Labour in the lead-up to the 1997 general election. Private finance initiative extortions continued under the Labour government and anti-union laws were retained. A drive towards funding by big business to move away from reliance on union funding was only set back by the cash for honours scandals! Well, Stan?

We soon saw what happened to the promises of an 'ethical' foreign policy, of the government being 'whiter than white' and sleaze-free. We saw increasing attacks on civil liberties, the draconian and misused 'anti-terrorism' laws and a drive for compulsory ID cards - actually revoked by this coalition government! Labour got us involved in the occupation of Afghanistan, remained committed to the renewal of Trident and signed us up to the production of two aircraft carriers (destined to be without planes for 10 years).

New Labour did nothing to restrain the irresponsible gambling by the banks and finance industries and, to top it all, Brown claimed to have abolished 'boom and bust'. How many people because of those grossly irresponsible proclamations (made by a Labour leader, not a Tory) - and in the belief that property prices would forever rise - took out second mortgages or massive credit card debt?

The marketisation of the NHS and education went further under a

Potential of Labour

Labour government than it did under the Tories. Privatisation of our public services were added to by attacks on final salary pension schemes. All the while most Labour MPs acted like they were to the manor born and constantly voted themselves large pay rises, pension enhancements and expenses, whilst urging restraint on the working and middle classes.

Not one word about any of this from Stan. No revolutionary expects much from any reformist government wedded to trying to moderate capitalism. But one with a landslide majority and benefiting from a buoyant economy that produced so little gain for the working class? Where was the left in the Labour Party during all this? Backing Blair, then Brown in the name of 'unity' and for a Labour victory 'to keep the Tories out' - that's where!

The Labour right have learnt enough to ensure the left will get nowhere near gaining control. Look what happened to the leadership bids of John McDonnell, a good friend of PCS. He could not even get enough nominations to stand as a candidate against Blair, and then Diane Abbott headed him off by playing the diversity card to magnificent effect: she kept John off the ballot, but not the other middle-aged, white males. A far, far cry from the Tony Benn-Eric Heffer challenge of 1982!

Internally, clause four was jettisoned and party democracy crippled, with the result that Labour conference cannot make manifesto policies; MP selection procedures were changed,

allowing candidates to be imposed from above; and the Parliamentary Labour Party is not accountable to the organisation as a whole. How will the left be able to operate today? Every democratic change that the LRC argues for will be voted down if those in control (with eager media support) assert that it will hinder Labour's electoral chances.

Labour-affiliated unions will think twice about strike action against the cuts, now Miliband has argued Labour will not support them. Remind me, how many such unions called strikes under the last Labour government? What does anyone think Labour would do back in power with a massive deficit after arguing for cuts at the last general election? This will not be 1997 all over again with the cheerful optimism, seemingly justified at the time in the context of an economic boom. Well, Stan?

Why not try to inspire all the decent socialists who have left the Labour Party in droves after each betrayal? Look at the typical Labour Party membership today - either those who always justify support for Labour, no matter what the betrayals of the working class, with 'the Tories will be worse'; or those seduced by meaningless babble from Blair, Brown and now Miliband. Revolutionaries have not won masses of Labour Party members away from Labourism - however, Labourism has won over many revolutionaries.

Those wanting to participate in the LRC and the Labour Party are aiming to engage with people whose loy-

alty is 'to the Labour Party, no matter how awful'. Instead we should be engaging with those disgusted with all three main political parties, not fostering illusions in Labour all over again. It is not up for change, never really was, and is even less open to socialism today.

It is, of course, far easier to mix with 'socialists' in the LRC than to engage with the mass of the working class outside the Labour Party. It is easier to stay in the Labour Party and have a pint in the bar, commiserating over every betrayal, than start a real working class party all over again. But the LRC is misleading millions of working class people into once again looking to the Labour Party rather than to themselves.

No place for Marxists

The constant splitting of left parties is a huge problem for which I have no answer - except that those using them as fronts must stop their control-freakery and urge to dominate. The SSP and Respect showed a left alternative can win, but if the answer is not to build a halfway house, a "Labour Party mark two", it certainly is not to 'reclaim the Labour Party and turn it left' - groan. I agree with the *Weekly Worker* that the left has to openly argue for Marxism (even though it is still tainted by Stalinism). But that will not receive a warm welcome in today's Labour Party.

In his article on the LRC confer-

ence Stan describes the listing of the Labour government's sins by PCS activist Austin Harney as a "diatribe". What a disgraceful, sneering comment to make of a truthful summation. Keable the feeble then dismisses all PCS activists' comments because "PCS, of course, has never been affiliated to Labour". Why might it be that we have never affiliated?

For decades civil servants felt they had to be politically neutral - and seen to be. Is that the explanation? Or might it be the 100,000 job losses in the civil service under the New Labour government, the 13 years of pay restraint (that also devalued our pension benefits later), enforced whilst wages in the private sector took off? Might it be the Labour government's attacks on our pensions, then our redundancy scheme, and the forced introduction of regional pay in my department, the ministry of justice? Might it be the attacks on sick absence with warnings that can lead to dismissal? Might it be the privatisation of civil service work, forced through by Labour? Or are we to simply agree 'the Tories will be worse', shut up, ignore what has been done to us by the party in government - our employer - and vote Labour? Well, Stan?

I think we should concentrate on backing all resistance and strikes against the cuts and let us see where the people unified and involved in such activity go politically. I think PCS is right to debate at its May annual conference standing its own 'non-party' candidates in some elections on an anti-cuts basis. That will mean workers once again having to debate how

we hold our candidates to account, and whether we should stand as independents or perhaps form another party truly representing the working class.

Personally, I am not interested in winning over people in the Labour Party if it means having to give Labour MPs a voice on anti-cuts platforms. My loyalty is to my union members and the interests of working class people. The loyalty of Labour MPs is to their party. Their priority is to elect another Labour government without any minimum demands, without worrying about those who will excuse every betrayal with 'We're better than the Tories'. I am not with union barons who will not allow their members to debate the link with Labour or to reduce donations, who will hold back strike action if they judge it harmful to Labour's election chances.

Millions of working class people are disgusted with the spin and expense-fiddling of MPs, many of whom have never had a real job. They are looking for a credible alternative - and ideally from a left that will stick together. The British National Party has been knocked back, so there is now a real chance to bring together those angry with the cuts with those joining militant protests. The students have led the way, shouting down their own president - a sign that plenty of people are no longer prepared to blindly follow the usual 'leaders' with the usual dead-end politics. They are now ready to look *past* the Labour Party for answers, not to it ●

Dave Vincent

Radical-reformist Kautskyites

The problem that has emerged in the debate within Communist Students over affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee is the inability of the CPGB to counterpose a Leninist/Trotskyist revolutionary party to a reformist bourgeois workers' party.

The truth is that the CPGB is a libertarian, radical-reformist Kautskyite party. Hence the necessity to harness Lars T Lih to 'prove' that there was no essential difference between the Leninist Bolshevik Party and the Kautskyite German Social Democratic party. The project of a party of the whole class is inherently reformist, as is "extreme democracy" - the inability to distinguish bourgeois democracy and its parliamentary road from workers' democracy, which must result in a workers' state and a proletarian dictatorship if it is to be successful. The inability to have a 'no platform' position on fascism is more libertarianism. We will produce a major article on this for the next *Socialist Fight* (No 6).

The report on the LRC AGM puts forward clear reformist conceptions. Stan Keable, in line with the CPGB, says: "Motion 10 [on the LRC agenda] was defeated by a two-to-one vote. In truth the comrades opposing motion 10 were not downplaying the burgeoning mass anti-cuts movement, but emphasising that to be victorious it must be channelled into the fight to unite the left and to transform the Labour Party into a political alternative, a real party of the working class."

That is a fool's errand if ever there was one. Motion 10 was the real test and the CPGB and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty took the reformist line.

