



*weekly*  
**worker**



**Platypus debate: a common language is needed for the left to talk, writes Mike Macnair**

- Ireland: ULA forum
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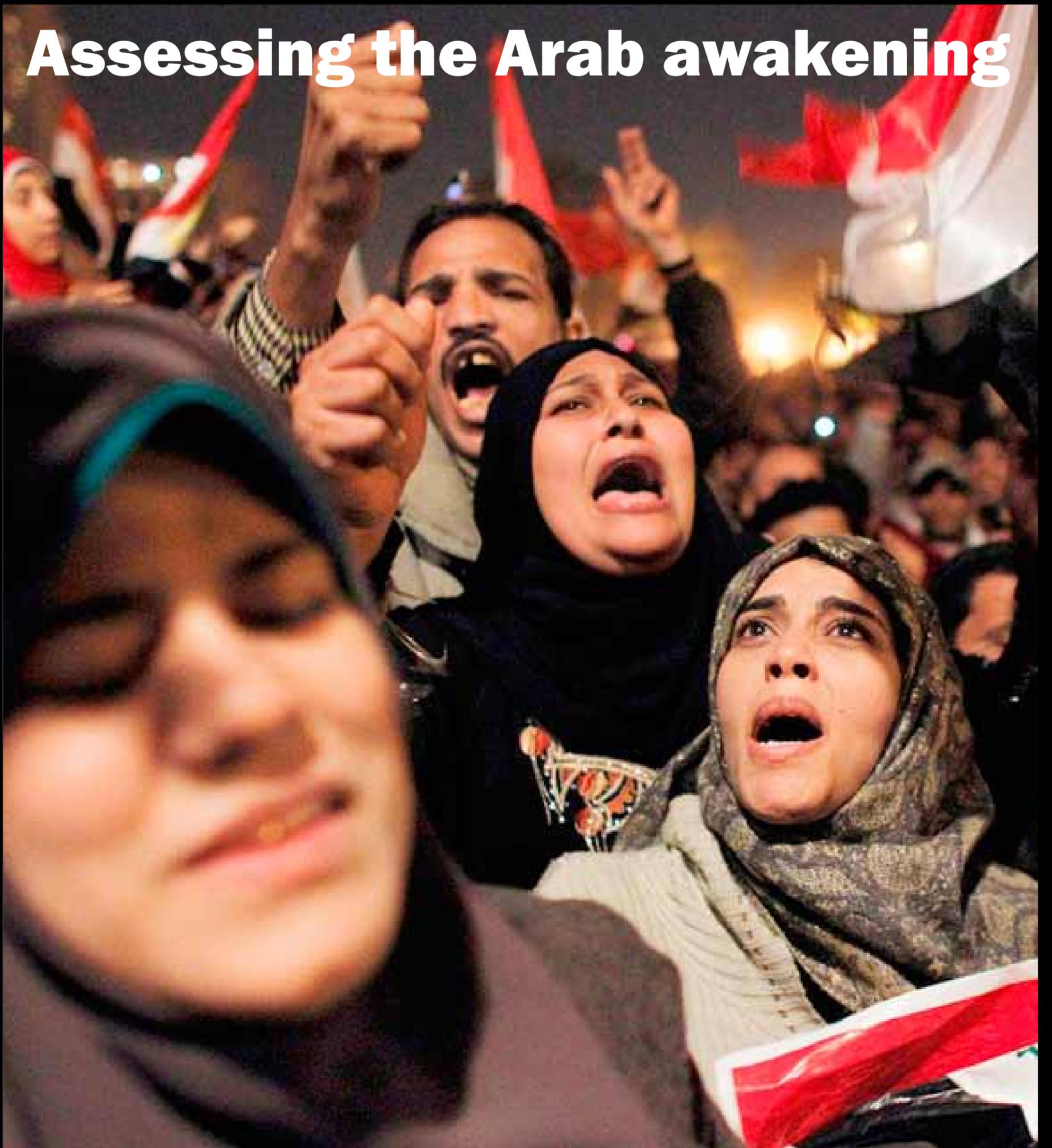
No 872 Thursday June 30 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

[www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk)

£1/€1.10

# Assessing the Arab awakening



## LETTERS



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

## Crack regiment

I read Harley Filben's review of Owen Jones's *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class* very carefully and get the clear impression from him that the demand to restructure British industrial capacity is somehow reactionary ('Chav-baiting and class politics', June 23).

The demands that you hear everywhere among the workers of the northern, Scottish and Welsh former centres of traditional industry are to rebuild and restructure coal, steel, engineering, shipyards and maritime marine, with as much direct workers' control as can be achieved.

Now, while those of us in the abandoned industrial heartlands see this as a programme to get our families and communities off the scrapheap into well-paid, unionised employment, Harley says 'no' and instructs us that such a strategy is based upon fundamentally *nationalist* strategies: "To turn Britain back into an industrial powerhouse ... means going into *competition* with Germany, China, India and the rest for a limited supply of industrial capital and working hours."

So our contribution to the vital need of spreading internationalism and world class-consciousness is to rot on the unemployment queues, see our communities devastated with hopelessness, poverty, low life expectancy, high infantile mortality, high ill health rates, low educational achievements and social goals, benefit dependency, anti-social crime, drug addiction and poor housing, content in the knowledge that our fellow workers in Germany, China and India are working. We are doomed to acceptance of impoverishment and disempowerment as a social class here because we can only change things internationally and can't make demands for this piece of land mass where we live, as that would be seen as 'nationalism'.

Leave aside the history as to how we actually arrived at this situation and that the defeat of the traditional proletariat here led to the superexploitation of workers in the third world who, tonne for tonne, are killed and maimed a thousand times more than we were and paid a pittance for equivalent labour-power; that our labour was unionised and posed political challenges, while the export of exploitation abroad actually took conditions back through time to those we had left behind centuries before. The export of jobs from Britain and Europe represented a massive defeat for standards of labour and qualities of life worldwide - it wasn't an act of internationalism by global capitalism.

Leave aside also the fact that basic production of coal and steel is actually *rising* around the world, *as is demand*, which will soon outstrip it. Rising energy prices (caused by the relative scarcity of fuel) are damning masses of British families to fuel poverty and premature death and will soon inflict widespread power cuts across the country. Sky-high energy prices are directly linked to closed pits, which caused natural gas exhaustion, North Sea oil depletion, vastly more expensive and dangerous nuclear expansion and futile plagues of inefficient, non-productive wind turbine estates.

We have apparently to put up with all that because the demand to exploit reserves here with labour here and restart basic manufacturing production is nationalistic.

If we can't achieve world socialism, we'll sit on our hands and let the whole damn place collapse around

our ears because there are no short-term solutions. Let's instead work on some abstract rebuilding of the labour movement, unions without work or workers (doing what, I wonder?), because anything less than simultaneous worldwide socialist revolution with a global strategy for work and production will be nothing but "fruitless guerrilla war against the bourgeoisie".

I'd like to see a communist programme for the struggle we're actually in, for the places where we live, and the people we live among, with the problems they've actually got. No, not *instead of* a world socialist struggle, or counterposed to it, but *part of it*. Because frankly, comrades, if you don't have answers in the here and now as to how to meet the problems which confront our class, you will remain desperately irrelevant and useless as a fighting unit of the working class.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Lumpen

Your review of Owen Jones's *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class* has provoked an interesting forum debate at [www.forteanimes.com](http://www.forteanimes.com).

Perhaps the most interesting comment was: "Next time some chavs throw stones at me and shout homophobic crap, I will shake my fist at them and inform them that they cannot harm me, as they are just a middle class construct. Or maybe I will just scarp.".

Even Marx believed in the existence of a lumpenproletariat. The members of the lumpenproletariat - this "social scum", said Marx - are not only disinclined to participate in revolutionary activities with their "rightful brethren", the proletariat, but also tend to act as the "bribed tools of reactionary intrigue."

They haven't gone away, you know.

**Pat Corcoran**  
email

## Some right

I'm not surprised to find the same liberal agenda used in your article on assisted suicide as we find in the mainstream media ('Dignity in life and death', June 23). Socialism has no developed tradition of tackling systemic oppression and has a regrettable tendency to subsume such issues in a reductionist class analysis.

Obviously, Eddie Ford is absolutely correct to argue that we should all have the facilities to end our lives at the time of our choosing. But taking this issue in isolation as a purely ethical and legal matter is wholly mistaken. There would only be a purely legal remedy to a problem with a purely legal cause.

It has long been argued that in order to find the true cause of the oppression of various groups there is no better method than to give them equal rights. When the situation remains unchanged, the cause will be discovered. The emphasis on recourse to law is the hallmark of liberalism. In fact, an 'equal' right to assisted suicide would merely amplify the existing inequality. Equal numbers of print books don't give blind children an equal opportunity to read.

One frequent objection to assisted suicide is that people will be pressurised into ending their lives by mercenary relatives; counterposed is the argument that the absence of facilities in Britain causes people to go abroad to die sooner than they wish. Therefore, the debate degenerates into one of humane relief of suffering and legal safeguards. The underlying political analysis of the reasons why campaigners such as Debbie Purdy and Terry Pratchett are so much more palatable than Liz Carr (opponent of

assisted suicide) remains unanswered.

We are left with no means to establish why it might be that disabled people are to be given no other rights - only the right to assisted suicide. The BBC have not had three-hour-long documentaries about why it will be impossible to go to the paralympics in a wheelchair on the tube, no coverage of the lack of lifts and ramps in the average High Street bookshop, no-one famous interviewed on the inaccessible venues chosen for socialist meetings and conferences. Still less, why effective treatment for many conditions is unavailable on the NHS. So all we're left with is that disabled people want to top ourselves because we're disabled: the political problem has been shifted onto the individual physical body.

Our oppression is therefore naturalised. But it is no more natural than having separate (or no) drinking fountains for black people and then saying they can't come in because there is no separate fountain. A recent event by disabled arts activists showed that a woman in a wheelchair asking for donations to help her 'fly to die' collected a lot of money with no questions asked. Under the current circumstances, the 'right' to die will be the only right we get.

Campaigning for the 'right to die' in isolation will leave the rest of society untouched except for brief periods of heart-warming self-congratulation for resistance to reactionary moralism. Disabled people will be admired for our courageous acceptance of an inevitable fate, and the rest of the world can continue unaffected by the inconvenience of changing to accommodate us. Since when did socialists promote acceptance of social and political inequality?

**Heather Downs**  
email

## Property right

In Mike Macnair's book, *Revolutionary strategy*, the following demand was listed: "Abolition of constitutional guarantees of the rights of private property and freedom of trade." I would like to see this demand fleshed out more.

For example, the civil courts can be prohibited from enforcing the collection of the interest portion of debt payments or impose severe criminal penalties on those who use threats of harm to extort interest. Society can also directly establish 'maximum allowable personal wealth', a populist limit on non-possessive property ownership, and then adjust it by mass democratic means.

Right now, I'm a witness to the Canada Post labour dispute. What started as a rotating strike was escalated into an employer lock-out and now discussions on back-to-work legislation, plus media spin in favour of the government side regarding this 'essential service'. How about prohibiting lock-outs for those employers in 'essential services' (such as in response to rotating strikes or 'free service' strike situations, like bus drivers not collecting fares)?

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Facebook ban

The internet platform Facebook has banned Republican Sinn Féin Germany/Austria, without warning after less than six months in existence.

The group had been set up to use modern media to spread the message of Irish republicanism in times of economic crises, bailout and sectarian attacks. The group's wall was used to publish statements, press releases and events of the political organisation, Sinn Féin Poblachtach.

An email to the administrator, dated June 13 2011, said that the

group promotes ideas of "hatred, menace or obscenity". Furthermore, it is forbidden to "attack individuals and groups". While sexist, racist and sectarian material is allowed on Facebook and similar websites, democratic voices are systematically attacked.

**Dieter Blumenfeld**  
Republican Sinn Féin

## Tax slaves

James Walsh seems to think that Egyptian tax collectors still extort taxes from workers and peasants with instruments of torture, as they did in Roman times, and therefore they should be shunned by the left (Letters, June 23). No, things have moved on.

The fact of the matter is that we are dealing with a 41,000-strong organisation, its full title being the Real Estate Tax Authority Union, one of the 620 unions affiliated to the 20 million-strong Public Services International. These brave men and women established their own, independent, union in 2008, after a three-month-long strike under the conditions of the Mubarak dictatorship. They won a 325% increase in wages.

The RETAU president, Kamal Abou Arta, has been imprisoned 22 times under Sadat and Mubarak. As to the job that his members perform, it is hardly the moral equivalent of "kiddie fiddling" or working as a gas chamber operative - as comrade Walsh suggested. And under present circumstances ending the collection of real estate taxes might just benefit the rich rather than the poor.

But comrade Walsh seems to be implying that it is wrong to struggle for trade unions amongst those tainted by working in arms factories, prisons, police and armed forces, etc, because all such people are somehow beyond the pale and can never be won to our side. I do not agree.

The first concern of a trade union is to defend the interests of its members and RETAU has certainly done that. But that has not led to a narrow, sectional, attitude. No, far from the tax collectors' union being conservative in outlook, it fought for the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and today extends its solidarity to the PCS strikers in Britain. In the context of Egypt the first independent trade union since 1957 is surely to be wholeheartedly welcomed. Its birth marked the beginning of the end of the old regime and indicated the strength and breadth of what was going to come. Needless to say, RETAU contingents took part in the Tahrir Square protests.

Workers under capitalism are the slaves of capitalism. They often hate every minute of the work they do and hate those they work for. Their work is alienated. They work for wages in order to live, not because their work fulfils their human potential. For instance, the work of coalminers and steelworkers undoubtedly helped the imperialists in both World War I and World War II. But it no good turning our back on them. The point is to end capitalism. Not blame its slaves.

**Phil Kent**  
Haringey

## Star rant

It is not James Walsh who has 'lost his marbles', as the headline you gave his letter implies: it is the British left. Anyone with half a mind can see that the British left, including the CPGB, is only going round in ever decreasing circles. The left will continue to do so while it is built on such failed methods and ideologies. Anyone thinking otherwise must be mad or bad.

