



# weekly worker

**Principles shape electoral  
tactics: lessons from  
Bismarckian Germany**

- Cameron and migration
- Commodifying education
- Labour affiliation
- PCS elections

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## Triumvirate commits to regime change in Libya

# LETTERS



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

## Trotskyology

Arthur Bough objects to many points in my reply to Gerry Downing on the question of Libya (Letters, April 14).

The first point is insubstantial. I do not believe that imperialism 'thinks', any more than Marx, when he refers to the 'point of view' of capital, believes the latter has eyes. It is a figure of speech, not a conspiracy theory.

Comrade Bough goes on to object to my placing the words 'united front' in Trotsky's mouth when it comes to anti-imperialist strategy - apparently Trotsky reserved that phrase for agreements between workers' organisations only. My knowledge of Trotsky is by no means comprehensive enough for me not to take his word for it on this narrow linguistic issue (he does use the phrase, it should be noted, with regard to defence of the USSR). Nonetheless, the drift of his thought is clear. Trotsky's policy when it comes to bourgeois colonial revolts in conflict with imperialism is to urge communists to side with the colonised against imperialism.

Arthur usefully draws out the political conclusions of this line for the Libyan case: "...in the face of an imperialist attack on the country, communists still have to support the state, whilst continuing to mobilise the workers to oppose both imperialism and the Gaddafi regime." So communists unite with the regime against the common enemy of imperialism, without surrendering their independence and freedom to criticise and so forth - in other words, the dictionary definition of the united front.

That this 'united front' is not with another workers' organisation does not change the character of the relationship - except inasmuch as it is almost guaranteed not to work, and to end in disaster. Gaddafi has a long and sordid history of repressing forces to his left. Things will have to look pretty gloomy from his perspective before he changes his tune on this point. Such is, in reality, the story of bourgeois nationalists throughout recent history. You can call it the anti-imperialist united front, or you can call it - as the Spartacists and their derivatives do - military-but-not-political support, or you can call it - as Bough does - nothing at all. It does not work, and it never has. Trotsky was wrong.

Comrade Bough also accuses me of 'lesser evilism'. This is, I think, an unfair reading of a passage he quotes later on: "...the mere fact of a rebellion is a positive, progressive development." The Libyan rebels are not the 'lesser evil' with regard to Gaddafi. For the Libyan working class to be able to organise as a class, indeed for the Arab revolution to be more than a beautiful dream, Gaddafi and his regime will have to go, sooner or later, like all the rest of them. A threat to his power - as comrade Bough correctly notes - may issue in something worse. It is up to the Libyan masses to act upon their democratic aspirations to make sure this does not happen; again, I say with Lenin - those who wait for a pure revolution will wait forever.

Bringing the Arab revolution into the equation was no accident either - comrade Bough, like most who argue against supporting the rebellion, is very keen to stress that this time it is different. Yes, there are always differences - for that matter, there were and are differences between Tunisia and Egypt. There is a commonality, however: the unresolved Arab national question, which *objectively* unites these struggles. The potential is there

for these revolts and revolutions to grow together rather than drift further apart, and it is in the interests of communists that this should happen. Again, Gaddafi is an obstacle.

The complaint that this is a civil war, not a 'real' rebellion, is an odd one for someone so keen to defend Trotsky - sometimes rebellions are not telegraphic, or clean. Sometimes they are civil wars. They change our tactical priorities, not our strategic tasks. Whatever else one might want to reproach Trotsky with, shrinking from providing a clear political lead in a real mess is not one of them. Concretely, if workers in Tripoli "oppose Gaddafi, but even more fear the rebels", that does not change our strategic task - for a sustainable democratic outcome, *Gaddafi has to go!*

On to the question of imperialism. Gaddafi is not militarily capable of defeating the combined forces of the US, UK and France - no matter how many communists form a (non-) united front with him (and he has seen to it that there are not many). Forcing the end to this mendacious, bloodthirsty campaign is in reality a task for *us*, both in the sense of the working class in the belligerent countries, but also more broadly the democratic, anti-imperialist masses everywhere - especially in Tunisia and Egypt. If the remnants of the Mubarak and Ben Ali regimes can be swept away for good, we shall see who comes out on top in Libya - imperialism, Gaddafi (that is, in the long run, imperialism again) or the beleaguered Libyan masses.

Comrade Bough refers to my arguments as 'dangerous'; but this is more true of his, as they attempt to efface the regional and global-strategic context of the Libyan conflict, in which lies the possibility of a genuinely progressive outcome.

**James Turley**

## Algebraic

Eddie Ford falls into error in a number of respects due to what is, I believe, an incorrect view of the class nature of the revolution in Egypt ('Mubarak's detention is due to targeted mass pressure', April 14).

Eddie says: "...if the army starts to fray at the edges - even split down the middle - this poses a mortal threat to the entire regime, not just the present army incumbents or a future, tame, 'civilian' government deemed friendly to the interests of the Tantawi ruling council and the Egyptian ruling class as a whole."

This suggests that Eddie sees that ruling class standing behind the existing regime. I think that is wrong. The regime in Egypt, as with many more in the region, is Bonapartist. It exists precisely because the bourgeoisie as a ruling class is absolutely too weak, due to its historical development, to rule directly. Bonapartism is not a regime that capital chooses freely, but one it is forced to endure due to its absolute or relative weakness.

In fact, it is the economic development that has occurred in the last two decades - the strengthening of the bourgeoisie not just internally, but the growing numbers of foreign productive capitalists establishing in the country, along with a rapidly rising middle class, many of whom are the ones who led the protests in Tahrir Square - which has provided the material basis for the revolution: a bourgeois democratic revolution. As with all previous bourgeois democratic revolutions, the workers are necessarily drawn in to support it.

The fact that it is a bourgeois revolution should give us pause for thought about where the interests of Egyptian workers and other social classes are joined and where they diverge. Indeed, the truth is that the

main beneficiaries of a successful bourgeois democratic revolution in Egypt will, of course, be the bourgeoisie. That is why the United States and other big powers have been attempting to nudge the regime in that direction, in a way that brings about the kind of managed change that will ensure the interests of capital are safeguarded.

As Lenin put it in *The state and revolution*, "Another reason why the omnipotence of 'wealth' is more certain in a democratic republic is that it does not depend on defects in the political machinery or on the faulty political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell ..., it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it."

In other words, for this big capital that extracts profit by means of relative surplus value, bourgeois democracy is the best means of disguising the nature of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, of incorporating the workers via the trade unions and collective bargaining, and of maintaining the oppression and exploitation of the workers. It is the idea that the French Marxists developed during the 1970s within the terms of the regulation school, under the heading of 'Fordism'. The nature of the democratic revolution in Egypt today will be defined by how much the regime attempts to cling to power. But, in fact, the more successful that revolution, the more the revolutionary forces themselves must fracture, precisely because of the opposing interests of the workers and the bourgeoisie that comprise its elements.

It is for that reason that I believe the demand raised by Eddie for the establishment of a popular militia is wrong. It is, of course, a democratic demand associated with the bourgeois democratic revolution. It was raised in the American revolution. But it is precisely the nature of the democratic revolution, under conditions where the working class exists as a developed social force in its own right, that now makes this demand redundant from the standpoint of the workers.

A popular - ie, people's - militia clouds the issue of the classes involved. The workers, the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie might have shared interests in winning bourgeois freedoms in Egypt now, but tomorrow, as those freedoms begin to be achieved, their interests will be sharply opposed. We should not wait until then before developing the workers' own demands, own means of struggle. We should demand not a popular militia, but a workers' militia, democratically accountable to workers' committees established in their neighbourhoods, and defence squads established in each workplace democratically accountable to factory committees of workers.

That the army is fracturing is also good. We should demand the establishment of soldiers' assemblies and democratic rights, including the right to elect immediate commanding officers. We should attempt to tie in the soldiers' committees to the workers' committees and factory committees.

Indeed we should attempt, as Eddie suggests, to ensure the arming of the militia by the soldiers. But workers in Egypt are also involved in arms production and we should seek to ensure that the workers are armed directly by these means. A meaningful international revolutionary movement, would be itself organising to send direct military aid, including fighters, to come to the assistance of the Egyptian workers to oppose the

regime and any attempt by powerful capitalist states to intervene in the way they are intervening in Libya.

Trotsky opposed the social-imperialism of those such as Milyukov who cherry-picked which atrocities to condemn, as groups such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty do today. An individual, a group, a party or a class that 'objectively' picks its nose, while it watches men drunk with blood massacring defenceless people, is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive.

In fact, it is for some of the other reasons that Eddie sets out about the weakness of the working class throughout the Middle East that such international support is vital. But I think that Eddie is wrong to tie the Egyptian workers' fate to that of the rest of the Arab world. It would, of course, be good if all of the oil revenues of the Gulf states could be used to help develop the region as a whole. But it is precisely the fact that these Gulf states remain dependent upon the extraction of rent from oil that makes this scenario unviable. Whereas economic development in Egypt and, to an extent, Tunisia has produced a sizeable working class, in the oil-producing states this is not the case.

It is difficult to see how a proletarian revolution is possible in states where the working class is so small and undeveloped, and frequently comprises foreign workers tied to the oil companies themselves. Socialism may not be possible in Egypt at the moment, but it certainly is possible for the interests and organisations of the Egyptian workers to be developed, to defend and where possible extend their position. What develops from there, as Lenin would describe it, is 'algebraic'.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Dead-end street

I want to support James Turley's defence of halfway houses ('Intervention, not incoherent abstention', April 14).

Some years ago I argued that communists should not *just* build their own organisation, but should build an alternative party to Labour, which would be a united front for all pro-working class partisans and organisations. This party should include communists and socialists. In one early formulation this was a 'communist-labour' party, which meant bringing workers from both traditions into one militant party. Objectively this can only work as a republican socialist party. It would be like the Chartist Party, not another Labour Party.

It pursuit of this dual strategy I joined the CPGB-led Campaign for a Marxist Party and the Socialist Party-led Campaign for a New Workers' Party. The first was a sleek racing horse that fell at the first fence and had to be shot. The second was a carthorse, which plodded along and is now stuck in the mud. It was abandoned for a new horse called 'Tusc', which is trotting around, even though it doesn't know where the winning post is.

Previously the CPGB had an ultra-left policy of opposing 'united front' parties as halfway houses and only building a Communist Party. The CPGB has broken from that and adopted a 'dual' strategy. The 'new' policy should be called 'New' Halfway Housism, perhaps in response to the apparent demise of the 'New' in Labour.

James Turley points to the CPGB theses, which say: "The Labour Party can be made into the real party of labour. By that we communists mean establishing the Labour Party as a united front for all pro-working

class partisans and organisations." If I had an amendment it would replace all references to Labour Party with "a Chartist party/RSP". Hence, "By that we communists mean establishing the Chartist Party/RSP as a united front for all pro-working class partisans and organisations."

In the old leftist days the CPGB presented its opposition to halfway houses as a matter of principle. Now we can see it was merely a matter of strategy and tactics. Behind the united front tactics were the strategies of the *British road to socialism* and the republican road to socialism. Historically the former rests on a two-party alliance between the Labour Party and the CPGB, which means defending and supporting the Labour Party.

Leftists argue that communists should not set out to build a new united-front workers' party. This would imply that communists had some sort of responsibility for it. They think it would be better to stand back and let the reformist workers lead and criticise their failings or, if they try to exclude us, for being parasites, not leaders.

In opposition to the leftists we have the new cuckoo tactic, where you fly into somebody else's nest, chuck out a couple of eggs, put your own there and wait for mother bird to hatch them out. This way the old leftist revolutionary purity is maintained and we can avoid responsibility because we did not build the nest in the first place!

Of course the Labour Party is a popular front led by capitalist interests. It is a dead-end house, not a halfway house. But at least I understand your ambition to transform it from a dead end to a halfway house. So Chris Stafford has a point after all: Labour is a dead-end street.

**Steve Freeman**  
South London

## Anti-blather

I was bemused by the letter (April 14) from Republic complaining about the ban on their street party on April 29. Are they so politically innocent as to imagine the ruling class will meekly accept what it sees as a threat and an insult to one of its sacrosanct fetishes? Labour councillors compete with Tory landlords to grovel at the feet of a dysfunctional feudal anachronism.

Republic has tried to make republicanism respectable - all appearance and little real political substance. But history shows that republicanism has been anything but respectable. John Lilburne, Thomas Paine, George Harney and John De Morgan were revolutionaries who would have brought down the monarchy and class rule with pike and musket.

The Republican Socialist Convention at South Bank University on April 16 was small, but of high quality. From Republic's own ranks came myself (I was a founding member in 1983), Scott Reeve, who is on Republic's board, and Peter Tatchell who said he was proud to be a republican socialist.

After many false starts such as the Workers' Republican Forum and the Republican Communist Network, it remains to be seen if anything will come from the Republican Socialist Convention. But in view of the mystifying shmaltz and blather, designed to distract us from the economic crisis and the savage cuts, on April 29 and long after, a viable republican socialism remains an urgent necessity.

**Terry Liddle**  
South London

## Swallow that

Whatever the detailed specifics of Chris Bamberg's resignation from



the Socialist Workers Party, the bigger picture is one of a long-predicted, slow implosion of a Stalinoid undemocratic sect - an organisation going the same way as similar internal regimes in the Revolutionary Communist Party, Workers Revolutionary Party, Socialist Labour League, etc, but just taking a bit longer to reach the final inevitable denouement (‘Latest irresponsible split from SWP’, April 14).

The worry is that active socialists with many strengths - commitment, self-sacrifice, willingness to fight injustice and exploitation - either continue to follow a figure like Bambery or get involved in a single issue or, worse still, simply give up in disgust, perhaps tarring all groups with the same brush.

