

weekly  
**worker**



**Platypus: is it a sect? Is it an academic grouping? Is it a theoretical dead end?**

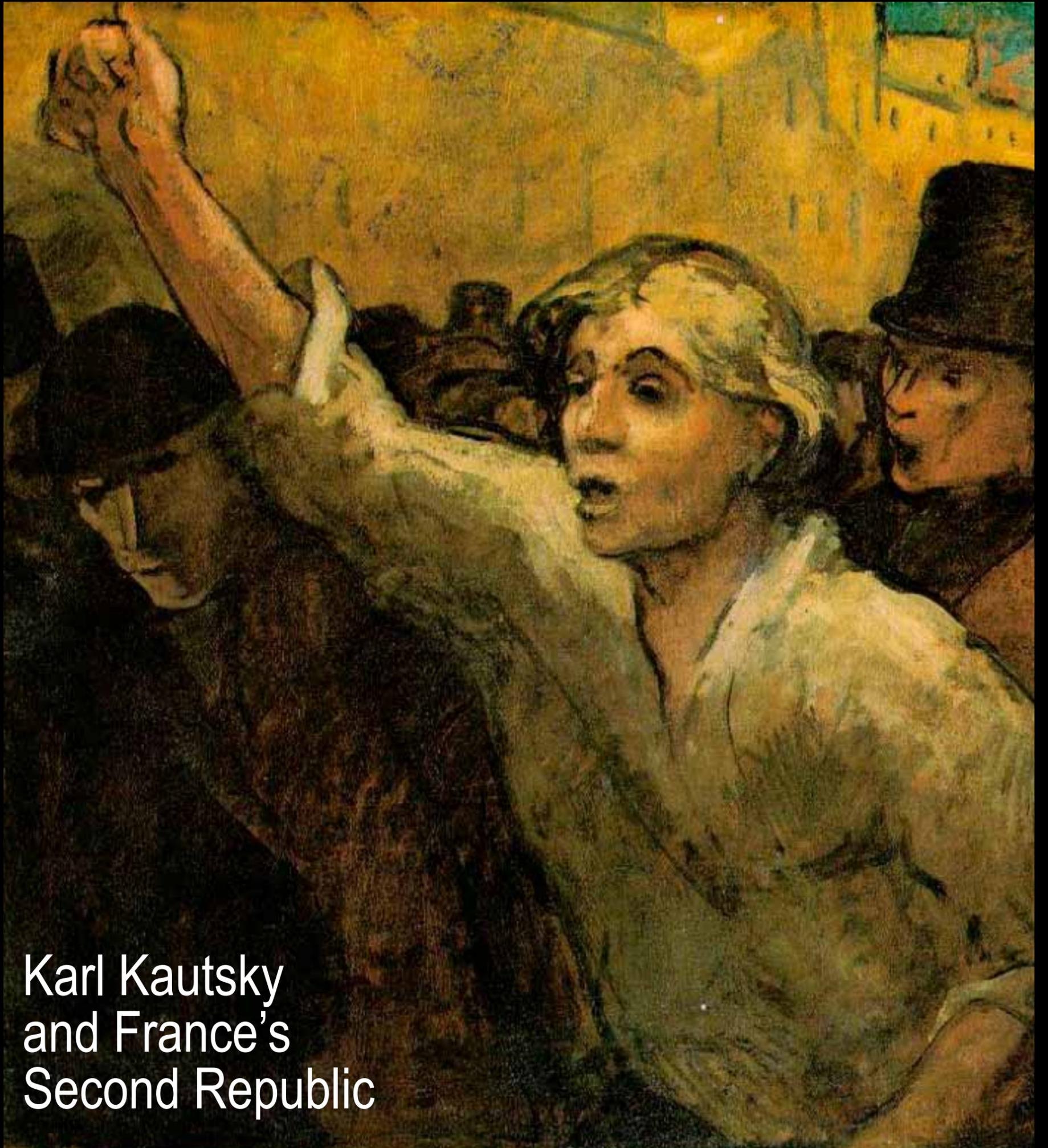
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Karl Kautsky  
and France's  
Second Republic

## LETTERS



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

## Platypus

On behalf of Platypus, let me express how greatly we appreciate Mike Macnair's very thorough report on and critiques of the events at the recent Platypus convention in Chicago from April 29 to May 1, at which we were very happy and grateful to have his participation ('No need for party?', May 12).

However, I disagree with how Macnair characterises Peter Nettl's argument, which I referenced, specifically to show how Luxemburg's and Lenin's Marxist revolutionism offered an alternative to both opportunist reformism and (anarchistic or Sorelian) actionism. I think Macnair avoids (or I didn't present clearly enough) the issue I was raising about the inherent unavoidable authoritarianism of late 19th century mass (working class) parties that needed to be worked through by later Marxism (unlike circa 1848), and the problems of which Lenin and Luxemburg were aware, unlike the German Social Democratic Party centre (of Bebel and Kautsky) and later Stalinism (including Maoism).

Luxemburg's pamphlets, *Reform or revolution?* and *The mass strike*, hone their critiques of the SPD and broader Second International precisely on this score, as does, more broadly, Trotsky's *Results and prospects* (see especially the section on 'The prerequisites of socialism'). This concern, the problem of the *raison d'être* of the social democratic (and later communist) party, is less explicit, but nonetheless present as a key background issue in Lenin's *What is to be done?* and *The state and revolution*, as well as his *Leftwing communism* and *Imperialism* pamphlets. The Second International radicals recognised, after Marx and Engels, the modern state and its political parties as phenomena of Bonapartism - that is, the need for proletarian socialist revolution.

On 'the bourgeois revolution', the historiography offered by some members of Platypus by way of perspective does not treat the 1789-1815 Great French Revolution as the 'first', but rather the last of the great bourgeois revolutions, and somewhat late at that, explaining in part its pathologies; and in the Marxist view 1830 and 1848 were already 'proletarian'. The importance of the earlier Dutch and British experience is very much present in our minds as the original emergence of modern bourgeois society, such that bourgeois Britain was the bastion of reaction against the French revolution. So I think the perspective we tend to adopt in the Platypus approach to this history is not so 'new leftist'/post-1960s as Macnair suspects.

Our general perspective in Platypus is that, for Marx, proletarian socialism not only potentially 'negates', but also importantly potentially 'completes', the bourgeois revolution (at a global, world-historical scale), that the crisis of bourgeois society in capital is the need for socialism, but that socialism was not understood by Marx to be a final end-point: rather a potential new beginning for human history.

I look forward to the promised second part of Macnair's critique of Platypus as a project. However, I would caution that it is important to note the actual basis of our project - that is, our "hosting the critical conversation on the left" (about Marxism), that we don't think will take place without our project's specific focus. This, and not any purported 'Platypus positions' to be derived, for instance, from my or other Platypus members' writings, requires judgment and criticism. We've

published the transcripts of most of our major public fora, so I think our project should be judged on the basis of whether these are productive. The convention that Macnair attended threatens to give a skewed perspective on our actual activities, which don't usually put forward Platypus members' takes so prominently or, in some instances, (nearly) exclusively as at our convention. There is a potentially important distinction between what we do as an organised project and the consensus of how we understand the need for our project - that is, our take on Marxism. As a project, we want to be judged on our practice rather than on our 'theory', whatever the latter's limitations.

Lastly, the title of my online collection of writings for Platypus, *The last Marxist*, is indeed meant to be provocative (what would it mean to make such a claim or have such an aspiration?), but with what I hope is recognisable humour, if not exactly tongue in cheek.

**Chris Cutrone**  
email

## Misconceptions

I wanted to clear up some misconceptions about the Democratic Socialists of America. I don't know who represented DSA at the Platypus convention, but apparently she or he didn't do a good job.

No, we don't have 10,000 members at present (the high point of the organisation was in the early 1990s, with around 11,000 paid-up members). We have, last I knew, around 6,000. Some members may think we have more, but they're misinformed.

Our image of an alternative society is not Sweden or Finland. We say that the immediate struggle in the United States is to force reforms into existence that make the US economy more 'Scandinavian', if you will, but that does not exhaust our vision. We're explicitly for workers' self-management and democratic planning and such. A number of members are taken with the model in David Schweickart's *After capitalism*, which I think is a well-written book, if too 'market socialist' for my taste. I think the work of Pat Devine provides a better vision - one of more comprehensive planning - and I've promoted it within the DSA.

This brings us to the Democratic Party question. I'll present the mainstream DSA position (one with which I've traditionally agreed, but am currently somewhat sceptical of).

The DSA is in and around the left wing of the Democratic Party mainly because (a) most of the people we want to work with and recruit are there, including rank-and-file unionists, and (b) the US has an electoral system which makes the formation of a mass left/labour party uniquely difficult. In a parliamentary system where the members of parliament select the prime minister as head of government - especially in countries with proportional representation - electing minor party legislators is much easier. But in a system like that of the US, where the president is elected separately by nationwide votes and members of Congress are elected in single-member districts, only two parties can survive.

You note the organisational looseness of the Democrats (and Republicans). In fact, today they are both quasi-state institutions - no longer political parties in the European parliamentary sense; they are legally regulated structures with fixed times and places, where anyone can register. Open to all, they have no ideological requirements for membership. To become a Republican or Democrat, you just register as such. In fact, these are not really parties at all, but coalitions of more or less compatible

social forces, in which various groups contest for influence under a common banner. Of course, it is still difficult for any individual or group to succeed in this process without lots of money. But organised groups with clear programmatic ideas and a long-term commitment can become forces within either party. The mainstream of the DSA thinks that labour and the left should do precisely that within the Democrats - to become 'a party within a party'. The DSA supports left Democrats like Dennis Kucinich and John Conyers to that end. (I admit that this is not always spelled out explicitly within DSA literature, but that's the thinking.)

Is this popular frontist? It's not intended as such. It has nothing to do with old CPUSA arguments for supporting 'representatives of the progressive wing of the bourgeoisie' or what have you. The argument is that Democrats such as Kucinich and Conyers are *not* representatives of the capitalist class; that they are traditional social democratic-type workers' reps, because the Democratic Party is in fact basically a structureless line on the ballot which is open for (class) contestation.

Now all this may be wrong, but I'd say it's something better than "not even Lib-Lab".

**Jason Schulman**  
New York

## De rigueur

I thought Mike Macnair's article on the Platypus convention was very interesting. The only thing I would want to raise for the sake of clarity, as opposed to a dispute over politics, is his invocation of philosophical rigour.

While it is true that philosophical rigour is part of a ruthless critique of anything existing, Adorno in *Minima moralia* writes: "The injunction to practise intellectual honesty usually amounts to sabotage of thought." And he goes on to detail how the antithetical function of thought is undermined by this injunction.

Naturally, there is an issue with simply affirming or denouncing intellectual rigour: neither nonsense nor triviality will suffice as modes of thought today, nor could they ever, but I think that the issue Adorno raises of intellectual rigour falling into affirmation is a very real one. Indeed that is what has largely happened to analytic philosophy. Wittgenstein's literary executor was Anscombe: while a brilliant philosopher, her Catholicism was compatible with her philosophy because of its irrelevance.

The real question about philosophical rigour is not textual analysis, but philosophy as a method of thought about our world and our place in it. In that respect the advent of philosophical rigour has been only one side of a defeat, either in the form of obtuse French theory or positivism that, while intriguing and better than its modern followers, cannot say much about the questions we all face today.

As for Mike's account of the convention itself, while it is true that Richard Rubin did coin the excellent phrase, 'neo-Kautskyan', at Mike's presentation and most of the Platypodes were sympathetic to his critique of your project, it is not true that a lot of us thought the splits in the Trotskyists were principled. I regret that there was not a chance to push the sectarians in the room on the principled or unprincipled nature of their splits. I think this was a result of how well Mike presented the case for unity as a practical matter, and indeed 'Pythonism' in splits has been a deeply ingrained feature in the movement on this side of the Atlantic as well - a fact we all know well in Platypus. Afterwards I heard quite a bit of sympathy and agreement around Mike's position on the need for unity

at this moment, although most also felt this would be insufficient for resurrecting the left.

Anyway, I am looking forward to the upcoming article on the Platypus project itself and following the CPGB with great interest.

**Watson Ladd**  
Platypus Affiliated Society

## Defeatist

I believe that Mike Macnair is wrong in his analysis of the position of the early Comintern and Trotsky in relation to the question of the 'anti-imperialist united front' and the tactics of communists in relation to the national and colonial question (Letters, May 12).

Besides the fact that the Comintern in its Fourth Congress theses explicitly talks about opposing pan-Islamism masquerading as anti-imperialism, Mike fails to take into account what Lenin had said in the debate around the theses, or indeed in previous discussions within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party on the question. In those earlier discussions, for instance, Lenin talks about guarding against movements that were in effect acting as agents of external powers. But, more clearly, in his contribution at the Second Congress, he says: "... as communists we will only support the bourgeois freedom movements in the colonial countries if these movements are really revolutionary and if their representatives are not opposed to us training and organising the peasantry in a revolutionary way. If that is no good, then the communists there also have a duty to fight against the reformist bourgeoisie ..." ([www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm)).

Mike says that there are lots of examples in the 20th century where nationalist movements have simply turned into Stalinist regimes. That is true, but is that in itself proof that the tactic of supporting a non-imperialist state against an imperialist state in a war, where the latter is trying to subjugate the former, is falsified? No, of course not.

Simply applying the correct strategy is no guarantee of victory in anything. Given the extremely weak forces that revolutionary Marxists had at their disposal compared with the forces of reformism, Stalinism and imperialism, it would have been remarkable if simply having the correct strategy were sufficient to guarantee success. But it would be opportunistic in the extreme to conclude from that balance of class forces that we should abandon basic Marxist principles.

The main problem has been that in many of these struggles, the revolutionaries have not adopted the position of Lenin and the Comintern, as set out in the quote above, and have simply turned themselves into cheerleaders for the nationalist forces rather than setting themselves the task of building up a genuine revolutionary movement in the process of opposing imperialist aggression. Take Trotsky's position in relation to Mexico under Cardenas. Was Trotsky right to support the Cardenas regime in opposing British imperialism and nationalising British oil interests in Mexico? I find it hard to believe any revolutionary Marxist could answer no to that question. But Trotsky did not simply become a cheerleader for Cardenas in the way some today have done in relation to Chávez. He argued against Mexican revolutionaries submerging themselves in the Institutional Revolutionary Party, and argued instead for the need to build a Mexican workers' party.

I would suggest another concrete case where Mike might wish to consider the implications of what he is saying. That is France under German occupation. Is he saying that, if the Free French resistance movement had

proposed some joint activity with the communist resistance, he would have opposed such a joint action? That seems to me to be ultra-left, third-periodist madness. Of course, in any such case, the revolutionaries have to go into such an arrangement with their eyes wide open, and believing that those with whom they are making this tactical alliance are likely to stab them in the back, but to refuse to agree to such action would undoubtedly condemn the revolutionaries in the eyes of the masses.

What Mike's argument really comes down to is the fact that we cannot apply this strategy because we are too small. But history shows that revolutionary organisations that refuse to defend basic principles are doomed never to become larger forces. But I would ask Mike then what the conclusion of his thesis is in relation to Libya? Presumably, if he is opposed to supporting Libya, as against British, US, French imperialism, etc, then he will not be unhappy to see imperialism install its own puppet regime in Tripoli.