The *Weekly Worker*/CPGB has become a sad parody of the old Eurocommunist CPGB. At least they were prepared to recognise that things weren't working. You lot have become

about the triumph of the will. Even your theories on anthropology are about putting thoughts above material conditions.

Pretty much the first rule of scientific ethics is 'cause no harm'. The so-called organised British left keeps active for the sake of being active. Are you worried that people might reflect and try and think about the deep-rooted problems if they cease running around like headless chickens? The British left has no concern about leading workers to certain defeat or encouraging a mad man to live on the streets so as to send himself to an early grave. The British left is built on the principle that it is better to encourage woolly thinking if that gives them the answer they want for today.

The only moderate defence I've heard for the invitation of the Socialist Workers Party to the Egyptian tax collectors' union is that at least they are moving away from the Islamists. That flirtation has caused massive amounts of harm, but not so much to the SWP. The SWP still builds on the faulty logic that anyone who is slightly against the capitalist states should be embraced as a friend. Faulty logic underpins a rush to the lowest common denominator - or, in this case, the lowest not very common denominator - of only serving the interests of those who have moderately privileged jobs in the state sector.

We don't have scientific socialism in this country; we have neurotic, insane socialism that is only interested in serving the interests of sectional movements and their buddies. You, 'comrades', are the true sectarians. You and those who you support are the backward proletariat; the advanced proletariat recognise we have no movement worthy of the name.

The ruling class think you're a joke, the working class think you're a joke and I think you're a very old, sad joke, but you take yourselves way too seriously. The ruling class even took the insanity of Stalinism seriously.

**Darren Redstar**  
email

## Selfish

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, two oil companies, Toreador Resources and the Hess corporation, are "prepared to seek oil and gas under the Eiffel Tower" (June 22). This is called by some people 'progress' and the 'free market'.

Disappointed tourists visiting Paris may soon discover that the Eiffel Tower has become an oil derrick. The oil pipeline, of course, will be concealed beneath the Louvre museum. Now all that is lacking is for the oil companies to find oil under the Statue of Liberty ...

The indigenous tribes in the Peruvian Amazon have been fighting against oil drilling in their lands. They were denounced by the outgoing president of Peru, Alan Garcia, as "selfish". No doubt those who are socialists who wish to defend the Eiffel Tower will be called the same.

**Earl Gilman**  
email

## Self-defence

I'm curious about the official Communist Party stance on the individual ownership of arms, particularly firearms for self-defence.

The history of firearms control in Britain clearly has its roots in class relationships, particularly the desire of the ruling classes to disarm and suppress peasants and workers. The 1920 Firearms Act was in fact introduced due to growing fears of working class uprising following World War I, as was seen in Russia and, closer to home, Ireland.

**Arm Britain**  
email

**IRELAND**

# Voodoo and left posturing

**O**n June 25 the United Left Alliance held its first national membership gathering - not a democratic conference, but a forum. Despite the election of five ULA TDs in the February general election, both the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, the two main components, seem incapable of uniting in a ULA party.

As I noted in my article last week, the SWP wants the ULA to be a broad front which does not describe itself as socialist ('No to ULA talking shop', June 23). In the first plenary session Kieran Allen told the 350 comrades gathered in Dublin's Liberty Hall: "It's not about how many times you mention the word 'socialism'. It's whether you are capable of spelling out in concrete ways what it means and how you will get there."

On the face of it this seems an entirely reasonable position. Marxism is, after all, about theory and practice. Simply calling for socialism without putting forward a programme *would* be hopeless. But actually what comrade Allen was really doing was trying to obscure the fact that he and the SWP leadership are totally opposed to the inclusion of 'socialism' in the ULA bullet-point platform and literature. It is not that he does not want the word used abstractly - he does not want it used at all. In other words, SWP leaders are divorcing socialism from the immediate struggle.

Instead they want the ULA to continue as an electoral bloc ... meanwhile let the working class learn "from the experience in struggle". But such an organisation needs semi-Keynesian policies. Professor Terrence McDonagh from National University of Ireland was invited to provide intellectual legitimacy for this voodoo economics. He seriously proposed a scheme which could "be implemented within 48 hours and turn the economy around". The plan would involve not only defaulting on the debt, but also leaving the euro, relaunching the punt, creating a 'good bank' and nationalising the Corrib gas field. This would create the basis for full employment, as control over currency would mean there would be more money to invest.

But the good professor and his followers in the SWP leadership seem to have forgotten a few things. Firstly Ireland is an integral part of the world economy. We are in the middle of a global economic downturn, within which Ireland is particularly vulnerable. The Irish economy has little indigenous industry and has always been the 'poor relative' of world imperialism, dependent on investment and loans from outside. It is not possible for it to 'opt out' of what is an international

crisis ... without courting the fate of Stalin's Russia, Enver Hoxha's Albania and Kim Il Sung's North Korea. To suggest that Ireland could go it alone even for a short time is a utopian diversion. We should leave that to neo-Stalinists such as Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan of the failed Scottish Socialist Party.

Instead of indulging in such left-nationalist, hair-brained schemes, we should be concentrating on developing a programme of immediate demands to defend and build our movement. These would include a minimum wage, healthcare at the point of need, and formulations in response to the many serious and urgent democratic and social questions that need to be addressed. We must link up with workers' organisations throughout Europe - for both united action and moves to build an all-European revolutionary party. Instead, sadly, in this time of unprecedented capitalist crisis and working class discontent, the SWP is turning to what are Stalinist solutions rather than fighting for what they say they believe in.

Throughout the day SWP members repeatedly said that arguing for 'socialism' was an abstraction, a barrier to building the ULA. By pushing for the inclusion of the word, the Socialist Party was apparently putting an ultimatum to the working class. Instead, according to the SWP's Richard Boyd Barrett, we must "wage war on jargon" - the language and traditions of the left can be off-putting, you know, and there is a lot of suspicion of leftwing political parties.

The SWP's report of the forum argues that there needs to be "a dual strategy": that is, on the one hand, "construct the ULA on the broadest possible basis, creating a space for those who still have reformist beliefs"; while, on the other hand, "revolutionary left forces organise within the ULA on an open and democratic basis to win the majority to the need for an overthrow of capitalism". It is difficult to see how promoting the likes of McDonagh can be interpreted as attempting "to win the majority to the need for an overthrow of capitalism". However, in reality, the SWP only wants to build itself. The immediate need for a mass party is absolutely secondary to its narrow interests.

But, as was countered by Socialist Party members and others, if you believe in your ideas you should argue to win others to them.

There are plenty of campaigns and broader alliances that the ULA can work in to win people. To build an organisation based on ideas you do not believe in seems absurd, but is in fact

profoundly opportunist. This was linked to another area of contention. The SWP is determined to push its own anti-IMF campaign, Enough, and its own Right to Work rather than involve the ULA directly in organising such campaigns. The only lesson the SWP seems to have learned from the abject failures of the Socialist Alliance and even Respect in Britain is that they went too far in the direction of creating party-like organisations.

The SWP editorial also says that revolutionary purity is no guarantee that an organisation will not sell out. This is a non-argument. It is the SWP that seems intent on pursuing opportunism of the crassest kind. The logical conclusion is liquidationism ... Republican Congress, Democratic Left and many others have taken that route before.

As for the SP in Ireland, it is all very well posing to the left - not too difficult when your main opponent is the SWP. But it too is just as hostile to the building of a single united party based on Marxism. It too is against transforming the ULA into a fully democratic party armed with a revolutionary programme.

There were calls for democracy throughout the day, mainly from various non-aligned members, who made up about a third of the ULA forum. TD Joan Collins remarked at the closing session that she hoped the steering committee would deal with the lack of structures within the next few weeks. At the moment there are branch meetings once a month at most and there is little communication outside of that. Individual members are left in the dark. By way of compensation perhaps, it was agreed that the minutes of the forum would be circulated to all members.

The workshops saw a number of non-decision-making debates and constant pleas to be involved in policy development. At the moment research groups have been set up which do not report to the membership. In one well attended workshop the women's question was discussed. It seemed to be agreed by all that abortion rights need to form part of the ULA programme and we were told by Sinead Kennedy of the SWP that she expected the current absence of this question from the platform to be rectified shortly. There were also a number of complaints about the lack of women on the platform and there was a call for quotas and positive discrimination.

The most you can say about the forum was that there was an exchange of views and that it brought some differences to light. But in a situation where our class is under constant attack by crisis-ridden capital, in a situation where workers are so disillusioned with established parties that they voted in five TDs belonging to the newly formed ULA in the general election, it is *criminal* that neither of the two left groups wants to take the project forward to its next logical step.

**Anne Mc Shane**

anne.mcshane@weeklyworker.org.uk

**Notes**

1. www.swp.ie/editorial/after-united-left-alliance-forum/4602.

**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).

**July 5:** Radical Anthropology Group annual general meeting.

**No cuts**

**Thursday June 30, 7pm:** Ashington Football Club (near Wansbeck Hospital).

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

**Save our services**

**Thursday June 30, 7.30pm:** Rally, Multicultural Centre, Friarscroft Way, Aylesbury.

Organised by Bucks Save Our Services: 07789 915221.

**Marxism 2011**

**Thursday June 30 - Monday July 4:** Friends Meeting House, University College London, Bookmarks bookshop, Bloomsbury, London WC1. Sessions include: the Arab revolts, understanding revolution, trade unions, the student revolt and the struggle against austerity. Speakers include: Sameh Naguib, Tariq Ali, Alex Callinicos, Sami Ramadani, Haifa Zangana, Mark Serwotka, Tony Benn, István Mészáros, Nina Power and Terry Eagleton.

Organised by Socialist Workers Party: <http://marxismfestival.org.uk>.

**Marxism fringe**

**Saturday July 2, 5pm:** 'The left: what a way to organise'. Speakers: Mark Fischer (CPGB), David Broder (Commune).

**Sunday July 3, 5pm:** 'The Arab awakening'. Speaker: Moshé Machover.

Both meetings: room 2a, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: 020 8533 6360.

**Assange and Žižek**

**Saturday July 2, 4pm:** Debate, the Troxy, 490 Commercial Road, London E1. Wikileaks and what it means for the future. Speakers: Julian Assange, Slavoj Žižek.

Organised by the Frontline Club: [events@frontlineclub.com](mailto:events@frontlineclub.com).

**Stop all deportations**

**Saturday July 2, 11am:** National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns AGM and conference, STUC, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3. Speakers from anti-deportation campaigns, Equality Network, NCADC. Workshops: 'Women seeking asylum', 'LGBT: sanctuary, safety and solidarity', 'Migration legal workshop', 'Anti-deportation campaign toolkit'.

Organised by NCADC: [ncadc@ncadc.org.uk](mailto:ncadc@ncadc.org.uk).

**Deaths in custody**

**Saturday July 2, 12 noon:** March, Abbey Street, Winson Green, Hockley, Birmingham. Justice for Kingsley Burrell and all those who have lost their lives in police custody.

Organised by Campaign for Justice for Kingsley Burrell: [mhayles@btconnect.com](mailto:mhayles@btconnect.com).

**Sunday July 3, 4pm:** Vigil, High Wycombe police station. Justice for Habib 'Paps' Ullah, who died while in the hands of the police.

Organised by Justice4Paps: [justiceforpaps.com](http://justiceforpaps.com).

**The right to protest**

**Monday July 4, 9am:** Lobby, City of Westminster court, Horseferry Road, London SW1. Support the Fortnum and Mason 145 on the first day of their trial.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: [info@defendtherighttoprotest.org](mailto:info@defendtherighttoprotest.org).

**Kill Lansley's bill**

**Tuesday July 5, 5.30pm:** Demonstration, Savoy Street, Strand, London WC2 (nearest tubes: Charing Cross and Leicester Square). Kill the bill, defend the NHS.

Called by Unite and Socialist Health Association: 07795 412932.

**Working for Palestine**

**Saturday July 9, 10am:** Conference, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Dave Randall, Dr Karma Nabulsi, Hugh Lanning, Andy Slaughter MP. Registration essential.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [info@palestinecampaign.org](mailto:info@palestinecampaign.org).

**Pro-choice fightback**

**Saturday July 9, 1.30pm:** Demonstration, Old Palace Yard, Parliament Square (opposite parliament).

Organised by Swansea feminist Network: [swanseafeministnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:swanseafeministnetwork@gmail.com).

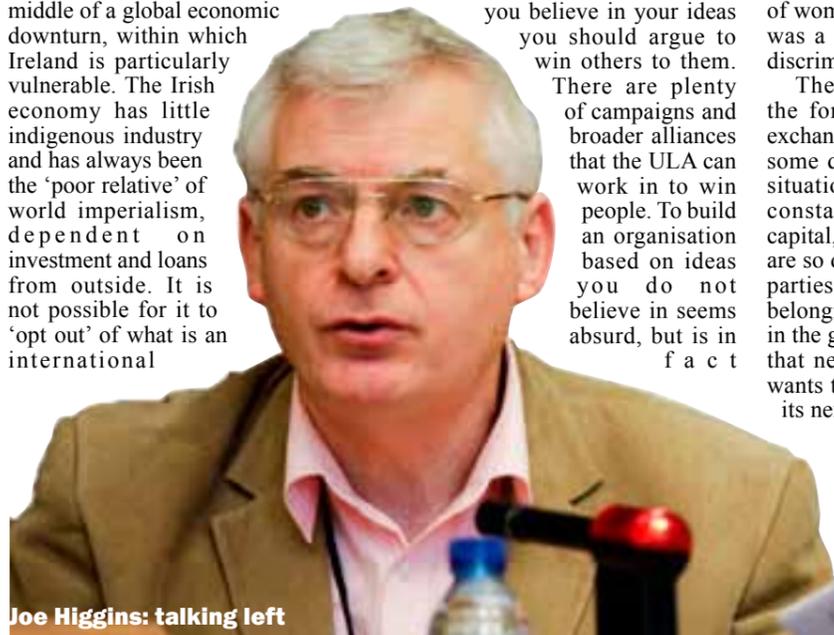
**Coalition of Resistance**

**Saturday July 9, 10am:** National conference, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Wendy Savage (Keep Our NHS Public), John McDonnell MP, Clare Solomon (ULU president), Zita Holbourne (Barac), Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition). Membership and conference fee: £18 waged, £7 unwaged.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance: 07913 643485.

