



# weekly **worker**

**Imperialist hands off  
Libya, down with the  
Gaddafi regime**

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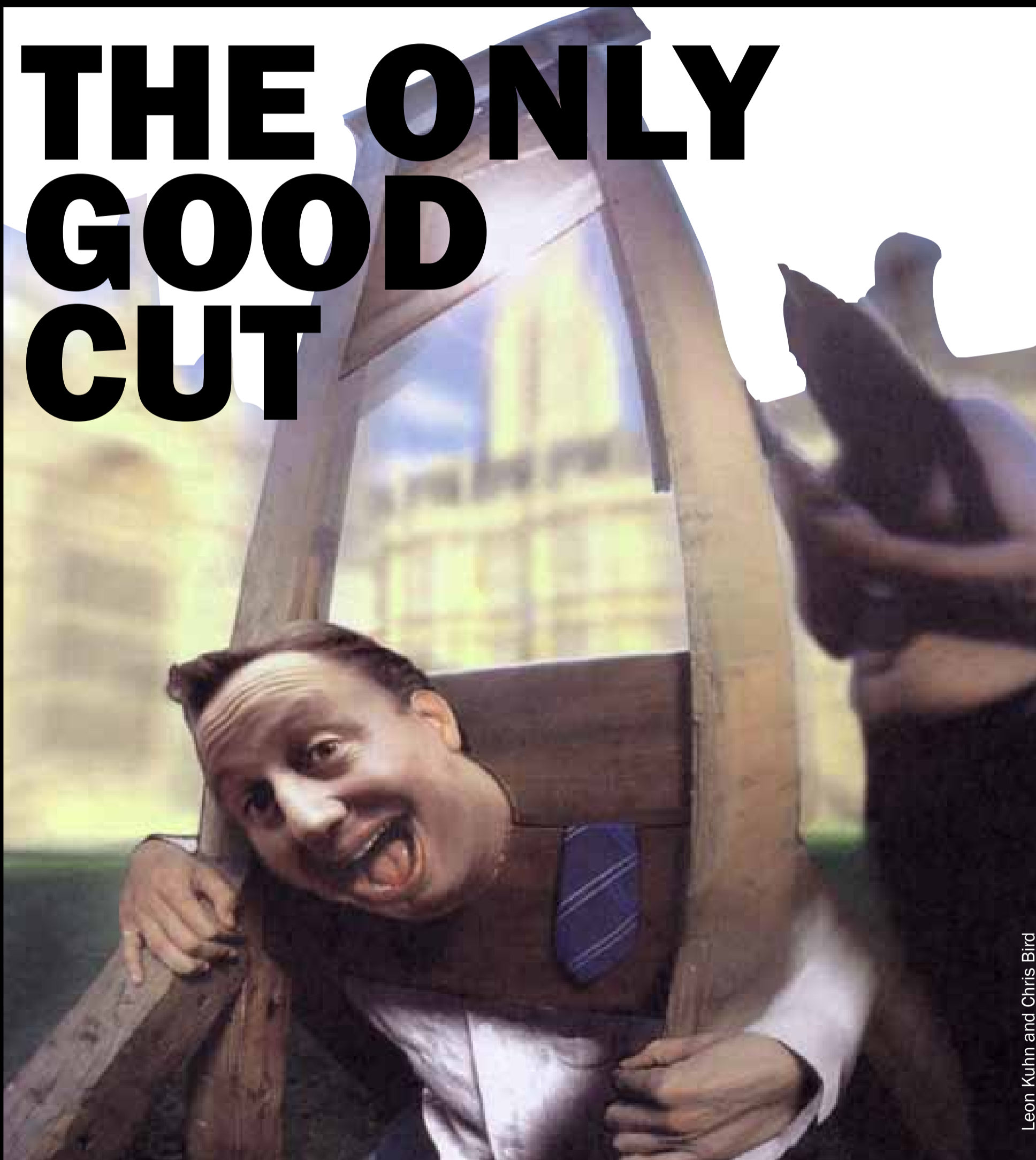
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# THE ONLY GOOD CUT



Leon Kuhn and Chris Bird

# LETTERS



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

## Nuclear future

In response to the current nuclear crisis in Japan, Sadie Robinson commented in *Socialist Worker*: "The latest crisis has shown what many people have argued for decades - that nuclear power poses a horrific threat to our lives and the planet. We don't need nuclear power. We should demand that every nuclear plant is shut down now" (March 15). To me, this is not a reasonable response to the situation or to nuclear power in general, but simply anti-science hysteria.

We are also starting to see a response along these lines from several parts of the world, with the European Union member-states agreeing to perform stress tests on the 153 reactors around Europe, and the German government going several steps further by declaring that for the next three months eight reactors will be offline whilst they undergo checks. German nuclear policy may even be reconsidered. This is also the case in China, where the government has announced that it will suspend the approval previously granted to several proposed nuclear plants. We can expect other countries to follow suit.

I think that it would be more helpful to approach this event logically and carefully. Japan is a densely populated country, and it experienced an earthquake measuring over 9 on the Richter scale. This scale is logarithmic, which means that a quake measuring 9 is 10 times as powerful as one measuring 8, and 100 times greater than a quake measuring 7, etc. The Japanese earthquake was therefore around 100,000 times more powerful than that which Christchurch experienced recently, and there have only ever been three other earthquakes recorded that measured 9 or above. Is it not a testament to the safety of nuclear power that a 40-year-old reactor was able to cope so well with such an extreme catastrophe as this?

This is not to say that we shouldn't review the safety of ageing scientific projects, such as nuclear power stations. There has undoubtedly been a huge amount of development in the industry since these reactors were built. It seems to me that the crisis at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has been exacerbated by cost-cutting techniques, such as the stacking of spent fuel rods too closely together in pools near the reactors. Throughout this catastrophe, the integrity of the containment structures, which surround the reactor, has been maintained. The reactor buildings contain the core of nuclear fuel, and these have also remained intact.

The fact of the matter is that nuclear energy still presents the only immediately available, reliable and cheap, low-carbon-energy source. It is well documented that we have to move beyond burning fossil fuels to provide energy for a growing global population and, as desirable as some of the renewable energy sources are (wind, solar, tidal, geothermal are all candidates), at the moment these are simply not able to fill the hole that is going to be left, as we migrate from coal, oil and gas, unless vast sums of money are to be spent on energy. We also must consider the future and how we see our energy needs being met as we become a planet that is increasing its energy consumption. The strongest candidate that we have to meet this need is nuclear fusion.

Once the technological obstacles that stand in the way of fusion are overcome, this option will be the outstanding candidate for comparatively cheap and clean

global energy production. Do we abandon nuclear research because of this incident in Japan? At the time of writing, it looks possible that as a result of this disaster there may be almost (if not exactly) zero deaths from radiation, and extremely low levels of radiation released that is dangerous to human health, apart from short periods to those working within the facility, and no significant, long-lasting environmental damage.

We need to spend more on nuclear power and produce energy - without the emphasis on saving money, but on safely and efficiently providing energy with a minimum amount of carbon emitted (and also a minimum amount of radioactive waste - another argument for fusion). We need to push scientific development to help us meet the energy challenges we are going to face. The potential of fusion, the process that drives the sun, is so great that we simply have to keep developing our understanding of, and our ability to harness, nuclear power.

Misinformation about nuclear power is common in the media, but in this case it has provided a distraction from the real disaster in Japan - namely the death toll, which is currently expected to exceed 20,000.

**Anthony Rose**  
Brighton

## No heroes

Over the last year or more, an organisation called Help For Heroes has been active in support of the British armed forces involved in the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The military wing of British imperialism and the boot boys of the ruling class caused the dislocation of millions of people in both countries and death and destruction on a massive scale.

These British armed forces, in collusion with the USA and other Nato members, dropped thousands of tons of high explosives in both countries. They used B52 and other fighter bombers, helicopter gunships, hell-fire missiles, tanks and guns to kill and maim, terrorise, torture and abuse many hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghani men, women and children. The night raids on Iraqi and Afghani families were intended to terrorise and cower these people. The use of the death squads of the SAS and SBS to carry out the secret assassinations of alleged insurgents in both countries has often ended with the deaths of innocent men, women and children, reminiscent of the way that the British army behaved in Ireland.

I ask the question, do the above atrocities carried out by the conquering British armed forces make them 'heroes'? Are the British soldiers who threw an Iraqi youth of 17, an asthmatic who couldn't swim, into a canal, walked away and watched him drown, also 'heroes'? Are the British squaddies who kicked and beat to death the Iraqi hotel receptionist, Baha Mousa, leaving 98 assault marks on his body, also 'heroes'? No British soldier has yet been arrested and charged with his murder. Are the British paras who murdered 14 unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry in 1972 also 'heroes'?

The Help For Heroes campaign attempts to normalise and legitimise the state terrorism carried out by the British armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and seeks to glamorise and make acceptable the actions of the British armed forces by calling these military actions 'heroic' and those doing the terrorising 'heroes'. This jingoism and glorification of war and death is best encapsulated in the macabre ritual at Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire for the returning dead soldiers and in the parades by the military regiments in the towns and

cities of Britain. How arrogant and superior these squaddies must feel, full of pride, returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with no respect and scant regard for the feelings of the people that they occupied, oppressed, killed, orphaned, tortured and abused.

Racism, jingoism, reactionary nationalism and war-mongering have always been at the forefront and at the heart of all British imperialism's wars of conquest against many countries down the years of its 'glory' days of the British empire - or should I say the darkest, inglorious days of empire in South Africa, India, Ireland, Egypt, Aden, Cyprus, Malaya, Palestine, Kenya *et al.* The British armed forces are made up in the main of working class youth who are brainwashed, indoctrinated, dehumanised, lied to, groomed and brutalised into becoming killers for capitalism and imperialism - mere cannon fodder in the cause of 'queen and country'. These same squaddies, whilst in the service of imperialism, are also the sworn enemy of the working class and its interests.

The interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, like all imperialist interventions, were carried out in order to seize control of the oil and gas and other raw materials such as minerals. In a sentence, to steal the natural resources in Iraq and Afghanistan and to use both countries as bases from which imperialism can protect its strategic, economic, political and military interests.

Sad to say, but not surprisingly, all trade union leaders in Britain and the Labour and trade union bureaucracy support unconditionally imperialism's wars of conquest. While the Stop the War Coalition adopts a pacifist and non-revolutionary position on imperialism, any Marxist worthy of the name would call for the defeat of imperialism and campaign in the working class on the slogan, 'The enemy is at home' - not the poor, oppressed and exploited masses in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Charlie Walsh**  
Socialist Fight

## Welcome them

The imperialist air and sea attacks on Libya since Friday can only be welcomed by readers of this paper. Without them the anti-Gaddafi rebellion would have been crushed, with slaughter in Benghazi. That's the truth. To believe otherwise is fantasy.

The democratic hope in Libya requires the defeat of the Gaddafi regime. Of course, it would be better if Libyans did it all themselves, but last Friday afternoon showed it wasn't going to be possible. The armoured raid, penetrating to two miles from the city centre, was never going to control Benghazi: it simply demonstrated the promised mayhem and destruction. The rebels were facing a bloody defeat, and the imperialists saved the day. All Marxists and anti-capitalists should applaud this, as should all who believe in representative democracy.

So what are the facts?

1. There is no evidence that the Interim Transitional National Council in Benghazi does not speak for the rebels throughout the country.
2. An aim in the founding statement of the TNC was "to accomplish international recognition of all [sic] the Council."
3. That statement concludes by saying: "We request from the international community to fulfil its obligations to protect the Libyan people from any further genocide and crimes against humanity without any direct military intervention on Libyan soil."

Marxists believe in the self-determination of a non-oppressor people - even more so when they are in revolt against dictatorship. So when the TNC's pleas for foreign help are answered - and no-one doubts survival

was at stake - Marxists can only be pleased. It was what the rebels wanted, and it was the only way they could live to fight another day.

It's not a surprise the imperialists are exercising a double standard, refusing to act decisively against the Bahraini and Yemeni regimes. Also no-one doubts that the imperialist governments are also acting in what they judge are their own national interests. But all this is no reason not to applaud, be thankful and support the continuation of a *de facto* military alliance between the rebels and the imperialist armed forces. It is the choice forced upon the rebels by dint of circumstance.

And it is also why we should support the hastening of their victory through violation of the Libyan arms embargo. Marxists in Britain, and especially in France and Portugal (the only countries to recognise the TNC, moreover deeming it the sole representative of Libyans), should campaign for their governments to supply weapons and train the rebels. Marxists need to be logical, speak plainly, and follow through what they analyse to be true. Pat responses are an insult to the brave fighters for democracy in Libya. Their sacrifice demands clarity and a recognition of the existential threat they faced from the middle of last week. Their saviour was the imperialists.

