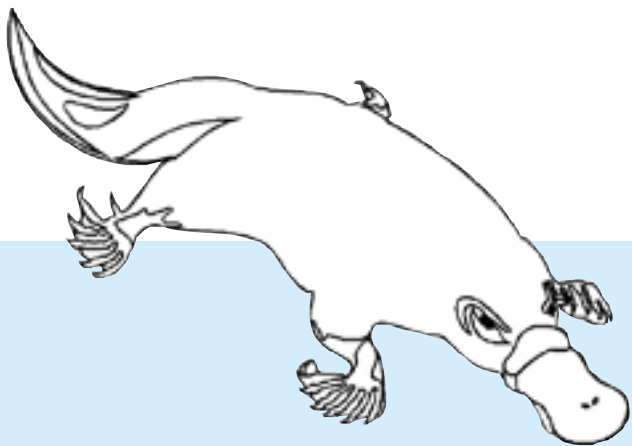


weekly **worker**



No need for a party? Mike Macnair reports from the US Platypus convention

- Labour makes gains
- Non-Labour left
- Lib Dem slump
- CPGB aggregate

No 865 Thursday May 12 2011

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CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS BECKONS

LETTERS



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

Both wrong

The exchange between James Turley and Arthur Bough on Libya ('No united front with Gaddafi', April 7; Letters April 14, 21 and 28) contains errors on both sides regarding the Comintern's and Trotsky's position.

James's error is the smaller. He identifies the anti-imperialist united front (in the sense of advocacy of the victory of nationalists against imperialism) as a line of Trotskyism derived from Trotsky's writings in the 1930s. It is, in fact, a line of the early Comintern and is shared by Maoists and other anti-revisionists and episodically by 'official' communists.

Arthur denies that Trotsky or the early Comintern held the position of the 'anti-imperialist united front' with nationalists. The record is unequivocally against him (Fourth Congress *Theses on the eastern question*, point 6: 'The anti-imperialist united front').

It is perfectly clear that the line defended by the Comintern was more than Arthur's attempt to explicate it as a matter of either exposure or tactical agreements in action.

Second Congress *21 conditions*, point 8: "Any party wishing to join the Third International ... must support - in deed, not merely in word - every colonial liberation movement" (www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch07.htm#v1-p303); and *Theses on the national and colonial question*, point 11a: "All communist parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form the support should take must be discussed with the communist party of the country in question, should such a party exist. This obligation to offer active assistance affects in the first place the workers of those countries on which the backward countries are in a position of colonial or financial dependence" (www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch05.htm#v1-p177; emphasis added).

Fourth Congress *Theses on the eastern question*, point 2: "The Communist International, though well aware that in different historical circumstances fighters for national political independence can be very different kinds of people, gives its support to any national revolutionary movement against imperialism".

On Trotsky's later writing I have assembled in *Revolutionary strategy* (London 2008, pp78-84) more references than either James or Arthur uses on the issue of supporting colonies and semi-colonies in wars. Arthur's account muddles two different issues: Trotsky's line in the 1920s (urban CP and the KMT's struggle with warlords) and his line in the 1930s (small Trotskyist groups, the CP having withdrawn into the countryside, and Japanese invasion).

Add the *Transitional programme* (1938), 'The struggle against imperialism and war' section: "Some of the colonial or semi-colonial countries will undoubtedly attempt to utilise the war in order to ease off the yoke of slavery. Their war will be not imperialist, but liberating. It will be the duty of the international proletariat to aid the oppressed countries in their war against oppressors" (emphasis added; www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text.htm#iw).

I offer a criticism of this line in the passage of *Revolutionary strategy* just cited and have also done so in my 2004 series on imperialism (with criticisms and a response *Weekly Worker* July 29-September 23 2004). What it boils

down to is that the course of the 20th century provides unequivocal proof that the line of the 'anti-imperialist united front' and its derivatives are false: the victory of the nationalists over the imperialists produces at best Stalinism, more usually merely a new form of semi-colonial tyranny, not an advance for the working class. To defend the 'anti-imperialist united front' in the 21st century is like defending creationism, Ptolemaic astronomy or the theory of phlogiston.

Communists have reasons to fight against imperialism and to defeat it in imperialist wars. These reasons do not include wishing for the victory of the nationalists (or Islamists or whatever).

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Nonsense

James Turley ('Fighting Stalinism politically', May 5), criticises Paul B Smith for wanting to go back to *Capital*. Apparently, Marx studied a lot and wrote many things, but everything boils down "to a single proposition: the working class needs to organise itself collectively to politically expropriate the bourgeoisie".

Why the disdain for studying *Capital*, when it is generally acknowledged among Marxists of all shades that it provides a scientific basis for understanding the capitalist mode of production and the possibility for socialism to emerge based on real material processes rather than a utopia spun from someone's imagination?

Marx's work forms an integral whole, a doctrine of human liberation. Comrade Turley thinks Marx had less to say about philosophy in the later years. I suggest that dialectics are demonstrated in *Capital*. He thinks it does not matter much whose interpretation of dialectical materialism is used, so I am tempted to ask if it would have mattered much to him if Marx had muddled up dialectics and never explained surplus value. After all, it could be said that the revolutionary potential of the working class holds good, regardless of what Marx wrote in *Capital*. It seems he is mainly interested in the political conclusion, not the reasoning behind it. Hence the name-dropping ramble through the groves of academe.

Turley goes on to tell us that Stalinism was not all bad and should not be rejected *in toto*. However, the nearest we get to hearing about the good bits is to be told that Stalinism did not succeed in killing off Marxism entirely. Could not the same be said of the Nazi movement? In fact, the Stalinist bureaucracy could not finish the job and kept printing the books, despite killing most of the actual Marxists, because it rested on the Russian Revolution and needed the legitimacy of the Bolshevik tradition. This did not prevent the bastardisation of Marxism in the shape of Soviet ideology and of the whole trajectory of Stalinist movements around the world.

He acknowledges the many crimes and betrayals committed by Stalinism. He could hardly deny them, but spreads the blame a bit by accusing Trotskyists of popular frontism and other sins. This is true only to the extent that Trotskyists (and mainly ex-Trotskyists at that) adapted to the dominance of Stalinism over the workers' movement in the post-war period.

If the CPGB wishes to present itself as a revolutionary Marxist tendency, it should drop the nonsense about being in a line of descent from the party that died politically in the 1920s.

Mike Martin
Sheffield

Stalin problem?

I am a 40-year-old Russian scientist working at the Keldysh Institute of

Applied Mathematics. My father is a physicist and has been a Communist Party member all of his life.

I wonder very much what is wrong with Stalin? I can understand some old people in Russia because they remember Stalin's terror. I can understand our local Russian anti-communists, many of whom are intellectuals, because of their faith. I can understand the modern Russian authorities, because they are criminals and capitalist thieves. But what is the buzz with Stalin to foreign communists? I read your paper and I hardly understand what all this is about.

Stalin was the Soviet leader who managed the USSR in the 1930s and provided something like six-fold growth in the Soviet economy in the first three five-year plans before World War II. Stalin definitely oppressed opposition and was responsible for about 700,000 to 800,000 death sentences.

Please note that I speak in exact terms, because I am highly interested in Soviet history, not other ciphers which are not confirmed. We have done a great deal of work here in Russia to get objective and exact knowledge of the scale of Stalin's terror. Yes, it was a bloody terror, but, as we understand now, most of that was not a direct aim of Stalin's. It was a complex civil war, not just one man's orders.

My question is, how can one remove this terror from its historical context? The historical context is that Russia could have been wiped off the world map by Hitler or someone else. World War II itself was produced not by German Nazis alone, but by western capitalism as a system. Stalin's achievement was Russia surviving this west-made war. Moreover, it was Stalin's USSR which saved the world from fascism. The Soviet army defeated 75% of all German troops in World War II.

I try to understand what western people can accuse Stalin of. Say the USSR attacked Finland in 1939 and so all people in the west, regardless of their political outlook. Yes, a bad war. But from a Russian perspective the USSR has to attack Finland to get territory to defend Leningrad in a future war. This is not specifically Stalin's war - it was a war of generic Russia. So maybe it is not Stalin, but Russia itself which is criminal for the west? But rational people should estimate all sides, not just one. Russia defeated Hitler and saved the whole world. If Hitler's plan to occupy Switzerland did exist, and he was ready to launch it, it was the battle of Stalingrad which stopped it.

As for Katyn, I know no genuine facts which lead us to accuse the USSR instead of Hitler. And we lost 600,000 soldiers in Poland in order to free it. What about overall balance?

It is alleged that Stalin killed Trotsky. Yes, in 1940, not earlier. The Spanish civil war showed that Trotskyists could act in collaboration with German Nazis. Trotsky, due to his large influence in the domain of the western left, was a huge threat to the USSR.

It is said that we had no democracy in Stalin's USSR. How can a democratic country get ready for such a war - the most terrible war any country has ever had to face in history? We have never had democracy in Russia.

So could you explain me what is so very wrong with Stalin?

Pavel Kurakin
email

Conspiracy

Harley Filben's article makes some very good points, including, very importantly, that the US originally supported jihadist forces in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia

('Bloody end of US-created monster', May 5).

The web page <http://cryptome.org/shayler-gaddafi.htm> contains an official document proving that MI6 funded associates of Osama bin Laden to assassinate colonel Gaddafi, as exposed by MI5 whistleblower David Shayler (leading to him twice going to jail when he came back to Britain, after going on the run with fellow ex-MI5 officer Annie Machon). The plot failed and innocent bystanders died.

What I take exception to in Harley's article, however, is his dismissal of 9/11 conspiracy theories. He correctly points out that some rightwingers have ridiculously tried to blame Jews, and George W Bush clearly wasn't clever enough to be responsible either. However, the US secret service, based in the third tower that collapsed despite not being hit by a plane, was almost certainly responsible for planning the atrocity. The BBC2 *Conspiracy files* programme on the third tower can be viewed on YouTube. Only four steel-reinforced towers in history have collapsed (supposedly) due to fire - the three World Trade Center towers on 9/11 each in about 20 seconds and a later Madrid fire in about 20 hours (and still not collapsing completely). The *Conspiracy files* programme points out the most likely cause - explosions from below using nano-thermite.

A lot of evidence is also supplied in the 'Loose change' videos, also viewable at YouTube, including clear photographic evidence of an explosion in a window below where the tower was collapsing.

The danger when discussing 9/11 conspiracy theories is that the main protagonists of such theories in the USA are rightwing - so-called 'libertarians' - due to the weakness of the left in that country. But that should not stop us from examining and revealing the truth.

The point of 9/11, as expressed in a Project for a New American Century document proclaiming the need for "a new Pearl Harbour", was dividing Muslims from Christians, Jews and Hindus in particular, and non-believers. There is a need for religious and non-religious people of conscience to unite together against our common enemies - world imperialism and its ally, Islamic 'extremism'.

Juno Zenetti

Jewish/Islamic Revolutionary Front

Double dealing

Pakistan can be called a Muslim state, where all institutions are determined by religion. Everything - their parliament, their legal organisations, society. Apart from some Marxist-Leninist Maoist parties, and pure socialist parties which don't have much influence over the Pakistani common people, all the others are driven by Muslim religious influence. They may say they are the common people's friend - they may even say they are socialist.

Naturally such a religious framework allows space within the state for staunch Muslim fundamentalist organisations like al Qa'eda. The religious state and the fundamentalist organisations feed off each other. But all this is a barrier to US imperialism. It prevents the development of a healthy capitalist market and control over Pakistani politics. These barriers also obstruct the US in its attempts to get its bloody hands on China.

That is why US imperialism wants to destroy these fundamentalist organisations, labelling them terrorists. A non-Muslim Pakistan would result in a completely American-dominated Pakistan - exactly what we saw in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places. But we must recall also that there was a time when the US funded these fundamentalist organisations to control other countries in the region. Double

dealing!

Because the US doubted Pakistan's intention to counter the fundamentalists it ignored the Pakistani army and killed bin Laden. Pakistan is no more a sovereign state.

Sanjib Sinha
Kolkata

Not right

I am writing with regard to an article by Dave Vincent on the PCS union, 'Can the left win over the members?' (May 5). Contrary to Dave's classification of myself as being on the right, I am a libertarian socialist (see my NEC election statement in 2010, where I quoted Rosa Luxembourg.)

Dave is misinformed about my influence in my branch. However, the Burma and the Cuba motions he was referring to were indeed drafted by myself. There is nothing mischievous about the motion to affiliate to the Burma Campaign UK. I have supported human rights issues and Amnesty International for over three decades and I am scheduled to go as part of an Amnesty International North East delegation to the European parliament in October to lobby on issues of human rights. The motion makes particular reference to the fact that Burma is a slave labour state. Is that not an issue for trade unionists? Dave, please do not let prejudice get in the way of solidarity.

If you go to www.4themembers.org.uk/manifesto.html, you will find 4themembers unequivocally in support of human rights. I doubt you could say the same about some of our opponents.

The Cuba motion referring to the complete uselessness of the official Cuban labour organisation, falsely classified by misinformed people as a trade union, should deserve the support of Dave and all other true trade unionists. Real trade unionists, supported by the International Trade Union Conference, have often had to spend time in Cuban prisons.

I am an internationalist. Unlike those on the pseudo-left who claim to be internationalists, I believe that it is fundamentally wrong for trade unions to affiliate to organisations that are in 'solidarity' with police-state governments, rather than people or workers. As a trade unionist I have always felt offended by the affiliations of both the TUC and major TUC unions to an organisation, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, that has no problem with people being arrested for daring to set up any political party not permitted in a one-party state.

Ever since my first national conference, I have also been offended by the fact that PCS allowed the Cuba Solidarity Campaign to run the social on the Thursday night. The free rum is not free. It comes from the Cuban embassy. A bottle of Havana Club seven years old sold in Britain costs more than a Cuban worker earns in a month. Sold in Cuba, it costs almost a monthly salary.