**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.



Joe Higgins: talking left

## AGGREGATE

# Assessing the significance and prospects of revolution

CPGB members, meeting in London on June 25, debated the Arab awakening and Israeli-Jewish national rights. Alex John reports

On behalf of the Provisional Central Committee, comrade John Bridge introduced the theses, 'The Arab revival and Israel-Palestine', noting that the situation had changed dramatically since our previous discussions on the Middle East three years ago. Although we had been in the process of drawing up an analysis, our discussions were interrupted by other matters, and no theses had been adopted at that time.

The purpose of our theses is not to display our deep knowledge, said comrade Bridge, nor to set out what the Arab masses ought to do from the safety of our armchairs, but to begin to engage with the Arab left. Indeed our knowledge about what is going on in various Arab countries is very limited. There is a distinct lack of information in the western media about the politics of the opposition movements being courted by the United States and European Union powers in the name of democracy, and we are driven to speculate whether this reflects a reluctance to admit an "inconvenient truth". While demonising Muslims as extremists at home and as the foreign enemy in the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and elsewhere, it would be embarrassing to report that the new allies the west is cultivating in its attempt to harness and divert the Arab democracy movement are Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood.

The "Arab awakening" over the past six months is a world historic development, marking a further step in the decline of the US imperialist hegemon and in the decline of the capitalist system itself. The US backs Israel, but it also backed the Arab regimes which it now decries. The "elephant in the room", when they mouth slogans about democracy, human rights and progress, is, of course, Saudi Arabia. For profligacy, corruption and bestiality, the imperialist-backed House of Saud is unrivalled. Imperialist hypocrisy on this score is therefore massive and revealing.

Comrade Bridge emphasised that, while presidents have been driven from office, no Arab state has yet been overturned. Although there has been no successful revolution yet, the movement has widened the democratic space and there is great potential for real political and social change.

Some of the left in Britain have been calling for quick elections and a "workers' government", but, while this was realistic in 1917 Russia, it is unrealistic in the Arab world today. We have seen the collapse of the USSR and 'official communism', and of the secular Arab nationalism which depended on it. The danger is that elections would reveal the residual strength of the old regimes, the growth of the Islamists and the confusion and disorganisation of the masses. Indeed there are signs that the US is ready to bring the Muslim Brotherhood in from the cold and come to some historic compromise.

The best conditions for the working class are those of permanent revolution. That is, the complete destruction of the old regimes, sweeping away the muck of corruption, bureaucracy and the whole secret state apparatus; the separation of the state, education and the law from religion and a



The masses: the solution

commitment to secularism; an ever expanding democratic space, within which strong trade unions, militias, cooperatives and political parties can be organised. That would result in weak capitalist regimes which are easy to influence and easy to overthrow, as the working class readies itself for power.

Following comrade Bridge's introduction, comrade James Turley proposed a set of amendments which modified and added to the final theses. He supported the main thrust of the PCC proposals, that Palestinian rights can be achieved through the Arab revolution, not by the Palestinians alone. In the immediate situation, therefore, a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine question is as "equally impractical" as a one-state solution, he said.

Comrade Yassamine Mather said that the Muslim Brotherhood were latecomers in Tahrir Square, Cairo, and the democracy movement has already defeated political Islam. Nevertheless the Islamists are involved in negotiations with imperialism for the defeat of the democratic revolution. On Israel/Palestine she said a two-state solution is unrealistic for reasons of geography - because of the "islands of settlement" which permeate the Palestinian areas, and because the present Israeli state would not tolerate a return to 1967 borders. It is also impractical because, although the labour force in Israel is mixed - part Israeli-Jewish, part Palestinian - there is little Palestinian capital. A one-state solution, she said, is not as unrealistic as the theses say, because a third of Israelis now think a one-state solution is possible.

Comrade Mike Macnair favoured

comrade Turley's amendment because it leaves the one-state/two-state question open. He said there is a problem with the general principle of self-determination and "the right to form a state". If we use Stalin's 1913 definition, then a state necessarily involves a "contiguous block of territory". The West Bank is already "bantustanised", he said, and the right of a people to form a state means the right to control territory, and "therefore to subordinate minorities".

Comrade Moshé Machover - a visitor - emphasised that the democracy movement is an Arab national movement, pointed out that the current struggles in Syria had been greeted by people on the Jordanian side of the border with slogans calling for Arab unity. As for Al Jazeera, it is running a series of documentaries titled *The Arab awakening*, a conscious reference to the seminal 1938 book of that name by George Antonius, the first historian of modern Arab nationalism.

The theses are "better than anything else on the British left", he said. But he queried our preference for a "centralised Arab republic" in thesis 23, arguing that a federal republic would be more acceptable to the diverse Arab population currently divided into over 20 states - as he had argued in his article, 'Breaking the chains of Zionist oppression' (*Weekly Worker* February 19 2009). The problem with a "single-state solution" is that it would have to be imposed on the Hebrew, or Israeli Jewish, people, he explained. Before 1974 the Palestine Liberation Organisation aimed for a unitary "secular, democratic state"; but why the adjective "secular"? Surely a democratic state *is* secular. What they meant was that Jews would have

religious rights - but not national rights, not the right of self-determination, so unity would be imposed on them. The democratic principle socialists should uphold, argued comrade Machover, is "equal national rights".

Comrade Peter Manson (and a number of other comrades) thought this principle "too abstract". The theses should include an explicit demand for two secular states, he said.

Challenging comrade Macnair's view on self-determination, comrade Bridge said that, while states almost always contain national minorities, this does not necessarily imply oppression or ethnic cleansing. And in answer to comrade Machover, he insisted that we favour a centralised rather than a federal state, and that the multitude of tiny Gulf states should be "cleared away".

Comrade Stan Kelsey commented that comrade Macnair had "painted himself into a corner" by arguing that the right to secession necessarily means either ethnic cleansing or the oppression of minorities. The right to self-determination must include the right to form a separate state; but it does not mean we favour separation. We favour unity, so long as it is voluntary. Comrade Kelsey proposed that thesis 28 be amended to uphold the "right of both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples to their own democratic and secular state", rather than explicitly aiming for the formation of such states.

However, comrade Machover argued that, in the context of an Arab revolution, while the Israeli Jewish nation would certainly want its own state, the Palestinian Arabs would simply be part of a larger Arab state, along with the rest of

the Arab population. 'Palestine', he said, was a short-lived imperialist creation after World War I, and had only existed from 1923 to 1947. Comrade Yassamine Mather argued that the PCC's proposed theses, having established that no solution exists for the Palestinian Arabs without an Arab revolution, and having set the aim of a centralised Arab republic - in which the Palestinian Arabs would not need a separate identity - then took a "step backwards" in thesis 28 by reverting to the aim of "a democratic and secular Palestine".

Comrade Machover suggested that we should not wait to settle the finer points of our views on the general question of national rights before stating our views on the Arab awakening, and this was accepted by the meeting. Comrade Bridge accepted comrade Turley's amendments and additions, saying two matters were particularly important: that the CPGB backs the Arab democratic revolution and that we uphold the national rights of the Israeli Jewish nation.

No serious disagreements were evident, and it was agreed that adopting a firm position on the Arab revolution should not be delayed. A series of votes confirmed each detailed amendment to the text, which was then adopted unanimously (see opposite).

## Other decisions

The meeting also briefly discussed a number of other matters. National organiser Mark Fisher reported on the technical problems which have delayed the launch of the CPGB's upgraded website beyond the June 11 aim set by our May 8 aggregate. While the driving force will remain the *Weekly Worker*, the site's role as organiser and educator will be augmented by links to a variety of other resources, including videos, political texts and copies of the paper's forerunner, *The Leninist*.

The start of our Summer Offensive annual fundraising drive, too, was delayed a week to June 18, in the hope of launching it simultaneously with the new website, but this was not to be. The website is still 'teething' but will appear "soon". Comrade Ben Lewis reported that the initial pledges from individual comrades had nevertheless made a good start towards the £25k target, to be achieved by the final day of Communist University - August 20. Overcoming the *Weekly Worker's* present monthly cash shortage is a central issue in this year's SO. Regular income is down, costs are up. Systematic contacting of *Weekly Worker* supporters is underway, aiming to raise monthly standing orders by a minimum of £300.

Minor amendments to the text of the CPGB's revised *Draft programme* were proposed by the PCC and adopted unanimously. The text arrived at by the January 23 aggregate ('Programme for the class' *Weekly Worker* January 27), through a somewhat complicated process of amendments to amendments, had introduced inconsistencies discovered during proofreading - thankfully prior to publication. As the necessary changes were more than merely grammatical corrections, the PCC decided to submit the amendments to the members' aggregate ●

**THESES**

# The Arab awakening and Israel-Palestine

**1.** The mass movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, etc have been truly inspiring. Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali have been forced from office due to the bravery and pressure exerted by the masses. People have been and remain prepared to die in order to see an end to the military, semi-military and monarchical dictatorships.

**2.** There are many factors behind the Arab awakening. Food and other commodity prices have shot up in the recent period. Living standards have been put under greater and greater pressure. Poverty has grown substantially. However, there is more to the Arab awakening than economics. All classes and strata have been swept up in the maelstrom. In other words, there is a movement towards a democratic revolution. That is to be unreservedly welcomed and encouraged. Whatever happens in the short to medium term, US imperialism and imperialism in general has suffered a huge setback. Israel too has been weakened.

**3.** Communists recognise that the democratic revolution has not really happened anywhere in the Arab world. Some presidents may have gone. But the old regimes remain largely intact. We support those who are fighting for a real, thoroughgoing revolution that clears away all the muck of oppression. Abolish the secret police, replace the professional army with a popular militia, close down the old ruling parties, begin land redistribution and the formation of co-ops, confiscate corrupt wealth, put privatised and nationalised industries under workers' control.

**4.** Plans for quick elections and constitutional referendums are rightly opposed. They are not in the interest of the working class. We warn against imperialism diverting, or incorporating, the democratic movement in the Arab world. That is what has happened in Libya. There is also the danger that a declining US will re-impose control by reaching an historical compromise with Islamist forces, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood.

**5.** We recommend the Marx-Engels idea of making the revolution permanent. The working class is not in a position at the moment to take power in any Arab country. Hence communists want to see not stable government, but an ever widening democratic space available to the working class. Specifically that means demanding free speech, ending censorship, winning the right to publish, the right to form trade unions, co-ops, workers' defence guards and political parties. Working class parties must not support any bourgeois or petty bourgeois government. They must constitute themselves as parties of extreme opposition. Only when the workers' party commands a clear popular majority and can realistically hope to carry out its entire minimum programme can taking part in/ forming a government be considered.

**6.** Besides particular struggles to overthrow this or that leader, this or that regime, there is abundant evidence of the continued existence of an unresolved Arab national

question. The mass movement in Tunisia fed into Egypt and the mass movement in Egypt fed into Yemen, etc, etc.

**7.** There are nearly 300 million Arabs in a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea. Though studded with national minorities - Kurds, Assyrians, Turks, Armenians, Berbers, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Despite being separated into over 20 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shi'ite, Alaouite, Ismaili, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Maronite, Nestorian, etc - they share a strong bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of a common language, but of a closely related history.

**8.** Arabs are binational. There are Moroccans, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, etc. But there is also a wider Arab identity, which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. Admittedly the Arabs were politically united for only a short period of time historically: eg, under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

**9.** It was the disintegration of the Ottoman empire, through the combined efforts of Russian tsarism and Anglo-French imperialism, that triggered the birth of modern Arab nationalism. Hence European capitalism helped both to disunite the old Arab nation and to create the conditions for a rebirth.

**10.** Hopes invested in the Young Turks quickly passed. So did illusions in platonic imperialism. Britain encouraged Arab nationalism against Ottoman Turkey in World War I, only to disappoint and betray. France and Britain greedily carved up the Middle East between themselves. Pleas for a single Arab state in the Mashreq fell on deaf ears. The creation of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq suited the needs of Britain and France, but was a crime as far as Arab nationalists were concerned. It ran completely counter to their aspirations.

**11.** Inevitably the two imperial robbers generated independence movements. The Balfour declaration (1917) and Zionist colonisation in Palestine fed Arab nationalism too. However, the Saudi and Hashemite royal houses agreed to serve as puppets and, together with their British and French masters, again and again stymied the forces of pan-Arabism.

**12.** After 1945 and the triumph of US superimperialism, the Arab countries successively gained formal independence. But the Arab world remained Balkanised along the neat lines on the map drawn by the old colonial powers.

**13.** Oil money brought huge riches for the elites in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, etc. While that allows for a degree of clowning and posturing, the military, political and economic control exercised by the US cannot be hidden. Oil revenue is recycled through the purchase of US and British arms, invested in the money markets of London, New York,

Frankfurt, Zurich and Tokyo, or fritted away on palaces, luxury jets, gambling and vanity projects.

**14.** Hence the situation in the Arab world is broadly analogous to Italy, Poland and Germany in 19th century Europe. The national question remains unresolved.

**15.** The most famous candidate for Arab unifier was Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-70). This uncrowned Bonapart led the Free Officers' revolution in 1952, which overthrew the pro-British monarchy of Farouk I. Nasser then oversaw a radical agrarian reform programme, nationalised the Suez canal, allied Egypt with the Soviet Union and put his country on the course of state-capitalist development. This went hand in hand with crushing both the Muslim Brotherhood and the working class movement.

**16.** Nasser called it 'Arab socialism'. Especially with his success in the 1956 crisis - an Israeli invasion followed by a pre-planned joint French and British intervention and then an unexpected American veto - Nasser's popularity soared throughout the Arab world. Pro-Nasser Arab socialist parties, groups and conspiracies were sponsored or established themselves. His name became almost synonymous with pan-Arabism.