Just prior to that Stan gave the game away: "Simeon Andrews (who romped home onto the NC with 81 votes) gave the motion the kiss of death by announcing that he did not want to 'transform' the Labour Party, but to 'replace' it. And, sure enough, when I checked his election address, there it was in black and white: '... we need a movement that can not only bring down the coalition government, but can lay the foundations for a new party which can once again represent the interests and aspirations of the people'."

It is true that Simeon may be seeking a more radical leftist reformist party, but we do need "a new party which can once again represent the interests and aspirations of the people" - a Leninist/Trotskyist revolutionary party. Stan 'forgot' about even the CPGB version of the substitute because it is not counterposed at all in theory. Indeed, despite all its Marxist rhetoric, the SPD turned out to be just as reformist and a thousand times more counterrevolutionary than the British Labour Party because it was put to the test. The Labour Party would have done the same in Britain as it does in all its foreign wars when in government.

That does not mean that the opponents were right in anything other than a healthy opposition to a reformist parliamentary road to socialism.

Ultra-leftism can now creep in where we declare, as with Barry Biddulph on the Communist Students website: "In any case the united front was a tactic for mass communist parties which never existed in Britain and the historical context is fundamentally different. The phrase 'bourgeois workers' party' is not very helpful either. Politically the leadership and programme of the Labour Party are bourgeois, as the evidence of recent Labour governments demonstrates. The Labour Party is a bourgeois party, as Lenin acknowledged, but the sociological addition of the word 'workers', to make the phrase 'bourgeois workers' party', implies that the trade union bureaucracy represents the historic interests of the working class indirectly through the Labour Party (their party). This misrepresents the nature of the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Party."

The united front - or workers' united front, as it is better to call it - is not just a tactic for mass communist parties, but the communist method of work in the trade unions in relation to the Labour Party. It is a 'tactic' which we apply outside of revolutionary situations (when the masses have lost their illusions in reformism and are directly turning towards the revolutionary alternative): ie, right now, no matter where we are and how big or small a group we are in. It is no good telling us that they have 'lost their illusions in Labour', which they supposedly had in 1921 when Lenin and Trotsky developed the tactic.

It was precisely because they have illusions in *reformism* that we need the tactic. Barry is an ultra-leftist who is so strongly anti-Leninist that he feels himself far more leftwing than Lenin or Trotsky because of his scorn for reformist workers.

Barry is wrong about the trade union bureaucracy also. They were just as bureaucratic and counter-revolutionary in Lenin's time as today. The Labour Party was always the alliance of the union bureaucrats with opportunist capitalist politicians who rode on the backs of the working class. It was formed as such - Lenin knew this well when he wrote his *Leftwing communism*; and so did Trotsky - even in 1936, when he demanded a vote for *all* Labour Party candidates where revolutionists or centrists were not standing. When was it that the party's leaders were better than today? In 1918, 1926 or 1931, with Thomas, Henderson or MacDonald? Did Lenin and Trotsky really believe these capitalist politicians represented the historic interests of the working class? *All* Labour leaderships and governments are capitalist-imperialist governments. The question is the party as a whole: the relations of the trade unions to it, the mass of the workers who vote for it and how to win them to revolutionary politics in struggle.

In *Socialist Fight* No3 page 24, in the article, 'Bourgeois workers' parties: behind the mask of pseudo-revolutionary intransigence' by Ret Marut and Philippe Couthon,

we spelled out in detail what was wrong with this ultra-leftism. The authors quoted an opponent who had claimed of the workers' united front: "This tactic may be termed a united front from below to bypass the traitorous leaders." They responded: "Of course, the 'traitorous leaders' cannot be 'bypassed'; they must be fought, exposed, unmasked and defeated in order for the revolutionary socialist party to be built. 'Bypassing' was certainly how the anarchists, Bukharin and the rest of the ultra-lefts understood the UF at the time, but this misunderstanding was fought by Lenin in *Leftwing communism*, by Trotsky in his address to the 1922 4th Congress of the Comintern and by the best Bolsheviks at the time."

If you do not seek the road to the mass of the working class by this work you are no use to the revolution. Of course, entryism into Labour or fully independent work is a tactical question, as is affiliation to the LRC. The question is, can you fight for revolutionary politics to build a revolutionary party when in the LRC? Yes, you can. Can you fight for this in the Labour Party proper as a whole? Not very well now, but ground may open up. Wherever you are, your goal is to build or gather the forces to build a revolutionary party counterposed to Labour. If you cannot do that, you are a reformist - and that is what the CPGB and the AWL are looking like now in their Labour Party projects ●

Gerry Downing

IRAN

Stepping up solidarity

John McDonnell MP will launch a new campaign at the Hands Off the People of Iran annual conference this coming Saturday (February 12), reports **Yassamine Mather**

The 'Free Panahi! Free all political prisoners!' initiative is expected to pick up significant international support. Renowned film director Jafar Panahi has had a savage six-year jail sentence imposed on him, plus a 20-year ban on making films and travelling abroad, for the 'crime' of planning to make a film about the mass movement for democracy that spilled onto the streets of major Iranian cities in 2009.

The conference will also feature an important session on the latest imperialist threats against Iran in the context of the global economic crisis and the dynamic situation across the whole Middle East. It will discuss solidarity with Iranian workers and commemorate the 40th anniversary of a key act in the rebellion against the shah's regime.

According to information compiled by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 121 individuals were hanged between December 20 2010 and January 31 2011. Amongst them were at least four political prisoners. We must do all we can to stop this wave of terror, and the campaign to end all executions and free all political prisoners will be a crucial part of Hopi's activities this year.

Fightback

The new wave of oppression unleashed in Iran has been directed

against all opponents of the regime - including trade unionists, democracy campaigners and students.

But there have been stirrings of rebellion from below. Last week workers in Iran Khodro, the country's main car manufacturer, reported a major accident. Four workers died and 13 were injured when a worker who was unwell and exhausted after repeated shifts had been forced to come to work. The truck he was driving ran into a group of workers in the transport section of the plant during the night shift.

This sparked a protest by workers in every section of the plant. Rattled managers tried to remove the bodies, but angry workers stopped them. They got hold of the body of one of their dead colleagues and carried him around the plant shouting, "Death to Najmodin" (Iran Khodro's CEO). This is not the first time that workers in Iran Khodro have lost their lives at work - far from it. A large, spontaneous demonstration took place outside the factory and workers were involved in scuffles with both company security and the regime's revolutionary guards, and the protest spread rapidly to other plants.

Also this week workers at Iran's Alborz tyre factory resumed a strike over the non-payment of their wages - they had only received 50% of their back pay - and more than 5,000 workers at the Haft-Tapeh sugar cane factory in the southern province of

Khuzistan were also on strike. Vahed Bus workers demonstrated in front of the prison where their leaders are detained, including Mansour Osanloo, who is serving a five-year sentence for union activities. Meanwhile, truck drivers blocked main roads and ports in protest at price rises. Following the abolition of subsidies, including for fuel, the price of diesel has gone up by 25%. At the same time, according to the Islamic government's ministry of labour, the Iranian economy is shedding an average of 3,000 jobs a day.

These types of protests are not new, but what has changed over the last few weeks is the slogan, "Death to the dictator!", which has become the standard cry of workers' protests all over Iran. Ruben Markarian from the executive committee of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar) will speak about workers' struggles in Iran and what we can do to support them at the Hopi conference.

Staking a claim

Both factions of the Islamic regime have claimed that the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen mark some kind of continuity with past events in Iran.

The leaders of the 'reformist' wing, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, were quick off the mark,

describing the protests in Tunisia and later in Cairo as an extension of Iran's massive demonstrations of 2009, which challenged the legitimacy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency. Former 'reformist' president Hashemi Rafsanjani, not usually known for his outspokenness, also claimed affinity with protest movements in the Arab world. He stated that the people want to see the "bad elites" behind bars: "No dictator can stop popular movements ... People want democracy," he said.