I contend that the revolutionary Marxist position remains to oppose imperialist aggression and intentions, to support any truly revolutionary forces in Libya, and to propose joint action with other forces against imperialism, whilst continuing to ruthlessly expose the class nature of those forces, to expose their inability to wage an effective struggle against imperialism and, where necessary, as Lenin says above, "the communists there also have a duty to fight against the reformist bourgeoisie". For Marxists outside Libya, our duty is to support any genuine revolutionary forces - I am not at all convinced that the 'rebel' forces come under that heading - and to assist in whatever way we can the building of independent working class organisations.

We should attempt to assist in the building of links between workers in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and other adjoining states. We should attempt to make contacts with genuine revolutionary socialist organisations in Libya and provide them with arms, finance and other practical support. I cannot for one moment imagine that, were I a revolutionary Marxist in Libya, adopting the defeatist position as Mike suggests, in the face of massive imperialist aggression, would be a credible position.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## No mention

It's a wee bit disappointing that Anne Mc Shane totally leaves out the results of militant nationalist and republican candidates in the local election in the six occupied counties, only mentioning the Irish Republican Socialist Party in Belfast ('Governing parties consolidate', May 12). She doesn't mention the particularly strong votes of the IRSP in Strabane, Gerry Donnelly of the 32-County Sovereignty Movement in Derry or Eirígí in West Belfast and Fermanagh, where they got a councillor elected.

Are militant nationalists not worth mentioning in a communist paper? The platforms of these groups are in many points much more progressive than the petty bourgeois, anti-nationalist manifestos of tiny Trotskyite groups like the People Before Profit Alliance, the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party.

**Dieter Reinisch**  
Vienna

## Dreary

Anne Mc Shane's article on the assembly and council elections in the Six Counties rightly notes the importance of the national question there and the failure of the SP and SWP to address it.

But, unfortunately, Anne's report itself fails to note the vote gained by Éirigi at all, and the combined vote for the socialist republicans (Éirigi and the IRSP). In the council elections, the two socialist-republican groups gained 4,200 votes, compared with the 2,300 of the SP and SWP/PBPA. The fact that Éirigi scored over 2,000 votes in West Belfast is a significant achievement, especially on their first outing and in such a Sinn Féin stronghold.

Given the centrality of the national question, it seems odd that even when socialist-republicans perform better electorally, as on this occasion, they are largely ignored in the paper.

The one thing about the Éirigi and IRSP campaigns that I found disturbing, however, is that two groups with very similar politics stood against each other in one Belfast ward - madness! - and didn't call for a vote for each other elsewhere.

I'm not bothered about the divisions between the opportunist groups who pursue what Connolly described as the "screamingly funny" idea that Belfast is the same as some industrial city in Britain. However, the divisions between socialist-republicans are counterproductive and do actually matter because these are the political forces which are right on the key questions of Irish politics. Moreover, both Éirigi and the IRSP are far more forthright in talking about socialism than the likes of the PBPA and the SP.

Joint action and, further down the track, unification by socialist-republicans could create a significant new and genuinely revolutionary party in Irish politics, something at least on the scale of the IRSP of Costello's time. This is more likely to offer a fruitful way forward than the dull economism of the United Left Alliance and its dreary competing component parts.

**Philip Ferguson**  
email

## Cell mate

I have just read your deep analysis of the local election results ('Non Labour left election results', May 12). Wow! What a massive amount of work you must have put in. Expressing your opinion on the Socialist Equality Party keeping quiet on their results in Scotland was genius, in-depth exposure reporting at its best.

The only problem is, the SEP had nothing to say on their results in Scotland because they didn't stand a single candidate there. Hence their zero vote. About as many as you have brain cells in your head, I guess.

**Danny Dickinson**  
email

## Zero sum gain

I can state categorically there was no SEP candidate in Scotland in the recent elections. It is a bit puzzling that such an error could arise. The BBC was unable to explain it, but removed the incorrect entry from its website. As a zero vote would have been fairly bizarre, it is a pity that the *Weekly Worker* did not check directly with the SEP.

However, Peter Manson was quite right to state that the SEP considered it significant that it overtook the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition campaign in Sheffield Walkley. The SEP's position - calling for rank-and-file committees and exposing the fraud of the TUC-led campaign against spending cuts - was sharply distinguished from that of Tusc. The two positions had a public airing at a hustings meeting called by the PCS union. Candidates present were challenged to endorse a PCS five-point pledge, which hinges on supporting the PCS's 'There is an alternative' campaign. Apart from the SEP candidate, the rest readily fell into line (Greens, Labour and an independent who all accept 'some' cuts). The SWP Tusc candidate for Burngreave endorsed it and went on to insist that unions could be pressured to lead the

fight against cuts.

A fuller account was posted on the World Socialist Web Site: "The Tusc position, even when they don't go on, like the Socialist Party, to work for a mark two Labour Party based on the unions, fully embraces the union-inspired 'alternative' that simply calls for taxes to be collected from businesses to avoid the need for cuts to make up the deficit due to the financial collapse. Brendan Barber and his chums at the Bank of England would have no trouble with that."

Tusc and the entire 'left' fraternity that merely calls for more action on the basis of such a feeble platform are ideologically welded to the unions and will never lead the kind of struggle that the situation demands.

**Mike Martin**  
Sheffield

## Internationalist

The debate over whether to back George Galloway in his failed attempt to get elected to the Scottish parliament has seen some ridiculous responses from a number of comrades. This and the open letter ('No vote for Galloway', May 5) has exposed the mistaken approach and narrow tactics adopted by the Provisional Central Committee during the elections.

The CPGB adopted a perspective document which called for support for anti-cuts candidates, naming all of the more high-profile left groups who stood. The *Weekly Worker* suggested no preferences for any other constituency or list where the left were competing against each other. It did not state that we back Galloway in the document; yet come election time Galloway was singled out for support. So why was he given special treatment?

In Glasgow the *Weekly Worker* picked Galloway ahead of the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Labour Party because the latter organisations did not meet the extra conditions which elevated Galloway above others. It argued that internationalist comrades were wrong to place extra conditions on candidates beyond opposing all cuts and proposing vaguely working class politics - even if you can consider a popular front in miniature the politics of our class. Galloway's British unionism was argued to be better than the SSP's call for an independent socialist republic in Scotland.

Other comrades attempted to paint the Galloway list as some sort of left unity endeavour. Ridiculous when you consider the reality of what happened. Dangerous when you acknowledge the sectarian politics Galloway pitched during the election. The lack of numbers out campaigning for Galloway was testament to the fact that it was simply an opportunist stitch-up. There were no open meetings, no conferences and no serious debate about the politics of the list. You would find more democracy and working class participation in Scottish Labour in deciding candidates and policy. Furthermore there was no tangible organisation or strengthening of the anti-cuts movement in Glasgow. It is a very odd unity endeavour that leaves the left fractured, weak and marginalised.

Apparently the CPGB gave only critical support to Galloway. Yet the only serious critical comments in the paper against Galloway came from my previous letter (April 7) and the open letter printed on the day of the elections. Whilst the *Weekly Worker* has exposed Galloway's awful politics and his links with the Iranian regime in the past, it failed to do so for this election, weakening our intervention.

The worst of the attacks on the open letter is the hysterical claim that the 30 or so comrades who signed it are promoting a social-imperialist line. The leading comrades who signed the letter have collaborated with the CPGB in attacking social-imperialism through Hands Off the People of Iran and in the pages of our paper. Yet they

are shamefully smeared as social-imperialists and accused of backing Alliance for Workers' Liberty-type political attacks on Galloway. This is a desperate and pathetic insult to internationalists who have proved in deeds and words their opposition to imperialism many times. Such attacks weaken our anti-war and solidarity work and cedes what are essential criticisms of Galloway as the sole property of the social-imperialists.

According to Jack Conrad *et al* Galloway is no different to the Communist Party of Britain's John Foster or the Workers Revolutionary Party. This is a lie. Many comrades both in our organisation and outside who refuse to back Galloway went to polling stations holding their noses and voted for all sorts of backward and centrist candidates. What makes Galloway different is the role he plays in the repression machine of the Islamic Republic. We know his links with the Iran through his work on Press TV. A channel where tortured, beaten and exhausted victims are paraded and forced to make false confessions. A channel that declares the murdered comrades who lie under the stars at Khavaran and thousands of graves across Iran as terrorists, drug smugglers and rapists. A channel where Galloway attacks the masses and pledges support for their murderers when they rise up for freedom. Galloway is a conscious cog in the machine of terror directed at the Iranian people. To ignore this and focus on what happens on this little island alone is narrow opportunism and a betrayal of our internationalist duty.

It does not matter whether those that play a part in discrediting and repressing our comrades in Iran stand in Tehran Central or Glasgow, as Jack Conrad and James Turley have bizarrely claimed. The class struggle knows no borders. What happens to workers in Tehran matters for the struggles of workers in Glasgow. The open letter represented a consistent internationalist approach that puts the global struggle of our class ahead of the vanity of parasite reactionaries like Galloway.

**Chris Trafford**  
Manchester CPGB

## No apologies

The CPGB has developed a pattern of denouncing the AWL over its positions, only to quietly adopt similar positions later on without any apologies or acknowledgment - eg, on the Middle East, Ireland and the Labour Party. I wonder how long it will be before the 'social-imperialist' slur is quietly dropped in favour of a more consistent third-camp approach?

And, as someone living in Glasgow, I'd like to know how exactly I campaigned against Galloway in the Scottish elections ('Constitutional crisis beckons', May 12)?

**Peter Burton**  
Glasgow

## Pointless

I fail to see why your pages donated such space to a debate on whether the left should back George Galloway in Glasgow, especially as the left in Glasgow had the choice of three protests votes who stood no chance of being elected (the SSP and SLP being the other two).

It also had the choice of trying to boost the Greens, who had a left reformist programme and maybe a more imaginative and democratic one than the other lists. Another interesting debate would have been what the left should have done in the constituency votes, where it had to choose between the Scottish National Party and Labour.

The debates on George Galloway come across as ultimately pointless. The only observation I would make is that you shouldn't think you can parachute into an area and have support.

**James Tomkinson**  
email

# ACTION

## CPGB podcasts

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

## Communist Students

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

## Radical Anthropology Group

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

**May 24:** 'Falstaff: lunarchy in the kingdom of England'. Speaker: Camilla Power.

## Solidarity with Syrians

**Friday May 20, 5pm:** Vigil, outside Syrian embassy, 8 Belgrave Square, London SW1. Solidarity with Syrian martyrs and against the regime simultaneously in many cities. [www.facebook.com/event.php?id=215593605135282](http://www.facebook.com/event.php?id=215593605135282).

## Hands Off Venezuela

**Saturday May 21, 10am to 6pm:** Annual conference, room 3B, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Members free. Join on the day for £7.50 (£5 unwaged). Organised by Hands Off Venezuela: [london@handsoffvenezuela.org](mailto:london@handsoffvenezuela.org).

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.enoughcoalition.org.uk).

## Protest against Uribe

No to legitimisation of state terror. **Saturday May 21, 4pm:** Picket, Latin American business forum, 27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 (nearest tube: Baker Street).

**Monday May 23, 5pm:** Picket, LSE campus, Houghton Street, London WC2 (nearest tube: Covent Garden).

Organised by Colombia Solidarity Campaign: [www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk](http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk).

## Defend the NHS

**Tuesday May 24, 7pm:** London-wide meeting, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: [www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com](http://www.KeepOurNHSpublic.com).

## Save Manchester Advice

**Thursday May 26, 10am:** Council meeting, Manchester town hall. Come to the council scrutiny committee. Decisions over the complete closure of Manchester Advice are to be reviewed by councillors at a meeting open to the public.

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

## Drop the charges

**Thursday June 9, Friday June 10, 9am:** Picket, magistrates court, 70 Horseferry Road, London SW1. Drop the charges against student protesters. Organised by Defend The Right To Protest: <http://defendtherighttoprotest.org>.

## No to academies

**Saturday June 11, 10.30am to 4pm:** Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Stop primary, secondary and special schools converting to academy status. Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: <http://www.antiacademies.org.uk>.

## Ten years on

**Saturday June 11, 9.30am:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Afghanistan and the war on terror 10 years on'. Speakers include: Tony Benn, George Galloway, Tariq Ali, Lindsey German, Military Families Against the War. Admission: £5 - book in advance. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

## CPGB wills

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

## US LEFT

# Theoretical dead end

The US Platypus group is in the borderlands of two types of left, argues Mike Macnair in the second of two articles

In last week's paper I reported on the third Platypus International Convention in Chicago, April 29-May 1.<sup>1</sup> The concluding plenary discussed the 'Platypus critique', where speakers from the group denied that it had "a line". This, and the convention as a whole, pose another question: the critique of the Platypus.

If it was really the case that the Platypus Affiliated Society had no political line or agenda, but merely aimed to 'host the conversation', then to critique it would be like offering a critique of large, vague academic 'learned societies' like the classicists' American Philological Association or the English Lit crowd's Modern Language Association.

Such a critique would only be worthwhile to the extent that the learned society in question *already* dominated the 'conversation' in question, and in doing so maintained an *implicit* line - like the idea of 'western civilisation', which had the effect of excluding work which did not comply from academic recognition. This situation certainly exists in the economists' learned societies (exclusionary dominance of neoclassical microeconomics), and *de facto* exists in several Eng Lit societies (exclusionary dominance of postmodernism).

For a small group like Platypus such a critique would be pointless. In reality, however, Platypus both does not, and does, have a political line and agenda.

It does not have a political line and agenda in the sense that it does not call for votes for anyone, or vote on a platform or political positions which it is to defend in common. The comrades claim that because of the death of the left this is *impossible* without the prior theoretical critique which might, at some unspecified date in the future, make political action possible.

It does, however, have a political line and agenda - even if this was only the statement on its website: "Hence, to free ourselves, we declare that the left is dead. Or, more precisely, that we are all that is left of it." This involves identification with "the left" or at least with its history; and a *negative* critique of the existing left. Other things apart, it would also be the classic claim of a sect.

## Imperialism

In fact, there is more, and it centres on the issue of imperialism. Platypus's claim that "the left is dead" is a claim motivated at the end of the day partly by the perception that the left has become so small as to be politically irrelevant, but also by the perception that the left has abandoned the project of general human emancipation.

The basis of this perception is expressed in a wide variety of articles on Platypus's website - some by Platypus members, others expressed by their choices about who to interview or review. Here the idea of 'Spartacism plus Adorno', considered as *critiques* rather than as positive policy, has explanatory value.

From Spartacism come hostility to 'statist feminism', which allies with the right on sexual purity issues, and to other reactionary-utopian politics like 'green' arguments for 'small is beautiful', anti-technology, anti-globalisation, ideas of the peasantry or indigenous peoples as 'showing the way', and Maoism. From the political culture of Spartacism come the 'in your face' provocations like "the left



Chris Cutrone

is dead ... we are all that is left of it". With much, though not all, of the political substance of this critique of the contemporary left CPGB comrades would agree, though we do not draw the sect conclusion.

