



weekly **worker**

Marx and Engels on passive materialism, theological atheism and religion

- SPEW and Tusc
- Sluts and rape
- Watkins' La Commune
- Superinjunctions

No 867 Thursday May 26 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

Paris Commune: 140th anniversary



LETTERS



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

Voting tactics

It is a pity that comrade Chris Trafford, in defending the open letter calling for no vote to George Galloway on May 5, did not engage with the actual position of the CPGB of which he is a member.

He writes: "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 ... they are shamefully smeared as social-imperialists and accused of backing Alliance for Workers' Liberty-type political attacks on Galloway" (Letters, May 19). It would be shameful and even hysterical if it were true that the signatories had been attacked as social-imperialists. But who has done that? Certainly not the CPGB.

It is also a pity that comrade Trafford did not attend the May 8 CPGB members' aggregate, which debated and unanimously agreed a resolution on the open letter. Chris does not appear to have read this resolution, which, far from writing off the signatories as social-imperialists, recognises their motivation as that of "legitimate disgust at Galloway's support for and organised links to the tyrannical theocratic regime in Iran". However, "in focussing solely" on Galloway, the open letter did not clearly oppose "the operations of the imperialists" and therefore "risks associating" members of Hands Off the People of Iran and Communist Students who signed the letter "with the Eustonite/Alliance for Workers' Liberty camp". It was for this reason first and foremost that the open letter was a "political mistake" ('Aggregate resolution', May 12).

While the signatories were not motivated by social-imperialism, it is in fact the case that the open letter had all the appearances of an 'AWL-type political attack on Galloway'. It is *exactly* the style of the AWL to one-sidedly focus on the failings of a single left candidate and to claim that this made him uniquely unsupportable, while saying not a word about the failings of any other left candidate. No wonder the AWL reproduced the open letter on its website. The very fact that this occurred should have made comrade Trafford stop and think.

He implies that the *Weekly Worker's* support for Galloway was not really "critical" - we failed to expose his "awful politics and links with the Iranian regime ... for this election". In reality we did not actually give him - or any other left candidate - much support (in the way, say, that *The Socialist* campaigned week after week for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition). We published just two articles before the election explaining our attitude and in both we gave equal space to condemning Galloway's links to the Iran regime as to explaining why he should be supported nevertheless.

We did not place "extra conditions" on the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Labour Party by recommending a vote for Galloway's Coalition Against Cuts in Glasgow rather than them. We made it clear that all three met our conditions for support for working class anti-cuts candidates. Despite their obvious failings, the election of any of their lead candidates would have resulted in a small advance for the working class cause. All three would have provided some kind of working class voice against the cuts (as well as against imperialist wars, etc). But workers obviously could not vote for all of them, and only Galloway had any chance of being elected (and at

least his campaign could be seen as part of the Britain-wide working class resistance rather than the Scottish separatism of the SSP). Elsewhere in Scotland there was no point in suggesting which of the three no-hope sectarian campaigns (SSP, SLP, Solidarity) were more worthy of working class votes than their rivals.

It is unfortunate that Chris Trafford accuses CPGB comrades like Jack Conrad of telling "a lie" for stating that Galloway's backing for the Iran regime is similar to the support for Stalinist regimes offered by 'official communists' or the Workers Revolutionary Party for Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In my view all have been truly nauseating and should equally be condemned, and it is rather uncomradely of Chris to accuse his fellow CPGBers of lying for disagreeing with him on this. Personally I think his assertion that "Galloway is a conscious cog in the machine of terror directed at the Iranian people" is an absurd exaggeration (you might just as well accuse Paul Mason of *Newsnight* of being a similar "cog in the machine of terror" of British imperialism). But I do not accuse comrade Trafford of lying for making it.

Finally, let me point out to comrade Trafford the nature of electoral tactics. This means that working class internationalists able to contest an election in Tehran would highlight different aspects of their programme than those contesting in Glasgow. In Tehran their main focus would be the repressive regime, I would suggest, while in Glasgow it would be the cuts, not to mention anti-imperialism. In Iran genuine communists would perhaps give critical support to any working class candidate who demanded the end of the regime, irrespective of serious failings and weaknesses, such as support for austerity measures, for instance.

Contradictory? No. When our class is weak we try to build support for our side by focussing on the key dividing lines, while refusing to be diverted by issues, however important, that are secondary at a given time or place.

Peter Manson
South London

Big lesson

Mike Macnair has pointed out that "there is very little in Marx's and Engels' writings on electoral tactics" ('Propaganda and agitation', April 28). He went on: "Engels says that Keir Hardie 'publicly declares that [Irish nationalist Charles Stewart] Parnell's experiment, which compelled Gladstone to give in, ought to be repeated at the next election and, where it is impossible to nominate a Labour candidate, one should vote for the Conservatives, in order to show the Liberals the power of the party. Now this is a policy which under definite circumstances I myself recommended to the English ...'"

This is a massive revelation - that Engels actually supported a vote for the Tories under certain circumstances! The biggest lesson to draw is that electoral strategy and tactics that are correct at one time may not be correct at another.

I was a member of the Militant Tendency, now the Socialist Party, from 1990 to 1998. I fully supported the Scottish turn, establishing Scottish Militant Labour, which was an extremely successful strategy leading to Tommy Sheridan getting elected from his prison cell (for defying the poll tax) to Glasgow city council in 1992. This led on to a few more electoral victories for SML, the establishment of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the later formation of the SSP.

I left the Socialist Party when it

failed to support the establishment of the SSP in 1998. The SSP was a very successful project, winning one seat (Sheridan's) in 1999 and six seats in 2003. Contrary to how it is expressed in the *Weekly Worker*, this was not a failure, despite the disintegration of the SSP after the Sheridan affair.

The best tactics to adopt now are very different - there is a need for a Scottish Revolutionary Socialist Party, as well as a broad socialist party like the SSP and Solidarity. Revolutionary platforms of broad socialist parties, including Labour, would also be a massive step forward.

Steve Wallis
email

Fat chance

I learnt a great deal when I attended the Lambeth People's Assembly, organised by Lambeth Save Our Services on Saturday May 21. I heard inspiring contributions from campaigners and trade unionists fighting to retain local services and opposing privatisation and job losses, students learning that their courses will not be continuing the following year, librarians seeking to save reading groups, tenants fighting privatisation and disabled people campaigning to save transport services.

It was a privilege hearing from, Kingsley Abrams, who I understand is the only Labour councillor in London to oppose the cuts to services. For his pains, he has only just been re-admitted to the Labour group on the council. However, his stay is likely to be short-lived, as he pledged to oppose the further waves of cuts and closures planned.

Ted Knight, the former leader of Lambeth council in the 1980s, outlined that the Labour Party should not be meekly going along with the government's savage cuts, but should be working with campaigners and trade unionists and leading the fight to defend jobs and services. Fat chance!

A political campaign across London is needed and the Greater London assembly elections next year will give all those who oppose the cuts an opportunity to register a protest. The Labour Party have abandoned their history of defending the weak and those reliant on council services. This duty must now fall on others.

Lewisham People Before Profit are keen to talk with all those fighting the cuts to services and would like to explore contesting the GLA elections with others.

Nick Long
Nominating officer, Lewisham PBP

PCS conference

Despite Dave Vincent's effort in the *Weekly Worker* to lobby against the Public and Commercial Services union balloting for strike action on June 30 alongside other unions, only two out of over 900 delegates voted against the leadership's plans ('Don't rush - make sure we can win', May 12). Funnily enough, even comrade Vincent voted *for* the motion in the end - despite speaking against it and calling for more patience. Comrade Vincent had been persuaded by conference.

While voting for the motion, I - like many other PCS activists - would criticise the June 30 action from a very different angle: if we are serious about defeating the vicious plans of this Con-Dem government, we need to do much more than call one-day strikes. These are good enough as a 'vote of protest', but not much more than that. The government can easily ride out one-day strikes (even if another larger one follows, as planned, in October).

True, longer strikes might currently see a lower turnout. This has partly to do with the general low confidence and activity of the working class,

but also a lack of confidence in the PCS leadership, which for the last 10 years has been run like a fiefdom by the Socialist Party.

Most members, whilst loyal to their union, don't actually believe that the leadership have a strategy to defeat the attacks (which will lead to hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost in the public sector, working conditions further undermined and pension provisions cut). As comrade Vincent reports, the turnout for the NEC elections was just over 10% - though many more members will turn out for strike action. The leadership seems almost paralysed by this low turnout. Because they fear they can't convince members of more militant action, they don't even try. Plus, over the 10 years they have been running the union, they have failed to build up a decent strike fund that could actually finance more long-term action.

In my opinion we need to become much more ambitious in this period. Instead of simply mobilising the whole PCS membership for one-day strikes every few months, it would be much better to organise more targeted and militant strike action alongside it.

For example, could you imagine the damage caused if workers in customs and excise went on indefinite strike? Or if tax collectors refused to work, starving the government of vital income? This would hit them where it hurts. Despite general secretary Mark Serwotka recently saying that "no tactics are off the agenda", this kind of action is unlikely to be called by the SP-dominated NEC.

Unfortunately, the emergency motion on Iran was not heard. The standing orders committee did not regard it as worthy of a conference motion and therefore 'D-marked' it as something that could be dealt with by correspondence. As a delegate I did get the opportunity to speak for the motion by challenging the decision by way of a reference back. But this was only supported by about 80 delegates and so the motion - which opposed all imperialist military action and sanctions, and called for support for the new campaign, 'Freedom for Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners' - did not get onto the main agenda.

Lee Rock
Sheffield

Fish nor fowl

I wish to respond to the characterisation of Platypus, politically, as having affinities with the anti-'anti-imperialist' left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty *et al.* ('Theoretical dead end', May 19). However we have been influenced theoretically by aspects of Moishe Postone's work on Marx's critique of capital, we are not in political agreement.

Platypus, which has been motivated by the diagnosis that the 'left is dead', originated in the era of the anti-war movement of the Bush II years, and our project of "hosting the critical conversation on the left", that we didn't think would otherwise take place, was necessitated by the predictable failure of the anti-war movement, of which we thought its supposed 'anti-imperialism' was the Achilles' heel. We wanted a more effective anti-war and anti-imperialist politics.

In considering the problems of the 'left' today, we discern that they are two-sided, embodied by not only the 'anti-imperialist' left of the US International Socialist Organization *et al.*, but also by the 'anti-fascist' left of Christopher Hitchens, Kanan Makiya *et al.* We consider not only Tariq Ali, but also Hitchens, to be important exemplars of today's 'dead left'. We consider the ISO-US *et al.* to be sham anti-imperialist, or pseudo-left, just

as we would consider Hitchens's claims to be anti-fascist in supporting US imperialism to be pseudo-left (pseudo-liberal).

We take seriously Fred Halliday's characterisation, reported in his interview with Danny Postel ('Who is responsible?' in *Salmagundi* No150-51, 2006, pp 221-240) of his political departure from *New Left Review* and Tariq Ali, as follows: "About 20 years ago I said to Tariq that god, allah, called the two of us to his presence and said to us, 'One of you is to go to the left, and one of you is to go to the right.' The problem is, He didn't tell us which was which, and maybe he didn't know himself. And Tariq laughed. He understood exactly what I was saying, and he didn't dispute it."

We interpret this to mean that both Halliday and Ali turned to the right, or that both are disintegrated (or decomposed) remnants of the death of the left and therefore worth critical consideration. And not only Halliday, but also the aforementioned Hitchens and Makiya, could legitimately claim that they didn't abandon the left so much as the left abandoned them.

The ideal conversation we in Platypus would like to have hosted, when we first launched our project, would have been a debate on the 'war on terror' between Tariq Ali, Alex Callinicos, Halliday, Hitchens and Makiya (with perhaps Slavoj Žižek thrown in for fun). In such a debate, we don't think anyone would have represented the left that the world needs today - hence the need for such a conversation. For we think that they are all wrong and, hence, all 'right'. As a project, Platypus is about exposing and putting forward a need: the present absence of a true left. We don't have answers, only questions.

On the issue of 'imperialism', I dispute the supposed distinction of a voluntaristic (or opportunist) versus structural-historical approach to the problem of, eg, Luxemburg versus Bukharin. I think that Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky found that the 'imperialist' phase of 'monopoly capital' and the changing 'organic composition of capital' (at a global scale) by the turn of the 20th century had been the product of the successes of the workers' movement in the core capitalist countries. They found this success to have advanced the crisis of capital. In other words, the social democratic workers' movement had itself brought about the crisis of capital, or 'imperialism' as capitalism's 'highest' or last stage (Lenin): that is, the eve of revolution. Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky thought that the socialist workers' movement was part of and not extrinsic to the history of capital. This meant, for Luxemburg, that the workers were responsible for the world war and thus historically obligated to bring about socialism and avert barbarism. This was not merely a moral injunction.

Moreover, what the Second International radicals meant by 'imperialism' was inter-imperialism, not core-periphery relations. The emphasis on the latter was the hallmark of the post-World War II new left and its derangement on the problem of global capital in history.

So it is not, for us, a matter of waiting for the world to become entirely liberalised or uniformly bourgeois in social relations before the struggle for socialism can commence (which would indeed be like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*), but rather recognition that the problem of 'imperialism' has been a symptom of capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution, at least since 1914-19, if not significantly long before.

When Platypus says that the 'left is dead', what we mean is that the rottenness of the world today is the

historical legacy and responsibility of the left (and the failure of Marxism). As a project, we are neither ‘academic’ nor ‘activist’ (neither fish nor fowl), but rather about provoking recognition (blocked by both academicism and activism) of this long overdue and festering task, which we think is found in historical Marxism, but buried under many layers of regressive obfuscation from which it needs to be disinterred.

We don’t think that this task can be formulated straightforwardly politically, programmatically, but only indirectly, through pointed and acutely symptomatic conversation that can have a transformative effect ideologically. This will not involve Platypus developing some better theory ahead of better practice, but rather our doing something that will need to be accompanied, in a ‘division of labour’, by a reinvigorated workers’ movement. We think the ideological work we are doing in hosting and pointedly curating the conversation can have an effect, however indirectly, on freeing up and potentially revalorising the idea of socialism and a Marxist approach that we think would be necessary - if for now at some distance from immediately practical questions - for such a workers’ movement.