Marxists may not like this, but that's neither here nor there: it's simply true. Sometimes the imperialists are progressive: in the post-1945 decolonisations they decided not to create a bloodbath everywhere, and that was good. Likewise we should rejoice with the rebels and welcome the aid they are now receiving.

**Dave Gannet**  
email

## Flexible

Nick Rogers has distorted the argument I made for proportional representation in my article on the alternative vote electoral system ('Socialism mean winning the majority', March 10).

In his letter last week, comrade Rogers says: "... according to Peter Manson, the way in which representatives to the [Paris] Commune were elected should have made that body incapable of representing the working class" (March 17). I neither stated nor implied any such thing. Nor did I say that "only in a factory or office do workers have sufficient 'common interest'" for the election of their own individual representatives (emphasis added).

The quotations from the article which Nick reproduces do not bear out his claims. I wrote that in the workplace it is "often appropriate that [workers] should elect their own representative to union bodies or, in a situation of much greater class-consciousness, soviets". By contrast, "council wards or parliamentary constituencies rarely have common factors that give their inhabitants ... a common interest based purely on where they reside" (emphasis added).

I should have thought this makes it pretty clear that I favour a flexible approach and am open to different electoral systems according to concrete circumstances. As Nick well knows, democratic electoral systems fall into two basic categories: proportional representation and what comrade Moshé Machover terms "district representation" (see 'Proportional representation and Brown's opportunist ploy', April 1 2010). The former aims for an elected body that accurately reflects the political views of electors in proportion to those who hold them, while the latter results in individual representatives associated with a particular electoral unit - be it a council ward, parliamentary constituency or

workplace - who can in theory be recallable by their electorates.

The problem is, of course, that these two equally valid systems are for the most part mutually incompatible. Under PR it is either impossible or impractical to allow for representatives to be recalled by their electors (as opposed to the parties that selected them as candidates). This is because, depending on the form of PR adopted, either representatives are not associated with a particular constituency or, if they are, they will often have been elected by a minority of its voters in the first place.

On the other hand, district representation (DR) *does* make it possible for representatives to be recalled by their electorate, but in no way guarantees that the overall majority view of the electorate will prevail. DR systems, whether 'first past the post' or AV, also make it difficult for sometimes quite substantial minority viewpoints to gain any electoral representation at all.

Comrade Rogers, as he has made clear in this paper (see 'Electoral reform and communist strategy', May 27 2010), comes down firmly against PR. He argues strongly that recallability and therefore some kind of DR must take precedence over the proportionality of political viewpoints in legislative and administrative assemblies both now and in the future. Consequently he fails to address the point I raise about the difficulty of any individual ever being able to truly 'represent' all the electors in a current council ward or parliamentary constituency, with "all their disparate, often antagonistic interests and views".

For my part, I am open to persuasion about the type of electoral system we ought to favour in different circumstances. That is why at our CPGB conference in January I voted for an amendment to our *Draft programme* which leaves open the type of voting system we should advocate under the rule of the working class (the new version of the *Draft programme* will be available very soon, by the way).

However, right now we need to end the system whereby the establishment parties enjoy a virtual monopoly over political representation. That means a system of genuine PR, where recallability is exercised by parties and the voters can give their verdict on the performance of those parties through annual elections. We recommend a critical 'yes' vote in the May 5 referendum on AV, not because AV is a form of PR - it most certainly is not - but because it at least allows for the genuine support for small, anti-establishment parties to be recorded and would demonstrate that FPTP is not set in stone.

**Peter Manson**  
South London

## Labour revival

Around 50 members squeezed into the premises on Sunday March 20 for the Chipping Barnet Labour Party annual general meeting - a considerable advance on the 16 of the previous year and well beyond the quorum figure of 20.

Following the usual election of officers, the main part of the proceedings was the nomination of a contender for the Barnet-Camden Greater London Assembly seat, to stand against Tory smart alec Brian Coleman. There were four candidates: Tom Copley from Camden (a Kentish Town resident); Andrew Dismore, ex-MP for Hendon; Kathy McGuirk, a councillor from Finchley; and Neil Nerva, chair of Hampstead and Kilburn LP and vice-chair of the Jewish Labour Movement.

All four candidates were naturally and commendably in favour of specific

reforms for the area and anxious that the party should mend its fences with the electorate. To this end, a certain left rhetoric emerged, including the use of that long-forgotten word, ‘comrade’ (for example, Andrew Dismore began by saying, “Well, thanks for inviting me, comrades”). Kathy McGuirk promised to “put people first and not the market” - not exactly what she was saying in defence of the NHS during Tony Blair’s administration. She also steered clear of any comment about the current behaviour of banks, but did at least come out in support of rent control in housing. Dismore, in response to a question about the loss of UK tax revenue through tax havens, observed interestingly that in his view the UK should adopt the approach of the current Greek government and tax assets as well as income.

Some of the most revealing comments from the candidates were in response to questions concerning relations with the far left, with trade unionists and with Ken Livingstone as candidate for the post of London mayor. Ken was roundly advised to shut up about foreign policy issues and plug his real achievements for the city: viz bikes courtesy of Barclays, Crossrail and the Olympics, all of which mayor Johnson claims the credit for. Before that, however, Tom Copley had drawn attention to the appeal of the Socialist Workers Party and similar organisations for students. This prompted a questioner to ask all four candidates whether they were in favour of united action with the “hard left” in any shape or form.

Kathy McGuirk, Neil Nerva and Tom Copley all voiced their opposition to the SWP. Kathy said that, in her experience, “SWPers are rich”. Neil Nerva censured them for working for Respect against Oona King in Tower Hamlets and for attacking industrious Labour councillors. Tom Copley bemoaned the apparent non-existence of SWP trade unionists, denounced the organisation for welcoming worst-case scenarios because they would accept “nothing short of revolution” and stated outright: “We should not work with them.” Andrew Dismore was more diplomatic, but did point out that he joined the Labour Party in 1974 and supported it on the basis of the actual reforms achieved by the Wilson government between 1974 and 1978. He also reminded the meeting that he had voted against top-up fees in universities under Blair. All these attitudes are no doubt evidence of a lack of revolutionary zeal on the candidates’ part, but also appear to indicate a failure by the SWP to get its basic political message across to Labour supporters, so that when, as on rare occasions, the SWP actually specifies a series of reforms it would like to see put in place, the average Labourite is unaware of them.

Andrew Dismore emerged the clear winner in the ballot, as was to be expected, picking up a total of 30 first preferences against a combined figure of 22 for the other three. In the circumstances, a wise choice, in this writer’s view, since he looks clearly best placed to take on Brian Coleman by threatening to make inroads into the latter’s core vote.

**Chris Gray**  
email

## Sabotaged

In what was an interesting discussion on the tactic of the general strike, I take issue with only one point. Mike Macnair says: “A general strike can lead to a massive defeat, as in 1926” (‘Anarchist origins’, March 17).

While the miners’ strike was a massive defeat in both 1926 (a lock-out) and 1984-85, we can’t really suggest that it was the general strike which was defeated. It was never engaged. Less than half the unions had been called out. It only lasted eight days before the TUC general

council pulled the plug before testing the power of the general strike and the trade union movement. The failure to launch the general strike in any meaningful way left exposed the forces which had taken strike action, and it left one million miners and their families to fight alone for another six or seven months.

We can’t say it was the general strike as such which was defeated; rather the general strike was sabotaged by the TUC leadership. Who gave them authority to do it? The bloody CPGB with their slogan, ‘All power to the TUC general council’. Not all power to the workers, the shop stewards, the councils of action, the branches or the trades councils - but the general council.

Having handed control of the general strike to men steeped in treachery, don’t blame the general strike as a tactic. Blame the leaders you put your trust and authority in.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Sexual freedom

I thought I had included enough disclaimers regarding Foucault, whose method I deemed “a more sophisticated variation of labelling theory” (‘Lady Gaga and the “gay gene”’, March 3). This did not keep Richard Farnos from demanding that “as a supposed Marxist” I should make use of Marxist sources only - “such as that given by John D’Emilio”.

Actually, D’Emilio takes Foucault’s account as a starting point, while, much like myself, outlining the social conditions that gave rise to the scientific theorisation of separate sexual identities and the homosexual subculture. Investigating the beginnings of ‘homosexuals’ in the USA, D’Emilio’s essay, *Capitalism and gay identity* (1980), complements Foucault’s account rather than contradicting it. It is perfectly possible to draw on material from the postmodernist canon without succumbing to postmodernism.

Farnos’s reference to Terry Eagleton’s work is interesting, but has little to do with my article - I refer to the “gay-straight dichotomy” as “artificial”, but make a point of acknowledging the LGBT communities as real. It is correct that some accounts of early homosexual subcultures, such as d’Emilio’s, attribute a more active role to homosexuals than I have, though my formulation - the subculture “acquired its own cultural codes and practices, as well as its own sources of self-worth” in reaction to scientific and legal condemnation - suggests a more dialectical interplay than Farnos’s interpretation of my article would have it.

All of this might make for some fruitful debate, were Farnos’s polemic not so ill-intentioned. He writes: “Apparently the proles are so lumpen 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.” This sentence features so much convoluted sarcasm, it ends up not making much sense at all, and one can only guess as to what precisely Farno is attempting to insinuate.

In any event, our organisation does not believe that one and a half centuries of homophobic discourse, disseminated through the all-pervasive ideological state apparatuses of the bourgeoisie, have not left a mark on popular attitudes. While Farnos’s idealised workerism might lead him to think otherwise, our communist *Draft programme* acknowledges that “bigoted attitudes divide the working class and aid those advocating the authoritarian state”.

Farnos is welcome to study the ‘Sexual freedom’ section of our the *Draft programme*’s immediate

demands, which I believe set out the conditions under which the gay-straight schism can gradually dissolve, and submit his critique to our paper.

**Maciej Zurowski**  
email

## Abundance

I was pleased that it was Andrew Northall (Letters, March 17) who replied to my criticism of Paul Smith (Letters, March 10). The former is a supporter of the Stalinist regime in the ex-Soviet Union.

Northall belies Smith’s claim that ‘Stalinism’ is a barrier to thought and theory. Unfortunately, in his reply to me, comrade Northall makes the mistake which most Marxists are making at the present time. This is the failure to understand that society will soon face a serious discontinuity caused by the global peak in oil production.

My view is that, in so far as Marxism ignores the energy issue, it cannot be regarded as a science. But there are other problems with Marxism as well. The Marxist argument that communism is a product of the development of the productive forces is untrue. The truth is that communism comes from the ideological struggle. So I say to comrade Northall that all the productive forces in the world will not lead to communism without the ideological struggle. His view that that economic conditions will determine the potential of a society is uncontroversial and even a defender of capitalism will agree with him. However, what determines whether a society takes the form of, say, capitalism or communism is the ideological struggle.

I therefore reject Marx’s view that the bourgeoisie made communism possible by developing the productive forces. In principle, communism has always been possible when humans join together in groups. It is ideology, not productive forces, which will determine whether communism will exist or not.

Comrade Northall argues that the 20th century created the conditions for abundance. To be more exact, it was the industrial revolution - meaning mass production, made possible by a plethora of cheap energy resources - that caused Marx to speculate about a future communist society of abundance. For Marx, the term ‘communism’ became interchangeable with the term ‘abundance’.

Those who think that the essence of communism is abundance will have to wake up to the real world, where irreplaceable resources are constantly being used up. I am not saying we should give up on abundance where it is possible, but we should stop defining communism by this term, which smacks of gluttony.

We should begin to recognise, as Mao did, that communism comes from the ideological struggle, not the means of production. It is more about quality than quantity. Marxism has dominated communist thinking for so long that I fear this lesson will be the hardest to learn.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## No comment

The Legal Defence and Monitoring Group (LDMG) has updated and republished *No comment: the defendant’s guide to arrest*. This little booklet is essential reading for anyone at risk of arrest, which means anyone involved in protests.

You can download a copy of *No comment* from our website at [www.ldmg.org.uk](http://www.ldmg.org.uk). Or send a self-addressed envelope with a second-class stamp on it to *No comment*, c/f BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX, and we will send you a copy. Groups wanting bulk copies should email us.

**LDMG**  
email

# 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](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.communiststudents.org.uk](http://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 29: ‘The wives of the sun and moon’ (Plains Indian). Speaker: Chris Knight.

### Oppose the cuts

**Saturday March 26:** National demonstration against cuts in public services. Assemble 11am Victoria Embankment, for march to rally in Hyde Park.

Organised by the Trade Union Congress: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk).

