



# weekly worker

**Chris Cutrone on Benjamin and Adorno, the philosophy of history and the abuse of theory**

- Standing order appeal
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No 869

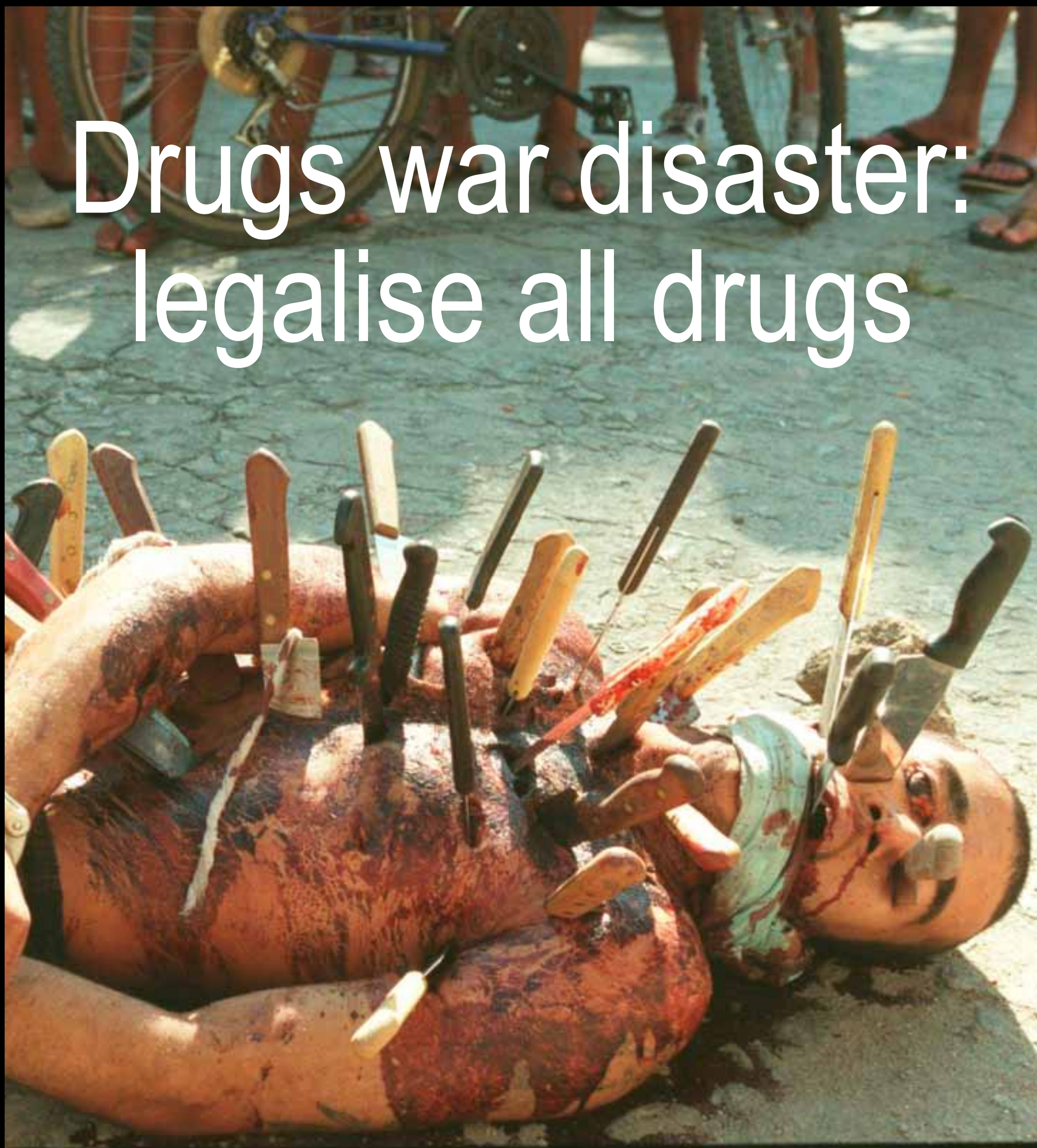
Thursday June 9 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# Drugs war disaster: legalise all drugs





# LETTERS



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

## No opt-out

Dave Vincent reminds us once again about the attacks of the last Labour government on the working class (Letters, June 2). Yes, Dave, we know that the Labour leadership is (and always has been) pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist. So when he asks what the trade union link "is delivering for the working class today", the answer is pretty obvious and pretty much the same as it has been throughout Labour's history: not very much.

Dave himself has identified one of the main reasons for this. The "union barons" are more concerned about patronage and possible knighthoods than they are for their members' interests, he writes, which means that the union link "has always acted to dampen down militancy, not get union members benefits". The same barons "urge members to vote Labour in their magazines and do not allow critical letters to be published about this or the link". Union leaders - particularly in Labour-affiliated unions, thinks Dave - exercise a "dictatorship" over their members.

This points to one of the main tasks facing rank-and-file members - irrespective of whether their unions are Labour-affiliated or not, actually: the urgent need to organise in order to hold leaders to account, to ensure they act in the interests of the membership or are replaced. In other words, the problem is not the link with Labour at all, but the *behaviour and unaccountability of the bureaucracy*.

Dave completely writes off the possibility of the left or pro-worker forces making headway in the Labour Party. But he has told us himself why things seem that way and as a result unwittingly indicates *how* things can be changed. We are unable to make headway at present because the union tops *choose* not to pursue pro-worker policies and instead cooperate with the rightwing leadership. As I have said, that is first and foremost a question of *union* democracy and demonstrates the necessity of workers themselves taking control. If we had responsive, democratic trade unions, the leaders would be obliged to fight for change within the Labour Party, not act as the main block against progressive policies.

So there is no short cut in the fight to win a party that really does act in workers' interests - and certainly not in the way the Socialist Party in England and Wales proposes. If the unions under their current leadership broke away from Labour to form a 'genuine' workers' party (in reality a Labour Party mark two), why would the bureaucracy behave any differently? The new party would just be a repeat of mark one.

Dave tries to convince himself that workers "will only vote [Labour] back in if there is no left alternative". But you only have to look at May 5 to see that this is not so. *Sitting* left candidates were voted out in favour of Labour. Dave says: "We need alternative left anti-cuts candidates until the working class come to see the need for a Marxist party." But that is exactly what we had on May 5 in the form of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, whose results he calls "abysmal". No, Dave, standing in elections is not a panacea.

He is correct on the need to "establish credibility". But, once again, how is that to be done? Anything less than Marxism is simply *not* credible. Just what is our alternative to cuts? Keynesianism? No, that would not take the working class forward one centimetre. The

"alternative" is Marxism.

So Dave's proposal, quoted above, needs rephrasing. We need to fight for a Marxist party in order to stand alternative anti-cuts candidates - if we want them to *be* credible, that is. This fight is central and needs to be fought in all the organisations of the working class. Including in the unions and in the Labour Party. We can no more opt out of the fight within Labour than we can the fight within the unions.

**Peter Manson**  
South London

## Organic link

While I generally avoid making comments on issues in dispute on the left 10,000 miles away, my own experience of having lived in Britain in the past, and having been a member of the Labour Party Young Socialists, plus the function and make-up of the New Zealand Labour Party, tends me to agree with Dave Vincent. I think he's quite right to question just what 'organic links' the British Labour Party has with the working class and point out the dangers of confusing the union barons with the class.

I'd also question an idea that Dave's letter touched on, but didn't delve deeply into: Labour Party financing. The lazier elements of the left in NZ argued for years that the Labour Party here was mainly financed by the unions. This simply wasn't true and hasn't been the case for many a year. In fact, it is predominantly financed by the state, through the allocations of parliamentary services funding. Its next biggest source of funding is business donations. Unions here supply a minuscule fraction of the Labour Party's total income. I find it hard to believe that the situation in Britain would be completely different.

Perhaps it's time to look more deeply at how Labour in Britain is funded, in particular to what extent the state underwrites Labour's total income and expenditure. To do that you'd have to investigate not the party's official accounts, but the allocations of parliamentary services, or whatever they are called in Britain, to political parties.

You might just find that, as in New Zealand, the primary 'organic link' Labour has is to the state, just as its primary loyalty link is to managing the capitalist system.

**Phillip Ferguson**  
Christchurch

## Hairy monster

Peter Manson confirms the CPGB's 'dual' or two-party strategy ('Give up on Tusc', May 26). I have referred to this before (Letters, April 21) and nobody has disputed it - one party for communists and at the same time an 'AN Other' party. Peter suggests an identity for these two parties: "The working class needs its mass Marxist party. But a Labour Party that was an 'instrument of struggle for working people' could play a vital role in bringing together partisans of our class in the fight for workers' power."

This is no abstract sloganeering. The CPGB's Ben Lewis calls for industrial action on June 30, combined with the political demand to join the Labour Party ('Striking together', June 2). Surely this is not an end in itself, but merely a step to some variation on 'Labour to power on a socialist programme'?

No real surprises here. The *British road* of the former CPGB had a dual strategy. This was rejected by the current CPGB in its ultra-left phase. Then the CPGB berated the left for supporting calls for an 'AN Other' party. They argued that true communism stood for one party alone. Fortunately, this stage of 'one-club golfing' passed when the Provisional Central Committee ditched it to back

Labour.

I was reminded of the difficulty communists have in criticising anarchist leaders. Since anarchists reject leadership as such, there is no leadership to criticise. One could not criticise the CPGB's argument for an 'AN Other' party simply because there wasn't one. Some of us did not believe that. Now this second party turned up and called itself the Labour Party!

The 'debate' between the CPGB and the Socialist Party is about the 'AN Other' party. On one side we have Miliband's 'New New Labour' party and on the other we have Bob Crow's 'New old Labour' party. Both have fundamental flaws which each side can expose. Dave Vincent did exactly that in last week's letters. What we have is Hobson's choice between two dead-end parties.

Backing the conservative Labour Party means ignoring decades of the practice which contradicts the CPGB theory of Labour as "an instrument of struggle for working people". Peter's view that Labour "could play a vital role in bringing together partisans of our class in the fight for workers' power" is very *Labour Briefing* and more Alliance for Workers' Liberty than the AWL. On the other side, in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, we have the theory of spontaneity, or making it up as we go along. Workers do not need dead-end parties, whether conservative or spontaneist.

It was Peter himself who came up with the alternative in theoretical terms. He produced the slogan of a 'halfway house party'. Of course, he invented this by accident because he wanted a hairy monster to frighten the children. It worked when the lights were off during the dark night of leftism. Today the monster has been banished by the PCC and children can stop hiding behind their fingers.

Nevertheless, like the apple that fell on Newton's head, it either makes us frightened or has us thinking in the right direction. A halfway house is not going back to the past in the search of true Labour. It is going forward at least halfway to where we want to be. Since a democratic republic is on the road to communism, then it too is a clue adding to what Peter started. A halfway house party must be a republican party. If this is a working class party, then it is the republican party of the working class. Therefore, neither the Labour Party nor Tusc are halfway houses. If they are houses at all, they are prison houses of the old constitutional monarchy.

**Steve Freeman**  
email

## Can't consent

Grant Williamson (Letters, June 2) has very strong opinions on the definition of rape. He states: "... forcing a person *against their will* by physical force, threat or other coercion to have sex when they don't want to. That is what rape is." He relies on a 'common sense' notion of rape; 'common sense' is notoriously likely to be based on reactionary ideas.

The current legal definition rests on the question of consent, not physical force, because the victim's willingness to potentially sustain further injury in a fight is not on trial. The onus is on the (overwhelmingly usually) man to have a reasonable belief that the (overwhelmingly usually) woman consented to his actions. This emphasis on consent is why people under 16 are described as having been raped - because they do not have the capacity to consent, just as they can't consent to surgery or getting tattoos.

But Grant does not discuss our attitudes to young people's sexuality outside of this narrow legal framework. He does not define what he means by 'sex', but, under

the previous legislation which he seems to think was better, it meant 'penis in vagina'. Not 'broken bottle in vagina' (a disturbingly common phenomenon), not 'penis in mouth'.

It is 'penis in vagina' because rape legislation was originally a form of property law, not concerned with injury to the victim so much as damage to her husband's property: her capacity to produce legitimate heirs to inherit the rest of his property. By shifting the narrow definition of 'sex' to one of considering the damaging physical and psychological effects of sexual violence, the (only partially successful) attempt was made to address the experiences of victims more sympathetically. Obviously, reducing women's sexual behaviour to granting or withholding permission to have things done to us is extremely limited, but not at the top of many people's list of priorities for change in an area with so many more pressing issues.