Christopher Cutrone
 email

Lost grip

In place of a socialist understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Tony Greenstein once again offers his Arabesque/Islamist narrative in accord with his published ambition to see the “destruction of the state of Israel” (‘Re-enacting Nakba crimes’, May 19).

In order to delegitimise and demonise Israel, the only democratic state in the Middle East, and support the idea of a unitary Palestinian state, Mr Greenstein uses analogous reasoning and decontextualises history, whilst at the same time arguing as if the Palestinians are the victims and the Jews the persecutors. Worse and morally repugnant are the simplistic parallels between Nazi-fascism and the Israeli state - false and morally suspect. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and minister Ehard Barak, we are told, “have been responsible for the murder of thousands of Palestinians”, in a comparison with Libya’s Gaddafi who, if caught, will be held to account for the use of the military against his own countrymen during the recent revolt for democratic rights. But Israel on May 15 was defending itself against ‘a protest of rage’, another violent ‘intifada’, which was designed to incite an attack against Israel. Thus the analogy is clearly false: Israeli Arabs have human rights and the vote and are not comparable with those Arabs in revolt against Arab dictatorships.

In this respect, Netanyahu and Barak are not ‘murderers’, but defending the state of Israel; just as any democratic state is entitled to defend itself, (and the Israel Defence Forces have as good a record as any progressive nation for their policy of trying to avoid non-combatant fatalities). Greenstein’s repeated attempts to make Israel equivalent to Arab dictatorships are simply false, arriving at the notion that the Arab regimes and even Iran “are Israel’s reliable collaborators and allies” - stretching the imagination, to say the least. Moreover, we are led to believe that the BBC is a Zionist organisation (world conspiracy of Jews?) whose director is plotting against the Palestinians.

Greenstein is losing his grip. The fact that many trade unions and student unions have started boycotts and advocated the closing down of Israeli/Jewish stores and shops in Europe is largely due to the way in which the left has singled out Israel

for delegitimation and demonisation. Many states with demonstrably worse human rights records simply don’t register with the left, whilst the left often supports Islamic terrorist organisations and Arab dictatorships. The singling out of Israel for unfair attack has demonstrably anti-Semitic undertones (shutting down Israeli/Jewish stores were Nazi-fascist tactics).

The notion that Israel is the “only colonial settler-state left in the world” forgets the real context of the continuous historical connection of the Jewish people with Israel and the legitimate creation of Israel in 1948. Thus the Islamist notion of the ‘Nakba’ or ‘catastrophe’ - used as analogous to the holocaust - is a lie and an insult to every victim of Nazi-fascism persecution and aggression.

Benny Morris, the Israeli historian, has shown that viewing the Palestinians as victims is too simplistic and the historical context does not support Greenstein’s Islamist narrative. But this does not satisfy Greenstein’s position and so he enlists the idea that Morris is a “Judeo-Nazi”. It is, of course, a far more complex picture than can be dealt with in a letter, but suffice to conclude that Mr Greenstein’s miseducates and misleads many socialists and communists today, especially the younger generation, who are fed into the arms of Islamists and away from a peaceful and just two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Henry Mitchell
 London

Stolen land

On Nakba Day, May 15, I participated in a demonstration in the north of Israel, 14 kilometres from the Lebanese border. We were a group of about 400 who tried to reach the border with Lebanon, but we were forced to stop by the police. We were allowed to demonstrate for one hour, but then the police tear-gassed us. Around 10 of us suffered very badly following this attack and 22 were arrested. However, compared to other Palestinians and the few Jews who participated in the demonstrations in the Golan Heights, Ras Maroun in Lebanon and Gaza, the price we paid for the right to demonstrate for the Palestinian refugees to return was negligible.

Israel is doing everything to erase the memory of the Nakba. It has removed mention of the fact from its rewritten official history books and a bill proposed by the rightwing Yisrael Beiteinu party stipulates fines for local authorities and other state-funded bodies for simply holding events marking the Palestinian Nakba Day.

Another bill, which succeeded by a majority of 35 to 20, formalises the establishment of admission committees to review the position of potential residents of Negev and Galilee communities that have fewer than 400 families. After its passing there were skirmishes in the knesset, as Ahmed Tibi, member of the knesset for the United Arab List-Ta’al, was not content to compare the bill to South African apartheid legislation, but likened its context to the Wannsee conference, where the Nazis decided on the ‘final solution’ in 1942.

However, following the May 15 demonstrations and the cold-blood murder of Palestinian protestors, the name ‘Nakba’ is becoming familiar for many people around the world.

If anyone had any doubt as to the class nature of the Egyptian army, the events in Tahrir Square on Nakba Day showed the real face of the generals. At least 120 people were injured, when security forces fired tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets at pro-Palestinian protestors who were trying to storm the Israeli embassy. At least 20 people were arrested.

Protesters responded by burning tyres and throwing stones.

This incident followed the visit to Egypt by Amos Gilad, a senior Israeli defence ministry official - the first trip by a top Israeli official since the revolution that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak in February. Clearly, just as in Mubarak’s days, the Egyptian army is allying itself with Israel and oppressing the Palestinians. This army has to go, to be replaced by a workers’ army. For this it is necessary to split it along class lines. The new trade union federation and workers’ party must organise workers’ militias to defend, among others, the Palestinians and the Copts.

The incident also shed more light on the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah - struck under the auspices of the Egyptian generals - which aims at putting together an interim Palestinian government. While the reformists present this agreement as a step forward in the struggle against Israel, it is actually a step in the direction of the Oslo agreement.

The Nakba Day events have shown anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear that a key question of the so-called Israeli-Arab conflict is the Palestinian right of return. Netanyahu said that the Nakba Day protests were not about the 1967 borders, but rather about “undermining the very existence of Israel”. He is right on that. The demonstrations were not for a mini-Palestinian state, with Israel still controlling 80% of Palestine. They were for the right of the refugees to return to their land. But if that were allowed, the majority of people living in this country would be Palestinians. For this reason Israel is prepared to kill thousands and thousands of Palestinians in an attempt to prevent such an outcome and, as long as Israel exists, the Palestinian refugees will not be able to return.

Yossi Schwartz
 Internationalist Socialist League

19th century

I misunderstand Marx, argues Chris Gray (Letters, May 5). However, comrade Gray doesn’t explain, even briefly, what this misunderstanding consists of.

Is Marx not associated with the view that production relations are determined by productive forces? Is this not the essence of the theory of historical materialism? Marx argues in *Capital* volume one that men enter into production relations independently of their will and these relations correspond to the degree of development of the productive forces. As I argued before, I believe this view is false, because exploitative production relations are imposed by one class on another using force, and this is backed up by ideology. For Marxism, exploitation was a necessary stage in the development of humanity. I do not think so and the existence of primitive communism refutes the Marxist thesis.

Chris wants to hear any counterevidence to the peak oil thesis. There is counterevidence aplenty in the writings of various free-market economists, who believe that the market will solve the problem. This literature is mostly delusional and hides the fact that the immediate problem is not the end of oil as such, but a decline in supply and the end of cheap oil.

The positive thing about Chris’s letter is that, unlike most people on the left, he recognises the need for an urgent, informed debate on the issue. Most communists base themselves on Marxism, a 19th century doctrine which did not realise that the foundation of society is energy. That leads to Marxists underestimating the coming energy crisis.

Tony Clark
 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 or check out 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 31: ‘Advanced lunarchy: implementing slow time’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Stop the EDL

Saturday May 28, 12 noon: Vigil against English Defence League provocations, headland, south of Central Pier, Blackpool. Organised by Blackpool and Fleetwood Unite Against Fascism: <http://blackpoolandfleetwooduaf.blogspot.com>.

Labour’s socialist left

Northumberland LRC: Thursday June 2, 7pm, Ashington Football Club (near Wansbeck Hospital). ‘How Labour turned left, how Labour turned right, how Labour begins to turn left again!’ Speaker: John McCormack, UCU national committee and Ashington council leader.
Northern Region LRC: Saturday June 18, 11am, Gateshead Civic Centre, Blaydon room. ‘The situation in Britain today’. Speaker: Peter Doyle (former Unison full-time official). Organised by northern region Labour Representation Committee: northern.region.lrc@wilkobro.wanadoo.co.uk.

Miscarriages of justice

Thursday June 9, 11am: Protest - stop miscarriages of justice - free the innocent! Assemble New Canal Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 (opposite Old Curzon Street station) for march to CCRC offices. Organised by West Midlands Against Injustice: westmidlandsagainstinjustice.webs.com.

Drop the charges

Thursday June 9, Friday June 10, 9am: Picket, magistrates court, 70 Horseferry Road, London SW1. Drop charges against protestors. 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 schools converting to academy status. Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: 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.

Cuba: 50 years

Saturday June 11, 9.30am-12.30pm: Annual general meeting, Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Hamilton House, London, WC1. Followed by anniversary event, 2pm to 4pm, with guest speakers from Cuba. Organised by CSC: 020 8800 0155; office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 11, 11.30am to 4pm: Annual conference, South Camden Community School, London NW1. Organised by NSSN: www.shopstewards.net/conference.htm.

Remember Gaza

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

City of sanctuary

Wednesday, June 15, 6pm-8pm: Open event to keep Glasgow a place of sanctuary and solidarity, STUC, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3. Refreshments, crèche available (angela@gcin.org.uk). Organised by Glasgow City of Sanctuary: www.cityofsanctuary.org.

Save Esol

Sunday June 19, 12.30pm: Demonstrations to save English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.
East London: Assemble Hackney town hall, Mare Street, London E8; **or** Stepney Green, Tower Hamlets, London E1 for march to Esol festival, Bethnal Green Gardens, London E3.
South London: Assemble Windrush Square, Brixton, London SW9 for march to Esol festival, Kennington Park, London SE11. Organised by London Action for Esol: <http://actionforesol.org>.

Cuba solidarity

Tuesday June 21, 7pm: Ninth annual RMT garden party for Cuba, Maritime House, Old Town, Clapham, London SW4. With live Cuban band, food and bar. Organised by Cuban Solidarity Campaign: 020 8800 0155.

Unite the resistance

Wednesday June 22, 6.30pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Mark Serwotka, Kevin Courtney and Tony Benn. Called by left union officials and promoted by Right to Work: <http://righttowork.org.uk/2011/05/unite-the-resistance>.

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.

SOCIALIST PARTY

Give up on Tusc

'If there was a serious prospect of shifting Labour towards the left, no serious Marxist could stand aside from this.' Peter Taaffe should live up to his words, says **Peter Manson**

Now that the dust has settled after the May 5 elections, how do the component parts of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition view their performance? Tusc stood 174 candidates in the English local elections and contested two regions for the Welsh assembly, and its votes ranged from disappointing to dismal.

I have already commented briefly on Nick Wrack's 'Some initial observations on the Tusc election results', which was posted on the Tusc website on May 8.¹ Comrade Wrack, a member of the coalition's steering committee, while noting the "generally small votes and low percentages" that are only "to be expected for a party that has no real national or local profile", concluded it was nevertheless "a good initial foray".²

"Given the difficulties that the socialist left has had working together to present candidates in elections over the last decade," comrade Wrack remarked, "it was a success to be able to put forward 174 candidates, representing the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party and independent socialists ..."

I will resist the temptation to comment ironically for a second time on his observation that, "If Tusc had been in a position to stand candidates in every ward in England, its vote may have been small in percentage terms at this stage, but the aggregate vote would have been significant ... An average vote of two percent would mean half a million votes."

Therefore, comrade Wrack concluded, "The Tusc initiative has the potential to develop into something very significant. We need to discuss how we can build on this start and map out a strategy for the future."

Well, Tusc has now called a "conference" for July 16 in order to plan for the 2012 local elections in England and Wales. But attendance is restricted to candidates, agents and "key campaign supporters" - and perhaps "those thinking of standing" in May 2012. In other words, the Tusc steering committee is not exactly planning for huge support from outside the ranks of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the comparatively small number of "independent socialists" like comrade Wrack, together with the usual token appearance from the SWP.

What about the SWP? What was its attitude to the May 5 results? It was rather more downbeat than Nick: "The elections saw people looking to the strongest mainstream alternative to the government across the UK. That meant that there were disappointments for many left-of-Labour candidates. For instance, George Galloway didn't get elected in Glasgow - and socialist councillors in England, such as Michael Lavalette, lost their seats Many Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ... votes were poor."³

Comrade Lavalette himself reports in the same issue: "I was inundated with emails, texts and Facebook messages of thanks and support after the result. That made me feel very proud to have been an SWP councillor." Except you weren't "an SWP councillor", Michael. Not in formal terms in any case. You were officially registered as "Independent

Socialist" and stood on May 5 as "Independent Socialist Against the Cuts".

Nevertheless, the SWP's conclusion was a reasonable one. It frankly admitted in its internal *Party Notes*: "The left-of-Labour vote was generally small and often very small ... it was very disappointing to lose councillors Michael Lavalette and Ray Holmes ... Having them in place was a boost to the fightback. *But we have always known that the key issue is the level of struggle.*"⁴

Super-positive

By contrast to the SWP, SPEW's extensive post-election coverage was super-positive, stressing Tusc's total of "over 25,000 votes" gained by candidates standing in 50 councils. It may not look like it right now, but Tusc is actually laying the ground for a new party that will eventually replace Labour! "In eight wards contested by Tusc," we are informed, "the Labour Party was so moribund that it either did not stand a candidate or stood in less than the total number of seats up for election."⁵

The Socialist published a dozen highly optimistic local reports, all claiming that Tusc did rather well in the circumstances. Typical was Paul Delaney's from Coventry, where Tusc's candidates were all SPEW members standing as Socialist Alternative. His piece is headlined: "Coventry: support for Socialist Party still strong in St Michael's". "Still strong" - despite the fact that the share of the vote for former councillor Rob Windsor was down to half that of the Labour candidate. In fact, "Our vote in some parts of the ward was as high as 70%, with people seeing us as the only principled fighters and campaigners ..."

However, comrade Delaney still felt the need to excuse SPEW's "strong" showing: "Our task was made harder because of the national situation, but also complicating local factors. For instance Mia Ali, the Tory candidate from 2010, had made a seamless transition to Labour, which undoubtedly increased the vote for Jim O'Boyle, the Labour councillor opposing Rob, as some of her support base would have gone with her."