Hopefully, instead the individuals involved will take time to reassess their politics, start to read some of the constructive criticisms of the SWP made by forces on its left and begin to engage in a dialogue with Marxists who have been historically accurate in their differences with the SWP’s ideas and methods. As Bob Dylan put it, “Swallow your pride; you will not die: it’s not poison.”

**Peter Burton**  
Glasgow

## Not the party

Alun Davies makes a rather telling error, or entirely misunderstands me, when he takes me to task for remarks about his father’s (Roy Davies) rejection of the revolutionary party (Letters, April 14).

Alun writes: “My father gave his all to Militant, he gave up his marriage and children to fight for the ‘revolutionary party’, so to say that he ‘rejected’ it is unfair. He should be commended for his undying support, not lambasted for it.”

Of course, I never suggested anywhere that Militant was the revolutionary party! Quite the opposite, as the bulk of those 10,000 words in ‘For democratic centralism’ makes rather clear. My contention was that Davies senior clearly rejected the *concept and politics* of the revolutionary party. That party, absolutely and expressly, not being Militant. Davies senior’s commitment to our class and the work he put in while a member of Militant and afterwards is not in doubt, but is not the point either.

In conclusion, I politely advise comrade Davies to re-read the document and, with the above remarks in context, my meaning should be apparent.

**Harry Paterson**  
Nottingham

## With our class

I have read Ian Isaac’s book (Letters, April 14). I knew Ian long before the miners’ strike. We both supported Militant. We both had fathers who were Labour councillors. We both sold the *Militant* at the south Wales miners’ conferences in Porthcawl. I was chairman of Bridgend miners’ support group, which didn’t have a so-called Militant majority. When our class moved into battle, we stood by them and we were prepared to go to the end.

In south Wales convoys of lorries were driven tightly together with Thatcher’s boot boys protecting them. Even though we knew that the Tories had planned for this for 10 years, we went with our class.

The cowardice of the Labour leaders and the TUC meant they failed to support the miners in their heroic struggle. Ultimately they were defeated, but they marched back to their pits with their heads held high, their banners unfurled and the band playing. It was a defeat, but it was better to fight than to surrender.

Seeing the masses move in the north African countries confirms our

faith in the ability of the working class and downtrodden masses to transform society. Mass picketing brings the class together, shows their strength and tests out their leaders. Emlyn Williams, Ian Isaac and Tyrone O’Sullivan gave a lead; others were found wanting.

There was tremendous support for the miners in south Wales, yet the leaders of the Labour Party didn’t want to be associated with mass picketing - a sure sign that it is the right tactic.

**Alun Morgan**  
email

## Chávez betrayal

The Chávez government in Venezuela expelled two alleged ELN guerrillas to Colombia on April 11. Chávez has put the lives of these comrades in danger. They are accused of killing four Colombian marines in an attack on March 17. At that time a group of four guerrillas fled across the border into Venezuela, assuming they would be given political asylum.

This action by the Venezuelan government puts into question its internationalism, espoused in the rhetoric of ‘Bolivarismo’. In practice, this has led Chávez to support so-called ‘progressive’, Bonapartist regimes, but not the revolutionary left.

At the same time the Colombian government is expelling Walid Makled, a narco kingpin, to Venezuela, despite demands by the Obama government that he be sent to the USA for trial. Obviously, a deal was made at the April 9 conference between Chávez, Santos (Venezuela) and Lugo (Honduras).

Though we may disagree with the politics of the ELN, supporters of the Venezuelan revolution should make known to that government that they oppose this betrayal.

**Earl Gilman**  
email

## Peak-a-boo

My disagreement with Tony Clarke’s advocacy of the peak oil theory is not about the fact that the oil will at some point run out - of course it will: everyone knows that - but his argument that peak oil equals the end of capitalism (Letters, April 14). This is determinist and frankly dangerous nonsense.

Capitalism as an economic and social system has proved extremely resilient over the past 400 years and there is no reason to suppose it will not survive the present economic and financial crisis as well as ‘peak oil’. But the point is, this will be at the expense of the majority working class, as always. If capitalism does suddenly collapse, the result is unlikely to be socialism or communism, but some form of barbarism - “the ruin of the contending classes”, as Marx and Engels put it.

You do need the productive forces to have developed to a certain degree before you can establish communism. In that sense, capitalism played a historically progressive role until the early 20th century, when it became technically possible to achieve abundance.

Yes, you need ideology to make the change, but more importantly you need a conscious political revolution, where the majority working class takes state power out of the hands of the capitalist class.

What I do think is that 21st century Marxism needs to be green as well as red, and I would especially commend the Campaign Against Climate Change trade union group’s pamphlet, *One million climate jobs*. This sets out a powerful and compelling case for massive investment in alternative renewable energy, wholesale renovation and insulation of homes and buildings, and a radical expansion of cheap and comprehensive public transport.

This makes sense in terms of

facing up to the challenge of climate change and sustainable living in the 21st century, and at the same time happens to create at least an additional one million well-paid public sector jobs, helps generate a vibrant and technologically advanced manufacturing base, and solves the economic and financial crisis - but in the interests of the working class and our succeeding generations.

Do I think such a programme can be implemented within capitalism? No, but advocating what we really need and in ways which make sense to working people is the way we build the broadest possible alliance for change and raise fundamental questions about the need to discard an aged and degenerating economic and social system, in favour of one in line with the needs and ambitions of a modern, integrated and interconnected 21st century world.

Not waiting for capitalism to collapse of its own accord, but using the scientific, dialectical-materialist method of Marxism to analyse its failings and to chart the road for revolutionary change.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Full frontal

In response to Mike Macnair’s article (‘Electoral principles and our tactics’, April 14), here is an attempt at possible routes to political consciousness.

Popular fronts seek to work with the liberal bourgeoisie. United fronts, as interpreted by Trotsky, seek to work with social-corporatists. In both kinds of work, one has to shut up about more radical politics, such as actual class struggle, and the class collaboration sets out achieving something less than even the orthodox Kautskyan minimum programme. The reader should note that there are such people as ‘bourgeois communarians’ and populists not fond of communitarian ideas (like individualists/‘libertarians’). It should also be noted that there should be independent working class political organisation in all three cases.

When I started out mapping some sort of road beyond popular and united fronts, I started very prematurely with the *populist* front, which implies something more than short-term organisation. Given the whole range of controversial issues that could be addressed by this populist front, I had to rethink my approach. Just because plain populist fronts aren’t viable doesn’t mean that populist front tactics, with respect to greens and various non-bourgeois but non-worker ‘third parties’ opposed to the two-party system, aren’t.

A whole range of other issues are there for populist front tactics to be applied to, such as:

- Full freedom of assembly and association - free especially from anti-employment reprisals, police interference, *agents provocateurs*, etc.
  - The expansion of the ability to bear arms, of self-defence against police brutality and of general self-defence, all toward enabling the formation of people’s militias based on free training.
  - The expansion of local autonomy through participatory budgeting and oversight by local assemblies.
  - The mandatory recognition of education and related work experience from abroad, along with the wholesale transnational standardisation of such education and the implementation of other measures to counter the underemployment of guest workers and all other immigrants.
  - The abolition of all copyright, patent and other intellectual property laws, as well as all restrictions on peer-to-peer sharing, open source programming and the like.
- Jacob Richter**  
email

# ACTION

### London Communist Forum

Saturday May 7, 5pm, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road (nearest tube: Kings Cross). ‘The Arab revolution’. Speakers to be confirmed.

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact [info@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.communiststudents.org.uk](http://www.communiststudents.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, 6.45pm to 9pm, St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).  
**April 26:** ‘A brief history of life on earth’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

### Gay marriage rights

**Monday April 25, 12 noon:** Marriage equality celebration in front of Buckingham Palace, London SW1. End the ban on same-sex marriage. Organised by Equal Love campaign: [www.equallove.org.uk](http://www.equallove.org.uk).

### Crisis in Japan

**Thursday April 28, 7pm:** Discussion forum, Italian Advice Centre, 124 Canonbury Road, London N1 (nearest tube: Highbury and Islington). Including speaker from Japan Revolutionary Communist League on the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. Organised by *Marxism 21* journal.

### Not the royal wedding

**Friday April 29, 11.30am to 3.30pm:** Republican street party, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). Celebrate democracy and people-power rather than inherited privilege. Delicious food, live jazz, Republic merchandise, magic and street performances. Organised by Republic: [www.republic.org.uk](http://www.republic.org.uk).

### Stuff the royal wedding

**Friday April 29, 8pm to 1.30am:** Party, 93 Feet East Club, 150 Brick Lane, London E1 (nearest tubes: Aldgate East). Tickets: £10 waged, £5 unwaged, from Bookmarks. Organised by Love Music Hate Racism and Cultures of Resistance: 020 7637 1848.

### May Day

**Sunday May 1, 12 noon:** March, Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speakers include: Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Sarah Veale (TUC). Organised by the London May Day Organising Committee: [www.londonmayday.org](http://www.londonmayday.org).  
**Sunday May 1, 1pm:** March, All Saints Park, Oxford Road, Manchester. Organised by Manchester TUC: [secmtuc@gmail.com](mailto:secmtuc@gmail.com).

### Communities under attack

**Wednesday May 4, 7pm:** Panel discussion, ‘Building alliances against criminalisation’, Friends House, 173-199 Euston Road, London NW1 (nearest tube: Euston). Speakers: Cilius Victor, Newham Monitoring Project; Sarah Walker, English Collective of Prostitutes; Asim Qureshi, Cageprisoners; Sam Lamble, Bent Bars Project; Gloria Morrison, Joint Enterprise - Not Guilty By Association; Emma Gin, Medical Justice. Hosted by Communities of Resistance: [www.co-re.org](http://www.co-re.org).

### Defend council housing

**Saturday May 7, 12 noon:** National meeting, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1. Organise next steps in campaign against Localism Bill. Organised by Defend Council Housing: [defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://defendcouncilhousing.org.uk).

### March to save the NHS

**Tuesday May 17, 5.30pm:** March to Whitehall. Assemble UCH, Gower Street, London SW1. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: [www.keepournhspublic.com](http://www.keepournhspublic.com).

### Confronting anti-Muslim hatred

**Saturday May 21, 11am to 6pm:** Conference, London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel Road, London E1. Speakers include: Muslim activists from Germany and France; Tony Benn, Mehdi Hassan, Salma Yaqoob, Daud Abdullah, Liz Fekete, Lindsey German and Lowkey. Admission free, but booking advisable. Organised by Enough Coalition: [www.enoughcoalition.org.uk](http://www.enoughcoalition.org.uk).

### Afghanistan and the war on terror

**Saturday June 11, 10am to 5pm:** Conference, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, George Galloway, Joan Humphries, Pankaj Mishra, Tony Benn. Admission £5 (please book in advance). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

### Remember Gaza

**Sunday June 12, 6pm:** Gaza Awareness Conference, Newcastle city centre (venue to be confirmed). Guests include Lowkey, Jody McIntyre, Yvonne Ridley. Proceeds to Ride to Gaza to provide kindergartens in Gaza refugee camps. Organised by Ride to Gaza: [www.ridetogaza.com](http://www.ridetogaza.com)

### 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.



## IMMIGRATION

# Left gets it wrong

Cameron should not be condemned for playing into the hands of the BNP, argues **Peter Manson**. He should be condemned for pushing a vicious anti-working class line right now

**D**avid Cameron's major anti-immigration speech last week was, as just about all commentators are agreed, clearly aimed at shoring up the Conservative Party's rightwing support in the May 5 English council, Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly elections.

But those on the left who say it was intended to whip up racism are badly mistaken. In fact Cameron went out of his way to demonstrate his politically correct, anti-racist credentials just three days earlier. Speaking in Harrogate on April 11, he used the opportunity of a question on the effect of tuition fees on poorer students to deflect criticism from coalition policy onto the elite universities for being insufficiently inclusive: "I saw figures the other day that showed that only one black person went to Oxford last year," he said. "I think that is disgraceful."

In reality, as well as the one student he was referring to who self-described as 'black Caribbean', there were 23 'black African' and four 'black other' among the new intake in 2009. The university stated that 22% were from an ethnic minority that year. Slightly misleading then. Especially when you consider that, out of all the 16,591 Oxford undergraduate and graduate students who disclosed their ethnicity at the start of the 2009-10 academic year, 1,477 were 'Asian', 1,098 described themselves as 'Chinese', 838 called themselves 'mixed race', 254 said they were 'other' and 253 were 'black'.

It is pretty clear, then, that the problem is not one of 'institutional racism', as Cameron implied, but the failings of the *class*-biased education system, which means that state schools in working class areas are totally inadequate - they are underfunded and underresourced, and most certainly incapable of helping their students attain the kind of grades demanded by the top universities. Not to mention the deprivations of the inner-city environment, where many working class and, in particular, black children have the misfortune to go to school.

## Clearing the way

However, Cameron was not in the slightest concerned at the outrage expressed by Oxford officials and top academics. His deliberately exaggerated and carefully prepared remark had the intended effect: clearing the way for his April 14 address to Tory activists in Hampshire on his desire to achieve "good immigration, not mass immigration" into the UK.

The speech itself was couched in anti-racist language and even pointed to the benefits of immigration that anti-racist and liberal critics of UK migration policy have continually acclaimed: "... yes, immigrants make a huge contribution to Britain. We recognise that - and we welcome it." Cameron also declared: "I want us to starve extremist parties of the oxygen of public anxiety they thrive on and extinguish them once and for all."

Note that the more common phrase, 'oxygen of publicity', was cleverly amended. For such speeches from mainstream politicians have a dual effect: on the one hand, they do allow the likes of the British National Party some more space temporarily, since the migration question is at the centre of their agenda (Simon Darby



Promoting xenophobia

of the BNP spoke, not inaccurately, of the "ceremonial adoption of our policy about two weeks before any major vote"); on the other hand, this type of speech generally succeeds in reclaiming support from people tempted to vote for the far right. And it is certainly true that millions of people are 'anxious' - in hard times they instinctively accept the 'obvious' answers of greater control over immigration to protect 'our' jobs, conditions and services.