From the tone of his letter, Grant seems to believe large numbers of teenage boys are incarcerated for having consensual sex with their girlfriends. I have never seen any evidence of this. I have seen surveys showing that one in three girls are sexually assaulted at school, that 42% of young people in Britain know at least one girl who has suffered physical violence from a boyfriend, and that 40% know at least one girl who has suffered sexual violence from a boyfriend. Equally disturbing are the figures showing that large numbers of young people believe this kind of male violence to be acceptable; 27% believed a boy could expect sex with a girl who had been 'flirtatious' (Amnesty International, 2006). But we are told the real victims are not girls, but young men.

Grant then goes into some detail concerning the high numbers of what he believes to be completely unjustified complaints and convictions of rape. This is an absolutely bizarre interpretation of the facts. In anonymous surveys, around a quarter of women say they have been raped. The majority (80%-90%) of cases are not reported; of those that are, most are not prosecuted, resulting in a conviction rate of about 6%.

I am looking forward to the day when I will read something in a socialist paper written by a man giving his unconditional support to women who suffer male violence. It is a depressing experience to be able to predict the response of the left press as being a series of obfuscation, qualification and minimisation; this paper has reported the Slutwalk circus in terms virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream media. No surprise to find the only way women claiming their right to self-determination is made acceptable is when its dominant image is one of sexual availability.

More than two women a week are killed by their male partners in this country; all we get from the left is the resentful defence of male privilege and some feeble hand-wringing. It is insulting to focus on an abstract aim of 'left unity' when you are prepared to tolerate this level of male violence against women in virtual silence.

**Heather Downs**  
email

## Political status

There will be a lobby of Sinn Féin's conference marking the 30th anniversary of the hunger strike at 12 noon on Saturday June 18 at London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. We will be calling Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to support the demand for political status now.

The hunger strike shaped the course of history, says Gerry Adams in

the blurb for Sinn Féin's conference, implying that the hunger strikers would have supported the Good Friday agreement (GFA) and Sinn Féin's acceptance that the conflict was about loyalism's 'legitimate concerns' (that they might have to concede equality to nationalists) and not about the occupation of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland by the armed forces of British imperialism.

Stiofán Ó Morna has written a horrific account of what happened to Harry Fitzsimmons in Maghaberry on May 29: "Harry's cell was entered by the riot squad; there had been no confrontation, no exchange of words, just brutality. His glasses were smashed into his face with such force that Harry believes there may be glass in his eyes. He said it is definitely in the multiple lacerations in his face. The thugs held him, while others punched, kicked and tore his clothing from his body."

Now tell us that Bobby Sands and his comrades would not have championed the right to political status for Harry and all his comrades in Maghaberry and elsewhere today. This conference cannot even mention that there are Irish prisoners-of-war today - in the exact same position, fighting the exact same battles as 1981 and the years preceding and following those hunger strikes.

But there is inevitable resistance. 'Dissident' republicans recognise that British imperialism is dividing the Irish people by force and continue to fight for the expulsion of the forces of the crown.

The fight for political status is intensifying inside the prisons - the very thing that the 10 hunger strikes died for 30 years ago, which was abandoned 13 years ago with the signing of the GFA. The *Belfast Telegraph* reports from Maghaberry: "The jail protest is about a number of issues - strip searches, lock-up times and freedom of movement inside Roe House, where on two landings more than 30 dissident prisoners linked to a number of groups are held ... Some of those prisoners are now involved in a so-called dirty protest. Others have been involved in 'hand-to-hand fights' with prison officers in recent days" (May 26).

The GFA has not improved the relationship between the communities in the north of Ireland. In Belfast, according to Henry McDonald in *The Guardian*, "There are now 80 permanent barriers dividing loyalist and nationalist areas of the city, according to a report by the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland. In 1994, when the troubles were declared over, there were 26" (July 28 2009).

The GFA has legitimised sectarian bigotry. This has made the unification of Ireland far more difficult. We demand that the participants in this meeting take their responsibilities to today's republican prisoners seriously, fight for their political status and that Sinn Féin cease imposing severe economic austerity on the working class and the poor, which is bound to exacerbate community tensions.

**Gerald Downing**  
email

## Facts

A couple of factual points regarding JP Nettl and his political sympathies ('The study of history and the left's decline', June 2). Firstly, he was a supporter of the Labour Party. I heard him address a Labour Party election meeting in 1959 in Shipley. Secondly, he contributed a book review to *International Socialism* in 1964 ([www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1964/no016/nettl.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1964/no016/nettl.htm)).

**Ian Birchall**  
email



## APPEAL

# Extra needed

**Robbie Rix** calls for better and more regular financial support for the *Weekly Worker*



The *Weekly Worker* is unique on the left - open, democratic and characterised by polemical vigour in its fight for political clarity. At the very centre of this paper's work is the need for principled Marxist unity in a single Communist Party.

And how that is needed! The working class is facing the fiercest attack on its jobs, living standards, services and collective rights for well over half a century. Yet readers will know that its organisations, defensive and offensive, are totally inadequate. Trade union membership is languishing at around seven million, compared to over 13 million in 1979. Union meetings are poorly attended, elections for officials are largely ignored by members, and bureaucrats have long aimed only to fend off the very worst aspects of the government and employer offensive.

As for our political organisations, they are far, far worse, especially when you consider the enormity of the tasks the working class faces. While the Labour Party is dominated by its openly pro-capitalist right wing and its left remains marginalised, the non-Labour left is disorganised by dozens of confessional sects, whose membership varies from the small to the microscopic.

Each group pretends that it alone provides the core of the revolutionary party, that it is progressing by leaps and bounds, that it has deep roots in the working class, that soon the masses will flock to its ranks. At their worse, the sects go so far as to deny the existence of their rivals. For instance, the Socialist Party in England and Wales recently claimed that its own publication is "the only paper that opposes all cuts to jobs and services" (*The Socialist* November 4 2010).

Just as bad, when these groups do decide to engage in common political action with forces beyond their own ranks - standing candidates in elections, for instance - they inevitably

do so on the basis of the lowest common denominator. It is always assumed that appeals for unity around the basic tenets of Marxism will fall on deaf ears. Over the last decade we have had projects such as the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, Respect, the Campaign for a New Workers' Party and, most recently, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - all of which have put before the electorate platforms far to the right of the programmes to which their leaders claim to adhere.

Alone among all the publications of the left, the *Weekly Worker* demands the kind of unity I am talking about.

But we need to put our finances on a firmer footing. Like others we have recently been hit by sharp rises in printing and postal costs and by increases in rents, rates and other overheads. However, one thing that has not risen over the recent period is the number of our regular financial donors. In fact the amount we receive in monthly standing orders has edged down, compared to the recent past. Mainly as a result of a number of generous comrades who have either died or been unable to sustain their previous level of support.

That is why I am urging all readers, supporters and friends of the *Weekly Worker* to take out a standing order to the paper - or, if you have one already, upping the amount you pay. We are aiming to increase our regular income through such donations by a minimum of £300 a month. If we did that we would be able to produce extra supplements, invest in new computer technology, begin to introduce colour.

Of course, we appreciate that a lot of comrades are feeling the financial pressure, given the mess capitalism is currently making of the world, and we are painfully aware that there are not that many millionaires out there in *Weekly Worker* readerland. But even small amounts, added together, will make a significant difference. The point is that there are scores of comrades who are being contacted

over the coming period and a significant boost to our finances would serve not only to maintain our paper, but to take it forward in terms of both page numbers and quality.

While *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist* and the rest may claim to be unique, that description actually does apply to the *Weekly Worker*. Only this paper campaigns for all the groups, together with all unorganised revolutionaries and communists, to unite around a Marxist programme.

However, while we know that these aims are shared by a significant section of left activists, too few translate their appreciation of the *Weekly Worker*'s role into concrete support. But, in order to rise to the challenge of the forthcoming period, we need a better, more widely read paper. And that demands regular, reliable support from more comrades in the shape of more and bigger standing orders.

Can you help? Editor Peter Manson has already written to dozens of our readers and many more will receive a letter from him over the next few days - including with this paper! We will be following that up with a personal approach. But please do not wait for your phone to ring. Fill in the form in the back of the print version of the paper or download it from the website. Alternatively please ring, write or email to let me know if you instruct your bank directly.

### Generous

June's fighting fund received a big boost in the shape of a very generous donation from comrade TG - £75, no less. Thanks, comrade. And thanks also to IR for the extra £3 he added to his cheque, to CS for his £10, received via PayPal (he was one of 10,454 readers last week), and to all those existing standing order donors who, between them, transferred £108 to the *Weekly Worker* account over the last week.

All that comes to £197 and a running total of £287 towards the £1,250 we need ●

## 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.communiststudents.org.uk](http://www.communiststudents.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

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

**June 14:** 'Greco-Roman myth at the Avebury monuments'. Speaker: Lionel Sims.

### The cuts con

**Thursday June 9, 7.30pm:** Meeting, Ealing town hall, New Broadway, London E5 (nearest station: Ealing Broadway). Speakers include: Katy Clark MP, Dr John Lister (Health Emergency), Andrew Fisher (Left Economics Advisory Panel). Organised by Ealing Trades Council: 07960 309457.

### 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).

### Union struggles in Egypt

**Tuesday June 14, 7pm:** Meeting, Resource Centre, 24 Murray Grove, London N1. Speaker: Dina Makram-Obeid.

Organised by Hackney Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

### 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).

### No-one is illegal

**Thursday June 16, 7.30pm:** Meeting, Old Library, Oxford town hall. What would a world without borders be like? Speakers: Tracy Walsh (Unison), Victoria Brittain and Rahila Gupta (writers and activists). Organised by No One is Illegal: [oxford@noii.org.uk](mailto:oxford@noii.org.uk).

### Nicaragua solidarity

**Saturday June 18, 11am:** AGM, followed by public meeting, Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 (nearest tube: Caledonian Road). 'Nicaragua, trade unions and elections'. Speakers from Nicaraguan public service union UNE, Nicaragua embassy and NSC. World premiere of film *Young, Nicaraguan and organised* about Nicaraguan trade unions and international solidarity.

Organised by Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: [campaigns@nicaraguasc.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@nicaraguasc.org.uk).

### Love Music, Hate Racism

**Saturday June 18, 12noon:** Festival, Harbour Parade, Ramsgate, Kent. Performers include: Congo Natty, Kid British, Spookasonic and The Chimney Boys. Free entry. Organised by Love Music Hate Racism: <http://lovemusichateracism.com>.

### 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.



**HOPi**

# Global crisis and Arab awakening

Tina Becker reports on the new discussion format tried out by Hands Off the People of Iran

**O**n May 28, Hands Off the People of Iran organised a round-table discussion on the recent Middle East upheavals, featuring Mohammad Reza Shalgouni (Rahe Kargar/Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran), Mike Macnair (CPGB), Moshé Machover (Israeli socialist) and Yassamine Mather (Hopi).

We filmed the speakers and edited up their contributions and the ensuing debate. The resulting film, which is just over one hour in length and has been produced by Red Mist Films ([www.redmistfilms.org](http://www.redmistfilms.org)), can now be viewed online at [www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org).

With comrade Mather in the chair, a number of highly relevant aspects were discussed. "Why are these revolutions happening now? Are they simply expressions of opposition to dictatorships or do they herald a more significant change in the world situation?" she asked. After all, some of the dictators in those countries had been in power for many decades. And while, of course, there had always been internal opposition, this was on a much lower level than the recent upsurges.

As first speaker, Mike Macnair addressed this point by explaining the impact of the world economic crisis that started in 2008-09. It helped to create the revolutionary upsurges in the Arab-speaking world - and continues to fuel and further radicalise them.

While many journalists rather lazily choose to explain the outbreaks simply as a reaction to a fruit-seller setting himself on fire in Tunisia, a few have dug deeper. Comrade Macnair positively referred to a graph produced by *Newsnight's* economic editor, Paul Mason, which shows the relationship between increasing food prices and the outbreak of revolution in each country - not just in the Middle East in 2011, but also in revolutionary Europe in 1848.

"People tend to put up with tyranny, as long as their lives are not made completely intolerable and violently unequal," said comrade Macnair. The latest crisis of capitalism, however, has led to a coinciding of those two situations: there is widespread unemployment and rapidly rising food prices. At the same time, the imposition of neoliberal measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund has dramatically increased inequality by "allowing the elites to integrate themselves into the international capitalist elite". This has created a situation where, "as Mao put it - a single spark can light a prairie fire". In that sense, the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi could really have "lit those revolutions".

Underlying all of this though is the "capitalist business cycle" that produces extreme, massive and regular crises. However, this had been obscured by an "artificial regime of stability" which was created in response to the existence of the Soviet Union in the cold war period. Bourgeois economists call this "financial repression", which is characterised by high level of controls over the movement of capital, elaborate regulations regarding the size

and shape of banks and the situation where only states are allowed to hold gold. In this period, the business cycle had led to "moderate levels" of crisis. But now we are returning to the old style of the cycle, which sees more severe and deeper crises.

