



weekly **worker**

**Mikhail Bakunin and
the errors and pitfalls
of general-strikism**

- Anti-cuts protests
- Debating 1984-85
- China and capitalism
- Zimbabwe arrests

No 857

Thursday March 17 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

Expel Hutton: **DEFEND PENSIONS**



LETTERS



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

Alternative view

This week sees the 140th anniversary of the Paris Commune (March 18-May 28 1871). Marx thought the brutally suppressed insurrection was the first example of the working class exercising power in its own name. Yet, according to Peter Manson, the way in which representatives to the Commune were elected should have made that body incapable of representing the working class ('Socialism means winning the majority', March 10).

Peter maintains that only in a factory or an office do workers have sufficient "common interest" to make it "often appropriate that they should elect their own representative to union bodies or, in a situation of much greater class-consciousness, to soviets". By contrast, "council wards or parliamentary constituencies rarely have common factors that give their inhabitants, or at least the overwhelming majority of them, a common interest based purely on where they reside".

Peter goes on to explain that the CPGB supports the party list system of proportional representation in which the whole country is treated as a single constituency and electors place a cross against a party rather than a representative. The CPGB also believes that between elections it is the party rather than the electors who should recall representatives elected in this manner.

140 years ago the working class of Paris was perfectly capable of directly electing representatives based on *arrondissements* (ie, geographic districts) and holding them directly accountable through the right of recall. These were among the features of the Commune, effectively Paris's local council, that Marx argued gave it a working class character.

No doubt the Parisian working class would have stood a better chance of long-term success if the First International and the ideas of Marx and Engels had exerted more influence on the councillors. But the electoral system made no difference to that outcome.

Now, I do not imagine for a minute that any elections in the immediate future (on May 5, say) are about to open revolutionary opportunities. Nevertheless, the Commune demonstrates the potentially revolutionary content of the simple act of voting.

The working class clearly has the potential of exercising great power in workplaces by asserting the right to vote - whether it is electing an accountable trade union representative, a delegate to a workers' council or a manager. However, it is also in local communities that workers are capable of challenging bourgeois society. In fact, given that many members of the working class do not work, it is only on a geographic basis that the working class can express the totality of its interests.

It is my contention (see my 'Electoral reform and communist strategy', May 27 2010, for a detailed discussion of these issues) that direct election and recall (both now and in the workers' state of the future) is the democratic principle that has the best chance of releasing the political and social creativity of the working class.

Nick Rogers
London

No to AV

Whilst I agree with much of the sentiment in Peter Manson's article, I am afraid I disagree with him about supporting the alternative vote as a step towards more extreme democracy. On the contrary, I see it as a retro-

grade step that will help to maintain the exclusion of current minority parties and maintain the dominance of mainstream parties that represent the political status quo.

I agree with the comments relating to the Labour Representation Committee. I recall hearing such sentiments when I was active in the Labour Party in the 1980s. Then the debate was around proportional representation, which was opposed by much of the left for the same reason. Apparently a Labour government with a radical programme was more likely to be elected with 'first past the post' and then socialism would be delivered by the passing of a few laws with the aid of the occasional enabling act. The role of the masses in creating socialism was reduced to putting an 'X' against Labour on the ballot paper! Incidentally, I agree that the list system would be one of the best systems.

The following hypothetical exchange between comrade X and comrade DP explains in more detail why I think socialists should vote 'no'. This is especially relevant to those who wish to see a left political alternative to Labour ever being able to get representatives elected.

DP: The problem with AV is that it is a majoritarian system which will make it even more difficult for minority parties to get representation. In this sense it is a retrograde step. What is needed is PR, not AV. For this reason I am opposed to it. If there had been AV instead of PR in the Scottish parliamentary elections both the Scottish Socialist Party and the Greens would never have got any seats.

Comrade X: But the referendum isn't to replace PR with AV. It's to replace first-past-the-post with AV. On the example you give, if FPTP had been used for the Scottish parliamentary elections, there wouldn't have been any SSP or Green reps elected either.

DP: True - but it would be even less likely under AV. Caroline Lucas was elected as the first Green Party MP under FPTP but it is very unlikely the Greens would get an MP elected using AV. Likewise if we have AV in parliamentary elections it will create an even greater barrier to get any socialist or radical candidates elected. I will give a hypothetical scenario of votes: Socialist 40%, Labour 30%, Lib Dem 20%, Tories 10%. Under FPTP the socialist would win the seat. Under AV the Tory would be eliminated and second choice votes would be redistributed. Those votes are likely to go to other mainstream candidates. This may change the results to say: Socialist 41%, Labour 32%, Lib Dem 27%. Then the Lib Dem candidate is eliminated and second and third choice votes redistributed. Say: Socialist 47% and Labour 53%. The result is that Labour is elected.

Comrade X: At least under AV votes can be cast for left parties without voters feeling that that they will let the Tories in.

DP: Yes. If your heart is socialist but you normally vote Labour then you can safely vote socialist first knowing that under AV your vote will revert to Labour once the socialist candidate has been eliminated. So the system under AV will allow more people to vote socialist in a first round, but with the assurance that any minority has the deck stacked against them. It will be near to impossible for a minority to actually get candidates elected under AV. The few communist, Labour Independent, Respect and Green candidates that have been elected in the last 100 years wouldn't stand a chance. The system would be biased in favour of parties representing the status quo.

Comrade X: Yes, AV is majoritarian but less so than FPTP.

DP: This is a misunderstanding of AV. Votes are eliminated and redistributed to next preferences. The final play-off is between the last two candidates standing, once votes have been redistributed. In theory, you could get 49% of the vote in a first round and still lose so long as the second, third, etc, preferences of the mainstream parties all end up stacked against you. FPTP is less majoritarian than AV. The party that will really gain from AV is any party in the centre of mainstream politics - the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems have argued throughout most of their history for PR, but instead they are offering a system which will benefit themselves and heavily discriminate *against* current political minorities (who will effectively be excluded from office). This is another Lib Dem sell-out. The Lib Dems are currently hated for their part in the vicious coalition cuts. Should they be rewarded by changing the electoral system to one which makes the seats safer for these hated politicians?

Comrade X: Clearly the Lib Dems are unlikely to gain as much from AV as they would from PR.

DP: If I remember rightly, they would gain around 30 or so MPs in most of the elections that have taken place in the last few decades under AV. A lot of Labour and Tory voters will give Lib Dems as second choice. Both Labour and the Tories will tend to be slight losers. Would the Lib Dems gain more from PR? In a sense, no, because they would have greater influence with AV, even if they could theoretically get more seats with PR. Even then I'm not sure whether the arithmetic would give them more under PR anyway. The biggest losers will be minority parties that will be totally excluded.

Dave Parks
Exeter

Proportional?

Your article on voting systems is well thought out and logical. It has led me to question my own preference for a 50-50 system with a d'Hondt top-up. I still wonder if localities do have some cross-class interests, but accept that communists may regard them as marginal.

The point I would make is that AV, in its requirement for 50% to win a seat, could likely lead to a less diverse parliament than we have now. The exaggerated swings could also lead to a less proportional one. Looking at Australia, the parliament there does appear to be less proportional than the UK one, with a hung parliament actually being rarer in Australia.

Also I feel the main parties will have less to fear of leftists of various stripes if they know our voters would likely transfer to them in later rounds.

James Tomkinson
email

Allende vote

There was an interesting passage in Peter Manson's article on the alternative vote: "Working class rule requires the support of a clear, if not overwhelming, majority of the population. Socialism is the act of the working class, carried out by the working class. It cannot be legislated into existence from above - and certainly not by a government that has less than 50% of the popular vote. As soon as a working class government attempted to introduce measures that undermined the power and privileges of the ruling class, it would be paralysed and in the end removed by any means necessary through the bourgeoisie's control of state institutions, the means of production and, not least, its 'bodies of armed men'."

Interesting for its implications, I mean. It would confirm one of the reasons why the Allende administration in Chile that came into office in

1970 was able to be overthrown three years later. In the presidential election, he received only about 36% of the vote (he was elected by congress using AV!) and the parties that supported him never got more than 50% in parliamentary elections. (The other reason his administration failed was that it was unable to make capitalism work for the workers and so left people discontent or indifferent to its fate.)

But does the second part of the passage mean that, even with over 50% of the vote, a socialist electoral victory would not be accepted by the last capitalist government and that this government would still be able to make capitalism function with a majority of the population against it? Wouldn't all hell break loose (strikes, demonstrations, mutinies, etc), leading to them being overthrown or surrendering anyway, a bit like the collapse of the dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt (and 20 or so years ago in eastern Europe)?

Adam Buick
email

Time, comrades

On December 16 ('We will be back'), Robbie Rix wrote: "Apart from a few technical glitches [the new website] is almost ready for launch." We're now well into March. Now, I'm well aware that time is a relative concept or, as Douglas Adams wrote more poetically, "Time is an illusion, teatime doubly so". But I do ask when the new website will see the light.

On a related note, and I reported this before, there seems to be a bug in the current website. In Firefox all seems fine, but in Google's Chrome I'm missing a few buttons, such as the link to the previous editions. I've no idea what might cause this and, as I'm into the subject of web design myself, I would like an answer as I'm genuinely interested.

My last question is one about study. I'm in a reading group and we've also settled on a few works of Jack Conrad. Could such books be put online when the new website (eventually) goes up? The Socialist Party in England and Wales, for example, does the same with its books, so I don't think that a group which sees itself as educating the rest of the far left on the subject of Marxism could stay behind for too long.

Benjamin Hill
email

Diversity class

In his book *After theory*, Terry Eagleton observes that, despite all its radical veneer, postmodernist thought has a conservative epistemology, because, like conservatism, it sees all things that are a product of social construction as plastic and hence ephemeral. Imagine my surprise therefore when I find that the supposed vanguard of the working class seem to share such a misapprehension. I refer, of course, to Maciej Zurewski's article 'Lady Gaga and the "gay gene"' (March 3) and Kevin Hind's letter on class identity (March 10).

Maciej Zurewski uses a Foucaultian account of the rise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender 'identities' - one in which LGBT people are purely passive, with their identity seen as an ideological imposition. Not surprisingly, therefore, Zurewski reaches the same conclusion as queer theorists that the "gay community helps to perpetuate the very same myths that are the source of its oppression".

I would have thought that, as a supposed Marxist, Zurewski would use a Marxist explanation of the rise of LGBT identities, such as that given by John D'Emilio. While science encourages people to think in deterministic ways about their feelings, the rise of LGBT identities, according to

D'Emilio, are more a response to the rise of capitalism. Specifically the rise of the wage labour system and the fragmentation of the traditional family relations in urban areas, which both allowed lasting same-sex relationships and made them necessary for people to survive. The rich and powerful have never needed LGBT identities, as their privileges have allowed them to live parallel lives. LGBT identities are a product of the struggle of working people who have had no choice other than to fight their corner. LGBT identities are therefore no more 'artificial' than any other social identities, be they gender, race or class.

More disconcerting is Zurewski's and Hind's dichotomisation of LGBT identities and that of the class struggle. Beyond a moan about the apolitical and commercial nature of the gay scene (as if straight pubs and clubs are a hive of political radicalism), no tangible examples are given as to how LGBT identities block the class struggle. What we do have is a Gorkian slur, with LGBT identities being associated with the far right: "Conservative right-wing capitalism finds its expression in the LGBT community," writes Hind, while for Zurewski, "this tendency has found its most recent, admittedly marginal, expression in the rainbow-flag-waving LGBT 'division' of the English Defence League".

But perhaps the saddest thing about Zurewski's and Hind's perspectives is their evidently poor opinion of straight working class people. Apparently the proles are so lumpy that LGBT workers need to climb back into the closet in order to counter the "conservative right, for whom it is a useful device to stir divisions within the working class".

The working class is diverse. It is made up of men and women, black, Asian, Muslim, Christian, gay, bisexual, straight, disabled, old and young, atheist, transgendered, and so on. We all have a diversity of needs and expectations and we have a range of skills and capabilities. Class unity cannot be achieved by pretending these diversities don't exist. On the contrary, respecting and utilising this diversity lays at the heart of Marxism. As the slogan goes, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.'

Richard Farnos
Upper Norwood

Postpone Pride

Outrage is not supporting the East London Gay Pride march scheduled for April 2, following the revelation of links between some of the organisers and the rightwing English Defence League. I have also withdrawn my personal support. We fear the march will be exploited and hijacked by the far right to create divisions and stir up intolerance against Muslim people.

Outrage opposes both homophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry. All forms of intolerance are wrong. The gay, Muslim, Jewish, Asian and black communities know the pain of prejudice and discrimination. We should stand together, united against hate. Let's celebrate east London's multicultural diversity. Don't let bigotry divide us. Together, we can defeat the hate-mongers.

While defending the right of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and inter-sex (LGBTI) people to protest against homophobia and 'Gay-free zone' stickers, it would be best if the march was postponed until a later date and organised by a broad-based grassroots and community coalition, untainted by associations with the EDL. Muslim organisations and speakers should be invited to participate in the rescheduled East London Pride.

Sadly, the East London Mosque and its London Muslim Centre must

bear some responsibility for previously stoking homophobia. They have hosted hate preachers such as Abdul Karim Hattin, Muhammad Alshareef, Abdullah Hakim Quick and Bilal Philips. These fundamentalist anti-gay preachers fuel a culture of homophobia that first and foremost intimidates and threatens LGBTI Muslims. We welcome the East London Mosque's assurance that it will not give a platform to anti-gay speakers in the future. We urge them to establish a regular, permanent dialogue with LGBTI organisations, including Muslim ones, to foster solidarity between the LGBTI and Muslim communities and to combat both homophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice.

