



# weekly worker

**Silvio Berlusconi trounced again: Toby Abse reports on Italy's political kaleidoscope**

- Miners' gala
- AWL and WP split
- Education market
- Summer Offensive

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The Prevent programme we inherited from the last government was flawed. It confused the delivery of government policy to promote integration with government policy to prevent terrorism



But we will not work with extremist organisations that oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation in our society



# LETTERS



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

## Feuerbach lives

Jack Conrad's 'The sigh of the oppressed' was of special interest - especially his competent, if brief, overview of Ludwig Feuerbach's contribution to human thought and its contribution to the early Marxian view of the world (supplement, *Weekly Worker* May 26). I would, however, draw attention to important elements of Feuerbach's work omitted by Jack. Some of them relate to my own research in the psychology of religion 30 years ago, which was largely inspired by Feuerbachian hypotheses.

Jack reminds us of Engels' exclamation, "We were all Feuerbachians!" This refers to the left-Hegelians' reception of Feuerbach's *The essence of Christianity* (1841), but it leaves *Weekly Worker* readers barely aware of his earlier and crucial work, exposing the flaws of Hegelian philosophy. Feuerbach's thinking and writing (as indeed that of Marx) was developing fast - as evidence of this, compare the two introductions to *The essence of Christianity* (1841 and 1846), illustrating the author's continuing departure from Hegelian idealism and fixed forms of logic.

Feuerbach learned much of his philosophy directly from Hegel, but his doctoral thesis already evidenced a shift to humanism. His first (post-doctoral) publication, *Thoughts on death and immortality* (1830), was widely perceived as an irreverent onslaught upon theology's use by the state, and was categorised as a dangerous and revolutionary piece of work.

Feuerbach's *Critique of Hegelian philosophy* (1839) raised humanity above Hegel's impassive and 'reflective hero'; no wonder Marx praised his achievement so extravagantly, describing him as "the only one who has a serious, critical attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field". Feuerbach had shown Hegel's philosophy as itself alienating, "estranging man from his own being and his own activity", as Marx encapsulated it. Here indeed was Feuerbach at his philosophical best, employing the weapons of the dialectic to critique the dialectic of Hegel; he would soon use the same methodology for his criticisms of world religions and Christianity.

*Weekly Worker* readers should be familiar with CJ Arthur's *Dialectics of labour* (1986), which touches upon the relationship between Feuerbach and Marx: "Much of what Marx says about the objective character of man and his world is drawn from Feuerbach. It is possible to overlook this and take as great discoveries of Marx himself things he copied wholesale from Feuerbach." Re-read Arthur in conjunction with Jack Conrad!

Although Jack begins his article highlighting important aspects of morality, and although much space would be occupied over-viewing Feuerbach, no reference is made to the latter's remarks on morality in *The essence of Christianity*. Here's Feuerbach: "Wherever morality is based on theology, wherever the right is made dependent on divine authority, the most immoral, unjust, infamous things can be justified and established. I can find morality on theology only when I myself have already defined the Divine Being by means of morality ... I have no criterion of the moral and immoral, but merely an *unmoral*, arbitrary

basis, from which I deduce anything I please ... We need no Christian rule of political right: we need only one which is rational, just, human."

Marx and Engels insisted human liberation must be an historical act, brought about through social development, industry, commerce, agriculture and an active proletariat - not through any 'act of will' by moral individuals, transcending themselves in an existential sense. Arguably, Marx's critique of Feuerbach seems well grounded: it is precisely when Feuerbach *should* be highlighting the consequences of his own critique that he fails. He remains too philosophical, too abstract, in his view of human nature.

However, it is questionable whether the differences between Marx and Feuerbach were as major as is routinely claimed. While Marx's criticism of Feuerbach *appears* well founded, in that "he did not seek to *destroy* religion", it is surely to make issue of a *very* secondary point. Having interpreted religion and philosophy dialectically, as alienated forms of a human activity, it is indeed true Feuerbach did not immediately set forth a 'programme of action', but that is hardly convincing evidence that Feuerbach "sees alienation in an entirely negative light" (as Jack tells us).

David McLellan offers a fairer prognosis: "Feuerbach certainly did not underestimate the importance of 'practical activity' ... (but) the religious problem was the only one that really interested him throughout his life, and secondly he did not judge the situation in Germany in the mid-1840s ripe for a transition from theory to practice - and subsequent events proved him right. Feuerbach was not at all opposed to practical activity at the appropriate time, but he considered it foolish to act before men's minds were sufficiently prepared."

Feuerbach's critique of religion aims to show theology as no more than an esoteric psychology. What was *absolute* in Hegel becomes *human* in Feuerbach.

When working on my doctorate of philosophy, I was interested to explore the Feuerbachian hypothesis that theology plays only a minor role in determining which congregation a religious person chooses to join; rather it is the believer's *personality* that plays the major role in this decision. My special interest was fundamentalist Christianity and people often queried why in this scientific age, when the majority of intelligent individuals reject religion, I should be devoting so much time and energy to such an investigation. The simple answer was that, contrary to popular belief, fundamentalism was a 'growth area' in the world of religion, and had been for more than half a century.

My hypothesis was that contrasting religious communities - fundamentalist and liberal - could be distinguishable, in principle, exclusively by the 'personalities' of those they recruited. I attended weekly *Bible* meetings of 15 Brighton congregations, making it very clear from the outset I was not myself a believer. These meetings provided the best opportunity for participation in discussion, and to mix with and get to know congregation members. By the end of the first year, I had selected four contrasting communities suitable for my research; I had developed a friendly, informal relationship with the four group elders/ministers, playing down my own atheism (yet never pretending to believe).

My objective with each congregation was to submit

identical questionnaires to each, exploring psychological attitudes. My preliminary investigations led me to hypothesise that the fundamentalist person shared essential characteristics: fear of uncertainty, obsessive sense of urgency, perceived personal inadequacy, anti-intellectualism, a schizoid view of the world, personal guilt feelings, etc. It was anticipated that, although every fundamentalist may not share each characteristic to the same degree, the majority will share most. Specifically, my hypothesis was that religious communities are distinguishable by the salience afforded community members for these psychological traits.

On completion, a copy of the 90,000-word thesis was passed to each of the four participating congregations. Surprisingly, all were delighted, not only with my reportage of my experiences with their communities, but also the 'personality scores' obtained. The two fundamentalist communities, for example, were more likely to give extreme scores to the 10 personality statements on the questionnaires, which I interpreted, psychologically, as registering their high scores for 'dogmatism'; the Jehovah's Witness elder specifically wrote to confirm that they were indeed "close-minded" and "dogmatic".

I actually received documentary and statistical help from Canon John Drury, editor of the periodical *Theology*, who wrote to thank me for the "project findings". Similarly, Peter Brierley, editor of the *UK Christian Handbook* for the Bible Society, wrote to say: "I am sure you are right in feeling that membership has far more to do with psychology than theology. There are a number of current trends which would support your comment."

Perhaps Feuerbach would be pleased to know his psychological initiatives were still under investigation a century and a half after his death.

**Bob Potter**  
email

## Small world

How? On June 2, we are told, an international body published a report calling for drugs to be on sale legally and a UK body of distinguished persons called for the 1970 act to be repealed ('End war on drugs now', June 9).

Small world, isn't it?

**Barrie Buxton**  
Gravesend

## Consensual rape

Regardless of froth, red herrings and kitchen sinks that Heather Downs throws into the discussion on rape - most of which isn't in question or dispute - we come down to the assertion that "people under 16 are described as having been raped - because they do not have the capacity to consent ..." (Letters, June 9).

Heather defends the right of the state not only to deny the actual physical fact that young people under 16 willingly consent to sex, but also to imprison and brand their partners as rapists. Young people under the age of 16 have the mental and physical ability to consent to sex and neither Heather nor the state has any right to condemn them for doing so, never mind cheer-leading their repression and incarceration.

How dare she assume to tell young people they "do not have the capacity"? Who made her lord high protector of morality and sexual conduct? Of course they have the capacity to consent - and have been

consenting for generations and centuries, and will continue to do so, even if Heather believes it's right to lock them up and call them rapists.

Voluntary sexual relationships between consenting parties - and that means fully voluntary and consensual - are not rape. Rape cannot be taken out of the realms of common sense, which Heather so decries, and words cannot be given meanings to which they don't apply.

Yes, there are lots of situations which are rape, but consensual sexual relations between voluntary parties (even if one or both are under the state's arbitrary legal age of consent) isn't rape. All the huffing and puffing in the world will not make it so. That Heather defends this wilful repression of natural human sexuality speaks volumes for where this type of bourgeois feminist authoritarianism ends up.

**Grant Williamson**  
email

## Official

I am in the United States and have read the *Weekly Worker* for a number of years now since I discovered it online. While I am what you would call an 'official communist', I find the paper thought-provoking.

I like Mike Macnair's and James Turley's articles better than the 'gossipy' polemics with other British groups; they are more substantive, even when polemical in intent themselves. For example, it would never have occurred to me to compare the formal political programmes of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International with Eurocommunism. Now that doesn't seem so far-fetched at all; apparently the French Communist Party's executive is going to support the candidacy of the Left Party, whose roots, it is claimed, are in Trotskyism and the French Socialist Party.

**Lee Gloster**  
email

## Questions

Gerry Carroll, Socialist Workers Party Ireland and People Before Profit member, polled 8% of the vote in the West Belfast by-election on June 9. Compared with the state of the British left, this is out of this world. What is even more impressive, though, is that Carroll was the member of the only party whose vote increased.

That aside for now, I am an avid reader of all leftwing papers and, whilst I have only recently starting reading the *Weekly Worker*, I ask how the readers believe we are to build a mass revolutionary party or even a new party of the left in Britain.

Do we need a revolution across the left? Will the SWP form the basis of the party - or possibly be the party itself? Would it be correct to attempt build a new party with non-revolutionary forces (though certainly a future split would have to take place)? How do revolutionaries offer an electoral alternative, when militants have not broken from Labourism, but only from Labour? Could the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition form the base of a new party?

**Trevor Turner**  
Birmingham

## Trot dialogue

I have read Gerry Downing's contributions to the *Weekly Worker* for quite some time. Only on small points can I fault him (generous praise from a communist).

The Revolutionary Communist Party, and predominantly the Workers Socialist League (Thornett/Lister/Richardson), represented the pinnacle of Trotskyist politics

in the UK. The fact that the WSL was parasitised by the Pabloite Spartacists from one side, and Shachtmanite Matgamnists on the other, is a foul tragedy (but a tale for another day).

The point. With a handful of comrades, Downing *et al* have kept aflame the tiny spark of Bolshevik Leninism in the UK. The healthiest Trotskyist forces in the world are grouped around the Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International, which is led by the Workers Communist Party of Italy and the Workers Party of Argentina.

They have differences and tolerate differences within their ranks. In the last 30 or more years (the length of their groups' existence), they have never crossed the class line.

I invite comrade Downing and his forces to consider opening a dialogue.

**Gino Mollanari**  
CRFI supporter

## Bus cuts

Rugby Against the Cuts has expressed outrage at the cuts to local bus services, which come into effect on Sunday June 19. These cuts are a direct result of the withdrawal of funding by Warwickshire County Council for socially desirable, but not always economical, evening bus services. They are a direct result of Tory cuts.

Public transport is a service like other public services, and should not be run to make profits. Some routes and times are bound to be used more than others, but that does not mean any of them should be scrapped. A large number of people depend on public transport, including those without cars, the elderly, the poor and those with disabilities - in particular people who live in rural areas and have no other means of transport.