Immediately after financial crashes, following their massive losses, capitalists tend to withdraw their money from "newly industrialised countries" and invest their capital in those seen as "safe havens" - thereby externalising losses. This creates more severe crises in the so-called periphery, which leads to massive financial problems and, in turn, the imposition of IMF measures. This explains why we can see attenuated crises in the centre and, crucially, exacerbated crises in the periphery. There, the living conditions become increasingly intolerable for the mass of people.

Also, some countries directly intervene: the US has printed vast amounts of new money, which have further fuelled speculation in food and the rise of prices. "So, yes, Goldman Sachs has helped to create the food crisis," comrade Macnair said, referring to an article of that title by Frederick Kaufman in the US journal *Foreign Policy*.

This is the main point to grasp, comrade Macnair said: "The crisis did not come about because the Greek government borrowed too much or because the Irish were irresponsible in terms of property speculation. This crisis is not the fault of the periphery. The bubble and the crisis have been created in the central financial markets."

In response to a question from comrade Mather, he explained that the current situation does not mean that there is an automatic relationship between crisis and revolution. Crisis creates the conditions for revolutionary upheaval, but "human action" and subjective intervention are always needed to go that one step further.

## Arab revolution

Following comrade Macnair, Moshé Machover explained why in his view we are currently witnessing various expressions of a single, Arab revolution. He took on those who insist that there is only a vague connection between the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and the other countries in the region.

Of course, there are big differences in the history and political systems. There are also major differences in how the upheavals are playing out in some of the 22 Arab-speaking countries, and therefore the Arab revolution will develop in an uneven manner. However, the people there are united by language, by poetry, by culture and by history.

And crucially, in modern times, a nation can also be defined as a group of people who watch the same television station in the same language. In the Middle East, they are all watching Al Jazeera, comrade Machover said. Last but not least, there is "the strong and noticeable sense of solidarity with the Palestinians, who are seen as the most oppressed sector of the Arab nation."



**Ali Khamenei: your turn next**

To further underline his point, he discussed the original meaning of the words 'nakba', which is normally referred to as the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland between 1947 and 1949. "But the original use of 'nakba' stems from the year 1921 and refers to the way all Arabs describe the San Remo conference, which led to the balkanisation of the Middle East by carving up the Ottoman empire." Under the leadership of the British, capitalism artificially created Palestine, Libya and so on, while "Iraq was cobbled together".

In comrade Machover's view, the Arab world can only achieve lasting social and political change in "some kind of unity" - the exact form is not predictable, but the unity of the Arab nation, the creation of such a powerful force, is a prerequisite for compelling the Israeli state to decolonise the region, he argued.

In conclusion comrade Moshé expressed the view that the current uprisings are likely to spread even further: "We should not look at these revolutions as a series of still photographs or simply judge them by their demands or their immediate results. I believe that this is an episode in a revolutionary process that will be global." He mentioned demonstrations and sit-ins in Spain and Greece, which are "only a small beginning".

Mohammed Reza Shalgouni also expressed the view that there is an "Arab nation". He focussed on the obstacles and problems that these upsurges are now experiencing. Firstly, he observed the lack of "revolutionary spirit" amongst the people now rebelling. "Whatever one might think the problems were with the Soviet Union, it gave people something to rally around - an idea of socialism, however distorted." The collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to destroy the idea that there could be a viable political alternative: namely socialism/communism.

The young people on the

streets of Cairo and Tunis are not acquainted with Marx or the concept of communism and are therefore "vulnerable to liberal ideas". They are clearly on the left and support workers' strikes, but their movements have serious limitations.

Another obstacle is the Islamist trend in the Arab-speaking world. While in the past Islamists often "flirted" with the military regimes in power, now many of them, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, are being courted by the US, especially in Jordan, Syria and Egypt. At the moment, they are supporting the revolutions - but they are bound to betray them, just as they did in Iran in 1979.

He also argued that we should not forget the "main representative of Arab reaction": namely Saudi Arabia. Its people are not allowed to vote, there is no transparency, there is not even a government budget - after all, the monarchy owns most of the wealth in the country. Together with Israel and the rich, oil-producing Gulf states, Saudi Arabia is a major obstacle to the successful implementation of the Arab revolution.

## Impact on Iran

Comrade Shalgouni went on to discuss the impact of the revolutionary upsurges on Iran: they came as "a breath of fresh air" for the people on the streets of Tehran. However, they also damaged the theocratic regime. For a long time, the Islamic republic was able to present itself as an anti-imperialist force in the region. But since the June 2009 protests and the brutal oppression that followed, nobody is taking this claim seriously any more. None of the demonstrators in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya are looking at Iran as a viable alternative. They can see that the Iranian regime is even worse than their own.

Finally, Yassamine Mather reported on recent protests in Iran, where a new slogan has been adopted: "Mubarak, Ben Ali - now it's your turn, Khamenei." Many people have

been arguing that, because of the geographic proximity of Iran, Turkey and the Arab-speaking countries, there could be some sort of easy solution for the whole region. But Iran and Turkey are not part of the Arab nation, she explained. "We are internationalists, but that means we have to understand national and regional peculiarities."

She agreed with comrade Shalgouni's perception that one of the problems facing the protestors in Egypt and Tunisia is their lack of revolutionary experience: "The women's movement in Iran has fought against the Islamic regime for over 33 years, which makes them much more advanced compared to the protestors in Egypt or Tunisia." The people of Iran, even the young ones, still remember the role of the workers' movement in overthrowing the dictatorship of the shah in 1979. Therefore, it is not surprising that even the funeral of a famous footballer (who was active in the opposition movement) turned into a highly political event.

Nevertheless, the movement in Iran is currently not visible on the streets. This has partially to do with the brutal oppression of the 2009 protests, but also with the fact that the regime is still very much represented in the country's militia. Also, some leaders in the green movement actually took measures to prevent the 2009 protests from growing stronger. Furthermore, the state only recently cut subsidies on food and gas: "It's a relatively new thing that people haven't been able to pay their gas bills," comrade Mather explained. But the state is already retreating to avoid protests or mass non-payment.

But there is no doubt, the revolutions within the Arab nation will fuel further unrest in Iran and they have already increased the divisions within the Iranian regime itself.

Following on from the openings, the four speakers went on to debate some of the issues further - for example, the fact that Islamists have not as yet been able to take a hold on the protests. Finally, the speakers discussed the crucial question of whether socialism is on the agenda in the Middle East.

"Objectively, the economic situation poses the question of socialism," said Mike Macnair. "But there is a crucial problem: socialism is only possible to the extent that the working class organises itself for more than trade union struggles, but also for cooperatives and mutual aid funds, so that this aspect is taken out of the hands of the imams. And, crucially, that the working class organises itself for political action, so that the demands of the working class are reflected in public legislation, to intervene in electoral processes - as the working class for itself." And unfortunately, the movement in the Middle East is currently a long way from having such a programme for change.

All four speakers will be at this year's Communist University in August. Details at <http://cpgb.wordpress.com>. ●

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## IRAN

# Osanloo free but repression continues

**T**rade union leader Mansour Osanloo has been freed from prison after four years. Osanloo, chair of the Syndicat of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed), has been leading workers in their fight for better conditions and for independent unions in Iran.

Arrested in July 2007, he was charged with organising “propaganda against the regime” and later accused of being a threat to national security. Throughout his imprisonment he has been subject to horrific abuse. In February 2010 there was an attempt on Osanloo’s life in Rajai-Shahr prison. He was attacked by a former member of the Revolutionary Guards state militia with the support of prison wardens. Two other prisoners intervened and saved him. Later in June 2010 further tragedy hit his family when security forces attacked Zoya Samadi, Osanloo’s daughter-in-law, causing her to miscarry.

Osanloo’s release has been welcomed by trade unionists and the working class internationally. Unite general secretary Len McCluskey likened Osanloo’s courage to “a beacon of hope for the people of Iran” and said his release showed that international solidarity can help workers in struggle.

We should, however, remember the other working class activists that remain in the prisons of the Islamic Republic. Abdol Hosseini, Reza Gorgi, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, Majid Tamjidi, Hassan Moradi, Hamid Reza Solouki, Ebrahim Madadi, Majid Tamjidi, Jafar Taghinejad and Reza Shahabi are still incarcerated for their involvement in the working class movement. There is growing concern over the lack of news of Ali Nejati, Reza Rakhshan, Mohammad Heydari Mehr, Jalil Ahmadi and Ferydoun Nikoufar, who are leading activists among the Haft Tapeh sugar cane workers. Then there are imprisoned teachers Rasoul Bedaghi and Aliyeh

Eghdam. Just the tip of the iceberg - there are many more working class activists in prison or on bail awaiting trial.

Meanwhile, there is continuing repression of the student movement, with those on the left paying heavily for their opposition to the regime. Leftwing student and activist Mohammad Pourabdollah, who has been in prison since February 2009, was initially sentenced to six years, although this was reduced to three on appeal. He has spent months in solitary confinement, enduring methodical physical and mental torture. On the day of Pourabdollah’s arrest comrade Alireza Davoudi was also detained and later tortured to death.

Left activist Abed Tavancheh, a member of Amir Kabir student association, is currently being held in prison in Arak. He has been arrested several times before for organising students. State thugs forced him to give himself up after threatening to evict his family and take their possessions. This is a trick used by the regime to put as much pressure and pain on the family of those wanted for or convicted of political ‘crimes’, so they hand themselves over to the torturers rather than see their family homeless and destitute. Nasim Soltanbehgi, another leftwing student activist, who was involved in women’s movement, has recently been sentenced to six years for “endangering national security”.

Habib Latifi, a Kurdish student at Azad University, was arrested in Sanandaj in October 2007 during a massive crackdown and similarly charged with *moharebeh* - conspiracy against national security and being part of an armed group. A charge which Latifi’s family describe as a complete fabrication. Like other activists, including student activists Ali Ajami, Mohsen Ghamin and Nader Ahsani, comrade Latifi has been tortured and can be executed at any time.

In addition to what is in reality the thought crime of “endangering national security”, student and worker activists can be charged with “waging war against Islam”. Many of those recently arrested were involved in the inspirational movement in Iranian universities in 2007 and for them state prisons are not a new experience. 2007 not only saw students protests against the regime, but the militarisation of campuses and imperialist threats.

The best way to celebrate Osanloo’s release is by stepping up the international campaign in support of working class struggle against both the theocratic regime and imperialism. The *Morning Star*’s editorial was correct when it pointed out: “Many crocodile tears have been shed for Iranian democrats and trade unionists by western politicians, for whom the victims of theocratic regime repression are simply pegs on which to hang their demands for military invasion of Iran” (June 4-5).

It was also excellent that the *Star* gave over its front page of last weekend’s issue to Osanloo, but a pity that the same anti-imperialism did not feature in its lead story. Reporter Paddy McGuffin contented himself with quoting McCluskey, Unison leader Dave Prentis, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber, Amnesty International and the International Transport Workers Federation. The ITWF has previously organised protests against the Tehran regime’s treatment of trade unionists, but has deliberately avoided any mention of the imperialist threats, which the increasingly fragile regime feeds off in its attempts to cling to power.

We must continue through Hands Off the People of Iran and other anti-imperialist solidarity organisations to give practical as well as political solidarity to those in struggle within Iran ●

**Chris Strafford**

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## COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

**Saturday August 13 - Saturday August 20**

Our annual school - Communist University - takes place in a world in flux. The near hysterical euphoria that surrounded the election of Barack Obama in 2008 has evaporated, as US foreign policy is characterised by aggressive continuity - for all the flatulent talk of “change”. Change *has* come to the Arab world - from below. Millions have risen in defiance of batons and bullets in a revolutionary fight for democracy and freedom.

In the UK, we have seen the first stirrings of revolt from the trade union movement against austerity and cuts, with the gargantuan March 26 demo and the coordinated strike action on June 30. The movement across the rest of Europe is further advanced. We have seen huge mobilisations in Ireland, Greece and Spain. The battle lines are drawn.

Given its explanatory power and practical programme, Marxism has huge potential in this period - a potential that is irresponsibly squandered by the sectarian in-fighting and opportunism of the Marxist groups. Communist University points a way out of this mess. Over eight days of intense and open discussion, comrades from a variety of left political backgrounds teach and learn from each other. Differences between comrades are debated in a fiercely partisan way - but without the fear of ‘excommunication’ characteristic of the confessional sects that inhabit much of the rest of the left. The aim is clarity to show the relevance of contemporary Marxism to the huge battles the workers’ movement is facing.

