



**Maurice Glasman: faith,  
flag, family and socialism?  
The politics of Blue Labour**

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# LETTERS



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

## Traitors

I note Peter Manson's article analysing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's abysmal results in the May elections and explaining the CPGB's support for the Labour Party because of the trade union link ('Give up on Tusc', May 26). But what does this actually represent - real benefits for union members or just patronage and knighthoods for union barons later? What is this much-vaunted link delivering for the working class today?

It would represent Labour having 'organic' links to the working class if unions actually allowed their conferences to debate (a) whether their union should remain affiliated to the Labour Party; (b) whether donations thereto should be reduced; and (c) whether their union should give funds or support to other candidates with similar aims or even stand their own; and the vast majority of members opting for (a).

I feel confident that no union affiliated to the Labour Party does or would allow these questions to be debated, given what happened to the two that did so. Affiliated unions urge members to vote Labour in their magazines and do not allow critical letters to be published about this or the link. So the much vaunted 'organic link' between the Labour Party and the unions today is just there by the dictatorship of the union barons - not the willing support of their members.

The only reason trade union donations represent 85% of Labour Party funding today is because the cash-for-honours scandal scared private donors away. Labour had been moving towards being funded mainly by corporations and billionaires in preparation for breaking the union link. That they failed was not down to the working class reclaiming the Labour Party - or the trade unions.

What did the unions get for their donations during 13 years of Labour government, compared with what the rich individuals and corporate donors got? What are they getting even now? The union link to the Labour Party has always acted to dampen down militancy, not get union members benefits. As PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has often said, there were more attacks on civil servants under New Labour over their 13 years in power than in the previous 18 years under the Tories.

How much of the Labour government's investment in public services actually went on improving services, rather than employing an army of managers and accountants bringing the market into the NHS, courts, prisons and schools? How did the union link, supposedly showing a connection with the working class, stop the illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? The Labour Party did not organise the one million-strong march on February 15 2003; it was the Stop the War Coalition.

Peter Manson has touched on the question I have raised in earlier articles - what is the quality and calibre of people joining the Labour Party today, compared to those who have left? But he does so by assertion, not any proof. Have these new members whom Peter is prepared to vouch for transformed constituency parties or the Labour Representation Committee? Or are they, as I suspect, just card-carriers? Being disillusioned with the Liberal Democrats hardly makes them militant radicals. Being sincere doesn't answer this. Plenty of sincere people are religious or support charities. What are these new sincere

Labour Party recruits doing and what is their background? Are they from the 71% who consider themselves middle class?

So Blair would probably not have addressed the TUC anti-cuts demo on March 26. I'll bet he would have done, had he been in opposition. In any event, so what? What was so radical about Miliband's address? Mark Serwotka got a far, far better response from a union not affiliated to the Labour Party on a march with 68 Labour Party banners addressed by their leader. That does not suggest to me that the Labour Party is attracting enthusiastic support rather than feeble, resigned voting of the passive non-protestors. As the letter from Nick Long of Lewisham People Before Profit pointed out, Labour only has one Labour councillor in London who pledges to oppose the cuts (how long will he last?). Is this any different anywhere else?

Peter demands left activists stop wasting their energy and commitment in futile attempts to build an alternative Labour Party. I'd say the same about futile attempts to reclaim the Labour Party and move it left that have proved futile for a far longer period than those trying for a Labour Party mark two!

The CPGB rarely deals with the actual problems the left would have trying to do this in today's Labour Party. Party members through conference cannot make Labour Party electoral policy. They are stage-managed rallies. Even if anything left radical were to be adopted, it would be dropped at election time for fear of being a middle England vote-loser. Today's new recruits are not organising to pull the party to the left. Increasing numbers of working class voters are not looking to the Labour Party and, having voted Labour out, they will only vote them back in if there is no left alternative.

Why did the wealth gap widen under the Labour government? The banks got less regulation. Non-socialists like Blair and now Miliband came to be Labour Party leaders. Decent socialist MPs like John McDonnell couldn't even get enough nominations to challenge both times for the leadership. The 1982 Benn/Heffer challenge was the high tide watermark of the left in the Labour Party and it's been downhill all the way since. Militant were thrown out and so would be any Marxists starting to have influence today (as if).

Just because the various left alternatives have floundered due to constant splits, it doesn't mean they were wrong to try. If the Socialist Alliance had not been scuppered, I wonder where it would be today? Same applies to the Scottish Socialist Party, having got six MSPs and then splitting. They had clearly proved you can get increasing working class votes outside the Labour Party if you establish credibility.

Labour Party members want their party, not the working class, to win. If that means dropping 'unrealistic' demands, if that means union leaders suppressing strike action to help 'their' party's electoral chances, if that means not standing any 'unrealistic' candidates for leader and if that means Marxists need to keep their heads down, they will all do so. Every betrayal of policy is justified by the pathetic 'The Tories would be worse'.

How can anyone stand to be in the same room as these class traitors, much less seriously think they are for winning to Marxism? They wouldn't actually stop the cuts even if they promised to. But they're not even promising to! I've said this before and it wasn't answered: more sincere people joining the Labour Party with the best motives have ended up being pulled rightwards than leftwards.

The essential 'organic link' of the organised working class to the Labour Party through affiliated unions didn't stop Labour losing, as millions of Labour voters gave up in sheer disgust at their disgraceful record in office. Were those voters wrong to hold Labour to account? It's a disgrace that the affiliated unions didn't.

We need alternative left anti-cuts candidates until the working class come to see the need for a Marxist party. I agree with the CPGB's aim here, but they will not see that need become a reality if all the Marxists are in the Labour Party having to hide their politics.

**Dave Vincent**  
Manchester

## Not rape

The veracity of Eddie Ford's piece on rape, or at least an important aspect of it, comes down to whether he or justice secretary Ken Clarke understands the law better ('Victims are not to blame', May 26).

Eddie argues: "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 ... that would *not* be treated as rape ... but rather 'unlawful sexual intercourse'." I am certain that Eddie is wrong. The Blair/Brown government *changed* the law from 'unlawful sexual intercourse' to plain 'rape', despite the fact it *isn't actually* rape. This is what Clarke was saying. He went on to talk about "rape as you and I would understand it". That is, forcing a person *against their will* by physical means, threat or other coercion to have sex when they don't want to. That *is* what rape is.

A couple having sex which they both voluntarily engage in and agree to is not 'rape', even if one of the parties is older. Clarke's example is exactly right, although actually it need not be an 18-year-old; it could be a 15-year-old boy and a 14-year-old girl. The boy will be charged with 'rape'. The nonsense of this situation is that, although judged too young to understand the concept of sexual consent, he is judged legally able to consent to the commission of rape!

The effect of this law change has great impact on the statistics and sentencing. Firstly, prior to the change, police forces would rarely take action against privately consenting individuals where the girl was slightly younger than the boy, unless there was a complaint from the girl. That is, if there was no victim, there would be no prosecution. Where they were caught in the act by a third party and reported, the boy would be charged with 'unlawful sexual intercourse'. Usually he would plead guilty, as this didn't carry any of the horrendous implications and punishments which go with a charge of 'rape', and simply meant his girlfriend was under the state's arbitrary law of consent.

With the Labour moralists' law change, aimed at stopping teenage girls having sex with their older boyfriends by sending them to jail, a number of things happened. 'Accusations' of rape (obviously) went up because now the law was able to take action with or without the approval of the 'victim' - that is, there doesn't have to be a complaint from one of the parties to the relationship. Secondly, few blokes will ever plead guilty to rape because of its social and legal implications - apart from the fact they actually haven't raped anyone. Thirdly, it becomes very difficult to gather enough evidence to prove something only two people were party to and neither one of them wishes to give evidence or support the prosecution. Fourthly, if it gets to court, British juries will not, despite the direction by the judge, consider

consensual sexual relations as 'rape' and continue to see this simply as underage sex.

So we are then left a pile of statistics which show that rape is on the increase (when it isn't), there are fewer prosecutions, there are fewer convictions and, when they are convicted, it carries a low sentence because of the nature of the 'rape'. All of which are entirely misleading statements. All that has happened is that the law was wrongly changed and now seeks to trap and convict people who are not guilty of anything.

This is what Mr Clarke was trying to broach to the very belligerent female interviewer. It is simply stupid to try and argue, 'All rapes are the same'. Truth is, some 'rapes' aren't rapes at all.

We could solve this situation tomorrow by repealing that part of the rape laws that applies to consenting parties and going back to the pre-Blair/Brown legislation. This would at once bring down rape statistics to a more accurate reflection of the crime. It would increase the number of prosecutions, convictions and incidentally longer sentences (as a proportion of the total number of rape crimes).

**Grant Williamson**  
email

## Enthusiasm

Eddie Ford's article started quite well, hitting some of the right targets like Ken Clarke, Roger Hemsley and the Canadian police and judiciary.

The article has also given some more publicity to what is surely the most sympathetically covered women's liberation story of modern times. Is there a national daily paper that hasn't covered the 'Slutwalk'? All using similar photos of women wearing not very much, usually made from leather or PVC, usually black. So I congratulate the picture editor for avoiding that particular clichéd contribution to 'chauvinist and sexist' culture.

Usually, 'Slutwalk' events are enthusiastically supported by men. All this support is an unfamiliar experience, only ever given to abortion rights. Reclaim the Night marches against sexual violence get media blackout, as do Million Women Rise events every year. After the new-found enthusiasm, might we be encouraged to hope that men might organise their own marches opposing violence against women (and maybe attend wearing something in red PVC?) Not holding my breath.

Eddie then helpfully points out where we've been going wrong. He explains that the word 'slut' has been appropriated in "the same way" that homosexuals reclaimed the word 'gay'. Eddie is mistaken: 'slut' has been used *exclusively* as a pejorative term, associated with dirt and laziness. The word 'gay' had no such connotations before being used in its modern sense, though it is worth pointing out its common use as a playground insult recently. He might have made the point better with 'black'. Such an interest in the historical development of language might have extended to 'prim' and 'schoolmarmish' - terms frequently used to belittle and dismiss political opinions on the sex industry and sexism. You could add 'strident', 'shrill', 'hysterical'. These terms have all been used to bolster sexism over the years.

Sadly, after a fairly good start, things go downhill swiftly when Eddie discusses the Socialist Workers Party's position on raunch culture and its effect on reflecting and reinforcing sexism. Eddie mistakenly assumes the 'sex' industry is about women's sexuality. Women enacting

a commercial imitation for men's consumption doesn't equate to an expression of authentic sexuality. Then we get to the absolute gem of arguing that there has been a "feminist and generally authoritarian backlash against women's sexuality". What does this mean? There is certainly a backlash, but not by feminists.

Feminists have been largely concerned with the violence associated with the 'sex' industry, in both this country and abroad. There is a backlash against abortion rights, not fuelled by feminists. Feminists are still arguing for adequate sex education that is not solely concerned with 'penis in vagina' and how to avoid the possible consequences of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. There is still an enormous amount of ignorance regarding women's sexuality. From Marie Stopes and Stella Browne onward, the vast majority of political work on this has been done by feminists.

Slutwalk deserves support for getting it partly right. But it would be a mistake to assume that getting approval from men and the mainstream liberal press for calling ourselves 'sluts' will lead to women's liberation.

**Heather Downs**  
email

## Unfair

Henry Mitchell's letter has some arguments which I don't feel are entirely fair (May 26). Firstly, he talks of Israel's democratic virtues. But is Israel that democratic? The left there basically doesn't exist, while there are people on dreadful wages, lots of poverty (for a developed country), a lack of healthcare, etc.

But these failures of Israel aren't that relevant: what Tony Greenstein and others are talking about is how Israel is not being democratic to the Palestinians by ensuring they don't have a state. This is particularly true for the current Israeli government; just look at Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress, where he essentially said his long-term goal was to annex the entire West Bank. Also, one must understand that many of the dictatorships in the region are backed by American (and British, if you want to go far back) imperialism, which created and ensured their survival, like Mubarak's Egypt until recently. So don't demonise/condemn those dictatorships, as Mitchell proposes - condemn the imperialism intrinsic to them.

Mr Mitchell seems to be taken in by Israeli propaganda, which vastly exaggerates the security threats to Israel in order to distract from its failure to allow a Palestinian state and compromise the size of that future Palestinian state. To imply Nakba Day threatened Israeli security is a very unconvincing argument. The Israeli Defence Forces being a progressive army is another myth: remember the sonic booms the air force conducted over Gaza and south Lebanon, which caused panic attacks, miscarriages and trauma amongst children? Or let's take Operation Cast Lead, where there were literally hundreds of non-combatant fatalities.

Mr Mitchell condemns Greenstein's (admittedly unfair) comparisons between Israel and Nazism (in the context of the left demonising Israel), but then equates the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement with what the Nazis did to Jews in Nazi Germany. Like Greenstein's comparison, this is vastly exaggerated. The BDS movement is an attempt to put pressure on Israel to make peace, end illegal settlements, etc. Equating it with Nazi anti-Semitism is morally wrong.

**Ollie Sutherland**  
email



**JUNE 30**

# Striking together



**TUC demonstration, March 26: anger**

On Tuesday May 24 the consultancy firm, MM&K, and the electronic voting agency, Manifest, published a report which exposed the harsh reality and twisted logic of capitalism in crisis. At a time when the majority of the population is bracing itself for a round of almost unprecedented austerity, the report reveals that the chief executives of the top FTSE 100 groups 'earned' on average 32% more in 2011 than in 2010.