These cuts to our bus services are yet another example of how public spending cuts disproportionately hit those with low incomes. They are less likely to be able to afford to run a car, especially with petrol so expensive at present. Only last month, *The Sunday Times* 'Rich List 2011' showed that the top 1,000 multimillionaires are £60 billion better off than they were 12 months ago. They now have wealth totaling £395,765 billion - they will not need public transport! Just like when a library, youth club or care home closes, it is the poor that suffer the most.

Rugby Against the Cuts member Liz Peck is a regular user of public transport. "The cuts to these evening services will make it very difficult and much more expensive for me to get around," she explained. "I do not have a car, and I use the bus in particular to visit family and friends and for social reasons. People travel to and from work by bus. We are supposed to be encouraging greater use of public transport to help combat climate change, and these cuts will make that even less likely. The real effect of public sector cuts are only just beginning to be felt, and I dread to think what the next 12 months will bring."

Ordinary working people should be made to pay for a crisis they did not cause. There is plenty of money floating around, as the Rich List shows - more than enough to overturn our economic deficit and then maintain and develop our public services, including public transport. It is all about political decisions, and the three main parties have all decided to make the poor pay for the crisis. So much for government leaders suggesting, 'We are all in it together'.

**Pete McLaren**  
Rugby



## DURHAM

# Miliband loses his bottle

Labour's leader has reversed his decision to speak at the Durham Miners' Gala. David Douglass reports

The Durham Miners' Gala is one of the biggest labour movement event in Europe. Last year it attracted crowds of 70,000 and now comes close to the size of its post-war heyday.

That this is not simply a pageant of labour history and union struggle on the hoof is demonstrated by the participation of what remains of the National Union of Mineworkers, masses of veterans from the coalfield areas and, perhaps more importantly, families of current trade union members from across the movement as a whole. The crowds which gather around this platform, tens of thousands strong, are the bedrock of the British working class. They listen in rapt awe, sometimes in anger, sometimes in humour; they cheer and clap approval; and at times they laugh in derision or shout in protest. But the people in this field - ordinary men, women and children of the working class - have come to hear the word on where we are, and where we are going as a class and as a movement. This is not just a day out at the heritage park, although elements of history, culture, roots and ethnicity feature large.

At one time no prospective Labour Party leader, or prospective Labour prime minister would dare miss an invitation to this stage, and many a leadership contest and controversial or exciting new policy was tested from its rostrum. So too the leaders of unions - in days gone by, of course, the NUM - but also of our allies from strategic positions in the workers' movement. This has always been a broad platform, with speakers ranging from famous anarchists and syndicalists, through communists, to rightwing social democrats, from militant firebrands of industrial and social direct action to beacons of compromise and 'moderation'.

This special place in the calendar of the parliamentary Labour Party came to an abrupt end in 1985, when Labour leader Neil Kinnock was on the platform following the defeat of the miners' Great Strike. The shape of things to come was marked by the bands that normally

stop and play a well chosen piece beneath the balcony of the Country Hotel, where the guests 'take the salute', as it were, and wave their approval. On this occasion, with Kinnock on the platform, the bands uniquely did not stop and marched on past, led by Easington playing 'Hold that tiger'. The significance was lost on no-one.

But it was the crowds themselves - workers sitting with their families in their tens of thousands, listening to the speakers - who delivered the greatest and most poignant rebuff. Many of us thought Kinnock would get a rough ride following his role during the epoch struggle, which ranged from lacklustre, tongue-in-cheek 'support' to out-and-out backstabbing treachery. Instead, as he took the stage, the vast bulk of the crowd simply got up, turned their backs on him and walked off. They melted away, preferring the funfairs and side shows, and left him blustering to an embarrassing smattering of folk. Such a slap in the face, four months after the greatest struggle the British miners had ever faced, could have been delivered by no other force.

Since then, no leader of the Labour Party has appeared here. Every year the general secretary of the Durham Miners Association (DMA), Davie Hopper, has shouted what a disgrace it is that the leader of "the party" isn't here, to address this magnificent crowd. Of course, Davie doesn't usually remind the crowd why that is, or add that the real disgrace is that such leaders have nothing to tell this magnificent crowd.

That was the situation until last year, when during the Labour Party leadership campaign, a pledge was made from the platform that, should David Miliband be elected leader of the party, he would be honoured to once more address the Durham Miners' Gala in that capacity. A pledge matched in whispered assurances by Ed's camp.

So it was that the press far and wide announced this year's gala would be graced by Ed Miliband. That the party leadership was recementing its roots. Although there were complaints from the non-Labour left that none of that lot should again darken our doors, for masses of people who still see Labour as the only alternative to what we have it was important. People wanted to hear what he had to say; wanted to hear if there was to be any rediscovery of socialism, be it ever so faded and humble.

Certainly from Labour's point of view this was an unmissable chance to secure the home ground and consolidate faith in the dwindling ranks of believers.

What happened next is truly disgusting. The leaders of the DMA are summoned to London and told that Miliband and the merchants of spin do not approve of the selection of platform guests. In particular they do not like the appearance of Bob Crow, who carries an alternative view to New Labour and is an advocate of militant trade unionism. Miliband would not wish to appear on a platform where he could be challenged, where real politics was being debated. This was not part of New Labour's stage-managed PR performances. Could Bob be 'uninvited'? To their eternal credit, the leaders of the Durham miners, Davie Hopper and Davie Guy, set out clearly where our principles stood, and what loyalty and sincerity meant: Bob would be coming. Ed unceremoniously and without further press statement simply bowed out stage right.

So instead poor old Dennis Skinner is wheeled out once more - a popular speaker at many galas and a fierce critic of all things Tory and Lib Dem, but he has nothing to say about the unprincipled and rightwing nature of the party he now belongs to. Denis will get a laugh, as he always does, and will be cheered loudly, but, when the applause dies down, he will not have said much about the direction of the labour and trade union movement today.

The stage has been left to Bob, and all credit to him.

I think this little cameo should tell us loud and clear that New Labour is still New Labour, still Thatcherite, still in the rut Kinnock, Blair and Brown ploughed. While it is not inconceivable people will vote for them out of sheer desperation, not being able to see any alternative, nobody can now expect either of the Miliband boys to be kicking over any traces and searching for a socialist soul on which to reforge a workers' movement. We can expect continued cuts and attacks on benefits and civil liberties, unions and communities. That being the case, it is not surprising Miliband is running scared of the class he claims to represent.

I hope readers of the *Weekly Worker* will join us at Durham on July 9, starting early from around 8am. This year few bands will be stopping to play their favourite pieces of music beneath the Country Hotel balcony, but that will not be a snub. It will be due to the sheer number of bands, the thousands with their banners and desperate attempts to keep to some sort of timetable in this mostly unregulated and unregimented working class festival •

### Durham Miners' Gala

Saturday July 9, from 8am until late, central Durham. Speakers include Bob Crow (RMT), Len McCluskey (Unite), Dave Prentis (Unison), Chris Kitchen (NUM), Dennis Skinner MP.

## 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 28: 'Woman's first husband is the moon'. Speaker: Jerome Lewis.

### Nicaragua solidarity

Saturday June 18, 11am: AGM, followed by public meeting, Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 (nearest tube: Caledonian Road).

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 LMHR: <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. £5 (£3 unwaged).

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

### Labour Representation Committee

Saturday June 18, 11am: Meeting, Blaydon Room, Gateshead Civic Centre. 'The situation in Britain today'. Speaker: Peter Doyle.

Organised by northern region LRC: [northern.region.lrc@wilkbro.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:northern.region.lrc@wilkbro.wanadoo.co.uk).

### Unison United Left

2011 Conference fringe meetings:

Saturday June 18, 7.30pm: LG planning meeting, Premier Inn, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester.

Sunday June 19, 6pm: 'The Poplar rebellion: when Labour councillors fought Tory cuts, Briton's Protection Hotel, 50 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester.

Monday June 20, 7.30pm: NDC planning meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester.

Tuesday June 21, 6pm: Pensions fringe meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester.

Tuesday June 21, 9pm: UUL social, Revolution, Deansgate Locks, Manchester. Tickets £5.

Wednesday June 22, lunchtime: 'Reclaim the union' meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street Manchester. Thursday June 23, 5.15pm: Stop the War meeting, Manchester Central Convention Centre.

Friday June 24, 12.30pm: End of conference organising meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester.

For more information: [marshajanethompson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:marshajanethompson@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>.

Thursday June 23, 7.30pm: Meeting, Adelades, 209 Bath Street, Glasgow. Speakers include: Derek Thomson (PCS), Roz Foyer (Unite), Paul Brandon (Right to Work).

Supported by PCS, Defend Glasgow Services, Unite United Left Scotland and Right to Work: [www.righttowork.org.uk](http://www.righttowork.org.uk).

### Defend jobs, pay, pensions and services

Saturday June 25, 10am: Rally, council chamber, Gateshead Civic Centre. Speakers include: Ian Mears MP, Kathy Taylor (University and College Union president-elect), Julie Young (PCS), Johnny Pickering (Newcastle Free Education Network).

Organised by UCU northern region: [gateshead@ucu.org.uk](mailto:gateshead@ucu.org.uk).

### Victims of torture

Sunday June 26, 2pm: Rally to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Speakers from Justice for Aafia Coalition, Peace Strike, UK Friends of Bradley Manning and Justice Not Vengeance.

Organised by London Guantanamo Campaign and Kingston CND: [www.londonguantanamo.org.uk](http://www.londonguantanamo.org.uk).

### Stop bombing Libya

Tuesday June 28, 6pm: Protest, Downing Street. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP and the poet, Sanasino.

Organised by Stop the War: [www.stopwar.org](http://www.stopwar.org).

### 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.



Ed Miliband: backs out

# ISLAMOPHOBIA



Theresa May: no money, no talks

## Government demonises Muslims as extremists

'Extremist' is being redefined to mean any Muslim who opposes British foreign policy. **Eddie Ford** looks at the revamped 'Prevent' strategy and the left's knee-jerk response

Last year, the government launched a review into the so-called 'Prevent' strategy, to be overseen by Lord Carlile of Berriew. Initiated by the New Labour government, the idea of Prevent in 2007 was to draw in respectable, non-violent Muslim organisations back into the fold. Muslims, and their many and varied organisations, had been by tradition prone to support the Labour Party in elections. But they had been deeply alienated by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the so-called 'war on terror'. Many turned to the Liberal Democrats. Not a few turned to the left and George Galloway's Respect party.

Over the four years that Prevent has been in operation, more than 1,000 projects have received Prevent funding. That includes Muslim umbrella groups, think tanks, sports associations, conferences, etc. The notion being that not only would the government make friends and influence people. Respectable Muslims would be empowered, as against Muslims who excused or advocated terrorism (and once again, though it was never made explicit, support Labour).

Lord Carlile, a Liberal Democrat peer, was never going to look kindly on this agenda. No surprise then, his review of Prevent found that the strategy was "flawed". It "confused" the delivery of government policy to "promote integration" with government policy to "prevent terrorism". He concluded that Prevent

therefore "failed to tackle the extremist ideology" at "the heart of the threat we face," and in trying to reach those at "risk of radicalisation, funding sometimes even reached the very extremist organisations that Prevent should have been confronting".