However, in this area of his speech Cameron was to the *left* of Gordon Brown's crude "British jobs for British workers" nationalism. He said: "This is not a case of 'immigrants coming over here and taking our jobs'. The fact is ... there are not a fixed number of jobs in our economy. If 100 migrant workers come into the country, they don't simply displace job opportunities for 100 British citizens ... they also ... create wealth and new jobs."

Nevertheless, the sheer weight of numbers has posed logistical problems, he says: between 1997 and 2009 "2.2 million more people came to live in this country than left to live abroad. That's the largest influx of people Britain has ever had ... and it has placed real pressures on communities up and down the country." Again this is an argument that will ring true for many, especially for those in high migrant areas suffering the effects of the Tories' own cutbacks.

The one area where Cameron did make a concession to BNP-type *racist* nationalism was in the section of his speech that bemoaned the 'changed character' of certain localities: "... when there have been significant numbers of new people arriving in neighbourhoods ... perhaps not able to speak the same language as those living there ... on occasions not really wanting or even willing to integrate ... that has created a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods."

Having acknowledged the vague sense of "discomfort" that many feel whenever a locality they are fond of and used to undergoes substantial change, Cameron went on to appeal to people's sense of injustice. Railing against "forced" and "sham" marriages, he used this to justify appalling restrictions on all British citizens who want to live in the UK with a

non-European Union partner. Because "some marriages take place when the spouse is very young, and has little or no grasp of English", the coalition has "introduced a requirement for all those applying for a marriage visa to demonstrate a minimum standard of English ... and we will defend the age limit of 21 for spouses coming to the UK."

The truth is that migration restrictions are aimed not at stamping out the exploitation of vulnerable women or any such nonsense. They are aimed at *controlling* the flow of labour to suit the needs of capital. That is why Cameron specifically linked the whole question to the insufficient 'incentive' - from the point of view of capital - of UK-resident workers to take employment as and when required: "... migrants are filling gaps in the labour market left wide open by a welfare system that for years has paid British people not to work".

While it is true that there are no restrictions on the free flow of labour *within* the UK (eg, workers migrating from a depressed area to a more prosperous one) or, in general, within the EU, that is more than made up for by migrants from outside Europe. Whereas "net immigration" (those coming in minus those who moved abroad) from the EU was just 27,000 in the year ending June 2010, from elsewhere it was 198,000.

It is hugely advantageous for capital to be able to place restrictions on such a potentially unlimited supply of labour - keeping out those deemed surplus to requirements at a given moment, while actively attracting and welcoming those with particular skills or abilities. This has the knock-on effect of disciplining the indigenous labour force - if UK workers will not knuckle under, there are plenty waiting outside to take over their jobs. And if a whole swathe of 'illegal' workers is created as a result of immigration controls, so much the better. Such workers have no employment rights and are in a very weak position to complain about their superexploitation.

## Reaction

What has been the reaction to Cameron's speech across the political spectrum? As for the Conservatives' coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, for the most part they behaved in their by now accustomed manner - forgetting all their pre-election talk about an amnesty on 'illegals' and generally going along with the Cameron line.

Maverick Lib Dem business secretary Vince Cable was an exception when he broke cabinet discipline to dub the Tory leader's remarks "unwise". Rather pathetically he said that "talk of mass immigration risks inflaming the extremism" of the far right. What? Just talking about it, even when you say it is not going to happen? Lib Dem leader and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg was happy to 're-interpret' Cameron's pronouncements to bring them more into line with his party's alleged liberalism. What a joy it will be to see hundreds of Lib Dems ejected from the council chambers following their drubbing on May 5.

What about Labour? Its leaders were equally pathetic, concentrating their fire on the coalition's internal divisions. Ed Miliband said the coalition needed to "get a grip", while shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper said

that the government "needs to tell us urgently what their policy actually is".

The truth is, there is a far-reaching establishment consensus on immigration and the alleged need for tight border controls. Which is why the left gets it so very wrong when it condemns Cameron not so much for his actual migration policies - anti-working class to the core though they are - but for playing into the hands of the BNP. So the Socialist Workers Party published a very short front-page article entitled 'Cameron wades into racist sewer'. But the only other mention of racism came in this sentence: "He is cynical enough to give confidence to the racists to try and save his own sorry skin" (*Socialist Worker* April 23).

The SWP-led Unite Against Fascism issued a statement entitled 'Cameron's dangerous remarks will boost racists and fascists' (April 14). According to UAF joint secretary and SWP central committee member Weyman Bennett, Cameron's immigration policies will not stop "extremist parties", as he claims: "they will have precisely the opposite effect. Both the tone of his language and the content of his arguments feed the myth that Britain is somehow being flooded by immigrants."

Comrade Bennett went on: "The effect of this rhetoric is more hatred, more hysteria and more strife and division in society." The BNP "and other racist and fascist organisations will thrive in such a climate. History shows that giving in to racist arguments does not make the racists go away. It endorses them and encourages them to demand more."

The comrade concluded: "Cameron should be ashamed of himself - and we should be proud to live in a multicultural society, where people from all backgrounds work and struggle together."

Dear me. Cameron should be "ashamed" - not for promoting policies that serve British capital, but for allegedly undermining the "multicultural society". Comrade Bennett should try switching on his television some time to see just how much not just the Tories, but the entire establishment, *promote* the idea of "people from all backgrounds" working and cooperating (if not struggling) together. Every popular TV programme - from *Casualty* to *Match of the day* reinforces the same message.

Of course, the establishment notion of multiculturalism is a little different from that of the SWP. The former exhorts "people from all backgrounds" - black, white, yellow or brown - to work together *in the interest of the British nation*: ie, British capital. Which is why British business must be promoted and protected, including through restrictions on the movement of labour.

Instead of whinging about the BNP, why doesn't the left stand up against our main enemy - the entire pro-capitalist establishment and its parties, who - right now - are strengthening their own hand and weakening ours through their management of the flow of labour?

## Favouring controls

Unlike the SWP, which prefers to keep quiet on the question, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain actually *favours* border controls. So we read in the *Star's* editorial on Cameron's speech: "There is a

... lacuna in his argument about preventing entry to Britain for people without the right documents, which ignores his government's slashing of 5,000 border agency civil servants' jobs" (April 15).

That is clear enough: "preventing entry to Britain for people without the right documents" is a valuable task that is being undermined by those unpatriotic cuts. For our part, we say, 'No to all cuts in public services' - as opposed to cuts in institutions of public *assault*. The border agency, like the production of Trident and other weapons of mass destruction, should be closed down and their staff transferred to *useful* work without loss of pay or employment rights.

While usually the *Morning Star* merely *implies* support for border controls, the CPB's extreme nationalist wing openly *demand*s them. An example came in an article published in the *Star* in March, which was written by the man 'credited' with drawing up the 'No to the European Union, Yes to Democracy' programme to contest the 2009 EU elections: Brian Denny.

The article, co-authored by Linda Kaucher, denounces an EU free trade agreement currently being negotiated (by Britain, as it happens) with India - part of a policy which allows "big business to bring in cheap labour from poor countries to carry out skilled work for very low wages - the process known as social dumping".

Denny and Kaucher inform us that the proposed agreement contains "no limit on numbers". However, "If transnational capital can simply tap into an inexhaustible reserve army of migrant labour, it will further diminish the skills base and training opportunities in Britain ..."

Actually the "reserve army of migrant labour" is not quite so "inexhaustible" in practice. After all, Cameron insisted in his speech on a 20,700 annual cap on skilled employment visas. But that is far too many for the red-brown wing of the CPB. These 'comrades' not only insist on the *necessity* of immigration controls: if you want to stretch the point, you could say they favour *racist* immigration controls. After all, they have no problem with *British* workers migrating from town to town within the UK. But when it comes to workers from India ...

Denny and Kaucher continue: "But the EU does at least stipulate that [the] workers should be 'graduates or equivalent'. Good news? Not really. India has millions of graduates, and graduate unemployment over here is very high already" ('The EU, mode four and social dumping', March 24).

To think that the Socialist Party in England and Wales stood - uncritically - on Denny's programme of nationalist poison under the No2EU banner. Genuine communists and internationalist socialists do not demand that the capitalist state take on yet more powers to restrict foreign labour in order to protect the jobs and conditions of British workers. Instead we call for the working class to take advantage of capital's internationalisation of the proletariat through organisation across borders - let us unite to level up pay and trade union rights and strive to build *international* political organisations ●

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## LIBYA

# Triumvirate commits to regime change

Imperialist 'mission lurch' sees first troops dispatched. Eddie Ford reports

Well, it's official now - imperialism wants regime change in Libya. David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and Barack Obama issued a joint statement on April 15 published in *The Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Le Figaro*. Understandably, after the Iraq debacle, there is a constant referencing of the United Nations security council and its "historic resolution" 1973. So while claiming that they are mandated by the UN to "protect civilians", and admitting they have no similar mandate to "remove Gaddafi by force", the three state that it is "impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power".

Hence, what started with a no-fly zone - always a gross misnomer - supposedly to 'protect' civilians has over the last week seen first Britain and then France and Italy sending "special military advisers". William Hague said the team would help the rebels "improve their military organisational structures, communications and logistics" and "distribute humanitarian aid and deliver medical assistance". But under no circumstances, Hague maintained, would the British government "train or arm rebel forces" fighting Gaddafi - absolutely not - and everything would be "fully within the terms" of resolution 1973.

What hogwash. The British government's deployment of 'advisers' to Libya is more akin to mission lurch than mission creep and might even, if you have a very good lawyer, be deemed "illegal under international law" - as the *Morning Star* disapprovingly notes (April 15). Of course, you would have to be extremely naive to think that 'advisers' and special operatives/forces from a number of countries are not *already* crawling over rebel-controlled Libya - and maybe further afield, right into Tripoli itself.

Just as likely, Hague's announcement could well presage the introduction of ground troops - whether overtly or semi-covertly. Hague himself has more or less hinted at such, delphically remarking to one journalist that there would be "no large-scale use of ground forces" in Libya - the obvious inference being that the 'small-scale' use is being contemplated.

If more evidence of imperialist intent was required, European Union member-states - by all accounts - have been poised since the beginning of April to send some 1,000 troops to the sporadically besieged city of Misrata ('Operation Eufor Libya'). Purely to "assist relief efforts" naturally, though this worthy humanitarian endeavour would require - as one EU official put it - that 'Eufor' troops "secure sea and land corridors" into Libya and engage in "defensive operations" if necessary. And the US has released \$25 million-worth of surplus military supplies to the Benghazi 'government' - vehicles, communications equipment, flak jackets, etc.

The end-game is clear: an imperialist-approved 'post-Gaddafi' government sitting in Tripoli. And one, presumably, that will need to be protected and defended from those that rebel against it - which is bound to happen sooner rather than later - that is, especially if the Arab revolution goes from strength to strength elsewhere. Such is the logic of 'humanitarian' imperialism, which inevitably has made fools out of the apologists on the liberal and social-imperialist left - they weaved fairy tales, some of them even well-intentioned, about how imperialist intervention would somehow 'coincide with' or 'correspond to' the democratic needs and aspirations of the Libyan masses.



**Benghazi army: imperialism will give more than a helping push**

So, like something out of *High noon*, the triumvirate declared that the world (the imperialist world, that is) would be committing an "unconscionable betrayal" if Gaddafi was left in power. To do so, they write, would leave the anti-Gaddafi forces open to "fearful vengeance" and risk Libya becoming a "failed state" - only spreading further instability and chaos in the region. Therefore, we are told - Gaddafi has to "go for good" and thus Britain, France and the United States "will not rest until the United Nations security council resolutions have been implemented" and "the Libyan people can choose their own future"; a future approved and rubber-stamped by the core imperialist powers and Nato, of course. The three leaders rejected demands for an immediate ceasefire or any sort of "negotiated exit" for Gaddafi (whether to Venezuela or Saudi Arabia). In other words, no 'peace' until Gaddafi and his entourage are finally booted out of Tripoli.

Perhaps we are seeing a rerun of imperialist history - a carving up of Libya? Between 1943 and 1951 Libya, which had been an Italian colony, was divided between France and Britain - with Tripolitania and Cyrenaica being under British administration, while the French controlled Fezzan. Meanwhile the US had established a significant military base in the south and used it, amongst other things, to conduct preliminary research into Libya's oil reserves (which, as it happens, are the largest in Africa and the ninth largest in the world - 41.5 billion barrels, as of 2007<sup>1</sup>).

More significant though is the fact that Obama has felt the need to come out with a more muscular-sounding policy. A return to the righteous front line after accusations from various critics, both to his left and right, that the US was dilly-dallying around and not behaving as the world's policeman. There is some truth to such a charge. US imperialism has dithered,

in certain ways, when it comes to the Gaddafi regime - and for quite understandable reasons. Simply, it fears getting sucked into yet another war. Obama and world imperialism have been completely wrong-footed by the Arab upsurge which has meant a whole succession of Arab regimes (including key client states in the region) staring revolution in the face - and blinking. Meaning that US imperialism is confronted by a whole new set of looming imponderables.

