



**Lars T Lih introduces the first English translation of Karl Kautsky's 'Republic'**

- Britain's republicans
- Election tactics
- May's elections
- Eagle of the ninth

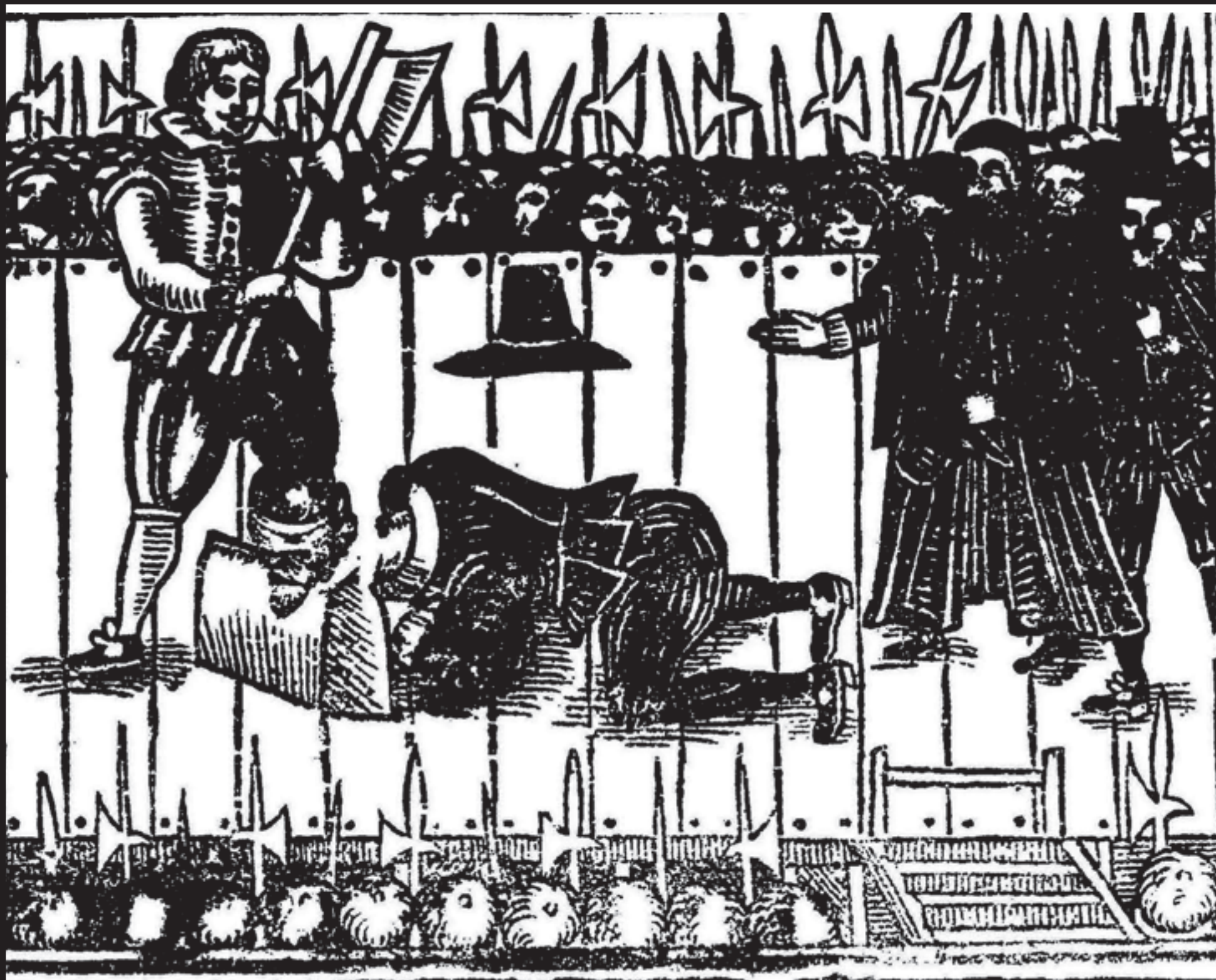
# weekly **worker**

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## Monarchist system must go



# LETTERS



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

## No, James

James Turley in his reply (Letters, April 21) to my letter the previous week gets into a further muddle. He says he's not familiar enough with Trotsky's writings to dispute whether Trotsky argues that a united front is only between two working class organisations. Well, it's set out in the 'Theses on the united front' agreed by the Comintern (see [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/fyici-2/08.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/fyici-2/08.htm)).

James says that Trotsky uses the term in relation to defence of the USSR, seemingly forgetting that the USSR was the biggest workers' organisation of them all! But James does not seem to grasp still that, even in relation to defence of the USSR, Trotsky makes a clear distinction between defence of the state, as opposed to defence of the regime - he was for total opposition to the regime of Stalin. The whole thrust of the united front - 'March separately, strike together' - sums up this approach of maintaining strict organisational and political independence, including conducting the most militant propaganda against the reformist/Stalinist organisations, whilst acting together against a common enemy.

James repeats what I said on this: "... in the face of an imperialist attack on [Libya], communists still have to support the state, whilst continuing to mobilise the workers to oppose both imperialism and the Gaddafi regime." But then strangely he says: "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."

He does not seem able to distinguish between supporting 'the state' and supporting 'the regime'. It is the same problem that the third campists had and that the Stalinists had. On the one hand, the third campists argued that supporting the state in the USSR meant supporting the regime of Stalin. On the other hand, the Stalinists argued that attacking the regime of Stalin was the same as attacking the USSR as a state. But the state and the regime are clearly *not* the same thing. Indeed, it is clearly impossible to be both 'opposed' to the regime and 'united' with it. The whole point is that communists in such a situation seek out the real revolutionary forces and unite with *them*.

James is, of course, correct to point out that in many instances the nature of a regime is such that any practical alliance is impossible, even at the level of simple negotiations to coordinate military activity. But that does not stop the communists in such a situation from organising their forces to defend the state against imperialist attack. Indeed they would use the refusal of the regime or other reactionary forces to engage in even such basic measures as part of the propaganda against them! In Libya today that would mean assisting the development of independent workers' organisations, militia and so on. I suspect that such organisations would be as much at risk from the reactionaries within the ranks of the rebels as they would from Gaddafi's forces, and so the point made by James in that regard rebounds on his own argument in relation to supporting the rebels.

But James also seems to confuse other terms and misunderstand my objection to his use of them. He refers to Lenin's quote about 'pure' revolutions, but my whole point is

that it is not clear to me that what we have in Libya *is* a revolution. That is why I made the point about it being a civil war - whilst many real social revolts end in civil war, not every civil war is the product of social revolt. The civil war in Rwanda was not. In such a situation, do communists choose a side or do they look to the interests of the working class across the divide? It is clear that communists defend the rights of a minority in such a situation, but that is not the same thing as supporting the victory of one side/community/tribe/religious group over another.

Moreover, if James really wants to ensure that the Libyan masses act to prevent something arising that is worse than Gaddafi, I would suggest that he begins now by not inviting those masses to join a popular front with the rebels and instead recommends that Libyan workers organise to defend their own interests both now and in the future and, by so doing, facilitate their own development and potential for winning leadership of the movement against both imperialism and Gaddafi.

The fact that the Arab revolution remains an unresolved issue is *not* an objective basis for lumping all of the disputes together. There are many 'unresolved issues' that likewise affect a number of countries, but that does not mean that this provides an objective basis for uniting a struggle in one of these countries with a struggle in another, other than at the highest level of abstraction. Obviously, a *potential* for linking these struggles together exists and, as part of building support for workers in Libya, we should look initially to support being provided from workers in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Algeria as the nearest neighbours.

But the economic and material bases in these various Arab states are very different and the nature of the revolts in each is also different. James's argument is really like saying that the socialist revolution is an 'unresolved issue' across western Europe. So if a strike occurs in France and one in Britain, we have to see it as an unfolding of this long-awaited revolution and should raise the European socialist revolution as our practical response rather than concentrating on the practical actions required to win the two disputes, whilst attempting to build whatever international links we can in the process.

James says: "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!" I have never argued that Gaddafi *does not* have to go. And the fact that there is a messy civil war going on does not prevent me from advocating a programmatic solution to that problem. Unlike James, that does not revolve around throwing in my lot with one or another reactionary grouping within that civil war, but rather around supporting the Libyan workers and attempting to build an independent working class solution to both.

James also seems under some misapprehension in relation to Egypt and Tunisia. If the regime in Egypt falls, then it will be replaced by a bourgeois democratic regime under the control of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and with the support of the international bourgeoisie, particularly from the EU. But, the moment the workers in particular begin to push their own demands and the bourgeoisie takes fright, it will realign with the military and introduce a new crackdown with the blessing of imperialism.

I consider the chances of a socialist revolution, which would be the only solution under those conditions,

unlikely. In either case, it will be the bourgeoisie and imperialism that will be in a dominant position in Egypt, not the working class, so the chances of that coming to the rescue of the Libyan masses is not great. That is another reason we should concentrate on building up the independent forces of the working class in Egypt and across the Middle East and north Africa.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Not just Arabs

Contrary to the claims of *Weekly Worker* writers, such as Eddie Ford ('Triumvirate commits to regime change', April 21), the present upsurge of mass struggle in the Middle East is not about the fight for the unity of the Arab people (where is this demand being raised other than by writers in the *Weekly Worker* and by Stalinist fellow travellers like George Galloway?) but the struggle of the masses for democratic rights and against the effect of the world crisis of capitalism.

The trigger for the mass explosion has been the increase in the cost of living for the masses (soaring cost of food and fuel on the world market, combined with cuts in government subsidies) and with the obvious fact that the old regimes have no positive answers to the social problems confronting the mass of the population.

Is not the mass struggle in Iran against the repressive regime and falling living standards intimately linked to the struggle in Egypt and Syria? There is, in fact, on the ground no struggle for 'Arab unity', but rather a struggle of the working class, youth and the poor for a better life, free from the kleptocratic regimes that dominate the region and also dominate much of what used to be called the third world. It should also be remembered that the Middle East is home to a large population of migrant workers who come from all over the globe and who must be integrated into any struggle for workers' power. And, of course, there are the large non-Arab minorities that live throughout the area and who have a history of oppression by the Arab ruling classes. In this situation for communists to advance the perspective of fighting for Arab national unity or issue calls for pan-Arab unity cuts against the struggle to establish working class unity and working class political independence from capital and plays into the hands of our enemy by promoting nationalism as the way forward.

Instead of this reheated nationalist rubbish about the fight for Arab national unity, communists should be calling for the unity of all workers of all nationalities in the region and beyond in the struggle for workers' power and socialism.

**Sandy McBurney**  
email

## Peaked

Andrew Northall (Letters, April 21) was right to criticise me for saying that peak oil means the end of capitalism. What I really meant was that peak oil, a period of stagnating global oil production, will *lead to* the collapse of capitalism.

This collapse started in 2008, when oil prices surged to \$147 per barrel. The coming period of declining oil production will paralyse the world economy, or, as Vernon Coleman writes in *Oil apocalypse*, "A permanent rise in oil prices will destroy our economy permanently." Coleman is no socialist or anti-capitalist. Yet the above is a simple fact ignored by Marxists.

The end of capitalism will follow on from the collapse of the system, assuming the left is able to unite on a new basis rather than live in the past. This need for unity may be

an uphill struggle with people who base themselves on a 19th century economic theory which did not need to understand the role of non-renewable energy in making industrial civilisation possible. In other words, Marxism based its economic analysis on labour-power and machinery, but did not concern itself with non-renewable sources of energy, which increasingly replaced labour-power.

Andrew is an orthodox, traditional Marxist, who imagines that Marxism explains how history works in the past, present and the future. I, on the other hand, reject Marx's *materialist interpretation of history*, which I adhered to in the past with some doubts. This theory argues that the production relations of slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist society are determined by the state of development of productive forces. It's a clever argument, but this doesn't make it true.

I believe that in all class societies, production relations between people are determined by the armed power of the ruling class backed up by ideology and tradition. If Marxism was right and production relations are determined by the productive forces, what use would the ruling class have of armed forces or the state for internal need? Marxism implies that class struggle against exploitation would be wrong or unscientific if directed against exploitative relations of production which had not outlived their usefulness.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Platform ticket

I would agree with Mike Macnair that it would be possible to cast a critical vote for Galloway in Glasgow at the Scottish election if he was the only credible candidate standing to the left of the major parties ('Electoral principles and our tactics', April 14).

However, he isn't. We have the Scottish Socialist Party list, with Frances Curran, a former MSP, at the top, standing on a platform which includes a workers' MSP on a worker's wage and a woman's right to choose -

neither of which Galloway supports.  
**Campbell McGregor**  
Glasgow

## Respectable

I agree with Terry Liddle that republicanism has not been respectable - that is why it has never made inroads into the royal cabal and its hordes of oath-taking protectors in parliament (Letters, April 21).

Republic is at least doing something different and worthwhile in presenting the respectable face of republicanism to the people, nearly all of whom continue to be enthralled by the theatrical pageantry of monarchy, and trying to get through to them with reasoned argument.

More power to their elbow - nothing else has worked thus far.

**Bob Wiggin**  
email

## Ukraine miners

The capitalists of Ukraine continue to attack the rights of the working class and their trade unions. The independent union of the miners of Krivbass, the NPGK, operating in the Dnepropetrovsk region, mobilised nearly 500 to actively defend the interests of the workers. NPGK leader Nikita Stotsky is standing firm, despite having already faced two dozen trials for refusing to accept the denial of legal rights to his union.

Some of the mining bosses are or recently were council members belonging to the rightwing party, Our Ukraine, headed by former president Viktor Yushchenko. Hundreds of workers are fighting to restore the rights of their militant trade unions, but the company management, local government and the corrupt courts are all refusing to back down. Our response must be working class solidarity.

Demand that all the union's legitimate rights be restored, that the state stop interfering in union activities, that the union's property be returned. Hands off Nikita Stotsky!

**Coordination Council of the Workers Movement of Ukraine**  
[ksrd@pisem.net](mailto:ksrd@pisem.net)

## Fighting fund

# Up our game

**A**s the end of the month looms, we are looking at an ominous shortfall in our April fund. With just three days to go and only £915 in the kitty, we are well short of our £1,250 target.

What makes matters worse is the fact it's a double bank holiday weekend, so there's no chance I'll get your cheque or postal order in time unless you've already posted it. So please go to our website and get out your credit or debit card! We will include any contributions received that way up to 5pm on Sunday May 1, so we can still do it. We will also accept IOUs if you give us a ring.

To be honest, I could do with a good number of comrades using our PayPal facility. Over the last seven days not one out of the 11,339 visitors to our site left a donation. But I can't believe none of them appreciated what they had read. That none of them found any of our analysis thought-provoking or any of the debate stimulating. That none of them thought our consistent campaigning message - we need class unity around a

Marxist programme - correct, non-sectarian and principled.

Well, if you were one of them and you did, how about doing something about it? We really do need to meet our target every month - the *Weekly Worker* is, after all, produced on a shoestring. And yet we also have plans to expand and improve the depth and quality of the paper's content: we need to up our game.