### Safe to dream

**Monday March 28 - Sunday April 3:** Art exhibition, Phoenix Square, Midland Street, Leicester. Created by young asylum-seekers from Afghanistan and Sudan.

Organised by Young People Seeking Safety: [www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk](http://www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.co.uk).

### Hands off Libya

**Wednesday March 30, 7pm:** Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. ‘Hands off Libya, hands off the Middle East’. Speakers include: Tony Benn, Lindsey German, Sami Ramadani, Jeremy Corbyn. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [stopwar.org.uk](http://stopwar.org.uk).

### We’re no fools

**Friday April 1, 2pm:** Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. ‘We’re no fools - another way is possible’. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Bob Crow (RMT), John Cryer MP, Mark Serwotka (PCS). Chair: Ann Green (BPTUAA).

Organised by the British Pensioners and Trade Union Action Association and Greater London Pensioners Association: [glpa@capital5.freemove.co.uk](mailto:glpa@capital5.freemove.co.uk).

### Save Gus

**Friday April 1, 7.30pm:** Music workshop, Labour Club, Yeovil, Somerset. Raising awareness on asylum rights. Performances include songs created by young people in support of their friend Gus, who faces deportation to Afghanistan.

Organised by Somerset Racial Equality Council: [www.srec.org.uk](http://www.srec.org.uk).

### Lancashire against cuts

**Saturday April 2, 1.30pm:** Rally, 53 Degrees, Brook Street, Preston.

Speakers include: Chris Bambery (Right to Work), cllr Simon Blackburn, cllr Matthew Brown, Billy Hayes (CWU), cllr Michael Lavalette, Alice Mahon, John McDonnell MP.

Organised by Lancashire Coalition Against Cuts: [www.lancashiretradeunions.org.uk](http://www.lancashiretradeunions.org.uk).

### Marxism 21

**Saturday April 2, 1pm:** INCA Italian Confederation of Labour, Italian Advice Centre, 124 Canonbury Road, London N1. ‘After the TUC March - next steps for the anti-cuts movement’. Speakers include: Jerry Hicks (Unite), Gabi Quevedo (Latin American Workers Association) and George Binette (Camden Unison). Further information: <http://rikowski.wordpress.com>.

### 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:info@shopstewards.net)

### Jayaben Desai

**Sunday April 17, 2.30pm:** Film, Tricycle Cinema, 269 Kilburn High Road, London NW6 (nearest tube: Kilburn). Tribute to Jayaben Desai and her role in the Grunwick strike of 1976-78. Showing of Chris Thomas’s *Great Grunwick strike - a history*, followed by a discussion of the strike with participants. Tickets £5.

Organised by Brent Trades Union Council: [info@brenttuc.org.uk](mailto:info@brenttuc.org.uk).

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party’s name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

## IRELAND

# Now the left has TDs

Anne Mc Shane urges principled unity in a new party

**T**he situation in Ireland following the election of the 31st Dáil has produced conditions in which the left can potentially make real progress. With the voting in of five United Left Alliance TDs on February 25, the possibility now exists to create a strong working class voice. Change is in the air.

Fianna Fáil, which had dominated Irish politics for 80 years, was reduced to a miserable rump of just 20 TDs (going from 13 to only one in Dublin, for example). Its canvassers had been run from the doors throughout the campaign, even in the party's traditional strongholds. But now we are faced with a different enemy.

Fine Gael, having assumed power with the Labour Party, has a massive majority. The new coalition has signalled that we need to prepare for even greater pain. Its 'Programme for government' pledges savage cuts in spending on top of the previous attacks. Government and health workers in particular are bracing themselves, as Fine Gael has a history of antagonism towards public service employees. New taoiseach (prime minister) Enda Kenny promises to slim down the public service by 20,000 workers - a huge number in a country of just 4.5 million people. Redundancies and 'natural wastage' will decimate the workforce. The health service is to be 'reformed' by shedding 8,000 jobs immediately. This when we already have a major crisis for patients, with wards closed and people left for days on trolleys and on the floors of accident and emergency waiting rooms. The Irish health service is now like that of a third world country.

It is no wonder that Eamon Gilmore, leader of the Labour Party and now tánaiste (deputy prime minister), warned his members at a conference last week that they would have to "walk through forests of placards in the months and years ahead".<sup>1</sup> He is aware that the working class will react to the programme of austerity. Labour will have to face down unions and others who are now preparing for the struggles to come. Gilmore had been particularly deceitful in the election - arguing that Labour needed to be voted in so as to protect against the worst excesses of the rightwing Fine Gael. With this message it did very well in working class areas. Now in power Labour is showing itself just as willing as Fine Gael to put the boot in.

Another promise made both by Fine Gael and Labour was that they would renegotiate the terms of the European Central Bank bailout to alleviate the pressure on the economy. Kenny claimed to have the ear of Angela Merkel in Europe. He hot-footed it off to Brussels immediately the election result became known, only to return days later with his tail between his legs. Sarkozy and Merkel told him in no uncertain terms that Ireland's low rate of corporation tax would have to increase in exchange for any renegotiation of the bailout. This is a problem for a government dependent on US transnationals which base themselves in Ireland because of the preferential treatment they are afforded, including low tax on profits and non-unionised workforces. To raise the rate above the current 12.5% could see them quickly relocate to other, more attractive destinations.

When the EU four-year austerity plan was imposed last December, both Kenny and Gilmore cried crocodile tears and protested at its harshness. Now they have promised their masters in Europe to implement it for the

next two years at least. By squeezing the working class the government believes it will regain competitiveness and repay its debts. But its chances are low. Even with the massaging of official jobless figures and the high numbers of young people leaving the country, unemployment is growing, and now stands at 15%. And a new banking bailout is planned which will almost certainly provoke fury. There is already deep anger at reports of huge bonuses being handed out to banking executives since the last one.

Fine Gael is keen to contrast itself favourably with the previous corrupt administration. It has cut ministerial pay by 6% and done away with some chauffeur-driven cars. There were even cutbacks in this year's St Patrick's Day trips abroad. Enda portrays himself as grey, sober and frugal - as a man who can identify with and lead the "plain people of Ireland" out of this mess. But recent revelations about the corruption of former minister Michael Lowry show that members of Fine Gael have had their snouts firmly in the trough in previous administrations.

## ULA newcomers

The election of five ULA TDs in the face of such drabness and austerity brings hope that the balance of power can be shifted. It has also brought colour and spirit to an otherwise monotonous and tedious Dáil. The newcomers have taken every chance to put themselves forward as the only real alternative.

At the inaugural sitting on March 9, Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party in Ireland was the first to rise to speak in opposition to Kenny and to denounce him as a *feall uafásach* - a horrible betrayal of ordinary people. Richard Boyd Barrett, elected for the People Before Profit Alliance and a leading Socialist Workers Party member, also gave a passionate speech. He and his fellow ULA TDs pledged to use their election to facilitate the growth of an opposition movement on the streets. The class war would be brought onto the floor of the Dáil. Members of the main parties shifted uncomfortably in their seats, and there were decidedly sour expressions on the faces of both Gilmore and Kenny.

The new TDs have also figured prominently in the media - and brought welcome controversy to political affairs programmes. There is a now an environment where the

left have a say in debates. And the ULA representatives have done well on the whole. But what limits them in all their contributions is the narrow nature of the solutions they espouse. They focus far too much on the benefits of nationalisation and can sometimes sound remarkably similar to Sinn Féin.

The ULA itself does not even mention the word 'socialism' in its programme. When I broached this with comrade Boyd Barrett at a meeting during the election campaign he accused me of raising "abstract slogans". Instead the alliance limits itself to acting as a "left coalition" against "the capitalist market" to "unite working people, whether public or private sector, Irish or migrant, with the unemployed, welfare recipients, pensioners and students in the struggle to change society".<sup>2</sup> There is not even mention of the working class in the programme - obviously also considered too "abstract" a concept.

The ULA calls for "democratic and public control over resources so that social need is prioritised over profit". The Corrib gas field off the coast should be taken into "public ownership" and state companies should be retained in order to create jobs, along with "a state programme of industrial development and innovation to build the productive capacity of the economy". All of this - with no mention of the working class taking power into their own hands and certainly no reference to the revolutionary transformation of society - leads one to the conclusion that in practice the ULA is for some kind of left Keynesianism. An impossible non-solution. The failure to connect reforms with socialism and the tendency to see the resolution of problems within the current national borders is an unfortunate reminder of the doomed projects of the Scottish Socialist Party, Respect and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition in Britain. It is socialism in one country. A recipe for disaster.

## Timidity

Other problems have flowed from the ULA's programmatic timidity. One of them is women's rights. The fact that the ULA or its main components, the SP and PBPA, did not mention abortion rights in any of their election propaganda is shameful. Interestingly the SP did have a pro-choice platform in the 2007 election.

One party activist I asked excused the omission by claiming that people were not that interested in abortion rights this time round!

In fact the issue is more relevant than ever, particularly in an economic climate where the majority of women simply cannot afford to travel abroad for terminations. In the recent ABC v Ireland case, the European Court of Human Rights found that Ireland had breached human rights by forcing ill women to go abroad for abortion and was mandated to legislate for change. Sinead Kennedy wrote recently in an article for *Socialist Worker* in Ireland that "we need to begin the fight today for immediate legislation and for free, safe and legal abortion. Political parties like the Labour Party who claim to support legislative change on abortion must be pressed to make good on their promises and make abortion legislation a core demand of any programme for government."<sup>3</sup> I agree with her - but why do her own comrades shy away from that fight?

Comrade Boyd Barrett was questioned about women's and gay rights at a post-election rally. His response was that "the ULA does not yet have a policy on these issues, but we must discuss them and arrive at a principled position".<sup>4</sup> This is insultingly disingenuous. The ULA is essentially run by the SP and the SWP - with some input from the Workers and Unemployed Action Group. There were rumours that the reason abortion was not in the programme was because Seamus Healy of the WUAG was said to be 'pro-life'. But comrade Healy made clear in a written reply to the Cork Right to Choose Group that he is committed to campaigning for abortion rights - and therefore definitely not 'pro-life'. The lack of any policy on such a principled and important question can only be because the SWP and SP did not want to lose votes over what remains a deeply controversial issue in Ireland today.

This preoccupation with playing it safe is especially pronounced when it comes to the SWP. An interview with comrade Boyd Barrett on the way forward for the ULA in the same issue of *Socialist Worker* reveals that he believes an "important thing to stress is that any new organisation would have to be broad and has to embrace those who oppose the neoliberal and cuts agenda but aren't necessarily

familiar with socialist politics in the traditional sense". This "new radical party" will have to be "broad and accessible".<sup>5</sup> Presumably he does not believe that a revolutionary party can be mass, accessible and attractive to those looking for change. No, instead of attempting to win over the masses to the truth - that the only genuine alternative is that of Marxism and international working class power - we have to restrict our politics to what we mistakenly believe the masses will accept: no-hope reformism. But, as we have seen on too many occasions to remember, the process of creating a 'broad reformist' party means that the self-avowed revolutionaries are forced to become reformists themselves and the project ends in a political cul-de-sac.

The SWP's populism seems to be undermining unity with the SP. In the immediate aftermath of the election Joe Higgins, responding to questions from journalists, was clear that plans would be quickly put in place to launch a new party. A few weeks later he and his organisation are much more ambiguous. At an SP meeting in Cork on March 16 he was asked about the delay in taking such an initiative. He answered that, while a new mass party was needed, he did not consider the conditions to create one now existed. He downplayed the support the ULA had attracted in terms of new forces and said that, although "we are going to continue to discuss this, we are not going to rush into it". Comrade Higgins was adamant that "we are not going to disperse our body of ideas" for the sake of the project. The SWP, for example, had refused to agree that the term 'socialism' could be included in the ULA election programme and this is obviously still a bone of contention between the two groups. But the SP itself has an extremely limited conception of socialism: ie, nationalisation plus public ownership within one country.

A convention is due to be held to discuss the future of the ULA. Comrade Higgins mentioned June, although I have heard that it will not take place until the autumn. There are also plans to have some ULA meetings, but there is no membership structure, so you cannot join. Both the SP and the SWP seem more interested in building their own group and hoping that a mass influx of new forces will change the dynamics in favour of their respective organisations. But these questions will not go away.

At the moment the ULA is run by a steering committee made up of unidentified members meeting behind closed doors. There are no reports of their discussions - we are just told about their pronouncements. People who are not members of the main groups do not know what is going on. And yet a significant number would join any new party if it were democratic and allowed genuine debate. The very reason why so many voted for the ULA is because its limited left unity seemed to promise a new beginning. That optimism could be sacrificed to narrow sectarianism and opportunist backwardness ●

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## Notes

1. *Sunday Business Post* March 13.
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3. [www.swp.ie/reviews/right-choose/4182](http://www.swp.ie/reviews/right-choose/4182).
4. <http://tomasoflatharta.com>.
5. [www.swp.ie/reviews/interview-richard-boyd-barrett-td/4184](http://www.swp.ie/reviews/interview-richard-boyd-barrett-td/4184).