This 'crisis' of popping champagne corks and Peruvian marching powder is, of course, a world away from the grim reality of daily life in modern Britain. Many workers employed by cash-starved local councils have either received their 'letter in the post' or are awaiting it with trepidation. Some have lost their jobs, others are told to accept 'downgrading' to cling desperately onto them. After all, the spectre of unemployment looms large, and its deleterious effects on people's lives border on the Kafkaesque: one shocking article in *The Guardian* reports that some Jobcentre staff are currently receiving guidance on how to deal with benefit claimants so fraught and distressed that they are contemplating suicide.<sup>1</sup>

Little wonder that we are starting to see some green shoots of resistance. On the back of the March 26 trade union anti-cuts demonstration, one of the biggest manifestations of working class anger in recent history, sections of the organised workers' movement are moving towards strike action.

The date already pencilled into many activists' diaries is June 30. If all goes to plan, that Thursday could witness over 650,000 public sector workers taking coordinated strike action against the government. Such a move can only be welcomed, as can the militant mood on display at recent union conferences. All have been characterised by anger and radical rhetoric, with the University and College Union and the Communication Workers Union voting unanimously for motions backing mass strikes -

in the case of the UCU for a TUC-organised general strike. The Public and Commercial Services union, National Union of Teachers and National Union of Journalists had already passed similar motions.

Depending on the outcomes of several ballots, the PCS, NUT, UCU, the traditionally unadventurous Association of Teachers and Lecturers, and Unison council workers in Doncaster and Birmingham could all come out on June 30.

Given this prevailing mood, it is more than a shame that unions like the Fire Brigades Union and Unite will not be on board. The FBU national executive managed to win its congress to an online survey of the membership rather than balloting for immediate action, whilst Unite general secretary Len McCluskey contented himself with assuring PCS conference that his members will "do what they can on the day to express ... solidarity and stand united against the cuts".<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, such synchronised action across the public sector, which will close schools, colleges and local government buildings, will surely be a taste of things to come.

Coordination makes all the more sense, given that many of the problems experienced by the different sectors revolve around the same issue: pensions. Already ground down by increasingly overbearing bosses and bureaucratic loopholes, teachers now face drastic cuts to theirs. It is estimated that the changes proposed by the government would require a teacher to work for 48 years in order to take home a pension of £8,000. Like the PCS, the NUT is confident that its ballot will see a formidable 'yes' vote. The UCU has already returned a 65% vote for action.

What is clear is that this shift in mood is finding reflection right across the workers' movement. Hardly any union has been unaffected by the impulse towards coordinated action. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union, for example, had been discussing the possibility

of linking up its proposed action against the victimisation of a London Underground union rep with the other strikes.

A bold show of mass opposition to austerity on June 30, along with well organised demonstrations and solidarity actions, would serve to increase the self-confidence of our class, leading to further coordination between different sectors and the possibility of organising the working class as a whole. We need to mobilise both the public and the private sector. And we also need to bring on board students, pensioners, the unemployed and so on. Strikes are indispensable weapons in our class's arsenal. Yet they are not the only one, and should certainly not be seen as some sort of sure-fire means of defeating the government.

Opposing austerity through working class militancy cannot be separated from the political representation of our class and our unions. As such it was a shame that the FBU voted down a motion to re-affiliate to the Labour Party at its recent congress. Indeed, if unions like the UCU, NUT, RMT and PCS were also affiliated to Labour, then this could have a real impact on the party of 'official opposition'. The presence of new layers of militants, from Mark Serwotka, Matt Wrack and Bob Crow down, would undoubtedly greatly add to the influence of the left within Labour.

The only way in which we can really challenge any government's authority is by rebuilding our class movement at the base. June 30 is an encouraging sign that this can be done ●

**Ben Lewis**

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. 'Jobcentre staff "sent guidelines on how to deal with claimants' suicide threats"' *The Guardian* May 9.
2. Speech to PCS conference: [www.unitetheunion.org/pdf/001-2011-05-20-PCS-speech-v3.pdf](http://www.unitetheunion.org/pdf/001-2011-05-20-PCS-speech-v3.pdf).

## ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Communist Students

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

### Radical Anthropology Group

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

**June 7: 'Stonehenge decoded'**. Speaker: Lionel Sims.

### Defend legal aid

**Friday June 3: Day of action**

**Birmingham, 12 noon:** March, leaving from Victoria law courts, Corporation Street, B4.

**London, 12 noon:** Rally, supreme court, Parliament Square, SW1.

**Coventry, 1.30pm:** March, leaving from Lady Godiva statue, Broadgate, CV1.

**Eastbourne, 1.30pm:** March, leaving from High Street, outside Debenhams.

**Hastings, 12.30pm:** March, leaving from Hastings Pier.

**Manchester, 12 noon:** Pop-up advice stand, Exchange Square, M4.

**Newham, 10.30pm:** Face-painting and more outside Primark, East Ham High Street, E6.

**Sheffield, 5pm:** Rally outside town hall, Pinstone Street, S1.

Organised by Justice for All: [www.justice-for-all.org.uk](http://www.justice-for-all.org.uk).

### Historical Materialism

**Saturday June 4, 9.30am:** Annual conference, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1 (nearest tubes: Russell Square, Tottenham Court Road). £15 waged, £10 unwaged (includes annual membership).

Organised by Marx and Philosophy Society: [www.marxandphilosophy.org.uk](http://www.marxandphilosophy.org.uk).

### Free the innocent

**Thursday June 9, 11am:** Protest - stop miscarriages of justice.

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](http://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 conversions to academies.

Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: [www.antiacademies.org.uk](http://www.antiacademies.org.uk).

### Ten years on

**Saturday June 11, 9.30am:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Afghanistan and the war on terror 10 years on'. Speakers include: Tony Benn, George Galloway, Tariq Ali, Lindsey German, Military Families Against the War. Admission: £5 - book in advance.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

### 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](mailto: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](http://www.shopstewards.net/conference.htm).

### 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](mailto:angela@gcin.org.uk)).

Organised by Glasgow City of Sanctuary: [www.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.cityofsanctuary.org).

### Remember the hunger strikes

**Saturday June 18, 1pm-5.30pm:** Conference to celebrate 30th anniversary of 1981 Irish hunger strikes. London Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square, London NW1. Speakers include: Bairbre de Brun MEP, Bik McFarlane (former IRA prisoner, Long Kesh), Tony Benn, Kevin McNamara, Ronnie Kasrils (SACP, former ANC minister). £5 (£3 unwaged).

Organised by Sinn Féin: [london1981conference@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:london1981conference@yahoo.co.uk).

### 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>.

### 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.



## BLUE LABOUR

# Faith, flag, family, socialism?

'Blue Labour' is the latest fad to enrapture the leadership of the Labour Party. James Turley probes into its appeal for 'Red' Ed

**E**edited by Maurice Glasman, Jonathan Rutherford, Marc Stears and Stuart White, the e-book *The Labour tradition and the politics of paradox* (2011) is introduced by Ed Miliband no less and contains contributions by "intellectuals and politicians" ranging across Labour's "spectrum".

Apart from its editors, they include soft-left doyen John Cruddas, Blairite lickspittle James Purnell, Lawrence and Wishart's director, Sally Davison, MPs David Lammy, Hazel Blears and David Miliband, and the writers and academics Stefan Baskerville, Graeme Cooke, Ben Jackson, Duncan O'Leary and Jon Wilson. Not insignificantly, the book is published in association with the Christian Socialist Movement, Compass, Fabian Society, Progress and the journal *Soundings*. Together this motley crew have been called 'Blue Labour'.

This new Big Idea (read: branding strategy) for the Labour Party will probably have gone more or less unnoticed outside the Westminster village and, more broadly, the politically conscious section of society. Indeed, I will argue that this is not strictly unjustified - while it *appears* as a particularly dangerous foe for proletarian socialism, it fits too neatly into the pattern of previous Big Ideas (remember Will Hutton's 'stakeholder society', anyone?) to suggest that it will, in practice, pan out any differently from any of the post-Kinnock Labour right's reactionary gimmicks.

Nonetheless, Blue Labour is not without interest for the far left - for two main reasons. Firstly, while Hutton's thesis (and the 'third way' strategy of Anthony Giddens *et al*) were fundamentally based on the idea that the class struggle was exhausted and, therefore, socialism was dead, Maurice Glasman and his colleagues base their arguments on a certain reading of labour movement history, which fundamentally accepts its continuity to the present. Blue Labour has attracted most attention for being blue, but it is very keen to stress, in an anti-Blairite manner, that it is *Labour* (socialism is not a dirty word to Blue Labourites).

Secondly, there is the matter of a 'warning from history' - the manner in which Margaret Thatcher decimated support for the National Front (cutting it off, as they say, at the ankles) simply by adopting its chauvinist-populist rhetoric on immigration. The NF had tacked more closely than any previous fascist organisation to the policies of the Tory right wing, which left it vulnerable to just such a manoeuvre.

The far left, as it stands today, is similarly vulnerable to Blue Labour, because in tacking ever closer to banal left Labourism on the basis that the Labour Party has abrogated its position on that ground, it is apt to be swept away if Ed Miliband finds a way to re-occupy the territory his predecessors abandoned, which he no doubt will. Of course, at this time not much remains to sweep away; but another decade in the wilderness will do the left no favours.

So what is Blue Labour? The recently elevated Maurice Glasman, a reader in political theory at London Met University and the moving spirit behind the phenomenon, poses it this way: "The Labour tradition is far richer than its recent form of economic utilitarianism and political liberalism would suggest. Labour is a unique and paradoxical tradition that

strengthens liberty and democracy, that combines faith and citizenship, patriotism and internationalism and is, at its best, radical and conservative" (*The Observer* April 24).

How does the canny political strategy overcome this paradox? Fundamentally, by recasting the phenomenon of working class organisation as a "small 'c' conservative" reaction by historically constituted communities against the abstract cosmopolitanism of capital: "Blue Labour reminds the party that only democratic association can resist the power of capital and that the distinctive practices of the Labour movement are built upon reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity."

I say the 'abstract cosmopolitanism of capital', but for Glasman the enemy is *finance* capital specifically. Finance capital is the object of a mangled Marxist critique, for turning "human beings and nature into commodities". The distorted Marxism even extends to the implicit association of financialisation with 'progress' - thus, working class resistance to (finance) capital is cast as a perverse variant of what Marx called 'feudal socialism', or a resistance against bourgeois society in the name of a more authentic pre-modern form of sociality.

The more sinister consequence of this dual identification (capitalism = progress; anti-capitalism = reaction) is that other forms of reaction can sneak in through the back door. Religious faith becomes, equally, a site of resistance to universal commodification. Of course, Glasman is pretty vague when it comes to the political consequences of his theory.

### Blairite

Where he does veer onto the territory of substantial politics, it really may as well be a Blairite talking, with a characteristic recommendation for "a strong agenda for both regulating finance and generating regional private sector growth". To Blair himself, Glasman attributes a "political alchemy ... between tradition and modernity. The problem was that his conception of tradition was superficial and his concept of modernisation verging on the demented: a conception of globalisation understood entirely on the terms set by finance capital."

And the problem with this critique is that it equally applies to Blue Labour. Glasman and co may not

advocate finance capital's vision of globalisation, but by posing against it the small-c conservatism of the working class, they no less wholly identify it with modernisation and modernity.

They do not seek to eradicate entirely the history of the workers' movement, as did Blair and Mandelson; yet their understanding of its history remains superficial. Blue Labour is unable to conceive of the working class as anything other than reactive; association to win democratic rights is instrumental in resisting capitalist progress, rather than in building a politics which will challenge it from the point of view of a putative *future*, where it has been overcome. Such elements, certainly, abound in the history of the British workers' movement; yet so do authentic radicals, from the left Chartists to the Communist Party. Even the Fabians were intoxicated with 'modern society' and its increasingly rational organisation.

So Glasman's inability to provide a coherent sense of the progressive *outside* of the depredations of finance capital ultimately leads him to forget that working class politics has always been a site of intense struggle and thus posit a prelapsarian moment, where the labour movement was an organically constituted community, united against a basically exterior opponent in the bourgeoisie - or rather finance capital.

By retreading this view of history, Glasman - despite his no doubt impeccable liberal credentials - aligns himself with some pretty dubious individuals. The separation of finance capital - cosmopolitan, indifferent to the realities of human existence - from productive capital is ultimately an inheritance from anti-Semitic literature. It should be noted that for the anti-Semites it was consistent with the dismissal of more radical traditions in the workers' movement and the *plebs* more generally. It could then be renounced as the machinations of the Jew, whose cosmopolitan modernism could appear as a perversion of the basic organic unity of the nation. As a progressive-minded individual - and moreover a Jew himself - Glasman can only be silent on the matter.

Glasman talks a lot about immigration without saying very much, although he touts his experience working on the London

living wage campaign, which taught him the necessity of integrating illegal immigrants into society at large. Then again, he is writing in *The Observer*. It is not difficult to follow his logic about organically constituted communities to an ethnic purism, even if he himself refuses to do so; the same goes for his cryptic comments about re-engaging with the English Defence League's support base.

It may seem a little unfair to put words in Glasman's mouth, but in the end he is engaged in a balancing act worthy of a Giddens or Blair, and his text is, again, extremely slender when it comes to substantial politics. If we want to know how his work is likely to pan out when applied to concrete politics, we have to read between the lines, and also have a clearer sense of the present state of the Labour right - and, indeed, the functioning of contemporary bourgeois politics - than Glasman has himself.

So Glasman makes great play out of the issue of immigration, and argues that it is a matter of considerable importance that migrants are integrated into the wider community. With this no socialist or communist would wish to disagree. By the time it gets out the other end of the Labour electoral machine, however, we know how it will look: immigrants are undermining the nation, so there should be less of them and they should know their place; 'multiculturalism' has failed and so immigrants must be caajoed into adopting British *chauvinist* ideology before they can truly be considered integrated.