I did get three donations via snail mail this week - thank you, SS (£25), KT (£20) and PT (£10). And there were four standing order gifts that landed in our account - thanks go to JT (£50), DO (£20), DS (£20) and GD (£5). But that only came to an extra £150.

We need £335 in just three days. Please go online or phone to say you have posted us your contribution.

**Robbie Rix**

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



INTERVIEW

# Hub of stability

Mark Fischer spoke to Clive Bloom, author of *Restless revolutionaries*, a book that aims to rediscover “Britain’s ‘lost’ republican history”

This book has been a sort of journey for me. I have been writing about forgotten literature, forgotten writers, interesting cultural movements that have been lost. When I went to university, it seemed to me that the British literature being taught there was distorted: it didn’t tell the whole truth.

I became more and more interested in the politicisation of reading. From that grew the interest I developed in ideologies and movements outside parliament and mainstream politics. These were often fleeting and were rarely covered in standard texts. I wrote my first book - *Violent London*, which is about riots and political dissent in the capital - then moved from there into the whole area of republicanism.

The more I read for my first book about London, the more I was coming up against alternative histories to the official narrative. People like EP Thompson and that school have obviously pioneered here, but I wanted to write a broader history that encompassed both leftwing and rightwing republicanism. I wanted in particular to look at the international aspects of British republicanism, something that has been under-studied.

So *Restless revolutionaries* is an anthology, a gathering together of the history of battles and revolts and conspiracies that could be previously only found in disparate books and reports.

What emerges from this is an alternative way of looking at the way the British Isles has been moulded. I looked at the development of the nationalisms in terms of republicanism, which most share, and the explicit internationalist aspects of some of them. I looked at fascist versions of republicanism as well - William Joyce, for example.

All of these republican movements in Britain have failed. A great many of their leaders went to prison, vanished or were executed. Then you have the Irish Republican Army and in this book I have taken the history of Ireland’s struggle as part of the history of the British empire.

In a way it’s a history of disappointment. **You talk about the history of republicanism’s “crushing failures” in the book. One way that these struggles are crushed, of course, is that the victor writes the histories ...**

Exactly. You have to unearth these histories, the documentation. You have to search for the graves where these people are buried - there are no monuments to guide you. More than that, you have to reconstruct the politics of the time to understand these rebellions in their context.

In the case of William Courtney and the 1838 rebellion in Dover, for example, there *is* a plaque on the church wall commemorating the dead. But why, when this guy turned up preaching as he did, were people prepared to believe it and to die for it? When we understand that, then history comes alive for us and speaks directly to how we live now, the struggles that surround us in today’s world. **Obviously, a discussion of historical republicanism is very relevant to us, given the royal nuptials. Clearly, the monarchy is an institution that ruling elites of various types have found very useful.**

Yes. From 1688 and the notion of a

constitutional monarchy it was found that keeping the king in place gives them authority. What particularly interest me are the legal and other fictions which keep a society in a certain mode and which act to disperse the revolutionary alternatives to it.

For example, the institution of monarchy itself that - by definition - underpins a notion of *subjection*. So, from queen Victoria onwards, the monarchy is a bulwark of the modern notion of family. Similarly, the royal wedding of Will and Kate is *everyone’s*, and princess Diana’s ‘fairytale’ marriage was absolutely ‘universal’ in the reactionary dreams and illusions it appealed to and bolstered.

Conveniently therefore, the fact that the royal family stands for things that can be detached from the state and government facilitates keeping the social fabric intact, especially in times of crisis. It reinforces the notion that history proceeds through dull, incremental change to what already exists, has existed ‘for 1,000 years’ and will stretch into the future.

The central idea of the book is that Britain actually exported revolutionary and republican thought; it didn’t have a chance to fully succeed at home. So the Chartists, the Fenians, the 1848 Italian revolutionaries, etc - we just exported them! We sent them to Australia.

So, in that way, we have a sort of displaced history of British revolutionary and republican ideas in the form of politics in Australia.

The battles were fought somewhere else as a proxy for fighting on the much tougher terrain of Britain. However, it all comes back home. For instance, the IRA - which was formed after the American civil war - was established by people who had been expelled or fled from Ireland after 1848. Many ended up in New York, then joined up with the union army and went on from there ...

**But that’s hardly an exclusively British phenomenon. You can stumble across nut-job Ku Klux Klan sites that talk of ‘Comrade Lincoln’ because of the number of ‘Red ‘48ers’ - communists and revolutionaries who fled Germany in the aftermath of the failed uprisings ...**

That’s true. But there’s a different trajectory with the IRA. Between 1866 and 67, they organised raids on British targets in Canada in order to carry on their revolution in a region that was the least well defended by the British. They fumbled their victories there, as they anticipated British reinforcements arriving, which they never did actually. Their ethos was: if you can’t beat the British in Britain, then beat there somewhere you can. (They were actually fighting a proxy war against the Scottish, if we are to be more precise!)

Via New York, the war then comes back again to the British mainland - you have the Clerkenwell and Manchester bombings in 1867, of course. The whole thing comes full circle back to the imperialist heartland, in a way you don’t see with other political émigrés.

**Of course, the question of republicanism poses high politics - the way we are ruled, the constitution, etc. There is a tendency on the left to downplay or at least only to pay lip service to the importance of these questions. What was going on in the political heads of the ‘restless revolutionaries’**

**you write about?**

I think there are two phases. The first is to do with personal economic disappointment. From that flows the dawning realisation that changing the political system will remove the conditions for that economic disappointment or ruination. A number of these revolutionaries had failed businesses.

So the outlook of these people is pretty individualistic. They value individual freedom and autonomy, personal liberty and property. Often they were followers of Tom Paine. However, to secure those rights you have to get rid of the people - the social strata - that suffocate those liberties, that deny them to others.

So from their individual disappointments they move on to collective organisation and revolt. At that point universalising a solution becomes a question of politics; it is very rarely thought of in terms of economics.

I think the high point of contemporary anti-monarchism was probably in the immediate aftermath of the death of Diana. Picking up on that theme of balance of politics versus economics in people’s attitude to radical constitutional change, I actually think the global economic crisis will have a conservative effect on most people’s attitude to the royal family. People are not going to want the instability in their economic circumstances to be matched by the same in these sorts of ‘stable hubs’ of British life political and social life. An economic squeeze makes people *less* radical, not more.

In that sense, the monarchy has been given another lease of life by the economic downturn. Especially if they continue to revamp and make themselves more inclusive, more tolerant and less ostentatiously wealth. The passing of Prince Philip wouldn’t hurt either!

**But then republicanism is about far more than an attitude to the royal family. We are talking about a constitutional monarchical system in the UK. This entails unaccountable power, the lack of transparency at every level of the state apparatus, the absence of any direct, mass control of the affairs of society.**

True, but there’s a lesson here about how the aristocracy transformed itself in the aftermath of the English revolution. Cameron - the *aristocrat* - is now just ‘Dave’. Like the TV channel. Like every bloke in a white van.

The aristocrats still run the country in that sense. They just reinvented themselves as an essential political caste that administers the new state. A clever trick. Ruling class ideology is very porous and the notion that the constitutional monarchy couldn’t be reinvented from top to bottom to capture and derail democratic movements from below is too glib. Especially as many people - precisely because of their economic agonies and travails in the coming bleak years - could well be looking to it as a hub of stability and continuity.

**Clive Bloom *Restless revolutionaries: A history of Britain’s fight for a republic* The history press, 2010, pp293, £12.99.**

## 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).

**May 3:** ‘Lunarchy for beginners: the history of the picket line’.

Speaker: Chris Knight.

### 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).

### Contemporary Marxist theory

**Wednesday May 4, 5pm:** Seminar, K2.31, Raked lecture theatre, Strand campus, King’s College, London. ‘Three cheers for Marxist monetary theory: the euro zone through the prism of world money’. Speaker: Costas Lapavistas (SOAS).

Further information: [alex.callinicos@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:alex.callinicos@kcl.ac.uk).

### 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).

### Counterforum: the politics of resistance

**Saturday May 7, 12 noon:** Conference, Upper Hall, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Discussions include: how mass protest can change the world; revolution and imperialism in the Middle East; tackling Islamophobia; Marxism and the struggle for democracy; from economic crisis to slump. Speakers include: Egyptian activists, Joe Glenton, Lowkey, Lindsey German, Andrew Burgin, Clare Solomon and Dot Gibson. Free entry, please register in advance.

Organised by Counterfire: [sam@counterfire.org](mailto:sam@counterfire.org).

### Fighting the cuts

**Sunday May 8, 12 noon:** Workshop, the Railway Club, Bletchley. Organised by Milton Keynes Coalition of Resistance: [MKCoR@mail.com](mailto:MKCoR@mail.com).

### Keep Our NHS Public meetings

**Monday May 9, 7pm:** Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1. With Frank Dobson MP.

**Monday May 9, 7.30pm:** Chestnuts Community Centre, St Ann’s Road, London N15.

**Tuesday May 10, 7.30pm:** Quaker Meeting House, 1a Jewel Road (off Hoe Street), London E17.

**Thursday May 12, 7pm:** Archway Methodist Hall, Archway Close, London N19. With Jeremy Corbyn and Emily Thornberry MP.

**Thursday June 9, 7.30pm:** Ealing Town Hall, New Broadway, London W5. With John Lister and Katy Clark MP.

Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: [www.keeppournhspublic.com](http://www.keeppournhspublic.com).

### The hardest hit fight back

**Wednesday May 11, 11am:** March, Victoria Embankment, London W1. Protest against the cuts threatening disabled people’s benefits, services, jobs and rights. Followed by lobby of MPs, as passage of Welfare Reform Bill reaches a critical stage.

Organised by The Hardest Hit: [thehardesthit.wordpress.com](http://thehardesthit.wordpress.com).

### 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.keeppournhspublic.com](http://www.keeppournhspublic.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.



## DEBATE

# Propaganda and agitation

Why do we need electoral tactics? Mike Macnair completes his three-part series

In the first two articles in this series I worked backwards through the history of Marxist electoral principles and tactics.<sup>1</sup> There is a small snippet of history remaining: Marx's and Engels' comments which address electoral *tactics*. The remainder of this concluding article will try to work from the general principles towards their concrete application.

As I said in last week's article, there is very little in Marx and Engels' writings on electoral *tactics*. What there is, is largely in defence of tactical flexibility within the framework of the principles. Thus both Marx and Engels in several places said that the SPD and its predecessors were correct to limit their public proposals - as far as was possible without positive abandonment of principles - to the needs of legality under an authoritarian regime. Engels in 1881 in 'Two model town councils' argued on the strength of French and German examples for the British workers' movement to stand candidates for local authorities, poor law boards, etc, in spite of their very limited powers. In 1893 he wrote a letter for publication to an American socialist arguing that it was not unprincipled to stand a candidate for the presidency, in spite of the fact that socialists sought to abolish it.<sup>2</sup>

Also in 1893, Engels says that Keir Hardie "publicly declares that [Irish nationalist Charles Stewart] Parnell's experiment, which compelled Gladstone to give in, ought to be repeated at the next election and, where it is impossible to nominate a Labour candidate, one should vote for the Conservatives, in order to show the Liberals the power of the party. Now this is a policy which under definite circumstances I myself recommended to the English; however, if at the very outset one does not announce it as a possible tactical move but proclaims it as tactics to be followed under any circumstances, then it smells strongly of Champion [Henry Hyde Champion, who was alleged to have taken money from the Tories for 'labour' candidates]."<sup>3</sup> In other words, under certain circumstances and if it was made clear that it was no more than a tactic, it might be acceptable to call for votes for the Tories in order to force concessions from the Liberals.

## Back to basics

The underlying central political claim of Marxism is that the working class needs to take over the leadership of society from the capitalist class. To embark on the road to doing so, it needs to organise itself as a political party, formulate its own policy independently of the capitalist class and petty bourgeoisie, and put this policy forward as an alternative for the society as a whole. I will not go into the justifications for this claim, but take it as a given.

The electoral forms which exist in capitalist parliamentary constitutionalism can provide the space for the workers' party to carry out this task. This is not just true of parliamentary elections, but of local and other elections as well. This fact creates an *obligation* to try to intervene in elections. It is illusory, except under exceptional circumstances, to expect to persuade the working class masses to accept abstentionism: the result is merely to isolate the partisans of working class rule. The point is made well and sharply by Engels in the beginning of *The Bakuninists at work* (1873):

"The labour masses felt this; they



**Reds needed to fill green benches**

strove everywhere to participate in events, to take advantage of the opportunity for action, instead of leaving the propertied classes, as hitherto, a clear field for action and intrigues. The government announced that elections were to be held to the Constituent Cortes [May 10 1873]. What was the attitude of the International to be? ... Continued political inaction became more ridiculous and impossible with every passing day; the workers wanted 'to see things done' ... At quiet times, when the proletariat knows beforehand that at best it can get only a few representatives to parliament and have no chance whatever of winning a parliamentary majority, the workers may sometimes be made to believe that it is a great revolutionary action to sit out the elections at home, and in general, not to attack the state in which they live and which oppresses them, but to attack the state as such which exists nowhere and which accordingly cannot defend itself ... As soon as events push the proletariat into the fore, however, abstention becomes a palpable absurdity and the active intervention of the working class an inevitable necessity."<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of intervention in elections cannot be propaganda (Plekhanov's definition: many ideas to few people), though it is possible to make propaganda in connection with an election intervention. It has to be agitation (Plekhanov's definition again: few ideas to many people).<sup>5</sup> The reason is the same reason that it is illusory to expect to persuade the masses to accept abstentionism. The masses are interested in (some) elections because they see them (to some extent) as deciding the great issues that affect their lives. A propagandistic electoral intervention therefore *functions* as a form of abstentionism.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of electoral interventions is generally to promote the independent class-political self-organisation and self-representation of the working class. That is the 'few ideas' (in fact,

one basic idea) that can be argued with many people under election conditions.

That implies aiming to win the election, to maximise the vote and to get as many candidates of the workers' party elected as possible. This does not completely rule out 'spoiler' tactics to force concessions from another party (as Engels suggested), though these are *prima facie* dodgy because they are not easily explainable to broad masses. Maximising the vote improves the self-consciousness, solidarity and morale of the working class more generally. Getting MPs (etc) of the workers' party elected has the same effect.

This is not the same thing as to claim that the working class can *legally* come to political power by winning a parliamentary majority in elections, even under universal suffrage and with full freedom of speech, press, assembly and association. This belief is an illusion, which rests on a misunderstanding of capitalist parliamentary constitutionalism and the role of elected representative institutions in it.

## Undemocratic capitalists

The capitalist class is not a democratic class and the idea of 'bourgeois democracy' is an oxymoron. The point should, at a certain level, be obvious: capitalists are quite a small minority in society (even if small capitalists who employ few workers are included). For capitalists to be the ruling class, therefore, there have to be mechanisms in place which make the state answerable to this *minority* and not to the proletariat and petty bourgeois majority.