However, last week Iran's supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, told Friday worshippers that the protests are an "Islamic uprising" in line with the principles of Iran's 1979 revolution. Khamenei's remarks immediately sparked rebuttals from Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt, where 12 Islamic groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood itself, issued statements denouncing the comparison.

While the 'reformist' green movement has called for demonstrations in support of Egyptian protests on February 14, it is not clear that they will go ahead if the ministry of interior refuses them permission.

Mike Macnair and Moshé Machover will lead a session on Iran and the international situation at the Hopi event.

War and sanctions

The world's attention might be turned to events in north Africa, but the threat of war on Iran (be it at the level of cyber war, sanctions or propaganda) has not gone away. On February 1 Defence secretary Liam Fox told MPs that it is "entirely possible" that Iran may develop a nuclear weapon by next year. During questions in the Commons Fox appeared to ratchet up the threats by stating it "would be worse for Iran to have a nuclear weapon" than for the west to organise an Iraq-style invasion of the country.

Following the failure of discussions between the six international mediators (Britain, China, Russia, USA, France and Germany) in the negotiations with Iran, the Iranian representatives are being accused of putting forward "unrealistic" proposals. Ominously, the French foreign minister and German chancellor have warned that western countries will tighten sanctions further if Iran does not comply with their demands.

Sanctions are clearly just one of a number of weapons used by the US and its allies. We now have confirmation that the Stuxnet virus was the product of US-Israeli intelligence cooperation. And interestingly, on the propaganda front, a controversial film - *Iranium* - about Iran's 'nuclear threat' was launched in US this week. The hour-long 'documentary' will be screened in cinemas across the United States and Canada and is also available on the internet. It is produced by Clarion Fund, an organisation founded by Canadian-Israeli film producer Raphael Store, whose self-proclaimed mission is to "educate Americans about issues of national security and the most urgent threat of radical Islam".

Iranium allegedly reveals Iran's plans to acquire nuclear weapons with the intention of using them against the west. It gives a brief history of Iran, from the Islamic Revolution up to the present day. It is an over-dramatised, neo-conservative view of the current conflict, based on material from the rabidly rightwing Fox News and featuring commentary from James Woolsey, an ex-CIA director who has long advocated bombing Iran. The film advocates pre-emptive strikes against what it labels the "sponsor of Islamic terrorism" to prevent it acquiring nuclear weapons.

Of course, despite the regime's own claims, Tehran is nowhere near nuclear capability. It is true that it is continuing to upgrade its conventional weaponry, however. On February 8, for example, the revolutionary guards test-fired a ballistic surface-to-sea missile capable of hitting targets within a 300km range. According to the chief commander of the revolutionary guards, general Mohammad Ali Jafari, the missile, called Persian Gulf, is supersonic, immune to interception and features high-precision systems. It is ironic that a country that cannot feed its population, a country where basic health and safety standards do not apply in workplaces like the Khodro plant, claims to have produced such a sophisticated weapon. Of course, this assumes that some of the images shown to the world media were not Photoshop-manufactured, as was the case with Iran's previous aerospace claims.

However, the regime's hyperbole does not excuse the continuing imperialist threats and we in Hopi are clear that we must keep our focus on the campaign's dual themes: No to imperialist war and sanctions. No to the theocratic regime.

Siahkal

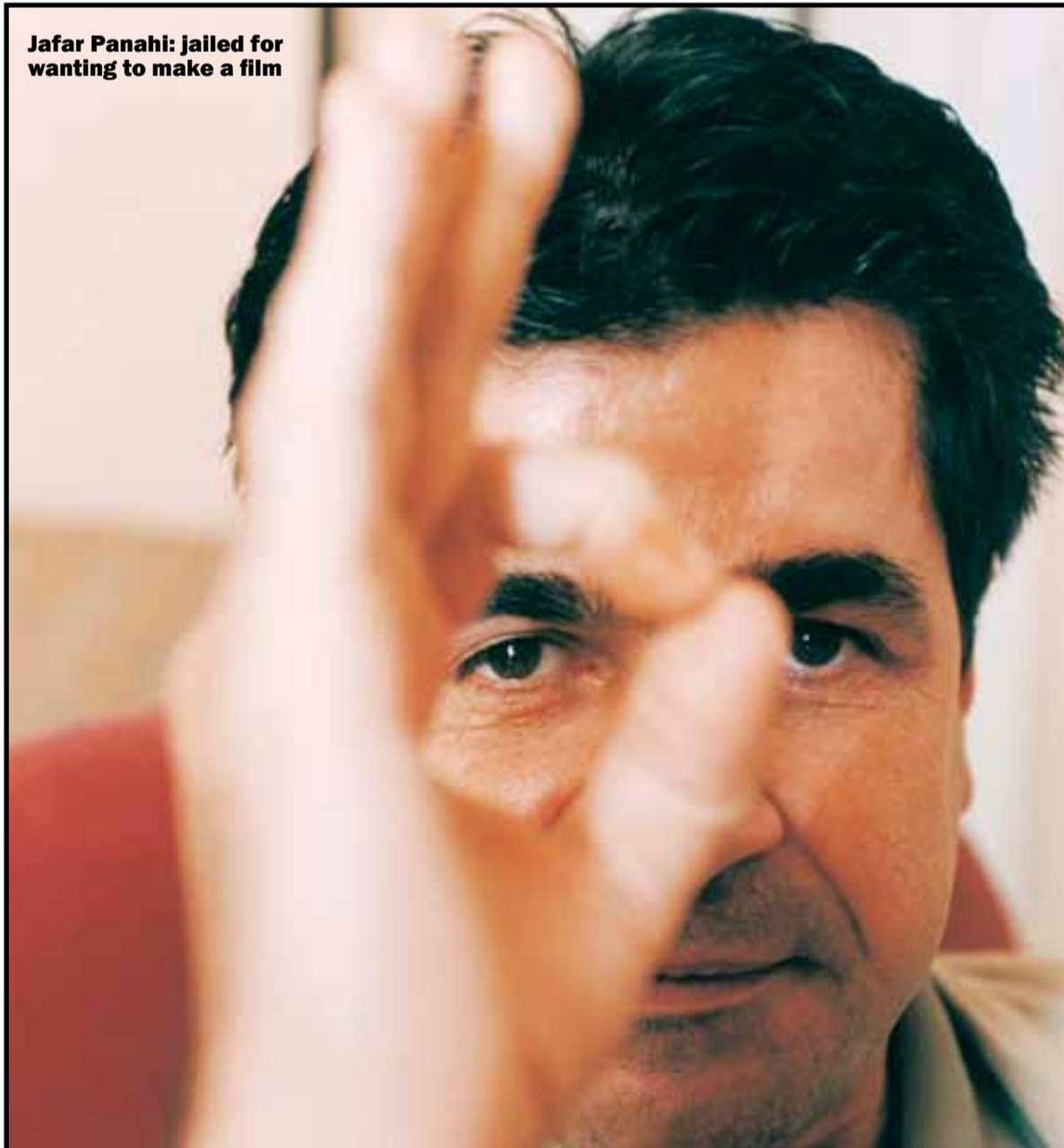
February 8 was the 40th anniversary of the 1971 Siahkal uprising. In a forest in the north of Iran, a dozen or so young revolutionaries took up arms, having taken over a gendarmerie. They were rebelling not just against the shah's regime, but also against the Tudeh Party, the traditional 'official communist' party in Iran, whose name had become synonymous with compromise and betrayal.

Of course, it was suicidal for so few comrades to launch an armed struggle against the regime and inevitably a large number of those who did would be killed - 13 out of the 19 of what was the original cell of the Fedayeen died in the fighting and a number of members and supporters were executed later. Nevertheless, Siahkal had a considerable impact on the youth and student movements in Iran subsequently. It marked the birth of the new left - not just politically, but culturally too. Many of Iran's prominent contemporary poets have written extensively about the event.