The vast majority of British Muslims are not fundamentalist fanatics. They don't support hate preachers. Although most of them do not approve of homosexuality, they do not discriminate or harm LGBTI people. We must be very careful to distinguish between Muslim people in general and the extremist minority who oppose democracy and human rights and who want to establish a clerical dictatorship.

Peter Tatchell
Outrage

30th century

I disagree with Tony Clark's assertion that "communism was possible at any stage in world history" (Letters, March 10). As Tony himself appears to acknowledge, this view is profoundly unMarxist.

The best definition of Marxism I have heard was Lenin's, when he described Marxism as the summing up of the working class in its struggle against capitalism and for socialism, and expressed and analysed in a scientific manner. Marxism is a scientific understanding of capitalist society and a scientific guide to revolutionary action, or it is nothing.

A scientific approach and understanding is key here. Class-divided society arose out of conditions of relative scarcity and the need for a division of labour to manage and control access to resources. This gave rise to a ruling class and a state apparatus, to protect the power and privileges of those ruling classes, and to manage society and its resources in the interests of those ruling classes.

However, since around the turn of the 20th century the productive forces have been developed to such a degree as to make an abundance of goods and services possible and capable of meeting the essential needs and indeed desires of every single woman, man and child on this planet for the first time ever in human history. The contradiction between this economic potential and capitalism's requirement to restrict production to ensure profit and capital accumulation resulted in capitalism entering its period of decay, decadence and destruction, over the course of the 20th century, characterised by permanent high unemployment, war, mass death and destruction, and impending ecological catastrophe.

To coin a phrase, communism is not just a nice idea, but became a vital and urgent necessity. A communist society where the resources of the world are owned and controlled by the vast majority of working people, where production is for use and to meet socially determined need, and not profit for a minority, provides the true scientific basis for a sustainable, harmonious and peaceful human society for the future. And a credible basis for human civilisation extending into and beyond a 30th century, rather than struggling to survive the 21st.

Such a communist society would represent the true beginning of human history and will in time regard the various phases of class-divided society within past human history as an unfortunate but necessary aberration.

Marx was right all along. The economics of any society underpin and determine its true potential. If previous forms of class-divided society did not have the economic potential to deliver abundance, they could not, by scientific definition, have delivered communism.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

LSA dies a death

Largely because of the clash with the Arts Against Cuts planning weekend in the same building, only 15 comrades actually attended last Sunday's London Student Assembly. Most were representatives of the far left, including Mark Bergfeld of the Socialist Workers Party/Education Activist Network, Luke Cooper of Workers Power/National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, Sean Rillo Raczka of Birkbeck student union and Communist Students. It was also good to see four comrades from the Socialist Party in England and Wales, who had not been able to attend for a while previously.

Given the numbers present, it was initially suggested that we postpone the meeting and reconvene at the next LSA we had organised for April 3. However, University of London president and Counterfire supporter Clare Solomon seemed fairly keen to put the LSA on the backburner altogether. She argued that numbers were down - possibly because we had scared some people off with sectarian in-fighting. We were all guilty of this, she suggested, and argued that we should look to "other ways of organising", learning from groups like Arts Against Cuts. She did, however, leave open the question of what we do next.

Luke Cooper was also for dissolving the assembly. Now that the student movement had declined and student actions were less frequent, he said, the key thing now linking up with many of the forthcoming workers' actions, like the University and College Union strikes on March 22 and 24. I agreed with Luke that the decline in support for the LSA reflected the general downturn in student struggle. However, it would be wrong and hasty to completely dissolve the LSA on the basis of the current situation, I said. After all, we had planned to hold an assembly in the immediate aftermath of the March 26 demonstration and it might be worth having this discussion then, with more activists present. Whilst Luke is right that we are likely

to see far more workers' struggles and as such worker-student solidarity will be a high priority, building such solidarity necessitates the kind of coordination which the LSA could bring. For his part, comrade Bergfeld of the SWP saw little point in handing out flyers for the LSA on the March 26 demo. He opposed the notion that the LSA could be developed into something better over time or that it should be just wound down temporarily. It should be dissolved.

It is rather frustrating that the far left currently has little or no particular interest in actually building such assemblies, across the different campaigns and networks. Just the day before the NCAFC had organised a last-minute planning meeting, but only sent one person to the actual LSA. The EAN has not behaved too dissimilarly either. And, as Sinead Rylance of CS correctly pointed out, surely another reason for the small numbers attending was the fact that we had until recently done very little in terms of publicity. In the end, there was no clear decision taken about what to do next - the Arts Against Cuts activists comrade Solomon had invited the day before then started to turn up wanting to talk about building for March 26. This meant that we had a mere 15 minutes or so to discuss the question and without any clear decision about whether the April 3 LSA meeting would go ahead. It would seem not, which is a shame.

Whilst some comrades clearly want rid of it altogether, it is understandable that the LSA has been dropped for now. Yet we in Communist Students will certainly argue that the LSA does represent an organisational model which can be taken up by every college and campus. For one thing it is a direct challenge to the cosy far-left consensus of contenting ourselves - as comrades Solomon, Cooper and Bergfeld seemed to do - with a plethora of different anti-cuts campaigns ploughing their own furrows, replicating the same work and thus crippling our effectiveness to fight back.

The concept of the LSA and its worth should not be ditched altogether. While the student movement will ebb and flow, there is a need for a more permanent organisation, imbuing longer-term perspectives and creating continuity between different struggles and across these ups and downs.

Ben Lewis
London

Fighting fund

In it together

We really will have to tighten our belts when it comes to pensions. We are all in this together, after all.

Including chief executives of the big companies, of course. In 2000 they 'earned' a mere 47 times median earnings, but thankfully by 2010 that had gone up to a more respectable 88 times. We all know how much restraint these people insist on showing in regard to their own remuneration. And I won't bore you again with details of those bankers' bonuses.

The kind of money we're talking about here dwarfs the sums that I'm trying to raise for our paper. The £1,250 we need to bring in every month is what goes into those CIOs' personal bank accounts every couple of hours. But not many of them are *Weekly Worker* readers. We rely instead on the generosity of our paper's working class support-

ers, who aren't quite so well off.

Which is why our monthly fighting fund total always creeps up far too slowly for my liking. Last week I received £86 in cheques from comrades TH, LP, SC and IR, plus £110 in all in standing orders. So that's another £196 to add to the running total, taking us to £536 with more than half the month gone. But once again we got nothing via our website - not one of our 11,913 readers last week thought to get out their credit or debit card.

So now we need to step up the pace. Anyone know any transnational company executives?

Robbie Rix

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

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.communiststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

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

March 22: 'Why do fairy tales feel magical? Violations of causality, fascination and spiritual experience'. Speaker: Charles Whitehead.

Celebrate Palestine

Friday March 18 - Sunday March 20: Festival, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. 'Celebrate Palestine - stories of the resistance'. Films, discussions, workshops, music and food.

Organised by SOAS Palestine Society: 07747 044145.

We're all in this together

Friday March 18, 7pm: Art Uncut first London show, Bull and Gate, 389 Kentish Town Road, London NW5. Featuring UK Uncut, False Economy, Josie Long, The Temp and the Tycoon, Rumour Cubes. Discussion on social and economic consequences of cuts, followed by music and comedy.

Organised by Art Uncut: www.artuncut.org.uk.

Mandy destroys world capitalism

Saturday March 19, 7pm: Play-reading performance by Bill Jefferies, Albany Theatre, Douglas Way, Deptford, SE8. £5 donation.

Organised by Lewisham Anti-Cuts Alliance: info@thewhitecircle.co.uk.

Travesties of justice

Reports from Bail Observation Project on immigration hearings. With report's authors, former detainees and immigration lawyers.

Tuesday March 22, 7pm: Committee room, Houses of Commons, London SW1.

Further information: Campaign to Close Campsfield: www.closecampsfield.org.uk.

No to cuts budget

Wednesday March 23, 5pm: Demonstration, Trafalgar Square, for rally at Downing Street 6pm.

Organised by Right to Work and Coalition of Resistance: www.righttowork.org.uk.

No deportations

Thursday March 24, 6pm: Demonstration, Council Chamber, Oaklands Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. Demonstrate outside council meeting, against plans for a 'pre-departure accommodation centre', where children under threat of deportation will be detained. Organised by London No Borders: noborderslondon@riseup.net.

Euro unions against austerity

Thursday March 24, 6.30pm: Rally, Mander Hall, NUT Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Speakers include: Christine Blower (NUT), Jimmy Kelly (Unite Ireland), Didier Louvet (CGT, France), Fernando Puig-Samper (CCOO, Spain), Owen Tudor (TUC international department).

Organised by Sertuc: www.tuc.org.uk/sertuc.

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

The revolutionary tradition

Tuesday April 5, 7pm: Meeting, Salsa Cafe, 89 Westgate Road, Newcastle. 'Karl Marx and the revolutionary tradition' - discussion of his philosophy, economics and politics.

Organised by Counterfire: www.counterfire.org

Our cuts - their celebration

Saturday April 16, 1pm: Meeting, Room A10, London South Bank University, London Road SE1. Two weeks before the royal wedding, a chance to debate the history of republicanism, socialism and its relevance for today.

Organised by Republican Socialist Convention.

Venezuela

Saturday April 16, 10am: National event, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Defending the majority, not punishing the poorest' - how Venezuela is developing social inclusion and public services for all.

Speakers include: Henry Suarez (Venezuelan ambassador), Seamus Milne (journalist), Billy Hayes (CWU) and Hugo O'Shaughnessy (journalist and writer). Topics include: 'Venezuela's economy - protecting living standards during recession and future challenges' and 'Who is the Venezuelan opposition?'

Organised by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: info@venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

Welsh shop stewards

Saturday April 16, 11am: Conference, Temple of Peace, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Organised by Wales Shop Stewards Network: info@shopstewards.net

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.

TRAITORS

Kick Lord Hutton out of the Labour Party

Those who collaborate with the Con-Lib Dem coalition betray the working class and bring discredit to the Labour Party, writes **Eddie Ford**

As expected, the report on pension 'reform' published on March 10 by Lord Hutton of Furness (a Labour peer, of course) represents another vicious attack on the working class, especially public sector workers. In order to tackle the supposed public sector pensions 'crisis', brought about by the obviously appalling situation where workers are living longer, John Hutton and his accomplices in the coalition government have come out with a brilliantly sophisticated solution - make us work longer for smaller pensions.

Hence Lord Hutton has made two key recommendations to bring "good Labour values" to the pensions system. Firstly, to raise the standard pension age in the public sector to match the state pension age, which will be 65 (for men and women) from 2018 and 66 by 2020. Secondly, to end the 'gold-plated' final salary schemes which link pension payments to salaries at retirement - local government workers in receipt of final salary pensions currently average a princely £4,000 a year for men and £2,800 for women. Instead, in order to cut back on such wasteful extravagance, they will now be linked to career average salaries - reducing payments overall, of course. This will directly affect six million public sector workers, who have suddenly found that the goalposts have been moved - almost out of view. But this is the only way, the Hutton plan tells us, to meet the cost of public sector pensions - which next year will come to £30 billion. Indeed, we are further told in Hutton-speak, these proposals represent the "least worst option" for workers - when compared, we presume, to receiving no pension at all. In which case, perhaps workers should be grateful to Lord Hutton.

Obviously, the March 10 report is an exercise in cynical deception. Quite risibly, and insulting our intelligence, Hutton has dared to suggest that his report is actually "socially just" and "fairer" to public sector workers. Under his scheme, he maintains, employee contributions would be "tiered", so that the highest earners pay in the most - thus "redistributing payments" from the highest to the lowest earners. This would end the situation whereby the taxpayer is "subsiding" the highest paid workers in the public sector (senior civil servants, etc) and, according to Hutton, two-thirds of the poorest public sector workers will end up receiving more if his proposals were implemented "in full" by the government.

This is all pure baloney - and Hutton must surely know this. After all, the government has already announced a 3% increase in contributions, phased in over three years starting next year, and a switch in the basis for pension indexation from the retail price index to the markedly less generous consumer price index - at a time when many workers are facing a pay freeze, if not unemployment. Hutton's proposals can only mean in reality that millions of workers will see a steady decrease - or plunge, in their living standards: they will have to work five years longer for a palpably worse pension. Very fair and just.

Here then is the penny-pinching



John Hutton: Con-Lib Dem agent

future envisaged for us by Lord Hutton and the coalition government. A bleak future motivated by the transparent desire to make the workers pay the price, quite literally, for the 'credit crunch' and the global economic crisis - a crisis produced by the dysfunctional *capitalist system*, not an over-generous pensions system or workers' longevity. Even Lord Hutton's own report hints at the truth. It features an analysis based on statistics produced by government's actuarial department - examining the cost of public sector pensions as a slice of overall GDP. And, yes, that figure has spiked up to nearly 2% and will stay there for the next few years. But then it slumps back down, to the extent that from the 2030s onwards - if present demographic trends continue - that cost will be *below* what it is today as a proportion of GDP, once the 'baby boomers' have retired over the next decade or so.¹

In other words, talk of the supposedly catastrophic pensions 'crisis' we hear so much about from the establishment is motivated by pure class interest, designed to get the bourgeoisie and the bosses out of a hole at our expense. Hence the onslaught

on pension rights, terms and conditions. With Lord Hutton brought into the coalition government's big tent to act as a political fig-leaf, attempting to lend spurious 'progressive' legitimacy to these vicious attacks.