I also notice an interview published in the *Weekly Worker* with Circles Robinson, the editor of www.havantimes.org ('More glasnost, less perestroika', January 13). I have occasionally commented on their website. It is the best source of information on Cuba with a variety of opinions.

Going back to 4themembers, we are a group of trade unionists with very individual views, who share one goal: not to be bulldozed by a minority claiming to have the right to represent the majority. Clearly, there are many in 4themembers who do not see themselves as socialists. I much prefer their company to those police-state socialist friends of Fidel Castro, a guy who cannot seem to see the irony when he claims that the North Korean monarchy is a socialist country.

Hubert Gieschen
email

MAY 5

Build on growing anti-cuts mood

Militant oponents of the Con-Dem cuts are few and far between. **Peter Manson** takes a looks around the country

The recovery of the Labour vote, witnessed on May 5, was hardly surprising. Labour won the biggest share of the vote in the English council elections and gained control of 26 local authorities.

Of course, it was primarily in the towns and cities, particularly in the north, where the working class's opposition to the coalition government's austerity drive is starting to be felt, and this is reflected in increased support for its traditional party. The same process was seen in the elections to the Welsh assembly, where Labour was just one seat short of an overall majority, although in Scotland this opposition has for the moment resulted in a turn to the Scottish National Party.

It goes without saying that the hundreds of new Labour councillors are mainly on the right of the party. The influx of new members has not yet resulted in any discernible loosening of the right's grip. Nevertheless, there are signs that the anti-cuts mood is beginning to be reflected both in the noises coming from the Labour establishment and in the emergence of more leftwing candidates.

Perhaps the most obvious example is a certain Keir Morrison, who made the news on election day by wearing a T-shirt with the slogan, "A generation of trade unionists will dance on Thatcher's grave", much to the later regret of Labour leader Ed Miliband. That was a sentiment that millions of older workers will approve of and, far from being punished for his 'extremism', comrade Morrison, together with a number of other left-inclined candidates, were returned in Ashfield in Nottinghamshire. Their local website describes Labour as a "party that cares about the people, putting people's needs before profit and greed". By contrast the "Con-Dems ... put profit before people: ie, selling off care homes for the elderly, cutting back on police and fire crews, chopping billions out of the NHS budget and opening it up to privatisation How do they sleep at night?"¹ Ashfield was one council where Labour won control on May 5.

Another was Calderdale in West Yorkshire. There successful candidate Dave Young stated before polling day: "... if elected I will fight to save our public services from the relentless attacks of Cameron and Clegg. The economic situation we are facing, thanks to the policies of this Con-Dem government, is one of real hardship and anxiety, as thousands of jobs disappear and major cuts to frontline services are implemented right across the board."²

Other Labour candidates made similar comments,

although clearly such statements will not necessarily translate into a refusal to implement the cuts. For example, in Blackpool, where the Tories were swept out of office last week in a big swing to Labour, the new leader of the council, Simon Blackburn, has built up a leftwing reputation of late, along with a number of his fellow councillors.

However, last year, when he was asked in an interview about how he would deal with the cuts if elected, he replied: "Government (local or national) is about making choices. These choices will become more difficult over the next few years, but if the council and the government bear in mind the needs of the people, when making these choices, they won't go far wrong."³ Not exactly inspiring. Earlier that year, when asked by the BBC about the £7.2 million Tory budget reductions in Blackpool in 2010-11, and the possibility of redundancies, he responded: "There is no need at the present time to do that." However, "In future years I do not doubt that we will need to make difficult and sometimes painful decisions."⁴

Evidently we must be on our guard. On the other hand, the like of Elaine Smith MSP should be encouraged in their apparent firm commitment to oppose the cuts. Bucking the trend in Scotland, she was re-elected with an increased share of the poll in Coatbridge and Chryston.

Before the election she wrote on her website: "The Tory cuts are a vicious attack on ordinary working people. They will hurt all of us, the poorest and most vulnerable most of all. They are based on ideology, not on need - the only sensible way to cut the deficit is to put people back to work. I

am proud to support the People's Charter which offers an alternative to cuts and I urge other MSPs and those who seek to be MSPs to sign up."⁵

On March 3, comrade Smith, who is actually vice-convenor of the Communist Party of Britain-inspired People's Charter, had proposed a motion in the Scottish parliament in support of the Scottish TUC's There is a Better Way campaign. She said:

"Cuts are not inevitable or necessary. Britain had a higher deficit in 1945, when the welfare state was introduced. The cuts agenda is simply an excuse to undermine the very fabric of that welfare state The deficit, which can be paid off over many years, is due to the recession and the greed of bankers. It is not the fault of public services or public sector workers, so why should they pay with wage freezes?"

Revealingly, Jim Mather, the Scottish National Party's outgoing minister for enterprise, said during the Holyrood debate: "The Scottish government has long recognised the convergence of interests and is committed to working closely with the STUC." He even went so far as to say: "We are starting to see people in other countries beginning to question how the modern capitalist system works. We must nurture that approach in Scotland."⁶

Perhaps comments like these demonstrate why the SNP nationalists are viewed by many north of the border as a progressive, leftwing force. But he went on to remind MSPs: "We have always argued that the spending cuts are too far, too fast."

Unfortunately that is still the dominant sentiment within the Labour Party too. We need to do all we can to encourage the minority of Labour representatives who have demonstrated their opposition to *all* cuts ●

Notes

1. <http://hucknalllabourparty.org/Ashfield-District-council-elections-MAY-2011>.
2. www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/news/2011/058.html.
3. <http://blackpoolaloud.org.uk/2010/06/14/exclusive-interview-simon-blackburn-blackpool-labour-group>.
4. http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/lancashire/hi/people_and_places/newsid_8542000/8542515.stm.
5. www.elaine-smith.co.uk/index.php?section=press&id=313.
6. www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/business/orsearch/ReportView.aspx?r=6150&mode=html.

Ed Miliband: no dancing on Thatcher's grave

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

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

May 17: 'Intermediate lunarchy: the trickster moon'. Speaker: Camilla Power.

End the siege

Saturday May 14, 12 noon: Protest, opposite Downing Street, Whitehall, London SW1. 'End the siege on Gaza - free Palestine'. Speakers include Andy Slaughter MP, Caroline Lucas MP. Called by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War Coalition, British Muslim Initiative, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Palestinian Forum in Britain: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Levellers day

Saturday May 14: Festival, Burford, Oxfordshire. Speakers include: Paul Mason (BBC *Newsnight*), Billy Hayes (CWU). Kate Douglas (Oxford and District Trade Union Council). Performers include: Alun Parry, Ann Lister and Trev Williams. Tickets: £12/£8, whole day; £7.50/£5, after 1pm; under-14s free.

Organised by the Levellers Day Committee: www.levellers.org.uk.

Organising socialist youth

Saturday May 14, 1pm: Meeting, High Street Social Club, Blyth, to discuss the establishment of a new socialist youth organisation. Speaker: Steve Brown (Northern Region Labour Representation Committee) on 'What is capitalism? What is socialism?' Organised by northern region LRC: northern.region.lrc@wilkobro.wanadoo.co.uk.

Solidarity with the Intifada

Sunday May 15, 12 noon: Protest, outside Israeli embassy, 2 Palace Green, London W8. Show solidarity with the third Palestinian Intifada.

Called by Equality Movement: theequalitymovement@gmail.com.

Stop the bombing

Monday May 16, 5pm: Demonstration, Downing Street, London SW1. Protest on the day parliament debates Libya.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk.

Burma - where next?

Monday May 16, 6pm: Seminar, Collingwood Suite, Newcastle Civic Centre. Labour rights, the position of trade unions/activists in Burma and the role of UK trade unions.

Organised by Amnesty International Newcastle Upon Tyne group and Unison northern region, with support from Northern TUC. Further information and registration: mick.namhoi@yahoo.co.uk.

March to save the NHS

Tuesday May 17, 5.30pm: March to Whitehall. Assemble UCH, Gower Street, London SW1.

Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: www.keeppournhspublic.com.

Dale Farm info-night

Wednesday May 18, 7.30pm: Info and music, Ratstars, 298 Camberwell Road, London SE5. Defend the people of Dale Farm from eviction from their own land.

Organised by Ratstars and Dale Farm Solidarity Network: ratstarcentre@gmail.com.

Dialectical passions

Wednesday May 18, 5pm: Seminar, K3.11, Raked lecture theatre, Strand Campus, King's College, London. 'Dialectical passions: art theory, art history and Marxism'. Speaker: Gail Day (University of Leeds).

For further information contact: alex.callinicos@kcl.ac.uk.

Lambeth SOS

Saturday May 21, 12 noon: Lambeth People's Assembly, Lambeth Town Hall, Acre Lane, London SW2. Both a festival of resistance and an organising point to exchange experience and plan for action. Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Gill George (Unite), Ruth Cashman (Unison), UK Uncut, Smiley Culture campaign and tenants, pensioner and disability groups. Entertainment, poster and banner making for kids, local campaign stalls and much more.

Organised by Lambeth SOS: lambethsaveourservices@gmail.com.

Beyond borders

Saturday May 21, 11.30am to 6.30pm: Day school, Easton Community Centre, Kilburn Street, Bristol BS5. Against migration controls. Speakers: Bridget Anderson (Justice For Domestic Migrant Workers, Oxford University); 'Why no borders?'; Clara Osagiede (RMT cleaners rep, Living Wage campaign); 'Migrant worker struggle'; Ann Singleton (Statewatch); 'The changing meaning of borders in the EU'. £5 suggested donation (free to asylum-seekers, refugees, unemployed). Lunch available.

Organised by Bristol No Borders: bristolnoborders@riseup.net.

Confronting anti-Muslim hatred

Saturday May 21, 11am to 6pm: Conference, London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel Road, London E1. Speakers include: Muslim activists from Germany and France; Tony Benn, Mehdi Hassan, Salma Yaqoob, Daud Abdullah, Liz Fekete, Lindsey German and Lowkey. Admission free, but booking advisable.

Organised by Enough Coalition: www.enoughcoalition.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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SCOTLAND

Constitutional crisis beckons

Labour's defeat at the hands of the SNP is hardly a cause for celebration, argues Sarah McDonald

While the May 5 elections across Britain saw an overwhelming rejection of a change in the electoral system, the results in Scotland most certainly open up the possibility of a substantial change to the constitutional status quo. Electoral reform: no; constitutional reform: perhaps.

While Labour made gains in local council elections in England and secured 50% of Welsh assembly seats, it met with a humiliating defeat in the Scottish parliamentary election. The Scottish National Party won a landslide victory (though largely making their gains on the back of the collapsed Liberal Democrat vote), even though one of the arguments against any form of proportional representation is that it makes a clear-cut majority less likely.

Yet, as readers will know, the SNP won the first ever outright majority in the Scottish parliament since its creation in 1999, with a total of 69 seats. Labour won 37, the Conservatives 15, Liberal Democrats five, Greens two, with Margo MacDonald remaining as the sole independent candidate.

The SNP had failed to mount a real challenge in the Scottish parliament until 2007, when resentment against the unpopular, Blair-led Westminster government saw it reap the benefits as the largest party, forming a minority government for the last four years. Its outright victory this time around can be put down to various factors. First Nick Clegg's capitulation in Westminster led to the virtual wipe-out of the Lib Dems in Scotland. Secondly the SNP won seats from Labour across Scotland's cities (including traditional Labour strongholds such as Glasgow Anniesland, former first minister Donald Dewar's old seat). In part these gains may be down to the SNP trying to present itself as an anti-cuts party (which it clearly is not). But it completely controls the North East, including Aberdeen and Dundee, and holds a majority of seats in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Thirdly a large section of the media, ranging from the *Scottish Sun* to the *Scotsman*, backed the SNP to one degree or another - in the *Sun*'s case support for the nationalists sat incongruously alongside support for the Tories. Finally, in an election campaign that has been widely regarded as dull and uneventful, the SNP's Alex Salmond came across as by far the most charismatic, capable politician among the party leaders, greatly outshining Scottish Labour leader Ian Gray, whose most memorable media moment during the campaign came when he was chased by a small group of protesters into a Subway sandwich shop. Gray held onto his own seat by a mere 151 votes and promptly stepped down from the leadership.

Referendum

So what are the implications of this nationalist victory? It is certainly not something to be celebrated, as some on the Scottish left are doing. It is true that the SNP vote is often a protest vote - anti-Labour, anti-Lib Dem, anti-cuts. But, anti-cuts or not, it does not represent a move to the left, compared to Labour.

This result will push the call for a referendum on Scottish independence to the foreground of Scottish politics. Salmond has claimed the "moral right" to call such a referendum within the next five years - and indeed he must, otherwise his party will lose all credibility. Whatever Salmond's five-

year plan is, he will have to play this one very skilfully if he is to succeed in winning a vote for secession.

The SNP's triumph in no way equates to a vote for independence. Opinion polls still show that only 25%-35% of the population is in favour of separation. Ironically, many who vote SNP are actually opposed to independence - its very *raison d'être*. The Labour Party, in fact, changed tactics in the last week of its campaign to remind voters that the SNP does advocate independence.

If the SNP managed to hold a referendum - despite the obstacles that Westminster will erect - and lose, it will likely put the separatist movement back quite significantly. Salmond will perhaps try to win over support among the unconvinced by offering a third option on the ballot paper - for fiscal autonomy within the UK, with responsibility for the military and foreign affairs remaining with Westminster. He will obviously delay the referendum in order to buy some time, as he knows full well that he would not win support for independence in present circumstances. Whether conditions would be more favourable for him a few years from now remains to be seen.

Of course, Alex Salmond may well have the "moral right" (or - let us be little more political about it - the democratic mandate) to call a referendum, but he does not actually have the *constitutional* right to do so - that is the reserve of Westminster. Salmond has stated he want an "indicative referendum", where a 'yes' result would not legally sanction Scottish separation, but rather add weight to the demand for it. But this hardly displays confidence in the outcome.

David Cameron has said: "If they want to hold a referendum, I will fight to keep our United Kingdom together with every single fibre I have."