Come and join us this year and make your contribution to the job of politically tooling up our side. Speakers include: **Moshé Machover** (Israeli socialist) **Mohammed Reza Shalgouni** (Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran) **Owen Jones** (author of *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class*) **Camilla Power** and **Chris Knight** (Radical Anthropology Group) **Hillel Ticktin** (Editor of *Critique*) **Yassamine Mather** (chair, Hands Off the People of Iran) **Jack Conrad** and **Mike Macnair** (CPGB) **Anne Mc Shane** (*Weekly Worker* Ireland specialist)

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## SOCIETY

# End 'war on drugs' now

Far more harm and social destruction has been caused by the west's anti-drug laws than by the actual misuse of narcotics, says **Eddie Ford**

**B**y any measure, the 24-page report published on June 2 by the 19-member Global Commission on Drug Policy is a scathing indictment of the madness that is the current 'war on drugs', and especially the role played in it by the United States.<sup>1</sup> Far from reducing the supply and use of drugs, or curbing the power of organised crime, it has had the opposite effect - with total predictability, of course. Yet those who insist on conducting this 'war', as the report notes, know full well that it is a doomed venture, but pretend to the world that victory is within sight.

So in no uncertain terms, the commission declares that the policy of drugs prohibition has "failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world". As a direct consequence, it has created the conditions for "rampant lawlessness" and hence acted to "fuel" organised crime - providing those gangsters with the right business attitude and entrepreneurial skill-set a golden opportunity to make fabulous profits in a very short time-span: the illegal market in drugs enriches such individuals to the tune of some \$300 billion or more a year. A lifestyle you can get used to.

Naturally, like any good businessmen, they will use all means possible to get a lead on their competitors in the market place and keep generating a good rate of return on their investments. For instance, on May 15 27 people in a north Guatemalan farm were slaughtered (mainly decapitated) as part of a longstanding turf war between the Mexican drugs cartel, the Zetas,<sup>2</sup> and the Guatemalan syndicate, the Leones<sup>3</sup> - the victims being ordinary farm labourers who had the misfortune to be employed by someone who had stolen a 2,000-kilo shipment of cocaine from the Zetas.<sup>4</sup> The killing of the farmworkers was the latter's way of collecting the bill in what is a tough, very competitive market. Needless to say, such killings and massacres are not uncommon.

In this way, various drugs syndicates and cartels have become formidable worldwide organisations with the ability to take on the state machine - and survive (the Zetas were able to avoid the Guatemalan authorities and slip back undetected into Mexico after their hard day's work of debt-collecting). Thus the commission report cites United Nations estimates that from 1998 to 2008 the worldwide use of opiates increased by 35%, whilst cocaine use rose by 27% and cannabis by 8.5%. Not to mention the small fact that the 'war on drugs' costs *billions* of dollars every year to wage. Hence last year alone the US federal government spent over \$15 billion, or \$500 per second, while state and local governments forked out at least another \$25 billion.<sup>5</sup> This year the total 'anti-drugs' bill so far amounts to just under \$18 billion.<sup>6</sup> As for the UK, the chairman of the bar council, Nicholas Green, recently commented that drug-related crime costs the UK economy around £13 billion a year in terms of police resources, recidivism, public health, etc.<sup>7</sup> An obscene waste of money in what is purported to be an age of austerity.

The commission, quite correctly, calls for an end to the "criminalisation, marginalisation and stigmatisation of people who use drugs, but who do no harm to others" - and goes on to



**Guatemala: victim of irrationality**

exhort leading figures in political and public life to "have the courage to articulate publicly what many of them acknowledge privately", which is that "the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that repressive strategies will not solve the drug problem" and that "the war on drugs has not, and cannot, be won". Instead, the authors state, what is urgently needed on this issue is a "paradigm shift" - citing the more liberal or enlightened drugs policies of Portugal, Holland and Australia as positive evidence of the "human and social benefits of treating drug addiction as a health rather than criminal justice problem".

Portugal is a particularly instructive example, historically having one of the highest levels of hard drug use - and abuse - on the continent, the number of heroin-users in 2000 measuring between 50,000 and 100,000 (and a correspondingly high level of HIV/Aids infection). But in 2001 it became the first European country to officially abolish all criminal penalties for 'personal possession' of drugs - defined as up to 10 days' supply, including cocaine, heroine and LSD.<sup>8</sup> Prison sentences were replaced with therapy and treatment. Far from becoming a magnet for drugs tourism though, after five years of decriminalisation, Portugal found that the illegal use of drugs by teenagers had significantly declined, rates of HIV infection sharply fell and the numbers of people requesting therapy to get off drugs had more than doubled. A definite and measurable success in terms of public health and general societal well-being.

From all this, the commission recommended that governments should "explore" the legislation of cannabis/marijuana and other controlled substances and in general "experiment" with "legal models" that would undermine organised crime syndicates. Through the "sensible regulation" of drugs policies based on "empirically proven" methods, the report concludes, we can begin to reduce crime, lead to overall better health and promote economic and social development. In short, abandon the crazy 'war on drugs' now.

No-one can accuse the Global Commission on Drug Policy of being bombed-out hippies hoping for one more trip. The team includes the former UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, and

three former presidents (of Mexico, Brazil and Colombia). Then there is the former head of the US Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, the current prime minister of Greece, George Papandreou, former US secretary of state George Schulz and the European Union's former foreign policy chief, Javier Solana. Even the *Daily Mail* would have problems portraying these people as irresponsible libertines hell-bent on the destruction of the moral foundations of civilisation.

## Obdurate

However, the 'official' response to the commission's report was typically obdurate. The US and Mexican governments described its findings and recommendations as "misguided" and "unhelpful" - unlike the 'war on drugs' which has brought nothing but destruction and misery, and innocent people getting their heads hacked off by ruthless criminals. A White House spokesperson mendaciously asserted that "making drugs more available" will "make it harder to keep our communities healthy and safe" - as if the commission was proposing to flood the market with yet more drugs rather than their conscious *regulation* in a crime-free environment.

Just as disingenuously, US national security spokesman Alejandro Poire said that the legalisation of drugs would be an "insufficient and inefficient" step, given the international nature of the illegal drugs trade - when logic surely dictates that it is *precisely* due to the international nature of drugs trafficking that it has to be controlled and regulated on an international scale. The US can no more rid itself of the scourge of drugs rackets alone than can Guatemala or Mexico, therefore to be truly viable the policy of decriminalisation/legalisation has to be carried out on a cross-continental level. Poire also made the curious statement that "to think organised crime in Mexico means drug-trafficking overlooks the other crimes committed such as kidnapping, extortion and robbery" - curious, given that a high preponderance of these sort of criminal activities are obviously drug-related in some shape or form. But clearly the US administration, and others, are monstrously determined - in defiance of all rationality - to blindly pursue the 'war on drugs' regardless of

the human or financial cost.

On the same day that the commission's report was published, *The Guardian* published a full-page advertisement-cum-open letter announcing the launch of a new campaign for the "immediate decriminalisation of drug possession".<sup>9</sup> The campaign, headlined "Drugs - it's time for better laws", has been organised by the drugs charity, Release, and was timed to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act - though in reality it is more accurate to say that for the last 40 years the far greater problem has been the misuse of drugs laws than the actual abuse of drugs.

This high-profile campaign is headed by an assortment of actors, academics, lawyers and former chief constables and the signatories call for a "swift and transparent" review into the "effectiveness", or not, of the government's current drugs policies and laws - making the worthy point that all the past 40 years has produced is a rapid growth in illicit drug use in Britain and noting the significant harm caused by the application of the criminal law to the personal use and possession of drugs. This results in the situation where nearly 80,000 people last year were found guilty or cautioned for the possession of illegal drugs - most of whom were young, black or poor - and where over the past decade more than a *million* people have ended up with a criminal record as a result. They included 44,058 people who were arrested and found guilty of possessing cannabis and a further 11,000 for simple possession of other class 'B' and class 'C' drugs such as amphetamines and tranquillisers.

Just like the commission, the Release open letter laments a policy which is "costly for taxpayers" and "damaging for communities" - observing that "criminalising people who use drugs leads to greater social exclusion and stigmatisation", which in turn makes it "much more difficult for them to gain employment and to play a productive role in society". A needless vicious circle, which leads to a "society full of wasted resources" and where the only real winners are the criminals raking in the lucrative profits thanks to the present policy of drugs prohibition. Commendably, one of the signatories, Richard Branson, implored the government to adopt "more humane and effective" ways to reduce the (potential) harm caused by drugs - that "treats people with addiction problems like patients and not criminals". Sentiments echoed by Sting, who urged David Cameron to think of more "imaginative ways of addressing drug use in our society".

True to form though, the government made clear that it had no interest in being either "imaginative" or "humane" when it comes to drugs policy or the criminal law in general. "We have no intention of liberalising our drugs laws," a home office official stridently announced, then wheeled out the well-worn tautological argument that "drugs are illegal because they are harmful" - to which the obvious rejoinder is that drugs are made harmful because they are illegal. But for our home office apparatchik "giving people a green light to possess drugs through decriminalisation is clearly not the answer".

## Socialisation

Communists, on the other hand, unambiguously call for the full

legalisation of *all* drugs - not just the supposedly 'soft' ones like cannabis. Not because we naively believe that ending the 'war on drugs' is some sort of universal panacea that will instantly usher in a society of perfectly adjusted, well-rounded, non-alienated individuals. No, our call for legalisation is principally motivated by the desire not to make a bad situation worse. Huge swathes of the population are criminalised by the current prohibitive drugs laws.

In the US, of course, this has reached barbaric proportions: arrests for drug law violations this year are expected to exceed the 1,663,582 that occurred in 2009. The various law enforcement agencies made more arrests for drugs violations than for any other offences in 2009 - an estimated 1.6 million, or 13% of the total number. The prison population has grown by an average of 43,266 inmates per year since 1995 - and *around 25% are there for drug law violations*. Furthermore, those receiving custodial sentence for drugs crimes are *disproportionately* black - so whilst blacks constitute 14% of regular drug users in the US, they constitute 37% of those arrested for drug offences and 56% those detained in hellish state prison as a result. Clearly the 'war on drugs' is more like a war on society - fundamentally no different from the 'war on booze' during the dark days of prohibition (1920-33).

The lifting of drugs prohibition would ensure that the gangsters' lucrative businesses would be ruined at a stroke - no more get-rich-quick profits to be made. Legalisation would also have the instant practical benefit of allowing for quality control, such as we now have with that totally legal drug, alcohol - which by scientific or objective analysis is a highly dangerous substance deserving of class 'A' status (or higher). Plainly, it is the *adulteration* of drugs by so many profit-hungry dealers and gangs that is the primary cause of damage and death. Just as you can 'drink responsibly', so you can smoke cannabis or ingest LSD and Ecstasy responsibly. In other words, drug consumption should be *socialised*.

Human beings have *always* taken drugs for stimulation or relaxation, whether for positive or negative reasons - to make us feel happy or to take the pain away. From that broader historical perspective, drug-taking of various sorts has never been abnormal or deviant - far from it. Mind-altering substances have always held an appeal, to one degree or another. There is absolutely no rational or logical reason to believe that this will change in the foreseeable future, including the communist future ●

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## Notes

1. www.globalcommissionondrugs.org.
2. http://insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/zetas/item/77-zetas.
3. http://insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/guatemala/leones/item/449-leones.
4. http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/952-with-guatemala-massacre-mexico-drug-gang-rules-by-terror.
5. www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/policy/10budget/index.html.
6. See the Drug War Clock for a second-by-second update: www.drugsense.org/cms/wodclock.
7. www.lawgazette.co.uk/blogs/news-blog/will-nick-green-qc-s-question-drugs-possession-be-heard-government.
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug\_policy\_of\_Portugal.
9. *The Guardian* June 2.



## DEBATE

# The philosophy of history

Chris Cutrone responds to Mike Macnair

**M**ike Macnair's critique of Platypus takes issue on the philosophy of history of Marxism ('The study of history and the left's decline', June 2). I would like to clarify this, and the senses in which I used the terms 'authoritarianism' and 'imperialism' in my letters of May 19 and May 26, in response to Macnair's two articles written after his attendance at the Platypus 2011 convention in Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

## Historiography of Marxism

First, however, I would like to address the issue of historiography with respect to the German Social Democratic Party in the 2nd International era. Carl E Schorske<sup>2</sup> and James Joll<sup>3</sup> are, among others, important historical sources for my and other Platypus members' views. But I do not think that what Macnair calls a "source-critical" approach to history should be attempted with reference to historians' biographies, which does not clarify but potentially compounds the problem of philosophy of history.

On JP Nettl, I would point to his substantial essay on 'Ideas, intellectuals, and structures of dissent'.<sup>4</sup> I dispute Macnair's characterisation of Nettl's concerns. I think Nettl's biography of Luxemburg was his life-work and not ancillary. Nettl was a liberal/non-Marxist, so there are perhaps some issues to be taken with his work on Luxemburg, but Nettl's views as a political scientist were drawn from his long and close study of Luxemburg and her relation to Marxism, not applied by Nettl to Luxemburg from elsewhere. For him, the history of Marxism raised questions about the possibilities of politics *per se*. Hence, the importance of Nettl's argument.

