



weekly  
**worker**



**The SWP should stop treating the working class like sheep**

- No bloc with Gaddafi
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No 859 Thursday April 7 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Coordinated strike action**



# LETTERS



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

## Freedom bombs

How is the Libyan uprising "reactionary" ("No defence of Benghazi", March 31)? Against what is it reacting? It started as mass protests, like in Tunisia and Egypt. When Gaddafi fired on the people, the army started to defect (just like in Yemen recently), turning it into an uprising. I don't see this as reactionary, even if the leadership is corrupt.

Gerry Downing writes of "Libya's history of struggle against colonialism and imperialism", but no-one has yet made imperialism in this Libyan intervention explicit.

Regarding Gaddafi, he writes that: "He redistributed wealth to Libyans, so that it is still the most egalitarian country in Africa, with the highest GDP per capita." He distributed so much wealth to Libyans, his family's wealth is something like \$40 billion (out of a GDP of \$76-96 million). Please.

Is it me or does the organisation of the tribes, as detailed in Downing's article, sound anti-democratic? Not only are they legitimising the anti-democratic Gaddafi regime (for what interests I can only guess), but they seem to be controlling their members' opinions towards the regime.

Downing describes the rebel leaders as "an alliance of former ministers in Gaddafi's regime; CIA-sponsored and -funded, pro-imperialist opportunists; monarchists; and al-Qa'eda Islamists" - which "could easily have been discovered by every leftist by simple Googling". But has their government been established yet? What if they're successful and a more democratic regime is installed? I don't think speculation like this is convincing.

His claim that "Stories of Gaddafi's black mercenaries hid the appalling slaughter of black workers carried out by our rebels" makes it sound as if the rebels were happy to slaughter sub-Saharan Africans merely because of their race, not because the somewhat understandable perception of theirs that sub-Saharan Africans were mercenaries used by the regime. From TV reports I've watched, there have been black people working with the rebels, chatting to them, and so on. How can we trust *Somaliland Press* cited by Downing so unwaveringly? How do they know that more than 100 sub-Saharan Africans have been killed? I find it odd how the author denounces "capitalist mass media" and then cites *The Observer* as a credible source. Regarding the rebel side being dominated by Islamists, once again I say, wait and see if the fears about the rebel government are proven true.

Downing says further that: "Any principled revolutionist would have taken a united front stance with Gaddafi, not only against the imperialist open assault, but also against imperialism's internal agents." But where is imperialism trying to control Libya? And how can one support Gaddafi, even if against imperialism? That's contradictory: if one dislikes imperialism because it's anti-democratic, surely one must also be against Gaddafi's anti-democratic regime rather than taking a "united front stance" with him.

The article contrasts "the humanitarian claptrap about Gaddafi shooting his own people" with the way in which Gaddafi supporters' deaths are treated as "simply collateral damage". No-one is calling for Gaddafi's supporters to be killed. The air strikes are aimed at military targets. Yes, there is collateral damage, but

maybe that's from Gaddafi placing civilians near areas he expects the coalition to bomb? At any rate, reports I've read see the civilian casualties of the coalition air strikes much less than Gaddafi's attacks against civilians.

I don't get how one can really blame rebels for using propaganda. And why would the mass media want Gaddafi's regime gone so much (by making up 'propaganda' detailing his atrocities, way before the coalition air strikes even began)? Surely capitalist mass media, subservient to business interests, wants a strong man (Gaddafi) to guarantee cheap oil? I reiterate what I've said before: we should analyse the situation in Libya for what it is instead of letting anti-imperialist principles make us see things irrationally.

Downing writes: "Of significance also is the religion of the eastern region. It is dominated by the Senussi, a Muslim political-religious order. King Idris was the grandson of the founder of this Senussi Muslim sufi order, to which Omar Mukhtar also belonged." While this sounds convincing in justifying how the east fell from government control so quickly, one cannot ignore the movement in the west of the country. At least half of the towns fell under rebel control. There were protests in the suburbs of Tripoli. And neither the pro-Gaddafi forces nor his supposed support from all the tribes have done anything to take back Misrata, the third biggest city, from rebel control (it's been weeks now).

Finally, people do not seem to be addressing the democratic element of the air strikes: the rebels asked for them.

**Ollie Sutherland**  
email

## Useless

If Gerry Downing is going to make dramatic claims such as the killing of black Africans by the rebels, he should provide specific sources. An interesting piece is rendered useless due to the vague and anecdotal nature of the sources (where any attempt to provide same is given).

**Brian Light**  
email

## Sensuous

My letter of March 24 addressed a crucial question: what attitude should Marxists have towards a failing revolt against dictatorship which appeals for help from abroad? Reviewing the pieces in this paper and on the web, the clamour has been to let it fail, even to deem it premature.

Yet again some Marxists have been found wanting and politically irrelevant, telling those in Benghazi and Tobruk that they should be left to the mercy of a war-waging dictator, and telling those in imperialist countries that their governments should not help a dictatorship end (Latin America? Indonesia?).

These Marxists have shown that they are content to let people die unnecessarily. Only they know their motives. But their refusal to speak about what their non-interventionist stance means for those who rebelled shows their lack of concern for their fate and the worth of their struggle. From the comfort of the imperialist country they live in, the bourgeois freedoms they enjoy, they have proven content to oppose the only hope the rebels had to establish representative government.

If the *de facto* partition of Libya persists, with representative government in the part forming a military alliance with some imperialist powers, then that is a victory, not just for those Libyans, but for all those who believe in human flourishing, especially those who take the standpoint of socialised humanity,

recognising it as sensuous living. In contrast, the politics of the non-interventionist Marxists is one of alienation.

**Dave Gannet**  
email

## Manipulative

The following resolution was passed last week by the Welsh Labour Grassroots steering committee. It has been distributed widely within the workers' movement:

"Welsh Labour Grassroots opposes military intervention in Libya and we disagree with the support given to it by the Labour front bench. Whilst appreciating that many comrades felt genuinely moved by the possibility of a humanitarian disaster, we believe it has become clearer day by day that western military intervention in Libya was a serious mistake and we believe that the Parliamentary Labour Party and party leadership should now dissociate itself from the ongoing activities of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

"Although we strongly support the progressive Arab struggles, including the struggle of the Palestinian people, we believe that intervention is not a sign of the west's concern for human rights in the Middle East or north Africa; indeed, as intervention was getting underway in Libya, the west's key ally and surrogate, Saudi Arabia, was being invited into Bahrain to help the regime there clamp down on pro-democracy protestors.

"The west was caught off guard by the popular uprisings in north Africa - until recently Britain was selling arms to Libya - and intervention in Libya is its attempt to regain influence and safeguard its access to oil.

"The government claims to be defending Libyan civilians. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were also carried out in the name of human rights and democracy, but have costs the lives of thousands of civilians. Western intervention will not help the people of Libya. The object is to try to manipulate and control the anti-Gaddafi forces, which would result in the Libyan and other Arab democratic revolutions being discredited and channelled in a way that serves western interests.

"It is obscene that, when public services are being destroyed and public sector workers are facing the sack, the Con-Dem coalition can find the money for yet another Middle Eastern military adventure.

"We note the increasingly robust view of a growing number of UN security council members - including at least one permanent member - that, whatever the original intentions behind resolution 1973, the French, British and US governments have produced such tortuous misinterpretations of its mandate that, as with Iraq, the credibility of the security council has been seriously undermined.

"In any event, the lack of clearly defined objectives, leadership, rules of engagement and an exit strategy put at risk the lives not only of Libyan civilians, but also those of service men and women."

**Bob Davies**  
Swansea

## Ultra-leftism

Charlie Walsh asks whether the ordinary workers in the armed forces, who are often economic conscripts from areas of the country where chronic unemployment has persisted for decades, are heroes (Letters, March 24).

Some no doubt are not. Some undoubtedly carry out atrocities. Such has always been the case in wars and other such conflicts. However, even such acts should be seen as being committed by people who are just

as much victims as those against whom the atrocities are committed. They are the consequence of the people committing them having been brutalised and returned to a state of savagery by a capitalist system that degrades every aspect of what makes human beings human.

But are many of these workers sent off to fight the battles of capitalism heroes? In many cases, yes, they are. The fact that, like the vast majority of workers, they have not yet reached the same level of class-consciousness as comrade Walsh is not their fault, is it? It is the fault of Marxists like comrade Walsh who over the years have had such a sectarian attitude to the working class - essentially condemning workers precisely for not yet themselves being Marxists ('ultra-leftism', as Lenin called it) - that they have made themselves completely irrelevant to the working class and can play no part in its development and the raising of its class-consciousness.

I suppose we should look at what the attitude of the Marxist teachers on this subject was. Engels argued for universal military conscription as an essential adjunct to universal suffrage. He actually saw no problem in recognising the need for national defence. His position was pretty similar to that developed by Trotsky in his proletarian military policy, where he said that we do not want wars, but we will have them until we overthrow capitalism and, therefore, the duty of Marxists was to be the best soldiers, just as they aim to be the best workers in order to win the respect of their fellow workers, the better to mobilise them against capital.

Towards the end of his life, Engels argued that, if Germany were attacked by Russia or its allies, the German SPD should be in favour of waging a war against them with everything they had got because defeat would also mean the defeat of the SPD and the socialist project it represented. One of his disciples, Karl Liebknecht, of "the main enemy is at home" fame, could not attend the Zimmerwald conference because he had been drafted. The Bolsheviks themselves had many of their members fighting on the front lines in World War I and indeed it was the means by which they were able to win support within the armed forces for the revolution! Can you really imagine the Bolsheviks organising protests against the returning troops?

It is necessary to distinguish between capitalist states and the soldiers they send to do the fighting. Opposition to the former and a struggle based upon the idea of revolutionary defeatism is not at all the same as opposition to the latter, whom we seek by all means to win to our side.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Abundant

Comrade Tony Clark appears to have been subject to some sort of Saul of Tarsus operation over the past 18 months and appears well on the road to complete non-Marxism and indeed non-communism (Letters, March 24). It was not that long ago Tony was with me defending the successes and achievements of the Soviet Union, as the world's first major breakthrough out of capitalism and moving significantly on the road to communism.

If material abundance is not possible, communism simply cannot ever become a reality. Without abundance you cannot meet the needs of the population and you are left with relative scarcity - and the need for a ruling elite with state power to ration and control access.

I am totally unconvinced by Tony's outlandish 'peak oil' theory, with which, I fear, he appears a little

obsessed. Obviously, the oil will start to run out, but there are tremendous opportunities to develop alternative sources of energy, such as nuclear fusion and other renewables like solar and tidal. It is hardly a difficult or complex technical matter to convert over time our current dependence on oil into sources which are safer, cleaner and infinitely more sustainable. The real question is whether capitalism is remotely capable of addressing these big issues and coming up with the required big answers. I would suggest not in a million years, which is what brought many of us to Marxism and communism in the first place.

I am, however, completely confident that a world owned in common and democratically run by and in the interests of the majority working people will be very capable and motivated indeed to develop such required solutions. I have complete confidence in the inherent common sense, intelligence and creativity of human beings to develop cooperative and mutually beneficial solutions to the challenges facing us, but I would suggest these can only be properly realised within the democratic and mutual framework of communism. And we need the scientific method and analysis of Marxism to help us get there

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## No Galloway vote

For the last few years, the most well known figure of the official anti-war movement in the UK has been paid tens of thousands of pounds to push the reactionary interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran via Press TV. He is, of course, George Galloway.

Thanks to the opportunism of the Socialist Party Scotland (Committee for a Workers' International), the Socialist Workers Party and what is left of Solidarity, he will head the Glasgow list under the humbly named 'George Galloway (Respect) - Coalition Against Cuts' in the upcoming Scottish parliament elections. He will supposedly be standing in opposition to the cuts by the Tory-led government and has a good chance of winning a seat. It may seem sensible to ignore Galloway's reactionary views and his role in attacking and undermining the resistance to Iran's theocracy and focus solely on the cuts agenda. This is wrong on two accounts.

Firstly, Galloway is not opposed to all cuts; in fact, he has steadfastly supported what is left of the Respect group on Tower Hamlets council, who have voted for cuts. Earlier this year they voted for a cut of £56 million from the council budget and Galloway never raised a criticism. Like Labour nationally, Respect talks against the cuts, but in the council chamber votes for them.