From Adorno, and *not* from Spartacism, come defence of capitalist 'high culture' and hostility to riots for the sake of 'resistance' - and hostility to the 'anti-imperialism' which demands that the left *side with* whoever is the current target of US military operations, even if they are obvious tyrants like the Ba'athists or Libyan Jamahiriya or clericalist reactionaries like the Iranian regime.

This last, of course, has led to the interpretation that Platypus is *presently* Eustonite: people who favour the victory of the US imperialism's military operations over the alternative on the basis of the unattractive character of the targets. The case was sharply made by Louis Proyect in 2010. His conclusion is:

"What we are dealing with is a section of the academic left that has become profoundly disoriented and succumbed to the pressure of living inside the US, the world's largest and most dangerous hegemon in history. The purpose of this article is to put a skull-and-bones sign next to the poisoned well they drink from, so as to warn any young graduate student to not drink the water at the risk of political death."<sup>2</sup>

There are two issues involved: one of politics and one of theory. The theory issue means specifically the theory of the problem Richard Rubin asked us to address in the Trotsky plenary at the convention: the problem of the defeat of the German revolution of 1918-19 at the hands of the SPD leadership, or, more exactly, the limitation of the German revolution to the creation of a capitalist state and the actual participation of this state in counterrevolutionary military operations against the Russian Revolution.

## Politics

The issue of politics is simple. Suppose a movement which seeks general human emancipation. *In fact* today as in 1900, albeit in different juridical forms, there is a hierarchy of countries. Countries higher up the global pecking order feel free to assist 'their' corporations to bribe officials in countries lower down the pecking order. If 'unacceptable' actions are taken by the governments of countries lower down, they feel free to intervene with covert support to minority and terrorist groups, and so on. And, when push comes to shove, they intervene with direct military force.

It should be clear that general human emancipation is inconsistent with the hierarchy of countries, and

that a movement which claims to seek general human emancipation but gives political support to this hierarchy is engaged in political doublethink.

At the same time, *only* Lenin's theory of imperialism - that it represents the final stage of capitalism and World War I the opening of a terminal crisis or *Zusammenbruch* - gives support to the conclusion drawn by the Comintern and maintained by Trotsky, that communists in imperialist countries must not only oppose the imperialist actions of their own countries, but also *seek the victory of the nationalist movement of the subordinated country, even if it is authoritarian or clerical-reactionary in character*. Not even Bukharin's or Luxemburg's theories, which are closest to Lenin's, support this conclusion.

And, in fact, the evidence of 20th century history is unambiguously clear that both the *theory* of terminal crisis (Trotsky's 'death agony of capitalism') and the *political conclusion* drawn from it of alliance of the workers' movement with petty bourgeois nationalists in the 'anti-imperialist united front' are false - as false and as disproved as the theory of phlogiston.

These circumstances require advocates of general human emancipation in countries high up the pecking order to pursue a *two-sided* policy in relation to their own countries' coercive operations against countries lower down. On the one hand, it is necessary to *oppose* these operations clearly, unambiguously and as far as possible practically. On the other, it is also necessary to give political solidarity and what practical support can be given to emancipatory movements in the countries targeted - and therefore to avoid stupidly prettifying tyrants, local Bonapartes, clerical reactionaries, etc, merely because they may from time to time talk 'anti-imperialist' talk.

To err on either side of this line once or twice or even several times is merely to err. To develop a *consistent* position one side or another of this line is to become a political agent of the system of global hierarchy: ie, to oppose general human emancipation.

The 'anti-imperialist' left gives political support to people who are the US's enemies now but have been their allies in the past and may well be again in the future; in doing so it makes itself an enemy of the local workers' movement in the country in question, and more concretely aids the regimes against the exiles of the workers' movements.

Groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Eustonites, by focusing their fire *only* on 'third world' tyrants without simultaneously up-front and explicitly opposing imperialist operations, become 'useful idiots' for the imperialist states - whose operations in the subordinated countries are as tyrannical as their opponents.

Richard Rubin in the Trotsky plenary said that defeatism is a moral obligation, but not one which could be expected to lead to revolution. What I have said so far is broadly consistent with this. This is because I have taken as the starting point *only* the Platypus claim that the left has died because it has abandoned the aim of general human emancipation, and supposed *only* that the movement is to fight for general human emancipation. It still follows that the movement cannot

be true to itself *as a movement for general human emancipation* without its sections in the countries higher up the global hierarchy displaying explicit, upfront and active opposition to this hierarchy, and therefore to the blockade and war operations of their own countries.

Chris Cutrone is Platypus's (presumably elected) president. He writes, not infrequently, on Middle Eastern affairs in its journal, *Platypus Review*. His language in these articles is at best Delphic - obscure and capable of multiple interpretations. Cutrone is (as an academic) a pupil of Moishe Postone, and says openly that his politics are influenced by Postone. Postone unambiguously *is* a Eustonite or a left Zionist of a variety not dissimilar to the AWL. Some of Cutrone's analysis of Middle East politics shows signs, like the AWL's analysis, of being taken from the overseas outlets of Tel Aviv. Louis Proyect argues that Cutrone's language (and that of other Platypus writers) is, rather than Delphic, Aesopian: obscure, and contains code which actually signals private (here Eustonite or AWLish) commitments.

A number of Platypus supporters responded to Proyect's posting. They took the opportunity to assert their critique of the left. They insisted that *Platypus Review* is an open magazine and - as Spencer Leonard said in the closing plenary at the convention - that Platypus does not have a line. They said that they *do not support* 'humanitarian interventions' - which is the code also used by the AWL. But they did not take the opportunity to say upfront that they as a group or as individuals *oppose* these 'sanctions' and military actions - still less that they would campaign to stop them, even at the level of publishing anti-war or anti-sanctions material in *Platypus Review*.

Cutrone's address to the convention - on 'The anti-fascist v anti-imperialist "left": some genealogies and prospects' - *may* have signalled a change in direction. I do not know because I missed the speech and he has not (yet) put it up on his blog.

In the absence of a shift, the problem is that the *balance* of the *Platypus Review's* coverage is AWLish. It is not strictly Eustonite, since it does not openly support 'wars for democracy'. But it uses the same sort of 'how can we condemn' evasions as AWL leader Sean Matgamna. If anything, it is to the right of the Matgamnaites, who do have practical commitments in the British workers' movement and a willingness to attempt to project a (defective) line for concrete support for independent working class politics in the Middle East.

Remember that I have not said anything more than that the absence of opposition to the global hierarchy of countries is as much an abandonment of the project of general human emancipation as is the 'anti-imperialism of idiots' that gives political support to local reaction and authoritarianism as offering in some way an alternative to the global hierarchy. I have not asserted Lenin's or any other theory of imperialism. It is merely that both Platypus's *claim* not to have a political line and its *claim* to represent a reassertion of the emancipatory project of Marxism are belied by the one-sided character of *Platypus Review's* coverage of these issues.

It would, of course, be possible to

maintain a pro-imperialist or neutral line if Platypus were willing to abandon the critique of the existing left as anti-emancipatory. All that would be needed would be to assert that the *immediate* general emancipation of humanity is impossible and that it is first necessary to pass through capitalism *via* imperialism. Platypus is a third of the way to this position, since it asserts that emancipation has to be built on the basis of the conquests of capitalism. Step two is to assert that the material or 'objective' conditions for socialist revolution had not matured as of 1917 (or 1938). This point has been clearly argued by Moshé Machover in 1999,<sup>3</sup> and, from within the 'Lukácsian' tradition to which Platypus adheres, by István Mészáros, in *Beyond capital* (1995). Platypus seems (from what Richard Rubin said in the Trotsky plenary) to reject it.

Step three would be to argue that objective conditions *have not yet* matured; that their maturing involves the complete global displacement of pre-capitalist social relations; and that this can only be accomplished through the agency of imperialism. This would then be substantially the theory of Bill Warren's *Imperialism, pioneer of capitalism* (1980). It would also be the theory of Bernstein in the Bernstein-Bax debate of 1896-97 and of the 'social-imperialists' in the 1900s.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever its merits (I should emphasise that I think that beyond the second step the merits are negligible: see my 2004 series on imperialism<sup>5</sup>), this approach would involve abandoning Platypus's critique of the existing left as 'dead' because it has abandoned the emancipatory project of Marxism. The reason would be that such a theory would *also* deny the possibility of immediate general emancipation: it would say that the next step is full global capitalism and global liberalism, to make a *future* general emancipation possible.

The 'anti-imperialist' line which supports the targets of US attacks does not deny that *future* general emancipation is desirable: rather, it says that the next step on this road is general global *Stalinism and Stalinoid nationalism*, to make a future general emancipation possible. The difference between two such approaches can be no more than one of theoretical, empirical and practical plausibility, not one of moral repudiation of one's own moral premises.

## Theory

In the Trotsky plenary at the Platypus convention, as I reported in last week's article, Richard Rubin of Platypus argued that both fascism and Stalinism resulted from the defeat of the German revolution; and that this 'German question' posed the question of 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, and both Trotsky and the Frankfurt school had grappled with this problem.

This outline narrative has two huge gaps. The first is the basis of the 'crisis of Marxism'. The second is the explanation of the problem of the 1914 betrayal *actually offered* by Lenin, the Comintern and Trotsky, which is not the power of ideology, but the effects of imperialism.

Marxism is distinct from pre-

Marxist socialisms and communisms in a very simple way: that it asserts that communism is not a simple act of moral will, but reflects the objective interests of the proletariat in the class conflict inherent in capitalism, so that the proletariat as a class can be expected at the end of the day to become (in broad terms) communist. It is thus the role of the proletariat which produces the result that for Marxists capitalism is the necessary precursor of communism.

Mass working class support for forms of reformism and gradualism, or - as in England before 1900 or the USA today - for capitalist parties, is generally taken to be the basis of the 'crisis of Marxism'. This is because it calls into question the claim that the class struggle between capital and proletariat forms a material basis for communism. Communism then reverts to being an ethical imperative, to be approached through moral persuasion on a cross-class basis or through one or another form of voluntarist minority action - or rejected.

In 1917-19 and again in 1943-48 this 'crisis of Marxism' argument was utterly implausible.<sup>6</sup> But in the period of stability and prosperity in the 1890s-1900s, and the returned stability and prosperity of the 1950s-60s - and also in a sense especially since the fall of the USSR - it has again become attractive.<sup>7</sup>

I have argued in *Revolutionary strategy* (chapter 2) that there are both positive and negative empirical grounds for defending the Marxist conception today in spite of the overall negative evolution since the 1970s. Marc Mulholland in two articles published in *Critique* in 2009 and 2010 has offered much more elaborated theoretical reasons for supposing a proletarian will to collectivism.<sup>8</sup>

The actual explanation of the betrayal of August 1914 offered at the time independently by Lenin and Zinoviev, and by Trotsky, was the effects of imperialism on the working class of the imperialist countries and its organisations: that is, that a section of the class was 'bought off' by the spoils of imperialism.<sup>9</sup> Trotsky continued to defend this view down to his death.<sup>10</sup> Bukharin's *Imperialism and world economy* took a slightly different angle, seeing the working class movement as tied to the capitalists through concessions organised by the imperialist state.<sup>11</sup> Herman Gorter's *Imperialism, the World War and social democracy* (1914) had aspects of both the Bukharin view and Luxemburg's arguments (below).<sup>12</sup>

Now this view may be right or it may be wrong, but it is not just Maoism or 'New Left'-ism. It is the product precisely of some of the 'classical Marxists' or 'second International lefts', whose legacy Platypus says it is concerned to redeem in order to enable a 21st century left to be reborn. It demands a precise and serious critique, which cannot be undertaken just on the basis of the modern Maoist caricature of it and the Trotskyist imitators of Maoism.

I have argued elsewhere that the Lenin-Zinoviev and Trotsky version of this analysis in terms of imperialism buying off top sections of the working class is false, but the Bukharin version is broadly correct, and can be extended to understand the existence of reformism and dominance of nationalism in the modern 'third world'.<sup>13</sup>

One of the 'second International lefts', of course, did not adopt this line. It is Luxemburg, not Trotsky, who offered a really 'accidental' explanation of the political collapse of the SPD - and hence of the epoch - in terms of Kautsky's (alleged) theoretical gradualism and did not attempt to ground this characterisation in any material process of change.<sup>14</sup> In this Luxemburg, as against Lenin and Trotsky, is followed by Korsch in

*Marxism and philosophy*.<sup>15</sup>

This line genuinely does imply that - as Richard Rubin argued - the failure of the German revolution has to be explained by the power of bourgeois ideology, or of alienation, reification and commodity fetishism. This sort of argument and not Lenin (except in an extremely dematerialised form) or Trotsky is the context of Lukács's *History and class consciousness*. The next step is that taken by the Frankfurt school people: to attempt to integrate alienation, reification and commodity fetishism with Freudian psychoanalysis. In other words, we arrive at the salience of the Frankfurt school for theory by rejecting the salience of imperialism in the explanation of the political collapse of the Second International.

But there is a theoretical as well as a political price to be paid for this choice. I have written on the political price or prices before: the explanation of reformism by the self-reproduction of capitalist order provides a theory which demands both an 'actionism', which is either ultra-left or opportunist or both, and the epistemological commitments that support the form of the small bureaucratic-centralist sect.<sup>16</sup> In the specific case of the Frankfurt school the upshot is just a politics of despair. But Platypus in a sense embraces both the politics of despair and the need for critique (*il faut cultiver son jardin théorique*), so these points are secondary.

The theoretical price is the expulsion of history from theory. This may seem a paradoxical statement, since all the variants derived under Lukácsian and similar interpretations - including, for example, Postone - insist that theory must be historicised and that transhistorical claims about human nature, etc must be expelled from Marx (or foisted on Engels) to achieve a properly historicised theory. That means one which focuses purely on the critique of capitalist modernity.

To take this turn, however, is to prohibit actual comprehension. It is like asking for drug therapy or surgery to remove your long-term memory in the hope that it will get rid of 'distractions' from the present. In reality, no such focus on capitalist modernity is possible: 'the pre-modern' remains as a silent other, albeit in a mutilated form, against which 'capitalist modernity' is identified. In reality, our ability to identify change depends on recognising also continuities. So the expulsion of the longer-term history of which capitalism is part results in a loss of vision of change within capitalism.<sup>17</sup>

It turns out, indeed, that to defend this scheme of 'historicised' theory, it is necessary to falsify the very local history of the enlightenment, Marxism and the workers' movement (examples in last week's article). Even if the students who form Platypus's base do not have political but only theoretical aims, they will find that this scheme is a theoretical trap. What will be driven to fill the 'absence' of the 'transhistorical' is either some form of liberalism - or, as in Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Aquinas.<sup>18</sup>

## Classifying the Platypus

Platypus takes its name from an anecdote about Engels:

"A story is told about Karl Marx's collaborator and friend, Friedrich Engels, who, in his youth, as a good Hegelian idealist, sure about the purposeful, rational evolution of nature and of the place of human reason in it, became indignant when reading about a platypus, which he supposed to be a fraud perpetrated by English taxidermists. For Engels, the platypus made no sense in natural history.

"Later, Engels saw a living platypus

at a British zoo and was chagrined. Like Marx a good materialist, and a thinker receptive to Darwin's theory of evolution, which dethroned a human-centred view of nature, Engels came to respect that 'reason' in history, natural or otherwise, must not necessarily accord with present standards of human reason.

