



weekly worker

June 30 coordinated strikes show strength of anger. Now on to strike action in the autumn

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SWP ... from Tony Cliff to Alex Callinicos



LETTERS



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

Useful Platypus

I am writing to respond to Mike Macnair's critique ('Divided by a common language', June 30) of my article on 'The philosophy of history' (June 9).

JP Nettl's biography of Rosa Luxemburg can be plausibly considered his life work and not ancillary to his primary intellectual concerns because it was the product of almost 20 years of thinking, not the three years of intensive writing that produced his book. Nettl's preface clearly indicates this. Immediately after World War II, his imagination was captured by the history of pre-World War I Marxism in the German Social Democratic Party and Luxemburg in particular, but the controversial nature of the subject made him ruminate long on it and forego available sources of support for his study of it, before publishing his 1,000-page book in 1966. Let's be clear: Nettl was not a Marxist. But that should not anathematise any insights he may have had.

On 'imperialism' and 'authoritarianism', I was concerned to show their interrelated character, which I sketched only in very broad outline: the general historical trend of post-1848 Bonapartism, all the way up to the present. As Marx and Engels put it, Bonapartism expressed a situation in which the capitalists could no longer and the workers could not yet rule society (see Engels' 1891 introduction to Marx's *The civil war in France*). I agree with Mike Macnair that, for example, Bukharin's explanation of imperialism's effect on the socialist workers' movement, the political compromise of the metropolitan workers with respect to their national states, is better than the idea that they were economically 'bought off' (I disagree, however, that the latter was Lenin's and Trotsky's essential perspective). I agree as well that the virtue of such an emphatically political explanation is that it can account for similar phenomena in the periphery.

But this raises the issue of what I have called 'authoritarianism' or willing support for the status quo and hostility to alternatives, and the subjectivity for doing so, again. Why are the workers more often conservative, even virulently and self-destructively so, than not? The explanation of (some) workers' support for fascism by reference to their peripheral character (ie, the unemployed or 'lumpenised') is what indeed 'dodges the issue'. While the SPD and KPD's refusals to fight a civil war against fascism in Germany in 1918-21 and circa 1933 may have been of decisive, conjunctural importance, this itself is what requires explanation (it also leaves aside the Italian case). It cannot be laid simply on bad leadership - on the parties' bad decisions - without reference to the workers' fear, or lack of support for better action, which was broken, however briefly, in Germany in 1918-19, but precisely as a civil war among the workers. The contrast of 1918-19 with 1933 could not be clearer: as Adorno put it, 1919 already decided what came later (see *Those twenties* Columbia 1998).

The issue of Hegelianism is a difficult one: how to include the 'subjective factor in history'. I think this turns on how one understands Marx's critique of Hegel. I don't think that Marx's reference to the 'real' is in an empiricist sense, but rather in Hegel's sense of the actuality of the rational in the real. The issue turns on the relation of essence and appearance, or, with what necessity things appear as they do. What is essential is what is practical, and what is practical is subjective as well as objective.

Theoretical reflection on the subjective must use metaphysical categories that are not merely handy, but actually constitutive of social practices in which one is a subject. The commodity form is not a generalisation from experience.

All of this, however, is largely beside the point regarding Platypus. For the conversation we seek to host is not between ourselves and others, but much more widely on the avowed left, and among those with far greater experience than what is available among our own members. We serve only to facilitate, even if we have to elbow our way in, provocatively, to make the space for such conversation, otherwise foreclosed. We consider the need for such conversation to be more ideological than practical at present.

I am glad that comrade Macnair recognises that Platypus may "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." This is precisely what we intend, though I think it is potentially much more. If Platypus does successfully what Macnair thinks it might, I for one will be happy to allow the "guide to history" through which we understand our own efforts to be considered a 'useful myth'.

Chris Cutrone
email

Abstract slogan

One has to wonder what the point is of theses such as 'The Arab awakening and Israel-Palestine' (June 30). On even the most basic level, it asserts that which it attempts to prove, underlying which is a paucity of analysis, made up only by half-digested generalisations.

The whole question of an Arab nation is problematic. Arab unity died with the Abassid caliphate nearly 800 years ago and arguably long before. So there is very little tradition of political unity. There is a common language, of sorts, but there is no common economy. What there is, of course, is a feeling that the region as a whole has been subject to the depredations of western imperialism, albeit in different ways.

Although the recent uprisings were sparked off in Tunisia, they spread almost entirely to the Arab east. Although the people of the region, including non-Arab minorities, felt a common desire for freedom from their US-imposed dictators, these demands were unsurprisingly focused on the local rulers. Although there is a consciousness of being part of an overall Arab people, the immediate struggles were of necessity local. To raise the demand of Arab unity is to raise an abstract slogan that has no immediate relevance to the most pressing needs of the Arab peoples at this particular juncture. That is not to say that the removal of imperialism from the region as a whole is not an important demand in the future.

However, the failure of the United Arab Republic tells us little. It was a consequence of its own irrelevance to the pressing needs of the day. The theses say: "Evidently, Arab reunification remains a burning but unfulfilled task." Would that it were so.

Yes, the Israeli Jewish 'nation' is historically constituted, but so what? Wasn't the tiniest principality historically constituted? You can tick all Stalin's boxes on territorial contiguity and language, but this does not a nation make. Israeli Jewish identity is versus the other, the Palestinians and Arabs. Even within the Israeli Jewish 'nation', there are deep ethnic divisions, over such fundamental issues as 'who is a Jew'. As to their common culture, thousands of nationalist Israeli Jews marching through Arab Jerusalem on Jerusalem day chanting 'Death to the Arabs' is one manifestation of this

national culture.

It is no more reactionary to deny the existence of an Israel Jewish nation than to deny similar colonial phenomena. But, whereas in the United States and Australia the indigenous people were defeated, if not wiped out, in Israel the colonists have only been partially successful. Israel lives in permanent tension with the Arabs, including its own Arab citizens. That this is precisely the role that imperialism intended for this Jewish Sparta seems to have escaped the attention of some of the most astute Marxist observers and also those who seek explanations in the 'Jewish' or Zionist lobby.

Nor is it "half-baked or perverted" to suggest that self-determination, which you accept as being a question of national equality, does not apply to a settler nation. Self-determination simply means the right to be free from national oppression, not that nations have the "right to determine their own fate", which is a blank cheque for Zionist expansion (as if under capitalism anyone has such a choice). It is therefore meaningless to talk of the right of self-determination of a warrior state, an armed satrap of the west, in such terms. It is a capitulation to social and national chauvinism.