Siahkal's historic significance cannot be ignored and at Hopi's AGM we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of this insurrection ●

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Jafar Panahi: jailed for wanting to make a film



SOCIETY

Divisive dead-end

Should the left 'defend multiculturalism'? James Turley looks at the reactions to David Cameron's weekend speech

Last weekend saw some peculiarly malign coincidences for all those opposed to the onward march of racist and bigoted ideology. Most frivolously, the BBC was forced to issue a formal apology on Friday after the three stars of its flagship motoring show, *Top gear*, engaged in a frankly lazy diatribe against, of all peoples, Mexicans - recycling all the old crap about fecklessness and bad food favoured by the soldiers of 19th century American expansion.

The next day saw rather more serious events. In Luton, the English Defence League - a motley crew of hardened fascists and football hooligans - staged its biggest yet march, with attendance estimates ranging from 3,000 to 7,000. The inevitable Unite Against Fascism 'counter-demonstration' was another example, among many, of UAF's dwindling influence - barely 2,000-strong and herded well away from the EDL.

Meanwhile, in Munich, David Cameron delivered a speech to an international conference on 'security'. After some platitudinous pledges to continue British involvement in Afghanistan and Nato, Cameron spent the bulk of his speech on the question of confronting "Islamist extremism". This included some, in reality, fairly mild criticisms of multiculturalism - to be clear, rather than proposing to axe state handouts to *soi-disant* 'community groups', Cameron proposes to vet them more carefully, to determine whether they believe in "universal human rights - including for women and people of other faiths"; "equality of all before the law"; and "democracy and the right of people to elect their own government". Most importantly, they should "encourage integration" rather than "separation".¹

Most media comment on the issue focused on, precisely, this coincidence - Cameron's speech was considered ill-judged primarily because it coincided with the EDL's march. Labour MP Sadiq Khan even accused the PM of writing propaganda for the EDL, which - despite the Tory Party's utterly appalling record on these issues - is probably over-egging the pudding.

Indeed, in a mirror image of the usual knee-jerk condemnations in the reactionary press against 'controversial' films, TV shows and books, it is not clear that many of his critics have actually read the speech. In particular, the recurrent claim that Cameron does not make reference to far-right groups is simply not true - he does throughout, mostly as a comparison to expose the supposed hypocrisy of "soft-left" defenders of multiculturalism and "passive tolerance".

That, however, is not really the point - given the longer-term background to Cameron's speech, and indeed the growth of the EDL, any mention of Muslim extremism was inevitably going to provoke a political firestorm over multiculturalism - even if he had dedicated the rest of his speech to talking about *The magic roundabout*. "The tongue," Lenin writes somewhere, "finds the aching tooth."

Voices from within official British politics have come out, increasingly, against multiculturalism. The turning point, unsurprisingly, was September



David Cameron with Angela Merkel at Munich

11 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror' - which provided reactionaries and the state with a whole new 'enemy within' to find lurking under every bed in the form of Islamic 'radicalism'. Trevor Phillips, then head of the Commission for Racial Equality, made a controversial speech in 2004 declaring multiculturalism a failure, which had encouraged separateness rather than integration.

Tony Blair was next, making a very similar speech to Cameron's in the wake of the July 7 2005 bombings in London. That was another turning point; not only had the war on terror come to the British capital: its agents were second-generation British Asians, brought up after multiculturalism became a truly comprehensive state policy. Since then, there have been numerous calls for promoting some kind of unitary British identity, based on certain timeless 'British values' like liberty, democracy and so forth. (It is barely worth mentioning that calling these ideas 'British values' is somewhat more historically illiterate even than Nick Griffin's hypothesis of an ethnic community of the British dating back tens of thousands of years.)

Multiculturalism

What, then, is this bogeyman multiculturalism? For some, particularly on the Tory right, it is everything that falls short of an active attempt to cajole immigrants into dropping their old national identities in order to blend seamlessly into the British melting-pot.

A more substantial definition is preferred by Marxists: multiculturalism is the official promotion and celebration of cultural differences, as part of a wider, tolerant Britishness. This resulted in the policy of offering material support to cultural and 'community organisations', coupled with an ideological offensive targeted at the racist right in order to foster social stability. However, its application - facilitating the distribution of state resources according to ethnicity, for example - could be just as divisive as racism itself. As such, it is bound up with that other semi-mythical bogeyman of the right - 'political correctness'.

The first stirrings of multiculturalism were the product of the Labour government of the late 1960s; but the policy did not really find its stride until the 1980s. After 'race riots' in Brixton, Toxteth and elsewhere, the Thatcher government sought to find partners in these deprived areas with whom it could do business. At this point, one thing should be stated clearly - unsurprisingly given the Iron Lady's inclinations, the recipients of the resultant government largesse were most commonly religious organisations.

Up until that point, the visibility of migrant and ethnic minority communities was a matter of political resistance to oppression - very often unfocused, but nonetheless real. The tendency to recognise mosques and churches, temples and gurdwaras, as representative bodies of a given 'community' became a self-fulfilling prophecy. With the concurrent decline of the political left, the tendency was for expressions of minority identity to be set in some relationship with dominant religious institutions. If individuals were not coopted into (say) the mosques, they reacted against the mosques with religious radicalisation rather than secularism; the latter was the story of the 7/7 bombers. (Similarly, when white workers react against the corruption of official politics, they very often go to the radicalised versions of its worst tendencies, in the form of the BNP and EDL.)

"A lie," Mulder is told early on in the *X files*, "is best hidden between two truths." Thus, for all their political and historical illiteracy, those bourgeois jeremiads about the results of multiculturalism have traction because they also have a certain truth. Multiculturalism, in its own terms, has failed. It was supposed to rid Britain of overt racism - but it has ushered in substantial electoral success for the BNP, and now a growing street-fighting proto-fascism in the form of the EDL. It was supposed to halt ghettoisation, but that has continued at more or less the same pace as before, though it is probably overstated.² Thirty years after the Brixton riot, we appear to be back in the 70s on these matters - down to oh-so-hilarious 70s sitcom-style jokes on popular TV shows.

That is the truth in Cameron's statement. What are the lies? He is certainly careful to hedge his language, and refuses to lump Islam in with "Islamist extremism", which confusion is the common currency of the "far right" (but then so did George Bush). This is an obfuscation in itself: in common with all religions, whose social role is increasingly limited to sustaining reactionary institutions - in particular, patriarchy - that capital can no longer advocate openly, 'good' Islam cannot be so easily dissociated from 'bad' Islam. Many apparently pacific Muslim clerics have come under fire for bloodthirsty statements regarding homosexuality - just as the purportedly liberal Church of England has proven itself increasingly beholden to similar opinions. (That is to say nothing of the shades of opinion in Cameron's own party, which includes former wearers of the infamous 'Hang Nelson Mandela' badge.)

His isolation of "Islamist extremism" serves a more dubious purpose even than this, however. Let us quote him at length, responding to "soft-left" explanations for Islamist

terrorism on the basis of particular grievances:

"They point to the poverty that so many Muslims live in and say, 'Get rid of this injustice and the terrorism will end.' But this ignores the fact that many of those found guilty of terrorist offences in the UK and elsewhere have been graduates and often middle class. They point to grievances about western foreign policy and say, 'Stop riding roughshod over Muslim countries and the terrorism will end.' But there are many people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, who are angry about western foreign policy, but who don't resort to acts of terrorism.

"They also point to the profusion of unelected leaders across the Middle East and say, 'Stop propping these people up and you will stop creating the conditions for extremism to flourish.' But this raises the question: if it's the lack of democracy that is the problem, why are there so many extremists in free and open societies?"

Here, David 'There is such a thing as society' Cameron, above all else, reveals himself to be a true-blue Thatcherite. His incomprehension of the notion that poverty could radicalise someone who is not starving, or imperialist-sponsored autocratic regimes could disgust someone who does not suffer under one, points to an elementary failure to understand even the most basic level of social solidarity.