However convincing (or not) readers of *The Socialist* find such explanations, they can take comfort in the fact that Socialist Alternative "slightly increased our share of the vote across the city, to obtain 3.5% from 3,081 votes" in all 18 council wards.

The paper's main article on the election hammers home the theme that Labour's decline is continuing and the situation is ripe for the emergence of a mass working class replacement: "... the rejection of Labour for a seemingly more combative alternative [the Scottish National Party] is an illustration of workers' distrust of Labour, not just in Scotland, but across Britain. Similarly, in Brighton, where the Green Party

has its stronghold, it became the largest party on the council." Even where Labour made gains, "Workers who voted Labour did so without real enthusiasm."

The article notes: "It is ironic that today Labour is chasing after the Liberal Democrats, just as the Liberal Democrats face electoral annihilation." Fair enough, but the anonymous writer concludes from this: "It confirms again that Labour today is not a mass party of the working class, but is one more capitalist party." This same point is repeated by SPEW general secretary Peter Taaffe the following week: "It is incredible that, as the situation worsens, New Labour shifts even further towards the right, offering even to rescue the Liberal Democrats in an alternative coalition to that of the present Tory-led coalition!"⁶

Then and now

What is really "incredible" is that SPEW claims to see confirmation that Labour is now "one more capitalist party" in the Labour leadership's willingness to enter into coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Labour leaders have *always* been prepared to form pacts or even governing coalitions with not just the Liberals, but the Conservatives too. There have been numerous 'understandings' with the Liberals, dating right back to Labour's foundation, and three instances of minority Labour governments supported by the Liberals (1924, 1929, 1977). And, of course, twice during the last century Labour entered into wartime coalitions or 'national governments' with both bourgeois parties.

But for comrade Taaffe everything has changed: "Gone are the days when Labour councillors, although they did not always stand on the left, nevertheless tended to be volunteers dedicating themselves to defending their communities and class. As Labour has been transformed from a workers' party at bottom into another capitalist party, so workers have dropped out of Labour Party membership. In their place have come careerists and place-seekers, devoid of any sympathy or susceptibility to the worsening plight of ordinary working class people."

It is all so simple, isn't it? While once there were dedicated volunteers, now there are only "careerists and place-seekers". It is true that the latter category increased in size and dominance under Tony Blair, but it is plain silly to suggest either that their existence was previously negligible or that the overwhelming mass of Labour councillors were once committed to "defending their communities and class".

Under Blair not only was there a huge influx of middle class careerists, but the party's

structures became hollowed out and its democratic space even more squeezed. But its basic character remained unchanged. Labour was, and is, funded, sponsored and supported by the trade unions. Despite the lack of "real enthusiasm", workers still look to Labour to defend them against the worst of the Con-Dem attacks.

SPEW's 2011 congress document on 'British perspectives' admits: "There has been a certain influx into New Labour's ranks, but nowhere near the scale of the past, when the Labour Party did act as a left pole of attraction for tens of thousands of workers who were looking for a real struggle against capitalism and the Tories."

"A layer of young people, some of them sincere in their intentions, may have joined. It was reported that 500 were mobilised in one day of canvassing during the Oldham by-election. But most new Labour Party members are likely to be passive new recruits, joined by the 'salaried' of paid councillors."⁷

A classic case of facing both ways. There has been a "certain influx" of young people who are "sincere in their intentions" into Labour's ranks and as many as 500 may have joined in the canvassing in a single day, but why should that make us change our dogmatic minds? Anyone can see that among those switching their support or joining Labour are not only those who viewed themselves as progressive and feel angered and betrayed by the Lib Dems, but thousands of workers who are being hit by the cuts and are coming to the conclusion that they must act to stop them.

SPEW may still dub the party "New Labour", but I cannot imagine Blair turning up to address a mass anti-cuts demonstration in Hyde Park, as Ed Miliband did on March 26. Union activists and a layer of members are exerting pressure on the bureaucrats to match their anti-cuts words with action and this is being translated into a pull to the left on Labour. Of course, it is important not to overstate its strength, but it is real enough.

SPEW's problem is its subjectiveness. In its previous existence as *Militant* it was witch-hunted out of the Labour Party by a section of purgers led by former Labour left Neil Kinnock. As Andrew Price recalled in *Socialism Today* last year, "In 1983, in the wake of a massive election defeat, the party elected Kinnock as leader. He and his followers were ruthlessly determined to rid the Labour Party of Marxists, as I found to my cost when I was expelled from Cardiff South and Penarth Constituency Labour Party ... 25 years ago. Ultimately, Kinnock was successful in driving out the Marxists - at the price of destroying the Labour Party as it had existed until then."⁸

As if Labour had never before engaged in purges against its left, not least the communists. But for SPEW it was not even Tony Blair and New Labour that marked a quantitative break from the past: it was Neil Kinnock with his overwhelming union support! And the reason SPEW knows this? Because Kinnock drove out "the Marxists!"

Moving left

In reality, there are still Marxists in the Labour Party, although they reside amongst a left that is as weak as it has ever been - for the moment.

Just as we expect the party itself to continue to move leftwards - and the leadership to continue to *pose* more left - reflecting its union constituency and the mass opposition to cuts, so we expect the Labour left to grow in size and influence. In truth, it could hardly do anything else, bearing in mind its current position.

Deep inside, SPEW knows all this. Let me quote from *Militant's real history: a reply to Ted Grant and Rob Sewell*, written by comrade Taaffe in 1996: "It can never be theoretically discounted - nor have we ever said this on any occasion - that an ex-workers' party which has degenerated into a bourgeois formation could, under the impact of mighty economic and political events, begin to shift once more towards the left and transform itself into a vehicle for workers. It is not theoretically excluded that the same thing could happen to the Labour Party in Britain, with Blairism being rejected, a big shift towards the left taking place and a new arena of struggle opening up for socialists and Marxists."⁹

So what is it about "an ex-workers' party which has degenerated into a bourgeois formation" that makes it different from a party that was a "bourgeois formation" from the beginning? Presumably comrade Taaffe does not believe it is possible to transform the Tories or Lib Dems into "a vehicle for workers". So why is it theoretically possible for Labour to become one? The answer can only be that the shift under Kinnock, John Smith and Blair had never been so great or so complete as SPEW has claimed. The union link is the key. This, and a mass working class electoral base, is what produces the left pressure and that is what defines Labour as a bourgeois workers' party to this day.

In the same polemic against his former comrades, Taaffe writes: "If there was a serious prospect of shifting Labour towards the left, so that it became once more an instrument of struggle for working people, then no serious Marxist would or could stand aside from this."

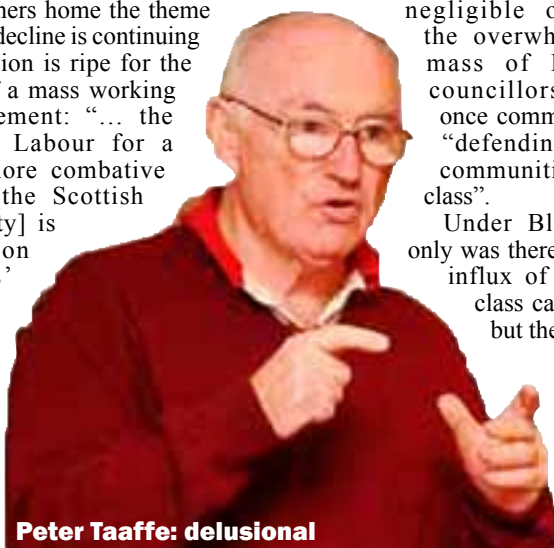
Excellent! All that now remains is for SPEW to recognise that there is indeed a "serious prospect" of that happening. Instead of wasting all the energy and commitment of so many dedicated socialists in futile attempts to build an *alternative* Labour Party through dead-end ventures like Tusc, SPEW should look to the real thing.

The working class needs its mass Marxist party. But a Labour Party that was an "instrument of struggle for working people" could play a vital role in bringing together partisans of our class in the fight for workers' power ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. 'Non-Labour left results', May 12.
2. www.tusc.org.uk/comment100511.php.
3. *Socialist Worker* May 14.
4. Original emphasis *Party notes* May 5.
5. 'Tusc shows alternative to Con-Dem and Labour cuts' *The Socialist* May 11.
6. P Taaffe, 'Britain now facing crisis on all fronts' *The Socialist* May 18.
7. www.socialistparty.org.uk/partydoc/British_Perspectives_a_Socialist_Party_congress_2011_document/9.
8. A Price, 'The road to New Labour' *Socialism Today* October 2010.
9. www.socialistworld.net/pubs/mrh/militantch1.html.



Peter Taaffe: delusional

RAPE

Victims are not to blame

We have been offered a glimpse of the chauvinist and sexist prejudices that are rife in society, argues **Eddie Ford**

Recent headlines have raised the issue of rape and, in turn, the more general question of women's oppression.

There was a furore last week over the comments made during a BBC interview by Kenneth Clarke, the justice secretary, in which he rejected the idea that "rape is rape" when it comes to the criminal justice system. Rather, he maintained, there are different and varying degrees of rape, going on to give the example of an 18-year-old man having sex with a "perfectly willing" 15-year-old girl - which, according to Clarke, is classified as rape, as she is under the legal age of consent and therefore "she can't consent". True, in the United States this is called 'statutory rape'. But what most people ("you and I") normally mean by rape, he ventured, is the scenario in which a man is "forcibly" having sex with a woman against her will - a "serious crime". Clarke next mentioned "date rapes", stating that they "can be as serious as the worst rapes", but in his experience as a practising lawyer "they do vary extraordinarily one from another" - meaning that, ultimately, it is up to the judge to "decide on the circumstances" and then sentence accordingly.

Clarke's remarks about serious and not so serious rape arose as part of a wider discussion concerning his proposals to increase the maximum discounted tariff for rape, alongside other crimes like robbery and burglary, from a third to 50% for those who make early guilty pleas. This scheme, as things stand now, looks likely to be included in the government's green paper, *Breaking the cycle*, now going through its final, protracted stages in the House of Commons. The backdrop is Clarke's scathing attack last year on the "failed" penal system and his call for a "rehabilitation revolution" - sentiments that communists fully endorse, it goes without saying. Prison does not work.

Of course, his plan is motivated more by financial imperatives than by humanitarian or progressive impulses - after all, he is a Tory who rose through the ranks during the Thatcher years. Bluntly, Clarke wants to cut costs. Early guilty pleas free up valuable court time (more than 10,000 cases a year end in a guilty plea at the door of the court) and the early release of prisoners, it is hoped, will help ease some of the financial pressures on the current penal system. The UK's prison population now stands at a monstrous 84,928, with a "usable operational capacity" of 87,787;¹ each new prison place costs £170,000 to build and maintain, while the annual cost for every prisoner is £41,000 (or £77,000 in Northern Ireland due to the "complexities of prisoners' needs").² Overall, the government spends £2.2 billion a year, and rising, on the prison system. No wonder that the green paper is keen to "stabilise" the prison population and halt the "sentence inflation" that has raged unchecked since the early 1990s - amounting to an obscene and inhuman waste of human and financial resources. As is only to be expected though, sections of the judiciary and the police - and, of course, the rightwing press - are hopping mad at what they see as an attempt by home office liberals to 'pamper' criminals and 'ignore' victims.

Condescending

Clarke's commentary on the UK's rape laws met a furious response - and for good reason. Clarke exuded a

distinctly condescending and boorish attitude during the entire BBC Five Live show - so much so that at one point presenter Victoria Derbyshire felt compelled to interject: "Don't patronise the listeners."³

He also got his facts plain wrong with his hypothetical case of an 18-year-old having consenting sex with a 15-year-old girl. In the UK, unlike the United States, that would *not* be treated as rape ('statutory' or otherwise) but rather as "unlawful sexual intercourse". Instead, what we often call 'statutory rape' - though that phrase is not used in the law itself - is having sex with a girl under 13 and there is no defence to this charge, even if a boy says the girl was willing or that he thought she was older than she was (carrying a maximum life sentence, though the average sentence is between five and seven years⁴).

When interviewed later that day on Sky News, Clarke accused his critics of trying to "add a bit of sexual excitement to the headlines" - only further adding to the suspicion that the justice secretary was at the very least guilty of gross insensitivity on the subject. Ed Miliband urged David Cameron to sack him - possibly in a show of sincerity, as opposed to naked political opportunism. Inevitably, Clarke was forced to eat humble pie in the end and apologise, declaiming that "all rape is extremely serious" and how sorry he was if his comments gave "any other impression". There is also the possibility that there could be political fall-out from the affair in terms of legislation - thus the green paper, when eventually finalised, might omit altogether the 50% tariff proposal.

But despite Clarke's seeming flippancy on the matter, the ugly reality is that sexual violence and intimidation against women - including rape - is rife in UK society, just as it is across the globe. For all the alarmist talk about false rape accusations, these are in fact very rare - but when they do occur, horribly, the disproportionate amount of headline coverage they generate can only give the impression that they are relatively common. God forbid that the law-abiding and eminently respectable tabloid press would do such a thing in order to spread misogynist prejudice and hence boost sales.

In reality, it is common for rapists to get away with their actions. Between half and four-fifths of sexual assaults are never reported to the authorities in the first place - maybe even as many as 95%, as suggested by various department of health reports. If so, a truly appalling statistic. And of those tiny minority of accusations that do come to light, only 6% result in a conviction on the *full* charge of rape. Conviction rates once formal charges are brought are, of course, higher, 59% in 2009, but most of these come from guilty pleas - meaning that far fewer are found guilty by a jury, underlining the extremely difficult problems posed by 'her word against his' trials.

Yet, for all that, the most ignorant and abominably backward attitudes remain stubbornly in place. So in France the former head of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, was frequently referred to as a "ladies' man" or the "great seducer" - which now seem to be euphemisms for sexual predator, if not a violently inclined

rapist. We now have allegations that nine years ago Strauss-Kahn sexually assaulted a French journalist, Tristane Banon, like a "rutting chimpanzee". Indeed, numerous stories are circulating that 'alpha males' prowl the IMF buildings for sex like something out of the "pirates of the Caribbean" - the women employees, from top to bottom, having to be constantly "on their guard" from sexual harassment and intimidation.⁵ Institutionalised sexism, IMF-style.