Needless to say, communists utterly reject Lord's Hutton's recommendations. We agree with Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union, when he blasted the report for its "blatant robbery" and for acting as a "stepping stone towards the wholesale privatisation of public services". By contrast, our CPGB *Draft programme* demands that the "state pension should be set at the level of the minimum wage" - a *real* minimum wage, that is, which enables everyone to live a secure and dignified age - and should be available by right, paid to "everyone who has reached retirement age and wants to give up work". Just as importantly, we say that there should be "no compulsory retirement on the basis of age"² (whether it be 60, 65 or 66), as it is inhuman - not to mention obscenely wasteful - to remove people from social-economic life once they reach an arbitrary age, regardless of their wishes or inten-

tions (or health). This right to retirement should be from age 60 for all workers, but also be made available at 55 for those workers in particularly unpleasant and dangerous occupations. No to both enforced idleness and enforced labour.

But the March 10 pensions report raises another vital question - John Hutton himself, a *Labour Party* member and politician. True, it cannot be denied, who could be better than Hutton to provide cover for the Tory-led attacks on the working class? The consummate career politician who was a member of the Tory, Liberal and Labour societies at his Oxford University days - always good to hedge your bets - and managed to manoeuvre himself into an array of cabinet positions under Tony Blair. Such as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (replacing his close political confidant and former flatmate, Alan Milburn), then secretary of state for work and pensions, business and enterprise, and eventually defence. When he was not busy in his capacity as chairman of the Royal United Services Institute, founded in 1831 by the Duke of Wellington and dedicated to studying the art of war.³ Well

deserving of a knighthood, you could well argue.

However, having said that, none of this detracts from the fact that John Hutton - even if he is a lord of Furness and an armchair general - is still a member of the Labour Party, a party set up to represent the interests of the working class (the clue is in the name). Or, to put it another way, a party which was founded to fight the Tory Party tooth and nail, even if it was dominated by a reformist leadership right from the very beginning - partly thanks, it should be quickly noted, to idiotic leftist sectarianism (like in 1901 when Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation petulantly walked out of the Labour Representation Committee, the proto-Labour Party). Does Hutton remember Aneurin Bevan in 1948 describing the Tory Party as "lower than vermin", as it "condemned millions of first-class people to semi-starvation"? By producing such a report, he is directly *collaborating* with the Tories - for once, we agree with John Prescott for his vituperative reaction to Hutton's original appointment by the coalition government.

Of course, Hutton is not the only one - regrettably. There is Milburn posing as the coalition government's 'mobility tsar' and the truly repellent Frank Field, obviously enjoying himself as 'poverty tsar'. Both working for a government which will send 'social mobility' into further sharp reverse by significantly increasing poverty and inequality - just as Hutton, the 'pensions tsar', wants to decimate pensions. Such individuals, by any reasonable definition, are clearly "bringing the party into disrepute" - an expellable offence under Labour Party rules (and under the rules and principles of any serious political organisation, the CPGB included). Bluntly, they are the enemy within. In which case, Alan Milburn, Frank Field and John Hutton should be kicked out of the Labour Party - along with anyone else who cannot resist Cameron's oily embrace.

If the likes of Hutton are allowed to get away with their treachery, this will undermine resistance to the coalition government. Of course, the expulsion of Hutton and his ilk is part and parcel of a much wider battle to make Labour into a party that actually serves the working class. Communists unashamedly fight to claim the Labour Party for the working class. By this we do not mean capturing the top post within the Labour machine through some form of deep entryism. Rather fighting to make the Labour Party a real workers' party, waging a protracted struggle to thoroughly democratise it, along with the trade unions, allowing left and revolutionary organisations to affiliate and openly organise, not least the CPGB, and winning the mass of the Labour Party's membership to the politics and programme of Marxism ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. <http://blogs.channel4.com/faisal-islam-on-economics/public-sector-pension-reform-a-recipe-for-strife/13859>.
2. Section 3.13 - http://www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1002575#3.13.
3. www.rusi.org.

CUTS

Their busted flush and ours

Laurie Smith is not impressed by the left's performance in Sheffield

On Saturday March 12 over 2,000 trade unionists, students, families and others turned out to protest at the Liberal Democrat conference being held in Sheffield City Hall. The march and rally was organised by the Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party-dominated Right to Work campaign.

Last autumn, the Lib Dems were forced to postpone their conference after the threat of student demonstrations made it impossible to find a venue in the capital which would accommodate them. So the annual policy-making jamboree was moved, to the city of Nick Clegg's constituency no less, and the police were certainly taking no chances. After assembling in warm sunshine at a small park down the road, we made our way to City Hall, where an eight-foot steel fence had been erected around the plaza in front of the building. This blocked off a main route into the city centre - though the police had thoughtfully ensured that the John Lewis store opposite the hall could remain open for business. Over this barrier one could see Lib Dem delegates popping out for a cigarette, and wonder what they made of the crowd below.

Hundreds of police surrounded this cordon and patrolled adjacent streets - we also spotted blue-jacketed 'liaison officers' who appeared to be trying to chat to members of the crowd and provide the friendly face of UK policing (remember, kids: no snitching!). This overbearing presence by the state seemed entirely unnecessary on their part, as the mood of the marchers was not exactly militant, though it was angrier than last week's drizzly Friday rally on council budget day. The vibe was more cheery and buoyant - probably because this was a large demonstration by Sheffield standards. But the lack of militancy - not much chanting, even - was rather disappointing; the most excitement occurred when a couple of people lit flares and held them aloft.

The march was billed as a family-friendly event by the organisers, though this did not stop local rag, the *Star*, from declaring we were planning 'direct action' - this based on minutes of a SACA meeting in which a proposal for more militant tactics had actually been voted down. In the end, it did not seem that anyone was put off by this scaremongering. There is, of course, nothing wrong with peaceful protests, but there is limited value in those which are as politically incoherent and politically tame as this march. It was in many ways an example of the left's failure to organise, agitate and educate on any effective level.

The sound system, which had failed to reach many of the 300 gathered at the previous week's protest, had no chance opposite the thousands who rolled up from Sheffield and beyond to express their anger and solidarity. Hence I have no proper notes from any of the speakers save Chris Bambery (SWP, but billed as Right to Work), who always makes best use of even the most underpowered equipment. But the politics on offer from this leading figure of the largest Marxist group in the UK, while superficially militant, well delivered and crowd-pleasing, was as woefully inadequate as the audio set-up.

His central point was a call for more direct action, and a general strike which could "bring down this government". And perhaps it could



Angry

- but the only thing which would replace it now is a Labour government likewise committed to a programme of cuts and of making the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism. For Marxists to think that a general strike - quite possible, given the scale of the attacks on the working class - will lead automatically to a situation of dual power and socialist revolution is dangerously naive. Strikes and general strikes are one tactic among many, but are not enough on their own to bring about a transformation of society, or even an increase in those adopting a communist perspective. The hard work of patiently building a mass party of the working class remains to be done.

Incidentally, student SWP members also appeared to be leading the chants of "Nick Clegg, shame on you, shame on you for turning blue". Surely a liberal capitalist taking the side of capital is not something which should surprise us.

Prize for most quotable speech goes to Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary and former Liverpool dockworker, who at one point addressed the police and, referring to the manhandling of activists on the student protests in London, advised them to "Keep your sleazy hands off our kids!" - which drew roars of approval from the crowd and looks of consternation from the serried ranks of her majesty's finest.

Surprisingly there was no visible Labour Party presence at all on the protest; no stalls and no carrying of the usual CLP banners. This was in spite of the fact that Labour (apparently) had two MPs speaking from the platform: Katy Clark and Paul Blomfield. The left outside Labour were out in force though - particularly the SWP, which was to be expected as it is 'their' anti-cuts group, Right to Work, which has been organising for the demo nationally. Also in attendance were the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Equality Party and a contingent from Revolution, youth group of Workers Power.

I exchanged copies of the *Weekly Worker* with comrades selling *Socialist Worker* and *The Socialist*. But other comrades were not so amiable and open to ideas, one young SWP member telling me that he was

interested in "politics, not gossip". Evidently he had not gotten as far as reading the headline, 'The unfolding Arab revolution', before repeating the standard dismissal of the *Weekly Worker* given to SWP recruits. Take-up of this week's issue was not great amongst the demo generally, though the dozens of SWP sellers did not appear to be having any better luck. The fact that there were at least four different papers being thrust at people may have had something to do with it. So might the fact that the messages visible on these missives were, if militant-sounding, somehow hollow. Calls for a general strike - while laudable in their militancy - seemed premature and over-excitable. Calls for unity against the cuts were undermined by the divided nature of the anti-cuts movement and its main political backers, the left.

The worst aspect of the left's message on the day though was the promotion - or through silence, the abetting - of the idea that by taxing the rich in Britain, or by various national measures of reform, we could stave off the effects of the capitalist crisis. The problem with this Keynesianism-with-knobs-on guff is that it is not even possible in the current downturn. In reality a flight of financial capital (the basis of the current UK economy) and acute economic crisis would quickly ensue, possibly leading to the 'mutual ruin of both contending classes', but certainly leading to the ruin of the proletariat. Anyone who reads a broadsheet or has done maths GCSE can understand why this is the case - just as they know that the fall of the current government now would only lead to cuts from Edward 'Hi guys!' Miliband. It is little wonder the left is failing to grow when, even in this period of resurgent action by workers and students, it continues to promote such simplistic and downright

inadequate answers to a truly global crisis of capitalism.

Our fight must be international or it is nothing. This requires a thorough break from Labourism. Not from open and honest intervention in the Labour Party, but a purging of Labourite ideas within the communist movement and an end to seeking *opportunistic* alliances with the Labour Party, which sees members of SPEW - and the SWP in their Right to Work guise - trotting out the same political material as the Labour left about cuts being bad for the economy, needing to tax the rich and reform the system and so on, on a national basis. Such arguments are already on the terrain of what is good for the capitalist economy, which is the same as what is good for capital. And, in fact, the cuts are what is good for capital! Another practical upshot of what is good for 'Britain plc' is the more or less naked exploitation of the peripheral countries of the world economy.

Later in the day, a small group of anarchists gave the police a merry chase around town, temporarily occupying Topshop and Vodafone among other shops and eventually getting kettled, along with several unlucky passers-by. This sort of stuntism highlights the frustration of some youth and students with the bureaucratic banalities of the unions and left sects. But it seems odd that this group targeted infamous tax avoiders Topshop and Vodafone, appearing to join with UK Uncut and the like in blaming particularly greedy individuals or inadequate taxation law for a systemic crisis of capitalism. A healthy hatred of the bourgeoisie and impatience with opportunists is, as Lenin argued, "the beginning of all revolutionary wisdom". But stunts, like strikes, are not enough on their own.

As communists we do not look to be managers of the system, but in

extreme opposition to it. We must start from the basis of what is necessary to transcend capitalism, not from some arbitrary halfway politics which becomes a magic stepping-stone to communism as soon as Trotsky's *Transitional programme* is invoked to bless it. Those like comrade Bambery who propose the odd highly militant tactic, while otherwise doing nothing to puncture the bubble of top-down statism which dominates the leftwing populace in Britain, are not that useful. Mass socialist consciousness - the necessary basis of a democratic revolution, rather than a vanguard-led coup - is not the automatic result of common struggle, through the extreme opposition of general strikes, occupations and so on, but requires the open fight for a revolutionary internationalist, radical-democratic perspective. A working class armed with this perspective is able to wage a more effective, determined and better informed battle in our everyday struggles, and maintain morale when some struggles end in defeat or a particularly poor compromise.

We must not sell quick fixes to the proletariat, but patiently argue that to well and truly defeat the cuts, capitalism itself must be challenged, at least on a European and eventually a global level. Further, a genuinely democratic society is possible, not just a souped-up welfare state which only just keeps us from going over the edge. The left is in no fit shape to make this argument and forge an organisation worthy of being called a party. We need more comrades with the courage to argue for political openness, freedom of debate and ultimately unity on the Marxist left, because presently the lot of us are still seen as a comedy sideshow.

The working class of Sheffield may be somewhat stoical, but they are not stupid - and they know a busted flush when they see one ●

Just the start

Over 200 people took to the streets of Northampton to demonstrate their opposition to the Con-Dem cuts on Saturday March 12. This followed other mobilisations in recent weeks outside the local council chamber and a successful 'Shake yer butts against the cuts!' benefit gig on March 11, which raised over £150 for campaign funds.

While many of us had hoped for a larger turnout for Saturday's demonstration, there was nothing to be too disappointed about here. The march itself was lively and diverse. A significant proportion of marchers had been mobilised by local trade unions, most noticeably the CWU, PCS and Unison.

Also present were students, families, disability activists, pensioners and two bangra, drummers who led the march from Beckett's Park, around the town centre, to the piazza outside All Saints church, where the finishing rally was held.

The response from the general public as the march made its way through the town was overwhelmingly positive with numerous people taking a break from their Saturday shopping to applaud and thank those on the march. I am pretty sure that

others decided, upon seeing the march, to join in, and later on other people were drawn in to listen to the speeches at the rally. I even saw a community police officer applauding one of the speakers. Leaflets advertising the upcoming TUC march in London were also distributed to onlookers and passing drivers (many of whom hooted their support). This positive response shows that there is certainly the potential for us to build larger mobilisations in the future.

As for the left groups, the Socialist Party were by far the best represented on the demonstration and there were a few comrades from the SWP and CPGB. While some Northampton Labour Party activists were on the march and have been supporting the anti-cuts campaign, the absence of their CLP banner was made all the more obvious by the presence of that from nearby Kettering. Labour Party lefts recently convinced one of their Northampton branches to call for the local party to campaign on an anti-cuts manifesto in upcoming local elections. Whether the whole CLP can be won to adopt this position we will see.