Likewise, the curvets towards localism, as opposed to state paternalism, *do* hit on a real defect of post-war capitalism, whereby the welfare state appeared as a great, bureaucratic monster, unresponsive to the conditions in the communities it is supposed to serve. At a time of mass cuts in state expenditure, however, this critique will merely serve as a cover for attacks on living standards, broadly cognate to Cameron's 'big society'. In other words, Blue Labour - whatever the intentions of its advocates - is most likely to end up as yet another alibi for yet another permutation of rightwing Labourism.

### Left murmurings

In this sense, the dark murmurings on the left - piqued by Glasman's overtures to EDL supporters - about

the fascist undercurrent to Blue Labour are partially misguided. Those things that Blue Labour has in common with fascism - fake-left criticisms of capital, especially finance capital; organicist and chauvinist ideology; advocacy of corporatist class-collaboration - are all things that are perfectly typical of Labourism as well; they are the common heritage of the epoch which gave birth to both. (Gimmicks such as this, and the tendency for great gulfs to open up between their existence on paper and in social reality, are another common feature.)

The left in Britain has disarmed itself in front of this kind of rhetoric, alas. Miliband's much trumpeted interest in Glasman's ramblings might be utterly self-serving, but it responds to something real - the disjunction between the more transparent sociality of people's daily lives and the impersonal, mechanical forces of the state and the market that operate in apparent indifference to them.

Glasman and Miliband draw reactionary political conclusions from this. The left, however, barely acknowledges it at all. There are those who all but openly advocate welfare-state Keynesianism as a stepping stone to socialism - the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, for example. There are those who advocate it as a compromise with their favoured union tops - the Socialist Party in England and Wales. There are those who advocate it out of what amounts to a variant of Glasman's idea that the working class is conservative: ie, that workers care about what affects them right here and right now, and our job is to get them *fighting* rather than to persuade them of a grander vision - the Socialist Workers Party.

In the first place, these strategies all implicitly defend the *status quo ante* 1979, with all its problems. In the second, the necessary *corollary* of statist reformism - nationalism and its attendant maladies - is simply denied. What stops the SWP from making concessions to racist workers, or more broadly workers opposed to immigration? Ultimately, it is a *moral* reflex, coupled with a denial that racist or chauvinist ideology has any real grip over any section of the class. The truth is that, as far as its public face goes, the SWP does not advance a critique of the state; without that, its defence of the welfare state and of multiculturalism (however qualified) is trapped in the same problematic as Glasman's attacks on the same.

Blue Labour is a pernicious ideology which needs to be combated - in the Labour Party and outside it. Yet we cannot do this simply by unmasking it as yet another variant of Blairism, true though that is. We need to distinguish ourselves as *Marxists* from Labourites, and present a clear vision of an alternative society. This is no short cut to mass popularity; but then no such short cut exists. The increasingly farcical phenomenon of Marxists pretending to be Labourites, in ever decreasing circles, is adequate testament to this basic fact.

It is time for the revolutionary left to give Maurice Glasman a lesson in that part of workers' movement history he chooses to ignore - the part which looked not to a mythical past, but to a better, communist, future ●

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Maurice Glasman: godfather



## UNEMPLOYED

# Victory claimed as GMB rejects workfare

What was a union's logo doing on a report recommending the privatisation of the employment and benefit service? **Tony Greenstein** reports

It began with a public meeting to launch a new Public and Commercial Services union pamphlet, *Welfare - an alternative vision*.<sup>1</sup> During the course of his speech last week in Brighton, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka let it slip that an unnamed trade union had co-authored a report with a company looking to privatise the rest of the employment and benefit service - known as Job Centre Plus - and had specifically praised the US workfare company, *America Works*.

In response to questions from the floor, Mark revealed that it was the GMB which was the union in question. I think most of us were taken aback that any union, however rightwing, would collaborate with those who were poised to slit the throats of the public sector and even more so, given that many, if not the majority, of GMB members were employed in the public sector.

I immediately penned an open letter to GMB general secretary Paul Kenny,<sup>2</sup> which, among other things, called on him to resign. In the course of a somewhat heated correspondence, it became apparent that Paul Kenny had not read the report in question, something which he confirmed to Brighton GMB shop steward Holly Smith: "I had not read or seen the document until this all came to light and I have tried to ensure that the GMB position is explained to all who seek clarification."

The report, 'The road to work and opportunity in the 21st century', was authored by four academics at Portsmouth University, including two criminologists. It transpired that the organisation which had commissioned the report, Kennedy Scott, was one of the many private parasites hoping to take a bite out of the welfare state. It had stuck the GMB's logo onto its report, which was sponsored by accountancy group PKF.

Questions remain, of course, as to what were the circumstances in which the GMB came to have any relationship with this group, but that is for GMB members themselves to ascertain. The key thing is that whatever relationship there may have been has been blown out of the water. The report itself was launched at a House of Lords reception, at which GMB official spokespersons appear to have been present.

It proposes: "The government should recognise that best practice is for contractors to have a presence in job centres", and talks of "improving the employability of the long-term unemployed group" and "the importance of delivering welfare to work provision coming from the public, private and voluntary sectors".

It explains that "Redundancy can be a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to start again" in the course of arguing that the higher end of the jobseeker's market should be privatised first: "It is unlikely that the Jobcentre Plus will be able to provide suitable services for former professionals ... conversely, a network is emerging which is based on voluntarism and social entrepreneurship." Quite.

What, however, should have rung alarm bells, in whichever official was responsible, was the sentence,



**Paul Kenny: no collaboration**

"Another idea the government should consider is encouraging welfare-to-work providers to have a presence in Job Centres." Which, of course, makes sense for the private providers, but it would not take long before the squatters took over the tenancy. The Report informs us: "It is important to take account of the more generous benefits system (and the consequential greater difficulty in getting claimants back to work)." The obvious implication being that benefits therefore should therefore be lowered (it goes without saying that raising wages runs contrary to all notions of privatisation and the free market). The right calls this the 'dependency culture.'

The report argues: "Exposing the welfare-to-work industry to the vagaries of the market is the best thing, not only for the taxpayer, but for the industry's clients, as well." Of course, what is best for the unemployed is not even mentioned. We are politely informed that "The country is facing the biggest change to the welfare system in 50 years and the new Work Programme will see up to 3.2 million people (6.3% of the adult population) go through its doors over the next five years." Well, that is one way of describing savage cuts to the disabled, massive cuts in housing benefits, the means-testing of child benefits, etc.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time as I was corresponding with Paul Kenny on behalf of Brighton and Hove Unemployed Workers Centre, Holly Smith was also writing, in somewhat more measured language. She said she was "incredulous that a trade union is actually recommending and encouraging a Tory government to increase their free-marketeering! Why on earth are we encouraging the opening up of the public sector to private providers? Do we really believe that introducing a profit motive into the public sector ensures the best possible service?"

Under the proposals carried in the report, employers would 'try out' each candidate for up to four months, during which time they

have no employee rights, and if they are found not to be suitable they are simply 'released'! "Here's how it works: America on Demand, a staffing company that is a subsidiary of America Works, places jobseekers in temporary positions. The employer has no obligations to hire at the conclusion of the subsidised wage period and has little or no risk during the period of subsidised employment because the staffing company is the employer of record. All of the paperwork involved in the programme is performed by the staffing company. The employer may terminate the arrangement at any time."

In other words, the workers have no rights whatsoever and we have what is an agency worker system, in which the legal employer is the agency rather than the end user.

### Persistence pays

But, whatever the origins of the GMB's links with Kennedy Scott, when faced with the anger of his own members, the GMB general secretary made it clear that the union is opposed to any privatisation of the benefit or employment services. He stated: "The report you refer to was not ours, nor did we endorse it or support the type of comments quoted. I have written to Kennedy Scott making it clear we do not support private companies in these services, nor do we support 'welfare to work' or their views. I have made my views clear about anyone using our logo or implying our support for 'welfare to work'."

Paul Kenny's explanation of how the union logo came to be on the report was that "the GMB had sponsored research from Portsmouth Uni, which we did to show the current system of payment by revolving door results is a complete sham". He emphasised: "The GMB and myself are 100% opposed to workfare and the privatisation of any public service, including employment services."

Kenny flatly denied that the GMB had "some sort of deal or partnership"

with Kennedy Scott: "The union has by bitter experience seen the impact of private sector firms on all walks of public service provision. The Remploi database claims on how they have helped many thousands of disabled people into mainstream jobs is highly dubious. Placing people into charity shops or collecting trolleys at supermarkets is not what everyone wants to do. The PCS has our full support and that has been made clear to them. The GMB does not support 'welfare to work', nor will it."

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn. The first is that the rot started under New Labour, when unions supported New Deal and the idea of private providers doing the work of the Job Centre and benefit staff and penalising claimants through sanctions. Having become accustomed to the role of private parasites like Atos Origin and A4E,

it was not a big step for unions to arrange their own tie-ups with these groups.

There is no doubt in my mind that the GMB, or some of its officials, knew more about this report than they were letting on. Equally I have no doubt that, once the matter had been aired in public and seen the light of day, the GMB, notwithstanding its support for New Labour, was left with no choice but to dissociate itself from the document. Ironically the only person left supporting it was Andy Newman on Socialist Unity!<sup>4</sup>

At the PCS meeting I spoke from the floor after the intervention from Colin Hampton of the TUC's Consultative Committee and the Unemployed Centres Combine. Both these groups have presided over the demise of unemployed centres in Britain - down from 250 in the 1980s to about 30 now. Their 'strategy', in so far as one can call it that, was to doff their caps and act as lapdogs for the TUC bureaucracy. In return they got kicked in the teeth, as the TUC adopted the rhetoric and language of New Labour and its privateers.

Brighton Unemployed Centre, as one of the few independent centres in Britain, was not beholden to anyone and was able to therefore politically challenge the third largest union in Britain to make it clear where they stood. There is no doubt in my mind and those of claimants who have contacted us that we won a significant victory by not going through the 'normal channels'.

But there is another lesson: only through the organised working class will the unemployed find their own voice ●

### Notes

1. [www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/welfare-reform/index.cfm](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/welfare-reform/index.cfm).
2. See <http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2011/05/paul-kenny-judas-of-gmb.html>.
3. The report can be read at [www.pkf.co.uk/web/pkf.nsf/D13546DB143A24CA8025788B004F11EE/\\$file/Welfare+to+Work+report.pdf](http://www.pkf.co.uk/web/pkf.nsf/D13546DB143A24CA8025788B004F11EE/$file/Welfare+to+Work+report.pdf).
4. [www.socialistunity.com/?p=8158](http://www.socialistunity.com/?p=8158).

## Fighting fund

# Web of intrigue

This month will see an important milestone in the progress of the *Weekly Worker*. I am talking about the much delayed relaunch of our website, which is due to happen on June 12. The new site will offer enhanced facilities, including the intriguing possibility of actually being able to track down the article you are looking for. Progress indeed!

The redesign has produced a large one-off addition to our overheads, of course - another reason why all you online readers should pull out your credit or debit card once in a while. Our PayPal facility is notoriously underemployed - although a couple of our 10,473 visitors used it to take out a subscription last week, no-one did what it says on the button: "Make a donation".

Mind you, two very timely last-

minute cheques ensured we were able to reach our £1,250 fighting fund target for May - just. Thank you, comrades RI and RG, for your tremendous gifts: £100 and £25 respectively. The *Weekly Worker* bank balance also increased thanks to a number of standing orders, to the tune of £123, just before the deadline. Which meant we ended the month with a total of ... £1,254!

I am pleased to report that the usual batch of start-of-the-month standing orders means that we have £90 to set our June fund on its way ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## DEMOCRACIA REAL YA

# Tahrir Square comes to Madrid

It is essential to critically engage with movements like Democracia Real Ya, argues **Maciej Zurowski**

**“R**allies are boring,” said one activist characteristically at the ‘open organising assembly for June 30 strikes’ in central London. The May 23 meeting may have been attended by more than 100 activists from various tendencies, but it was certainly decentralised direct action groups such as UK Uncut that set the tone. Particularly visible in recent months through their spectacular occupations of banks, Topshop outlets and the like, the group is a pole of attraction to the freshly radicalised, and there can be little doubt that many of them will stick around for a while.

“One of the most respectful, dynamic and inspirational meetings in a long time” is how one activist described the meeting in retrospect. This was true in that the room was buzzing with rapid-fire ideas, ‘jazz hands of agreement’, and a consensus-driven, *Zabriskie point*-style atmosphere very much to the taste of the largely student crowd (as well as the odd survivor from the class of 1968). It was also true that there was no sectarian squabbling between the various tendencies, the implicit notion being that anarchists, communists, socialists and the less ideologically solid might cooperate as long as we keep our politics to ourselves and stick to the lowest common denominator of opposing the cuts.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, members of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party were careful not to push their agenda too aggressively, while others urged trespassers not to make it “too political”. The most frenetic eruptions of ‘jazz hands’, meanwhile, were reserved for a small handful of Spanish students who introduced themselves as London representatives of the Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) movement, sending some of those present into what appeared like a state of rapture. Inspired by the Arab spring, the movement has been staging permanent occupations of central squares in all major Spanish cities in the months leading up to the regional and local elections. Following their calls to “bring Egypt to London” earlier this year, groups such as Counterfire and the SWP have already begun placing their bets on this new social movement: “Bring the spirit of Spain to the streets of Britain,” exhorted *Socialist Worker*,<sup>2</sup> while ‘Real Democracy’ spin-off groups have been forming everywhere from France to Greece.