All of which helps to explain why the US, burdened with wider geo-political imperialist interests, is in reality still dragging its feet over Libya - fiery rhetoric-by-numbers from Obama aside (not insignificantly then, US ground-attack aircraft have been quietly withdrawn from the Libyan operation). At the meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Berlin on the same day as the triumvirate statement, Nato general secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen was humiliatedly forced to appeal for more ground-attack aircraft - a plea which seems, so far, to have fallen on stony ground. Objectively, there is indeed a genuine - if not grievous - shortage of such aircraft and, pertinently, trained pilots to fly them. Take the UK and its Typhoon fighters - £60 million a piece and developed from the original Eurofighter. These were designed during the cold war for use against the military apparatus of the Soviet Union and are being constantly upgraded and redeveloped, the cost of which inexorably spirals upwards - from an original 1988 estimate of £13 billion to a 2011 national audit office projection of at least £37 billion.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, on the other hand, the US has no lack of the sort of *specialised* military hardware necessary to conduct such warfare. Far from it. For example, there is the gruesomely impressive Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II - designed to provide close air support for ground forces - which spits out death (thanks to its GAU-8 Avenger heavy automatic cannon) at tanks, armoured vehicles and just about anything else that makes the fatal mistake of getting in its way.<sup>3</sup> No, what is lacking from the US administration is *political* will - not military might or prowess. So Obama quickly stated that, although the US and Nato have apparently averted "wholesale

slaughter" by their intervention, there was no need for "greater" US participation in the military campaign - so it is up to Europe, as things stand now, to finish off Gaddafi.

The only trouble being that Europe is not interested in getting bogged down in the Libyan quagmire. Spain, the Netherlands and Italy are refusing to deploy their aircraft in an 'aggressive' fashion. Thus Rome insists that the eight it has supplied to the military effort against Gaddafi are only to be used for reconnaissance and monitoring purposes. Then there are the Russians, who are predictably less than happy with the current situation - for them, it has gone too far, too quickly. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov complained that Nato had been "exceeding its UN mandate" and called for an "immediate shift" to "a political and diplomatic settlement".

Sentiments endorsed by China, with its ambassador to the UN proclaiming that Beijing "respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Libya". It is not being cynical, of course, to suggest that the Chinese regime's 'respect' for Libyan 'sovereignty' - whether under Gaddafi's tutelage or not - is partly explainable by the fact that China runs about 50 large-scale projects in Libya, valued at about \$18 billion. Indeed, China evacuated thousands of its workers after oil establishments operated by China National Petroleum Corporation and other firms were attacked and occupied by anti-Gaddafi insurgents. As for the Arab League, it goes without saying that it has cold feet about the whole affair - after all, deposing Arab despots by external military intervention is not exactly a precedent it wants to see widely emulated.

Unsurprisingly then, there are tensions over UN resolution 1973, which 'mandates' the Nato action against Gaddafi - sorry, the action taken by the 'international community'. Anyway, the French foreign minister, Gérard Longuet, has gone on record to argue that the direct ousting of Gaddafi (ie, regime change) would "certainly" be beyond the scope of the resolution and would therefore require a new council vote. After the bloody Iraq debacle, some imperialist powers are understandably keen to be seen obeying the rules and strictures of bourgeois 'international law' - especially the "cheese-eating surrender monkeys" of France, of course,<sup>4</sup> given its fierce criticisms of the 'illegalities' surrounding the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. Otherwise, it could be accused of inconsistency and hypocrisy - as if. To date, both the US and UK are playing hardball with resolution 1973 - claiming it gives sufficient authority to dislodge Gaddafi from power. In all probability though, it will be 'amended' in such a way as to satisfy - just about - the different political/military considerations and interests of the US, UK and French governments. A UN fig-leaf for all occasions.

This then begs the obvious question - exactly *how* to topple the Gaddafi regime? The current military strategy, if that is not too grand a term for it, had led to nothing but stalemate - neither side, clearly, has the ability to mount a decisive knock-out blow. Nothing

flies, so the 'no-fly zone' is beginning to look absurd - if not a bit of an embarrassment for the military. Nato aircraft can buzz about forever, taking out this or that tank or armoured vehicle almost as a desultory afterthought. A grim stasis thus beckons, with both the insurgents and government forces fighting indefinitely over the same bit of desert - sometimes winning it, sometimes losing it.

Self-evidently, the only realistic course - from the viewpoint of imperialist goals and objectives - is to *arm* the Benghazi 'government', supplying it with anti-tank weaponry, RPGs, etc. And to provide the Benghazi-based regime with sufficient military clout to do the job. And if that does not work then it could well be boots on the ground. In that case the "special military advisers" are just the first tranche.

It could not be clearer that the imperialists' 'no-fly zone' was never about 'protecting' civilians from supposed 'genocide' or any other such thoroughly mendacious crap - that was just the big lie. Imperialism has no intention of spreading democracy throughout the Arab world - or anywhere else, for that matter: the bourgeoisie has never been a democratic class and never will be. But criminally, or tragically, some on the left fell for it, hook, line and sinker - or at least pretended to. Though from out-and-out social-imperialists like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty we never really expected anything else. First and foremost, the imperialist meddling in Libya was about reasserting control - so as to make sure that it was the 'great powers' determining who and what replaces Gaddafi, not the Libyan masses themselves. If it turns out that this or that *section* of the Libyan people tacitly prefer the new regime to the old - whether temporarily or longer - then that is purely incidental for imperialism. By turning the Benghazi proto-government into its agents or proxies, imperialism hopes that further down the line this will assist it in its efforts to reassert dominance over the region as a whole.

That does not mean we were wrong to support the spontaneous democratic uprising against the Gaddafi tyranny - quite the opposite. One would have to be wilfully blind, or a hopeless dogmatist, not to acknowledge that the Libyan uprising was inspired by the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions - which the protestors in Benghazi and elsewhere sought to emulate. Tragically, being weak and divided, they failed - with the last vestiges of that democratic revolution being subsumed by an imperialist-sponsored civil war. To borrow a phrase, the Arab revolution became deflected - then appropriated.

Yet communists have every confidence that the pan-Arab revolution is just in its initial stage and will come to revisit Libya again - sweeping aside whatever stooge gets the imperialist stamp of approval in Tripoli ●

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## Notes

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil\\_reserves\\_in\\_Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_reserves_in_Libya).
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurofighter\\_Typhoon#cite\\_note-45](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurofighter_Typhoon#cite_note-45).
- [www.af.mil/information/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=70](http://www.af.mil/information/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=70).
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheese-eating\\_surrender\\_monkeys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheese-eating_surrender_monkeys).



## DEBATE

# Principles to shape tactics

In the second of three articles **Mike Macnair** examines the electoral controversies in the SPD and the views of Marx and Engels

**W**hat should be the principled boundaries and acceptable tactics of communists in relation to calls for electoral support to coalitions, alliances, other parties or individual candidates?

In the first article in this series, last week, I worked backwards through the 'people's front' policy of 'official' communism and Maoism (strategic alliance with one or another section of the capitalist class), the 'third period' of communist electoral isolationism, the 'united front' policy of 1921-28, and the period in which the communists drove through the split in the Second International and its parties in 1918-21. I argued that the short-term tactical approach to electoral issues in the period before the people's front became fully established as a general strategic line of 'official' communism in the 1950s reflected the belief that capitalism had entered terminal crisis.

From there, I looked at a frequently cited passage in Lenin's *Leftwing communism* about the acceptability of agreements with bourgeois parties, and at what lay behind it: the electoral policy of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party between 1906 and 1914 and, in particular, the views of the Bolsheviks on this issue. I concluded that lying behind this RSDLP policy was the electoral policy of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which the RSDLP - like many other European socialist parties - attempted to imitate.

## SPD

The SPD, like the RSDLP, faced complex electoral systems designed to put obstacles in its path. The constitutional framework of the German Second Empire (1871-1918) was a federation of four kingdoms (Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg), six grand duchies, five duchies, seven principalities, three Free Hanse cities and one imperial territory (Alsace-Lorraine) - the *Länder*. Unlike Russia, the imperial parliament had legislative power and a limited power over the budget, which meant that a government in practice needed to be able to assemble a parliamentary majority, but the government was *answerable* to the kaiser, not the parliament.

The parliament consisted of two houses. The Bundesrat was composed of delegates of the *Länder*, with the small states overrepresented. The Reichstag was - unusually for its time - elected by manhood suffrage. This resulted from Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck's manoeuvres in the 1860s with Ferdinand Lassalle and his successors as leaders of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein (ADAV), in which Bismarck and Lassalle aimed to create a 'labour monarchist' counterweight to the National Liberal and Progressivist bourgeois parties.<sup>1</sup>

The voting system was two-round: ie, if no candidate got an overall majority in the first round, a run-off election would be held between the two highest placed candidates. This meant that, though the SPD tried to stand everywhere, it was inevitably confronted with the question of formal or informal advice to SPD voters if its candidate was knocked out in the first round.

The party discussed the issue at its 1887, 1897, 1902 and 1911 congresses. The first of these rejected advice which had been given by the leadership at the 1884 election; the last

three adopted variants of 'conditional support' tactics towards *individual candidates* of the bourgeois parties: ie, that the party would call for a vote for them if they met a set of minimum political conditions, but otherwise would call for an abstention. In fact, in the 1912 election the party leadership entered into a formal agreement with the Progressive Party to trade votes in the run-offs.<sup>2</sup>

The *Länder* had their own parliaments with fairly extensive powers. With the exception of the Free Hanse cities these invariably involved an upper house like the unreformed British House of Lords: ie, with a large hereditary component, a church component and a smaller, appointed component. Their electoral systems for the lower houses were highly diverse, but characteristically involved both substantial property qualifications and indirect election, in which the voters elected electors, who in turn elected the representatives.<sup>3</sup>

The Prussian system was notorious, and used by some other *Länder*. It divided the voters in each constituency into three classes by their share of direct taxation payments. In Essen, for example, the head of the Krupp family of steel magnates was the only voter in the first class. At the other extreme, people too poor to pay income and property taxes were not entitled to vote. The three classes then each elected one third of the electors, by *public* ballot (so that employers and landlords could take note of how their better-off employees or tenants voted and victimise them if they voted the 'wrong' way). The college of electors then elected the representatives.

Under electoral regimes of this type it was practically impossible to get anyone elected - outside a few constituencies so dominated by the working class that 'first class' taxpayers meant small shopkeepers and skilled workers - without electoral agreements of some sort between parties. This issue produced in the SPD divergent practices and debates linked but not identical to the debates between left and right.

In the south German states, the SPD had engaged in run-off agreements with the National Liberals in Bavaria as early as 1884 and continued to make deals thereafter. This evolution was reflected in Bavarian SPD leftist turned rightist Georg von Vollmar's arguments in his 1891 'Eldorado speeches' and afterwards, for the SPD to aim for a broad reform coalition **without excessive theoretical**

commitments. By 1894 the Bavarians were willing to vote for the *Land* budget, leading to a brief, violent controversy in the national party.<sup>4</sup>

In Prussia, the SPD was committed to boycotting the *Land* elections until 1897. In that year Bebel and others proposed that the party should participate; but Liebknecht backed an amendment prohibiting any election deals with other parties, which was carried. This was generally seen as a 'wrecking amendment' and Bebel afterwards argued (unsuccessfully) that it produced an internally contradictory policy and should be 'clarified' by the leadership. The 1898 congress resolved to leave the choice as to participation to local organisations, which resolved on continued abstention. When the SPD did begin to stand, in 1903, it received the second highest number of votes after the Conservatives - but no seats.<sup>5</sup>

This is a simplified summary of a complex story. What it shows is - as with the RSDLP before 1914 - the SPD grappling with competing objectives under an undemocratic electoral system. In the first place the party sought the independent political self-organisation and self-representation of the proletariat as a 'class for itself'. That implied the SPD standing in elections and doing so wherever it was possible. It also implied genuinely trying to get people elected to the representative bodies. But the electoral system made this latter task difficult without electoral agreements with the other parties, which could be inconsistent with the aim of class-political

independence.

The party rejected formal coalition deals and voting for the imperial budget in the Reichstag, but the centre was never willing actually to split with the south Germans in spite of their coalition policy. And lesser forms of deal and calls for second-round votes for 'left' candidates of other parties, on the basis of limited demands on them, were tactically accepted from an early stage, though they were episodically controversial. Nonetheless, the SPD aimed to make these tactical compromises without contradicting its basic fight for the independent political representation of the urban proletariat. These SPD aims and practices formed the background to the RSDLP resolutions I discussed last week in the first article. Behind them, in turn, were the basic principles argued for by Marx and Engels and brought into the German workers' movement in the 1860s-70s - imperfectly - by Lassalle and Wilhelm Liebknecht.

## Marx and Engels

The amount of comment on a workers' party electoral and parliamentary *tactics* by Marx and Engels is minimal and mostly by Engels. The reason is, of course, that it is only with the emergence of the proto-SPD as a real force in the later 1870s, and subsequently of socialist parties elsewhere, that tactical issues began to be sharply posed. On *principles* they wrote much more, and the problem is how to avoid writing at excessive length. What follows is therefore decidedly incomplete. Much more can be found in the volumes of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution*.

The starting point has to be 1846-47, when Marx and Engels moved from theoretical criticism to practical politics. The 'Address of the German Democratic Communists of Brussels to Mr Feargus O'Connor' on his election as a Chartist MP in July 1846 is an early intimation of their strategic orientation: "The contending parties have their respective battle cries forced upon them by their interests and mutual position: the middle class - 'extension of commerce by any means whatsoever, and a ministry of Lancashire cotton lords to carry this out'; the working class - 'a democratic reconstruction of the constitution upon the basis of the People's Charter', by which the working class will become the ruling class of

England."<sup>6</sup> In the same period, 'The communism of the Rheinischer Beobachter' (1847) polemicised against the idea of an anti-capitalism based on alliance with the monarchy against the Liberals.<sup>7</sup>

The *Communist manifesto* does not directly address elections. However, it placed the Communist League as *part of* the Chartists and their US counterpart, the Agrarian Reformers (National Reform Movement), who did contest elections.<sup>8</sup> It offered critical support to the Social Democrats in France round Louis Blanc, Ledru-Rollin and the *La Réforme* newspaper, and more cautiously to their Swiss equivalents, who formed part of the Radicals (chapter 4). It was emphatically hostile to tendencies which *opposed* working class political action, including utopian socialists, such as the Fourierists in France.<sup>9</sup>

In Germany, the communists "fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty-bourgeoisie. But they never cease, for a single instant, to instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in order that the German workers may straightway use, as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie, the social and political conditions that the bourgeoisie must necessarily introduce along with its supremacy ..." (chapter 4).