A gift for home secretary Theresa May. On June 7 she announced an overhaul of the Prevent strategy to parliament. Not only is the budget going to be slashed - from £63 a year to £46 million. Her "radically different strategy" is designed to "challenge extremist ideology" head on in order to "protect" institutions and vulnerable people. And, of course, what commentators have noted in particular is May's redefinition of 'extremist'. It turns out to be any Muslim who does not support "mainstream British values". Or, to put it another way, the government will cast into the wilderness those Muslim organisations and groups that conform to the new definition of 'extremism' - which is now regarded as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs", and also "calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas".

The origins of this turn can be found in David Cameron's speech at an international security conference in Munich back in February. It marked a sea-change in the govern-

mental approach to domestic "Islamist extremism" and multiculturalism in general. From now on, he asserted, the government must "confront" those groups that do not subscribe to British or "western values" - which he defined as "freedom of speech", "democracy", the "rule of law", "equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality", and so on.

In particular, he ventured, this meant challenging those "young dynamic leaders" who "promote separatism", as opposed to "integration" - which they do so by "encouraging" Muslims to "define themselves solely in terms of their religion". Indeed, Cameron argued, some organisations "seek to present themselves as a gateway to the Muslim community" and hence get "showered with public money" - yet do "little to combat extremism". Cameron announced that the government "will no longer fund or share platforms with organisations that, while non-violent, are certainly in some cases part of the problem".

Yes, just as one puff of cannabis inevitably escalates into heroin, so these "non-violent" groups "move along the spectrum" inhabited by the other, more violently-inclined groups - accepting "various parts of the extremist worldview", such as a "real hostility towards western democracy" or the goal of an "entire Islamist realm governed by an interpretation of sharia": here are the real roots of terrorism.

But if we are to "defeat this threat"

of Islamist extremism, he declared, then "it's time to turn the page on the failed policies of the past". We need to confront "indiscriminate" Islamist terrorism and "the issues of identity that sustain it". To this end, he bluntly declared that the "doctrine of state multiculturalism" had failed - it "encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream". In other words, multiculturalism has acted to weaken and subvert a clear, collective, British cultural and national identity.

### Redefinition

This redefinition of 'extremist' is now edging very close to anyone who strongly opposes British military aggression, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya. Let alone anyone who suggests, whether a Muslim or not, that oppressed peoples have the right to resist imperialist occupation. However, it goes without saying that "calls for the death" of those doing the resisting - or actually killing them - is not extremist in the slightest. On the other hand, according to the new Prevent redefinition and strategy (and the sentiments expressed by Cameron), to even *debate* with any group or individual labelled an 'extremist' can now mean that you too get stigmatised in the same way - after all, are you not giving them the oxygen of publicity?

No wonder that, by all accounts, there was a fierce battle within the cabinet - it being argued, not without

reason, that the new policy was short-sighted and self-defeating. In the words of Chris Huhne, the Liberal Democrat energy secretary, the revamped Prevent programme "alienates and marginalises Muslim communities" and "exacerbates racist bias and ignorant views" - not to mention that it has "just prevented a practical solution to tackling violent extremism". But the Michael Gove-Theresa May 'tendency' won the day and hence it is full steam ahead.

Meanwhile, ministers are waiting for a report from a universities working group, which has been in preparation for a year, on how to "prevent the radicalisation of students" on campuses.<sup>1</sup> The working group panel includes eight vice-chancellors and was established in response to the arrest of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (ie, the 'underwear bomber') in the United States for attempting to detonate plastic explosives hidden while on board a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on December 25 2009. Abdulmutallab, of course, studied at University College London between 2005 and 2008. The report is expected to call for "greater rigour" in the selection of speakers and stronger "monitoring" of religious societies. When the government receives this report, they will use it to decide which student Muslim societies should be banned.

At a stroke, 'respectable' Muslim groups have become 'extremist' almost overnight - including the Muslim



Council of Britain, which is by far the largest umbrella Muslim organisation in Britain (receiving £550,985 over a period of three years by the department of communities and local government). The MCB's secretary general from 1997 to 2006 was Iqbal Sacranie, who in 2005 was awarded a knighthood for his "longstanding service to the community" and "inter-faith dialogue". Farooq Murad, the current secretary general, is a former management and training consultant, who was chair of the charity Muslim Aid from 2004 to 2008. Despite all that though, we can only presume that they are both beyond the pale now.

Naturally, the rightwing tabloid press is cock-a-hoop about the recent developments. So the *Daily Mail* ran the headline, 'Islamist hatemongers funded by the taxpayer'. Melanie 'Mad Mel' Phillips, needless to say, could not resist crowing about the new government line on multiculturalism and Islamic extremism - triumphantly writing that ministers have "finally admitted what I revealed in my book, *Londonistan*, back in 2006 and have written many times since then": which is, "incredible as it may seem", that "hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money that was supposed to be spent on countering Islamic extremism has gone to groups or individuals actually promoting Islamic extremism".<sup>2</sup> Why? Because the previous Labour government, the intelligence agencies, police, universities, etc were all "paralysed by political correctness" and hence fixated on the notion that "promoting 'moderate' Muslims" would undermine 'extremist' Muslims - the liberal fools. If only they had listened to Phillips earlier.

With relish, Phillips lists those Muslim groups that she says are 'extremist'. There is the MCB, of course; the Cordoba Foundation, which was founded by Anas Altikriti, former president of the Muslim Association of Britain; the Islamic Foundation, set up by members of Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami opposition party; iEngage, the all-party parliamentary group on Islamophobia; the Street Project, run by Abdul Haqq Baker, the chairman of the Brixton Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre; Birmingham's Green Lane and Central mosques; Global Peace and Unity, an annual Muslim gathering which the Metropolitan Police had sponsored to the tune of £26,500, and doubtlessly there are numerous other Muslim organisations which could be added to Phillips' 'hate list'.

## Defend multiculturalism?

Predictably, the Pavlovian response of many on the left is to issue militant calls for the defence of multiculturalism - the automatic assumption being that anti-racism and multiculturalism are synonymous. The most notable, or notorious, example being the Socialist Workers Party,

which in the latest issue of *Socialist Worker* not only urges us to "defend multiculturalism", but also informs us that the SWP is "producing a book, *Defending multiculturalism*, to help in the fight to defend Muslims and our multicultural way of life".<sup>3</sup> Though we can, of course, understand such a gut reaction from the comrades, even sympathise with it up to a certain point, we think it is profoundly mistaken.

Unfortunately, the SWP - typically of most on the left - like to portray multiculturalism in an almost entirely positive light. In this narrative, multiculturalism is a straightforwardly progressive manifestation of anti-racism - a progressive gain wrested from an institutionally racist British establishment. This ignores the concrete political origins of *state* multiculturalism, and the fundamental role it played in the construction of a rearticulated national chauvinism that appropriated, or mimicked, the language and ideology of anti-racism.

In reality, state multiculturalism - in the shape of 'support' for ethnic minorities on a 'community by community' basis - only came to fruition as a coherent and systematic, state-sponsored programme *under the Thatcher government*, as a response to the 'race riots' of the early 1980s, when there was near insurrection on the streets of Brixton, Toxteth, Moss Side, Handsworth, etc. In that sense, 'full' multiculturalism was an emergency measure undertaken by a visibly panicked ruling class - a rather ironic twist of fate, you could argue, given that Thatcher virtually annihilated the National Front's political/electoral basis by essentially coopting large elements of its anti-immigration rhetoric.

So we saw her government hand out relatively substantial amounts of cash via local authorities to assorted 'cultural projects', which had a recognisable and officially identifiable 'racial' or ethnic-minority origin (please tick the appropriate box). This emergent 'equal opportunities' policy amounted to support for - or bribery of - various religious/faith groups and other petty-patriarchal power structures specific to a 'community'. By incentivising what later became known as 'identity politics', the power of the church and mosque duly expanded - the result being that the often highly politicised street gangs and Asian youth movements of the time, which had a distinctly working class orientation, eventually withered and died. Instead of class politics, the ethnic/religious projects came to dominate.

From this perspective, as op-

posed to the self-serving and opportunist fantasies of the SWP *et al*, multiculturalism had a profoundly anti-democratic and *disempowering* effect - heading off nascent political movements that could pose a *genuine* challenge to the state, at least potentially, and turning us all into state *supplicants*; all competing for whatever hand-outs that seemed to be going. Even more to the point, bourgeois or institutionalised anti-racism stressed an imaginary commonality - whether it was the Smiths, Singhs or Patels, we were all British now. And fed a mythologised history, where World War II represented a noble democratic crusade against the unBritish values of fascism and Nazism.

Of course, having said that, communists recognise that multiculturalism was an advance over the naked, unrestrained racism that preceded it - the fictional Alf Garnett being the embodiment of old, imperial, bigoted Britain. Yet it was a *contradictory* advance, as ultimately multiculturalism was a bourgeois phenomenon - an 'anti-racism' cut to measure for capitalist rule and which, though it made nods in the direction of unity, served primarily to divide us sectionally: forcing black, Asian, Muslim, etc workers deep into the arms of their 'own' exploiters. However, the establishment majority consensus around multiculturalism has long since broken down. But the answer to this is not to look back to yesterday's 'solution' - which in the last analysis leaves us tailing the bourgeoisie and their ideological agenda.

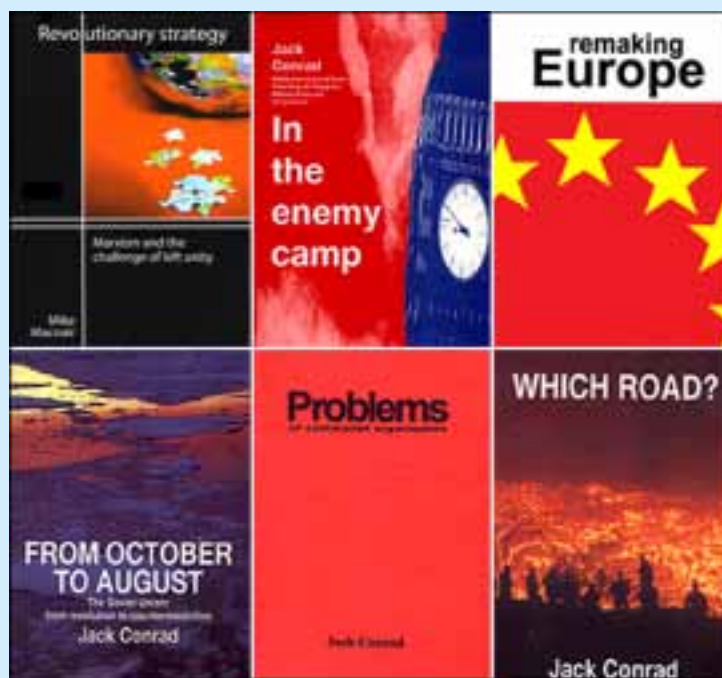
No, rather than "defending multiculturalism", as the SWP comrades exhort us to do, we need to go onto the attack - pushing our own revolutionary, *independent*, working class politics. One that is not afraid to point the finger at the Tory Party when it comes to the charge of 'extremism'. Is this not a party that cheerfully went into the 2001 general election still committed to the odious section 28 - a piece of legislation that existed purely to discriminate against gays? Or what about the Tory Party's allies in the European parliament, who are not the Christian Democrats, but rather the far right? When viewed in this light, the Tory Party is no collection of 'moderates', but more akin to the Front National in France - a rightwing, bigoted party ●

## Notes

1. [www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/06/university-heads-tackle-extremism](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/06/university-heads-tackle-extremism).
2. *Daily Mail* June 8.
3. *Socialist Worker* June 18.