Voting Fianna Fáil out

## LIBYA

# Imperialism out, down with the Gaddafi regime

Western intervention in Libya - and the rest of the Arab world - aims to subvert popular power and the Arab revolution, argues **Eddie Ford**

Almost inevitably, given the chronically weak state of the working class movement, imperialism has intervened militarily in Libya. Dutifully, both the United Nations and the Arab League, that thieves' kitchens of despots and dictators, sanctioned the action - even if it seems more like a coalition of the unwilling, or damned, than the willing. And, of course, the House of Commons on March 21 voted overwhelmingly in favour of the latest military adventure, by 557 to 13.

So, under the guise of setting up a no-fly zone to "protect" civilians in Benghazi and elsewhere, the UK, France and the United States - with a few stragglers like Qatar to provide Arab 'legitimacy' - have effectively declared war on the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Maybe even on him personally, United Nations resolution 1973 or not - US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles exploded in his Tripoli compound, but magically failed, presumably, to inflict any 'collateral damage' on those unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity. Perhaps Tripoli civilians need less 'protecting' than Benghazi ones.

Coalition forces appear to be expanding the scope of their operations almost by the hour - launching new air strikes against Gaddafi's troops outside the (currently) insurgent-held western city of Misrata. US secretary of state Hillary Clinton claims that people "close" to Gaddafi were in touch with other countries asking for advice on "exile options".<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, in order to justify the attacks, we have being bombarded with crap about "genocide", "crimes against humanity", "human shields", etc - the propaganda war to accompany the real hot war. Mere cant. It cannot be denied that the Gaddafi regime is a foul dictatorship which has violently oppressed the Libyan people for decades and which thoroughly deserves to be overthrown - with communists being amongst the first to welcome the armed uprising against its tyranny. However, such hyperbolic language is being deployed in an attempt to fool us into believing that Libya - unlike other, pro-western, Middle East dictatorships - is a special case and that this 'humanitarian' or liberal imperialism will somehow be beneficial to the long-term interests of the Libyan masses. In reply, communists argue that the Libyan intervention will no more bring liberation or democracy to its people than the imperialist overthrow of Saddam Hussein - a former client regime of the west - relieved the suffering of the Iraqi masses. Instead, the brutal imperialist invasion and occupation of Iraq just brought about new horrors and suffering - leaving the country traumatised and dismembered.

Therefore, from that perspective - an internationalist and democratic one - the Stop the War Coalition is to be commended for having staged a protest opposite Downing Street on March 20 against the air assault on Libya. Indeed, not to have done so would have made a mockery of its name. Addressing the 100 or so demonstrators, both Jeremy Corbyn and George Galloway noted that the

date marked the eve of the eighth anniversary of Operation Shock and Awe that led to the Iraq invasion and condemned the obvious hypocrisy of the western powers.<sup>2</sup> Where was the no-fly zone over Gaza when it was being blitzkrieged by Israel or, for that matter, the one over Bahrain - which has seen "invited" forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates murderously repress the pro-democracy activists trying to emulate the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions?

But, of course, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are friends, and strategic assets, of the west - so it is an entirely different story. Furthermore, compounding the hypocrisy, the UAE is lending military support - to some degree or another - to the imperialist campaign against Gaddafi (it being reported by Reuters that the Greek airbase at Souda, Crete, received a request from the UAE to stand by for the refuelling of 12 Dassault Mirage 2000s and 12 F-16 Fighting Falcons en route to Sicily<sup>3</sup>). Given that the UAE military is busily involved in the suppression of democracy, both at home and in Bahrain, it is utterly absurd - if not near madness - to believe that the very same military can help to bring social advance and progress to Libya.

True, it does have to be said, the STWC demonstration was small and, yes, we in the CPGB are critical of the politics often peddled by its leadership under John Rees (national officer and leader of Counterfire) and Andrew Murray (chair and Communist Party of Britain member) - least of which is its unprincipled exclusion of Hands Off the People of Iran to please the Tehran regime. But it was entirely correct to call the March 20 demonstration. Along with the STWC comrades and others on the left, we say: imperialism out of Libya; down with Gaddafi. Clearly, western intervention in Libya - and the rest of the Arab world - aims to subvert the Arab revolution.

But there are some on the left, totally misguidedly, who have come out in support of the imperialist 'no-fly zones' - a misnomer in the sense that we are talking about active and aggressive attacks on Gaddafi's tanks, armoured cars, mortar and infantry positions, and so on, not just the taking out of air defence systems (situated more by military necessity than cynical political calculation in densely populated urban areas). To see the 'pro-war' left at its most degenerate, and downright stupid, you would be hard-pressed to do much better than the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty - which in the past implied that imperialism had a progressive role to play in Iraq by creating a democratic "breathing space" for the working class.

Hence the AWL categorised the March 20 STWC protest as a "pro-Gaddafi demo" and castigated the Socialist Workers Party for its supposedly "oxymoronic line" slogan, "No to intervention in Libya! Victory to the Arab revolutions!" AWL functionary Sacha Ismail also mocked a Counterfire activist for waving a placard calling for "regime change here" (what a terrible demand

for a Marxist to raise), asininely remarking: "... as if that solves the problem of what socialists should say about Libya" - before further rebuking another Counterfire member for "leading the chanting" of "Hands off Libya!"<sup>4</sup>

Well, the AWL may have put the moron back into oxymoronic, but such philistine comments only serve to indicate that it has abandoned even the ABC of Marxism - which precisely, as the SWP and Counterfire comrades suggest, consists principally of fighting for "regime change" at home: that is, making revolution. The fact that the AWL finds this so hilarious just about says it all. But then again, as an organisation the AWL specialises in slippery and dishonest polemics - steeped as it is in a sectarian culture so assiduously promulgated by its fading patriarch, Sean Matgamna - in a feeble bid to disguise its instinctive first-campism (ie, pro-imperialism). For example, we have Matgamna's infamous 2008 "discussion article", where he rhetorically asked, "if the Israeli air force attempts to stop Iran developing the capacity to wipe it out with a nuclear bomb, in the name of what alternative would we condemn Israel?"<sup>5</sup> Given that the article stressed the right of Israel to self-defence, the implication was quite clear: a pre-emptive Israeli strike on "clerical fascist" Iran would be justifiable.

In this vein, the AWL is up to its old sophist tricks again. Hence, though we are advised by Clive Bradley to hold "no illusions" in the west, we are also informed that to oppose imperialist intervention means "abandoning" the anti-Gaddafi rebels, given that the workers' movement internationally "does not have a military force of our own to come to the aid of Benghazi".<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Bradley asserts, there cannot be an "issue of principle" that should make socialists "demonstrate against the one thing which might prevent untold slaughter" and avoid a "crushing defeat for the wave of revolutions" - namely, imperialist military might. Or, in other words, "Yes to Libya" and "not no to the USA". It is not "our job to try to stop the implementation of a no-fly zone", since, according to the AWL, the one operated against Saddam Hussein from April 1991 "provided some protection for the Kurds".<sup>7</sup>

The pro-imperialist logic is plain to see. By the same token, those who opposed the Iraq war in 2003 were guilty of striving to keep Saddam Hussein in power and thus abandoning the people of Iraq to their fate. Similarly, not sending the task force steaming down to the south Atlantic in 1982 - refusing to intervene - would have meant deserting the Falkland Islanders in their hour of need, leaving them to the tender mercies of the Argentinean military junta. Or, just as plausibly, surely it would have been the case that by not declaring war on Germany in 1914 the British government would have 'betrayed' or abandoned the plucky Belgian people - or the noble Poles in 1939? For the befuddled AWL, any sort of class analysis seems quite alien - replaced by a liberalistic, and shrilly moralistic, support for the 'underdog' at any given

moment (which more often than not neatly dovetails with the imperialist agenda).

Of course, the AWL are not the only ones on the left who come in favour of imperialist no-fly zones - although at least most have the decency to arrive at such a conclusion more reluctantly. Thus comrade Dave Osler, a member of the Labour Party/Labour Representation Committee and a former Trotskyist, writes that you "would need to be a liberal of a spectacularly gullible kind" to seriously "maintain that the American ruling class and those other ruling classes invest serious amounts of blood and treasure in the promotion of democracy for democracy's sake".<sup>8</sup> Yet, having said that, he goes on to argue: "... once in a while there is a more or less accidental coincidence between what the US wants to see happen in a country and the interests of working people that live there" - Libya being one of those times, he feels. Therefore he is compelled, though he does not find these "words particularly comforting to write", to "support the no-fly zone", but "with no illusions".

As for comrade Andrew Coates (a self-confessed Pabloite), he states - correctly - that "the left has to begin from the premise of support for the Libyan people's resistance to the Gaddafi tyranny" and that the uprising "takes place within the context of pan-regional Arab democratic revolutions", being "directed against a bureaucratic capitalist tyranny with close links to international capital".<sup>9</sup> But like comrade Osler he thinks that the imperialist intervention just so happens to "correspond to the particular needs of the Libyan population under imminent threat of repression by the Gaddafi state machine" - leading him to the conclusion that "blanket opposition" to no-fly zones, etc is "morally bankrupt" and the STWC's March 20 protest "against the help offered to the Libyan people" is "repellent". Rather, "in the absence of any other means of international support", comrade Coates gives "qualified support" to UN resolution 1973, which sanctioned the attacks.

Naturally, communists can understand - and sympathise with - the sentiments underpinning these arguments. Yes, the Benghazi insurgents are massively outgunned by the despicable Gaddafi regime, which responded to the initial pro-democracy demonstrations in the only way it knew - by brute repression and ruthless violence, leaving many dead and injured. Of course, communists agree that those leftists who urge support for the 'anti-imperialist' Gaddafi are contemptible - such as the Workers Revolutionary Party with its wretched slogan of "Victory to Gaddafi!", not to mention the highly practical "Bring down the Cameron-Clegg coalition with a general strike and go forward to a workers' government and socialism!"<sup>10</sup>

Or the Stalinite Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), which exhorts "support for the Libyan government in its fight to crush attempts to take control of Libyan

oil out of the hands of the Libyan people".<sup>11</sup>

However, for all that, by making such arguments comrades Osler and Coates - and others like them - are sailing into dangerous waters: they run the risk of constituting themselves as the leftwing conscience of liberal/humanitarian imperialism. The fact that, as the comrades like to emphasise in support of their position, *some* sections of the Benghazi provisional government (or Commune, as some have idiotically called it) have welcomed the imposition of a no-fly zone is no measure as to the progressive nature or efficacy of such a move - likewise, a large number of the Irish catholic-nationalist population in 1969 initially welcomed the British military intervention - but within a short space of time they had taken up Molotov cocktails and arms against the same imperialist 'liberators'.

No, the imperialist intervention into Libya is more akin to pouring water on the flames than re-igniting the spark of revolution, acting to divert the anti-Gaddafi uprising - and the entire revolutionary movement across the Arab world - into safe, containable channels. Indeed, if anything, the introduction of no-fly zones, etc runs the real risk of galvanising a measure of patriotic or 'anti-imperialist' support behind the regime - which as a consequence may mean that Gaddafi can cling on to power longer and at some future point inflict harsher reprisals against those opposed to his rule.

Unlike scabs such as the WRP, communists wholeheartedly backed the revolutionary democratic upsurge - the revolution - in Libya against the rotten regime, just as we did in the entire Arab world. We want to see *all* these regimes swept away by popular power, with the working class securing hegemony over the demonstrations, protests and uprisings.

But we envisage this happening as part of a pan-Arab movement, striving for the unification of the Arab people after centuries of Balkanisation, not by repeated imperialist interventions designed to reconfigure western control over the region - using a new generation of elected, 'democratic' clients, as opposed to the old-fashioned despots ●

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## Notes

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internationalism. This ‘realism’ is, however, actually acceptance of the existing international *state order* and attempts to obtain marginal advantages for particular national groups within it.

Instead of imagining a ‘socialist’ nation-state, what we need to imagine is *a unified international workers’ movement*, based on solidarity in fighting for the common interests of the working class across national boundaries. Such a movement could aspire to take power away from the capitalist class internationally and begin the *global* construction of an alternative to capitalism.

Between continents, we can offer moral solidarity, but only very limited practical aid to one another’s struggles. *Within* continents, however, common working class political action is possible, and capitalism itself has set up supra-national institutions: the European Union, North American Free Trade Area, Mercosur in part of South America, the ASEAN economic community project in south-east Asia and so on.