The illusion that the capitalist class is a democratic class results from the fact that in order to overthrow the European feudal regimes - which had to happen for the capitalist breakthroughs in the commercial, agricultural and industrial revolutions to take place - the capitalists need to

piggy-back on a revolution of the *petty bourgeoisie* and proto-proletariat against the landlord and clerical institutions. This revolution took Protestant ideological forms in the Netherlands and England, but secular-democratic ideological forms in the political revolution which created the US and in the French revolution - and hence in 19th century European and Latin American radical liberalism.

However, once feudal, clerical, peasant and artisan rights, and the state regime which upholds them, have been removed as obstacles to a capitalist economy, the minoritarian character of capitalist rule has to find institutional forms.

In early capitalist regimes, which do not face significant and persistent, organised pressure from the lower orders, a common state decision-making form is a closed group which is recruited by *coopting* newly wealthy families. The Venetian 'aristocracy' (of merchants entitled to participate in government) and the Dutch Regents both provide examples.<sup>7</sup> The English House of Lords, in spite of its feudal-aristocratic 'nobility of blood' *pretensions*, in fact operated in this way, and so did the commissions of justices of the peace in the localities; the boroughs also after 1688 had closed-elite systems dominant in their government, which lasted until Victorian local government reform, and persist in a diluted form in the peculiar City of London government.<sup>8</sup>

Institutions of this sort have not withered away: an *increased* use of 'appointed' bodies, in practice largely cooptative, has developed in the US and England since the beginning of the capitalist counteroffensive in the 1970s, as an alternative to elected local government and to the self-government of institutions like universities.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that elections are necessary to incorporate the petty bourgeoisie, property, income or taxation qualifications for the franchise are *normal*. If the Prussian form referred to above was peculiarly

bizarre, England - which no-one can claim not to have been a fully capitalist country - maintained property qualifications on the vote throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th. With the (unusual) exceptions of the manoeuvres of Louis Napoleon and of Bismarck, universal suffrage is something *extorted* from the capitalist class by the rise of the workers' movement. It is not something introduced for reasons dictated by the logic of capital.

Even before the extensions of the franchise forced on it by the emergence of workers' movements, a bourgeois state regime requires controls against the petty bourgeoisie. These controls function both outside the electoral and representative institutions and within them. They have increased in importance, as the capitalists have been forced to make concessions on the franchise.

Those outside the electoral and representative institutions are called 'checks and balances' or the 'separation of powers'. On the one side, the armed forces and bureaucracy are separated from the elected representatives by the role of the 'single person' (as it was called in the English constitutional arguments of the 1650s). Executive monarchies are now rare, but ceremonial monarchies are commonplace, and ceremonial and executive presidencies, *separately* elected from the election of representatives, even more so. These operate as constitutional backstops, with relatively rarely used powers to 'protect the constitution' available to block the decisions of elected representatives which are inconsistent with capitalist interests; they also ideologically represent in the constitutional order the managerial authority which is a principle of the capitalist workplace.

On the other side, modern capitalist constitutions also assert the independence of the judiciary from the elected representatives.<sup>10</sup> Overt judicial activism in relation to laws made by parliaments and other legislatures has varied; but in practice the scope of the judicial power to *interpret* legislation is inherently so wide, given the fluidity of human language, that the legislature's aims are very frequently frustrated by the judiciary. The independence of the judiciary, and the 'rule of law' which is its ideological expression, serves capitalist control for two reasons: the first is that *law as such* is founded on the sanctity of private property; the second is that the 'free market in legal services' has the effect that very often judicial proceedings will end with the victory of the party able to spend more money on lawyers.<sup>11</sup>

Controls *within* the electoral and representative institutions are less obvious, but more directly relevant to the present problem. They consist, in essence, of mechanisms to ensure that the lower orders are represented by the paid agents of the capitalists. Engels in 1891 identified the two-party system of professional politicians in the US as a form of corruption and a means of capitalist control.<sup>12</sup> But the professional politicians and the two-party system in reality went back to Whigs and Tories in the 'rage of party' of 1689-1714.

Equally important is the tendency to concentration of the means of communication in capitalist hands, which Kautsky remarked on in 1905, describing the capitalists as "flooding the country with a commercially



bribeable press” (again, referring to the US).<sup>13</sup>

The third element is - paradoxical as it may seem - the fact that the government is answerable to the elected representatives. The result is that the elected representatives can, in Engels’ phrase, “make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory [be] rewarded with positions”. It is also that the capitalist media can represent every election - even local elections - as not being about a choice of *representative for the constituency*, but rather a choice of *who should form the government*. By doing so they present the only ‘real’ choice as being between the contending gangs of paid agents for the capitalists, and even *electing* a minority party representative as being a ‘wasted vote’. Even where proportional representation is used, this possibility of gaining the spoils of office allows the hope of the professional politician obtaining a place through participation in a government coalition.

Electoral and parliamentary systems are in general designed to force the electors to choose between one or another gang of paid agents for the capitalists. First past the post in Britain and the US is notorious for this effect; in Britain we have the added hurdle of deposits, and the electoral commission - which, for reasons it is unwilling to explain, prohibits the CPGB and the Socialist Party in England and Wales from standing in elections in their own names. The second round system in France (and in second empire Germany, as we saw in the last article) has the same effect. The alternative vote system allows a token first preference to be cast for a minority party, but reinforces the monopoly of the two-party professional politicians. PR systems usually contain a threshold requirement, which gathers up minority votes for the benefit of the ‘main’ parties.

These mechanisms of control do not, of course, always work. They contain internal contradictions, which can allow political space for independent working class self-representation. And unpredictable events (wars, crises, etc) and external working class resistance (strikes, movements like the anti-poll tax movement, etc) can break them open. The working class can win concessions if our rulers are persuaded that the alternatives to concessions are worse than making them.

## The need for tactics

We want to see an independent workers’ party standing candidates in every constituency, every local government ward, and so on. We want to maximise the votes for this party, and to maximise the number of its representatives in the elected body.

The capitalists’ mechanisms for controlling the elections and the elected bodies are largely different today from the restricted franchises, indirect elections, and so on, of the 19th century. But it remains the case that the capitalist regime puts real obstacles in the way of working class electoral representation. *Tactics* are necessary to overcome these obstacles. These tactics can include technical deals with bourgeois parties and conditional support to bourgeois parties. The conditions are that the agreements must not compromise *arguing for independent working class political organisation and representation*.

That is, to paraphrase the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party-Bolshevik 1912 resolution, that “No electoral agreements may involve putting forward a common platform, and they may neither impose any sort of political obligations on ...

candidates [of the workers’ party] nor may they impede the [workers’ party] in their resolute criticism of the counterrevolutionary nature of [the bourgeois parties].”

Within this framework, and referring to the examples I gave in the first two articles, the SPD was probably right to offer conditional support to individual bourgeois candidates in run-off elections after the SPD candidate had been knocked out, Bebel was probably right to argue for technical deals to get SPD candidates elected in the indirect elections in Prussia, and the RSDLP were probably right to make technical deals with petty bourgeois democrats and even the Cadets in the highly undemocratic duma election arrangements. In neither case - with the exception of the controversial operations of the SPD south Germans - did these tactics muddle up the workers’ independent party with a ‘broad left’ or ‘people’s front’.

All the above proceeds on the assumption that there is *one* workers’ party. It should be clear that this is by a long way the preferable situation. The history of the SPD between 1875 and the early 20th century, and of its imitators founded in several cases by fusions (including the RSDLP), demonstrates pretty clearly that Marx’s and Engels’ objections to the 1875 fusion were wrong.<sup>14</sup> The working class got as near as it did to taking power in 1917-20 because of the prior construction of large, unified socialist parties and their associated movements - even if these were unavoidably split by World War I. Where there were only competing sects, the proletariat did not get close to power.

## Split workers’ movement

The split in the workers’ movement resulting from World War I was undesirable, but unavoidable, and we cannot ‘put Humpty together again’. I argued this point in *Revolutionary strategy* (2008) chapter 6, and I have argued it in a different way in relation to the Labour Party in two articles in this paper in 2009.<sup>15</sup>

The point has two aspects. One was already visible in the 1860s in the history discussed in the second article in the current series: Bismarck deported Liebknecht from Prussia in order to protect Schweitzer’s leadership of the Allgemeine Deutschen Arbeiterverein. The state, media and individual capitals intentionally intervene in the internal life of the workers’ organisation to promote their agents, or people who can be made into their agents.

The scale of the intervention in the 20th century was much larger than this little instance, and the fact that the bourgeois agents in the social democratic parties can call on the state to back them means that they can operate mechanisms of bureaucratic control which exclude real challenges to their power or the *open* presentation within the party of the politics of the proletariat taking over society.

The second aspect lacks the immediate intentionality of the first. It is that, to the extent that a workers’ organisation develops a full-time paid staff and/or elected representatives, these people become in their objective social position members of the class of professional politicians - people who make their living from politics - that Engels describes. Elected representatives in particular will therefore naturally tend to adopt the culture of the class of paid agents of the bourgeoisie. It is then a very small line to step over to actually taking capitalist support and doing favours for capitalist contributors.

As indicated in the second article, Marx and Engels saw the phenomenon in Britain, but tended to attribute it

merely to Britain’s dominance of the world market. In reality it is now plain that the same thing happens to workers’ elected representatives in poor countries.

The result of this combination of capitalist intervention in the workers’ parties and the logic of integration in the capitalist party system is a *political commitment* of the social democracy to serving capital: loyalty to the parliamentary constitution and the rule of law, loyalty to the nation-state and commitment to collaboration between classes on the basis of ‘fairness’ - as opposed to class conflict.

The Comintern believed that it had found remedies for these problems. But the remedies - bureaucratic centralism and purges - turned out, in fact, to exacerbate the problems. Already in inter-war France it was said that two deputies (MPs), one of whom was a communist, had more in common than two communists, one of whom was a deputy.<sup>16</sup>

With the stabilisation of the people’s front policy after World War II, the ‘official communist’ and Maoist parties committed themselves to *rejection* of the most elementary Marxist principle - the independent political organisation and representation of the working class - in favour of ‘democratic’ coalitions which repeat the projects Marx and Engels fought against - or, worse, in favour of coalitions for ‘national independence’, which subordinate the working class to the party of order.

The Trotskyists inherited the policy of bureaucratic centralism and purges. The upshot of this policy - in the absence of state power backing the Trotskyists, as it backed the ‘official’ communists - has been merely endless splintering and the creation of the present-day wilderness of sects.

This, of course, brings us forward to the recent past and present. What are our electoral goals and tactics in circumstances where mass workers’ parties *exist*, but are politically committed to class-collaborationism and the rejection of working class political independence, and controlled either by direct agents of the capitalist class (the social democrats) or by careerist bureaucrats (the surviving ‘official’ communist parties), and where the Marxists, who at least in theory stand for working class rule, are smashed to smithereens by bureaucratic centralism? What follows is brief, and inevitably specific to British conditions.

## Goals

In the first place we still aim to promote the independent class-political self-organisation and self-representation of the working class. Voting Labour both *does* in an attenuated way and *does not* promote this goal. It does promote it because of Labour’s name, the trade union link and Labour’s continued historical base in the working class districts - very visible in the 2010 general election.

It does not promote it because of Labour’s *institutional* control by the class of professional politicians and bureaucrats, and its *political* commitments to nationalism, class-collaboration and constitutionalism, which tie it to the capitalist class, creating a workers’ party controlled by capital - a bourgeois workers’ party.

These circumstances force on us the struggle for a party which is *institutionally* antagonistic to the dictatorship of the bureaucracy and *politically* committed to radical democracy, working class political independence and the unity of the interests and solidarity of the international working class: a Marxist, or communist, party. Our aim is that such a party should *replace Labourism*. This goal can be achieved either by overthrowing the constitution of the Labour Party and turning it into a simple confederal party or general

united front of workers’ organisations, within which a Communist Party could fight for political hegemony; or, if this proves impossible, by a Communist Party replacing Labour as the mass party of the working class.

The present obstacles to this goal are three - besides, obviously, the institutional forms and controls of the parliamentary and electoral system. The first is the political commitment of the British left, both inside and outside the Labour Party, to *Labourism* in the sense of nationalism and commitment to bureaucratic rule - reflected obviously in the Labour left, but equally in the character of the *Morning Star* and in projects like Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Alliance (which got nearest to a break from this politics), Respect and (even more!) ‘No to the European Union, Yes to Democracy’ (No2EU) and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. The second is the continued influence on the Labour and non-Labour left of the ‘official communist’ idea of the people’s front. The third is the splintering of the Marxist left, due mainly to bureaucratic centralism.

## Tactics

The *Weekly Worker* is an instrument of propaganda: many ideas to few people - about 12,000 currently read us online. Electoral interventions, however, are, as I have pointed out, about agitation - few ideas to many people. Our electoral interventions, where we cannot stand ourselves - as we could in the Socialist Alliance - are addressed to persuading our 12,000 readers to use a few ideas in agitation, in talking with the far wider layers they are in contact with.

The ‘few ideas’ are basically given by our goals: independent class-political self-organisation and self-representation of the working class, and the creation of a Communist Party in place of the existing splintered left with the aim of replacing Labourism. *How* we express these ideas in agitation is a matter of inserting them in current real discussions and conversations; as Trotsky correctly said, “agitation is always a dialogue with the masses”.<sup>17</sup>

Our forces are weak, and we are not, therefore, in a position to impose our own agenda on election campaigns - even at the level of the interventions of the far left or of the Labour left. Our electoral tactics therefore have to be highly flexible and responsive, in order to insert the ‘few ideas’ we want to put forward in the election campaign *which actually develops*.

We return, finally, to the issues with which the first article began. I do not mean to say that we have necessarily always been right in the tactical choices expressed in our electoral slogans. But we have consistent *goals and principles*. These have been expressed, repeatedly, in our support for any *serious* attempt at *united* electoral intervention of the far left. They have equally been expressed in our arguments for *conditional* support to Labour candidates in 2005, with the conditions based on the war question, when this issue formed a clear line between class-collaboration and proletarian internationalism in the election debates; in dividing support for Respect in the same election along class lines; and making support for candidates of the nearly red-brown No2EU project *conditional*.