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**Police: Muslims will be targeted**



## ITALY

# Silvio Berlusconi trounced again

**Toby Abse** looks at the situation in Italy after the prime minister's humiliating defeat in last weekend's referenda

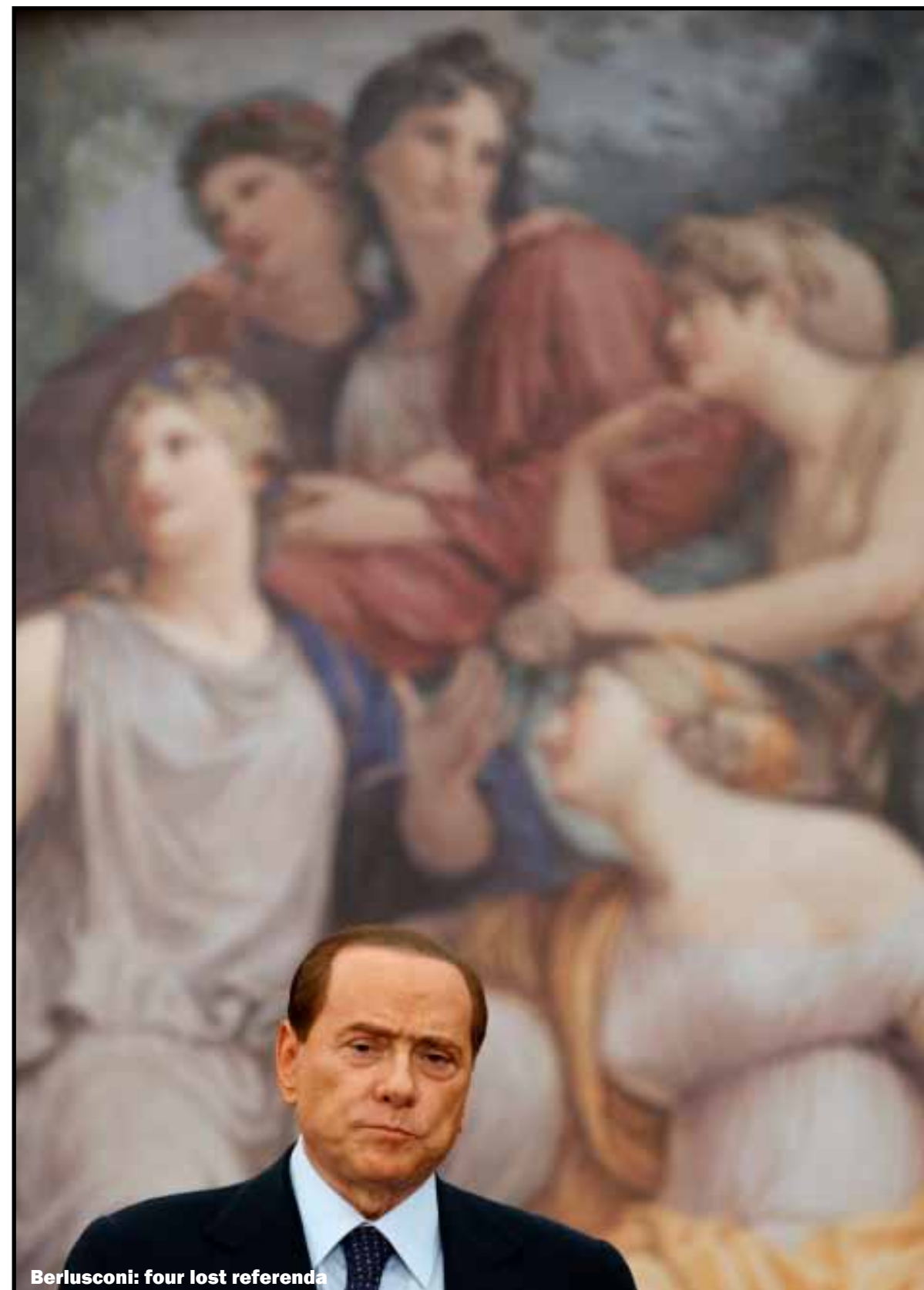
**T**he referenda of June 12-13 represent a decisive defeat for prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. He has suffered a fourfold rejection, on two questions linked to water privatisation, on nuclear power and most importantly on the immunity from trial of government ministers.

The defeat is so decisive for two reasons. Firstly, it has come so soon after the May 2011 local elections, in which his centre-right coalition not only failed to mount a convincing challenge to the centre-left in important cities like Bologna and Turin in the first round, but lost in Milan, Naples and a large number of other major towns and cities, including Trieste, the Sardinian city of Cagliari and his former Piedmontese stronghold of Novara, in the run-off ballots of the second round. Secondly, a referendum defeat has much more significance than a local government setback for a regime that might be best characterised as 'video Bonapartist'.

Berlusconi has always claimed to be the direct representative of the Italian people, regularly expressing his contempt for parliamentary intermediaries even at times when he had a secure majority, and until now he has never been clearly rebuffed in such a plebiscite. Of course, his claim in this respect - like many of his other claims, such as never having been found guilty in legal proceedings - involves a certain amount of bluff and distortion. Generally, he has gained his victories in previous referenda - on such issues as in-vitro fertilisation, electoral laws and job security - through the failure of his opponents to reach the requisite 50% quorum rather than because he could count on a majority of those who actually voted to support his position - only in 1995 did he actually win a referendum (on a 57% turnout), when his control of Italian television was under attack.

Nonetheless, even if he has made a rather habitual and cynical use of calls to abstention when he has feared a defeat, he has equally frequently been able to claim his opponents were a factious or elitist minority linked to magistrates, communists or Carlo De Benedetti, the proprietor of Berlusconi's rival *Repubblica-Espresso* press combine, and thus unrepresentative of the Italian people as a whole. This time the rejection was clear enough - most significantly on the 'legitimate impediment', the provision that allowed him to automatically avoid court appearances on the grounds that he was busy with cabinet meetings or other official business linked to his prime ministerial office, ranging from meeting foreign heads of state to opening motorways.

Moreover, as a result of his instructions to his supporters to abstain, he himself has ensured that the percentage achieved by his opponents was absolutely overwhelming (95.84% on water privatisation, 96.32% on selling water to consumers at a profit, 94.75% on nuclear power and 95.15% on the 'legitimate impediment') and indeed approaches those normally associated with a rigged plebiscite -



**Berlusconi: four lost referenda**

although unlike 2006, when he made allegations of fraud following his very narrow defeat in a general election, even Berlusconi is unlikely to make spurious claims about ballot-rigging this time.

Even before his rather unexpected defeat in the local elections, Berlusconi had been fearful of the outcome of these referenda. Hence the government's decision early on not to hold them on the same day as the first round of the local elections, which would have been the most obvious, and economical, course to have taken. He has assumed ever since the Japanese earthquake and the consequent Fukushima nuclear accident that no popular consultation on the question of civil

nuclear power could produce what he would regard as a desirable outcome - a perfectly rational assumption, given the outcome of the earlier 1987 referendum on nuclear power in Italy. Then the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the USSR played a decisive part in a massive increase in popular support for the anti-nuclear cause, which had previously been associated with activists on the fringes of Italian politics like Democrazia Proletaria and the Radical Party rather than any of the major parties.

Berlusconi had also assumed - perhaps less rationally - that the nuclear question was the only one of the four referenda that would guarantee a large turnout, since the vast majority of

those who came to the polling stations to vote on one issue would probably cast their ballots on the other three whilst they were there. In the event, the percentage voting on the nuclear question was marginally lower than on water profits and privatisation, even if it just exceeded that on the 'legitimate impediment'. But the assumption that almost everybody who voted on one question would vote on the other three was entirely correct - the turnout on all was almost identical at just over 57%.

## Nuclear reactionaries

Whilst Berlusconi's strategy in relation to the referenda in general

was to encourage abstentionism, when it came to the nuclear power stations, he sought to prevent the referendum from taking place by passing a law imposing a year's moratorium on the plans for their revival (but not definitively ruling out the nuclear option), which he claimed superseded the legislation in favour of the nuclear programme which the referendum's promoters sought to repeal.

This led to a couple of dramatic legal battles in the weeks between the second round of the local elections and the referenda. The Italian court of appeal (Cassazione) allowed the referendum to proceed with a last-minute change in the wording of the question and when Berlusconi got the Italian equivalent of the official solicitor to appeal to the constitutional court (the Consulta) days before the referenda were due to take place, it backed Cassazione, dashing his hopes that a few centre-right judges could be counted on to lobby their colleagues in his favour. Berlusconi had not helped himself in his attempts to persuade the judges that the moratorium amounted to a repeal of the earlier law when he had rather foolishly boasted to president Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who was anxious to win contracts for French nuclear firms, that the moratorium was just a trick to give Italian public opinion a chance to cool down after Fukushima.

Apart from legislative and judicial manoeuvring on the nuclear question, Berlusconi shamelessly used his control over the television channels to try and minimise turnout in the referenda, ensuring that five of the six main channels (the sole exception being the leftist and rather intellectual RAI 3 - once the enclave of the Partito Comunista Italiano) barely mentioned that the referenda were due to take place until the last week or so. Although this was so blatant that some of the channels were eventually fined for breaching the electoral code on the issue by the rather toothless authority that supposedly monitors Italian TV, such a slap on the wrist was the least of the prime minister's worries.

Berlusconi's overwhelming referendum defeat marks the culmination of a disastrous month, in which he presided over the loss of Milan in the local elections, which had been held by the right since 1993. Milan is his own home town, where he made his first fortune in construction and whose leading football team, AC Milan, is his personal possession. But the mayoralty went to Giuliano Pisapia, a candidate of the centre-left coalition. Although Pisapia's political history was on the far left, he is now a member of Nichi Vendola's Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà (Left, Ecology and Freedom) rather than the social democratic Partito Democratico (Democratic Party), which had somewhat reluctantly endorsed his candidature after its own favoured candidate had been defeated in a primary amongst centre-left supporters. Pisapia's 55%-45% victory over sitting mayor Letizia Moratti cannot even be dismissed



as a narrow outcome arising from the personal or political weaknesses of the candidate - the 10% margin indicated that a substantial proportion of the Milanese electorate had turned against Berlusconi himself, who had needlessly chosen to head the list of council candidates associated with Moratti.

It is also worth stressing the even more humiliating percentage achieved by Berlusconi's candidate in Naples, where in the second round of the mayoral contest about two thirds (65.4% to be exact) of the votes went to a former prosecuting magistrate - Luigi de Magistris - who used to specialise in political corruption cases and who is a member of Italia dei Valori (Italy of Values), the party led by Berlusconi's arch enemy, Antonio Di Pietro. Di Pietro first came to prominence in the Clean Hands investigation of political corruption largely associated with Berlusconi's prime political patron in the 1980s, Bettino Craxi. Berlusconi's decision to run Gianni Lettieri - a close political ally of the notorious Nicola Cosentino, whom magistrates have linked to the Camorra criminal mafia - was an appalling political misjudgement, which played straight into de Magistris's hands, enabling him to overtake a very feeble Partito Democratico candidate in the first round and focus the whole contest on questions of crime and corruption rather than more mundane issues about the nuances of centre-left and centre-right approaches to running the council.

## Fair means or foul

Despite the predictable calls for his resignation coming from Partito Democratico leader Pierluigi Bersani and other opposition politicians, Berlusconi will not go quickly or quietly, provided he maintains a majority in parliament by fair means or foul. He has two years left before he has to face a general election.

