



# weekly **worker**

**Chavs and the demonisation of the working class. Harley Filben reviews Owen Jones**

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No 871

Thursday June 23 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Fight for a massive, long-term wave of industrial action**



# LETTERS



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

## Capitulation

The BA offer to its cabin crew, as recommended by the Unite union, was indeed terrible and represented a defeat for those workers. Sadie Robinson's *Socialist Worker* article, 'BA workers should reject shoddy deal', was entirely correct to point out the unacceptable features.

These included "employing workers on lower pay and worse conditions", the job cuts imposed in November 2009 remaining in place, no guarantee that sacked workers will be reinstated, the promise by Unite not to support any member bringing legal action against BA, the below-inflation pay offer for 2011-12 and 2012-13 too. Comrade Robinson went on to add: "Allowing scab labour makes the current deal worse than previous ones" (*Socialist Worker* May 21).

The reaction to the article of the union's United Left was predictable: coming out in defence of "our left general secretary" against the "ultra-left" Socialist Workers Party. Nonetheless, some aspects of the letter from UL chair Martin Mayer and secretary Paul Birkett were shocking in their refusal to countenance *any* criticism of the union leadership. Referring to the *Socialist Worker* article, they claimed it "caused offence by implicitly criticising our left general secretary, Len McCluskey, ... for recommending this 'terrible deal'" (<http://unitedleft.org.uk>).

The UL has become an open tool of bureaucratic oppression of *all* militants within the union to the unprincipled manoeuvres of the top bureaucracy. Rank-and-filers everywhere can only react with revulsion to such a position.

The letter from Mayer and Birkett ended with a clear threat: "... our BASSA reps are saying they do not now wish to attend United Left meetings if SWP members are present ... We therefore invite comments and views especially from United Left regions ... on what United Left should do with regards to acceptance of SWP members within our organisation."

When Andy Newman posted the letter on his Socialist Unity website on May 27, he managed not only to demand that all criticism and opposition to McCluskey cease within Unite, but that we must all get behind Ed Miliband in the Labour Party - left reformists like Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell should cease their opposition to him.

The following comment thread showed where this cowardly capitulation is leading. 'E' ended his remarks with a question to Newman: "The logic of this would surely be that nobody on the Labour left should criticise Ed Miliband, for the simple reason that the Parliamentary Labour Party is so rightwing that no socialist is likely to be successful in mounting a challenge. Is that really your position? John McDonnell should stop 'destabilising' Ed Miliband's leadership?"

To which Newman replied: "Correct. The left's job is broadly to support Ed Miliband against the threat of the Blairite right; and certainly John McDonnell has shown a lack of tactical judgement, despite his many admirable qualities."

But what of Andy's very pertinent question to the SWP? - "... if they cannot act in a disciplined way to defend the left leadership of the union, then why are they in the United Left? Correct me if I am wrong, but don't the SWP owe their places on the exec to their being part of the United Left slate? In which case they would seem to be having their cake and eating it.

More generally though, I feel there is a definite loss of patience with the ultra-left in the unions now, as we are gearing up for very serious challenges, and can do without the infantile chorus" ([www.socialistunity.com/?p=8170](http://www.socialistunity.com/?p=8170)).

The SWP met in Birmingham on June 4 to decide what to do. It had already written a grovelling letter to apologise for the article; now it was time to make its position clear. After all, even the Socialist Party and Alliance for Workers' Liberty, having previously semi-defended the SWP for fear of the consequences for themselves of a full-scale anti-left witch-hunt, were now saying that the reasonable article by Sadie Robinson, with which no serious militant could disagree, was over the top and ultra-left.

Note that it was the UL national coordinating committee (NCC) which was to take the expulsion decision: the UL as a whole could not be trusted. The members had refused to go along with the previous attempt to expel the SWP over its support for Jerry Hicks in last year's general secretary election and there was a clear danger that Mayer and Birkett (read McCluskey) would lose again if they took the matter to the UL membership.

In the end the SWP decided to send Gill George, one of its most prominent rightwingers, to the NCC - some have joked that the SWP was thinking of sending her partner, the even more rightwing Pete Gillard. Both had argued passionately (but ultimately unsuccessfully) against supporting comrade Hicks at the SWP Unite caucus in 2010 (see my article, 'Jane Loftus syndrome' *Weekly Worker* August 26 2010).

Comrade George obviously gave the NCC enough assurance regarding the SWP's future good behaviour to mollify the witch-hunters-in-chief and secure the lifting of the expulsion threat. The argument was that *Socialist Worker* has published no further articles on the BA deal and in any case Sadie Robinson was not a member of the SWP Unite caucus, which therefore should not be blamed for her article.

I hear the discussion at the NCC went something like this:

"But you did sell that issue outside the caucus meeting, didn't you, comrades, implying you agree with your newspaper's line on the BA dispute? Say sorry and promise never to do it again."

"We promise, we promise. Please don't expel us, sir!"

"On probation then. Your last chance. But the next time an ultra-left SWP militant attacks some Unite bureaucrat you are gone."

So the effect of the UL intervention in the internal politics of the SWP has been to reverse the defeat the leadership suffered last year, when its Unite caucus eventually voted by 25 votes to five to support Jerry Hicks - the leadership had wanted to back McCluskey in order to keep in the UL's good books. Now Gill George is in practice back in charge of the caucus.

But we cannot just mock the SWP. The grassroot left's aspirations to build a genuine rank and file movement against all trade union bureaucrats has suffered a serious setback.

**Gerry Downing**  
email

## Lost marbles

Browsing the programme for the SWP's forthcoming Marxism festival, I was entertained by this little snippet: "Kemal Abu Aita to speak at opening rally. Kemal is a leader of the Egyptian tax collectors' union - the first independent union to be founded in Egypt for decades. Kemal has been

a lifelong opponent of Mubarak and supporter of the Palestinian struggle."

Has the British left truly lost it marbles? Would the left have support the trade unionists that saved kiddie fiddlers jobs in 1970s care homes? Would you support a job creation scheme for gas chamber fitters for the unemployed? This is more contemptible than the Militant and their 'workers in uniform' concept.

Tax collectors kill people. People are driven into work that is poorly paid, their personal relationships break down because of too heavy a burden and tax collectors carry on as androids showing little pity - they carry on as in a Milgram experiment. Do you support the self-interest of state employees, no matter what damage they do to the people, to the working class?

The British left have abandoned any working class morality. The British left have abandoned the working class. The British left, at least in this case, chose to support the self-interest of repressors, so the state can dominate people's lives. The SWP clearly believe in a state ruling a people, not a people ruling a state. The British left have lost all right to talk of solidarity. They show none themselves. They are leading the working class to protect the interests of our class's tormentors. They are leading another campaign that clearly is marching into defeat.

I am not a totalitarian and they are free to talk to whom they like. But I do think it's a disgrace and should be considered a great shame for socialism and Marxism. The thing to do to those in the left who disgrace the politics of socialism is to expose their hypocrisy and organise a protest. I intend to hand out leaflets and call for all SWP members and people of the left to boycott this event.

Like a leftwing Peter Tatchell we should be Outraged and be exposing those who claim to be socialists and serve the interests of the working class, when clearly they don't give two hoots what the working class think. The working class rightly despise these people.

**James Walsh**  
email

## No sink

I am sorry that Grant Williamson (Letters, June 16) chose to interpret my letter (June 9) as supporting the state's repression of young people's sexuality. My inclusion of other related issues was not an attempt to throw in everything but the kitchen sink, but a wish to show that the age of consent is but one aspect of a situation which fosters the systematic marginalisation of women's autonomy in general and sexuality in particular.

I should perhaps have made myself clearer; but, in fairness, my main point was that the small number of convictions of teenage boys for having consensual sex with their girlfriends is not a campaigning priority when one in four women have a lifetime probability of being raped and two women a week are killed by male current or ex-partners.

I thought (naively, as it turned out) that the letter gave adequate indication of my basic opinion that mainstream views of sexuality, including those of the judicial and education systems, are ultimately based on control of women's reproductive function for the purposes of inheritance. Obviously, I have no interest in supporting that. Equally, I have no interest in maintaining some warped form of compulsory heterosexual availability of women for the entertainment and manipulation of men.

I am aware that many on the left are more comfortable with the notion of working class unity and solidarity in the face of a draconian bourgeois state. Sadly, this does not fit the reality

of life for most women and girls, who spend our lives in constant awareness of the potential threat of male violence. It would be a pleasant change to get some recognition of that without having to put on a Slutwalk sideshow to garner approval for a campaign about the widespread indifference to women's safety.

**Heather Downs**  
Medway

## Market socialist

I am an ex-member of both the Labour Party and the old Communist Party of Great Britain (at different times). I left the CPGB in 1976 and currently am not a member of any political party.

In the past few general elections I voted Liberal Democrat, as I considered its policies to be the most leftwing of the three major parties, New Labour having gone so far to the right. Now that the Lib Dems are in coalition with the Tories, however, I'm likely to vote Labour once again at the next general election.

I feel that, as socialists, we need to learn from the mistakes of the past and, in particular, the experience of the Soviet Union and other socialist states. We should not be dogmatic and should be able to think for ourselves and adapt Marxism to the conditions of the 21st century, learning from the experience of 20th century attempts at establishing socialism.

I feel that it was far too optimistic to expect the working masses to become politically aware and active overnight. Some socialist states had a one-party system, others like the German Democratic Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had coalitions led by a Marxist-Leninist party. Neither of these two systems worked very well because opportunists and careerists clamoured to join the ruling parties/coalitions in order to gain perks and privileges, and they soon gained control. A new ruling class of bureaucrats arose and, while the basic needs of the population were met and the socialist countries achieved a great deal of success (including full employment, good public services, security in old age, good health and education systems, equal rights for women, etc), it was a distorted form of socialism because of the opportunist entryism and corruption and the difficulty the masses had in exercising true socialist democracy once the opportunists and careerists had entrenched themselves in the political organisations. Even true socialists and communists became corrupted by power, enjoying the perks and privileges and therefore not identifying with the experience of the masses.

I see no reason why various political parties should not contest elections under a socialist constitution. I feel truly free elections with rival parties/candidates are essential to insure corruption is not entrenched.

I am very much in favour of competing cooperatives, public and state enterprises in a friendly socialist market place, similar to Yugoslavia's old system, but with pluralism in the political as well as economic arena.

As an internationalist, I am also strongly in favour of the European Union, despite its current capitalist nature, and was pleasantly surprised to see that, almost uniquely among the far left, your party is in agreement with this line. In actual fact, the EU has been the impetus for much progressive legislation in Britain, such as equal rights for gays and laws against discrimination on the basis of age.

I do have reservations about your policies on the age of consent and on the use of force, if necessary, to achieve socialism. It depends exactly what these policies mean. Sex between teenagers under 16

should not be criminalised, nor sex between teenagers under 16 and older teenagers. However, young people must be protected against sexual exploitation by older people, who could use their power and authority over them.

As to the use of force, I am not in favour of violent, bloody revolution, which is always a precursor to a repressive dictatorship of one sort or another. As a pacifist, I believe the use of violence should be minimal in any situation and then only as a very last resort to prevent atrocities.

For this reason, I'm in favour of all national armies being absorbed into a permanent United Nations security force which should police all countries.

**Tony Papard**  
email

## Hypocrite

If David Cameron really believes that "leaving single mothers ... to fend for themselves simply isn't acceptable", then he should stop deporting fathers and make instant preparations to bring back to the UK all the fathers that his and previous governments have deported.

Deported fathers cannot, as Mr Cameron would like, "look after their families", if they are several thousand miles away. Runaway fathers have a choice of looking after their families; deported fathers don't.

The present immigration laws, which permit the splitting of families and incarceration/deportation of fathers and mothers, is nothing less than legal bullying.

Can Mr Cameron tell us how many 'absent fathers/mothers' are in immigration detention facilities and when he will release them back to their families?

As he has claimed that "a father's place is in the home", children who have had their father deported, and their mothers, should write to the prime minister and demand that he should grant them immediate entry clearance to return to the UK.

**John O**  
[www.freemovement.org.uk](http://www.freemovement.org.uk)

## Rise up

Capitalist politicians are trying desperately to arrange a second Greek bailout. Meanwhile, many thousands of ordinary (primarily) working class people are getting organised - on the streets and in trade unions and political parties.

Greek workers have already taken a 20% pay cut as a result of the austerity measures that capitalists insisted on as a condition for the first bailout. Why should ordinary people in Greece, the UK or elsewhere in the EU bear the brunt of the cuts resulting from actions of bankers and politicians? Most of the first Greek bailout went to finance capital, while Greek workers faced austerity measures.

It now seems that, whatever politicians and international financiers do, the concept of the euro as a currency for much of Europe is doomed. Greece will have to default, sooner or later, and/or leave the euro zone. The folly of the same currency for countries like Germany with a relatively well-paid, high-skilled workforce and generally lower-paid, low-skilled workforce in Greece is being exposed. Those, on the left and right, who warned of the folly of Britain joining the euro are being proved correct.

The only solution to capitalist economic crisis is to overthrow the capitalists. We need a real, very democratic, socialist Europe and world as a solution to the misery caused by the politicians and bankers. Peoples of Europe, rise up!

**Steve Wallis**  
email



## CAMPUS SPIES

# Students and researchers beware

Targeting Muslims under anti-terror laws freezes intellectual enquiry and needs to be opposed by all radicals, oppositionalists and the leftwingers, urges **Michael Copestake**



### Spies not wanted

**R**unning in parallel with the government's revamped 'Pre-vent' strategy for managing parts of the British Muslim community through its religious and community organisations (under which all those who oppose the 'war on terror' are classed as 'extremist'), are a whole series of other 'preventative' anti-terror measures and programmes.