Then in the UK please step forward Tory MEP Roger Helmer, for an especially odious illustration of the ubiquity of sexist culture. He felt duty-bound to weigh in behind the justice secretary, though doubtlessly Kenneth Clarke will be wishing he had not done so. Writing on his blog, Helmer outlined what he imagined (or so he pretended) to be a "classic stranger rape" scenario, whereby a "masked individual emerges from the bushes, hits his victim over the head with a blunt instrument, drags her into the undergrowth, rapes her and then leaves her unconscious, careless whether she lives or dies". On the other hand, he contends, there is "date rape" - which is when a woman "voluntarily goes to her boyfriend's apartment, voluntarily goes into the bedroom, voluntarily undresses and gets into bed, perhaps anticipating sex, or naively expecting merely a cuddle".⁶ But at the "last minute", Helmer posits, the woman "gets cold feet and says: 'Stop!'" But this "young man", he continues, is hopelessly caught in the "heat of the moment" and is therefore "unable to restrain himself and carries on". Yes, Helmer concludes, in both cases an offence has been committed, deserving of punishment. However, he adds, there is a clear difference between the two cases - it being that in the first example the blame is "squarely on the perpetrator and does not attach to the victim", but in the second case the victim "surely shares a part of the responsibility"; if only because she has created "reasonable expectations in her boyfriend's mind" as to her sexual wants and intentions.

In other words, she was 'asking for it' - a bit. Enough, anyway, to partially exonerate the rapist. Or maybe, to put it another way, as implied by Kenneth Clarke, there is "serious" rape and 'non-serious' rape. Deserving rape victims and less deserving rape victims. Women, somehow, by their own behaviour and actions are inviting sexual assault or rape. A viewpoint reflected in the now famous, or

infamous, words of the Toronto police constable Michael Sanguinetti, who told York University students at a "personal security class" three months ago that they should "stay safe" in the following way - "I've been told I'm not supposed to say this - however, women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised." Insult was added to injury for Canadian women a few weeks later when justice Robert Dewar, whilst presiding over a rape case, remarked that on the evening of the rape "sex was in the air" and the victim's "behaviour and attire" (she was wearing a tube top and heels) may have given the attacker the "wrong impression" - describing him as a "clumsy Don Juan".⁷ Justice Dewar also mentioned that the victim was wearing make-up and had been drinking. Obviously, she was 'asking for it' too. In the words of the rape victim, a 26-year-old single mother, the judge's decision was "beyond sexist".

Slutwalk

Naturally, the "slut" comments made by the Toronto cop were posted online and on April 3 over 3,000 attended a 'Slutwalk' in Toronto - protesting against those trying to blame the victims of sex crimes. This demonstration, which combined elements of carnival and street theatre, aimed to appropriate the word 'slut' - in the same manner that homosexuals appropriated the word 'gay' in order to show their defiance of homophobia. Historically, the word 'slut' has overwhelmingly negative connotations - as the "intent behind the word is always to wound", to quote the words of those who organised the demonstration. The organisers also write that women are "tired of being oppressed by slut-shaming" and of being "judged by our sexuality and feeling unsafe as a result". Instead, they reason, "being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work".⁸

On the April 3 demonstration, slogans included: "Sluts have dreams too", "Not asking for it", "Police look like sluts to uniform fetishists", and so on. The men who participated in the demonstration, itself obviously an excellent development, held placards saying things like "Real men take no for an answer", "Sluts are not as disgusting as Toronto police services", etc. Following Toronto's example, other Slutwalks were held in Canada and are being planned across the US and UK - including Glasgow on June 4 and London on June 11.

What has been particularly interesting has been the reaction of the Socialist Workers Party to the Slutwalk 'phenomenon'. Yes, obviously, the SWP comrades applaud the fact that women are fighting back - they "refuse to take the blame for rape" and assert that "many people are rightly angry" at the "pornification" of society - where "sex has become a commercial product to be bought and sold" rather than a "relationship between human beings", castigating what the SWP thinks is the "pressure on young girls to look like Barbie dolls".⁹

Having said that though, *Socialist Worker* - or the author of the article,

Sally Campbell - then rather primly registers her disapproval of Slutwalk's campaign to appropriate and redeploy the word 'slut', arguing that as a term it is "completely and inextricably bound up with women's oppression". For comrade Campbell, this can only mean that Slutwalk "seems to accept that binary opposition of the 'pure' woman and the 'slut' - but it simply reverses the polarity". This leads the comrade to the conclusion that Slutwalk's essential project "cannot get us very far in challenging oppression", though she notes that it "would be a shame if those feminists who balk at the name of this march cut themselves off from the many young women who will be taking part" - at times like this "you just have to link arms and argue".

The reference to "those feminists" is significant, as comrade Campbell's presumption appears to be that if Slutwalk was more feminist then somehow it would be more progressive. This is a totally mistaken position, though one that is indicative of the SWP's moralistic and non-Marxist streak when it comes to women's sexuality - especially younger women and girls. This was revealed when it came to the whole debate around so-called 'raunch culture', sparked off in 2005 by the publication of Ariel Levy's *Female chauvinist pigs: women and the rise of raunch culture* and the subsequent interview with her conducted by Judith Orr in the pages of *Socialist Review*. So we found that the SWP does not approve of activities like pole-dancing, etc - which, it seems, is an 'incorrect' activity for women to engage in - and think that young girls should not pierce their belly buttons, among many other things. Very schoolmarmish. In that sense, the SWP has been *part of* the feminist - and generally authoritarian - backlash against women's sexuality, rather than the opposition to it.

True, they make the point about commercialisation, but what under capitalism is not commercialised - including sex? The fact that the SWP comrades are now expressing deep unease about the Slutwalk demonstrations is just another manifestation of their moral conservatism, an unfortunately all too common trait on the British left, which has a history of economic priggishness - and philistinism - when it comes to sexual matters (artistic ones as well). But for communists the Slutwalk marches are precisely about promoting and defending women's rights to wear whatever they want and for the victim not to be blamed in cases of sexual attack. In this context, the term 'slut' in being used by the Slutwalk organisers in a creative and *joyous* sense - as an affirmation of the freedom to be openly sexual. No shame in sex ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/prisons-and-probation/prison-population-figures/index.htm
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/10412246
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13444770
4. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special-report/1999/02/99/e-cyclopedia/437789.stm>
5. *New York Times* May 19.
6. <http://rogerhelmermep.wordpress.com/2011/05/22/ken-on-rape-badly-phrased-but-basically-right/>
7. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/02/25/no-woman-asks-to-be-raped-victim-slams-judges-decision/#more-49309>
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slut_Walk#cite_note-SlutWalk_homepage-2
9. www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=24838



Toronto

ANNIVERSARY

Inspirational feats and heroic failure

The Paris Commune teaches us valuable lessons, writes Nick Rogers

One hundred and forty years ago the suppression of the Paris Commune was reaching its climax. On May 21 1871 the troops of the ostensibly republican regime based in Versailles entered Paris. They quickly occupied the wealthier west of the city. Nevertheless, for another week the working class and plebeian population of Paris, particularly in the north and east, resisted, as 130,000 troops systematically extinguished the hopes of the previous seven weeks, along with thousands of lives - 17,500 is the lower official estimate; some historians have calculated in the region of 35,000.

As the barricades fell, those fighters who surrendered were lined up and shot. The wounded were dispatched where they lay. Others were beaten to death with rifle butts. Women had fought heroically alongside men. Neither they nor children were spared by the forces of Versailles. The bodies - some still breathing - were dumped in shallow graves.

Even after the fall of the last barricade on May 28, the killing continued: those wearing army boots (assumed to be soldiers who had gone over to the Commune); those with watches (assumed to be communal officials); women with milk or wine bottles, who were denounced as petrol bombers.

Jean-Baptiste Millière had been elected a deputy for Paris to the reactionary assembly based in Versailles. After attempting in vain to conciliate between Versailles and Paris, he had returned to the capital but took no part in the Commune. Still he was ordered to be shot by a general who had been "revolted" by an article he wrote. Millière was "a viper that should be stamped out".¹ The counterrevolution was attempting to purge Paris - the city of revolution - of all political trends that posed any threat to the established order.

Thousands of survivors were to spend years in prison or brutal exile.

In 'the civil war in France', completed a few days after the fall of the Commune, Karl Marx quoted from an article by the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*. It reported the behaviour of general Marquis de Gallifet, the head of the Versailles cavalry, after he halted a line of prisoners: "Walking down slowly and eyeing the ranks, the general stopped here and there, tapping a man on the shoulder or beckoning him out of the rear ranks. In most cases, without further parley, the individual thus selected was marched out into the centre of the road, where a small supplementary column was, thus, soon formed ...

"It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose ... A few minutes afterwards a dropping fire in our rear commenced, and continued for over a quarter of an hour. It was the execution of these summarily convicted wretches."²

This was the same general Marquis de Gallifet who was appointed minister of war in the Waldeck-Rousseau government that the socialist, Alexandre Millerand, joined

in 1898. It was the debate around this crisis in the international socialist movement that prompted the 1904 series of articles by Karl Kautsky which is currently appearing in the *Weekly Worker*, having been translated by Ben Lewis.

Kautsky was defending the Marxist republican tradition against those who suggested that the reactionary nature of the French Third Republic emerging from the bloody destruction of the Paris Commune implied that the workers' movement should be indifferent to the constitutional form of the bourgeois state. A monarchy or a republic? How was that of concern to the workers?

Kautsky's response is to explain why for Marxists republican agitation does not cease with the formal removal or abdication of a monarch, but continues until the conditions have been created for the working class to take power: "ie, the republic as a means of the emancipation of the proletariat".³

In the first two articles Kautsky traced the history of republicanism in France, starting with the revolution of 1789 and the first republic. This week Kautsky reaches the Paris Commune of 1871 (pp8-10). For Kautsky, the Commune of some 30 years previously was the clearest example of the kind of emancipatory republic he aspired to win. In this article I want to provide a little of the background to the revolution that was the Paris Commune and ask what lessons Marxists can still draw from the experience of the Parisian working class 140 years ago.

Accidental revolution

No-one planned to carry out a revolution on March 18 1871.

A couple of days earlier Adolphe Thiers, head of the provisional government, had moved to Paris, together with the rest of his team. Elections on February 8, hastily called as a condition of the January 28 armistice with the Prussians, had produced a large majority of reactionary and monarchist deputies. The moderate and rightwing republicans who had retained power since the fall of Napoleon III's empire on September 4 1870 - after the defeat of French forces at the hands of Prussians at Sedan and the capture of the emperor - managed to play off the factions and, with some reshuffling, continue in office.

Now - with little need of prompting from Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who was anxious to see the disarming of a hostile force - order was to be restored to the turbulent capital that in a display of patriotic republican fervour had withstood a desperate winter siege and Prussian bombardment. Effectively, under the leadership of national guard battalions that elected their officers, the people of Paris were armed. After the political and economic breakdown of the winter and the departure of many of the wealthy inhabitants of Paris, everyone understood that the people armed meant the working class and poorest citizens armed.

The cannons possessed by the national guard had become the principal point of contention. The

national guard considered the cannons to be literally their own property, since they had been purchased by public subscription. The government wanted to remove them from the hands of the populace. After an earlier attempt to do so the crowd had on January 29 seized those located in the Place Wagram and transported them to the more working class northern and eastern suburbs.

Now Thiers and his cabinet wanted them back. In the early hours of the morning of March 18, the military commander of Paris organised the dispatch of army columns to the various sites where cannons were held. The most dramatic events took place on the heights of Montmartre. At this period a citadel of the working class, the hill was not yet disfigured by the marble basilica of the Sacré Coeur - built explicitly in expiation of the plebeian 'outrages' of the Commune.

On Montmartre and elsewhere the troops found the cannons unguarded and quickly took them under their control, but made no speedy effort to make off with them. As the local population awoke, the women were the first to react. They came onto the streets, stood in front of the troops and formed a barrier when national guardsmen arrived. The leader of the Montmartre military column, general Claude Lecomte, ordered his troops to fire on the crowd. They refused and military discipline collapsed.

Throughout Paris 'fraternisation' dissolved the distinction between the crowd, the national guard and government soldiers. Lecomte was seized by the national guard to protect him from the crowd and his own troops. Despite their best efforts, later in the day Lecomte was executed along with Jacques Clément-Thomas - picked out by the crowd as a leader of the repression of the June 1848 uprising.

These two deaths, along with the execution of 'hostages' (including the archbishop of Paris) in the final stages of the Commune's suppression, were subsequently proclaimed by government spokesmen as evidence of the bloodlust of the communards, justifying the slaughter of scores, then hundreds and finally thousands by 'official' France.

On March 15 the various battalions of the national guard had elected a central committee. This was now the effective political authority in Paris and it took control of the *hôtel de ville* (town hall), traditionally the focus of French revolutionary actions. The red flag was raised.

A full meeting of the government at the foreign affairs ministry was swiftly abandoned, with Thiers being the first to be driven away hastily in a coach to Versailles.

The battle lines for the next 72 days were being drawn - revolutionary Paris against the forces of 'order' to the south-west in Versailles.

Famously, Karl Marx, speaking on behalf of the general council of the International Working Men's Association (subsequently known as the First International) after the declaration of the September 4 republic, had advised against any uprising: "The French working class moves, therefore, under circumstances of extreme difficulty. Any attempt at upsetting the new government in the present crisis, when the enemy is

almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly. The French workmen must perform their duties as citizens ... Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of republican liberty, for the work of their own class organisation."⁴

Now, however, he threw himself into support for the Commune. In an April 17 letter he scolded his correspondent, Louis Kugelmann: "World history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances. It would, on the other hand, be of a very mystical nature if 'accident' played no part ... The struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its state has entered upon a new phase with the struggle in Paris. Whatever the immediate results may be, a new point of departure of world-historic importance has been gained."⁵

Extreme democracy

What did revolutionary Paris achieve in the space of the little more than two months allowed to it? From the perspective of Kautsky's argument on republicanism, it is the political and constitutional forms it erected that are its most significant legacy. The long quote Kautsky gives us from Marx's 'The civil war in France' demonstrates that it is a view he shared with Marx.