As I said in the first article, whether to call for votes for the ‘George Galloway (Respect) - Coalition Against Cuts’ list in Scotland is a tactical issue which depends on the political meaning of a vote for this list, or for George Galloway as an individual, in the current state of Scots politics. The more important point is that *all* such issues have to be

grasped as agitational tactics within a framework of principled aims, not as simple moral choices ●

## Notes

1. ‘Electoral principles and our tactics’ *Weekly Worker* April 14; ‘Principles to shape tactics’, April 21.
2. SPD and legality: episodic references in RH Dominick III *Wilhelm Liebknecht and the founding of the German Social Democratic Party* Chapel Hill 1982, chapters 8-10 and (at a low level of understanding) WH Maehl *August Bebel, shadow emperor of the German workers* Philadelphia 1980, chapters 5-12. ‘Two model town councils’ *Labour Standard* June 25 1881: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881-ls/lso5.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881-ls/lso5.htm). President: Engels to Sorge March 18 1893: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_03\\_18.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_03_18.htm).
3. 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). J Barnes, ‘Gentleman crusader: Henry Hyde Champion in the early socialist movement’ *History Workshop Journal* 2005, Vol 60, pp116-38 gives a sympathetic account of Champion, who passed during the 1880s from Georgism to Christian socialism to Hyndman’s SDF to ‘own brand’ labour representation, and by 1890 was in Australia calling himself a Marxist.
4. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/bkunun/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/bkunun/index.htm), at chapter 1.
5. ‘The tasks of the Social-Democrats in the famine’ (1891): [www.workersliberty.org/node/3134](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/3134).
6. It may, of course, in reality have a limited purpose, as the CPGB’s largely propagandistic electoral intervention in 1992 served notice that the Eurocommunists had not succeeded in obliterating communism when they themselves abandoned it. *This* idea was agitational even if the concrete form of the intervention was not.
7. Venice: FC Lane *Venice, a maritime republic* Baltimore 1973, chapter 18; J Martin, D Romano (eds) *Venice reconsidered* Baltimore 2000, chapters 2 (G Rösch) and 8 (S Chojnacki).
8. Netherlands: J de Vries, A van der Woude *The first modern economy* Cambridge 1997, pp586-90.
9. On the House of Lords: JV Beckett, C Jones, ‘Introduction: the peerage and the House of Lords in the 17th and 19th centuries’ in C Jones (ed) *A pillar of the constitution* London 1989, chapter 1. On local government the classic account is S and B Webb *English local government* London 1929, Vols 2 and 3. City of London: the (few) local residents have the franchise, but “Businesses and other organisations are also entitled to vote. All voters must be registered on the ward lists before they can vote in City elections. Sole traders and partnerships are entitled to register all equity partners. All other organisations are entitled to nominate a certain number of electors based on the size of their workforce.” [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LG\\_NL\\_Services/Council\\_and\\_democracy/Councillors\\_democracy\\_and\\_elections/Voting\\_and\\_Registration/Voting+FAQ.htm](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LG_NL_Services/Council_and_democracy/Councillors_democracy_and_elections/Voting_and_Registration/Voting+FAQ.htm).
10. J Stewart, ‘Appointed boards and local government’ *Parliamentary Affairs* 1995, Vol 48, pp226-41 surveyed the development in Britain at that date.
11. This was *not* a feature of the 18th century English constitution, in which it was normal for all the peers to vote in judicial appeals to the House of Lords and not unusual for the Lords to divide on party lines, so that the judiciary were subordinated to parliament (visible in judicial appeals in the Lords *Journals*, online at [www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue.aspx?type=2&gid=44](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue.aspx?type=2&gid=44)). The Act of Settlement 1700 reflects this approach in principle: judges, except the lord chancellor, who was also a minister, could no longer be removed by the king alone, but could be removed by address of both houses of parliament. The transition to the ‘judicial committee of the House of Lords’ as a free-standing court of professional judges took place *in practice* in the period of Tory reaction of the 1780s-1820s, but in formal legality only in 1875 (after the 1867 Reform Act).
12. More in M Macnair, ‘Free association versus juridification’ *Critique* 2011, Vol 39, pp53-82.
13. [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), quoted in last week’s article (‘Principles to shape tactics’ *Weekly Worker* April 21).
14. On the general point see M Macnair, ‘Marxism and freedom of communication’ *Critique* 2009, Vol 37, pp565-77. The Kautsky quotation is from Ben Lewis’s current draft translation of Kautsky’s ‘Republik und Sozialdemokratie in Frankreich’ *Neue Zeit* 1905, Vol 23, pp260-70 at p264: “Überschwemmung des Landes mit einer käuflichen Presse”. If Kautsky thought the US in 1905 was flooded with corrupt media it would be interesting to imagine what he thought of 2011 ...
15. This is not to disavow the substantive content of the *Critique of the Gotha programme* (though some of it, on the political part of the programme, is merely taken from Bakunin and was not followed by Marx or Engels in later discussions). The point is simply that the arguments *against fusion* (notably Engels to Bebel in 1873: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/letters/73\\_06\\_20.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/letters/73_06_20.htm)) were disproved by the course of events.
16. ‘Labour Party blues’, July 23 2009; ‘Making and unmaking Labour’, July 30 2009.
17. The earliest reference I have found on the web is C Hollis *Can parliament survive?* London 1949, cited in a review of the book by FC King *Irish Monthly* 1949, Vol 7, p495, but the statement is there already said to be proverbial.
18. L Trotsky *Whither France* chapter 1: [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/whitherfrance/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/whitherfrance/ch01.htm).



**KAUTSKY**

# The book that didn't bark

Independent scholar **Lars T Lih** introduces excerpts from Karl Kautsky's *Republic and social democracy in France*, published in English for the first time



**Storming of the Bastille in July 1789: proletarian and petty bourgeoisie then exert their power, according to Kautsky**

At the end of 1904, Karl Kautsky began a series of articles under the general title of *Republic and social democracy in France*. Kautsky's reflections on the proper Marxist attitude toward the republic arose out of a dispute among European socialists about the propriety of socialist participation in a bourgeois government, as exemplified by the case of Alexandre Millerand in France. Orthodox Marxists such as Kautsky opposed Millerand's presence in the French cabinet. Their criticism of the "bourgeois" Third Republic in France was so vehement that some German Social Democrats concluded that the Marxists were prejudiced against the republic as a political form. Perhaps the Marxists were politically indifferent - perhaps they even preferred a monarchy, such as Germany.

Kautsky took pen in hand to reject these suspicions and to clarify the somewhat complicated Marxist attitude toward the republic. The Marxists were far from politically indifferent, Kautsky asserted: they strongly supported the republic, and in particular saw the *democratic* republic as the only possible form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the bourgeois Third Republic was not particularly democratic - in fact, it was accurately described as a "monarchy

without a monarch".<sup>1</sup> One of the tasks of Social Democrats in countries like France and the USA was to struggle against "republican superstitions" that led workers to underestimate the fierceness of the class struggle even in a parliamentary republic. At the same time, French workers could and should look back with pride at certain episodes in the republican tradition: the First Republic (1792-1804) and the Paris Commune (1871).

To make his case, Kautsky first went through the history of the class struggle in France, starting from the 1789 revolution and going on to the Third Republic that had arisen from the smoking ruins of the Paris Commune in the 1870s. Then, in the second half of his series, he mounted a full-scale critique of the institutions and policies of the "bourgeois" Third Republic from the point of view of proletarian socialism. The resulting 90-page treatise made an impact at the time. In Russia, for example, a translation was issued shortly after the original German publication. In the early years of Soviet Russia, when works by Kautsky continued to be published in large editions, *Republic and social democracy in France* was again made available.

Today, Kautsky's treatise is forgotten except for brief discussions by Kautsky specialists, but there are

good reasons to bring it back into circulation. Extended treatments by leading Marxists on strictly political questions are not so common that we can afford to neglect one of this calibre. Kautsky's Marxist approach to French revolutionary history and his analyses of French political institutions retain their value, both for content and method. Ben Lewis is therefore much to be commended for undertaking the task of rendering Kautsky's treatise into English. The first fruits of his labours are published here. The finished result, I am sure, will quickly be seen as the major Marxist statement on the republic as a political form.

There is one more reason why I find Kautsky's treatise to be a fascinating historical document: it was *not* cited by Lenin in *State and revolution* (1917). The rest of my introductory remarks will be devoted to explaining the significance of this absence.

## Lenin's critique of Kautsky

Lenin had a life-long love/hate relationship with Kautsky. Most of us are familiar with the hate side - one that found expression after 1914 in Lenin's almost obsessive denunciations of Kautsky as a "renegade" who betrayed socialism.

Current research is steadily revealing the other side of the relationship.

For Lenin, as for almost all Russian Social Democrats, Kautsky's writings were the gold standard of Marxist orthodoxy. All Russian Social Democrats constantly invoked Kautsky as an almost unimpeachable authority during ideological disputes within Russian Social Democracy. But the intensity of Lenin's relationship to Kautsky's writings goes way beyond this. Indeed, Kautsky was an ideological mentor for Lenin at all stages of his career, at least up to 1917. Paradoxically, even Lenin's programme in 1914-1917, when he was loudly denouncing Kautsky's current position, was explicitly based on Kautsky's pre-war writings. Lenin made no secret of this fact and indeed continually emphasised the merits of "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist": that is, before 1914.

Only once did Lenin make a public criticism of anything written by "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist". This criticism came in the concluding section of Lenin's *State and revolution*. Yet this section also shows Lenin's ambivalence about Kautsky in all its glory. The section opens with an effusive (and historically accurate) compliment to Kautsky's role as a mentor to Russian Social Democracy. Although Lenin goes on to attack

Kautsky's *Social revolution* (1902) and *Road to power* (1909) for their "evasions" about the state, Lenin still cannot help remarking that the books contain "a great deal of valuable material" and reveal "the high promise of German Social Democracy before the war".

For the most part, Lenin's critique in *State and revolution* is aimed not at what Kautsky said, but at what he did not say. Lenin's case is that Kautsky *avoided* any discussion of the state in certain influential works written specifically to refute "opportunism". In particular, Kautsky did not talk about the radical democratic institutions of the Paris Commune nor about the necessity of "smashing the state", although these topics formed a prominent part of the legacy of Marx and Engels.

Proving a negative - in this case, that Kautsky did *not* talk about certain topics - is always a difficult undertaking. Lenin wrote *State and revolution* in 1917 while in exile in Switzerland and after his return to Russia. He had neither access nor time to do a search of Kautsky's writings. He therefore entitled the relevant section of his critique 'Kautsky's polemics against the opportunists': that is, he restricted his case to a few major works. But this self-limitation is never noted, and most readers



came away from *State and revolution* with the idea that Kautsky explicitly repudiated the democratic ideals of the Commune and that he was opposed to any form of “smashing the state”.

So the question arises: did Kautsky ever address these questions in other works, and, if so, what were his views? Trying to answer this question is what led me in the first place to dig up Kautsky’s long-forgotten treatise on the French Republic. I am sure that Lenin read Kautsky’s work back in 1904-05 when it was first published, although there are no specific references to it in his writings. Nevertheless, he seems to have forgotten about it when he wrote *State and revolution* in 1917. What does Kautsky’s text tell us about his attitudes toward the political institutions of the Paris Commune or about the need to “smash the state”?

## The ‘Commune ideal’

In the excerpts translated on the following pages, we find Kautsky’s account of the Second Republic (1848-50) and the Paris Commune (1871). At the end of this section, Kautsky writes: “to set out the political ideal of the Commune is not so easy, since various different tendencies clashed within it. But fundamentally all the practical demands and organisational efforts of the Commune arose from the same type of democratic republic that had already been established by the Great Revolution [of 1789].” Kautsky then gives a page-and-a-half quotation from Marx’s *Civil war in France*, in which Marx eulogises the political institutions of the Commune.

Among the specific points mentioned by Marx in this citation are suppression of the standing army, short terms for elected officials, local democratic control of the police, workmen’s wages for bureaucrats, and decentralisation. Marx ends by saying: “While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society.” For Kautsky, these political institutions were the ideal democratic republic

that “the Parisian proletariat created as a tool for its emancipation”.

During for the rest of his discussion, Kautsky uses these features of the ideal democratic republic as a template for a critique of the institutions of the French Third Republic. In every way, he finds, the actual republic fell far short of the standard created by the Paris Commune. After an extensive discussion of the corruption and decadence of actually-existing “parliamentarianism”, Kautsky concludes:

“Russian bureaucratic corruption or American republican corruption: these are the two extremes between which the life and being of all large capitalist states moves and must move. Only socialism can put an end to this by means of a [state] organisation such as the one the Paris Commune started to create: that is, by means of the most comprehensive expansion of self-government, the popular election of all officials and the subordination of all members of representative bodies to the control and discipline of the organised people. Already today, the best way to counter parliamentary corruption is through the formation of a large, strictly disciplined proletarian party ... Thanks to its basic constitution, today’s French republic can enjoy all the advantages of uniting parliamentary with bureaucratic corruption.”

Thus we must conclude that, contrary to the impression left by *State and revolution*, Kautsky subscribed to the Commune ideal, presented it to his readers (including Russian readers), and used it as a foundation of a scathing critique of the existing “bourgeois republic” in France.

Before moving on, a conceptual clarification will be helpful. In 1917, Lenin called for a “soviet republic”, but this political ideal should not be set in opposition to the democratic republic. Soviet-style democracy is an institutional *form* of the democratic republic. Whether or not it is the most expedient form is, of course, a matter of debate. Lenin contrasted soviet-style democracy to “bourgeois democracy” and to “bourgeois parliamentarianism”, but he was certainly not rejecting the ideal of representative democracy.

Similarly, although Kautsky

stoutly defended the “democratic republic” as a goal and defended representative democracy, he was explicitly not endorsing current republics and current parliaments. For obvious reasons, Kautsky does not use the vocabulary of “soviet democracy” in 1904. Nevertheless, Kautsky is calling for a radical democratisation of existing political institutions in all European countries, both monarchies and republics. We should not let conceptual sloppiness obscure the large overlap in the political ideals of Lenin and Kautsky, however significant the remaining differences.

## ‘Smash the state’

Before embarking on the topic of ‘smash the state’, some preliminary clarification will again be helpful.

This resonant phrase has at least three principal meanings. Making these distinctions is not just a matter of logic-chopping. Each meaning represents a separate scenario of revolution, and these scenarios can be advocated by people with strongly conflicting agendas. There is no logical contradiction between advocating one or more of these scenarios and rejecting the rest. These possible meanings of ‘smash the state’ need to be clear in our minds before turning to the texts.

- The anarchist scenario. According to the anarchists, the state is the *source* of all evil, and therefore the *first* duty of a socialist revolutionary was to raze all centralised authority structures, including democratic ones.

- The democratisation scenario. If we *define* the state as a tool of class exploitation that sets one part of society above another, then full democratisation that overcomes the alienation between society and its decision-making organs is equivalent to smashing the state.

- The ‘art of revolution’ scenario. One of the lessons drawn by Marx and Engels from the failed revolutions of 1848 was the necessity of preventing counterrevolutionary forces from using the repressive apparatus of the state to crush the revolution. Leaving these old structures intact was extremely dangerous. They needed to be smashed.

There is another important

meaning of ‘smash the state’ that I call the “breakdown and reconstitution” scenario, but this meaning is irrelevant to our present discussion. The very brief descriptions of different scenarios given here are meant primarily to show that ‘smash the state’ can be understood in sharply distinct ways.

What was Lenin’s position on these various scenarios as of 1917? If we put *State and revolution* alongside everything else Lenin was saying in 1917 (a necessary procedure not always followed), we find that Lenin energetically rejected the anarchist scenario about the immediate destruction of the state. One writer on Lenin, Neil Harding, equates ‘smash the state’ with anarchism and says that, in 1917, Lenin inscribed the war cry of the anarchist icon, Mikhail Bakunin, on his banner. This assertion is utterly misleading. Rather, when Lenin talked about ‘smashing the state’, he had in mind *both* of the other two scenarios: the democratisation and the ‘art of revolution’ scenarios - although he did not always take sufficient care to separate these two meanings.