Still imagining: a unified workers’ movement *across Europe* could take *Europe* away from capitalist rule. This would only be a first step to the global overthrow of capitalism. But it would be an immensely powerful first step, both because of the sheer scale of Europe - with a population of 822 million - and because it contains imperialist and other ‘core capitalist’ countries with highly developed material infrastructure and technical assets, as well as other countries whose economies have historically been subordinated to the capitalist core.

The scale of Europe, and the fact that it includes part of the capitalist core, means that following the overthrow of the capitalist class it would be less *immediately* vulnerable to war, blockade and financial ‘sanctions’ from the surviving capitalists than Russia was and third-world countries generally have been, or than any individual ‘advanced capitalist’ country would be (except perhaps the US, which as the biggest global exploiter of all is unlikely to lead the way in overthrowing capitalism). The high degree of capitalist integration through the EU, which effectively imposes its rules even on non-member states, makes it more transparently obvious than it is in other continents that workers need common action on a European scale. The historical strength and traditions of the European workers’ movement (although these have been gradually undermined by bureaucratic and nationalist leaderships over the last century), make workers’ power in Europe a serious project.

If we took power away from the capitalist class Europe-wide, what would that mean?

Under capitalism, social production is coordinated through money and credit. Human access to material goods and services is regulated through wealth in the form of money holdings. The financial crisis which has grown over into ‘austerity’ is a symptom of underlying disproportionalities in production, generated by the earlier boom, *given the fact that money regulates access to material goods and that the supply of money must be limited*. The crisis took the particular *form* it did because, in order to escape earlier crises in the 1980s-90s without a crash of the material economy, too much credit money was produced. This now fell to be devalourised: ie, if the money mechanism is to continue to function to coordinate social production, a lot of apparent money wealth has to disappear into thin air. People have to be made worse off, whether directly (savings evaporate, pension funds are worth less) or indirectly (reduced demand leads to factory closures and lay-offs; the state borrows a lot more money

and hence has to raise taxes and/or cut expenditure to pay *its* debts, etc).

The communist alternative is to take collective control of production and regulate production decisions and access to material goods by direct, democratic decision-making. The implication is unavoidably that people who are presently wealthy in money terms will become less wealthy: no-one gets more than a decent living and the right to participate in social decision-making. The capitalists and managerial and bureaucratic middle class also lose their *privileged access* to decision-making. This is true whether this privileged access is simply through control of private property, through ‘careers’ and forms of patronage, or through control of money in the form of corrupt donations to political parties, corrupt control of the media and advertising expenditure, or corrupt ‘free market’ payments to lawyers.

Democratic decision-making is fundamental. What we need is a superior alternative to the haphazard coordination achieved through the capitalist market system. As the Soviet Union and its satellites showed, bureaucratic-hierarchical decision-making is *not* a superior alternative. Workers’ power as an alternative to capitalism therefore necessarily *begins* with the struggle for radical democracy against the mechanisms of capitalist *political power* - the bureaucratic hierarchies of the nation-states and the capitalist corporations which imitate them, and, in the EU, the supranational bureaucratic hierarchy of the commission, court of justice and council of ministers, and the anti-democratic treaties.<sup>5</sup>

It also immediately means taking into public ownership under democratic control not merely shares in the banks, but the whole financial services sector. This relation between the financial sector and the state is one of the fundamental *political* mechanisms by which the capitalist class has control of the state.

*Without* radical democracy, public ownership is merely ownership by the bureaucratic-hierarchical state and the individual officials and managers: either a prop to capitalism or, if it replaces capitalism altogether, a regressive regime like Stalinism, destined to give way to capitalism. *With* radical democracy, the internal management - as well as the ultimate control of publicly owned economic institutions - has to be democratic: abolition of commercial ‘confidence’ and secrets, of state secrecy laws, of intellectual property rights, of the right of managers and leading committees to ‘confidentiality’ for the sake of ‘candour’ and so on, and the election and recallability of managers and their subjection to term limits.

## Economy

If we took power away from the capitalist class Europe-wide, how would we reorganise the economy? The first thing to be said is that the decisions about what to do would have to be *the decisions of the working class as a whole*, not some schema imposed by the enlightened communist cadres against the will of the majority. We cannot predict with certainty what the majority would decide. We can, however, have *proposals*.

What follows assumes that the working class taking power in Europe does not mean the immediate abolition of money or ‘war communism’, but the creation of a contradictory relationship of collective production and small to medium-scale market production, in which the working class as a class is politically dominant.

In a crisis or recession, material production is shut down, as capitalists and smaller savers ‘dash for cash’, attempting to preserve as much as possible of the disappearing money value of their assets. The starting point

of a communist alternative is that - on the contrary - *material* productive capacity has to be preserved until we collectively decide whether it is needed or should be scrapped. For example, the majority might well end up deciding that there are too many car factories and some of them should be closed down or converted to make something more useful.

The implication is that factories, etc, which are to be closed because they ‘cannot be run at a profit’ should neither be closed nor subsidised, but should instead be taken into public ownership or converted into workers’ cooperatives. The former owners should in principle only be compensated to the extent that failure to compensate them will leave pensioners or people with disabilities in hardship. (Non-pensioners who have been living on investment income can get jobs.) That said, the extent of compensation is at the end of the day a tactical question: at one end, it may be appropriate to expropriate without any compensation in order to punish attempts by individual capitalists to coerce the majority; at the other, in some cases generosity may be desirable for political reasons.

There is also no reason to retain private ownership in economic sectors which are either already monopolistic (mainly in infrastructure) or highly oligopolistic (the manufacture of cars, consumer durables, etc). The flow of profits to the private owners in these sectors is largely a rent charged on the rest of the economy.

The housing problem and its concomitant, property price bubbles in the US and elsewhere, was at the centre of the 2008-09 crisis and is a persisting ‘overhang’ affecting the current economy. The British government has leaned on the financial sector to postpone the inevitable wave of defaults and foreclosures, but in due course they will feed through.<sup>6</sup>

Public ownership of the financial sector, proposed above, automatically implies public ownership in the large majority of cases of the mortgagee’s interests in mortgaged property. This should be extended to *all* mortgages. Within this framework, it is possible in an orderly way to cut the capital and interest liabilities incurred at the height of the property bubble down to levels consistent with needs (ie, the replacement and repair costs of buildings, etc).

Engels argued back in 1872-73 that renting was more in the interests of the working class than freehold mortgage.<sup>7</sup> The enormous expansion of freehold mortgage since World War II has been the product of deliberate *state* policy aimed at creating the “property-owning democracy”: its outcome is the property bubble of recent years and the pain of growing numbers of foreclosures affecting US workers (and soon, probably, British workers).

But for the alternative - renting - to be attractive, we need to replace both private landlords and bureaucratic-hierarchical public landlords. As far as the private landlords are concerned, their interest, like that of other monopolists, needs to be replaced by public ownership. In relation to public landlords, what is needed is *democratically controlled* public ownership housing; and a housing system which also respects the genuine human need for individual and group self-expression in relation to housing: ie, does not rely on bureaucratic micromanagement.

This aim requires - as Marx says of a post-capitalist economy generally - “continuous relative overproduction”.<sup>8</sup>

That is, there is a need to plan for a permanent oversupply of a substantial range of housing types (and, consequently, for staffing to maintain vacant housing) in order to achieve flexibility. Hence, while money values in housing are falling, the common

interest of the working class requires the opposite judgment: that *more* resources should be put into housing.

I could go on at length to a range of other issues. Several are discussed under the heading ‘Immediate demands’ in the CPGB’s *Draft programme*.<sup>9</sup> But I think I have said enough to make the point. With common action of the workers’ movement to take power on a European scale, we could get rid of capitalist rule on this continent, on the road to getting rid of it worldwide. Getting rid of capitalist rule implies replacing it with radical, extreme democracy, through which Europe’s hundreds of millions can take common decisions about our common future. To do so opens the way to *fundamentally* different approaches to the questions posed by the economic crisis, like - in the examples given - banks, bankrupt companies and the house-price bubble and foreclosures.

I began this discussion of Europe with Alan McCombes, Tommy Sheridan and *Imagine*. It was appropriate because we are nearer to workers’ power in Europe - which is possible, but needs imagination to think about it - than we are to an ‘independent socialist Scotland’, which is a utopian delusion. I have not presented an elaborated ‘vision’ of a workers’ Europe, like *Imagine*’s vision of an ‘independent socialist Scotland’. That is partly a matter of space, but partly the difference between Marxism and utopian socialism: Marxism is about the *working class as a whole* taking the fundamental decisions, and that means - as I have said above - that the detailed shape of the future society is not predictable.

But we do still need to imagine the goal of a workers’ Europe on the road to the global overthrow of capitalism. If it is nearer to us than an ‘independent socialist Scotland’ or a ‘socialist Britain’ (or the Eurosceptic economist-Trotskyists’ ‘British workers’ state’), it is still some way away. The workers’ movement, from the trade union and Labourite tops to the economic far left, remains dominated by national horizons.

## Aim high

To aim for this goal is thus to aim high: at the opposite extreme from the absolutely minimal aim of *slowing down* the cuts represented by Ed Miliband and co. But to aim high will, in fact, make it more likely that we can win *partial* victories.

We can win concessions if we persuade the state elite and the capitalist class that there are worse alternatives than concessions. The British state defeated Chartism partly by repression, but also by concessions (for example, the Ten Hour Day Act 1847). It responded to the association of early trade unions with the First International in the 1860s, and forcible forms of strike action, with more concessions: the extension of the franchise to the top layer of skilled workers in 1867 and the legalisation of trade unions in 1871.

Across Europe in 1945, in France post-1968 and to some extent in Britain in the 1970s, the capitalist class was persuaded, by working class political action which amounted to less than overthrowing the government and less than overthrowing capitalism, that the actual overthrow of capitalism was in prospect. Because they were persuaded that this was in prospect, they were also persuaded that it was a better option to make big concessions in order to head it off.

At present the state elite and the capitalist class are not persuaded of anything of the sort. The phenomenon of generational replacement means that the people who lived through the 1930s and the 1940s are now out of politics and deep into retirement; and those who remember the rise of the shop stewards’ movement and

militant action from the 1960s-70s are also getting towards retirement age. The present ministers remember Thatcherism from their youth and celebrate it. At the moment they cannot imagine being confronted with really serious resistance.

It is possible, with sufficiently serious resistance and a political alternative (even a very imperfect political alternative, like the Left Party in Germany) that the capitalist class will back off from these cuts and make concessions, even if it is not *really* the case that we are about to take power. (After all, it was not really the case that the working class was about to take power in France in 1968 or in Britain in 1974.) We might scare them sufficiently to force concessions.

But in order to do that we need political action on a European scale. The reason is that, as long as the austerity consensus holds across Europe, any individual country which makes concessions to the working class will face a flight of capital. Action on a European scale could break the consensus. This idea is not at all unrealistic: we have already seen widespread mass action in *individual countries* across Europe. The obstacle is the nationalist character of the social democratic and ‘official communist’ leaderships.

But we also need people to be positively arguing for the overthrow of capitalism. Why the capitalist class perceived the overthrow of capitalism to be on the agenda in 1945 is obvious: Soviet troops reached the Elbe. The reason they perceived it to be on the agenda in the 1970s was also due to *international* considerations - if the USSR was militarily very much weaker than the US, the latter had not attained the capability it sought of a first-strike without effective Soviet response; the US was being defeated in Vietnam, the UK had been defeated in Yemen, and the insurgencies in Mozambique and Angola brought down the Portuguese regime. The mass actions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, though nationally limited, were global in range. And they took place in the context of there being large-scale ‘official communist’ parties, large Maoist splinters to their left and substantial Trotskyist organisations, all arguing at least formally for the overthrow of capitalism.

For all these reasons we should aim high - even if we have a long way to go before a European alternative is possible. Yes, we should fight every cut, every attack on wages, working conditions and pensions, every privatisation and so on. But to get real concessions the state elite and the capitalist class need to be put in fear. And to put them in fear means aiming much higher than a breakdown of the coalition and a Miliband government. It means aiming for working class rule Europe-wide ●

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## Notes

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3. Figures from www.uktradeinfo.com/index.cfm?task=eubackcast.
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**CAPITALISM**

# Not our solution to their crisis

The economic crisis is far from over. But does Keynesianism offer a way out? No, argues **Jack Conrad**. Keynesianism is thoroughly elitist, anti-working class and pro-capitalist



**Economic depression puts the system in danger**

**S**urprisingly for many observers, myself included, most governments in the advanced capitalist countries have responded to the ongoing economic crisis by adopting swingeing programmes of austerity. Given the grim lessons of the 1930s and how slump led to chronic unemployment, social dislocation, Nazism, World War II and threatened the existence of capitalism itself, one might have expected the ruling class, especially its more

enlightened sections, to have engineered a return to the policies associated with John Milton Keynes (1883-1946).