A handful of Green Party activists were also present and Del Pickup, one of their former candidates (in

Kingsley ward in 2007; whether he is still a member I do not know), has now been selected to stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate in the local elections.

The final rally was chaired by Ron Mendell (Northampton Trade Union Council and Northampton Alliance to Defend Services) and featured militant speeches from a number of trade union representatives, including Matt Wrack (FBU), Roger McKenzie (Unison), Cheryl Pidgeon (TUC Midlands regional secretary) and comrades from the Education Activists Network and Unite Against Fascism.

All speakers were clear that the national TUC demonstration on March 26, while hugely important, was just the start of an ongoing campaign against cuts and privatisation. Speaking about the industrial action that we can expect to see in the upcoming period, the CWU regional official (standing in for CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward) on the platform said that he and his members would rather break the law than cross other workers' picket lines ●

Dave Isaacson

dave.isaacson@weeklyworker.org.uk

STRATEGY

The errors and pitfalls

The March 12 London Communist Forum featured a discussion between **Mike Macnair** of the CPGB (below) and **David Broder** of The Commune (opposite)

Anarchist origins

We set up this debate in response to widespread calls from the Trotskyist left for the TUC to call a general strike against the cuts. My presentation is based on material I have written on the general strike in my book *Revolutionary strategy*.

There are three levels of the question. The first level is the history of this strategy. The second is the explanatory framework which examines why, in history, the strategy has been shown not to work. The third, which I did not discuss in the book, is the merits, or otherwise, of the *tactical* use of general strikes and whether such a slogan is *tactically* appropriate at present.

Strike strategy

The strategy of the insurrectionary general strike defended by the majority in the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire was within the LCR in 2006. It was linked to the idea of May 1968 as the 'dress rehearsal of the European revolution', and to the Mandelites line of aiming for dual power, which meant aiming for the creation of workers' councils, or soviets, in the context of a general strike or generalised strike movement. The Mandelites argued that it was only through the formation of workers' councils in the context of a general strike or strike movement that it was possible for the working class to acquire sufficient class-consciousness to break with the reformists and take power for itself. To this was added: it is only through experience of workers' councils that it is possible for the working class to see that there is a non-Stalinist alternative to capitalism.

Actually this general strike strategy is not original to the Mandelites. In substance it is Bakunin's line as of the 1870s. According to him, building workers' organisations under capitalism is inevitably going to lead to their control by the bourgeoisie. They become instruments of capitalist rule. Hence the working class can only act politically against the bourgeoisie through an insurrectionary general strike, leading to the immediate abolition of the state.

Bakunin's line was reinterpreted by the anarcho-syndicalists to permit *partial* strike struggles, and this shift allowed big post-Bakuninist trade union confederations to be built: the CNT in Spain in particular, but also the Italian trade union movement, to a considerable extent the Belgian trade union movement, and the French CGT before World War I.

Arising out of this mass syndicalist movement came theorisation; particularly Georges Sorel argued that *violence* - direct action (*action directe*) - was the key to working class independent class-consciousness. For Sorel, direct action was the difference between what he called the decomposition of Marxism, the allegedly scientific, deterministic Marxism of Karl Kautsky and others in the German SPD, and a really revolutionary policy.

Very similar arguments were put forward in Italy by Arturo Labriola within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and by Benito Mussolini - later a fascist, but in the pre-war period a leader

of the 'direct action' left of the PSI. In Germany, Robert Michels' book *Political parties* was written as a syndicalist critique of the SPD. Michels himself became a fascist in the inter-war period, and his book has become a standard textbook of US political science courses, an instrument to make students believe that *all* politics is about manipulations by small elites.

Closer to the ideas of 'classical Marxism', but influenced by the syndicalists, were those of Rosa Luxemburg, in particular in *The mass strike, the political party and the trade unions*; Anton Pannekoek; Karl Korsch; the young György Lukács in the 1920s; and the young Gramsci. It was from these sources that the 'new left' which emerged after Hungary 1956, and hence the 1960s-70s far left, took general-strikism.

This idea of the *strategy* of the general strike was common coin of the far left in the early 1970s. It became much less plausible after the Portuguese revolution of 1974-76. The reason was because the Portuguese revolution did involve mass strikes, the formation of workers' council-type organisations, and so on. And yet Portuguese politics was polarised around the question of government. What sort of government to support?

The far left was by and large sucked in behind the 'official' Communist Party and its popular frontist bloc with a section of the officers grouping, the Armed Forces Movement. There was another section of the Trotskyists - the American Socialist Workers Party and Pierre Lambert's international tendency based in Paris - who got sucked in behind a different popular frontist bloc: that between the Portuguese Socialist Party and the 'Socialist International', which in its post-World War II form is merely an agency of the US state department.

So in the Portuguese revolution there were masses on the streets, mass strike movements, self-organisation, workers' control initiatives, proto-workers' councils - but *still* at the end of the day politics was polarised by the question of government, and therefore by the pre-existing mass parties of the working class: the Communist and Socialist Parties. And the Trotskyist groups and Maoist groups of one sort or another found themselves inevitably in the tail of one or more of the contending forces capable of forming a government.

From Alexander Rabinowitch's book *Bolsheviks come to power* it becomes clear that the same was true in Russia in 1917. It is traditional for the left to think of the political tendencies in the Russian Revolution as just the big parties and their fractions: there are the Mensheviks (Defencists and Internationalists), the SRs (Right and Left) and the Bolsheviks. But in fact there was a thriving anarchist movement in Russia. And there was a range of left communist groups. If you look at the groups which Rabinowitch lists in the voting in the Congress of Soviets, in whose name the Bolsheviks took power, what you actually see is a coalition led by the Bolsheviks, along with the Left SRs and a whole range of little groups, including the anarchists. Because the

anarchists and the various small communist groups at the end of the day were not able to challenge for power, they were necessarily drawn in behind the Bolsheviks.

Come the Spanish Revolution in the 1930s, there were no soviets, because neither the Socialist Party nor the 'official' Communist Party, nor the superficially anarcho-syndicalist CNT union confederation wanted to create them. And the small groups to their left were not capable of creating soviets against them. But these small groups - and most strikingly the POUM - were drawn in behind the people's front of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the liberals. Equally strikingly, the *mass* 'anarcho-syndicalist' CNT was also sucked in behind the people's front. The question of government turns out to be the decisive question. Why should that be, as a matter of theory?

The problem

Suppose a very powerful mass left or trade union movement calls everybody out on strike. All the power is cut, no petrol is supplied, the transportation systems are shut down, nobody is working in the big supermarkets, the hospitals, etc. The reality is that a one-day general strike of that sort would be tolerable. A prolonged general strike, in which everybody goes home and that is the end of the story, would be intolerable to the society. Very rapidly people would start running out of food, parts of towns would burn, and so on. The social division of labour is just too integrated for the sort of all-out general strike in which everybody stops work and stays out.

Immediately, therefore, the question is posed not just of going out on strike, but of the working class deciding what production should continue and what production should stop; who is actually to strike and who is to carry on working. Hence, the working class has to take over the factories that need to be kept running.

But the working class then has to have means of taking decisions.

Moreover, it has to take over both the physical assets of capital and its planning information. That is, the working class has to actually expropriate the capitalists in order to conduct the general strike.

Now, the class might expropriate the capitalists, while promising to hand everything back afterwards. But the capitalists are not going to believe that. So a sustained, all-out general strike immediately poses the question of political power. It is an insurrection, whether you call it an insurrection or not: an attempt to overthrow the state and capitalist property rights and seize power.

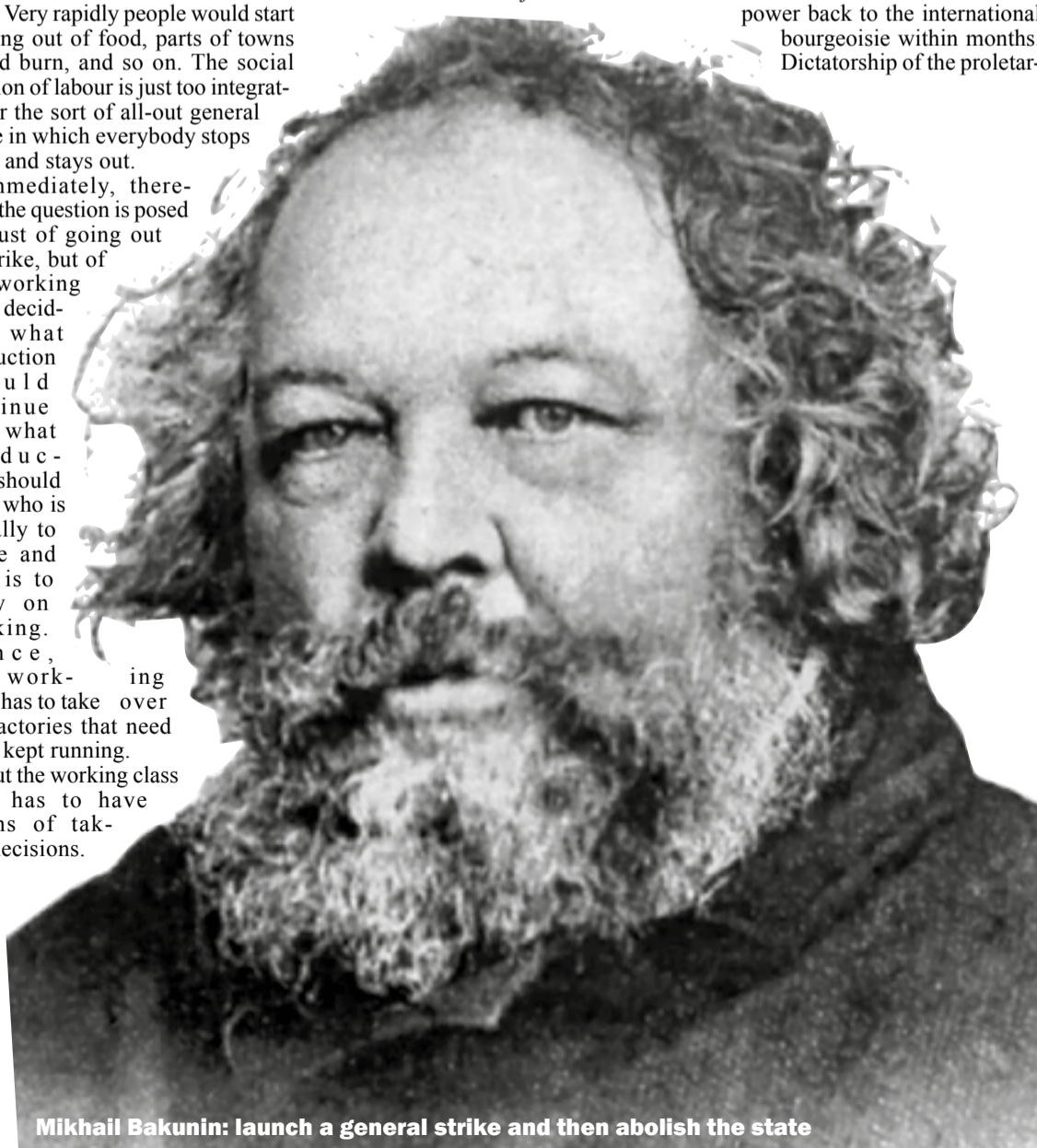
Now, the second level: actually a lot of these problems are not just characteristic of an all-out general strike, but also of a massive strike wave. Luxemburg's *The mass strike* is mostly a description of Russia in 1905. Political crisis lets loose the mass movement. You do not have a general strike once and for all - a single general strike - but some local general strikes, some industry-wide strikes, strikes for economic demands here, protest strikes for political demands there, and so on. The picture has been corroborated by very many subsequent revolutionary crises.

Such a mass, rolling strike wave poses the question of decision-making methods - of political power - as much as an all-out general strike. It is just a little bit

slower to get to that point. It is still produces disruption of fuel supplies and so on. The working class still has to decide who is going to be exempted from the strike in order to keep the hospitals running, and so on. As in Russia in 1905, soviets/workers' councils may emerge as means of taking those decisions. However, local workers' councils may be fine for taking those decisions within the framework of a single town, but suppose we have a Birmingham workers' council: it still does not solve the question of how the food is going to get into Birmingham. And that is the crunch which the Bolsheviks came to in winter 1917-18: how will the cities be fed?

The forming of local workers' councils, even at the most elaborated and developed level, does not solve the problem of how the cities are going to be fed, because we do not grow food in cities except at a trivial level. The food has to come in from the countryside. In Britain, of course, much of the food has to come in from abroad.

So the problem is that even a mass strike wave poses the question of government: it poses the question of decision-making on a national scale and, indeed, on an international scale. The idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain alone is a stupid illusion: millions would starve and the survivors would hand power back to the international bourgeoisie within months. Dictatorship of the proletariat



Mikhail Bakunin: launch a general strike and then abolish the state

s of general-strikism

iat on a European scale is perfectly feasible. Dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain as the opening stage of a continent-wide revolutionary war: that is a remotely feasible option (not at all a sensible one, but still remotely feasible). But dictatorship of the proletariat in one advanced capitalist country that is dependent on imports for food is an absolute illusion.

General strike tactics

Now we get to the third level. What about one-day, two-day, three-day general strikes as a tactic, as a protest form? The answer is *in principle* that this is a perfectly acceptable tactic of mobilising people to organise some action. It is, in reality, just a bigger

form of demonstration. A more risky form of demonstration, because if you call for a one-day general strike and a small minority come out, many of them are going to get victimised. It is only when, say, a million people come out that too many will be involved for mass victimisation.