Echoing proclamations on Democracia Real Ya’s various websites and blogs, the Spanish students at the May 23 meeting made a point of declaring themselves to be a “totally non-violent” as well as “non-political” group. The latter is, to some extent, analogous to the attempts of the ‘open organising assembly’ hosts to preserve ‘unity’ by suppressing political



**Madrid: jazz hands**

differences. More crucially, though, it is the expression of a generation’s disenchantment with electoral politics - particularly in a country where the centre-left PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) and trade union bureaucrats have been either carrying through or in effect excusing the savage austerity programme. Translate this disenchantment into a generalised anti-political, anti-party stance, and you might just arrive at the notion that only a broad social movement operating at street level, uncontaminated by ‘ideologies’, might effect change. How exactly that will happen, nobody is sure.

“Don’t know what I want, but I know how to get it: I wanna protest

peacefully’, then, is how a cynic might sum up the ‘spirit of Spain’ in a song - perhaps ending on the chorus, ‘... ’cause I wanna be democracy’. The neurotically contrarian *Spiked* magazine poured nothing but scorn on the Spanish protestors,<sup>3</sup> denouncing them as essentially apolitical kids who happen to enjoy a night out on the square. Much though the article smacked of the author’s indignation at the idea that the masses might start a protest movement without asking him for permission, he certainly had a few points, however. It is true that a ‘non-political’ or ‘anti-political’ stance will, sooner or later, lead any movement down a blind alley; instead of suppressing politics for the sake

of unity at any cost, they should be brought out in the open, so that an effective strategy might be formulated.

It is not the job of communists, however, to grumpily stand on the sidelines or, worse still, attempt to “subsume or subdue”<sup>4</sup> spontaneous struggles, however theoretically naive they may initially appear. An elemental, vaguely anti-capitalist outbreak of anger at a bourgeois establishment that presently condemns more than 21% of the Spanish population to unemployment,<sup>5</sup> the Real Democracy movement is a justified and positive development.

Moreover, one would have to be completely blinded by dogmatism not to appreciate the high level of

organisation and cooperation on display at Madrid’s Plaza del Sol. From communal cooking and educational/debating groups and spontaneously established free public libraries, the scenario portrays an intuitive communism wholly at odds with what we are being told all our lives: that human nature is intrinsically selfish and territorial. Likewise, the fact that the word ‘democracy’ is put up for open-ended debate in a nominally democratic western hemisphere is a welcome step forward - particularly so in a climate in which imperialism is scrambling to import its own idea of ‘democracy’ into the rapidly changing Arab world.

What communists can offer such spontaneous movements is a coherent theoretical outlook to “give voice to their various concerns within the framework of a comprehensive theory”, as Karl Kautsky referred to Marx’s work in the First International - even if that entails facing the same difficulties that the early Marxians confronted and weeding out the same petty bourgeois ideas and non-solutions all over again. After all, our goal is to make the dream enacted in the Plaza del Sol become reality and not just an ephemeral, utopian adventure.

As the history of 20th and early 21st century anti-capitalist movements demonstrates, the same old ideas tend to reappear again and again in new guises, inevitably condemning their followers to repeat the mistakes that had rendered their predecessors politically impotent first time around.<sup>6</sup> Nowhere is this truer than with cross-class, politically diverse ‘social movements’ and tendencies that advocate political abstentionism.<sup>7</sup> In my interview below, it is apparent that a political party which provides the collective memory of the class is indispensable if we do not wish to get caught up in perfectly avoidable dead ends. For the left, to uncritically herald every new movement as ‘showing the way’ or to pander to an anti-political consensus in the hope of signing up a few dozen recruits is irresponsible and short-sighted - to critically engage with these movements, on the other hand, is imperative.

On the weekend of May 28, just a week after the conservative Partido Popular’s victory in the local elections, I visited some 30 activists at the Spanish embassy in Knightsbridge, where they had been camping in solidarity with the protests in their native country. They referred me to Esther, who acts as the London-based press spokesperson for Democracia Real Ya. Together with a chap simply known as Hugo, Esther was recently touted by the Education Activist Network as one of the “main activists”<sup>8</sup> in what by and large appears to be a structureless movement ●

## An ethical revolution of the mind

Esther of Democracia Real Ya spoke to the *Weekly Worker*

### Can you tell us what you’re doing here?

We’ve been gathering in front of the Spanish embassy since May 15. For this weekend, we have organised a lot of camp activities and various workshops on democracy. We have also held general assemblies to decide where our movement is going and what steps to take next.

### Have you had any hassle from

### the police?

On the first day the ambassador called the police, but we’ve been demonstrating peacefully and all they did was ask us how long we would be staying. They were always helpful - one morning at six o’clock whilst we were sleeping it started to rain, so they asked us if we’d like any hot water. So, no, there have been no problems at all.

### Could you briefly sum up what Democracia Real Ya is all about?

There is demonstrably a failure in the political and economic status quo, so we are demanding a complete change in the democratic system and in the financial system. We are protesting against the unjust policies of the politicians and bankers that have led to a catastrophic situation.

### How did it all start - did your movement arise spontaneously or was there a lot of planning beforehand?

Originally there were two protest movements that started in several Spanish cities in mid-February. One of them was called Estado del Malestar, which means something like ‘badfare state’, the opposite of ‘welfare state’; the other one was

called Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth Without Future). Together, these two movements began organising flashmobs and awareness drives in the main town squares of Spain.

They decided to call for a big demonstration on May 15, just one week before the general election. It was much larger than anticipated and people thought spontaneously: ‘There are so many of us here. We



have to make the most of it while we're still awake. We cannot just leave the square now, so let's set up camp and talk.' So the original plan was just to hold a protest on the 15th, but the decision to camp in the square arose spontaneously. This was the beginning of Democracia Real Ya. **How did the Spanish media react? Are you getting any sympathetic press?**

There are many different reactions. There is one newspaper that portrays the movement in a realistic way, without distorting anything. The Spanish state media, equivalent to the BBC, hardly talk about us at all. And the far-right TV channels, such as Intereconomía TV, are just terrible. They simply portray us as hippies that enjoy gathering and camping in the street.

**Reading through Democracy Real Ya leaflets, websites and blogs, I have noticed that you are making a point of being 'non-political'. But how can a protest movement against the political and economic status quo be 'non-political'?**

We are political in the sense that we are making political demands, but we are non-political in the sense that some of us have very well-defined political ideologies, while others don't have them at all. The main thing that has brought us together is the economic situation, especially rising unemployment. We are a generation that is very well educated, but is forced to emigrate because we don't see a future in Spain. Sometimes we do focus on particular political issues and discuss them: for example, 'What kind of state do we want?' or 'Do we want a republic or a monarchy?' and so on.

**One of your websites says that you have some people in your movement who would consider themselves progressive, while others would self-describe as 'conservative'. How does that work? To be conservative means wanting to preserve the status quo that you say you oppose.**

To be honest, I cannot speak in the name of the whole movement. Personally, I have a very well defined political point of view, but I can't speak for everybody else. I can say, however, that we do work with movements who organise separately from ourselves: for example, yesterday we participated in the UK Uncut action.

**Since you mention that, it seems that movements such as yours and UK Uncut are almost exclusively street-based, with a heavy emphasis on direct action and a certain level of distrust towards political organisations. But our opponents own media empires and can write whatever they want about us; they own the banks and industries; they have people in parliament and in the courts; and if it comes to the crunch they have a police force and the military at their disposal. Won't it take a highly sophisticated political organisation, operating at all levels, to really challenge them?**

Actually, right now a people's assembly movement exists which truly is a movement of the people. We don't want to form a political party because of the mixture of political views within it. There are other groups in countries such as France, Greece and Portugal who have the same demands as us and with whom we are coordinating our actions internationally. We have foreign affairs sections in all of our groups. As for media representation, we prefer to pass information directly to each other via web-based social

networks - Facebook, Twitter and so on - because we don't want anybody to manipulate our information. In the media, you will always have a little bit of manipulation.

**Many say that the student protests, UK Uncut and Democracy Real Ya resemble the student movement of 1968. Now 1968 must have been a very exciting time and left a cultural imprint, but it posed no effective challenge to the political and economic power structures. It all just faded out.** Maybe I'm too optimistic, but I think - or I hope - that this is going to take us somewhere. We're not just students; there are all kinds of people in Democracia Real Ya. We will organise under our own political agenda until next year's general elections. We are going to ask solicitors for their advice on using the law to eventually change the constitution. These are only ideas and drafts, but during the summer they will all have to be decided and voted upon. We will then present all our demands to the politicians; we really hope to make changes before the next general election. **In your manifesto you say, "The political class isn't even listening to us." But if they started to listen to your demands and agreed to take a hard line on corruption, tackle unemployment and even think about proportional representation, would that be enough?**

We don't want promises: we want facts. We have heard many, many promises, and we are fed up with them. So until we see the facts we will continue. We want this movement with all its grassroots proposals and demands to be active in creating a new constitution. The existing constitution was approved in 1977 - two years after Franco died - in a very unstable environment. Because there was the fear of a coup by the far right at the time, it was an extremely conservative constitution that didn't change the existing system that much. **But surely changing the constitution requires real political organisation and a political party?**

It doesn't necessarily need to be a political party. It can be a big movement that decides in assemblies, which is a totally different concept. We are not talking about trade unions or political parties here. We are talking about something completely new: people's assemblies. **There have been a lot of big social movements that were insufficient to change things. Take the massive anti-Iraq war movement in 2003: the war went ahead anyway. There were also 'people's assemblies' at the time, not to mention the 'non-political' European and World Social Forums, which didn't go anywhere.**

There are so many indigenous and environmentalist people's assembly movements in Latin America. That's the way they have been organising all the time. If it works in Latin America, why shouldn't it work here?

As for the Iraq war, the vast majority of the Spanish population were against it. Some conservative politicians even left the Partido Popular when it decided that Spain should join the war effort. They said, you are not listening to the people; nobody wants to go to Iraq but you. Back then, the Socialist Party, which was the main opposition party at the time, was at the head of the anti-war demonstrations, but, now that they are in power, they are the ones selling weapons to Africa. They were only against the Iraq war because it was convenient for them at the time. **What about the other left**

**parties in Spain, such as the ex-communist United Left?**

Yes, there is Izquierda Unida and also the new Izquierda Anticapitalista, the 'Anti-Capitalist Left' party.

**How many people are protesting in Spain right now? In Barcelona and Madrid alone there have been 25,000.<sup>9</sup> If all these activists were organised in a single party, they could pose a serious political challenge.**

But that's impossible because politically we're so diverse. Initially at the Madrid assembly many demands were made. What they were trying to do was reach an agreement on everything. So what came out of that assembly were the four demands that you've read. And unfortunately, they're really nothing - they're so vague that it's almost impossible for anybody to disagree with them: separation of powers, fighting corruption, and so on. They don't commit you to anything ...

**So, speaking for yourself, what is your end goal? Do you want to reform the system and commit the economic and political elites to more fairness and transparency? Or do you want to do away with these elites and the system altogether?**

Yes, of course I want a different system. If we only repair things here and there, that's not going to change much. We've seen that this system has failed, so we can't just change a few policies: we need a real revolutionary change. And actually I want to highlight that at a Spanish level we can only change very little. We have to do it at a European level, because a lot of economic policies come from the European Union. And what's even more important: we have to abolish and change institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

**I agree with you. Many left organisations think that withdrawing from the EU is the solution. But nationalism is an illusion.**

Yes, I don't think it's good to isolate yourself. The best thing to do is to join forces internationally and, once we have identified who the enemy is, fight him together.

**Well, reading through your manifesto,<sup>10</sup> it seems you have already identified the enemy. Phrases like "the dictatorship of the major economic powers through the main political parties" and "an obsolete and unnatural economic model" surely refer to the capitalist system?**

I can only answer this in personal capacity, not on behalf of the movement. You know what I'm really for? I'm for downshifting. Everybody should work less hours so there are jobs for everybody and at the same time consume less and less every day. Have you read Serge Latouche? He's the main economist for this theory, and he wants us to return to a much more basic and easy way of life that is more in contact with nature.

**This sounds like he wants us to return to a pre-capitalist or early capitalist stage rather than move beyond capitalism.**

Oh no, it's a system of sharing everything together. Capitalism promotes working as much as you can so you can own as much as you can, so these demands run contrary to capitalism.

**You make a point of being a non-violent movement. Is that a moral principle or a tactical choice?**

It's a choice, because violence always generates more violence. Personally, I completely reject violence as a matter of principle because I think

that we should not make the same mistakes that the governments that use violence against us are making. We have endless debates about violence in the movement, though, and there are many different views on that. Therefore, I would rather not speak on everybody else's behalf.

**It's important to us communists that democracy has class content. Is class something that you talk about in the movement - do you want all classes to cooperate, or do you have a class agenda?**

We want to work as people with no differences between us. The people - that's everybody.

**Who or what is your biggest inspiration - any historical figures or events?**

When I was volunteering for a human rights organisation in Mexico, I met an environmentalist activist who I thought was amazing. She is not famous or anything, but she and some other activists I worked with have been such an inspiration to me. I don't admire any historic figure in particular - there are just so many people that have made a great contribution to the world ... maybe the Spanish republicans who had to flee the country in Franco's time and who ended up in Nazi concentration camps in France.

**Do you see any similarities between Democracia Real Ya and the Spanish anarchists of the 1930s?**

Actually, I see a lot of similarities between now and the beginning of the Second Spanish Republic. Before the elections, people started making demands and there was a lot of discontent among the population - so it was quite a similar moment.

**One of your demands is for "real separation of powers". Could you clarify what you mean by that?**

You have got the executive, the legislative and the judiciary power. But in Spain the executive is really mixed with the judiciary because it's the government that appoints and employs some of the judges. The executive overlaps with the other two powers and we want them to be totally independent. We don't want the executive to control all the powers.