"This is a parable we find salutary to understanding the condition of the left today."<sup>19</sup>

The Engels story is an embroidered version of one Engels told about himself in a letter to Conrad Schmidt in 1895, for a purpose rather different to that which the group Platypus uses it. Schmidt had (as can be seen from Engels' letter) raised empirical objections to the idea of the general rate of profit in volume 3 of Marx's *Capital*, and therefore wished to "degrade the law of value to a fiction".

Engels' response is that direct empirical confirmation or disconfirmation of individual concepts is not to be expected. After other examples, Engels comes to that of concepts in biology and the platypus:

"From the moment we accept the theory of evolution all our concepts of organic life correspond only approximately to reality. Otherwise there would be no change: on the day when concepts and reality completely coincide in the organic world development comes to an end ... How, without bringing one or both concepts into conflict with reality are you going to get from the egg-laying reptile to the mammal, which gives birth to living young? And in reality we have in the monotremata a whole sub-class of egg-laying mammals: in 1843, I saw the eggs of the duck-bill in Manchester and with arrogant narrow-mindedness mocked at such stupidity - as if a mammal could lay eggs - and now it has been proved! So do not behave to the conceptions of value in the way I had later to beg the duck-bill's pardon for!"<sup>20</sup>

The merits or otherwise of Engels' arguments as a matter of philosophy are violently debatable.<sup>21</sup> But it should be clear that Engels' point is not, contrary to Platypus, "that 'reason' in history, natural or otherwise, must not necessarily accord with present standards of human reason", but a considerably narrower philosophical point: that concepts are necessarily in imperfect agreement with the perceptible world.

The 'conceptual difficulty' with the platypus, of course, is that it and other monotremes are animals somewhere in the borderlands between, or overlapping, the taxonomical classes of birds or reptiles, which lay eggs, and mammals, which give birth and suckle their young. It is, however, in modern times regarded, for reasons of evolutionary-history analysis, as a type of mammal.

In this sense, if not in the sense of an existent impossibility, the Platypus Affiliated Society is rightly named. It is a group somewhere in the borderlands between, or overlapping, two sorts of left.

The first is the political-activist left: groups from Labour leftwards in this country, from the left wing of the Democrats leftwards in the US. This left consists primarily of organised parties and groups, secondarily of 'independents' (or sects of one member) who participate in left, broad-front campaigns and other initiatives. It is linked, even if imperfectly, to the broader workers' movement (trade unions, cooperatives, mass workers' parties), and attempts to intervene in public politics in pursuit of definite short-term and long-term goals, usually expressed through a public press.

The second is the academic left: academics who would regard themselves as 'being of the left' in relation to their academic work. (This is not the same thing as working

in a university, while being either a militant and political trade unionist or, outside of work, involved in the political-activist left.) This left consists primarily of individual academics, linked together by leftist academic journals, annual conferences and similar events. To the extent that it intervenes in public politics it does so by individual attempts to act as 'public intellectuals' through contributions to the capitalist media.

The Platypus Affiliated Society looks from one angle like an organisation of the political activist left; from another angle like a part of the academic left. At present, judging from its convention, it should probably be located, in spite of the ambiguities, on the academic side of the divide. Apart from the Saturday morning workshops on left groups, the format was that of an academic conference (papers, 'respondents', short Q&A sessions), not that of a political conference. The Frankfurt school commitments, the denial of the possibility of political action as such and the obscurely AWLish line on the 'war on terror' all give Platypus some degree of academic credibility.

It is therefore to be judged as a theoretical project, more than as a political project. My judgement is that, though the group is right that the 'anti-imperialist front' and the rest of the orthodoxy of the left is a dead end, Platypus's theoretical project is also a dead end as theory ●

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## Notes

1. 'No need for party?', May 12.
2. <http://louisproject.wordpress.com/2010/04/25/q-what-is-a-platypus-a-an-american-eunistite>.
3. M Machover, 'The 20th century in retrospect' *Workers' Liberty* No59, 1999; [www.matzpen.org/index.asp?u=101&p=20th](http://www.matzpen.org/index.asp?u=101&p=20th); Machover's email exchange with Dov Schoss, linked at the end of that page, is also useful on the issues involved.
4. Bernstein-Bax debate in H Tudor and JM Tudor (eds) *Marxism and social democracy: the revisionist debate 1896-98* (Cambridge 1998) chapter 2. Later social-imperialists: the targets of Kautsky's polemics in *Socialism and colonial policy* (1907): [www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1907/colonial/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1907/colonial/index.htm).
5. The original series with critiques and a response: *Weekly Worker* July 29-September 23 2004.
6. 1919: A Read *The world on fire: 1919 and the battle with Bolshevism* London 2008, albeit from a rightwing perspective. Any general history will

indicate the sheer extent of working class collectivism in 1943-48.

7. Postone's argument in *Time, labour and social domination* (Cambridge 1993) is at the end of the day a variant of it: "the working class is integral to capitalism rather than the embodiment of its negation" (emphasis added, p17). For Marx, as opposed to Postone, the working class was both integral to capitalism and the embodiment of its negation.

8. 'Marx, the proletariat and the "will to socialism"' (2009) 37 *Critique* pp319-43; "Its patrimony, its unique wealth!" Labour-power, working class consciousness and crises' (2010) 38 *Critique* pp375-417. Comrade Mulholland is not a CPGB supporter and is, obviously, not responsible for any use I may make of his argument.

9. VI Lenin *Socialism and war* (1915) chapter 1: [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/ch01.htm#v21f70h-299](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/ch01.htm#v21f70h-299). *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, having been written with a view to the tsarist censorship, is less explicit. L Trotsky *War and the International* (1914) chapter 10: [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1914/war/part3.htm#ch10](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1914/war/part3.htm#ch10).

10. *Where is Britain going?* (1925) chapter 5: [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch05.htm); *Their morals and ours* (1938): [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/morals/morals.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/morals/morals.htm).

11. [www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/14.htm).

12. [www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1914/imperialism.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1914/imperialism.htm).

13. *Revolutionary strategy* pp87-89; 'Labour Party blues' *Weekly Worker* July 23 2009.

14. Visible in the *Junius pamphlet* (1915): [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/index.htm).

15. [www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1923/marxism-philosophy.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1923/marxism-philosophy.htm). So too Pannekoek in 'Marxism as action' (1915): [www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1915/marxism-action.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1915/marxism-action.htm), though his 'The third international' (1917, [www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1917/thirdinter.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1917/thirdinter.htm)) is closer to the Lenin and Zinoviev-Trotsky-Bukharin line.

16. *Weekly Worker* articles, 'Hegelian pitfalls', July 21 2003; 'Classical Marxism and grasping the dialectic', September 4 2003; 'Spontaneity and Marxist theory', September 6 2007; 'Against philosopher-kings', December 11 2008.

17. This is, incidentally, my reason for believing that the theory of sexuality Jamie Gough and I defended in outline in 1985 has more explanatory power than Pablo Ben's 'Frankfurt' version. Because our account begins with matters prior to capitalism and their persistence within capitalism, it also grasps more fully the transformations of sexualities within capitalist development over the last three centuries.

18. Cf my 'Sects and "new left" disillusionment' *Weekly Worker* April 15 2010.

19. <http://platypus1917.org/about/what-is-a-platypus>.

20. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/letters/95\\_03\\_12.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/letters/95_03_12.htm).

21. Eg, Louis Althusser in *Reading 'Capital'* (online at <http://readingcapital.blogspot.com/2007/02/marx-and-his-discoveries.html>) gives the letter to Schmidt as an example of Engels' "empiricism" and departure from Marx; contra J Rees, 'Engels' Marxism' *International Socialism* 1994, No65: <http://pubs.socialiststudiesindex.org.uk/isj65/rees.htm>; cf also H Putnam *Mind, language and reality* (Cambridge 1979) chapter 11.

## Fighting fund

# A few coppers

Home secretary Theresa May is very understanding. She told delegates to the Police Federation annual conference on May 18 that she could see why they were "worried" about cuts. Some officers could see their pay drop by £4,000 a year, after all.

But the Conservatives are nothing if not even-handed - we are all in it together, you see, and so even the "finest police officers in the world" cannot be exempt from the suffering - which is so necessary for the good of the country. Perhaps this shows a degree of complacency, though. If they thought the mass of workers were about to rise up against the general austerity assault, the Con-Dems might think it a good idea to keep the police onside.

I don't suppose there are many *Weekly Worker* supporters among the police. And I would suspect most of our readers take home rather less than an officer's salary - a constable with a few years service will gross £40,000. On the other hand, many of our readers are driven by rather different imperatives than the average

bobby. They are motivated by a political vision and are happy to support financially a paper that points to the kind of organisation we need in order to make it a reality.

Among them this week was MM, whose monthly standing order for £70 is always gratefully received - as is the £60 in total from other SO donors over the last seven days. Then there were those comrades who contributed online - thanks to JR (a brilliant £50), DV and PY (£20 each) and RP (£10). They were among 11,457 internet readers last week.

Thanks also to KC (£25), LG (£20) and LD, who added £10 to his subscription. All that comes to £285, which takes our fighting fund total for May to £716. But we are still quite a way off the £1,250 we need. Can you spare a few coppers - even if you're one yourself?

**Robbie Rix**

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

**KAUTSKY**

Uprising: 1848 different to 1793

# Same hymn sheet

Ben Lewis introduces another excerpt from his translation of Karl Kautsky's 'Republic and social democracy in France' - published in English for the first time

The following text is the second part of Karl Kautsky's 1905 work, 'Republic and social democracy', which was originally published as a series of seven articles in the theoretical weekly, *Die Neue Zeit*. As the reader will see, in the second part of his series Kautsky, picking up from where he left off,<sup>1</sup> discusses the French Second Republic of 1848-50. This *historical* approach is a common feature of Kautsky's polemics and theoretical articles. He often sets out a problem or dispute and then maps out its development through different time periods and circumstances.

Thus he traces a 1904 dispute over the Marxist attitude towards the republic back in time through an analysis of the USA, the French revolution, the Second Empire in France and the Paris Commune, finally returning to the Third French Republic, which had originally sparked the dispute. In addition to this article, the *Weekly Worker* will also publish the third part of the series - a discussion of the Paris Commune - as part of our commemoration of the 140th anniversary of that tumultuous event.

This article provides a lot for readers to get their teeth into. Not only does the polemic put forward further

arguments for republican democracy and the expansion of democratic self-government in the localities: it moves on to an extremely interesting discussion of the history of French socialism in its various guises.

As a means of asserting some basic Marxist political positions, Kautsky sheds light on the most influential *sect* projects which struck real roots in 19th century French society and competed for the hearts and minds of the masses. He pithily summarises the strengths and weaknesses of these competing tendencies, while locating their qualities and shortcomings in the conditions of their time. In so doing he frames Marxism's contribution to the socialist movement in "outgrowing its utopian stage". Marxism's strength, argues Kautsky, lies in its emphasis on the need for mass working class organisation on *all* fronts, intervening in *all* political questions as a way of boosting its confidence, organisational muscle and ideological clarity.

For Marxism, says Kautsky, forming government coalitions with a section of the bourgeoisie, focusing solely on economic organisation and neglecting the latter in favour of solely political organisation are all dead-ends. His attacks on coalitionism form a core part of the text, setting it in its

historical context. While 'Republic' was occasioned by a dispute over the French Republic at the Second International's Amsterdam Congress of 1904, it now becomes clear that the text also represents Kautsky's parting shot in the 'revisionist' controversy.

The 'revisionists' claimed that the age of revolutions was now over and that socialism could be enacted through reforms within the existing constitutional order. To counter this, Kautsky constantly stressed the need to win the working class majority to abolish the capitalists' means of rule, not simply to take them over. Alexandre Millerand may have long been expelled from the Second International for joining Waldeck-Rousseau's government in 1898, but similar perspectives are clearly still one of Kautsky's main polemical targets.

By locating the various tendencies of French socialism in the conditions which ultimately gave rise to them, Kautsky sheds light on *why* similar tendencies do not simply disappear, but constantly reassert themselves in different forms at different times. They keep coming back because of the nature of the proletariat as a subordinate class in capitalist society. As such, as long as we have capitalist

society, we are likely to see similar tendencies again and again.

We only need to think back to the recent past to see the profound truth in Kautsky's argument. The disastrous effects of Rifondazione Comunista joining Romano Prodi's government in Italy in 2000; leftists seeking the liberation of the working class by clinging to the coat-tails of Hugo Chávez/Muammar Gaddafi/Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; Proudhonist localism emerging in the anti-capitalist movement as a way of tackling the apparent omnipotence of 'multinational' corporations; the rise of autonomism and the belief in 'changing the world without taking power'; manifestations of syndicalism/'pure' trade unionism on the part of those calling on unions to 'break with Labour' and so on. Moreover, the Socialist Workers Party's 'Where we stand' formulation, "The workers create all the wealth under capitalism", has more to do with Ferdinand Lassalle (the rather quirky, German version of Proudhon) than Karl Marx. But this passage is hardly the result of Alex Callinicos *et al* making a *conscious* effort to study Lassalle and reappraise his theoretical contribution as against that of Marx. They are ideas which,

to coin a controversial phrase we will discuss below, *spontaneously* emerge in class society.

The article also makes some excellent points concerning the *transmission* of revolutionary ideas across generations. This is extremely pertinent: in order to change the present we have no choice but to look to past glories and failures, even tragedies.

For example, Lenin and the Bolsheviks kept the experiences of the French Revolution at the forefront of their minds, often drawing analogies between events unfolding in Russia and the experiences of those heady days. Try as they may, bourgeois historians, journalists and politicians find it very difficult to erase the memory of past revolutionary upheavals. As Kautsky puts it, these memories provide "powerful impulses which continue to have an effect for decades, centuries even".

Kautsky goes into some detail to explain how the traditions of 1793 had a profound effect on the revolutionaries of 1848. However, some of these effects were *negative*, in that the traditions prevented the '1848ers' from seeing how the situation in which they were operating had changed quite fundamentally

from the end of the 18th century. For those of us who still fight for the revolutionary transformation of society, this is worth keeping in mind, when looking back to the great events in the history of our class - all the more so if a revolutionary party is to play the role of the collective 'memory of the class'.

### Why bother?

Why, some readers might be asking themselves, are comrades in and around the *Weekly Worker* going through such efforts to publish what might appear to be an esoteric text? Should it not be buried, along with Kautsky himself? Some of our more dogmatic readers will doubtless see in its publication further proof of a 'creeping Kautskism' in the ranks of the CPGB, evidence of our comrades further conflating Labourism with Marxism, social democracy with Bolshevism, or some other such nonsense.

The fact is that, "when he was a Marxist",<sup>2</sup> Kautsky was an absolutely prolific *revolutionary* writer, who learnt his trade under the tutelage of Friedrich Engels. Kautsky played an integral role in popularising Marxism and providing the programmatic basis for the formation of enormously influential working class parties of Marxism, *especially* the Bolsheviks. In fact, before Kautsky abandoned his revolutionary perspectives, Lenin was to Kautsky what Kautsky was to Engels - a talented pupil of a highly venerated 'master', keen to pepper polemics and substantiate theoretical tracts with the 'orthodox' citations of their respective teachers.<sup>3</sup>

Reading Kautsky's writings from the 1890s-early 1900s, for example, it is striking how many terms and expressions were common currency for both Kautsky and Lenin, reinforcing the sense of the unity of their thought. One such term, *urwüchsig*, pops up in this text, and thus requires some explanation.