We turn now to Kautsky. No-one will dispute that Kautsky rejected the anarchist scenario. In previous sections, we have seen that he also strongly advocated a programme of a wide-ranging and radical democratisation of existing political structures. What about the ‘art of revolution’ scenario about breaking up the state repressive apparatus? Kautsky’s 1904 article provides documentation of his views on this issue as well.

Kautsky argues that the “petty bourgeois” Jacobins of the French Revolution were able to accomplish as much as they did because they “destroyed [*zerstört*] the means of rule of the ruling classes”: namely, the church, the bureaucracy and the army. He then draws the lesson for later proletarian revolutionaries:

“The proletariat, as well as the petty bourgeoisie, will never be able to rule the state through these means of rule. This is not only because the officer corps, the top of the bureaucracy and the church have always been recruited from the upper classes and tied to them with the most

intimate links, but also because the very nature of these bodies as means of rule includes a striving to raise themselves above the mass of the people in order to rule them, instead of serving them. They will always be for the most part anti-democratic and aristocratic ...

“The conquest of state power by the proletariat, therefore, does not simply mean the conquest of [the existing] ministries, which then, without further ado, use these previous means of rule - an established state church, the bureaucracy and the officer corps - in a socialist sense. Rather, it means the dissolution [*Auflösung*] of these means of rule.”

The two key words in Kautsky’s discussion are *zerstört* and *Auflösung*. My German-English dictionary defines *zerstören* as “wreck, ruin, destroy” and *Auflösung* as “dissolving, disappearance, dispersal, disbandment”. So, while Kautsky may not have used the word ‘smash’, his feelings about these bourgeois “means of rule” are hardly ambiguous.

Once we are aware of the positions staked out by Kautsky in his 1904 treatise on class struggles and the French republic, Lenin’s 1917 critique of “Kautsky, when he was a Marxist” loses a good deal of its sting. The political positions of the two men overlapped to a much greater extent than any reader of *State and revolution* would expect. No doubt very substantive differences remain. But, as Great Britain celebrates (if that’s the word) a “royal wedding”, perhaps we should focus on the political programme *common* to the Marxist left during the early years of the previous century: a republic with radically democratic institutions of the Commune type ●

## Notes

1. Very similar points are made by Kautsky’s mentor, Friedrich Engels, in his influential *Critique of the Erfurt programme* (1891). He writes: “If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown.” Further: “So, then, [we should support - LTL] a unified republic. But not in the sense of the present French republic, which is nothing but the empire established in 1799 without the emperor” (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm>).

# Republic and social democracy in France<sup>1</sup>

The International Congress<sup>2</sup> has had an unexpected aftermath. Following a series of statements they made in Amsterdam, Bebel<sup>3</sup> and Guesde<sup>4</sup> have been accused of indifference to the republic, even of a certain preference for the monarchy. It was not surprising that the bourgeois press seized on this - it does not know any better. The fact that Jaurès<sup>5</sup> and his friends spread this interpretation of events was less edifying, but understandable from their point of view. But eventually, after I had examined the reasons why social democratic republicanism differs from bourgeois republicanism in the *Neue Zeit*,<sup>6</sup> even *Vorwärts*<sup>7</sup> began to sing from the same hymn sheet.

A polemic which consequently unfolded between comrade Eisner<sup>8</sup> and myself soon went in a direction which made me realise that an understanding between us would not be achieved in this manner. I thus broke off the polemic - not because I could admit defeat in this way, as Eisner so kindly pointed out - but in order to continue the debate on a different,

and in my opinion more productive basis by setting aside all polemics as much as possible. Urgent work on the publication of Marx’s *Theories of surplus value*<sup>9</sup> prevented me from finishing this series of articles earlier. But its postponement was not the end of the world. The issue does not become outdated that quickly.

Above all we must clarify which points are actually disputed.

First I can only first repeat what I said in the *Neue Zeit* (XXII, 2, p675): “We are republicans for the very reason that the democratic republic is the only political form which corresponds to socialism. The monarchy can only exist on the basis of class differences and antagonisms. The abolition of classes also requires the abolition of the monarchy.”

To be sure, there has been talk of ‘social kingship’. But the monarchy can never abolish classes. At most it can strive to ensure that the classes balance each other out, that no class dominates another too much. The most important proponent of the idea of social kingship, Rodbertus,<sup>10</sup>

therefore did not demand the abolition of capital and landed property. Nor did he demand the abolition of the wage system, which he considered indispensable for centuries to come. He merely demanded a configuration of the working wage which would ensure that it shared in the increasing productivity of labour in the same way that profit and rent do.

As the power of the monarchy is at its greatest when the different classes balance each other out (ie, when the monarchy is least dependent on any one of the classes and controls each class through the other), under certain circumstances it can be in the monarchy’s interest to oppose a strong class in order to protect a weaker one. For this reason royalty has often supported the rising bourgeoisie *vis-à-vis* the feudal aristocracy. But for the same reason, the monarchy has to strive to sustain a weakening class, even if this comes at the cost of economic development or opposing an ascending class. The very same monarchy, whose interests demanded that it protect the weak bourgeoisie

against the strong feudal bourgeoisie, later saw it as its task to keep the economically degenerate feudal nobility above water at the cost of the nation, curtailing the development of the bourgeoisie as much as possible.

Thus, from time to time the monarchy has also granted the proletariat political rights or other concessions in order to play it off against the bourgeoisie. But the ascendant proletariat always finds the monarchy amongst its opponents.

And from the outset the monarchy always views the fighting proletariat with suspicion - more so than any other class. Because, whatever class it may be advancing through its political interests at any given moment, it is always separated from the proletariat by the gulf that separates the propertied from the propertyless. Both the monarchy and papacy can undergo the most variegated of transformations, but they always remain members of the propertied classes - and as such opponents of the emancipation of the proletariat.

This also explains the opposition

of the fighting proletariat. Both the worker’s class movement and his ultimate goal make the class-conscious worker a republican. Whilst this or that propertied class can be driven to republican sentiment here or there in special circumstances, only the proletariat becomes republican *in principle* due to its position among the classes of the modern state. Surely, we all agree on that. But this does not eradicate the dispute. It merely defines its sphere.

Insofar as the republican form of government and the proletariat come into consideration, the matter is, of course, very simple. The difficulty comes about through a third factor, which we unfortunately cannot ignore: the bourgeoisie.

This class holds power in today’s economic and social life. With this also falls to it the power of the state, albeit a power which is not always direct and undivided. The bourgeoisie is far more adaptive than the proletariat.

If, in accordance with its class position, the proletariat can only come to power in the republic, if the



# KAUTSKY

republic is the only possible form of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, then the bourgeoisie is able to seize state power in every political form. In this the bourgeoisie is like the Catholic church, with whom it shares a robust digestive system. The bourgeoisie is most directly able to exercise its rule in a parliamentary republic or a parliamentary monarchy, whose head is merely decorative. The parliamentary form of government is the one which most corresponds to its class interests.

Thus, the same republic which forms the basis for the emancipation of the proletariat can at the same time become the basis for the class domination of the bourgeoisie. This is a contradiction, but one which is no stranger than the contradictory role played by the machine in capitalist society: the machine is both the indispensable precondition for the liberation of the proletariat and at the same time the means of its degradation and enslavement. These contradictions are particular to all social institutions in a society built on class contradictions. Identifying them only appears as a contradiction in terms to those who are not clear about the contradictions in real society. Those who have identified these contradictions will no more deduce the glorification of the monarchy from a critique of the bourgeois republic than they will perceive Marx’s remarks in *Capital* on the degrading tendencies of machinery as a glorification of machine-free petty production.

Whether one recognises the contradiction which lies in the role of the republic in civil society or explains it as the product of an error in reasoning thus depends on whether and to what extent one recognises the effects of class contradictions on political life. In praise of the republic, Kurt Eisner stated in *Vorwärts* “that in bourgeois democracy, from the conditions of its own existence the proletariat must be far more intensively courted by the various groups of the ruling classes than in a monarchy, and that in a republic the class struggle appears to be more obscured ... hence the interest in luring the workers”.

I do not dispute that at all. Rather, in my article on the Amsterdam congress I explicitly recognised it. However, I differ from Eisner in that that I dispute the possibility of such a courtship constantly disguising the class struggle. I also differ from him in that it is impossible for me to discover an advantage for the proletariat in the class struggle being obscured.

Whoever accepts the former must be of the opinion that between “the various groups of the ruling classes ... far more intensive” antagonistic interests exist than between the propertied classes on the one hand and the proletariat on the other. Whoever accepts the latter must be of the opinion that the class struggle is an evil - perhaps an unavoidable one, but an evil nonetheless. If this evil can be weakened and obscured as much as possible in order to benefit the proletariat, then the republic is to be preferred to the monarchy.

This is indeed the view of Jaurès and his friends - and in this they are in stark contrast to the Marxists, who explain that the class antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat is a fundamental and irreconcilable one, which goes far deeper than any clash of interests within the propertied classes.

To be sure, the propertied classes have every reason to engage in “luring the workers”, but only in the rarest and most transitory cases do they concede real concessions for this purpose - concessions which make the proletariat stronger and more fit for action. As a rule, these are pseudo-concessions made to split the proletariat, to lull it, to lead it astray or to corrupt it - in short, to weaken

it. In the long run, however, these cannot overcome class contradictions anywhere. Sooner or later these contradictions break through again and again, and, the more concessions the bourgeoisie has previously made to the proletariat, the more the bourgeoisie must feel threatened when the proletariat begins to apply these democratic achievements in its own class interest instead of in the service of the bourgeoisie; the more energetically every attempt at repression by the bourgeoisie must fail, since, as soon as the proletariat stands on its own feet and has enough of the game, in the republic the bourgeoisie is far more directly threatened than under a monarchy.

We Marxists see an advantage of the republic precisely in the fact that under these circumstances class contradictions burst asunder more directly and starkly than at the same level of economic development in a monarchy. Were the republic, as Eisner eulogises, to really “obscure class contradictions”, then in our eyes this would have to be considered a serious disadvantage of the republic. As long as society is based on class contradictions, we see in these contradictions the driving force of social development - not in the categorical imperative of Kantian ethics,<sup>11</sup> nor in the intoxicating power of the slogans of bourgeois democracy.

The issue is now clearly defined. It is not about whether the proletariat should favour the republic or not. We all agree on this. The question is whether the republic mitigates the class antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and proletariat or whether it exacerbates them. In the republic, is the bourgeoisie driven to be friendlier to the workers, to promote the liberation of the proletariat more or to obstruct it less than in the monarchy?

And on the other hand: is it the task of social democracy to support the undeniable striving of the bourgeois republicans to obscure class differences? Is it social democracy’s task to promote the belief that the republican bourgeois is friendlier to the workers than the monarchist bourgeois? What is it about? If this defines the matter at hand, then it also defines the area it applies to. The question can only arise in a republic: it is virtually irrelevant in a monarchy. The question can only occupy us in Germany because of our international relations, because of the necessity of clarifying differences with the French comrades. For Germany (with the exception of the few Hanseatic cities which are not democratic republics) the republic does not in any way signify a form of the class rule of the bourgeoisie. For us, only the other side of the republic comes into consideration: ie, the republic as a means of the emancipation of the proletariat.

## The American republic

One can explain our matter of dispute in two ways. One way is to abstractly investigate the essence of the republic, the republic of the bourgeoisie and of the proletariat and its class contradictions - a very cumbersome path, which is all the more tiring for not leading through very well known territory. For our practical purposes it is certainly shorter and less fatiguing to investigate not an abstract republic, but a concrete one, the one around which the whole controversy revolves - the French.

Simply in order to highlight that we are not dealing with a specifically French issue, however, but a problem particular to each and every bourgeois republic, let us quickly deal with the American republic, which represents a very different type to that of the French. In the French republic we see the extensive centralisation of

administration as well as intellectual and political life in a huge capital, the greatest possible limits on the autonomy of the municipalities and departments and all the means of class domination - military, police and state church - highly developed. All of these are absent in the United States. There, class antagonisms have been particularly weak for a very long time.

The basis of capitalist exploitation is formed by separation of the mass of the population from their means of labour, especially from the most important of these means - land. But for a long time in the US there was more than enough land for all who demanded it. Thus not only could anybody become an independent farmer: the internal market grew too, as did the demand for intellectuals - lawyers, administrators, etc. The most brilliant careers were opened up to anybody who was sufficiently energetic and intelligent, even those who began without means. Especially to workers who were best placed to take advantage, the position of a wage worker simply appeared to be a transitional phase. This prevented the workers from obtaining proletarian class-consciousness just as much as it held the capitalists back from harassing the proletariat - or at least its most militant layers - and challenging it to fight. The republic did not seem to allow class struggle and socialism to develop.

But, as is well known, this has changed enormously in recent decades. As Hillquit puts it, “In 1870 strikes and lockouts were hardly known in America; between 1887 and 1894 the country witnessed 14,000 disputes between capital and labour, in which about four million working men participated.”<sup>12</sup> But, the more the American proletariat grows and class contradictions increase, the more the bourgeoisie is anxious to use all means the republic offers it to suppress the proletariat. It engages in the much-vaunted “luring the workers” on the most tremendous scale - not through social reforms (those which have been passed recently are not worth talking about), but through systematic corruption of the masses, by flooding the country with a commercially bribable press, through buying votes in elections, through the extraction of influential labour leaders.

Today, in every country, they are trying these methods to confuse and corrupt the workers. Even absolutist Russia saw the attempts of the police officer, Zubatov, to create a workers’ movement kept on a lead by the police. But nowhere are these experiments carried out on such a scale and with such tenacity as in the republic, precisely because of the power of the ballot paper, the press and the trade unions. But these efforts are nowhere more successful than in the republic.

The traditions of the past live on in the American worker, traditions where each one of them carried a marshal’s baton in their satchels. The American workers still believes that thanks to his democracy he is better off than workers living under monarchies, and that he has no need of socialism, which is a mere product of European despotism. He still believes that in democracy there are no classes and no class rule, because the whole people hold political power. The main task of our American comrades today is to destroy this republican superstition, to make the worker see reason, to point out that he is no less exploited and enslaved than his comrade living in a monarchy and that, just like in a monarchy, democracy has become a tool of class rule, that democracy can only again become a tool to break this class rule when he has overcome its republican superstitions.

That is what our American comrades’ agitation consists of today - and they would mockingly laugh

at anybody who wanted to make them believe that any benefits for the proletariat arose from the republican bourgeoisie “luring the workers”.

In their agitation against the republican “luring the workers”, the American socialists are strongly supported by the fact that in using this means to hold down the proletariat, the American bourgeoisie does not stand still. As much as it would like to, the American bourgeoisie is unable to permanently “obscure” class contradictions: the veil it attempts to throw over them tears again and again, and, the more zealously it attempts to tame the working class using the carrot, the more angrily it employs the stick when the carrot fails. One has only to remember what happened in Colorado<sup>13</sup> to show how brutally the bourgeoisie uses all the instruments of power made available by the republic if it is necessary to crush recalcitrant workers.