His real concern in wheeling out this bizarre logic, of course, is to conveniently sweep all these grievances under the carpet as soon as mentioning them. There is no need to withdraw troops from Afghanistan (as demanded by the leader of the 7/7 bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan), no need to stop superexploiting countries at the periphery, no need to withdraw support for oppressive states - because it is all the fault of a "perverse" ideology, propped up by multiculturalism.

What else is there?

The half-truth is that, as noted, the relative strengthening of religious organisations as a whole has led to grievances being interpreted in religious terms (the rise of anti-Muslim bigotry among Christians, Hindus and others is an almost identical phenomenon to the rise of Islamism). Yet can David Cameron really imagine that the aggressive strains of Islam would have much appeal, were the 'hate preachers' not able to point to all this injustice in the world? Even Osama bin Laden cannot claim his attacks to be purely and simply in the interests of establishing a new caliphate - he must talk in terms of Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine to energise the likes of Sidique Khan.

Despite his attack, however, nobody should imagine that Cameron has delivered the eulogy for multiculturalism. His great solution is ... to apportion public money to different religious groups. That was also Blair's response to 7/7. For all the bashings it comes in for, multiculturalism is proving a difficult beast to slay. This, in the end, is because it is the principal means the state has to manage ethnic tensions in a bourgeois society characterised

by large-scale, but unfree, immigration. Multiculturalism is a way to get influential sections of ethnic communities inside the tent, pissing out, and gain passive support from the rest of the community through the petty-patriarchal power structures already in place. For Cameron in particular, whose 'big society' programme - inasmuch as it manifests at all - effectively amounts to an attack on secularism, this is not something that can be easily sacrificed.

Multiculturalism represents a partial gain for oppressed groups by comparison to the overt state racism that preceded it. Now more than ever, however, it is revealed as a reactionary dead end. The struggles of the oppressed against their oppression are paramount to the success of the revolution - but resolving them democratically means rejecting multiculturalism, which merely serves to reinforce the structures of patronage sustained by religious and patriarchal groups and is directly counterposed to the aspiration of achieving a higher, working class culture, able to absorb the best from the thousands of diverse ethnic, national and local cultures the world over.

The Socialist Workers Party, albeit seemingly in retreat from its generally uncritical endorsement of multiculturalism, remains in a state of confusion on this point. "While Cameron holds multiculturalism responsible for the growth of 'Islamic extremism'," writes a *Socialist Worker* correspondent, "the left has its own critique of the policy. We have taken it to task for being tokenistic and seeking to blunt radical challenges to racism. Nevertheless, we have always understood that another kind of multiculturalism was possible, one that rests on the traditions of unity forged in struggle. Our multiculturalism can be seen in today's Britain. It is the product of decades of protests and strikes, gigs and carnivals, relationships and friendships."³

This amounts to saying that multiculturalism should be promoted from below, not from above. In fact the SWP's internal *Party Notes* goes further, imploring: "... we have to defend multiculturalism and black and white unity" - apparently unaware of the contradiction between the two.⁴ We stand for *class unity against the state* - the exact opposite of the multicultural legacy, which means begging at the rulers' table for a few crumbs of council money, of which there is in any case not going to be much in the coming period.

Such unity will be achieved through the promotion of a common, working class identity, not the continued celebration of differences ●

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Notes

1. www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference-60293.
2. *Socialist Worker* cites a study by the University of Manchester, which found that less than 20% of ethnic minority individuals socialise exclusively amongst their ethnic group - compared to 50% of whites ('Don't let the Tories play the race card', February 12). Indeed, ghettoisation is as much a function of 'white flight' as anything else.
3. 'Racism: part of a long Tory tradition' *Socialist Worker* February 12.
4. *Party Notes* February 7: www.swp.org.uk/party-notes.

CULTURE

Philanthrocapitalist manifesto

Giving money to the arts enables capitalists to launder their ideology. But, asks **Gordon Downie**, what effect does this have on creative output?

There has been much discussion recently of the need to encourage people with lots of money to give it away - to charities, cultural organisations and assorted recipients. There is clearly recognition that militant capitalists are so bloated with spare cash they may as well give some of their loose change away to some deserving cause.

The most popular causes seem to be those associated with health provision, medical research or so-called disadvantaged children: donors can look really saintly holding a starving child with Aids and their giving can be recognised in perpetuity if they establish a cancer ward named after them. For the religious capitalist, there is also the bonus of ensuring their safe passage in the afterlife. After healthcare, culture is also a good bet, as Peggy Guggenheim and a long list of other personalities with fat wallets have realised.

In the US, philanthropy has increased from \$100 billion to \$300 billion per year during the 40 years from 1969 to 2009.¹ The US government allows philanthropic donations to reduce taxable income by 50%, which is clearly a significant incentive for the concerned capitalist. And in June 2010 Bill Gates and Warren Buffett attempted to place this process on a more secure foundation by establishing the 'Giving Pledge', an appeal designed to encourage billionaires to give away their money to solve "grand global problems".²

To understand better the philanthropic mind, the *Financial Times*'s 'How to give it' column is a useful source of enlightenment. Healthcare and underprivileged children are prominent in the capitalist conscience. Thus, asked what the first charity he supported was, Steve Berger, vice-chairman of investment company Weld North, replied: providing "toys for underprivileged children, especially at Christmas".³ And asked when she made her first substantial donation, Christina Domecq, a member of the Domecq sherry family, replied: "It was about half a million dollars to develop an orphanage in Tanzania. I was about 23. I wondered if I could do something local and people said I should go see this place. I was floored by the expression of joy on the children's faces - you think how unappreciative we can be, and these children were just happy to have a loaf of bread. I now support five orphanages."⁴

For those responding to Bill Gates's and Warren Buffett's call to action, the Giving Pledge appears to offer the concerned capitalist an unrivalled opportunity to 'make a difference', in order to remedy some of the world's pressing inequities. Warren Buffett summarises this process when he tells us: "My luck was accentuated by my living in a market system that sometimes produces distorted results, though overall it serves our country well. I've worked in an economy that rewards someone who saves the lives of others on a battlefield with a medal, rewards a great teacher with thank-you notes from parents, but rewards those who can detect the mispricing of securities with sums reaching into the billions. In short, fate's distribution of long straws is wildly capricious."⁵

The common thread here seems to be: leave the system alone and let kind and caring philanthrocapital-



New York Philharmonic: bland

ists pick up the pieces and heal the world's little inequities and problems. However, it depends what the problem is: an arguably unpalatable and media-unfriendly condition such as diarrhoea, for example, which is a major cause of infant death worldwide, attracts relatively little philanthropic attention. Thus, given the prevalence of self-titled foundations and the rarity of anonymous donations, the primary motive for philanthropists appears to be self-aggrandisement to increase their symbolic capital, public image, and historical legacy, and the further expansion of their control over personal, public and political affairs. It would appear that conspicuous philanthropy begins when conspicuous consumption ends.

But it is wholly grotesque to witness those who control, manage and benefit from the capitalist system electing to solve problems for which the system is directly or indirectly the cause. This, of course, is a neat trick, as capital accumulates further credit. In their defence, it is frequently claimed that such donors retain what is customarily termed a 'social conscience'. But this is of no significance. Lives and resources cannot be determined and managed based on the random and spontaneous largesse of a few well-off money-makers with an ego to service and a troubled conscience to salve.

This process mirrors the unadulterated and congenitally inane drivel propounded by Matthew Bishop and Michael Green in their *Philanthrocapitalism - how giving can save the world*. In his foreword to the book, Bill Clinton states: "We have to transform [the world] into one of shared responsibilities, shared opportunities and a shared sense of community."⁶ The philanthrocapitalist manifesto informs us that we are "at the dawn of an era of mass philanthrocapitalism" and, while "Thirty years of market reform has been good for Britain's rich", unfortunately "our society has become more unequal". Despite this, there is no place for "populist bashing of the rich". Rather we need to "rewrite the social contract between the rich

and the rest. The winners of capitalism have a responsibility to the rest of society, not just to pay their taxes, but to give back with their money and their skills", whilst "The corporate world, too, is starting to realise that business can 'do well by doing good'.⁷

So that is the world in a nutshell. If you picked one of the short straws: hard luck. But if you are really fortunate, someone sitting on a cash-pile accumulated through creative accountancy, opaque financial instruments or tax-avoidance will give you a couple of quid to help you get by.