The 1850 'Address to the central committee of the Communist League' expresses the fact that the bourgeoisie had not acted "in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy ...". It does, however, contemplate (mistakenly) an early overthrow of the existing governments, leading to elections.

In this case, "the proletariat must take care: ... (2) that workers' candidates are nominated everywhere in opposition to bourgeois-democratic candidates. As far as possible they should be League members and their election should be pursued by all possible means. Even where there is no prospect of achieving their election the workers must put up their own candidates to preserve their independence, to gauge their own strength and to bring their revolutionary position and party standpoint to public attention. They must not be led astray by the empty phrases of the democrats, who will maintain that the workers' candidates will split the democratic party and offer the forces of reaction the chance of victory. All such talk means, in the final analysis, that the proletariat is to be swindled. The progress which the proletarian party will make by operating independently in this way is infinitely more important than the disadvantages resulting from the presence of a few reactionaries in the representative body."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile in France Louis Blanc had joined the republican provisional government - and displayed only political powerlessness within it. And in 1849-50, in the view of Marx and Engels, expressed in Engels' *Letters from France* in Harney's *The Democratic Review*, in Marx's *The class struggles in France 1848-50* and retrospectively in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the unwillingness of the Social Democrats to force a political confrontation, even in elections, emboldened the right



Otto von Bismarck: never with the state autocracy



and helped set the scene for Louis Bonaparte's coup. These events cast a long shadow: opposition to minority participation in government was still a feature in Engels' 1894 advice to the Italian Socialist leader, Filippo Turati.<sup>11</sup>

The 1850s saw an ebb tide of the workers' political movement across Europe. In the 1860s, however, it began to revive, and the movement in England in support of the north in the American Civil War, together with the reviving Proudhonist movement in France, formed the basis of the creation of the First International in 1864.

Because the First International involved an alliance with the Proudhonists, who were opposed to working class political action, its documents did not call for such action until a late stage. Marx argued the case at the 1871 London congress, and the 1872 Hague congress adopted the formulation: "Against the collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes."<sup>12</sup>

In Germany, meanwhile, the ADAV led by Lassalle had been formed in 1863, demanding universal suffrage and state-backed cooperatives. Wilhelm Liebknecht joined it and hoped to persuade Lassalle to move away from his political relations with Bismarck or to build an opposition to Lassalle, but this project was aborted by Lassalle's death in a duel in August 1864, which made Lassalle into a mythical martyr of the workers' movement. Liebknecht, and Marx and Engels, initially cooperated with Lassalle's successor as ADAV leader, Johann von Schweitzer, and the newspaper he founded. But it turned out that Schweitzer was equally committed to Bismarck. Marx and Engels in February 1865 broke publicly with Schweitzer's newspaper, citing their 1847 article against alliance between the proletariat and the monarchy.

Engels' pamphlet *The Prussian military question* argued that the proletariat had to aim for political concessions from the bourgeoisie ("freedom of the press, freedom of association and assembly, universal suffrage, local self-government"), not economic concessions from the monarchy. Even if the monarchy conceded universal suffrage, "one has only to go to France to realise what tame elections it can give rise to, if one has only a large and ignorant rural population, a well-organised bureaucracy, a well-regimented press, associations sufficiently kept down by the police and no political meetings at all". The pamphlet was advertised on the basis that, "unlike the most recent 'social democratic' party tactics, this pamphlet bases itself once more on the standpoint adopted by the literary representatives of the proletariat of 1846-51 and develops this standpoint as against both reaction and the Progressivist bourgeoisie".<sup>13</sup>

Liebknecht had already moved into opposition in the ADAV, and began to have some success in the Berlin branch, and influence beyond it. At this point Bismarck interfered on Schweitzer's side by deporting Liebknecht from Prussia. Liebknecht moved to Leipzig in Saxony, where he joined the liberals' workers arm set up to counter the ADAV, the Verein Deutscher Arbeiter Verein (VDAV) and the left-liberal German People's Party (DVP). He worked within these organisations with August Bebel, an early convert, to pull them towards socialism and the ideas of the First International. A series of manoeuvres, splits and fusions ended with the creation of the SPD (mark one) at Eisenach in 1869; but Liebknecht and this SPD did not break with the

DVP until 1870.<sup>14</sup> The SPD (mark two) fused with the ADAV in 1875 at Gotha, to form the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD) which was suppressed under the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878, and operated semi-clandestinely until this law expired in 1890, when it was refounded as the SPD.

## Relevance

The relevance of this history to Marx and Engels is it is clear that during the First International period the German groups were a political embarrassment to them. Formal affiliations of the German groups were impossible under the repressive laws of the German states, but individuals could join the International. Rather few did.

Marx and Engels had committed themselves from the late 1840s to independent working class political action. They were working in the International with British trade unionists, who were not committed to political action, and with the Proudhonists, who opposed it, and from 1868 the Bakuninists, who also opposed it. And here were their 'co-thinkers' in Germany, attempting political action ... the ADAV in half-alliance with Bismarck, and the Prussian monarchy, Liebknecht in actual entry in a bourgeois liberal party. Surely examples of all that was *wrong* with political action (as Bakunin was quick to point out).<sup>15</sup>

In this situation, in spite of their formal public break with Schweitzer's newspaper in 1865, Marx and Engels took a degree of political distance from both sides in Germany - though they continued to correspond with Liebknecht, they did not provide him with the public polemic against Lassalle he sought; and they continued to correspond also with the ADAV and its leaders.<sup>16</sup>

In 1871-72 the International crashed. The French Proudhonists were crushed by the repression after the Paris Commune. The English trade unionists were pushed away from the International by the witch-hunt after the Commune, and pulled towards the Liberal Party by the Trade Union Act 1871. Marx and Engels and their co-thinkers on the general council forced through a split with the Bakuninists, and the 1872 Hague congress moved the seat of the general council to New York, where the body died.

The correspondence of Marx and Engels shows that down to and including the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha programme* and Engels' equivalent critique in his letter to Bebel, they were still thinking in terms of the debate with the Bakuninists and a certain degree of suspicion of both German groups. In practice, contrary to their expectations, the Gotha unification allowed the unified SAPD to break through to the creation of a mass workers' party, the Anti-Socialist Law proved to be only a temporary setback and suspicion was largely replaced by promotion of the SPD as a model - albeit they and, after Marx's death, Engels, intervened in the left-right fights in the party. They were particularly hostile to any backsliding towards the 'people's party' conception.<sup>17</sup>

After the episode of the First International, the basic idea of an independent workers' party which stood candidates in elections, however weak its initial political platform might be, continued to inform Engels' attempts to intervene in British politics and his correspondence with US socialists. Here the criticisms were often turned against what he saw as narrow socialist sects - but also against the Lib-Labs and, more sharply, those who flirted with Conservatism. The latter was a major element in his hostility to Hyndman, and turned up as a criticism of Keir Hardie in 1893.<sup>18</sup>

In relation to Britain, both Marx and Engels explained the relative

political passivity of the working class by Britain's domination of the world market. In relation to the US, Engels in his 1891 postscript to the new edition of *The civil war in France* extended the criticism of universal suffrage without democratic liberties to the US political system:

"Society had created its own organs to look after its common interests, originally through simple division of labour. But these organs, at whose head was the state power, had in the course of time, in pursuance of their own special interests, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society, as can be seen, for example, not only in the hereditary monarchy, but equally also in the democratic republic. Nowhere do 'politicians' form a more separate, powerful section of the nation than in North America. There, each of the two great parties which alternately succeed each other in power is itself in turn controlled by people who make a business of politics, who speculate on seats in the legislative assemblies of the union, as well as of the separate states, or who make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory are rewarded with positions.

"It is well known that the Americans have been striving for 30 years to shake off this yoke, which has become intolerable, and that in spite of all they can do they continue to sink ever deeper in this swamp of corruption. It is precisely in America that we see best how there takes place this process of the state power making itself independent in relation to society, whose mere instrument it was originally intended to be. Here there exists no dynasty, no nobility, no standing army, beyond the few men keeping watch on the Indians, no bureaucracy with permanent posts or the right to pensions, and nevertheless we find here two great gangs of political speculators, who alternately take possession of the state power and exploit it by the most corrupt means and for the most corrupt ends - and the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality exploit and plunder it.

"Against this transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society - an inevitable transformation in all previous states - the Commune made use of two infallible expedients. In this first place, it filled all posts - administrative, judicial and educational - by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, with the right of the same electors to recall their delegate at any time. And, in the second place, all officials, high or low, were paid only the wages received by other workers. The highest salary paid by the Commune to anyone was 6,000 francs. In this way an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up, even apart from the binding mandates to delegates to representative bodies which were also added in profusion."<sup>19</sup>

## Principles

In this history we can find two principles consistently defended from the 1840s to the 1890s, a third which was temporarily subordinated to broad unity in 1864-71, and one shift in assessment. The first principle is the independent organisation of the working class for political purposes: as opposed to pure trade unionism or cooperativism; as opposed to the working class forming the tail of this or that wing of the capitalist politicians; and as opposed to sects constructed on the basis of a schema of the future society and counterposed to the actual movement of the masses.

The second principle is that the working class needs political democracy and liberties in order to emancipate itself, and therefore

an unvarying hostility to alliances between the working class and authoritarian parties and politicians for the sake of economic concessions. For Marx and Engels, for the working class to form the tail of bourgeois liberal parties or petty bourgeois democratic ones was undesirable and would, as in France in 1848-51, lead to disaster; but it was *less* undesirable than alliances with monarchies or other authoritarians, which was directly opposed to the interests of the working class as a class.

The third principle, which was temporarily subordinated to unity in the First International, was that the workers' party needed to intervene actively by standing candidates in elections and trying to get worker representatives elected.

The shift in assessment is in relation to universal suffrage and to the parliamentary-constitutional regime as such. In the 1840s-50s, Marx and Engels argued that the implementation of the six points of the Charter would amount to the dictatorship of the proletariat, or even simply that "universal suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population ..." <sup>20</sup> In the 1860s and afterwards, this assessment was shifted by the experience of manhood suffrage in France without political liberties as an instrument of the Bonapartist regime. Of this, of course, the 20th century has provided numerous examples.

Finally, implicit in Marx's account of the Paris Commune in *The civil war in France* and explicit in Engels' 1891 postscript is a critique of the parliamentary regime *as such* - even with political liberties - as one in which the capitalist class rules through the corrupt cartels of the professional politicians. The remedies proposed? The end of the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers; the election of *all* officials, with the right of recall; and the limitation of official pay to a worker's wage.

The three principles lay behind the electoral policy and tactical choices of the SPD. They did not, however, use or develop the changing assessment of the capitalist electoral and constitutional regime as such.<sup>21</sup>

This history is naturally not decisive of how we should act today. But understanding it can help us formulate principles, and the *limits* of tactics, for today. This will be the task of the third and final article in this series ●

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## Notes

- See RH Dominick III *Wilhelm Liebknecht and the founding of the German Social Democratic Party* chapter 4, Chapel Hill 1982. The surviving part of Lassalle's correspondence with Bismarck is online (in German) at [www.marxists.org/deutsch/referenz/lassalle/bismarck/briefe/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/deutsch/referenz/lassalle/bismarck/briefe/index.htm).
- GP Steenson *Not one man! Not one penny! German Social Democracy 1863-1914* Pittsburgh 1981: electoral system - pp42-43; second-round advice - p53; the resolutions from 1897 on are (in German) in the *Protokolle über die Verhandlungen der Parteitage der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, available at <http://library.fes.de/parteitage/index.html>: for 1897 - pp154-55; 1902 - pp88-89; 1911 - pp159-60.
- Information (in German) at [www.deutsche-kaiserreich.de](http://www.deutsche-kaiserreich.de). Steenson pp171-73 has detail on the Prussian system. A Bebel, "Unsere Betheiligung an den preussischen Landtagswahlen" (1897) 15 *Neue Zeit* pp609-17 at p617 lists *Land* competences as including among other topics police, courts and prisons, public education, schools and churches, direct taxes, agrarian laws, local government, forests, mining, railways, waterways and highways, and employment law.
- GP Steenson *op cit* pp53, 178-85; RH Dominick *op cit* pp390-93.
- RH Dominick *op cit* pp394-98; GP Steenson *op cit* p166 (and pp176-78 on the subsequent history of the SPD's intervention in Prussian elections and the Prussian franchise question); slightly different narrative in WH Maehl *August Bebel, shadow emperor of the German workers* (Philadelphia 1980) pp305-309, though the obsessive (and contradictory) ideological commitments