In America, therefore, republican superstitions have very little resonance in party circles. In France, however, the matter is not so simple.

## The First French Republic

In one of his Amsterdam talks and again recently in a series of articles in *L’Humanité*,<sup>14</sup> Jaurès explained that the peculiarity of proletarian tactics in France was justified by the French Revolution. These tactics had to be the precise opposite of those German tactics inaugurated by Marx and Lassalle<sup>15</sup> because Germany had unfortunately never known a proper revolution. Jaurès’s tactics are indeed the opposite not merely of those of Guesde, but also of Marx, Lassalle and German tactics more generally, whereas those of Guesde and the Germans are based on the same reasoning - that much is true.

But this is only something incidental. What comes into consideration here is Jaurès’s thesis that the French Revolution has proscribed different tactics to the French proletariat than those of the German proletariat. Thanks to the revolution and the republic, since its beginning the proletariat has played a great historical role “by initially supporting the revolutionary bourgeoisie and then dragging them along with it” (*L’Humanité* September 14 1905).<sup>16</sup>

Here too there is a kernel of truth. No doubt, thanks to the revolution (which itself was a consequence of a particular economic development and severe exacerbation of class conflict) the proletariat achieved great political significance in France earlier than in any other country. But this was only in part due to it “initially supporting the revolutionary bourgeoisie and then dragging them along with it”. For the most part it was achieved through the proletariat coming to loggerheads with the bourgeoisie and fighting it.

At the end of the 18th century the feudal monarchy had led France into a situation comparable to that in Russia today: defeats abroad, corruption and economic ruin at home. Completely bringing down the system of government had become a vital question for the entire nation, something in which all classes who did not have a direct share in the existing state administration were interested. But even back then this overthrow of the system of government would not have been possible without the intervention of the lower classes: petty bourgeois, peasants, proletarians. They armed themselves, stormed the Bastille, burned down the castles of the nobility, abolished feudal burdens and began the self-administration of their communities.

The National Constituent Assembly merely confirmed what the people had carried out. The law/decreed of December 14 1789 recognised the

complete self-administration of the municipality. No government official stood above it. The municipality also received its own armed forces in the form of the armed citizens, the national guard, which elected its own officers; the law/decreed of December 22 laid down the self-administration of the *départements*: on May 5 1790 the election of judges by the people was established, on July 12 it was finally determined that every municipality would elect its own pastor, every *département* would elect its own bishop.

This upheaval of the constitution corresponded to an upheaval of taxation. The ruling class always knows how to offload state debt - a state which both protects the ruling class and is exploited by it - onto the exploited and suppressed classes. One can therefore recognise the social character of a state by looking at how the ruling class does this.

Of course, the Great Revolution eradicated the tax exemption of the privileged classes, but it also eradicated indirect taxes - taxes on salt and drinks, the tobacco monopoly, internal tariffs and the municipal octroi.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the national tariffs and the proceeds from state and municipal property, which were increased enormously by church assets, state revenue was to be set through a single direct tax on net income. This, according to the prevailing physiocratic teaching at the time, was seen exclusively in ground rent. In this way the people had made the instruments of class rule their own: the state administration, the judiciary, the army and the church. They also shifted the burden of maintaining the state from themselves onto the upper classes: a tremendous achievement indeed, accomplished by the supportive and propulsive intervention of the proletariat in the bourgeoisie’s struggle against the monarchy.

But even then, as conceived harmony existed between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the class contradictions between them at most came to light in sporadic food riots devoid of political significance, the class instincts of the bourgeoisie warned them against granting excessive political concessions to the proletariat. As it could not even dare to directly confiscate the proletariat’s newly won freedom, it attempted at least indirectly to monopolise this freedom by creating a distinction between the active citizen and the passive citizen.

It was not the people who were armed, but only the active citizens; only they could elect the municipalities, representatives, judges, priests, etc and (eventually) the deputies to the national assembly. But, according to the decree/law of December 22 1789, only those who were over 18, had lived for a year in the district and paid a direct tax to the sum of at least that of three normal day labourers were active citizens. The number of active citizens was four million in a population of 26 million. Furthermore, all these elections were indirect ones, and since the bourgeoisie still did not feel sufficiently protected by this, they made election to the national assembly contingent on the possession of property and the payment of a direct tax to the sum of one silver mark (50 francs).

The rampart protecting the census politically was joined by the professional army. With regiments it had often recruited from abroad, the old army remained in force alongside the national guard. In part, these old army regiments could still be used against the people and remained subjected to the discipline of aristocratic officers. Ultimately the monarchy remained as a rampart of the bourgeoisie. Although the monarchy was subordinate to the parliament, the national assembly, it did retain its command over the army,



its appointment of governing ministers and its right, at least for a certain period of time, to withhold consent from decisions of the national assembly, without which these decisions could not become law (the veto).

The big bourgeoisie clung to the monarchy and the army as the last bulwark against the storm of the revolutionary people - the petty bourgeois and proletarians. And when Louis XVI attempted to flee abroad from Paris in order to draw on the help of foreign monarchs to prop up his tottering throne, his capture led to the first hostile encounter of the two classes in the revolution. Whereas the masses demanded that the king abdicate, the majority of the national assembly defended him. The extent to which this majority was conscious of its class interests in doing so is shown by what Barnave<sup>18</sup> said back then: “The revolution must pause: one more step along the path of freedom and we will see the abolition of property.”

When on July 17 1791 a petition was launched on the Champ-de-Mars demanding the abdication of the king and the people flocked in droves to sign it, the ‘freedom fighter’ Lafayette moved in with the bourgeois national guard of Paris and violently dispersed the crowd in a bloody massacre. That was a worthy introduction to the class struggle of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Barnave had been right: the bourgeoisie needed the revolution to come to an end. The bourgeoisie had achieved what it needed. Every further step on the path of the revolution had to turn against property: ie, against the bourgeoisie itself.<sup>19</sup>

But in the struggles of 1789 and 1790 the subordinate masses, especially those in Paris, had recognised their power. They had won, but the fruits of victory had fallen to the propertied bourgeoisie. They could not be content with this. They had to strive to march further along the path of freedom and equality to work their way out of poverty and misery. And, since the bourgeoisie resisted the masses’ attempts to drag the bourgeoisie along with them in this, it soon had to come to heavy fighting between the two classes.

Their conflicts were further intensified by the war conducted by the allied monarchies of Europe against revolutionary France - a war in which France could only assert itself through the most energetic mobilisation of all its resources, as well as the mobilisation of the inconsideration the lower classes felt for property. Now (in 1792 and 1793) the monarchy was smashed to pieces, universal suffrage was proclaimed, the old army was completely dissolved and replaced by the arming of the whole people; now the wealth of the rich was used to feed the army and the poor. But this happened at a time of terror - a time of terror for the bourgeoisie, which felt neither ‘supported’ nor ‘dragged along’ by this regime. They did not at all consider acts such as the execution of the Girondists<sup>20</sup> to be products of the “cooperation of the classes”.

The reign of terror, this dictatorship, even if it was not the dictatorship of the proletariat alone, necessarily arose from the prevailing circumstances. But it was equally necessarily doomed to fail. The possibility of social production was still not present, but the possibility of restricting society to the individual production of petty proprietors had already disappeared. The rule of capital had become a social necessity. As it has done everywhere in the last century, the war strengthened the tendencies propitious to capitalism, creating a huge demand for mass production and trade. As soon as the war took a turn towards victory, it created the demand for capitalism alongside capital and capitalists. Immeasurable riches of the neighbouring countries, especially of

their churches, aristocrats and royal courts, filled the pockets of the victors and their exploiters. This, along with supplies for the armies, created new capitalists again and again.

Since commodity production remained intact, the reign of terror also remained subject to providing the most important of the modern means of war: money, money and more money. And since indirect taxes had almost completely been repealed and direct taxes did not yield enough, the government’s main source of income came through selling confiscated ecclesiastical and aristocratic goods to people who could pay cash - ie, not to proletarians, but to capitalists. Land speculators bought immense areas cheaply and sold them as small plots - mainly to peasants and day workers. This was another way that the war created a vast and rich capitalist class.

With victory, the predicament which the regime of terror had made into a necessity for all revolutionary classes disappeared. Its forcible interventions into economic life became ever more unbearable - except for the proletariat. But the war robbed the proletariat of its most militant elements - not only through disease and enemy weapons, but also through booty and the fortunes of war, which lifted many a poor wretch up into the ranks of those in command and the rich. It was precisely through this that a new caste was created, separated from the people. This caste of officers had capitalist instincts and interests, taking the place of the old feudal officer corps.

Thus the balance soon had to fall back onto the side of the bourgeoisie. Thermidor 9 (July 27) 1794 - the fall of Robespierre<sup>21</sup> - was the turning

bureaucracy replaced self-government of the municipalities and the *départements*.

The government-appointed prefect became the soul of local administration. He was placed at the head of the *département* and appointed the local councils of all municipalities in the *département*, as well as the mayor in communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. The mayors of the bigger municipalities were under direct orders from the government.

Instead of a head of state elected by the people, the head of state was appointed. Admittedly this was done by judges supposedly independent of the government. But the judges, the most active elements in the judicial process, were set to one side in favour of the public prosecutor - a government official who got his orders straight from the government and had to carry them out!

Finally, the church hierarchy was also restored and incorporated into the newly created state apparatus by the concordat of 1801.<sup>24</sup>

This concordat still exists today. Right at this moment it is the object of fierce struggles. But it is not merely the concordat which remains intact today. The entire constitutional structure created at the turn of the 1800s, the structure which so closely corresponded to the interests of the bourgeoisie, has in all significant aspects remained unchanged.

And what is true of the constitution is also true of tax legislation. Direct taxes again decreased in significance alongside indirect taxes, which were re-introduced and modernised. The empire renewed taxes on beverages, salt, the tobacco monopoly and the octroi of the municipalities, and also increased duties on imports. According

to Adolf Wagner’s *Finance* part III, the French budget expected the revenue to be [as in Fig 1 above].

The bourgeoisie had no objections to any of that. The only thing it felt uncomfortable with in the constitution of the empire was the lack of parliamentarism. This is the form which best corresponds to the bourgeoisie’s class rule. It strives for this form wherever it has gained economic power. In the decades after the rise and the collapse of the empire, this was the sole thing around which all the political battles of the individual layers of the bourgeoisie revolved (high finance, big and small industrial capital, wholesale and intermediary trade): the establishment of a representative system, the increase in the rights of parliament, the configuration of the right to vote.

## Notes

1. The text is the first of a seven-part series of articles published in 1905. Translation work on the other six parts is ongoing. Many thanks to Mazieć Zurowski for proofing the translation, and Jacob Richter for his technical assistance in accessing the original German files.
2. This refers to the sixth congress of the Second International, held in Amsterdam from August 14-18 1904. Amongst other things, the congress discussed the question of socialist participation in government and the general strike. There is an interesting account of the congress by Daniel de Leon, chairman of the Socialist Labor Party of America’s delegation. It is available online at: [www.archive.org/details/flashlightsOfTheAmsterdamInternationalSocialistCongress1904](http://www.archive.org/details/flashlightsOfTheAmsterdamInternationalSocialistCongress1904).
3. August Bebel (1840-1913) was a worker and Marxist revolutionary who co-founded German social democracy with Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1869 and was its leader until his death. Bebel was a member of the Reichstag from 1867 and was sentenced with Liebknecht to two years’ imprisonment for “treason” (opposition to the Franco-German war) in 1872. His fiery parliamentary speeches - from 1868 he was continuously a member first of the North German and later the German Reichstag - are part of the history of German social democracy, as are also his books, above all his autobiography, *From my life and Woman and socialism*.
4. Jules Guesde (1845-1922) was a French socialist and leader of the Marxist wing of the French workers’ movement. From 1877 onwards he published the socialist paper *Égalité (Equality)*. In 1879-80, together with Paul Lafargue and others, he founded the French Workers’ Party (Parti ouvrier), whose programme was largely written by Marx in Engels’ front room in London. In the 1880s and 90s Guesde led the fight against the ‘possibilists’ and came out decidedly against Millerandism (socialist participation in government), but in the 1890s he was already beginning to retreat to social-chauvinism and reformism. Later he was one of the most prominent centrists in the Second International, during the war a social-chauvinist and in 1914-15 a member of the French government.
5. Jean Jaurès (1859-1914): French socialist, founder of the socialist daily *L’Humanité* and leader of the French section of the Second International. He was a gradualist, a non-Marxist socialist who felt that Marxism gave undue weight to the role of material interests in history. He was assassinated by the extreme nationalist, Raoul Villain, in 1914.
6. *Die Neue Zeit (New Times)* was a weekly journal of German Social Democracy published between 1883 and 1923. Kautsky, who edited the magazine from its inception, was removed from his position as editor due to his oppositional activity in the party during World War I. In October 1917 the editorship then went over to the rightist, Heinrich Cunow. It was a hugely influential journal both in Germany and abroad - particularly in Russia. It published key texts such as Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha programme* and Engels’s ‘Criticism of the draft Social Democratic programme of 1891’.
7. *Vorwärts* was the central publication of the German Social Democratic Party, published daily in Berlin from 1891 until 1933.
8. Kurt Eisner (1878-1919) was an editor of *Vorwärts* in 1898, working as a literary critic. He was a revisionist. In 1914 he opposed war on pacifist grounds, joining the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) split in 1917. He organised a network of delegates in Munich factories. He was sentenced to eight months in jail after the strikes of January 1918. The leader of the Bavarian revolution in November and new prime minister of Bavaria, he was assassinated on February 21 1919.
9. Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein were the literary executors of Marx and Engels. In the 1860s Marx had worked on composing three large volumes, *Theories of surplus value*. This work, commonly known as ‘The economic manuscripts’, was published posthumously under Kautsky’s editorship. It is often seen as the fourth volume of *Das Kapital*.
10. Karl Johann Rodbertus (1805-75) was a