Donate now

The current Tory-led coalition, as part of its programme to butcher public provision and bring the British population to heel, is in the process of substantially reducing state support for arts and culture, and is seeking to establish a "US-style plan to increase philanthropic donations by the rich".⁸ For this administration, the US is clearly the model to follow, though its proposals merely build upon and extend processes of privatisation pursued by successive governments during the last 30 years or more.

The cultural terrain we have today has been in large measure generated by this process and the government's plans are aimed at taking it to its logical conclusion. Indeed, as Christine Lindey has remarked, many cultural events take the form they do because of the "symbiotic relationship between the mainstream media, major institutions and the corporate sponsors upon which the latter are financially dependent".⁹ She continues: "Tate Modern's Gauguin exhibition is sponsored by Bank of America Merrill Lynch and its media partner is *The Sunday Times* and its Turbine Hall displays are named the Unilever Series after their multinational sponsor." She concludes: "institutions must court sponsors and convince them of potentially large audiences and this leads to a domination of safe themes".¹⁰

So what model is this? What happens when it is applied? How does its application affect the process of

cultural production itself? Can cultural producers and organisations be sure that the relationships they develop with corporate and private philanthrocapitalists will continue to be beneficial, as the true nature of the capitalist system enters popular consciousness at a deeper level? There can be no better illustration of what happens when capital gets its grubby hands on culture than the artistic and programming policies of large-scale cultural organisations such as symphony orchestras.

In the UK, both the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) and the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) offer a wide variety of sponsorship options. To attract corporate donors, the CBSO tells us: "Whether it's about showing your commitment to the community, looking after your employees or thrilling your clients, the CBSO can engage with your business to provide a mutually beneficial relationship"; while "Our corporate partnerships are based on shared aspirations, values and culture".¹¹ Current corporate sponsors include Barclays Wealth, HSBC, RBS and Ernst and Young.¹²

On the LSO's website meanwhile, we are enjoined to *Donate now!*¹³ For the Patron's Scheme, levels of donation range from the modest Bronze at £1,000 to the slightly more adventurous Diamond at £10,000.¹⁴ Corporate members are lured by a similar, but pricier range of options. LSO Premier, starting at £20,000 plus VAT per annum, is a "top-level client entertaining and business networking forum, offering corporate members a high-calibre international events programme, aligned with world-class performances by the LSO". In addition, "The event format allows significant client networking opportunity" with "previous events including a reception at the Bank of England, hosted by governor Mervyn King".¹⁵ In addition, the Employee Engagement scheme offers "corporate team-building workshops on the Balinese gamelan", whilst workshops attempt to draw "parallels between orchestral and business leadership and

communication, offering the exclusive experience of sitting within the orchestra".¹⁶

Meanwhile, in the US, this process is rather more advanced. The existence of the New York Philharmonic (NYP) is in large measure maintained through the injection of corporate capital and private philanthropy. Reflecting this, the begging bowls - significantly extending those schemes used by the orchestra's British counterparts - come in a variety of sizes to entice both small and big capitalists. Patrons can donate at a variety of levels and get a variety of perks in return, including cocktail receptions, post-concert dinners and opportunities to "meet the artists".¹⁷ But at any level the patron's "name will appear in subscription concert programmes all season long and in our annual report. So even when you can't attend, the audience will see your name and applaud your generosity."¹⁸

By joining the Leonard Bernstein Circle, donors are offered three membership schemes: Concertmaster, entitling them to an "Invitation for two to salon evenings"; Maestro, offering a "Personalised concert dedication with concert tickets and dinner for eight"; and Virtuoso, complete with an "Invitation for two to a dinner with the chairman of the board".¹⁹ In addition to these programmes, donors can choose a variety of other sponsoring routes, including donating stock, endowing an orchestral chair or, in the case of the Yoko Nagae Ceschina Chair, funding the salary of the orchestra's music director, Alan Gilbert. In response to Mrs Ceschina's generosity, Gilbert effuses: "Yoko is more than a remarkably generous supporter of the New York Philharmonic - she has become an integral member of the Philharmonic family."²⁰

In the case of corporate sponsorship, the orchestra states that it has "cultivated longstanding partnerships with many leading corporations in our region and across the globe. From enhancing brand awareness and visibility to unique client entertainment experiences, sponsorship at the New York Philharmonic provides our corporate partners access to: co-branding and visibility through our extensive marketing platform; our highly desirable audience and patron demographics; and one-of-a-kind Philharmonic entertaining events. We would be pleased to customise a sponsorship plan to fulfil your business objectives."²¹ Corporate sponsors include Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, and JPMorgan Chase and Co.

How to spend it

This process has a devastating impact on the artistic policies of the NYP, as its programming and subscription series have to be of a kind that big capital and corporations find acceptable and ideologically compatible - and of a kind that maintains the grins of private donors and sponsors whose images adorn the orchestra's website.

In consequence, attending a NYP concert (in common with almost all other orchestras worldwide that are dependent on private donors: ie, the majority) is the equivalent of visiting a museum, where physical artefacts and antiquities are replaced by their

aural equivalents, the so-called established repertoire of Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, with a dash of pop-Bernstein thrown in. The mind-numbing and intellectually stultifying tedium of this is only matched by the enthusiasm exhibited by the orchestra's bourgeois, Manhattanite patrons, for whom concert-going is just another accessory or asset to add to their real-estate and investment portfolio, and their fine wine and modern art collection. And there is always a healthy supply of maestros willing to service this corpse that passes for musical culture.

At first glance, it may therefore be surprising that the orchestra has recently established the post of Marie-Josée Kravis composer-in-residence and a new music competition prize of \$250,000 - both funded by a \$10 million gift from the financier, Henry R Kravis. In addition, it has initiated a new music concert series with the arousing title of 'Contact!', which illustrates - it claims - its "dedication to the music of our time",²² though the series - comprising only two concerts - is separate from its mainstream concert programmes.

Henry R Kravis seems to be very enthusiastic about culture. Like other philanthropists, he clearly considers it important that, in conformity with the philanthropic manifesto, he gives something back to society and the needy, such as cultural organisations, composers and hospitals. And Mr Kravis would appear to need no advice from the *Financial Times*'s 'How to give it' column or the 'How to spend it' weekend supplement. On the contrary, Mr Kravis - a fundraiser for George W Bush and John McCain - has already determined that one of the best ways to spend it is by commissioning for his wife, Marie-Josée Kravis, a birthday gift of a new orchestral work from the British composer, Judith Weir (Commander of the Order of the British Empire), recipient of the 2007 Queen's Medal for Music. The work was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2000. Henry R Kravis is ranked the 201st richest person in the world by Forbes, and his net worth - amassed in part from his application of the leveraged buyout, which frequently leads to the sacking of workers in companies targeted by the practice - is considered to be \$4.2 billion.²³ Mrs Kravis is an economist and member of the neo-con think-tank, the Hudson Institute. As *The Independent* reported, "Kravis is a product of the 1980s, the whirlwind of deregulation ... that funnelled huge fortunes into the pockets of a few financiers and bankers on Wall Street."²⁴

But the NYP's commitment and dedication to the "music of our time" is in name only - it is merely part of a wider marketing, branding and promotional strategy. In *content*, such a policy has to maintain the interest and support of its corporate and private donors, who have to be confident of a profitable symbolic return on their real investment. This being the case, any new music that is programmed must be of a kind that reflects, or offers no challenge to, the ideological horizons and mindsets of the donors that keep the orchestra in operation. We should be unsurprised, therefore, that the new music that is featured in the orchestra's 2010-11 concert season is selected from the conservative and right wing of the aesthetico-political spectrum: creative product that evokes little or no controversy from corporate sponsors' shareholders. It is thus a commitment to an ideologically vetted sector of "music of our time". Thus, the efficient operation of this process is predicated on the willingness of composers to subordinate their creative aspirations to those market-driven priorities that ensure the maintenance of philanthropic support.