So you always have to make a judgment about this tactic. Is the relationship of forces right? Is the dynamic such that calling a one-day general strike, a two-day general strike, whatever it may be, is actually going to lead to a forward movement of the working class - or is it going to lead to an immediate defeat? That is equally true of an all-out insurrectionary general strike. It is also equally true of a strike wave, but, of course, we cannot call for a strike

wave. Strike waves are things which happen whether the organised left wants them to or not.

So in each of these cases there is a concrete decision in relation to whether the left should call for a general strike. General strikes can in certain circumstances be an appropriate tactic, and the call can be, too. The Socialist Labour League in the early 1970s sold a great many papers with front-page headlines such as 'General strike to kick out the Tory government', because the strike *wave* and large-scale class confrontations - especially those of the miners and dockers - meant that the issue was actually on the agenda of the broad masses.

But the unspoken part of the slogan was '... and return a Labour

government'. More exactly, '... and return a Labour government committed to socialist policies', or some variant. Or the International Marxist Group's variant at the time, '... and bring in a workers' government based on the trade unions'. This, of course, omitted the fact that the Labour Party is the party of the trade union bureaucracy: 'a workers' government based on the trade unions' in reality would mean ... a rightwing Labour administration.

A general strike can lead to a massive defeat, as in 1926. A general strike, or a big strike wave, can create massive disruption - and, as in fact happened in May 68, an election is called, which the right wing win. Or compare the recent Irish election. Everybody blamed the Fianna Fáil

bourgeois government. So what did they do? They voted in Fine Gael, the traditional bourgeois party of the *right*. And the Irish Labour Party has entered into coalition with Fine Gael ... to implement more of the same austerity policies.

The demand for the TUC to call a general strike has underlying it a fetishisation of the general strike, and a fetishisation of strike action, as the only way in which it is possible to resist the attacks of the bourgeoisie and in which class-consciousness can progress. The result of that fetishisation is to *fail to address* the problem of political authority, which a general strike, or even a mass strike wave, poses ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org

New organs of power

Different sectors are all facing cuts and, of course, it makes sense to want to link up action against them so as to increase their impact - all public sector workers in a sense have the same employer. The government ultimately has some responsibility for keeping the privatised sector running too - railworkers, for example.

Mike mentioned the example of Britain in 1972, when the demand for a general strike had a certain traction because there were already large strikes taking place. Their main potential weakness was their isolation, and going on strike together with other sectors would make them more powerful. But I think actually in Britain today we don't have mass resistance to cuts. There are not strikes going on in individual public services. So really the demand that the TUC call a general strike represents the wishing of a movement into existence. In the face of the cuts most people are still totally passive, so when, say, the Socialist Workers Party demands the TUC call a general strike, they are calling on the trade union bureaucracy to create a struggle which does not as yet really exist.

But actually because the level of resistance to the cuts is so weak they do not actually persist: the call is purely atrophic and distant. It is meant to expose the trade union leaders for being charlatans and failing to organise the fightback. But in fact wherever the SWP are actually represented in the leadership of a union they have not actually advanced this call for a general strike.

In a very similar way the anarchist left is very keen to 'expose' the trade unions for doing nothing and to advocate more militant tactics against the cuts. Yet in reality we are all constrained by the problem: the leaders of the movement are not doing enough to further a struggle which does not actually exist.

If the TUC did call a general strike, if they did fight more militantly, what would the position actually be? Well, if a general strike were organised as a coalition of different sections of the working class purely as a defensive and reactive response to the cuts, that in no way implies a positive political agenda beyond merely trying to put pressure on the coalition - to crack it apart, so that Labour gets back into office. The SWP does not actually say, 'Labour to power'. They say, 'Break

the coalition' - which clearly *means* 'Labour to power.'

As for the groups who might say, 'Labour to power with socialist policies', even if a strike movement caused the coalition to fall apart, that would not necessarily be able to affect or control what Labour did after getting into office.

In the past, massive strike movements have removed leaders from office or forced a change of government, but that has often tended to pacify the movement by removing the immediate object that it is opposed to. This is not just a matter of strikes *per se*, but of any movement which is defined by what it is *against*, not what it is for.

Mike mentioned the example of Portugal, but there it was the army which removed the fascist leader, Marcelo Caetano. That opened up space for strike movements which were ultimately pacified because they had no agenda for reorganising society. It is in the very nature of a strike that you are just withdrawing your labour, but that is not in itself creating new social relations. Indeed, lots of strikes which we might think of as massive and participatory and so on actually were not.

Take May 68 in France, which is the best organised, largest, most continuous general strike in history, involving nine million workers for three weeks. The fact is that the general strike removes from individual workers the choice of whether to go into work or not. For instance, there are no trains, no post, there are cuts in electricity, and so on. The whole country just stops moving, so you do not even need to go to your workplace to picket it. Actually in May 68 lots of workers just sat at home waiting for the return to normal. Or for some sort of political solution to be played out above their heads. It is not as if there were general assemblies of workers debating the way forward. Almost in the nature of a general strike is the conferring of power from the mass of people to the leadership of the strike - as opposed, as an example, to a rolling series of wildcat strikes.

Italy 1944

Let us take a curious example, perhaps. In Italy in the middle of World War II, there were massive attacks on working class living standards. But even under the fascist regime, there began to appear spontaneous expressions of anger against the authorities.

The government grants some concessions, but the protests start to spread, as people take confidence: they think, 'We can go out on strike too'. Which, of course, is what is completely missing from the dynamic in Britain today - the sense that striking can win anything. People's cynicism about their ability to change things is a real problem - and in a sense rather apt and hard to argue against without getting into dishonest or naive triumphalism: you know: 'March 26 is going to be the start of the revolution.'

But in the Italian case the movement spreads when people see other workers are winning, similar to Tunisia or Egypt today. The fear the regime is able to project is punctured - and people start moving. There is a rolling series of strikes, and the Communist Party, in the process of being re-formed after its banning, is increasingly able to direct it. In March 1944 all the strikes are suspended, with the intention of bringing everyone out together within a short time. To which the regime responds with a generalised lockout.

But the disruption in itself does not damage the bourgeoisie's political rule. It just means all the workers sit at home and have a week off. It does not empower them. Indeed, whereas the earlier movement takes the form of people themselves daring to defy the regime, once they become more coordinated, the strikes just become the tool of the party wishing to further its overall political objectives. It is a means of exacting pressure on the regime, but it is very mechanical: it can be switched on and off.

And that is a big part of the problem with the idea of the TUC calling a general strike. It is similar to the way the more militant unions like PCS or the RMT use industrial action. They call a one-day strike or whatever in order to exert pressure to aid negotiations with management. But that does not pass power from the leadership of the union to the striking workers.

In his book Mike talks a lot about the question of workers' councils. The point here is that, while it is true that a workers' council in an individual city cannot rule effectively in isolation from others, the example of the Russian Revolution does not demonstrate that that is an insuperable problem. Workers' councils could theoretically create representative bodies which *do* coordinate. For example, those in different cities could elect

representatives to some body which oversees the whole country, Europe, the world ...

The problem with the transfer of power in Russia in 1918-19 after the creation of Sovnarkom, the council of people's ministers, is that the government is not a representative body based on the workers' councils: it is something the Bolshevik Party has created outside those bodies. There is not any sort of democratic process or accountability of the government to the soviets. These are entirely separate bodies.

But workers' councils are important. Firstly, because they go above and beyond the sectional divides within the working class, according to industry and trade union and so on. Secondly, they are able to represent inclusively - a workers' council is not necessarily just composed of delegates from particular workplaces. There could be a more general participatory democratic body.

Bolivia 2000

For example, in Bolivia in 2000, in El Alto, a city near La Paz, there is a body called literally the residents association - but actually it is a local council representing almost the entire population in that city, which is very poor. It involves employed people, those who sell in the street, unemployed and retired people. It is like an organ of counter-power - something that could rule instead of the bourgeois state. Indeed in October 2003 they kept the army out for weeks and ran the place themselves. This did not spread to other cities, nor did it last, but in this example we can see the workers' council as something beyond representatives of different trade unions or workplaces.

But the limitation of general strikes is not just something peculiar to them - it is a problem of revolutionary politics more broadly. The problem is, do we just oppose and resist the people who happen to be in government at the moment and exact pressure on them or attempt to remove them from office? Or do we have a strategy for replacing capitalism with a different system entirely?

As I say, withdrawing your labour does not as such create new social relations. I would say that workers' self-management is a necessary, if insufficient, precondition for revolution. If it is not just a question of replacing the Tory government with a Labour government, replacing old managers with

new managers. If the workers themselves do not create some sort of new organs of power, then the people who ride on the back of the mass movement - like the transitional regime in Egypt - will decide what the new society is like and how it is ordered. Even if the mass of working class people are used as foot soldiers or as an instrument to help remove this or that leader.

I think what Mike says about the question of governance is correct - if there is a strike which creates social breakdown, then people will ask the question, 'Who's going to put it right?' Jack Conrad has advocated that in May 1968 the Communist Party should have advanced a programme for a Sixth Republic, a more generous or fuller democracy. But the problem is, if there is not some direct, participatory, grassroots democracy, then all there can ever be is different stages of the bourgeois state. More democratic, more social ...

If you believe that revolution is possible, then that can only come about through a struggle to create new social relations. That is what is rich and valuable in the experience of soviets - they were organs of struggle. They were created in 1905 in order to lead the struggle against the bourgeoisie, but were also at the same time potential new bodies to govern society as a whole. Workers' councils, because they can represent the whole of the working population and be both means of struggle and organs of government, are totally different from a trade union, which is inherently limited to setting the terms of capitalist exploitation.

Although in a sense I agree with Mike, it is really true that a general strike cannot be revolutionary - and in fact there has been no revolution in history based on a general strike, except in the fantasies of Pouget's *How we shall bring about revolution* and William Morris's *News from nowhere*. A general strike does not lead to the creation of new organs of power, which are a necessary precondition for revolution.

To conclude, appeals for the TUC to call a general strike are just wishful thinking in the absence of any real movement. Combined with the traditional Trotskyist 'Bring the leaders to account' and 'The TUC are selling us out'. But the real question in Britain is, why is there such passivity, why is there such cynicism? What is really lacking is the belief in the possibility of a political alternative. And without that a general strike is impossible ●

SOCIALISM

Capitalism with Chinese characteristics

Ben Lewis wonders why some still consider China a model for socialist development

If ever there was a story that pithily summarises China's transition from a 'bloc of the four classes' (National Liberation Army, national bourgeoisie, peasantry and workers) under Mao Zedong to a Stalinist sweatshop 'big player' in the global imperialist world order, then it is that of the 45-year-old Fang Fang.

In a story which was picked up by the *Financial Times*,¹ Fang Fang recently got into a spot of bother with his employers in the run-up to last week's sessions of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) and the National People's Congress (NPC).

What is so unusual about that? After all, there are near-daily reports of labour unrest, spontaneous strikes and explosions of anger amongst Chinese workers increasingly disgruntled with overbearing bosses, grinding political repression and soul-destroying hours and conditions.

Yet Fang is no 'ordinary' worker. As JP Morgan's top man in China, Fang had to explain to the bank's rather perplexed US owners why he had been nominated as a delegate to China's highest political advisory body, the CPPCC. After all, if the rather overblown rhetoric of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is to be believed, the CPPCC, as an "organisation of the Patriotic United Front of the Chinese People", is an "important forum for promoting *socialist democratic politics* with Chinese characteristics" (my emphasis). Images of toiling peasants making fiery speeches and soldiers expounding on the nuances and intricacies of revolutionary war are immediately conjured up. But bankers?

We have all heard of 'socialism for the bankers' following the enormous bailouts of 2008, but how did Fang Fang explain his presence in a forum which, on the surface of things, should have nothing to offer him but a noose from which to hang himself? Rather revealingly, the only way Fang could explain himself was by likening his appointment to a banker being elevated into the House of Lords - hardly a body for summoning the revolutionary energy of the national bourgeoisie, the people's army, the workers and the peasants.

Indeed, the story of Mr Fang speaks volumes. Whereas the CPC and its 'official communist' hangers-on internationally may labour under the illusion that China is on the long march to socialism by drawing the 'national bourgeoisie' into its four-class bloc, the reverse is actually true. China's path may have been a difficult, tortuous and even contradictory one - but it is a path that has led straight back to capitalism. Not even Mao or Stalin had a vision of the *international bourgeoisie* playing an integral role in the struggle for so-called 'socialism'. And, whereas under Mao the national bourgeoisie's representation was essentially tokenistic, today those like Mr Fang have real influence. Sure, when it comes to actually *voting* in the assembly, Mr Fang and his friends will in all likelihood have raised their hands along with everybody else in the hall. As such, the sessions of the CPPCC and NPC are rather analogous to a Blairite party convention - a tightly controlled, freeze-dried media pageant attempting to parade unity and strength, with all



China's House of Lords

the decision-making hidden from the public. The CPC is, of course, fully in control.

As Mr Fang himself puts it, "There is an enormous machine working behind the scenes to ensure CPPCC requests and suggestions are all taken seriously and answered by the relevant authorities." As he doubtless made clear to his employers at JP Morgan, such benefits are absolutely essential to the flourishing of business in a capitalist society "with Chinese characteristics" (ie, an all-embracing Stalinist bureaucracy overseeing commodity production). Members of the CPPCC have the right to pick up the phone directly to ministers to frame legislation, and can also get the ear of local mayors to ensure that this legislation is also carried out in the way that they see fit.