Most English-speaking *Weekly Worker* readers will be familiar with the Russian translation of *urwüchsig*, as it appears in the famous Kautsky passage quoted by VI Lenin in his 1902 pamphlet, *What is to be done?*: "Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [*von Aussen*

*Hineingetragenes*] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [*urwüchsig*]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme [of Austrian social democracy written by Victor Adler and endorsed by Kautsky in 1889] quite rightly stated that the task of social democracy is to imbue [literally, saturate] the proletariat with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task."<sup>4</sup>

*Urwüchsig* is often translated as 'elemental' or 'primitive'. This underlines how in this text Kautsky uses it to denote the working class movement in its most elemental form: ie, the *immediate* conflict between the worker and the boss.

The above passage is as controversial as it is misrepresented. Anarchists, syndicalists and others see in it irrefutable proof of the 'elitism' of both Kautsky and Lenin and their distrust of the 'spontaneous' working class movement. However, as we see in his discussion of French socialism here, the point Kautsky is making is that the working class must move beyond this to create a rounded world view if it is to emancipate itself. This is something which does not simply emerge from the conflict between boss and worker. It presupposes the proletariat organising itself in an independent political organisation, which aims at capturing state power and has a revolutionary outlook in respect of all classes in society as a whole - something in which all of the tendencies of French socialism were lacking.<sup>5</sup>

### 'Fall from grace'

Kautsky's defection to the camp of the bourgeoisie and his renunciation of Marxism are precisely what make him the "renegade" he is remembered as today. But a "renegade" is precisely somebody who *reneged* on a previous standpoint, the revolutionary Marxism he had developed and which had been learnt and assimilated by the Bolsheviks.

For those who often invoke the name of Leon Trotsky to cling to the dogma that Kautsky has nothing to say on the formation of revolutionary, Bolshevik methods in today's world, let us quote comrade Trotsky himself: "At the time, Kautsky himself fully identified himself with my views. Like Mehring (now deceased), he adopted the viewpoint of 'permanent

revolution'. Today, Kautsky has retrospectively joined the ranks of the Mensheviks. He wants to reduce his past to the level of his present. But this falsification, which satisfies the claims of an unclear theoretical conscience, is encountering obstacles in the form of printed documents. What Kautsky wrote in the earlier - the better! - period of his scientific and literary activity (his reply to the Polish socialist Ljusnia, his studies on Russian and American workers, his reply to Plekhanov's questionnaire concerning the character of the Russian revolution, etc) was and remains a merciless rejection of Menshevism and a complete theoretical vindication of the subsequent political tactics of the Bolsheviks, whom thick-heads and renegades, with Kautsky today at their head, accuse of adventurism, demagoguery and Bakuninism."<sup>6</sup>

As Lars Lih points out in his arguments against leading Socialist Workers Party thinkers John Molyneux and (the now deceased) Chris Harman, today still far too many self-proclaimed 'Bolsheviks' attempt to "reduce Kautsky's past to the level of his [post-1914] present". But this cosy consensus is also "encountering obstacles in the form of printed documents".<sup>7</sup> It is hoped that the reader is about to encounter another such "printed document".

It will require a further, and much longer, article to exactly trace the multifarious ways in which Kautsky desperately attempts to reduce his "past to the level of his present", how he exploits his *past* status as the 'papal' authority of Marxism to seek to undermine the Bolshevik revolution. Yet one example is worthy of note.

In two of his writings on the German Revolution,<sup>8</sup> Kautsky was of the firm conviction that the German working class had *come to power* in November 1918. Going back to the preconditions of proletarian power he outlines both in the following article and elsewhere, his absolute *collapse* as a revolutionary theoretician and politician is clear for all to see. If the Kautsky who had written 'Republic' in 1905 was the same person writing in 1919, as opposed to the 'renegade' Kautsky who had disavowed what he once wrote, then he would have been in no doubt that the working class had *not* conquered power. To take just two of the criteria he outlines for the 'commune ideal'

in the last article, the powerful state bureaucracy of the old order remained intact and the army supreme command remained master of the situation - not the armed people. In response to Kautsky's musings, Grigory Zinoviev hits the nail on the head: "What should surprise us more: Kautsky's naivety or his shamelessness?"<sup>9</sup> Clara Zetkin wittily deployed a religious term to describe Kautsky's 'fall from grace' [*Sündenfall*] - a biblical term associated with the 'fall of man'.<sup>10</sup>

The above quotes reveal something belittled, forgotten or simply ignored by the consensus on Kautsky that exists among much of the far left: the fact that for the best parts of the Russian movement Kautsky and the Bolsheviks sang from the same hymn sheet on many pivotal questions of class organisation, programme and strategy.

One of these common approaches regarded the need to struggle for *republican democracy*, which is why we in the CPGB think the text is an important one. We can only echo Rosa Luxemburg in her call to make republican democracy the "password of class identity, the watchword of class struggle". Contrary to what our opponents claim, our minimum programme and the struggle for the democratic republic is not some Menshevik/'stagist' concoction to complete the 'bourgeois democratic revolution' or some other such twaddle. No, the culmination of the demands in our minimum programme (the armed people, annual elections to a single assembly, etc) is the dictatorship of the proletariat, the conscious rule of the majority. As the events of 1871 and 1917 underline, however, this 'commune ideal'/democratic republic take can varied forms. It is hoped that this series of Kautsky translations can help the far left to break with its narrow *economism*, its inability to articulate the revolutionary Marxist programme of *democracy*.

As I am not a native speaker of German, I often rely on the support of comrades and friends to proof my work. For her meticulous attention to detail, I must thank comrade Tina Becker.

Some readers have written into the paper to ask whether I plan to produce the seven-part work in its entirety. I would like to assure them that there are

plans to publish it as a pamphlet in the near future. It is absolutely vital that the workers' movement acquaint itself with Kautsky's writings, "when he was a Marxist", as they provide a profound insight into the political perspectives of the Second International in which Bolshevism placed itself: the mass party informed by the minimum-maximum programme; the merger of the workers' movement and socialism; and, of course, the need to fight for republican democracy ●

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### Notes

1. K Kautsky, 'Republic and social democracy in France' *Weekly Worker* April 28.
2. "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist" was a favourite phrase of Lenin's. For an exhaustive record of the numerous occasions when Lenin deploys it between 1914 and 1924, see Lars Lih's "Kautsky as Marxist" database, available to download at [www.historicalmaterialism.org/journal/online-articles/kautsky-as-marxist-data-base](http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/journal/online-articles/kautsky-as-marxist-data-base).
3. The relationship between Kautsky and Engels was obviously more intimate in that they both lived in London. An 1886 Kautsky letter written to Eduard Bernstein provides some insight into the close cooperation between a young Karl Kautsky and an older Friedrich Engels: "I will give [Kautsky's critic, *Kathedersozialist* Anton] Menger a proper thrashing - easily done when 'the general' [Engels] writes at least half of it" (quoted in T Schelz-Brandenburg *Eduard Bernstein und Karl Kautsky: Entstehung und Wandlung des sozialdemokratischen Parteimarxismus im Spiegel ihrer Korrespondenz, 1879-1932* Böhlau 1992, p99).
4. VI Lenin *What is to be done? Burning questions of our movement*. [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm).
5. For a thorough refutation of Lenin's alleged 'distrust of the workers' see LT Lih, 'Lenin disputed' *Historical Materialism* 18, Leiden 2010, pp108-74.
6. *Ibid* p168.
7. *Ibid*.
8. The texts are 'Problems of the German Revolution' and 'A programme of socialist reform', both of which are quoted by Zinoviev in *Die Kommunistische Internationale* (see footnote 9).
9. Quoted in G Zinoviev, 'Die Sozialdemokratie als Werkzeug der Reaktion' *Die Kommunistische Internationale* No2, 1919, p70.
10. C Zetkin *Der Weg nach Moskau* Hamburg 1920, p10. It is worth reproducing the quote in full because it reinforces the sense of embittered disappointment felt by many leading Bolshevik figures following Kautsky's capitulation: "Nobody disputes Kautsky's great and enduring service of teaching the most advanced workers the ABC of scientific socialism, of historical materialism. Nor does anybody dispute that he fought to shed further light on Marx's world of thought, to develop this thought and to make a cadre of advanced proletarian fighters feel at home within it. But it is precisely this which makes his 'fall from grace' all the more inexcusable."

# Second Republic and the socialists

**W**hen the republic was proclaimed on February 24 1848, all memories of 1793 were awoken. From the outset the lower classes regarded the republic as the surety protecting their interests, as the "social republic" which would reassume the work of equalling out class differences and saving downtrodden humanity with the same force as that of 1793, but with more success, because it was informed by all the experiences since then.

But, as Marx noted immediately after the revolution's conclusion, the only thing the men of 1848 had borrowed from the Jacobins of 1793 was their costumes. While the men of the revolution still believed that the tasks they had to carry out were the same as those of 1793, while they believed that the same forces were at their command and the same methods

were called for, the battlefield, weapons and even the fighters themselves had thoroughly changed. As encouraging as the revolutionary tradition was, it became an obstacle for the new revolution, because it hampered the recognition of the real tasks at hand, as well as the means of solving them.

Above all, the situation had now become totally different, because now there was peace. When the republic came about in September 1792, the foreign enemy<sup>1</sup> had advanced into France, approached the capital and was about to re-erect the ruinous and universally hated feudal regime. In February 1848 peace prevailed, and it continued. In 1792 monarchist Europe had allied itself against revolutionary France. In 1848 the revolution, starting in France, seized the whole of Europe and only stopped before one monarchy on the continent: the

Russian, which was careful not to oppose the revolution by force of arms as long as it was advancing.

Yet without the state of war the lower classes' reign of terror would have been impossible. The war created the state of emergency, the conditions from which this abnormal formation could arise: an anti-capitalist regime within a capitalist society. This had to lead to the most unsustainable of situations. It had to lead to the disappearance of either the anti-capitalist regime or capitalist production itself. As the latter was not yet possible, the former had to happen. The Jacobins' reign of terror only became possible because of the war and the fear of defeat. In and of itself, war is antagonistic to each and every mode of production and always demands measures which constrict the normal production process. A defeat would have brought even greater

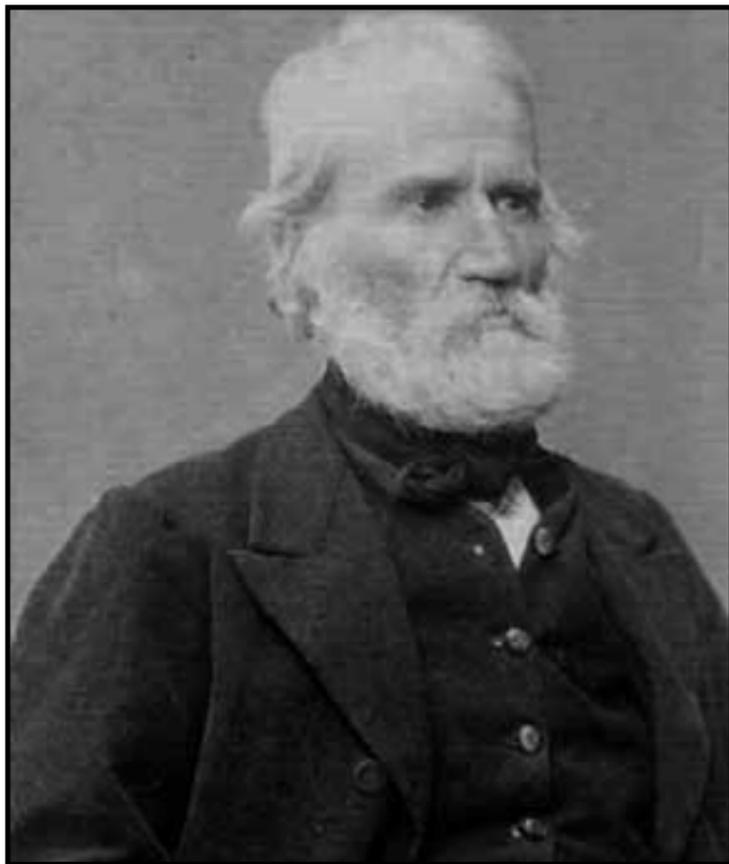
suffering than the war and the reign of terror did.

But, just as the external situation was different in 1848, the classes were different too. The soul of the movements of 1793 was formed by the Parisian petty bourgeoisie. The proletariat of the Parisian suburbs had vested the petty bourgeoisie with strength and boldness by standing behind it, driving it forwards and providing it with the most energetic and ruthless fighters. But the proletariat had not yet developed its own consciousness. It still thought and perceived things in a rather petty bourgeois manner, especially because the petty bourgeoisie still thought and perceived things in a revolutionary manner. The petty bourgeoisie recognised that the struggle against all ruling powers - both capitalist and feudal - were the means of its own uprising and its liberation.

Since then, a number of decades of the most rapid capitalist development had taken place. This increasingly drove the petty bourgeois from a whole series of important branches of production and forced them back into others, driving them from production to sale and resale. While it once formed the basis of industry, the petty bourgeoisie had now become its parasitic appendage.

The petty bourgeoisie also increasingly lost its revolutionary strength and boldness, becoming more unreliable and floundering. At the same time, its connection with the proletariat loosened to the same extent that the proletariat had begun to develop its own consciousness and to set its own goals - goals which were opposed to petty bourgeois commodity production and private ownership of the means of production. Thus a deep discord stretched between the two

# KAUTSKY



**Auguste Blanqui: power**

classes, which had once conquered the republic and which were seeking to revive the traditions of the revolution. Both of these forces learned something quite different from these traditions.

But the proletariat itself was no less split. A part of the proletariat, and a very large one at that, had not yet freed itself from petty bourgeois ideas and sentiments, providing troops for the politicians of bourgeois radicalism just as it did in 1793.

Alongside this, however, a large part of the proletariat had already attained independent consciousness and independent goals in the form of *socialism*, which in the 1840s had started to outgrow its utopian stage. Back then socialism changed: once it had been a doctrine for bourgeois thinkers, which appealed to bourgeois philanthropists to provide the forces and the means to raise the proletariat and thereby abolish it. Now it had become a doctrine which was seized upon by the proletariat in order to raise itself and search for the means and ways of liberating and thereby abolishing itself.

But, however clear and simple the proletariat's class position may be, however united its class struggle can be, the theories the proletariat took up were extremely diverse, as were the tendencies representing its socio-political aspirations.

In 1848 it was possible to distinguish between three main tendencies in the French socialist movement, denoted by the names of Blanqui,<sup>2</sup> Proudhon<sup>3</sup> and Louis Blanc.<sup>4</sup>

## Blanqui

The most elemental [*urwüchsig* - see introduction, BL] of them was the Blanquist tendency, which directly drew on Babeufism. In turn, Babeufism was nothing more than the continuation of Jacobinism translated from a petty bourgeois outlook to a proletarian one. Just as the Jacobins conquered Paris through a series of popular uprisings, dominated the convention (parliament) and held the whole of France at bay through their tight organisation and the tremendous power of the Paris Commune, the Blanquists wanted to bring Paris under the sway of the proletariat through a series of proletarian uprisings, to dominate France via Paris and to gradually impose a socialist mode of production on the country. In these uprisings, the Parisian proletariat was to be led by a most centralised organisation modelled on the Jacobin

club. After achieving victory, this organisation was to direct the proletariat.