He who pays the piper

The new Marie-Josée Kravis composer-in-residence at the NYP is Magnus Lindberg. Given Lindberg's recent statements, would appear a suitable choice for a cultural organisation that needs to be alert to the needs and requirements of its corporate sponsors.

Lindberg traverses the centre-right and soft-left wings of the aesthetico-political spectrum. Marketeers find this a particularly useful aesthetic fraction, as it enables them to enlist categories of promotional language that can signal the market competitiveness of the organisations for which they are agents, whilst avoiding the necessity of managing or representing the types of product that such language objectively denotes. This includes terms such as *groundbreaking*, *cutting edge* and *innovative*. No cultural marketing campaign is complete without such language and its usage is ubiquitous. Attributes of operational and strategic agility are assigned to any organisation that employs them, and they are characteristics that all modern corporations seek to display - and if their application has a grain of truth then the process is all the more effective. The representation of such a fraction also enables cultural organisations to feign inclusivity, while in reality operating a closed-door policy toward cultural product of a genuinely critical comportment. Through such a strategy critique and dissent can be effectively managed or neutralised.

The first requirement for artists working within such a context must be a willingness to jettison creative autonomy. It is this very autonomy that challenges those ideologies seeking to force all phenomena to conform to the priorities of capital, and such autonomy is a primary political goal and operational feature of a long series of 20th and 21st century avant-gardes, including a significant fraction within high-modernist music. But Lindberg tells us: "We can't afford to work that way any more. Music is about communication between human beings, and in that sense the audience really matters."²⁵ However, what Lindberg actually means is that, as an employee of the NYP, he is not allowed to work like that any more.²⁶

Thus, within music, he who pays the piper literally does call the tune. In his defence, Lindberg states: "I'm not saying we should prostitute ourselves and think 'What do they want?'"²⁷ What then is he saying? His statement seems to assert that there are *gradations* of compromise; that a *partially* compromised aesthetic object is not a *totally* compromised aesthetic object; that the creative artist can compromise a *little*. Whilst it may be true that part of a limb can be amputated, an aesthetic artefact either retains its integrity, autonomy and authenticity or it does not - there is no intermediary ground.²⁸

Though Lindberg's actions and statements are located within an aesthetic field of operation, they mirror with illuminating and depressing clarity those actions and statements of accommodation that characterise the political behaviour of soft-left or centre-left careerists and opportunists (in reality a fictional left) - a ubiquitous fraction that is no less responsible for the hegemony of capital than the neo-cons and far right itself. Indeed, by cleansing and occupying the ground that belongs to, and should be the site of, opposition and critique, they function as its suitably compliant and servile substitute or simulation. Indeed, there can be no more efficient means by which capital (and those forces of reaction that reflect and assert its interests in the complex ideological superstructure) can manage and neutralise dissent than by determining the ideological complexion of its opposition. It is through these processes of accommodation and assimilation - however complexly mediated they might be - that creative artists place their practice at the service of capital.

It may be conjectured that, within the relatively capital-poor aesthetic field, it is unreasonable or unrealistic to expect practitioners to deny themselves access to opportunities for self-development and career enhancement. This may be the case, and the history of art is in many respects a record of this process. But Lindberg - and several other British composers, such as Thomas Adès and Julian Anderson, who are featured in the NYP concert series - clearly perceive career value in an association with big capital. However, such an association offers capitalists yet another route by which to

launder their ideology and a cheap way to legitimise their financial practices through philanthropic good deeds. In consequence, those in receipt of scraps from the rich man's table are complicit in those processes that maintain the hegemony of capitalist political and economic power, and all that flows from this domination. But, given the system's current internal crisis (and popular recognition of the extreme inequities associated with hyper-extreme concentrations of wealth and the power that it can wield), creative artists may need to reconsider whether such an association is quite the route to career success, fulfilment and CV enhancement they imagined.

We have to be continually aware of the effect this process has on the creative media and aesthetic objects in question, and ask ourselves whether processes we condemn within the political arena are processes we should tolerate within its aesthetic counterpart. To paraphrase Guy Debord, in a world that really has been turned on its head, success is a moment of failure²⁹ ●

Notes

1. 'Giving heaps' *Financial Times* December 11 2010.
2. *Ibid.*
3. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/330a80de-2d00-11df-8025-00144feabdc0.html#ixzz15s0L6VPZ.
4. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/220ca084-342b-11dd-869b-0000779fd2ac.html#ixzz15s1dmHJu.
5. http://givingpledge.org/Content/media/PledgeLetters.pdf.
6. www.philanthropiccapitalism.net/2010/01/the-philanthropiccapitalist-manifesto.
7. *Ibid.*
8. 'Ministers push for rich to leave more money to charity and the arts' *The Guardian* December 8 2010.
9. 'Radical resolution' *Morning Star* December 30 2010.
10. *Ibid.*
11. www.cbso.co.uk/?page=involved/corporatepartnership.html.
12. www.cbso.co.uk/?page=involved/supporters.html.
13. http://lso.co.uk/donatenow.
14. http://lso.co.uk/page/3182/LSO+Patrons.
15. http://lso.co.uk/page/3188/LSO+Premier.
16. http://lso.co.uk/page/3190/Employee+Engagement.
17. http://nyphil.org/support/membershipGrid_patrons.cfm.
18. http://nyphil.org/support/patrons.cfm.
19. http://nyphil.org/support/bernstein_details.cfm.
20. http://nyphil.org/about/gilbert_nagae.cfm?utm_medium=homepage&utm_source=button3_gilbert-named-chair_0103.
21. http://nyphil.org/support/otherGifts_corporate.cfm.
22. http://nyphil.org/newsroom1011/releases/2010-11_Lindberg_supplement.pdf.
23. www.forbes.com/lists/2010/10/billionaires-2010_The-Worlds-Billionaires_Rank_9.html.
24. www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/henry-kravis-a-barbarian-at-the-gate-445595.html.
25. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/182e5bdc-8ae8-11df-bead-00144feab49a.html#axzz15pmU12we.
26. Lindberg's reference to "the audience" makes an allusion to the 1958 essay of American composer Milton Babbitt, 'The composer as specialist', which the publisher altered to "Who cares if you listen?". This essay and the position it articulates is routinely invoked by those segments of the music establishment that seek to remind us of what they perceive to be the creative and ideological misdemeanours of the high-modernist avant-garde: by this means younger composers can be alerted to the dangers to their careers of aligning themselves with it. In this essay, Babbitt outlines an alternative model for the creative artist, a model that views composition as a specialism on a par with other intellectual professions, such as physics, computer science or mathematics, requiring a similar level of preparation for its proper understanding. Babbitt's diatribe was and continues to be a refreshing and inspiringly militant defence of advanced composers' creative rights, and a robust assertion of the possibilities of the medium unfettered by poorly and illiterately formed notions surrounding the creative artist's responsibility or obligations to the public. However, one of the problems with Babbitt's analysis is that it reduces the problem primarily to an opposition between composer and listener. As such, his model and explanatory framework is more or less devoid of any serious political content. It leaves unexamined more complex dynamics and causes that have their source in the very fabric and structure of capitalist society and the commodity form. The intellectually debilitating effects of extreme divisions of labour are not recognised here, and the problem and its solution are confined within the analytically constrained limits of the domain.
27. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/182e5bdc-8ae8-11df-bead-00144feab49a.html#axzz15pmU12we.
28. In a simplistic attempt to transfer strategies of political opportunism into the aesthetic realm, creative artists not infrequently believe that professional goals are obtainable by deploying creative *product* tactically. This is mistaken. While short-term realignments and tactical manoeuvring is not only common, but frequently essential in the realisation of *political* aims, such processes cannot be transferred to the *aesthetic* realm because creative products and professional goals cannot be decoupled without annihilating the former - process and product are not separable. This error is responsible for the muddled and directionless complexion of a large proportion of contemporary creative production in all media.
29. Guy Debord's original statement, "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood", appears in his *Society of the spectacle*.