In its first week or so the central committee of the national guard was primarily concerned to establish political legitimacy by handing power to the people of Paris. It sought to hold city-wide elections. These were delayed while negotiations took place with the mayors elected for each arrondissement on November 4 1870, who had collectively been running municipal affairs. The mayors as a group were of a moderate republican temper, but eventually recognised the reality of the new power balance in Paris.

On March 26 elections took place to a Commune of 90 members, with one representative for every 20,000 electors. The election was based on universal *manhood* suffrage using the existing electoral register. Despite the leading role of women on March 18 there was no suggestion that they should be enfranchised. The Commune was to be the central authority (although sometimes contested, as we shall see) for the remainder of the revolution. For Marx, the key lesson of the Commune's rule was that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes".⁶

The standing army was abolished: "Paris could resist only because in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a national guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men... The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people."

The police also were transformed: "the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune."

The communal assembly itself was "responsible and revocable at short terms" and was to be "a working, not

a parliamentary, body - executive and legislative at the same time".

The roots of bourgeois careerism were cut off: "From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service at to be done at *workmen's wages*."

These principles applied equally to the legal system: "Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable."

But Marx resisted the suggestion that this conception of governance represented the abolition, rather than the reconfiguring and transformation, of the state: "The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by communal, and therefore strictly responsible, agents ... While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society."

For the purposes of Kautsky's and our discussion of republicanism, it is necessary to emphasise that in Marx's view the bedrock of the form of democracy that can serve to emancipate the working class is quite simply universal suffrage: "The Commune was formed of municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."

Marx's response to Mikhail Bakunin's criticism of electoral democracy is instructive.⁷ A choice example of Bakunin's approach is the following: "By a people's government the Marxists understand the government of the people by means of a small number of representatives elected by the people by universal suffrage. The election by the whole nation of the self-styled representatives of the people and leaders of the state - this is the last word of the Marxists as well as of the democratic school - is a lie that conceals the despotism of the governing minority, a lie all the more dangerous in that it is presented as the expression of the alleged will of the people."

The distortion of Marx's argument is transparent. Universal suffrage is the starting point of Marx's conception of democracy, but his discussion of the Commune two years before proves definitively that it is hardly the "last word". In response to a question Bakunin's poses, "The Germans number about 40 million. Will, for example, all 40 million be members of the government?", Marx responds unashamedly: "Certainly! Since the whole thing begins with the self-government of the Commune."

Social revolution

The social measures carried through by the Commune were modest by comparison with the constitutional forms it pioneered: ie, Marx's conclusion that "the great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence" (p217). This was partly an inevitable consequence of the revolution's short time-span, but it also reflected a degree of ineffectiveness on the part of the Commune, which discussed much,

but decided little, and the conflicting cacophony of political trends that were represented.

During the months of the siege political organisations in Paris had multiplied, but there were also attempts to generalise political trends, such as the national committee of the 20 arrondissements, in which the Paris branch of the International was influential.

Kautsky has traced the lines of development of the main political traditions. In Paris 1870-71 it was mostly Proudhonists (dominant in the Paris branch of the International), Blanquists and straight Jacobins who vied to have their voices heard, while avowed Marxists were very thin on the ground.

A few were influenced by Marx, however - some of the Proudhonists, for instance, as a consequence of their involvement in the International. The Proudhonists, against their better judgement, given their mutualist political doctrine, had also been influenced by the rising strike wave in France - the Paris branch of the International even shared a building with the French trade union federation. Forty members of the Commune - out of the 81 who eventually took their seats - had been involved in the workers' movement, and most of these had joined the International.

The Blanquists had less contact with Marx, since they had held back from joining the International and were only to do so when in exile in London after the defeat of the Commune (they left after the 1872 decision of the Hague congress to relocate to New York). Marx, nonetheless, considered Blanqui the only political leader who might have provided some coherence to the Commune's military operations. But Blanqui spent the whole period of the Commune imprisoned by the Versailles authorities. He was only to be released in 1879, two years before he died.

The prominent Jacobin, Félix Pyat - who contrived to place himself at the centre of communal political events, but disappeared from the scene in late May at the approach of Versailles troops, to reappear when safely in exile - was considered by Marx to be a dangerous demagogue and charlatan from whom he had determinedly disassociated the International on several occasions during the 1860s.

So Marx is speaking of unfolding logical consequences rather than programmatic commitments when he announces in defence of the Commune: "Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators."

The concrete social reforms of the Commune fell into three broad areas. First there was the crucial step taken to cancel rent payments for the period October 1870-April 1871. Any sums already paid were to be credited to the account of the tenant. This early measure was a direct rebuff to the national assembly, which had voted to end the moratorium on the payment of rents enacted by the provisional government of national defence and enforce the payment of arrears.

This cancellation also met the needs of many middle class inhabitants of Paris. Economic activity had ground to a halt during the siege and it had become a question of economic survival for many. Throughout February public meetings had been held in Paris on this issue and a Tenants League was formed. This one measure decisively secured broad support for the communal authorities. However, it outraged the most conservative forces in France. Take Flaubert: "The government is interfering now in matters of natural law; it is intervening in contracts between individuals."

The Commune set up nine

commissions to fulfil the role of government ministries. Only two took effective action in the field of social reforms: the commission of labour and exchange, headed by Leo Frankel, and the education commission, headed by Édouard Vaillant, who despite his Blanquist proclivities was a member of the International and knew Marx.

The commission of labour and exchange promulgated two measures relating to labour conditions - the abolition of the night work of journeymen bakers; and the abolition of fines by employers on their workers. It also passed a decree authorising trade unions to take over workshops abandoned by their owners and run them as cooperatives. Ten factories were subsequently occupied for this purpose.

The education commission took steps to increase educational provision and root out the influence of the church. For much of this it was dependent on support at local level and progress differed from arrondissement to arrondissement, depending on the level of local self-activity.

Lest we be too critical of the progress made by the Commune, it is worth bearing in mind that many civil servants and other administrators left Paris for the duration. Simply keeping existing services functioning in the face of this disruption, and in the context of foreign occupation and civil war, was in itself a major achievement.

Many observers attest to the success on this front - and also to the virtual disappearance of crime. Even those who were far from entirely sympathetic. *The Observer* of May 24 1871 commented that the leaders of the Commune were men who "governed well, very patiently - quite as well as an English vestry would have done." And in August 1871 *Fraser's Magazine* concluded: "The Commune was a mistake; but it did keep Paris clean and morally wholesome; it did manage its police, its schools, its hospitals strangely well."⁸

‘Dictatorship of the proletariat’

How are Marxists to characterise the Paris Commune? It is possible to construct a rather pedantic argument around this issue. In his writings Marx never used the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in relation to the Commune.

On the other hand, Engels in his introduction to the 1891 edition of 'The civil war in France', addressing those German social democrats who wanted to shy away from the term, did: "Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what the dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Does this reflect a significant difference between Marx and Engels?

Well, Hal Draper has shown Marx had not used the term in *any* context for 20 years before the events of 1871. It was simply not Marx's favoured term for discussing what he usually described as "the rule of the working class". Draper also points to a contemporary newspaper report of a speech Marx gave at a banquet after the September 1871 London conference of the International. Many former members of the Commune were present, including Blanquists, against whom Draper argues Marx was more likely to discuss the dictatorship of the proletariat - in contrast to the Blanquist concept of 'dictatorship of the conspiratorial sect'.

The report paraphrases Marx as defining the Commune as "the conquest of political power of the working classes" and saying that, before the basis of "class rule and oppression" could be removed, "a proletarian *dictature* would become necessary".

August Nimtz is correct to argue that this piece of evidence does not settle the argument particularly decisively one way or the other. However, I think he is

on shaky ground when he argues that, if push came to shove, Marx would rather have characterised the Commune as a "dictatorship of the people's alliance - that is, an alliance of the proletariat and its allies - or, the working classes in its broadest sense".⁹

No working class revolution will be made without building alliances with other social classes, but this does not affect the fundamental nature of working class rule. The point about the Paris Commune is that the working class - however politically confused the bulk of its representatives - was hegemonic.

Marx again: "The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favour, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour."¹⁰

This strikes me as fairly conclusive evidence of Marx's view. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat if it is not "the political form ... under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour"? It is true that Marx was later to admit that "the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist nor could it have been". I agree with Draper that this is a question of political programme versus class content (workers' state) - although admittedly when these aspects of working class rule are out of sync we have a highly unstable political form.

More to the point, contemporary participants and observers were agreed on applying the terms 'working class' and 'proletarian' to the institutions and actions of the Commune. The bourgeois press, once again, can be instructive. *The Times* of March 29 1871 wrote that one of the main "streams in the bed of the insurrection ... was the predominance of the proletariat over the wealthy classes, of the workman over the master, of labour over capital".

Military disaster

The prospects for the success of the Commune were never very good. Surrounded on three sides by victorious Prussian forces that were reluctant to directly intervene (aware that an attack by foreign invaders would rally support for the Commune), but not prepared either to see the social and political forces represented by the Commune flourish. On the other, a vengeful Versailles.

The omissions and commissions of the Commune itself contributed to defeat. Primarily, the prosecution of the war effort was nothing short of disastrous. Marx thought the key error was to focus on elections in the days after March 18 rather than make an immediate attack on Versailles and eliminate the threat from that quarter. Whether the military forces of the Commune would have been capable of an organised attack so far from their home base is a moot point.

In the early days of April, angered by exploratory attacks on Paris's defences by the forces of Versailles, a *grande sortie* against Versailles was launched. Versailles by this stage had been able to bring in troops from other parts of France who could be insulated from the contagion of Paris. 'Fraternalism' was not to be a feature of any of the later stages of the war against the Commune.

A later sympathetic description has the mood and composition of this 'military' expedition as more "a band of turbulent holidaymakers setting out gaily and unconcernedly for the country than a column of attack". Fired on from a fort they assumed was in friendly hands, the majority of the column fled back to Paris. The

remainder came within four miles of Versailles, but they were dispersed and hunted down. Gallifet began as he meant to go on, executing three prisoners - a form of exemplary punishment he had apparently refined against Mexican insurgents. Goustave Flourens (who had led the October 31 1870 Blanquist attack on the *hôtel de ville*) after surrendering was chopped to death with a sabre. Ex-soldiers on the side of the Commune were shot out of hand and the prisoners who survived were kept in appalling conditions in Versailles.

At no stage in the remaining weeks of the Commune was anyone able to form the military resources at the disposal of the Commune into any kind of coherent force. The national guard battalions were loathe to leave their home district. Forts were abandoned. Attacks initiated and then turned into retreats.

In the meantime, relations between the Commune and the central committee of the national guard (which had not dissolved itself, as many expected) deteriorated. Neither displayed evidence that they were capable of taking control of the situation.

At one stage in early May a meeting of 15 battalions of the national guard demanded that the Commune abolish the war ministry, leaving the central committee in sole charge of military affairs. If the Commune hesitated the national guard "would act in a revolutionary fashion and take over again their revolution". In effect, a coup was being threatened.

Later when the Blanquists and Jacobins successfully persuaded the majority to set up a committee of public safety with dictatorial powers - prompting the sizeable minority who opposed this measure to walk out of the Commune - no discernable contribution was made to improving Paris's fighting capacity.

When the decisive attack by Versailles was made, their forces entered Paris unopposed and it was virtually a day before the authorities in the *hôtel de ville* became aware of the severity of the situation. Under attack, the forces of the Commune retreated even more determinedly to their local district. This time around, the cannons of Montmartre were taken without a fight. Square by square, district by district, arrondissement by arrondissement, the barricades, although defended with fierce heroism by a large part of the local population, fell.

Bank of France

There was one other instrument the Commune could have used to give themselves negotiating options. The Bank of France remained in Paris throughout this period. Yet the communards treated this institution with the utmost caution and restraint. The acting governor, the Marquis de Ploeuc, cultivated relations of concerned bonhomie with the member of the Commune sent to negotiate with him, the Proudhonist, Charles Beslay.

De Ploeuc argued that a seizure of the Bank's reserves would destabilise the currency and the French financial system and discredit the Commune in the rest of France. Beslay - true to his Proudhonist beliefs in the importance of credit for mutualist ventures - was impressed with this argument: "In financial matters, the Commune's only principles should be order and economy." De Ploeuc offered regular loans (a total of just under 17 million francs) so that the Commune could pay its bills.

Yet, had the Commune seized control of the reserves, they could have held bourgeois France to ransom. This was no doubt in Marx's mind when he wrote to the Dutch socialist, Ferdinand Nieuwenhuis, on February 22 1881: "With a small amount of sound common sense they could have

reached a compromise with Versailles useful to the whole mass of the people - the only thing that could be reached at the time."

The reserves were substantial: 500 million francs in cash; 11 million francs in bullion; seven million francs of jewels held on deposit; and one billion francs of assets, shares and securities. They far exceeded the Commune's own needs and were a much bigger sum than the indemnity demands made by Bismarck.

But there was no-one to challenge Beslay. His attitude of financial probity - a feature of working class reformism ever since - was shared by the financial commission and the question of the Bank of France was never discussed in the Commune.

Communist republicanism

The historical experience of the Paris Commune teaches us a threefold lesson.

First, the key role of political leadership and programme. The Commune clearly lacked coherent political leadership. It did not even have a clear idea of what it sought to achieve. This was partly a question of political ideology, but it was also an expression of the lack of any working class party to speak of. In Paris (and in the other cities of France, where during this period several communes of only a few days' duration were declared) there were political traditions, clubs and conspiratorial groupings. Lacking from the political firmament was any party seeking to democratically represent the interests of the whole class.

The International came closest and was subsequently blamed by the French government for the uprising. It banned the International in France and wrote to governments around Europe urging them to take the same action. But the Proudhonist majority in the French section held to a theoretical position that rejected political action (and trade unionism, for that matter). It was not ready to lead a workers' revolution.

Second, the spontaneity of the working class is capable of great feats. What was achieved in Paris during April and May 1871 by the citizens of the city retains the capacity to inspire. Local initiatives proliferated. Right up to the last week a mood of festival prevailed. It is not the role of a political party to subsume or subdue such initiative, but to provide a focal point for directing the working class's capacity for political and organisational creativity in an agreed direction.