Presumably this means opposing the very idea of a referendum on the subject if there was a possibility of a 'yes'. Of course, the British state will seek to do everything it can to hold the union together. It would perhaps be in Cameron's best interests to insist on calling a referendum himself very soon. Not only are current indicators strongly against separation: he would be able to choose the phrasing of the question. A 'no' vote could put the establishment's Scottish headache onto the backburner for the foreseeable future.

We communists are also opposed to the idea of Scottish separation, but for very different reasons from David Cameron's unionism. We are for the greatest *voluntary* unity of the working class, rather than seeing it further divided on national lines. After all, to be successful we need to make revolution on a world scale; therefore we need to take power within the largest possible units, not the smallest (eg, we favour a united states of Europe, not fragmentation of the existing states) to avoid immediate defeat.

Self-determination

As communists we are consistent democrats. We believe that the people of Scotland should have the right to self-determination, up to and including the right to secede. But that is totally different from *advocating* separation. For some unfathomable reason there are some on the left who equate self-determination with independence.

The right to self-determination is a democratic demand. We would certainly support the Scottish people's *right* to a referendum on the question of independence, should the UK state attempt to bar it, while at the same time vehemently opposing separation. The call for a federal republic links the demand for republicanism with the democratic demand for self-determination, while at the same time

promoting the voluntary unity of the working class in Britain.

As readers will be aware, we have consistently fought for this position on the national question - a position which promotes the unity of the working class. Sadly, this is not the view of the Scottish left, which has embraced nationalism in varying degrees over the last 15 years or so. The Scottish Socialist Party is an organisation *defined* by nationalism, where Scottish independence has become central to all its work. Solidarity has a nationalist position on independence too, but to a greater or lesser extent depending on who it is you are talking to and what kind of mood they are in.

The Committee for a Workers' International has two 'affiliated parties' in Britain - the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and the Socialist Party Scotland. Chris Bamberg was able to pull away a substantial section of the Socialist Workers Party in Scotland to his International Socialist Group split, linked to the John Rees Counterfire grouping. These separate Scottish entities are symptomatic of the left's failure to properly address the national question - leading to outright nationalism on the one hand and directionless opportunism on the other.

This will doubtlessly lead to utter confusion, as Scotland faces the prospect of a referendum campaign. The SSP will, of course, not only support a referendum on independence, but agitate for a 'yes' vote - no great shock there, given that it is a left nationalist organisation. If Solidarity does not drop its own pro-independence position, it too will end up campaigning for a 'yes' vote. The Socialist Party Scotland has commented in its post-election analysis that a referendum is on the cards, but avoided offering a position on the matter.¹

Abysmal

The left's performance in the election

was as abysmal as expected. In an article on Counterfire's website Ben Wray quite correctly comments: "We have lost our roots within working class areas. Galloway's vote in the east of Glasgow (where youth unemployment is running at 50%) and Pollok were particularly weak." His solution, however, lacks vision. He argued: "The need for a Scotland-wide voice that argues the capitalists should pay the price for the crisis and that the solution is a bigger, not smaller, public sector is paramount."²

SPS, while calling on the unions to build a fightback and urging the working class to organise in local anti-cuts groups, is hardly offering a political and organisational lead. Better though than the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Essentially the AWL argued that the left vote might have been crap, but at least we can all take solace in the fact that George Galloway wasn't elected! (The AWL's contribution to the election campaign was to actively campaign against Galloway).³

Galloway was the best chance that the left had of getting someone elected, but his result was poor - his Coalition Against Cuts picked up a disappointing 3.5% of the list vote in Glasgow. Even if there had been no other left candidates standing against him and he had picked up the entire vote of the Socialist Labour Party (1.1%) and SSP (0.7%), he still would have been some way short of picking up the final proportional representation seat, which was won by the Tories with just over 6%. Elsewhere in Scotland the SSP and Solidarity proved they are completely finished, trailing far behind even the SLP. How long will it be before the likes of Alan McCombes find a comfortable home in the SNP? Entertainingly, the Socialist Equality Party failed to pick up a single vote in the West of Scotland region - presumably its candidate failed to persuade himself he was worth voting for.

What is needed is not a "Scotland-wide voice" to oppose cuts in public services. While the anti-cuts movement is a key area of work, it cannot provide a *political* alternative. What is needed is a Britain-wide party armed with a Marxist programme. The brief coming together of the sects at election time to offer uninspiring statements on the NHS and suchlike will not lead to electoral breakthroughs. It will continue to reap the same results as it has in the past few years: around one percent of the vote and little or no profile between elections, when comrades can go back to being SWP, CWI, etc (the vanguard in waiting).

Our advice - to vote for anti-cuts candidates of the workers' movement, both inside and outside the Labour Party - was correct, but it arises from the position of extreme weakness that our movement finds itself in. In the absence of a credible partyist project we called for support for working class anti-cuts candidates in order to agitate for independent working class politics in the election, while at the same time arguing for the need for a Communist Party across Britain ●

Notes

1. www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/news-analysis/scottish-politics/300-snp-landslide-but-it-will-be-a-government-of-savage-cuts.
2. www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/analysis/12184.
3. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/05/07/poor-showing-scottish-left.



MAY 5

Non-Labour left results



Infamy, infamy: no-hopers

The performance of the non-Labour left on May 5 was, to be frank, dismal.

Symptomatic of this was the fact that in the English council elections we saw the loss of three of the remaining non-Labour left councillors - Michael Lavalette in Preston, Ray Holmes in Bolsover and Peter Smith in Walsall. All three finished second to Labour despite winning more than 30% of the vote (comrade Lavalette picking up a fraction below 40% in fact) and all three were contesting this time under the Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts umbrella. Comrades Lavalette and Holmes are members of the Socialist Workers Party, while comrade Smith was the last of the 11 witch-hunted leftwing councillors expelled from Labour in 1999, the Walsall Democratic Labour Party.

In the end Tusc stood 174 candidates across England and the three above-named were among 13 who won over 10%, while 33 others scored more than 5%. Another who finished second with over 30% was Rob Windsor, standing for Socialist Alternative in Coventry St Michaels. Socialist Alternative is, of course, the electoral name of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the main driving force behind Tusc. And one of St Michaels' three seats is held by Dave Nellist, who is not up for re-election until next year. Perhaps that is fortunate, since comrade Windsor's Labour opponent gained almost double his votes.

Among others who scored reasonably were the SWP's Maxine

Bowler (14% in Sheffield) and Tom Woodcock (12% in Cambridge). Such results show that it is possible for far-left candidates to build up support through patient, hard work campaigning for workers in their locality. But that hardly amounts to a viable national strategy. SPEW, for example, was barely able to register in the rest of Coventry - its other Socialist Alternative candidates, contesting every ward across the city, averaged around 2%.

And that was par for the course for Tusc candidates - the great majority of whom struggled to rise above the votes recorded by eccentric independents. However, Nick Wrack of the Tusc steering committee describes the coalition's overall performance in the local elections as, on balance, a "good initial foray".¹ Comrade Wrack points out that Labour is "seen as a line of defence" against the Con-Dem cuts and that Tusc, which really is against the cuts, was virtually unknown everywhere. Nevertheless, he says, if a 2% return was registered in every constituency across England in a general election, that would translate into half a million votes. Not bad at all!

Come off it, Nick. Think of what it would require just to register a candidate in 550 parliamentary constituencies (the equivalent of several thousand council wards), let alone mount any sort of campaign. How could we do that? We could not. Not unless we first built a working class party - ie, an organisation that became part of the working class.

Which brings me to a second, very pertinent point. Why do "most voters

think Labour is opposed to cuts", to quote comrade Wrack? Because most voters are workers, many of whom consider Labour to be some kind of working class party. And with good reason. Trade union cash, trade union money and trade union votes all help ensure that Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party. That, together with the illusions that workers have in Labour and Labourism, will mean that the party will continue to keep the bulk of class-conscious votes. And, in turn, that means any attempt to build a Labour Party mark two - exactly what SPEW, the SWP and the likes of comrade Wrack have in mind - is doomed to failure. Not even the RMT union will support such an endeavour.

There are two lessons. Far from writing off Labour, Marxists must take it much more seriously as a site for struggle. Secondly, the battle to win Labour for the working class must go hand in hand with the battle to build the only formation that can lead our class to emancipation - a Marxist party, uniting all decent left groups, including those within the Labour Party.

Unfortunately, however, that is something most on the left refuse to countenance - at least at the moment. The SWP and SPEW may find themselves temporarily in the same electoral coalition, but they cannot even unite in a single anti-cuts campaign, let alone a single party.

Braggers

As a postscript, let me mention other left forces I know of that contested the council elections. First, there is

Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, whose website brags about its results in Wales and Scotland, where it contested every region in the assembly and parliament elections respectively. In Wales it gained 2.4% of the overall vote, easily outdistancing both Tusc (less than 0.5% in the two regions where it stood) and the *Morning*

Star's Communist Party of Britain (0.3% across the whole principality). Similarly in Scotland the SLP's 0.8% was far ahead of both the Scottish Socialist Party (0.4%) and Solidarity (0.1%). It won more votes than the SSP and Solidarity combined in every region.

But the SLP is strangely reticent to give details of its contests in England. It boasts of its candidate (a former mayor) having notched up 27.34% in Chester and claims good results in two wards on Merseyside - without giving any figures. And that is it. In reality the SLP no longer has any organisation to speak of anywhere. Scargill long since killed off his own party by driving out anyone who opposed him.

Yet thousands of workers, a tiny proportion, compared to those voting Labour, knowing nothing of his record as an ageing labour dictator, remember him as an intransigent fighter for our class during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. It was Scargill who ensured the candidate lists were drawn up and the deposits paid, thus earning the SLP a party political broadcast in both Scotland and Wales.

The SLP website, by the way, announces that "issue 2" of its paper, *Socialist News*, is "out now".² Funny, that. *Socialist News* was first published in 1997 and ran to a few dozen issues. So presumably this is a relaunch. But the website only reproduces its front cover and the title of the paper's articles. You don't expect to be allowed to read it without paying your £1, do you?

It is also worth mentioning the Socialist Equality Party, whose candidates in Sheffield and Manchester polled 1.8% and 3% respectively. One of them even "placed higher than the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition". No wonder the SEP considers that "This was a significant vote." But it does not say how "significant" its vote was in the entire West of Scotland region, where it scored ... precisely zero. Perhaps its failure to mention its 'campaign' in Scotland in its post-election report is understandable.³ ●

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Notes

1. www.tusc.org.uk/comment100511.php.
2. www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk.
3. www.wsws.org/articles/2011/may2011/elec-m07.shtml.

Fighting fund

Such a laugh

Last week saw an increase in our online readership, compared to the average. The 13,646 figure for people who read us via our website was over 1,000 up on what we usually get.

Unfortunately, though, those extra readers didn't seem to push up the number of donors - although I must thank comrades CM (£25), RP (£10) and EJ (£5) for making use of our PayPal facility. But I did receive a few contributions in the post, including from new subscriber JD, who threw in an extra fiver. The others were HJ (£25), FG (£30) and SA (£10).

FG sent us a covering note with his cheque: "I was really taken by the image on your front page last week. This is your reward for giving me such a laugh!"

Personally I can't see what's so amusing about Osama bin Laden ... Anyway, comrade, whatever makes you happy.

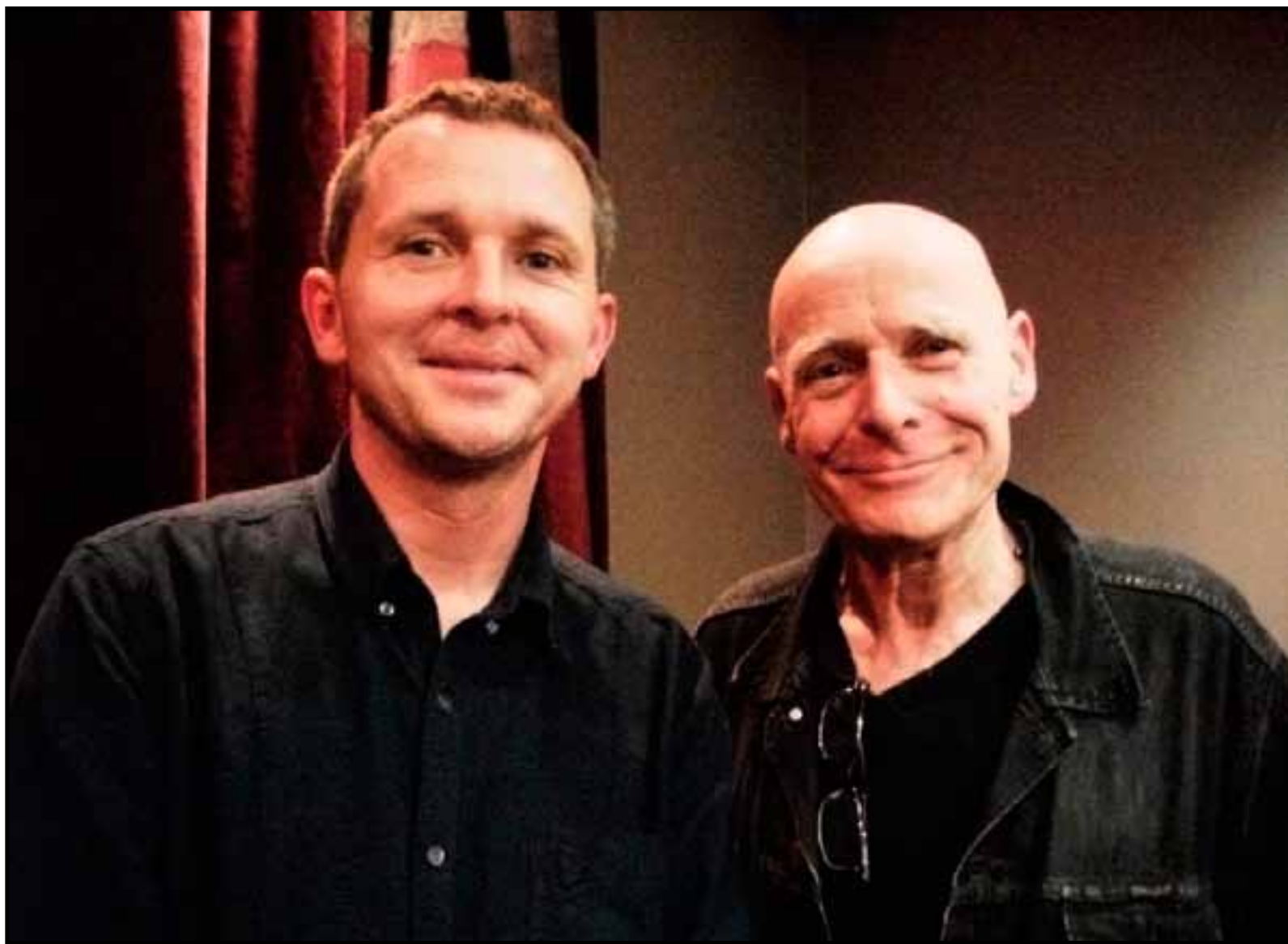
Not so many standing orders came my way last week, but thanks to SWS, RK, SM and JS for your regular gifts. However, the total for the week was definitely on the low side - just £150, taking our running total for May's fighting fund up to £431. But that's quite a bit down on where we need to be if we're going to achieve our £1,250 target.