Israel is an artificial entity. It was always intended thus. The fact that it has created a civil society should not blind us to this. The inability of its working class to create its own labour party or even a genuine trade union - and the statist Israeli Labour Party has all but collapsed - is a symptom of this. It is the most rightwing 'nation' in the west and also the most racist. Its most atavistic religious elements are increasingly to the fore in national politics and openly argue for the removal and murder, on religious grounds, of the Palestinians. This is the real Zionist national identity coming to the fore. And it finds its expression in the Zionist belief, which is part of Israel law, that there is no Israeli nation - only a Jewish nation. In other words, Israel is not even a state of its own citizens, but a state of Jewish people worldwide.

Yes, the French state is entitled to self-determination, should it be attacked, as in 1940, and its independence threatened. But this is a state that was historically constituted, which underwent a bourgeois revolution and the battle of the Third Republic between democratic republicanism and the clerical-military-royalist castes, imbued with anti-Semitism. It was a fight that was symbolised above all by the trials and tribulations of the Dreyfusards. Pray tell me the name of Israel's Dreyfus? There is no democratic or republican conflict within the Israeli Jewish people. Alone in the world, there are no anti-imperialist currents. The majority support 'transfer' even of Israeli Arab citizens. By a large majority, Jews don't wish to be neighbours or friends of Arabs. This is the 'culture' of a settler people or nation, if you will. But self-determination?

How are Israeli Jews oppressed other than in their dreams? When you use the term 'genocide', it is noticeable that it is not applied to those who have suffered from it, the Arab peoples, but instead Jewish Israel. The holocaust was in Europe, not Palestine! It is not the hard-nosed Israeli generals and the rabbi Dov Lioris, for whom Jewish blood is superior to that of Arabs, who are in any danger of genocide, but their victims. Even the most common and garden settler racist in Israel has a better understanding of these things than the CPGB aggregate. 'Gas the Arabs' is a popular form of settler graffiti. It is no coincidence that a section of the settlers identify their own role with that of Hitler.

The idea of two states is simply not credible because it does not deal with

the root of the problem - Zionism. It's like a solution in Ireland that ignores partition. In fact, British socialists have long since done just this - eg, the Socialist Party. And, in any event, apart from political objections, the settlers have long since ensured that there can be no Palestinian state worthy of the name.

But socialists cannot just counterpose an abstract socialist federation of Arab states to the conflict in the here and now. We have to pose national solutions that are in fact only attainable as a consequence of the overthrow of the Arab order. This means that the solution of a democratic, secular state in Palestine is the only solution in the socialist book. Two democratic, secular states is a nonsense. If they are secular, why have two states?

Moshé Machover asks mischievously, why 'secular' and 'democratic'? I would have thought the answer was obvious: a democratic state can also become a religious tyranny. It is a fundamental precondition that a democratic state should also be a secular state, precisely in order that there is no subjugation of religious minorities.

Tony Greenstein
email

Here and now

We can all sympathise with David Douglass in his plea for action now (Letters, June 30). But is it logical to argue that world socialism may be the answer, but we'll have to wait a long time for it? It is just that attitude that delays socialism and the chance to make a real change. There is nothing "now" to be done that will solve the problem. (He is also overlooking that there is an endless stream of issues under capitalism and a myriad of organisations involved in them all.)

Socialists are not immune to the human tragedies which occur daily. Socialists suffer those tragedies as severely as anyone else. If social activism had solved all the workers' problems, or were even to be able to say that things were steadily improving, that would argue in favour of the approach that Dave advances. But that is not the case. The reality is that the reforms which the social activists promote do not work. The social activists are not gaining much and the same problems continue to appear. It is so often one step forward, several steps back. One can pick any problem and sometimes find an improvement has taken place but most likely only after a very long period of agitation. Rarely, if ever, has the problem disappeared, and usually other related problems have cropped up to fill the vacuum of suffering left by the 'solution'.

Socialist activists have claimed impressive 'successes' and 'victories' in every field except one. History has proven beyond any shadow of doubt that they have not remotely convinced the workers of the need for socialism. The efforts of social activists have been geared to an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism.

There are two kinds of reformism. One has no intention of bringing about revolutionary change; the other being the one Dave appears to favour that cherishes the belief that successful reforms will somehow prepare the ground for revolution. He is seeking the best of both worlds by both supporting reforms and advocating revolution. Reformists always claim how much better everything would be if only they were in power: the NHS, the environment, the economy, education. And how is all this to be achieved? Dave prudently exercises silence, but we do know the typical left solution: taxing the rich and nationalisation - ie, state capitalism.

Dave also risks believing class struggle militancy can be used as a lever to push the workers along a political road, towards their emancipation. But how is this possible if the workers do not understand the political road and are only engaging in the economic immediate struggles? It can only be concluded that the answer lies in 'leaders in the know' who will direct the workers. For revolutionaries to attract support on the basis of reformist policies - on the basis of saying one thing, while really wanting something quite different - would be quite dishonest. And then to maintain non-socialist support, revolutionaries will be forced to drop all talk of socialism and become even more openly reformist.

Dave's argument (I stand to be corrected) is that the working class is only reformist-minded and winning reformist battles will give the working class confidence. Thus the working class will learn from its struggles and will eventually come to realise that assuming power is the only way to meet its ends, that the working class will realise, through the failure of reforms to meet its needs, the futility of reformism and will overthrow capitalism. Yet, regardless of why or how the reforms are advocated, the result is the same: confusion in the minds of the working class instead of growth of socialist consciousness. Dave desires that revolutionaries should change their ideas to be with the masses rather than trying to convince the masses to change their minds and be with them.

There is little wrong with people campaigning to bring improvements to enhance the quality of their lives and some reforms can indeed make a difference. Our objections to reformism is that our continued existence as propertyless wage-slaves undermines whatever attempts we make to control and better our lives through reforms, that it throws blood, sweat and tears into battles that will be inevitably undermined by the workings of the wages system. All that effort, skill and energy could be better turned against class society.

It is only when people leave reformism behind altogether that socialism will begin to appear to them not as a vague, distant prospect, but as a clear, immediate alternative which they themselves can achieve.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Straight talking

Wow! Four great letters in the *Weekly Worker* (June 30).