Third, a workers' revolution transforms the political and constitutional landscape or it is not a revolution. That is why communists raise democratic and republican demands. It is a lesson most of the present-day 'revolutionary' left has forgotten. The rediscovery of Kautsky "when he was a Marxist" can help hammer home that lesson ●

nick.rogers@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. S Edwards *The Paris Commune 1871* Newton Abbott 1972, p341.
2. K Marx 'The civil war in France' *First International and after: political writings* Vol 3, London 1974, p233.
3. K Kautsky, 'Republic and social democracy in France' *Weekly Worker* April 28 2011.
4. K Marx, 'Second address of the general council on the Franco-Prussian war' *First International and after: political writings* Vol 3, London 1974, pp185-86.
5. K Marx *Letters to Dr Kugelman* London 1936, p125.
6. This and following quotes in this section from K Marx, 'The civil war in France' *op cit*.
7. Discussed in H Draper *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 3, *Dictatorship of the proletariat* New York 1986, pp298-301.
8. Both quotes H Collins and C Abramsky *Karl Marx and the British labour movement: years of the First International* London 1965, p200.
9. AH Nimtz *Marx and Engels: their contribution to the democratic breakthrough* New York 2000, p220.
10. K Marx, 'The civil war in France' *op cit* p212.

KAUTSKY



The Second Empire and the Paris Commune

This is the final excerpt in the current series from Karl Kautsky's 'Republic and social democracy in France', translated by Ben Lewis¹ and published in English for the first time. Kautsky begins his discussion of the Commune by examining the situation in France under emperor Napoleon III

One of the first acts of the empire was to try to reconcile the working class, which the bourgeois republic had estranged. Under Louis Philippe,² the number of voters for the second chamber had been very limited - there were only 300,000 in total. The revolution suddenly caused this to swell to around nine million. The electoral law of May 31 1850 then reduced it by three million again. The constitution of January 14 1852 restored universal suffrage, which has existed to this day in France.

But the proletariat did not allow itself to be bought off by this. Its opposition to the empire remained intransigent. It remained faithful to the republic, even when the empire made further political concessions in addition to universal suffrage from 1860 on, expanding the parliament's powers and dealing with the press, clubs and meetings in a more liberal fashion.

The bourgeoisie came to terms with the empire more easily, even though this meant the inhibition of the

parliament, which was condemned to utter impotence. This hit its chosen means of rule, the political institution which most closely corresponds to bourgeois class interests, the hardest. But the empire brought about protection of property from communism, as well as an economic boom. And this is a spell which the bourgeoisie has never been able to resist.

The decades following the February Revolution³ were the golden age of industrial capitalism in England and France. As Gladstone⁴ put it, it was the period of the "intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power". The emperorship had not created this, but it profited from it and won the bourgeoisie's recognition. But, just like in England, in France this "intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power" was almost entirely restricted to the capitalist class (including the large estates). The working classes' share of this was small, imperceptible; for wide layers of working people this development even expressed itself in a direct

depression of their living standards, so that their opposition to the capitalist class grew and grew, as did their opposition to the ruling regime.

Rise of Marxism

But, if the days after the February Revolution had been particularly favourable to the tendencies of Louis Blanc,⁵ now Proudhonism came to the fore. Louis Blanc's illusions had been drowned in the blood of June for a long time to come. But this defeat had also paralysed the power to engage in a political rebellion along the lines of Blanqui. The bulk of the socialist working class despaired of politics, believed political activity to be as futile as it was corrupting, and predominantly turned to the advancement of peaceful economic organisations.

When the International⁶ emerged in the middle of the 1860s, the Proudhonists were also predominant in its French section. But, the more it grew in strength, the more it was persecuted; the more the opposition against the empire grew, the more the

French section of the International went from the society of peaceful social studies and experiments it initially was to a fighting organisation. With this, it increasingly lost its original Proudhonist character. From 1868 other elements arose alongside the Proudhonists: Blanquists and Bakuninists.⁷ Bakunin, who had escaped from Siberia in 1860, exaggerated both Proudhon's distrust of the state and the Blanquists' putschism, uniting these two extremes into a mixture very much to the taste of the declassed intellectuals in the romance countries.

Besides these, however, a new tendency began to emerge in the International: Marxism, which in this context can be viewed as the synthesis of all the viable seeds contained within the three tendencies of French socialism. Like Blanquism, it recognised the necessity of conquering political power as an indispensable precondition for the emancipation of the proletariat. But Marxism was clear that the methods of 1793 were not suitable for this,

that the proletariat could no longer be victorious by organising a small number of conspirators, but only by organising itself in an independent political party of the majority of the people. But in addition it also understood that the seizure of state power was tied to a series of moral and material preconditions, which not merely demanded the political organisation of the proletariat, but its economic organisation as well. This economic organisation should not develop behind the backs of the ruling powers, but in the struggle against them.

Marxism substituted the organisation of the economic struggle - the strike organisation, the *union* - for the peaceful economic organisations of petty bourgeois Proudhonism like insurance institutions, exchange and credit banks, cooperatives, etc. At the same time it also recognised the need to use the available political means to wrest as much as possible from the contemporary state, to carry out measures through the bourgeois state in favour of the workers. But

unlike Louis Blanc it did not expect from the capitalist state the means to build a new, cooperative, anti-capitalist mode of production, but a means to protect labour-power, that commodity in whose largest possible use-value capitalist society is always most actively interested. It did not demand from the state that it subsidise workers' cooperatives, but that it concede a normal working day and similar measures of worker protection.

As I have already said, this reasoning signified a synthesis of the viable seeds of all three tendencies of French socialism. But it was too much at odds with the revolutionary traditions of France and the traditions of each and every one of these tendencies. It was only assimilated by a few members of the French section of the International. These few were, of course, its best members.

Incidentally, Marxism went through a similar experience in the other sections of the International. In the International, Marx did not merely seek to organise the Marxists. Just as in theoretical terms his politics were themselves a synthesis of all the viable seeds of the various proletarian movements, he also wanted to fashion their practical application into an organisational synthesis of these movements in a united class struggle.

The International was open to all: Proudhonists and Blanquists, British trade unionists and German social democrats. Albeit with great effort and difficulty, Marx initially succeeded in keeping together these various elements. But eventually each of these tendencies again sought to go its own particular way to the exclusion of the others. In the name of freedom of expression and tolerance, they were up in arms against the 'intolerant' Karl Marx, the one who had wanted to unite them all. And so that each tendency could one-sidedly restrict itself to its own specialised hobby, they rebelled against the 'narrow and one-sided dogmatism' of Marxism, which had given voice to their various concerns within the framework of a comprehensive theory.

This, however, only happened after the fall of the Paris Commune, which had risen on the ruins of the empire.

Military empire

Before its internal opponents had become strong enough to overthrow it, the emperorship succumbed to its foreign policy. This policy had to be world policy in order to impress its own bourgeoisie - to compensate for the fact that, whilst he was condemned to political impotence at home, abroad the French bourgeois would be marvelled as the citizen of a great nation. Of course, world policy necessarily became military policy. But these policies were also necessary for the empire to keep the army busy and happy. The empire rested on the army's shoulders.

However, wars cost money - lots of money. Where to get this from? Perhaps through frugality in other areas of government spending? But Napoleon⁸ and his men were a gang of adventurers who had conquered the state not in order to use it for the realisation of a social idea or to bring a certain class to power, but to plunder it. The most shameless waste coursed through the court and the upper civil service.

Thus the only remaining way of satisfying the financial demands of war policy was to increase taxes. But the regime, volatile and weak as it was, was scared of this, constantly scrambling for cheap popularity. It was frivolous and unscrupulous enough to plunge the country into war adventures, but not strong and bold enough to burden the country with the consequences by raising

taxes accordingly.

"The Second Empire," writes Adolf Wagner,⁹ "was always - even at its height - anxious about and dependent upon not stirring up the population through unpopular tax policy" (*Special taxation* p394). The revenue from direct taxes therefore remained essentially the same as it was at the end of the July Monarchy.¹⁰ With the other taxes they sought to change as little as possible. In many cases the increase in revenue resulted not from an increase in tax, but from the increase in the population and the "intoxicating augmentation of wealth". This was particularly true in the case of the increased revenue from transaction taxes.

Adolf Wagner illustrates this in a table, from which we have taken the figures (see Fig 1). Thus tobacco,

longer fend off a foreign invasion without arming the proletariat. Under the impression of the first military defeats, the bourgeois republicans had demanded an expansion of the national guard in the chamber of the old empire. In the empire the national guard had become the meaningless gimmick of a few select bourgeois circles. All citizens of full age were to be armed - "as long as they have been living in the community for at least a year". This nonetheless signified a manner of arming the people, which included numerous proletarians.

It was a most democratic measure when you come to think that the new battalions of the national guard were conceded the right to choose their officers and non-commissioned officers themselves. It was their fear of the victorious Germans, and even

whole of France. Here the capitalist class was presented with much less of a threat from the enemy without. Whereas this enemy would weaken it financially and restrict its domestic market, the enemy within threatened the foundations of its very existence.

The situation was thus quite different to that of 1793. The revival of the revolutionary traditions, the belief in being able to drive out the enemy abroad through the *levée en masse*, was therefore illusory. It was precisely the arming of the people which paralysed the country in defending its key point, Paris, by severing those defending it into two hostile camps.

Finally, on January 29, there was a ceasefire which was to initiate peace. In order to conclude this peace, a national assembly was elected by universal suffrage on February 8. The elections resulted in a large majority for the reactionaries - 450 of the 750 deputies were monarchists. If the proletariat and the proletarian parties were the most determined advocates of the republic, and also in favour of continuing the war, then both the peasant and the bourgeois alike cursed it. The former particularly did so because it ruined him. The latter because the war entailed the arming of the people and increasingly brought the armed proletariat to the fore. It cursed the republic, along with the war.

The reactionary composition of the assembly arose far more from the desire for peace and the hatred of revolutionary republican Paris than from monarchist sentiments. The clerical-royalist country squires were also welcomed by the liberal bourgeois republicans as angels of peace. In equal measure they were welcomed as opponents of Paris, whose revolutionary proletariat terrified all of them. When it came to weakening Paris and humiliating it, republicans and monarchists worked together in the national assembly. This is something which must be established in the face of the current attempts of the revisionists to shift the blame for the battle against the Paris Commune and for the June battle of 1848 from the bourgeois republicans entirely onto the clerical monarchists.

It was not a member of the

latter tendency who became head of the executive power of the republic. It was Thiers,¹³ who to this day is admired by the French bourgeois republicans as their great man.

And at the time of the Commune radical republicans like Jules Favre,¹⁴ Picard¹⁵ and J Simon¹⁶ were members of this government. From the outset the hatred against Paris dominated the national assembly. Its delegates were verbally abused. Paris itself was divested of its status as the capital of France by the order of March 10, which made Versailles the seat of the government and the national assembly. This again had the petty bourgeoisie of Paris up in arms against the assembly, driving it into the ranks of the revolutionary elements.

Civil war

This contradiction became increasingly trenchant, ultimately breaking out into open civil war when Thiers consigned a few regiments to steal the Parisian national guard's canons in the early hours of March 18 - a move he hoped would initiate the disarmament of Paris. The attempt was detected and thwarted. But with this war was declared. From the defence of the Parisian proletariat's weapons ensued that violent war which both initiated and toppled the first modern proletarian regime.

It was initially a struggle for the national guard, in which the proletariat was victorious in Paris. On March 26 it then gave itself its own government in the Commune.

Unfortunately it was not a united one: within it we again find the three directions of French socialism present. Alongside the Proudhonists were the Blanquists. Alongside these there was a third tendency, admittedly no longer a theoretically based one like that represented by Louis Blanc, but a mere petty bourgeois-proletarian mishmash - devoid of any particular programme, but boasting a lot of passion and drive. Above all, this tendency was steeped in the traditions of the Great Revolution.

At this point Louis Blanc himself was no longer to be found in Paris. Paris may have elected him as a deputy to the national assembly, but when the assembly declared war on Paris, he remained in Versailles and supported the government in its fight against the Commune. His illusory belief that the proletariat had to collaborate with the most advanced and noble parts of the bourgeoisie in order to liberate itself culminated in his collaboration with the most backward and brutal elements of the country squires in order to defeat it. In doing so his theoretical views and sympathies had hardly changed. But class divisions were stronger than his pious wishes. Anybody who, coming over from the side of the

Fig 1. State revenue (millions of francs)

Types of tax	1847	1870
A. Direct taxes	331.7	332.8
B. Transaction taxes (stamps, transportation, transfer duties)	253.8	446.5
C. Indirect taxes:		
1. Customs	160.3	75.1
2. Salt	70.7	31.8
3. Beverages	102	243.4
4. Domestic sugar	19.3	111.8
5. Tobacco monopoly	112.5	246.8
Total	464.8	708.9
D. Remaining small taxes	48	54.8
Total (A-D)	1,098.3	1,543

sugar and alcohol had to 'bleed'. But in return the taxes on salt, already cut under the Second Republic, and customs duties were reduced. But because the receipts increased nowhere near as much as expenditure, the natural consequences of this was necessary deficits, debt and the breakdown of state finances. The *Statesman's year book* (1904) stated that the debt of the French government was as set out in Fig 2.

more so of the outraged Parisians, which on August 11 forced the reactionaries in the chamber to accept this proposal of the radicals. But when the empire collapsed and the people of France again became the master of their own destiny, the bourgeoisie was seized by an even greater fear: the fear of the battalions of the Paris national guard.

Of course, in the hours of the Commune's distress the proletariat

Fig 2. French debt (millions of francs)

	Capital	Interest
January 1 1852	5,516	239
January 1 1871	12,454	386

The increase is thus an enormous one. Nonetheless, given the general corruption of the state administration, the borrowed billions were not sufficient to meet the demands of the army. The army was less and less up to its tasks. Of course, this is not an argument in favour of firmly cranking up taxes, but one in favour of eschewing any adventures in world policy.

As long as France was only up against equally corrupt and bankrupt powers like Russia, Austria and China, it emerged victorious. But the empire failed as soon as it confronted countries like the USA and Germany, which back then were at the beginning of their rise to leading world powers. In the face of US threats, Napoleon III withdrew from his Mexican adventure¹¹ without a fight.