Not only are informants employed within mosques to keep tabs on potential 'extremists', but the university system is increasingly being pressed into the service of the state anti-terror apparatus. Not least through the use of extraordinarily wide-ranging and ill-defined anti-terror laws, the state has the ability to monitor and disrupt every form of social resistance or protest. The ideology of 'order' is used to legitimise this in a general way, but in the post-9/11 world the crowbar of choice for the state to act against its citizenry has been precisely the threat of terrorism, and of 'Islamic terrorism' in particular.

The latest 'spying on campus' scandal has surfaced at the University of Nottingham. The actual events took place in 2008, but came to light this month when a report by lecturer Rob Thornton exposed the dishonest conduct of the university and the continued maltreatment of two innocent people. Hicham Yezza and Rizwaan Sabir, a member of staff and student respectively, were reported to the police by the university after a copy of an al Qa'eda training manual was found on a university computer used by the pair. Sabir had been conducting research into militant Islam and had been discussing this with Yezza, also a political activist and editor of the magazine *Ceasefire*, for his PhD thesis.

By reporting them to special branch the university was complying with the Labour government's 2006 injunction to universities to keep closer tabs on

'Asian-looking' students and also the activities of Islamic societies, whether or not they were inviting 'radical' preachers and so on. It rapidly became apparent, of course, that the pair had no connections with terrorism, but they were detained under the provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000 for six days.

The affair not only had grave consequences for two people engaged in basic research activity, but also has sinister implications for the content of university courses themselves. In the aftermath, and following its complete lack of effort to defend academic freedom from state intrusion, the University of Nottingham's politics department established a committee to review the reading lists of its lecturers to ensure they do not contain "material that is illegal or could incite violence". At the time vice-chancellor Sir Colin Campbell stated that those who sought to research terrorism would just have to put up with it if they were detained by the security services - if they were sincere researchers with no terrorist agenda, then they would surely be able to explain themselves.

Interestingly there is no legal definition of what constitutes 'extremism' under British law, as was revealed by *The Guardian* in 2009, though people familiar with the law may already have known this (October 26 2009). There are the police 'forward intelligence units', the national domestic extremism unit and so on - all functioning against 'extremism' without any precise definition of what exactly it is.

In the same report we get a working definition: "Senior officers describe domestic extremists as individuals or groups 'that carry out criminal acts of direct action in furtherance of a campaign. These people and activities usually seek to prevent something from happening or to change legislation or domestic policy, but attempt to do so outside of the normal democratic

process'. They say they are mostly associated with single issues and suggest the majority of protesters are never considered extremists." We have seen, however, green groups targeted by anti-domestic extremism units - the case of police infiltrator Mark Kennedy is a well known example - and the increasing conflation of 'extremism' and 'terrorism'.

A commission on universities is due in the near future to report on 'campus extremism' to the government, which will then decide which student Muslim societies will be banned. But surely one can see the enormous scope afforded to campus bureaucrats and the state here in combating the extreme left, Marxists and anti-war activists? Are we not just another target, like the environmental activists or, now, the Muslim Council of Britain, amongst others? In relation to the use of 'inflammatory' academic materials, could we see a situation where Marxist texts - those concerning imperialism most obviously - would be classed as such and removed from reading lists?

From the point of view of the state those outside the intelligence services do not need to understand terrorists - trying to grasp their motives might lead to sympathising with them. Terroristic acts of madness cannot be understood by right-thinking people, so do not even try. In this way the spectre of terrorism can be retained as one of the most powerful weapons in the bourgeois armoury - special outrage is reserved for those who go against the grain and attempt to articulate why, at bottom, desperate conditions produce desperate people. When Cherie Blair, for example, said in 2002 that she could understand why living as a Palestinian under Israeli occupation may drive one to terrorism out of desperation, she was pounced upon.

If the wife of the prime minister could be treated in that way, students and researchers beware ●

## 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.

### Unison United Left

**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).

### 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).

### Strike events

**Thursday June 30**

**Aberystwyth, 12 noon:** Rally, Morlan Centre, Queens Road.

**Bristol, 11am:** March, College Green.

**Cambridge, 12 noon:** Rally, Parker's Piece, Parkside.

**Canterbury, 10am:** Rally, Abbots Barton Hotel, New Dover Road.

**Cardiff, 12 noon:** March, Sofia Gardens, Cathedral Road.

**Carlisle, 12.30pm:** Rally, Old Town Hall.

**Chatham, 12 noon:** Rally, Command House, Dock Road.

**Chelmsford, 11am:** Rally, High Street.

**Colchester, 12.30pm:** Rally, Colchester Town Hall, High Street.

**Dover, 12 noon:** Rally, St Mary's Church Hall, Church Street.

**Exeter, 11am:** Rally followed by march, Corn Exchange, George Street. Speakers include: Brendan Barber (TUC).

**Glasgow, 12 noon:** Rally, George Square. Speakers include: Janice Goodrich (PCS), Grahame Smith (Scottish TUC).

**Gloucester, 10.30am:** Rally, the bandstand Gloucester Park, Park Road.

**Halifax, 10am:** Rally, Arden Road Social Club. Speakers include: Linda Riordan MP and Ian Murch (NUT).

**Hastings, 10am:** Rally, White Rock Hotel, White Rock.

**Huddersfield, 12 noon:** Rally, Market Cross, Market Place.

**Hull, 10am:** Rally, Royal Hotel, 170 Ferensway.

**Ipswich, 10.45am:** March, Giles Circus, Princes Street.

**Leeds, 11.30am:** March, Leeds Metropolitan University, Woodhouse Lane.

**Liverpool, 11.30am:** March, William Brown Street.

**Llandrindod Wells, 11am:** Rally, The Pavilion, Spa Road.

**London - central, 11am:** March, Lincoln Inn Fields, WC2. Speakers include: Christine Blower (NUT), Sally Hunt (UCU), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Dot Gibson (National Pensioners Convention) and John McDonnell MP.

**London - Wembley, 10am:** Rally, The Torch Pub, Bridge Road (by Wembley Park station).

**Luton, 12 noon:** March, Market Hill.

**Maidenhead, 11am:** Rally, Thames Hotel, Ray Mead Road.

**Maidstone, 12 noon:** Rally, Walnut Tree, 234 Tonbridge Road.

**Manchester, 11am:** March, All Saints, Oxford Road.

**Middlesbrough, 4.30pm:** Rally, Russell Street (by the bottle sculpture).

**Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 12 noon:** March, Life Centre, Times Square.

**Newport, 12 noon:** Rally, John Frost Square.

**Norwich, 12 noon:** Rally, the Forum, Millennium Plain, Bethel Street.

**Oxford, 12 noon:** March, Town Hall, St Aldate's.

**Plymouth, 12 noon:** March, Guildhall Square.

**Portsmouth, 12 noon:** Rally, Guildhall Square.

**Preston, 12 noon:** Rally, Flag Market.

**Reading, 12noon:** Rally, Reading International Solidarity Centre, 35 London Street.

**Rotherham, 11am:** Rally, All Saints Square.

**Sheffield, 12 noon:** March, Peace Gardens, Pinstone Street.

**Sittingbourne, 11am:** Rally, Phoenix House, Central Avenue.

**Swansea, 11.30am:** Rally, Castle Square.

**Taunton, 11am:** Rally, Taunton Rugby Club, Hyde Lane.

**Truro, 10am:** Rally, Lemon Quay.

**Worthing, 11am:** Rally, Steyne Gardens, Warwick Road.

**Wrexham, 11.30am:** Rally, Queens Square.

### 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.



**JUNE 30**

Students out too

# Fight for a massive, long-term wave of industrial action

**W**ith great reluctance for the most part, the leaders of the public sector unions are being pulled towards strike action to defend their members' jobs, conditions and pensions.

As readers will know, the first cross-union, coordinated action will take place on June 30, following the large majority votes for a strike in the National Union of Teachers (92%), Association of Teachers and Lecturers (83%) and the Public and Commercial Services union (61%). Three quarters of a million workers are expected to be out on that day. Even the National Association of Head Teachers is balloting for action, although it is looking ahead to what is likely to be the second round of walkouts in the autumn rather than June 30. Like the ATL, the NAHT has never before called its members out on strike.

What has really angered teachers and civil servants is the outrageous attempt to slash their modest retirement pensions. Under the government's proposals, public sector workers will pay much more in contributions (up to 10% of their salary), work years longer, until the age of 66 (and eventually 68), and at the end of it get lower pensions than those received by their colleagues who are already retired. To save money, the government wants pensions calculations to be based on a worker's career-average salary, not what they earn on retirement, as at present - a huge difference. And, to rub salt in the wound, annual increases would no longer be linked to the retail price index, but the rather lower consumer price index.

According to Danny Alexander, chief secretary to the treasury, this pitiful 'offer' is "by far the best that is likely to be on the table for years to come" and striking against "the best pensions available" would only lead to a worse deal. Alexander praised Lord Hutton - a New Labour collaborator with the coalition government - for creating "the chance of a better change" in drawing up the recommendations upon which the proposals are based. Instead of going out on strike, the unions should help "shape" the deal.

Surely public sector workers

must realise that their pensions are exceedingly generous, compared to the private sector? Well, that depends on which particular people in the private sector you are talking about. Top managers, like civil service bosses, pocket sums most workers can only dream about on retirement. But, in any case, the whole system rests on direct deductions from wages and contributions made by the employer in lieu of higher pay. In that sense pensions are nothing but deferred wages.

And, of course, our answer to the attempt to pit worker against worker, public sector against private, is to demand decent pensions for all: their *upward* equalisation.

Great play has been made of the fact that none of the successful ballots achieved anything like a 50% turnout - for the PCS it was more like 20%. This led to fresh calls for the 50% threshold to be made a legal requirement - Neil Bentley, deputy director-general of the Confederation of British Industry, said that the government ought to rush in emergency legislation to stop the strikes here and now.

For Alexander the reason why most members of the unions concerned did not take part in the strike ballots was that "the vast majority realise such a step is unjustifiable". By the same token, Tory MPs and councillors elected on low turnouts must be bitterly opposed by the "vast majority" of their constituents, I suppose, and their election should be declared illegitimate.

No, the low turnout clearly does not reflect active opposition to the proposed action - if there really was such hostility to it, then obviously it would simply be voted down. But there is no getting away from the fact that it *does* reflect a lack of enthusiasm - a belief that nothing much can be changed by militant action (or by voting, for that matter). The truth is, huge numbers of workers are alienated by the circumstances of their existence under capitalism - and that includes those aspects that aim to alleviate it. The concept of collective action not just to win improvements, but to overturn the whole system, is also a casualty. We on the left bear a big responsibility for this - but that is another story.

The main gripe of many union leaders seems to be that ministers are just not serious about negotiations. Union bureaucrats are reasonable people, you know. Instead of announcing the changes to the media virtually as a *fait accompli*, why not sit round the table with them and strike an amicable deal? After all, it is only four years since the public sector last accepted measures to make pensions 'affordable' - in 2007 they agreed to a two-tier system, whereby new recruits would have to suffer some of the things the government now wants to impose on everybody. What a surprise!

Despite assurances back then that the new arrangements would eliminate the pensions deficit, CBI director-general John Cridland said the gap between contributions and pay-out is now "£10 billion a year, and growing". So what went wrong, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber wants to know - why not show us the actual figures? In fact, certain union bureaucrats are doing the media rounds saying that if the government can *prove* that the proposed measures are necessary then "of course" they will call off the strikes. But we should not be in the business of balancing the books for the capitalists. If their system is so badly malfunctioning that it cannot afford *existing* pensions, let alone decent ones, then it is the system that should go. That should be the message coming from the lips of trade union leaders.

## Fighting talk

In the meantime we have heard fighting talk from Unison general secretary Dave Prentis. He has promised that his union will begin balloting over a million council and NHS staff in the autumn and said the government should brace itself for a "massive", "long-term" wave of industrial action - the biggest "since the General Strike", with up to 10 million people involved. "We wanted to negotiate all the way through," said Prentis. "But if we're going to be treated with disdain ..."

It is more than a shame then that Unison will not be out on June 30. However, the next round of strikes needs to involve the widest sections of the organised working class. The TUC should be flooded with resolutions

demanding a protest general strike against the government's 'age of austerity'. Cuts do not just affect public sectors workers, but all those who use government services: ie, everybody.

Predictably, shadow chancellor Ed Balls was not going to support any strikes. He said: "The trade unions must not walk into the trap of giving George Osborne the confrontation that he wants to divert attention from a failing economy." Obviously, workers should just wait around until the next election and replace George with Ed at No11. Then we will have kinder, slower cuts and a marginally less brutal assault on pensions. Then again, when has Labour ever supported strike action (apart from Solidarity in Poland, that is)?

But that can and must be changed. Labour needs to serve the movement, not the other way round. Prentis and all the other trade union leaders could exercise control in the Labour Party - they have the financial clout and the millions of block votes. They could, that is, if they had the will - or if they were forced to.

The demand for the "massive", "long-term" wave of industrial action must be taken into the Labour Party itself. Ed Balls should be told in no uncertain terms to back our industrial action or face the boot. The same goes for Ed Miliband and the whole shadow cabinet. Instead of talk of kinder, slower cuts, we need intransigent opposition and a clear class line. This year's Labour Party conference in Liverpool is due to be another tame rally, a show box for Ed Miliband. That is what the fixers and spin doctors are planning. But it could be different. If the unions applied their strength the conference could be transformed into a platform for working class anger and a springboard for working class resistance.

Of course, there are those who think the Con-Lib Dem government will be a pushover. That is why last weekend's *Morning Star* editorial was completely wrong to claim that "The government's threats represent weakness rather than strength and the unions are justified in calling its bluff ..." (June 18-19). We should not be fooled by tensions within the coalition between the Tories and Liberal Democrats, believing them to represent "weakness" on the part of the

government. The Lib Dems are stuck with the coalition - to break with it and so force an election would see them wiped out, and they know it.