- of this author produce severe unclarity in his interpretations. A Bebel *op cit* argues for limited agreements and a conditional support tactic towards 'left' Progressive, National Liberal and Centre Party candidates on the basis of a set of minimum demands. I suppose that it is in the context of one of these debates that Bebel made the comment about being willing to ally with "the devil and his grandmother", which was quoted by the Menshevik Tseretelli at the 1907 London congress of the RSDLP (E Kingston-Mann, 'A strategy for Marxist bourgeois revolution', 1980 7 *Journal of Peasant Studies* pp131-57 at p140, n37, citing the *Protokoly* of the congress) and resurrected by Trotsky in the context of the united front ("The united front for defence: a letter to a Social Democratic worker", 1933: [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330223.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330223.htm)); but I have not found the actual Bebel reference.
- [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/07/17.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/07/17.htm).
- Deutsche Brüsseler-Zeitung* September 12 1847: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/09/12.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/09/12.htm).
- "The communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties" (chapter 2), but the "other working class parties" are "the Chartists in England and the Agrarian Reformers in America" (chapter 4).
- Chapter 3, at the end, on the utopian socialists: "By degrees, they sink into the category of the reactionary conservative socialists depicted above, differing from these only by more systematic pedantry, and by their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science. They, therefore, violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from blind unbelief in the new gospel. The Owenites in England, and the Fourierists in France, respectively, oppose the Chartists and the *Réformistes*."
- [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm).
- Texts all available on Marxists Internet Archive; Engels' *Letters* less obvious than the other 'classics': [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/newspapers/democratic-review.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/newspapers/democratic-review.htm). Engels to Turati: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94\\_01\\_26.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94_01_26.htm).
- [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-speech.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-speech.htm); [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/21.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/21.htm); [www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/parties.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/parties.htm).
- [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/23.htm); [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/27.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/02/27.htm).
- This paragraph and the last summarise in extreme outline RH Dominick *op cit* chapters 4 and 5.
- <http://libcom.org/library/a-critique-of-the-german-social-democratic-program-bakunin>.
- Episodic references in RH Dominick *op cit* chapters 5-7. WH Maehl *op cit* chapters 2-5 is at his worst in dealing with the period. Marx to Engels October 10 1868 ([www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68\\_10\\_10.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_10_10.htm)) is particularly illuminating on the issue.
- As a model: 'To the working men of Europe in 1877' *Labour Standard* March 3-31 1878: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1878/03/03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1878/03/03.htm); 'A working men's party' *Labour Standard* July 23 1881: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/07/23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/07/23.htm); 'The elections of 1890 in Germany' *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* March 3 1890: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/03/03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/03/03.htm); Engels' introduction to *The class struggles in France* 1891: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/class-sf/intro.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/class-sf/intro.htm).
- Intervention in the SAPD/SPD's internal debates: quite a lot of information in RH Dominick *op cit* chapters 8-10 and (at a low level of understanding) WH Maehl *op cit* chapters 5-12. A particularly sharp and relevant example is the September 1879 circular letter in response to the 'Zurich manifesto', which argued for Social Democracy to end its exclusive focus on the working class and build a 'broad left': [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1879/letters/79\\_09\\_15.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1879/letters/79_09_15.htm).
- Sects: eg Engels to Bebel, August 18 1886: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86\\_08\\_18.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86_08_18.htm) (Britain); Engels to Sorge, November 29 1886: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86\\_11\\_29.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86_11_29.htm); Lib-Labs: eg, 'The English elections' *Der Volksstaat* March 4 1874: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/02/22.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/02/22.htm); 'A working men's party' (see above, n17). Hyndman: eg, Engels to Bernstein, May 3 1882: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82\\_05\\_03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_05_03.htm); Engels to Bebel, January 15 1886: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86\\_02\\_15.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86_02_15.htm); 'May 4 in London' *Arbeiter Zeitung* May 23 1890: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/05/23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/05/23.htm). Keir Hardie: Engels to Bebel, January 24 1893: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_01\\_24.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_01_24.htm).
- [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm).
- 'Free trade and The Chartists' *New York Daily Tribune* August 25 1852: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/08/25.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/08/25.htm).
- Lars T Lih has drawn our collective attention to Kautsky's response to Jaurès's arguments on republicanism in a 1905 series of *Neue Zeit* articles (which Ben Lewis is in the process of translating). This series was, however, far less influential than Kautsky's arguments for the separation of powers in *Der Parlamentarismus, die Volksgesetzgebung und die Sozialdemokratie* 1893 (*Parlementarisme et socialisme* Paris 1900) or for the working class making use of the existing civil state bureaucracy in that book and in the *Agrarfrage* 1899 (*The agrarian question* London 1988) and *The road to power* 1909: [www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/index.htm).

## EDUCATION



**Corporate self-worship: antithesis of real education**

# Defend academic freedom from corporate conformism

Commodification is wrecking higher education, argues **Yassamine Mather**

**I**n October 2010 Lord Browne published his independent review into higher education funding and student finance in England - the latest in a long list of such proposals since 1979. It recommended changes to the system of university funding, including removing the cap on the level of fees that universities can charge.

The report by this former chairman of BP was based on a confidential survey of parents and pupils costing £68,000. The survey, falsely labelled 'research', focused on how much participants should pay for university education. The subsequent spending review proposed a drastic cut in the United Kingdom's higher education budget from £7.1 billion to £4.2 billion by 2014. Although funding for arts and humanities is hardest hit, everyone is sceptical about government promises of support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees, especially as recent graduates of these subjects are amongst the long-term

unemployed.

Of course, market forces had already been making a serious impact on higher education, following concerted efforts initially by the Conservatives in the 1980s and then by the subsequent New Labour government to impose 'corporatism'. It was during the last Labour government that students were labelled 'consumers', being prepared for participation in the 'labour market'. Students and staff in higher education who resisted this consumerism and commodification were labelled by Labour ministers elitists, who were not in touch with the 'real world'. However, in the words of two Marxist researchers, the problem is "the underfunded university system diverging from a collegial, academically strategic focus to that of a corporate-style emphasis on efficiency and commodification of teaching" and research, plus "structural issues, such as the university reward system."<sup>1</sup>

This commodification converted

institutions of higher education into service-providers, with universities becoming 'training centres' and the number of disciplines reduced to those favoured by 'the market'. That necessitated an attack on academic freedom and democratic structures within departments and faculties. It also reinforced managerial rather than education-centred decision-making processes on campus.

Academic heads of departments elected or at least supported by their colleagues have been replaced by line managers. In engineering and science this often means *former* academics who had looked to advance their careers in the private sector, but, having returned to academia either as a result of the economic crisis or because of their own failure, now have the necessary 'entrepreneurial skills', according to university authorities. These 'failed industrialists' often bring with themselves an ethos of conformity and mediocrity resented by the very

staff a university department seeks to nurture: for example, academically gifted research professors.

The first thing to say about many of this new breed of academic managers is that, had they been good teachers or researchers dedicated to their subject, they would very likely have never left the universities for the private sector. Even more pointedly, had they been successful 'entrepreneurs', they would not have returned to academic life, having already shown their preference for the market, as opposed to intellectual pursuits. These 'managers', masters of colourful Powerpoint presentations and meaningless Excel spread sheets depicting market trends, epitomise everything that is wrong with the new higher education system: 'They know the price of everything and the value of nothing.'

In fact our failed industrialists lack the narrow-minded scientific judgement of real industrialists,

bankers, financiers, etc. For example, as far as information technology is concerned, at a time when most of the City is embracing the more efficient, more secure systems, our outdated university managers are turning universities into testing grounds for mediocre, inefficient, virus-ridden, expensive applications.

The new universities, former polytechnics that ingratiated themselves with New Labour, were the front runners in this drive to commodification. However, the Russell group of so-called 'elite institutions' has been quick to follow in their footsteps, with the exception of Oxford, Cambridge and sections of London University.

Commodification has also had a direct impact on the funding of and therefore access to higher education. In most universities staff are now responsible for funding not only their own posts, but also overheads in connection to their office, research



environment, postgraduates and post-doctoral researchers ... Even as late as the 1980s research grants from the Higher Education Funding Council were dedicated entirely to the costs of the research itself. It was the responsibility of higher education institutions to provide adequate laboratories, and technical and administrative support for researchers. However, as successive governments looked at ways of reducing public funding, universities started charging for the use of research facilities.

The Research Excellence framework, replacing the Research Assessment Exercise, had all the hallmarks of Lord Mandelson's business approach to higher education - its subtitle was *The future of universities in a knowledge economy*. According to this document, research is termed an "output", judged through competitive mechanisms such as "impact": "Significant additional recognition will be given where researchers build on excellent research to deliver demonstrable benefits to the economy, society, public policy, culture and quality of life. Impacts will be assessed through a case-study approach that will be tested in a pilot exercise." Then there is "environment": "The REF will take account of the quality of the research environment in supporting a continuing flow of excellent research and its effective dissemination and application."<sup>2</sup>

Higher Education Funding Councils in England or Scotland never give any examples of how arts and humanities departments might increase the 'impact' of their members' research. But the terminology makes it clear: the researcher has to find a client before embarking on any work. The private sector is now the paymaster and the aim is clear: to establish tighter political control over the universities.

As far as undergraduate studies are concerned, the right to free education has, of course, been abolished. At a time of high graduate unemployment, access will depend increasingly on the financial capabilities of the parents of the 'consumer'. Parents are encouraged to compare 'value' via national surveys and assess higher education institutions in exactly the same way as they might choose a holiday. This banal exercise is marketed as a sure sign of 'quality assurance'. Here the not so hidden agenda is that competition between universities will lead to more institutions proposing easy, profit-based courses (with staff competing to give access to questions prior to exams - the best way to gain popularity, according to national student surveys). After all, if 'consumers' have to pay £27,000 for a degree, they will not want their child failing the finals just for the sake of higher education quality!

## Education v training

Traditionally higher education was considered a public service, benefiting society. However, over the last 30 years, as governments have claimed insufficient funds against the background of neoliberal economic policies, that view has increasingly been challenged. The state, media and university managers now hold the view that higher education is a commodity to be traded like any other.

In an article in *Monthly Review* adapted from his new book, David Noble explains what is wrong with the business model of higher education by pointing to the difference between 'training' and 'education'. Computerised 'distance learning' is not the same as 'education', he says:

"Training involves the honing of a person's mind, so that it can be used for the purposes of someone other than that person ... Education is the exact opposite of training, in that it

entails not the disassociation, but the utter integration, of knowledge and the self - in a word, self-knowledge. Here knowledge is defined by and, in turn, helps to define, the self. Education is a process that necessarily entails an interpersonal (not merely interactive) relationship between people - student and teacher (and student and student) that aims at individual and collective self-knowledge.

"A commodity is something created, grown, produced or manufactured for exchange on the market. There are, of course, some things which are bought and sold on the market which were not created for that purpose, such as labour and land: 'fictitious commodities'. Most educational offerings, although divided into units of credit and exchanged for tuition, are fictitious commodities, in that they are not created by the educator strictly with this purpose in mind. Here we will be using the term 'commodity', not in this fictitious, more expansive, sense, but rather in its classical, restricted sense, to mean something expressly created for market exchange.

"The commodification of higher education, then, refers to the deliberate transformation of the educational process into commodity form, for the purpose of commercial transaction."<sup>3</sup>

This commodification, nowadays a fact of life in higher education, has serious practical consequences for educators. There is a need to 'speed up production' (reduce the length of degree courses and postgraduate studies), introduce standardisation (reducing autonomy and originality), allow managerial supervision and cut costs (resulting in job insecurity). However, as David Noble rightly points out, "... there is a paradox at the core of this transformation. Quality education is labour-intensive; it depends upon a low teacher-student ratio and significant interaction between the two parties - the one utterly unambiguous result of a century of educational research. Any effort to offer quality in education must therefore presuppose a substantial and sustained investment in educational labour, whatever the medium of instruction. The requirements of commodity production, however, undermine the labour-intensive foundation of quality education."

Here the figures do not make sense. It is now clear that all English universities are going to charge between £8,000 and £9,000 a year for home and European Union undergraduate students. Given that staff-student ratio in the non-Oxbridge Russell group universities is around 1:20, each member of academic staff would bring £160,000-£180,000 of income to his/her institution every year. This is without considering that received for research or in grants. Universities claim that staff constitute 70% of their expenditure and we know that the average academic staff salary is around £52,000, including overheads (space, phone, administrative/IT and technical support). The question many academics are asking at a time of severe cutbacks is, what will institutions be doing with the extra £128,000 of income created by academic staff per annum?

The answers are not encouraging. Huge sums are earmarked for ridiculous salaries of incompetent and mediocre senior managers (up to £400,000 in some cases) for a costly, yet ineffective bureaucracy, aimed at improving the image of the institution as a competitor in the higher education market. This takes the form of 'corporate communication' offices and costly consultation paid to unscrupulous private contractors, who promise a 'technical' solution to everything from timetables to student 'contentment' and 'life cycles'!

Gullible and often ignorant senior managers are happy to pay these private consultants astronomical sums

to prove their allegiance to the market, yet they are reluctant to pay a decent wage to academics who often spend over 60 hours a week working on what the institutions are supposed to be all about: teaching and research.

Quality education necessitates the teaching of and research in a broad range of subjects - from science and engineering to philosophy, from medicine to arts and social sciences, from mathematics to history. Yet the new breed of university managers, supported by an army of unelected, non-academic administrators obsessed by balance sheets (often based on fictitious figures), are quick to dismiss subject areas not deemed to be profit-making in the short term. Courses in philosophy, literature, anthropology and so on are amongst the first victims of cuts (unless they can find a link to management or medicine perhaps). Staff joke about launching new courses, such as 'Shakespeare for managers' or 'Aristotelian philosophy for business'. It now seems that history departments even in Russell group universities can only survive if they become involved in war studies. Sociology is doomed unless it seeks funding from 'global security' interests. In fact, as many have found on campuses throughout the country, no subject is safe. Biological sciences, in fashion one day, are on the list of faculties needing to cut back drastically the next.

Until last year, engineering departments were on vice-chancellors' hit lists. Of course, their existence hardly makes sense at a time when manufacturing industries (with the exception of arms) have next to no budget for research and development and offer few jobs for graduate engineers. However, the coalition government's imaginary 'turn to manufacturing' and Lord Browne's report have brought a respite. Yet most academics in this sector doubt this will last long. After all, the turn away from manufacturing and towards finance capital is not accidental: it reflects the economic priorities (some would argue, realities) of late capitalism in the Europe and the United States.