Don't let us down, comrades.
Robbie Rix

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

NORTHERN IRELAND

Governing parties consolidate



SWP TD Richard Boyd Barrett and Eamonn McCann

The results of the Northern Ireland assembly elections showed a growth in support for the two main parties in the power-sharing coalition, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin.

This is despite the fact that they have been in government since 2005 and have overseen major cuts in services and jobs since then. The Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party expected a backlash, particularly against Sinn Féin. But the opposite happened. SF increased the number of its assembly members by one to 29 and the DUP by two to 38. The Alliance Party also increased its representatives by one: it now has eight members.

In contrast the old parties previously enjoying support from unionists and

nationalists respectively, the Ulster Unionist Party and Social Democratic and Labour Party, lost two seats each and seem destined to continue their decline. UUP leader Tom Elliott was intensely peeved at the results and in his speech at the Omagh count railed against the Sinn Féin "scum" present who waved "the flag of a foreign nation". The fact that so far he has refused to withdraw the remarks or apologise has further undermined his own party, which is beset by internal factions and rows.

The trend of unionist and nationalist voters coalescing behind the two dominant, most extreme, parties was also seen in the council elections, with both Sinn Féin and the DUP (as well as the Alliance Party) increasing their

councillors at the expense of the UUP and SDLP. There is no doubt that the politics of Northern Ireland continues to revolve around the national question and that the divisions between Catholics and Protestants remain as deep as ever. The SP and SWP dismiss this as the sectarianism of the old and instead try to forge unity on an anti-cuts basis. But now we have seen the government that has been imposing the cuts voted back in with an increased majority. Frankly, there is no way the working class can be united without positively addressing the national question.

In terms of the left vote, the SWP front, the People Before Profit Alliance, did better than the Socialist Party. The SP was formally to the left of the PBPA

in that it called for socialism. But the content of its immediate platform was largely the same. Eamonn McCann, well known for his history in the Derry civil rights movement, came very close to getting an assembly seat for the PBPA in Foyle. He received 3,120 first preferences (8.3%) - just 19 votes short of winning a seat.

But the left vote was split, particularly in Belfast. The SP, PBPA and the Workers Party stood against each other for the assembly in West and South Belfast. In West Belfast, a traditional republican stronghold, PDPA candidate Gerry Carroll got 1,661 (4.8%), SP candidate Pat Lawlor 384 votes (1.1%) and John Lowry of the WP 586 (1.7%) - ie, 7.8% in total. It is obvious that this pathetic split in

the vote was stupidity writ large - and yet here are two organisations talking about forming a joint party in the south. Elsewhere the left votes were much worse.

It was the same in the council elections. SP's candidate in Fermanagh, ex-Sinn Féin councillor Donal O'Cofaigh, received 248 votes (0.8%), while PBPA once again did a little better, its four candidates gaining 3.2% of the vote. In Belfast, however, it could only manage 0.4%, just behind the Irish Republican Socialist Party (0.4%). The IRSP declined to stand in the assembly elections and stood just five local council candidates. The SP got 0.5% in Belfast.

With the exception of the assembly votes in Derry and West Belfast, the left is practically insignificant at the present time. A major problem is the absence of unity. The United Left Alliance in the south, with all its limitations and unprincipled opportunism, has shown the possibilities by gaining five TDs in February's general election.

The ULA convention on June 25 is to discuss the possibility of forming a new party, including the SP and SWP, not just in the south, but throughout Ireland (the fact that they are still standing against each other in the north is an anomaly, to put it mildly). ULA TD Seamus Healy is particularly keen on an all-Ireland party and it is only right that this should be part of the debate at our first national gathering. That there was no mention of the national question in the general election manifesto indicates that this is a question both the SWP and the SP are keen to avoid. It is the elephant in the room. But this deeply controversial issue will not go away.

The creation of an all-Ireland party would be extremely positive, but it must be based on a democratic resolution of the national question. In my view that is a united Ireland with the right to self-determination of the Protestant majority in the north - in other words, a united, federal Ireland. All nationalism north and south must be fought and our working class must become the democratic class, fighting for the voluntary coming together of the people of the island and the immediate withdrawal of the British state. Unity with the British working class must also be fought for as part of this programme ●

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Wales

Labour rejects coalition

In stark contrast to the party's fortunes in Scotland, Labour did reasonably well in Wales. On a lower turnout compared to the last elections to the Senydd (42% compared to 43.5% in 2007), the party increased its overall share of the vote, gained four seats and secured 30 out of the total 60 seats available.

Clearly, Welsh Labour, which is marginally to the left of the party in Britain as a whole, has seen a return of its traditional voters. In the main this is due to the Con-Dem coalition government and its programme of savage cuts. The Liberal Democrats were seen as betraying their principles in order to get into government and have

been suitably punished. Their share of the vote slumped, though they only lost one seat, going from six to five AMs. Meanwhile, Labour's old coalition partner in Wales, Plaid Cymru, actually lost four seats. For the first time since the birth of the assembly in 1999, Plaid ended up behind the Tories, finishing third and thus making its claim to be the "party of Wales" seem a little thin.

As good as this might be for Welsh Labour, however, the failure to capture the 31st seat means that it is unable to form a majority administration in the Senydd. Nevertheless, Carwyn Jones, Labour's leader in Wales, announced that his party would

go ahead alone. At least to begin with - reportedly the door is being left open to Plaid and the Lib Dems at a later date. Needless to say, all coalition deals should be rigorously opposed by the left. Labour must not be allowed to water down its already completely inadequate election manifesto commitments. Better to suffer defeat than a rotten compromise.

Leave that aside, the fact is that the Welsh administration's budget has already been set at a level which threatens mass redundancies and cuts in services over the next four years. Militants must demand that Welsh Labour uses its position in the assembly to mobilise resistance rather than engaging in

special pleading for Wales. What is more, it must refuse to implement the Con-Dem cuts in areas under its control. If all other AMs vote against it - an unlikely scenario - or Westminster moves in hard - so be it. Labour should appeal to the working class for support.

The results for non-Labour left organisations were abysmal. Promoting a generally principled anti-cuts agenda, yet standing against each other despite arguing for a similar platform predominantly relating to economic demands, the Socialist Labour Party and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain contested all five of the country's regions. Trade Unionists and Socialists against

Cuts stood in two of them as well.

Both the CPB and Tusc barely registered, finishing towards the bottom (if not at the bottom) of the regional poll, below such reactionary organisations as the Welsh Christian Party and the British National Party (itself on a much reduced overall percentage vote). Faring rather better, but hardly capturing any significant section of the Welsh working class vote, was the SLP. In those regions with a history of militant working class politics (in particular South Wales West and South Wales Central) Scargill's organisation secured around 3% of the vote (and 2.4% overall) ●

Gareth Evans

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Captain Clegg will not go down with his ship

After the May 5 elections and referendum Nick Clegg and co seem to face extinction as an independent political party, observes **Eddie Ford**

Super Thursday could not have gone much worse for the Liberal Democrats. The May 5 referendum saw the “miserable little compromise” of the alternative vote system, as Nick Clegg not inaccurately described it, decisively defeated on a 41.97% turnout - with 32.09% voting ‘yes’ and 67.87% ‘no’ (though, of course, we in the CPGB favoured a highly critical ‘yes’ vote).

Perhaps even more humiliating for the Lib Dems were their results in the English local elections, the most calamitous in the party’s history - their share of the popular vote plummeted to only 15%, and they lost 748 councillors and control of nine councils. Meanwhile, their performance in the elections to the Welsh and Scottish assembly and parliament was almost as dismal - coming fourth in Scotland with a mere 5.2 % of the vote (five seats) and in Wales they scored a similarly unimpressive 8% (five seats). To further compound the misery, one of the councils they were ejected from was Sheffield - the site of Nick Clegg’s constituency.

The upshot of all this is that the Lib Dem vote has been decimated, essentially falling to Labour in the north of England and Wales, to the SNP in Scotland and to the Tories in southern England. However, when you examine the results a bit more carefully, the picture is even worse for the Lib Dems - or at least potentially. Of the 279 councils holding elections, only in half of them were *all* the seats up for grabs - in the rest, just a third were contested. Imagine what would have happened to the hapless Lib Dems if all their councillors had been up for re-election - including in London, where there was no local poll on May 5. For instance, in Stoke - where every seat was fought - the Lib Dems lost all their councillors, with Labour winning 38 out of the 44 seats (and, as a fortuitous by-product, depriving the British National Party of its five councillors too).

Furthermore, it is important to recall that turnout in local elections is always much lower than in parliamentary polls - which in practice favours the Lib Dems, whose supporters have been more likely to vote than Labour’s during local elections. Therefore, it is a reasonable deduction that if it had been a general election held on May 5 - in so far as one can deal with, and predict, such imponderables - the Lib Dems’ share of the vote could have sunk to round about the 10% level or even lower (some opinion polls estimate that the party’s current support is between 8% and 11%).

But, whichever way you look at it, under Clegg’s leadership the Lib Dems are regarded with contempt and derision by increasing numbers of the British people. Needless to say, this is a development that communists welcome - they richly deserve such opprobrium. The supposedly saintly Liberal Democrats, that is, who righteously promised to abolish student tuition fees - only to dutifully troop into the House of Commons last year and vote for proposals to treble them.



Heading for disaster

And then there were their Keynesian ‘counter-crisis’ measures before the general election, which turned to dust as soon as they entered the coalition government and became committed axe-wielders. Contemptible.

In from the cold

Just a year ago we had Clegg’s stomach-churning love-in with David ‘call me Dave’ Cameron in Downing Street’s rose garden. Then he was basking, or so it seemed, in the role of the great man who had brought the Liberal Democrats back in from the cold and into the corridors of power. A serious national party again, as was fit and proper for an organisation with such an eminently bourgeois pedigree; with the prospect of electoral reform to further excite Lib Dem ambitions - and placate the increasingly disgruntled rank and file, who for sure had not got involved in politics just to get the Tory Party elected yet again, coalition government or no coalition government. But if dealing and working with the Tories in a one-term parliament (and no more) delivered up AV, albeit as an initial ‘stepping stone’ to proportional representation, then maybe it was a price worth paying ... then came the train crash that was the May 5 elections/referendum, and the inevitable recriminations. Perhaps even the opening salvoes of a Lib Dem civil war.

So Vince Cable, the business secretary, described his supposed Conservative colleagues as “ruthless, calculating and thoroughly tribal” - as if you would expect anything else from the Tories, the preferred party of the ruling class. A party whose political instincts are anti-democratic, elitist and reactionary to the core.

Lord Ashdown also vented his fury, the former Lib Dem leader accusing Cameron of a “breach of faith” for his refusal to disassociate himself from the “regiment of lies” poured out by the ‘no’ to AV campaign - like the idea that it was a “Lib Dem fix”. As for Chris Huhne, the energy secretary, he had exasperatedly denounced his cabinet colleague, Baroness Warsi - the Tory Party chairperson - for her involvement in the “Goebbels-like campaign” against AV, “for whom no lie is too idiotic, given the truth is so unpalatable to them”. Hence the contention that the introduction of AV would cost more than £250 million (thus leading to the closure of hospitals, etc) and would somehow “benefit” the likes of the BNP. Seeing how the BNP called for a ‘no’ vote on May 5 (alongside most of the left), such a charge is indeed curious. Even more so when one of the well observed effects of AV/preferential voting systems is a tendency to pull votes into the boggy centre ground. Exactly one of the reasons, of course, why communists, despite our critical ‘yes’ to AV, advocate PR (under a party-list system).

Now, almost fantastically, given the election results, senior Lib Dem figures have lined up to declare that they need to make more of a mark on the coalition government and its policies - put a bit more yellow back into a government that is too blue. To this end, Clegg has stated that there will be a “louder Lib Dem voice” in the administration - more “muscular” and “visible” - and claimed that the party is a “moderating influence” on the Tories, helping to “protect” the country from a “return to the unfairness of Thatcherism”.

Naturally, for Clegg this means “defending” the NHS, and he expected “significant changes” to the planned ‘reorganisation’ of the NHS, as laid out in the white paper - which amongst other things would give GPs control of much of the NHS budget - and if necessary would “block” legislation he was unhappy with. Talking tough, Clegg told the BBC that getting the NHS white paper right was “now my number one priority” and he would insist on guarantees from the Tories that there would not be “back-door privatisation” in the health service. He, Nick Clegg, was no Tory - “never, never, never” - and “will be carried out in my coffin as a card-carrying Liberal Democrat”.