Secondly, we can't ignore the struggle of our class is international. Galloway has been part of the Iranian regime's spearhead in propaganda, dismissing and attacking the uprisings and protests that have rocked Iran over the last few years. He even slandered a gay man hung for his sexuality, wrongly suggesting that he had been a child molester. Even now, as Galloway is lining his pockets, his paymasters have unleashed a massive austerity programme. The cuts in subsidies are forcing millions more families into poverty. Malnutrition is on the rise. Workers go unpaid for months, women are degraded second-class citizens, and opposition is dealt with through torture, rape, imprisonment and executions.

Working class partisans who are consistent internationalists must not support Galloway in May's election unless he breaks all links with the



Iranian regime and opposes austerity in deeds as well as words.

**Chris Stafford**  
CPGB, Manchester

## My perspective

I read with interest and some confusion your perspectives document in the *Weekly Worker* ('Organising for things to come', March 31).

As an introduction to my comments, I must first confess that I was a member of the group led by Ted Grant - what you call a 'confessional sect' - in which I was a constant recipient and participant in the discussion of 'perspectives'. He too would preface the outline of expectant events with a statement on the economic health or otherwise of capitalism at that time and a prognosis for the immediate or long-term future of British or world capitalism. He (it was normally Ted who performed this task) would, as your group does, follow this with a statement of economic and political perspectives.

While accepting Marxism provides a guide to trends and general developments in society, it is no crystal ball and I again confess that I lost interest in this form of fortune-telling during my time in Militant. In particular, when the perspectives attempted to be detailed and precise. My favourite relates to those for the recreated Spanish monarchy following Franco, which was portrayed as going to be short-lived. Alan Woods (Grant's stable mate) would say with glee, echoing the Spanish Stalinists, that it would be 'Juan the brief'. As we are all aware, Juan is still there over 40 years later. I will therefore hold off any desire I have to comment on the details of the CPGB's perspectives, save to add that I think 'perspectives' is a disease caught by the Leninist left.

My remarks are restricted to the introduction to the document concerning the crisis of capitalism. Grant would at least give a *tour de force* when considering the economic state of capitalism; it reduces this analysis to a meagre collection of bald statements and brief descriptions. Your document states: "World politics will be coloured, driven and shaped by the ongoing crisis of capitalism, and for many years to come at that. This crisis is the deepest since the 1930s."

No problem here, but what about an analysis of the crisis and causes?

"The focus has shifted from subprime mortgages and banks to sovereign debt. However, the crisis is conjoined with the continued decline of capitalism as a system ... The decline of the US as a hegemon and what appears as the absolute limits of capitalism as a system."

Are these causes, symptoms or just comments? If these are causes of the crisis of capitalism, then it is simple: the banks are run by stupid, greedy wankers. Well, sack them and get a set of more competent wankers. Job done. Or if the cause is that governments lost the confidence of the world moneylenders by, possibly, overborrowing, then it's the same answer: you stop the borrowing or sack the governments. But the first part means cutting state spending - wage and welfare cuts or increase taxes. If it's the second, replace the government. This begs the question - with whom and to do what? It is completely reformist in politics and sub-Keynesian in economics.

This economic introduction to your perspectives document continues with an outline of the decline of the US economic domination of the global economy and the inability of it being replaced by any other national or group of combined economies. Is this decline of the US economic dominance permanent? Is it really impossible for others to replace the US as the dominant economy? Some would have said that of Britain in the 1860s. Marxism is a tool, not a set of

tarot cards

Like the third period Stalinist of yesteryear, you seem to hold the absurd idea that there is some final crisis of capitalism. This denies the ability of the ruling class to find a way out, reducing them to helpless fools with only a programme of chauvinism and xenophobia. (You then proceed on the flimsiest of evidence to associate other left groups with these degenerate ideas of the ruling class.)

A clear statement about what causes and constitutes a crisis of capitalism is required, as without it a reformist position is inevitable. That is not say that we should adopt a maximalist approach. There is a need for such demands as 'work or full pay', 'stop the cuts', 'free education with full maintenance', and so on. If some of these demands are achieved within capitalism, thereby reducing the misery of the class, all good and well. Demands of this nature are not the end in themselves; they need to be part of the programme leading the struggle to end capitalism, not to reform it.

My years with Ted Grant taught me a number of things, good and bad, and some have a Marxist clarity about them. Firstly, crisis is endemic to capitalism. That crisis consists of cycles of booms and slumps. In times of boom, the working class is able to force concessions out of the boss class. In times of crisis, the bosses take them back - pay cuts, welfare cuts and at the most extreme case the wasting of the class and materials through wars.

Secondly, there is no final economic crisis of capitalism - the ruling class will always find a way out. The cost of the recovery will be measured in the level of misery suffered by ordinary people through the reduction of their living standards, curtailment of democracy and attacks on the organisations of the class. The answer to the crisis for the bosses is to reduce the share of wealth produced in society going to the working class. The final solution to the crisis for working people is to end capitalism and this will be achieved when the working class, as a majority of society, takes power to itself.

I do not pretend to have all the answers. I am seeking a way forward. But I do hold to the view that capitalism, with or without crisis, is incapable of providing a society where everybody reaches their potential. In the struggle to bring an end to capitalism, I look towards a working class with the spontaneity outlined by Luxemburg, the ability to create, utilising the transitional approach of Trotsky and a democratic workers' party based on the ideas of teachers like Marx and Engels.

**Terry Burns**  
Ex-Labour, Militant, SLP

## What else?

The perspectives document says: "In 2011 we shall publish second, expanded editions of *Fantastic reality* and *Revolutionary strategy*."

What exactly is there to add to *Revolutionary strategy* besides connecting the ultra-left syndicalists with fascists and also more differentiation of the Second International tendencies (Luxemburg and co vs Sorel and co; Ebert and co vs Bernstein and co)? For example, my requests for a follow-up on relating the centre strategy to federal vs provincial and local politics, for highlighting the New Democratic Party of Canada as a problematic 'no government experience' case, etc would be better off as part of a second book?

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Fight goes on

We've been waiting to see if the building union, Ucat, would salvage even one victory over the Consulting Association Construction Database

blacklist of building workers like Brian Higgins via the tribunal system. After all this surely shouldn't have been too difficult with crystal-clear evidence of blacklisting.

Of course, we realise tribunals are always weighted very heavily in favour of employers and workers lose them much more often than not. But even with this in mind it's nothing short of astonishing and sickening that Ucat and their lawyers did not win a single case. The CACD registered victory after victory against members. Many were told they were clear out of time. The tribunal judge said they hadn't submitted their papers for claims soon enough. Others were told that their claims related to events which happened before an industrial law came into force in the early 1990s.

What happened to Brian Higgins is a prime example of just how badly Ucat members were let down. A union lawyer told him that he had to attend a tribunal review hearing in Manchester on October 9 last year. He lives in Northampton and there are venues much nearer. A few days before that date he received a letter and then a phone call from the lawyer telling him the union was withdrawing funding for his case. They were not prepared to pay the costs of the review hearing, as it was very likely to go against the union. Faced with this, Brian felt he had no option but to withdraw his claim.

As he had not failed in a UK court, he could not take the case to the European Court of Human Rights. Talk about a double blow! He said he felt brutally betrayed by his union and lawyers. He felt that surely a union like Ucat, which boasted of being the only and biggest specialist union for building workers, would have had a contingency fund to deal with costs, particularly in the more severe cases.

Some other members had their funding withdrawn, and others were dealt with just as shabbily. This shows how the general secretary's very public protests were total bullshit and only for the media. It also shows the complete lack of any sort of commitment to fight for blacklisted members. They were always much more interested in cutting costs and preventing names of union officials being exposed than fighting for blacklisted members.

We are absolutely positive that the main reason for Brian's case being withdrawn is that if his case had gone to a hearing he would have asked for the many names, which were blacked out on his redacted file, to be made known. This would have led to the names of quite a few Ucat officials who supplied information on Brian to the CACD and building employers being revealed. There's no way the EC would want these names to come to light. Think of the embarrassment, the shame. So it's much easier to withdraw funding to ensure no revelations.

Some of those members, so badly let down by the union, have been taken on by a new legal firm with the help of the Blacklist Support Group. This firm does not work under the orders of any union, so there's a real chance of some kind of justice. They are in the process of preparing a class/group action, mainly under the Data Protection Act, against some employers named in the CACD.

The best opportunity ever presented to the trade unions, with the discovery and exposition of the CACD, has been squandered. These unions are more interested in saving money and protecting the names of those officials grassing up union members to the employers. And let's not forget they also want, at all costs, to preserve the sweetheart relationships they have with those same employers that provide full-time union officials with cushy and privileged lifestyles.

**Anti-Blacklist Campaign**  
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.comuniststudents.org.uk](http://www.comuniststudents.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

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

**April 12:** 'Is world mythology one myth only?' Speaker: Chris Knight.

## Where next?

**Thursday April 7, 7pm:** Meeting, Old Moray House, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh. Speakers include: Dave Moxham (STUC), Des Loughney (Edinburgh Trades Council), Mike Williamson (Edinburgh University Student Association).

Organised by Right to Work: [righttowork.org.uk](http://righttowork.org.uk).

## Iran forum

**Thursday April 7, 6pm:** Meeting, G2 lecture hall, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. *Socialist Worker* forum - 'Lessons of Egypt for Iran'. Speakers include: Ali Alizadeh (Iranian-Australian poet), Alex Callinicos and Egyptian speaker.

Organised by the SWP: [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk).

## Community action

**Saturday April 9, 11am:** Meeting, South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, NW1. How can we work together to resist the cuts?

Hosted by Camden United Against the Cuts on behalf of the other broad-based borough alliances: <http://camdenunited.org.uk>.

## Iraqi women's struggle

**Saturday April 9, 2pm:** Conference, Pirate Castle, Oval Road, London NW1 (nearest tube: Camden Town).

Sessions on 'Women's role in the armed resistance', 'Destruction of education sets back Iraqi women's rights', 'Iraqi women trafficking', 'Levels of resistance and the role of international women's solidarity'. Organised by Women Solidarity for an Independent and Unified Iraq: [solidarityiraq.blogspot.com](http://solidarityiraq.blogspot.com).

## No to the cuts

**Saturday April 9, 11am:** Meeting, Gateshead Civic Centre. Discussion on the public sector cuts, the lack of response from Labour and the role of the left.

Organised by northern region Labour Representation Committee: [northern.region.lrc@wilkobro.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:northern.region.lrc@wilkobro.wanadoo.co.uk).

## Save Esol

**Saturday April 9, 1pm:** Meeting to keep courses in English for speakers of other languages (Esol), St Thomas Church, Haymarket, Newcastle. No cuts in Esol. No cuts, full stop!

Organised by Tyneside Community Action Against Racism: [tynesidecarn@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tynesidecarn@yahoo.co.uk).

## Right to choose

**Monday April 11, 6pm:** Demonstration, French embassy, 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (nearest tube: Knightsbridge). Protest against ban on the niqab that comes into force in France on April 11. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.org.uk).

## Build the fightback

**Monday April 11, 7pm:** Rally, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Speakers include: Billy Hayes (CWU), Lee Jasper (Black Activists Rising Against Cuts).

Organised by Manchester Coalition Against Cuts: [coalitionagainstcuts@gmail.com](mailto:coalitionagainstcuts@gmail.com).

## Celebrating coup defeat

**Wednesday April 13, 7pm:** Meeting on ninth anniversary of defeated rightwing coup in Venezuela, The Ship, 68 Borough Road, London SE1 (nearest tube: Borough High Street). Speaker: Jorge Martin, Hands Off Venezuela international secretary.

Organised by HOV London: [london@handsoffvenezuela.org](mailto:london@handsoffvenezuela.org).

## Our cuts - their celebration

**Saturday April 16, 1pm:** Convention, room A10, London South Bank University, London Road, SE1 (nearest tube: Elephant and Castle).

Sessions: 'Royal wedding - what would Tom Paine have said?' (Clive Bloom); 'The fight for a republic - the flags of our ancestors' (Steve Freeman); 'What is English republican socialism?' (Peter Tatchell); 'The case for republican secular democracy' (Clive Bloom).

Organised by Republican Socialist Convention: [49sfreeman@googlemail.com](mailto:49sfreeman@googlemail.com).

## Support Zimbabwean socialists

**Monday April 18, 1pm:** Protest, Zimbabwe House, 429 Strand, London. Stop the treason trial.

Organised by Action for Southern Africa: [campaigns@actsa.org](mailto:campaigns@actsa.org).