David Douglass is pretty much as right as someone can be. The left has become all about the fetishes of metropolitan talking heads and chattering professionals. Dave thinks socialists should be talking to and responding truthfully to the working class concerns. What a revolutionary practice that would be.

Pat Corcoran is dead on the target as well. It's a shame that the lumpenproletariat hasn't gone away - but most Marxist thought about seeing the real world as it is, rather than how we would wish it to be, has. I've always thought the best way to deal with scum is have the threat of a jolly good kick in the knackers, not a promise of a hug from a social worker.

Heather Downs is also right. You lot (the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB) remind me of the character, Jack, in *Fight club*. He takes solace from those in pain and gives solace by saying he understands and feels their pain. In the meantime, he does nothing to stop more such desperate cases coming along the production line of society. Now I know that you claim to believe in a socialist-communist society, but, as Dave said, it's about the here and now.

What a compliment it is for a

comrade to be called a ranter. Ranting is a fine English revolutionary tradition that has been lost to a shameful degree. We are in an internet and telly age, where communication is more about the verbal than ever, but the verbal is still clearly despised by the British left, even though it is the most democratic and natural form of communication.

Many class relationships haven't changed as much as we would like and many pretend since Roman times. The ruling class still maintains instruments of torture and the big stick to maintain their rule and their taxes. I think that is the Marxist position. Not the position of Phil Kent, who wants to pretend that it isn't normal people who maintain social relationships, but instead a tiny handful of mega-capitalists. So what if someone is against Mubarak? So was the British ruling class.

I liked the bit about how Platypus should speak in plain English, I do wish that the *Weekly Worker* would talk about politics of concern to ordinary people in the language of ordinary people.

James Walsh
email

Save Dale Farm

Some 90 families at Dale Farm, the UK's largest traveller community, have been hand-delivered a final notice of eviction, giving families until midnight on August 31 to abandon their homes, or face their entire community being bulldozed. The central government and Basildon council have set aside over £18 million for the eviction

battle that could last three weeks. It will be the biggest clearance of its kind, involving the ploughing up of 54 separate plots created on a former scrapyard purchased by the travellers 10 years ago.

Dale Farm is only a 30-minute train ride from London, and hundreds of people have pledged to join residents in non-violent resistance. The residents have encouraged their supporters to establish a base at Dale Farm - Camp Constant - to resist this eviction and house human rights monitors.

Join us on Saturday August 27 and beyond, starting with a weekend of traveller history and celebration, together with practical eviction resistance training. There will also be training for legal observers and human rights monitors. Sleeping space is available in caravans or you can bring a tent. The eviction could go ahead right after midnight on August 31, so we will be staying at Dale Farm before then in preparation.

On July 9 and beyond, we will be building defences to resist the eviction. We will also hold a meeting every Saturday at 1 pm.

Save Dale Farm
<http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>

Harare trial

The International Socialist Organisation Zimbabwe wishes to update all progressive cadres, socialists, revolutionaries and democrats who have been in solidarity with us since the unjust February 19 arrest, detention

and torture of ISO comrades, student leaders and human rights activists.

The case against them for "subverting a constitutional government" goes to court on July 18 in Harare. Our national coordinating committee comrades, Munyaradzi Gwisai, Tafadzwa Choto and Tatenda Mombeyarara, will be standing trial, together with trade unionist Edison Chakuma, debt rights activist and ex-ISO comrade Hopewell Gumbo, and student leader Welcome Zimuto.

Your solidarity messages condemning our arrests were important in increasing the political cost on Zanu-PF for keeping us detained. You indeed fought for our freedom. They can beat us, kill us and detain us. But they will not survive the revulsion against the intrinsic contradictions of capitalism that we are exposing. Workers will always stand up and revolt. We won't stand by, while rampant corruption and crass materialism disable both government and private sector. We will shout at the top of our voices when we detect the abuse of power and political intolerance.

Egypt and Tunisia are lessons for the poor and an opener to another Russia 1917. The workers and the oppressed masses of the present world, if united, can easily make capitalism history. As revolutionary socialists we remain convinced that there is only one solution to capitalism. That solution is a revolution.

Please send messages of solidarity.
ISO Zimbabwe
iso.zim@gmail.com.

Summer Offensive

Get dialling!

Comrades who attended the Social Workers Party's annual Marxism event report a pretty brisk trade on our stall and for our individual paper sellers (well over £250 in sales over the weekend). Of course, there was also the usual irrational hostility from some of the established members of the SWP when they were approached - many readers will be familiar with the two main forms this takes. Either there is a look of surly distaste or a stony-faced, Easter-Island-statue refusal to even grant you the courtesy of acknowledging that you might exist, let alone may have just said something or offered a leaflet.

However, a good number of others - including many younger SWP members - were prepared to engage. Indeed, our comrades' anecdotal evidence from the intervention underlines how correct it was for us to place support for the *Weekly Worker* at the core of this year's Summer Offensive, the annual fundraising drive of the Communist Party.

In common with other sellers, I was approached by comrades who told me that they were weekly online readers and consequently felt obliged to buy this week's issue as a small act of solidarity and gratitude. Hardly a surprise that a high percentage of our online readers - 11,912 of them last week - would be at an event like Marxism. Our paper is read overwhelming by militant activists, comrades eager for ideas, political clarity and honesty about the state of our movement that they

unfortunately do not find in the other left publications. This has always been the case - however, we have noticed a distinct shift over the past 10 years or so.

Our reading periphery has grown more sympathetic to us. We are not yet talking about an active identification with the core project that the *Weekly Worker* embodies, but many have certainly moved beyond the snarling resentment we sometimes used to encounter from comrades who felt they *had* to read the paper, despite the fact that it was clearly compiled by evil little trolls who did the dark bidding of Satan or, perhaps a tad more likely, MI5.

The online readers who took the rare opportunity at Marxism of having a living, breathing *WW* vendor in front of them to give a little token solidarity represent an important shift. They are also the tip of an iceberg of untapped potential support. An important task over the two months of the Summer Offensive 2011 (it ends on August 20, the last day of our annual school, the Communist University) is to start to convert an appreciable number of those comrades into regular financial contributors to the paper - a prelude to making them engaged political partisans of the project of the organisation that sustains it, of course.

On the coalface in this are the comrades who have been telephoning contacts of the party. The general reports that are filtering back about this are very good - this week, for example, we have added another £61 towards our target

of £300 extra in standing orders to the paper, bringing the total of new regular money to a pleasing £135. Moreover, comrades tell me it is pleasant work, with those approached often praising highly both our publication and the political project of principled Marxist unity.