**Do you see any dangers in the concept of the separation of powers? Imagine, for example, a political party that enjoys majority support and wants to pass a law for shorter working hours. If I was the CEO of Vodafone, I might make a small donation to my friends in the judiciary, who would then veto the law as unconstitutional interference with free enterprise.**

But it is idealistic to think this will happen. In truth, if all the powers are represented by the same political party or one assembly, that's too dangerous. Don't you see more danger in that, when the ruling party can do whatever it wants because there's a conjuncture of all powers in one body?

**It couldn't necessarily do what it wanted if the political representatives were recallable by the people at any time. But your manifesto calls for an "ethical revolution" - what would that entail?**

An ethical revolution is a revolution of the mind. We have to implement democratic principles in people's minds because most of them have never been at an assembly in their lives. They have never thought about being the sovereigns of their future. It is very important that we educate ourselves about different political systems and learn about politics.

**I've noticed that you use 'jazz hands of agreement' at**

**assemblies a lot. Does that mean you favour consensus decision-making?<sup>11</sup>**

My group only just started calling assemblies two weeks ago and for the moment we are implementing the decisions of the majority. We only use the 'jazz hands' motion to imply agreement, and we will actually be having workshops on consensus and majority votes, where we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both. We haven't yet decided which decision-making process we will use in the future.

**Who wrote your manifesto?**

The people at the assembly in Madrid wrote it.

**Could you tell us something about the process by which a few thousand people create a document?**

So far, it has always depended on the kind of decision that needed to be made. They have worked in little groups, each of which has a spokesperson. Then the speakers for the different groups meet up and put together all the decisions that the different groups had arrived at. Or, alternatively, everybody who was there makes decisions together. This will actually be the next step of our movement - to decide for which occasions we will work in little groups and for which we will take decisions as a whole.

**Where is Democracia Real Ya heading?**

So far, we have an agenda until the next general election. Generally speaking, our movement is only really starting now, but it has to continue until we achieve real change. I think it's a slow process where things have to be done properly in order to be consistent. If you try to move too fast the movement might not last that long. That's why we want to go little by little, step by step ... but consistently.

We haven't yet discussed what political direction we want to take, and I don't think this is something that will be discussed any time soon. In the long term ... maybe ●

## Notes

1. Though certainly more creative in their application of the direct action credo than the po-faced poseurs of the anarchist black bloc, the commendable militancy of groups such as UK Uncut is not necessarily matched in radicalism by the political content of their actions. The austerity measures are "bad for economic growth", we are told on the UK Uncut website. UK Uncut essentially limits its demands to taxing the living daylight out of banks and cracking down on corporate tax-dodging.
2. The logical political conclusion to this approach is to call for a strongman centre-left government enforcing law and order against the 'worst' capitalists: ie, the kind of government that is the stuff of old Labour dreams. But can we realistically hope for any government, let alone the Miliband-led Labour government that would inevitably follow on the heels of a successful general strike, to implement such measures as long as capitalism exists? Was this, in fact, even the case in the 'golden age' of Labour, upward mobility and the welfare state? Ralph Miliband and John Saville's 1964 essay, *Labour policy and the Labour left*, makes for an interesting read *vis à vis* such myths ([www.marxists.org/archive/saville/1964/01/labour.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/saville/1964/01/labour.htm)).
3. 'Spanish protests show the way ... revolt against austerity' *Socialist Worker* May 28.
3. 'Spanish protests: Viva, err... what exactly?' ([www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/10540](http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/10540)).
4. See the lessons drawn from the Paris Commune by Nick Rogers in his article, 'Inspirational feats and heroic failure' *Weekly Worker* May 26.
5. [www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-04-29/spanish-unemployment-rate-rises-to-more-than-21-as-inflation-accelerates.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-04-29/spanish-unemployment-rate-rises-to-more-than-21-as-inflation-accelerates.html).
6. See M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy* p16.
7. *Ibid* pp30-33.
8. May 23 entry at <http://educationactivistnetwork.wordpress.com>.
9. In total, some 250,000 people came out to protest in 60 Spanish towns and cities on May 15.
10. The movement's manifesto can be found at [www.democraciarealya.es/?page\\_id=814](http://www.democraciarealya.es/?page_id=814).
11. The classic text on this subject is Jo Freeman's *The tyranny of structurelessness* ([www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm](http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm)), though it did not take long before voices from the current generation of protestors too began to express doubts about the questionably non-hierarchical consensus model: <http://stavvers.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/the-trouble-with-the-consensus-model>.

## THEORY

# The study of history and the left's decline

Dealing with the present demands not useful myths, writes **Mike Macnair**, but a real understanding of the past

**C**hris Cutrone's two letters responding to my report of the Platypus convention, and my critique of the project, are useful and clarificatory.<sup>1</sup> His presidential address to the Platypus convention posted on his blog is also helpful.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, both the second letter and the address take clearer distance from the so-called 'anti-anti-imperialist' left than was apparent from earlier material in the *Platypus Review*. This does not eliminate the question of imperialism as a *theoretical* problem, or, equally, as a *historical* problem in relation to the history of the workers' movement, Marxist theory and the left. But these texts do answer my political concern about this issue in the second of my two articles<sup>3</sup> on the convention. I suggested that Platypus was focussing mainly on the stupidities of 'anti-imperialism'. That implied placing itself in the morally untenable position of opposing loudly the 'left' supporters of the third-world tyrant/reactionary monkeys, while speaking only softly about the 'left' supporters of the 'western' organ-grinders. Comrade Cutrone's letter and address partially reassure me on this front.

The theoretical aspect of my criticism of Platypus about the issue of imperialism as an explanation of reformism and nationalism, as opposed to Lukácsian and 'New Left' explanations, remains. It is unavoidably linked to the history of the workers' movement and Marxist theories, as well as to the general history of capitalism and where we stand today - the question of 'capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution', as comrade Cutrone puts it in his second letter.

If the issues are linked, to work through them demands a degree of separation. I will address in turn the questions *why* understanding the history is important; the problem of *how* to attempt to understand it; the problem of Peter Nettl's diagnosis of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in which both Bernstein and Luxemburg are preferable to Bebel and Kautsky, and comrade Cutrone's diagnosis of this as displaying an issue about the 'necessary authoritarianism' of the SPD; and the question of imperialism, as an issue in the pre-World War I socialist movement, and as an issue of the larger history, 'ripeness for revolution', and the diagnosis of our own future.

## Memory and history

I begin with something which I have referred to before.<sup>4</sup> Memory is indispensable to conscious engagement with the recalcitrant material world. 'The present' is a concept without a direct referent: rather, it refers to a *presumption*, which we have to make every moment we are awake, that the immediate future will be more or less like the immediate past. We therefore constantly predict the future, and act, on the basis of probabilistic inductive inferences from the past. We cannot avoid doing so. Theories, whether in experimental sciences or in observational ones

(astronomy, evolutionary biology and history count among observational sciences), are *systematised from* inductive inferences from the past to the future, not counterposed to them.

From this point of view the study of history is indispensable to politics. In reality, even those bourgeois politicians who deny its significance in public consider in private the historical development of elections, party affiliations and 'public opinion'. Hence, serious engagement with history would be essential, however successful the left was. To refuse it would either be to refuse all understanding, or to adopt *de facto* some unexamined history.

There is a subtle difference between this conception and Platypus's engagement with history and specifically with the history of the movement. Platypus's engagement with history is intimately connected with its particular conception of the *decline of the left*.

Thus Ben Blumberg, introducing a 2009 panel on that issue: "[Platypus] was brought together by a shared realisation that the social and cultural theory of Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research *contained the legacy* of the revolutionary Marxism of the antecedent period. This realisation was coupled with another: to claim that Adorno's theoretical ideas were the legacy of the practical politics of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky put Platypus at odds in numerous respects with the existing left ... *By falsely resolving the problem of theory and practice the left has relinquished the defining feature of its politics and ceased to be the left at all*. This has profound effects on the development of the history of capitalism, in which the left traditionally has acted as a transformative catalyst. Because its politics no longer mediate theory and practice, the left has begun to decompose. Following Adorno, Platypus calls this process historical regression" (emphases added).<sup>5</sup>

Or the panel description at the April convention on 'The Marxism of the Second International radicals': "How were the Second International radicals, importantly, critics, and not merely advocates, of their own political movement? What is the legacy of these figures today, after the 20th century - as Walter Benjamin said in his 1940 'Theses on the philosophy of history', 'against the grain' of their time, reaching beyond it? How did Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lukács contribute to the potential advancement and transformation of Marxism, in and through the crisis of Marxism in the early 20th century? How can we return to these figures productively, today, to learn the lessons of their history?"<sup>6</sup>

These are not histories of the ordinary self-location of politics in the world as it moves. They are attempts at the *redemption* of a 'usable past' on the *assumption* of a total break in political and theoretical continuity. Platypus is not, of course, unique in this. Many tendencies and many authors try to look back to a 'true Marxism', whether this is to be found in Marx without Engels, Marx and Engels without the Second International,

the Second International without the Third, the first four congresses of the Third without its later history (mainly Trotskyists), pre-war Trotskyism (Al Richardson and others) or pre-'Pabloite' Trotskyism.

My *Revolutionary strategy* (2008) argues for an attempt to understand where we are, at the level of the practical political problem of left unity, through understanding the history. But it also precisely argues *against* the idea that the film of history can be rolled back (p66) or that there is an uncorrupted historical theoretical moment to be found. There are in my view bad mistakes in Marx and Engels, which were amplified in the Second International, and fundamental errors in the views of the first four congresses of the Comintern, and so on; and these have to be addressed *with the benefit of hindsight* in order to construct a politics for the future.

Equally, the *recent* experiences of the organised left form, for me, part of the basis on which we are to look for a way forward: like the partial strengths of the post-1945 communist parties as working class organisations in spite of their nationalist, bureaucratic and class-collaborationist politics, or the failures of far-left groups in Portugal in 1974-76, or the partial successes of 'unitary' projects like *Rifondazione Comunista* ending in ultimate failure. None are to be ruled out of consideration by political 'original sins' or 'historical regression'.

## Historical method

These different *purposes* of historical inquiry for politics have implications for differences in the *method* of historical inquiry. Platypus's distinction from other forms of search for a redemptive retrieval of the lost past is that (following Benjamin and Adorno) what is sought as a 'usable past' is to be a historical *myth*. To use phrases from Benjamin, "setting alight the sparks of hope in the past", "the name of Blanqui, whose distant thunder had made the preceding century tremble", a view of the past which calls forth working class "hate" and "spirit of sacrifice" and makes possible a "leap into the open sky of history".<sup>7</sup>

There is a strange paradox in using such an approach as a critique of a left whose decline is - as is obvious to most people, Platypus included - predicated ultimately on the shadow of Stalinism and its failure. This is that the historical lineage of the role of myth and the "leap into the open sky of history" in fact runs from the part of the Second International left influenced by Sorel and similar thinkers, through the Bogdanov-Lunacharsky *Vperyod* faction in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, through the 'military opposition' in the Russian Civil War, through elements of the left wings of both majority and minority in the later 1920s Russian Communist Party, to - the adventurism of the first five-year plan and the 'third period', high-period Stalinism, and the Maoism of the 'great leap forward'.<sup>8</sup>

For the argument I have put forward above, in contrast, the purpose of historical inquiry is to grasp the processes of historical

change in which we are - unavoidably - embedded in order to make choices between real available options. These political choices are in my view no different in principle from individual choices in everyday life. Memory mistakes and belief in false theories (which are built on inadequately tested claims about the past) can have real and catastrophic implications. My grandmother was lucky not to be run down when, in her 90s, she set out to cycle to town, forgetting that traffic speeds and density on the road passing her house had changed since the 1930s; my mother was less lucky when her belief in treating her 'neuralgia' with homeopathy and other 'alternative remedies' led to late diagnosis of lymphoma.

The phenomenon in which 'official communist' parties in the periphery countries since World War II have believed in strategic alliances with the 'national bourgeoisie', ending with the CP massacred or discredited and marginalised, is, I think, no more than errors of the same type scaled up to that of collective decision-making. In this view, Benjamin's, or Adorno's, philosophies of history and the search for usable myths make such errors *more*, not less, likely.

How do we attempt to get a more accurate grasp of the history in which we are embedded, in order to make better choices?

The elementary principles of historical source criticism (assessing biases of the witness, closeness to the event described, consistency of evidence, corroboration, antecedent probability of the narrative, and so on) are originally derived from legal approaches to evidence of recent events used in court, and the same approaches also form a substratum of the assessment of the reliability of observational and experimental evidence in the physical sciences. In the legal context it is clear that certainty is unavailable and the court *must* act on *probabilistic* information. Scientific and technical breakthrough was made possible when this was accepted in the physical sciences, in place of the 'certain' textual authority of scripture and ancient authors.<sup>9</sup>

In history, which continued to be seen as an art, the breakthrough to source criticism was later and more gradual. Once it had happened, historical inquiry acquired a partially cumulative character, as enquiry in the physical sciences has acquired a *definitely* cumulative character.

Marx is (just) this side of the source-critical watershed in history: hence the concrete documentation of the second part of *Capital* Vol 1, hence the critical notes published as *Theories of surplus value*, hence his elaborate critical notebooks on pre-capitalist property forms, as yet imperfectly published.<sup>10</sup>

The Frankfurt school, in contrast, wanted to *step back* from this approach to one which philosophised from the standpoint of 'critique of what is', but which picked and chose odd snippets of history which would serve its, ultimately moral, purposes. This is evident as much in Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of enlightenment* as in Benjamin on the philosophy of history.