Indeed, if such a thing was possible in 1793, why should it not be possible in 1848, now that the proletariat had become so much stronger?

Like all politicians who sought to resume 1793 in 1848, the Blanquists too failed to recognise how the situation had changed since 1793. In many respects these changes were even more unfavourable to the proletarian Jacobins of 1848 than they were to the petty bourgeoisie.

As we have already mentioned, for all their anti-capitalism, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie of 1793 had actually remained grounded in commodity production and private ownership of the means of production - at the time, the basis of the whole economic system. Capitalism was still in its infancy. It had become a social necessity, but the mass of the population still lived from petty production. The anti-capitalist tendencies of the Jacobins corresponded to their personal needs, even if they ran contrary to *social* needs - something which the individual was not directly conscious of.

In 1848 capitalism was perhaps no longer a universal social need. It could have perhaps already been replaced by social production in several regions and in several branches of production. But for the greater part of France's population, and even for a large part of those living in Paris, commodity production and private ownership of the means of production remained a personal need. Thus the proletarian Jacobins of 1848 stood in far greater opposition to the needs of the mass of the population than the petty bourgeois Jacobins of 1793 did. In order to assert their dictatorship, they would have had needed much greater instruments of power at their disposal than their predecessors.

However, the exact opposite was the case. Since 1793 power relations in France had shifted tremendously to Paris's disadvantage. One of the conditions of Jacobin rule was that in 1789 all the ruling class's means of rule - church, bureaucracy and army - had been destroyed. The proletariat, as well as the petty bourgeoisie, will never be able to rule the state through these institutions. This is not only because the officer corps, the top of the bureaucracy and the church have always been recruited from the upper

classes and are joined to them by the most intimate links. It is in their very nature that these institutions of power are striving to raise themselves above the mass of the people in order to rule them, instead of serving them, which means they will almost always be anti-democratic and aristocratic. The Jacobins sensed this so well that when the war forced on them the need to create an officer corps again, they placed every senior officer under the supervision of civil commissioners, because from the outset all of them were suspected of having aristocratic inclinations.

The conquest of state power by the proletariat therefore does not simply mean the conquest of the government ministries, which then, without further ado, administers the previous means of rule - an established state church, the bureaucracy and the officer corps - in a socialist manner. Rather, it means the dissolution of these institutions. As long as the proletariat is not strong enough to abolish these institutions of power, then taking over individual government departments and entire governments will be to no avail. A socialist ministry can at best exist temporarily. It will be worn down in the futile struggle against these institutions of power, without being able to create anything permanent.

In 1792 the Jacobins were in the favourable position of finding all these institutions dissolved. Using its enormous instruments of power and the Jacobin club, which was so superbly disciplined and organised throughout the country, Paris was able to fully deploy its superiority.

After Thermidor 9,<sup>5</sup> and especially under the empire, however, the bourgeoisie and the empire had reconstructed and infinitely perfected the means of rule described above.

It is true, these institutions were strictly centralised and directed from Paris. As long as they remained in the possession of the Parisian government, France was governed from Paris. But as soon as Paris fell into the hands of a democratic regime these means of rule had to immediately turn on this regime and thus on Paris itself. These institutions were also able to find a necessary central point outside Paris, as shown by the experience of 1871. Those centralised institutions then became the power which led the whole of France against Paris and which crushed it.

It is completely mistaken to presume - following the Jacobin tradition - that the centralisation of administration would allow a revolutionary Paris to rule France more easily than with an extensive self-government of the municipalities. Revolutionary Paris was dominant precisely when self-government of the municipalities was most highly developed. The centralism of the Jacobins controlled the federalism of the localities. The Girondists' attempt to mobilise the provinces against Paris at that time failed miserably. It was precisely *centralised* France which successfully carried out the Girondist plan<sup>6</sup> in 1848 and 1871.

This clearly points to the tasks of French socialism: the conquest of the provinces is as important as that of Paris. The dissolution and weakening of the centralised means of rule is to be promoted as much as possible - particularly through the expansion of local *self-government*, naturally on the basis of universal and equal suffrage. Many French socialists, of course, appear to be of a different opinion even today. They believe, for example, that the threat to the republic posed by the army's aristocratic tendencies can best be combated by increasing the police powers of the state, rather than by introducing the militia system.

Had Jacobin Blanquism conquered Paris, it would have encountered far greater difficulties in the face of these tremendously centralised institutions

of power than its predecessors of 1793 did - despite the fact that their forces were significantly smaller. It was certain to fail eventually, just as its predecessors had. Nonetheless, Blanquism would actually have been able to temporarily establish a socialist regime, which would not have been in vain. This is because no great revolutionary movement fails without leaving tremendous traces behind. These traces cannot be erased again - the failed movements provide powerful impulses, which continue to have an effect for decades, centuries even. The revolution of 1848, then, would have achieved more for the cause of the proletariat than merely sharpening proletarian class-consciousness and deepening class antagonisms through the June battle.

But Blanquism could not deploy its full strength in 1848. When the revolution broke out, its organisations were weakened by the unsuccessful putsches of the previous decade. Its best leaders were in prison - above all Blanqui himself. And alongside Blanquism other tendencies had emerged, which captivated a large part of the proletariat.

## Proudhon

One of these was the *Proudhonist* tendency. If Blanqui operated above all as a fighter, an organiser, then Proudhon was above all a theoretician - from time to time a dreamer too. He recognised the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as much as Blanqui did. But he occupied his mind in researching its economic laws far more than the latter.

The experiences of 1793, however, had quite a different effect on him than on Blanqui. Blanqui wanted to continue Jacobin policy in the interests of the proletariat, and one-sidedly pushed the need to conquer state power to the fore. Proudhon only saw the revolution's failure and became distrustful of revolutions and changes to the state, and eventually of the state itself. For him, the proletariat was to emancipate itself not by conquering the state, but by reshaping economic conditions. But if the proletariat wishes to emancipate itself through purely economic means, then these are necessarily petty means - means which can be obtained from its own funds. And they are also necessarily peaceful means which do not encounter any significant resistance from the ruling classes, because they do not appear dangerous.

In its practice, Proudhonism thus restricted itself to such means - to establishing insurance funds,

exchange banks and cooperatives. Some of these, like the exchange banks, were completely utopian. Others, like insurance funds and cooperatives, could be quite useful if they were applied alongside other, more powerful and more important means of the proletarian struggle for liberation. However, these means had directly harmful effects and thus became objectionable, because they were supposed to form the exclusive area of working class activity, preventing the proletariat from using other means.

And limiting the struggle to these petty, peaceful means necessarily entailed limiting the final goal of the struggle itself, because small means could only achieve small ends. Fundamentally, the final goal could amount to nothing more than the abolition of capitalism and the emancipation of the proletariat through transforming it into a *petty bourgeois*. The final goal of Proudhonism was not the abolition of commodity production and its replacement by social production, but the formation of a new type of commodity production, in which capitalist profit was to be abolished by suppressing money and intermediary trade.

Proudhon was decidedly hostile to social production and communism. He was both contemptuous of and unsympathetic to the revolution.

Many of his ideas were quite petty bourgeois and thus in many cases reactionary, most clearly so on the women's question.<sup>7</sup> On May 17 1846 he wrote to Marx: "I believe we have no need of it [the revolution] in order to succeed; and that consequently we should not put forward revolutionary action as a means of social reform, because that pretended means would simply be an appeal to force, to arbitrariness: in brief, a contradiction. I myself put the problem in this way: to bring about the return to society, by an economic combination, of the wealth which was withdrawn from society by another economic combination."<sup>8</sup>

Discovering this combination appeared to him to be the main task of socialists, not conquering political power.

## Blanc

However, at the outbreak of revolution the third tendency of French socialism, that of Louis Blanc, had far more influence than that of Proudhon and Blanqui. Blanc recognised the profound contradiction between capital and the interests of the proletariat just as much as Proudhon and Blanqui. Like Blanqui, but in



**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: economy**

complete contrast to Proudhon, he also recognised the significance of state power for economic life and for the transformation of society.

But in contrast to Blanqui he did not wish to set the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the revolutionary struggle. He thought it was possible - and therein lies his historical distinctiveness - to convince the more noble and intelligent sections of the propertied classes of the necessity of socialism, because they suffered under capitalism and free competition no less than the proletariat. Louis Blanc envisaged the means of realising his socialism as consisting of a state authority standing above all classes, powered and enlightened by the best elements of the entire nation. His socialism, therefore, had to be a peaceful one, inimical to any idea of class struggle. He did not envisage the victory of the proletariat, but the victory of reason, which is the same for all classes. He aimed for social production, but not through the conquest of capital's means of power and the expropriation of the capitalist class. For him, the workers' cooperatives set up and supported by the state were to grow alongside the capitalist enterprises, gradually expanding more and more.

Above all, then, Louis Blanc counted on the good will of the bourgeoisie, which had to be convinced of socialism. If for Blanqui the sovereign means of liberating the proletariat was its *political organisation*, if for Proudhon it was its *economic organisation*, then for Louis Blanc it was the power of the *orators and literati* of socialism in stirring people's hearts.

He saw in beautifully spoken and written rhetoric the most important weapon of socialism - a weapon he himself deployed with virtuoso skill. And what is true of him is true of his successors. They are brilliant speakers and writers who regard the magic of their words as irresistible. In fact, without this belief their tendency would be inconceivable.

## Weaknesses

We can see that all three tendencies had their weaknesses. But the weakness of each and every one of them arose from the weakness of the proletariat itself. While the proletariat already felt the burning need to emancipate itself, it did not yet possess the strength to rule society. Each of the three tendencies sought a different path to make this emancipation possible, before the proletariat itself had gained sufficient strength to do so.

At the same time, each of these tendencies was caught up in the traditions of the Great Revolution, and this was the second aspect of their weakness. Blanquism drew directly on Jacobinism and its illusions. In contrast, it was the doldrums brought about by the failure of the illusions in the Great Revolution which were active in Proudhon. Louis Blanc, on the other hand, embodied those great memories, where revolutionary movements, in spite of the class differences which ultimately motivated them, appeared as purely human movements. They appeared to be the effects of the great ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity - like, for example, when during the night of August 4 1789 feudal lords and church dignitaries voluntarily abolished their own privileges. Of course, seen in the light of day, these privileges had actually already been smashed to smithereens by the outraged people, so that renouncing them was not too great a sacrifice.

While these three tendencies were best represented by the three people named above, they were not actually created by them. The tendencies arose from circumstances which are not *coincidental*, but *essential* to modern society, so that we still find



Louis Blanc: pen

all three tendencies in France today too - although they have long since been stripped of the special features which accorded them the above three protagonists, and each has adapted to modern conditions and completely changed in appearance. Indeed, this is not just true in France. Again and again we find these tendencies represented to a greater or lesser extent in the whole of the international socialist movement: one tendency which wants to liberate the proletariat by conquering political power in a struggle against the bourgeoisie; another which wants to do it by winning the good will of the state or a section of the bourgeoisie; and a third which wants to emancipate the proletariat behind the back of the state, through economic organisations and without much by way of politics. The vitality of these three tendencies is probably due to the fact that each of them represents a necessary part of the proletarian struggle for emancipation. That is also true, *cum grauo salis* [with a pinch of salt], of Louis Blanc's tendency.

The proletariat cannot emancipate itself if it is not constituted as an independent political organisation, which captures state power. Yet this cannot be the work of a coup by a small minority of the working class. It presupposes the slow and laborious, in many cases peaceful work of raising the mass of the proletariat economically, morally and intellectually, whereby the development of its economic organisations is indispensable. And this cannot happen by ignoring the bourgeois state. The proletariat cannot place itself outside the state. It remains within it, and any change in the latter in turn has an impact on the proletariat's own development. It cannot, therefore, stand on the sidelines of the political struggles between the different bourgeois parties, it cannot regard the composition of legislation with indifference. It must actively engage in the former, supporting one side against the other. And it must attempt to wring laws from the state which advance the proletariat's cause.

Thus, whilst each of the three tendencies has a healthy core, each of them made errors because of their isolation from the working class movement as a whole. Today as well, therefore, every one-sided accentuation of one of the three aspects of the class struggle which ignores the others - political revolution, economic organisation, influencing legislation -

must turn a truth into an error and lead the proletariat astray, increasing its casualties and reducing its successes in battle.

But, while the proletariat can only deploy its full strength when it remains conscious of all three aspects of its struggle for liberation, real conditions will at certain times give more prominence and success to one aspect of the struggle than the others.

The fact that one aspect of the struggle then comes more to the fore is not at all objectionable. As long as this does not lead to the other aspects being completely forgotten or even absolutely condemned, then it is highly beneficial to the cause of the proletariat. Because under different circumstances these other aspects can become much more effective and need to be kept in view if the accentuation of one aspect at one particular time is not to lead to one-sidedness. One-sidedness can only lead to illusions, followed by disappointments.

During times of political revolution, it was the conquering of political power which had to be pushed to the fore by the advanced fighters of the proletariat. Blanquism best corresponded to the needs of the situation back then. The proletariat could gain most from the situation by energetically and unitedly entrusting itself to the Blanquist leadership.

## Man of the hour

But we have already pointed out that the Blanquist organisations were weakened and their leaders were in prison. And this particular aspect of the proletarian struggle, the conquering of political power, was precisely the one that required a unified political organisation and recognised leaders. The time of political revolution was, of course, not very propitious to Proudhon's economic prescriptions. Louis Blanc, on the other hand, became the man of the hour. His illusions corresponded to the lack of class-consciousness amongst the majority of the proletarian mass. But he also presided over the press: that great weapon with which modern politicians most influence, indeed control, the unorganised masses.

Louis Blanc's illusions in the cooperation of the classes always found the most fertile soil in *journalistic circles*. The journalist is exploited by capital and degraded as one of its wage workers. However, he often originates from bourgeois circles and is incorporated into the

bourgeois milieu through personal relationships, interests and goals. Literally and politically, the journalist reproduces the intermediate position between bourgeoisie and proletariat, which the petty bourgeois occupies economically. He easily develops proletarian sympathies, but looks for a way of asserting them without breaking with the bourgeoisie. Every one of us 'academics' in the socialist movement has probably been through this stage - even those who have now come to emphasise the proletariat's class point of view most sharply. Many remain stuck in that stage for life.

The journalist who makes 'public opinion' through his editorials is also most easily seduced by the illusion that he is able to overcome class contradictions through spoken or written editorials, or that he is able to convince the different classes to work together.

While the spontaneous proletarian movement always oscillates between the two extremes of political revolution and economic organisation of the working class (something which in 1848 took the forms of Blanquism and Proudhonism), the literati socialist always tends towards cooperation of the classes, as represented by Louis Blanc in 1848.