More broadly still, we increasingly hear that the Lib Dems are entering a “transactional business relationship” (and so on) with the Tories, a cool and somewhat distancing phrase first used last autumn by Cable. And which in turn was a reflection of the unhappiness expressed by Sir Menzies Campbell, another former Lib Dem leader, that the impression was being given - god forbid - that they “get on like a house on fire with their Tory secretaries of state”. Stepping up the pressure, the Lib Dem federal committee will meet shortly to set out the specific ways in which it expects the party to do more to “differentiate” itself from the

Tories, in line with a lengthy motion passed at the party’s spring conference in Sheffield. In private though, revealing the deep tensions within the party, many senior Lib Dems are said to be “spitting” at what they regard as an ill-judged attempt by some in Clegg’s inner circle to project the coalition as a kind of “new ideological fusion of JS Mill and Friedrich Hayek”. No third way - only the Liberal way.

Pipe dream

But this plan to ideologically renew the Lib Dems and finally start stamping its imprimatur upon the coalition government is a hopeless pipe dream - based as it is on the fantasy notion that they are in some sort of position to dictate terms to their Tory ‘partners’ in the coalition. They are not, having just been annihilated in the elections. Time for a reality check. Rather the boot is on the Tory foot - with strident voices from the right insisting that there is no need to make any more concessions to the Lib Dems: enough is enough. After all, who the hell are they with their pathetic 15% vote of the vote and a failed referendum campaign behind them? Instead, time to steer the ship of government into clear blue waters.

We may be witnessing the Titanic moment for the Liberal Democrats, which will almost certainly be a disaster with few survivors. It is not that the Tories are using them as human shields - an obvious nonsense. People are deserting the Lib Dems because they betrayed their own manifesto, their own promises. The chances are that in 2015, or whenever the next general election is held, the Tories will offer Lib Dem ministers and MPs a deal. Stand as coalition candidates and we will not oppose you. Those who have got used to life in high office, those who aspire to high office, those who actually like their Tory colleges will accept. They will become coalition Lib Dems: ie, they will split away, as the National Liberals did in 1922 and then again in 1931 (the latter only finally merging with the Conservative Party in 1968).

Not that that will be openly discussed and debated by Clegg, Cable or Huhne. Try announcing that to the next Lib Dem annual conference - anyone got a rope? ●

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Nick Clegg: Tory slave

US LEFT

No need for party?

The US Platypus grouping does not have a political line because there is 'no possibility of revolutionary action'. **Mike Macnair** reports on its convention

I attended the third annual Platypus International Convention in Chicago over the weekend April 29-May 1. The Platypus Affiliated Society is a, mainly student, left group of an odd sort (as will appear further below). Its basic slogan is: 'The left is dead; long live the left'. Starting very small, it has recently expanded rapidly on US campuses and added chapters in Toronto and Frankfurt. Something over 50 people attended the convention.

The fact of Platypus's rapid growth on the US campuses, though still as yet to a fairly small size, tells us that in some way it occupies a gap on the US left, and also tells us something (limited) about the available terms of debate. The discussions raised some interesting issues (though I am not sure how productive most of them were). It is this that makes it worth reporting the convention. This article will be an only slightly critical report of the convention; a second will offer a critique of Platypus's project.

I was invited to give a workshop on the CPGB's perspectives, and to participate in the Saturday evening plenary on 'The legacy of Trotskyism'. I also attended some of the panel discussions and the opening and closing plenaries, on 'The politics of critical theory' and 'What is the Platypus critique?'

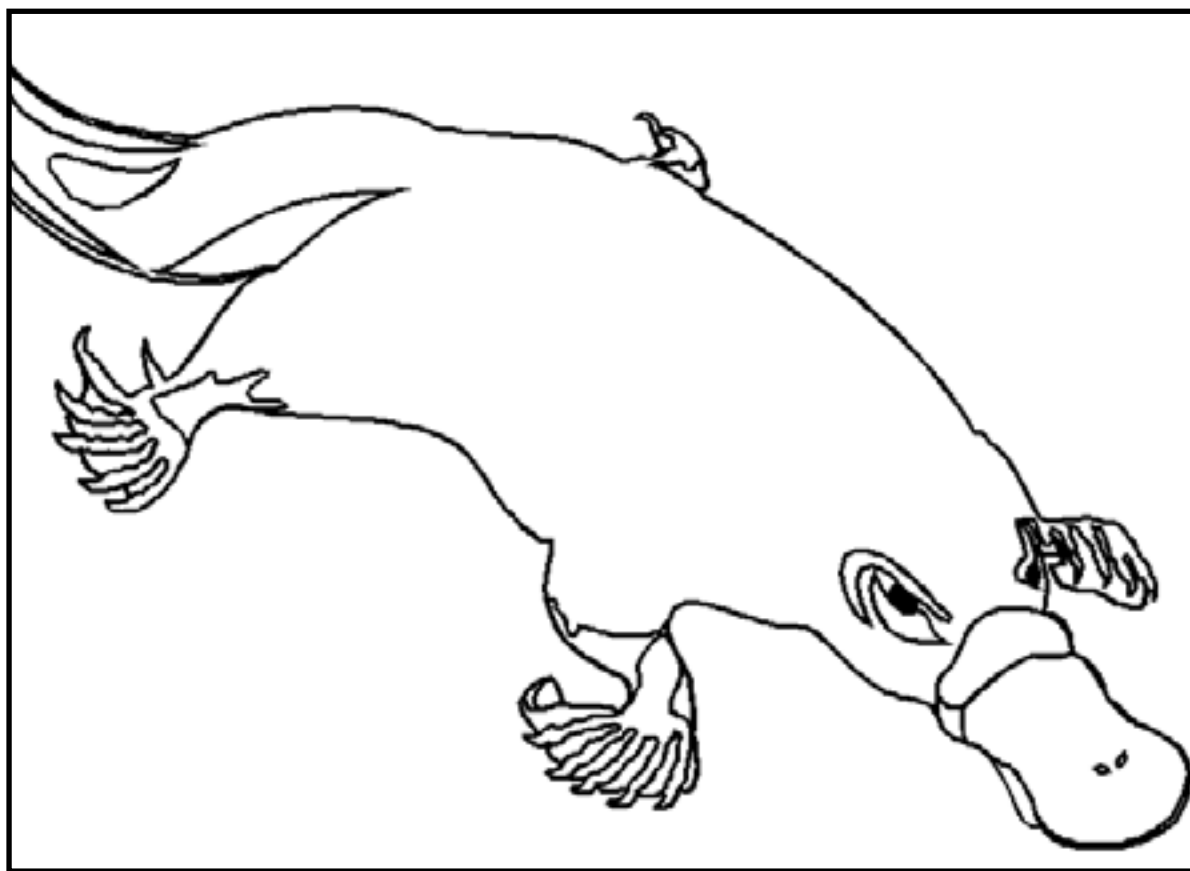
Critical theory

I got little from the opening plenary on 'The politics of critical theory' (on the Frankfurt School). The speakers were: Chris Cutrone of Platypus and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; the philosopher of technology and student of Herbert Marcuse, Andrew Feenberg of Simon Fraser University; Richard Westerman of the University of Chicago; and Nicholas Brown of the University of Illinois Chicago, as respondent to the three papers.

The plenary took as its starting point the publication by *New Left Review* in 2010 of translated excerpts from a set of notes by Greta Adorno of a series of conversations in 1956 between Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer with a view to producing a modern redraft of the *Communist manifesto*. This project got nowhere, and (as Andrew Feenberg pointed out) the Adorno-Horkheimer conversations are frequently absurd.

Feenberg, who is a 'child of 68', remarked also on the extent to which, in the conversations, Adorno and Horkheimer displayed fear of falling into Marcuse's positions: these, he argued, had more connection to the real emancipatory possibilities of the post-war world than Adorno and Horkheimer's theoreticisms.

Chris Cutrone has posted his paper, 'Adorno's Leninism', on his provocatively (or perhaps merely pretentiously) titled blog *The Last Marxist*.¹ It argues that the project of the Frankfurt School derived from the interventions of György Lukács (*History and class consciousness*) and Karl Korsch (*Marxism and philosophy*) in the 1920s, and these in turn from the 'crisis of Marxism' represented by the revisionist debate in the German Social Democratic Party in the 1890s and 1900s and the betrayal of August 1914, and the idea of Leninism as representing a philosophical alternative. So far, so John Rees or David Renton.² Adorno, he argued, continued down to his death committed to a version of these ideas.



Strange combination

After the papers had been presented and Nicholas Brown had responded, there was a brief and not particularly controversial question and answer session.

Debating politics

Saturday morning saw two 50-minute sessions of parallel workshops under the title, 'Debating politics on the left today: differing perspectives'. In the first hour the choice was between the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party of the USA (leader since 1975: Bob Avakian) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). I went to the latter.

DSA claims to be the largest left group in the US with around 10,000 members, though the paid circulation of their paper is lower, at around 5,700 (and the Communist Party USA claimed, as of 2002, 20,000 members). The presentation made clear that the group essentially consists of activists in the left of the Democratic Party engaged in a range of campaigns for liberal good causes, plus some support for trade unionists in dispute. Its image of an alternative society is Sweden or Finland. It is committed to popular-frontist 'coalitions' and has in its constitution rejected any electoral intervention. It is, in short, not even Lib-Lab: the late 19th century Lib-Labs at least agitated for working class representation within the Liberal Party.

In the second hour the choice was between CPGB and the Marxist-Humanists US (one of the splinters from the News and Letters Collective founded by Raya Dunayevskaya). I presented the CPGB workshop. I gave a very brief capsule history of the *Leninist* and of the CPGB since 1991 and explained the nature of our orientation to 'reforging a Communist Party' through unification of the Marxists as Marxists, and on democratic centralism as an alternative to bureaucratic centralism.

The question-and-answer session which followed was lively, and I was pressed by Platypusers with the ideas that the divisions among the

left groups were, in fact, principled ones which would prohibit any unity; and that programme was less fundamental than understanding history or the movement of the class struggle. I think I was able in the short time available to answer these points reasonably clearly: *some* divisions on the left do have a principled basis, but many do not, and in any case the divisions in the early Comintern were as wide or wider; a clear, short formal party programme is essential to party democracy.

A representative of the International Bolshevik Tendency argued that our view of democratic centralism amounted to going back on the fundamental gain represented by the 1903 split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks: I pointed out that the Spartacist (and other far-left) dogmas around this split actually originated with Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party* as a factional instrument against Trotsky and were subsequently promoted as part of the Stalin school of falsification. This argument shocked him.

Panels

In the afternoon there were three sets of parallel panel sessions under the general title, 'Lessons from the history of Marxism', with (in theory) 15 minutes break between them.

In the first period the choice was between 'Marxism and the bourgeois revolutions' and 'Marxism and sexual liberation'. I have interests in both areas, but chose to go to the sexual liberation panel. It was evident from the panel blurb for 'Marxism and the bourgeois revolutions' that Platypus shares the common 'new left' error of imagining that bourgeois thought begins with the 18th century enlightenment, and that the bourgeois revolutions began with the French.³

It might be thought that Jonathan Israel's massive excavation of the links of this period with prior Dutch and English politics, religion and thinkers, in *Radical enlightenment* (2001) and *Enlightenment contested* (2006), would have disturbed this

approach and led to a return to Marx's understanding of a much more prolonged historical process of transition to capitalism, including the first experiments in the Italian city-states and the Dutch and English revolutions (visible especially in the second half of *Capital* Vol 1).

But beginning with the French Revolution and late-enlightenment ideas is, in fact, a new left dogma. It is linked to the idea that the 'Hegelian' logic of the first part of volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* can be read without reference to the broader claims of historical materialism about the history before fully developed capitalism. This approach is foundational to Lukács, Korsch and the Frankfurt school, who play an important role in Platypus's thought.

Sexual liberation

The panel on 'Marxism and sexual liberation' featured four interesting papers. Pablo Ben critiqued the Reich/Marcuse conception that 'sexual liberation' would undermine the capitalist order. This idea informed the early gay men's movement, and later the arguments of Pat Califia and others in the lesbian sadomasochism movement and its more general 'sex-positive' offshoots. The critique combined the ideas of Adorno in relation to the regulative power of capitalist economic relations over all aspects of social life with the point - well understood by historians of the issue since the 1970s - that 'sexuality' as such (ie, the link of sexual choices to personal 'identities') emerges under capitalism. This was a well argued and provocative paper. But I am not yet convinced that the detail of the theoretical approach is superior to that which Jamie Gough and I argued in the mistitled *Gay liberation in the 80s* (1985).

Greg Gabrellas argued for an interpretation of Foucault as a critic of Reich starting out from French Maoism. This was again a useful paper, though with two missing elements. He did not flag up the extent to which Foucault's historical claims

about madness and the penitentiary, as well as about the history of sexuality, have been falsified by historians. And, though he identified Foucault's tendency to marginalise class politics, he saw this as merely a product of the defeat of the left, rather than as an active intervention in favour of popular frontism. Hence he missed the extent to which the Anglo-American left academic and gay/lesbian movement *reception* of Foucault was closely tied to the defence of extreme forms of popular frontism by authors directly or indirectly linked to *Marxism Today*, for whom it was an instrument against the 'class-reductionist' ideas of Trotskyists.

Jamie Keesling deployed the 'typical Platypus' combination of Adorno with elements of 1970s Spartacism to polemicise against the taboo/witch-hunt in relation to intergenerational sex, which she argued flowed from a fetishism of the 'innocence' of childhood and a refusal to recognise the sexual desires of youth. This paper was competently done and valuably provocative to current orthodoxies.

It nonetheless did not get as far as the British debate of the 1970s-80s on the same issue. This recognised that the other side of the coin (adult aspirations to intergenerational sex) *also* flows from fetishisms, of innocence and of powerlessness; and that statistically very much the larger part of intergenerational sex is father-daughter incest, which exploits family power relations for what is in substance *non-consensual* activity. Since an immediate transition to the 'higher stage' of communism is not to be expected, a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state order will not result in the immediate disappearance of this problem. Accordingly any *immediate* (or 'transitional') programme point on the issue must take a form like that in the CPGB's *Draft programme*: "Abolish age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals to enter into the sexual relations they choose, provided this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse."