It is for these reasons that in my report I characterised many of the papers at the Platypus convention as "neither quite rigorous philosophy nor quite rigorous history". Watson Ladd in his letter quotes Adorno's comment in *Minima moralia* that "The injunction to practise intellectual honesty usually amounts to sabotage of thought." Comrade Ladd admits that "neither nonsense nor triviality will suffice as modes of thought today".<sup>11</sup> In my opinion, however, the method in Benjamin, in *Dialectic of enlightenment* and in *Minima moralia*, produces precisely occasional interesting *aperçus* buried in a mass of nonsense and triviality. The idea that this method is counterposed to "obtuse French theory" (ie, postmodernism, Foucaultianism, etc) is illusory: it is, rather, a forbear of the literary theory on offer in today's academy.

The question of source-critical method then affects the specific issues of history and theory to which I referred in the beginning: Nettl on the SPD, 'authoritarianism', imperialism, and 'ripeness for revolution.'

## Nettl

In the case of Nettl, the issue is that the historian has to be understood as a witness to the research he reports; and it is necessary both to check the report against other witnesses (other historians of the SPD) and, where practically possible, against the primary sources (easier now that so much is online). It is also necessary to evaluate the witness's biases.

Peter Nettl<sup>12</sup> was a child of Viennese émigrés from fascism, and came to the UK in 1936 at the age of 10. Unlike many émigrés, his father had a subsisting interest in a textile firm in Bradford, and Nettl was therefore privately educated. Called up in 1944, he was in 1945 at the age of 21 commissioned as a major in British intelligence, presumably in order to give him sufficient rank to be taken seriously in the interrogation of German prisoners in Berlin, to which he was immediately assigned.

On demobilisation he went to St John's College, Oxford and took the 'accelerated' degree made available to veterans. He obtained a first class and was immediately offered a teaching job at St John's and Brasenose College. However, he took only a one-year tutorship. In this period he published *The eastern zone and Soviet policy in Germany 1945-50* (Oxford 1950). The book is a conventional early cold war piece.

He then went to work in his father's textile firm - initially in Bradford, but thereafter as a global travelling salesman. While doing this job, he published a few pretty orthodox papers on issues in economics,<sup>13</sup> and reviews of German Democratic Republic publications for *International Affairs*. The latter suggests that he may have retained links to the 'intelligence community' in this period.<sup>14</sup>

In 1961 he took a visiting fellow position at Nuffield College, Oxford, where he stayed until appointed in 1963 to a lectureship in politics at Leeds University. 'The SPD as a political model' dates to 1964, two years before the publication of his biography of Rosa Luxemburg (1966). The latter



was followed by *Political mobilisation* (1967), *The Soviet achievement* (1967), which reads Soviet history in terms of Weberian modernisation theory, and *International systems and the modernisation of societies* (1968). In 1968 he was appointed to a professorship in political sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, but died in a plane crash shortly afterwards.

Hanson in his memoir of Nettl describes him as having moved from field to field, and in particular from history (the biography of Luxemburg) to sociology. It is, however, far from clear that the biography of Luxemburg was motivated by a desire to 'do history'. Nor is it a product of sympathy for the political left or for Marxism, of which there is no evidence in Nettl's other work.

Rather, 'The SPD as a political model' shows a primary motivation to understand the SPD-like aspects of nationalist and revolutionary political parties, in broadly Weberian terms, in connection with 'decolonisation' and 'modernisation'. Behind that lies - it can be guessed - practical questions for British policymakers' understanding of and relationships with nationalist 'inheritor parties' after decolonisation. The biography of Luxemburg was a *by-product* of these goals, albeit a very large one.

This is, I think, reflected in the fact that reviews by historians (as opposed to political scientists) of both the Luxemburg biography and *The Soviet achievement* commented that Nettl was quite cavalier in his treatment of those historical facts which appeared to him to be only contingently relevant to the arguments of the books.

A 1980 review essay by Richard Breitman discusses a substantial body of literature on the pre-1914 SPD, which gives sharply different theoretical accounts of the SPD's evolution: witnesses of similar standing to Nettl - ie, non-Marxist historians and sociologists of politics - who do not corroborate his account.<sup>15</sup>

I will not go into depth on direct confrontation between Nettl's account and the primary sources, but there is one small significant point. Nettl treats Robert Michels' *Political parties* (1911) as an unqualified primary source for SPD practice and for what comrade Cutrone calls "authoritarianism". But Nettl takes no account whatever of Michels' political bias: ie, that at the time of writing Michels was a revolutionary syndicalist (after World War I he followed another semi-syndicalist leftist of the pre-war period, Benito Mussolini, into fascism).

## 'Authoritarianism'

Comrade Cutrone writes in his first letter: "I think Macnair avoids ... the issue I was raising about the inherent unavoidable authoritarianism of late 19th century mass (working class) parties that needed to be worked through by later Marxism (unlike circa 1848), and the problems of which Lenin and Luxemburg were aware, unlike the German Social Democratic Party centre (Bebel and Kautsky) and later Stalinism (including Maoism)."

'Authoritarianism' is a slippery word. Early citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are from 1879 - "Men who are authoritarian by nature, and cannot imagine that a country should be orderly save under a military despotism"; and 1882 - "Communists of the 'authoritarian' type."<sup>16</sup> The latter, from Karl Blind, fairly clearly draws on Bakunin's critique of Marx's alleged 'authoritarian' aims.<sup>17</sup>

The first sense of 'authoritarianism' means a politics which denies the legitimacy of political dissent and the possibility of the *accountability* of authorities to those below. It may be military in character, as in the quotation, or clericalist. Modern bourgeois sociologists distinguish

*authoritarianism* in this sense from the (worse) *totalitarianism*, meaning fascism, Stalinism or sub-Stalinoid nationalist regimes. The real distinction is that 'totalitarians' engage in land reform (Mussolini, Mugabe) or job creation schemes at capitalist expense (Hitler), while 'authoritarians', like Franco or Pinochet, 'permit a sphere independent of the state': ie, the capitalist market.

The second sense of 'authoritarianism' means, in Bakuninist hands, a politics which admits any sort of authority or binding collective decisions at all. In liberal-libertarian hands, it means any politics in which decisions for the common good are capable of binding 'free individuals', meaning property owners. Non-property owners are left under such a regime with the (perfectly free!) choice of submission or starvation.

Which version does comrade Cutrone mean in relation to the SPD? Nettl means simply that the SPD was not liberal-libertarian: "The English or American notion of limited government, that it might be better to do without certain activities if they involved authoritative regulation or control, was utterly alien."<sup>18</sup>

If what is meant is that the legitimacy of dissent, and accountability to those below, were rejected, Breitman (cited above) discusses Susanne Miller's *Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf* (1974) as showing that the SPD leadership only became authoritarian in this sense *in and after* 1914: ie, because of the choice to support the Reich in the war. In doing so, it raised up the USPD as an opposition.

Engels, in *On authority* (1872), offered a critique of the Bakuninist version. Marx, in his unpublished *Conspectus of Bakunin's statism and anarchy* (1874), makes similar points.<sup>19</sup> The issue was not therefore one which arose after Marx's time.

I do not mean to deny that the SPD was substantially bureaucratised before 1914 - though not, as yet, an authoritarianism (sense 1) or 'totalitarianism' of the bureaucracy like the Luxemburg-Jogiches-Dzherzhinsky Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, Stalinism or the modern '1921 Leninists' (Stalin fans, Maoists, 'orthodox' Trotskyists). Nor do I mean to deny that bureaucratic rule is a real problem facing the workers' movement and the left.

The problem is, rather, what the *alternative* to the dictatorship of the bureaucracy is. If it is to be liberalism-libertarianism, we should give up on any alternative to the present-day social order,

because 'It might be better to do without certain activities if they involved authoritative regulation or control' is no more than an ideology of capitalist society.

If it is to be diluted Bakuninism, as in Sorel, Michels and in an even more diluted form the

Luxemburg of *The mass strike* or the Trotsky of *Our political tasks* and *Results and prospects*, we should also give up. In the first place, mass-strikism without permanent party organisation has been repeatedly tried and as repeatedly failed. Secondly, as Bakunin was the first to admit, as Luxemburg and her comrades showed in the SDKPL and mass-strikist groups have shown repeatedly since, the attempt to move the masses into action, as opposed to winning them to a political programme, inexorably demands the 'invisible dictatorship', the small and conspiratorial group of *illuminati* which directs the 'spontaneous will to revolt' of the masses.

The option which has not really been tried is *political 'civic republicanism'*. This means the rejection, not of all subordination to the collective, but of *permanent* subordination to decision-makers.<sup>20</sup> It means recognition that we have to take binding collective decisions, and that this will involve delegating individuals as leaders/managers, and so on. But, on the other hand, it means insistence that these people are *subordinated* to the membership (and ultimately the masses) through freedom of information, speech and horizontal communication, and association *against* the existing leadership. In my opinion - not a CPGB view - it also involves *term limits* for leaders and managers, etc, at all levels.

## Imperialism

In his second letter comrade Cutrone writes: "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."

This claim is a commonplace from *somewhere* in the historiography (I have also heard it from Marc Mulholland). The problem is that it cannot really survive confrontation with the primary sources.

In early usage, it is true that 'imperialism' did not mean 'colonialism', but rather the adoption of imperial styles and titles (Louis Napoleon in 1852, Wilhelm I in 1871, queen Victoria in 1877) and of 'Napoleonic' militarism and centralised bureaucracy. 'Colonialism' rather attracted the label, 'colonial policy', in early SPD and Second International debates.

'Imperialism' came to be attached to 'colonial policy' through Joseph Chamberlain's advocacy of colonialism as a solution to 'the social problem' under the name of imperialism. Chamberlain's imperialism was then critiqued in the book of that name by Hobson in 1902, which was rapidly known to the left. Hence, though the SPD debate of 1907-08 was still conducted under the name of 'colonial policy', 'colonial policy' appears as an aspect of 'imperialism' in Hilferding's *Finance capital* (1911). And, as I cited in my second article, Hobson's and Hilferding's usage is the one found in Lenin and Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky

and Gorter's books on the causes of World War I.

The idea that the Second International was unconcerned with "core-periphery relations" cannot survive any look at the 'colonial policy' debates. The whole 'revisionist debate' in a sense began with the Bernstein-Bax exchange of 1896-97 about Marxists' attitude to the colonial expansion of capitalism. Kautsky responded on this specific issue in a three-part series in 1898. The issue flared up again after the SPD's defeat in the 1907 'Hottentot election' - which was, as its name indicates, fought on the issue of the Reich's dirty colonial war in what is now Namibia.

If "the Second International radicals" is to include the Lenin of the war and the early Comintern, the claim is manifest nonsense. Since I have cited some of the relevant texts in a reply to Arthur Bough (Letters, May 12), I will not repeat them here.

Before the passage I have just quoted, comrade Cutrone argues in his second letter 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 a merely moral injunction."

I would be very interested to see real evidence for this proposition as a claim about what Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky wrote - as opposed to what they *might* have written. My own reading of the texts is that Lenin and Trotsky at least believed that imperialism *made possible* concessions to (sections of) the working class, rather than that it was *required* by the offensive of the working class.

I will admit that there is evidence from the political discourse of bourgeois imperialists, like Joseph Chamberlain, that imperialism was needed as a response to the rise of the workers' movement. The problem is this. The export of capital to colonial possessions and periphery states goes back to Venice and Genoa in the late Middle Ages. The ascendancy of financial capital in Britain long predates the 1870s and is, in fact, a necessity of the *rule* of the capitalist class as such. The peculiar form of 'fusion' of financial and industrial capital which Hilferding identified as a novelty turns out to have remained specific to 'civil law' countries and has never reached the 'Anglosphere'.<sup>21</sup> Extensive welfarism based on the gains of the East India Company goes back to the Dutch Republic.<sup>22</sup> So what is *new* after the 1870s?

## Over-ripe?

Comrade Cutrone says 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". Though "capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution" is orthodox Trotskyism from the *Transitional programme*, it has two problems in this context. The first is that if it is to describe 'symptoms', those of imperialism, which go all the way back to the creation of the

first proto-bourgeois and bourgeois states, the idea of 'ripeness' loses all meaning.

The second is, of course, that Marx's conception of 'ripeness' is - in outline - that "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed" (preface to *A contribution to the critique of political economy*). And, as I said in my second article, both Moshé Machover and István Mészáros have given us strong reasons to suppose that from this point of view global capitalism was *not* "over-ripe for revolution" at the beginning of the 20th century. To this point comrade Cutrone has not responded.

If so, however, the argument that we are to explain the recent difficulties of *the left and the workers' movement* by capital's "historical over-ripeness for revolution" falls to the ground - even if this "over-ripeness" were to consist in imperialism as a response to the rise of the workers' movement. Rather, we should understand ourselves as in a historical situation which is in a sense akin to that of *bourgeois* revolutionaries between the failure of the project of the city-state in the *signorie* of the late Middle Ages and the breakthrough of the Dutch and English revolutions. Stalinism is used endlessly as a stick to beat us, just as the propagandists of the early modern monarchies (like Shakespeare) told endless stories of the disorder and corruption of Italian politics.