Whilst Berlusconi won the 2008 national poll with a comfortable majority, the fusion of his personal creation, Forza Italia, with the 'post-fascist' Alleanza Nazionale ended in at least partial failure. Amidst the increasing stench of sleaze and corruption surrounding Berlusconi and his government, a group of largely former AN deputies led by Gianfranco Fini, the speaker of the chamber of deputies, broke away to form Futura e Libertà per l'Italia (Future and Freedom for Italy). However, Berlusconi survived Fini's botched attempt to bring him down in parliament in December 2010 by cobbling together a group of deputies from other parties, who have subsequently adopted the totally ludicrous name of 'the Responsabili'.

This episode caused outrage - reflected both in scuffles in parliament and full-scale rioting on the streets of Rome - since a handful of these deputies had actually been elected on the lists of the Partito Democratico and the populist, anti-corruption Italia dei Valori rather than for one of the formations of the right. It is widely believed that Berlusconi or his associates gave considerable monetary incentives to these new-found allies and some of them have subsequently obtained minor ministerial offices (whilst others continue to demand them). Some of these shady characters had already changed party on more than one occasion and if their reward in December took the form of a lump sum in cash of the kind that female participants in Berlusconi's bunga-bunga parties regularly received rather than a longer-term promise of a secure job or pension, their continuing loyalty cannot be guaranteed.

If we leave to one side the question of the future reliability of the Responsabili, the other problem



**Fukushima: fed anti-nuclear mood**

that Berlusconi faces in parliament is whether Umberto Bossi and the Lega Nord (Northern League) will stick with him until the bitter end, if it means an electoral wipe-out in two years' time that could prove the death knell of these regionalists. Bossi is now a shadow of his old self - with his once deafening voice on greatly reduced power since his stroke some years ago. The local elections were a disaster for the Lega as well as for Berlusconi - perhaps the politics of Islamophobia and anti-gypsy racism no longer convince many former Lega voters increasingly aware that Italy's economic stagnation is accompanied by a growing gap between rich and poor.

The pattern of the 2010 regional elections, in which the Lega had picked up votes at Berlusconi's expense, so that the overall strength of the centre-right coalition remained more or less constant, but the internal balance of forces moved in Bossi's favour, has been broken. A survey of 40 key northern municipalities cited by the political scientist Ilvo Diamanti demonstrates that the Lega's vote has gone down from 15.6% in 2010 to 10.9% in 2011, even if Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedom) fell more dramatically - from 30.7% to 22.5% (*La Repubblica* June 1). This meant that Bossi did not feel sufficiently confident to turn on Berlusconi at the end of May in the immediate aftermath of the local elections and joined him in a self-destructive call for abstentionism in the referendum, from which some of the other, more wily, Lega politicians distanced themselves, primarily by discovering an aversion to water privatisation.

However, Bossi may now calculate that a few losses at an early general election would be better than more serious ones in 2013 and may believe that if he broke with Berlusconi in advance of such an election and ran independently of the rest of the centre-right - as he did in 1996, when he branded Berlusconi a mafioso and successor to the German kaiser - the party might score well, even if it deprived itself of the rich rewards of ministerial office that its leading figures have become so accustomed to, despite their continuing ritual denunciations of the Italian state.

The reiterated claims addressed to the Lega's base that only Berlusconi can deliver the Lega's long-awaited

federalist reforms have worn rather thin, as it becomes increasingly doubtful whether the premier has any concerns beyond his own survival, now that his efforts to buy Confindustria's continued support with nuclear power and water privatisation have proved such a boomerang. The Lega's rank and file have clearly had enough of Silvio, as every phone-in programme on Radio Padania demonstrates: given their hatred of Arabs and Muslims, his consorting with an under-age Moroccan prostitute may well have been the last straw.

Maybe only the incompetence and abject cowardice of much of Italy's centre-left can save Berlusconi or any chosen successor he might anoint in a bid to ensure his protection from the possibility of any legal or financial penalties arising from his numerous ongoing trials, now that recent events in North Africa have ruled out any possibility of following his mentor, Craxi, into gilded exile in Tunisia. Whilst Bersani's Partito Democratico remains by far the largest force amongst the opposition parties, his leadership has been widely judged to be lacklustre and its programme remains as vague as ever. Moreover, whatever Bersani's weaknesses may be, he shows a little more common sense than his perpetual critic, Massimo D'Alema, who remains enamoured of alliances with the Christian Democratic Unione di Centro (for all its Sicilian links with the Mafia and ultra-conservative positions on the rights of women and gays) rather than forces to the PD's left.

## Dismal left

The greatest mayoral victories were won not by the PD, but by Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà in Milan and Italia dei Valori in Naples. SEL consists for the most part of the old right wing of Rifondazione Comunista, which refused to accept Paolo Ferrero's congress victory in the wake of the party's electoral defeat in 2008, with the addition of some refugees from the left wing of the Verdi (Greens), a party which seems intent on throwing off its 'radical left' tag and positioning itself nearer the centre of the political spectrum like its more electorally successful German and French counterparts.

SEL is to the left of the PD, but, unlike Ferrero's Rifondazione,

which shifted further to the left once it lost representation at national and European level, SEL has not abandoned any wish to join governmental coalitions at the national level. However, it certainly seems to have abandoned any claim to be part of the communist tradition, often promoting the virtues of the Scandinavian 'social democratic model'. It is also somewhat dangerously centred on one individual, Nichi Vendola, the president of the Apulian region, just as Italia dei Valori is centred on Antonio Di Pietro.

Whilst Vendola and Di Pietro seem, as far as one can judge, to have a great deal of personal integrity, whatever their political weaknesses, after years of personality-driven politics on the right, the growth of a kind of mirror image of the old Forza Italia in the form of an anti-Berlusconian populism centred on rival charismatic individuals is a somewhat negative

trend. Nonetheless, even if left populism has to some degree replaced right populism, there seem some encouraging signs that the 17-year-long domination of Italian politics by television ownership, and the hideously distorted news bulletins it has produced, may at last be coming to an end, despite the abject failure of centre-left governments in both 1996-2001 and 2006-08 to do anything about it.

The internet has clearly played some role in the mobilisation of the younger generation against Berlusconi for both the mayoral elections and the referenda - Berlusconi has not been in a position to control either Facebook or Twitter, despite an attempt at an almost Chinese-style clampdown a year or two ago, when Facebook groups were formed praising the man who hit him with a model of Milan cathedral, and he has been the subject of much mockery on YouTube. Needless to say, the amount of foreign internet material about Berlusconi and Rubygate has made a mockery of his strenuous attempts to keep the scandal off the television news bulletins, eroding the Berlusconi consensus amongst the generally apolitical and apathetic. More positively, the anti-Berlusconi Popolo Viola was in a position to organise its initial successful mass demonstration by using Facebook and text-messaging, even it is likely that face-to-face contact has subsequently played a role in this social movement.

It is far from clear whether the PD, SEL and the IdV will stick together long enough to fight a common general election campaign. Whilst the Federazione della Sinistra (essentially Rifondazione and the Party of Italian Communists) maintained a relatively good level of support at the local elections - only slightly lower than SEL in most places - the most vigorous opposition on the far left in recent times has come from the FIOM metalworkers' union rather than the communist parties.

In short, it would be wrong to assume that the downfall of Silvio Berlusconi will open the floodgates to any rapid shift to the left, even if the overwhelming popular rejection of nuclear power and water privatisation shows that there is a potential electorate for a party that combats neoliberalism in a way that the PD never has and never will ●

## Fighting fund

# Keep 'em coming

As national organiser Mark Fischer reports elsewhere in this paper, the CPGB's Summer Offensive annual fundraising drive begins on June 18 ('£25k in two months', p10).

At its very centre will be the drive to put the *Weekly Worker* on a firmer financial footing - in particular by increasing our regular monthly income. So until the back end of August, when the SO ends, it will be Mark reporting on all the cash raised - including the money coming in to our paper.

Talking of regular monthly income, last week I stressed the urgent need to increase the number and size of the standing orders paid to the *Weekly Worker*. We are aiming for an extra £300 per month as a minimum. I am pleased to say that within days three comrades had responded by either upping their existing standing order or taking out a new one. Comrade SB emailed us to say she has arranged a £10 monthly payment directly with her bank, while comrade DW is rather more modest: he doubled his standing order to £20,

but was too shy to tell us about it! Meanwhile, comrade BP has raised his quarterly payment by a fiver - all of which translates into an extra £22 per month.

But back to June's fighting fund, which ends as the Summer Offensive gets underway. It was boosted by the £120 in current standing orders that landed in the *Weekly Worker* account over the last seven days. Then there were two donations received via our website - thank you, EL (£25) and PP, who donated £20 (we had 10,639 visitors last week, by the way). Finally, a cheque from GJ took our total for June to £472.

You will be hearing a lot about the *Weekly Worker* standing order campaign from comrade Fischer between now and the end of the SO. See you then!

**Robbie Rix**

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



## PRIVATISATION

# Who pays for education?

Michael Copestake discusses AC Grayling's New College of the Humanities

**D**id he know what he was in for? This is the first question that springs to mind at the sight of the do-gooding liberal philosophy professor, AC Grayling, formerly of Birkbeck College, judging by the uproar and opprobrium that his plans for a private, £18,000-a-year tuition fee-paying 'New College of the Humanities' have brought raining down upon his head. Students, fellow academics, *Guardian* readers, lefties - all are up in arms.

Naturally, immediately on being on the receiving end of some hard stick from those sectors of society that he may on better days expect to be applauding him, in rather Clegg-like fashion - though not nearly as tearfully - the good professor complained to *The Guardian* that he hoped at least people would accept the purity of his motives: "I would like to be given a little bit of credit for trying to do it sincerely," he says.<sup>1</sup> What is important to realise is the extent to which Grayling and his other business partners are doing their bit not to ameliorate the state of higher education in England (as they claim) in the light of the recent and severe cuts to teaching grants for the humanities, but to open another door leading to an ever more expensive, pseudo-marketised and class-ridden system of higher education, even if his own experiment fails. In this sense he continues the themes established by the coalition's existing educational policy.

However, even some of those who one would expect to be the most receptive to this venture are anticipating either its prompt failure or a pained existence as a repository for fools with rich parents whose degrees will be worthless.<sup>2</sup> The mix of furore and apologies that has ensued in the media is instructive as to the new situation facing the system of higher education: 'soft' humanities subjects lose state support, as students are shunted down more business-friendly avenues.

The details of Grayling's new private university are emerging and so far they have been contradictory. What we do know is that the university is being established by 14 celebrity academics (some more famous than others), investors from the City of London and a private couple from Switzerland. What could be more wholesome? It will be a for-profit institution that teaches philosophy, history, law, economics and English literature and will be guested by scientists such as Richard Dawkins and Steve Jones for the sake of well-roundedness. An unimpressed Terry Eagleton, declaring Grayling's venture to be "odious", correctly surmised that the celebrity professors will be doing very little of the actual teaching at the new institution, but will enjoy salaries of around 25% more than those paid in the state-funded university system.<sup>3</sup> This notwithstanding his own allegedly well remunerated guest lecturing at the privately owned catholic University of Notre Dame in Chicago.

As of yet, the New College of the Humanities has no campus or academic resources of its own; no books, computers, laboratories, etc. In the true spirit of the 'big society' it will, in the interim, be mooching resources off of the University of London. It may well be paying for them, but this hardly hides the fact that the same pool of resources used by students in the state system will be made more scarce by the presence of new and mostly well heeled

interlopers. The same problem goes, of course, for private healthcare, the new 'free schools' and so on.