- German economist who held socialist views. He championed Prussian Junker development along bourgeois lines, believing that the contradictions between labour and capital could be resolved through reforms carried out by the Prussian Junker state. He maintained that all economic crises resulted from low national consumption.
11. This is a polemical point. Kautsky is drawing attention to Kurt Eisner’s rejection of dialectics and his espousal of Kantian ethics.
12. M Hillquit *History of socialism in the United States* - English taken from [www.archive.org/stream/cu31924022571701/cu31924022571701\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/cu31924022571701/cu31924022571701_djvu.txt).
13. This refers to the miners’ strikes of 1903-04 in the Cripple Creek District. The all-out walkout turned into what is now known as the ‘Colorado labour wars’.
14. The anti-union Republican governor, J H Peabody, declared martial law, with the state militia crushing organised labour and sending many of its leaders into exile.
15. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-64) was a unique and controversial figure in the German workers’ movement. He founded the General German Workers’ Association (ADAV) in 1863, a group which sought to win universal suffrage through peaceful means. Lassalle was of the opinion that the workers’ movement could ally with the Prussian aristocracy against the emergent bourgeoisie, even if this meant cutting deals with the ‘iron chancellor’, Otto von Bismarck. Given these obvious shortcomings, he has rightly been heavily criticised by Marxists both of his time and since. However, his historical contribution to the German workers’ movement should not be underestimated. For a generally positive take on his life, see Rosa Luxemburg’s short essay, ‘Lassalle’s legacy’ (1913): [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/xx/lassalle.html](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/xx/lassalle.html).
16. The original French is : “... la Révolution à la française, l’assaut donné aux anciens pouvoirs par une bourgeoisie révolutionnaire qu’assiste d’abord, qu’entraîne ensuite un prolétariat toujours plus hardi et plus fort - “... French-style revolution, the assault against the former powers by a revolutionary bourgeoisie which was assisted at first, and dragged along afterwards, by a tougher and stronger proletariat.”
17. An octroi is a local tax collected on various articles brought into a district for consumption. It stems from the French ‘octroyer’ - to grant, authorise.
18. Antoine Barnave (1761-93) was one of the most influential orators of the early French Revolution. He was one of the founding members of the Feuillants, a splinter from the Jacobins which opposed the overthrow of the monarchy in favour of a constitutional variant.
19. This is an extremely important passage for the Second International debate around ‘permanent revolution’, in which Kautsky played a key role. The debate revolved around what strategy the workers’ movement should adopt for revolution in countries like tsarist Russia, which were dominated by pre-capitalist social relations. For both Kautsky and Lenin, the idea was to carry out the democratic revolution to the end (*do komsa* in Russian), not allowing the bourgeoisie to stop the revolution halfway before things got out of hand for them and their propertied interests. This strategic debate remains controversial to this day. For an interesting series of contributions from Marxists at the time of the discussion, see D Gaido and R B Day (eds) *Witnesses to permanent revolution - the documentary record* Leiden 2009.
20. In the French Revolution, the Girondists were the representatives of the big bourgeoisie in the Convention of 1792-94, the parliament set up to replace the monarchy. The Girondists were ‘the party of order’, vacillating between democratic measures and compromise with the royalists. Their opponents were the Montagne, the ‘mountain’, representing the most consistent democrats based among the petty bourgeoisie and the poor. The terms ‘Girondists’ and ‘Montagne’ were also used during the revolutionary events of the 19th century to identify opposing currents, by analogy with the parties of the 1790s. This is the division which is the origin of the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’.
21. Maximilien Robespierre was the leader of the left Jacobins and head of the revolutionary government between 1793 and 1794. He fell from power on Thermidor 9 of the new revolutionary calendar.
22. Francois Babeuf (1760-97), known as Gracchus, headed the Conspiracy of Equality in the French revolution. He and his followers wished to provoke an armed uprising of the plebeian masses against the bourgeois regime of the directory and to establish a revolutionary dictatorship as part of a transition to “pure democracy” and “egalitarian communism”. For their activities, he and other leaders of the Conspiracy were executed.
23. At its height, the Jacobin Club had about 420,000 members. It was responsible for implementing the Reign of Terror. The club was closed after the fall of Robespierre.
24. An agreement signed between Napoleon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII, re-establishing the Roman Catholic church as a major institution in France.
25. The House of Bourbon ruled over France from 1589 until 1792.
26. A branch of the Bourbon dynasty that came to power during the July revolution of 1830 and was overthrown by the revolution of 1848.
27. The French Second Republic was the brief period of republican government between the revolution of 1848 and the 1850 coup by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, which initiated the second empire.



## ROYAL WEDDING

# Monarchist system must go

The working class movement must fight for republican democracy, argues **Eddie Ford**

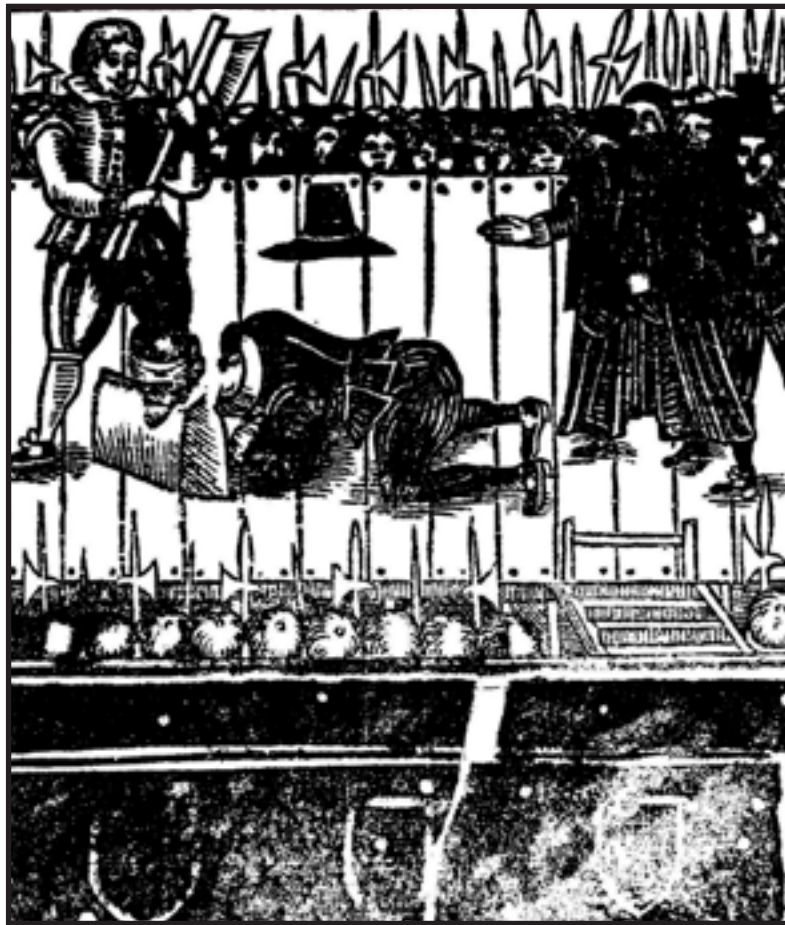
**A**pparently the marriage of William Arthur Philip Louis Windsor and Catherine Elizabeth Middleton represents a “lovely fairy tale” - a “beautiful love story” of ideal romance and courtship. Or so Johnny Rotten, former fake anarchist turned monarchist propagandist, dribbled in the pages of *The Sun* when the royal couple’s engagement was officially announced.<sup>1</sup> The same sort of things were said about Charles Windsor and Diana Spencer - who were supposedly wafting about on cloud nine, when in reality they were miserable participants in a nightmarish charade, with the then naive Diana finding herself the victim of a cruel deception.

Yet Rotten’s pretty vacant sentiments are a far from isolated example of the bedazzled stupefaction that we are *meant* to sink into, like a warm bubble bath after a stressful day, when presented with anything royal. Which, needless to say, is marketed, advertised, packaged and sold to us in a totally cynical manner - the working assumption being that all of us are imbeciles, unable to remember the catalogue of disasters that have been previous royal marriages: princess Anne and captain Mark Phillips, prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson... (Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn did not go that well either.) But, of course, *this* time will be different: love’s dream will come true.

And now we can enjoy *Kate and William - a very public story* - a 60-page comic strip illustrated by Gary Erskine and Mike Collins of Marvel Comics, responsible for such characters as Spiderman, Judge Dredd, Warheads and Jack Cross. The royal couple are now transformed into virtual superheroes in a “dramatic retelling” of their story. He, apparently, is a “chisel-featured action man” and she is “slim and beautiful”.<sup>2</sup> Possibly an all-time low when it comes to mindless royalist spin, but there is still time for new abominations.

It goes without saying that the media coverage has been and will continue to be merciless. They are determined to capture your heart and mind, no matter what the cost. Therefore more than 100 international broadcasters will be camping outside Buckingham Palace and other key strategic points. The BBC alone is expected to dedicate 1,000 staff to cover the wedding, whilst the US networks are sending over their biggest guns. Around two billion people across the world are expected to watch some or all of the wedding, in what will certainly be the biggest live TV audience in history. Talk about bread and circuses.

Then there is the guest list - which just about says it all. So St James Palace, the official residence of the queen (though neither she nor any other monarch has actually lived there for almost two centuries), has released many of the names of the 1,900 guests invited to attend the nuptials.<sup>3</sup> Elton John will be there obviously - no royal wedding would be complete without him. There are more than 40 members of foreign royal families (although Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa of Bahrain had to give his apologies due to the ongoing “unrest” in his country<sup>4</sup>). Some 200 or more are members of the government, parliament and the diplomatic corps, and approximately 80 are drawn from the various worthy charities that William Windsor supports (not *all* of them holding senior positions). Over 20 are representatives of the Church



**Execution of Charles I in January 1649: communists want to do more than get rid of kings and queens**

of England and “other faiths” - such as cardinal Cormac Murphy-Connor, the chief rabbi (Lord Sacks), Imam Mohammad Raza, the most reverend Gregorios (archbishop of the Greek Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain), Malcolm Deboo (president of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe), the venerable Bogoda Seelawimala (acting head monk of the London Buddhist Vihara), etc. Last of all, there are 60 governor-generals and Commonwealth premiers - not to mention 30 members of the defence services. In other words, the entire establishment - corporal and spiritual - will be there to celebrate, and glorify, monarchist power and privilege.

### What about the plebs?

David Cameron claimed on April 25, without presenting any evidence, that some 4,000 street parties are going to be held on the big day - though, even if that is true, it would still represent a significant reduction in numbers from those held for the 1981 wedding of Charles and Diana.

Though it appears that fun and frolics on April 29 are strictly confined to pro-monarchists - or at least according to Camden council. Thus the ‘Not the royal wedding’ street party organised by Republic, a group “campaigning for a democratic alternative to the monarchy”,<sup>5</sup> was at first prohibited on the ostensible basis that it had failed to provide a “management plan” and “consult local residents”. Obviously Cameron’s call in *The Sun* for “people who want to come together to celebrate with their neighbours” to just go ahead and do so (“We’ve done our bit by ripping up red tape”, so, he warned local authorities, “Don’t make problems where there are none.”<sup>6</sup>) was conditional on *what* people want to celebrate. If you are dealing with a republican fly in the ointment, dig up as much red tape and obscure bureaucratic by-laws as you can.

As for the Metropolitan police, they have promised that “any

criminals attempting to disrupt” the royal wedding, whether in the “guise of protest or otherwise” (like waving republican placards, for instance?) will face a “robust” response. To this end 60 “troublemakers” have been banished from central London for the day. These “troublemakers”, we discover, consist of people who were arrested following the student protests outside Millbank Tower last year and also during the March 26 Trade Union Congress-organised ‘march for the alternative’ - that is, people arrested for protesting against the coalition government’s vicious cuts in public spending and education. Predictably enough, Muslims Against Crusades has had its application to hold a protest event at Westminster Abbey rejected.

Overall, some 5,000 officers will be deployed to ensure that the marriage of William and Kate is a “safe, secure and happy event”. Having said that, warned commander Christine Jones - the Met officer in charge of operations on April 29 - it “would be wrong” to dismiss the obviously appalling possibility that “spontaneous” or “static” protests could take place at nearby locations to Westminster Abbey, the ‘modest’ venue chosen by the royal couple as part of their effort to help shoulder the burden during these days of financial difficulty. Commander Jones called upon the British public to be the “eyes and ears” of the police on April 29, in order to ensure that it is a day of “celebration, joy and pageantry”. She is, of course, supposed to be a ‘non-political’ functionary of the state - above mere politics. Now, there is a *real* fairy tale.

Which brings us neatly to the truly whopping monarchist lie, repeated *ad nauseam* - which is, that the wedding of William Windsor and Kate Middleton is a sublimely ‘non-political’ event which can unite the nation. True, not as good as a world war, but it will do for now. So for a few brief hours on this “happy and momentous occasion”, as Cameron put it, we can forget our petty ‘party political’ differences and disputes - especially in this gloomy

age of austerity - and instead enjoy an innocent, bunting-filled street party or jolly knees-up in the local.

What utter rot. The whole absurd and befuddling spectacle of pomp-and-circumstance is a ‘wedding of mass distraction’ - promoting the historic virtues of the ruling class, and the establishment as a whole; precisely at the time when it is carrying out wholesale attacks on the working class, with *plenty* more to come. Even if David Cameron and his grandees had planned it in advance, the timing of the royal wedding could not have been much more fortuitous - anything that helps to dampen down resistance to the government’s scheme, even if only temporarily, is to be welcomed.

### Drenched in politics

In that sense, as a partial antidote to all this infantile and mendacious nonsense about the ‘apolitical’ nature of the monarchy, we should be grateful to *The Daily Telegraph*’s Matthew d’Ancona for cutting the crap and unsentimentally telling things how they are. He reminds us that the royal wedding “will be positively drenched in politics” and that “this kind of ceremony carries a dauntingly heavy payload of messages and symbols about where we are as a nation”.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to state, quite correctly from the communist perspective, that the monarchy “occupies much more than an ornamental role in our unwritten constitution” - which means not just the spawning of a “lucrative heritage industry” and acting “intermittently” as a “soap opera with global reach”.

Useful though those things are, he writes, the real importance and “essence” of the institution “concerns power” and “its distribution” - who has it and who does not have it. Even more hard-heartedly, but entirely accurately, he points out that in the UK political system “the people are not sovereign” nor in fact is parliament - rather, “that power resides” in the “queen-in-parliament”; or, as it “shall one day be in the case of her eldest grandchild, the king-in-parliament”. Therefore, he concludes, “on such a day” as April 29 politics becomes a “branch of semiotics” - a “carnival of signs, signals and encoded messages” - and one such “magnificent” signal will be to “frame and dramatise the continued prosperity of the monarchy”: a “remarkably resilient” institution which acts as a force for continuity and *stability* in British politics. Therefore, steady as she sails and god bless the monarchy.

Needless to say, d’Ancona’s reasons for supporting the constitutional monarchy system - and hence the status quo as a whole - are almost precisely the reasons why communists are so adamantly opposed to it: it serves as a bedrock for the British state and British capital. For ruling class ideology, the monarchy symbolises the mythological unity of the British people - a unity that supposedly rises above all divisions, not least those of class. While in times of unrest - like a growing anti-cuts movement that pits worker against employer and state - David Cameron and Ed Miliband may continue to exchange insults across the floor of the House of Commons, these expressions of different interests are of minor importance, when compared to the underlying *common* interest of this imagined British family. Or so we are led to believe by establishment politicians and the mainstream media.

That explains why we in the CPGB

place so much emphasis on revolutionary republicanism - the fight to abolish the monarchical *system*, not just the actual monarch. By which we mean sweeping away the House of Lords, getting rid of the presidential prime minister and all forms of prime ministerial patronage, introducing a single-chamber parliament with proportional representation, annual elections and MPs’ salaries set at the level of a skilled worker, and so on. We also mean disestablishing the Church of England, ending the acts of union and the abolition of the standing army and its replacement by a people’s militia.