What of the Socialist Workers Party with its call for *indefinite* strike action? Internally the SWP is egging on its members with the prospect of a second wave of strikes in the autumn, when the slogan, "Come out, stay out", would be on the agenda. But what would an indefinite general strike mean? It could only be a battle for power. Society would grind to a halt and we would have to be ready to fill the vacuum. In current circumstances, in the absence of a mass revolutionary party, to talk in such terms is crazy.

It is true that the SWP is linking its mobilisation for June 30 with attempts to recruit to itself. So union militants must be won, in the first instance, to come to the Marxism festival, which actually starts that day. The call is: "Build for a wave of resistance, build Marxism 2011" (*Party Notes* June 20). The mass strike provides "fertile ideological soil for Marxism 2011. Every person won to coming to Marxism 2011 is a step towards building a socialist spine for the resistance now taking place."

It would clearly be an excellent thing if even a tiny proportion of the June 30 strikers attended Marxism. But the problem is the SWP's limited - and sectarian - view of what they should then do. Simply join the SWP, of course. Yet it has only set itself a target of winning 1,000 extra members in 2011. An ambitious and substantial increase on one level, but how would an organisation of, say, 3,000 members match up to the tasks of leading a general strike and the subsequent battle for power?

This also leaves out of the equation the question of what *sort* of party? Just the SWP writ large? No, that would make no real difference. If we are to win more than concessions, the transformation of the whole labour movement, including the Labour Party, is urgently required and integral to that is the building of a mass Communist Party armed with a genuinely Marxist programme ●

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# Refound Labour as a real party of labour

Peter Hain, chair of the national policy forum, was commissioned by Ed Miliband in November 2010 to write a consultation paper with the aim of reorganising the Labour Party, so that it could regain “the trust of British people”. *Refounding Labour* has been widely discussed in the mainstream press, web forums and numerous Labour Party meetings. Submissions have been asked for. This is the contribution of the newly formed **Labour Party Marxists**

**R**efounding the Labour Party is long overdue. There have been too many wasted years. It is a crying shame then that Peter Hain’s consultation paper is so timid, so uninspiring. No damning critique of capitalism, no bold socialist vision, no proposals to radically democratise the party. Instead we are offered managerial, tokenistic, superficial tinkering. The continued existence of capitalism goes unquestioned. The deepest, most protracted economic crisis since the 1930s gets a mention, but no commensurate conclusions follow.

Our party, our society, our species face huge challenges. No-one objects to using the internet, tweeting, community campaigns or organising an annual “summer weekend” festival. Yet, given the ongoing massive cuts programme of the Con-Dem government, the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, the terrible wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the drift into new ‘humanitarian’ interventions, the abject failure to counter the danger of ecological collapse, the urgent necessity for a socialist transition and a complete transformation of all existing conditions, more, much more, is needed.

There are those amongst us, of course, who fondly look back to what they imagine to be a golden age. The old clause four (part four) of our constitution committed us: “To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.”

Mistakenly, this is interpreted as a sincere commitment to socialism. But when it was first adopted, in February 1918 - during the slaughter of inter-imperialist war - the idea of Sidney Webb and the Fabians was to divert the considerable sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, constitutional, channels.

Needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. However, even if it had been taken seriously and put into practice, Fabian socialism is antithetical to working class self-liberation. Industry, banking, transport, etc would be bureaucratically nationalised. The mass of the population, however, remain exploited wage-slaves. Capitalism without capitalists.

Nevertheless, the old clause four resulted from mass pressure. Because of World War I, because of the Russian Revolution, capitalism was widely discredited, viewed as inherently irrational, warlike, prone to constantly recurring crises. Socialism was seen as the answer. What was true of 1918 is increasingly the case in the 2010s. There is a widespread rejection of capitalism; even in the United States an April 2009 Rasmussen poll showed only 53% of American adults rating



capitalism “better than socialism” (www.rasmussenreports.com).

Showing how badly out of touch he is with the growing anti-capitalist mood, Peter Hain actually celebrates what he calls the “reforming” of clause four in 1994. A “hugely important political symbol”, he emphatically declares. Indeed it was.

Tony Blair and New Labour were trying to assure the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy that capitalism would be safe in their hands. That a New Labour government would not even pay lip service to what was in fact a British nationalist version of state capitalism.

Whatever differences Peter Hain has with New Labour, he is impeccably New Labour on this score at least ... meanwhile Ed Miliband flirts with Blue Labour.

Calls for a return of the old clause four are understandable, but totally misplaced. We need to go forwards, not look backwards. Labour needs to organise on the basis of an explicitly socialist, as opposed to a social democratic, neoliberal or Blue Labour programme. Only then can we fulfil our responsibilities.

That is why Labour Party Marxists advocate extreme democracy in society and throughout the labour movement, working class rule and international socialism.

## Class party

Historically - in terms of membership, finances and electoral base - our party has largely relied on the working class. This has been our greatest strength; and here is the source of our hope and confidence in the future. Because of its constantly renewed social position the working class tends towards collectivist, socialistic solutions.

Despite Blairism, New Labour and the public sacrifice of the old clause four, we remain a distinctly class party. The historic relationship with the trade unions survives, there are still 2.7 million affiliated members and the working class “core vote” stood up well in the last general election.

Peter Hain is right, of course, when he points to a long-term decline of our mass base. Between 1997 and 2010 we lost five million votes. However, there must be more to this than three terms in government, changing patterns of work and the “growth of sports and

other leisure interests.” Maintaining Tory anti-trade union laws, widening inequality, Iraq and Gordon Brown’s fawning before the market, big business and the banks caused dismay and demoralisation. Our voters did not in general desert to other parties. They simply stopped voting.

We are asked how “better working class representation” can be achieved. *Refounding Labour* registers an aspiration to “recreate a much more organic link between the party and the trade union movement” - underlined by Ed Miliband’s introductory statement that he does “not want to break the party up, but build it up”.

Unlike New Labour, he harbours no ambition to break the link with the trade unions. Nowadays, that would certainly result in a financial catastrophe - debt crippled our election campaign in 2010 and donations from the super-rich have almost entirely dried up. Yet, whatever the motivation, a commitment to retain the trade union link is to be welcomed.

So how to re-engage our traditional base, how to reinvigorate the relationship with the trade unions? We say the Labour Party can and must be refounded as a real party of labour. By that we mean rebuilding and thoroughly democratising the Labour Party. We want to make Labour into a common home for all workers and working class organisations - the goal of the founders of the party in 1900.

As a party we should commit ourselves to energetically campaign to revive the trade union movement. The fall from 12 million trade union members in the late 1970s to some seven million today can be reversed. Party members should take the lead in recruiting masses of new trade unionists and restoring the strength of the unions in the workplace and in society at large. Every level of the party needs to be involved. That includes our councillors and MPs.

Strikes must be unashamedly supported. There ought to be a binding commitment to back workers in their struggle to protect jobs, pensions and conditions. Inevitably the anti-trade union laws will have to be defied.

In parallel *all* trade unions ought to be encouraged to affiliate to the Labour Party, *all* members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy to the Labour Party and join as

individual members.

Unions that have either been expelled or have disaffiliated need to be welcomed back: eg, the RMT and FBU. But there are unions which have never had an organised relationship with the Labour Party: eg, PCS and NUT. Indeed of the 58 unions affiliated to the TUC only 15 are affiliated to Labour. Winning new trade union affiliates would help transform our present situation.

While Labour Party Marxists support the idea of making membership affordable for those who are students, unemployed or are on low pay, we oppose the suggestion of blurring the distinction between those who are members - with the right to elect, be elected and decide policy, etc - and those who are supporters. Membership of the Labour Party should be something to value, to be proud of.

Naturally, the fight to refound and rebuild the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. All trade union officials ought to be subject to regular election and be recallable. No official should receive pay higher than the average of the membership. Moreover, rules which restrict the ability of the rank and file to organise and criticise must be swept away. They bring discredit to our movement.

Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries, but proportionately, according to the political balance in each delegation. Conference cannot be dominated by four or five men in suits.

## Reorganise

The Labour Party should be reorganised from top to bottom. All socialist and communist groups, leftwing think tanks and progressive campaigns ought to be allowed to affiliate. Towards that end the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be rescinded. Clause two (five) must be reformulated. A whole raft of new affiliated socialist and other such organisations would not bring in hundreds of thousands of new recruits; it would though bring in many highly valuable men and women of talent and dedication. The culture of our party can that way be greatly enhanced.

The Parliamentary Labour Party has to be brought into line. We must end the situation where Labour members vote for one thing and the PLP does another. Musings about minimal parliamentary attendance and codes of conduct are a dangerous diversion. What is needed is not further measures of bureaucratic control from above, but democratic control from below.

Our ward and constituency parties will continue to wither and die if they remain under the thumb of regional organisers and are expected to act as mere transmission belts for Victoria Street. Local autonomy enlivens, educates and lays the basis for growth and national influence. All officials in

the Labour Party must be subject to regular election and re-election.

Labour Party Marxists want the present post of Labour leader abolished. While our party has to fulfil the statutory requirements laid down in the thoroughly undemocratic Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, the *Führerprinzip* can be left to others. The leader of the Labour Party should be a nominal position. Instead of a Bonaparte with the power to appoint shadow ministers, the national executive committee should be responsible for electing chairs of the PLP, shadow ministers, etc.

Members are deeply alienated. The joint policy committee, the national policy forum and the whole Partnership into Power rigmarole have demonstrably failed. Instead of being reformed they should simply be abolished. The NEC must be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestoes. And, of course, the NEC needs to be fully accountable to annual conference.

Annual conference must be the supreme body of the Labour Party. We need democratic debate and binding votes. Not a happy-clappy rally designed for TV producers. Make officials and shadow ministers report as humble servants. No more preening media stars, no more control-freakery, no more business lobbyists, promotions and exhibits. An authoritative, honest, no-holds-barred conference would certainly guarantee an immediate increase in CLPs sending delegates to conference: numbers fell from 527 in 2002 to 444 in 2009 and only 412 in 2010 - under two thirds the total entitled to attend.

As with the trade unions, our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes Labour MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMS, councillors, etc.

Likewise, without exception, our elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker. When it comes to existing salaries, the balance should be given to the party. On current figures, that means around £40,000 from each MP (at present they are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarians’ subscription rate). That would give a substantial fillip to our depleted finances.

It should be a basic principle that our representatives live like workers, not pampered middle class careerists. If that was done, no longer would people say, ‘All politicians are the same’ or that they are ‘all in it for personal gain’.

Our task is refounding the Labour Party as a real party of labour: a workers’ party ●

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## LABOUR

# Disuniting our class

Jim Moody examines the damage caused by the Labour Party's bans and proscriptions



No more self-inflicted damage

Established in February 1900, the Labour Party was initially a federal party composed only of affiliated trade unions and other organisations, such as socialist societies. One of the latter, the British Socialist Party (formerly the Social Democratic Federation), helped found the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. It was only in 1918 that the Labour Party permitted individual membership; before that time its activist base had been provided by affiliates, including the BSP and the Independent Labour Party.

Thanks in large part to its affiliate structure, the Labour Party continued for some time after World War I to have CPGB comrades as full individual members, though all CPGB requests to affiliate as an organisation were refused. In 1922, two CPGB members won parliamentary elections as Labour candidates: JT Walton Newbold was elected MP for Motherwell and Wishaw at a by-election in November; and Shapurji Saklatvala joined him by becoming MP for Battersea North at the general election later that same month.

Labour's national executive committee had been forced to drop its attempt to ban members of the CPGB becoming conference delegates, so that at the 1923 annual conference there were "36 party members as delegates, as against six at Edinburgh", the previous year.<sup>1</sup> This conference again considered, and rejected, CPGB affiliation on a card vote of 2,880,000 to 366,000.

In the December 1923 general election, Walton Newbold (in Motherwell) and William Gallacher (Dundee) stood as Communist Party candidates. However, fellow CPGBers Ellen Wilkinson (Ashton-under-Lyne), Shapurji Saklatvala (Battersea North), M Philips Price (Gloucester), William Paul (Manchester Rusholme) and Joe Vaughan (Bethnal Green SW) were official Labour Party candidates, while Alec Geddes (Greenock) and Aitkin Ferguson (Glasgow Kelvingrove) stood as unofficial Labour (there being no official Labour candidate in either constituency). Despite an increase in votes, none was elected.<sup>2</sup> A ban on CPGB members standing as Labour Party candidates followed.

However, although Labour Party support was forbidden for communist candidates, in the October 1924 general election, Battersea North Labour Party endorsed Saklatvala overwhelmingly; Joe Vaughan was unanimously endorsed by Bethnal Green SW CLP and William Paul similarly by the Rusholme CLP executive committee. Saklatvala was once more elected an MP.<sup>3</sup>

The 1924 annual conference decision against CPGB members retaining their LP membership was reaffirmed the following year. "At the same time, trade unions were asked not to nominate communists as delegates to Labour organisations."<sup>4</sup> Despite these moves, at the end of 1926 1,544 of the CPGB's 7,900 members were still individual members of the Labour Party.

After the 1926 General Strike, rightwing Labour and trade union leaders wanted the movement to draw the lesson that the only way to make gains would be through increased cooperation with the capitalists - combined, of course, with the return of a Labour government. As an essential concomitant, the Labour leadership moved to impose a stifling central control and clamp down on the left, including the communists, who could be expected to fight their class collaboration.