The less organised, the less politically educated the proletariat is, the more it will be controlled by the press. And in February 1848, with the exception of a few secret clubs, the Parisian proletariat possessed no organisation at all. *La Réforme*, founded in 1848 and edited by Louis Blanc in association with petty bourgeois/socialist democrats, was a force amongst the revolutionary masses at that time.

The fact that it was Louis Blanc and not Blanquism which influenced the composition of the provisional government was a reflection of the lack of independent organisation and class-consciousness of the Parisian proletariat. This was also true of the fact that the government was not a socialist government, but a bourgeois one in which two socialists, *Louis Blanc and Albert*,<sup>9</sup> were condemned to impotence from the outset. Their presence was not a proletarian outpost in enemy territory, but protected the bourgeois government from the proletariat.

Jaurès wrote in *Cosmopolis* that it was a great misfortune that with Blanc's participation in government, "socialism appeared to be in power without possessing it. Socialism was represented in the provisional government in which bourgeois views prevailed; a semblance of power, through which socialism overexcited the fears of the capitalists, without possessing the power to get rid of capitalism" (quoted by E Bure in *La vie socialiste* 2nd issue, p125).

The strength which the proletariat developed in the February days was not enough to overthrow the bourgeois regime, but it was enough to make the existence of the monarchy impossible - and thus to replace it with the republic.

While it forced the republic into existence, the proletariat achieved nothing more than to impose on the bourgeoisie the task of transforming the republic - considered by the proletariat as the tool of its emancipation and embraced as a 'social' republic - into a tool of bourgeois class rule. It forced the bourgeoisie to reign over the proletariat itself - an unpleasant task, which the bourgeoisie had previously left to the monarchy.

However, the significance acquired by the proletariat in the republic induced in the bourgeoisie a hatred against the working masses, which it had not known under the monarchy. If under the monarchy the bourgeoisie gladly used the proletariat to intimidate the government and to make it compliant, it now pushed

the government to put an end to the new power, which was rising up so threateningly alongside it. If necessary, this should be done quickly, with terror.

While the workers led by Louis Blanc dreamed of solving the social question through a social republic, which would alleviate all class differences and lead to the cooperation of the classes, the bourgeois republic was preparing for a horrific class conflict, the likes of which had not been seen in the 19th century.

Above all, the new government saw it as its task to get a 'reliable' military power to Paris to disarm the proletariat, which had acquired weapons in the February days. This led to the disaster of the June days, to the bloody suppression of the proletariat. And now everything that the proletariat had seized by defeating the monarchy was taken back from it by the victorious republic. Its press was suppressed and its clubs were disbanded. The national guard, which had been made accessible to all classes, was once again restricted to the bourgeoisie. And when, in spite of the June defeat, the elections saw socialists enter the national assembly, universal suffrage was abolished.

The right to vote was now tied to a residency of three years. Moreover, police fines, even violations of the laws of association and similar trifles, were sufficient to entail the loss of the right to vote.

This is how the bourgeoisie succeeded in completely containing the crushed proletariat. But in doing so it eliminated a buttress of the republic - a buttress which the republic had even more need of in 1848 than it did after 1793. At the time of the Convention the petty bourgeoisie had still been energetic and strong. Fifty years on, it had become unstable and timid. Yet the bourgeoisie still viewed the republic with suspicion, hostility even. The army brought them assurance. But the bourgeoisie also submitted itself to the regime of the army's trusted man, Napoleon III.<sup>10</sup> It was just as necessary that the Second Empire would follow the battle of June, as the First Empire had followed Thermidor 9 ●

## Notes

1. The "foreign enemy" Kautsky refers to is the combined military might of monarchist Prussia and Austria. Their armies were advancing on Paris, but were forced to retreat at the famous Battle of Valmy in September 1792.
2. Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-81).
3. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65).
4. Louis Blanc (1811-82).
5. Thermidor 9 (July 27 1794) marked the fall of the Jacobin leader, Maximilien Robespierre (1758-94).
6. As noted in the previous article in the series ('Republic and social democracy in France', April 28), the Girondists sought to create a parliamentary monarchy. Thus the 'Girondist plan' of 1848 and 1871 refers to attempts to restore the monarchy.
7. It is unfortunate that Kautsky does not proceed to discuss Proudhon's flaws on the women's question in any detail. Tony Cliff's *Class struggle and women's liberation* provides some (non-referenced) quotes by Proudhon, such as this one: "Genius ... is virility of spirit and its accompanying powers of abstraction, generalisation, creation and conception; the child, the eunuch and the woman lack these gifts in equal measure" ([www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1984/women/03-commune.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1984/women/03-commune.htm)).
8. [www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/letters/46\\_05\\_17.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/letters/46_05_17.htm).000
9. Here, Kautsky is referring to Alexandre Matin, who was commonly known as *Albert l'Ouvrier* ('Albert the worker') due to his background as a machinist in a button factory. Matin, who was closely associated with Louis Blanc, soon lost faith in the provisional government and subsequently led an uprising against it with Auguste Blanqui. Matin was arrested and jailed for four years on charges of treason.
10. Napoleon III (Charles Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, 1808-73) was nephew of Napoleon I. He was president of the Second Republic and then emperor of the Second Empire from 1852-70. As president of the Second Republic he spent much of this time consolidating power, and staffing the government administration with his supporters. But the constitution stipulated that the president had only a four-year term, and Bonaparte sought to change this. However, he was unable to get the majority he needed, so on December 2 1852, before his presidency expired, Louis Bonaparte staged a coup to overthrow the government and install himself as emperor.

## IRAN

# God's representative in Tehran sees off 12th Shia imam fan

What lies behind the power struggle in Iran? Yasmine Mather looks at the contending factions

Just as it seemed president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's submission to the wishes of supreme leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei would hold together the conservative factions currently in power in Iran, the conflict at the top reignited last week - proof of the depth of the political crisis facing the country.

On May 14 Ahmadinejad fired three key cabinet ministers and on May 16 declared himself 'caretaker for the oil ministry'. The cabinet members - oil minister Masoud Mirkazemi, welfare and social security minister Sadeq Mahsouli and industry minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian - had been at the centre of a power struggle between parliament and the presidency.

On May 8 MPs had opposed Ahmadinejad's plans to merge a number of ministries. Ali Larijani, the speaker of the majles (parliament) and a close ally of the supreme leader, dismissed them: "The government has no right to announce such policies before the majles approves them." Ahmadinejad responded immediately, saying his cabinet had been charged with reducing the number of ministries from 21 to 17, which it has proceeded to do. He told Larijani he should inform himself about the country's constitution and stop "creating unnecessary confusion". However, the president was then rebuked by the powerful Council of Guardians. The council, whose members are selected by the supreme leader and which has the responsibility of overseeing government adherence to the Islamic constitution, rejected the plans for merging a number of ministries, leaving Ahmadinejad in even deeper trouble.

A lot has been said and written about spirits, sorcery, jinns (genies) ... however, for all the references to supernatural beings, the conflict has its roots in a good, old-fashioned power struggle between, on the one side, landed old money, senior ayatollahs and their periphery and, on the other, what they call *tazeh bedoran ressideh ha* (the *nouveaux riches* or new rich) in the Ahmadinejad camp. This at a time when the Iranian state is feeling the pressure emanating from the major uprisings across the region and from the continuing protest movement inside Iran.

Over the last few years analysts and commentators have identified a new powerful military-bureaucratic group around the Pasdaran militia (revolutionary guards), which is answerable to Ahmadinejad and capable of taking power away from senior clerics. The events of the last few weeks have proved above all else the fallacy of such claims. Clearly military/revolutionary guard support for Ahmadinejad depended entirely on a nod from the supreme leader. Every time the president tried to negotiate a compromise regarding his responsibility in naming or dismissing ministers (a power clearly given to him by the Iranian constitution), everyone from Pasdaran leaders to clerics and civilian religious figures united in taking the side of the supreme leader. In more than three weeks of power struggle, not one leading member of the revolutionary guards came out openly for Ahmadinejad and his band of *tazeh bedoran ressideh ha*.

Iran's Islamic Republic is no stranger to internal political crises.



12th Imam: calligraphy

However, the serious differences and conflict between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei have sometimes seemed to paralyse the daily functions of government. The US administration is now talking of "structural crisis in the Iranian state". The latest stand-off all started in April, when Ahmadinejad found out that a number of officials close to his office, including his former chief of staff and heir apparent Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaie, were under electronic surveillance by agents of the ministry of intelligence. According to one government official, "Top intelligence commanders of the revolutionary guard ... bugged the office of Mashaie - as they must - and monitored his private and public political behaviour."

Apparently, Mashaie, who is a former intelligence ministry official himself, discovered the electronic devices and promptly fired his deputy, Hassan Abdollahian, amid allegations of betrayal. On April 17 Ahmadinejad ordered intelligence minister Heydar Moslehi to hand in his resignation. The supreme leader overruled Ahmadinejad and all hell broke loose.

Under the Iranian constitution, the president clearly has the right to dismiss his 'chosen' ministers, but the problem is Moslehi was an appointee of the supreme leader. Khamenei and his supporters justify his interventions by referring to the principle of *maslahat*, the greater interest of Islam, implying it had been violated by Moslehi's dismissal.

A cleric has always held the position of intelligence minister since the 1979 revolution and during the presidencies of both Mohammad Khatami and Ahmadinejad, the appointment has always been made in conjunction with the offices of god's representative on earth, ayatollah Khamenei. Moslehi's dismissal would have weakened the position of the clerics in keeping control of the unruly president and his controversial 'advisor', Mashaie. Over the last few years Mashaie has been blamed for spreading 'nationalism' (placing Iranian values above Islamic principles) and for the infamous claim that "Today, Iran is a friend of the United States and Israeli nations."<sup>1</sup> The ministry of intelligence was keeping tabs on Mashaie and others in Ahmadinejad's inner circle under the direct orders of Khamenei's office. Moslehi was reappointed by the supreme leader within a couple of hours after being told by Ahmadinejad to quit.

## In a huff

Ahmadinejad went into a huff, staying at home for eight days and boycotting cabinet meetings for almost two weeks, and he threatened to resign himself. He eventually returned to the cabinet in early May a much weaker president, forced to bow down after considerable pressure from the allies of the supreme leader in the majles, army and revolutionary guards. The president was also forced to accept the return of Moslehi as minister of

the Iranian revolution: the concept of *vilayat-i faqih* ('guardianship of the jurist' in the hands of a wise leader like Khomeini). In other words, Hojjatieh opposed the notion of an Islamic republic because it would delay or hinder the return of the 12th imam.

Throughout the last decade Ahmadinejad's opponents have accused him of being a member (or former member) of Hojjatieh. The group is believed to be connected to Qom ultra-conservatives, such as Mesbah Yazdi. A number of cabinet ministers and the president's confidant, Mashaie, are also rumoured to be Hojjatieh members. Over the last few days influential ayatollahs and politicians have referred to Mashaie in terms used for Islam's worst enemies. According to them, the president's closest ally, the man he was grooming as his successor for the 2013 presidential elections, is a foreign spy, a freemason and the leader of a plot to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

Ahmadinejad has fought hard to keep close allies in sensitive ministries. He has also striven to gain control over the country's national security branches - his first move after the disputed elections of 2009 was to purge the intelligence ministry of those he mistrusted. However, in dismissing Moslehi he has clearly gone too far and that is why he has faced serious opposition.

On Friday April 29, a hard-line cleric used his nationally broadcast sermon to indirectly warn Ahmadinejad that he would be moving into dangerous territory by continuing to challenge Khamenei and went as far as to tell Ahmadinejad that his wife would be *haram* to him (legally forbidden by Islamic law), if he continues to disobey the supreme leader. Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami added: "Obedience to the supreme leader is a religious obligation as well as a legal obligation, without any doubt."<sup>2</sup>

Although religious differences have dominated analysis of the current conflict within the Iranian state, there are also plenty of political reasons to explain the events of the last few weeks. The conservatives believe Mashaie has made a series of contacts to start a dialogue with the United States. The US denies any meeting has taken place, although there has been no denial of the contacts. It is possible that Washington is wary of meeting a former chief of staff of a lame-duck president, ostracised by most of the senior ayatollahs and the supreme leader.

This news is not surprising, however. Iranians remember Ahmadinejad's efforts in 2009, at the height of the last presidential election campaign, to seek a resolution of the nuclear dispute with the west, only to be rebuffed by Khamenei. The Iranian president would love to be credited with rapprochement with the west and the ending of sanctions.

## Upsurge

The current power struggle in Tehran is also a reflection of the Arab revolutionary upsurge and the momentous events that are shaking the entire Middle East. After the euphoria of the collapse of old Sunni enemies - Mubarak and Ben Ali - came the unrest in Syria. The Shi'ite camp - Iran, Hezbollah, Syria, etc - is also facing a serious challenge. Hamas

is now in alliance with Fatah, the Syrian government is facing a serious crisis and even the death of Shia's longstanding enemy, bin Laden, has not helped.

Inside the country Iranian students organised a successful nationwide strike on May 15, closing down over 30 university campuses, while oil and petrochemical workers have won a major dispute,<sup>3</sup> which can only encourage workers turning to militant action in other sectors. The Iranian economy is in trouble, with MPs warning of 40% inflation.<sup>4</sup> All this is making Tehran very nervous.

On May 10 a new row broke out between the president and supporters of Khamenei. Iran's parliament had approved a budget of 5,083 trillion rials (\$480 billion) for the current Iranian year, which started on March 21. This is about 40% up on last year's budget due to an increase in oil prices and the implementation of the government's policy of abolishing food and fuel subsidies. However, on the day the budget was finally approved after months of delay Ahmadinejad's deputy, Mir Tajeldini, claimed: "This budget approved by the majles has nothing to do with the one proposed by the government. The majles hasn't passed our budget: they have written their own version." One of the crucial issues of dispute is the way the state should apply the abolition of subsidies.

Whatever the reasons for the conflict, one thing is clear: Ahmadinejad tried to resist pressure from the supreme leader and lost. He has been badly weakened by recent events. Many have compared Ahmadinejad's likely fate with that of Abulhassan Banisadr, the Islamic Republic's first president who fell out with Khomeini and was forced into exile. Iran's semi-official Mehr news agency reported last week that several members of parliament had revived a bid to summon Ahmadinejad for questioning over "recent events". Revolutionary Guard leaders, together with senior conservative clerics, have only tolerated Ahmadinejad because the supreme leader told them to do so. But Tehran's power struggle has left Iran with an impotent president surrounded by strange allies and a supreme leader who, despite his ill health, looks more and more like the other dictators at the sharp end of mass protests in Arab capitals.

The working class, student, youth and women's movements in Iran have not only Ahmadinejad in their sights and not only Khamenei, god's representative in Tehran. They want to see the defeat of the whole, oppressive Islamic state ●

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## Notes

1. See my article from earlier this year, 'Ahmadinejad slapped as factions turn on each other', January 27.
2. D Ignatius, 'A quarrel in Tehran': [www.indystar.com/article/20110508/OPINION12/105080341/David-Ignatius-quarrel-Tehran](http://www.indystar.com/article/20110508/OPINION12/105080341/David-Ignatius-quarrel-Tehran).
3. On April 20, 10,000 Port Imam petrochemical workers ended their 11-day strike after reaching a settlement with management. The text of the settlement published by the Free Union of Iranian Workers claims that management asked for three months to end the use of contracting companies and transfer administrative work to Port Imam Petrochemicals and the oil ministry.
4. BBC Persian Service business reports: [www.bbc.co.uk/persian/business/2011/05/110509\\_ka\\_tavakili\\_subsidies.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/business/2011/05/110509_ka_tavakili_subsidies.shtml).