**17.** Nasser demanded that natural resources be used for the benefit of all Arabs - hugely popular with those below. Everyone knew he meant oil. Of course, the house of Saud instantly became an implacable enemy. Yet because of mass pressure the Ba'athist authorities in Syria sought a merger. Despite the repression suffered by their co-thinkers in Egypt, the 'official communists' and the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood likewise favoured unity.

**18.** The United Arab Republic was formed on February 1 1958. Nasser was appointed president and Cairo became the capital. Yet the UAR proved fleeting. Syrian capitalists did not gain access to the Egyptian market and Egyptian administrative personnel were painted by Syrian generals, bureaucrats and top politicians as acting like colonial officials. The union ignominiously collapsed in 1961. Opposition came from the Damascus street. However, from then onwards the UAR became a hollow pretence. It united no other country apart from Egypt.

**19.** The 1967 six-day war with Israel proved to be the final straw for Nasserism. Israel's blitzkrieg destroyed the air forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan on the ground and by the end of the short-lived hostilities Israel occupied the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Nasser was humiliated and died soon after a broken man.

**20.** As for Ba'athism, though it succeeded in spreading from Syria to Iraq, petty bourgeois nationalism ensured that the two Ba'athist states became bitter rivals. Nor did 'official communism' - an ideology of aspiring labour dictators - do any better. Under instructions from the Kremlin the 'official communists' tailed bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalism. Working class political

independence has been sabotaged again and again. So has Arab unity. Eg, the 'official' Communist Party opposed the incorporation of Iraq into the UAR. State independence became a kind of totem. One disaster inevitably followed another. Mass parties were reduced to rumps or were liquidated.

**21.** Evidently, Arab reunification remains a burning, but unfulfilled task. The fact that Nasser's short-lived UAR saw the light of day is testimony to mass support for Arab unity. What was a potent sentiment in the 1950s and well into the 1970s needs to be revived in the 21st century in light of the Arab awakening and given a new democratic and class content.

**22.** Communists need to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity. This task is inseparable from the struggle for socialist revolution and the formation of mass Marxist parties, first in this or that Arab country and then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia.

**23.** We favour the formation of a democratic, centralised Arab republic - the form we envisage for working class rule. This can only happen if first the working class sweeps away the capitalist regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq: that is, the most populous of the Arab countries. A revolutionary war to unite the entire Arab world - in particular so that the Arab masses can benefit from the oil wealth of the sparsely populated Arabian peninsula - might well be necessary. It would be a just war, a war of liberation.

**24.** While communists have no truck with Zionism and condemn the colonial-settler origins of Israel, we recognise that over the last 50 or 60 years a definite Israeli Jewish nation has come into existence. To call for its abolition is unMarxist. Such a programme is either naive utopianism or genocidal. Both are reactionary. The Israeli Jewish nation is historically constituted. The Israeli Jews speak the same language, inhabit the same territory, have the same culture and sense of identity.

**25.** The Palestinian national movement has been sustained only because of the existence of and its relationship with the wider Arab nation. Solving the Israel-Palestine question requires a combined Arab and proletarian solution. Communism and nationalism are antithetical. Nevertheless we champion the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination. In the conditions of Israel/Palestine that means supporting the right of the Palestinians where they form a clear majority to form their own state. Such a state is only realistic with a working class-led Arab revolution.

**26.** Communists do not deny the right of the Israeli Jewish nation to self-determination on the basis of some half-baked or perverted reading of classic texts. The right to self-determination is not a Marxist blessing exclusively bestowed upon the oppressed. It is fundamentally a demand for equality. All nations must have the equal right to determine their own fate - as long as that does not involve the oppression of another people. Hence communists recognise that the US, German

and French nations have self-determination. Today that is generally unproblematic. However, we desire to see that same elementary right generalised to all peoples.

**27.** The immediate call for a single Palestinian state, within which the Jewish Israeli nationality is given citizenship and religious, but not national rights, is in present circumstances to perpetuate division. Israeli Jews will not accept such a solution - the whole of the 20th century since 1933 militates against that. There is moreover the distinct danger that the poles of oppression would be reversed if such a programme were ever to be put into practice. In all likelihood it would have to involve military conquest. The call for a single-state solution is therefore impractical - Israel is the strong nation - and, more than that, reactionary, anti-working class and profoundly anti-socialist. Liberation and socialism must come from below. It cannot be imposed from the outside.

**28.** A two-state solution effectively falls at the same hurdles. We cannot expect the Zionist state, as presently constituted, to concede the territory necessary to create a contiguous, viable Palestinian republic. Without a serious transformation in the regional, and indeed global, relation of forces, any such solution will inevitably leave in place the oppression of Palestinian and Israeli Arabs, and will thus be a mockery of democracy.

**29.** It is the job of communists to produce the change in regional and global conditions that will make a democratic solution possible. Whether this leaves present-day Israel/Palestine as two states, one state, a federal republic, etc will be dictated largely by the course of the Arab revolution. To this end, our immediate demands must be for: the complete withdrawal of Israel to its pre-1967 borders, an end to military interference in the West Bank and the perpetual siege of Gaza, and full democratic and civil rights for all Arabs in Israel.

**30.** Additionally, for a democratic settlement to be possible, Palestinians must have the right of return - this is a right of habitation decided upon individually, or by family group. It is not a demand for a folk movement of the entire diaspora - which now inhabits not just Jordan, Kuwait, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, etc, but the US and many countries in western Europe too. Communists demand substantial compensation for the Palestinian people as a whole from the state of Israel for the historic injustice that was perpetrated upon them.

**31.** Only through the process of Arab reunification can we expect the growth of an anti-Zionist 'enemy within' the Israeli-Jewish nation and the growth of trust and solidarity between the two peoples and their eventual merger.

**32.** Equally, the Zionist colonial project and the arbitrary divisions among Arabs are substantially propped up by global imperialism. It is incumbent upon communists in the imperialist countries to force the termination of all military aid to Israel ●

## TURKEY

# Wolf in liberal disguise

Esen Uslu looks at the situation following the AKP victory in the June 12 general election and the good showing for the leftwing BDP

As might have been expected, the much hyped June 12 general election failed to resolve any of the key questions facing Turkey - not least the perennial demand for Kurdish self-determination.

The decision by the supreme election council (YSK) to bar a newly elected Kurdish MP, Hatip Dicle of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), from taking up his seat symbolises the continuing impasse. Less than two weeks after the election, the YSK ruled that Dicle's election was invalid, since he had recently been convicted of "disseminating propaganda" for the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and he is still being held. Meanwhile, the flight of thousands of Syrian refugees into Turkey has not only exacerbated tensions between Ankara and Damascus - as troops from both sides have been mobilised near the border - but also highlighted the Kurdish question. Government officials have claimed that the PKK may be infiltrating its militants among the refugees.

## Winner and loser

June 12 resulted in a third successive election victory for the soft Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) - not to mention an impressive showing from the Kurdish freedom movement. The AKP's vote increased by around 3%, compared to the previous general election, and the party won nearly half the vote, although its parliamentary representation was actually reduced. This was due to several factors, including the higher number of representatives apportioned to the provinces to reflect the country's changed demographics - in Kurdistan the AKP lost seats, for instance.

Also, the undemocratic 10% threshold aimed at keeping smaller parties out of parliament this time worked against the AKP. Despite assuming an increasingly nationalist stance and parading a hangman's noose to win over a few percentage points from the fascist MHP (the infamous 'grey wolves' of the Nationalist Action Party), the AKP spectacularly failed to keep the MHP under the threshold - it picked up 13% of the vote and won 53 MPs. Had the ploy been successful, the AKP would have gained many more seats, but, in the event, its nationalist stance alienated possible Kurdish swing voters. Nevertheless, the AKP still has 326 out of the 550 seats - in 2007 elections it won 341.

Despite the fact that the AKP has a clear majority, these figures are important. Its principal aim during the next parliament is to amend the constitution imposed by the military junta in 1982 - or else replace it with a brand new one. But to do so outright requires a two-thirds majority (367 votes), whereas a constitutional amendment passed with between 330 and 367 votes in favour has to be put to a referendum.

So the AKP is in an invidious position: either it has to buy a few MPs to get enough votes to put its new constitution to an uncertain referendum, or it has to seek consensus with the other parties. And among them is the BDP, which made a strong showing in the election, but its MPs are threatening to boycott parliament unless Dicle is reinstated.

The BDP is the main component of the Labour, Freedom and Democracy bloc, supported by a number of small left parties and eminent individuals around the pillar of Kurdish freedom. Its candidates stood as independents



AKP's Tayyip Erdoğan: third term

in order to bypass the 10% threshold and won 36 seats after an impressive campaign (its share of the overall vote was 6.6%).

Initially the eligibility of all BDP candidates was questioned by the supreme electoral council, but following massive protest action they were allowed to stand. Both the protests and the campaign itself were the object of police violence. Demonstrations were banned, or attacked when illegal slogans, such as "Vote for the guerrillas!", were chanted.

The AKP's own electioneering gradually descended into howling anti-Kurd nationalism, with calls for the re-adoption of the death penalty, specifically so that the original death sentence imposed on jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan could now be carried out. However, the painstaking organisation of young Kurdish militants - and especially the steadfastness of the Kurdish women - triumphed against all odds.

The bloc ran well known figures of the Turkish left as candidates. In Istanbul Levent Tüzel, the former chair of the Party of Labour, and Sirri Süreyya Önder, an artist, orator and activist since the 70s, were elected; in Mersin on the south coast, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, the last leader of the Revolutionary Youth (Dev-Genç) organisation of 1960s and the only survivor of the notorious Kizildere massacre of March 1972, were also successful.

However, the bloc's main candidates were leading Kurdish activists, including six who have been remand prisoners for the last two years. One of them is Kemal Aktaş, who was elected as an MP for Van province. He was arrested following the 1980 coup, charged with treason and sentenced to death in a show trial of PKK militants. This was later commuted to life imprisonment and he spent 21 years in jail until his release in 2001. He then became active in

several legal Kurdish political parties - all closed down one after another. He has been a remand prisoner for the last two years awaiting trial for his role in the allegedly 'terrorist' Kurdish Communities Union (KCK). Eleven of the bloc's MPs are women - some of them the first ever elected in their provinces - and among them is Leyla Zana, who has spent 10 years in jail for her role in the struggle for Kurdish rights. Barred MP Hatip Dicle was himself re-elected despite being held in the KCK case.

The result of elections and the conciliatory tone adopted by prime minister Tayyip Erdoğan seemed to offer hope that the PKK's unilateral ceasefire, declared before the election, would be extended and negotiations with Öcalan might bear fruit. However, Turkish military operations have continued and three guerrillas were killed in a clash in Sivas province immediately after the elections.

## AKP 'achievement'

How was Erdoğan able to engineer the AKP's third electoral victory?

A large part of his popular support derives from the 'Ergenekon trials', where several serving and retired generals and admirals were charged with organising several attempted coups against the AKP government. This was seen as a valiant attempt by the AKP to rid Turkey of a junta-in-waiting. The plotters were clearly identified with the main opposition party, the 'social democratic' Republican People's Party (CHP) - three of these illustrious defendants were actually elected as MPs on the CHP list.

For seasoned observers, however, it is clear that the AKP government was not acting alone when it initiated the Ergenekon trials. They resulted from a coalition formed by the AKP with sections of the armed forces looking for a clean sweep - and, by the way, wanting an escalation of the war against the PKK. This all-or-nothing

policy was soon abandoned.

Another factor in the AKP's success is the improved state of the economy, especially compared to the pre-AKP period of chronic high inflation. Although the policies pursued were set out before the AKP government was formed, Erdoğan has closely followed the agenda of international finance capital: higher taxation, reduced public spending, reduced wages, privatisation and an attack on bureaucracy.

As a result Turkey has paid back the substantial loans it received from the International Monetary Fund in 2001, although the current account deficit has grown to record levels. Unionised labour has been severely undermined, while previously protected professionals, such as doctors, have been subjected to the rigours of a new health market. This has resulted in a reduction in waiting times and better health services.

The freed-up aviation market, with its low-cost airlines and cheaper fares, has increased air passenger traffic. The possibility of flying from one end of the country to the other in one and a half hours at affordable ticket prices instead of a 20-hour coach ride has created a new set of satisfied customers. There are also fast intercity train lines, and more efficient light rail systems in major cities. A rapid programme of building dual-carriageway highways, together with increased car ownership, have also produced improvements, not least for the middle classes.

In addition, increased transfer payments were used to create a patronage of AKP-run charities and municipal services aiding the poorest sections of the people, who have been skilfully manipulated. The same goes for shopkeepers and small businesses, who have benefited from financial support. Then there is the removal of visa requirements thanks to bilateral agreements with many countries in the region.

All these improvements in ordinary daily life were summed up in a single word during the election campaign: "achievement". Yes, much of it is circumstantial, rather than resulting from AKP magic, and it certainly cannot be sustained. A few years of crisis will surely take the shine out of the AKP's polish. However, for the present the plot is working.

## Liberal disguise

The conservative AKP wolf came in a rather ill-fitting liberal disguise. In fact economic liberalism has most definitely not been matched by political liberalism. The media have been put under immense pressure to toe the AKP line. The time-honoured attitude of appearing to deal with thorny issues while doing nothing tangible has been continued by the AKP in relation to the long-neglected problems, such as discrimination against non-Muslim minorities or the demands of Alevi-Bektashi-Kizilbash sections of the population. The arts have also been treated in an off-hand fashion - to the chagrin of the educated and chattering classes.

The same goes for international politics. The Cyprus question was put on freeze and forgotten. The vocal criticisms of blatantly aggressive Israeli actions were not followed up in deeds. The ascension to the European Union was also put on hold. The major pipeline projects announced with much fanfare came to nothing. Iran has continued to rebuff Turkish attempts to be a go-between so as to resolve its conflicts with imperialism. However, the recent changes in the Arab-speaking world have resulted in a few Turkish brownie points.