What we need in this situation is not a useful *myth* of the past to inspire the spirit of revolt: it is a real *understanding* of the past in order to make real choices about options in the future ●

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## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* May 19, May 26.
2. <http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org>.
3. 'No need for party?', May 12; 'Theoretical dead end', May 19.
4. 'Teleology, predictability and modes of production' *Weekly Worker* January 27.
5. <http://platypus1917.org/2009/11/18/the-decline-of-the-left-in-the-20th-century-introduction>.
6. <http://convention2011.platypus1917.org/saturday-schedule>.
7. [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm).
8. D Priestland *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation* Oxford 2007.
9. B Shapiro *A culture of fact* New York 2000.
10. K Anderson *Marx at the margins* Chicago 2010, appendix.
11. Letters, May 19.
12. What follows is partly from the memoir by AH Hanson in TJ Nossiter, AH Hanson, S Rokkan (ed) *Imagination and precision in the social sciences: essays in memory of Peter Nettl* (London 1972) pp1-12 and partly inferences from this narrative and from Nettl's published work.
13. For example, 'A note on entrepreneurial behaviour' (1957), 24 *Review of Economic Studies* 87-94 finishes with the "distorting" effect of high taxation on entrepreneurial motivations.
14. A genealogy website reports a completely unsubstantiated and implausible rumour that at the time of his death he was working for Mossad (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~prohel/names/misc/bauer1.html>). The rumour could reflect a garbled version of links to the British 'intelligence community'. For an ex-officer of British military intelligence working as an international salesman, links to British intelligence are positively likely.
15. 'Negative integration and parliamentary politics: literature on German social democracy, 1890-1933', 13 *Central European History* pp175-97.
16. [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com), quoting *Daily News* June 28 1879; *Contemporary Review* September 1882, p459 (Karl Blind, 'The radical and revolutionary parties of Europe', part 1). A search on 'Karl Blind' on MIA will display Blind's antagonistic relations to Marx at the time of writing.
17. See D Adam, 'Marx, Bakunin, and the question of authoritarianism': <http://libcom.org/library/marx-bakunin-question-authoritarianism>.
18. *Past and Present* No30, p58.
19. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/10/authority.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/10/authority.htm); [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm).
20. Theoretical analysis in P Pettit *Republicanism* (Oxford 1997); on the relationship of this theory to Marxism, my 'Republicanism and Marxism' *Weekly Worker* May 29 2003.
21. Hillel Ticktin has argued that it is, in fact, a feature of early capitalism: 'Towards a theory of finance capital, part 2' (1986) *Critique* No17, 1-15, especially 9-15.
22. J de Vries, A van der Woude *The first modern economy* Cambridge 1997.



Umberto Boccioni: continuity in space



## OUR HISTORY

# Impressions of the convention

**T**he formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920 was the highest political achievement of the working class movement in this country. Its unity embodied far more than the merger of the British Socialist Party, the Communist Unity Group and other, smaller left organisations. The CPGB was to be a party of working class action, a party of revolution and an attempt by the most advanced militants to concretely apply the lessons of Bolshevism. The August 5 1920 edition of *The Communist* - the first edition an "organ of the Third (Communist) International" published by the CPGB, "incorporating" the BSP's *The Call* - carried a series of short articles by leading comrades which gave their impressions of the Unity Convention (later known as the 1st Congress of the CPGB).

**Arthur McManus<sup>1</sup>:** The convention more than surpassed the best of my expectations. The feeling created was that, after all, everything involved in its preparation had been well worthwhile. The atmosphere was intense, with the earnestness and determination of the delegates. To preside over such a convention was a pleasure indeed, because, however delicate the moments may have been, and these I can assure were many, the sincerity of all was demonstrated by the willing and ready assistance rendered to the chair. The value of the work done is inestimable at the moment, but of one thing I feel sure: it will bring more hope and gladness to the soul of our struggling comrades in Russia and elsewhere than anything else which has been done in this country.

**Rob Stewart<sup>2</sup>:** The essence and value of the conference was its evident eagerness and sincerity. Its old men were young, its young men did not lack wisdom and that comprehensive understanding which seeks and finds and acts upon its findings.

To chair a conference where all can talk and nearly all wish to, where tension is strong, and issues are straight is a test to try even a nimble-witted lad like McManus, but he survived the ordeal, and will chair bigger, where issues will be still further narrowed to immediate questions of life and death import. The leftest of the left and the rightest of the right showed an evident anxiety to start fair, and to keep the Communist Party of Great Britain free from puerilities and that ineptitude for action which has hitherto been not an uncommon feature in the debating stage of our growth.

In resolute action and emulation of the high-spirited and far-seeing but practical social revolutionists of Russia, minor differences will be relegated to their proper place, and the Communist Party of Great Britain, belated in arrival though it be, will play its part in the overthrow of capitalism and the rising of the first real common civilisation built by workers for workers.

**AA Watts<sup>3</sup>:** It will be of no use for the capitalist press to call this convention a collection of hot-headed, irresponsible youths; there were a very considerable number of middle-aged men and women delegates and, when it is remembered that these men and women have arrived at the need for a Communist Party, that they represent a definite membership, and also a large, indefinite body of opinion outside their actual membership, the outlook for a powerful revolutionary party in this country is exceedingly hopeful. Its power will depend upon the num-



Joining the Third International

bers, its energy, its determination. It is possible for every communist organisation to be affiliated; it should be made possible for every individual communist to become a member; it is up to every organisation and every communist to rally to the party and to make it the power it should be.

**Lt Colonel CJ Malone<sup>4</sup>:** The number of delegates who were able to be present was good, remembering that owing to the difficulties of travel, expenses, etc the numbers present were only a percentage of the communist groups in Great Britain, apart altogether from the bodies of communist opinion not yet organised.

Some delegates appeared even now a little muddled as to parliamentary action. Of course, it is purely for propaganda, and I still hold not the most effective means of employing available energy. As to affiliation with the Thomas-Henderson crowd,<sup>5</sup> a little more effort and the motion would have been defeated.

But the formation of the party stands out as a definite milestone of the weekend. The resolutions are subsidiary.

Work, work everywhere, and organisation are now required; not discussions or resolutions. Let the delegates go back and those who were not present devote all efforts they can spare in the workshop, factory, town, and hamlet to make the party not merely a strong force, but in the not far distant future, the governing force in this country.

**JT Walton Newbold<sup>6</sup>:** The heartiest possible welcome to the Communist Party of Great Britain! To my mind it behoves every out-and-out communist in this country to lend every energy towards building up "this party in one rock-bound programme of the Communist International".<sup>7</sup> We who embrace without hesitation or reserve the soviet system, the dictatorship of the proletariat, *with all that it entails*, who reject parliamentary 'democracy' and all the apparatus and ideology of the capitalist state must, responding with enthusiasm and determination to the ringing call "to the communists of

the Independent Labour Party" ... do all in our power to swing our party into, and merge it into, the Communist Party. My loyalty, at any rate, is now, as it has been for two and a half years, first and foremost to the position of the Third International.

I call on my comrades to fight for the affiliation of our party with the Communist International; not by obtaining the unwilling consent of your leaders to join it, but by means of determined propaganda within our own party to rid ourselves or the opportunist leaders of the right.

Who is not with us is against us, and we are with the Communist International every time!

**The Communist also carried an important lead article by comrade Arthur MacManus dealing with the immediate situation facing communists.**

## The task awaiting the Communist Party

The education of the masses to communism, the shattering of their faith in the institutions of capitalism, the encouragement of a belief in their own powers of social construction, of self-reliance, the general work of agitation and organisation, and the stimulation of an aggressive revolutionary fervour amongst the working class. These are but a few of the matters to which we must bend our efforts at once.

The general situation with regard to capitalism has lost none of its vicious, soul-destroying, and slavish qualities, while we have been engaged in constituting our organisation; if anything, it has become much more intense. The cost of living still goes soaring up, and the endeavours of the engineers, miners, textile workers, etc to secure even a compensating increase in wages are ruthlessly turned down with contempt. More production is called for, further working class exploitation is insisted upon, if the

relative position between wages and prices would be maintained ...

Such is still the capitalism ... which continually promises to amend itself, when approached by our reluctant trade union and Labour Party delegations. Capitalism, and particularly that section which emerged victorious out of the recent commercial struggle, is saturated with the power of achievement ...

The birth of the Communist Party is not a moment too soon. The shams, hypocrisies and lying subtleties must be torn aside, and the beast revealed in all its perfidy and soullessness.

The challenge of our Churchills must be taken up, and the spirit of the working class struggle for emancipation nursed, tended and directed to smash capitalism in its entirety. Nationally, locally and in our individual capacity we must set about this task - expedite the organisation of your branch and facilitate the work of stabilising the machinery of the Communist Party; transfer the zeal and enthusiasm of the convention into the local work, and set about the work of local education, agitation and organisation; take fullest advantage of every opportunity to acquaint the workers of communism; explain it to them inside of the workshops and outside; assist and encourage the formation of shop stewards' committees inside every workshop, plant or factory; develop the interest of the worker in that committee; explain the possibilities which are latent in such organisation, and by insistent discussion endeavour to wean away his faith from the false moral values of capitalism.

Here is work awaiting us in every town and village; vital work, work of essential importance. The ultimate success of the Communist Party will rest more upon the amount of energy and attention given to this work than by theoretical comparison with the other organisations. The Communist Party was formed because we felt that such an organisation was indispensable if this task had to be accomplished - that is our justification.

A word here on the convention will not be out of place ... The voting on the Labour Party was such as indicated a strong, evenly divided opinion on the question of affiliation and, while, according to the result, the minority are honourably expected to acquiesce in the decision, there is also an obligation placed upon the majority to fully appreciate the strength and character of the minority.

The matter has now, for the time being, got beyond the stage of argument, and time and actual experience alone will indicate the validity of other points of view. Let us, then, cease devoting our full energy to discussing the various points involved, to the neglect of our other work, and let both sides realise that the party itself is our immediate responsibility. This much, I think I can safely say, was the definite impression gathered from the discussion.

The only points of difference were tactical points, and not a single voice was raised against the party's principles. Let us carry these to the masses, then, and endeavour to secure their acceptance. Every communist employed in a factory or workshop should secure election as shop steward or delegate, and there try by argument and example to demonstrate the full value of a communist outlook by the advice and guidance given to the workers.

Don't stand aloof because you may from time to time be asked to negotiate for something which to you may appear as trifling and non-essential; state your opinion on the matter first, and, in the event of its not being accepted, pursue it to its ultimate, assured that sooner or later the workers will come to learn the full value of your advice and guidance. Remember always that it is the working class *alone* who can effect the emancipation of the workers, and that you must be with them when they may be wrong today if you hope to be with them to guide them rightly tomorrow.

Thus, and thus alone, can a movement be working class, and absence from their ranks in the everyday struggle can in no way be compensated for by the seriousness of theories superbly aloof.

The Communist Party is *not* its executive, but every single member of that party, and the extent to which it will succeed will just be the extent to which we each individually respond to our obligations and responsibilities. The revolutionary movement has received a considerable impetus by this weekend's deliberations, and the decks are cleared for action. The Third International is our one international hope, and in this country it must become the rallying standard for the revolutionary movement ●

## Notes

1. Arthur McManus (1889-1927) was chair of the newly formed CPGB and workers' leader on the Clyde.
2. Robert Stewart (1877-1971) was the former leader of the Socialist Prohibition Fellowship and a popular figure in Scotland. He spent years in jail because of his resistance to World War I.
3. Alf Watts (1862-1928) was a former treasurer of the British Socialist Party.
4. Lieutenant-colonel Cecil John LeStrange Malone (1890-1965) was originally elected in 1918 as a Coalition Liberal MP. However, in 1919 he visited Soviet Russia and on his return joined the BSP and then the CPGB. Within a few years he had left the party and was elected Labour MP for Northampton from 1928 to 1931.
5. He was referring to the successful resolution to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. Arthur Henderson and JH Thomas were rightwing Labour leaders.
6. Sitting Labour MP John Turner Walton Newbold (1888-1943) was a member of the left wing of the Independent Labour Party who would soon join the Communist Party.
7. The words of the Communist International in its 1920 call to the ILP left to join the CPGB.



## TRADITION

# Class war never went away

David Douglass reports on the destruction and restoration of the highly symbolic Wardley miners' banner

I am immensely proud to invite *Weekly Worker* readers to the relaunch of this most controversial and radical banner. It has been my obsession since I first discovered it while a National Union of Mineworkers student at Ruskin College in 1971. This was the lodge banner which would have been familiar to my father and grandfather, though it had long gone by the time I started work and joined the Follonsby lodge in 1964.

While interviewing the 'aud lads' of Wardley colliery for my work on the Durham miners, I came across a very battered black-and-white photo of the banner on the wall of the old miners' hut. Rediscovering the history of this lodge, its leadership and the story of the banner became something of a magical mystery tour, which, off and on, has lasted 40 years.

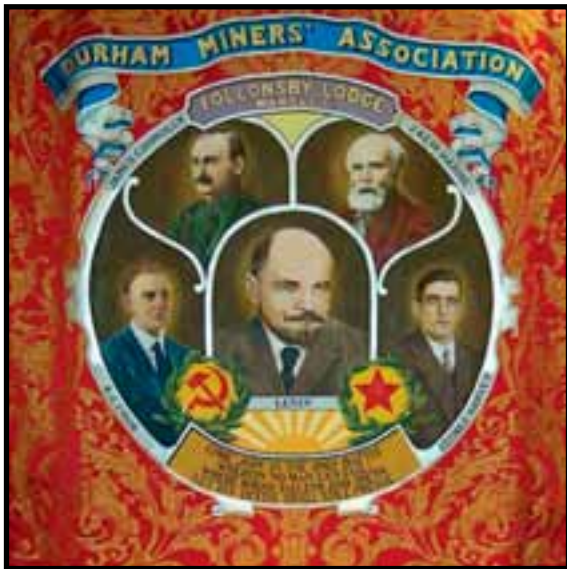
There is at least one other 'red' Durham miners banner: the famous ('Little Moscow') Chopwell banner of 1924, which carries an image of both Marx and Lenin and was unveiled by the legendary Jim Larkin. At least two other banners carried the portraits of Marx, but this Follonsby banner is probably the most revolutionary since the days of the Chartists, in my view. Here is the only British union banner to carry the portrait of James Connolly, a man who launched an armed socialist insurrection in the middle of an imperialist world war and, lest there be any mistake as to why he is there, he wears the uniform of the Irish Citizens Army, Europe's first 'red army'. The slogan urges us to take up the revolutionary struggle - to death if needs be.