The *Financial Times* comments: "In today's China, Mr Fang's very different roles - as a western banker and as a political adviser to the Chinese government - are, in fact, not contradictory. Rather, they reflect the increasing influence of business interests on the country's political process." The article then proceeds to provide further information which appears rather at odds with official Chinese descriptions of its 'House of Lords': the richest 70 of the 2,985 delegates to the CPPCC are worth an estimated \$75 billion - no wonder, when they include representatives from some of the world's most influential transnational companies like HSBC and Deutsche Bank AG.

Capital looks on

It should come as no surprise that the *Financial Times* has provided relatively extensive coverage of the official gatherings. It is, after all, the publication where the bourgeoisie is able to speak to itself in a relatively forthright and open fashion.

Indeed, whilst talk of a double-dip recession abounds, and doubt is increasingly cast on the nature of the global economy's 'recovery', many a speculator, hedge-fund manager and government strategist will have their eyes on the enormous economy that is modern China.

For all the talk of the 'decoupling' of China and the west, one cannot help but sense a distinct tone of anxiety in the financial press. Concerns are beginning to surface both about China's trade balance and about the low per-

centage of GDP made up by household consumption. Thus the run-up to the adoption of China's 12th five-year-plan at the NPC was keenly followed. Some economic commentators have even gone so far as to describe the plan as a "market-maker".

Financial Times commentators have also chipped in with their views regarding the Chinese 'economic model'. As Michael Pettis puts it, "The heated debate between the reformers, who are as unpopular as anyone who brings bad news tends to be, and those who see no reason to abandon a model that has generated such spectacular growth, has become one of the debates in the world. How quickly it is resolved will determine the pace and nature of China's economic growth over the next several decades."²

Internally too there are big worries about the Chinese economy. Li Jinhua, vice-chairman of the national committee of the CPC, has spoken about public anger at the rapidly growing wealth of communist officials' family members and the corruption that this breeds,³ as well as problems resulting from rising inflation and property prices.

Of course, none of these big questions were to be aired publicly. And following days of surreptitious networking, arm-twisting and multiple dinners between bigwigs of the Stalinist bureaucracy and representatives of international capital, the 12th five-year-plan was eventually endorsed by 2,778 of the NPC's 2,785 deputies - a rather impressive figure, given the contentious issues at hand!

These proceedings in the splendour of the Great Hall of the People are a world away from the day-to-day reality under the Chinese state: the People's Armed Police seeking to crush even the smallest manifestation of political opposition, the imprisonment of critics of the regime and an execution rate which has only recently been surpassed by the tyranny of the mullahs in Iran.

Looking away

Yet many are so blind that they do not wish to see. Take, for example, the comrades from the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain.

The only coverage of these important events in China I could find was a piece reminiscent of some of the more craven 'official communist' reportage

of the Soviet Union. Whilst our class enemy seeks to get to grips with China in the pursuit of its profit interests, the CPB can only rehash standard fare based on a CPC press release, under the drab title 'State expands healthcare to millions more' (March 9).⁴ It speaks of "government plans to spend 172 billion yuan (£16 billion) this year on healthcare, an increase of 16.3% on the previous year", and to expand "the total number of urban residents covered by health insurance to 440 million - about 90% coverage". Great stuff.

It is well known that, when it comes to China, our comrades at the *Morning Star* tend to put on their rose-tinted glasses. Now that the 'socialist' USSR has disappeared, they appear to have fully embraced Chinese 'socialism', or 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Whether this is out of desperation - a last-ditch attempt to enthuse and inspire new members - or out of the desire to chase 'Beijing gold', now that the Moscow source has dried up, is unclear.

Many leading CPBers make no secret of how they fondly look back to the 'golden age' of the USSR. Maybe errors were made and it was a pity so many died, and maybe Bukharin and Zinoviev should not have been executed. But, as the comrades put it in their programme, *Britain's road to socialism*, "during its near 70-year existence the Soviet Union showed how socialist planning and public ownership could transform society in the interests of the mass of the population".⁵ Naturally, they add, "serious mistakes, pressures and unresolved contradictions eventually resulted in the collapse of the socialist system in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe". But what of China? Can we really see China as showing how socialist planning and public ownership are transforming society "in the interests of the mass of the population"? The programme fawns: "China's communists have placed greatest emphasis on economic and social development" - leading to a situation where "state power is being used to combine economic planning and public ownership with private capital and market mechanisms, with the aim of building a socialist society in its primary stage". Tell that to JP Morgan and HSBC, comrades!

Maybe they do genuinely believe that the Chinese communists are doing the right thing in a country where the working class enjoys far less political freedom than in most other large economies. Perhaps the comrades from the CPB view the noises coming from the high bourgeois press as merely further evidence that the ruling class simply does not have a clue what is going on any more. Perhaps it is the financial commentators who are falling for a trick: their supposed "market-making" Chinese plan is *actually* a step in the direction of universal human liberation. Of course, alongside the more general decline of its system, the poverty of bourgeois ideas and 'solutions' becomes increasingly evident. But our class enemy is far from stupid, and it would be disarming to our struggle against them to believe such a thing. The *Financial Times* knows a "market-making" scheme when it sees one. And so should we.

The big problem for the CPB is that its entire reformist outlook is predicated on 'national roads'. Its thoroughly bourgeois conception of socialism is in theory and practice inimical to working class rule, control from below and democracy.

There is no such thing as a 'national road to socialism'. Not in the USSR, not in China, not in Britain. As the history of the 20th century and the aborted transition from capitalism so painfully and frustratingly underlines, socialism must be international or it will represent nothing but a freakish, ectopic historical aberration: the long and winding road back to a particularly 'red in tooth and claw' form of capitalism at the cost of millions of lives.

The idea of 'national' roads to socialism was complete anathema to the Bolsheviks - up to and including Joseph Stalin - in 1917. All were fully aware that October had to be first and foremost a spark for the European revolution. Indeed, the theorisation of 'socialism in one country' marked a *decisive break*, a rupture with the outlook of orthodox Marxism: something which, in their various ways, bourgeois historians, Eurocommunist theoreticians, Maoist activists and Stalinist leaders are all at pains to deny.

Where China will end up at the end of its long and winding road back to capitalism remains to be seen. We are quite clearly seeing a vast expansion of the power of the capitalist class, a class which is also now welcome into the CPC with open arms. Rather aptly, 'Communist Party of China' now appears under 'Businesses' on the *Financial Times* website's search engine!

We are still some way from what could be described as 'normal' conditions of bourgeois rule (anti-democratic rule-of-law constitutionalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, independent judiciary, private property protection, etc) being introduced to China. This would require the CPC to gradually relinquish its monopoly of power and accept the existence of other (pro-capitalist) parties.

That said, the regional and indeed global *imperialist* aspirations of China as a power are explicit - and already beginning to bear fruit. One key aspect of the 12th five-year plan is the expansion of military expenditure - up 12.7% on last year's budget.⁶ This will see the growth of the world's largest standing army, and also see China's navy in a stronger position for its exercises in the South China Sea and beyond.

Even by the bureaucratic and statist standards of the 'official communists' and their USSR-tinged conception of 'socialism', how on earth can China be a model for human liberation in *any* meaningful sense?

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/22461922-4684-11e0-967a-00144feab49a.html#ixzz1GkydWugi.
2. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/94fe455e-4e70-11e0-98eb-00144feab49a.html?catid=20&SID=google#axzz1GloC2sQ4.
3. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4477fda-2df1-11df-b85c-00144feabdc0.html#ixzz1GIHATZo.
4. *Morning Star* March 9.
5. www.comunist-party.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=250&Itemid=13.
6. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6525224c-462f-11e0-aefb-00144feab49a.html#axzz1GkunMkrf.

MINERS

Mysteries and controversies

David Douglass continues the debate about the miners' Great Strike

I had thought my review of Ian Isaac's *When we were miners* was balanced ('A Militant take on the Great Strike of 1985-85', November 25 2010). Ian's reply in last week's *Weekly Worker* clearly suggests he was far from happy with it ('Tactics and the Great Strike', March 10).

Without wanting to bore the arse off readers with minutiae or literary ping pong, let me first clear up some minor issues. I did not spell his name wrongly. It was supposed to read 'Ian Isaac's *When we were miners*', as it does in the second paragraph of that review, but instead the apostrophe was omitted [this was partly the fault of the *Weekly Worker* team - ed]. The word "slim" in my phrase, "slim, but vital volume", was meant as a description, not a criticism (180 pages, taking into account the breadth of the subject being taken on - in much the way my own book *Ghost dancers* is described as a 'weighty tome' at 510 pages, though it covers 30 years).

I considered the title of Ian's book a bit limp, given the dynamism of the descriptions it contains and the wealth of experience inside. This matters because people are often drawn to a book by the title, but, as Ian says, this is an entirely subjective judgement. Reviews are rarely free of subjective comment and are always a personal 'take' on someone else's work. *Ghost dancers* as a title and reflection does refer to North American 'Indians' and other cultures and ethnicities wiped out in the teeth of obstinate resistance, but again whether that choice of title grabs the theme of the book or not is purely a subjective opinion.

Disagreements

More seriously, the question of Orgreave is an important issue. Nothing Ian says in his reply demonstrates to me that he knows how that situation came about. Contrary to his assertion in the book that "I don't think it was Arthur Scargill" who was the "controlling mind", it actually was.

I have only one real criticism of the way Arthur conducted himself and led the union in the strike - and that was Orgreave. Arthur ended the agreement we had with the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and the steelworks, whereby agreed shipments of coke to keep the furnaces intact would be provided and in exchange no steel would be produced. The danger of collapse of the Scunthorpe oven linings led directly to the scab runs into Orgreave, following a written plea from the plant and the ISTC to the National Union of Mineworkers national executive. This is all documented in my book.

The end of the agreement opened up a second front across Britain, as we then went into action against steelworks and docks - which drew us from the scab coalfields, import wharfs and power stations. It stretched our limited number of pickets and opened up the field to armies of blackleg lorries. Until Orgreave, like a champion snooker player, we had all those pockets covered with minimal pickets and total support. There is not room here to debate Arthur's thinking, except that he planned for the re-creation of a Saltley Gate situation. Yes, we needed such a situation, but not by knocking a hole in the dyke when we were already up to our bollocks in water.

If Ian does not accept this explanation - and my review of his book spells it out - then really he should tell us how and why Orgreave *did* come about. Why steel workers who had been holding the line and had stopped steel production, why the ISTC - which was



Battle of Orgreave: diversion

on national and regional joint union coordinating bodies to take the strike to victory - suddenly turned into the enemy? Ian says he does not think it affected the long-term outcome of the strike, but it certainly did not help. It distracted us from more strategic targets - the scab pits and the power stations (the latter were hanging on by their fingertips and nudged total shut-down on numerous occasions).

Ian has misread what I wrote about his past. I said that he left Cowley car works to work in the coal industry and then went to Ruskin College. He says: "I worked at Cowley between 1971 and 1974. I started in St John's Colliery, Maesteg in August 1974 and went to Ruskin College ... in October 1976." That's the same thing, isn't it? I never said Ian was a militant steward and longstanding member of the Communist Party. I said his dad was [another error that crept in during proofing - ed].

My refutation of Ian's assertion that Yorkshire mines had "factory-like conditions" stand. Although the point that Ian makes that the incentive scheme divided men along area lines (and often according to the relative conditions they worked in and money they earned) is correct, it ain't necessarily so. Kent and Yorkshire voted heavily for strike action and took strike action, official and unofficial, more regularly than any other coalfield, but were among the top earners. But the general point is accepted.

I will not restate my objections to Ian's interpretation of syndicalism in the coalfields and *The miners' next step* - we do not agree. 1912 was one of the most revolutionary periods in recent history, a time which posed a serious revolutionary challenge to capitalism on many fronts - not least the mines, with nearly one and a quarter million miners on strike. Again, the miners' strike of 1984-85 could indeed have

posed a revolutionary challenge and a catalyst for all-out class action, at least to the point of ousting the government and imposing progressive demands on the state. Though it did not have the same ideological and organisational strengths as 1912, which was an advancing movement, not a defensive one.

South Wales

We also disagree over a question of fact - a crucial question actually: that of Lewis Merthyr in 1983. Lewis was rolling forward in a branch and area strike, as had the movement of 1981, which completely stopped the first Tory closure programme in its tracks. Pits were picketed out in the same fashion. Yorkshire area voted at its council meeting to strike alongside Lewis and bring out 68,000 miners. At this crucial stage, the NEC calls for a national ballot on closures, centred on the Lewis dispute. Who asked for this national ballot? I cannot say definitively, but one assumes it was the South Wales executive. We hold a national ballot (of course, it is held in each respective area, as the national ballots of 72 and 74 were, but the votes are counted nationally).

The facts (which are detailed in my book) are as follows: the ordinary council meeting of the Yorkshire area, following a lobby of South Wales miners, agreed the following on February 28 1983: "This Yorkshire area of the NUM fully supports the South Wales miners in their fight against pit closures and for the life and shape of our industry. The Yorkshire area will therefore take total strike action as from midnight, Sunday March 6 1983 and will inform the NEC of this decision for their urgent attention." Two delegates voted against. A lobby of the NEC was endorsed to urge the executive to support the action of Welsh miners on strike against the closure of Lewis

Merthyr Colliery.

A special council meeting held on Friday March 4 heard a "very careful and detailed report" from general secretary Owen Briscoe of the March 2 special NEC, which authorised a national ballot commencing on March 8 1983, and agreed to suspend any action called for Monday March 7. The ballot result was 76,540 voting 'yes' in favour of a strike and 118,954 voting 'no' against a strike (39% for, 61% against). Yorkshire voted 27,597 for and 23,841 against; South Wales voted 11,800 for and 5,500 against.