The AKP government has made use of the traditional prejudice that 'rich, infidel foreigners' are attempting to hold back the development of Turkey as a powerful nation. And the European Union-sponsored reforms which marked the first AKP government were gradually sidelined in the course of the second term. During the election campaign, the achievements of the military-industrial complex, such as the building of F-16 and F-35 aircraft, were paraded instead.

A new spate of ambitious projects for the third term was trumpeted, including two major satellite cities on either side of Istanbul and a shipping canal parallel to the Bosphorus. Almost every major city has its AKP 'crazy project'. Most probably there will not be sufficient finance to see many of them through, but a new construction boom without any regard to the environment, to be followed in the long run by an inevitable bust, is to be expected.

Meanwhile, the strong showing of the BDP and the willingness of Kurdish nationalists to cooperate with the Turkish left are good omens, but there is much to be done. In order not only to maintain the momentum of the election, but to go on to achieve its true potential, the bloc must be transformed into a political party, extending its message of democracy across the whole country.

In order to overcome voter apathy over Kurdish issues, a comprehensive democracy programme should be presented, and particular attention should be paid to the plight and demands of Alevis of central and eastern Anatolia, as well as Thrace.

During the election campaign there was not much chance to discuss these matters, so now is the time for the BDP to take up these vital issues ●

## AFGHANISTAN

# Imperialism cuts its losses

The 'longest running war in US history' is nearing its end. Eddie Ford looks at the wreckage

Carnage continues in Afghanistan, of course. On June 29 a Taliban suicide bomber team attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, killing at least 10 people. Afghan officials said a meeting of provincial governors taking place there might have been the target, though it is just as likely that the hotel was selected because the next day it was due to host a conference addressing the transition of civil and military responsibilities from the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) to the Afghan authorities. Unsurprisingly, the Taliban - albeit in their own distinctive way - wanted to make their presence, and increasing reach, felt: who rules the country? Isaf responded to this strike on such a high-profile target by claiming to have killed all the assailants in a five-hour battle involving the use of two helicopters.

The assault on the Intercontinental Hotel follows last week's suicide bomb attack on a medical clinic in the east of the country, killing 35 people and injuring more than 50. The victims, mostly women and children, included patients, visitors and medical staff. The Taliban denied responsibility for the attack; indeed, denounced it - and there is no special reason to disbelieve them. On the same day another blast, this time caused by explosives rigged up to a bicycle, ripped through a bazaar in the Kunduz province, killing at least 10 people and wounding 24. So far, no-one has claimed responsibility for that attack either. So take your pick, as the list of potential attackers is very long - cynical freelancer, criminal gang, rival Islamist group, local warlord, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence, Iranian agents, etc.

Last year saw more than 2,700 civilians killed - a 15% increase on 2009, according to UN-compiled figures. Three-quarters were caused by "insurgents" - mainly a euphemism for the Taliban - and most of those deaths were the result of suicide bombings and roadside 'improvised explosive devices', or IEDs. According to the UN, May 2011 was the deadliest month for civilians since it began systematically recording such fatalities in 2007 - with June and July, unfortunately, looking set to break new records.

The upsurge in violence from the Taliban is partly attributable to the killing on May 2 of Osama bin Laden, which coincides with their traditional 'spring offensive'. However, the main reason is more basic - imperialism is pulling out of Afghanistan and the Taliban, like the rest of the world, know it. Therefore time to start seriously flexing muscles. Not without reason the Taliban feel that their time has come again - the organisation's writ holds sway in large parts of the south and even the prize of Kabul glitters once more. All that is required is time and patience, of which the Taliban have plenty.

Unlike US imperialism, needless to say - which to date has suffered 1,600 fatalities and has a presidential election looming. Plus the small matter that the Afghan war is costing \$120 billion a year to fight. So we had the June 22 announcement in a prime-time speech by Barack Obama that 10,000 US troops would withdraw from Afghanistan this year and another 23,000 by the end of September 2012 (a few weeks before he is due for re-election) out of a total of 100,000 US troops deployed in the country. This would mark the "beginning of the end" for the longest running war in



After the US who next?

US history, he stated. The remaining troops are "scheduled" to leave by 2014, provided that Afghan forces are "ready" to take over the 'security' of the country - a very big proviso, to put it mildly.

But, details aside, the direction is clear - US imperialism wants to get the hell out of Afghanistan, preferably not clutching to the skids of helicopters. And, of course, where the US leads, the UK follows - being the second largest contributor to Nato's Afghanistan operation, with more than 10,000 troops (not to mention the 500 or so 'special forces'). Hence David Cameron duly "welcomed" Obama's statement and pledged to pull back British forces by 2015 - even earlier "where conditions on the ground allow".

### End game

Obviously, Obama's June 22 speech hardly came as a bolt from the blue. He had openly declared that July 2011 would see the start of a "disengagement" from Afghanistan when he first unveiled the "surge" strategy in December 2009 - though the suspicion at the time was that Obama had in fact been boxed into a corner by general Stanley McChrystal's leaking of the need for additional troops, dubbed by the *New York Magazine* as the "McChrystal risk".<sup>1</sup> Regardless of that, Obama's strategy has ended in predictable and bloody failure. Surging to nowhere. However, Obama never said in 2009 how fast or extensive that troop withdrawal would be. Now we know: end game. None of which prevented an editorial in *The Nation*, a Lahore-based English language daily newspaper, from excoriating Obama's withdrawal proposals as "just a misnomer" and a "clever attempt at sophistry" - which "does not give much of a solace to the beleaguered Pakistanis who have been the victim of persistent militant backlash of the war on terror".<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably, Obama's announcement

has opened up the tensions - and divisions - between the 'hawks' and the 'doves' in the US political establishment. Not that the split falls into neat Republican-Democrat party lines. For example, last month a large number of House Democrats joined with a handful of Republicans to establish a definite "timetable" for full withdrawal - but they lost on a close 215-204 vote. This grouping, which has been growing in strength, is not likely to be appeased by Obama's announcement. A fact indicated by the remarks of the Democratic leader in the House and former speaker, Nancy Pelosi, who offered the view that it is the "hope of many in Congress and across the country" that the complete removal of all US forces from Afghanistan "would happen sooner than the president laid out".

On the other hand, hawkish opinion is vexed by the thought that Obama is wimping out - the goddamned liberals are selling out the military again, even if they are not quite stabbing us in the back this time (yet). So John McCain, the former Republican nominee for the 2008 presidential elections (who, disastrously for him, got saddled with the screwball Sarah Palin as his running mate), and Lindsey Olin Graham quickly complained that Obama's plan "poses an unnecessary risk to the hard-won gains that our troops have made thus far in Afghanistan". They also moaned, again, that Obama had ignored the advice of the top US commander in Afghanistan, general David Petraeus - who had urged only "modest" withdrawals, especially as there had been no noticeable "dividend" from the death of bin Laden. Instead, he and other senior military figures in Nato had urged Obama to keep in place the "bulk" of the extra 30,000 troops he committed as part of the "surge" until the end of 2012 - with a phased "drawdown" beginning in

2013. This would give, they argued, the military another full "fighting season" to attack Taliban strongholds and further "target" insurgent leaders.

Either way though, the Republicans are likely to enter the presidential primaries with at least three different positions on Afghanistan. Former Utah governor Jon Huntsman has gone on record to say that Obama's withdrawal is "too slow". But, alternatively, Tim Pawlenty, the former Minnesota governor, has called for a "slower" withdrawal. Meanwhile, the former Massachusetts governor, Mitt Romney, has adopted a sort of 'halfway house' stance - asserting that the US government should not "adhere to an arbitrary timetable" on troop withdrawal. Neither slower nor faster? Not that the Democrats exactly present a shiny picture of unity on the question. Rather, the US ruling class is riven with unease over its role in Afghanistan and elsewhere, a reflection of the general decline - and malaise - of US imperialism itself.

### Nation-building?

Bluntly, imperialism is once more cutting its losses in Afghanistan - and what will be left behind? One thing is guaranteed: it will not be a stable or 'democratic' government - a fantasy equal to the notion that the "surge" against the Taliban was a "success". Quite self-evidently, to begin with the US/UK-led invasion never had anything to do with promoting democracy or stable government. Let alone, as some on the left stupidly insist, a grab for resources like minerals and oil pipeline projects - as if imperialism looked at Afghanistan and then rubbed its hands thinking of the opportunities it provided to make a buck.

No, imperialism got involved in Afghanistan because it had become a nuisance - not least by having bin

Laden as an honoured 'guest' and letting him use the country as a base for military operations - crucially, of course, the September 11 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC. For that the Taliban government had to be removed in the name of the 'war on terror'. Of course, this foreign adventure was the product of the Bush administration's imperial hubris, which genuinely believed that the US military could just march into any country it liked and then mount a dignified - if not noble - withdrawal at the moment of their own pleasing. Defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld promised a swift militarily victory ... and got one. However, the few thousand US and other troops could not impose and kind of order. Indeed warlordism, banditry and opium production were "given a new lease of life". Moreover, the Taliban, who shifted the centre of their operation to Pakistan, were soon back in control of the southern half of the country.

In this way, inexorably - and against its own inclinations - US imperialism found itself engaged in an obscenely costly nation-building exercise in Afghanistan; but one which it could never bring to fruition because of the country's extreme economic backwardness, ethnic diversity and the return of the Taliban. In the process it got stuck with a former protégé devoid of political or moral legitimacy, Hamid Karzai - who in the 2009 presidential elections, with almost farcical incompetence, was unable to secure the 50% of the vote needed to declare himself an outright winner despite having engaged in systematic electoral fraud. Yet under both Bush and Obama US imperialism just dug in, disregarding the obvious hopelessness of the situation, on the near primal basis that to pull out would invite humiliation - and, it was said, encourage other regimes (such as China or India) to aggressively push forward their own geopolitical standing and interests in the region. But now, finally, Afghanistan is just not worth the candle any more - mission over.

As always, it is the Afghan masses who end up the victims - pulverised between the competing, wretched players in the 'great game' that has dismembered and impoverished that country for some two centuries. Now, of course, the Taliban and their allies are vying to become the dominant power in Afghanistan again - with elements within the Inter-Services Intelligence viewing them as an extension of Pakistan: a valuable tool in the endless regional power struggles with India.

By a final twist of irony, though hardly unforeseen, the US occupation of Afghanistan has done nothing but add to the further potential disintegration of Pakistan - an extraordinarily unstable (and artificial) country with a very large population and armed with nuclear weapons. The 'Talibanisation' of Pakistan, or even an Islamist takeover of the entire state, would make the Afghan nightmare almost dwarf into insignificance by comparison, and not just for US imperialism. Such a counterrevolutionary outcome would represent a potentially deadly setback for the workers' movement in Pakistan and the region as a whole ●

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### Notes

1. *New York Magazine* April 18.
2. *The Nation* June 24.

## THE LEFT

# Real attempt to learn the lessons

The 'Towards a New International Tendency' statement marks a step forward, notes **James Turley**

The International Marxist Tendency - which in 1992 split from the Militant Tendency and its Committee for a Workers' International over the issue of whether to continue entry work in the Labour Party and other mass social democratic organisations - has run into its own organisational difficulties of late.

The IMT existed from its inception under the primary leadership of Militant founder Ted Grant and his lieutenant, Alan Woods, and then the latter after Grant's death in 2006. In rapid succession, the IMT lost a thousand-strong faction in Pakistan, and the majorities of flagship sections in Spain and Venezuela, along with minorities throughout their Latin American sections.

A sad tale, then, but business as usual for the post-war left so far. What is more interesting is that some of the resulting fragments have begun to re-examine seriously the political basis for this calamity. One such grouping has taken the name, Towards a New International Tendency (Tanit), which seems to have come together from the 'collateral damage' of the recent convulsions - individuals and groups whose tangential relationship to the major splits resulted in expulsions or resignations.

The Tanit website (<http://tanit.co>) lists comrades in a great number of countries, although most of these will be individuals or handfuls at best (the only IMT group I know of to go over wholly to Tanit is the Iranian section, whose comrades were alienated by Woods's vacillations over the 2009 protests after Chávez came out for Ahmadinejad). A statement of the group's basic orientation, by comrade Pat Byrne, is currently in circulation (although not apparently on the internet), and it avoids a salutary number of the usual pitfalls of such 'declarations of independence'.

## Tanit's view

Firstly, comrade Byrne notes that the name adopted is "temporary" for a reason: "no firm decisions have yet been taken on what programme Tanit should have and how it will be organised. This is not accidental or to be regretted. In contrast to most international socialist left organisations, we have no desire to rush into creating yet another narrow and marginalised group." He owns up to the group's roots in the IMT, and notes that "the problems of sectarianism and bureaucratic centralism in the IMT were not unique. In essence, they were present in almost every other socialist organisation." Quite so.

There then follows a short summary of the world situation - the economic crisis has undermined the basis for neoliberal ideology and indeed shaken confidence in capitalism itself. Shoring up these ideological defences is a task made immeasurably more difficult by the explosion in global communications represented by the internet in particular; yet "every opinion poll demonstrates the growing discontent and pessimism of the vast majority of the world's population. They are looking for answers but they can't find them. Why is this?"



**Bureaucratic centralism: self-perpetuating**

Byrne's answer is the "legacy of the left": where, a hundred years ago, we could promise a democratic, rational society, an end to despots, the chaos of the market and war, the intervening century of defeat has left socialists in a bad way. We "have either abandoned [our] aim of transforming society, or are reduced to small, isolated bands of the faithful".

The first part of his response to this issue is to try to break the classical Marxist taboo on mapping out some details of the socialist future. This is treading on thin ice, but Byrne nevertheless makes some useful criticisms of the traditional emphasis on public ownership (most marked in the Militant tradition) without substantial comment on the problem of bureaucracy; and also on the limits of 'workers' control' as a corrective to this.

He also provides a section on "real democracy", which makes the point that 'democracy' under capitalism is in fact subject to considerable levels of bribery and suppression of genuine political debate. Most concretely, he calls for a radical change in the media, which must be "transparent and accountable to democratically agreed standards and institutions". Democracy should be about giving the masses "direct control over every aspect of their lives".