## 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 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).

## 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.



## LIBYA

# No united front with Gaddafi

Those who are waiting for a 'pure' opposition will wait forever, writes James Turley

In the last *Weekly Worker*, I attacked those on the left who imagined that the imperialist intervention in Libya was, or could be, somehow to the profit of the masses of that country.<sup>1</sup> In the same issue, comrade Gerry Downing illustrated the opposite error - of opposing the anti-Gaddafi rebellion itself.<sup>2</sup>

I said 'opposite error' - not 'equal and opposite'. Soft-soaping imperialist meddlings in the countries of the periphery is about the most egregious error it is possible for a communist to commit, and it is the duty of all of us to cleanse our movement of such illusions. That comrade Downing avoids this is to his credit. Unfortunately, he has fallen at the next hurdle.

Orienting the working class movement correctly involves highlighting the international dimension of all struggles. The dynamics 'on the ground' in particular countries are of great importance, of course, for revolutionaries, principally revolutionaries in those particular countries; yet our project is doomed if it is not international, and thus does not tackle in a principled, democratic and consistent way the malign consequences of the division of the world into competing states.

Supporting imperialism is one, particularly harmful, error in this regard - because imperialism thinks and operates internationally itself. In the case of Libya, it is clear that the ambitions of the American, British and French governments extend considerably beyond the borders of that country; and support for their operations on the basis that otherwise there would be a massacre of anti-Gaddafi forces amounts to philistine short-termism.

Other failures of principled internationalism are possible. One broadly derives from Trotskyism - in the event of an imperialist attack, it is necessary for the forces of the working class to enter into a united front with the belligerent opposed to the immediate imperialist attack. This is posed in numerous ways, most clearly by the Spartacist League and its descendants as the policy of 'military support', as opposed to 'political support' (the latter caveat, if not explicit, is nonetheless present in Gerry's perfectly accurate criticisms of Gaddafi).

The primary source is in Trotsky's writings of the 1930s: thus, for example, he excoriates leaders of the Independent Labour Party for calling the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) as a "conflict between two dictators". Trotsky wrote: "If Mussolini triumphs, it means the reinforcement of fascism, the strengthening of imperialism and the discouragement of the colonial peoples in Africa and elsewhere. The victory of [Selassie], however, would mean a mighty blow not only at Italian imperialism, but at imperialism as a whole and would lend a powerful impulsion to the rebellious forces of the oppressed peoples. One must really

be completely blind not to see this."<sup>3</sup>

The bulk of comrade Downing's article is an extremely unflattering portrait of the rebel forces - engaged in racist pogroms against black African migrant workers; riddled with pro-imperialist elements, former Gaddafi-regime functionaries and al-Qa'eda; and utterly bereft of any progressive content at all. If this is a little one-sided, to say the least, it does contain an element of truth: there have been racist pogroms, and the Islamist presence is more widespread in Benghazi than it was in Tunisia or Tahrir Square.

The problem is that it is equally true, at least, of Gaddafi's regime. If he has not specifically massacred groups of migrant workers, he has hardly been coy about delivering death to the Libyan opposition - even before things degenerated to the point of a civil war. If the opposition is coloured by tribal politics and reactionary Islamism, that is *a fortiori* the case with Gaddafi, who has exploited tribal allegiances and religion in order to keep any single element of society from becoming powerful enough to challenge his rule. The swift and efficiently brutal response to the initial uprising testifies to his success in this regard - this is the most serious crisis his regime has suffered, with high-level defections, the mass absconding of his diplomats and all the rest.

As long as Gaddafi and his regime sit atop Libyan society, opposition movements will inevitably be coloured by this reactionary agenda. There has been no space for the working class to organise openly on a mass basis since *before* his accession to power. If comrade Downing wants to wait for a "pure revolution", as Lenin put it, he will wait forever. As it is, in his jeremiads about the malign influence of Islamism in Libya, he - irony of

ironies - ends up sounding a lot like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (which, this time around, has deemed it appropriate to park its usually implacable opposition to all things 'clerical fascist').

As such, despite the reactionary forces involved (which by no means are defining it), the mere *fact* of a rebellion is a positive, progressive development. Marxists, since Marx, have always been ready to exploit any divisions in the ruling class for the benefit of the masses - it will suffice to cite Lenin's famous dictum that a revolutionary situation happens when the rulers cannot rule in the old way, and the masses will not be ruled in the old way.

The 'Arab spring' seriously weakened Gaddafi's hold on power simply by taking place - there is no way, with hindsight, to argue that the Libyan rebellion was not premature; yet something like it will have to happen before the working class and rural masses of that country can begin to push an agenda which is authentically their own. The correct response is not to abandon the rebellion for Gaddafi, but to purge it of the reactionaries who have, as reactionaries do, slithered their way to the top, and truly take ownership of it.

Downing is very keen to distance the Libyan events from the uprisings surrounding it - a geographically implausible separation, given borders with Tunisia to the west and Egypt to the east. His argument on this point is precisely, as we have seen, to paint the Libyan rebels as political reactionaries. The truth is, however, that by the time Mubarak actually fell in Egypt, a great many of his closest flunkies had switched sides, just as Gaddafi's did; and, while the very much better organised workers' movements in Egypt and (especially) Tunisia have played a more prominent role in their respective uprisings, that was never going to be the case in Libya, where traditions of working class organisation are simply much weaker.

In trying to draw a line between Egypt and Tunisia on the one hand and Libya on the other, Downing ends up in the theoretical dead end we highlighted earlier - he considers the Libyan movement in isolation from the general political shifts in the region (we might call it 'methodological nationalism', in the sense of 'methodological individualism' in the human sciences).

In fact, that broader context should give Libyan leftists and democrats cause for optimism in the longer term; the reactionaries who have claimed leadership of their revolt, and consigned it to oblivion by meekly allowing imperialist

intervention, may yet be swept away on the revolutionary tide sweeping the Arab world.

Such an eventuality recedes ever further into the distance with every Nato bombing raid, of course; the Benghazi regime becomes increasingly supplicant before the great powers, which in turn strengthens the latter's hand against any more radical elements in the movement. Meanwhile, Gaddafi's hand is also strengthened, as he can once again paint himself a brave anti-imperialist warrior. As such, I am sure comrade Downing and I agree that the primary task of communists in Britain, France, America and other belligerent countries is to fight for the immediate end to all Nato military action in Libya.

Where we part company, to put it mildly, is on the consequences of this task. For Downing, "any principled revolutionist would have taken a united front stance with Gaddafi, not only against the imperialist open assault, but also against imperialism's internal agents". This Trotskyist canard, the anti-imperialist united front, runs into difficulties in almost any conceivable application - the trouble with anti-colonial nationalists is that they tend to be either reactionaries or Stalinists, neither of which are particularly prepared to enter into a "united front stance" with revolutionary Marxists.

In this case, its absurdity is apparent. In the name of anti-imperialism, comrade Downing argues not only for propping up a dictator who, after all, has managed to schmooze his way into imperialism's good books before, in the face of an immediate military assault. He argues for giving him the leeway to maintain an oppressive state apparatus in order to root out CIA spies. Of course, there will *always* be such spies - that is what the CIA does.

Toppling Gaddafi is put back to such time as the forces opposing him are as pure and clean as the driven snow - we will wait forever for that.

In fact, exposing the shady manoeuvrings of imperialist agents is not counterposed in any way to destroying Gaddafi's regime - indeed, the tasks dovetail perfectly. CIA agents can only do their dirty work effectively if the means exist to conceal their operations. Such people are trained well in the black arts of gaining access to influential positions in bureaucratic state regimes. Placing political power genuinely in the hands of the masses has the side effect of shining a light into the shadows where spies and saboteurs like to hide.

This is true on a larger scale too. The one thing imperialism fears more than anything else is the further spread of these Arab revolts - its favoured strongmen in Egypt and Tunisia have gone, and the enthusiasm with which Saudi Arabia both participated in the Libyan attack and simultaneously deployed troops to suppress demonstrations in Bahrain testifies to the monarchy's deep unease. Should Gaddafi be run out of town by his own people, that will only spur this movement onwards. It is the initiative of the radicalised masses that our rulers fear the most - and that they have intervened to strangle at birth in the Libyan case. It is not the job of revolutionaries to pour cold water on such radicalisation.

Genuinely implacable opposition to imperialism does not mean a "united front stance" with whatever petty Bonaparte happens to fall foul of the US and its allies at a given moment. It means overthrowing them all ●

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## Notes

1. 'You are useful idiots' *Weekly Worker* March 31.
2. 'No defence of Benghazi' *Weekly Worker* March 31.
3. [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/v3/ch02i.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/v3/ch02i.htm).



Friends: Tony Blair and Muammar Gaddafi



**LRC**

# National committee endorses anti-intervention line

The Labour Representation Committee's national committee met in Preston on Saturday April 2, its first out-of-London meeting since the January AGM enlarged the NC to include delegates from local LRC groups. Greater London deputy delegate **Stan Keable** reports

In a two-hour agenda tightly managed by LRC chair John McDonnell MP, with attendance boosted to 21 by five delegates representing local groups, the April 2 LRC NC meeting backed the executive committee's opposition to the imperialist intervention in Libya and overwhelmingly endorsed its March 15 statement, 'Libya, north Africa and the Middle East: we need less western intervention, not more' ([www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk)).

It surprisingly rejected on technical grounds (by 10 votes to eight) a motion on 'national committee reporting'; and carried overwhelmingly with no votes against (or, perhaps, unanimously) a motion on 'The Irish election and the Irish Labour left', after amendment to include the United Left Alliance; and it decided to affiliate to the Health Emergency and Keep the NHS Public campaigns.

Reports on the various liaison units and sub-committees tasked with implementing AGM resolutions and building the organisation showed that they were struggling to get underway, the successful formula for small committees with national spread seeming to be the conference call. The Labour Party Liaison Unit, for example, is making plans for the proposed Labour left anti-cuts conference, probably on Saturday September 10, and drafting an LRC flyer/pamphlet, 'Getting involved in the Labour Party'. The LRC fringe meeting at the Labour conference is planned for the evening of Monday September 26.

## Libya, etc

Darrell Goodliffe (Leeds LRC) supported the 'no-fly zone' "with qualifications", arguing that "colonial imperialism" no longer exists, and bizarrely that "the Saudi tail sometimes wags the US/UK dog". West Yorkshire deputy delegate Mike Catterall "reluctantly" supported the NFZ on the basis that the working class was unable to deliver the necessary solidarity. Almost all other comrades spoke in support of the EC statement.

Comrade Terry McPartlan (representing Unison Labour Left) noted that the Middle East upsurge had been sparked by the worldwide economic downturn. I spoke of the necessity of opposing the military adventures of our own ruling class, if we are to defeat them at home. Comrade Steve Brown (Northern region LRC delegate) responded that the Libyan rebels "have the right to call for help from anywhere".

Comrades Andrew Fisher and Pete Firmin highlighted the hypocrisy of the so-called humanitarian and pro-democracy arguments for western intervention - arguments which were applied selectively, only where it suited western imperialist interests. Imperialism did nothing about the millions of deaths in the civil war in the Congo, the Saudi intervention in Bahrain or the killing of democracy protestors in Yemen, among other examples. Comrade Gary Heather (Islington North CLP) said he had been uncertain, but had been convinced by the 'hypocrisy' argument. Comrade Graham Bash said that the western



**Target Libya: cruise missile launch**

intervention "had destroyed the Libyan revolution". Its purpose was to install western-friendly regimes. Pointing to imperialist hypocrisy did not mean we call for intervention in Bahrain, he said - "the double standards are with the west". However, asking "Do we *always* oppose western intervention?", he was uncertain, although he believed, "That is our default position".

Comrade Ted Knight (representing Croydon trades union council) said that the western powers "must control the oil". He was "disturbed" by the role of the Labour leadership, behaving "like Michael Foot in the Falklands war" and "subordinating itself to the market" - which showed once more that the Labour Party "is finished and needs to be replaced", he said. However, comrade Knight was alone in expressing the view that the party was beyond redemption. Personally, while I agree the pro-capitalism, anti-working class, rightwing leadership should be junked, I believe that the road to transforming the party is not blocked. So long as the trade union link with the party has not been definitively broken by the right, everything is possible.