The trouble is not enough of it is being done! It seems that the "culture of low expectations" that I wrote of last week is not simply leading some comrades to expect lukewarm responses when we ring our contacts: it is leading some of us to be reticent about starting at all. Get dialling, comrades! You'll be pleasantly surprised! (And if you have any ideas about people who might be persuaded to back the paper, recommend them to us and we'll contact them.)

The state of play more generally in the Summer Offensive is equally positive. In the past seven days, we have taken a sturdy £2,847 off our £25k target, bringing our running total to £7,885 - very respectable indeed at this still early stage in the campaign. Special mentions go to comrade JT for both a £300 one-off and increasing his regular standing order by £25 to a fantastic monthly £75. To CG for modestly increasing his by £10 to a regular £30, but not actually telling us! And to PS for a new commitment of £30 a month.

This SO looks set to be one of our best for years, comrades. Let's keep up the momentum and bust through our target ●

Mark Fischer

mark.fischer@weeklyworker.org.uk

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 or check out www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

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.

Pro-choice fightback

Saturday July 9, 1.30pm: Demonstration, Old Palace Yard, Parliament Square (opposite parliament). Organised by Swansea feminist Network: 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.

Unite against EDL

Saturday July 9, 11am: Demonstration, Cenotaph, Albert Park main entrance, Middlesbrough. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.org.uk.

Palestine workers

Saturday July 9, 8.15pm: Film showing, Highgate Newtown, Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, Archway, London N19. Screening of *Pictures of Zain*, followed by discussion, to raise money for Salit quarry workers in Palestine. £6 waged, £4 unwaged - includes food and a beer. Part of Ideas for Freedom 2011: awl@workersliberty.org.

Workers' control

Tuesday July 12, 7.30pm: Meeting, Trade Union Centre, Marton Road, Middlesbrough. 'Public ownership and workers' control. Speaker: Ronnie Mason. Organised by the Teesside and South Durham Labour Representation Committee: l-r-c.org.uk.

LGBT rights

Wednesday July 13, 7pm: Meeting, Unison, 130 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Carola Towle and Namarda Thiranagama (Unison), Peter Purton (TUC disability and LGBT policy officer), David Braniff-Herbert (Hope Not Hate LGBT Network). Organised by Hope Not Hate LGBT Network: www.hopenothate.org.uk.

La Commune

Thursday July 14, 5pm: Film and lecture, Peanut Factory, Unit 1, Building H, Dace Road, London E3. Screening of *La Commune* (Peter Watkins 2000). Preceded by lecture, 'The historic significance of the Paris Commune'. Speaker: Ben Lewis (CPGB). Organised by Ciné-club Hackney Wick: postalter@gmail.com.

Congo support

Saturday July 16, 12 noon: Demonstration, All Saints Park (opposite BBC Manchester), Oxford Road, Manchester M1. Call for an end to violence and impunity in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Followed by meeting, 2pm, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2: 'Congoese general elections 2011- democratic or undemocratic?'. Organised by Congo Support Project Manchester: 07405 685861.

Terrain for struggle

Tuesday July 19, 5.30pm: Lecture, Peel Lecture Theatre, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, University Road, Bristol. 'Urbanisation and the city as a terrain for anti-capitalist struggle'. Speaker: David Harvey. To register: Joanna.Trotter@bristol.ac.uk.

Self-defence is no offence

Saturday July 23, 10.30am: Conference, Khalili Theatre, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1. 30th Anniversary of the Bradford 12 - fighting racism and the importance of solidarity. Speakers include: Bradford 12 defendants: Ruth Bunday and Gareth Peirce (lawyers for Bradford 12); Anwar Ditta, Minkah Adofu, Amrit Wilson, Mary Pearson and Leila Khalid on Palestine; Samarendra Das on India; plus speakers on the Arab uprisings. More information: <http://thebradford12.wordpress.com/commemoration-in-london-23rd-july-2011>.

Solidarity cricket

Sunday September 11, 12 noon: Cricket fundraiser, Wray Crescent cricket pitch, London N4. Third annual match between Hands Off the People of Iran and Labour Representation Committee. All proceeds to Workers' Fund Iran. Organised by Hands Off the People of Iran: ben@hopoi.info.

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.

MARXISM 2011



From Tony Cliff to Alex Callinicos

Peter Manson looks at the leadership pecking order and calls for the SWP to open up

Organisationally the Socialist Workers Party's annual Marxism festival took a step forward this year with the relocation to University College London and the nearby Friends Meeting House. The June 30-July 4 school took place within a smaller, more compact area - at its centre the imposing UCL quad. And the SWP claimed a bigger attendance than in recent years. According to *Socialist Worker*, it was 4,500 - the most for a decade.

However, while more of the SWP's members, supporters and contacts came along, there was unfortunately little sign of the scores of newly radicalised public sector strikers the organisation was hoping to attract - Marxism began on the very day of the June 30 mass action. But, needless to say, the SWP remains uninterested in debating with those to its left, and continues to discourage the participation of other revolutionary groups.

For example, the new venue could have been used to much greater effect. There were only a handful of stalls within the quad and the left groups who turned up had to set up outside on the narrow Gower Street pavement. Why not take a leaf out of *Lutte Ouvrière's* book? The French Trotskyist group positively welcomes the stalls of all sorts of left political organisations at its annual fete and organises a specially designated area to house them. There is plenty of room for a similar feature within the lawned UCL quad - why not try to make Marxism a carnival of vibrant, contending ideas? What is the SWP afraid of?

The major international theme at Marxism was the "Arab revolts"

that have dominated the news in the recent period. For the SWP this is clearly linked to the major domestic theme, the "struggle against austerity" in Britain, which it hopes will lead to similar direct action. In this context, the organisation views the establishment's turn away from multiculturalism as an attempt to divide the resistance to cuts. And it goes without saying that opposition to racism, fascism and the English Defence League remains at the very centre of the SWP's agenda.

Hierarchy revealed

It fell to national secretary Charlie Kimber to pull together these themes in his Saturday morning rallying speech in the session entitled 'Crisis, austerity, resistance: perspectives for socialists today'. In a way his speech was most notable for what he did *not* say, and what was added from the floor by Alex Callinicos, the SWP international secretary.