Thus, his article on 'The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as political model'<sup>5</sup> argued that Luxemburg's views, as expressed in

*Reform or revolution?* and *The mass strike*, among other writings, were not actionist, but concerned with the transformation of the SPD, in which the Marxist left had a stake. Luxemburg and Lenin were not opposed to the formation of workers' political parties as necessary instruments of emancipation, but they were aware of the dangers inherent in this, from a Marxist perspective on the historical development of capital, in which such workers' organisations (including labour unions) were inevitably bound up. In other words, how, for example, the SPD was a phenomenon of the history of capital, or, more precisely, how the workers' movement for socialism was part of the historical development of capital, and did not somehow oppose it from outside.

In this sense, there was an affinity of Eduard Bernstein's views on 'evolutionary socialism' with Luxemburg's, but they drew the opposite political conclusions: where Bernstein found the transformation of capital through reforms to be ameliorative, Luxemburg found a deepening crisis. This was Luxemburg's thesis in *Reform or revolution?* - only reformists separated social reform from political revolution, because Marxism recognised that reforms deepened the crisis of capital and made revolution not less, but more necessary.

## Benjamin and Adorno

I dispute Macnair's characterisation of Benjamin's and Adorno's philosophy of history as attempting to generate "useful myths".<sup>6</sup> Rhetorical and literary style aside, Benjamin and especially Adorno were rigorous Marxists and Hegelians who engaged the issues of 'historical materialism', as manifested after the failure of Marxism. Benjamin and Adorno were not postmodernists *avant la lettre*, despite their spurious late pomo popularity. Rather, Benjamin and Adorno, like Lukács and Korsch (from whom they took direct inspiration), followed Luxemburg's and Lenin's judgments about the crisis of Marxism as the crisis of bourgeois society that Marxism itself, as part of the ideology and practical political leadership of the international social democratic workers' movement, had brought about.

Benjamin and Adorno challenged the linear-progressive conception of history, recovering from the history of Marxism what might appear to be an obscure point, but one addressed, for example, by Plekhanov as history moving in a "knotted line," and by Lenin as history moving in "spirals" of repetition and crisis.<sup>7</sup> This Hegelian-Marxist approach to the dialectics of history was digested usefully by Lukács, as a discussion of historical "moment" and "process" in 'Tailism and the dialectic' (Lukács's unpublished 1925 defence of *History and class consciousness*).

## Hegel and Kant

The Hegelian - and Kantian - point is that the relation between theory and practice is not one of empirical deduction from trial and error, in which an always imperfect theory is corrected, but 'inductive', in that the concrete 'material' object of practice is the concretisation of abstractions, and, furthermore, the object of practice is

indeed first and foremost the human subject: ie, the 'subject-object' of transformation.

The question is the adequacy of the relation of theory and practice. Metaphysical ('theoretical') categories refer not to a world extrinsic to human subjectivity, but to the world constituted socially in and through such categories, which are always eminently practical as well as theoretical. So, in the most pertinent example, the 'commodity form' is, for Marxists, a category of social relations, which gives it an effective *social* reality, different from physical nature. Macnair seems not to have attended to the Kantian revolution in philosophy, from which Hegel, Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno followed.

How this matters for the philosophy of history is that history is not a compendium of past facts, but a *social relation* of the 'present' with itself. The past is not 'past' but present, and present 'historically'. So, for Benjamin and Adorno (following Lukács and Korsch, who, in turn, followed Lenin, Luxemburg, and Marx and Engels on this point), the question was how to reckon the history of Marxism and the greater socialist workers' movement as *symptomatic expression* of the history of capital, or how the 'proletariat' was and could become the transformed 'subject-object of history'. Lukács's term for the self-alienated character of this 'subject-object' condition of the working class in capital was 'reification'. 'Reification' referred not to the workers' quotidian consciousness in capitalism, but to the 'class consciousness' of the workers, as expressed by social democracy (and 'Marxism') at its height. For Lukács and those who followed, 'reification' meant Kautsky.

## Abuse of theory

Nettl has a great line about how Kautsky attempted to "invest certain observed phenomena with the normative sanction of Marxist theory". Nettl cited Parvus against Kautsky: "All the guts knocked out of [Marxism]. Out of Marx's good raw dough Kautsky made *Matzes*".<sup>8</sup> Kautsky abused theory, making it serve as justification or rationalisation - as most 'Marxists' do - rather than as a provocation to the self-reflection of consciousness, in the Hegelian sense.

While it may be tempting to oppose such apparent static/immobilised (or 'contemplative') consciousness with action(ism), Lukács knew well that the opposition of static and dynamic was an antinomy of capital itself, that capital moved through a dialectic of the antinomy of the dynamic and the static in history. This is where the recovery of the Hegelian dimension of Marxism was critical: Marxism itself had become 'vulgarised' in its self-understanding, and had failed in taking a dialectical approach to itself as a historical phenomenon, as a symptom of the history of capital. Marxism had succumbed to the 'bourgeois' (pre-Kantian) view of (linear) progress through trial and error, the asymptotic view of knowledge, in which, as Benjamin put it, mordantly citing, in his 'Theses on the philosophy of history', Dietzgen as pathological example of social democratic progressivism, "Every day our cause becomes clearer and people get smarter." History has proved otherwise.

## Philosophy

Benjamin's and Adorno's challenge to such a 'progressive' view of history, which they thought was ideologically

blinding, was not irrationalism any more than Hegel was. It does not call for "myth", but a different philosophy of history than the empiricist-deductive one. Dialectics is not a matter of estimating probability, but grasping inherent possibility in history.

As Adorno put it, in his 1942 essay 'Reflections on class theory', in response to both Benjamin's 'Theses' and Marx's and Engels' *Communist manifesto*, "According to [Marxian] theory, history is the history of class struggles. But the concept of class is bound up with the emergence of the proletariat ... By exposing the historical necessity that had brought capitalism into being, political economy became the critique of history as a whole ... All history is the history of class struggles because it was always the same thing: namely, prehistory. This gives us a pointer to what history is. From the most recent form of injustice, a steady light reflects back on history as a whole. Only in this way can theory enable us to use the full weight of history to gain an insight into the present without succumbing in resignation to the burden of the past. [Marxism has been praised] on account of its dynamism ... Dynamism is merely one side of dialectic: it is the side preferred by the belief in practicality ... The other, less popular aspect of dialectic is its static side ... The law that, according to the Hegelian dialectic, governs the restlessly destructive unfolding of the ever-new consists in the fact that at every moment the ever-new is also the old lying close at hand. The new does not add itself to the old, but is the old in distress."<sup>9</sup>

## Authoritarianism

This brings me around to the issues of authoritarianism and imperialism, which have different usage for me than the colloquial ones. Adorno co-authored the famous study on *The authoritarian personality*. This followed from the earlier Frankfurt School *Studies on authority and the family*.

A commonplace misunderstanding of Frankfurt School critical theory is that it attempted to synthesise Marxist and Freudian psychoanalytic approaches, but this view is mistaken. Rather, Freudian psychoanalysis was itself taken by Adorno *et al* to be a symptom of the historical development of capital. Freud's categories were taken to be descriptive and then resituated, critically, in a Marxian view of historical development of society. In this view, Marx was not ignorant of Freudian insights, but rather it was only as a function of the later social-historical development of capital that human 'psychology' appeared as it did to Freud.

A contemporary of Benjamin and Adorno, Wilhelm Reich, in his early work on 'Ideology as a material force', published later in his book *The mass psychology of fascism* (1933), pointed to how Marxism had failed to apprehend the 'progressive' character of fascism; in other words, how fascism had expressed, however pathologically, the social-historical transformation of capital in the early 20th century better than 'vulgar', economic-determinist Marxism had been able to do. Hence, fascism's ideological and political victory over Marxism. For Reich, (the failure of) Marxism was responsible for fascism. Fascism expressed the workers' 'fear of freedom', which Marxism, in its false rationalism of

'economic interest', had failed to overcome. Workers had a subjective, 'psychological' interest in unfreedom that Marxism needed to address.

What this meant to Benjamin and Adorno, following Lukács's view on reification, was that Marxism had failed to address authoritarianism dialectically, as a function of the transformation of capital. In the Marxian view, the workers' movement for socialism is itself the most important 'self-contradictory' and self-alienated phenomenon of the history of capital. This is why Marx began with the critique of socialism, or, why the 'critique of political economy' is the critique of the necessary and symptomatic consciousness of the socialist workers' movement.

## Imperialism

What I raised in my May 26 letter concerning the changed organic composition of capital is this: that the 'mass' proletarianisation of the core capitalist countries was the result, as Marx discussed in *Capital* Vol 1 on 'the working day', of politically variable social conditions of wage labour that, with increased worker empowerment, cause a shift from variable to constant capital, or from labour-time-intensive sweatshop to automated machine production, requiring ever less labour input and resulting in ever greater value-crises.

This, in turn, affected the conditions of colonialism. Whereas colonies in the classical bourgeois era of the emergence of modern capital were sites of market expansion, in the late era of 'imperialism' or 'monopoly capital', colonies become raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry. The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a 'reserve army of unemployed', but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics. This was already true of the post-1848 world Marx addressed in Bonapartism (also evinced contemporaneously by Bismarck and Disraeli), but became even more so subsequently. The question is why the workers supported authoritarian politics, and how the workers' movement for socialism was not free of this effect. (In this sense, Hayek's critique of socialism in *The road to serfdom* is apposite.<sup>10</sup>)

This is the world in which we continue to live today, but without the proximal history of the late 19th-early 20th century social democratic workers' movement and its Marxist political leadership that, in a 'dialectical' (self-contradictory) way, participated in the history that brought these conditions into being - producing the need for world revolution that is Marxism's legacy ●

## Notes

1. M Macnair, 'No need for party?' *Weekly Worker* May 12; and 'Theoretical dead end', May 19.
2. C E Schorske *German Social Democracy 1905-17: the development of the great schism* Harvard 1955.
3. J Joll *The Second International 1889-1914* London 1974.
4. Collected in P Rieff (ed) *On intellectuals: theoretical studies, case studies* New York 1969.
5. *Past and Present* No30, April 1965.
6. M Macnair, 'The study of history and the left's decline', June 2.
7. See Lenin's 1915 *Granat Encyclopaedia* entry on Karl Marx.
8. P Nettl, 'The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as political model' *Past and Present* No30, April 1965.
9. T Adorno *Can one live after Auschwitz? A philosophical reader* Stanford 2003, pp93-95.
- 10 F Hayek *The road to serfdom* Chicago 1944.



**Paul Klee's *Angelus novus*: according to Benjamin, looking upon the unfolding catastrophe with horror**



## REVIEW

# Propaganda of the deed

Sean Birchall *Beating the fascists: the untold story of Anti-Fascist Action* Freedom Press, London 2010, pp413, £15

**T**his book appears at an interesting time, given its subject matter. The historical narrative it lays out - the rise of militant anti-fascism from the 1970s, and its decline in the mid-90s - covers a certain period of British far-right activity, where it was dominated by those who sought to exercise physical control over their turf. Violent altercations between fascists and their opponents (or, more often, unlucky victims) were frequent.

All that changed with the electoral turn of the British National Party, first of all under former leader John Tyndall and then more enthusiastically after Nick Griffin's palace coup. Yet now this period too is perhaps coming to an end; the BNP is presently under an enormous amount of strain, having faced a series of electoral disasters and internal spats.

Meanwhile, the English Defence League - a rather more physical, thuggish outfit based primarily on rightwing football casuals - is on the rise, and looks more of a threatening force than any on the far right we have seen since the 1970s. The left's initial response to the EDL - that it was a creature of the BNP - was a basically risible conclusion from its systematic overstatement of the BNP threat, and is now clearly empirically false; Griffin and his cohorts always considered it a threat, and now the whispers are of the EDL hoovering up a substantial bloc of dissatisfied BNP cadre.

So now is probably an apt moment to reconsider the history of the anti-fascist movement in Britain, and *Beating the fascists* amounts to a valuable, if flawed, contribution. A weighty volume, the bulk of its contents are culled from eyewitness interviews with those directly involved in confronting various fascist groups - in the fullest sense of the word 'confronting'.

This aims, from the outset, to provide a counterweight to the received wisdom that Britain's political culture, with its traditions of pragmatism and tolerance, is immune to the explosion of far-right populism that blights those excitable continents.

Instead, "British nationalism was sidelined for almost a quarter of a century, not by tolerance and diversity, but by the insurrectionary strategy pursued by fascist groups and the cold-eyed countermeasures adopted by their direct opponents ... while race awareness took all the plaudits, it was a strikingly illiberal militant anti-fascism that did all the heavy lifting" (p18).