## Healthy openness

The motion proposed by comrade Darrell Goodliffe (Leeds LRC delegate) affirmed "the right of its delegates to report on its meetings in any forum they deem fit, both internally and externally in the public domain". It included caveats about recognising "legitimate concerns ... around confidentiality" and the need for a "responsible attitude to reporting", "accuracy" and the need to distinguish between facts and the author's opinions.

The executive committee had discussed the motion and supported it, adding its own amendment, that "NC minutes will be published in full on the

LRC website, subject to any omission agreed by the NC". However, comrade Susan Press objected (a) that the EC had believed the motion came from Leeds LRC, but in fact it came from comrade Goodliffe individually, and (b) it cut across her mandate from the EC to draft a 'code of conduct' following a complaint from comrade Knight concerning the NC email discussion list. When comrade Goodliffe declined to remit his motion to the EC, it was narrowly voted down.

I was unable to speak in the brief discussion, but I sincerely hope that organisation rejects the 'code of conduct' method, which can only lead to damaging bureaucratic restrictions in place of healthy open debate.

## Irish left

The motion tabled by comrade Terry McPartlan noted Labour's "large gains" in the Irish general election (37 TDs) and that a special conference had endorsed the party's entry into coalition with Fine Gael. It supported the Labour left's "principled position of opposition to the coalition", which would compromise Labour's ability to defend working people, and resolved to offer "solidarity and support" to three named left Labour comrades and to "further develop our links with the Irish Labour left and with the Irish community in Britain".

Having read Anne McShane's *Weekly Worker* report, 'Now the left has TDs' (March 24), I moved an amendment to include support for the non-Labour left: to "welcome the election of five United Left Alliance TDs on an explicitly anti-cuts platform"; to note that the coalition government "pledges savage cuts in services and massive public service job losses"; and to develop links with the ULA too.

Comrade McPartlan said we should be "cautious" about developing links with the ULA, which was an unstable

unity, and asked if I would withdraw that part of my amendment. I believe he was reflecting the hostility of the Socialist Appeal tendency towards the non-Labour left - which is, no doubt, fed by the hostility of the ULA's main components, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, towards the Labour left, not to speak of their hostility towards each other.

Standing by the LRC's strategy of seeking to unite the left *within and without* Labour, I argued that omitting the ULA would be "Labour-sectarian". Comrade McDonnell commented that leaving the ULA out of the equation would be "failing to recognise reality" - and the amended motion was carried with no votes against.

## Expanding

Holding some of its national committee meetings outside London, in conjunction with a local campaigning event - this time a well attended Lancashire Against the Cuts meeting - is part of the Labour Representation Committee's effort to grow into a truly national organisation, striving to build local groups in all parts of Britain.

In 2010 NC meetings held outside London were inquorate (an attendance of 25% of committee members is needed), but this time numbers travelling from London and other regions were up, certainly reflecting the enthusiasm generated by the TUC's massive anti-cuts demo on March 26 and the continuing growth in LRC membership. But the key difference is the January AGM decision to expand the NC to include a delegate from each local LRC group. To ensure representation, local groups are encouraged to elect a deputy delegate - which is how I came to represent Greater London, when our secretary, Norette Moore, was unable to attend.

This time five out of nine local

LRCs were represented, alongside five out of seven delegates from "general affiliates". But there was only one affiliated trade union delegate (Pete Keenlyside of the CWU) out of a potential 12 (two each for six unions). All six officers were present, but only four of the 16 individual NC members elected at the AGM - bringing the total to 21.

Reflecting the commendable open character and democratic propensity of the LRC, NC meetings are open to all LRC members (without voting rights, of course). The same openness was reflected in the December NC decision to publish minutes of NC meetings on the website; a decision not yet implemented due to an oversight, but I am assured it will be.

Any new local group with 10 or more members, once it has been established and recognised by the NC, has an automatic seat on the NC. Whereas the officers and individual NC members will retain their seats for a full year, delegates from recognised local groups can be replaced at any time, as can those representing "general affiliates", trade unions and the two "sister organisations" (Campaign for Socialism and Welsh Labour Grassroots). This gives an incentive to recruitment and the establishment of new local groups, and opens up the prospect of an expanding NC, reflecting and responsive to a growing individual membership and nationwide organisation.

As a left unity organisation which brings together organisations and individuals inside and outside the Labour Party, the LRC has the potential to become a key component in the struggle both for the organisational unity of Marxists and for the transformation of Labour from a bourgeois workers' party into a real party of working class struggle - which must, of course, include the organised left in its ranks ●

**DEBATE**

# Labour dead end and our strategy

Two comrades, **Chris Strafford** and **Dave Vincent**, take issue with the CPGB's aim of transforming the Labour Party



**Ed Miliband: don't fight him from inside Labour ... well, not for the moment**

The Labour Party represents a particular challenge for the revolution in Britain. It is to the detriment of any Marxist to ignore the fight to supersede it and replace it with a Communist Party.

At present there is no wave of workers joining and resuscitating constituency Labour Parties and strengthening links with the trade unions. The Labour left - whilst relatively large, compared to the left outside the party - is still small, diminished in stature and organisational capacity and, further, for the most part terminally wedded to reformism, compromise and ultimately class treachery. Democracy in the party is still a distant memory, conference is more of a rally than a decision-making body, the trade unions and local parties have little influence on the parliamentary party and the leadership.

Throughout the Labour Party debate within the CPGB there have been attempts to denigrate and beat down a phantom left in our organisation. There have been silly accusations of "leftism", "anarchism" and even the branding of the anti-Diane Abbott minority as "archetypical left-communists". In the Provisional Central Committee perspectives document the organisation is asked to "guard against impatience, frustration and childish leftism ... Inevitable amongst those with a low level of theory and little understanding of Marxism."<sup>1</sup> Apparently the criticisms and questions that have arisen in and beyond our ranks are down to a lack of Marxist theory and not the confused and contradictory line taken up by the PCC-led majority.

The charges levelled at us

are easily brushed off. They did, however, divert the discussion away from the fluctuating positions of leading comrades who dodged the substantial arguments around backing Diane Abbott for Labour leader. Unfortunately the discussion suffered, as our accusers' understanding of leftism and the left-communist tradition owed more to Wikipedia than serious study. Something which was also demonstrated by left-communist comrade James Tansey in the pages of our paper.<sup>2</sup> The article on 'leftism' by Jack Conrad knocked down straw men and did not deal with the arguments of internal critics and left communists.<sup>3</sup>

Those who are arguing for greater intervention in the Labour Party grossly misrepresent and ignore Lenin's advice to communists in Britain. Lenin argued that the Communist Party should affiliate to and work within the Labour Party so long as they "retain complete liberty of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Of course, without this latter condition, we cannot agree to a bloc, for that would be treachery."<sup>4</sup> This freedom does not currently exist and furthermore we are not in a position to form any kind of serious bloc with the Labour Party, as suggested by Lenin. Our organisation, and the wider left, is in no position to support Labour like the rope that will hang it at present. In the future we may be at that stage and we may be confronted with such tactical choices. There have been attempts to use Lenin's advice and Comintern policy, while discarding crucial elements and distorting what is used.

The situation we face both nationally and internationally is also drastically different. Schemas cannot

simply be transplanted from history; they must face up to today's reality. In the 1920s, the proletarian movement internationally was inspired and energised by the victory of the October revolution. This sent Labour and social democracy on a leftwing course to head off the revolutionary movement and the formation of the new Comintern-affiliated parties. Labour was a genuinely mass force that dominated workers' lives, uniting cooperatives, the unions, clubs for camping, etc with a voice in parliament. This situation made work in the Labour Party a necessity to win those workers who were moving leftwards from Labourism to the newly formed CPGB.

To pursue such a strategy within the Labour Party with all the current restrictions in place is a certain dead end. Despite this, we have seen arguments for the left to form a historical re-enactment society. Jack Conrad argued that "we can hold up [the National Left Wing Movement] as something that could be repeated."<sup>5</sup> As I argued in my previous article, the NLWM sowed confusion and built illusions in the left Labour and union leaders in the most crucial period of working class struggle.<sup>6</sup> Through the NLWM the communists subordinated themselves and the broader movement to the Labour left and trade union leaders, who unsurprisingly betrayed the class.

Historically the left wing of the Labour Party has been a force of compromise and treachery in the workers' movement. This left wing that was lionised by the CPGB during the General Strike has shown itself time and time again to be a poor ally. By placing hopes of change in

a Labour government the Labour left has entered into almost any agreement with the right wing of the party to become electable. This symbiotic relationship is used by the right wing to put boots on the ground come election time and present a left cover when in opposition. If we are to overcome this relationship it will require the determined work of many thousands, eventually millions, of communist-led workers.

Communists should not be in the business of building up the Labour left; nor should we create halfway houses outside Labour. It is right and a duty to work with Labour members and organisations like the Labour Representation Committee in struggles. Instead of rebuilding a Labour left that will lead us to disaster, we must fight for an explicitly communist programme and organisation. It should not be up to communists to extend the life of an atrophied and spent social democracy within the movement.

## Labour Party theses

Since adopting the new theses on the Labour Party, the leadership has taken to giving advice to 'Labour Marxists'. In reality this means comrades pretending to be Labourites with a Marxist twist. Which is no surprise, considering the numerical weakness of Marxists and the anti-communist bans that result, to quote the theses, in "keeping one's 'true' politics under wraps, burying oneself in the bowels of the Labour Party".<sup>7</sup>

The orientation towards the Labour Party has opened up a fierce debate within Communist Students. The

decision to affiliate to the Labour Representation Committee and the motion on democratising the Labour Party moved by CS at LRC conference was opposed by the overwhelming majority of CS comrades. Apart from this being the position of the LRC already, it is an attempt to re-orientate CS to Labour work with no real discussion and the complete absence of policy agreed at any of CS's conferences.

The agreed theses have been presented by some PCC members as a strategy document for now, whilst others consider it a strategy document for a future Communist Party. This demonstrates shifting positions and the subsequent confusion within our ranks. It is a compromise of differing views and analysis stuffed with half-truths and historical inaccuracies, not least when it comes to the experiences of the CPGB in the 1920s. The proponents of this re-emphasis have clung desperately to the idea that the National Left Wing Movement was overwhelmingly positive. This is a ridiculous understanding for Marxists - during its NLWM turn the 'official' CPGB subordinated itself to the trade unions and bred illusions in trade unionism.

The theses also neglect over 80 years of Labour history and governments. Apparently understanding the Labour Party in the 1920s is sufficient to develop an approach today. It clearly is not. The reality of the party today does not live up to the illusions held by some comrades and that is why, in the theses, history stops with Labour being a mass movement with genuine mass participation of millions of workers across the country in the theses. The decisive battles of the last century where Labour has consistently undermined struggles and utilised them for election victories are ignored.

The comrades take on Lenin's advice to help put Labour in power in order to break illusions in them. Labour has been in power several times since Lenin's advice in the 1920s, yet Conrad *et al* ignore this and pretend it has no impact on communist understanding of the Labour Party. Workers voting Labour today do so knowing that the party is led by treacherous careerists, but is generally the least worst option. In the 1920s voting for Labour was an expression of the positive and militant mood of the working class in opposition to the capitalist offensive against the revolutionary wave. However, the constant betrayals have had a qualitative effect on working class support and have numerically reduced Labour and the unions by millions. But the illusions remain and one of the engines in building such illusions is the Marxist left itself. We currently see the opportunist slogans for general strikes and to bring down the Tory-led government, implicitly anointing Labour as the only credible political solution. On a higher level those for further intervention also help strengthen illusions with talk of "rebuilding", "transforming" and "winning" the Labour Party.



When communist organisations adopt a strategy they must have an eye on today and an eye on the future. We must look after the long-term interests of the movement, whilst clarifying the role of communist praxis today. A key problem with the theses are that they are excessively vague and lack any actionable content. This gives the PCC *carte blanche* when deciding the practical interpretation of the theses. This is bad for democracy and gives space for individuals to interpret the theses how they want.

The most realistic excuse for the new theses is that they are only actionable if and when revolutionaries unite and we have some semblance of a Communist Party. If the left unites it could have a serious impact on the Labour left and could potentially be a force to spread Marxist ideas in the trade unions and the Labour Party. In this regard it is wrong to rule out Labour work in principle. It is, however, tactically wrong for communists to organise work in Labour currently and a strategic error to fight to rebuild the Labour Party, which, far from undermining Labourism, will only strengthen it.