The call for the national ballot was a disastrous decision. The unofficial action was odds-on to stop the entire country. Following this defeat, we impose the national overtime ban, which is meant to swing the odds back to us and reduce coal stocks in readiness for the big clash we now knew was looming. The decision to hold a national ballot before a *de facto* national strike was rolling strongly influenced the decision we made one year later, in March 84.

Ian and I do not agree either about the influence of a 'national union', as against the devolved, area-confederated union. The NUM *is* and was an industrial union: one union, one industry. If you are a surface worker, canteen worker, electrician, mechanic, diesel driver or collier, you are in the NUM. It was not, though, a monolithic, single national structure. If the NUM had not been structured the way it was, there would never have been a strike in 1984 - which was a collection of area strikes rolling through the country to create a *de facto* national strike. The decentralised and autonomist branches, regions and areas were both a strength and a weakness. Though it came down to metal and class-consciousness in the end, not the rule book or structures.

'Guerrilla action'

Again on violence and sabotage we

will not agree. We should be for safety workers while the management respects the union's authority. Once they try to destroy the union and its authority by bringing in blacklegs to prove they run the industry - OK, let *them* save the pit with their black-legs. If they judge the skills and authority of the union are worth more than a few scabs, then we agree to safety workers. Once the police are installed at the colliery, our safety workers leave the pit to them, and to management, who brought them in. Not to adopt this attitude is frankly to let them piss up our backs.

One thing that cannot be said of me is that I would ever "follow a band of urban guerrillas from behind or sit on the sidelines until it's all over". That is not me, as anyone involved at the sharp end will tell you. I think, anyway, Ian has taken too literally my suggestion of guerrilla tactics over that of the Charge of the Light Brigade at Orgreave. I was talking of mass pickets, but turning up where least expected, avoiding set-piece battles with the police, never letting them know what we would do and where. That was the only way to challenge their superior numbers and equipment - and if there were any "urban guerrillas" they were all miners and I would usually be in the front rank with them in any situation. Actually our guerrillas were drawn directly from the coalface and the heart of the coal communities.

Paint-bombing, or real bombing, of scab trucks and buses is a perfectly correct tactic if we cannot get them to cease their dirty work through normal channels. What would Ian suggest instead? We did not expect to march to a single field with banners flying and band playing and fight it out toe to toe with armed cavalry, dogs and riots troops, outnumbered three to one. The situation required guerrilla tactics - hit and run, or surprise, mass, flexible engagements, as well as static token pickets at places where we knew they would be respected.

Neither do we agree about the *coup de grâce* delivered by Nacods, the supervisors' union. In the 12 hours between the union tripartite 'bottom line' deal delivered to Acas, the arbitration and conciliation service, which Thatcher had all but conceded under threat of all-out Nacods national strike, Ian is telling us they walked away and signed their own deal because the mandate for their strike action, which had just been achieved, had been 'timed out'. Even suppose their rule book did only grant them a few days to implement the ballot result or it was ruled out (I doubt this very much, by the way), why would you put your name to a worthless agreement when we had one ready to deliver which conceded us nearly everything?

I think this rings of someone (not Ian, obviously) trying to come up with an excuse for something that was inexcusable. Even Thatcher in her autobiography does not suggest that one, although she concedes she does not understand the Nacods U-turn. Others might suggest it was crude bribery, but there is no evidence of that.

There are many issues outstanding on the Great Strike, many controversies, many mysteries even, which will keep us all arguing and disputing until we cop our clogs. That we were there, and fought our corners for our class and for justice are the most important thing, and in that I know Ian was as committed and dedicated as I was ●

OUR HISTORY

In Liebknecht's footsteps

As we noted in the last issue of the *Weekly Worker*,¹ the absence of ultra-left trends such as the the Workers' Socialist Federation of Sylvia Pankhurst² at the 1st Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain did not mean that there were no ultra-left sentiments expressed from the delegates who were present.

The resolution on parliamentary action put to the founding congress was moved for the Joint Provisional Central Committee by comrade Tom Bell. The resolution was seconded, then delegates agreed to take speakers for both sides in the debate on the substantive issue, despite the fact that the question was probably one of the least controversial at the congress. That meant leaving amendments to the motion till after the vote had actually been taken.

The nub of the argument was not whether parliament could be used to legislate in socialism. Almost all present agreed that parliament had to be replaced. The majority, however, recognised the propaganda value that parliamentary elections and a platform in the House of Commons afforded revolutionaries.

The minority countered that any engagement, no matter what the platform and the safeguards put in place by the party, would ensure an unavoidable downward spiral of corruption and reformist degeneration. More than that, readers will also see in some of the contributions of the 'leftists' a species of *anti-political*, rather narrow, trade union economism - a feature of the party that, unsurprisingly, given the nature of the British workers' movement, its history and theoretical traditions, was to be an enduring problem.

The chair called six speakers against and 13 for the resolution. We give edited excerpts from all speeches, as reported in the official account of the congress.

C Abbott (Southwark Herald League³): It seemed to him that most of those in the unofficial section of the Socialist Labour Party and the British Socialist Party wanted this question of parliamentary action pushed, and when they had done they would go on with the old game of coming in with the Labour Party. A man sent to parliament would not be recalled, but would sit there as long as he liked. In the factory, where you talked to the workmen, was the point where organisation should take place.

Harold Macmillan (Glasgow Gain-gad Independent Labour Party⁴): The class war must be conducted in every country very much as any other kind of war - we must take into consideration the geographical situation of the country, its economic position, and the temperament of the people. Taking all these points into consideration, he had come to the conclusion that it would be a great mistake to cut ourselves adrift from bodies who undertook to run the masses by electoral methods.

TJ Watkins (Trethomas Communist Unity Group): If he had not been an anti-parliamentarian before coming to the convention, the mover of the resolution would have made him one. We should not be such fools as to face guns armless, and we knew that, so long as we used a weapon as obsolete as parliament, we were not going to bring satisfaction to the working class.

JR Stead (St Helens Socialist Society): Said he had always understood that it was the economic power outside parliament that controlled the



Karl Liebknecht: MP

inevitable development of working class conditions.

Robert Williams (BSP national branch): Supported the general principle of the resolution. To be a revolutionary did not imply either that one was a utopian or an impossibilist. We must have some regard in contemplating revolutionary possibilities to revolutionary occurrences elsewhere. The convention had already agreed to affiliation with the Third International and affiliation with that revolutionary organisation would impose duties and obligations upon us, as well as entitle us to claim rights and privileges ... Would anyone tell him our movement would not be considerably stronger if we had a man like Karl Liebknecht in the House of Commons? It would be a considerable accession of strength if we had only one man in the House of Commons today who, every time a cabinet minister got up to make a statement, would repeat "You're a liar!" That in itself would be sufficient to intensify our propaganda. If half a dozen men were championing the cause of the proletariat in the House of Commons, we could make it possible to use the pages of *Hansard* as revolutionary propaganda.

W Hill (Oldham Communist Unity Group): We should be prepared to take every instrument of capitalism and use it to smash the capitalist system, and parliament could be used to good effect if we got the right man ... We did not want men who would go there to ameliorate the conditions of the workers, but men whose object was to smash the machine.

J Hamilton (Liverpool Communist Unity Group): Political activity and agitation could be carried on in other directions than by putting up candidates for parliament ... Undoubtedly it was the industrial machine that would have to function if revolution took place, and not the parliamentary machine, which would be on one side.

H Webb (Ashton-under-Lyne Communist Unity Group): If we are eventually to have some form of parliamentary activity along obstructionist lines, we should see to it that the men who had to move along these lines were real revolutionary fighters; and a vote against parliamentary action now would enable us to get this.

W Mellor (Guild Communists): Said he took it that no delegate at the conference regarded this question as a matter of principle: it was one of expediency and tactics. However much we might fear the contamination of the capitalist machine, we had to work inside that machine if we were going to smash it. We must look at the matter not from the high peak of Marxian dogma, but from the low ground of Marxian analysis. Marx showed that we had to use the instruments that were at our disposal at the moment. These included, on the one hand, industrial organisation and, on the other hand, the power that came to the workers in local and national assemblies.

Mrs DB Montefiore (Glasgow College BSP): Reminded the convention that one of the messages read that morning was from Clara Zetkin. There was no doubt about Clara Zetkin be-

ing a revolutionary ... Yet on the first chance of getting to the Reichstag Clara Zetkin had presented herself and had been elected ... Important as the industrial method was, at the same time we must go into parliament and work there.

EW Cant (BSP Paisley): It had been asked, how were we to justify ourselves participating in parliament and at the same time arguing that parliament was no use as a means of emancipation? But the man in the street was not so critical as the average member of a Socialist Party, and was not so hidebound theoretically as all that ... Circumstances had so worked it that a crisis would be forced upon us, and as to whether we should take full advantage of that crisis, would not depend upon the measure of perfection of our organisation, but it would depend on the amount of propaganda we had done. That propaganda could be done at the workshop gate, inside the factory, inside the public house, at general elections, and at all times; and he was prepared to advocate the use of the parliamentary weapon so as to get at the workers' minds.

Bob Stewart (Socialist Prohibition Group): There would be elections whether we participated in them or not, and the chances were that we should spend more time telling the other fellow that it was not worthwhile, than it would take to do the job and be sure that it was not worthwhile. We should not keep out of parliamentary elections, however much we wanted to do so; people congregated to hear what the candidates had to say at election times, and the opportunity for propaganda ought not to be missed. Beyond this, it was our business to go where laws were made, so as to annul all the laws that sanctioned theft and to substitute a law by which theft would be sanctioned no longer ... A great many people talked about guns who would run away when they saw one. He was more interested in folks having brains in their heads.

I Manoin (BSP Sheffield): Supported the resolution.

F Marsh (BSP Central Hackney): It was necessary to use every weapon at our command to fight the master class. Anyone who supported industrial action but not parliamentary action, or *vice versa*, was like a man going into a boxing match with one arm behind him.

FL Kerran (BSP Central London): Delegates were in too much of a hurry. They talked as if they had the whole of the masses of the people at their disposal; but, as a matter of fact, they only represented a very small fraction of the workers of this country. We could not make bricks without straw, and we could not bring about a revolution without having a certain number of the masses to support us.

U Roberts (BSP Saltlybridge): It was the duty of a member of the Communist Party not only to attack the capitalist system, but to defend the working class politically as well as industrially; he was aware that we could never hope to bring in the revolution by the parliamentary machine, but he recognised also that the strength of the socialist movement did not depend on the numerical state of the vote, but rather on the tenacity with which we defended the working class all the time. He believed in defending the working class, not because he wanted to standardise their slavery, but because in defending them he was attacking capitalism, and because they were the class that would bring about the revolution.

A Siffleet (BSP, Tooting): In favour-

ing parliamentary action because we simply could not afford to omit its use, he did not imply that he attached undue importance to it. He was of opinion that there was no time for us to convert the electorate to any extent and get our men on the floor of the House of Commons in any number. He believed the revolution was too near for that. Answering comrade Stewart's reference to guns, we did not want guns if we could avoid them; but force would not be withheld so far as the master class were concerned. The workers must consider the question of armed force if necessary, to meet what would be brought against them. It was not enough to say, 'Wait until the time', because we should find the other man armed and ourselves with nothing but ideals. We must avail ourselves of the parliamentary weapon, but not overrate it. Its only utility was for the education of the masses to bring about the social revolution.

Tom Bell replied to the discussion. He said there had been nothing substantial advocated against participation in parliamentary elections; the main point was that such participation was not vital. Not vital to what? Not vital, he presumed, to the communist movement. But all spheres of life where the working class mind was to be influenced were vital to the communist movement. We had got beyond the frame of mind that looked to conditions at some future date to determine what we were going to do. The Communist Party in the near future was going to be above all an active, decisive and consciously working organisation in the labour movement. We were not going to leave things to chance or time, but would seek to direct them in the direction we thought they ought to go, so far as our communist purposes were concerned.

He appealed to all present, whatever decision might be made in this matter, to subordinate these minor and secondary aspects of the movement to the fundamental principles of an active Communist Party.

The chair, comrade Arthur MacManus, said the motion would now be put to the convention. In the event of its being carried it would be subject to amendments such as did not touch its integral character.

The resolution was put to a card vote. Cards to the number of 186, and representing 4,650 votes, were shown in its favour, while 19 cards, representing 475 votes, were against ●

Notes

- ¹ *Weekly Worker* March 10.
- ² Sylvia Pankhurst (May 5 1882 - September 27 1960) was a prominent suffragette who, in 1914, broke with the official Women's Social and Political Union, led by her mother and her sister, over that organisation's support for the war. She set up the East London Federation of Suffragettes. This militant formation evolved leftwards, changing its name first to the Women's Suffrage Federation, then to the Workers' Socialist Federation.
- ³ The *Daily Herald* was published from 1911 to 1964. Its origins were in a fight the printers' union, the London Society of Compositors, launched for a 48-hour week. A daily strike bulletin called *The World* was started. From January 25 1911 it was renamed the *Daily Herald*, and was published until the end of the strike in April 1911. At its peak it had daily sales of 25,000. Radical trade unionists were inspired to raise funds for a permanent labour-movement daily. Readers and supporters formed local branches of the Herald League, through which they had their say in the running of the paper. Oddly enough, the paper ended up as today's *Sun* - a fate infinitely worse than death for a working class newspaper.
- ⁴ The ILP was established in 1893, as an attempt to create a working class organisation *politically independent* of the Liberal Party. Broadly a Christian socialist organisation, the Keir Hardie-led ILP was strong enough by 1895 to contest 28 seats.