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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weekly worker

Movement at a low point

Mobilise the majority

Ben Lewis reports on the lack of ambition witnessed at the seventh London Student Assembly

Around 40 comrades attended the February 6 London Student Assembly. The majority of them were far-left activists from groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and Workers Power, together with several anarchists and one comrade from the Socialist Party in England and Wales. The disappointing attendance (just last month around 200 had been present) set the rather downbeat tone.

Nonetheless, proceedings got off to a very positive start with an extensive political discussion. Naturally this tended to focus on the current state of play within the student movement and the reaction to the London and Manchester demonstrations on January 29.

Mark Bergfeld, SWP student leader and challenger to current National Union of Students president Aaron Porter at this year's NUS conference, was in good form. For him, having two separate demonstrations on the same day had been vindicated, embodying the approach of "working with the union bureaucracy when it is good, and against it when it is bad". Like most of us in the room, he was glad that the demonstrators' anger prevented Porter from addressing the crowds. Apparently last week's NUS executive meeting was full of jokes about vice-president for further education Shane Chowen 'over-egging a point' or 'putting all his eggs in one basket' - he actually managed to speak to the demonstration in Manchester, but had to dodge the occasional aborted chicken offspring hurled at the platform.

However, comrades from Counterfire had a different view of the clash of activities last weekend. James Meadway thought it was very positive that the NUS had organised a demonstration and that it was "wrong" for another event to then have been called for the same day. His assessment was that the demos were thus smaller and less effective - which seemed to downplay their bold, disciplined and militant nature. But other Counterfire comrades agreed. Ellie Badcock said that the fact that students chased Porter away looked "quite bad" and could have been seen as "divisive". After all, added University of London Union president Clare Solomon, it is not as if Aaron Porter is a fascist.

Well of course he is not. But, as James Turley of Communist Students pointed out, there are good reasons why people sent him scurrying away: his record in defending students from the Con-Dem onslaught has been despicable. From the chair, Sean Rillo-Raczka (mature students representative on the NUS NEC) backed him up by pointing out how difficult it was to get NUS support for anything vaguely leftwing or progressive: the majority of the executive views groups like the LSA, Education Activists Network or the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts as "inherently unsafe" and

are already making it clear they will not support any industrial action by the University and College Union, whose members are being balloted this week. There was a slight sense of *déjà vu* when comrade Badcock in particular spoke about the movement being as "big and broad as possible". Agreed. But broad enough to include those like Porter who are actually in favour of 'necessary' cuts and who have echoed the sentiments of the gutter press in seeking to undermine the student movement?

I made the point that, whilst those like comrades Rillo-Raczka and Bergfeld should use their positions to move motions to the NUS NEC in support of actions and protests, what we should collectively be concentrating on now is building support amongst the *mass* of students: coordinated leafleting, the establishment of student assemblies, organising alongside workers in dispute and gaining momentum for the March 26 TUC demonstration. I also suggested that we do not draw premature conclusions from the current numbers at the LSA - there is still enormous potential support and we must look to mobilise it.

There were many sympathetic nods in the room. But, as we shall see, it does appear that the left is currently not taking these basic tasks seriously enough.

Back to 2003?

The discussion then turned to some of the actions being planned in the coming weeks: building support for the UCU dispute, picketing the Universities UK gathering of vice-chancellors in London on February 24 and 'marching on Eton' - an SWP-backed stunt at the Old Etonians' Association open day on Thursday February 17. This session could have actually been a lot shorter, which would have ensured more discussion about plans for the LSA to build support and broaden its base. Many of the proposals

were identical to those made at the SWP-inspired National Assembly for Education the week before, and many speakers simply repeated each other's points about the importance of the UCU dispute and keeping up the pressure with action at the UUK gathering.

When it came to discussing March 26, however, some political disagreements surfaced once again. An anarchist comrade pointed out that the danger with simply building for a 'massive demonstration' was that we could see a rerun of February 15 2003, where a million marched against the invasion of Iraq, but then simply went home without having achieved their aims. The comrade wondered whether there would have been more of an impact if there had been "slightly less people who actually did something" and whether this time we could do "something different which creates a focus".

Doubtless such a sentiment will be widespread. Those who view marching from A to B as pointless will look to break off from the official march and cause greater disruption for the authorities. But stunts cannot substitute for mass consciousness, organisation and *politics*. Demonstrations, pickets, well-timed stunts, etc must be subordinate to the development of a working class political strategy, which in turn can build confidence and combativity. Thus communists wish to see millions on a militant demonstration on March 26. We want to see them return to their local anti-cuts groups, trade unions, student assemblies, etc with fresh ideas and purpose. As an 18-year-old kid in 2003, I know I certainly did! The problem of the anti-war protests was not the fact that the million people on the streets simply marched and listened to speeches, but the fact that the Stop the War Coalition leadership deliberately prevented any attempt to inspire them with a *strategic alternative* - after all, the important thing

was the movement itself and the mobilisation of the greatest possible numbers, not arming it with a political programme.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I got the distinct impression that some of the Counterfire comrades were arguing along such 'movementist', STWC-inspired lines. Yet we must also guard against the immature leftist view expressed by a comrade from Movement for Justice, who argued that on previous student demonstrations there was "not enough violence, not enough social unrest".

Efforts must now be redoubled to mobilise students for March 26. Encouragingly, a feeder march for education is currently being organised which will join the main march after picking up students across London universities. A working group was also established to plan to build for this on London campuses. But unfortunately it will not meet until Friday, February 18. Quite clearly we will need to draw up a battle plan to leaflet every London campus and hall of residence - March 26 will soon be upon us.

Stepping up

Unfortunately however, instead of *increasing* the LSA's activity and vigour, both Counterfire and the SWP seemed quite keen on winding it down. Initially Clare Solomon, who is obviously snowed under with numerous commitments, proposed that the assembly meet once a month from now on. I pointed out that we would then only meet *once* before March 26 - effectively leaving everything to the working group and reducing our ability to draw in more people to build for it on campus. After a few speeches for and against it was decided that we would decide on the frequency of the LSAs at the next meeting. Fair enough. But the next meeting will be on ... February 26!

This was all rather disappointing, given the tasks ahead. Comrades are quite rightly a little frustrated with the turnout and other political work is obviously taking its toll. But even taking some rather modest measures could easily boost the numbers turning up to the LSA on a regular basis.

After all, it is nigh on impossible to find out details of LSAs - there is no dedicated website, little to no publicity on campuses and no group of comrades currently devoting their time to working on it. My proposals to set up a website and prioritise some of these basic tasks were effectively buried, meaning that until February 26 we will be stuck with this totally unacceptable situation of having to publicise assemblies by word of mouth or via Facebook.

Comrade Rillo-Raczka claimed that taking on such tasks required elaborate structures and bureaucratic organisation - a course correctly rejected by the sixth LSA. But this is untrue. There is nothing stopping *ad hoc* groups or individuals taking up tasks in between *regular* LSAs - nothing, perhaps, except for attempts to gain narrow sect advantage. Frustratingly, many on the left seem happy to carry on with 'business as usual'. They see the LSA as a place where the various groups and fronts can at best avoid stepping on each other's toes - not where they can actually come together to jointly *build* student assemblies and organise more effectively.

The student movement will clearly ebb and flow. But the recent demonstrations and the current occupations in Glasgow and Hull show that its radicalism has not gone away. March 26 must be seen as a springboard to further militancy. And, with the will to build them, student assemblies and delegate-based national gatherings could become organising hubs of mass student-led resistance ●

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