**PALESTINE**

# Re-enacting Nakba crimes

**O**n the day it was announced that Libya's Muammar Gaddafi will likely be indicted at the International Criminal Court at The Hague for war crimes, there was a strange omission. Israel's prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and 'defence' minister Ehud Barak, who have been jointly responsible for the murder of thousands of Palestinians, were omitted from the list of potential war criminals.

The latest killings occurred on May 15, when peaceful and unarmed demonstrators at the Lebanese border, the Golan Heights, Gaza's Erez Junction and many other places were killed in cold blood and hundreds injured, tear-gassed and arrested, as they commemorated Nakba Day, marking the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland in 1947-48. Thousands of Syrians and Palestinians marched to the 'border' with Israel - in reality the illegally occupied Golan Heights that Israel captured in 1967. The 'only democracy in the Middle East' used its customary murderous force to repel the native population seeking access to their own lands.

People often say, why do the Palestinians not take up peaceful protest like Ghandi (leaving aside the myths around the man)? But the reason has historically been that Israel's only reaction to peaceful demonstrators is, in the words of assassinated Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin, to "break their bones" or today to simply shoot to kill.

Israel, despite its democratic pretensions, is demonstrating very clearly that it refuses to be left out when it comes to the violent suppression of demonstrations in the Middle East. The Israeli government has already been panic-stricken over developments in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. It has not even condemned Syria's Bashar al-Assad for mowing down demonstrators, since it knows that the Arab regimes, including Iran, despite their rhetoric, are Israel's reliable collaborators and allies.

But, whenever things go wrong for Israeli public relations, one can always rely on the BBC to step in to lend a helping hand. So John Humphrys, on the *Today* programme, managed to describe the demonstrations as marking the creation of the state of Israel!

Presumably by that feat of logic, Holocaust Memorial Day is really about remembering the creation of the Third Reich. Ever since it was badly bitten by New Labour over the Iraq war, when its suggestion that the dodgy dossier had been sexed up, the BBC has been running scared of even the slightest criticism of imperialism - indeed director-general Mark Thompson is known to be a Zionist politically.

Despite the BBC and Israel's friends, the Christian Zionists and Europe's far right (the Jews' traditional anti-Semitic enemies) the reputation of Israel amongst trade unionists and the public has never been lower. Slowly but surely, the campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions is beginning to make ground. But for socialists the aim of a democratic Israel/Palestine as part of a democratic and secular Middle East is one that should be the highest priority. Israel is the only settler-colonial state still active in the world.

## Nakba myth

Nakba means 'catastrophe' and that is how it is seen by Palestinians. Between 1947 and 1948, Zionist militias deliberately massacred thousands of Palestinians in order to 'encourage' 750,000 Palestinians to leave for neighbouring Arab countries, never to return. The aim was the creation of a 'Jewish state' in Israel - established on May 15 1948. To do so in a land where the majority of the population was non-Jewish, it was absolutely vital to expel the vast majority of Palestinians from the territory. That was why 'transfer' committees had been set up under the Jewish Agency to plan the mechanics of the expulsion.

In subsequent years Israel created the myth about how the Arabs had voluntarily left their homes in order that the armies of the neighbouring Arab states could enter. This is, of course, standard practice for colonialism. Eventually Israeli historians, for different reasons, decided that the time had come when Israel had to come to terms with its past. It could not live forever on what was clearly fabricated history. Historians such as Simha Flapan, who had been national secretary of the 'left' Zionist Mapam Party and director of its Arab department, effectively broke with Zionism in his path-

breaking *The birth of Israel myths and realities* (New York 1987). Another 'new Zionist historian', Benny Morris (*The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949* Cambridge 1987), and Ilan Pappé (*The ethnic cleansing of Palestine* Oxford 2006) demolished this revisionist attempt to rewrite history. Morris though has become, in the words of the late professor Yehoshua Leibowitz, a Judao-Nazi. His only regret is that the expulsion of the Palestinians did not end until not a single Palestinian remained.

In fact, the myth that the Arabs fled on orders from their leaders had already been debunked in the early 1960s. A Palestinian historian and an Irish journalist, Erskine Childers, nephew of the Irish president, had investigated Zionist claims that Arab leaders had ordered an evacuation. In *The Spectator* of May 12 1961 he explained: "I next decided to test the undocumented charge that the Arab evacuation orders were broadcast by radio - which could be done thoroughly because the BBC monitored all Middle Eastern broadcasts throughout 1948. The records, as companion ones by a US monitoring unit, can be seen at the British Museum."<sup>1</sup>

Childers found the *opposite* of "evacuation orders": repeated appeals, "even orders, to the civilians of Palestine to stay put".<sup>2</sup>

Walid Khalidi, a Palestinian American, working in radio archives, independently confirmed this:

"There are in fact two monitoring collections for 1948: one compiled by the BBC, the other by the CIA, both from Cyprus ... Both collections give detailed daily coverage of broadcasts from Arab capitals and of such Zionist radios as Haganah Radio (in Hebrew, English and Arabic), the Free Hebrew Station (Stern) and the Voice of Fighting Zion (Irgun) ... the complete CIA collection here in Princeton also overwhelmingly confirms and elaborates the results that Mr Childers and I have arrived at independently of each other ... There are countless broadcasts by Zionist radios which indicate deliberate psychological warfare against the Arabs. There is not one single instance of an Arab evacuation order or hint of such an order. There is an impressive stream of explicit Arab orders to the Palestinian Arab civilians to hold their ground and remain in their towns and villages ..."<sup>3</sup>

Ever since 1948 Israel had been engaged in trying to erase the collective memory of the Nakba. The names of over 250 Palestinian villages, out of 530 destroyed, were uncovered and mapped by the late professor Israel Shahak, a holocaust survivor himself and a noted Israeli human rights activist. Zionist organisations like the 'charity', the Jewish National Fund, which today tries to cover itself in 'green' credentials, planted forests and parks over those Palestinian villages that the kibbutzim - the symbol of 'socialist Zionism' - had not already confiscated and built over.

But, the more the Zionists try to ban and erase the memory of the crimes of 1948, the more it is embedded in the consciousness of Israel's Palestinians. Laws to outlaw historical events do not have a notable record of success. Those who deny the Nakba are no different from those who deny the holocaust. The principle - the erasure of memory, the denial of witness testimony - is exactly the same ●

**Tony Greenstein**

## Notes

1. E Childers, 'The other exodus' in W Lacquer and B Rubin (eds) *The Arab-Israeli reader* London 1987, p146.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *The 'Spectator' correspondence* (from May-August 1961): [www.palestine-studies.org/enakba/exodus/Erskine Childers, Walid Khalidi, Jon Kimche, et al.pdf](http://www.palestine-studies.org/enakba/exodus/Erskine%20Childers,%20Walid%20Khalidi,%20Jon%20Kimche,%20et%20al.pdf).

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Become a Communist Party associate member

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**From generation to generation: keys kept as a reminder**



# weekly worker

**Privacy  
versus free  
speech**

## Hacks versus celebrities

The principal interest of the on-going *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal is less the story itself as what it exposes about society more generally.

Sure, the drip-drip of criminal accusations against one of the world's most powerful media conglomerates has the trappings of a classic conspiracy thriller - think *All the president's men* transplanted to Wapping - but the remarkable facts of the case consist not in those acts of tabloid subterfuge that happen to fall the wrong side of the law, but the manner in which the cover-up has dragged everyone from the Tory government to the Metropolitan Police, to Murdoch's tabloid rivals into the swamp.

Now that News International has agreed to negotiate settlements with a number of individuals in its high-profile, but carefully hedged apology and now that the first such payment - a cool £100,000 to film star Sienna Miller, has been arranged - it is worth examining the case from a different perspective: that of the victims.

We can divide these into two broad categories - political victims and celebrity victims. There are, it seems, considerably more of the latter than the former; and, to a certain extent, they are all much of a muchness to the *News of the World*, for whom a sensational scandal is a sensational scandal, whoever is at the bottom end of it. (Perhaps it is no accident that suspicions were first raised by the royal family, the most important institution to exist in the murky netherworld between 'celeb' culture and high politics.)

The political figures targeted are unsurprisingly largely from a Labour or left background. John Prescott has been the most vocal, in his typical blustery fashion, but Tessa Jowell is also on the list for payouts. To their left, George Galloway - who has previously pursued damages against the *Mirror* in Robert Maxwell's days in charge, and more recently *The Daily Telegraph* - is attempting to bring his case to court. The date is set for early 2012; that is how long Murdoch has to match Galloway's price or otherwise cobble together a defence. Likewise, Tommy Sheridan is very keen to know exactly how the *News of the World* came upon details of his private life, whose publication ultimately resulted in his jail sentence for perjury.

Given the sociopathically reactionary character of Murdoch's gutter press, that it has targeted lefts for smear campaigns is hardly front-page news, as it were. While Galloway and Sheridan are clearly enough victims of concerted attempts to destroy their political careers - in the latter case successful - the interest in Prescott is at least partly an interest in him as a public figure (and, indeed, a political ally of the Murdoch empire through his participation in the Blair regime).

So perhaps more interesting, paradoxically, is the 'celebrity' factor - which raises the attendant, although ultimately false, dilemma of free speech versus the right to privacy. The problem of privacy is highlighted very clearly by the phone-hacking affair - it should be pretty obvious to any



Sienna Miller: payout

observer that somebody listening into your voicemail messages is a violation of your privacy.

The dimension of free speech is more obviously implicated in another, related, slow-burning legal scandal - that of the super-injunction, whereby a court has the power to order the press not to report on an issue under legal dispute, and also not to report the existence of the injunction. (The writer and comedian, Charlie Brooker, likened it to being gagged, and then having a bag put on one's head to obscure the gag.)

The emergence of this practice - by its nature obscure - is clearly linked to the massive expansion of digital media, whereby the existence of innumerable smaller media outlets in a kaleidoscopic variety of legal jurisdictions makes older methods of suppressing a story more or less obsolete. A paper merely has to report that, say, a footballer has obtained an injunction to prevent the revelation of an extramarital affair, and the internet rumour mill will rapidly whittle down the list of candidates to one.

It has been widely reported that the majority of these injunctions are, indeed, brought by well-known individuals with respect to concealing embarrassing aspects of their private lives from the wider population. In

particular, the profile of the typical super-injunction-seeker is a middle-aged male concealing his infidelity. Infamously, one such man to own up to the practice was Andrew Marr, a BBC journalist who does not himself refrain from probing the personal lives of interviewees. The hypocrisy is breathtaking - once it became clear that the story was going to break anyway, Marr came clean with what amounted to a grovelling apology to his profession.

The double standards of BBC hacks, however, is hardly the least edifying aspect of this whole business. Most infamously, the Dutch oil company, Trafigura, obtained a super-injunction suppressing the publication of details of an internal memo, which appeared to confirm accusations that a Trafigura-owned ship had dumped thousands of tonnes of toxic waste in heavily populated areas of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast.

So very serious matters are entangled with 'celebrity culture', which everywhere has the effect of effacing the distinction between the personal and the political. On the one hand, the phone-hacking scandal reproduces the tendency for big settlements and libel verdicts against the gutter press to be awarded to well-heeled celebrities, and thus obscure the violently reactionary attacks against political figures less materially able to fight back (in Galloway's case, it is a most felicitous use of the Press TV/Talksport shilling that allows him to buck the trend); the explosion of the *News International* case has at least partly exposed this dimension, but it will be once again buried, as Murdoch pays off the likes of Sienna Miller.

On the other hand, the preponderance of celebrity scandals in the super-injunction phenomenon obscures the ability of the obscenely wealthy to buy silence - and silence about the silence - concerning their even more obscene crimes. Andrew Marr is a more identifiable figure than Trafigura; he gets more column inches for possibly fathering a bastard child than all the thousands of victims of an oil company's act of chemical class

warfare put together.

The basic functioning of celebrity culture can be summed up easily with another example. Among the so-called 'women's weeklies' on newsstands everywhere, there are two main types: those that deal in typically grotesque 'true-life stories', and those that deal in celebrity gossip. There is one in particular which aspires to cover both in one easy package: its sublime Freudian slip of a tagline is "real life and celebs". Celebrity culture is an ideology whose purpose is to introduce a separation between figures in the public eye and, precisely, 'real life'.

It provides the bulk of front pages for mass market tabloids, and indeed a substantial amount of copy for the slightly more upmarket likes of the *Mail* (as well as daily free sheets). This penetration into the mass media gives celebrity stories a repetitive rhythm and narrative logic. It does not particularly matter that the vast bulk are essentially just made up, or at best the result of wild speculation. It certainly does not matter that, whatever their talents on a football pitch, movie set or recording studio, most celebrities are not particularly interesting individuals. The point is to seize on any scrap of biographical information and turn it into a narrative.

This is the both the grain of truth and the major flaw in those apologies for tabloid gossip that state, broadly, that celebrities have chosen to be in the public eye, and tabloid intrusion is part of the job. The truth of it is that being a celebrity *is* in a sense a job in itself - we are long past the point where it became possible to be famous simply for being famous - Katie Price's long-expired career as a glamour model barely factors into her aggressive entrepreneurship of her own notoriety. The flaw is that celebrity culture continues in a manner basically indifferent to what its objects actually do, so in no sense can famous individuals be held responsible for its content. The young Britney Spears no doubt sought stardom. She did not seek to end up the protagonist of a protracted tabloid adaptation of *The*

*yellow wallpaper*.

The cannibalistic logic of celebrity culture infects ever more spheres of life. Its colonisation of mainstream bourgeois politics is more or less complete - bourgeois parties and politicians currently lack much room for manoeuvre, thanks to a lack of pressure from below and an abundance of pressure from above, so differences are invented through the deployment of charismatic personalities. Here, one need only mention Barack Obama.

It also makes restrictions on free speech inevitable, by turning the private lives of individuals into a source of profit. The *News of the World* and its competitors will always be involved in a guerrilla struggle against the great and the good over which means it may employ to obtain which grubby details; injunctions, super-injunctions (and now 'hyper-injunctions') are the inevitable result, as are tighter restrictions on the press, all of which will be exploited in due course by the likes of Trafigura.

It is fruitless to try and seek a legal 'balance' between privacy and free speech. It is quite legitimate for the press to use every means it can to expose corruption, mendacity and worse on the part of our rulers and the class they represent. They should be able to hide nothing. Sienna Miller, Hugh Grant and the like should be able to conduct their personal affairs in peace (as should Tommy Sheridan); but the reason they cannot has nothing to do with the availability or otherwise of legal sanctions, but is rather a function of a whole cultural-ideological system which needs to be overcome.

Partly, this means destroying the power of media moguls, which is in any case a necessary part of fighting for democracy, thus decapitating the celeb apparatus; but it also means the working class and the broad masses becoming active producers of their own culture, diametrically opposed to the insubstantial trashiness of tabloid gossip ●

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