That is, republicanism forms an intrinsic part of our communist minimum programme. And it does so because such demands directly raise the question of the state itself - of *how we are ruled*. And by logical extension the *form* of working class power. After all, it is not for nothing that the overwhelming majority of the bourgeoisie see the constitutional monarchy set-up as a treasure to be defended and cynically venerated - it serves their interests admirably.

Unfortunately though, many on the left seem to regard republicanism - and the struggle for republican democracy - as a mere optional bolt-on to their worthy but abstract calls for socialism. For instance, the latest issue of *Socialist Worker* informs us that the “promotion of the monarchy is part of the elite reasserting its rule over the rest of us” and how the “monarchy is part of the capitalist system in this country” - only “through a revolutionary change can we see this class system, with all its absurdities, done away with”.<sup>8</sup> True enough, as far as it goes. Yet nowhere does the Socialist Workers Party agitate for or even *demand* a democratic republic - let alone place revolutionary republicanism at the core of its literature and propaganda. In other words, the SWP’s republicanism - like so many on the left - is purely platonic. Yes, it would be a jolly nice idea, of course, but we are not going to do or say anything about it - so let’s get down to business as usual organising the next anti-cuts meeting. A crippling economism reigns on the left.

Finally, we do not put the demand for a republic in our minimum programme because we have some sort of anachronistic ‘stagist’, Menshevik vision of revolution: ie, before we put working class rule on the agenda we must get rid of the monarch. Still less because we want to ‘complete the bourgeois democratic revolution’, as some of our more stupid critics allege. Rather, we recognise the necessity of the working class becoming the most militant and consistent advocate of democracy. Fighting for a democratic republic is part and parcel of the struggle to democratise *all* aspects of society - from top to bottom. We are opposed to aristocracy and elitism in all its guises, whether in the workplace, trade union, school, university, parliament - or even, for that matter, amongst the left, with its confessional sects and self-perpetuating central committees ●

### Notes

1. *The Sun* November 18 2010.
2. [www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1353100/Royal-Wedding-Kate-Middleton-Prince-Williams-love-story-mischievous-cartoon.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1353100/Royal-Wedding-Kate-Middleton-Prince-Williams-love-story-mischievous-cartoon.html).
3. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13175842](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13175842).
4. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/04/2011424165555715419.html>.
5. [www.republic.org.uk](http://www.republic.org.uk).
6. *The Sun* April 11.
7. *The Daily Telegraph* April 23.
8. *Socialist Worker* April 30.



REVIEW



Hollywood version of Rosemary Sutcliff's children's classic

Male-bonding cretinism

Kevin Macdonald (director) *The eagle* general release

Not much annoyed me more than when school teachers used to say, ‘Oh, you have to read the book. The book is always miles better than the film’. Or whatever. In fact the film should always be better, unless idiots are making it. Why waste your time reading instead of watching when there are so many other books to read?

But I hated it even more when the teachers were right.

I’d recommend all of them (and parents) to encourage children to read Rosemary Sutcliff’s *The eagle of the ninth* (1954). It’s a marvellous example of historical writing, which shows how literature can cast light on the human condition and address serious social questions. Set in Roman-occupied Britain in the 2nd century, the book deals with how peoples of different nations can cooperate and how imperial might prevents it happening. The film, by contrast, demonstrates how capitalism and the lowest common denominator can distort and utterly turn on their head the words of a great author. Although I would recommend the book for 11- or 12-year-olds, the film shows how the mass media treat adults as if they are more stupid than children.

I never expect Hollywood to get the books of nations other than America right. But I think I might be even more outraged this time than when the *Hitchhiker’s guide to the galaxy* came out. That book had way too much intellect for Hollywood (they probably think Zaphod is the hero) and that little gimp from *The office*. I’d like to knock his teeth in for even thinking he was near good enough for the part. Hollywood wouldn’t dare treat their greats of literature with such disdain - just look at *Huckleberry Finn* or *Batman* films! For this slander the

American ambassador should be called in and we should receive the head of whoever is responsible on a platter. If we were still a nation with any self-respect, *The eagle* should have provoked rioting in the streets! They had to change the name from *The eagle of the ninth*, by the way, so US filmgoers didn’t think it was about golf. If it had been about golf they may have made a film truer to the source.

Christ, all they had to do was follow a book. But right from the start they turn it on its head. Not only do they turn the book on its head: they turn history on its head. For example, the Roman troops move back towards the fort in a diamond formation. When the chariots come they run for higher ground. But the Romans wouldn’t have jeopardised their fort in this way: they would have accepted the loss of troops. Neither are the officers - including Marcus, who is trying to discover the truth about the disappearance of his father’s legion - fools or pig-headed in the book, but smart professionals. It seems that the Marcus of the movie is based on the worse, most sexually repressed officers of World War I rather than on a Roman.

Everything about the gladiatorial display is better in the book. Then there is Escap, the bought slave, who gets a wolf cub - something which would have appealed to children and should have been left in the film, you might have thought. The cub could be seen as an allegory for what should be done with the wild children of an orphaned nation.

The film makers also cut out the love interest of Cottia, a girl from a Romanised family. They need to leave this character out, as the storyline here is about compromise and how the Romans can get on with the

British. It runs completely contrary to the macho-fest that runs through the film from this point, with the fights becoming more and more ridiculous. Guern is also a character than shows how the Romans and British have a common human interest. But in the film he is a militarist fool who finds honour in death like a Viking nut job. Not the really nice fellow of the book, who tries to get on with the locals instead of murdering them.

In the last scene the Roman legion is not reformed for sensible, logical reasons, as in the book. It is not reformed because those corrupt, meddling politicians don’t do the right thing and support ‘our boys’. Talk about reliving the rightwing mythology of Vietnam.

There is no nonsense in the novel about how the Romans are kind to children - unlike those horrible savages who all deserve to be murdered by Roman military power. What utter shite. The natives look a lot healthier than the Scottish punks I’ve seen in Edinburgh when I go to gigs there. I expect less Irn Bru and a healthy outdoor life would have done them a lot of good. There is no stupid stuff in the book about the ignorant, thick natives not having horses or the death rattle of a militarist who wants one more last stand because he didn’t get killed last time.

Hollywood takes a great anti-militarist book (but with all the excitement of militarism - not to mention swords and sandals) and turns it into an exercise in dumb, male-bonding cretinism: a recruiting video for the most moronic and ignorant cannon fodder that America can produce amongst its educationally deprived ●

Will Mahan

What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
- All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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# weekly Worker

## May 5 elections

# Vote working class anti-cuts

**W**ith just a week to go before polling day, it is worth restating the position of the CPGB. As *Weekly Worker* readers will know, on May 5 there will be council elections across England (apart from in London), while in Scotland and Wales voters will be choosing a new parliament and assembly respectively. On the same day the referendum on the alternative vote system will be held.

When it comes to the elections, we are recommending the same tactic everywhere: put simply, vote only for working class anti-cuts candidates. By 'working class' we mean candidates standing for organisations (or individuals) that clearly belong to the working class movement, including, of course, the Labour Party; by 'anti-cuts' we mean those who will commit themselves not just to speaking out against all cutbacks directed at jobs, conditions and services, but to vote against them too if elected. It is evident that the government's 'austerity' assault is the key question facing our movement right now and this recommendation is intended to draw a clear line between those who are on the right side and those who are not.

In relation to the local elections following this advice should be a pretty straightforward matter - if, that is, you happen to live in one of the tiny number of council wards where a working class anti-cuts candidate is standing. They are of course, so few and far between that it would be astounding if there were more than one contesting the same seat.

I have heard of a small number of Labour candidates who say they will vote against all cuts, and no doubt there will be more, but I do not expect their total to reach even three figures. We need in particular to ensure that such Labour candidates receive the full support of all working class partisans. Apart from them, most of the supportable candidates will be representing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - usually standing as Trade Unionists and Socialists Against the Cuts.

There are 154 candidates standing as Tusc, for 53 different councils. A couple of dozen are members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which is also standing 18 candidates as Socialist Alternative in Coventry. Dave Nellist is one of them - he is attempting to retain the seat he has held since 1998 - and these comrades also fall under the Tusc umbrella despite deciding to retain the electoral name many voters have become accustomed to in the city. The same applies to the eight candidates of the Democratic Labour Party in Walsall, so, all told, there are 180 candidates linked to Tusc.

While SPEW makes up the biggest single bloc of Tusc candidates, there are also supporters of other groupings - most notably the Socialist Workers Party, which has six. Two are sitting councillors: Michael Lavalette (Preston, Town Centre) and Ray Holmes (Bolsover, Shirebrook North West). Comrade Lavalette was first elected eight years ago as Socialist Alliance, then re-elected as Respect and subsequently changed his designation to 'Independent Socialist'. This time

he is 'Independent Socialist Against the Cuts'. Comrade Holmes was another who was previously elected as Respect - before he joined the SWP. Strangely his official party designation remains 'Respect - People Not Profit', according to the council website,<sup>1</sup> but this time around he is standing as Trade Unionists and Socialists Against the Cuts.

As far as I know, there are only two other groupings standing for any council in England. The first is the Socialist Equality Party, which is putting up one candidate in Sheffield and one in Manchester (the SEP's parent and rival in the ultra-sectarian stakes, the Workers Revolutionary Party, does not seem to be contesting this time). The second is Unity for Peace and Socialism, which has council candidates in Leicester (two have agreed a "common platform" with Tusc, according to the latter's website<sup>2</sup>).

UPS is a strange grouping of overseas 'official communists' (mainly from India) "domiciled in the UK" and allied to the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain. In Leicester, UPS's Mohinder Farma is standing for mayor. According to the *Star*, he thinks that "Cuba's socialist model should be seen as a blueprint for how the city's public services are run".<sup>3</sup> Well, good luck with that one, Mohinder. However, comrade Farma also says: "No services will be cut on my watch and instead I'd increase public spending on services in Leicester".

It has to be said that none of the above organisations has any prospect of substantially advancing the cause of the working class either organisationally or politically. Not even Tusc - SPEW's electoral vehicle in its forlorn drive to create a Labour Party mark two - has any legs: not just the RMT union, but Bob Crow himself seems to have lost interest in it, while the SWP is currently using it as an electoral front of convenience. Nevertheless, the larger the vote for *all* working class anti-cuts candidates - irrespective of their rightism, opportunism, sectarianism, etc - the

greater the possibility of instilling *politics* into the working class fightback and thus allowing the space to debate what those politics should be.

## Scotland and Wales

While in the English council elections the main problem will be finding a candidate to vote for, north of the border no fewer than three left groups are contesting all eight regions under the under proportional-representation party-list system.

This means that every voter in Scotland will be able to choose between three working class anti-cuts slates vying for the 56 additional-member seats to supplement those elected under 'first past the post' for the 73 constituencies. The three groups are: the rump Scottish Socialist Party, still campaigning for "socialism and independence"; the SSP breakaway, Solidarity, led by jailed former icon Tommy Sheridan; and what remains of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which only resurfaces nowadays to contest major elections.

A slight correction: Solidarity is only contesting seven of the eight regions: in the eighth - Glasgow - it is supporting the 'George Galloway (Respect) Coalition Against Cuts', which also has the backing of the Socialist Party Scotland and the SWP (and Chris Bambery's recent split from it, the International Socialist Group).

The elections to the Welsh assembly are contested using the same system - 'first past the post' plus party-list top-up - as in Scotland and here the SLP is opposed in all five regions by slates put forward by the CPB (which is also contesting one constituency seat in Scotland - Glasgow Anniesland, where Marc Livingstone is the candidate).

Voters in Scotland and Wales may be spoilt for choice, but that choice is hardly an appetising one. Clearly the SSP, Solidarity, the CPB and the SLP are all organisations that are well past their sell-by date. In the absence of any Labour Party anti-cuts regional slates (and, I assume, any Labour anti-cuts FPTP candidates), we say,

vote for whichever of the rival anti-cuts slates you find least repulsive. We can, however, give one (almost) positive recommendation, I think. In Glasgow the Coalition Against Cuts list marks a slight advance over both the SSP and Solidarity, in that it does not include the left nationalist call for an "independent socialist Scotland" in its platform. That is because George Galloway - who heads the list and actually stands a chance of getting elected - opposes the call (in reality he is a left *British* nationalist).

However, there can be no doubt that the election of comrade Galloway - as an undoubted anti-imperialist and opponent of the cuts consensus - would represent a step forward. Let us hope, if he is elected, his victory speech will include the announcement that he has decided to end his shameful role for the Iran-sponsored Press TV, where he acts - in the name of some perverted anti-imperialism - as a disgraceful apologist for the reactionary Islamic Republic regime of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

## Referendum

Also on May 5 voters everywhere will be able to vote for or against the proposal to change the system of electing a government. Virtually alone on the left, the CPGB is recommending a 'yes' vote in favour of AV.

Not that we think AV is much of an advance: it is not. We are for full PR based on the party list system with no minimum threshold for election. Nevertheless, there would be two clear advantages in a 'yes' victory. First, a change of voting system will demonstrate that there is nothing sacrosanct about the current UK electoral procedure. Secondly, it will allow the genuine preferences for parties marginalised by the current political system to be reflected in recorded votes. Because casting a first preference for a 'no hope' candidate is unlikely to cost a voter's second favourite victory, such first preferences under AV are much more likely to register a smaller party's actual support than is the case with votes cast for it under FPTP.

These would be small gains, it is true, but that is no reason to reject them simply because they are not PR. That is, in effect, the position of the SWP, SPEW, CPB, etc, but it overlooks the fact that a 'no' vote will actually be acclaimed as a vote of confidence in FPTP.

There are also those who, because they have no faith in the democratic power of the working class majority, prefer to trust in quick fixes to produce social advance. So, for instance, Owen Jones of the Labour Representation Committee, writes on his blog: "... I'll be completely honest: I oppose a change in electoral system because it will make a leftwing Labour government less likely; it will make undemocratic coalitions with the Liberal Democrats more likely; and it will make Tory-led governments more likely."<sup>4</sup>

Since we are for the rule of the majority, we have no interest in futile attempts to sneak in progressive measures through undemocratic means, such as comrade Jones seems to have in mind: a left Labour government supported by, say, 40% of voters, but returned with a parliamentary majority, thanks to FPTP. We are for representative bodies accurately reflecting society's contending political views - both under the current capitalist order and in the future socialist society. That is why we demand a voting system based on genuine proportional representation

Comrade Jones's disdain for democracy leads him to dismiss the referendum as "an unwelcome distraction from fighting an aggressively rightwing government determined to take the Thatcherite project to its logical conclusion". When will the left understand that fighting for the working class and fighting for democracy are one and the same struggle? ●

Peter Manson

## Notes

1. [www.bolsover.gov.uk/councillors/387.html](http://www.bolsover.gov.uk/councillors/387.html).
2. [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk).
3. *Morning Star* April 16-17.
4. <http://owenjones.org/2011/04/20/why-im-voting-no-to-av/#more-1112>.

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