ZIMBABWE

Release the six

On Wednesday March 16 the six leftwing militants still being held in Zimbabwe on ludicrous, trumped-up charges of treason were finally granted bail - at US\$2,000 per head. The International Socialist Organisation, to which three of the comrades belong, has launched an urgent appeal to raise the necessary \$12,000.

Until the cash is handed over, the ordeal of Munyaradzi Gwisai, Tafadzwa Choto, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Hopewell Gumbo, Edson Chakuma and Welcome Zimuto will continue. They have been held since February 19, when police broke up a meeting in solidarity with the movement for democracy in Tunisia and Egypt and arrested a total of 46 people for "plotting to subvert the government by unconstitutional means". Since then, the six have suffered appalling treatment, including severe beatings, denial of food and medical attention, and solitary confinement in filthy conditions.

Edzai Matica, who works alongside comrade Gwisai in the Zimbabwe Labour Centre and describes himself as a "de facto member of the ISO", told me: "From the 19th to the 24th, when they were taken to court for the first time, the six were all beaten. They believe it was people from the Central Intelligence Organisation, not police officers, who assaulted them." They were made to lie on their stomachs and comrade Gwisai, a former member of parliament in the early days of the Movement for Democratic Change, reports receiving between 15 and 20 blows in one torture session.

The female comrades were not spared this brutality - including comrade Choto, who suffers badly from asthma and an ongoing condition for which she has recently had three operations. As with all the others, she was denied the medication and treatment she needs until the prisoners won a court order after two weeks, giving them the right to be examined by a doctor of their choice. The aim of the CIO state thugs was to 'persuade' the comrades to confess to subversion (not at this stage "treason", a charge which was sprung on them at a subsequent court appearance) - or at least become a state witness. One of those arrested actually agreed to testify for the prosecution and was promptly released under police protection. But all the others adamantly refused to betray their comrades, maintaining that it is not a crime to fight for the interests of the working class and progressive movements.

A further 37 people were released on March 7, the magistrate ruling they had no case to answer. Not all of them had even been at the meeting, which the police used as their excuse for their draconian action. Comrade Matica said: "I believe five of them were arrested just for being in or near the building where the meeting was taking place, but they had nothing to do with it."

The six comrades still being held were particularly targeted for their role in the movement. ISO members Choto and Mombeyarara are, like Munyaradzi Gwisai, Zimbabwe Labour Centre officers, while Hopewell Gumbo is a former president of the Zimbabwe National Union of Students and prominent anti-debt campaigner. Comrade Zimuto is another NUS activist, and Edson Chakuma is an Ufawu union militant.

So they continue to endure unspeakable conditions - at least for the moment, until sufficient US dollars can be raised for their bail, which, hopefully, will be within a day or so. Comrade Matica told me: "There is no running water, and no blankets - they are just sleeping in their clothes." Virtually no food is provided, except by friends and relatives, and even then it can only be taken in the afternoon. People attempting to take the comrades supplies in the early evening have been turned away. "They were held in solitary confinement 23 hours a day", and this included being manacled for days at a time. "They are complaining about the lice. I could see Munyaradzi has developed



Munyaradzi Gwisai: arrested

some kind of rash on his face caused by the lice. You can see frustration on their faces. They've been held so long now - almost a month since they were arrested."

Comrade Matica himself had, obviously, not been at the solidarity meeting, but had been able to piece together what had gone on from his numerous prison visits and discussions with the released comrades: "The meeting was to discuss the lessons of Tunisia and Egypt, with invited speakers to lead the discussion. They were watching a video, which actually consisted of different news reports from international channels like CNN, Sky and Al Jazeera - I have seen one of the disks. It was of demonstrations and so on."

The meeting had started at about 2pm, but was broken up by about 100 police officers an hour later. The official media say the "lessons" the ISO was hoping to learn from Tunisia and Egypt was how to launch an uprising against the regime of president Robert Mugabe. Fortunately the plotters were interrupted before they could finalise their plans - or so the official line goes.

The bail application was vehemently opposed by the prosecution, on the grounds that the accused all have connections outside the country and may abscond. Also, they may continue plotting to overthrow the government - treason, after all, is a very serious offence carrying the death penalty - and could interfere with witnesses and tamper with evidence. Of course, the authorities, by contrast, are meticulous in their upholding of judicial propriety.

Apart from the punitive cash sums demanded as surety (even for a university lecturer like comrade Gwisai), the comrades must stay at specified addresses, surrender their passports and all travel documents, and report three times a week to CID Law and Order in Harare. The prosecution may yet appeal against the granting of bail and it could well be a year before any trial begins.

I asked comrade Matica why he thought the state has decided to move against the ISO. Affiliated to the Socialist Workers Party's International Socialist Tendency, it is not exactly a huge or influential grouping. It has recently appeared to splinter, with at least two small groups breaking away. Since he is not a full member, comrade Matica did not feel able to talk about the size or health of the ISO, but he told me that "Anything is possible in Zimbabwe", meaning that even a group like the ISO could suddenly become a real threat.

"They want to make an example of the comrades - that's how it's being reported in the media." Besides, it is not just the ISO: "There have been a lot of arrests. In fact three officials from the Movement for Democratic Change have just been arrested for no reason at MDC headquarters." The MDC, set up in 2000 by the trade union movement under the leadership of former Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions president Morgan Tsvangirai, was eventually taken over by an alliance of middle class blacks and white farmers, backed by international capital. It is now part of a 'power-sharing' government of 'national unity' alongside Mugabe's Zanu-PF. The former union leader holds no less a post than prime minister.

Comrade Matica said: "The last time I heard Tsvangirai speaking at a press conference, he was saying it was dubious to arrest someone like Munyaradzi Gwisai. He was saying Munyaradzi wouldn't hurt a fly and shouldn't be detained." Well, if that is the view of the prime minister ... Clearly all this says a lot about the balance of power between Zimbabwe's two main parties.

Comrade Matica ended our interview with an appeal for solidarity. Support the international day of protest on Monday March 21. Send a donation to the bank account set up in South Africa to support the prisoners, their families and their defence. Go to the website comrade Matica himself has helped launch (www.freethemnow.com), sign the online petition and leave a solidarity message. "Publicise the case widely to let the Mugabe government know that the arrests are unjustified. Zimbabwe claims it is democratic, allows freedom of speech and freedom of association, and upholds human rights."

Peter Manson

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

Day of protest

Monday March 21, 12 noon: Picket Zimbabwe embassy, 29 The Strand, London WC2.

Donations

Account name: 'CDL Solidarity Fund'; account number: 100 185 3784; Swift code: NEDSZAJJ. Reference: 'Zimbabwean treason trialists'. Receiving bank: Nedbank, Killarney branch (code: 191 60535), Johannesburg, South Africa.

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.**

Become a Communist Party associate member

Name

Address

Town/city

Postcode

Telephone Age

Email Date

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly worker

**Police should
have trade
union rights**

Cracks in state apparatus

The mass student protests mobilised a wide variety of young people (and their teachers, parents and lecturers) from different backgrounds - geographical, social and political.

Yet, in the past week or so, most will have been thinking the same thing - 'I told you so!' As every face-off with police lines in every kettle ended with chants of "Your job's next!" being directed at the boys (and girls) in blue, so it has come to pass - the government has finally announced its wide-ranging cuts to the police force, and the Police Federation, the force's pseudo-union, is up in arms.

The Winsor report into police pay stops short of calling for cuts in police numbers - recommending instead wide-ranging attacks on wages and bonus payments (when we talk bonuses, needless to say, we are not in Fred the Shred territory here). Yet many local police forces have already translated departmental cuts into redundancies; and in any case that unlucky 40% of officers facing a pay cut of between £3,000 and £4,000 will not be happy.¹

The government, to be sure, is playing a pretty dangerous game here. On the narrow level of British electoral politics, all three main parties have been playing the 'law and order' card - the Lib Dems more reluctantly - in order to woo enraged petty bourgeois philistines. Given its particular role in this game, the Tory Party is particularly vulnerable to fallout from attacks on the police force.

More worryingly from the perspective of the ruling class, there is the possibility - though remote - of serious police rebellion, up to and including a strike. Fresh in the minds of all government ministers will be the 2009 Prison Officers Association walkout. Neither the police nor the prison officers have the legal right to strike; but the POA, perhaps the most unlikely left-led union in the country, did it unofficially anyway. The government caved in with quite extraordinary rapidity. After all, what could they do - lock the strikers up?

Further back in the annals of history, there are the police strikes that led to their illegalisation in 1918-19. The first - on August 29 1918 - led Lloyd George to remark, years later, that "the country was nearer to Bolshevism that day than at any time since".

His worry was not without justification. At the end of the day, police repression is a key tool in the armoury of the ruling class against proletarian resistance. Imagine the impact a large-scale police strike would have had on the outcome of the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike. Thatcher and her goons were certainly not unaware of that potential disaster - police squads were routinely deployed to pickets far from their regular beats, to minimise the possibility of desertion in that near-paramilitary situation.

The Tories have not been blind to such alarming potential consequences this time either. While 40% of officers face very substantial pay cuts, other sections of the force will be rewarded. Numerous pay incentives are offered, including a 10% rise in wages for those working between 8pm and



Our side or theirs?

6am. Thus they hope to neutralise the potential electoral consequences with a face-value commitment to 'front-line' policing; and minimise dissent in the ranks through the time-honoured divide-and-rule strategy.

What are we to make of all this? There is a worrying tendency among some groups on the left simply to dismiss discontent among the 'armed bodies of men' of the bourgeois state as an internal ruling class matter, in which the forces of the workers' movement should revel, but not intervene. Despite the sometimes Trotskyist phraseology in which this position is couched, we should not be deluded - at the end of the day, it is bread-and-butter ultra-left moralism.

Sometimes, a great theoretical barrier is erected between soldiers, who

are more 'authentically' plebeian and not normally directly involved in repressing workers' political activity, and the police. This has a certain validity where conscript rather than volunteer armies are concerned, and even now - where most volunteers are 'economic conscripts'. Yet, as the experience of the police strikes of 1918-19 and the POA dispute should make abundantly clear, this is merely a *tendency* rather than an iron law.

The class position of the police is contradictory. On the one hand, they are salaried employees, with bosses and bureaucrats breathing down their necks like the rest of us. While the pay is, by public sector standards, relatively good, hours are long and unpredictable - and the work sometimes difficult and dangerous.

On the other hand, there is no getting away from what that work actually consists of - imposing the will of the state on an often recalcitrant population. Even when they are not kettling children, the police are generally used as a rough instrument to maintain order in a decaying social formation. The conditions are just right for reactionary ideology to flower, and to keep even the most put upon rank-and-file copper from organising in unity with the workers' movement, apart from in exceptional circumstances.

Are we in such exceptional circumstances now? The answer appears, regrettably, to be no. While most public-sector unions are happy at least to talk of united action, of a government offensive against all workers (whether or not they actually plan to do anything about it), the Police Federation - however indignant it may be - couches its anger in the language of exceptionalism, and hides behind the reactionary 'public opinion' that perpetually demands more and more police officers, if we are to believe the *Daily Mail*.

It was not always thus. In the tumult of 1918 and 1919, the National Union of Police and Prison Officers (Nuppo) outdid many of its fellow unions in revolutionary rhetoric. It affiliated to the TUC and Labour Party, and trades councils across the country, and, most ominously for the British state, it pledged to refuse to put down strikes and repress labour struggles. They were, of course, heady times - in the wake both of the Russian Revolution and World War I. Yet it has to be said that the state brought it on itself to a large degree - police wages at the time compared unfavourably to that of unskilled labourers.²

We are not in a generalised revolutionary situation just now, obviously enough. Yet we are in a conjuncture of rapidly sharpening class struggle. That was what led to the emergence of Nuppo as a mass-membership union in the wake of the war - and what led to its belligerent rhetoric and combativeness with regard to its employers, and admirably sharp class-consciousness. The moment is perhaps upon us where

cracks in the state apparatus can be prised further apart - if not to the point of open and generalised mutiny, at least to the point where the police are not so keen to view the workers' movement as enemies.

A good start would be to demand full union rights for the police, as well as the army. The Police Federation is *not* a union; it is the union substitute with which almost a century of successive governments have fobbed off the police. The TUC is not exactly a hotbed of resistance just now - though the March 26 jamboree looks, much to the consternation of Brendan Barber and his cronies, like being a landmark protest - but the working class has nothing to lose and everything to gain from integrating the police into its struggles. Again, we do not have to achieve full-scale rebellion to reap the rewards; wavering in the ranks of a police kettle, or questioning of politically motivated orders, would be benefit enough for our activities.

In the long run, of course, we have to face the full social role of the police squarely. Even a *Guardian* correspondent notes that, despite the jeremiads of the capitalist class, the post-World War I police strikes did not result in generalised anarchy on the streets.³ Policing, though it will no doubt remain a sad necessity after the revolution, can be perfectly well carried on by the organised masses. That it is not at present gives the ruling class a monopoly on armed force inimical to democracy, which will inevitably be wielded against us. We must revive the long-dormant, elementary democratic demand for a popular militia to replace the standing army and police force. We learn this lesson anew every time we get stuck in a kettle ●

James Turley

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. *The Guardian* March 8.
2. www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/latest/Police.html.
3. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/10/police-crime-disorder-cuts.

**Subscribe
here**

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum every 3 months... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

**Standing
order**

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/£28	£50/£55	£200/£220
Europe	£30/£33	£60/£66	£240/£264
Rest of world	£60/£66	£120/£132	£480/£528
New UK subscribers offer:			
3 months for £5			

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

Total £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____