The assault on CPGBers' individual membership began in London, where "434 communists out of a total London membership of 1,105 were active in their local Labour Parties or as delegates to them."<sup>5</sup> In exposing the leading attacker, Herbert Morrison, secretary of London Labour Party, summarised his views thus: "When the workers of London are prepared to lead, we of the London Labour Party will possibly consider whether it is desirable or convenient or respectable or constitutional to follow."<sup>6</sup>

Despite claiming that 'communists were splitting the movement', the Labour leadership did just that, by disaffiliating the existing Battersea LP for choosing Saklatvala and refusing to expel communists, and setting up an alternative. A similar prohibition was carried out against Bethnal Green LP, where communist ex-mayor Joe Vaughan was the right's bugbear. This pattern continued elsewhere, too, with unrecognised and official Labour Parties existing side by side for some

years in several areas.

The Labour left fought back in the form of the National Left Wing Movement, which was set up in late 1925 not only to fight the bans but to hold together disaffiliated Labour Parties. The NLWM insisted it had no aim to supersede the Labour Party, but to bring it nearer to rank and file aspirations and in this it was greatly aided by the newly established *Sunday Worker*. Despite being set up on the initiative of and funded by the CPGB, the *Sunday Worker* was the voice of the NLWM and at its height achieved a circulation of 100,000. The NLWM's 1925 founding conference had nearly 100 divisional and borough Labour Parties sending delegates. Of course, as the right's campaign of closures and expulsions remorselessly proceeded, the NLWM found itself weakened in terms of *official* Labour Party structures. Hence at the NLWM's second annual conference in 1927, there were delegates from only 54 local Labour Parties and other Labour groups (representing a total of 150,000 individual party members). Militant union leaders, such as miners' leader AJ Cook, supported the conference.

As the decade advanced, CPGB relations with the Labour Party were to change markedly, as Stalinism took hold in the Soviet Union. Communist parties around the world slavishly followed the Soviet-run Comintern's turn against social democratic parties in 1928, loyally parroting the 'social-fascist' label of the 'third period'. In Britain, the CPGB was no different: theoreticians such as Rajani Palme Dutt led its relatively small membership into self-imposed exile outside the Labour Party.

In countries like Britain, where there was a small Communist Party, the Comintern line inevitably led to isolation from the rest of the politically organised working class. As part of this self-inflicted madness in 1929 the *Sunday Worker* was closed and the NLWM wound up. Ralph Miliband notes: "It was only in 1929 that the Communist Party, on instructions from the Comintern, came under the control of the erstwhile minority and adopted the new line of total opposition to all non-communists in the labour movement. From then until 1933, the CP held to a 'revolutionary' policy, which isolated it ever more strictly from the labour movement and brought it to the nadir of its influence."<sup>7</sup>

## Widening bans

In 1930, 10 years after the foundation of the CPGB and 12 years after the Labour Party introduced individual membership, the Labour Party produced its first 'proscribed list', although it was not issued under a section of the constitution.

By this means, members of proscribed organisations became ineligible for individual membership of the party and local Labour branches were prohibited from affiliating to proscribed organisations; these included the influential National Unemployed Workers' Movement and the National Minority Movement. At the time when the restrictions were introduced, it became a condition of Labour Party membership that members already active in proscribed organisations had to leave them forthwith. Nevertheless, it took a further three years' intense activity by the Labour Party right before it was able to change the constitution to prohibit individual members of the

CPGB from joining as and remaining members of the Labour Party.

Of course, this was just when real fascism came to power in Germany and Comintern's line changed again. But, with this turn, the CPGB's new cross-class popular frontism was hardly destined to win influence for revolutionary politics in the Labour Party in any case. A formal proscribed list was to remain in place in the Labour Party for the next four decades.

Not only was the CPGB proscribed, but a whole raft of organisations fell foul of the Labour leadership's attack on anything smacking of the revolutionary or even radical left. Those affected included organisations of the unemployed, international solidarity bodies and trade union defence committees. The League Against Imperialism (1927-36) was also proscribed. The LAI's secretary was Reginald Bridgeman, a former British diplomat in Iran, who had contested Uxbridge for Labour in the 1929 general election. But he was expelled from the party because of his membership of the LAI. More organisations continued to be added to the proscribed list throughout the 1930s.

The Independent Labour Party formally joined with the CPGB and the NUWM on September 29 1931 to fight unemployment. After years of battling the right in the Labour Party from within, a special conference of the ILP in 1932 disaffiliated from the Labour Party; that section of its members which stayed in the LP helped found the Socialist League. This was not the first time the SL had campaigned with the CPGB, of course. "From 1931, the CP-led National Unemployed Workers' Movement captured the field as the leading champion of the unemployed, and large number of Labour Party SL members were caught up in demonstrations led by CP members (by November 1932, of 5,400 Communist Party members, 60% were unemployed)."<sup>8</sup>

A bare few months after Hitler's Nazis had taken over in Germany, anti-communist prohibition and the threat of proscription were still the paramount issues for Labour's right wing: "Labour leaders warned SL members *against any form of collaboration* with CP members in anti-fascist organisations under CP control or influence."<sup>9</sup>

Led by Stafford Cripps, the Socialist League was a continual thorn in the side of the right. In 1936 Cripps and the SL were pulled in behind the Unity Campaign by the ILP and the CPGB. The aim was to oppose the growing forces of the far right and fascism. Spain became their great cause. In January 1937 Labour's national executive disaffiliated the SL, on the basis of the organisation's alleged 'disloyalty' to the Labour Party. Two months later, the NEC delivered the body blow and declared membership of the SL incompatible with that of Labour.

The majority of the SL decided to disband the organisation and remain as individual LP members. "It was on the advice of the Communist Party that the SL was 'invited' to disband; it was on CP advice that joint meetings between Labour Unity supporters, the ILP and the CP were terminated. There were discussions in the Unity Campaign committee as to SL tactics, and CP leaders urged the SL to prove the sincerity of its desire for unity 'within the framework of the Labour Party' by accepting the ultimatum



of the NEC and voluntarily dissolve itself.”<sup>10</sup>

Clearly scenting blood, Labour’s NEC went further at its June 1937 meeting in witch-hunting everyone associated with the Unity Campaign. “Women’s sections and constituency parties were forbidden even to discuss ‘unity’; divisional party officers were told to ensure the UC’s defeat; party membership was refused to applicants whose husbands were communists ...”<sup>11</sup> Although Cripps complied with the NEC’s ruling and subsequently organised the members-only Labour’s National Unity Committee, this too was added to the list of ‘crimes’ that eventually led to his expulsion at the May-June annual conference in 1939.

In 1942, the Labour Research Department (which had originally been founded in 1912 as the Fabian Research Department, an offshoot of the Fabian Society) was accused of being controlled by the CPGB; it too was proscribed and remained so until 1971, though many branches of Labour-affiliated trade unions in struggle continued to find enormous value in its publication of companies’ accounts and directorships in the intervening decades. While some LRD staff members were CPGB members, it was financed and controlled by its 592 affiliated bodies, only 11 of which could be described as largely communist-influenced organisations.

## Cold war hysteria

Following the end of World War II, anti-communism took on hysterical proportions. Propagandists from Voice of America to the BBC denounced the largely imaginary Soviet threat. This was the age of Winston Churchill’s ‘iron curtain’ Fulton speech and Joe McCarthy’s House Committee on Un-American Activities. The cold war had begun.

In that atmosphere the Labour Party right was able to step up its moves against the left under the guise of acting against ‘red sympathisers’. The new wave of proscriptions continued well into the 1960s.

In 1951, for example, annual conference endorsed a ban on the Socialist Fellowship, which had been founded in 1949 on a programme that “included increased public ownership, workers’ control of industry, heavier taxation of the wealthy and a more equal distribution of income, reduced compensation to the former shareholders of the nationalised industries, greater efficiency in industry and improved social services”.<sup>12</sup> This was surely a pretty clear left Labourite platform. The World Federation of Scientific Workers (1946-96) was proscribed in 1953, along with another 17 groups newly investigated that year by the national agent’s department, which had overall responsibility for compiling the proscription list. In 1954 the publication *Socialist Outlook* was proscribed and as a result folded the same year.

In 1958, John Lawrence, who had been its editor, and several dozen other leading members of the St Pancras Labour Party, including councillors and aldermen, were expelled for activity that party bureaucrats described (without evidence) as “inimical to the best interests of the Labour Party”. One of the group’s crimes was to have flown the red flag over the town hall in place of the union jack on May Day in 1958, prompting Mosleyite fascist and Tory physical attacks. In a protest letter to the NEC, Lawrence proudly remarked that he had been the “leader of a borough council which has earned itself a reputation for defying the Tory government and for refusing to meekly acquiesce in Tory policy”.<sup>13</sup>

As the 1950s came to an end, the number of proscribed organisations continued to grow. In 1959 the Socialist Labour League, of which Gerry Healy was a leading member and whose comrades were also Labour

Party members, was proscribed. SLL influence over the Labour Party’s youth organisation, the Young Socialists, led to the Labour right closing YS in 1964.<sup>14</sup> In the 1960s, proscribed organisations included the British-Soviet Friendship Society, the World Peace Council and the World Federation of Trade Unions. In 1965, Labour’s NEC expelled 18 members of Paddington South CLP following allegations of a Trotskyist takeover.

When Ron Hayward replaced Harry Nicholas as Labour general secretary in 1972, he called into question the effectiveness of the proscribed list. In a circular to party members in July 1973, Hayward wrote: “The national executive committee conducted a complete review of the list of proscribed organisations, during which it became apparent that the list was unsatisfactory. While some political organisations had been formally placed on this list, others which advocated policies of a like nature were not included.

“Difficulties have been experienced in keeping a current record of the many political organisations that are established, many of which are of short life, change their names or merge with other organisations. Moreover, the existence of the list had created an impression that if an organisation were not listed it was in order for affiliated and party organisations to associate with it.”<sup>15</sup>

Hayward’s careful use of words in the transmission of the NEC’s decision cannot disguise the underlying belief in the continuing entitlement of the party right wing to rule the roost by administrative means. The right’s weapon of prohibition against the revolutionary left organising in party groupings remained, but reformed into something other than a simple list of proscribed organisations. It meant, too, that this weapon was no longer to be wielded by the party’s organisations from branch level up, but only by the central bureaucracy. Despite the feeling then that the right was beleaguered on the NEC, it still had a majority, but one which had to be more subtle in swinging the axe against elements of the left.

As one academic study shortly after these events commented, “The NEC has not diminished its powers. The change is one of policy, not a constitutional amendment, and the proscribed list could therefore be reintroduced by the NEC at any time without notice. In the meantime it can act against any organisation of which it disapproves on the basis of the existing rules on ineligibility that remain in force.”<sup>16</sup> It was in fact on the basis of ineligibility that the next battles commenced.

## Expulsion of Militant

At the end of 1975 the party’s national agent, Reg Underhill, drew up a report on Trotskyist groups in the Labour Party. However, Underhill’s established reputation as a witch-hunter notwithstanding, the balance of forces in the party was not sufficiently tilted to the right to enable it to act quite so crudely against the left as before.

In recalling these events later, the current general secretary of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Peter Taaffe, who was then editor of *Militant*, noted: “At the NEC organisation sub-committee Underhill called for action to be taken. He was answered by left MPs Ian Mikardo and Eric Heffer. Mikardo declared that there were ‘good articles in their paper - good material in *Militant*. Reg’s evidence says that they are pretty small in numbers. With 30 full-time organisers to only have 800 members is not very good.” Eric Heffer declared: ‘My party [Walton] in the past was run by the Deane group [who pioneered

Marxist work in Liverpool before the establishment of Militant], but that was nothing to get upset about ... What is wrong with selling *Tribune* or *Militant* in preference to *Labour Weekly*? ... don’t react to pressure from outside for a witch-hunt ... don’t push youngsters into a corner.’ Underhill interjected, saying that ‘all the denials under the sun were made by the Socialist Labour League when they controlled the Young Socialists’. Eric Heffer angrily hit back: ‘They were a bunch of gangsters. Militant are totally different.’ The sub-committee decided not to proceed with Underhill’s enquiries.”<sup>17</sup>

While he was leader (1976-80), James Callaghan continued the rightwing imperative to stifle dissent in the party by calling on both the Tribune and Manifesto groups to disband. Quite correctly, they ignored him.

However, the campaign against Militant in the Labour Party gathered apace in 1981 under the leadership of Michael Foot, one of the most prominent figures on the Labour left. At the end of that year the NEC set up an inquiry under Hayward and national agent David Hughes into Militant’s activities within the party. It reported in June 1982, in part proposing a register of non-affiliated groups that would be allowed to operate within the Labour Party. This was a new variation on the old proscribed list theme.

The Hayward-Hughes inquiry’s definitive finding on Militant was that it was a “well-organised caucus centrally controlled ... with its own programme and policy or separate and distinctive propaganda”. This latter phrase is a direct reference to a prohibition in clause two, section five of the Labour Party constitution; the inquiry found Militant in breach of this rule. To put it another way, Militant “would not be eligible to be included in the proposed register”, which it had applied to join. In fact, the register was never actually drawn up, leading to the inevitable conclusion that it was an undemocratic and bogus device to expel Militant and its members from Labour ranks with a gloss of legitimacy.

“Both Foot and Mortimer<sup>18</sup>, then, saw themselves engaged in a delicate balancing act: on the one hand, to curb Militant’s influence, whilst, on the other, devising a strategy which would both mobilise a solid vote at conference and avoid large-scale expulsions. Hence the register, whose application, it was anticipated, would lead to the removal of Militant’s ‘inner organising group’ (Mortimer’s phrase) and extend no further.”<sup>19</sup> Initially, then, only a handful of Militant members were expelled: the editorial board of *Militant* - the only clear and avowed members of the Militant Tendency who could be identified with certainty. This restriction was partly a result of the unsuccessful legal action taken by Militant members, which had this side-effect, on party lawyers’ advice, forcing Mortimer to adhere more closely to party rules, rather than acting *ultra vires* and against ‘natural justice’. But eventually the attack widened.