## Unity with the right

There is a tedious tradition on the British left to describe anything with more than three people from different organisations as a united front. Even when alliances are forged with businessmen and government-funded bodies, sections of the left try to sell them as united fronts. The Socialist Workers Party's Unite Against Fascism incorporates everyone from prime minister David Cameron to strike-breaking Liberal Democrat councillors, to the SWP's *faux*-Trotskyist leaders like Martin Smith. The united front as laid down by the Comintern has been twisted and diluted to fit and legitimise all manner of opportunist turns.

The question of a united front with the Labour Party throws up even further problems. The Bolshevik advice to British communists is contradictory and at times out of touch with the realities of the post-1918 Labour Party. No leader of the early CPGB or the Communist International proposed turning the Labour Party into a "permanent united front", as

comrades suggest.

Graham Bash and Labour Briefing are probably the most notable purveyors of such politics and his arguments emerged in the late 70s. At Communist University in 2005, Bash explained that the "centrepiece of the building of the revolutionary party is the struggle within the rank-and-file bodies of the Labour Party and trade unions, as embryonic and potential forms of proletarian state power".<sup>8</sup>

At the February 13 2011 CPGB aggregate Conrad argued that the task of communists is to fight in the Labour Party to "transform" it - not into "an alternative Communist Party", but into a permanent united front, ending in a situation where there is a "Labour Party led by communists, led by a mass Communist Party". The Labour Party would then be won to a communist programme, which would be utilised by the class for revolutionary purposes. We have already seen that the Labour Party is not just a collection of workers' organisations and we saw in the 1926 General Strike that Labour represented the most serious obstacle in the minds of workers to transforming their Councils of Action into bodies of proletarian power. Permanent unity with the Labour left, the trade unions and centrist socialist organisations would be detrimental to future struggles and to the ability of workers and a future Communist Party to act independently.

There is nothing dogmatic in defending the Comintern understanding of the united front as a temporary agreement of workers' organisation around specific struggles, so long as it gives a positive guide to communist work under differing circumstances and is not used as a straitjacket. The united workers' front has to be temporary in order to maintain communist independence and stop the political subordination of the Communist Party to social democracy or Labourism. There is no struggle that requires permanent unity with the Labour Party or its affiliates. The logical conclusion of a permanent united front - that is, permanent unity - is essentially liquidation. Existing as a simple faction of the Labour Party means being permanently tied to reaction and at times a capitalist government. When Rifondazione joined the coalition government in Italy, this paper correctly attacked

the decision and betrayal. Would it be any different for a Communist Party in Britain to be a constituent part of a Labour government if the bans and proscriptions were removed and we had communist Labour MPs? No.

Leon Trotsky explains why the split in the movement is necessary and why we can only conclude temporary agreements with other proletarian forces in volume 2 of *The first five years of the Communist International* in 1921: "We broke with the reformists and centrists in order to obtain complete freedom in criticising perfidy, betrayal, indecision and the halfway spirit in the labour movement. For this reason any sort of organisational agreement which restricts our freedom of criticism and agitation is absolutely unacceptable to us. We participate in a united front, but do not for a single moment become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment. It is precisely in the course of struggle that broad masses must learn from experience that we fight better than the others, that we are more audacious and resolute. In this way, we shall bring closer the hour of the united revolutionary front under the undisputed communist leadership." And later: "In the event that the reformists begin putting brakes on the struggle to the obvious detriment of the movement and act counter to the situation and the moods of the masses, we as an independent organisation always reserve the right to lead the struggle to the end, and this without our temporary semi-allies."<sup>9</sup>

Conrad has borrowed a Bashite conception that places Labour Party general committees where the soviets stood in the Russian Revolution. It was perhaps a reasonable mistake in the 60s and 70s, but today it is out of touch and long passed its sell-by date. This illusion itself is founded on Tom Nairn's and Perry Anderson's thesis that saw the Communist Party as an alien in the British labour movement and stated the impossibility of building a party outside Labour because of the peculiar conditions of British trade unionism.

This ignores the reality of working class struggle in Britain, where in key battles workers have gone beyond the unitary structures and established their own organs. Seeing the Labour Party

as nothing more than a collection of unions, socialist clubs, co-ops and the left is a mistake, as Mike Macnair explains: "Since 1918 Labour has claimed not only to be a united front, but also, and contradictorily, to be an individual membership party founded on an ideological programme (clause four and its replacement, and so on). This second claim is reflected not only in clause four, etc, but also in the system of bans and proscriptions: initially in the form of bans on 'communist' organisations."<sup>10</sup>

Our comrades argue for the winning of Labour "for Marxism". This apparently is done by driving out the right wing and removing the bans and proscriptions. However, it maintains organisational unity with the rest of the treacherous sections of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy. This strategy, taken to its logical conclusions, would be a repudiation of the split in the workers' movement that opened up because of World War I and the Russian Revolution. This split was essential in rescuing Marxism from the reactionary clutches of Bernstein's reformism and Kautsky's stale dogmatism. There must be no going back.

## Prioritise fight against austerity

The debate over Labour is crucial at the moment. We have seen mass demonstrations by students and their supporters and strikes have been increasing. It is clear the resistance will grow and the March 26 TUC demonstration showed emphatically that new forces are entering the movement.

The CPGB's response has been lethargic, to say the least, whether in the anti-war movement or at anti-cuts conferences. Comrades should listen to Sinead Rylance's call to step up our game.<sup>11</sup> At our February aggregate we agreed two measures to strengthen our work, but we must go further and place work in the anti-cuts movement as the most crucial arena for communists in the coming period. It also gives us a greater opportunity to speak with the thinking sections of the Labour left. Those who are genuinely committed to fighting for socialism and the cuts will not be found in dull CLP meetings of half a dozen people, but in the meetings and demonstrations

of hundreds, thousands and hundreds of thousands of workers and students.

We need to choose our political priorities according to where our forces can best make an impact over the coming months. The Labour Party is not one of these places: a mere handful of comrades will be wasting their time and resources preaching to a party that is devoid of democracy and a Labour left that is subjugated to the right wing in the hope of another Labour government.

We must engage with those in Labour. The reality of the trade union link and the continued class identification with the party by millions of workers rules out ignoring Labour. That is, unless we wish to build a sectarian organisation with few or no links in the class. This understanding does not, however, mean entry work, where comrades fight for a radical version of Labourism or pretend to be something else.

In the future, work in the Labour Party may be essential for our project, but it will require the energies of many thousands of communist-led workers, not the pitiful numbers the Marxist left in the Labour Party can muster today. The precondition of Labour work by communists has to be complete liberty in the Labour Party and the unity of revolutionaries into a common party armed with a Marxist programme. A Communist Party. To seek to cut corners and jump ahead will not only lead to political mistakes, but is a criminal waste of energy at a time when the broader movement is stirring to fight the Conservative-led government ●

Chris Strafford

## Notes

1. 'Organising for things to come' *Weekly Worker* March 31.
2. 'In defence of left communism' *Weekly Worker* November 4 2010.
3. 'Lessons of Lenin's Leftwing communism', *Weekly Worker* October 14 2010.
4. <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm>.
5. CPGB e-list, September 25 2010.
6. 'Wedded to left reformists' *Weekly Worker* January 20.
7. [www.cpgb.org.uk/worker2/index.php?action=viewarticle&article\\_id=1004137](http://www.cpgb.org.uk/worker2/index.php?action=viewarticle&article_id=1004137).
8. 'Labour and revolutionary strategy' *Weekly Worker* September 22 2005.
9. [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/flyci-2/08.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/flyci-2/08.htm).
10. 'Dances with scabs' *Weekly Worker* November 11 2010.
11. *Letters Weekly Worker* December 9 2010.

# Stop fostering illusions

What is up with some leading lights within the CPGB?

Stan Kelsey at the March 27 aggregate argues for the recruitment of anti-cuts activists into the Labour Party! Eddie Ford in 'Taking on redder hues?' describes those who dismiss Labour as "misreading the situation" or of being guilty of "self-serving sectarianism" (*Weekly Worker* March 31). Oh well, that's won that argument then.

He feels a bit of left rhetoric by Ed Miliband at the massive March 26 anti-cuts demo shows he has been forced leftwards by the growing resistance to the cuts. Er... the same Ed Miliband who stated the coalition government should not be brought down by industrial action - it must only be voted out at the next general election?

Anne Mc Shane, in her article, 'Now the left has TDs', quoted the Irish Labour leader (and deputy prime minister) warning members they "would have to walk through forests of placards in the months and years ahead" (*Weekly Worker* March 24). Isn't this the attitude held by British Labour councillors already voting cuts through?

James Turley reports that PCS

general secretary Mark Serwotka received a rapturous reception when he called for generalised strike action at the rally in Hyde Park, whereas those speakers who advocated the official Labour perspective of less cuts received a lukewarm response ('Arm the movement with Marxist politics', March 31). Given the number of Labour-affiliated trade unions present, what does that tell you about where their ordinary members are politically, compared to the union tops?

Labour-affiliated unions who refuse to let their conferences debate the Labour link or even levels of donations have no mandate to declare their members should vote Labour and they do not represent where most ordinary union members are.

The varied but consistent reactions to the speakers said it all. No-one has exposed Miliband's hypocrisy in praising the struggles of the suffragettes and civil rights movements - who did not rely on simply voting Labour or, in the US, the Democrats rather than taking to the streets. Both parties jump on the protests bandwagon to divert support to themselves, then stall the

struggle and divert it to electoralism.

BBC1's *Question time* on March 31 featured Mark Serwotka on the panel, and every opinion he gave secured the loudest audience applause - compared to no applause on any response from so-called leftwinger Diane Abbott, who, let it not be forgotten, was supported by a number of CPGB leading lights in the Labour leadership contest.

I have argued before that socialists/Marxists should be relating to those joining anti-cuts protests who are not Labour Party members rather than wasting time with 'Labour Party no matter how bad' useful idiots (to capitalism), who foster illusions in Labour.

If you give various labels to those who detest the Labour Party for 13 years of betrayal of the working class, then you have a duty to explain exactly how the Labour Party will be pulled left, given the anti-democratic procedures enforced on constituency parties and party conference. Any hint of trying to do so will be condemned as harming Labour's electoral prospects, and the Labour Representation Committee will fall meekly into line.

Eddie Ford quotes *Socialist Worker* to the effect that there

were "at least" 68 Labour Party banners on March 26. On a march of 500,000? Is that all? How many would have been there had Miliband not been a main speaker? How many of the 68 wards supported John McDonnell in his two woeful leadership bids instead of Brown or Miliband? How many of the 68 will only back anti-cuts Labour candidates? How many of today's 'moving to the left' Labour Party MPs voted for intervention in Libya (and voted for the Iraq war)?

So many people who don't think very much still look to Labour. How many of the self-deluding saps also think they are now middle class (supposedly 71%)? Given the disgraceful disunity of the left, is that surprising?

The answer is to give people a left alternative - not to foster illusions that the Labour Party can be pulled left (yawn). Or even for trade unions and communities to stand independent, anti-cuts candidates. Now that would be a real move to the left: ordinary people collectively deciding to get involved in politics once again. Where might such discussions, decision-making and campaigning lead? But, no, we must vote for self-serving,

careerist Labour MPs talking left in opposition.

Eddie Ford thinks that Miliband addressing the anti-cuts demo, and intending to address the Durham miners' gala, to be of some significance. Eddie, might it be just bad, old-fashioned opportunism? Miliband still argued cuts were necessary to the Hyde Park rally. That was an insult to all those who had just marched - not 'moving to the left'. Not one of the 18 members of my union branch who had come from Manchester praised Miliband - but they all raved over Serwotka's address.

CPGB members need to stop looking to the Labour Party and start looking outwards to those fighting the cuts and who have no time for Labour. But then the CPGB's stance against halfway houses (and independent anti-cuts candidates too?) forces them to be trapped into supporting the Labour Party with the lame fig leaf that we should be 'working within to pull it left'. All the left-turning pit tunnels collapsed years ago, but keep clearing away the rubble, comrades!