Third Republic

In his conflict with Germany a few years later, he became the prisoner of victorious Germany after a few quick blows. With this the Third French Republic was created. This time, this ripe fruit fell into the lap of the people without any exertion at all.

Today, due to the existence of modern mass armies on the one hand, and the modern mass proletariat on the other, a capitalist state can no

did not think about its specific class interests. It unhesitatingly put up with the fact that the bourgeois republicans in the chamber simply formed a centrist government, without consulting any proletarian elements.¹²

On the other hand, the bourgeois leaders of the new republic were from the outset paralysed in defending the country by their fear of the armed Parisian proletarians. The defence of Paris suffered just as much from the their attempt not to allow the national guard to become too powerful, or even to achieve victory, as it did from the arms of the besiegers. This time around, the arming of the people, the *levée en masse* from which miracles were expected, had quite a different effect than it did in the Great Revolution.

In 1793 the great mass of the people consisted of peasants and petty bourgeois. The class contradiction between capitalists and proletarians was still weakly developed and pushed into the background by the great common opposition of all these classes to the aristocracy, which was allied with the foreign enemy. Back then the arming of the people had signified the highest military power of the nation. In 1870 the class antagonism between capital and labour already dominated the



Adolphe Thiers and the spirit of Bismarck

KAUTSKY

bourgeoisie, does not possess the courage and abjuration to wholeheartedly join the fighting proletariat against the bourgeoisie and to break all ties with it can eventually, notwithstanding all of their proletarian sympathies, all too easily be pushed onto the side of the proletariat's opponents at the decisive moment.

As bad as the theoretical fragmentation and ignorance of the Parisian proletariat was, it was not so much damaged by this as it was by its lack of a uniform organisation. This was indeed partly caused by theoretical disjointedness and partly by the absence of the right to association and assembly, which had rendered the creation of any proletarian mass organisation impossible since 1794. We shall return to the latter point further on.

Proletarian rule

However, notwithstanding its theoretical ignorance and organisational fragmentation, the Parisian proletariat achieved amazing things in the organisation of economic and social life. It came upon one of the most difficult situations: the misery of the siege which had left Paris completely exposed followed the mismanagement and bankruptcy of the empire. Circumstances forced on the proletariat the administration of this enormous, completely ruined area without any preparation at all. During a war, and in the face of the betrayal of the previous administration, it had to build up a new administration with new forces in an instant. Despite everything it was most successful in this task. Paris had never been administered as well as during the Commune.

We may hold up this example to those faint-hearted in our ranks, who fear nothing more than our victory, and consider it their main task to convince the world that for a long time to come the conquest of political power by our party will necessarily mean chaos and the bankruptcy of our party. If a generation ago the proletariat of Paris - completely undeveloped and operating under the most trying circumstances - proved up to its social tasks, then today we may look forward to the day of our victory with the most joyous expectation.

Where the Commune utterly failed, however, was in military affairs and politics. In these matters it completely lost its way. Whilst it could doubtless boast some serious, capable men in these areas too, their effectiveness was more than paralysed by vain dandies, bawlers and do-nothings who stayed away from organisational and administrative work, preferring those aspects of work where one could feign greatness with sabre-rattling and rhetoric. Above all, however, it was here in particular that the disjointed character of the Commune had the most severe consequences.

Whatever the individual socialists' theoretical quirks may have been, when they were faced with the practical work of social and political organisation, their instincts led them to quickly unite around what was necessary and to work out what the most indispensable tasks were, even if this ran contrary to their outdated theories.

Things were different when it came to the *military* and *political* struggle against the enemy. It became apparent that the modern mode of production and its elemental *[urwüchsig]*¹⁷ social struggles might by themselves develop the proletariat's capacity for social and political organisation, but not the higher art of war and high politics. We can easily appreciate the absence of the former.

On the other hand, political education can actually be more easily accessed by the proletariat than military training. But political education was also lacking amongst the Parisian workers in 1871. Such education not

only requires knowledge of their own needs and strengths, but also those of the enemy. But this can only be attained by detailed study or extensive political practice. The proletarians of 1871 lacked both. Extensive participation in parliamentary work provides the best school for the political struggle against the bourgeoisie, but neither the Proudhonists nor Blanquists had participated in the parliamentary struggle, and the petty bourgeois-radical 'sentimental socialists' *à la* Rochefort¹⁸ were generally incapable of learning anything politically.

The little bit of political insight which all of these tendencies were able to develop was obscured by the traditions of the Great Revolution. They were still guided by these traditions and failed to realise that the situation had completely changed.

Rapid, uniform and consistent action was needed if Paris was to be victorious against the forces of the whole of France, deployed by the central government of Versailles - or rather, if Paris was to paralyse this government and win so many of the country's forces over to its side that it could attain a settlement securing the democratic republic and the proletariat's political and military ability to put up a fight. But this rapid and uniform action was impossible. For Paris had not sought the war: rather it was surprised by it. And there was no single political organisation with specific goals which could have led the Commune politically and militarily.

Manifold organisations whirled around - each with different goals and different tactics. They took the political and military leadership of the Commune in a different direction with each day that passed. One day would see an aggressive stance. The next would see this aggression countered with peaceful mediation. The roar of cannons the day after would then undermine this newly initiated mediation before it had brought any results.

Whereas the proletariat did not quite know what to expect from the bourgeoisie and how it could best deal with it, the government was determined from the outset to suppress and decimate the armed proletariat at all costs. And in this endeavour it met with the unanimous approval of the national assembly - including its far left. Despite the proletariat's capability of social organisation and administration most brilliantly manifesting itself, the politically disjointed Commune succumbed to this unity and confidence of bourgeois politics and warfare.

Since then the supremacy of bourgeois politics has come to an end. Three decades of parliamentary struggles have sufficiently acquainted the proletariat with bourgeois politics. The military superiority of modern rulers, on the other hand, only lasts as long as the army remains its submissive tool. With an unreliable army, even the greatest general cannot be victorious.

To set out the political ideal of the Commune is not so easy, since various different tendencies clashed within it. But fundamentally all the practical demands and organisational efforts of the Commune arose from the same type of democratic republic that had already been established by the Great Revolution.

Marx on the Commune

There is no better way for me describe the constitution initiated by the Commune than by repeating Marx's classical description in his declaration on the civil war in France. He says:

"Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a national guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men.

"This fact was now to be

transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

"The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body - executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune.

"So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at a workman's wage.¹⁹ The acquired interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared, along with the dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the central government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune.

"Having once got rid of the standing army and the police - the physical-force elements of the old government - the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the 'parson-power', by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles. The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state.

"Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it. The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments, to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable.

"The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal regime once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old, centralised government would in the provinces too have to give way to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of national organisation, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the national delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by communal and thereafter responsible agents.

"The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organised by a communal constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power

which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity, independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society."²⁰

Thus the ideal of the democratic republic was created, which the Parisian proletariat of 1871 would seek to form into an instrument of its emancipation ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. Thanks again to Maciej Zuroski for his excellent work in proofing this translation.
2. Louis Philippe I (1773-1850) was king from 1830 to 1848. He spent 21 years in exile following the French Revolution, mainly in the USA. He was proclaimed king after Charles X was forced to abdicate. When, in 1848, he was forced to abdicate the throne, he again went into exile - this time to England.
3. This refers to the revolution of February 1848 in France, which ended the Orleans monarchy and created the French Second Republic.
4. William Ewart Gladstone (1809-98) was a British Liberal who served as prime minister four times. As chancellor of the exchequer in 1860 he presided over the Cobden-Chevalier treaty, which reduced trade tariffs between France and Britain.
5. For Kautsky's discussion of the various tendencies of French socialism around Proudhon, Blanc and Blanqui, see K Kautsky, 'Second Republic and the socialists' *Weekly Worker* May 9.
6. The International Workingmen's Association, or First International, was established in 1864 and disbanded in 1876. Seeing that its creation represented a real step forward for the working class movement, Marx and Engels threw their weight into the organisation and its work.
7. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76) was one of the founders of anarchism and played a disruptive role in the First International.
8. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (1808-73) was the president of the Second Republic, before becoming ruler of the Second Empire. Elected president by popular vote in 1848, he initiated a coup in 1851, before ascending the throne as Napoleon III on December 2 1852, the 48th anniversary of Napoleon I's coronation. He ruled as 'Emperor of the French' until September 4 1870.
9. Adolph Wagner (1835-1917) was one of the most important economists of the Bismarck era. A leading monarchist politician, he was also a key figure of the anti-Semitic 'Conservative Central Committee'.
10. The term 'July monarchy' refers to 1830-48, when Louis Philippe I was on the throne.
11. Napoleon III sought to reassert French influence in Europe and beyond. Amongst other things, this saw wars against Austria (1859), Russia in the Crimean war, and intervention in Mexico in 1861. French troops were withdrawn by 1867.

12. Footnote by Karl Kautsky: "Here I would like to confront a misconception surrounding a claim I made in the Amsterdam tactical commission. I explained that, among the predicaments in which a socialist may enter into a bourgeois government, I count 'situations like, for example, that after September 4 1870 in France, when demands came from socialists that a socialist like Blanqui or Delescluze ought to join the government, which had the aim of organising national defence'. Jaurès thinks that if for the defence of the fatherland I am accepting something which I reject for the defence of the republic then I am countering his republican ministerialism with a far worse 'nationalist ministerialism'. This same reasoning is repeated by Pressensé in his article on the Amsterdam Congress in the first issue of *La Vie Socialiste*.

"In fact, nowhere did I mention that the defence of the fatherland justified a socialist joining the government *per se*; this would mean that the Russo-Japanese war would eventually force our Russian comrades to support the tsar's government. I spoke of 'situations, like that after September 4 1870 in France'. Back then it was not simply a matter of defending a country against foreign invasion, but also of defending a democratic republic against an enemy which wanted to maim and weaken it, to force the hated usurper onto it. It was a situation where all freedom-minded [*freiheitlich gesinnt*] elements of the whole civilised world, including German Social Democracy but not German liberalism, took the side of France.

"If in 1899 the republic had been just as much at threat as in 1870, and if back then the government participation of socialists had increased the forces defending the republic, then in such a predicament - solely for the purposes of defending the republic and only for the duration of its defence - Millerand's participation in a bourgeois administration would have been justified. However, it has never been demonstrated that this was the case. And a bourgeois administration was a far cry from an administration of general Gallifet. The inclusion of this man in the government was an insult to the socialists. But rescuing the republic cannot be initiated by insulting its staunchest defenders."

13. Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was prime minister under king Louis-Philippe of France. Following the overthrow of the Second Empire, he came to prominence as the French leader who suppressed the Paris Commune. From 1871 to 73 he held the presidential post of head of state.
14. Jules Favre (1809-80) was vice-president of the government of national defence under general Trochu and minister of foreign affairs, tasked with negotiating peace with Germany.
15. Ernest Picard (1821-77) held the portfolio of finance in the government of national defence. In January 1871 he accompanied Jules Favre to Versailles to negotiate the capitulation of the Paris Commune, and in the next month he became minister of the interior in Adolphe Thiers' cabinet.
16. Jules François Simon (1814-96) was education minister in the government of Thiers. He became French president in 1876.
17. For a brief discussion of the term *urwüchsig*, see B Lewis, 'Singing from the same hymn sheet' *Weekly Worker* May 9.
18. Victor Henri Rochefort, 1830-1913.
19. Footnote by Kautsky: "The biggest salary was 6,000 francs."
20. Quote taken from the Marxists Internet Archive: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm.

Fighting fund

Income supplement

The *Weekly Worker* is pleased to carry our special eight-page supplement this week - at no extra charge to our readers. But it is not without cost to produce, obviously. Printing is by no means cheap, while postage charges for this issue come to approximately two and a half times the usual amount.

From our point of view it is well worth it. I am not talking about financially, but politically, of course. If we can add to our common understanding of such an important question as the role of religion, we cannot put a value on that in terms of pounds and pence.

Nevertheless, we still have to find the money to produce the supplement - which is where our readers and supporters come in. They are the difference between the paper appearing and going out of existence, at least in printed form. And they also enable us to find the additional funds as and when necessary. Each and every month they rally round to ensure (usually) that we raise the £1,250 which is our fighting fund target.

Hopefully May will not be an exception. Mainly as a result of standing order contributions received over the last seven days (thanks to SK, DO, RP, GD and DS), our fund went up by £290, taking our total for the month to £1,006. I must also mention donations ranging from LK's £25 cheque to NF's fiver handed to a CPGB comrade.

But we received nothing via our website this week - despite the fact that 11,289 people read us online, including several hundred who downloaded the whole paper. Well, this week you have 20 instead of the usual 12 pages and it is still free. But, comrades, we need your help anyway. We could do with breaking right through that £1,250 barrier to recoup the cost of publishing the supplement.

We have five days to raise £244 - and more! ●

Robbie Rix

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

REVIEW

Truth, memory and distortion

Peter Watkins (director) *La Commune* 2000, DVD

Sitting through this film in its 345-minute entirety requires much coffee and many breaks. You will be thrust into the world of the 11th arrondissement in Paris 1871, to a world where seemingly eternal values are being turned on their head, and where society as a whole is engaged in feverish debate. Emerging the other end of this cinematic odyssey, with *La Marseillaise* ringing in your ears and your mind buzzing with questions, you might not be quite the same person as when you started.

Those expecting some sort of triumphalist, breast-beating ode to revolutionary action of the Paris Commune overlaid with a nice love story will be disappointed. Watkins' work consciously eschews such an approach. Where the film could proclaim, rejoice and celebrate, it probes and provokes. It challenges head-on contemporary conceptions of documentary production and entertainment more generally. If one of the slogans of the Great Revolution was 'War on the palaces - peace to the huts', then *La Commune* primarily declares war on the mansions of the media moguls.

How are events reported? And how is this reportage transmitted or remembered? In order to expose the stupefying and duplicitous mass media, Watkins employs a cunning narrative device. His documentary takes the form of two fictional television stations covering the 1871 events 'live' in Paris. In the blue corner we have 'National TV Versailles', predominantly consisting of studio reportage from a dapper, moustachioed presenter, alongside a historical 'expert'. In the red corner there is 'Commune TV', whose footage consists of live interviews with the people on the ground conducted by two assiduous reporters.