Naturally being spared the cost of the necessary capital investments to acquire such buildings and resources is a big advantage for investors. Even the degree courses taken by the new college's students will be those of the University of London's international programme.<sup>4</sup>

### Right support

While the core personnel and branding of the New College is impeccably liberal (putting the participation of latter-day empire loyalist Niall Ferguson aside for a moment), its most enthusiastic support has come from the right. Even though, as mentioned earlier, many expect this particular venture to fail, it is the principle that they applaud. Freedom from the untrustworthy state, freedom from quotas of working class students, ethnic groups and the like, the freedom to make fistfuls of cash from a market full up to bursting point.

The cuddly liberals have thus found themselves falling in with a bad crowd. *The Economist*, the *FT*, Boris Johnson, members of Ayn Rand societies, Toby Young - all have come out in enthusiastic support. But perhaps our adventurous, caring professors are not all they seem, with their ostensible concern for the humanities and education in the abstract. The mask slips most dramatically when one learns more about the origins and purpose of the New College. Conservative London mayor Boris Johnson's June 6 *Daily Telegraph* column had the following delicious subtitle: 'A private university that will take on the cream of the rejects ...' Johnson goes on to quote from a personal conversation with Grayling: "He explained that the idea had first occurred to him years ago, when he was tutor for admissions at an Oxbridge college. For every person we admitted, we turned away 12, each of whom could have done outstandingly well at the university, he said. The trouble with Britain today, he said, was that we simply didn't have enough elite university provision ..."<sup>5</sup>

The whole appeal of the New College is to the elite and their emulators in the middle class, who may have a spare £18,000 plus living expenses to throw around. For the sake of comparison that kind of money will also net your boy a year at Eton.<sup>6</sup> The sweetener is that 20% or so of the student places at the New College will go to the 'deserving poor'.

This combination of professed 'good intentions' and the sop of 20% of places to the 98% of the population unable to afford them in the first place, taken together with the reality of the cuts to higher education, has been enough to bring the more pragmatic liberals onside with Grayling's business venture.<sup>7</sup> This line of thought essentially boils down to the usual 'It's the best we can do right now', 'At least the poor are getting something', and so on. After all, given the cuts, surely it is better to have something than nothing? The leftist fetish of state provision is also attacked, usually with reference to the university system in the United States, whose league-table-topping institutions are mostly private.

Higher education in the United States runs on the basis of public universities supported by the individual states through taxes, on the one hand; and a series of private

institutions, who exist on the back of their enormous tuition fees, and in some cases their enormous financial endowments, on the other. After Harvard and Yale, with endowments worth around \$27 billion and \$16 billion respectively, there is a very large drop-off.<sup>8</sup> Oxford University in comparison has an endowment fund of around £3 billion (\$4.8 billion). Naturally state universities are usually underfunded, pushing up prices at the private universities.

Incidentally, the American system is also in the throes of a student loans crisis, as costs rise, defaults increase, student loan-based derivatives collapse and the whole thing moves closer to the precipice. From the point of view of capital there are also far too many humanities students - liberal arts graduates, who may in future simply be denied loans due to their collapsing work prospects. As in the UK, this leads to the idea that each student must view themselves as a small business of one and take a degree that will increase their 'economic viability'. We move from receiving an education to receiving 'training', often at the expense of the individual or the state, and for the benefit of capital.<sup>9</sup> Education becomes a commodity for the elite and the few lucky winners of the paupers' academic lottery (though even here let us also remind ourselves that there is no obligation for a private university to extend any places whatsoever to working class students: that is left purely to the charitable feelings of the investors, as with the Grayling enterprise).

This whole mess, here and across the Atlantic, comes down to the problem in capitalist society of who will pay for the higher education that the economy seems to demand, as fees rise. However, we should also note that employers' organisations now complain that there are too many graduates.<sup>10</sup> The state is less and less willing to fund higher education directly out of taxation. This appears irrational, as the state is paying for higher education in a way that will only cost it more in the long run if present trends in university uptake persist. But ideology dictates that the universities must run and be funded like businesses. The choices end up being a system of public or private loans and the eradication of the degrees that are not in the interests of business. But what the government saves in cutting teaching grants it loses in increased costs in loans, as tuition fees rise to cover the gap. On top of this is the recovery rate on debt, that the Student Loans Company puts at 70% - a 30% write-off. The increased fees themselves have left a 'black hole' in the governments education budget for the coming year.<sup>11</sup>

Many universities, of course, are simply cutting the humanities subjects altogether rather than trying to make the sociology or history department 'pay their way' in the world by attracting private investment from Mars or BAE or whoever. Just because someone studies accountancy or engineering rather than history or philosophy, however, does not decrease the cost of the course, the rate of default or the black hole in the budget. Nor does the production of more x graduates over y graduates automatically produce economic growth. An 'oversupply' of nurses and engineers rather than media studies and philosophy graduates changes nothing.

One could suppose that the whole aim is simply to reproduce clearer distinctions between social elites and the masses, and to discourage excessive participation in frivolous educational pursuits. How this will affect the state's long established goal of disguising youth unemployment through more open higher education remains to be seen.

### Whose universities?

The fact that the workers' movement as a whole, and the Marxist left in particular, does not seem to have answers to the education cuts beyond 'Fight them harder' and 'Tax the rich' only exacerbates the problems we face. Sure, one can point out why the idealisation of the American system is ill-founded and would not work here; one can point out that only a small increase in the tax take could provide a higher education for all, and one can point to AC Grayling's crazy haircut, but this will all come to nought without a wider strategy.

As Marxists, we are not *automatically* in favour of state education any more than we are of state healthcare or state-owned industry. After all, we are dealing with the *bourgeois* state. Demands such as 'Save our NHS', or in this case, 'Save our universities', ignore the fact that these are not our institutions: they are institutions of the capitalist state and its adjuncts. Naturally if the capitalists want to flog them off there will be little chance of stopping them, and even if we did they would only return to the safe proprietorship of the bourgeois state. Even to achieve this the working class would have to be able to exercise substantial political power in society, at which point the question of our own schools, clinics, workers' education centres and cooperatives would all be posed. The attendant questions of democracy, the nature of the state and the need for a party cannot be ignored.

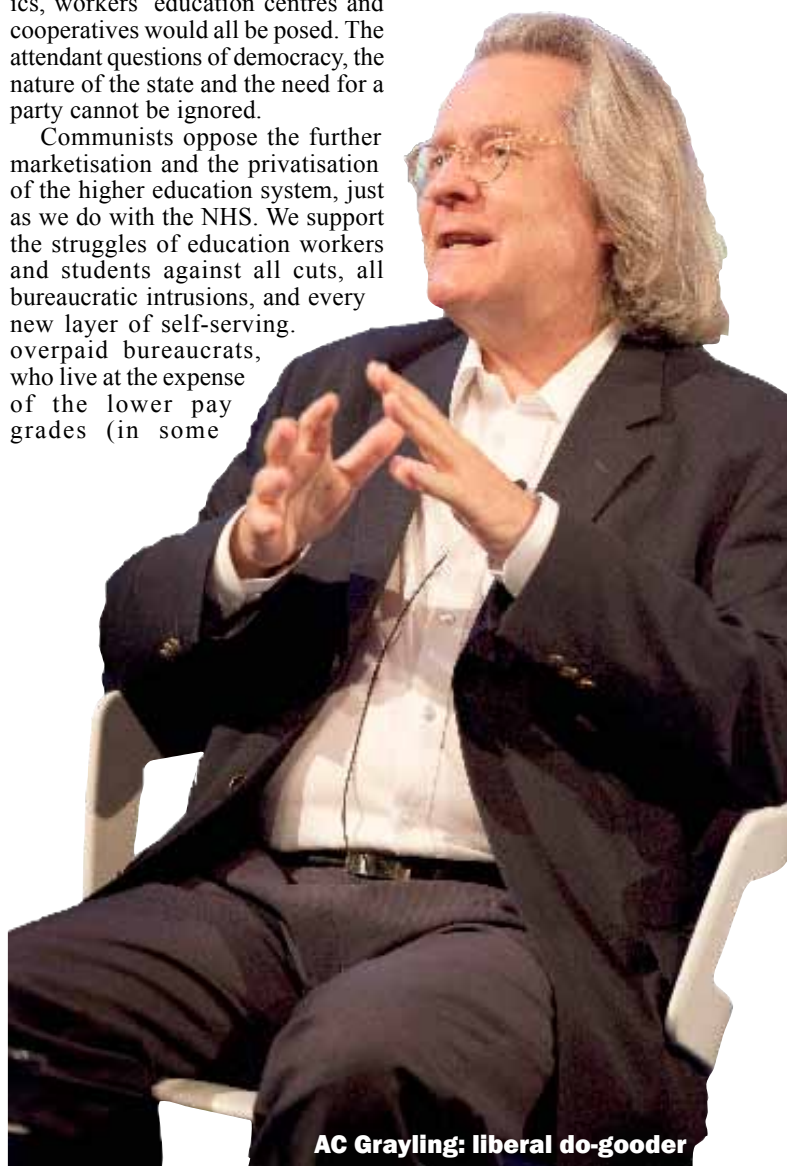
Communists oppose the further marketisation and the privatisation of the higher education system, just as we do with the NHS. We support the struggles of education workers and students against all cuts, all bureaucratic intrusions, and every new layer of self-serving, overpaid bureaucrats, who live at the expense of the lower pay grades (in some

universities - Liverpool and Sheffield amongst them - they are having their pensions cut by up to two thirds<sup>12</sup>). However, we understand that our tasks extend far beyond mere opposition, and even less a default position of defending bourgeois state property. We have a duty to pose to the working class the question of political power and running society itself - including education. This, in the long run, is the only real way to chase off the cuts on the one hand and the Graylings on the other.

Our immediate tasks must be to unify the opposition to the cuts - an opposition that is at present divided and unable to achieve the limited tasks of reform and resistance that it has set itself, let alone change the world. The unification of the anti-cuts campaigns could be the first step to a united communist party which actually might ●

### Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jun/09/grayling-abused-over-new-college-plans.
2. http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/indialenon/100090894/three-reasons-why-the-new-college-of-the-humanities-will-fail.
3. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/06/ac-grayling-new-private-university-is-odious.
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\_College\_of\_the\_Humanities.
5. www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/borisjohnson/8558621/At-last-an-Oxbridge-for-those-who-cant-get-into-Oxbridge.html.
6. www.etoncollege.com/currentfees.aspx.
7. 'Give AC Grayling's new college a chance': www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/07/give-grayling-new-college-humanities-chance.
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_colleges\_and\_universities\_in\_the\_United\_States\_by\_endowment.
9. See Y Mather, 'Defend academic freedom from corporate conformism' *Weekly Worker* April 21.
10. www.agr.org.uk/Content/AGR-A-manifesto-for-graduate-recruitment.
11. See www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard/2011/jun/07/university-tuition-fees-controversy-live-blog?INTCMP=SRCH.
12. Unison Sheffield leaflet, June 10.



AC Grayling: liberal do-gooder



## NCAFC

# Apolitical wrangle ends short-lived unity

Laurie Smith reports on a split in the student anti-cuts movement

**T**he Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Workers Power have vied for influence in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) since its formation over a year ago, but their tense marriage of convenience appears to have come to an end.