Mortimer and the party leadership were in something of a dilemma and, “short of abandoning the fight, the NEC had no option but to proscribe Militant. This it did, by 18 votes to nine, in December 1982. The tendency’s members were now ineligible to remain within the Labour Party. Given that Militant denied having any members (only ‘supporters’), the next step was to devise a workable definition of Militant membership. To comply with legal requirements, the definition finally approved by the NEC in January was wide-ranging. It stated that, in seeking to establish membership of Militant, the executive ‘shall have regard, in particular, to their involvement in financial support for and/or the organisation of and/or the activities of the Militant

Tendency.”<sup>20</sup>

Labour’s right now had to keep its powder dry and gather evidence against the mass of Militant supporters who were Labour Party members sufficient, if need be, to satisfy the bourgeois courts and thus stall any legal challenge to expulsions. And anyway the mood of non-Militant rank-and-file members in the 1980s was not to accept demurely the diktats of the leadership, but rather to question its authority. Mass expulsions of Militant members would likely have produced widespread membership refusal to accept NEC decisions, leading to a breakdown in the leadership’s ability to manage the party.

In September 1982 annual conference endorsed the Hayward-Hughes report, declaring that the Militant organisation was ineligible to affiliate to the party and that its members were thus banned from operating in any way within it. Many on the Labour left were not happy with this result, especially as it dawned on them that the weapon it handed to the right could be wielded in a similarly unprincipled way against members of any left grouping within the party that was not already an affiliate. Although the soft-left Tribune group supported (albeit by a narrow margin) Foot’s and the right’s attack on Militant, others declared strongly against it. The Labour Coordinating Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, among others, denounced it as unacceptable and an attack on party members’ democratic rights. But it was in the end approved by the NEC by 16 votes to 10. In an editorial, *New Socialist* declared strongly against witch-hunts in the Labour Party, stating that, “The Labour Party always has been a broad collection that includes Marxists amongst its ranks.”<sup>21</sup> There was, however, clearly insufficient opposition to effect a reversal, which gave the right added incentive to press on.

Controversially, as a last desperate stand, in December 1982 Militant tried for a court injunction to restrain the NEC, but was unsuccessful. Comrade Taaffe subsequently claimed: “Militant did not believe that this was the main way to fight the witch-hunt. At best it was an auxiliary which could temporarily stay the hand of the right wing and allow time to build up support amongst the ranks to prevent a purge, or at least limit its scope.”<sup>22</sup>

At the end of February 1983, the NEC had expelled the five members of the *Militant* editorial board: Taaffe, Ted Grant, Keith Dickenson, Lynn Walsh and Clare Doyle. When all five appealed this decision to the September 1983 annual conference, they lost largely thanks to the trade unions. While two thirds of constituency delegates voted against expulsions, the block votes wielded by union general secretaries assured rejection of their appeals; card voting was 5,160,000 for expulsion to 1,616,000 against for four of the appellants, though Ted Grant got 175,000 votes extra in his favour.

Neil Kinnock’s address to the 1985 annual conference marked the beginning of the second wave of the attack on Militant. The committee of enquiry into Liverpool council, a Militant bastion, produced a damning majority report.<sup>23</sup> The Liverpool party was suspended and its Militant members expelled; more expulsions around the country followed. A realignment of the left in the party meant that much of the opposition evident three years earlier was absent and conference voted by 6,146,000 to 325,000 to expel Militant’s members.

## End the bans

This is the catch-all prohibition against organisations that the right does not like in clause two, (section 5a) of the Labour Party constitution:

“Political organisations not affiliated or associated under a national agreement with the party, having their own programme, principles and policy for distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing branches in the constituencies, or engaged in the promotion of parliamentary or local government candidates, or having allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party.”

Obviously this is very much a moveable feast and open to interpretation, like much bourgeois law - with the NEC judging when it might be politic to utilise it.

Clearly there is no problem with groupings on the Blairite right - which is why there are no moves, for example, to ban Progress, even though it is not an affiliate, but has its own principles and carries out distinctive and separate propaganda. On its website, the group proclaims: “Progress is the New Labour pressure group which aims to promote a radical and progressive politics for the 21st century. Founded in 1996, we are an independent organisation of Labour Party members and trade unionists. Through our national and regional events and regular publications, we seek to promote open debate and discussion of progressive ideas and policies.”<sup>24</sup>

It all comes down to *how* “distinctive and separate” an organisation’s programme and propaganda is considered.

In a statement submitted to the 1986 annual conference, the NEC was forced to acknowledge that now, “if challenged, our basic rules and long-standing procedures may well be deemed by the courts to be incompatible with natural justice in certain respects.”<sup>25</sup> It was fear of the bourgeois courts that made the right more circumspect than it might otherwise have been over the Militant affair ●

## Notes

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3. *Ibid*.
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8. M Bor *The Socialist League in the 1930s* London 2005, p154.
9. *Ibid* p272, summarising rightist Emie Bevin in *TUC report* September 1933, appendix C, p434.
10. *Ibid* p374.
11. *Ibid* p380.
12. D Rubinstein, ‘Socialism and the Labour Party: the Labour left and domestic policy, 1945-50’ in *What Next?* 1978: [www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/history/Lableft.html](http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/history/Lableft.html).
13. Quoted by Bob Pitt in his *Red flag over St Pancras*: [www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/whatnext/spancras.html](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/whatnext/spancras.html).
14. The Socialist Labour League became the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1973.
15. R Hayward, ‘Discontinuation of the proscribed list’ (circular to secretaries of affiliates and Labour Party organisations, July 1973).
16. P McCormick, ‘The Labour Party: three unnoticed changes’ *British Journal of Political Science* Vol 10, No3, July 1980.
17. P Taaffe *The rise of Militant: Militant’s 30 years* London 1995, chapter 12. Taaffe’s internal quotes are taken from *The notes of Nick Bradley*. Nick Bradley was the Labour Party Young Socialists’ delegate on the NEC and Militant was at the time heavily involved in the LPYS.
18. Jim Mortimer, Labour general secretary 1982-85, had himself been forced to leave the party for a period in the early 1950s, when he was vice-chair of the proscribed Anglo-Chinese Friendship Society.
19. E Shaw, ‘The Labour Party and the Militant Tendency’ *Parliamentary Affairs* (1989) 42(2), p183.
20. *Ibid* p185.
21. *New Socialist* September-October 1982.
22. Quoted by Bob Pitt in *Red flag over St Pancras*: [www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/whatnext/spancras.html](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/whatnext/spancras.html).
23. Labour Party NEC *Investigation into Liverpool District Party* 1986.
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25. Labour Party rules 2010, quoted on p194: [www.leftfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Labour-Party-Rule-Book-2010.pdf](http://www.leftfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Labour-Party-Rule-Book-2010.pdf).

## EUTHANASIA

# Dignity in life and death

The desire to end your life as a fully sentient being is a perfectly honourable and legitimate one. **Eddie Ford** argues for the 'right to die'

**T**erry Pratchett's BBC documentary, *Choosing to die*, has elicited equal measures of praise and condemnation - as is only to be expected. Screened on June 13, the film followed the journey of 71-year-old Peter Smedley, a millionaire hotelier, to the renowned Dignitas clinic in Switzerland. Suffering from motor-neurone disease, a degenerative condition that is at present incurable, Smedley took a lethal dose of barbiturates under carefully supervised conditions - with the documentary featuring footage of the man's death. Over the last 12 years the Swiss clinic has helped 1,100 to die in such an 'assisted' manner.

This film could be viewed as a follow-up to Pratchett's two-part programme for the BBC in February 2009, *Living with Alzheimer's* - which attracted 4.3 million viewers. Not to mention his Dimpleby lecture a year later, *Shaking hands with death*, which was also shown on the BBC. This programme served as a testament to the popularity of the 63-year-old author of the extraordinary successful Discworld books. In his talk, Pratchett called for the setting up of "euthanasia tribunals" and in general espoused his strong support for assisted suicide - or, as he prefers to call it, "assisted dying". In turn, this sparked off a nationwide debate on the ethics and legitimacy, or otherwise, of 'mercy killings' - helping individuals with incurable or helplessly debilitating illnesses to die. Or, if you prefer, the act of speeding up the death process.

Pratchett himself has a very rare form of Alzheimer's known as posterior cortical atrophy, meaning that his active life as a writer has been foreshortened. His body can go on, but his mind cannot. Smedley's condition was the opposite: his mind was still as sharp as a knife, but his body was rapidly deteriorating. "It's a beastly, undignified business," he said of his disease. As for Pratchett, he wants to "die peacefully with Thomas Tallis on my iPod before the disease takes me over" - if he were allowed to "die at any time I wanted", then "every day would be as precious as a million pounds". By any yardstick, majority public opinion is certainly with Pratchett and against the current (anti) suicide laws. In fact, you can state with a reasonable degree of confidence that most people are *positively* for "assisted dying" - that is, they support the 'right to die'.

Criticism of *Choosing to die* came mainly, though not exclusively, from those with religious convictions. For example, Michael Nazir-Ali, the retired bishop of Rochester, in a somewhat curious choice of words, condemned the programme as a piece of "science fiction" - offering the view instead that the "Judeo-Christian tradition is a surer guide": it is "about acknowledging the gift and dignity of human life" that "we do not have the competence to take". Care Not Killing, an umbrella organisation opposed to the legalisation of euthanasia,<sup>1</sup> was similarly blind to the virtues of the documentary - describing it as a "recipe for elder abuse and also a threat to vulnerable people". CNK also suggested, as others have done, that the BBC is conducting a concerted 'pro-euthanasia' campaign using licence-payers' money - the corporation has produced five documentaries or docudramas since 2008 portraying assisted suicide in a "positive light". But where, asks CNK,



**Terry Pratchett: his life, his decision**

are the "balancing programmes" that show people the "benefits of palliative care and promoting investment on social support for vulnerable people"?

## Concerns

Of course, these are quite legitimate concerns - as communists are the first to acknowledge. Indeed, it would be very mistaken to summarily dismiss such anti-euthanasia sentiments as mere examples of religious bigotry, and no more. After all, for one thing, all those attacking the programme have nothing but sympathy for Pratchett's personal plight. Secondly, it could be argued by extension that if people like Pratchett with various degenerative conditions are granted the 'right to die', then so should the chronically disabled or mentally ill - even if someone else might have to make the decision for them. This, of course, immediately raises the noxious spectre of eugenics, an ideological phenomenon that - whether we like it or not - was intimately linked 'programmatically' to euthanasia and which in its most extreme or logical form culminated in the systematic murder of those deemed in one way or another to be 'undesirable'.

So at the beginning of the 20th century there were movements, and then state-sponsored programmes, to rid society of 'useless' members. This took a grotesque governmental form in the US, where some states, especially in the south, forcibly sterilised "imbeciles" and "defectives".<sup>2</sup> Between 1907 and 1963, over 64,000 individuals were assaulted in this way. Significantly, there was a steady increase in the percentage of women victims. Therefore it is hardly accidental that Nazi Germany cited the 'California model', the state with the highest levels of sterilisations by far, as proof perfect that such wide-reaching programmes were 'feasible' and 'humane'. Nor should we forget that not all proponents of eugenics were rightwingers - the Webbs, HG Wells and George Bernard Shaw were ardent supporters.

Maybe more prosaically, there is also the worry that the legalisation of assisted suicide or euthanasia would

enable greedy and ruthless relatives to persuade granny to book a visit to the newly opened Dignitas clinic in London or Glasgow so that they can sell her house. Another legitimate concern. From this angle, Pratchett's critics are expressing a perfectly understandable revulsion against narrow-minded greed.

But, in the end, their viewpoint must be rejected - it is one that supports the status quo and the continued illegality of euthanasia. One that takes the real, suffering individual out of the equation and gives primacy instead to god or the state. Terry Pratchett wants to take control of his life and hence the manner of his death as well. And communists support his right to do so, or what *should* be his right to do so. The current situation, whereby British people have to "drag themselves" to Switzerland in order to get the "services that they were hoping for", is, as Pratchett says, "appalling" and something to be "ashamed" of. Clearly, the state should not stop people from deciding to end their life - forcing them to go on living in a way they find insufferable. And people need to be able to exercise such a choice in a humane way - as opposed to throwing yourself under a train or buying some cheap heroin from your local dealer in the hope it does the job. Obviously, this is not "Nazism" - as often stupidly, and hysterically, claimed by many 'pro-lifers' and religious fanatics. Rather, it is a simple recognition that the quality of life is just as important as its duration.

Inevitably, this fundamentally humanistic ethos means coming up against mainstream religion. The present-day legal situation is derived in the last analysis from Christianity. The prime culprits being propagandists like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who adhered to, and developed, the dogma - in the literal sense - that whoever deliberately took away the life bestowed to them by their creator was displaying contempt for "the will and authority of god" and hence jeopardising their path to salvation. This now constitutes a fundamental part of Catholic doctrine<sup>3</sup> (though, it should be noted, suicide was not

considered a sin under the Byzantine Christian code of Justinian).

Yes, times move on, just about, and Christian obscurantist nonsense has less of an overt or direct influence on the legal code than it used to - thank heavens. Yes, the 1961 Suicide Act declared that suicide as a crime is henceforth "abrogated". However, before we rejoice, it goes on to declare: "A person who aids, abets, counsels or procures the suicide of another, or attempt by another to commit suicide, shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years." Instead, it created a new offence of 'complicity in suicide' - so if an individual actually incapable of committing suicide for him or herself enlists the aid of an outside party in performing such an act, that party may be charged with conspiracy. Obviously, this necessarily creates an illogical situation, where the act itself is not illegal, but assisting it is - the long and the short of it being that in reality the 1961 act changed nothing for those incapable of ending their own lives unaided.

## Life and death

We are now left with a situation, thanks to this pernicious Christian legacy, which forces individuals into an invidious position - do the compassionate thing and you risk getting a jail sentence.