Keynesianism was the dominant economic theory of capitalism from the 1940s till the mid-1970s. Keynes's most important book, *The general theory of employment, interest and money*, appeared in 1936: that is, during the tail end of the great depression. Soon afterwards he was credited with ushering in a

"revolution" in economic thought. Keynes and his growing band of co-thinkers defined themselves as against so-called "classical economics": eg, Say's law, the comforting notion that markets are self-adjusting and supply creates its own demand.

*Laissez-faire* doctrines served capitalism well in its 19th century heyday, but were subsequently torn to shreds by events. World War I necessitated massive state intervention. Government dictats were substituted for market-determined allocation, and not only in war industries. Each belligerent country ran up enormous debts in order to sustain their killing machines. Certainly the 1930s widely discredited Say's law. The complacent assumption that unemployment could only be "voluntary" or "frictional" lost all credibility. Keynes readily acknowledged the existence of "involuntary" unemployment.<sup>1</sup>

While mainstream opinion in Britain, including big business and the treasury, initially derided Keynesianism as the "raving of wild and irresponsible extremists",<sup>2</sup> a rather strange mix of political forces found "scientific" vindication. Eg, both fascists in Nazi Germany and Fabian socialists in Britain enthusiastically embraced Keynesianism because it purported to offer a cure for all the failings of capitalism, while leaving wage-slavery intact.

Albeit not explicitly, 'official communism' bought into Keynesianism in the 1970s. In collaboration with left Labourite allies the old CPGB conceived, developed and gave birth to the Alternative Economic Strategy. The AES was a classic example of nationalist reformism, which, given the needs of the times, had on occasion to be dressed up as a "revolutionary strategy".

Eg, the Eurocommunist, Sam Aaronovitch (1919-98), excused the AES because he claimed it was designed to "advance towards fundamental change in the class and property relationships in society".<sup>3</sup> In fact what the AES proposed was the election of a reformist left government committed to democratising industrial relations, widespread nationalisation and a large-scale investment programme. Such measures, its advocates promised, would "regenerate Britain".

The AES would necessitate, of course, imposing draconian protectionist measures, such as import controls, and "leaving" what was then the European Economic Community. In other words the AES was a reformist utopia, which if put into practice could only but end in disaster: ie, isolation, economic collapse, population exodus and social regression.

## Alex Callinicos

Showing to what degree the far left has lost its bearings and has moved to the right, we now hear similar left Keynesian proposals routinely spouted by organisations as diverse as the Labour Representation Committee, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Respect, Scottish Socialist Party and

the Socialist Workers Party. As with the Eurocommunists, their collapse into left reformism has to be dressed up as Marxism or at least what passes for Marxism - especially when it comes to internal consumption.

Hence we have Alex Callinicos, abusing his considerable talents, providing an 'orthodox' cover for the Irish SWP (amongst others). Its People Before Profit Alliance electoral front proudly issued an "Alternative Economic Agenda" in April 2009.<sup>4</sup> While many of its demands are eminently supportable, democracy, state power and the aim of socialism are noticeably absent.

Without doubt the AEA considerably overlaps with the old AES. Callinicos is honest enough to admit that much. However, those who want to "dismiss" it on such grounds "ignore the radically different context from that of the 1970s". The comrade cites "deregulation" and the "devastating economic slump". Recognising the banality of that non-argument, Callinicos latches on to the claims of his youth: the old AES was "a reformist attempt to rescue capitalism". True, not that the 'official communists' ever openly admitted any such thing.

## Renegade

The last resort of the renegade is to invoke "transitional demands", as "understood by the early Communist International and by Trotsky". Then, almost by magic, "everything changes": and that, of course, is exactly what Callinicos maintains.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Keynesianism remains Keynesianism, whether advocated by Nazis, Fabians or fake Marxists.

Surely letting the cat out of the bag, Callinicos's Irish comrades write that they wish to "prevent the bulk of the pain of the economic crisis falling onto the shoulders of the working class". Moreover, their AEA enviously looks to the "stimulus packages" in "the US and some EU countries", which are designed to "revive their economy".<sup>6</sup> Ireland, they argue, should follow suit.

Needless to say, Keynes was no socialist. A vulgar materialist, he displayed an uninhibited optimism about technology, capital accumulation and expert knowledge. With the right men at the helm, all problems could be solved *within* capitalism. In that elitist spirit he scorned the writings of Karl Marx. Eg, *Capital* was dismissed as an "obsolete economic textbook". The "decent, educated, intelligent son of western Europe" will reject it out of hand unless "he has first suffered some strange and horrid process of conversion which has changed his values".<sup>7</sup>

Nor was Keynes a friend of the proletariat. When it came to the "class struggle", he was perfectly candid. He knew which side he was on. He came from and fully identified with what he described as the "educated bourgeoisie".<sup>8</sup>

So how did Keynes propose to tackle capitalism's periodic crises? Crudely put, to save the system, governments ought to greatly extend state powers and spend money they do not have (eg, through issuing bonds and

other forms of borrowing). Namely, fiscal and monetary stimulants - eg, arms spending - which soak up unemployment and boost aggregate demand. According to Keynes, that approach would produce a "multiplier effect" (a ratio between investment and total employment generated, first introduced into bourgeois economics by Richard F Kuhn in 1931).<sup>9</sup>

With higher levels of employment "effective demand" expands and revives profits. Extra taxes skimmed off by governments would in turn pay off debts. Seemingly a virtuous circle, which if dutifully followed supposedly eliminates, or at least substantially ameliorates, the negative effects of capitalism's periodic economic downturns.

As an unintended consequence, however, such measures devalue money and reduce the system's ability to discipline the working class through unemployment and what Marx called "commodity fetishism": ie, the supposed naturalism of the law of value. Hence, on balance, we can say that Keynesianism is a means whereby capitalism manages its own secular decline through increasing the role of organisation as against the role of the market. Markets, including the market in labour-power, are retained, but are thoroughly bureaucratised.

Under such circumstances, internal contradictions must mount up. Eg, economics is politicised and objectively the power of the working class grows at the expense of capital. Hence from top to bottom the system visibly malfunctions ... and that is exactly what happened from the late 1960s onwards. Inevitably the ruling class, crucially in the Anglo-Saxon world, broke with Keynesianism, callously encouraged unemployment to grow, downgraded productive capital and sought salvation in financialisation.

## Bailout

Of course, in 2008 and 2009 the financial system was bailed out in true Keynesian fashion. George W Bush twinned himself with Gordon Brown. Britain alone poured in over £500 billion of government money to prevent a meltdown. Banks and insurance companies were nationalised or part-nationalised one after the other (eg, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds TSB and in America Goldman Sachs and Citigroup). Chrysler and General Motors were also rescued from bankruptcy through the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program or Tarp).

The mainstream media, not least the conservative right, were full of laughable accusations that Bush had gone over to "socialism". Thoroughly enjoying the humiliating ideological U-turn, Hugo Chávez ironically called him "comrade". The Venezuelan president mockingly announced that "Bush is to the left of me now".<sup>10</sup>

However, there was a grain of truth in the media accusations. Across the world, but especially in North America and Europe, the huge losses suffered in 2008-09, at least for those concerns deemed 'too big to fail',

were socialised. The sums involved head into the trillions of dollars. Hence the subprime, banking and insurance crisis metamorphosed into the sovereign debt crisis.

Though borrowing, as a proportion of GDP, is perfectly manageable, at least for the core capitalist countries, and, far from being unprecedented historically - eg, the 1940s and 50s saw comparable debt levels - a suffocating consensus has emerged. There is no alternative. Debts must be reduced as soon as possible through deep cuts in government spending programmes. So it is back to the future.

As shown by Osborne's much trailed budget speech on March 23, there is to be no change of course. Benefits, higher education, local government, etc are all to be butchered. Simultaneously, taxation levels, retirement ages and pension contributions are being ratcheted up. The crumbs he threw to home buyers and car drivers might delight the *Daily Mail*, but his main aim remains cutting government borrowing: he hopes to oversee a drastic reduction from this year's projected £146 billion to £122 billion next year, then £101 billion in 2012-13, £70 billion in 2013-14, £46 billion in 2014-15 and £29 billion in 2015-16. Towards that end Osborne - the "poster boy of fiscal hawks around the world" - is committed to £81 billion of cuts.<sup>11</sup>

There has been nothing comparable to Osborne's age of austerity since the 'Geddes axe' of the early 1920s. The coalition government of prime minister David Lloyd George was determined to drive down the debt inherited from World War I. Eric Geddes and his committee duly obliged by recommending cuts totalling £87 million - about 10% of the country's entire GDP at the time. That translated into a 35% reduction in the number of civil servants and the abolition of entire government departments, including "labour, mines and transport".<sup>12</sup>

Revealingly Osborne's Con-Lib Dem programme is welcomed by the CBI, IMF, Bank of England, etc.

Not that Labour is much different. While Ed Miliband made much of the pain and how the programme is not working, he too is committed to austerity. Labour cuts were slightly slower and slightly less deep. But pain, it is agreed, cannot be avoided.

This austerity consensus now includes France - which for a while appeared determined to resist German demands for savage cuts throughout the euro zone. Last year Christine Lagarde, France's finance minister, gave the go-ahead for a deficit reduction plan "worth €40 billion".<sup>13</sup> A package that will see the loss of 97,000 civil service jobs. And, of course, Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, is insisting that Ireland, Greece and Portugal - "peripheral" members of the euro zone - impose even harsher austerity measures.<sup>14</sup>

## Obama

Even Barack Obama's administration in the United States is busily watering down the soft Keynesianism admired by the Irish SWP. This month Obama offered the Republicans stop-gap cuts of \$6 billion in exchange for a congressional vote to keep the federal government working until April 8. However, the Republicans - now commanding a congressional majority - clamour for cuts worth \$61 billion. Supposedly a first step in tackling the "runaway" \$1.1 trillion federal deficit. Paradoxically, this goes hand in hand with Republican calls, especially from its Tea Party wing, for yet further tax breaks for big business and the mega-rich.

The claim is that such a policy will stimulate economic growth to benefit the entire population: the so-called 'trickle-down effect'. Such 'voodoo economics' are particularly associated with the class-war presidency of Ronald Reagan and his budget adviser, David Stockman.

Needless to say, the theory has been comprehensively disproven, not least because the result, when put into practice in the 1980s, was far from being to the common good. True, the rich got richer. Much richer.

Meanwhile, however, the living standards of the rest, the great majority, either remained static or actually shrank.

The austerity consensus, plus the Arab reawakening, plus oil price hikes, plus the Japanese earthquake, plus general global instability can only but press down on aggregate demand ... and increase discontent. Indeed Derek Barnett, president of the Police Superintendents' Association, recently warned that the Con-Lib Dem austerity measures are likely to lead to rising "disaffection, social and industrial tensions".<sup>15</sup>

Under the coalition government an estimated 226,000 public sector jobs are set to go, according to the GMB union. Official unemployment is expected to "hit 2.65 million towards the end of 2012".<sup>16</sup> The real figure is reckoned to be much higher. At least 5.5 million.<sup>17</sup>

How to explain the austerity consensus? I think there are two main factors at play.

● The financial crisis of 2008-09 was, of course, bad news for the entire capitalist class. It was not only a blow to profits. Neoliberalism was reduced to a busted flush. As an ideology it no longer works. However, the crisis, especially the debt crisis, was greeted in certain quarters as a golden opportunity to further roll back the post-World War II social settlement. Once the madcap dream was of restoring a pristine capitalism. Nevertheless, working class living standards - the share labour takes from the social product - can be driven down. Not only wages paid by employers, but the social wage too. Necessarily that means yet more attacks on trade unions and new authoritarian restrictions. Anyhow, the rate of exploitation is to be intensified under the patriotic rubric of balancing the nation's books.

● The capitalist class is increasingly irrational. Its leading sections are acting in a way that not only hurts the majority of the population, but runs counter to their own interests. What the noted *Financial Times* columnist, Martin Wolf, colourfully called the "risk" of the "mother of all meltdowns" has not gone away. Determined to exploit the debt crisis, the bourgeoisie appears not to see the dangers. Not only might the cuts trigger a double-dip recession, but there is also the likelihood of a social explosion. Greece, Spain and France have already seen protest general strikes. Surely only a hint of things to come. The bourgeoisie has abandoned its old Keynesian methods of managing capitalism's decline in a relatively civilised manner. As a class it remembers the 1940s-70s and is agreed - never again. However, the austerity consensus objectively puts revolution and the necessity of socialism back on to the agenda. Do the bourgeoisie really want to be hung up on lampposts? ●

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## Fighting fund

# All get together

Many of those attending this weekend's demonstration will be witnessing for the first time what must seem to them like a bewildering array of left groups pushing very similar politics. Many will ask the obvious question: 'Why don't you lot all get together?'