Thus in a series of long shots and intermittent inter-titles, Watkins seeks to reconstruct the experience of all the people living through those times - members of the national guard loyal to the Commune, the umbrella-waving bourgeois women decrying the "yobbos", the politicians who come to the fore in the movement, and - of course - the women of the Union des Femmes.

This is history 'from below' - long, unscripted scenes recompose the raw nature of the discussions raging at the time about more or less every practical issue of the day. Do we need bosses? What about the Committee for Public Safety? What to do about Versailles? What about the banks? One is thrust into the tos and fro of the activity of *les citoyens et citoyennes* - an active political mass shaping its future. The voiceless have got their voices back. And as the film's length alone testifies, they have a lot to say. The sense of energy and vigour is reinforced by the fact that Watkins completely junks a formal narrative structure in favour of raw, spontaneous dialogue in the form of Commune TV interviews.

Following 16 months of arduous historical research and pre-production, he went around looking for ordinary people to act in the film - mainly Parisians, but also other from regions of France, including many migrant workers living in France. They in turn were told to research their roles, discuss their particular points of view with the other actors and thus participate in the film's creativity as much as possible. Watkins contrasts this "experiential" approach with the "hierarchical" structure of conventional film production.

So it is that we see opinions clash: between the central committee and the



Commune TV

Commune, between women of different classes, between revolutionary journalists on how to report events. Watkins then distinguishes the public accounts with the reportage on National TV Versailles, where events are often distorted beyond recognition. This interplay between competing ideas on the ground and conflicting reportage provides sinister insight into the power of the media, leading us to further question many of the 'facts' we often take for granted.

This emphasis on the *dialectical* process of contending ideas has implications for the relations not only between the historical actors, but also between the audience and the film. The influence of Brecht is unmistakable. Opening with a Brechtian-style chorus, the two reporters for Commune TV show the viewer around the film's set in a disused Parisian factory. They tell of the events about to unfold, and show just where the firing squads will line the communards up for execution. This forces viewers to focus not so much on the plot and passively be in thrall to the scenes unfolding before them, but to question and reflect.

This is just one of several ways in which the distinction between actors and viewers is blurred, underlining the film's *transformative* emphasis. If revolution is as much a process of changing the people themselves as the society they live in, then it is a thrill to see how people are transformed in the course of the film. The school girls, for example, are initially taught by the nuns, inculcated with the ABCs of being good religious housewives. Yet, as events unfold, they begin to ask their religious governesses what god thinks of state schools and are soon singing revolutionary songs. These make you want to jump out of your seat - even after four hours of viewing.

The plot unhurriedly traces the Commune's brief, three-month existence. Yet in doing so it junks all notions of linear temporality and causality. This interlocking of past, present and future is a kind of historical materialism for the big screen, allowing Watkins to use the events of 1871 as a foil through which to develop a critique of contemporary society. Some scenes spliced into the plot look almost exactly the same as the others. The same actors. The same clothes. The same background. Yet it soon becomes apparent that the scenes are actually recordings of the actors engaging in discussion of *contemporary* issues as part of the preparation for filming particular scenes.

This is initially quite confusing. But it works a treat, allowing you to see how producing the film has changed the actors' conceptions. Thus, in one of the many scenes based on discussions of today's circumstances spliced into the general plot, some national guard soldiers debate how the Commune's principle of recallability is absolutely indispensable in today's conditions, where a "political caste" of

well-heeled professional politicians inhabit their own little bubble. "Foreigners" and "immigrants", castigated by well-to-do bourgeois women for inciting "foreign" revolution, are referred to ironically as *sans-papiers* - a reference to the ongoing struggle for migrants' rights in France.

If all this historical shifting and impassioned argument sounds slightly chaotic and unstructured, well, that is because it is! You sometimes wonder in which particular period you are at a given moment, not to mention whether you will actually survive the rest of the film!

But at the back of your mind you know that you are being tested, challenged. So you keep going. You soon appreciate Watkins' mission of confronting the "mind-numbing conformity and standardisation caused by the systematic audio-visualisation of the planet", ensuring a "synergistically created world where ethics, morality, human collectivity and commitment (except to opportunism) are considered oldfashioned."

Most of the Union des Femmes women had to face untimely deaths. As the credits roll, the love song adopted by the communards, *Le temps des cerises* (the time of the cherries), can be heard once again. The basic message of the 1866 song is that love may have led to heartbreak and ruin, but 'I will love again and again'. Better to die on your feet than on your knees. Seeing the firing squads shoot down the Commune's best fighters we have accompanied through the film, the masses of people buried alive in open graves and the others humiliatingly sent into exile, you seethe with anger. You repeat the words of one of the communards: "They can't always hide what they have done."

Right from the outset, 'National TV Versailles' had been looking to belittle the crimes of the government soldiers, concentrating its focus on the couple of hundred killed by the communards in the war instead. If the Commune's martyrs are, as Karl Marx once wrote, to be "enshrined forever in the great heart of the working class", then this cannot but mean a forthright struggle against the institutions which rewrite history in their own image. No easy task. But it is this commitment to historical memory and, of course, the fact this memory helps to inform and shape the present which leap out from Watkins' efforts.

The film might not be easy going. But then again, nor will be completing the emancipatory tasks of our fallen Parisian comrades ●

Ben Lewis

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. For an excellent description of Watkins' experiences in making the film, see his notes at <http://pwatkins.mnsl.net/commune.htm>.

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 member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

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

Printed and published by: November Publications Ltd (07950 416922).
Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © May 2011

weekly Worker

For an
alternative
culture

Democracy against 'privacy'

He has played for a single football club over 600 times in the last 20 years; he quickly became iconic of Manchester United's 'golden generation', of which he is almost the last survivor; and as such has seen more success on the football pitch than the vast majority of players can even dream of.

To this impressive CV, perhaps Ryan Giggs will soon be able to add a rather more dubious entry. His name has rapidly established itself at the centre of the political storm over privacy law and, more specifically, superinjunctions. British newspapers (or rather British tabloids) - we now know, thanks to MP John Hemming's use of parliamentary privilege to out him - have been banned from reporting the allegations of a glamour model that Giggs had been, so to speak, playing away; and they have also been banned from mentioning that the ban is in place.

The case of Giggs's alleged infidelity, then, has become the latest staging post for opponents of superinjunctions. Matters are, of course, complicated by the fact that - as Hemming and even David Cameron have acknowledged - mainstream media outlets were unable to report Imogen Thomas's claims (best known for a stint on *Big brother* in its declining years) did not mean that they were not widely known anyway. Anyone with any interest in Giggs's extra-curricular activities had only to peruse Twitter to discover his identity - he had been outed as the 'mystery footballer' in no less than 75,000 140-character sound bites by the end of things, and the story was subsequently carried widely in the international media.

Giggs has chosen the King Canute response - launching a lawsuit against Twitter, which has all the makings of a crucially important 'test case'. And it also a 'test case' for us, bringing together as it does a whole series of means of capitalist domination - principally the 'rule of law' and the power of the media.

Combatants

To take the latter first, the most obvious truth this scandal highlights about the mass media is its - often overstated, but nevertheless real - changing structure. The global communications infrastructure is nothing new, but, in the age of the internet, media globalisation has been considerably accelerated.

In this respect, it is quite clear that Giggs's lawsuit - whatever impact it may have on Twitter's British operation - amounts to, as the saying goes, pissing in the wind. Even if we arrived at a situation where there was a legal requirement to notify the subject of a news story prior to publication, equally binding on social networking sites as on newspapers (this was the unsuccessful interpretation of privacy law Max Moseley brought to the European Court of Human Rights), that would only cover a limited legal jurisdiction. A website hosted in Gambia which presumed to flout a British superinjunction would not be subject to any meaningful censure once the legal practicalities are taken into account.

So the fact that the world is divided into a great tranche of distinct *states*, great and small, increasingly conflicts with the tendency for capital to work across different national boundaries, with the effect that it becomes ever more difficult for a *particular* state to impose censorship on its media. More unashamedly authoritarian regimes resort to wholesale censorship of internet communications, but it is difficult to know how effective that is where it has been tried.

The result is that attempts to suppress digital media are often wildly counterproductive. Internet commentators have even coined a phrase, the 'Streisand effect' - named after singer Barbra Streisand, who attempted to censor an image of her home - to describe the phenomenon whereby a revelation taken off one website is immediately republished. On innumerable others, such that it cannot be deleted from the public consciousness.

Conflicts with the judiciary are inevitable in any case. It is up to the state to ensure the conditions under which capitalism may continue to reproduce itself are maintained, and a good part of those conditions consists in control over information, and who may possess it. Not for nothing is 'Open the books' a revolutionary demand with a long and storied history - secrecy in the affairs of capital, and moreover in the affairs of the

state itself, is a measure of power afforded the ruling class over the rest of us.

So, while the flashpoint of this dispute is the infidelity or otherwise of a footballer (and a series of other prominent men), the implications go much deeper. What is at issue is not so much the immediately apparent matter of whether the rich and famous should have legal recourse to keep their private lives out of the press, but the ability of the state to keep things out of the press *tout court*, by way of judicial regulation of what may be published.

This, in the end, accounts for the timidity of David Cameron's government in dealing with the superinjunction; a parliamentary committee convened to discuss the matter ended up with a series of platitudinous recommendations, including new legal guidelines designed to make it more difficult for people to obtain injunctions. The issue that will not be put on the table is the 'right' of the judiciary to decide these matters itself, precisely because it is a key component of capitalist political rule. In this situation, court judgments come out in favour of those who spend the most money; making injunctions more onerous to obtain merely raises the average cash injection required to get one.

Ironically, therefore, it may put them out of the reach of duplicitous footballers - who may be rich, but are hardly billionaires - but not corporations like Trafalgar, which obtained a superinjunction in order to cover up a corporate atrocity in the Ivory Coast. Moreover, the celebrity gossip industry bleeds more easily over the internet - superinjunctions are far more of a threat to serious investigative journalists, who rely on the resources of a major media outlet, and then may find their explosive scoops canned by a corrupt judiciary.

Prurience and prudishness

In a cameo role here is the matter of 'bread and circuses' - the crucial

importance to the mass media of voyeuristic celebrity reportage. I dealt with this side of the question last week¹ and only mention it again to note that many commentators, in the mainstream media and also on the left, have used the 'profile' of the superinjunction (usually taken out by a prominent man to conceal alleged sexual indiscretions) to dismiss the whole matter as a minor skirmish in the ongoing legal guerrilla war between the tabloid press and its celebrity prey.

The wooden spoon goes to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, whose paper carried an article under the headline, 'Why superinjunctions are good'.² The arguments of its author, Pat Murphy (thankfully his group is far from united on this line), are frankly so preposterous, philistine and downright idiotic that they make the AWL's increasingly delusional ramblings on the Libyan war look like the very soul of intellectual rigour. He claims that the whole scandal around superinjunctions has been got up by tabloids concerned about their profit margins; that, after all, the rich as well as the poor have a right to privacy.

"But that [right] would not be the only gain" if there were more court orders, Murphy assures us. "It might also mean that some of these celebrities will get less casual sex than they do now! If there was little chance of selling salacious (though usually tired and predictable) details to the press that would be a good thing. These stories are 'bread and circuses' of the worst kind, demeaning their readers almost as much as their victims." The logic here is astounding: interest in celebrity gossip 'demeans' the reader, apparently; but nobody is more demeaned than our comrade Murphy, who in the same breath declares an interest in how much casual sex celebrities enjoy ...

More substantially, is the Marxist approach to 'bread and circuses' really to take away the bread and torch the circus? In the end, we too would be guilty of the King Canute error; such things are inevitable, and if we are not all distracted by Ryan Giggs's sex life,

we will be distracted by his incisive passes on the football field. The best argument against this prudish moralism is precisely this scandal - which has already well overstepped the bounds of celeb gossip and become a pitched battle between the judiciary and the fourth estate.

We must draw out the *political* stakes of this split in the ruling class, and the affronted media have done half the job for us, declaring it a matter of freedom of speech. Indeed it is: communists are in the tradition of the American constitution here, if not on many other matters, considering the right to free speech a foundation stone of democracy. We must go further - free speech must not be hostage to the whims of judges, and behind them the money-power of the ruling class.

The 'right to privacy' is not something to be 'balanced' against this, but a fig-leaf for capitalism's abhorrence of democracy. The all-pervasiveness of celebrity voyeurism is an index not of inadequate legislation, but of our collective *failure* to build any kind of meaningful alternative to it. There is a need for a new kind of culture, in which people actively participate rather than passively consume whatever is thrown at them; a culture not divided institutionally between 'high' and 'low'; and above all a culture in which the great and the good are not seen as a breed apart from the rest of us.

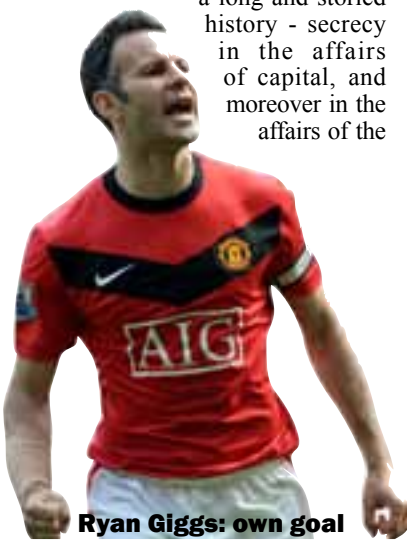
We must not be intimidated by the contemporary omnipresence of trash. Against the immense creative potential of the masses, the bourgeoisie's bread and circuses do not stand a chance; unlocking that potential is a matter for politics, however, and those who would give quarter on free speech - and, more broadly, the fight against the capitalist state - only help the gossip-peddlers they so despise ●

James Turley

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. 'Hacks versus celebrities', May 19.
2. *Solidarity* May 18.



Ryan Giggs: own goal

Subscribe
here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum £10 every 3 months ... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing
order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/£28	£50/£55	£200/£220
Europe	£30/£33	£60/£66	£240/£264
Rest of world	£60/£66	£120/£132	£480/£528
New UK subscribers offer:			
3 months for £5			

Name _____
Address _____
Post code _____
Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____
Donation £/€ _____
Total £/€ _____
Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____
Branch Address _____
Post code _____
Re Account Name _____
Sort code _____ Account No _____
Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____
This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)
Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____
Date _____ Address _____