As well as the two Trotskyist groups, at its founding conference in February 2010 NCAFC also had a fair number of independent activists and student union officers, anarchists and others, and was a step forward organisationally from the many 'rainbow coalitions' or 'broad fronts' which were in reality treated as the property of a single group - Education Not for Sale (AWS), Education Activist Network (SWP) and Student Broad Left (Socialist Action). Communist Students welcomed this small step toward unity of the student left. But neither WP nor the AWS had a vision of working towards the unity of Marxists, as Marxists. They seemed content, in public anyway, to limit their politics to what was 'realistic'. This was acceptable to the independents, many of whom regarded Marxism as old hat, or had been successfully injured to it by the left's dogmatism and control-freakery. But maintaining even a loose 'n' broad unity against cuts to education has proved impossible.

The current spat began when AWS members announced a 'reinvigoration' conference of NCAFC for June 4 in Birmingham.<sup>1</sup> The not quite unilateral call was also supported by some local anti-cuts groups, but the manner in which it had appeared on the website, effectively as a *fait accompli*, was sufficiently underhand to provoke fury from both Workers Power and the leading independents in NCAFC. Members of the AWS were at a London meeting of NCAFC two days before they put out the call, but made no mention of it there - or on the group's e-list - until after it had been announced. The date also fell in the middle of many students' exams or holidays. Evidently, the hard work of some AWS members for NCAFC had not been entirely sincere - having built up some sympathisers around them in the north, it was pretty transparently attempting to pull a fast one and recreate NCAFC as a group under its own hegemony, where it could fish for recruits to its own peculiar brand of social-imperialist 'Marxism' without awkward and potentially embarrassing competitors around. What a narrow and really quite patronising view of politics!

For many newer activists not familiar with the sectarian approach of the left, the conference no doubt sounded reasonable. The manner in which it was conceived and the ensuing backlash on the group's email list would not have reached them; and, ironically perhaps, NCAFC's very lack of an accountable leadership (which would be, like, way too hierarchical and *authoritarian*, man) made this sort of manoeuvring much easier. Once it became clear that the conference had achieved a momentum of its own online and was getting support from quite a few local groups, leading NCAFCers, rather than oppose it, insisted that it should not elect a leadership body, as the AWS planned, and should not be able



Student anger: dissipated

to overturn NCAFC policy adopted at previous conferences. Workers' Liberty comrades initially agreed to this compromise, before going back on their word at the conference itself.

The committee elected is about one third AWS members, with the rest being independents. Some Workers Power members did attend the conference, but, churlishly perhaps, refused to stand for the committee because of the way the conference had been set up.<sup>3</sup> The contributions of some of the new faces on the e-list make it clear that they were primed to believe that NCAFC had been run in a top-down fashion by a London clique, and to regard all criticism of the conference as sectarian and unfair attacks on the AWS.

Several leading figures (three Workers Power members, and three independent union officers) posted an open letter about their "grave concerns" about the conference.<sup>2</sup> This was initially deleted from the NCAFC website, the AWS evidently having realised that without accountable leadership it is those with the admin rights who wield the real power. It was not long before the letter was reposted elsewhere on the web, and the AWS eventually caved in, allowing it to remain on the NCAFC site. It is hardly surprising that most independents have been dismayed at the argument, which has appeared apolitical, with each accusing the other of power-grabbing and engaging in games of numbers and 'who said what, when'.

Given that on the surface (and in reality) both of the groups at the centre of this fight have the same political approach to NCAFC, bemusement

can be readily understood. Some of the new additions to the e-list have immediately asked to be removed after finding their inboxes full of claims and counter-claims going on for pages. A special mention must go to one independent and union officer, who proved that a lust for power is not just a Trotskyist trait, when he called on the new committee to coopt some London members of the old committee (which he was on), so that 'core activists' could be "re-included with the minimum of fuss". In other words, compounding the democratic failings of the conference with backroom deals.

It was never going to be a clean break for the AWS, and Workers Power has not exactly burnished itself with glory either - sending adverts for the WP summer camp from NCAFC email addresses and using the organisation's logo, in what is perhaps a final two fingers up to its rivals.

### Lack of politics

Differences over dogma aside, the AWS and WP approach to student politics is basically the same. We need to create broad coalitions over free education, not bang on about Marxism too much, and 'build the movement'. Both are ostensibly in favour of unity of the student left around such basic demands.

So what's the beef? What has been striking about the statements published by the AWS and WP on the matter is their complete lack of politics. Their main point of difference, on imperialism, has not been discussed since the first conference and does not appear to have played a role

in this bust-up. Needless to say, the AWS-written platform for the June 4 conference made reference to "international solidarity", but took no line against the presence of imperialist troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Just maybe, the AWS could simply no longer stomach being part of an organisation which had anti-imperialism (part of the political ABC for pretty much everyone else on the British left) as part of its platform. But this commitment was never a big part of NCAFC's activism, and the original policy document has not been on the website for some time. For its part, WP never seemed to have a problem keeping quiet over the matter, though many would have been sympathetic if it had decided it could no longer work with the pro-imperialist AWS.

But rather than a principled split, or even an unprincipled one, when one looks behind the claims and counter-claims, what this ruction reveals is sectarianism pure and simple: putting short-term gain for one's own group ahead of the interests of the class as a whole. In this case, the interests of the AWS in picking up some new members. And Workers Power, in fairness, have the same fundamental approach to student work. As the practice of British Trotskyism has become incredibly cynical and opportunistic - a self-reinforcing product of the left's weakness - 'theory' has had to follow suit. And what the AWS and WP share with the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, etc, is a narrow and manipulative view of what the working class is capable of politically. I have had it explained

to me by representatives of various groups that the differences on the left are principled and unity is impossible; all we can do is wait for the inevitable crisis of capitalism; whatever group takes the right lines or are the best fighters at this point will win the support of the masses.

From this perspective then, the only important thing is to try and induct as many people as possible into your group in the hope that you will be in pole position when it all kicks off. The idea of patiently building a mass party with millions of active, thinking, debating members, (as the Bolsheviks or Germany's SPD once were - no, really, comrades), and of revolution being the conscious act of the working class itself, becomes something like a joke, or a pipe dream at best.

### Embarrassing, but not a disaster

The student movement is currently in a trough - at precisely the time when we need to be strengthening it - politically, organisationally - for its inevitable reappearance, as the cuts hit harder and faster. Unfortunate, then, that some groups have instead seen the lull as a period for manoeuvring; continuing to think only of sect advantage and not what the working class needs to defend itself.

While Communist Students warned that the fragile unity achieved between WP and AWS students in NCAFC would not last, we have no desire to gloat. Such apolitical, sectarian warfare makes us all look bad, and makes it that much harder to win people to the Marxist vision of universal human liberation through working class revolution. Independent activists who glowingly approved when these groups ditched their own politics, ostensibly for the sake of unity, should consider after recent events whether this denial is in fact a deliberate part of their manipulative approach (and why it is that our fellow Marxists get most riled when CS members raise the topic of ... Marxism). In fact, the political opportunism and organisational sectarianism of the left are just two sides of the same coin: a narrow, hidebound vision of politics.

The tussle over the NCAFC name, which may yet become a split, or see the walkout of WP, is not a disaster though. NCAFC never provided the space which students need to debate ideas and strategy; politically it has not offered anything substantially different from the SWP, suffering from the same monomaniacal focus on 'action, action, action' - albeit 'non-hierarchical' action.

There always was, and remains, the possibility that NCAFC will simply be superseded by a larger and more representative organisation thrown up in the course of struggle - fine. If a genuine, mass united front against cuts to education comes about, that would be a big step forward •

### Notes

1. <http://anticuts.com/2011/05/05/ncafc-reinvigoration-conference-birmingham-4-june>.
2. <http://anticuts.com/2011/06/09/open-letter-grave-concerns-over-ncafc-5-june-conference-3>.
3. [www.socialistrevolution.org/2761/ncafc-reinvigoration-5-june-statement](http://www.socialistrevolution.org/2761/ncafc-reinvigoration-5-june-statement).



## SUMMER OFFENSIVE

# Aiming for target of £25k in two months

The *Weekly Worker* is at the very centre of our annual fundraising drive, writes CPGB national organiser **Mark Fischer**

From Saturday June 18 the CPGB embarks on its annual fundraising campaign, the Summer Offensive. This is the two-month stretch in every year when our members, supporters and sympathisers collectively attempt to raise thousands of pounds and - flowing from this - set themselves some ambitious targets for their individual contributions. Again this year, we are pushing for £25,000 and I am pleased to report that already party members and some of our closer supporters have pledged to raise £13,390. An encouraging start, given how much the economic travails of global capitalism have impacted our comrades' lifestyles - and bank balances - over the past 12 months.

This year's campaign was preceded by two extensive discussions by our leadership - the Provisional Central Committee - on the relevance of its format and its place in the culture of the organisation. Some unease was expressed on the committee that the SO had grown a little stale and that the rhetoric that went with it jarred with the content of what most comrades actually did during the two months. While the Offensive was touted as a chance for the organisation to turn outwards, to engage with the party's sympathising periphery more, often there was too little of this. Comrades will recall that writers on the campaign in previous years have pointed to the problem of older comrades treating it more like an annual personal tax. Younger ones found the

going tougher and often came to be a little flummoxed by the whole thing.

These problems notwithstanding, the PCC was unanimous that the Summer Offensive remains an essential part of the organisation's work. What will be new is that we will put fundraising for the *Weekly Worker* at its very core this year. This means that the paper's campaign to win more standing orders, as explained by Robbie Rix in last week's paper, will play a big part in the SO.

The urgent reasons for our paper's finances to be upped were clearly spelled out by Robbie. As he wrote, "While *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist* and the rest may claim to be unique, that description actually does apply to the *Weekly Worker*" ('Extra needed', June 9). We wish it didn't, of course. We wish that whole swathes of the ostensibly Marxist left had the culture of our paper - open, democratic, and characterised by an unshakable fealty to communism and the struggle to unite all communists and revolutionaries around a genuinely Marxist programme. Clearly, the world in 2011 - and what we can see coming over the horizon for our class - quite simply *demands* this.

We are entering an intense period of conflict between the workers' movement and the coalition government. We have seen the huge TUC demonstration of March 26 and now with the June 15 vote by the PCS to join hundreds of thousands of teachers and lecturers in a coordinated walkout on June 30, the temperature has risen noticeably. With a

coming 'autumn of discontent' being spoken of almost as an established fact by media pundits, various bourgeois politicians have floated the possibility of another raft of repressive anti-trade unions laws - Boris Johnson, Vince Cable, and Francis Maude have talked about placing yet more restrictions on trade union action.

What lies in front of us is nothing less than a strategic battle. So the key thing for us is the readiness of our class - most starkly revealed by the state of its advanced part: the comrades organised in the left of Labour, the left militants in the trade union movement and in and around the revolutionary sects.

That left has taken a pounding over the past period. The Labour left has been dramatically reduced in size and influence. Trade union membership is around seven million, compared to over 13 million in 1979, the basic structures are emaciated and the bureaucrats continue to exercise a profoundly deadening influence, despite the recent increase in protests.

The revolutionary groups have criminally squandered chances to establish a beachhead for Marxism in wider society, particularly in the field of electoral contests. Instead, narrow sect interests continue to prevail and hopelessly opportunist 'get rich quick' schemes have been foisted on the movement. Now, these forces have retreated into the activity that largely defines them - wasting a huge amount of effort constructing Potemkin villages, attempting to fool the working class that they alone are 'the socialists', that anything else

that might exist is irrelevant at best, that the party our class needs will arrive only through the accumulation of new recruits.