Comrade Kimber's competent, but rather plodding performance (in comparison to previous national secretaries he is no orator) certainly outlined the SWP's priorities. However, clearly in comrade Callinicos's view, it was too unambitious and uninspiring. Kimber had pointed out to the rally that the SWP had been criticised "a few months ago" for "making June 30 a key focus". But, he said, "We were right: June 30 has transformed the political landscape. Now there is the potential to bring down the government." There were likely to be strikes in the autumn of three-four million workers, but it was now important to put pressure on the trade union leaders to "name the day".

In passing, comrade Kimber also mentioned other SWP priorities: the "huge demo" to be organised by Right

to Work at the Tory Party conference on October 2; and before that the September 3 national demonstration against the EDL in Tower Hamlets - "another key struggle".

But it's not just about strikes and demonstrations, he said: "we need a political struggle". Our demands must include 'tax the rich' and 'nationalise the banks' (under workers' control). After all, "Even a very high level of strike action doesn't answer the question of 'which way forward?'" That is why the Marxism event is so important: it is where the ideas are hammered out and should be regarded as a "council of war".

Comrade Kimber added that the SWP "is not the linchpin - I wish we were". But it *is* playing an important role in the struggles. And it is central in "putting forward a vision of an alternative world" (one where the rich are taxed and the banks are nationalised). We need more people in order to mount a "higher, harder fight for the socialist future".

When he made his contribution from the floor, comrade Callinicos also sniped at "those who claim to be on our left" over their criticisms of the SWP's focus on June 30 and likewise proclaimed the organisation's mobilising role. But, turning to the need for escalation, he stated: "We have to say, not just 'Name the day', but 'All out, stay out'."

In his reply comrade Kimber virtually repeated Callinicos's words - we not only demand, "Name the day", but "All out, stay out" too. The art of leadership, he said, was in identifying the "key link". In this case it was to urge that when workers come out, they must stay out.

This incident said a lot about the current SWP hierarchy. After Tony Cliff died in April 2000 there was no

doubting that John Rees had replaced him as the SWP's number one. But, when comrade Rees was ousted in 2008 it appeared to some that Martin Smith, the national secretary, had become the main driving force. In reality, however, as with Charlie Kimber, he was a bureaucratic functionary (and a somewhat wild and hamfisted one). Without doubt comrade Callinicos is the power behind the throne.

And it looks for all the world as though Martin Smith's article, '30 June pensions strikes: let's set a date for next wave', in the pre-Marxism edition of *Socialist Worker* underwent a similar 'correction'. Commenting on the remarks of Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, comrade Smith wrote: "He argued in Manchester, 'To those who say name the day, I say a day is not enough ... We will strike to defend our pensions. A campaign of strike action without precedent.'"

To which comrade Smith responded: "Of course, a one-day general strike is not enough, but it would be a very good start!"

But then, and seemingly in total contradiction, Smith's article ends in this way: "If we're going to defeat the government our demand to the union leaders should be: 'Name the day' - and our slogan should be: 'All out and stay out'" (*Socialist Worker* July 2). This conclusion, appearing out of the blue, bears the hallmarks of another intervention from the SWP's real leader.

All out, stay out

That was the first time the slogan had been raised publicly. It had, however, appeared internally in the June 16 *Industrial Notes special*, issued by SWP central committee member and industrial organiser Michael Bradley.

Comrade Bradley had written: "We need to call for more coordinated strikes in the autumn, and we need to urge Unison, GMB and Unite to join the fight. After June 30 our slogan will become 'All out - stay out'."

But the phrase did not resurface for another two weeks - not even internally, in the more widely read internal *Party Notes*, for instance. So it seems that comrade Callinicos took it upon himself to make sure it was prioritised. However, in the latest *Socialist Worker* it has once more disappeared from sight. The reports of June 30 feature lots of calls for further coordinated action and even talk of an eventual general strike, but nowhere is the slogan, 'All out, stay out' - or anything implying that an *indefinite* general strike is the order of the day - raised.

Here is part of a report on the SWP's festival: "Marxism 2011 was not a talking shop, but a springboard to further action. Participants debated how we step up the fight against the Tories. Many trade unionists said that socialists should push for another wave of coordinated strikes in the autumn - but this time involving more unions ... Many want a general strike to bring down the Tories, and some raised the idea of staying out for more than one day" (*Socialist Worker* July 9).

Ah, I see. "Some" comrades "raised the idea" of staying out "for more than one day". Hopefully this 're-interpretation' of comrade Callinicos's call represents a rejection of such foolish and irresponsible adventurism on the part of the central committee majority.

In truth, unless it is viewed as militant-sounding, but basically empty verbiage, the slogan, 'All out, stay out', is totally at odds with

current reality. This was clear from the other interventions from the floor following comrade Kimber’s Marxism speech. SWP comrades were perfectly comfortable describing their experiences of building for June 30 and mobilising for further coordinated action in the autumn. But nobody said anything about an indefinite general strike, or how it could come about.

There are huge problems with both parts of the slogan. To take the second part first, for how long should workers “stay out”? Until what demands are met? Until the government agrees to withdraw all cuts or, more realistically perhaps, collapses under the pressure of the mass strike? Of course, demands that are made at the beginning of an action can be expanded and solidified during it. But it would be crazy to *undertake* such an action without first setting out clear aims around which support can be mobilised.

Even more seriously, however, the call for an indefinite general strike in reality represents a call to challenge for power. If such a strike really was ‘general’ - ie, backed by all the most important sections of the working class - it would bring everything to a halt. Our class would have to organise and arrange the distribution of essential goods and services. In short it would have to overturn the current order through a revolution.

An attractive idea, to be sure. However, as the SWP knows full well (it did, after all, run a series of sessions at Marxism entitled ‘Anarchism and autonomism’), there can be no revolution without a mass revolutionary party. And a couple of thousand members grouped in the SWP is not it. An attempt to seriously challenge for power would be ruthlessly crushed by a ruling class which is armed to the teeth.

What about the first part of the slogan? What is meant by “all”? Getting out those in the private-sector will doubtless be a difficult task. There is a low density of organisation and most of the union bureaucracy will plead that there is no ‘legitimate industrial dispute’ against the immediate employer. They fear new draconian government moves against the unions. A bold call for coordinated strike action in the autumn has every chance of inspiring millions of workers, organised and unorganised.

But we should avoid leftist posturing, especially of the kind that is first and foremost about building the sect, not the actual combativity of the working class.

Multi or inter?