We had the recent story of Helen Cowie and her son, Robert, 33, who died at Dignitas. As she put it, "His life was terrible. He suffered every single day. He couldn't do anything for himself but sit there. He was just a head and just didn't want to be like that any more." Needless to say, the case is now under investigation by the police with a view to bringing charges against Helen Cowie.

There is also a broader question: a precondition for a dignified death is surely a dignified life - which, quite barbarically, is denied to so many elderly people. Their fate is often incarceration in a run-down residential home, which more resembles a detention centre - abandoned, or only half-remembered, by society and relatives burdened down by their

own pressing financial and other difficulties. Bunged in front of the TV all day or pumped full of drugs so they do not become a 'nuisance' - just waiting for death. Where is the dignity in that?

And the situation is sometimes even worse, as a BBC *Panorama* documentary told us in April 2009 - with elderly people in some institutions subject to a regime which amounted to active cruelty. Three of the companies that were prominently featured in the programme, Domiciliary Care, Carewatch and Care UK - 'care' for the elderly being a lucrative business, of course - went on to blame "administrative errors", and so on, for the routine neglect that was exposed.

Elderly people need the fullest autonomy possible - facilitated by the state if and when necessary. Preferably, of course, we want to see older people remain in their own homes, but where this is not possible they should be provided with high-quality accommodation and assistance - helped by well-trained and well-paid staff. Then there is the frighteningly atomised and fragmented nature of current capitalist society - exemplified, to a large extent, by the bourgeois nuclear family of a man and a woman and perhaps a couple of children; with the grandparents, and other relatives, often living miles away. We look forward to a communist society where people have a rich and *extended* network of variegated relationships, so that elderly people - and anyone else, for that matter - are not just abandoned or left to rot in isolation. Here are the 'family values' of the future that communists keenly anticipate.

For us, suicide is a perfectly honourable way to end your life if that is what you want to do - to finish life as a fully sentient human being. Which is all Terry Pratchett desires. From our own communist tradition we have the supremely dignified example of Laura Marx (second daughter of Karl) and her husband, Paul Lafargue, who both died as part of a suicide pact in 1911. The elderly couple decided they had nothing left to give the movement to which they had devoted their entire lives. In his suicide note, Lafargue wrote that he wanted to end his life "before pitiless old age, which has taken from me my pleasures and joys one after another and which has been stripping me of my physical and mental powers, can paralyse my energy and break my will, making me a burden to myself and to others" - but taking comfort from the "supreme joy of knowing that at some future time the cause to which I have been devoted for 45 years will triumph. Long live communism! Long live the Second International!"<sup>4</sup> Years later, Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, recounted how he had said to her: "If one cannot work for the party any longer, one must be able to look truth in the face and die like the Lafargues".

Such is our vision - to choose the manner of our life and death. Sometimes "it's better to burn out than to fade away"<sup>5</sup> ●

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## Notes

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2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics_in_the_United_States).
3. [www.scborromeo.org/cc/p3s2c2a5.htm#2280](http://www.scborromeo.org/cc/p3s2c2a5.htm#2280).
4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laura\\_Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laura_Marx).
5. [www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/neilyoung/mymyheyheyoutoftheblue.html](http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/neilyoung/mymyheyheyoutoftheblue.html).



## OUR HISTORY

# To your posts, comrades

**I**mmediately following its formation over the weekend of July 31-August 1 1920, the Communist Party was plunged into action. British imperialism was set on another attempt to provoke war with the Soviet Republic, doubtless in order to restore capitalism. The CPGB was determined to stop it.

A London Hands Off Russia! committee had been formed on the initiative of pro-communist shop stewards in January 1919. This was quickly joined by other committees around the country, culminating in the formation of a national Hands Off Russia! committee in the autumn, which was at the head of a broad, mass, militant movement.

Its leadership brought together official representatives of big unions such as the boilermakers, railway workers, engineers and miners. The TUC's parliamentary committee was also represented, in the form of AA Purcell, a founder member of the CPGB.<sup>1</sup> Alongside them there were three vice-presidents - all CPGB foundation members - Tom Mann, general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, George Peet, secretary of the National Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement, and Willie Gallacher of the Clyde Workers' Committee.

The Hands Off Russia! campaign had already scored a brilliant success. On May 10 1920, after patient agitation amongst London dockers, it had stopped arms being shipped on the *Jolly George*. A rolling series of solidarity strikes followed and forced the government to back away from supporting Polish aggression against Soviet Russia. Two months later, however, Britain was threatening war, this time demanding that the Red Army halt its offensive against Poland.

The first CPGB circular to branch secretaries was issued under the signatures of Arthur MacManus and Albert Inkpin.<sup>2</sup> It was a call to action:

### The threatened war against Russia

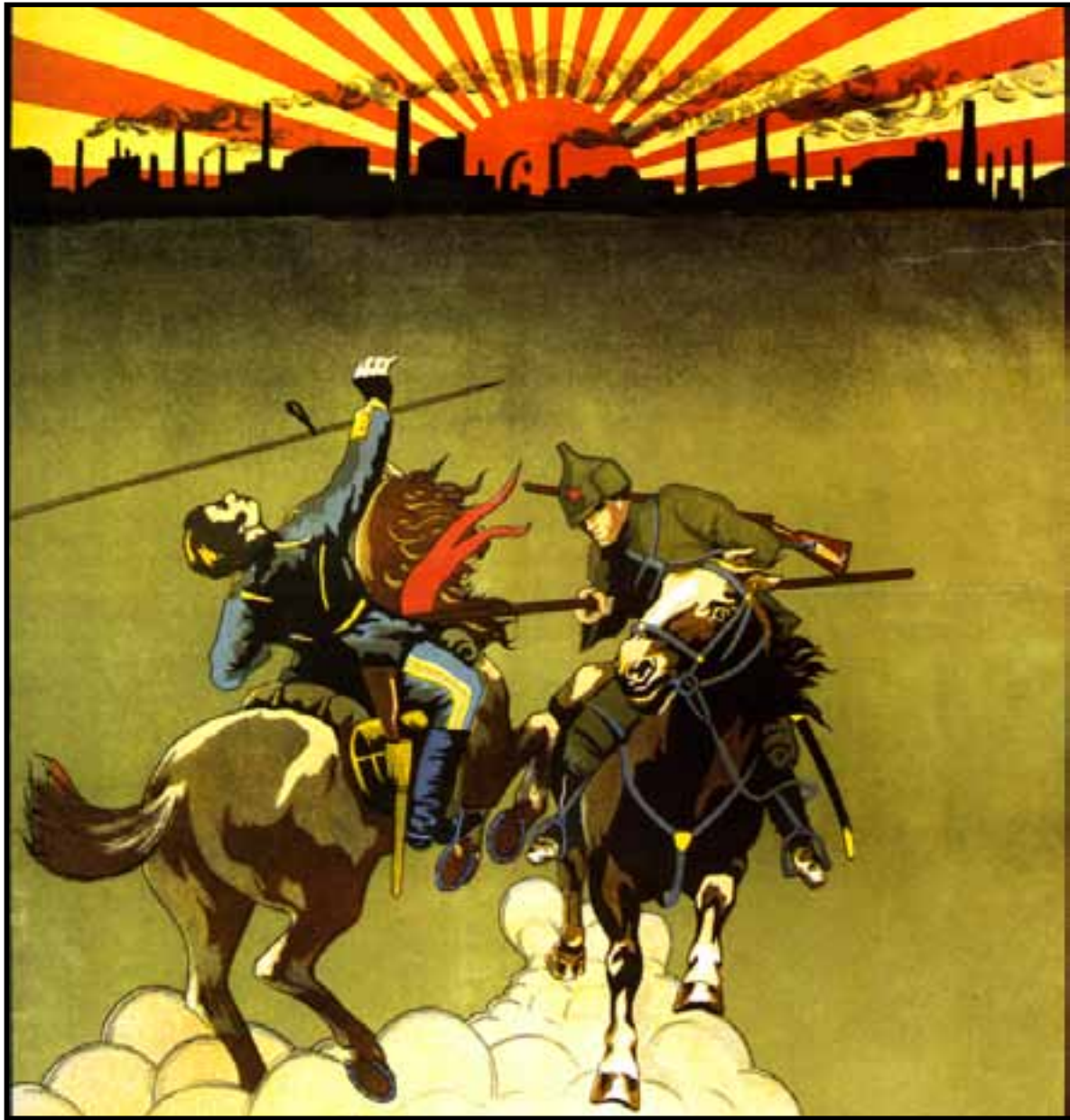
There is no need to remind you of the importance of saving Soviet Russia from the attacks of the capitalist governments. For nearly three years you have worked loyally and well to that end. Your efforts, according to their own admission, have paralysed the militarists' attempts to crush our Russian comrades, for they realise how deeply Hands Off Russia! propaganda has sunk into the minds of the workers.

But this is a supreme moment for action. War - definite, open, bloody war - in support of the Polish nationalists is threatened against Russia... Comrades, the government must be told in plain terms that the workers will not have war against Soviet Russia. It is our duty deliberately to advise the workers not only to refuse all service for that purpose, but to oppose it actively.

The Communist Party, in the first days of its existence, must be worthy of its mission. Let us rise to the height of a great occasion.

Call meetings ... get in touch with organised workers ... and urge them immediately to notify the government that they will not make nor handle munitions, nor volunteer for service, nor be pressed into service, but will actively oppose, by a general strike, the threatened campaign.

Speak boldly and act quickly. Neglect nothing. On the shoulders of every individual member of the Communist Party rests the fate of Russia at



Revolutions must be defended

this critical moment. Let every member, therefore, be a missionary for the salvation of Russia, lest we be branded with infamy of crushing by our apathy the first socialist republic - and our hopes and ideals at the same time.

August 5 1920

On August 7 1920 the CPGB issued a call for the formation of councils of action; this was endorsed two days later at the first meeting of the Provisional Executive Committee. Hundreds of Hands Off Russia! meetings took place all over the country and passed motions in line with the CPGB's resolutions. It was in this atmosphere that the Labour Party executive and the TUC's parliamentary committee (on which sat two CPGB members) met and agreed to threaten the government with a general strike. To organise this it set up a National Council of Action.

On August 13 1,044 delegates met at Central Hall, Westminster. They demanded the end of all British support for Poland and any other "efforts against the Soviet government", the "withdrawal" of the navy blockade, the recognition of the Soviet government and the "establishment of unrestricted trading and commercial relationships between Great Britain and Russia". Quite correctly, CPGB chair Arthur MacManus saw these developments as potentially insurrectionary.

### Towards the revolution: our policy

The decision to form a Council of Action and the granting to this Council of "full powers" to organise a general

strike ... constitute a situation which must be examined and judged on its merits of revolutionary possibility.

Apart from the actual decision to prevent war by a general strike if need be, the general course adopted to arrive at this decision, and the path pursued, contain significant consequences which are at once vital and important.

To decide to strike against war, or the threat of war, dismisses once and for all any further question as to the validity of industrial or direct action for political purposes, and relegates the bones of that skeleton in Labour's cupboard to the political crematorium.

Again, the granting of power to the Council of Action to summon a strike immediately, should such be necessary, is not only, as JH Thomas<sup>3</sup> put it, "a challenge to all constitutional institutions", but, however little he may have dreamed it, it is a challenge to the constitutionalism of Labour itself. The unwarrantable insistence on a constitutional ballot before any industrial action could be adopted, which has in the past been well-nigh the strongest weapon in the armoury of capitalism, is, let us sincerely hope, also a thing of the past.

We must see to it that the working class tactics against capitalism in future are determined solely by the exigencies of the moment, and the possibilities of success, and *not* by any stale and crusted formulas which may have served labour a hundred years ago. The other feature, the challenge to capitalist institutions, is the first real ringing declaration of war against the power of our exploiters and oppressors, which has gone up from labour's ranks.

On this score *The Times* rightly attaches the greatest importance, and it

is tragically amusing to read that "Any overt attempt to overthrow the constitution would be met with a firmness on the part of the great bulk of the people of this country that would bring our magniloquent revolutionaries to their senses." And then to read almost immediately following that: "Most British citizens know as little of the constitution as of the composition of the air they breathe."

Due attention is paid to the possibilities thus opened up to such a body as the Communist Party, and certain of our executive recommendations are quoted to show that we are alive to such possibilities. Well, they will not be disappointed. We see in the threatened war with Russia not only another military holocaust, but a deeply conspired imperialist attempt to crush the working class Republic of Russia.

Official Labour can rest assured of our support in this crisis, because the Communist Party is to the Republic of Russia flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone. We are not to be intimidated into a lukewarm support or pacifist shelter by the insidious references to the conditions in Russia and the policy of those whom we seek to support. The dictatorship of the proletariat has no terrors for us, in that, not being blinded by capitalist morality and sentiment, we can appreciate realities when such confront us, and we *do* know that capitalism will not allow the working class of this country to attain its economic emancipation unless compelled to do so by the organised might of that working class. That is the dictatorship so much decried, particularly by those who today dictate for capitalism.

The Communist Party has sent out several communications to its members, advising them as to policy and a

general line of action. Its executive is apprehensive of all that is at stake, and of what is involved in the formation of the Councils of Action. We have sought for representation ... on the Council, but so far our efforts have met with a refusal. We intend to insist upon such representation, not as a successfully absorbed body, but as an independent and free unit, with equal right to advise and urge both as to policy and action. Meantime our members are again strongly advised to get on to the local Councils, not only as representing the local branch, but as delegates from their shops, unions, committees, etc.

The Councils may be called upon to function not only in controlling a strike, but constructively in efforts to maintain the strike. Any local construction must bear the hallmark of communism, and only the communists can stamp such an imprint. Labour will, and must, obviously in the interests of its own policy, endeavour to effect a consummation to the present decisions by the establishment of a Labour government. This is in their minds and the Councils of Action but the means to this end.