I know what you are pulling and it isn't Labour to the left! ●

Dave Vincent

## CUTS

# Serwotka gives a lead - TUC must follow

The TUC has had leadership of the anti-cuts movement thrust upon it, writes Peter Manson. But the left must look to the long term

There is no doubt that, following the magnificent London demonstration on March 26, the leadership of the movement against the coalition government's vicious austerity drive has been placed firmly in the hands of the Trade Union Congress.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said in his Hyde Park speech: "... this is just the beginning of our campaign - and we will fight the government's brutal cuts in our workplaces and our communities." Unfortunately, however, that is as far as it went. There was no indication of what the next steps ought to be, of what action we ought to envisage to "fight the government's brutal cuts".

Nor has Barber enlightened us since. In fact the TUC has grown strangely silent since the demo. It failed to issue any kind of statement following the event - not even to congratulate itself for having brought hundreds of thousands of working class people onto the streets of London. True, Barber spelt out his soft-Keynesian 'alternative' to cuts in a speech to Bristol Business School on April 6, but neither he nor the TUC has hinted at any possible course of action trade unionists could undertake to make the government change course.

What about the TUC's main affiliates? Take Unison, which undoubtedly played a much more dynamic and enthusiastic mobilising role than Congress House. The union's general secretary, Dave Prentis, *did* indicate what his members ought to do next when he said: "The march for jobs, justice and growth will be a warning shot to the Con-Dem government of what's in store for them after the May elections - a wipe-out."<sup>1</sup>

The implication was pretty strong - workers ought to cast their votes for someone else (although Prentis seems a bit reluctant to specify who the recipient ought to be). Speaking at Unison's health conference on April 5, he repeated this message at the end of his highly rhetorical speech:

"... And, yes, conference, we will build an alliance of all public service unions to break the pay freeze, protect our pensions, stop the cuts. We will rise to the challenge. Show our resolve. Defend our health and community services - our welfare state. Fight for that vision of a fairer society. Build a powerful coalition of our own ... And that's why we'll keep marching. And organising, and agitating and mobilising. And we won't stop until we've sent this coalition packing. And next time we'll only put politicians in power who will stand up for us, our values, and our National Health Service."<sup>2</sup>

As I say, it was highly rhetorical, but, once again, short on substance. In fact, it was as though Prentis felt he had to constrain members' expectations, for he warned: "And we know we don't always win everything we want. And we know we will lose some battles ..." So don't expect too much then.

The GMB union also referred to the May elections in its post-demonstration statement, issued on March 28. General secretary

Paul Kenny said: "May 5 should be a referendum on the coalition government's economic and social policies ... The next step is for the alternative voice to be counted in the ballot box in May. GMB will urge voters to reject unemployment, poverty and cuts in public services ..."<sup>3</sup>

OK, so GMB members should vote against the coalition, but who should they vote *for* exactly? The "next step" (if you can call it that), as outlined by Paul Kenny, is less than explicit - although we all know that he hopes Labour will be the beneficiary.

What about Britain's largest union, Unite? Unlike Unison in particular, it did not trumpet the success of March 26. In fact, whereas Unison's website was full of information beforehand and updates on the day, Unite did not even think it was worth a mention afterwards (no doubt, judging from the Unite turnout on the day, most areas and branches took a rather different attitude). Like the TUC, Unite clearly has no plans to coordinate action against the cuts.

One of the two unions that is openly agitating for common action - specifically strike action - to defend the assault on jobs, pay and pensions is the Public and Commercial Services union with its majority left leadership. Its general secretary, Mark Serwotka, has done the opposite to most of the other union tops, in that he has openly stated the need to step up the action, as epitomised by his rallying cry on March 26:

"Now look around you in this park. Imagine what it would be if we didn't only march together: we took strike action together across all of our public services ... We are stronger when we march together, so let's ensure that we strike together to let the government know we won't accept it. So, just in case they are listening. If you want to take action together, make some noise."

And noise there was - in fact a cacophony. As is only to be expected, the PCS website was full of comrade Serwotka's opinions. In fact it was so obvious that he was the main union general secretary who was not just *calling* for opposition to the cuts, but *meaning* it, that BBC1's *Question time* dropped its invitation to Bob Crow of the RMT to debate with London mayor Boris Johnson at the last moment last week (much to the anger of comrade Crow and his union, who called the decision "outrageous political bias"<sup>4</sup>). The BBC said that comrade Crow had just appeared on Radio Four's *Any questions?* and called in comrade Serwotka for the March 31 edition of the show instead.

The RMT also had good coverage of the big day on its website, where it prominently displayed comrade Crow's statement: "Today's demonstration against the cuts was the biggest labour movement protest in a generation and lays the foundation for coordinated strike action."<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the PCS and RMT, the other left-led unions are not quite so up for it, it seems. Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union is full of praise for March 26, but fails to outline what should happen next. The FBU's pre-demo statement (March 25)

declared: "They expect us to suffer tax increases, pay cuts, unemployment and devastation of our pensions to pay for the crisis their friends in the City caused. They should expect the fight of their lives."<sup>6</sup> But so far the union has not given its view on how that fight should be developed.

Tony Kearns, Communications Workers Union senior deputy general secretary, was equally vague: "We will continue to stand in solidarity against the damaging cuts proposed by the Con-Dem government and against the privatisation of Royal Mail. Let's use this momentum to apply maximum pressure to the government to put an end to their dramatic agenda of cuts."<sup>7</sup>

Kearns is right about the momentum, but it is essential that this is not lost through inaction. What we are seeing at the moment are dozens of comparatively small-scale acts of resistance, such as the March 30 one-day strike by Tower Hamlets and Camden council workers. The National Union of Teachers is organising a national strike ballot from April 22 and teachers in Camden have already voted for action locally. The University and College Union dispute over pensions, which saw two one-day strikes just before the TUC demonstration, is far from settled and 1,500 tube drivers are being balloted for action by the RMT over management attempts to impose cost-cutting changes to their pay structure.

It could well be that the "coordinated strike action" demanded by comrades Crow and Serwotka actually happens within the next two or three months. The Socialist Workers Party is correctly urging more, and its main campaigning is now around the slogan for a "general strike". According to a *Socialist Worker* article entitled 'NHS jitters show that Tories fear a battle', "The government looks weak and divided", so surely generalised strike action would see it off in no time?<sup>8</sup>

We should not count on that. The ruling class shares a common consensus on the overriding need for cuts - the differences being over their extent, duration and severity. Even if it were true that the coalition

government is "weak and divided" and that the Tories "fear a battle", the only alternative government on offer is that of Ed Miliband, with his apparently less unpleasant austerity.

A one-day general strike against the cuts would provide an even more powerful demonstration than March 26, but it would be just that: a demonstration. Nevertheless, we should be pushing for the greatest possible coordinated resistance, and not just within Britain - we should aim for such coordination across Europe.

While the unions have had the leadership of the anti-cuts movement thrust onto them, the left has a big responsibility. It must do all in its power to ensure the union bureaucracy does not demobilise its members - a good start would be to bring together the three separate, left-led anti-cuts campaigns in order to provide a single, authoritative voice.

But most of all we need a *political* alternative - something the SWP,

Socialist Party in England and Wales *et al* fail to work for - except by trying to recruit to themselves, of course. But even if you think that, say, a larger SWP could provide such an alternative, its 2011 target is for a mere 2,000 new members. Given its 'revolving door' turnover, that would probably leave it with around 6,000 on paper ...

The left needs a viable political strategy, which it must start to implement now. We need to unite our own forces into a single, Marxist party capable of winning leadership over the resistance. Instead of calling on the unions to quit the Labour Party mark one in order to create a Labour Party mark two (or at best ignore the whole Labour Party question), we must launch a coordinated fight both within Labour *and* within the unions. The current union leaderships have the Labour Party they deserve: they must demand a Labour leadership opposed to cuts ●

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## Notes

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2. www.unison.org.uk/asp/presspack/pressrelease\_view.asp?id=2248.
3. www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/latest\_news/gmb\_message\_after\_huge\_march.aspx.
4. www.rmt.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=143609&int1stParentNodeID=89732.
5. www.rmt.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=140503.
6. www.fbu.org.uk/?p=2180#more-2180.
7. www.cwu.org/news/archive/march-for-alternative-in-pictures.html.
8. *Socialist Worker* April 9.



Mark Serwotka: crowd-pleaser



**SWP**



# Stop treating the working class like sheep

General strikes are a tactic, not a strategy. **Michael Copestake** attends a local meeting of the SWP

**O**n Thursday March 31 the Socialist Workers Party held a public meeting in the Showroom Cinema in Sheffield, to lay out its perspectives for the direction of the workers' movement in the aftermath of the massive TUC-organised protest against cuts in London on March 26. Around 50 people attended, about half of whom were evidently members of the SWP. But there were other familiar faces from the left, and a fair smattering of students and young people.

The meeting was chaired by SWP member Max Brophy, who recently received an impressive 1,600 votes in the University of Sheffield student officer elections. The speakers were preceded by a striking and competently edited video of clips from the TUC march, mixed with a speech by left Labour MP John McDonnell. Dotted around the room were posters bearing the now familiar SWP demand, 'TUC: call a general strike!' Perhaps somewhat ironic, given the disastrous CPGB slogan of the 1926 General Strike: 'All power to the TUC general council!'

On the panel were two members of the SWP: Jim Board, also branch secretary of Doncaster Unison, and Maxine Bowler, who will be running in council elections under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner as an anti-cuts candidate. Comrade Board began by contrasting the success of the TUC march in terms of its size and wide-ranging composition with the historical treachery of the TUC in its role as a mediator between labour and capital. The TUC was forced to hold the demo, he said, by the pressure building up at the grassroots, yet the idea of coordinated or even general strike action was taking root amongst the working class as a whole. What is more, the time to strike is sooner rather than later, before the cuts really hit and the movement risks losing momentum and becoming demoralised.

Both speakers called for socialist

politics and the creation of a new society. The vision set out was one "for ordinary people" - with "wealth distribution", the end of the profit motive and of super-rich bosses and elites. This vision was linked to the demand for a general strike - the SWP seems to believe that winning the masses to take defensive action will raise class-consciousness to such a degree that this vision of the political alternative will be embraced by hundreds of thousands. Spontaneity solves all problems. But what happens next is anyone's guess and was left completely unmentioned.

Comrade Bowler illustrated the fruits of a strategy of constant agitation with the example of newly radicalised students, who in their confrontation with the forces of the state had come to understand that it was not their friend. No communist would deny that both workers and students learn with incredible speed in the process of the class struggle, and that in revolutionary situations the class can achieve near miracles. But there is the small matter of the subjective factor - the influence and leadership of a *party*. Then there is the international aspect: to survive, an alternative political and economic order would have to spread beyond the boundaries of a single country - it would almost certainly need to embrace the European Union as a whole.

The apotheosis of spontaneity avoids the patient, difficult task of building the new society within the old, relying instead on the objective workings of capitalism - the increased socialisation of labour, negation of private property in the corporate form and so on - to achieve these mass, subjective tasks. The building up of class strength prior to confrontations is limited to 'build our own sect'-type activity, combined with trade union struggle. Or, as Lenin called it, 'economism'. True, neither comrade claimed that the SWP was *the* revolutionary party: it was, however, the party that "united

revolutionaries". Both made confident and impassioned speeches about the horrors of capitalism and the potential existing already within capitalism for a better society.

Contributions from the floor were largely from SWP members, who testified to the effectiveness and potential of their organisation: it had enabled them to be better activists, who successfully moved resolutions in their union branches for a general strike, organised strikes in their workplaces, and so on. One comrade argued that the absolute success or failure of the general strike was neither here nor there; what was important was that it would push people into action and radicalise them, which would leave a class memory for the next round of the struggle.

Two CPGB members spoke in the discussion. Laurie Smith made the point that the withdrawal of labour in itself provides no positive alternative to capitalism, yet in a general strike situation the question of political power is posed. Comrade Smith pointed out that in current circumstances the political consequence of a crisis of the coalition would be a Labour government likewise committed to cuts, and not the new society that SWP comrades had been talking about. Comrade Lee Rock gave his opinion that there is "no chance, even in a month of Sundays" that the TUC will call a general strike, irking several SWP members in the room. He said that quite in spite of any radicalisation that occurred on the TUC march and the like, the majority of those people will still have a reformist perspective on politics and vote to return a Labour government, not have a revolution. As he moved on to the question of the organised left and its current disunity, the mention of the SWP by name appeared to prompt the chair to bring his contribution to a swift end. Members of the SWP were allowed to speak for considerably longer about the virtues of 'the party'.