On one level, this sort of behaviour is just farcical of course. On another, it speaks of a criminal irresponsibility and totally cavalier attitude to the needs of the movement for principled unity. This degenerate culture is, unfortunately, the dominant one and has been strengthened, not weakened. Clearly this awful state of affairs has had a material affect on the work of the CPGB and - as an important part of that work - our annual SO.

Our ability to turn outwards has been constricted, as the left has declined and retreated into itself. In this sense, the *Weekly Worker* is our most effective weapon. It is read by thousands of advanced workers in this country and across the world. It hammers home its message of unity, of programmatic clarification and death to sectarianism every week and, despite its weaknesses, is the embodiment of an approach to politics that can take the left out of its current sad impasse. Sustaining its finances and providing the wherewithal for us to actually plan expansion - more pages, adding colour, actually running *fighting* campaigns to expand its circulation, dedicated office space instead of the rather makeshift arrangements we currently have - all of this will be at the very centre of this year's Summer Offensive.

Of course, the place where most readers encounter our paper is on the organisation's website and that has obviously been a real weakness. The current site is totally inadequate to present our politics to the relatively

huge numbers who visit it, compared to those who take a hard copy of the paper. Obviously, the *Weekly Worker* is what really drives the site's content forward and this will continue for the foreseeable future. However, on June 18 - the first day the Summer Offensive - a revamped site will finally be launched that is designed to have a great deal more interactivity.

In order to develop our online presence further - indeed, to get this redesigned site off the slipway - we have had to buy in commercial web expertise. Not something we do casually, as a cash-strapped organisation overwhelmingly composed of working class people - despite the lurid tales about our limitless funds and establishment connections that do the rounds in some of the more stupid quarters of the left - but, given the growing importance of the web for our work and the circulation of the *Worker*, we have had no option.

We will be systematically contacting the readers and sympathisers of the paper over the next couple of weeks to ask them a simple question - whether a physical version pops onto their mat weekly or they read the paper online, do they value the contribution it makes in the search for a positive resolution of the palpable crisis of the left? Does it deserve not simply to survive, but *flourish* and expand? If so, can they make a regular contribution to support that process?

Two months to make £25k, comrades, and to put the *Weekly Worker* on a footing to consolidate and then expand! Let's hear from you! ●

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Unity: in action



## REVIEW

# The Red Mist descends

James Turley introduces a new cultural website



Arts, politics, theory

**“A** Klee painting called *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise: it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

Walter Benjamin

**Theses on the philosophy of history**

After the death of England’s best-loved alcoholic gambling bigot, the queen mother, the *Daily Mail* rather ludicrously suggested that the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square should be given over permanently to a statue of her. *The Guardian* impishly proposed the potential responses of contemporary artists to the challenge. For Antony Gormley, we got ‘the angel of the south’: a steel sculpture of an old lady, complete with cane, handbag, absurd hat and enormous aeroplane wings.

This is how one pictures the angel of contemporary culture. Her eyes stare at

hordes of tourists, bemused consumers of Britain’s heritage industry. Her existence is a cheap trick, a grandiose prosthesis grafted onto a piece of idiotic kitsch. Nobody any more is quite sure if she is a serious endeavour or a mischievous joke; the work of a dedicated artisan or of an industry. Unlike Benjamin’s angel, she does not want to stay behind but to take flight from this shabby existence. Unfortunately, she is riveted to the plinth. These rivets are what we call capitalism.

Cultural products are produced because someone has something important to say, progressive or reactionary, rational or irrational; yet everywhere the result is trite banality. Late capitalism has become ever more adept at enforcing its conservative, accountant-friendly agenda on culture. In the world of the market, an artist can only try something that has already been tried and been seen to succeed. The state’s arts-funding bureaucracies - not much less conservative than private investors, but acting at least in the name of different priorities - are getting slashed out of existence, along with everything else that needs public money to function (failing banks excepted, of course). At this rate, in 50 years all movies will be sequels, all plays will be musicals and all novels will be airport-friendly crime yarns. (All academic papers, meanwhile, will be cooked up to order by corporations.)

Red Mist is the successor to London Book Club, to whose interesting accumulation of reviews we intend to add some serious political direction, editorial focus and old-fashioned panache. As Marxists, we do not

think that the above depressing outlook is the only possible outcome for the human race. More to the point, we do not think that artists, writers and thinkers meekly accept their fate - nor do their works. Ernst Bloch used to say that every artefact of capitalist society, no matter how apparently banal and degraded, had a hidden utopian striving beyond its mundane existence; the reverse is also true, however, and even the most radically leftwing work has to come to terms, secretly, with the reality that gave it birth.

Working out what is what is the job of critics. It is not our job to say that we liked film X and thought that it was good; or (still worse, as the reviews in most leftwing publications do) say that we approved of the explicit political content of film X, and therefore liked it and thought that it was good. And, though we are a theoretically minded project, we will not destroy your will to live with 10,000 word Lacanian disquisitions on Proust.

What we will do is review all manner of texts - from pop singles to academic monographs - and reveal what *really* makes them tick. We will do this with the oldest tools in the box: a knowledge of context, an understanding of the medium and a sprinkling of humour (after all, if you didn’t laugh, you’d cry). Join us on our journey through the bizarre, contradictory cultural life of capitalism - hopefully we will one day get out the other side ●

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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

## America and Europe are diverging

# Nato paralysis and US decline

In recent years, there have been no end of occasions for military strategists to wonder what, exactly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is actually for.

It used to be pretty obvious: with the Soviet bloc extending out as far west as Berlin and as far east - until the Sino-Soviet split, at least - as Pyongyang, an alliance between the USA and various European states was something of a no-brainer to the anti-communist ruling class of the western world.

Now the cold war is over, however, and so is that sense of a fundamentally shared purpose. Nato has visibly been in decline since the final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and with each passing year - sometimes, it seems, with each passing month - the contradictions between different signatories become more obviously acute. Many have been long-running, of course - Gaullists in France resisted full-fledged Nato membership from 1966 until 2009, and the resistance of post-war Germany to overt militarisation is understandable - but now there is nothing left to paper over the cracks. The occasional outrages of Islamist terror cells make a poor substitute for the Evil Empire.

The latest crisis arises directly from an exasperated US establishment. Robert Gates, outgoing Pentagon chief and long-serving military-industrial bureaucrat, used a valedictory speech in Brussels on June 10 to launch a scabrous attack on European commitment to the alliance. Already in America, he said, there was a new generation of politicians who had not come of age in the cold war, and were sceptical of carrying its legacy for no obvious reason. Indeed, the broadly isolationist views common to the American right in the inter-war years are making a comeback under the sign of the Tea Party.

What is already a hard sell is made harder by the belief that only the US and a handful of close allies are truly meeting their Nato commitments, leaving America in the position of bailing out underfunded military ventures. The latest of these is the imperialist attack on Libya - "The mightiest military alliance in history is only 11 weeks into an operation against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country," said Gates. "Yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions, requiring the US, once more, to make up the difference."

Fundamentally, this is an issue not of political will in the immediate case of Libya, but of reticence about military funding. "Many of those allies sitting on the sidelines do so not because they do not want to participate, but simply because they can't. The military capabilities simply aren't there."

In the case of more recent admissions to Nato, of course, this is understandable. George Bush and Dick Cheney may have been full of praise for 'new Europe', as against the old powers of France and Germany, when the latter opposed the Iraq war. Yet the fact is that Germany is an industrial powerhouse, and France hardly cash-strapped (by today's standards, anyway). The same cannot be said of the post-Stalinist countries in eastern



Nato: two-tier

and central Europe, or indeed the crisis-ridden countries of southern Europe.

The result is ominous for the US ruling class. "In the past," declared Gates, "I've worried openly about Nato turning into a two-tiered alliance - between members who specialise in 'soft', humanitarian development, peacekeeping and talking tasks, and those conducting the 'hard' combat missions ... This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable."

In truth, the post-cold war enlargement of Nato has brought its own problems, especially its extension into various ex-Stalinist countries. This was most dramatically highlighted in the South Ossetia crisis in 2008. Nato had been lukewarm about admitting Georgia to the alliance, most obviously because of the increasingly fraught diplomatic relations the former Soviet republic had with Russia. When war broke out between them over two autonomous provinces, the fact that Georgia remained outside Nato was a consolation - after all, had it been admitted, Nato would then have been under a formal commitment to intervene on the side of a militarily weak state run by an authoritarian and widely hated leader.

In practice, the nuclear arms race meant it was always impossible for Nato to wage a war - except in the most exceptional circumstances - against the Soviet Union. It could, nonetheless, serve the purpose of shoring up European borders against the Soviets, with the expectation that the US could enjoy popular support off the back of anti-communist sentiment for its troop and missile deployments. Today, it just looks like what it is - cynical big-power politics. Nato was always a means to rubber-stamp US foreign policy - but now they cannot pretend it is anything else.

Robert Gates's criticisms are not idle threats. They are expressions of the underlying dynamic towards fragmentation among the western powers, and ultimately the decline of the US as a global hegemon state - its interests increasingly diverge from those of the core European powers. True, the ascendancy of China and other countries has been considerably overstated and it remains crucially the case that the US can inflict a military defeat on any state of the periphery - witness Iraq and Afghanistan. But it appears unable to impose any kind of stable political order.

The Libyan intervention is an

attempt to regain ground in the Arab world after a great wave of popular struggles that caught America and its allies on the hoof. The first casualties were US strongmen in Tunisia and Egypt; who knows who the next will be? Even here, however, the difficulties are obvious. America was hardly chomping at the bit to send the cavalry into Tripoli; the limitations of sustained aerial bombardment are increasingly obvious, and Gaddafi looks like he will hang on.

This is not to say the US is effectively neutralised - on the contrary, the lesson of the Bush years, and indeed of Obama's reign so far, is that it is increasingly compelled to engage in irrational, destructive military engagements. However, in doing so it is increasingly less able to win much support from former allies, who very often see their own imperial interests suffer in the resulting devastation (the French government's opposition to the Iraq war is a case in point).

From this perspective, it would seem that the mothballing of Nato is an inevitability. Certainly, in its present form, it is unsustainable. Gates's comments are above all else a challenge to Germany to increase its defence spending, supported by

other countries. Should it do so, and begin to make real contributions to the 'hard' combat missions, then perhaps the organisation as such has a future.

In the short term, this is not so much an issue; more advanced conventional weaponry, and crucially nuclear arms, are highly dependent on a technological infrastructure owned and controlled by the United States. Further into the future, there is the *potential* for this military-technical integration to fragment as well.

As with the Chinese case, the proclamation of the century as a European one by starry-eyed ideologues is vastly premature; Europe is a very long way from being able to challenge US military supremacy - no candidate to replace it exists, or looks likely to arise. The decline of the US as a hegemon is one tendency resulting from the decline of capitalism as a whole; the accumulation of such tendencies renders the operations of the system increasingly irrational.

In any case, the core European states - indeed, most states in the world - are not in a position to transform themselves into military superpowers at present. There is, after all, an economic crisis on, and this time around the military has not escaped public sector cuts. Even in America, the scaling back of Nasa, the US space agency, is implicitly a defeat - for now - for those bellicose governments and Pentagon apparatchiks who dreamed of weaponising space.

Alas, military spending does not need to be increased - or even maintained - for the world to be a very dangerous place. There already exist enough nuclear warheads to exterminate life on Earth several times over; and the age of austerity did not stop Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama from wading into Libya. It is impossible to predict exactly how the present period of global instability will play out. The only certainty is this: unless the working class rises to impose its agenda, there will be many more Iraqs and Libyas - or worse ●

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