The banner has a long, fascinating and contentious history. It was first commissioned in 1928 and unveiled by the bogey man of the British state, Arthur Cook, president of the Miners Federation during the most bitter struggle of the 1926 General Strike and great miners' lock-out. Cook himself appeared on the first version of the banner, but it was a short-lived incarnation, for it was lost in a mysterious fire 10 years later. A fire which destroyed the Miners Welfare Hall, the miners comprehensive library, taking Geordie Harvey's priceless collection of first-edition books - and very nearly his life and that of his wife - in the process.

The banner was immediately re-commissioned, this time to even more exacting standards and quality. The central portrait of Lenin was painted in Moscow (by "a famous Russian artist"), sent to Britain, copied and then returned, while that of Connolly was by one of his ICA comrades, Thomas Jain, who escaped the Dublin post office in the final moments before its surrender in 1916.

It should be noted that during this whole period, beginning around 1910, through to the 30s, the workers' movement was engaged in a turmoil of debate - philosophical, ideological, tactical and organisational. Some of this has been covered in the *Weekly Worker's* series on the formative struggles of the CPGB. Goals themselves were fluid; strategies and tactics were fiercely contested and argued for in the mass, organised ranks of labour - and nowhere more so than in the highly politicised coal communities. Who appeared on a lodge banner, their character and ideology were often bitterly contested - the debates went beyond the mass meetings of the lodge hall, beyond the specially convened community debates in chapel and bar, and resounded through every public assembly available. The banner completion was itself part of a whole process of debate related to direct experience, leadership and expectations.

The recreated banner of 1938 was un-



Follonsby Lodge: banner bright

veiled by Arthur Horner, communist leader of the south Wales miners and destined to become the national president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Arthur had left the Welsh valleys as a 16-year-old and himself joined Connolly's ICA, acting as a 'powder monkey' during the rebellion. Truth is, the paths of all the heroes depicted on the banner crossed in one form or another.

The history of the banner really begins with the foundation of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago in 1905, and with George Harvey, the banner's architect and political inspiration of the lodge. He is depicted on the bottom right. While Connolly was a founding member of the IWW and one of its first national organisers, Harvey was a founder member of the Industrial Union of Britain and the first person to publish pamphlets of industrial unionism as a tactic and philosophy. *The Socialist*, which George wrote for and edited for a time, was printed on Connolly's Irish Republican Socialist Press. George was caught up in the Socialist Labour Party's soul-searching following the Russian Revolution, and became one of the first members of the CPGB.

The centrality of Lenin in the process is symbolised by his centrality on the banner. Keir Hardie was, of course, the 'father of the British Labour Party' - a lad who started his working life down the mine at 10 years old and witnessed the incredible slaughter and hardship of pit life in those early years. He was the first independent Labour MP and founder of the Independent Labour Party. A passionate socialist pacifist, it is said he died of a broken heart following the mighty blow dealt to international socialist aspirations by World War I.

If the appearance of this banner caused a stir in 1938, what happened next split the village for decades, as the mine went into rundown and union membership fell, and the village population moved on to nearby collieries. The new lodge leadership painted over the contentious banner, inserting images of the moderate opposition in place of the original revolutionaries. When next the fortunes of the mine revived and the revisionist banner was paraded once more, uproar ensued at its first sighting - many resolved never to carry it again, although few stuck to that resolve over the passing years.

As time went on, the fire, the painting over and finally the banner's loss became fused as one event in folk memory and nobody actually remembered there had been two versions. But the history of that bold banner still remained and - like the frag-

ments of the causes and leaders it espoused - fragments of it, stirrings of it remained. It gives me the greatest satisfaction after years of knock-backs to finally be able to have this banner unveiled again, to rise the heckles again, to strike up the controversies and debates again, to re-raise those vital arguments of 'Where to?' and 'Which road?'

That enough Gateshead councillors were able to utilise their influence in the allocation of the much called-upon community fund to pay for this banner restoration, of all banner restorations, speaks volumes about their class-consciousness and regional roots - I say this despite my own bitter disagreements with their Labour Party membership and politics.

The brilliance of this banner is that almost uniquely it represents the three major political ideologies of the labour and working class movements: social democracy, syndicalism and Bolshevism. It poses tactics of the ballot box and the bullet, parliament and the general strike. That they are posed in composite suggests perhaps that they are not 'either-or' options. The reverse side of the Follonsby banner, which has remained constant through all four versions, is an illustration of socialist simplicity: health, leisure, education, decent housing, and a version of socialism which men like my dad thought they were on the way to achieving in 1945 through their Labour Party aspirations.

It also puts me in mind of Connolly's famous quote: "For our demands most moderate are, we only want the earth" (1907). Fact is, working class socialists like my dad became bitterly disappointed with Labour, especially after Harold Wilson backed off from what could have been a more radical programme than 1945 in the 60s. Then he felt betrayal, as first Heath and then Thatcher tore up what he thought had been a 'post-war consensus' that would give workers a steadily improving social and political prospect. As mounted police rode through pit villages in 1984-85 and miners were clubbed down as they had been in 1926, he realised like many that the class war had never gone away - here it was raw and bitter once again.

Following 13 years of crude New Labour Thatcherism, and its current, more elegant Con-Dem variant, the moment couldn't be more apt to bring this banner back to life, and pose the old questions once again: Where to? Which road?

A specially commissioned, 74-page history of the lodge and political trajectories of the miners and their leaders will be out in time for free distribution at the launch. *George Harvey, pitman Bolshevik, and the Follonsby miners lodge banner* will be available after the launch for £10, post paid, from [djdouglass@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:djdouglass@hotmail.co.uk). Proceeds to the Follonsby Lodge, Durham Miners Gala band and bus fund ●

## Banner relaunch

**Saturday June 18, 10.30am:** Unveiling by mayor of Gateshead, Wardley Legion Club, Sunderland Road, Gateshead (nearest metro: Pelaw - walk up through Ellen Wilkinson estate). Followed by entertainment and buffet. Organised by Follonsby Miners Lodge Banner Association.

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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# weekly worker

## Respect considers its future

# Beginning of the end

The Respect national council has declared that 'carrying on as if nothing has changed' is 'not an option'. **Peter Manson** reports

Unlike the Socialist Party in England and Wales, with its super-optimistic assessment of the May 5 election results obtained by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition,<sup>1</sup> the Respect party has been much more sober and realistic.

According to national secretary Clive Searle, "The reality of our results on May 5 was that we had a very disappointing night."<sup>2</sup> First of all, hopes that George Galloway would be returned as a member of the Scottish parliament were dashed when the Coalition Against Cuts lists he headed could only manage 3.5% in Glasgow.

Then Mohammed Ishtiaq, despite picking up 3,413 votes (38.6%), was unseated in Birmingham Sparkbrook, where Respect previously boasted all three councillors. Right now things do not look good for Shokat Ali next year or even for Salma Yaqoob in 2013. Respect also contested two other wards in Birmingham, where it managed to gain 13.6% and 5.4% respectively. Apart from that, it had three candidates in Rochdale (13%, 5%, 2%) and one each in Manchester (2.7%) and Liverpool (1.1%). As comrade Searle puts it, "In most places our votes were declining or very small indeed."

Meeting on May 21, the national council discussed "the prospects for Respect", states comrade Searle. He sums up the NC's thinking in this way: "It appears clear now, with the exception of Tower Hamlets with its peculiar local circumstances, that the electoral space that we have sought to occupy in recent years has been closing since the final few weeks of the 2010 general election campaign. As voters were faced with a stark choice between Labour and Tory governments, most working people - many of whom had spent the previous few years disillusioned with Blair and then Brown - returned to the Labour fold. With the Con-Dems in power, and viciously cutting essential public services, that process has continued - and is likely to accelerate, as the cuts begin to bite."

He is quite right. Respect is facing up to this reality in a way that much of the left - not least SPEW - is refusing to do. Workers still regard Labour as a party likely to provide some kind of defence against the Con-Dem attacks and are not about to switch their allegiance to some phantom alternative - especially one like Tusc that virtually ceases to exist between elections.

In a way, it has been easier for Respect to recognise that the game is up. Unlike the Socialist Alliance, Tusc and 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy', to name just three, it was never intended to be a mere banner of convenience under which sections of the left could come together at election time. Respect was aiming to be a big player that could win MPs and get councillors elected. Indeed in the 2005 general election comrade

Galloway was returned to parliament as MP for Bethnal Green and Bow and the following year Respect won 12 council seats in Tower Hamlets, becoming the official opposition to Labour. By 2007 it had 18 local councillors across the country.

By contrast, Respect now has no MPs and just four councillors - two in Birmingham, two in Tower Hamlets. Clearly all hopes that Respect could be transformed into a weighty political party have vanished - which is why the national council "agreed that carrying on as if nothing has changed was not an option".

The NC also agreed that "we didn't want to risk losing the coherent body of anti-imperialist, anti-racist, pro-investment ideas that have become associated with Respect" and to that end "a number of different proposals were made for the future". Comrade Searle does not go into what these were, but promises: "The next issue of the *Respect Quarterly* will carry articles analysing the election and making suggestions for the way forward."

Respect will then "hold a series of



George Galloway: back to Labour?

regional forums for all members and supporters" and the NC will "discuss the outcome from these forums at our next meeting on September 10. We will then report back to the membership as a whole."

So what are the options? I understand that at the NC at least four possibilities were mooted. The one that has the least going for it at the moment is that Respect members should join or rejoin Labour. While individuals may simply quit Respect and follow that course, there is no serious proposal that Respect members as a whole should go into Labour as a bloc or apply for affiliate status.

However, the proposal to edge closer to the Green Party is a serious one. Sections of Respect, particularly in Manchester and the north-west, have in the past struck local electoral deals with the Greens and their former national elections coordinator, Peter Cranie, addressed the Respect conference in November 2010. Comrade Searle himself openly admits that the idea of Respect joining or becoming a component of the Green Party is not something he personally would reject. However, despite the departure from Respect of the last organised left group, Socialist Resistance, last year, remaining members who view themselves as part of the working class tradition would strongly oppose any such reorientation.

The proposal that could win out seems to be one that would see Respect transformed into a kind of 'think tank', making use of that "coherent body of anti-imperialist, anti-racist, pro-investment ideas" and putting it at the disposal of the whole left. Hmm. I wonder who the innovative thinkers and the prolific theoretical writers are amongst the Respect

leadership? I somehow doubt that they would be able to follow in the footsteps of even *Marxism Today* or *Spiked*. In truth Respect policy is a mishmash of totally unoriginal old Labourism, greenism and left liberalism.

On the other hand, there are those like national chair Abjol Miah who do seem set on "carrying on as if nothing has changed". His post-May 5 article on the Respect website emphatically states that "there is a bright future for Respect" - and comrade Miah does not appear to see any reason for Respect to change course.

He writes: "Some may be attracted to the Labour Party because it is doing better in the polls, but ... the party has not drawn the correct lessons of its devastating defeat in 2010 or its humiliation in Scotland ... Labour needs to go back to its old values of standing up for working people and the less well off, defending the principles of public service and promoting equality rather than greed. Instead the debate in the Labour Party today is between those who would follow in Blair's footsteps and those who want to make the party comfortable for the likes of the English Defence League. This is not a party progressive people will feel comfortable in and quite rightly."

Comrade Miah concludes: "There remains therefore a huge intellectual space for progressive politics in this country, a space that has been vacated by both the Lib Dems and the Labour Party. We are facing an unprecedented assault on our living standards and an ideological assault on the very foundations of the welfare state. We need organisation and ideas to fight the battles ahead. That is why there remains a pressing need for Respect. I'm here to announce that we intend to build on the referendum success and the by-election we won in December against all the forces Labour could

throw at us. We are here to stay and we are here to grow."<sup>3</sup>

The by-election he refers to saw Respect's Fozol Miah ride on the success of the newly elected mayor, councillor Lutfur Rahman. Despite being selected as mayoral candidate in a democratic vote by Labour members, Rahman was dumped by the leadership and stood as an independent. When he won, that left a vacancy in Spitalfields and Banglatown, where sympathy for Rahman and antipathy towards the Labour bureaucracy was translated into votes for Respect.

But there is no reason to believe that these "peculiar local circumstances" in Tower Hamlets will automatically result in greater longevity for Respect in the borough: quite possibly the opposite, in fact. Here a combination of 'community leaders' and the mosque has been able to lead whole sections to switch political allegiances. While comrades like Abjol Miah, former leader of the Respect group on the council, are undoubtedly left Labourites, I doubt whether they have the following to withstand the basically patriarchal networks.

Despite that, one Respect NC member told me that in Tower Hamlets there is "everything to play for". Here at least there was every reason to continue contesting elections, while elsewhere there ought to be a "cautious and realistic" approach to the question.

That too sounds like "carrying on as if nothing has changed" ●

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## Notes

1. See my article last week: 'Give up on Tusc', May 26.
2. 'After the election - where now for Respect?', May 24: [www.voterespect.org/2011/05/after-election-where-now-for-respect.html](http://www.voterespect.org/2011/05/after-election-where-now-for-respect.html).
3. [www.voterespect.org/2011/05/tower-hamlets-needs-respect.html](http://www.voterespect.org/2011/05/tower-hamlets-needs-respect.html).

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