Responses from the panel speakers

helped illuminate the degree of political confusion in the SWP, which results from the fact that they have begun with a tactic, the general strike, linked it to the 'new society' in a nebulous fashion, and everything else they say is based around a defence of that tactic. This rapidly fell apart - comrade Board acknowledged that a general strike may well result in a Labour government, but stressed that it would be a "different Labour government": ie, a *left* government "held hostage" by the radicalised masses and unable to implement a cuts programme. Of course, it is just as easy to make a case that a left-talking Labour government - in cahoots with the union bureaucracy - would use such a mandate to get away with implementing slightly less devastating cuts at a slower pace. This, in fact, seems a more likely scenario.

Concretely then, the SWP perspective appears to boil down to the election of a left Labour government, even though comrade Board had said earlier that workers would "never trust Labour again". Now that the party is out of power, and in the absence of any alternative to its left, workers are once more looking to Labour. But pursuing a strategy of strikism, while operating under the belief that a Labour government would *necessarily* be under enough pressure from the working class to make a difference, enables the SWP to avoid the key question - the necessity for Marxist unity.

Maxine Bowler struck a different note in her response, emphasising that we had to win the battle of ideas and achieve a hegemonic position in society. Part of this battle involved her standing to be a Tusc councillor so that she could propagandise for socialist politics and a socialist society. She also bigged up the Right to Work campaign, and, of course, encouraged non-members in the audience to join the SWP.

Implied throughout the meeting was the orthodox SWP belief that

the working class is strongest when it withdraws its labour. The problem here is, firstly, that the flip side of the withdrawal of labour is a management lockout, when the boot can be on the other foot. The second and far more important point is that it is a bogus perspective, because the working class is at its most powerful when it asserts its class character *positively*, by organising in its own interests, and pursuing a programme that can lead it to a position of political and economic dominance. This does not involve treating workers like sheep, but the creation of mass organisations of the working class and forms of workers' own socially owned, democratically controlled property. It presupposes a high degree of political unity and education and it means the working class forming itself into a political party - a Communist Party. Such a movement would require an open, critical culture to accompany its radical Marxist politics, if bureaucratic degeneration were to be prevented, and give a real role to the mass of workers under capitalism.

The unity of the existing revolutionary left on this basis would be a first step, but, sadly, such a perspective is not in evidence from the SWP. Even its own role, should SWP strategy come to fruition, is unclear. Perhaps this information is restricted to 'members only'. Or perhaps its perspective for the anti-cuts movement really does end with more spontaneity, and 'there is always next time'.

Meanwhile, if you want a political programme, the SWP, wearing its Tusc (or Respect, Left List ...) hat, can always give you national reformism. Pick your poison. However, despite Tusc's shortcomings, the coalition represents a not insignificant part of the organised left, and we will, of course, give comrade Bowler critical support. CPGB comrades offered to help out with her election campaign. We hope sectarianism will not trump unity in action - repeatedly invoked at the meeting - around such a basic task ●



## OUR HISTORY

# The Leninist bludgeon

**O**n August 1 1920 - the second day of the 1st Congress of the CPGB, the Communist Unity Convention - it was agreed to establish a Provisional Executive Committee. This was done by adding to the existing Joint Provisional Committee six members directly elected from the floor. Congress then sent its "warmest greetings" to the second congress of the Communist International and next business turned to relations between the new Communist Party and the Labour Party.

The earlier vote for using parliament as a platform for revolutionary propaganda had been a foregone conclusion.<sup>1</sup> However, this question of inter-party relations was far more controversial, as it divided the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group, the two main organisations that came together to form the CPGB.

Two alternative propositions were put: (a) That the Communist Party shall be affiliated to the Labour Party; and (b) that the Communist Party shall *not* be affiliated to the Labour Party.

The propositions were submitted in this angular form so there could be no ambiguity. If the convention decided to go into the Labour Party, delegates could then discuss what comrades should do within it. Proposition A, for affiliation, was moved by comrade JF Hodgson of Grimsby BSP, a Provisional Executive Committee member. This is an edited version of his perceptive and effective speech.

Mr chairman and comrades, after the exhausting proceedings through which we have just passed, it is my very pleasant duty to introduce you to the real bone of contention, and I would like to say before I commence to speak on behalf of the BSP ... that from the first in these unity proceedings and conferences, which have been almost as exhausting as our proceedings this morning, we have always maintained the point of view that the party itself, when formed, should be allowed to decide on this very important matter.

We have never budged from that position, and when at last it was decided - as the executive's or party's delegates could not agree - it was decided to put the matter to the vote of

a rank and file convention, it was on our proposal that that was done. Our friends on the other side accepted the proposal readily.

Now I say that because I want to add that, as far as we are concerned, we are very keen on this matter, but that, whichever way the vote shall go, it is our intention, even though it be against us, it shall not be the means of reducing one jot the enthusiasm and energy which we intend to put into this new party. I call for that spirit from those who differ from us, and I want to remind you that, unless we have that spirit present among us in all our proceedings as a party in the future, we are born to impotence and are likely to enter into disaster quite soon.

I hope that we shall settle this matter of the Labour Party ... settle it one way or the other. It has been said that it is perfectly easy talking here about the Labour Party itself, because most of the delegates have come to this conference with a mandate. Well, it applies to most of us; but at any rate I take this view, that we have had these discussions *ad nauseam*, and I suggest that we should try to steer clear of the old cut and dried arguments, and to see if we can strike out on a new line. We shall be assisted in that effort by certain things that have transpired quite lately.

For instance, there is Lenin's book on the *Infant disorders of the left communists*, an interesting work which sheds a flood of light upon the whole question.<sup>2</sup> Also we have had - and I want to refer to this matter first - we have had from the left communists<sup>3</sup> a clear declaration that their policy with regard to the Labour Party is distinct from their policy towards the trade unions. It appears that we are not to join the Labour Party because it is led by trade union leaders, who have a bourgeois outlook and whose mentality is that of the middle class. Therefore we are to have nothing to do with the Labour Party.

That is clear and distinct, and with regard to these same Labour leaders I would say more than that - I would say that these men are destined to play the part of your Scheidemanns and Noskes,<sup>4</sup> and the time will come when we shall have to deal with them in a no uncertain way. Not by voting, I say that. But, comrades and friends, this same declaration proceeds to say that it shall be the duty of the branches to form communist groups in trade

union branches, and to work inside the trade union movement in the same way. Now I confess that I cannot understand that. It seems to me to be a high example of confusion. Here you meet on the industrial field in the trade union certain trade union leaders.

You are fully aware that, whether or not through sheer rascality, duplicity and corruption, they are misleading the working class. You meet them there with the intention of destroying their influence, and of winning the confidence and trust of the rank and file to that end. That is exactly the kind of tactic that I believe in. But may I remind you that you meet these same people in the Labour Party, and that you meet them on a much larger field than you do in the trade unions. We are a political party. We meet these same trade union leaders in the Labour Party on the wider and far more important political field. That is the view I take, comrades.

Many of our comrades have done important work inside the trade unions by starting unofficial committees and reform movements. This was extremely important. They have done good work in that way, but those are the very comrades who refuse to say that you could act in exactly the same way inside the political movement of the workers, which is the Labour Party.

If you are going to have your communist groups inside trade union branches, why not inside the branches of the Labour Party? If you are going to operate inside the trade union movement, why not inside the Labour Party at its annual conferences? And why not try to help in such a way that when we go to the annual conferences we shall not find ourselves, as we did at Scarborough, a little group of a dozen - and the rest reactionists, or moderates, or blind men, because the best elements in the trade union movement had not sought to get elected as delegates to the Labour Party conference?

I know there are objections to this policy. We are told, for example, that if you affiliate to the Labour Party, and work inside the Labour Party, you become identified with the policy of the Labour Party. I deny that. I believe the best way you can illustrate the fact that you are not with the general body of opinion inside the Labour Party is to get in there and illustrate it from inside.

I say that our comrades who work

with the unofficial movement have done more in that way to illustrate the fact that they have a point of view which is entirely different from that of the official elements than they could possibly have done outside. You do not become identified with the policy of the Labour Party by becoming affiliated to it or working inside. On the contrary. But the most difficult argument to understand, to my mind, is the objection that the Labour Party is going to take office; and that when it does, you will be identified with all the ruin that is going to come upon the party once it takes office and assumes responsibilities which it cannot possibly fulfil.

I do not know whether the delegates are aware of it, but this matter has been dealt with by Lenin in his latest work of his. I say this because I know that those who will oppose this resolution from the point of view I am putting forward, have been accustomed in the past to refer to the example of the Bolsheviks, and always to quote Lenin as their apostle and bludgeon us in that way. We are entitled to use the same kind of bludgeon, and I would remind you that Lenin considers this kind of objection to Labour Party affiliation as one of the "infant disorders of the left communists". We had a talk yesterday about parliamentary action. It is surprising to know that Lenin advises that we should take part in parliamentary action, that we should get our members into parliament, and that when they are in parliament they should support the Labour Party in downing Lloyd George and Churchill, and should try to get the Labour Party into office.

You should give them such support as the rope gives to the executed person. I mean to say that, after all, we have to be realists in this matter, not to live in a realm of theory, but to get right down to the reality. Surely we understand that the British working class has not yet passed through the experience of having a Kerensky or a Scheidemann, and that, the sooner it goes through that experience, the better. We cannot assist it to go through that experience by a policy of aloofness from the working class movement. A realistic sizing up of the situation means that we must be in and out of the labour movement all the time. But, of course, if you want to get a reputation for real revolutionary fervour, you must use words like

these: "Let us march straight forward, turning neither to the right nor to the left, but keeping our revolutionary principles clear and unsullied."

That is the way you become a *left* communist because you leave your comrades behind. I make my plea this morning, in connection with the new party, that it shall not indulge in such antics. After all, something important has happened in the world during the last few years, and that is the Russian Revolution, and the experience of a proletarian revolution which you get from that; and we know that the Bolsheviks would never have won through to the triumph they have achieved by the policy of aloofness, dogmatism and so forth, which is at rock bottom the inspiration of the antagonism to affiliation to the Labour Party.

A week or two before the outbreak of the October revolution the Bolsheviks were getting ready their list of candidates for the duma. A fortnight, or it might have been three weeks or a month after, they abolished the duma. That is the way to be flexible. That is the way to adapt yourself to circumstances. That is the way to fight scientifically. That is the way to use strategy and tactics in order to win through.

Of course, I am talking like a Labour fakir! "The only way in which you can win is by a frontal attack, never mind what kind of support you have got; if the battalions are small don't hesitate: go right in." I don't believe in that kind of thing; I think that the longest way round is sometimes the nearest way home. I know we are working against an enemy who is very insidious in his methods. He does not use frontal attacks, but flanking movements of all kinds to undermine our position. I want us to use the same kind of thing.

Now, comrades, we had from comrade Bell yesterday what, to my mind, was an extremely lucid exposition of the arguments for revolutionary parliamentary action.<sup>5</sup> They were also very powerful and cogent arguments for affiliation to the Labour Party. Comrade Bell told us, and I thoroughly agree with it, that all spheres of life where working class opinion can be influenced are important. With that I steadfastly agree, but to say that, and with the next breath to advocate that we should keep outside the Labour Party, seems to me a contradiction.

Inside the Labour Party we can influence working class opinion. Inside the Labour Party we can use a lever by which we can ultimately destroy the influence of the treacherous leaders of the trade union movement on the political field ●

## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* March 24.
2. This is actually a less negative version of the original title than the name most comrades know the work by - ie, *Left wing communism, an infantile disorder*. As Mark Fischer wrote, "... a better translation of the phrase rendered 'infantile disorder' is actually 'childhood disease'. What Lenin is attempting to do ... is address some of the growing pains, the maladies associated with the infant stage of the world communist movement." See *Weekly Worker* October 21 2004.
3. In Britain represented by Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation - see *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010.
4. Philipp Scheidemann (1865-1939) was a leader of the German Social Democratic Party who voted for war credits in 1914. In 1918, Scheidemann unilaterally proclaimed the republic from a balcony in the Reichstag building in order to upstage the proclamation of a workers' republic by the communists, led by Karl Liebknecht, which indeed followed a couple hours later.
5. Gustav Noske (1868-1946) was defence minister in 1919-20. He unleashed the infamous Freikorps (paramilitary organisations of ex-soldiers), who were responsible for the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.
5. *Weekly Worker* March 17.