The model proposed for university management relies primarily on the fetishism of the private sector. As Christine Cooper has argued, this fetishism requires adopting a language for "legitimising action based on the perceived meanings of terms such as 'budget', 'deficit'". She points to the way "myths, stories and other forms of anecdotal evidence are used to justify certain social events or relations. Eg, private sector businesses create wealth that the public services then spend."<sup>4</sup>

New Labour was as guilty as the Conservatives in propagating these myths. For example, that while public services may have some value, they hold back the private sector. In reality of course, the private sector could not function without state subsidy and provision. According to Christine Cooper, it is said that "The state sector is bureaucratic, cumbersome, fat and wasteful, whereas the private sector is modern, efficient, slim and thrusting. Of course, anyone with any experience of the private sector would know this to be a falsehood."<sup>5</sup>

## Academic resistance

Academic staff are becoming increasingly alert to the fact that academic freedom, faculty autonomy, intellectual excellence and job security are under threat. They have seen how senior university managers, who are no longer involved in teaching and research, are constantly aiming to reorganise and restructure purely to cut costs.

In one Russell group university, departments were deemed to be the main planning units, but within a very

short time this responsibility was handed over to the faculties - only for all this to be abolished in favour of the old-fashioned department-faculty arrangement. Within a few years this system was done away with too, and responsibility was given to schools and colleges. At the same time academic staff are recognising that the former university structures - with senate, departmental and faculty meetings - represent the last line of defence against the wholesale commodification of higher education and the commercialisation of academia.

At one Scottish Russell group University, where a particularly incompetent management tried to dilute the authority of the senate (a body composed of senior academics), the collective efforts of academic staff forced a retreat. The university's move against the senate came a few weeks after opposition to the cuts from an informal grouping of some 200 academics - the Cordelia group wrote to the Scottish government to publicise their concerns about a list of proposed cuts, including the axing of modern languages, including Czech, German, Russian and Polish, together with anthropology, nursing and adult education. In the year of the Scottish elections it was no great surprise that the academics' protest was supported by Mike Russell, Scottish National Party education secretary, who launched an outspoken attack on the running of this university. He described the cuts as "perverse" and based on "false figures".<sup>6</sup> All this forced university managers to 'reconsider' the timing and method of the proposed cuts.

It should be remembered that in all universities power always resided in the principal and the management group, but until the early 2000s there were real debates and concessions were made by the authorities; departments had regular staff meetings, which acquired real power over the functioning of the curriculum and research; and there were meetings which took crucial decisions on the operation of each faculty. In many universities deans and heads of department were elected. University staff talked of academic freedom and university administrations were put on the defensive. True, there was discrimination against those whose

research or teaching was critical of the capitalist system, and such research was starved of funding.

Today, however, in most higher education institutions the situation is far worse. There is just the pretence of democracy at the level of staff meetings. The increasing demands of the REF have reduced academic freedom in relation to choice of subject, viewpoint and control over time. In the name of raising academic standards, university managers have established various forms of subtle and less subtle control. Instead of the goal of education being learning in and for itself, the university sets itself the aim of providing skilled personnel for business and the making of profits.

Now academic staff face the threat of mass redundancy. On many campuses there is talk of 25% of staff being dismissed over the next two-three years. Entire subject areas are threatened. In order to confront this, there is need to establish a left pressure group to ensure that the restrictions on academic freedom are eliminated and that staff are protected against attempts to demoralise them.

The austerity package imposed on the UK by the coalition government is a deliberate, planned policy to destroy the welfare state and throw the capitalist economy back to its fundamental form of mass unemployment, with minimal safeguards for those thrown out of work, with limited state- and employer-provided pensions, and maximum privatisation of institutions and corporations. It cannot be fought through simple strikes or economic measures. The policy is political and it has to be fought politically - something the universities' union bureaucracy is singularly incapable of doing ●

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## Notes

1. A Milton , B O'Connell *International Journal of Critical Accounting* 2009, Vol 1, No3, pp204-27.
2. DF Noble *Digital diploma mills: the automation of higher education*: www.monthlyreview.org/books/digitaldiplomamills.php.
3. *Ibid*.
4. Professor C Cooper, seminar on higher education: www.gla.ac.uk/departments/socialisttheory-andmovement/centre%20seminars.
5. *Ibid*.
6. *The Herald* March 29.

# Fighting fund High fives

It goes without saying that the *Weekly Worker* is not affected by the coalition cuts - not directly, at any rate. Readers will not be surprised to learn that we receive no government or council grant, no subsidy. We rely entirely on our own ability to raise the cash we need, thanks to the generosity of our readers and supporters.

However, we are affected indirectly, in that a good number of those readers and supporters are having to make savings, having seen a real drop in their income because of the current attacks. Some have seen their take-home pay slashed, while others have lost their jobs. And that means they are having to reduce the size and/or frequency of their donations to the paper.

This week, for example, I received round about the usual number of gifts, but a high number of them were for just £5. Of course, those fivers mount up, but in the past, some of those comrades would have thought nothing of donating £10 or £20.

That is why it is particularly

gratifying that comrades who can afford to support us more generously are continuing to do so. For example, this week a total of £300 in standing orders was transferred to the *Weekly Worker* account from just two comrades - thank you, SK and MM, for your continued magnificent support. They know that our paper is the only one that fights for what our class really needs - a single, united Communist Party.

Anyway, £370 came in over the last seven days, taking our fighting fund running total to £765. But our target is £1,250, with just over a week to. We could really do with a lot more contributions - another 20 or 30 fivers would do me very nicely! How about all you web readers (there were 12,769 of them last week)? ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## OUR HISTORY

## For Labour affiliation

**A**fter hearing comrades JF Hodgson and William Paul respectively speaking for and against CPGB affiliation to the Labour Party,<sup>1</sup> the Communist Unity Convention moved on to a general discussion.

The idea was, first, to arrive at a decision on affiliation; after this, amendments would be taken in order to hammer out the details. The chair, Arthur MacManus, insisted that it was necessary that “every delegate should feel that the subject had been thoroughly debated”, and there would be 23 speakers - nine for affiliation and 14 against.

Those opposing maintained that the Labour Party was thoroughly corrupt and - like T Barber of Southwark British Socialist Party - they knew this from direct personal experience. The official report of the discussion underlines that, despite the crudity of some of the opinions expressed, the leftism on display was coming from transparently sincere working class militants, with a history of work and real roots in working class communities. Comrade Barber, for instance, told comrades: “He and other members of the Southwark BSP, as it was then, stood as Labour candidates at the last borough council elections. They got in and were by that time disgusted absolutely by the policy and actions of the Labour Party.”

A constant theme was that the Communist Party must not be tainted through association and that workers would never understand the ‘subtle’ reasons advanced for affiliation. This was certainly the argument put forward by Tom Bell:

“The first essential to rally together all the elements in the country in favour of communism was to make it clear that we have no associations with and did not stand for the same policy as the Labour Party ... we wanted a Communist Party clear and distinct from any association with reformism or the Labour Party.”

CL Gibbons argued along similar lines. The official report reads as follows:

CL Gibbons (Ferndale Socialist Society) opposed affiliation to the Labour Party, saying ... he would give his own experience in his own locality. There the Labour Party was in power; it was not fighting for power but had a big majority on the district council. It was discrediting itself every day; and if it was a communist district council it would discredit itself even more. What was happening? Every section of the working class in Rhondda, after working for the municipality, had been on strike against it during the last 12 months. That fact had done more to discredit the Labour Party in the eyes of the workers of Rhondda than anything we could do either inside or outside.

Even people who were not communists were saying there was nothing in the Labour control of municipalities. Were delegates from that district to go back and say to such people, ‘Having reached this point by your own observation, now try and believe there is something in it’? It could not be done; they dare not. In his own lodge there were three district councillors, two members of the board of guardians and two JPs. One had resigned because he refused to carry out his mandate; another had refused to carry out his mandate but had remained in office ...

Communists in the Rhondda had been telling the people all along, ‘If you go in and get control of the municipal and parliamentary machinery nothing



With the hammer and sickle inscribed on Labour's banner

will come of it, except that you will discredit your own case’, and he and other delegates from that district dare not go back and tell the people there to go into the Labour Party.

He asked the delegates to look at the question from that point of view - not what it would entail in a general sense, but what it would entail upon them tomorrow. They would go back and have to take part in the whole of the Labour Party action if we became affiliated to that party. The Labour Party might perform the miracle of accepting communist candidates, but it would not accept all communist candidates, and they would be pledged to support every candidate put forward by the Labour Party. If they did not they would be kicked outside that party; if they did they ought to be kicked outside the Communist Party.

FL Kerran (BSP, Central London) said he thought the last speaker had given really the best towards guiding us to the right conclusion; he had given an excellent description of what was going to be the future of the political Labour Party in this country. He had described to us what had happened in Rhondda. He had told us that the Labour Party there had actually got the majority, and had failed in their local council, and that the Labour council had become thoroughly discredited.

What was going to be the result of that? When the workers found out that the Labour Party was no damned good to them, they would then overthrow the Labour Party. But it was our business first of all to help the Labour Party get into office, and then, when they had got into office, our first act was to kick them out. When all was said and done we were really wasting our time in discussing this subject. We were discussing tactics, but what have we to do with tactics? In so far as we were concerned, we were a few individuals trying to form a general staff without an army.

Our work in the future was to go on educating enough people to agree with us. When we have enough of the men behind us we would consider tactics.

Comrade Paul said that the revolution was coming soon. He (Kerran) sincerely hoped it was not; if we were going to be the people to guide the revolution in the strength we were today it was a very bad lookout for us.

**George Deer of the British Socialist Party in Rawtenstall supported affiliation. In reply to those who suggested that the communists would be swept aside by the working class if it affiliated to the Labour Party, he saw a different scenario unfold. The BSP was an affiliate and as such hugely enhanced its influence:**

He wanted to suggest to the convention that the only possible chance we had of showing the workers that our viewpoint was different from that of the Labour Party was by remaining inside and fighting them on their own battleground ...

We knew our case and could state it, and he emphatically denied that there was any possibility of our being mistaken as being either of them or with them. When the cry was raised in Russia of ‘All power to the soviets’, what happened? Lenin wanted to get power out of the existing organisations, and his fight was with the reactionists who were inside those organisations. Our fight was with the same kind of people here ...

If we wanted to give the reactionists joy we should leave them. After we had gone they would say, ‘Thank god we have got rid of that element. Now we can have quiet, peaceable and happy times.’ Another point was that if we left the Labour Party there was great danger of people who did not take our viewpoint posing as the left wing within the Labour Party. It had only been our attitude at Scarborough that had unmasked the MacDonalds, Hills<sup>2</sup> and the rest who were posing as the left wing. It would interest those present to know that, while they accepted John Hill as vice-president of the Hands Off Russia committee, and agreed with him over industrial action so far as Russia was concerned, in ne-

gotiations on the standing orders of the Labour Party conference no man had tried to sabotage us more than he. We had to remain with these people in order to fight them.

The millions of votes cast for the Labour Party at the last general election were votes given mainly by people who were dissatisfied, but did not quite know what they wanted. These were the people we had to show the way to; if we could not win them we could not win anyone.

We should retain our communist identity inside the Labour Party - until such time as the Labour Party became a Labour Party with a communist mind - and this could be done, for what we said today our Labour leaders would have to say tomorrow - and inscribed on the Labour Party banner the sickle and the hammer of the communist movement.

W Mellor asked those delegates who had not come with mandates that could not be broken again to look at this question without any heat, to look at it from the point of view of expediency. We were not a collection of Machiavellis. We were a collection of people who disliked the Labour Party, and had very grave doubts as to whether modern trade unionism was the thing we were particularly keen upon.

But we were inside the capitalist system, inside every manifestation of that system, and one of those manifestations was parliament. The Labour Party - meaning thereby not the Parliamentary Labour Party, but the federation of trade unions, socialist societies, local Labour Parties and cooperative societies - was a manifestation of the desire of the working class to take advantage of the parliamentary system. It was a collection of the various aspects of the labour movement on its industrial or consuming side, coming together to express in a political way certain desires and aspirations. The desires and aspirations of the present labour movement were something of which he had nothing to say; they were miles behind the things that we were aiming at, but they were the things for

which the people of this country were asking.

We had to recognise that the revolution would not come unless we could get assent not to our principles, but to our tactics, from the organised workers; that to be successful in our efforts to change society we must be in strategic positions if we as a Communist Party, beginning our career, cut ourselves off from the political expression of the labour movement of this country, without having examined whether the time had arrived to do so, we should rue the step ... our job was to see that any strategic position that was going was ours and that we were on the spot to get hold of it ... We must use every instrument there is ... we could not afford at the very beginning and creation of a revolutionary party in this country to lose the chance of taking advantage of every machine that the labour movement had created.

**It was not clear from the debate exactly how the vote would go. As it turned out, there was a 199 to 85 majority for affiliation - by prior agreement all delegates were bound by majority decisions. In this spirit a Provisional Executive Committee was formed by adding to the Joint Provisional Committee six new comrades: Fred Shaw, Bob Stewart, Dr DB Montefiore, CL Malone, George Deer and William Mellor.**

**The convention also adopted Tentative proposals providing for transformation into the Communist Party, a document prepared by the old Joint Provisional Committee. This signified agreement with the drawing up of a draft constitution and rules, and the transformation of all the participating organisations and groups into the Communist Party of Great Britain ●**

## Notes

1. See *Weekly Worker* April 7, 14.
2. Ramsay MacDonald, a leading member of the Independent Labour Party, took a social-pacifist position during World War I. John Hill had a left reputation as leader of the boilermakers union and became president of the TUC in 1917.



## PCS

# Push for anti-cuts candidates

PCS executive candidate **Dave Vincent** explains the main issues in the union's elections

**M**embers of the Public and Commercial Services union have received their ballot papers for the national executive elections which close on May 5. As *Weekly Worker* readers will know, PCS is not affiliated to the Labour Party and this makes a difference to left politics within it.