We must follow the developments very closely, and all the time keep strengthening our organisation and machinery to ensure that we shall be fit and prepared to take the fullest advantage of any opportunities which may present themselves. Our work is not for a political revolution with a Labour government, but a social revolution with administration by soviets or workers' councils. Your local Councils of Action have potentialities which should be nourished and developed, and in the meantime we hope that all members will endeavour to act in uniformity with the executive policy, and thus ensure the greatest margin of success from this impasse.

Get to your posts! Keep there! And be prepared to respond to such advice as the situation at headquarters may warrant the offering. Our watchword for the present should be: "Be active, alert and ready." ●

**The Communist Vol 1, No3  
August 19 1920**

**Faced with mass working class pressure, prime minister Lloyd George dared not act. War was stopped. The Russian Revolution survived.**

### Notes

1. In the lead-up to World War I, Albert Arthur Purcell (1872-1935) was attracted to syndicalism, but - like many from a similar background - was drawn to communism post-1917 and then the CPGB. The bans and proscriptions of the early 20s posed a stark choice and - tempted by the offer of a parliamentary seat for the Forest of Dean in the general election of late 1922 - he quit. His role in the 1926 General Strike as part of the treacherous TUC 'left' further soiled his reputation.

2. Arthur MacManus was a member of the Socialist Labour Party. He played an important role in the Unity Committee created in 1919 to facilitate the merger of the SLP, British Socialist Party and others. Later, MacManus was the CPGB's first chairman, a post he held until 1922. Albert Inkpin (1884-1944) had previously been the secretary of the BSP, the largest component party of the new CPGB. When he gave this report, he was the secretary of the Joint Provisional Committee. Inkpin was the party's first general secretary and led the CPGB for nine years. In 1929, he became secretary of the Russia Today Society - a post he held until his death in 1944.

3. James Henry 'Jimmy' Thomas (1874-1949) became the general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen in 1917 and presided over the successful rail strike of 1919. He was elected to parliament in 1910 for the constituency of Derby. He served as the secretary of state for the colonies in MacDonald's minority Labour government of 1924. He became secretary of state for the dominions in 1930 and retained that position when he joined Ramsay MacDonald's national government (1931-35) - for which he was expelled from the Labour Party and the NUR, of course.



## REVIEW

# Chav-baiting and class politics

Owen Jones **Chavs: the demonisation of the working class** Verso, 2011, pp298, £14.99



This book, at first glance, appears to have come out of nowhere to dominate the world. Owen Jones is a supporter of the Labour Representation Committee, one of the main hotbeds of the 'hard' Labour left; yet his book has received broadly enthusiastic notices from soft-left *doyenne* Polly Toynbee<sup>1</sup>, left Blairite Jon Cruddas<sup>2</sup> and many others. It has even received that ultimate backhanded compliment for a social democratic radical: a scabrous and basically spurious review in *Spiked*.<sup>3</sup>

On one level, comrade Jones has the advantage of arguing at exhaustive length, with a compelling sense of anger and outrage, what such people had talked about only in brief op-ed columns, or even only thought at the back of their minds. Primarily, this amounts to the proposition that the middle classes have found a new blood sport, and its name is chav-baiting; and that, underlying (petty) bourgeois contempt for the dress, diet and social habits of so-called 'chavs' is a bilious form of class hatred directed against workers.

On another level, however, Jones's book is genuinely of use to certain trends in the Labour Party more influential than his own. It is no accident that Cruddas received it so warmly (and, indeed, was happy to be interviewed candidly in the book itself). Labour is in opposition; as always, it is faced with the dilemma of reconnecting with a core support base it has spent its time in government thoroughly alienating. Questions of class, and class organisation, drip more easily from the lips of people who not two years ago were the City's biggest fans.

Currently, this regular-as-clockwork shift is taking place under the sign of Maurice Glasman's Blue Labour; and in a book substantially taken up with a wide range of often illuminating interviews, it is impossible not to draw conclusions from the New Labour figures involved here. Hazel Blears and James Purnell

turn up to admit that New Labour, whatever its strengths, got too caught up in finance capitalism and forgot about class. Both are now found supporting Blue Labour.

The appeal is clear: comrade Jones's book is not only, on one level, an argument for redeeming the cultural worth of the working class, for the very real traditions of communal solidarity to which Blue Labour figures like to pay lip service. Its political arguments, too, dovetail in many respects - although they form rather too much of an old Labour left programme to be taken up in any unqualified way.

## The rise of chav-baiting

Jones's account starts with an anecdote, drawn from a 'middle class' east London dinner party: "It's sad that Woolworths is closing," notes a guest. "Where will all the chavs buy their Christmas presents?" For Jones, the event sums the whole phenomenon up - even a group of ethnically, sexually, etc mixed people with a natural abhorrence of bigotry can happily accommodate this kind of snobbishness about the lower orders (p1).

How, Jones asks, did we get here - not just to borderline-innocent dinner party jibes, but to Gymbox's expensive 'chav-fighting' classes, Activities Abroad's 'chav-free holidays', the aggressive attacks of chavscum.com and chavtowns.com on an ill-defined social grouping? The book is his answer to the question. The first chapter focuses on "the strange case of Shannon Matthews", the young girl kidnapped by her own family in pursuit of reward money a few years ago (pp13-17).

Jones notes, first of all, the massive disparity in press coverage between Matthews' case and that of Madeleine McCann. As far as the media were concerned, the McCanns were 'their kind of people'; the likes of Karen

Matthews, from a dirt-poor community in the north, may as well have been living on Mars. Then, of course, there was the revelation that the whole affair was a scam; the bloodhounds were loosed, and the story became not that of an isolated and damaged individual (Karen Matthews), but of a whole community, the growth of a feral underclass in which such events were to be expected.

The strong tendency for this sort of reasoning - some atrocious but isolated event being taken as representative of working class communities *tout court* - is a recurring theme in Jones's book; more broadly, the role of the media in building up this image is criticised thoroughly. For Jones, the media and political classes, with a disproportionate amount of public school and elite-university alumni as well as a relatively cosseted lifestyle, simply have no idea how things actually are on council estates; the image of a great, irresponsible mass of welfare-dependent thugs amounts to a defence of their own privilege.

The second chapter outlines the more substantial cause of all this, which can be summed up in one name - Margaret Thatcher. The rise of the Tory new right, which took truly catastrophic form in Thatcher's period in office, transformed class relations in this country; Thatcher wielded unemployment as a weapon, to devastating effect. The defeats inflicted on the unions, in particular, and the decimation of British industry pulled the rug out from under the organised working class.

The decimation of the working class as an organised force, along with the 'social democratic consensus' of state-administered public services, opens the way for an ideological shift. Collectivism is, if not exactly destroyed, submerged by the waning profile of the unions and the rightward drift of Labour; in its place grows the paradigmatic Thatcherite creed of 'rugged individualism'. The social ills of our age - long-term unemployment,

the devastation of ex-industrial communities and so forth - can be cast as the personal failings of particular individuals.

Of course, these things remain *objectively* class issues; so those a few rungs up the 'social mobility' ladder begin to hypothesise the existence of an incorrigibly feckless underclass. The result is a culture of bloodthirsty snobbery, laid out in punishing detail in a chapter entitled 'A class in the stocks', that encompasses everything from David Walliams's *Little Britain* to David Cameron's 'broken Britain'.

## Class

From there, Jones confronts the issue of the working class directly. He starts with a relatively simple 'Marxist' definition, which he takes from the mouth of Neil Kinnock, of all people: "I'd use the broad definition - I always have: people who have no means of sustenance other than the sale of their labour are working class."

Jones considers this insufficient: "Is a Cambridge don really in the same category as a supermarket checkout worker? The important qualification to add is not only those who sell their labour, but those who lack autonomy, or control over this labour" (p144). Exactly what this means is somewhat ambiguous: he claims that autonomy means "power over [one's] everyday activity", which is said to be more true of professors than cashiers.

Jones substantiates this definition with a series of interviews, primarily with supermarket and call centre workers. He points out differences in the workplace culture of the call centre, as opposed to the factory, and concludes that while non-manual jobs are "cleaner and less physically arduous" (p145) than a daily trip down a coal-pit, the interlinked loss of camaraderie, job security and union organisation has resulted in downward pressure on wages and increases in stress-related conditions.

In truth, this definition is basically inadequate. For a start, it is unclear

how true it is even of professors, or at least academics further down the food chain, that work is characterised by 'autonomy', what with the universities' spiral into intrusive managerialism; more broadly, many jobs previously considered 'middle class', and not without some justification, have become proletarianised as a result of the economic transformations of the last three decades. Would a teacher's control over lesson plans constitute 'autonomy', despite research suggesting teachers actually work up to 60 hours a week meeting all the "broad parameters" of their job?

A more serious problem - extremely serious in present conditions - for the theory is the unemployed. On the strict Jones definition, the unemployed do not fit into the working class. They do not directly exchange their labour for wages; you could even argue that, having no job at all, they have nothing but "autonomy" over their daily routines! This practically poses Jones two options: firstly, grasping the horn and simply saying that the unemployed are not working class; or, secondly, adding a further qualification to his definition.

Neither solution is particularly appealing. If he qualifies his definition, then he will have to requalify it again and again with each new, analogous layer of the population - children from working class backgrounds, housewives ... this, in the end amounts to class analysis as Ptolemaic astronomy. In a throwaway aside, as it happens, he suggests that "most" of "the old working class ... were men", suggesting that he prefers a strict definition of those in work (p166). In that case, what class are the housewives?

More importantly for this book, what about the unemployed? Remember - its whole argument is that attacks on benefit-dependent 'chavs', far from identifying an underclass separate from the working class, amount to coded attacks on the latter. Yet if he cannot conceive of a working class housewife without a job, then he surely cannot conceive of the unemployed as working class, which leaves them as ... what, if not a discrete underclass?

The truth is that this is *not* a Marxist view of class. For Marxism, the working class is a negative category; it is not positively selling one's labour that makes one working class, but rather having nothing else to sell *but* one's labour (strictly speaking, labour-power). The shift is crucial, because in effect it is a shift from the empirical life of a discrete individual to the dynamics of society as a whole.

The working class has no power except to the extent it is organised - in unions, cooperatives, parties and other forms. The unemployed fit in neatly here as a 'reserve army of labour', and the success of working class struggle in the near future will depend considerably on united organisations of employed and unemployed. No doubt Jones would agree with this political point; but there are adverse political consequences that stem from failing to theorise it in terms of the working class's objective tendency towards, and need for, united collective action.

## Class politics

And so, when Jones comes to outline a response in his conclusion, entitled 'A new class politics?', his view of the working class comes to distort his view of working class politics. It is worth summarising his proposals:



firstly, an airy and unobjectionable call for a “total redefinition of aspiration” (p258) - as the old slogan has it, ‘Rise with your class, not above it.’

Secondly, the rather undefined agent of change - presumably a Labour government - must seriously tackle unemployment. That, obviously, means creating good, skilled work for thousands and even millions of people. That, in turn, means a largely unspecified “industrial strategy”. We can kill two birds with one stone, as it were, by launching a large-scale programme of council house-building, which will create thousands of jobs and also make some headway in ending the acute housing crisis. Talk of a ‘green new deal’ turns out, again, to be about upping the environmental standards of housing specifically.

More radically, he targets the intense alienation typical of modern service sector jobs by calling for substantial measures of workers’ control in the private sector: “It would be a real alternative to the old-style, top-down, bureaucratic form of nationalisation introduced after World War II,” he writes. On top of that, we should defuse the immigration issue by refocusing anger against tax-dodging billionaires, ‘reclaim’ the anti-social behaviour issue from the authoritarian right (again in an unspecified way), and rebuild the trade unions through massive efforts to extend union membership into the private sector.

Finally, he argues that we in Britain cannot do this alone: “only the power of a strong international labour force” can stop the global race to the bottom.

The issue is that the international dimension does not figure in any of his particular demands, which are fundamentally based on nationalist

assumptions. An “industrial strategy”, after all, is fundamentally about Britain. Germany does not need one, because it already has one; Britain’s role in the global economy is effectively to be an offshore tax haven for Wall Street. Changing this is no doubt necessary if we are to end up, one of these days, in a sane world; but it *already* poses the international dimension, particularly on the European scale.

It is no accident that housing trips off the tongue as the one concrete example of reviving industry, since it is a more or less strictly endogenous problem. However, it is at best a temporary fix - eventually, everyone will have a house, and all of them will be fitted out with the necessary green trimmings. With sufficient political will, this could be achieved in a few years. To turn Britain back into an industrial powerhouse beyond that time fundamentally means going into *competition* with Germany, China, India and the rest for a limited supply of industrial capital and working hours. All things being equal, that actually undermines the possibility of united workers’ organisation across borders.

All things being equal - but they need not be. The way to square the circle is to be *more* radical - to win masses all over the world to the vision of a fundamental transformation of society at an international level. This is the point of communism - it is not a ‘nice idea’, but the response to an *objective necessity*. If even the most elementary improvements in living standards are to apply *internationally*, let alone persist, then we need to target the world market in favour of a collective means of ensuring an equitable global division of labour, and thus target the

international state system which props it up. None of this will happen overnight - but without a movement oriented to that goal, the immediate struggle becomes a fruitless guerrilla war against the bourgeoisie.

Such is the problem with Jones’s excommunication of “international politics” from his working class programme. “Many working class people may oppose the war [in Afghanistan], but that does not mean their opposition trumps concerns like housing and jobs” (p256-57). It is by no means clear, however, why working class people in this country would necessarily care more about labour conditions in China than foreign wars.