**Guilt by association? First Labour cabinet in 1924. Prime minister Ramsay MacDonald is fifth from left in front row**



**STUDENTS**

# Making plans

Communist Students convened in Manchester for its annual conference on April 2. Greg Compton reports



Student protests have gone but have politicised many

Communist Students was formed on the initiative of student members and supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain, nearly five years ago. We were, then as now, concerned that the far left was offering very slim pickings to radicals on campus - in fact, the same reheated left-Labourite politics it serves up to those in 'adult' society.

Alas, rejecting the political and intellectual timidity of the student left is one thing - putting something better in its place quite another. The recent period has seen a whole series of student protests, with an attendant pace of radicalisation that outstripped both the decrepit official structures of the National Union of Students and, to an extent, the efforts of the far left to harness that energy. This year's Communist Students conference had perhaps the most urgent tasks to discuss in our brief existence.

After report-backs from branches, then, discussion focused on perspectives for the coming year. Ben Lewis moved a motion from the outgoing executive, which emphasised both the chaos ushered in by the capitalist crisis and the opportunities this raised for communists on campus. It would be necessary for us to up our game in new conditions - Ben presented various proposals, including regular national meetings, more frequent publication of *Communist Student* and a more systematic approach to education.

Sebastian Osthoff also presented proposals to the conference. He suggested that focusing our work on producing regular bulletins for students and workers would enable us to 'bridge the gap' between activist work and political discussion, which were at present disconnected. The ins and outs of producing a bulletin occupied a great deal of discussion, with separate motions from Chris Strafford and Liam Conway, and Ustun Yazar.

The Manchester CS branch has already produced two such bulletins (*The Educator*), but numerous reservations were raised; Manchester comrades were concerned that *The Educator* had been the work more of a handful of individual comrades than the branch as a whole. Others, including comrade Lewis and myself, considered the focus on high politics, which has been Communist Students' main priority, to have been submerged under elementary campus issues.

Comrade Osthoff's suggestion that future bulletins be modelled on the factory bulletins put out by the idiosyncratic French Trotskyist group, Lutte Ouvrière, also caused some concern - many were keen to point out that we were a student group, and our proper communist orientation towards working class revolution did not entail adopting workerism. Nonetheless, the idea of distributing bulletins was adopted

by the conference.

There was further discussion on the need for more systematic education in the group. Conference approved comrade Osthoff's motion on the subject, which emphasised that collective education was an integral part of CS membership, and suggested 'classic' and introductory texts as the basis for reading.

We also debated the role of the CS executive, which had become a point of contention when it decided to affiliate CS to the Labour Representation Committee earlier this year, against the wishes of many comrades. The issue was revisited in the final session, which was given over to the tactics and strategy we should employ in relation to the Labour Party. I argued in favour of the CPGB's theses on the subject (see *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010): Labour is, and always has been, a party of the labour bureaucracy, and thus in the last analysis has served as a tool of the bourgeoisie.

However, it presents a serious material obstacle to all who would organise the working class in Britain - both anti-Labourite attempts to organise in complete disregard for its existence, and 'entrism' projects which ignore independent organisation are doomed to fail. The Labour Party could, however, be transformed into a united front of *all* working class organisations - almost uniquely among

parties of social democracy - roughly equivalent to the soviets of 1917. Needless to say, this would mean a radical break with all of its history, not to say the pro-capitalist right which has always dominated it.

Comrade Chris Strafford, also a CPGB member but opposed to the theses, argued instead that, while some kind of intervention in the Labour Party was necessary before we could make revolution, it was not practical to expect our slender forces to achieve it at the present time. He suggested that we would find better opportunities working in the burgeoning anti-cuts movement.

Furthermore, we could forget about transforming Labour into a united front, said comrade Strafford - the point of the united front tactic was rather to break substantial sections of the class from social democracy. He saw the CPGB's policy as basically similar to the project of Labour Briefing, which, he said, relied on the Perry Anderson-Tom Nairn thesis regarding the peculiarity of the British working class movement, with its view of the old Communist Party as an alien imposition lacking any real roots.

Debate broadly polarised around our two positions, with additional discussion on the merits of LRC affiliation. The discussion, however, was pinched due to time constraints - and looks very likely to continue. We resolved to revisit it at our next members' aggregate in the autumn term ●

## Fighting fund

# Double likes

Our March fund ended with just £15 received on the final day (thanks to new subscriber JD for the extra donation), giving us a total of £1,347.

So we passed our £1,250 target with a bit to spare and we have also got off to a good start in April - we have exactly £300 in just six days.

I know for a fact how much the specific *Weekly Worker* message is appreciated from talking to people at the huge TUC demo last week and I am hoping that this will translate into both an increased readership and the more regular fulfilling of our fighting fund target.

One of those who contributed this week was GJ, who writes: "What I like about you is double! You say we should all unite and you say we

should all keep our principles!" Well, that sums it up, I suppose - sort of. Thanks for the tenner, GJ. Thanks also to those internet donors, who made use of our PayPal facility: £25 from CM, a monthly £5 from EJ and £10 from DV, in addition to his usual standing order. We had 12,221 online readers last week, by the way.

Talking of standing orders, 13 of them hit our account during the week. Brilliant! And a big 'thank you' to new CPGB supporter EL for her £20 cheque and to FJ for the generous £25 added to his sub.

Keep it coming, comrades! ● **Robbie Rix**

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

# What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

**Ireland's  
ULA calls  
convention**

## Aiming for a party

The United Left Alliance, which won five TDs in last month's general election, has called a convention with the aim of setting up a party. The ULA's two main components, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, made the announcement through the organisation's interim steering committee on March 28.

This comes against the backdrop of yet another bailout to Irish banks. On April 1 the new Fine Gael-Labour government declared that a further €24 billion is to be pumped into one more banking restructuring attempt - all to be paid for by cuts and tax increases. This news was linked to the announcement that bondholders would not suffer any losses. In an effort to secure continuing credit, finance minister Michael Noonan was at pains to emphasise that there would be no default. In other words, the Irish working class would continue to shoulder the main burden.

Even the likes of Martin Wolf, chief financial commentator at the *Financial Times*, remarked, in connection to the problems for peripheral countries such as Ireland, that "the idea that taxpayers should bail out senior creditors of massively insolvent banks at such risk to the solvency of their state is both unfair and unreasonable". As argued in a recent article on the anarchist Workers Solidarity Movement website, "During the bubble years from 2000 to 2007, UK, German, US and other banks fell over themselves to invest a truly stupendous five times the annual GDP of the country into the reckless property game being played by the Irish banks and developers. When the bubble burst, the then government decided that the losses of these greedy but guileless investors should be guaranteed by the population as a whole."<sup>1</sup>

This reality has not escaped anyone. But the problem continues to be the lack of confidence within the working class and the absence of a united revolutionary organisation. In its absence, other solutions vie for the political space. For example, Sinn Féin, having done very well in the election, has positioned itself to the left. It has adopted a Keynesian approach (not dissimilar in this respect to the ULA) and argues for more investment, etc. It is a vision that is dangerously utopian in the present circumstances. The implication that Ireland can go it alone is absurd - this country is completely bound up with the world capitalist economy. It cannot avoid the current crisis by withdrawing and relying on local investment. Any such 'go it alone' project also encourages nationalism and antipathy to 'outsiders'.

The fact that Sinn Féin espouses such ideas is no surprise. The ULA's main components, the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party, point quite rightly to the fact that Sinn Féin manages capitalism in the north of Ireland and implements the Westminster government cuts. Sinn Féin responds that it is doing its best in the circumstances. It is not promising socialism, after all, but a



Richard Boyd Barrett and Joe Higgins: SWP and SP leaders

fairer capitalism. As the ULA points out in its programme, "There can be no just or sustainable solution to the crisis based on the capitalist market." But, rather than clearly advocating the revolutionary supersession of capitalism, the ULA then goes on to state: "... instead we favour democratic and public control over resources, so that social need is prioritised over profit."<sup>2</sup> A deliberate fudge.

In reality the ULA proposes a Keynesian resolution to the crisis - a leftwing government presiding over a tamed Irish capitalism. Keynesian economists have at times argued for elements of nationalisation - ie, state control over some resources and essential services. Similarly the ULA's "democratic and public control" is not linked to the working class taking power into its own hands in order to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society - a necessarily international task, in any case. The working class is not even mentioned in its programme. It is no wonder that at ULA meetings audience members often ask what a ULA government would do about unemployment, taxation, etc. Their understanding of the programme is precisely that it aims to reform the present system.

Hopefully there will soon be opportunities to thrash out these issues. The ULA convention is to be held in late June, where "a broad range of policy areas will be discussed, as well

as the steps necessary to launch the United Left Alliance as a party."<sup>3</sup> The interim steering committee has also decided to begin setting up branches and recruiting members. Good news, and I for one hope for an open and full debate with the opportunity to put written proposals on programme and organisation. The convention must not be a rally.

Meanwhile, I have received a number of comments on my last article,<sup>4</sup> in particular from SP members - some supportive, some quite the opposite. The latter have argued that I was mischievously trying to stir up trouble. Apparently I had deliberately given the impression that the ULA does not support gay rights. It does and I did not intend to give that impression. But the main points I made about the opportunism of the programme and the shameful omission of a policy on abortion rights have not been dealt with by my critics. Certainly these issues will not go away and I am not the only member raising them. These too need to be tackled in members' meetings and at the convention.

A point which was made by Philip Ferguson last week was that the ULA programme contains no policy on the north of Ireland.<sup>5</sup> He is absolutely right that there is a silence on the border. Not only is there no mention of it in the ULA programme, but the SWP and the SP in the north only ever mention republicanism in the negative - as part and parcel of the

'green-orange' sectarianism that they want to defeat through unity around anti-cuts campaigns.

Unlike in the south the two organisations are contesting separately in the forthcoming local and assembly elections. The Socialist Party is standing four candidates and is calling on people to vote socialist to defeat the cuts. It argues for "a new, mass working class party that can provide a genuine socialist alternative to the sectarian parties in elections".<sup>6</sup> As is to be expected, the SP avoids the question of the British state presence and the division of Ireland. The Socialist Party has always been known for its dreadful position on the occupation.

The SWP, however, has historically had a better stance on the national question, but its comrades in the north do not want it mentioned in election contests under the People Before Profit banner. In fact the SWP's campaign in the north is, if anything, to the right of the SP. It has three candidates, including veteran SWP member Eamonn McCann. One of the three, Dympna McGlade, is standing for the assembly in North Belfast. For her the main issue is cuts. She rejects the "tribalism" of Stormont and "if elected she will reject the labels, 'orange' and 'green', and will describe herself as 'other'".<sup>7</sup> This relates to the fact that current assembly rules stipulate that you have to use one of three labels: 'nationalist', 'unionist' or 'other'.

For his part, comrade McCann

argues for investment to be paid for by taxing the rich. He describes himself as an active trade unionist, but does not refer to his history in the civil rights movement, as an SWP member or socialist. He too says, if elected, "I would designate myself not as nationalist or unionist, but as 'other'".<sup>8</sup> While the comrades are right to reject the 'nationalist' and 'unionist' tags, the problem is the lack of a socialist identity. And the absence of any mention of the role of the British state is a huge problem. Everything is reduced to being anti-cuts, as the SWP tries to ignore the deep political divisions, as though they were just dreamed up by Stormont politicians and have nothing to do with the working class.

In the middle of this global crisis those who call themselves revolutionaries must put forward ideas that deal with what is really happening in the world - and democratic solutions to the problems of nationalism and sectarianism that put the working class at the helm. It is a delusion to pretend that all the working class has to do is fight the cuts and it will spontaneously be drawn towards socialism - despite those cleverly worded leaflets that do not even mention the word. Getting elected is a step forward - but not at the price of watering down your politics for a few extra votes. We must use elections to make propaganda for socialism and to educate and win the working class to that programme - it is, after all, the only solution ●

Anne McShane

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### Notes

1. www.wsm.ie/c/ireland-bank-billion-bailout-april-fool.
2. www.unitedleftalliance.com.
3. *Ibid.*
4. 'Now the left has TDs', March 24.
5. Letters, March 31.
6. www.socialistparty.net/elections/120-news-front/579-vote-against-cuts-vote-socialist-on-5-may.
7. www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/taxonomy/term/29.
8. www.eamonmccann.com/1/archives/04-2011/1.html.

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