Ashley Weger's paper on the sexual emancipation of women was the weakest of the four papers, moving from Juliet Mitchell to the modern debate among feminists about 'sexy dressing', to philosopher Harriet Baber's 1987 article, 'How bad is rape?' (which argues that compulsion to do routine labour is a more serious harm to the victim),⁴ to 1970s radical feminism (whose arguments she did not grasp or attack in depth), to Moishe Postone's 2006, broadly Eustonite, 'History and helplessness',⁵ to Adorno. While various points were interesting, this did not add up to a coherent whole.

Four papers in 90 minutes, followed by brief comments from each speaker on the other papers, led to a very compressed Q&A session. Chris Cutrone asked for and got brief responses from the speakers to a general question about the relations between Marxism and liberal political theory, Pablo Ben's being the most substantial response. A woman of British origin asked about the relation of issues of sexuality to ideas of gender and the division between public and private spheres (again an aspect of the debates of the 1970s-80s) and did not get a satisfactory response.

I have gone into this panel at length because it was intellectually one of the strongest in the convention. I would nonetheless assess that the speakers were operating at a lower *theoretical* level than that of the debates of the left in the British feminist and lesbian/gay movements in the 1970s-80s.

There are two reasons why that should be the case. The first is that in our 1970s-80s debates there was a real link between theoretical arguments and positive practical politics. Practical political choices force out the logical implications of theoretical positions in a way that theoretical critique on its own does not. The second is that the sub-Frankfurt School historical schema of the ‘defeat of the left’ stretching back to the ‘crisis of Marxism’ in the 1900s has a tendency to blind its adherents to the details of concrete history. By doing so, it permits schematic theory, which moves from arbitrarily chosen elements of the concrete to the abstract, but can never return to work up the concrete as a combination of abstractions.

Maoism and lefts

The second session offered a choice between a panel on ‘Badiou and post-Maoism: Marxism and communism today’ and one on ‘Art, culture and politics: Marxist approaches’, which offered consideration of the theories of art of Trotsky, Adorno and Walter Benjamin. I went to the panel on Alain Badiou, addressed to his *The communist hypothesis* (2010) and a debate which had already developed online between Chris Cutrone of Platypus and the Maoist or post-Maoist ‘Kasama project’.⁶ The panel was Chris Cutrone, Mike Ely and Joseph Ramsey of Kasama, and John Steele of Khukuri, all of whom defended Badiou; Mike Ely’s paper is available on Kasama, John Steele’s on Khukuri, and Cutrone’s on his blog.⁷

The arguments of Badiou’s defenders on this panel are intellectually and politically uninteresting. They seem to be merely a new version of the tendency of the ex-Maoist, ex-Eurocommunist, and academic left to episodic fashions, like the fashion for Roy Bhaskar’s ‘critical realism’ which ran for some years in the 1990s.

Cutrone’s argument judges, I think correctly, that Badiou’s ‘communism’ is directly anti-Marxist.⁸ Cutrone therefore equally correctly appeals to the Second International and its left as the high point of the movement against capitalism to date: it was this movement that *made possible* 1917. But he tends not to interpret the strength of the late 19th century movement in terms of Marx’s and Engels’ idea of capitalism creating its own gravedigger in the proletariat, and hence the key to the movement being the political self-organisation of the working class.

Instead, he poses the need for an emancipatory movement to start from the conquests of capitalism - which is, indeed, central to Marxism - in terms of the conquests of *liberalism*. The political logic of this intellectual move is the path followed by the Schachtmanites, by Adorno and Horkheimer, and more recently by the British Revolutionary Communist Party/*Spiked* and the Eustonites, towards the political right.

The final panel session offered a choice between ‘Marxism and political philosophy’ with the same late-enlightenment focus as the ‘bourgeois revolutions’ panel, here on ‘The classical figures of bourgeois political thought: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel’; and ‘The Marxism of the Second International radicals’. I attended the latter, featuring papers by Chris Cutrone, Greg Gabrellas, Ian Morrison and Marco Torres.

I may have missed something by arriving late, but I did not get much

out of this panel beyond the stale new left orthodoxy about the sterility of the SPD majority which is, as I have already indicated, more clearly defended by British authors from the Clifflite tradition like Rees and Renton.

In Chris Cutrone’s paper I was struck by three specific features. The first is that he claimed that Marx and Engels were suspicious of political parties.⁹ This is plain nonsense and I have provided the evidence to the contrary in the second of my articles on electoral tactics: Marx and Engels argued from the 1840s to the 1890s in *support* of the working class forming itself into a political party.¹⁰

The second, and related, feature is the claim that political parties were a new phenomenon in the late 19th century and suspect to earlier ‘classical liberals’. The latter part of this claim is true, but the former is simply false: if the Dutch Regent oligarchy did without formal parties, Whigs and Tories in Britain appeared in 1679-81, reappeared promptly in 1688-89, and continued to dominate political life until the Whigs were replaced by the Liberals in the mid-19th century. What was new in the late 19th century and with the SPD was *highly organised, mass-membership* political parties with democratic structures. This was a product of the political intervention of the proletariat as such and is reflected in the fact that in the US, where the proletariat has not succeeded in breaking into high politics, the Democrats and Republicans retain looser organisational forms.

The third feature was Cutrone’s reliance for analysis of the SPD on Peter Nettl’s 1965 article on the SPD as a ‘political model’.¹¹ This is, to be blunt, unambiguously a work of cold war sociology, which seeks to force the conclusion that the only real choices available in politics are between reformist coalitionism and something derived from the ‘actionism’ of Georges Sorel and the ultra-left.¹² Its analysis of the SPD is apolitical-Weberian.

Nettl’s story reaches its climacteric with the betrayal of August 1914. But missing, accordingly, are, first, the later emergence of the USPD as a mass opposition, and, second, the fact that the working class *did in fact* use the SPD and its Austrian equivalent, the SPÖ, as organising instruments in the overthrow of the Hohenzollern and Habsburg monarchies in 1918-19. Of course, the leaderships held back to national horizons and created ‘democratic republics’, which were in reality bourgeois parliamentary-constitutional regimes.¹³ These circumstances fit better with a *political* account of the SPD’s and the wartime and post-war Kautskyites’ failure to serve the interests of the working class - because of their nationalism and false political ideas on the state - than with Nettl’s Weberian sociological story of political impotence through ‘isolationism’.

Platypus calls on us to recover the history of the left in order to understand and get beyond its present ‘death’. But in its own attempts to do so, the standard of *historical work* is sloppy.

Trotskyism

The Saturday evening plenary on ‘The legacy of Trotskyism’ featured labour historian Bryan Palmer, of Trent University (Ontario, Canada); Jason Wright from the International Bolshevik Tendency; myself; and Richard Rubin from Platypus. The panel description contained the claim that, “As one Platypus writer has suggested, Trotsky is as out of place in the post-World War II world as Voltaire or Rousseau would have been in the world after the French Revolution. Trotsky, unlike Trotskyism, exemplifies the classical Marxism of the early 20th century, and that tradition certainly died with

him.”

Bryan Palmer is a Trotskyist, and (as far as can be seen from online sources) one coming from the background of the part of the US Socialist Workers Party and its international tendency that did not break with Trotskyism in the 1980s.¹⁴ His speech made nods in the direction of Platypus’s claims, but asserted positively that the crash of 2008 showed the relevance of Marxism today; that the defeats of the 20th century are the result of Stalinism; and that the ideas of Trotsky and Trotskyism - especially the idea that the crisis of humanity reduces to the crisis of revolutionary leadership - retain all their relevance. The problem was a *trahison des clerics*, in which the intellectuals sought new alternative ideas repudiating the basics of Marxism, as with postmodernism, rather than attempt to put Trotsky’s ideas into practice.

Jason Wright gave the sort of speech that could be expected: revolutionary continuity runs through the Fourth International 1938-53, the International Committee 1953-61, the Revolutionary Tendency of the US SWP and, following it, the Spartacist League, from 1961 to the 1980s; and thereafter the IBT. The CPGB, he said in passing, breaks with the tradition of the pre-war socialist movement as well as that of Bolshevism by calling for votes for bourgeois candidates. I did not get an opportunity to reply to this at the meeting, but my recent three-part series on electoral principles and tactics can serve as a reply - to the extent that it is worth replying.

I criticised the formulations proposed in the panel description. In the first place ‘Trotskyism’ means an organised political movement formed on the basis of definite programmatic documents - those of the first four congresses of the Comintern, of the International Left Opposition and of the 1938 founding congress of the Fourth International. The Trotskyist movement has splintered into diverse fragments, but it is on its formally adopted positions that it is to be judged and criticised.

Secondly, ‘classical Marxism’ is an amalgam, like the ‘counterrevolutionary bloc of rights and Trotskyites’. In the sense in which it used by Platypus, it derives from the new left’s, and hence the British SWP’s, attempt to paste together Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukács and Gramsci, in spite of their diverse and in some respects opposed political and theoretical positions.¹⁵ To say that “Trotsky, unlike Trotskyism, exemplifies the classical Marxism of the early 20th century, and that tradition certainly died with him” is therefore an empty claim. What is needed to understand the past of Marxist theory is to understand the political and theoretical disputes of the Comintern in the light of the political and theoretical disputes of the Second International and of the pre-1917 RSDLP.

Within this framework, in the first place the idea of separating Trotsky from post-war Trotskyism is wrong. Secondly, it is necessary, in order to progress, to critique the actual programmatic positions of the first four congresses of the Comintern and of Trotskyism, as I have attempted in *Revolutionary strategy* (2008). The most fundamental point is the rejection of bureaucratic centralism. Thirdly, the failures of the Trotskyists are not all given by some Trotskyist (or ‘Pabloite’) original sin: there are lessons, albeit mostly negative, to be learned from the Trotskyists’ attempts to build small groups into something larger and to intervene in live politics.

Richard Rubin argued that revolutionary continuity is impossible; there is a fundamental discontinuity in politics and the main task is to understand it. Trotskyism is merely a historical relic. Trotsky insisted on the *accidental* character

of the tragedy of the 20th century; but the idea of an accidental epoch is inconsistent with historical materialism. We have to be Marxists because there is no better way of thinking, but Marxism may be inadequate; the failure of Trotskyism expresses the antecedent crisis of Marxism. Both Stalinism and fascism were products of the failure of the German revolution. This ‘German question’ poses the question how the strongest Marxist party in the world, the SPD, could betray its own revolution. Since the objective conditions for socialism had matured, the explanation had to be the power of bourgeois ideology; both Trotsky and the Frankfurt school grappled with this problem.

The outcome of World War II represented a victory for the enlightenment, but a defeat of revolutionary possibilities. In the 1950s-60s Trotskyists as well as Maoists were prone to illusions in third-world nationalisms. The 1968 period offered a ‘Dionysian moment’ of ‘revolution through pure ecstasy’; the Trotskyists, except the Sparts, integrated themselves in the new left and lost the character of Trotskyism as a critique of the existing left. It was this aspect of Trotskyism as honest critique and fidelity to the October revolution that had to be redeemed.

The speakers were given an opportunity to respond to each other and this was followed by slightly longer than usual Q&A discussion. Four substantial issues were posed. In the first place it seemed to be the common view of the other panellists that the divisions of the Trotskyist left were in fact principled and unavoidable splits, a view which I rejected. Secondly, a questioner asked whether the evolution of some US ex-Trotskyists towards neo-conservatism reflected something about Trotskyism; on this there seemed to be general acceptance of a point I made, in response, that such an evolution is not found in Europe, while ex-Stalinists had also gone over to the right.

The third was whether defeats for your own imperialist power make revolution more likely, as Jason Wright argued - in my view falsely, except in the case of defeat in *inter-imperialist*, or great-power, war. Pablo Ben raised from the floor the classic case of the Argentinean left’s shipwreck when it supported the military regime’s aggression in the 1982 South Atlantic war. Richard Rubin argued that defeatism was a moral obligation, but not one from which revolution could be expected. This, I think, underrates the issue. Even if defeatism in our own country’s unjust wars cannot usually be expected either to *cause* a defeat or to bring on revolution campaigning on a defeatist stance educates as wide layers of the working class as possible in the need for political independence from the local capitalist state, and thereby *prepares the political ground* for circumstances in which revolution is on the immediate agenda.

The fourth and most general question was whether revolution *is* on the agenda and if so in what sense, and whether a party is therefore called for. Bryan Palmer’s and Jason Wright’s answer to these questions was emphatically yes. Chris Cutrone’s (from the floor) and Richard Rubin’s was that the objective conditions were present, but the subjective conditions even for a party were not present. My own response was that proletarian revolution is on the *historical* agenda; that the weakness of proletarian organisation takes it off the short-term agenda; and that if Lenin’s ‘the ruling class cannot go on in the old way and the masses will not’ was to be placed on the *immediate* agenda the result would therefore be disastrous. But the result

is precisely that the party question, and the tasks of patiently rebuilding the workers’ movement, *are* on the immediate agenda.

Platypus critique

The Sunday morning plenary on ‘What is the Platypus critique?’, with three Platypus speakers, was in one way the oddest and in another the most symptomatic of the sessions. Spencer Leonard opened by saying that Platypus was sometimes said to have a line which combined Spartacist Trotskyism with Adorno. This was incorrect: Platypus *does not have a political line*. Rather it recognises that there is no present possibility of revolutionary political action, because of the deep-going crisis of Marxism. Its goal is therefore to bring the left to a recognition of its own failure and to address the theoretical issues. To this end it aims to ‘host the conversation’.

He was followed by Laurie Rojas, speaking to her organisational work for Platypus: this again focussed on the necessity (and difficulty) of addressing the left, but also emphasised the constant return of the *necessity* of the Platypus project. The final speaker was Ben Shepard, whose speech was interspersed by readings from Samuel Beckett, with Spencer Leonard attempting to take the other part - I take it using absurdism to indicate the present left’s absurdity; I am sorry to say that I found this sufficiently distracting that I can say no more about the points he made.