Byrne moves on to criticise the ills of revolutionary hero worship and related errors; the bottom line is to involve as many comrades as possible in theory and research, and "bridge the divide that now exists between progressive intellectuals and political activists".

By far the longest part of his document is focused, unsurprisingly for an ex-IMT grouping, on "work in the mass organisations". For Byrne, such work is necessary because real organic links persist between the class and its mass organisations, and to ignore the latter is in practice to abandon the former.

This is an understandable error, given the rightward drift of social democracy and the unions; nevertheless, "we believe that the intervention of conscious socialists can make a decisive difference. All wings of the mass movement need rebuilding and renewing on the basis of unity, democracy and struggle. Central to this, the labour movement needs to revive its historic mission

to end capitalism and achieve the democratic socialist transformation of society. This mission cannot be just in words, but must become an integral part of its day-to-day thinking and practice."

Byrne does criticise entrism; however, his critique is limited to the narrow definition of entrism as a clandestine 'recruitment raid', and does not take into account the 'entrism *sui generis*' formulated by Pablo with regard to the communist parties, and taken up in substance by Grant for his Labour Party entry project. However, he does disavow secret organisation on more positive grounds, too: after all, this is *our* movement: "We have no need of any secret organisation. We claim the right to be an open campaigning group within the labour movement. No more and no less."

Finally, he argues for a change in the organisational practices of the left, emphasising freedom of debate and exchange of ideas. Unity in action is important, but not at the expense of debate. For Byrne, this means replacing the term 'democratic centralism' with 'democratic unity'; we disagree here, but there is no point quibbling over wording.

## Advances and problems

There is much in this short piece that is encouraging. That the comrades do not appear to have set out to turn themselves directly into the 700th embryonic Fourth International is an important break from typical Trotskyist self-aggrandisement in itself; while the material on the socialist future is generally vague, it at least takes seriously the question of democracy, although clearly much more work needs to be done here.

The material on mass organisations and entrism is partly a restatement of old-fashioned Grantism, and is the point at which Tanit's roots are most obvious. Yet even here the comrades break in important ways. They assert their right to participate in the Labour movement and decry the lack of democracy characteristic of mass workers' organisations today. They also declare themselves prepared to cooperate with all those willing to participate in the building of a force for 'democratic socialism', which is certainly an enormous advance on the rigorous sectarianism of Militant, for

whom other left groups seemingly just did not exist.

That said, there are important ambiguities. Byrne makes too much of the advent of the internet and mass communications. These have their limitations, too: web traffic is no less reliant on 'gatekeepers' than the rest of the media, and building trust in *our* media - be it online or printed material - means gaining serious penetration into the movement, such that we are respected as a force within it, rather than relying on technical fixes.

The attempts to put together a vision of the future do not collapse into utopianism, but there is a confusion in the background here on the matter of programme. It is certainly necessary for Marxists to be *very* detailed about the regime with which we want to replace capitalism: that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the *means* by which capitalism can be finally overcome.

This is not the end point, however - the anti-utopian taboo is about setting up a grand vision of the end goal - communist society. It is good, as he says, to "imagine" authentic democratic control over all our lives, but that both requires much more detail in terms of the state and democratic forms necessary for the workers to rule, and acknowledgement that such forms are transitional to something we cannot yet map out except in the broadest terms.

On the question of the mass organisations, it must be noted that if - in Britain - Tanit comrades gather serious strength and insistently proclaim themselves a legitimate platform in the Labour Party, they will find the iron heel of the bureaucracy coming down on them. The long-term tendency of Marxist entry groups (broadly defined as groups wholly immersed in Labour work) is for them to become programmatically accommodated to social democracy; this is not just a subjective degeneration, but a bad response to the need to evade bureaucratic domination.

Work in the mass organisations is critically important; and, indeed, the perspective of raiding for recruits is simply obsolete in the current conditions of severe relative weakness of the revolutionary left, and probably counterproductive anyway.

Yet that leaves us a tricky path to pick out - on one side, there is the danger of the liquidation of any independent Marxist profile, and on the other there is a naive tactical purism unsuited to what amounts to a long-term 'war of position' against the bureaucracy and capitalist right in the labour movement. To put it bluntly, sometimes Marxists in the Labour Party will have to *lie*, but in such a way that the substance of our politics comes before a wider audience, as must our argument for democracy in the movement. That means organised fraction work rather than total immersion, which results only in the Hobson's choice outlined above.

## Party regime

As for the internal democracy of the revolutionary left itself, Tanit's emphasis on mutual research and

democratic debate is salutary. Comrade Byrne, however, is guilty of sins of omission, and one potentially dangerous red herring. The omissions: there is no suggestion that minorities should be allowed to express their opinions - not just before the membership, but also the wider movement and the class. There is no problem with engaging wider layers in 'internal discussions'; in fact, this is merely an acknowledgement of our wider participation in the movement.

Secondly, in criticising the leadership of the left, no mention is made of the fact that an elected and accountable leadership is necessary to carry out the will of the membership between conferences and congresses. Accountability is key here; leaders should be recallable. Without a leadership, however, bureaucratic degeneration is paradoxically more likely; in practice you end up with each arm of the division of labour using its own particular turf as a staging post for factional warfare. Pity the poor fool who takes up cudgels against the webmaster in such a scenario ...

The red herring is the intention to produce a 'code of conduct' in order to keep debate comradely. Given the tongue-lashings the various comrades are likely to have suffered at the hands of Woods and his cronies, it is quite understandable that they should seek to keep discussions to matters of substance. In practice, however, *someone* has to enforce any 'code of conduct' - and that someone is going to be a leadership body or full-timer. The potential for bureaucratic abuse is a far more serious danger than the potential for personal abuse. The fate of the Unison four - Socialist Party comrades suspended from Unison on trumped-up accusations of racism - is a clear example of where this can lead.

In any case, our movement is faced with a seriously damaged society, in which slander and bad faith are endemic. It is better that poisonous elements should vent their spleen openly, so we can see them for what they are, than it should manifest as passive-aggressive backbiting. Byrne is right to criticise the bureaucratic turn of the Comintern in the early 1920s, but he should also note that in earlier times, where the Bolsheviks operated more democratically, extremely fierce polemics were common. It was not necessary for everyone to be 'nice' to each other for serious and substantial debate to take place - indeed, hard lines clarify as often as they obscure. The venomous war of words between Lenin and Trotsky did not stop the two giants coming together at the crucial moment to make a revolution.

I have spent much of this article criticising many of Byrne's conclusions. Yet it should again be stated that his view represents a real attempt to learn the lessons of the fate of the IMT and the revolutionary left more generally. A serious Marxist pole of attraction in society has never been more necessary, and thus the abiding sectarian culture of the left has never been more dangerous. As such, for all our reservations, we welcome this contribution and hope to continue these discussions ●

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REVIEW

# Pace, race and resistance

Stevan Riley (director), *Fire in Babylon*, 2011, DVD, £12.99

Those who labour under the illusion that cricket is the dull and dreary preserve of the British establishment, that the gentle thwack of willow on leather should hold no interest for the workers' movement and should be confined to the fields of Britain's public schools, would do well to watch at least the opening scenes of *Fire in Babylon*.

Intimidatingly built young men from different Caribbean islands replicate the run-up of a fast bowler, with the film then cutting back to archive footage of some of the greats of the late 1970s and 80s, the *belle époque* of West Indian cricket. This footage depicts the fastest 'bouncers' - short-pitched, fast-paced deliveries, which rise up at the batsman's ribs/throat/face - in a frenzy of broken jaws, cracked ribs, bruised torsos and dislodged helmets. The game can be brutal and captivating in equal measure - a world away from the soporific shelter of the exclusive MCC box at Lord's. As any trip to the slums of Mumbai or the shanty towns of Bangladesh will show, cricket is a sport that can capture the hearts and minds of millions.

*Fire in Babylon* is the story of how, under the shrewd captaincy of Clive Lloyd, a great West Indian cricket team stood up against the best in the world to do precisely this: to captivate and inspire millions across the globe, from Guyana to Melbourne to Dacca.

The team's legacy lies not merely in the fact that it rose to become the best in the world within a matter of years, nor that its development of breakneck speed bowling revolutionised the game. The team also became a symbol of black self-assertion, confidence and identity for those who had been stripped of this identity by colonialism. The team sought to create a 'level playing field' in a world still marred by the basest racial prejudices and inequality. And then it proceeded to bombard that playing field with lightning-bolt deliveries which few could cope with.

In the words of Bunny Wailer (of Bob Marley and the Wailers fame), cricket in the West Indies belongs to "daily life" and is deeply rooted in the "spirit" of the islands. The film portrays the roots of the game by capturing local musicians - young and old - rapping, singing and telling stories about the great cricketers names which every young person growing up on the islands would have known: Garfield Sobers, Frank Worrell and so on. Cricket and social life are inseparable.

It is no accident, then, that one of the greatest works on cricket was written by the Trinidadian Marxist, CLR James (*Beyond a boundary*). As James harrowingly depicts, the game blossomed within the struggle against colonial oppression. He writes of black slaves working on plantations who, in a desperate attempt to escape their bondage through cricket, would wait for the ball to be hit out of the cricket ground and throw it back as hard as possible, hoping to be accepted into the team of their rulers. To the colonial masters living out their lives in the sun, cricket was seen as a way of imparting 'British values' and 'decency'. Indeed, it was not until the 1960s that the West Indies team had a black captain, thanks in part to the outraged CLR James.

For Clive Lloyd's team, young and keen to prove itself on the world stage, cricket became a way of turning these attitudes on their head, standing up in solidarity and resistance against



Viv Richards: influenced by black power

continued racial oppression and injustice.

In order to do this, the team had to stick together in the fight against 'Babylon', an enemy which took on multifarious forms and guises both at home and abroad. 'Babylon', as Bunny Wailer explains, is not a "place", but a "process", and it includes the West Indies Cricket Board that paid them a pittance and then banned them for playing in the well-paid World Series Cricket; the racial oppression of a South African government that tried to lure them into touring as 'honorary whites' (!); the British gutter press which decried the West Indian 'terrorists' and spoke of 'bouncers and bongos'. Although relatively short, this film portrays a long and arduous struggle; from the lows of humiliation at the hands of Australian fast bowlers Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson in 1975, to the highs of subsequent international success.

It was this drubbing in Australia in 1975 which sparked a rethink of the West Indian approach formerly dubbed 'calypso cricket'. While 'calypso' has connotations of fun, entertainment and beauty, the term epitomised a colonial attitude towards the benighted team. It portrayed them as cricketers also-rans who were keen to please the crowd, knew their place and lost with a smile on their faces.

Seeing the devastation caused by the ability of Lillee and Thomson to bowl at over 90 miles per hour, Clive Lloyd travelled around the West Indies searching for bowlers who could do the same. Michael Holding, whose dulcet tones will be familiar to any cricket fan from his television commentary, was one of the four 90mph bowlers dubbed 'the four horses of the apocalypse' who terrified batsmen into submission with deliveries that whizzed past their ears.

When in 1979 the West Indies went to Australia, the number one side in the world, they returned what 'Lillee and Thommo' had dished out ... with interest. Here were the beginnings of a new era, in which West Indian cricket became a beacon of hope against racism throughout the world - whether in the stands of an aggressive Melbourne crowd ("Lillee, Lillee, Lillee - kill, kill, kill!") or on tour in England, where many West Indians had settled to work and would flock to the grounds to watch their heroes. Cricket was equality, competition was respect. Winning was dignity.

Not that this unprecedented success was unreservedly welcomed by the British cricketing establishment. On the contrary, there were jealous and defensive calls to ban bouncers, to make the pitches slower or to limit bowlers' run-ups. The objectors had short memories: it was the English team that invented 'bodyline' - fast deliveries aimed not at the wicket, but at the batsman's torso - during the 1932-33 tour of Australia. This intimidatory tactic saw England coast to a clear victory against the pre-series favourites.

Against the backdrop of the West Indies tours to England, the film nicely pieces together clips of several people decrying the number of "immigrants" in the country and moaning about how there were not enough houses to go around. Not much change there. But the cricketing team became a rallying point for Caribbean migrants, who flocked to the games to celebrate their team's success - in particular what will forever be remembered as the 'blackwash': the 1984 5-0 hammering of the English on their own soil.

The interviews with some of the cricketing greats are occasionally heart-rending, at times heart-warming and often simply hilarious. For

example, Joel Garner - the sight of his 6'8" frame alone would turn most batsmen's legs to jelly - recalls how he once asked his fellow bowler, Colin Croft, what he would do if he had to bowl against his own mother. "Then my mother is the target," quipped Croft.

The character that dominates the film is Vivian Richards, the 'master blaster'. As a remarkably aggressive batsman and Clive Lloyd's successor as captain, Richards was one of the figures most influenced by the philosophy of black power. When, unlike Croft and others, he refused to tour South Africa and thus turned down a 'blank cheque', his stance inspired many across the world. He recalls how he then incarcerated Nelson Mandela conveyed his personal thanks via bishop Desmond Tutu, and how he became a hero back home, whereas many who went on the rebel tour were cast out from Caribbean society.

Protected only by his cap and his wristband with the African colours of green, yellow and red (he never wore a helmet), Richards would swagger out to the middle as though he was strolling into his kitchen to put the kettle on, not facing bowling that could knock his head off. "But inside," he says, "inside you were focussed." He felt the pain of oppressed black people worldwide, and had a point to prove.

Viv has always been a bit of a hero for me, and this sentiment was only reinforced by this film. While the film did not explore just what Viv now thought of those like Mandela, today's poster boys of imperialism ("the struggle goes on", he declares), it would be misplaced to criticise the film on this score. It is a film about how remarkable sporting performances can challenge seemingly immutable views and beliefs.