Perhaps some of them will be surprised to learn that we in the CPGB - not least through our paper, the *Weekly Worker* - argue exactly that, week in, week out. Of course, we realise that it is not quite so simple. Unity must be on the basis of Marxist principle, not some lowest common denominator. But we, virtually alone on the left, consistently point out that our fragmentation is counterproductive and foolish. As Ben Lewis shows elsewhere in this paper, we not only argue against the current divisions, but identify their origins and the reasons for their perpetuation. In order to overcome them we need openness and democracy - not just as a temporary expedient, but as a permanent feature of our culture.

It is precisely because we continue to push that message that our paper has won both a substantial readership and an expanding pool of support. We rely on our readers and supporters

to provide us with the financial wherewithal to continue publishing and improving the quality of our paper. Each month they help us try to reach our £1,250 fighting fund target - and usually we do.

Last week, for example, we received £438 - £355 of which came in the form of regular standing orders. Thanks to SK, MM, DO, AP, RP, FP and GD. Then there was the £73 received via our website's PayPal facility - thank you, DY, JME and the mysterious "Unwelcome Guests Collection" (?). Mind you, three donations out of a total of 11,804 readers is not a high proportion. Finally comrade RB added £10 to his subscription cheque.

Well, now you know what we stand for, if you agree with our key aim, you too can help support us. Hand in a donation at one of our stalls or to a *Weekly Worker* seller. Our monthly total stands at £974 and we have just a week to make our target. With your help we can go way beyond ●

**Robbie Rix**

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## OUR HISTORY

# Accountable to the party

**A**fter an overwhelming 186-19 vote in support of the principle of parliamentary action, the delegates to the first congress of the CPGB, the Communist Unity Convention, reconvened to consider amendments.<sup>1</sup> The first two were trivial and were voted down. The third provoked a debate around the key question of balance in the new organisation between centralism and local initiative and was of more interest, even though there was confusion on both sides of the argument.

In many ways, this and other discussions underlined that in 1920 these comrades had yet to fully internalise the lessons Bolshevism could teach (or, indeed, even be aware that these problems had been successfully addressed by the Russian comrades at all - much of the literature was still unavailable in English). For example, here is Lenin on the ticklish question of autonomy, in a polemic against the Bund: "The party as a whole, its central institutions, lay down the common fundamental principles of programme and tactics; as to the different methods of carrying out these principles in practice and agitating for them, they are laid down by the various party organisations subordinate to the centre."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that amongst the delegates were advocates of a form of federalism illustrates that many still operated more at the level of rank-and-file industrial militants - determined to guard local independence against a stifling central bureaucracy - rather than conscious, communist politicians.

**J Hamilton** (Liverpool Communist Group) said he considered altering the words, "representatives of the party elected to parliament" [who were to be accountable to the party], to "members of the party contesting or elected to parliament" would help prevent careerism; and the introduction of the word "contesting" was important, because it made it explicit that the rule applied both before and after election. They had another amendment, to delete the words, "according to national or local circumstances"; because they considered this phrase would give an opportunity to evade the candidate's being tied down by the resolution so far as tactics were concerned.

**W Mellor** opposed the amendment, and drew attention to what he considered a danger in the resolution as it stood. What was meant, he asked, by the phrase, "laid down by the party"? Did this refer to the party in delegate conference or to the executive? It seemed to him that the clause as drafted would

lead to centralisation of the worst possible type, endangering local initiative and setting up a bureaucracy which future conferences would be always criticising.

The convention did not accept the idea that local circumstances did not count, or alternatively, that the people at head office understood all local circumstances. From the head office manifestos, leaflets, speakers, etc could go out for ever; but unless there was a response inside the localities all such efforts would be in vain. Neither the amendment nor the resolution as it stood safeguarded local life, local initiative, local control, and he asked the delegates to consider seriously whether the last two sentences of the resolution expressed what the convention wanted.

He thought the amendment should be rejected because of the deletion of the words "according to local or national circumstances"; but there was a more vital question before them than that. They were faced with the whole question of the relationship of the local groups of the Communist Party to the executive, and the resolution was giving the executive an awful amount of authority. He did not think it wise for the Communist Party at its birth to begin by bureaucratising its administration.

**A MacManus**, the chair, said that they were only deciding the tactical policy of the Communist Party for a few months. When the convention was finished, the first obvious duty of the executive would be to issue a call for resolutions that would be embodied in a draft constitution. That skeleton would be sent out to every member of the party in order to ascertain every point of view as to what the constitution of the party should be, and a later draft would be prepared for further examination and criticism.

**AA Watts** said he did not think the party could lay down to the local branches throughout the country all items of policy for their local conduct. The resolution meant that the comrade elected to a particular body would represent the party as against the electors, and that if he went from the policy of the party he should no longer be regarded as one of its members. Mellor had read into the resolution an entirely different meaning. A national party could not lay down all the things that were to guide the party throughout the country. The party locally must decide on local affairs, and nationally on national affairs, but its members would sit on public bodies as representing the party, not their constituents.

**J Grierson** (BSP Openshaw) supported the amendment. They could not have one thing in Essex and another in Northumberland, but must have a Communist Party with rigid discipline. In the British Socialist Party we had seen some branches supporting Labour candidates, while others opposed them, and on one occasion Hyndman<sup>3</sup> had come down to Openshaw and supported a Labour candidate in preference to a BSP candidate run by the

local branch. Such things would happen again if we were not careful.

**H Webb** said local autonomy would lead to confusion. In the north they would have half a dozen towns in close proximity to each other, but all pursuing different policies.

**Mrs Kennedy** (BSP Erith) said that if local autonomy was not allowed, more damage might be done to the Communist Party than otherwise.

**Miss E Wilkinson**<sup>4</sup> (Manchester Guild Communist Group<sup>5</sup>) said if we were going in for a revolutionary party we must have a general staff and be willing to obey it. After the revolution we could have local decentralisation. The present discussion was important, because if the convention was laying down the lines on which the Communist Party was to be formed, and if it was got into the heads of the people who were to draft the constitution that they were to go on the same old lines, we could not have a revolutionary party, much less a revolution. A revolution meant discipline and obedience.

**JE Thomas** (Aberdare Communist Unity Group) said, on this point of rigid discipline, he would like to know how far the conference could tie the hands of a member of a trade union who was also a member of this party if he was run as a candidate.

**FW Llewellyn** (BSP, Plymouth) said he supported the amendment. He had been asked only last week to run as a Labour candidate for one of the wards in Plymouth, and had replied that he would only stand as a communist candidate. Members of a trade union who were also members of the Communist Party must stand by their communist principles. There was too much local autonomy now. Elections were fought on local questions, but we wanted to have them fought on the principles of the party, and our candidates must run on a common platform.

**CL Gibbons** (Ferndale Socialist Society) said that number one resolution had been carried unanimously, and the convention had thereby agreed to the soviet or workers' council system. A part of that system was the right of local recall - not party recall.<sup>6</sup> It was going too far in paternal government for the party to undertake to keep the representatives in order. If the man was not elected in a communist constituency there was no point in the party controlling him, because he would not get in unless he compromised.

**T Bell** said there was no contradiction in advocating the workers' councils idea and determining the tactics that would be adopted once our representative was returned to the House of Commons. The soviet idea was our alternative to parliamentary institutions when we had achieved our revolution. We participated in local and parliamentary elections for agitational purposes.

Different localities varied from each other; in parliamentary constituencies situations were continually arising that called for particular tactics to be adopted, always with a view to fomenting our

revolutionary agitation. In the past members of parliament had divorced themselves from the party that had sent them there. We wanted to ensure that our representatives on local and national bodies should keep in close contact with the Communist Party executive, and that the executive should have regard to the general situation, whether industrial or political, and should collaborate with those representatives upon the tactics that were to be adopted in order to achieve the best values as far as revolutionary agitation was concerned.

It seemed to him that the movers of the amendment had no case whatever. The Joint Committee would not quarrel about the words "members" and "representatives". Where the resolution spoke of the "party" it meant the national executive, as appointed by the party in conference; provision would be made in the constitution to see that that executive was elected in a properly constituted and democratic manner.

**W Mellor** asked if there would be the same measure of control over local as over national representatives.

**T Bell** replied that all the localities did not have the same degree of civic and social development as each other. There were variations of development in municipalities and so forth, and these would very largely determine the policy and tactics that would be most efficient for our propaganda purposes. That was what the Joint Committee had in mind when they used the phrase, "according to local circumstances".

**W Saltmarsh** (Cardiff Communist Unity Group) said it seemed to him wrong that the majority of the members took parliamentary and political action seriously. If they were to abide by what they had already decided they were going to treat it as a joke. He recognised that the greatest part of the value of the work would be the educational side of the constituency. If by chance a candidate was returned and took his seat, he would be sitting on rotten eggs and nothing would come of it.

**The amendment was lost by 56 to 122.**

**J Fitton** then moved to add to the resolution the words: "In the event of any representative violating the decisions of the party as embodied in the mandate which he or she has accepted or been instructed upon, he or she shall be called upon to resign his or her membership of parliament or municipality and also of the party." He said those who talked about party discipline ought to support the amendment.

**The amendment was then voted upon and carried, 84 being in favour and 54 against. The resolution was adopted as follows:**

"The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy, but regards parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a means of

propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by representatives of the party elected to parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the party itself according to the national or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit. In the event of any representative violating the decisions of the party as embodied in the mandate which he or she has accepted or been instructed upon, he or she shall be called upon to resign his or her membership of parliament or municipality and also of the party" ●

## Notes

1. See *Weekly Worker* March 17.
2. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 7, Moscow 1977, p95.
3. Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921) founded Britain's first socialist party, the Social Democratic Federation, in 1881. Although Eleanor Marx was a member, Engels was distinctly lukewarm and regarded Hyndman's pretensions to 'Marxism' with considerable suspicion. Hyndman - a rich man, who generously funded the SDF - treated the organisation as a piece of personal property. Thus, while the SDF propagandised widely for socialist ideas and scored some respectable results in council and parliamentary elections, its politics tended to reflect the unhealthy programmatic appetites of its 'proprietor', Hyndman - most noxiously, an incipient jingoism. In 1900 Hyndman led the SDF into the Labour Representation Committee, the body tasked with setting up the Labour Party. But the SDF withdrew (a tactical blunder) when the LRC refused to accept socialism as an objective. Later, he successfully expanded the SDF by winning over a layer from the left of the Independent Labour Party. This resulted in the formation of the British Socialist Party in 1911. Hyndman's jingoism reached its logical conclusion in 1914, when he backed Britain's imperialist 'war effort'. The internationalists in the BSP rebelled, issued their own factional paper, *The Call*, and sought to defeat Hyndman and the social-imperialists. At the Easter 1916 conference of the BSP the internationalists won a majority. *The Call* became the official BSP paper and the organisation went on to play the leading role in the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. Hyndman slipped off into political obscurity via the ominously named National Socialist Party and spent much of the rest of his political career fulminating against the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks.
4. Ellen Cicely Wilkinson (1891-1947) left the CPGB in 1924 and went on to be a Labour MP for Middlesbrough and later Jarrow. She was a prominent supporter and publicist for the small and ineffectual Jarrow march against unemployment of 1936, which was designed as a cynical charity-mongering alternative to the militant work of the genuinely mass, communist-led National Unemployed Workers Movement (see Mark Fischer's 'Lessons of the NUWM and UWC' *Weekly Worker* January 28 2010).
5. The Guild Communists were a faction of the National Guilds League. Guild socialism was a political movement advocating workers' control of industry through the medium of trade-related guilds (an association of 'craftsmen' in a particular trade). Robin Page Arnot and Ellen Wilkinson were associated with the group.
6. This is an ongoing debate amongst communists, as regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will be aware. See our brief report of the party's programme conference in *Weekly Worker* January 27 this year, for example.

## THE LEFT

# Beyond disunity

In seeking to prop up their crisis-ridden system, the capitalist class is united around cuts, cuts and more cuts. If we are to fight back and win, our class must also unite, argues Ben Lewis

**M**any people attending the March 26 demonstration against the savage attacks of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government will encounter the world of the revolutionary left for the first time. They will come across hard-working, selfless activists armed with newspapers, petitions and leaflets. Many of these activists will have been organising against this rotten system long before Nick Clegg was (briefly) popular and even before David Cameron was a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed Etonian.