The plenary started late and the Q&A session was brief. One self-described “newbie” said from the floor that she felt at the end of the weekend rather as if she had accidentally wandered into a postgraduate philosophy seminar. A more accurate description would be a *literary theory* seminar. The panel on political theory which I missed *might* have had the analytical or phenomenological rigour found in philosophy seminars. But most of the theoretical papers I heard had the ‘neither quite rigorous philosophy nor quite rigorous history’ quality of many literary theory papers ●

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Notes

1. <http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org>.
2. J Rees *The algebra of revolution: the dialectic and the classical Marxist tradition* London 1998; D Renton *Classical Marxism: socialist theory and the Second International* Cheltenham 2002; and see my review of both books *Weekly Worker* September 11 2003.
3. For another example of B Fine *Democracy and the rule of law* (1984; reprint Caldwell, NJ 2002).
4. *Hypatia* Vol 2, pp125-38.
5. *Public Culture* 18, pp93-110; also available at various places on the web.
6. <http://kasamaproject.org>.
7. Steele: www.khukuritheory.net/why-is-badiou-of-political-value; Cutrone: <http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org/?p=1144>.
8. Andrew Coates has made somewhat similar points against Slavoj Žižek, with whom Badiou is linked, in this paper (‘The leadership of “events”’, March 3). Cf also James Turley’s review of *Lenin reloaded* (‘Hegel reloaded?’, December 13 2007).
9. He based this on the far left’s common but inaccurate exegesis of the statement in the *Communist manifesto* that “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties” (in which, in fact, “the other working class parties” means *only* the Chartists and the related US National Reformers).
10. ‘Principles to shape tactics’ *Weekly Worker* April 21.
11. *Past and Present* No30, pp65-95; more on the same line in Nettl’s two-volume biography of Rosa Luxemburg (1966).
12. Nettl seeks to distinguish Luxemburg from the anarchists on the grounds that her version of activism was based on the spontaneous movement of the working class masses, not arbitrary ‘initiatives’ of the revolutionaries. But this shows only that, if Nettl had read Sorel at all, he had not done so with any care.
13. More in my ‘Leading workers by the nose’ *Weekly Worker* September 13 2007.
14. This appears from the judgments of his review essay on Jan Willem Stutje’s *Ernest Mandel* (2010) *55 International Review of Social History* pp117-32.
15. There is an older usage belonging to the cold war academy, in which ‘classical Marxism’ was used to mean a (caricatural) version of Marxism before Lenin.

AGGREGATE

Agitation for independent working class politics

Electoral tactics was the main topic on May 8 at the CPGB's all-members' aggregate meeting in London. **Alex John** reports

Opening the discussion on the May 5 local elections, Provisional Central Committee member Mike Macnair reaffirmed that the organisation had been right to call for a critical vote - without conditions - for George Galloway and the Coalition Against Cuts list which he headed in Glasgow. It would have been wrong to make our support conditional on Galloway renouncing his support for the Islamic Republic of Iran and his involvement with the regime's Press TV, as some comrades had argued during the run up to the election, just as it would have been wrong to make our support for candidates conditional on their calling for troops out of Afghanistan, because the key issue for the mass of the population was public service cuts - not Iran, and not war.

A resolution upholding this policy (see below), and critical of the open letter calling for no vote for Galloway because of his support for the Islamic regime (*Weekly Worker* May 7) was carried unanimously, after debate and a number of amendments.

Drawing on the arguments in his recent three-part series of *Weekly Worker* articles on electoral tactics, comrade Macnair sketched out a communist understanding of bourgeois democracy as the background for our method of tactical intervention in bourgeois elections. The bourgeoisie is not a democratic class, and universal suffrage has been won by working class struggle. When the working class is organised, then the bourgeoisie can only rule with its consent. Working class consent must be gained.

The early workers' movement gave electoral support to one or other of the bourgeois parties. The concept of independent working class politics and independent working class parties was brought into the workers' movement through Marxist intervention, and mass workers' parties were built on that basis. But the bourgeoisie was able to capture the mass socialist parties through nationalism and bureaucracy.

Communist intervention in bourgeois elections, comrade Macnair said, is essentially agitation, in Plekhanov's useful definition: presenting a few ideas to many people - as opposed to propaganda:

presenting many ideas to few people. The "few" ideas we are offering are (a) independent working class politics, and (b) the need for an independent party of the working class, a communist party.

In the present dire situation, lacking any mass party based on independent working class politics, we have little or no purchase on the results of an election. So how to intervene? Our method is to identify the dominant political issue and seek to drive a wedge into the mass electoral conversation, in order to open it up for our communist ideas. Our electoral tactics to this end are diverse, because of changing political circumstances.

In 2005 the invasion and occupation of Iraq had been the dominant political issue, and we had made our support for Labour Party and other working class movement candidates conditional on them taking a public position for immediate withdrawal of British troops from Iraq. Today the cuts in public services dominate the terms of public debate, and can be expected to do so for the immediate future. That is what determined our decision to make public service cuts the basis of our electoral tactic this time.

Our "framework position", he said, was to critically support (a) those Labour Party candidates publicly opposing the cuts, and saying that they will not implement them; and (b) (where there is no Labour anti-cuts candidate) candidates of left platforms who say the same. In this way we seek to engage with the supporters of such candidates and to insert the idea of a Communist Party and programme around the anti-cuts question.

We made no general line on which of the multitude of non-Labour left anti-cuts platforms to support, in the event that they were standing against each other, leaving that for comrades to weigh up locally. But we did explicitly call for critical but unconditional support for the Galloway-led Coalition Against Cuts list which, besides Galloway himself, was a left unity list in which various left organisations in Scotland - Socialist Workers Party, Chris Bamberg's McCounterfire, Socialist Party Scotland and Solidarity - participated.

Comrade Macnair said that the open letter had made a serious political

error because, while it condemned Galloway's support for the obnoxious Islamic regime in Iran, it failed to mention imperialist sanctions and the threat of imperialist war. If the CPGB had chosen to make conditions for electoral support with respect to Iran, we would have said 'Don't support the imperialist war drive', rather than 'Don't support the Islamic regime' - because the immediate enemy of the British working class is the British state, which operates globally as an imperialist state. The main enemy is at home.

Some CPGB members had been involved in campaigning for signatories for the open letter against Galloway, said comrade Macnair, but had withdrawn their own signatures before it was published, because support for the Galloway list was an agreed action of the organisation. This showed their commitment to the organisation, and to the principles of democratic centralism. If CPGB comrades had let their signatures remain on the open letter that would have been a breach of democratic centralism, which requires that we all pull together in action. Workers do this in a strike action: you may vote against strike action, but then you abide by the majority decision. This is essential for the political democracy of a party.

In the discussion, comrade Farzad said that she agreed with our "framework" anti-cuts electoral tactic, and that she had declined to support the open letter. However, she was critical of the organisation - and self-critical - because we did not adequately investigate and elaborate its concrete application, particularly given the circumstances in Glasgow. Galloway is not simply a supporter of the Islamic regime: he has a close relationship with Press TV, which is directly involved in the persecution of political prisoners, putting torture victims on display to make forced confessions.

Much more could have been done. CPGB comrades in Hands Off the People of Iran should have explained how the framework fits the present situation. 'Vote Galloway, but ...' was a difficult position to argue in Glasgow. We needed to directly address local Iranians who are in danger from the Islamic regime. The regime has people

following students in Glasgow. The election of Galloway would have encouraged the harassment of Iranian exiles by supporters or agents of the regime. We should have been sensitive to the growing anti-Galloway feeling in Glasgow, and perhaps produced a local leaflet explaining our approach. Nevertheless, she said, the AWL's social-imperialist anti-Galloway campaign had been the worst evil.

Comrade Tina Becker emphasised that critical support should indeed be critical. We do not have a problem criticising Galloway during the election campaign, and much more of this should have been done. He has many other faults besides his support for the regime. For example, his opposition to abortion rights. We had castigated him for this previously, in *Respect*, while calling for a vote for him. Comrade Nick Rogers said that it was correct for the motion to be critical of Hopi supporters who had signed the open letter. In the united front principle, he said, it was a duty to openly criticise our allies. Unity in action must not mean diplomatic silence.

Comrade John Bridge backed this approach, saying that critical support is our way of engaging with our allies. He reminded us of the pregnant man image with which we had spoofed Galloway's opposition to abortion rights - while supporting him electorally. However, it is legitimate to make an exception to our framework tactic in concrete circumstances. This should not be ruled out in principle, but in this case there was nothing new. We had given critical support to Galloway before, in the full knowledge of his shortcomings. It was important that our motion criticises Hopi signatories to the open letter, he said.

Study

The meeting also accepted, without opposition, the PCC's decision, after the March 26 TUC demonstration, not to proceed with the immediate publication of an anti-cuts pamphlet, as had been agreed at the February 13 aggregate. First, the PCC - and the organisation as a whole - will undertake longer-term serious research and study, aimed towards a deeper, concrete assessment of the crisis of world capitalism, as the basis for developing

an effective anti-cuts strategy. Our analysis will be developed through *Weekly Worker* articles tackling different aspects of the question.

Comrade John Bridge pointed to the TUC's March 26 anti-cuts demonstration. It was certainly very big, but the political level was low. On the demo, although we handed free copies of *Weekly Worker* to those who showed an interest, they were not snapped up. The PCC estimated that if we had produced a pamphlet, we would have not sold very many. However, the public service cuts are only just beginning, and the inevitable mass fightback by the working class is likewise at a very early stage. Comrade Bridge reminded us that we are a "left unity organisation", aiming to establish a Marxist party by going through the existing left. A deeper analysis is necessary than anything currently on offer.

Furthermore, a CPGB pamphlet must give the view of the organisation, whereas *Weekly Worker* articles give the views of the author. At present, leading PCC members have differing assessments of the room for manoeuvre open to the capitalist class in the present crisis. John Bridge considers that, faced with a powerful working class fightback, they have room to make Keynesian concessions, whereas Mike Macnair believes they are adopting austerity measures because they have little elbow room. However, these are "underdeveloped differences" and should be tackled by research and study. Likewise, comrade Macnair casts doubt on the appropriateness of the organisation's current policy of calling on local councils to refuse to implement cuts and set illegal budgets, suggesting that a study of the history of the mass social democratic parties of France and Germany, among other things, may cast useful light on this issue.

The aggregate set the launch date for the CPGB's Summer Offensive annual fundraising drive for June 11 - to coincide with the projected launch date of our new website. And the initial draft plan of topics and speakers for Communist University 2011 (Saturday August 13 to Saturday August 20 inclusive) was briefly reviewed, with an open invitation to comrades to make fresh suggestions ●

Aggregate resolution

1. We recognise that the motivation of the 'Open letter to the left' arguing for no support to George Galloway in the Scots parliament elections is a legitimate disgust at Galloway's support for and organised links to the tyrannical theocratic regime in Iran. This support is directly opposed to the interests of the working class, and it was justified that these criticisms should be made during the election campaign.

2. Galloway's support for the theocratic regime in Iran is not unique to him. It is a scab policy widespread on the left. Galloway's particular role arises merely from his personal prominence. It is necessary

to combat this policy in order to promote the political independence and international solidarity of the working class.

3. However, the CPGB considers that the open letter was a political mistake. 4. Hands Off the People of Iran has throughout its existence insisted on a two-sided policy in which opposition to imperialist war threats and sanctions has to be accompanied by support for the workers', women's and democratic movements in Iran, and conversely support for the workers', women's and democratic movements in Iran has to be accompanied by explicit opposition to imperialist war threats and sanctions.

The open letter, which focussed solely on Galloway's support for the theocratic regime in Iran without clearly opposing the operations of the imperialists, being signed by people who identified themselves as Hopi supporters and as members of Communist Students as such, risks associating Hopi and Communist Students with the Eustonite/Alliance for Workers' Liberty camp. By doing so, in our view it undermines our ability to win supporters of an anti-war position away from the scab policy of political support for tyrannical regimes targeted by imperialism. 5. In particular, if the CPGB had called for a position on Iran to be a condition

of our calling for a vote for candidates in these elections, the condition we would have put forward would have been opposition to imperialist sanctions and war threats against Iran. The UK state is an active party in these sanctions and war threats, and the first responsibility of communists in the UK is to oppose them.

6. In fact, the main question facing the working class in Britain at the May 5 elections was not Iran, but the vicious cuts assault of the coalition government. The CPGB's position was to vote for working class candidates who committed themselves to oppose and, if elected, vote against all cuts.

7. For these reasons the CPGB dissociates itself from the open letter and reaffirms that it was correct to call for a critical vote for the 'George Galloway (Respect) - Coalition Against Cuts' list in Glasgow.

8. We self-criticise for the late expression of a clear CPGB line on specific votes in these elections, though our main line and orientation were expressed in our perspectives document adopted in March; we also self-criticise for weaknesses of discussion in our press of the concrete issue of the 'George Galloway (Respect) - Coalition Against Cuts' list in Glasgow and of criticisms of George Galloway in this context ●

POLEMIC

Who's afraid of George Galloway?

The open letter urging no vote for the Coalition Against Cuts list was understandable, but badly wrong, writes James Turley

George Galloway's run for the Scottish parliament, in the event, ended in failure. The vote for his Respect/Coalition Against Cuts list in Glasgow, bulked up by current and recent members of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party Scotland, was respectable compared to non-Labour left showings either side of the border in the last few years (although obviously not even close to the electoral success of the Scottish Socialist Party at its height).

Yet what was abundantly clear was that the Galloway/SWP/SPS list was the only remotely serious candidacy the non-Labour left was able to muster in Scotland. The SSP, since the acrimonious split with Tommy Sheridan a few years ago, has been a truly pitiful sight. Now, it is regularly outstripped in the polls by Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which has not existed in any real sense for close to a decade. This year was no exception.