A childhood memory I will never lose is of a close member of my family, one who may even have made the odd racist remark, running into the room elated, a copy of *The Sun* in his hand: "Viv Richards is coming to Glamorgan! Viv fucking Richards is going to play for Glamorgan!" If that is not an indication of the *universality* of sport, of the fact that the achievements of such a figure can inspire so many, then I do not know what is. Viv's decimation of opposing county bowlers did much to challenge certain forms of racial narrow-mindedness in south Wales.

Cricket enthusiasts and sports fans will probably get the most out of this film - especially those a little older than me who remember those summer days spent watching these inspiring men. Yet the pervading spirit of freedom, equality and dignity which leaps out from every frame extends well beyond the boundaries of the cricket pitch. Stevan Riley's film allows even a newcomer to cricket to understand both the game and the politics. As such, even those who cannot tell their googlies from their flippers or their leg slips from their deep gullies will draw inspiration from a film destined to be enjoyed by people far beyond cricketing circles ●

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**Solidarity cricket**  
The third annual solidarity cricket match between Hands Off the People of Iran and the Labour Representation Committee will take place on Sunday September 11 in east London. Money raised will go to Workers' Fund Iran. For more information, email info@hopoi.org.

## DEBATE

# Divided by a common language?

The Frankfurt school methodology employed by Platypus is worse than useless, argues **Mike Macnair**

The US Platypus grouping aims, as its comrades have told us before, to “host the conversation” about the past and future of the left (in the group’s own terms, about the left’s non-existence and necessity).

Conversation, however, requires mutual comprehension, or - to put it another way - some degree of common ground. If I address you in Latin and you reply in Japanese, but neither of us understands the other language, we are attempting to interact, but it would be bizarre to call this attempt a “conversation”.

We may, for that matter, be ‘divided by a common language’ (as is commonly said of Britain and the US). For a simple example, the ‘No solicitors’ sign not uncommonly found on building entrances in the US bans door-to-door sellers, not lawyers. If we use the same words for different entities or processes, we will talk at cross-purposes.

I raise this issue because comrade Cutrone’s response to my criticisms concludes by attempting to explain specialised senses in which he uses the terms ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘imperialism’.<sup>1</sup> In both cases the senses he uses are, in my opinion, unhelpful.

The underlying problem is to find common ground from which conversation is possible. I have argued before that there is negligible chance of the left finding such common ground on the basis of seeking philosophical agreement.<sup>2</sup> This problem is more acute in relation to Platypus, precisely because the Hegelian commitments make the philosophical argument more ‘closed’ to ideas and information from its outside than more conventional forms of Hegelian Marxism.

For this reason, I am not going to engage directly with comrade Cutrone’s epistemological claims about the so-called “Kantian revolution in philosophy” (which in my opinion is merely a part of the process of transition from enlightenment to counter-enlightenment thought), except very briefly at the end of this article. In addition, to elaborate on the politics of epistemology and theoretical method from Locke and Spinoza to the present would take too long and too much space for now.

In my May 19 article, “Theoretical dead end”, I attempted to find this common ground necessary to any conversation: in the project of general human emancipation. This is a project which - as an aim - we in CPGB, and the whole global self-identified Marxist left, share with Platypus.

Indeed, in a certain sense the common ground goes further. The self-identified ‘anti-imperialist left’ advocates *de facto* alliance of the left with ‘resistance’ to the US even if it is clericalist (the Iranian regime) or Stalinoid shading into hereditary monarchy (the Gaddafi family-led Jamahiriya in Libya, the Assad family-led form of Ba’athism in Syria). The self-identified ‘anti-fascist left’ (Eustonites, Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and so on) advocates *de facto* alliance with the ‘western democracies’ against the clericalist and Stalinoid-monarchist regimes and movements. Platypus comrades say that both sides have abandoned the project of general human emancipation (though their fire has, at least until recently, been most heavily concentrated against the ‘anti-imperialist left’). CPGB comrades, I think, agree that both the ‘anti-imperialist left’ and ‘anti-fascist left’ represent political dead-ends. Here

is, in principle, a degree of common ground which could represent a starting point for a conversation.

For it to be a possible starting point does, however, require us to be speaking broadly the same language. And from comrade Cutrone’s June 9 article it seems that we are speaking different theoretical languages.

## Imperialism

On imperialism, it is regrettably necessary to trace through the shifts in the arguments. In my May 19 article I used ‘imperialism’ in the way it has been used conventionally on the left since - at the latest - World War I: to mean the systematic subordination of some nations to others, connected with economic superexploitation. I argued, first, that as a matter of politics the project of general human emancipation required upfront public opposition to this systematic subordination and not *only* to domestic forms of subordination.

Secondly, I made the point that the Hegelian Marxist explanation of the ‘crisis of Marxism’ was *opposed to* the explanation of reformism in terms of the effects of imperialism - in the sense of the ability of states to redistribute economic gains from the subordination of other countries - offered by an important part of the ‘Second International left’: Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin and Gorter, among others. I suggested that Bukharin’s version at least had more *explanatory power in relation to the concrete history* than Lukácsian or other Hegelian Marxist accounts of the ‘crisis of Marxism’.

In his May 26 letter comrade Cutrone responded to this aspect of my argument (1) that “Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky found that the ‘imperialist’ phase of ‘monopoly capital’ and the changing ‘organic composition of capital’ (at a global scale) by the turn of the 20th century had been the product of the successes of the workers’ movement in the core capitalist countries” and (2) that “what the Second International radicals meant by ‘imperialism’ was inter-imperialism, not core-periphery relations. The emphasis on the latter was the hallmark of the post-World War II new left and its derangement on the problem of global capital in history.”

My June 2 reply was largely addressed to issues of *historical method*, which engage the epistemological question, and why these should matter to the political left.<sup>3</sup> I responded to the specific points on imperialism with the observations as to point (2) that, though this is a commonplace in the historiography, it cannot survive confrontation with the primary sources; and, as to point (1), that “I would be very interested to see real evidence for this proposition as a claim about what Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky wrote - as opposed to what they *might* have written.” I went on further to argue that the symptoms of imperialism go back to the beginnings of capitalist class rule, and to ask the question: (3) “So what is *new* after the 1870s?”

Comrade Cutrone’s June 9 article does not reply to any of these points. Instead, he steps sideways to a different argument. I will, therefore, take him as *conceding* (1) that there is no evidence in the writings of Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky for his reading of their views on imperialism; and (2) that I am correct that the ‘Second International radicals’ were concerned with core-periphery relations, not just with ‘inter-imperialism’.



Let's talk

I do not take him as conceding the third point, since, though he has not attempted to answer it, his new point attempts to reassert the idea of ‘imperialism’ as a response to the rise of the workers’ movement in a different way.

Comrade Cutrone’s new point is that:

“[T]he ‘mass’ proletarianisation of the core capitalist countries was the result, as Marx discussed in *Capital* Vol 1 on ‘the working day’, of politically variable social conditions of wage labour that, with increased worker empowerment, cause a shift from variable to constant capital, or from labour-time-intensive sweatshop to automated machine production, requiring ever less labour input and resulting in ever greater value-crises.

“This, in turn, affected the conditions of colonialism. Whereas colonies in the classical bourgeois era of the emergence of modern capital were sites of market expansion, in the late era of ‘imperialism’ or ‘monopoly capital’, colonies become raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry. The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a ‘reserve army of unemployed’, but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics.”

This side-step *dodges* both the political issue of the attitude of Marxists to the subordination of some nations to others, and the issue of the relative explanatory power of Hegelian Marxist accounts and of the theory of imperialism in relation to the ‘crisis of Marxism’ around 1900. It does so by shifting the issue into that of ‘authoritarianism’ - to which it will be necessary to return separately later.

The argument is independently false, for two reasons. The first concerns the shift from variable to constant capital. If this were *primarily* a response to the rise of the workers’ movement, we would expect to see it *first* emerging as the workers’ movement is strengthened and begins to make an impact on wages and the length of the working day. But in fact new, labour-saving technology involving a relative increase in constant capital already began to develop under conditions of wholly unfree labour in the sugar-cane industry, and of semi-free labour in

cotton mills - to a considerable extent worked by the forced ‘apprenticeship’ of unemployed youth under the old Poor Law.<sup>4</sup>

Equally, we would expect to see old labour-intensive technology exported to the periphery, where labour is *prima facie* cheaper; but in fact, though this does happen, we also see new *capital-intensive* technology exported to the periphery (for example, railways in the 19th century).

Why? The answer has two aspects. The first is that the working day is not only subject to social limits, but also to a physical maximum; and the wage is also subject to a physical minimum of subsistence goods. Suppose capital succeeds in driving wages down to this minimum and hours up to this maximum, it will *still* be the case that improving the productivity of labour will lead to an increase in relative surplus value.

The second is that capitals are, in fact, in competition with one another, and the first capital to introduce technology which improves labour productivity will therefore gain not only improved relative surplus value, but also an improved share of total profits relative to other capitals. Hence each individual capital has an interest in introducing labour-saving technology even if absolute surplus value is already maximised.

Secondly, the early modern ‘periphery’ was *already* “raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry” in the sugar-cane colonies feeding the late medieval Venetian sugar end-processing industry, and a *fortiori* in the eastern European ‘second serfdom’, which fed raw materials to the Dutch republic and England.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, however, there is no conflict at all between the colonies being “sites of market expansion” and “raw material resource-extraction zones”. Leave aside the market for capital goods in transportation and first-stage processing: if a formerly peasant and artisan population is forced into wage-labour (or even merely into putting out production), domestic production of basic goods will be reduced and a secondary market will be created for food, clothes, etc.

## Authoritarianism

This point can be briefer. I said in my June 2 article that ‘authoritarianism’

can have more than one meaning, and asked which comrade Cutrone was using. I pointed out that unless a Bakuninist or libertarian/liberal sense is being used, the late 19th-early 20th century workers’ movement cannot be described as ‘authoritarian’ without violent distortion.

Comrade Cutrone responds that he is using Adorno’s co-authored *The authoritarian personality* (1950) and Wilhelm Reich’s *The mass psychology of fascism* (1933; translated 1946); in particular, he paraphrases Reich as arguing that “Fascism expressed the workers’ ‘fear of freedom’, which Marxism, in its false rationalism of ‘economic interest’, had failed to overcome.”

This response, however, does not in the least answer my question about what comrade Cutrone means by ‘authoritarianism’ as a *political phenomenon*: is ‘authoritarianism’ to mean a politics which denies the legitimacy of political dissent and the possibility of the accountability of authorities to those below? Or a politics which admits any sort of authority or binding collective decisions at all? Or any politics in which decisions for the common good are capable of binding ‘free individuals’, meaning property owners?

In fact, it involves him in further difficulties. Following the Frankfurt school, he claims that “Fascism expressed the workers’ ‘fear of freedom’”, and, quoted above, that “The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a ‘reserve army of unemployed’, but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics.”

But these claims suppose that the workers actually voted for the fascists - and that they did so because the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) had already habituated them to ‘authoritarianism’ (whatever that is to mean). The reality is very different. The Nazis did pick up working class voters and supporters - from the countryside and the small towns, among atomised workers who had previously voted for one of the kaleidoscopic array of rightwing parties in the Weimar Republic. However, the urban-industrial core of the support of the SPD and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was not tempted, even in 1932, by Hitler’s rightist demagoguery.<sup>6</sup> The Frankfurt school explanation of the victory of Hitler is thus hollow at its core.

At root, explaining the failure of the SPD to defeat Hitler does not in the least require any such theoretical fantasies. Quite simply, sometimes civil war is unavoidable and necessary. The SPD was unwilling to fight a civil war it could have won in 1918-21, and still unwilling even to attempt to fight a civil war in 1933. The KPD’s fantasies of ‘social-fascism’ and ‘after Hitler, us’ rendered it equally useless. The world, and in particular Europe’s Jews and the other targets of the holocaust, paid in 1939-45 the price of the SPD’s pacifism and constitutionalism in 1918-21 and 1933. But to call pacifism and constitutionalism ‘authoritarianism’ would be obvious nonsense.

## Evidence

I say here and in relation to imperialism that comrade Cutrone’s arguments simply fail to explain the historical evidence. In a sense he responds in advance to this by denying the relevance of the evidence, when he says that “history is not a

compendium of past facts” and that “the concrete ‘material’ object of practice is the concretisation of abstractions”. This latter is a confused version of Marx’s argument in *Grundrisse*, chapters 1, section 3, on the method of political economy.

To quote just a little of this argument: “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception.” (emphasis added); and

“Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being.”<sup>7</sup>

The problem is that comrade Cutrone’s “history is not a compendium of past facts” amounts, in substance, to the denial of Marx’s point that the concrete “is the point of departure in reality and hence the point of departure for observation and conception”. This denial leads to starting from the abstractions of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of spirit*. Instead of working up the perceptible concrete “as a concentration of many determinations”, this method works up a *fantasy* of the concrete which is inconsistent with the perceptible and recalcitrant concrete.

“To add verisimilitude to an otherwise

bald and unconvincing narrative”, more or less arbitrarily selected corroborating material is added. In comrade Cutrone’s account of the SPD this corroborating role is played by Nettel, James Joll’s *The Second International* (1955) and Carl Schorske’s *German Social Democracy* (1954) - all cold war products, not confronted with the post-cold war historiography. This follows Hegel’s method in the *Philosophy of right*.<sup>8</sup> The method is, in fact, Hegelian at precisely the point at which Marx broke with Hegel.