Once again there are four factions contesting for the NEC. Currently in control is the electoral pact (originally claimed to be temporary, but now in force for years) between Left Unity and the PCS Democrats under the mild, non-threatening (and deliberately not left-sounding) name of 'Democracy Alliance'.

Left Unity, as the largest by far faction in the union, is controlled by the Socialist Party in England and Wales, but is also supported by the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party of Britain, Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity and independent socialists. It is harder to accurately define the PCS Democrats - they have a Liberal Democrat councillor and Labour Party members amongst their small grouping and they make no political comments.

Apart from the two factions of the Democracy Alliance there is the Independent Left, a small breakaway from Left Unity; and on the right we have '4themembers' - previously the National Moderate Group, when Barry Reamsbottom was PCS general secretary.

It was originally argued that the electoral alliance between Left Unity and PCS Democrats was the only way the right could be defeated and the latter was indeed voted out. But now this argument is used annually, even though '4tm' has only three out of 41 NEC members, since its candidates are usually runners-up - sometimes very close - behind the DA.

What, this year, are the factions' main campaigning points, as contained in their election statements?

The DA states that, under its leadership, the union has stopped thousands of compulsory redundancies, halted planned privatisations (that should read 'some'), cemented unity with others unions, including Unison and built a strong, influential, democratic PCS. Then it lists a number of issues we need to keep campaigning on - fair pay, defence of pensions and jobs against the government's attacks. While DA candidates had their own individualised election statements, mostly they were parochial and economic, save two (one from an SWP comrade), who mentioned wider issues, including the revolutions in the Arab world.

The Independent Left all submitted near identical election statements. Their main thrust was to object to constant NEC spin, which claims victories which at best are only partial. They also demand the election of all full-time officers (with pay to be brought more in line with that of most members), and insist we need much more industrial action (not just a day here, a day there), including selective strikes (the NEC seems to be against any mention of this tactic) and that PCS should go it alone if other unions will not come on board. IL also make the point that thousands of jobs are being lost by 'natural wastage' and voluntary redundancy, and the NEC is not doing anything about it.

Bar the odd individual comment here and there, all IL statements are concerned purely with civil service issues and none mentioned anything happening outside the UK. Last year the IL made great play on the fact it was standing more female candidates than DA, including for president. This year,



**Mark Serwotka: opposed by Independent Left's John Moloney**

however, its presidential candidate is John Moloney.

The rightwing 4tm set out its usual stall: PCS is controlled by left extremists wasting money on causes with no relevance for ordinary members (the favourite target being support for Cuba and Venezuela), they are too strike-happy, they are using PCS to further the aims of the hard left ... Of course, 4tm claims to support the use of industrial action - but only as a last resort. It paints a picture of successful negotiations with the government, if only PCS members were to elect a sensible and reasonable NEC.

Quite amazingly 4tm attacks the stated PCS intention of standing anti-cuts candidates in future elections. Why amazingly? Because *none* of the DA or IL candidates - not even president Janice Godrich - mention this anywhere in their own election statements.

Rob Bryson of 4tm is standing again after coming extremely close last year to defeating SP assistant general secretary Chris Baugh (although he did lose heavily to Mark Serwotka in the general secretary election). Although typically 4tm candidates get only 12 branch nominations (compared to around 20 for the IL and something like 135 for the DA), they are usually not too far behind in the vote. Which suggests that after 10 years of an SP-controlled NEC and a constantly proclaimed campaigning union the vast majority of our members have not been radicalised. A large section remains passive.

I am contesting again myself as an independent socialist and am the only one to mention support for standing anti-cuts candidates and to state that public sector unity is not attained because of the attitude of those unions affiliated to the Labour Party.

If you want a prediction, I think there will be the usual low turnout, DA will win most seats on the NEC, 4tm will end up with the usual handful, the IL will not get any and I may not come bottom!

Returning to the question of anti-cuts candidates, the NEC has run two consultation exercises to get the views of branches. As a 4tm candidate points out, only 150 out of 800 branches bothered stating a view and of those two thirds were in favour. We have not been told by the NEC the reasons given by the 50 or so that were against. They could be significant. Could it be that Labour supporters among branch officers do not want PCS contesting? Could it be fear that our candidates will end up all being SP members?

I was surprised Mark Serwotka said nothing about this at the March 26 TUC demonstration in London, nor during his appearance on BBC1's *Question time* on March 31. Is he being leaned on by the leaders of the bigger unions - those affiliated to the Labour Party? Is the SP getting cold feet about the idea? Support for the Campaign for a New Workers' Party or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is not exactly growing in PCS.

This whole question brings me to James Turley's polemic against my anti-Labour Party article, which I enjoyed (at last someone has responded and I will reply!). As well as apparently "misreading the situation" and indulging in "self-serving sectarianism" (Eddie Ford), I see I am now an 'incoherent abstentionist' (April 14). So that's settled *that* argument then!

But seriously, no *Weekly Worker* writer has dealt with my support for unions like PCS standing their own anti-cuts candidates. This is not a proposal for a Labour Party mark two or a halfway house. Nor, of course, is it for a Marxist party or indeed any party. But only giving voters the choice between the coalition and the Labour Party does not test whether people voting Labour are doing so as a clear move to the left or just to get the coalition out (how soon it has been forgotten why Labour lost).

Again unanswered was my question of the politics of those leaving Labour and those joining now - this matters. One leaving and one joining is not an equal exchange if those leaving are socialists and trade union activists and those joining are from the 71% who think they are middle class! How can Labour be 'pulled to the left' if those joining have no intention of making that happen? Less snippy dismissal and patronising put-downs and more analysis, comrades - and replies to my questions, please. I feel *Weekly Worker* writers are dismissing the questions raised by ordinary people coming together and deciding to stand their own anti-cuts candidates out of hand.

What ideas might such people have or arrive at? Isn't the whole exercise better than just having to choose between machine politicians? Isn't ordinary people exercising democratic control and accountability, taking power back to communities, looking for an alternative, better than the current stitch-up? Won't the experience of such involvement open more people to an alternative, ground more people in debate and tactics, than telling them to vote Labour again? ●

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Become a Communist Party associate member

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Town/city \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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



# weekly worker

## Police hand in glove with media

# The fall of the Murdoch empire?

As the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal grows, the corruption underlying the bourgeois state becomes ever more obvious, argues **James Turley**

Referring to British rule in India, Marx observes: "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked."<sup>1</sup>

What he might have added is this - in times of generalised social upheaval and crisis, even the 'respectable forms' adopted for domestic consumption begin to wither. So not only have the recent Arab democratic revolts, in time-honoured form, exposed the imperialists again and again as the greatest enemy democracy has in this world, but (for example) the neoliberal ideology that good government in our age consists of competent and prudent administration of the economy has been given the lie by the economically illiterate yet omnipresent drive towards autocannibalistic budget cuts.

Finally, the idea that constitutional capitalist 'democracy', with its checks and balances and strong institutions, represents an imperfect but effective bulwark against corruption has been repeatedly exposed under the pressure of the times for the most laughable fraud. In keeping with the best traditions of seditious journalism, nobody has made quite so great a contribution to uncovering this fraud than Rupert Murdoch and his cabal of cronies.

Readers will be aware of the basics of the case - what began as an investigation into how exactly the *News of the World's* then royal correspondent, Clive Goodman, came to know certain salacious details of Prince Harry's private life, a question which seemed to have been buried by Goodman's conviction (along with shady private eye, Glenn Mulcaire) for hacking into the prince's mobile phone voicemail, has continued to spiral into a scandal of epic proportions.

Murdoch and his cronies have attempted to cover up the extent of the scandal at every step. In doing so, they have proven the old adage that the cover-up often causes more problems than the crime. A constant drip, drip of new revelations has exposed their manoeuvrings at every stage. If it was just 'one rogue reporter', as initially claimed, why did the list of potential victims include many of the great and the good with no known links to the royal family? What induced the Murdoch organisation to hand Gordon Taylor, general secretary of the Professional Football Association, a generous wad of hush money? The questions kept on piling up - thanks in no small part to rival media organisations like *The Guardian*, along with more old-fashioned muckraking outfits like *Private Eye*, the story just did not die.

Now, the police have grudgingly admitted that the possible scope for criminal convictions is far wider than previously conceded. The situation has already forced former Andy Coulson out of his new job as David Cameron's chief spin doctor. Neville Thurlbeck

and Ian Edmondson, at the time chief reporter and news editor respectively, have been arrested. The police have stated that at least 91 individuals may have a case against the paper. Most ominously for Murdoch, trusted and loyal lieutenant Rebekah Brooks - former editor of both the *News of the World* and *The Sun* - has been taken in for questioning on the basis of an unguarded admission that Murdoch papers had suborned police officers to get those sensational law 'n' order stories.

Previously, Coulson was the main target in the sights of rival journalists and muckrakers. After all, getting him bang to rights would not only deliver a bloody nose to the Murdoch empire: it would provide serious embarrassment to the government and David Cameron in particular. Some of the sting has gone out of the latter possibility, after Coulson fell on his sword. Yet, now that Brooks - chief executive of News International - is potentially in the frame, even juicier targets present themselves. After all, Brooks is answerable to almost nobody except Murdoch and his clan.

It is in this light that we must regard News International's "unreserved apology" to eight victims of phone-hacking - remarkable as such a public admission of civil liability from a major, litigation-hardened news organisation was. Firstly, it was far from 'unreserved' - the admission of guilt was limited to those eight cases, and to the years of Coulson's editorship. This, on one level, is an attempt to protect Brooks. On another, it is worth noting, as *Private Eye* has, that just a week before news of the apology broke, James Murdoch - son and heir to the big man - was spirited away to America for a new job.<sup>2</sup> Coincidence? You decide.

I said above that the cover-up has caused more trouble than the crime. Not for News International, it is true: it remains possible that some key

executives may be saved from court convictions they might otherwise face. If, however, Murdoch had held up his hands, he certainly could have pleaded ignorance; the *News of the World* would have all but collapsed overnight, and that would have been a publicly humiliating (and costly) spectacle, but the rest of his empire would probably get through unscathed.

What Murdoch has done, by ineptly fighting to the bitter end (the bitter end, of course, is not yet here, but nobody can seriously expect him to give up now), is drag almost the entire British establishment into it. Suspicions about the Metropolitan Police's role in this affair have been rife since the beginning. The cops are always willing to come out on the reactionary line that in today's 'liberal' society the rights of criminals override the rights of victims to exact vengeance through the agency of the state.

Yet never - except when there has been something amiss - have the police been so timid in pursuing leads in a high-profile case. The victims certainly seemed far more sure a crime had been committed than the cops - former Met deputy commissioner Andy Hayman, who was in charge of the original investigation, last September even publicly ridiculed the "rants" of John Prescott. Of course, he would do that - Hayman walked straight out of the Met into a job at ... the *News of the World*.

He was not the only big wig in London's finest, meanwhile, to be winned and dined at the Murdoch empire's expense - simply the most cooperative of a pretty craven bunch (when, that is, they are faced with large-scale corporate criminality, as opposed to engaging in the agreeable Saturday afternoon hobby of kettling 12-year-olds). That similar schmoozing and ingratiation was directed at the top levels of government and the civil service barely needs to be mentioned - that, too, has become clearer as time

goes on.

The influence of media barons on government is not simply about mobilising public opinion around a number of reactionary canards (the more or less unchanging top three: 'political correctness gone mad', 'immigration chaos', 'dependency culture'). It is also about direct access to ministers and mandarins - up to and including the prime minister. The former is more useful in imposing policy agendas; the latter more useful in guarding particular corporate interests. (It is notable in this connection that the department for business still does not consider the phone-hacking affair in any way relevant to Murdoch's attempt to secure a controlling interest in BSkyB.)

With the carrot comes the stick. Hayman was buttered up, to be sure - but one of Murdoch's 'incentives' was an agreement to spike an embarrassing *News of the World* story about his private life. Members of various parliamentary sub-committees have complained of threats to their reputation, should they tread too heavily on Murdoch's toes. Given that phone-hacking is merely the technically illegal tip of an iceberg of subterfuge techniques in the regular employ of Murdoch's tabloid hacks, it is not particularly paranoid to assume that they have *some* dirt on almost everyone with any influence in the establishment.

Despite the genuinely admirable energy with which *The Guardian* and other bourgeois papers have pursued this investigation, they are not wholly innocent - because they, too, would like it to be a compartmentalised story: about the Murdoch organisation, antipathetic to almost every value *The Guardian* holds dear (not to say very much a senior rival in the broadsheet market), and also to a limited extent about the Tories, and an even more limited extent about the tycoon's influence on Blair's New Labour

project.

Communists are clear: this scandal shows in uncannily stark detail the objective structure of bourgeois politics *as a whole*. The capitalist press has such a massive reach because of advertising - that is, it is objectively *subsidised* by the bourgeois class to pursue its interests (in an often complicated and indirect way). The reactionary tabloids in particular work to ensure the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the petty bourgeoisie, with the political expression of this relationship residing in votes for the Conservative Party when possible, or Labour Party when necessary. The persistence of these media organisations, of which Murdoch's is merely the most infamous apotheosis, through the span of many governments gives a certain guarantee that the same *class* interests will be embodied through those governments - as does the persistence of the Sir Humphreys of the state bureaucracy, the generals, judges, etc.

For any democracy to be possible, it is not enough, as genuine Marxists have always emphasised, to smash the state bureaucracy and armed bodies of men: we must also neutralise capitalist control over the media. Advertising subsidy should be abolished, so the capitalists can no longer effectively buy public opinion. Any paper, TV station or website that cannot survive on its mass audience alone should be fully socialised under workers' control. Otherwise, at best we will just end up, to coin a phrase, with Murdochism without Murdoch - and the ability of bourgeois society to conceal its barbaric essence will be saved from the brink ●

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## Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm.
2. *Private Eye* April 12.

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