The objection to both lines of reasoning is fundamentally the same - though they may not appear so, the issues are bound up together. The Socialist Workers Party has made much of the amount of money squandered on killing thousands of people in fruitless imperialist wars, and rightly so - after all, you could build a lot of social housing with that. More generally, it is the relations between *states* - expressed, in part, by military conflict - which ensures that Britain is a tax haven, India and China are sources of great masses of bargain-basement labour, and so on.

Underlying all this is the fundamental class issue: the more restricted the working class is in its political perspectives, the more individual workers consider the world through the prism of their direct individual interests, the weaker the class becomes. Our side needs unity on a mass scale, which in turn means winning people to perspectives that undermine the bases of sectionalism: the state, the imperialist order, reactionary ideology, the world market and so forth. The danger here is not, as comrade Jones thinks, overemphasising the importance of international issues, but of compartmentalising them *away* from our conception of ‘class politics’.

It is plain that such a mass movement for international socialism does not exist today, nor will it exist in the near future. For that reason, Jones is right on the money to call for the reconstruction of the trade unions, and for making unemployment a political issue rather than (as in the chav stereotype) an index of personal failure. Other defensive measures of class organisation - cooperatives, mutual societies and so forth - must also follow if our class is to get out the other side of this crisis in any better a position than when it went in, or even just to mark time.

This is common ground, in fact, with the likes of Blue Labour, who are all for community and class organisation. However dubious that movement, it has actually treated the issue far more seriously in its own way than much of the far left in recent history.

The difference is that Glasman and his allies have incorporated this stance into an overarching historical narrative in which class solidarity is fundamentally communitarian-conservative and defined by national character. That this narrative is utterly spurious is not an argument for not having one of our own. Jones presents a vision of a working class battered by economic convulsions for a generation, but not dispossessed of its dignity, which is a salutary response to the bourgeoisie’s chav grotesques. To leave it there, however, opens the door for Glasman and the like to coopt our class and its history, which is an eventuality we must fight against.

When the bourgeoisie hears the phrase ‘working class’, we do not want them to think of the honest, salt-o’-the-earth types of the Glasman stereotype, or some obnoxious chav minstrel show after the fashion of Vicky Pollard. We want them, to quote Jones one last time, to hear “working class boots stomping towards Downing Street ... a resolute mass brandishing red flags and dog-eared copies of the *Communist manifesto*.”

Now that’s what I call a new class politics ●

Harley Filben

## Notes

1. *The Guardian* May 31.
2. *The Independent* June 3.
3. [www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/viewofbooks\\_preview/10592](http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/viewofbooks_preview/10592).

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Become a Communist Party member

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Town/city \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## Summer Offensive

### Rhythm and pulse

The annual fundraising drive of the CPGB is underway. Mark Fischer reports on a good start and underlines the potential of this campaign

**A** more than solid start for the first week of this year’s Summer Offensive, comrades, with an enormously praiseworthy £4,278 in the bank! Particular pleasing has been our readers’ response to the stand-alone strand within this year’s SO around the *Weekly Worker* - that is, to raise a minimum of £300 a month in standing orders for our paper. We have already had a jump of £59 from people committing to regular, steady donations to this paper and the website it powers - where most of you read us, of course. So, speaking of which ...

OK, comrades, OK - back off. Yes, it is true that we announced that the revamped website would be up from June 18 and, palpably, it wasn’t. A comrade I have been working with on the site (yes, I too am culpable) mentioned something about the gestation period of an elephant - ‘*if only*’ is the obvious response.

It has actually been well over two years (which is what our uniquely four-kneed friends take to drop, as I understand from Google) since our original site was attacked by politically hostile hackers and we had to start from scratch. It must be said that our makeshift substitute has not been that shabby, however, with a 10k-plus readership for the paper weekly (over the last seven days we had 10,684 visitors, to be exact). Enormous credit is due to the *Weekly Worker* team for this. The top-quality product they turn out every week is what has driven the high engagement with the site, despite its

pretty denuded and too often otherwise stale nature.

Our determination is that our paper - with its vibrant controversy and analysis - will remain the powerhouse of the new site. This does not mean that we will treat it simply as a slightly more snazzy archive for the physical publication. What we want to do is increase the interactivity of our readers, to feature facilities for comrades to respond to and engage with the ideas they read, to access the archives not simply of the *Weekly Worker*, but also of *The Leninist*, the successful, lively, sometimes painfully youthful, but always *principled* paper that it superseded and, I think, retained the best features of. The site must have a rhythm and pulse of its own.

In the words of comrade PW, who followed up his subscription with an additional £10 standing order, the “*Weekly Worker* is the best and most honest paper on the left”. He and the other comrades who have started or upped their regular contribution (thanks also this week to comrades BH, JM and DV) are clearly recognising something very important about our strategic project, not just the paper’s individual articles. If you are reading this, I suspect you do too. So isn’t it time you contributed? Come on - let’s hear from you! ●

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



# weekly Worker

## Workshops no substitute for democracy

# No to ULA talking shop

While major strikes in Greece have shaken the government, for the moment the Irish working class seems compliant and passive in the face of very similar attacks.

As protests erupt across the continent, we Irish are apparently the 'sensible ones' of Europe - the helpful, small nation that is swallowing the bitter medicine of capitalist austerity. Unlike the unruly and disruptive Greeks, Portuguese and Spanish, our working class is taking a long-term and realistic view - we have embraced the need to suffer in the interest of the 'greater good'. Thus the current passivity is enthusiastically interpreted as an indication of solid support for the new government's drive to slash state spending and wages.

But there is no such support. It is not acceptance, but resignation, in the face of an apparently intractable situation. The intensity of the previous antagonism remains. As *The Economist* has noted, "The Greeks are not alone in feeling resentful about having to pay so high a price for past misdemeanours. Many Irish now see themselves as victims, paying a penalty for having done a favour to other European countries by propping up their banks and thus preventing losses by foreign bondholders that had lent to them. If the mood turns sourer, it may be harder for the new Irish government led by Enda Kenny to push through the further austerity that is needed."<sup>1</sup> Certainly the situation remains highly fragile and conflicts could erupt at any time.

The Socialist Party in Ireland believes September will see an upsurge. It is no doubt right that the working class will again be forced to resist. But the problem remains the lack of the subjective factor. We need a mass, revolutionary party that the working class can join and make its own.

We also need an agenda to unite with the European working class. The last thing we need is a neo-Keynesian attempt to construct 'socialism' in Ireland. In today's world it is absolutely obvious that we cannot build socialism in one country. The current crisis is an international one, and the world's working class is the only force that can resist and supersede the capitalist system.

This Saturday's United Left Alliance forum is our first opportunity to debate the way forward nationally following the ULA's success in the February general election, when it emerged with five TDs. Up to now the organisation has been led by a steering committee made up of representatives from the SP, the People Before Profit Alliance (in reality the Socialist Workers Party) and two local organisations from Tipperary and Sligo/Leitrim. All decisions are made by this group or by the component organisations themselves. The individual non-aligned members - and ordinary members of the SWP and SP - are left in the dark for the most part. The ULA website contains very little beyond a few official statements and members are notified of monthly meetings by letter.

This snail's pace, undemocratic

method of organisation clearly needs to change if we are to get anywhere. We need to organise ourselves immediately, debate out a draft programme and set up functioning branches. The ULA must be a democratic, inclusive party.

The main problem in opening up the organisation seems to be differences between the main two component groups. In essence the SWP wants a "radical" (non-socialist) party which is "broad and democratic".<sup>2</sup> The SP, on the other hand, wants the ULA to adopt a "a socialist plan and a plan for economic development".<sup>3</sup> And, while the SP's conception of socialism is very limited (being based more on nationalisation than the rule of our class internationally), there is no doubt that it is trying to steer the project to the left of where the SWP wants it to be.

These differences have played themselves out in the Dáil. Leading SWP member Richard Boyd Barrett has consistently placed himself to the right of the other four ULA TDs. He has argued for a "broad populist party" and aligned himself on one occasion with rightwing TDs Shane Ross and Stephen Donnelly in tabling a private members bill calling for a referendum on the EU/IMF bailout. The two SP TDs, Clare Daly and Joe Higgins, refused to sign up to it and, despite the best efforts of both sides to pretend otherwise, the media reported this as the first split in the alliance.

Boyd Barrett has proved to be a bit of a maverick, to the embarrassment of many ULA members. He recently advocated

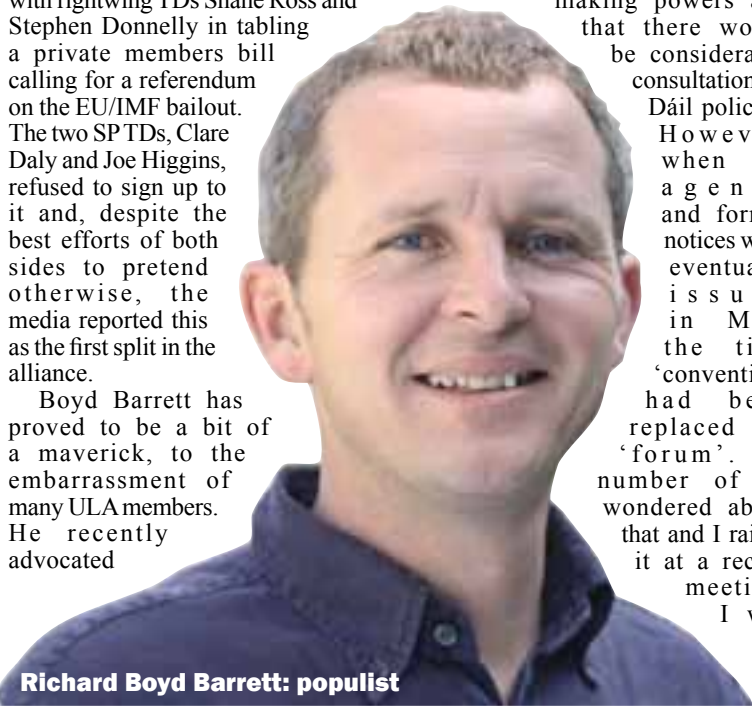
raising the current corporation tax from 12% to a derisory 16%. This is considerably lower than in many European states, including France, which has a rate of over 30%. Of course, he is entitled to give his own views, especially in the absence of a ULA policy on most issues. This must be remedied. But of critical importance is the fact that TDs are not accountable to the membership.

There are lots of rumours of tensions and arguments at the top, but unfortunately there have been no reports to the membership about these differences. Yet we plainly cannot have a democratic, membership-led organisation if members are not informed. And surely our debates ought to be in the open. If our class is to become the ruling class it must be made aware of and be part of all our political discussions.

It was announced immediately after the general election that the ULA would hold a convention in late June. There followed a long period when nothing further was heard. SP members indicated that the convention

would have some decision-making powers and that there would be considerable consultation on Dáil policies.

However, when the agenda and formal notices were eventually issued in May, the title 'convention' had been replaced by 'forum'. A number of us wondered about that and I raised it at a recent meeting. I was



Richard Boyd Barrett: populist

informed by leading SP member Stephen Boyd that 'convention' was "a complete misnomer, leading to an incorrect impression that decisions and votes would be taken at the event". Instead there will be two main plenary sessions and a range of workshops. In other words it is being organised as a mere talking shop.

For individual non-aligned members this is particularly frustrating. Leftwingers and those new to politics all want a proper say in their organisation. But it seems that both the SP and the SWP are united in denying the ordinary membership any real voice.

In spite of this they are starting to organise. A group of non-aligned members have come together to set up an email list and blog, and hope to have a stall and a fringe meeting at the forum.<sup>4</sup> A leading independent, Des Derwin, has written that "the ULA should become, as widely promised, a membership organisation". The continuation "of all decision-making by a small steering group is not an option".<sup>5</sup> He echoes the experience of others at branch meetings - where the SP and SWP put obstacles in the way of organising and tell us that it is too soon to start building. In a recent Cork branch the modest proposal to set up an email discussion list and hold fortnightly meetings was met by fierce opposition - resulting in those of us proposing these measures being outvoted by an SP-SWP coalition. We were accused of trying to dominate the ULA - a bit rich from those who refuse to allow normal measures of democracy, while themselves maintaining tight control.

Other discussions are being held between non-aligned members and these will have an effect on ordinary SP and SWP comrades too. If they really want to build something serious, then they have to step out of their leaderships' shadow and speak out. Otherwise we will end up with yet another failed left unity attempt.

I am aware of some comrades' sensitivity that enemies and opponents of the ULA will pick up on and exploit our differences. That is to be expected.

In fact the only way to defeat such forces is through openness. We need to declare that we are an inclusive, democratic organisation, unafraid of expressing sharp differences, while uniting in action.

On Saturday there are a number of big issues to be debated. The first plenary of the day is on the left's response to the crisis. Then there are workshops on health, housing and education. The afternoon plenary is on the type of party we want. This is followed by a workshop on the women's question - unfortunately, but typically, not dealing with abortion rights, if the organisers have their way - and others on socialism, climate change and the left in the north. All important issues for which we need not only full debate, but programmatic solutions adopted through democratic decision. Instead it seems that our current leadership wants us to turn up, listen, talk among ourselves in small workshops and leave all power firmly in their hands.

I hope there is a rebellion against the leadership on Saturday. I hope individual members have the courage of their convictions and stand up to the steering committee's plan to hold the project back. We need a mass party now and we as members have the duty to act.

The SP has said it will propose the election of non-aligned members to the steering committee. Apparently the SWP is against this. We should support the SP's proposal, but argue for it to be taken further. We need to move to a fully elected and recallable committee, and the formation of delegate bodies.

That is working class democracy. Let's hope we see some on Saturday ●

Anne Mc Shane

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## Notes

1. www.economist.com/node/18836230.
2. www.swp.ie/reviews/united-left-alliance-what-kind-party/4331.
3. www.socialistparty.net.
4. http://weareragbags.wordpress.com.
5. http://tomasoflatharta.com/2011/06/22/ula-what-kind-of-party-do-we-need-2.

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