Platypus on June 4 held a discussion of my critique. The blurb for the meeting contains the comments that “Marxism could be considered (today, and perhaps also in the past) as either: (1) a guide to action; or (2) a guide to history. We would pose the latter, Marxism as a guide to history, against the typical sectarian ‘left’ rationale for (or, eg, anarchist or liberal, *rejection of*) Marxism as a guide to action”; and “We would, indeed, maintain (controversially) that Marxism has *always* been primarily a ‘guide to history’ rather than a ‘guide to action’, or, more precisely, that it has only been a guide to action through being a guide to history.”<sup>9</sup>

The boot is in my opinion on exactly the other foot. It is possible that Platypus might, by “hosting the conversation”, serve a useful anti-sectarian purpose in near-future politics. It is also possible that it serves a useful political purpose by hammering home the bankruptcy of both the ‘anti-imperialist’ and ‘anti-fascist’ left (though it needs to step up on its critique of the latter). But as a “guide to history” its Frankfurt school methodology is worse than useless ●

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## Notes

1. ‘The philosophy of history’ *Weekly Worker* June 9.
2. ‘Against philosopher kings’ *Weekly Worker* December 11 2008.
3. For this reason I respond only in this footnote to comrade Cutrone’s objections to my comments on Peter Nettel, and to Ian Birchall’s points (Letters, June 9) that Nettel was a Labour supporter in 1959 (at the height of the ‘Butskellite’ Labour-Tory consensus) and contributed a review of Luxemburg’s *The accumulation of capital to International Socialism* in 1964. On comrade Birchall’s points I would refer him to Jim Higgins’ 1966 review of Nettel’s biography of Luxemburg (www.marxists.org/archive/higgins/1966/xx/luxlen.htm): evidently Higgins did not regard Nettel as in any sense a comrade, though he thought he had “carried out a useful and long overdue service”. Nettel’s 1964 review, in spite of where it appeared, placed particular stress on Joan Robinson’s left-Keynesian critique of Marxist political economy. Comrade Cutrone objects to my consideration of the politics of Nettel’s writing apart from the biography as *partially* explanatory of Nettel’s interpretive choices in relation to the SPD. I am not persuaded by this objection. I see no reason to suppose that the biography of Luxemburg was Nettel’s “life-work” (Cutrone), as opposed to the product of three years’ intensive full-time research by a man who was characterised in Hanson’s memoir of him as both polylingual and a speed-reader, who was otherwise occupied before 1960, and who produced three more books at great speed between 1966 and 1968. I note, moreover, that comrade Cutrone responds to *this* point about Nettel, but offers no response at all to my citation of Breitman’s review of more recent literature on the SPD, which offers other interpretations.
4. Sugar-cane industry: JH Galloway *The sugar cane industry: an historical geography from its origins to 1914* Cambridge 2009. Cotton mills: K Honeyman, ‘The London parish apprentice and the early industrial labour market’, www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/conference2007/Assets/HoneymanILB.doc, which refers to a good deal of earlier literature.
5. Sugar-cane: JH Galloway *op cit*. ‘Second serfdom’: B Kagarlitsky *Empire of the periphery* London 2008, chapters 4-9 is a convenient discussion of one example.
6. D Geary, ‘Nazis and workers before 1933’ (2002) 48 *Australian Journal of Politics and History* pp40-51.
7. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm#3.
8. M Macnair, ‘Law and state as holes in Marxist theory’ (2006) 34 *Critique* pp211-36.
9. www.archive.org/details/Platypus DiscussionOfMikeMacnairsCritique6411.

# 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.**

## Summer Offensive

# Hitting the big numbers

“Why hasn’t anyone chased me for a regular financial contribution?” PS wonders in a message to me this week. Despite being “not so despicably rich, as my bank balance would prove”, the comrade - an ex-member of the CPGB - is keen to contribute to the paper, which she reads online (along with 12,568 others last week, by the way). Notwithstanding her criticisms of the details of the party’s current strategic orientation, PS feels the need to show her appreciation for the *Weekly Worker*, the tangible manifestation of the political work of that organisation and the way the party ‘comes alive’ for the vast majority of the comrades in our quite substantial periphery, of course.

LC, another ex-member, wrote in response to a mailing of our occasional e-bulletin, *Notes for action*. He admits that he has “been meaning to subscribe to the paper for ages. It’s just getting round to it. I will do it immediately and post today.” That’s the sort of response we want to our comrades cajoling! An instant ‘yes’ and a promise of a standing order in the next day’s post! (So, LC. You’ve now been ‘name’-checked in this column. As you well know, this amounts to a solemn pact in our culture. Renege and the CPGB’s ‘Taffia’ - fellow Welshman Ben Lewis and myself - will come round and make you an offer you can’t understand, in the immortal words of John Cooper Clarke).

The drive for an expanded base of regular financial donations to this paper is the core component of this year’s Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising drive. In addition, comrades are planning other initiatives to raise cash either directly for the CPGB or for political organisations and campaigns we are centrally involved in. The SO is a gauge of the intensity of the work of party members in a wide

variety of fields - amongst students, in the anti-war and Iranian solidarity movements, left cultural initiatives like the new Red Mist website (see last week’s paper). We don’t take a narrow approach.

You can help with this work. We need comrades to pitch in to build this year’s cricket match between the Labour Representation Committee and Hands Off the People of Iran. (This has been an annual humiliation for our Labour comrades so far - Hopi activists confidently predict another long day at the office for the LRC in 2011. Here’s hoping ...). There are CPGB stalls to be staffed at some music festivals, pints of beer to be pulled for the Workers Beer Company at others; film screenings to be organised in support of Iranian director Jafar Panahi; solidarity music gigs for Workers Fund Iran to build and an international contingent of comrades running the recent Berlin marathon for the same cause.

How could you help? Quite apart from any direct physical support you could offer, you could advertise these events on your blog/website if you have one - and/or nag friends/comrades to do the same (we can supply banners and technical support). You could contact local trade union branches or progressive organisations and campaigns for support and direct affiliation in the case of Hopi, for example. (Or organise a front-room solidarity screening of a Panahi film, as groups of Hopi supporters have - a guide will be available on Hopi’s website soon for ideas on this sort of ‘cottage industry’ solidarity work).

CPGB comrades have been getting on the phone for personal follow-ups to the blunderbuss SO mailings that have been coming from the party office over the past week or so. One initial criticism that has been made about both our comrades’ individual approach as well as some of

this written material is that it talks *down* what we should be able to achieve. Perhaps we have unconsciously bought into a culture of low expectations when it comes to comrades’ commitment, their appreciation of the role of the *Weekly Worker*, their partisan identification with the project of re-establishing genuine *Marxism* as the hegemonic politics of the entire workers’ movement - and this is even before they *start* haggling about how much pain their standing order is going to entail.

So instead let’s talk some big numbers this week, comrades. We are delighted with *any* commitment you can make to regularly donate to the *Weekly Worker* - that’s a given. The fact that the vast majority of comrades who read us are hard-pressed working class people - again, a given. However, in this week’s column, I want to emphasise that neither are we embarrassed by large - nay, *huge* - regular donations. There are no lower limits, comrades; and trust me when I write, there are no upper limits either.

The new standing orders we have received this week, however, all fall in the former category - three £5 commitments from comrades JC, TP and DL. In the case of DL it was a £5 *increase* - he modestly raised his existing monthly donation from £15 to £20 without even telling us! The extra regular income that has come in for the *Weekly Worker* since the start of the SO already stands at £74 a month.

In terms of hard cash this week has seen £734 come in towards our target of £25,000. We’re over £5k, comrades, after just two weeks - outstanding work.

Mark Fischer

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# weekly worker

## June 30 strikes

# Take the battle into Labour

**S**o the June 30 strikes are upon us, with four teaching and civil service trade unions out on strike against the vicious class-war cuts programme of the coalition government. Although this initial action should be seen as more of a shot across the government's bows - a prelude to more widespread strike action in the autumn - the national political situation is undoubtedly hotting up, as the labour movement begins to stir in a way not seen for two decades or more. What then is the reaction of the Labour Party?

First to pronounce publicly on the matter was shadow chancellor Ed Balls. Writing in the *Sunday Mirror*, he posed as the sympathetic friend of the trade unions - urging them not to go on strike, as to do so would be to fall into the Tory "trap". Out of the other side of his mouth though comes the voice of the establishment: "Everyone agrees public sector pensions need to be reviewed, as people live longer. But the government should be getting round the table and talking changes through."<sup>1</sup> Everyone agrees? Certainly we do not, and this is the stultifying and contrived consensus that the labour movement must shatter.

For Balls then, it is not what the coalition is doing that is the problem, but merely the methods being utilised. Taking the approach of Pontius Pilate, Balls washes his hands of the dispute and urges the trade unions to throw in the towel before the bell has even rung. This mealy-mouthed approach - claiming to take a neutral position between the two sides where none can possibly exist - characterises the whole approach of the Labour Party leadership today, and indeed historically.

Ed Miliband later found his voice, though he too has produced only banalities, as he flounders between the working class and the capitalist state - hoping to serve the interests of the latter without unnecessarily upsetting the former, upon whom he and his party ultimately depend. Though he has not condemned the strikes outright, it goes without saying that he has lent no support either. The unions are meant to fight alone and the Labour Party will do no more than refrain from denouncing them outright. In justification Miliband cites "public opinion" and "inconvenience": "I don't think the argument has yet been got across on public sector pensions as to some of the injustices contained in what the government is doing. Personally I don't think actually strike action is going to help win that argument and I think it inconveniences the public."<sup>2</sup>

During prime minister's question time on June 29, the very eve of the strikes, Miliband refused to raise this major issue, preferring to try and catch David Cameron out over NHS quangoes. This gave Cameron, who only had to deal with 'friendly questions' on the industrial action, an easy target: Miliband was embarrassed to raise the subject, he said, because he is "in the pocket of the unions". A strange way to behave in that case. In fact Cameron's jibe ignores the little fact that none of the unions currently



Ed Miliband: no support

striking are affiliated to the Labour Party (some on the left say that with a leader such as Miliband it should stay that way). That aside, it is a disgrace that the hundreds of thousands of workers who are attempting to defend their living standards and hold on to their modest pensions do not have the Labour front bench speaking out for them in parliament.

For his part, shadow Welsh secretary Peter Hain commented: "I don't think political leaders, in opposition or in government, should either applaud strikes or condemn strikes."<sup>3</sup> Thanks very much, Peter. A bloodless and technocratic view, yet one with a very slight difference in emphasis from the other senior Labour figures. One that has been pounced on by the bourgeois newspapers as a sign of treachery against the establishment. However differently the leading Labour figures put it though, we will call it what it is: vacillation, capitulation and cowardice.

It was not as though we were not warned. Miliband in his first keynote speech to Labour's conference declared: "I have no truck, and you should have no truck, with overblown rhetoric about waves of irresponsible

strikes. The public won't support them. I won't support them and you shouldn't support them either."<sup>4</sup> We do not expect him to change his tune on the matter any time soon.

Ultimately this behaviour derives not just from Labourism as an ideology, but from the history of the party as a *parliamentary* pressure group, and the privileged rights and powers held by its sponsors, the trade union bureaucracy. The members of the Labour Party are much more akin to mere 'supporters', as are trade unionists who pay the political levy. Under Blair this reached its logical conclusion with conference reduced to a mere rally, managerial control-freakery and a concerted attempt to establish a wide donation stream from capitalists and other rich individuals.

From this perspective the working class, as such, does not exist beyond its requirement to turn up at the ballot box every four or five years. It is always an unpleasant experience for the the Labour right when the class flexes its muscles and begins to act for itself. Such behaviour is an embarrassment for a Labour leader who wants to be seen as his 'own man' - in other words beholden to the *Mirror*, *The Sun*, Sky

News and the Murdoch empire. To this end Miliband intends to reform Labour's organisation - the union block vote once again being a prime target. There is talk of it being lowered from 50% to something "fit for the 21st century". At the same time he wants to provide a platform, if not voting rights, for charities and (unspecified) 'campaigning organisations' at the annual conference.

Just three general secretaries wield 40% of the votes at Labour conference - and, it is true, in a highly undemocratic way, which does not even allow for the political balance of their delegations to be taken into account. Theoretically, the unions, with the support of a handful of allies, could win every vote and ensure that policies in the interests of their members, and of the working class, were adopted. The reality is, however, that the unions have more often than not been the mainstay of the Labour right. In the end this is because the bureaucracy, as a result of its role as intermediary between capital and labour, has no interest in encouraging working class self-activity.

A further planned reform is to allow public petitions gathered by constituency Labour Parties, if they reach a certain threshold, to win a debate at conference. Not as motions to be voted on, mind you. Instead this is a purely cosmetic measure arising out of anxieties expressed by Miliband that around a third of CLPs do not even bother to send delegates to conference: it is, after all, a mere talking shop, especially after the changes introduced under Tony Blair - though Miliband does not put it quite like that.

In tandem with this, Miliband wants to remove the right of the parliamentary Labour Party to elect a shadow cabinet when in opposition and transfer this role to a single individual, the leader: ie, himself. This would then mirror the power of prime ministerial patronage held over the party when in it is in government. This would bend Labour more firmly to the will of a single uncrowned

monarch at all times.

What should the response of the trade union movement be? Rank and file pressure must be applied in all Labour-affiliated unions to force their leaders to point-blank refuse to vote for a further reduction of their own political influence within the party. The unions must demand that their sponsored MPs come out openly on the side of workers fighting to defend their jobs, pensions and services. Those who do not must be deselected and replaced. Far from demanding that the unions disaffiliate in order to go off and form a no-hope Labour Party mark two, we should launch a campaign to strengthen the fight against the right within Labour by winning left-led unions such as PCS, NUT, RMT and FBU to affiliate.

The unions must reject the terms of debate established by the government, the bourgeois media and the Labour opposition around the issue of pensions and the age of retirement. This affects the *whole* of the working class, not just those in the state sector. The poisonous notion that 'everyone agrees' the working class must pay because people are having the temerity to live longer disguises the fact that, firstly, gains in labour productivity far exceed the increase in life expectancy - we should be campaigning for retirement for all at 60 and a 35-hour week; and, secondly, the so-called 'hole' in public sector pensions is nothing but a myth.

The trade unions must be won away from the useless politics of 'moderation'. Instead of telling us to wait for the next Labour government, the bureaucrats must be made to fight for what we need. Those unions not striking on June 30 must come out in the autumn. Militant-sounding general secretaries like Dave Prentis of Unison must be made to follow up words with action.

Michael Copestake

### Notes

1. *Sunday Mirror* June 19.
2. *The Guardian* June 25.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Independent* September 28 2010.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Post code \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Tel \_\_\_\_\_

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

I enclose payment:  
Sub £/€ \_\_\_\_\_  
Donation £/€ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total £/€ \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

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