There are three main threads to the narrative - the first is the evolution of fascism and far-right nationalism in the period covered; the second the complex political shifts and intrigues in the anti-fascist movement; and the third the series of often violent clashes between the two sides. The first thread is broadly uncontroversial and serves mostly as background material, though some attention is paid to the sensationalism of the media and liberal anti-fascists in its own estimations of far-right forces (in particular, the overhyping of Combat 18).

The debates among anti-fascists are covered from an unashamedly partial standpoint - this book is a product of Red Action, which split from the Socialist Workers Party in the early 80s. The SWP apparat denounced RA as 'squaddists', obsessed with violent confrontations against the NF; but



**National Front: faced down by AFA**

RA was equally noted for its vocal support for Irish republicanism and increasingly snotty attitude to the rest of the left.

Some have reduced the latter to a kind of macho posturing, but that is not strictly true - RA comrades not only considered themselves the hardest men in the room, but the smartest and the most apt to face difficult truths. (In spite of their hatred of Trotskyism and 'Leninism', it must also be said, they have remained faithful to the distasteful Trot habit of labelling any and all political opponents 'middle class'.)

So there is a very definite political thread running through the AFA debates, which is broadly the matter of how RA got to the point of forming the Independent Working Class Association, a semi-leftwing municipal political organisation, notable for a brief flurry of impressive votes in council elections. Combined with the story of AFA's substantial activities, RA's account of all this is more notable than it might be, because it gets halfway to the right answer.

## Turf wars

Most of the book is, as noted, taken up by accounts of AFA's - and especially Red Action's - battles with the National Front, British National Party and sundry other fascist factions. From the initial stirrings of a new generation of militant anti-fascists, at the 'business end' of the SWP's Anti-Nazi League, to turf wars in Islington, to football firms in Manchester, the comrades strove to meet fascists wherever they popped up.

By the group's own estimation, "practically our only other political activity at this time was taking part in and selling our paper ... at large leftwing demonstrations" (p89). The flipside of this monomania was the quite admirable seriousness with which they treated militant anti-fascism. It is common to see slightly silly Trotskyists (Permanent Revolution are repeat offenders) talking loudly and publicly about the need to physically

take on the BNP and so forth, without making any serious attempt to conceal their identities or otherwise pay heed to the *military* nature of this kind of work.

Not so RA and AFA - "As an organisation, our safety lay in our anonymity ... individuals were forced to remain politically anonymous at work and in the communities in which they lived for fear of identification and retaliation by fascists and their sympathisers" (p89). A chapter headed 'Political cleansing in north London, 1987' gives a certain flavour of the use to which they put this anonymity:

"Intelligence indicated the fascists had established a relationship with a pub back of Kings Cross station ... Before making their move, AFA security stewards made sure they were aware of all the possible permutations. In order to carry as little threat as possible, female intelligence officers were directed to frequent it." So careful was their preparation on this occasion that, in the event, they did not in the end need to turn over the pub to break the landlord from offering a base of operations to Ian Stuart (pp129-30).

For the author, it is the pursuit of organised, basically paramilitary operations against fascists that, in the end, forced the latter to abandon its notion of controlling the streets. In spite of John Tyndall's and others' apprenticeship with the neo-Nazi, Colin Jordan, who insisted on drilling them for race war in the countryside of the home counties, *Beating the fascists* is on the whole pretty sniffy about the amateurism of AFA's opponents; AFA could face them down, despite very often being outnumbered, by employing tactical nous and the element of surprise. Tyndall, and then Griffin, had to swap the boots for suits, ultimately because they were the ones getting booted.

## Conclusions

AFA, under the leadership of Red Action, should be commended for taking note of this change in tack by the BNP, and attempting to readjust

accordingly. The BNP had made its first electoral breakthrough, getting Derek Beackon elected as a councillor on the Isle of Dogs in 1993 - it managed this off the back of patient work among the electors over many years, with a helping hand from local race-baiting Liberal Democrats.

Combined with the retreat from street confrontations - which proceeded haltingly until Nick Griffin took the reins - the BNP had hit on the strategy it attempts to pursue to this day. To the large rump of disaffected, alienated working class people bequeathed us by Margaret Thatcher, it pitches a simple message: we are the only ones who really care. BNP activists make themselves useful to local community campaigns, giving them a surreptitious lick of chauvinist paint; and then reap the rewards, so the theory goes, at the ballot box.

Birchall quotes extensively from a 1994 AFA leaflet, with Red Action fingerprints all over it. The bottom line is an equally simple message. "The BNP's attack on Labour is from the right and is racist, ultra-conservative and anti-working class. Our primary role is to guarantee that a successful challenge to Labour comes *only* from the left" (p368). Whatever else may be said about Red Action, it must be pointed out that, unlike those erstwhile Workers Power comrades now in Permanent Revolution (WP does not come out of this book well, but for other reasons), and certainly unlike the SWP, it acknowledged that a *political* response was needed to the far right that took into account mass alienation from mainstream politics.

Its response, ultimately, was the Independent Working Class Association. The IWCA attempts, in the last analysis, to replicate the kind of community work taken up by the BNP, in the same kind of places (predominantly white working class communities), politically expressed in votes for IWCA candidates in council elections. It falls broadly within the older tradition of municipal socialism,

although the IWCA has largely dropped references to socialism and the left, believing the left to have *de facto* abandoned the working class in order to pursue right-on causes friendly to an ill-defined middle class and student milieu.

The IWCA continues to exist, over a decade since its foundation; but initial successes in Oxford and good one-off votes elsewhere have failed to translate into a strategy replicable on a wider scale. Perhaps this should not surprise us - it has not, after all, been a sustainable strategy for the BNP either, as evidenced by its present predicament - although future heirs to the right-populist tradition will no doubt find the BNP's decade in the sun of interest.

In the end, the political price is too high. Many thousands of working class people are stuck on sink estates with no obvious means of political representation; but the point of communist politics is to unite the class in order to rule society, not to achieve "working class control of working class areas", as the IWCA website puts it, which is in any case an impossibility on any major scale under the bourgeois state.

Doing so means taking on the larger issues of national and indeed global significance. It is quite understandable that housing looms larger in many people's minds than Libya - but the SWP is actually *right* to point out that the X billion pounds spent on bombing Gaddafi could build Y thousands of houses; and it is, moreover, the global movements of capitalism that result, at the molecular level, in housing shortages on the one hand and bloody wars on the other.

There is worse. By going into rough working class neighbourhoods with, in a sense, nothing to say, Red Action and the IWCA have ended up parroting the 'law and order' line on several occasions, and indeed dropping universal opposition to immigration controls altogether. These are ultimately the lines of the reactionary press; and it is the latter, along with other things, that provides the ideological atmosphere in which the far right can gain traction. Holding fast to these principles is not about being right-on, but about providing an alternative ideological pole of attraction to these reactionary forces; and RA's attacks on the 'middle class left', especially given its more recent disavowal of the left as such, veer perilously close to *The Sun's* populist attacks on north London Guardianista types.

This, in a sense, brings us back to the beginning. There *is* something about British society which makes it harder for fascist and right-populist forces to make gains in society. It is certainly not 'tolerance and diversity', or 'race awareness' - it is the fact that far-right ideas are a perfectly ordinary part of mainstream discourse, and already have a political representative: the Conservative Party. Enoch Powell was not in the NF; and ultimately Thatcher was able to cut the latter's support off 'at the ankles' because "racist, ultra-conservative, anti-working class" politics have always had a safe home in her party.

Taking on the far right ultimately means taking on British chauvinism, which means thinking bigger than the IWCA ●

**Harley Filben**



## OUR HISTORY

# The tragedy of Sylvia Pankhurst

**A**s we have seen, Sylvia Pankhurst had become increasingly alienated from the negotiations that led to the formation of the CPGB.<sup>1</sup> In a pre-emptive sectarian attack, she took the lead in setting up the so-called 'Communist Party - British Section of the Third International' on June 19 1920. This had Edgar Whitehead as secretary, TJ Watkins as treasurer and herself - an undoubtedly talented journalist - as editor of *Workers' Dreadnought*, its official organ.

The CP-BSTI involved a scattering of individuals from the South Wales Socialist Society and Socialist Labour Party rumps, but was essentially little more than Pankhurst's *Workers' Socialist Federation* rebranded. The formation of the CP-BSTI was therefore an act of political vandalism, timed to wreck a unity process that involved the overwhelming mass of communists in Britain. Of course the Third International was totally opposed to her move.

Yet in spite of this, or maybe because of it, plus her well-known leftist attitude towards electoral work and affiliation to the Labour Party, Lenin ensured that Sylvia Pankhurst was able to give special branch agents the slip and be smuggled via Norway into Soviet Russia. Arriving during the course of Comintern's 2nd Congress, she found herself and Willie Gallacher - also a delegate from Britain - targets of Lenin's anti-left-communist polemic.<sup>2</sup>

The debates and votes at the 2nd Congress saw the left communists decisively defeated. However, while Gallacher returned to Britain determined to unite all communists into the CPGB, Pankhurst stuck to her 'infantile' views, still dismissing the CPGB as "Communist Party (British Socialist Party)".

Nevertheless, the momentum towards unity was unstoppable and was to create a qualitatively *higher* form of organisation, not simply the BSP augmented. At its national inaugural conference in Gorton, Manchester, the CP-BSTI voted to "join the conference proposed by the executive committee of the Third International".

## Are we in the Third International?

Our statement in last week's issue, that the Communist Party is part of the Third International, is challenged by W McLaine of the Communist Party (BSP). We quote, therefore, from the theses governing this question, which was carried by the Second Congress of the Third International:

"The Second Congress of the Third International considers as not correct the views regarding the relations of the party to the class and to the masses, and the non-participation of the communist parties in the bourgeois parliaments and reactionary labour unions, which have been precisely refuted in the special resolutions of the present congress, and advocated in full by the Communist Labour Party of Germany<sup>3</sup> and also partially by the Communist Party of Switzerland, by *Kommunistus*,



Arrested for inciting 'mutiny and lawlessness'

the organ of the West European Secretariat of the Communist International in Vienna, and by several of our Dutch comrades; further, by certain communist organisations in England, as, for instance, the *Workers' Socialist Federation*. Also by the *International Workers of the World*<sup>4</sup> in America, the *Shop Steward Committees* in England, and so forth.

"Nevertheless, the Second Congress of the Third International considers possible and desirable the immediate affiliation of such of these organisations which have not already done so officially ..."

The congress having passed this resolution, the executive of the Third International declared that a new United Communist Party should be formed in Britain, and asked the delegates from the two Communist Parties, the English Shop Stewards' and *Workers' Committees*, and the Scottish *Workers' Committee* to recommend the following proposal to their respective parties. This the delegates from the respective parties, including those of the Communist Party (BSP), unanimously agreed to do; not a protest was raised from any quarter. The proposal is, that within four months, a conference shall be called, at which shall assist the two Communist Parties, the English and Scottish *Workers' Committees*, the Welsh Unofficial Industrial Committees, and Communist Movement, and any other communist organisations desirous of being represented. A committee of two representatives of the societies above named is to make the arrangements for the conference.

The Communist Party at its Manchester conference decided to accept the call of the Third International to take part in this proposed conference. Is the Communist Party (BSP) also prepared to do so?

***Workers' Dreadnought* October 9 1920, Vol 7, No 29**

The CPGB did press for unity, and from August 1920 to January 1921 a series of meetings and discussions took place to that end. The majority

of the CP-BSTI were obviously sincere in their desire for unity; indeed at its Cardiff conference on December 4-5 1920 it not only agreed to unity, but voted 15 to three to accept the theses and resolutions of Comintern's 2nd Congress, including the stand against leftism. Pankhurst was not able to vote against. Since October 20 she had been in prison, charged with inciting members of the armed forces to "mutiny and lawlessness" - something she did not deny. From prison she made her views known on the supposed "non-communist elements" in her own organisation. More than that though, her sectarianism was leading her to put her individual projects before the party. She imagined herself at the head of a 'left' faction in the CPGB and threatened to use her paper, the *Workers' Dreadnought* to these narrow ends.

## Unity and the Workers' Dreadnought

Dear comrades

On January 29 and 30 a conference of the Communist Party (BSTI), the Communist Party of Great Britain, Scottish Communist Labour Party, and others, will be held with the object of merging into a united party.