Demonstrators with the most energy (and the biggest coat pockets to hold it all) will hopefully collect and read much of the literature on offer from the far left and immerse themselves in its competing ideas, trends and strategies. Yet the existence of this swathe of rival groups underlines a major problem for the anti-cuts movement. Whereas the ruling class and its hangers-on in the Tory Party, the Lib Dems and the leadership of the Labour Party are all agreed on the need for cuts and closures, the forces seeking an alternative which upholds the interests of the working class, women, students, the elderly and so on suffer from debilitating divisions. Our dedication and commitment is beyond question, but we are still a long way from becoming a force that could politically challenge today's capitalist cuts consensus.

Indeed, on the front line of the struggle against cuts this division is painfully obvious. There are four anti-cuts campaigns: Right to Work (set up and run by the Socialist Workers Party), the Coalition of Resistance (Counterfire), People's Charter (*Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain) and the National Shop Stewards Network Anti-Cuts Campaign (Socialist Party in England and Wales).

## Rebuild the movement

It goes without saying that these different formations should unite as a matter of urgency. Their politics and perspectives are virtually identical, and it is a criminal waste of time and resources for them to continue duplicating each other. They replicate the same work, split up our forces and keep activists apart from one another.

The far left is unfortunately unable to see beyond the interests and influence of its little groups. Many present themselves as *the* embryonic mass working class party of the future that simply needs recruits to fulfil its destiny - even if this means putting forward inadequate, reformist demands in the here and now.

Yet defeating the cuts offensive will not simply require more demonstrations and mobilisations. It will actually mean reviving and rebuilding the workers' movement as an independent force: strengthening trade unions at the base, getting working class MPs elected, establishing cooperatives, setting up workers' education societies, welfare associations, workers' pubs, sporting associations and so on. In short, the workers' movement must begin to articulate another vision: not just against the cuts, but for an alternative society. Most of all, our class urgently needs a *party*.

We in the CPGB do not pretend to be that party. We have a project that is much more realistic - and ambitious. Whilst we have the name 'Communist Party' we are clear that such a party - uniting all the revolutionaries, all the anti-capitalists, all the militants, and sinking deep roots in the working class - does not exist. The name reflects our aspiration to fight for that party, uniting the different strands and factions of the left and based on the politics of Marxism - the theory which alone can explain not only why our rulers



Together

are launching such a forceful attack on the gains of our class, but how we can win a world in which there is no basis for either cuts or rulers - communism.

Indeed, whereas the anti-cuts campaigns, despite their far-left leadership, restrict themselves to demands such as taxing the rich and closing tax loopholes, we communists have a vision *beyond* capitalism - to a society where profit, accumulation for accumulation's sake, ecological destruction and war are consigned to the dustbin of history. Instead of sowing illusions in warmed-over Keynesianism, the left can and must stand openly for these perspectives. Indeed, if we fail to do so then the danger is that the only 'alternative' people can turn to is Ed Miliband and 'nice cuts' - ie, no alternative at all.

## Parties and sects

A Communist Party is the voluntary organisation of the politically advanced part of the working class. This advanced part is certain to contain a wide range of views about theory and tactics, and in any sort of healthy party these will be openly debated and tested in practice. If the working class is to liberate itself and the whole of humanity from the fetters of capitalism, then this party must rally millions to its banner and programme - the working class majority, conscious of its goals and aims.

Whilst there are many so-called 'parties' touting their different wares on demonstrations and marches, what we unfortunately see around us today are in reality different competing *sects* with varying degrees of influence and following, *sects* organised around rigid belief systems. Deviation from these systems of thought may lead to disciplinary action or even expulsion.

For us, however, unity must be achieved on the basis of *acceptance* of a political programme, not ideological or philosophical shibboleths. We locate three core principles of Marxism, around which this unity can be achieved: democracy (in relation to both our own organisations and the state); working class independence (no strategic alliances with bourgeois parties); and proletarian internationalism (in opposition to all sectional and national deviations). Questions of philosophy, history and theory are extremely interesting; studying them is absolutely essential if the working class is to develop a rounded, sophisticated world outlook. But it is madness to suggest that unity today presupposes the 'correct'

understanding of the Soviet Union or Hegelian dialectics.

But many on the far left opt for such an approach of narrow ideological *agreement*, as opposed to programmatic unity - many do not even *have* a programme! What they seek to do is preserve their demarcation from other competing groups and then - or so the plan goes - eventually the masses will have it so bad that they will desperately throw in their lot with one of them: a thoroughly utopian, not to say sectarian and elitist, perspective.

This partly explains why many groups are disdainful of, and even completely hostile to, democracy and the public airing of differing views. The preservation of their separate existence must take priority over clarity of ideas or serious rapprochement with other forces. Disagreements within your group - where they are permitted, that is - must be kept private and are not for the eyes of the working class. Often this means that even group members do not really know what is happening within their own organisation.

Yet the manner in which we organise now is inseparable from the sort of society we aim to achieve. If we wish to see democracy and human freedom flourish and the chaos of the market replaced by the law of conscious, controlled planning from below, then a democratic internal culture is required *now* so that the working class can grow, develop its consciousness, win the battle of democracy and make itself fit to rule society.

Genuine communists are the most consistent champions of democracy - something which must also hold true in our own ranks. But the extremely undemocratic nature of the far left can only increase and perpetuate disunity and fragmentation: if a comrade or group of comrades have grievances with the party leadership and no avenues through which to express them, then they appear to have no choice but to split away.

In placing such emphasis on democracy, we base ourselves squarely on the best traditions of the most formidable Marxist parties. There were often fierce and public factional exchanges in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party - between the Mensheviks such as Julius Martov, Georgi Plekhanov and Pavel Axelrod and Lenin's Bolsheviks; and among the Bolsheviks themselves. But the open airing of differences within a single organisation helped build and rebuild revolutionary unity.

Overcoming sect amateurism today requires a big political struggle, a patient fight *through* the existing left. Whilst some of our more bone-headed opponents on the left dismiss our partyist approach as "sectarianism", it is imperative if we are to become a united force to win the hearts and minds of the majority of the population. We need a revolutionary party in which different trends can organise and thrash out a common perspective.

We on the Marxist left must cease regarding Marxism as some sort of secret credo, to be debated at our own schools or in theoretical journals. We must cease organising around politics we know to be insufficient in the forlorn hope of using them as some sort of 'sign post' towards Marxism. These are not 'sign posts', but manifestations of the politics of other classes - ie, Labourism and reformism. That is why we argue for, stand on and agitate around the politics of Marxism as the only way to unite our movement and form the working class into a political class.

This is the theoretical struggle to which the *Weekly Worker* is dedicated ●

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## 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

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# weekly Worker

**Capital cannot  
be trusted with  
nuclear energy**

## No more Fukushima

**W**hen they were not on Libya this week, the world's eyes have been on Japan, following its most severe earthquake on record and the resultant tsunami. However, the focus soon shifted from the thousands who died to the effect the earthquake and tsunami had on the various nuclear power facilities close enough to the epicentre to suffer damage. In particular, of course, the Fukushima No1 nuclear plant on the Pacific coast, which was severely hit.

Inevitably, these events have reopened the thorny question of exactly how advisable it is to build and maintain nuclear power plants. The massive post-war expansion of the industry ground slowly to a halt after the 1979 near-disaster at Three Mile Island in the United States, and the full-blown catastrophe at Chernobyl in 1986. Recently, however, the tide has begun to turn. The nuclear energy lobby has found new life with the increasing prominence of anthropogenic climate change on the political agenda; Barack Obama announced the construction of several new plants last year, to little controversy.

The last thing the nuclear money-men need is another disaster to take the safety-conscious sheen off their product. Yet here it is - the Fukushima plant suffered several explosions, propelling radioactive steam into the air. A large exclusion zone is in place, and the reactor itself is in such a mess that simply restoring power to the site took the best part of a week. The plant itself is a total write-off, and can look forward only to a great sarcophagus on the model of Chernobyl.

Of course, Chernobyl this ain't - in that case, an apparently routine test of a new safety measure resulted in a great fire at the reactor cores, which sent enormous amounts of radioactive material pluming into the atmosphere and the tender mercies of the weather - some of it reaching Wales. Alarming as it is, the Fukushima accident is not a threat to life and limb on that scale.

Yet it is an unflattering insight into the priorities of the nuclear industry. Japan sits on the 'Pacific ring of fire', which accounts for the vast majority of seismic and volcanic activity in the world - 90% of the world's earthquakes take place somewhere on the Pacific rim. In those circumstances, is it really wise to construct a nuclear reactor on the meeting point of three tectonic plates - and, even better, right on the coast to make easy pickings for a tsunami? It was the 10-metre wave, it should be noted, that caused the problems by flooding the plant.

Fukushima No1 was shielded against tsunamis up to five metres high - but, given the geological nature of the region, this was always a hostage to fortune. That such a powerful earthquake should strike just off the coast of Japan is horrific, to be sure - but it is no great surprise.

That painfully inadequate attitude to possible natural disasters sums up the safety record as a whole. Less than two weeks before the earthquake, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which owns the plant, formally admitted to over two decades of systematically misreporting safety



Testing for radioactive contamination

records to government inspectors. This marked the conclusion of a scandal that had first erupted in 2002, and resulted in many of its plants (including Fukushima No1) going offline for three years ... or, it would have marked the conclusion, had not its oldest site found itself victim to mother nature's caprice.

Fukushima No1, indeed, is an old plant. Nuclear power has gone through numerous technological advances since its construction. This simply begs the question - why are all these ancient reactors still in operation? The issue here is a fundamental one

- under capitalism, it is the exigencies of profit that determine what gets built, and for what purpose. Nuclear power is rolled out - even where it is manifestly ill-advised to do so - because there is big money to be made.

For the same reason, safety records are falsified. Mighty public relations apparatuses function wholly to dispel popular concerns over the potential environmental and human costs of these power plants, regardless of how close to reality these concerns are. Inconvenient matters such as the problem of nuclear waste disposal, or

the decommissioning of old plants, are quietly brushed under the carpet. Everything is fine, we are told - until something like this happens.

It was once the fashion, both in the west and in the old Soviet Union, to imagine that technological development was apt to drag humanity into a glorious future, massively reducing the demands of work on people's daily lives and ushering in the 'leisure society'. There were perhaps more people who feared for the consequences of the death of honest graft than people who questioned the likelihood of that scenario in the first place (Aldous Huxley's *Brave new world* is a prescient example).

Technology, however, is not socially neutral. It is shaped according to the needs of the society which produces and deploys it. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of nuclear power. It was to be the lynchpin of the aforementioned 'brave new world', making electric power so cheap that it would not be worth the electric companies' while to charge us for it; yet it demonstrates very clearly the perverse imperatives of capitalism both in its 'classic' (Three Mile Island, Fukushima) and bureaucratic state (Chernobyl) forms.

Capitalism's short-termism is embodied in the nuclear power industry generally, but particularly the matter of radioactive waste. Beyond persistent pipe dreams about blasting it into space, and various infamous illicit ventures to dump it in the ocean, the best solution the finest scientific minds of our time have come up with is ... bury it and hope it does not leak. It is not for want of trying that capital has failed to come up with a serviceable solution to this problem, but any method of managing materials that remain toxic for thousands of years is likely to be difficult - and expensive.

An even more directly sinister tendency of capitalism implicated in the nuclear power industry is the transformation of means of production into means of destruction. Civilian nuclear power and nuclear armaments

are inextricably linked; the former has provided an alibi for the latter since the beginning, and still does - Iran is merely the best known contemporary example of this link, of which there are many. The technologies are substantially different - no nuclear plant is ever going to go up in a mushroom cloud - yet closely enough related that attempts to promote one at the expense of the other frequently collapse into absurdity. Nuclear power is the 'acceptable' face of the human race's ability to obliterate itself.

There is no reason to rule out of hand splitting the atom as a potential source of energy for the future. The problems with nuclear power today are very serious ones for anybody concerned with maintaining the natural environment; but we should not assume it is beyond the ken of man to solve them. We Marxists declare our faith in science openly, and overly generalised arguments against nuclear power - as with many products of the green movement - frequently lapse into proto-primitivist misanthropy.

Science, however, is hamstrung through its instrumentalisation by capital. The methods of rational inquiry and investigation are presently deployed in the service of increasingly *irrational* social forces. The 'white heat of technology', far from liberating us from drudgery, puts us all the more thoroughly in chains; greater understanding of our physical and natural environment, far from allowing us to preserve it, simply enables capital to destroy it more efficiently. The plain truth of the matter is that capital cannot be entrusted with nuclear power - the interests of humanity demand the closure of all nuclear plants.

Communists look forward to the day when science - and all other forms of human endeavour - are liberated from these perverse imperatives. Only then can we ensure that there will be no more Fukushimas and no more Chernobyls ●

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