The session later on the Saturday on ‘Why we defend multiculturalism’ proved to be surprisingly interesting - not for the entirely predictable and infantile rant from Martin Smith or the bog-standard left liberalism of Salma Yaqoob, but for the considered and useful contribution from SWP member Michael Rosen, the writer and poet.

Introducing the session, chair Hassan Mahamdallie made clear where the SWP stands on this issue: “Our multicultural way of life that we have fought so hard to build” is under threat, he said, before handing the baton to comrade Smith.

The former national secretary alleged: “The Tories want to put the anti-racist agenda back to the 50s and 60s. This government is going to play the race card more and more.” He went so far as to state that we have “never seen such racism since the 1930s”. But “don’t expect anything else from the Tories - they’ve always been racist”. And that was about as sophisticated as it got. He did, however, make the interesting claim that the EDL was “dancing to David Cameron’s tune”. Usually the SWP puts it the other way round: the Tories are adopting the agenda of the EDL or British National Party in order to shore up their rightwing vote.

Salma Yaqoob was also “worried about losing this precious thing”. She said: “Multiculturalist Britain is working - leave it alone.” According to her, the Tories believe that “We can’t get on and work together because our differences are too vast.” And the answer? We should go out and promote “muscular multiculturalism”.

Admittedly Yaqoob made some good points. For example, we should defend the right of women to wear the hijab, but at the same time encourage people to support Slutwalk: “People should have the right to wear what they like - no matter how much or how little”. She also pointed out (although not in as many words) that anti-migrant sentiment is not quite the same as racism: you hear Pakistanis

saying, “Those Somalis are taking our jobs,” said Yaqoob.

The truth is, in times of cutbacks, workers do tend to prioritise their own means of living when it is under attack and - especially in the absence of a strong, collective, working class consciousness - turn to ‘obvious’ solutions: keep out the immigrants, look after ‘our own’ first. But why is this confused with racism? The logic it follows is that there are only a certain number of jobs, houses and services to go round, so it ‘makes sense’ not to increase the numbers chasing after them. ‘Our own’ usually means those already here, irrespective of their ethnicity.

It is also mistaken to dub the imposition of ever tighter border controls as straightforward racism, as comrade Smith did. We all know that the capitalist class favours the importation of labour from abroad. Not only to plug the so-called shortage of skilled labour that employers perennially complain about, but attract underpaid semi and unskilled labour which whole sectors of the economy rely on. It is the bourgeois state and bourgeois politicians that bang on about immigration controls. It is the very same bourgeois state and bourgeois politicians that strive to *unite* British people as against outsiders. Given post-World War II mass migration, the British people are no longer almost exclusively white. Hence the old, racist, ideologies and forms of control have largely given way to what is a ‘colour-blind’ *nationalist* ideology that rests on so-called British values such as fair play, democracy and equality before the law.

We in the CPGB do not argue that the bourgeoisie’s official ideology of anti-racist British nationalism is a victory for the left, for the forces of rationality and humanism. No, on the contrary, we want comrades in the SWP to understand this rearticulated ideology of British nationalism the better to combat it. What is the point of condemning Cameron’s Munich speech in February for seeking to divide us on ethnic grounds (Smith again) when the Tory leader specified that the aim must be to “encourage integration” rather than “separation”?

Of course, it is integration on the bourgeoisie’s terms, not ours. They

want to see us united - black, brown and white - behind the queen and country. Yes, we are “all in it together”, British labour and British capital - our ‘common interest’ ranged against that of rival labour and rival capital.

Divisive

But the previous bourgeois majority consensus in favour of multiculturalism has been overturned. Not because it was bringing us together, but because it was dividing us. Anyone could see that allocating resources on the basis of the religion or ethnicity of the recipient group or ‘community’ was divisive. It was divisive from the British nationalist point of view and divisive from our, proletarian internationalist, point of view too. And, in these times of massive cuts, there is an added incentive to do away with the promotion through monetary grants of rival supplicant groupings. The multiculturalist notion that the encouragement of ethnic or religious sub-identities would somehow supplement and cement an overriding, unifying British identity was always dubious in any case.

Yet all this is lost on the SWP leadership, for whom ‘multiculturalism’ simply means people from different backgrounds finding common cause and getting on together. The term often seems interchangeable with ‘anti-racism’. As comrade Smith states, the Tories have “always been racist” and it is second nature to them to foment racial divisions when they are in difficulties.

The only problem is, there is no evidence of such racial divisions being fomented. Quite the opposite in fact. The comrades should try switching on their televisions some time. Every programme, from *Eastenders* to *A question of sport*, attempts to reinforce the nationalist, ‘official anti-racist’ message: black, white and brown, rich and poor, we British are one. We can and do ‘get on together’.

In view of all this it was very heartening to hear an SWP comrade who is actually prepared to think about the question. True, it would have been a brave man who opposed head-on the multiculturalist ‘truths’ accepted by the overwhelming majority in the hall - far from embracing and celebrating the existence in perpetuity of separate (and often rival) cultural identities,

our job is to work for the creation of a higher, working class culture that combines and incorporates the best, the richest of all cultures. It goes without saying that this process must be a voluntary one.

So Michael Rosen chose to undermine the left-liberal multiculturalist consensus from *within*. Yes, of course we should “defend multiculturalism”, he said, but we need to go further: “We should actually be defending *interculturalism*”. What this means is, first of all, upholding “the right of every human being to migrate” - they usually do so to escape political or economic repression. Furthermore, it is natural for people arriving in a new country to group together in order to secure their preferred food, music, religious practices and so on - we should not call this segregation.

Comrade Rosen warned that the “assimilation” proposed by the establishment was “a con”. It was assimilation into the ideal Britishness of the ruling class - “none of us are going to bloody get there”. But that clearly did not mean that he was against the coming together, the merging of separate cultures: his term ‘interculturalism’ said it all. He gave the example of his own family: three generations ago, they spoke Polish and Yiddish; now he speaks English. “How did that happen?” he asked us to consider. He might have added, ‘Where is the “multi” in that?’

Clearly the overwhelming majority in the room - including comrade Smith, it has to be said - just did not get it. Everyone knows that we must “defend multiculturalism” and not undermine it by wild talk of separate cultures being unified and thus superseded.