If I were free to attend this conference, I should advocate the formation of a united party under the following conditions:

1. That the leftwing elements keep together and form a strong, compact left bloc within the party. Lenin advised this when I discussed the question with him in Moscow, and I think the advice is sound.<sup>5</sup> The left bloc should have its own convenors, and its own special sittings prior to party conferences, to decide its policy. In the Italian Socialist Party, the right, left and centre sections hold their special sittings each evening during the party's conference week, in order to formulate the policy for the

next day's session. The policy is thus classified and hammered out. The same procedure should be followed here by our left bloc. The activities of the bloc will not be confined to party conferences. Every district will have its left bloc, working to mould the policy of the party, to act as the 'ginger' group and give the lead.

2. The left elements should insist that the constitution of the party shall leave them free to propagate their policy in the party and in the Third International as a whole.

3. The entire executive of the party, and all the officials, should be elected at the inaugural conference, and thereafter at party conferences. This is a question of vital importance. All officials and members of the executive should be subject to recall by a special party conference, called on the initiative of one-third of the branches.

I believe that a united party ought to be formed. I have not changed my view that there are elements in the Communist Party of Great Britain (BSP), which are not revolutionary, not communist, and which belong in spirit to the Second International. In the Communist Party (BSTI), there are also in my opinion, non-communist elements.

I believe that the interests of communism can best be served at this juncture by forming a united party and fighting to make it a genuine Communist Party, and to expel from office all those who are not communist revolutionaries.

When the Communist Party (BSTI) merges in the new united Communist Party, as I believe it will, or if the Communist Party (BSTI) should split into separate factions, the conditions under which I placed the *Workers' Dreadnought* at the disposal of the party as its organ will have ceased to operate.

The *Workers' Dreadnought* will then become an independent organ, giving an independent support to the Communist Party from the leftwing standpoint. The paper will be run by

those who are now responsible for it, until my release from prison.

**E Sylvia Pankhurst  
*Workers' Dreadnought* January 15 1921, Vol 7, No 43**

Pankhurst's own CP (BSTI) comrades must have been disturbed by this undisciplined threat and it probably encouraged them to press ahead with unity with other communists.

## Communist unity

A further meeting was held in Leeds on Saturday, the last of the committee appointed to organise the convention to establish a united Communist Party. Those present included A MacManus and A Inkpin, representing the Communist Party of Great Britain; JV Leckie and J Maclean, representing the Communist Labour Party; and R Beech and T Watkins, representing the Communist Party (BSTI).

The Unity Convention was definitely fixed to be held at Leeds on Saturday and Sunday, January 29 and 30. Representation will be of branches of participating organisations, as well as of independent communist groups willing to join the unity party on the basis of one delegate for the first 25 members and one delegate for additional membership above 25. Voting at the conference will be on the basis of one vote for every 25 members represented. Notices convening the conference will be issued this week and all inquiries and applications for delegates' credentials should be addressed to Albert Inkpin, 16 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2.

***Workers' Dreadnought* January 15 1921, Vol 7, No 43.**

When Sylvia Pankhurst was finally released in May 1921, the Leeds convention had taken place. Former CP-BSTI secretary ET Whitehead sent her an official letter repudiating *Workers' Dreadnought* as an organ of the Communist Party - during Pankhurst's imprisonment it had been run as a factional journal by her faithful friend, Nora Smythe. From here on in it was downhill all the way for Pankhurst and her sectarian project. Over the summer of 1921 she resumed editorship and in August, desperate for funds, the paper was turned into a £1-a-share corporation along the lines of today's *Morning Star*. As a result the CPGB broke all links with her and after a brief lash-up with Herman Gorter, the Dutch left communist, Sylvia Pankhurst drifted out of working class politics altogether. She ended her days in Ethiopia, dying in September 1960 a friend and devotee of the 'Lion of Judah', the emperor Haile Selassie - a truly bizarre and tragic end for a highly talented, charismatic former partisan of the working class and communism ●

## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010.
2. See *Leftwing communism* and *Speeches at the 2nd Congress*.
3. The Communist Workers Party.
4. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or the Wobblies) exists today as a syndicalist sect with a claimed membership of something like 12,000 internationally, but at its peak in 1923 it boasted some 100,000, and could mobilise the support of perhaps 300,000 other workers for specific actions.
5. Obviously, this was a complete fabrication.



## POLEMIC

# Making Marxist education a priority

Paul B Smith replies to James Turley

**D**o the organised groups of the left inhibit or facilitate the development of a Marxist perspective? Readers of this newspaper may be familiar with the argument that most groups have in one way or another adapted to a Stalinist or Labourist environment. Although they purport to be 'socialist', 'communist' or 'Marxist' political parties (or the embryos of such), they promote policies and practices that delay or prevent the emergence of a proletarian movement for communism. This is the opposite of the role they are designed to play - one of enabling and accelerating the revolutionary process.

## Commodity fetishism and Stalinism

Sympathies with this argument influenced the writing of two pieces that appeared here recently ('A Marxist culture free from the taint of Stalinism', February 24; 'Stalinist barriers to study and thought', March 3). In these articles I tried to explain the neglect of the study of Marxist literature (and the anti-Marxist culture that supports it). I gave two reasons for this. The first was the role commodity fetishism plays. I described the latter as the source of the ideology that keeps capitalism in place. Aspects of this ideology include assumptions that capitalism has existed and will continue to exist for all time; that market forces operate independently of individuals' actions; that workers are powerless to challenge capitalism; and that humans are inherently selfish, vicious and competitive.

The second reason I gave was the legacy of Stalinism. I mentioned that most people do not distinguish between Marxism and Stalinism. Stalinism made the idea of communism repulsive to workers. It dressed up anti-Marxism as Marxism. It replaced Marxism with two sterile dogmas: 'histmat' (historical materialism) and 'diamat' (dialectical materialism). Stalin made a scientific understanding of Soviet-type regimes impossible by deleting the concept of the surplus product from Soviet discourse. I described the damage the Stalinist philosopher, Louis Althusser, did to the coherence of Marx's work with his claim that there is an "epistemological break" between the early humanist Marx and the later anti-humanist Marx. I argued that the objections directed at Marxism by thinkers such as Karl Popper are true of Stalinist dogma, but not of Marxism.

I concluded that the fusion of commodity fetishism with Stalinism has created institutional barriers to the study and comprehension of Marxism. These include an education system dominated by the needs of the market and industry, and the absence of a vital movement for socialism. These barriers are temporary and the conditions for overcoming them are now emerging, as universities come under attack and leftwing groups formed during the Stalinist period disintegrate and collapse.

## Adaptation

James Turley has both developed my argument and attempted to prove its



**Pol Pot ruthlessly purged intellectuals in order to control criticism**

opposite - that there is a positive side to Stalinism ('Fighting Stalinism politically', May 5). He reminds readers that Stalinism continues to have a catastrophic effect on leftwing politics. Ostensibly anti-Stalinist groups and individuals have adapted to and reproduce Stalinist policies, forms of organisation and practices. He targets popular frontism, bureaucratic centralism and nationalism as results of acculturation to Stalinism. The effect has been class-collaboration and reformism. He suggests that these patterns of thought and practice are still with us today. They need to be challenged politically and intellectually.

In my experience, these challenges emerge out of discussion and debate. A recent example taken from the *Weekly Worker* is Eddie Ford's arguments for an Arab revolution in the Middle East. Correspondents have criticised this as the return of nationalism and the Stalinist two-stage theory - a first stage of democracy and a second stage of socialism. They argue that workers' election of managers at the workplace level without a socialist seizure of power would be repressed mercilessly by the ruling class. Another well challenged example of Stalinist adaptation is the Scottish Socialist Party's advocacy of independence as the first stage of a socialist revolution. This adaptation emerged out of a Stalinised reading of John Maclean's call for a Scottish workers' republic in the 1920s. This led to support for Scottish nationalism.

Most Trotskyist groups have adopted two-stage theories. The latter have a well established Stalinist

pedigree and are derived from what Turley describes as pressures to "collaborate with ... the 'national bourgeoisie'" imposed on the left by Soviet diplomacy during the cold war. In the case of Trotskyists, they follow from belief in the progressive nature of nationalised property relations (whether or not these are under workers' control).

Written forms of criticism imply the existence of educated critics and an educated readership. Individuals are more likely to adapt to a Stalinised culture if they have no time to study and no contact with intellectuals. The adaptation of groups is more likely if Marxist education is not given organisational priority. For example, someone who has studied and understood Marx's article on the Jewish question (and Trotsky's writings on the Russian Revolution and Stalinism) is less likely to adopt a two-stage theory than someone told by his or her comrades that Marxist-Leninism dictates a two-stage theory for national liberation (and to criticise it is heterodox).

## Anti-intellectualism

Stalinism has been responsible for an anti-intellectual culture on the left. This has prioritised activism over education. Those employed to police and enforce a group's line (ie, the policy the group's leadership has to persuade potential voters publicly) have disparaged critical intellectuals as 'armchair theorists'. They are dismissed as interpreting the world and not changing it. If members are

made busy with leafleting, writing and selling newspapers and organising meetings and demonstrations, then there is less likelihood of dissent and disunity.

Intellectuals are by nature critical. They are likely to question or challenge arguments or positions based on authority or prejudice and try to develop them themselves. Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot ruthlessly purged intellectuals in order to try to control criticism of the unviable regimes and irrational politics they promoted. The Soviet gulags contained not only old Bolsheviks, anarchists, Mensheviks, socialist revolutionaries and Trotskyists, but also journalists, trade unionists, priests, academics and lawyers. Mao publicly humiliated intellectuals interested in studying Hegel and Marx, and sent them along with others into the countryside to do hard physical labour. The Khmer Rouge considered everyone who worked and lived in the cities as potential intellectuals and exterminated them indiscriminately.

Although popular front politics encouraged grooming intellectual 'fellow travellers' in the west to defend Soviet-type states, there was always the danger that the latter might use their literary skills and influence in the media in a critical manner. Given the dearth of intellectuals in the former USSR, Stalinists relied on loyal academics in the west to polemicise against the 'petty bourgeois' class character of dissenting intellectuals. If intellectuals moved to the left, they were denounced as 'Trotskyists' or 'anarchists' - labels that meant the same as 'class enemy'.

Stalinist anti-intellectualism lives on in the behaviour of leaders of leftwing groups who quote great slabs of text from historical debates in order to silence critics of contemporary policies. It survives in the feelings that many rank-and-file members of groups have of being incapable of handling or understanding criticism. Many individuals seem to have difficulty distinguishing between criticism, public humiliation and personal attacks. Others seem so fearful of criticism, they cope by ignoring it. I guess this is because it feels or looks like a public humiliation or a personal attack. The expression of differences of opinion either takes the form of mindless polemic or is avoided altogether for fear of becoming the object of attack.

The lack of confidence in educated debate and discussion has been eroded by the Stalinist legacy of suppression of difference through violence or ostracism. There is a long history of members of groups resorting to physical or verbal abuse when faced with challenges to their knowledge or authority. A recent example was the rapid descent of members of the Campaign for a Marxist Party's into name-calling and threats of violence. This arose when differences over whether or not to adopt a political programme or to engage within electoral politics became apparent.

A lingering Stalinist influence is the habit of speculating whether a political opponent is a police spy, *agent provocateur* or infiltrator. This leads to a culture of distrust, suspicion and the ever-present threat of exclusion and violence. A combination of the above



practices has served to isolate individuals in groups making them incapable of either engaging with workers, developing Marxist theory or prioritising Marxist education. It serves to atomise and divide revolutionaries.

### Guilt and blame

Within such a culture, it is unsurprising that James Turley should read a tone of denunciation into the text of my articles. He interprets my optimistic hypothesis that there is now sufficient awareness of the effects of Stalinism and commodity fetishism on the left to create a Marxist culture free from the taint of Stalinism as a moral diatribe. He thinks this is directed against individuals and groups (such as the CPGB) that have at some stage in their histories supported Stalinist regimes critically or uncritically. This is not my intention. I want to enlighten rather than offend. I want to open up the question of why a Marxist culture does not yet exist either within or outwith organised leftwing groups.

It is true that I make a sharp distinction between Marxism and Stalinism. I have taken from Hillel Ticktin the idea that Stalinism has been the most powerful form of anti-Marxism in existence. I therefore disagree with Turley that Stalinism is a distortion of Marxism. If it were the latter, it would be easily corrected rather than taken for Marxism itself. Like Turley I am as frustrated and annoyed by the ignorance, confusion, desperate politics and wasted energy Stalinism has caused. On the other hand, I am not one of those Trotskyists who think that people with a Stalinist heritage should be hauled before the tribunal of proletarian justice, found guilty and shot.

### Althusser again

Up to this point, Turley and I have walked together. We go in different directions when he tries to prove that there is a positive side to Stalinism that has extended Marxism. If he means by this that Stalinism was neither capitalist nor socialist; that it was an unviable system that promoted nationalism and irrationalism throughout the world; then, there is the positive conclusion to be drawn that it had nothing to do with Marxism. Unfortunately he does not mean this. He argues that Stalinism has produced works of intellectual worth that have developed Marxism in a positive direction.