It is, in a sense, no surprise. While the SSP still has activists, it has even less reason to exist than the SLP rump. Its increasingly tailist left-nationalist politics have effectively wiped out what distance there was between the SSP and the left wing of the Scottish National Party. As for the Sheridan splinter group, Solidarity, its main activist bases are the two groups that backed up Galloway's list - and they certainly did better under the latter's tutelage than Sheridan's.

In the Glasgow list poll, then, there was only one substantial leftwing option on offer - the one that united the two largest British left-of-Labour groups, with noted publicity-hound Galloway at the top. The comrades satisfied our fundamental conditions for support in this election - workers' movement candidates opposed to *all* cuts. As a result, we in the Communist Party of Great Britain decided to recommend a vote for Galloway, despite our numerous criticisms of this deeply flawed individual. There cannot be many on the left, indeed, who expected us to do anything else - we have called for critical Galloway votes in various elections since the Respect period, including when he ran successfully against the pro-war Blairite, Oona King, in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005.

Last week, our paper carried an open letter from several comrades urging the left to withhold its support from Galloway.¹ The list of names includes supporters of Hands Off the People of Iran and Communist Students, two organisations set up, in part or in whole, on our initiative. It is also the case that a few CPGB members have expressed support for the letter internally, though they refrained from signing it in recognition of the fact that we were now engaged in an agreed action - to give critical support to all working class anti-cuts candidates.

The reasons given by the comrades for not doing so in the case of Galloway are understandable and, moreover, amount for the most part to correct *criticisms* of him, which it was necessary to raise in the election period (and, indeed, we repeatedly raise in one form or another in the course of our activity). The comrades focus overwhelmingly on the matter of Iran, perhaps unsurprisingly, giving us a rundown of Galloway's disgracefully obsequious courtship of the Islamic regime. As a primer on his appalling record on this score, the open letter serves pretty well.

The comrades also note Galloway's reactionary positions on abortion, and his habit of making himself scarce when parliament debated issues (women's rights, gay rights) which might divide the left and

Islamist elements of his 'constituency'. They are on dodgier ground when they simply complain that he did not turn up to parliament very much at all; this phases into the *faux*-grassroots ('astroturf', as they say in America) campaigns against Galloway got up by his local constituency Labour Party during his reign in Bethnal Green. Cringe-inducing *Celebrity big brother* appearance aside, Galloway is a professional politician, and uses his various media platforms to espouse his *politics* - however horrible they may be in places.

Likewise the complaint about his 'egomania'; it is certainly true as far as it goes, but is this really a reason to deny support to an individual? Would this prevent people from supporting, say, Tommy Sheridan, who is far from short on narcissism himself?

Of course, Galloway tends to *make* problems for himself on this score. It is worth watching his faintly embarrassing election video:² His pitch consists mostly of explaining how much better he is than the run-of-the-mill MSP, some of whom cannot even speak in "the proper grammar and syntax". The people of Glasgow "sorely need" a well-spoken champion, because some of the roads in the town "look like they've been bombed by the RAF, confusing the Gorbals with Libya". However, nowhere does he mention that he is part of a slate.

So why on earth would we recommend a vote for this dubious character? First of all - whatever the man himself may think about the matter, this election was not all about George Galloway. It took place in the context of an enormous government assault on all our living conditions. The cuts agenda dominated the run-up to the May elections, however much consternation there was about the alternative vote referendum. It is responsible for the broad outline of the results - substantial Labour gains in the heartlands (Scotland excepted); a calamitous showing for the Liberal Democrats.

The CPGB recognised this - so our intervention was about drawing a *class line* on the cuts issue. As noted, the formulation we ended up with was: vote for (a) candidates of the workers' movement who (b) oppose, and (at least say they) will vote against, all cuts to public services. We also argued that voters should prefer Labour candidates who meet the conditions to non-Labour, though this is irrelevant in the Galloway case.

Galloway meets the conditions. He is a product of the labour movement; and, while part of his campaigning is invariably redirected through local mosques and patronage networks, he remains reliant on support from willing left groups (in this case, the SWP and SPS). He says he will oppose and vote against all cuts. Therefore, in the absence of *quite exceptional* reasons not to do so, the CPGB recommended a vote for the CAC list.

The reasons offered by the comrades are not exceptional. They are mundane, and true to one extent or another of innumerable left candidates. The left of the labour bureaucracy, for a start, is conditioned by decades of Stalinist hegemony; thus one can find all manner of Labour left or *Morning Star*-type candidates with extremely dodgy records on supporting dictatorial regimes abroad. The rump of the Workers Revolutionary Party can sometimes be spotted running an electoral campaign - and sometimes on a march chanting "Victory to Gaddafi!" Is that level of apology really preferable to Galloway's softness on Iran?

If not, then how long is our list of conditions going to end up? Let us step back for a minute: by pitching a 'line' on the elections, the CPGB makes propaganda to the left about appropriate election policy. At the end of the day, this is propaganda in favour of an appropriate *agitational* line that would allow us to make a real, principled impact on sections of the masses, were the vanguard united. The *logic* of making sure all votes are 'squeaky clean' is not only abstentionist, but contrary to the whole point of interventions around elections (short of running communist candidates) in the first place.

Say Galloway was standing for election in Tehran - well, in that case, his support for state repression by the Islamic Republic would certainly rule him out! This is an irrelevance, however; Galloway does *not* get to dispatch units of bassiji militias to quell Iranian demonstrations from Holyrood. As a British politician, he does, however, position himself against imperialist sanctions and war on Iran. The comrades clearly make a serious political error by not even mentioning the imperialist threat at any point in their letter. It may be objected that a statement against voting for Galloway is not a place to indicate a position on which he is (broadly) principled; but the problem is that the question of the Iranian regime *cannot be separated* from the question of imperialism without equivocating on one or the other.

Our first duty as communists is to oppose the imperialist machinations of our own state. If we were to make Iran an election issue in Britain, it would be by making *opposition to war and sanctions* a condition; and again we would have to vote Galloway, while making clear that his persistent whitewashing of the regime ultimately undermines the anti-war struggle he no doubt sincerely supports. By posing the question in this way, the open letter merges into the social-imperialist arguments of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. It matches up so well, in fact, that the AWL website saw fit to republish the letter *in toto*, not surprisingly without any criticism.³

Communists do not advocate critical support for dubious individuals out of sheer appreciation of the artistry of a good balancing act. We do so, in the first instance, because a given political conjuncture imposes its own priorities on our propaganda and agitation, and we must find ways of highlighting those priorities without blunting our independent line of attack.

More generally, however, *critical* support is an attack on the whole style of politics advocated by Galloway and - in the last instance - most of the far left. Our aim is to win the masses to active partisanship in the working class struggle for socialism. Galloway wants *passive* support from enough of the masses to pursue his own interests. To point out that even the 'best' candidates available are woefully inadequate is itself a challenge to do more than vote. In arguing for critical support, we attack both serenely useless abstentionism, on the one hand, and passive acceptance of whatever turns up on a ballot paper, on the other - we argue, that is, for a critical *mindset* proper to Marxism and conducive to communist activity •

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Notes

1. 'No vote for Galloway', May 5.
2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxZ1agILCLw.
3. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/05/02/no-vote-galloway-open-letter-left.

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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Printed and published by: November Publications Ltd (07950 416922).
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weekly worker

PCS annual conference

Don't rush - make sure we can win

The Public and Commercial Services union is left-led and it is not affiliated to the Labour Party - both factors explain why it is often in the forefront of fighting government attacks. PCS is also an organising and campaigning union rather than a traditional 'servicing' union.

As delegates gather for our annual conference, we must make sure the decisions we take match up to the union's potential. But, before I discuss the key question of action against the cuts, let me deal with the national executive elections, whose results have now been announced.

As usual, there was a three-way fight between the organised factions (aside from a handful of non-faction independents like me). The left has controlled the NEC for some years now, thanks to an electoral pact between Left Unity (dominated by the Socialist Party, with comrades from other left groups, as well as independent socialists, on board) and the PCS Democrats, the far smaller faction, but generously given more places on the electoral slate. The pact goes under the name of Democracy Alliance. Then we have '4themembers' - the self-styled 'moderates' of the right wing. Finally there is the breakaway faction from Left Unity called Independent Left.

Once again the DA pact has won a clear victory - 28 out of 30 places on the executive. 4tm now has only two (compared to four last year), although its losers were reasonably close runners-up. The Independent Left occupies its usual third place, with no NEC places.

On a very slightly increased turnout (10.9%, compared to 10.8% in 2010) DA candidates pulled in an average of 11,000 votes, whereas both 4tm and IL candidates were down by about 1,000 (the 4tm average vote was 8,000 and IL's 5,000). This means that the voting PCS membership continues to prefer the current cautious left leadership to its rightwing challengers, but favours the right over the Independent Left, which continues to make no headway amongst the one in 10 PCS members who can be bothered to vote.

The DA candidates usually secure in excess of 130 branch nominations, while 4tm typically gets about 15 and the IL 20. How on earth does the DA, with the support of 130 branches, only just beat 4tm with its 15? The answer lies in the fact that branch nominations are agreed by the activists who turn up at union meetings, not the membership as a whole.

Whilst individual socialist candidates generally declare their political affiliations in their election statements, when it comes to election literature issued in the name of the Democracy Alliance there is no mention of either Left Unity or

the PCS Democrats, let alone their electoral pact. PCS members just see 'Vote Democracy Alliance' and are told that means backing the current NEC, which is resisting government attacks.

The fact that 90% of members do not vote suggests the SP-dominated leadership has yet to win over the bulk of ordinary members - hence its caution when it comes to militant action despite years of controlling the NEC and the appointment of an army of SP-sympathising full-time officials pushing the line amongst our activists.

Strike ballot

The big question at our May 18-20 national conference will be industrial action in defence of jobs and conditions. Over what precise question should it be called and when? How can the largely apathetic membership be mobilised by the core of excellent activists?

General secretary Mark Serwotka has already told the media that PCS will be balloting for a strike the week after conference, with the aim of united action alongside other unions - the National Union of Teachers, Association of Teachers and Lecturers and University and College Union - to take place on or around June 30. He has presumed conference will endorse the NEC's emergency motion calling for this. So we could see 295,000 NUT, 270,000 PCS, 119,000 UCU and 120,500 ATL members out together. But, then again, we might not.

I think the NEC's intended strategy is a high-risk gamble not worth taking and my branch has put an alternative emergency motion to conference. There may well be others offering

other strategies, which we will not see until we get to conference.

I will explain my concerns and alternative here.

The NEC wants united action with *some* teaching unions for June 30. But where is the NASUWT? We have sought unity with the NUT before (over pay) and seen it win the ballot, only to call off the proposed action because the majority was too slim. PCS then decided to follow suit. Rushing things to make the end of June means other unions cannot come on board because of the timetable for ballots laid down in the anti-union laws. It also means the leadership will not have consulted activists, branches or members on their current mood.

Because PCS will be running an industrial action ballot rather than a consultation exercise the employer will not allow workplace meetings. This means we will be forced to hold meetings in car parks in members' own time and/or leaflet members going into work.

Where are Unison and Unite? PCS signed a much-hyped 'joint working agreement' with Unison. Where's the 'joint' and where's the 'working'? All I know that Unison has done is pay for billboard adverts urging people to "Vote for the party which supports public services" on May 5 (Which one is that then?). I have seen no Unison appeal for united public sector action, let alone a general strike.

But going for June 30 lets the big two, along with other unions, off the hook.

My alternative strategy to be debated at conference (if I am not stitched up by the standing orders committee) is to call for the ballot later in the year to give us more time

to get other unions on board, which will, in turn, get more PCS members on board. There should be a pre-ballot consultation exercise so we can get members together collectively and win them to support action. We must also ensure that membership records are correct, given the recent successful legal challenges, resulting in the banning of action over minor discrepancies. We also need a recruitment campaign amongst the large minority of non-members.

I agree with the Independent Left that members are getting fed up of the 'one day here, one day there' action that seems to get nowhere. PCS national ballots seem to result in fewer members voting, the margin of support narrowing, fewer pickets turning out and more members strike-breaking. The issue is not the need to fight the cuts - the issue is the need to win the ballot overwhelmingly. We have to win our members over. Work-to-rule action is usually a flop - we have to be confident that the members will maintain solidarity.

The NEC talks about the need to maintain the momentum of the TUC's March 26 anti-cuts demonstration (so should the other unions). Oddly enough, PCS called for the demo to be held in November 2010 rather than leaving it until March 2011. But that very delay gave activists more time to make it the success it was. We would not have been able to mobilise 500,000 back in November and the same consideration applies now to industrial action.

On March 26 Mark Serwotka told the Hyde Park rally: "Imagine what it would be like if we didn't only march together; we took strike action together across all of our public

services." Well, Mark, my suggested strategy gives the best chance of that happening, so why are you rushing to meet a deadline that suits the education unions, but not the PCS or others? My strategy (near identical to that of the NEC, but calling for the ballot to be held later) gives us a better chance of getting more unions on board, more PCS members voting for action, with a greater likelihood of winning the ballot overwhelmingly and not by a narrow margin, and more non-members joining. I can afford to be proved wrong on this. The NEC cannot.

We have not even heard if Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, a guest speaker at our conference, will pledge any concrete support. He is timed to address us on Friday *after* we have debated the strategy (on Wednesday). It would be useful for delegates to hear what he promises (if anything) before we debate our industrial action strategy, but it seems we are to be denied this opportunity. What is going on here?

If we agree to ballot and then hear Unite has no intention of calling action this year, that will hardly boost morale, will it? If he is aiming for action later, our members will ask why we are being called out now (and then again later?). Our members are low-paid, those on higher salaries are on a pay freeze and inflation is taking off.

I am asking the questions members have been asking me, but I have been given no answers, apart from 'We have to fight the cuts'. My best activists are telling me June is too soon - where are the other, bigger unions? ●

Dave Vincent

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