Comrade Rosen has taken the first step in combating the SWP’s multiculturalist illusions. Let us hope they can be dispelled. But for that to happen there would probably have to be a revolution within the organisation. There would have to be a culture of open, democratic debate - not that of the wise leaders handing down the line, to the loyal, three-minute echoes of the rank and file ●

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Fringe benefits

Two successful and well attended CPGB meetings

The Marxism fringe, organised by the CPGB, produced two well attended sessions of thought-provoking debate. Comrades from a variety of organisations joined us at the University of London Union to add their experiences and opinions to those of the platform speakers. On the Saturday, Mark Fischer of the CPGB and David Broder (the Commune) spoke on the culture of the left in Britain and, at the second meeting, Israeli socialist Moshé Machover gave his analysis of the ‘Arab awakening’.

The first session, entitled ‘The left: what a way to organise!’, kicked off with Mark Fischer’s description of his own undemocratic expulsion from the Young Communist League in the 1980s. The stifling atmosphere of the YCL was typical of many groups, where expulsions, bans on associating with members of other left organisations and a condescending attitude towards members and readers of the party press are endemic. The position of Marx and Engels was that the communist revolution must be

“the conscious act of the majority”, said comrade Fischer, and yet much of the left acts as though it can be carried through by an unaccountable clique. Workers must become “a sophisticated political class that understands the nuances of the different debates, the different trends within the workers’ movement and grasps the nuances of high-level politics. If we don’t have a class like that then we don’t have socialism.”

David Broder’s exposition went into the thought processes within the left groups. He talked of how appeals to personal loyalty can be used to disrupt internal democratic debate and how a long history of defeats and marginalisation has led to a fear of self-criticism and the manufacturing of urgency and super-optimism to persuade members that it was necessary to go for immediate action for its own sake rather than engage in careful discussion and arrive at informed strategic decisions: “Our movement has been through 90 years of defeat and degeneration, and the culture of the left reflects that. We need a longer-term vision of the kind

of society we wish to create and our organisational practice should reflect that.”

What followed was a lively debate on the role of the party, the balance between democracy and action, theory and practice and the relationship between the party and the wider working class. Comrades from several different tendencies participated.

Moshé Machover’s talk on the Arab awakening the following evening produced another wide-ranging debate. While comrade Machover warned that it was unlikely there would be thorough-going change in the short term, the recent upsurge erupting across the Arab world will retrospectively be seen as a “momentous turning point”, he predicted. He stated that these events are the opening scenes in a drama that will unfold over the coming years. However, although the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia have been “decapitated”, thanks to the mass mobilisations and the lack of will to defend the heads of state on the part of the military, the people still have the bulk of the ruling class to contend with. Even

so, the removal of Ben Ali and Mubarak constitutes a real step forward.

On the other hand, “I would regard the situation in Libya as a failed revolution, because the revolutionary forces no longer have control of the revolutionary process,” he went on. Because Gaddafi’s forces were stronger than them, the opposition movement turned to the west for support and rapidly lost control. Comrade Machover described the underlying feeling of solidarity and desire for Arab unity within the revolutionary movements - this is certainly brought out by Al Jazeera’s coverage. Left-inclined journalists and presenters at the channel consciously employ the term, ‘Arab awakening’ - the title of a seminal 1938 book by George Antonius.

After describing the history of working class and democratic struggles in the region, as well as imperialist interference and the colonial nature of Zionism, comrade Machover went on to give his view of the relationship of the Arab awakening to the Israel-Palestine conflict: “In the case

of the Palestinians, their strength lies in being part of the wider Arab nation. The only prospect for solving this conflict is that of unification with the Arab world, which can change the balance of power.”

Again a lively debate followed, with comrades questioning, among other things, the extent of Arab sentiment as a driving force for unification, whether it was a concession to Arab nationalism, and the role of the working class. Other important threads in the debate included the fate of minorities such as the Kurds and the Berbers, and the rights of the Hebrew or Israeli Jewish people.

Over the two meetings, comrades from the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Fight, International Bolshevik Tendency, Socialist Party of Great Britain, the US Platypus group, the Commune and, of course, the CPGB made contributions to the debate. The Marxism fringe provided a taste of what can be expected at next month’s Communist University ●

Leo Godwin

MARXISM 2011

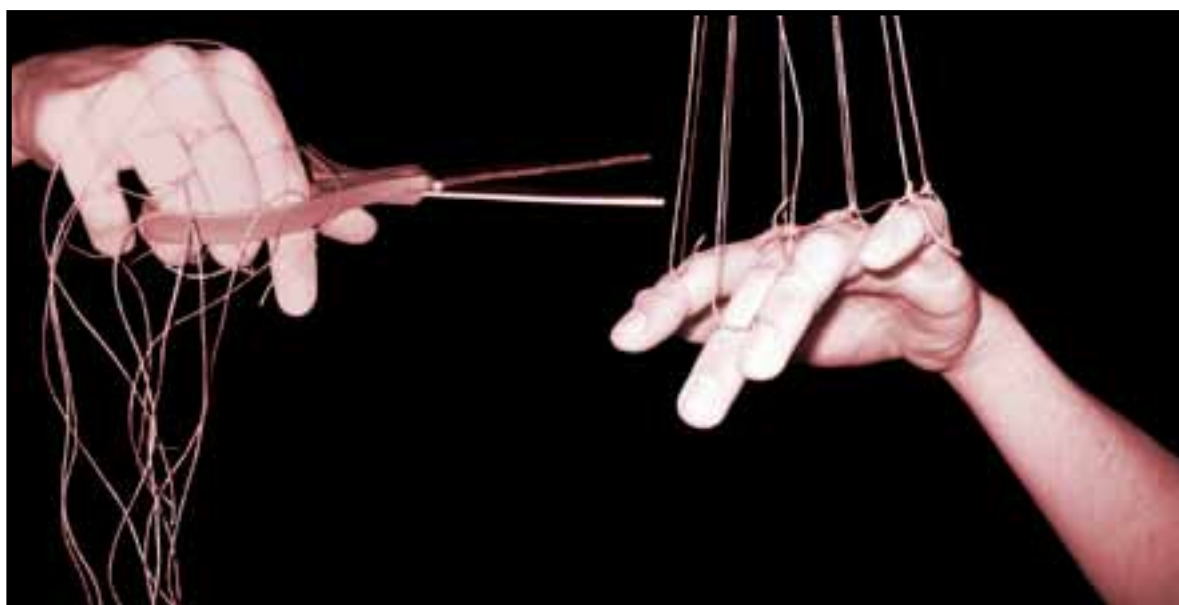
Impressions from sectarian alley

The SWP was a lot less hostile than in previous years

At each and every Marxism there are places where attendees are politely warned not to go by Socialist Workers Party full-timers and more narrow-minded members. The left groups, armed only with pasting tables, books, pamphlets and leaflets (which just might have the odd critical thing or two to say about the SWP and its leadership), are confined to what the SWP tops dub 'sectarian alley'.