In my articles, I used the example of Louis Althusser as one of the most influential Stalinist intellectuals of the 20th century. Many scholars have used Althusser's writings as a source of inspiration to advance their thinking and careers. This was unavoidable during the cold war, when, as a result of popular front policies, Stalinist academics formed powerful networks and temporary alliances with left-leaning anti-Stalinist intellectuals. Such networks enabled them to survive, organise and promote pro-Soviet or pro-Maoist policies. I agree that academics have made use of the work of Stalinist thinkers to develop ideas within the university disciplines of labour history, sociology and literary and media studies. These may be ideas of some intellectual worth. Their contributions to their disciplines may be interesting and thought-provoking.

I am sceptical, however, that they have made any contribution to Marxism. I question whether these writings have advanced the body of knowledge workers need to rule as a class and develop the conditions for a classless society worldwide. The latter requires the development and application of categories found within Marx's political economy, such as abstract labour, productive and unproductive labour, use-value and value, finance capital, decline and planning. These are applicable to the understanding of contemporary crises, class formation and the nature of Stalinism itself. Althusser did not develop these categories nor apply them to contemporary reality. On the contrary, he interpreted them according to a non-Marxist doctrine - structuralism.

### Turley's argument

Turley defines Marxism as the political expropriation of the bourgeoisie by the collective organisation of the working class. He opposes this to an understanding

of the Marxist method applied to political economy, history and philosophy. As a result he states that whether workers use a Stalinist textbook or apply a Marxist method to the understanding of capitalism is unimportant. He thinks that, although *Capital* is worth studying, the study of political economy, history and philosophy from a Marxist perspective takes a lower priority than political activity. Organising and developing policies are more important than study. They are important because political activity contributes to changing the world, whereas study only arms us intellectually in attempting to achieve that goal.

In support for the above position, he argues that revolutionary politics takes both a logical and a historical priority over the development and application of political economy to our understanding of capitalism and socialism. He criticises *Capital* for being about capitalism and not about socialism. He states that *Capital* does not prove that the working class is the basis for socialism.

This is a common misunderstanding of *Capital*. As I stated in my articles, *Capital* is an advance in socialist theory. In *Capital* Marx showed that socialism is incompatible with the market in all its forms. Socialism will not preserve small-scale commodity production, but destroy the latter along with large-scale monopoly and finance capital. Socialism will replace commodity production with planning of production, distribution and consumption on a global, not just a local or a national scale.

There can be no third way between the market and socialism. The latter will abolish the division of labour, release free time for creative and scientific activities and automate every form of unwanted labour. There are many insights into the future society within *Capital*. Marx argued that capitalism has created the objective conditions for its supersession: abstract labour presupposes versatile and flexible labour. This is one of the foundations for the abolition of the division of labour. Capital's drive to lower the value of labour-power informs a tendency to prefer automated machinery. This is the foundation for generalised abundance and the dominance of free over necessary labour-time.

### Logical and historical priorities

Contra Turley, I contend that his political definition of Marxism takes neither logical nor historical priority over Marx's political economy.

The political expropriation of the bourgeoisie necessarily follows from Marx's political economy, but it is insufficient. In the first phase of socialism after a proletarian seizure of power it is possible to imagine a political seizure of bourgeois property that does not eliminate the exclusive control over the surplus product by a social group. Those involved with value could be crushed by force. This would require a powerful state and regime that rules from above with the consequent transfer of control of the surplus to a bureaucratic or military elite. In contrast, the elimination of any possible ruling group requires measures that make sure that the economy is controlled by the ordinary worker. One of those measures is the priority given to educating workers in the nature of political economy and the potential they have for creating a socialist alternative to capitalism. Without this education workers will be incapable of participating in debates on the economy and the nature of the transition from market to planned social relations. Participation in these discussions is essential to workers' democratic control over the productive process.

It is also false to state that revolutionary socialist politics takes historical priority over the teaching and learning of Marxism. Here Turley follows Althusser by breaking Marx into two. He presents two different related aspects of Marxism as two separate, unrelated stages in the development of Marx's and Engels' thought. The first is the revolutionary socialist Marx of the *Manifesto* and subsequent political writings. This revolutionary Marx takes

precedence over the social scientific Marx of *Capital*. The fact he can do this depends on ignorance of the influence of political economy on socialist politics.

As I argued in my articles, every educated socialist in the 19th century had a basic knowledge of political economy. They agreed that labour was the source of wealth, that classes were formed based on the revenues they derived from the ownership of wealth, and that socialism presupposed that wealth be distributed to those who produced it. It is no accident that Marx and Engels began their critique of this political economy at the same time as developing their ideas on the revolutionary potential of the working class. In other words, they realised that the recognition that workers were exploited and that the bourgeoisie robbed them of the fruits of their labour was insufficient to the revolutionary task of supporting workers to bring an alternative, non-exploitative society into being. It follows that the development of Marx's and Engels' critique of political economy was at the heart of their revolutionary socialist politics. It informs the *Manifesto* as well as *Capital*.

### Revisionism

Why are revolutionaries such as Turley today blind to the connection between Marxist political economy and socialist politics? I guess that one of the reasons is that, unlike 19th century Marxists, revolutionaries today are reluctant to write or even think about the socialist future. This reluctance is a direct product of Stalinist and social democratic influence. The 19th century revisionist thinker, Bernstein, was the first to argue that to write about the socialist future was utopian and therefore unMarxist. Kautsky, Bebel and other Second International Marxists had written extensively on the subject. Stalinism turned 'utopian' into a term of abuse.

Revolutionaries continue to denounce each other as utopians if they dare to speculate about the nature of the socialist future. Bernstein's attack on attempts to theorise an alternative to capitalism was a vital element in turning the movement away from revolutionary strategy and tactics and towards reformism. Turley's arguments for prioritising organisation and the formulation of policies over the study and development of Marxist political economy remind me of Bernstein's position that the movement is everything and the goal is nothing. It may even explain why so many revolutionaries 'burn out', become demoralised and give up.

I have argued here that the teaching and learning of Marxism is essential to workers conceiving of a rational alternative to capitalism. I suggested that making Marxist education a priority is crucial to accepting that socialism is realisable in a non-utopian form. I am not, of course, arguing that organising, political journalism and formulating policies do not have a priority and should be dropped in favour of continuous classroom education. I am, however, suggesting that education be taken more account of and given greater attention in thought and action than it has been.

### A beginning

Readers may be asking what does it mean in practice to give Marxist education a priority? It seems to me that there are two possible target areas for a campaign. The first targets the existing leftwing groups. The second targets teachers and students in and around higher education. The aim is to develop programmes of study, inquiry and research within and outwith institutions and organisations at formal and informal levels. These would be designed to support every student to become a teacher and every teacher to become a student. The questions I would raise initially are the following: 'What has been your experience, if any, of Marxist teaching and learning?' This stimulates critical reflection. The second question is: 'How do you define Marxism?' This encourages discussion and debate, which is in itself educational ●

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# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

## Why Madrid is not Cairo

# Real democracy needs organisation

**T**here is a need for sober analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Real Democracy Now! movement in Spain. Clearly, the inspiration provided by the Arab Spring is both its great strength and weakness. Even with its brutal complications in Libya, Bahrain and elsewhere, the Arab reawakening has become a beacon for the downtrodden everywhere, and justly so. With the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia and especially Mubarak in Egypt, the illusion of invulnerability every ruling order has to sustain was torn aside. The symbolism of Real Democracy Now! protestors occupying central squares in major Spanish cities is lost on no-one, with Tahrir Square now an icon for popular power.

On one level, then, the Egyptian movement is a profound asset to the Spanish protestors, as it is to all of us. The dangers lie in, first of all, idealising that movement (and, indeed, overstating the stability of its successes in the uncertain post-Mubarak situation); and secondly, misconceiving the lessons we must draw from it.

Ironically, the great advantage enjoyed by the masses in Tahrir Square consisted in their enemy himself. Hosni Mubarak, it was widely known, was detested by ever broader sections of the population. His regime, and others like it, was weakened considerably by the onset of the global economic crisis and consequent soaring food prices and intensifying labour disputes among especially textile workers.

Many different classes and political trends could be united around, essentially, a single demand - Mubarak must go! This was not some crass projection of resentment onto the man unlucky enough to be in charge at the wrong time. A Marxist has one programme for Egyptian society, a liberal reformer another, and the Muslim Brotherhood yet another; but *none* of these programmes had any chance of success with Mubarak and his post-Nasserite regime in place, strangling all popular initiative. The common interest between different trends was limited, but quite genuine.

At this stage, however, things are necessarily far from clear-cut. The Egyptian military, having rid itself of Mubarak, now seeks to implement some token 'democratic' reforms which will leave it still the major force in the country's political direction. The Muslim Brotherhood looks set to cut a deal with the army itself. Meanwhile, strikes continue, and the left and workers' movement - suddenly able to operate much more openly - are themselves in a process of reconstitution.

For those, like the Spanish protestors, interested in 'real democracy', it is clear that the job is



**Madrid protests: acquire the trait**

not done in Egypt. Yet the time of unity around a single agitational demand has clearly passed; developments in the Egyptian workers' movement, such as the new Democratic Labour Party and so forth, are encouraging because serious and sustained political organisation is so *necessary* to keep the revolutionary momentum, as is a clear programme.

The Spanish protests can unite, for now, around the slogan of 'Real democracy', or the slogan of 'System error'. These are not, however, cognate to 'Mubarak must go'. After all, there was a very simple way in which the latter could be fulfilled - Mubarak could, and did, resign from his post. The ruling order was constituted around the practice of maintaining autocracy, in his person and in those of Sadat and Nasser before him; and so the enforced overthrow of Mubarak could only come as a serious body-blow to the apparatus which propped

him up.

To argue for 'real democracy' in a *negative* way - that is, to condemn what currently exists as undemocratic - is quite correct to a point, but even at the most immediate level the issue can be resolved in a number of incommensurable ways. The most likely, at this point, is the outcome indicated by the Spanish regional and local elections: the Socialist *government* becomes identified with the denial of democracy, and the official opposition party is propelled to power.

That, it is painfully obvious, will solve nothing for the Spanish masses. The People's Party is a straightforward, rightwing bourgeois party; it will relish the kind of brutal austerity measures that torment the current social democratic government. Its last prime minister, José Maria Aznar, started his political career as a Falangist student and - since being

dramatically turfed out of office in 2004 - now is a director on the board of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Such people have no interest in democracy, real or otherwise.

The Spanish movement, then, needs a programme for democracy which can rally the masses *independently* of the bourgeois establishment, which in turn means serious discussion of politics and political organisations of a type that the mainstream of that movement has hitherto attempted to avoid. One of the remarkable things about the recent coverage of Spain is that the left is almost invisible - this is understandable, given that the Spanish left is just as crippled by internal divisions and stale politics as its comrades everywhere else, but ultimately it is a weakness.

The trouble with the left is not that it advocates sustained political organisation, or that it attempts to 'impose' a rigid schema on the flux of human history; it is that, broadly speaking, it gets this task wrong. The parties of the ruling class are quite happy to impose grand visions, even where these visions are manifestly counterproductive (viz, the age of austerity); and they are able to do so because bourgeois politics is highly organised, both through formal political parties and through the structures of the state. In order to fight back, we just as much need the weapon of organisation in our armoury.

More substantially, however, they are of fundamental importance to democracy, which in the last analysis means nothing more than the rule of the majority. If the majority is to rule, it needs to join together, freely, around a programme. This can only happen in any meaningful way if all political voices are not only heard, but allowed to gain support.

The same is true of party organisation. The bourgeois parties and the 'parties' (in reality, sects) of the left are hardly a great demonstration of this point. Yet collective discipline is absolutely fundamental to majoritarian politics. Suppose Real Democracy makes only the steps towards party organisation necessary to run some candidates at the next election - what will be the sovereign body to decide policy, and more importantly to decide when elected representatives deviate from it?

Movements of this kind are almost invariably accompanied by a sense of novelty. The old politics is to be left behind; our movement will organise in new ways (UK Uncut is another contemporary example of this trend). The fact is that there is nothing new about any of this; indeed, similar perspectives were the target of Engels' *On authority* over a century ago. The appearance of novelty is an unfortunate by-product of the tendency for such movements to fizzle out into irrelevance, their failures soon forgotten along with their existence.

The 'old left' belief in political parties may have become quite deformed; but even in its most historically illiterate forms, it is a response to real problems and as such 'dies hard'. That the most comically irrelevant 'Leninist' sects *persist*, and 'new' anti-authoritarian political trends merely *repeat*, is basically a matter of social Darwinism - ie, party organisation is a selective trait.

Acquiring that trait will be critical in the success of popular movements, whether in Cairo, Madrid or Washington DC ●

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