New SWP recruits are instructed not to waste time talking to us 'sectarians'. We are there only to "poach" members - mere locusts to "parasite" off the "the party". This approach is all too reminiscent of the attitude of the 'official' CPGB towards 'the Trots' - an irrelevant, inward-looking distraction.

Anyway, this year again many far left groups set up their stalls outside Marxism's new location, centred on the University College London campus in Euston. Most of my time was spent on the CPGB stall, and I can report that it was mainly an enjoyable experience. Unlike previous years, there were no threats against comrades handing out leaflets for our fringe meetings and no low-level intimidation of those on the stall. Doubtless because of the antipathy against competing ideas and tendencies drilled into members by the SWP leadership, the attitude towards the *Weekly Worker* and our ideas is, of course, largely negative - albeit characterised more by indifference than outright hostility: slightly embarrassed, many look down at their feet as they walk by, while some snort vaguely in our direction. But there are quite a few comrades who will now stop for a brief chat, take a leaflet and then go on their way. While our stall can never claim to do a roaring trade at Marxism, this year we sold well over £200 of materials, including books,



Will SWP members ever cut free?

badges, papers and even a whole set of *The Leninist*, forerunner to the *Weekly Worker*. Several of the more open-minded and friendly SWP comrades we have established relations with over the years came over to the stall and also attended our two fringe meetings.

I like spending time on and around the stalls. I enjoy the exchanges you have during the course of the weekend - something that is perfectly healthy and natural in the workers' movement. Moreover, the festival is a chance for you to catch up with friends and comrades from various left groups/localities whom you may not have seen for a while, to find out what others on the left are saying first hand and to buy some interesting literature - in my case a copy of Michael Löwy's *Politics of combined and uneven development* from the well-stocked Bookmarks official stall, and a new translation of

the Communist International's theses on women's organisation from the Spartacist League. Other groups were the Sparts' nemesis/twin in the form of the International Bolshevik Tendency, the Commune, *Revolutionary History* (with its shiny new volume on Iran), Workers Power, the Socialist Equality Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales (very briefly), Workers Fight and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

The award for worst fringe meeting/leaflet must go to the social-imperialists of the latter group, who were handing out a leaflet asked: "Was 'no to Nato intervention' the only anti-imperialist line for Libya?" This, of course, led to some rather heated debates on the nature of imperialism with AWL members. Not only CPGB comrades, but - to their credit - some members of the Spartacists and the occasional SWPer certainly took the AWL

members to task. The CPGB's Mark Fischer pointed out that the AWL had learnt nothing from the Iraq disaster, and that they were still labouring under the illusion that imperialist intervention could create a 'space' for working class activity denied them under Gaddafi.

The AWL's Daniel Randall, once an oppositionist on the question of Iraq, one might recall, reminded us that there were now trade unions in that country! This idiotic position overlooks the obvious fact these rights have been won *in spite* of the carnage and barbarity inflicted on Iraqi society, and that, had it not been for the invasion and occupation of Iraq (which the AWL refused to oppose), then today Iraq would almost certainly be in a situation more analogous to Egypt with an outcome more favourable to the masses. The AWL leaflet is all the more disingenuous in that it claims to

be 'anti-imperialist'. For the AWL, the "right side" won in 2003, something undisputed by AWL members at their stall. Shameful.

Over a beer on the Saturday night, an American friend from the Platypus group wondered what it would mean for the SWP to have 30,000 members. As currently constituted, it would be nigh on a miracle - for the SWP or any other left group, for that matter - to reach such a figure. Bureaucratic centralism, the inability of members to *openly* articulate their differences, the unwillingness to engage with other far-left groups or strive for revolutionary unity preclude this. This is why we need a space to thrash out our views and work out ideas which *can* change the world.

It was excellent that attendance at Marxism was up on past years, and also positive that some of the more distasteful aspects of running a stall in 'sectarian alley' were not repeated. Opening up the Marxism timetable to address some of the points made by those to the SWP's left (its relationship to the union bureaucracy, lack of programme, etc), not to mention actually inviting the other groups to bring their stalls inside, would be real step in radically transforming the culture of the SWP, and with it the left as a whole. It might even help us to emerge from the quagmire we are currently all in: talent is wasted, new comrades are miseducated and our political work is criminally replicated.

That is why it is not 'sectarian' to address our disunity in the honest and forthright fashion that we in the CPGB do. See you next year, comrades ●

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The situation is excellent ...

As part of its (often basically nominal) commitment to revolution, the SWP arranged a bloc of three Marxism sessions devoted to that subject. The first saw SWP veteran Colin Barker give some answers to a fundamentally important question - what is a revolutionary situation? His views were in many ways more sober and considered than one has come to expect from an organisation that exists in a more or less permanent state of slightly forced excitement.

He began with two definitions: one from Trotsky, who argued that a revolutionary situation was characterised by dual power; and another from the bourgeois political scientist, Charles Tilly, who identified three factors - the old regime's loss of a distinct part of its power, contenders to power enjoying a substantial level of popular support, and an inability of the old regime to immediately repress the contenders.

It was important, he said, to be clear on what did and what did not fit these overlapping definitions. May 1968 was *not* a

revolutionary situation, for example, as the old regime never lost control. Conversely, there are some conjunctures that "don't smell right" to revolutionaries, but nevertheless fit the bill: comrade Barker cited the fall of Franco, the end of Stalinist rule in Poland and the end of apartheid as stitch-up transitions that nevertheless were real responses to real revolutionary ferment.

In 2011, with the Arab awakening and mass revolts in Greece and Spain, we are clearly not faced with such a situation - yet. The process is drawn out - there is no "straight line" to a resolution, and everything is still to play for. These processes begin, Barker argued with reference to Egypt, with a great show of mass popular unity around the immediate demand of the masses, before dividing, as the generalised crisis reasserts itself along the lines of particular social interests. This results in what Trotsky calls the "politics of flabbiness", with neither side able to fully assert its authority.

A side effect of this pattern is that the initial revolutionary vanguard

is almost invariably a minority.

In 1917, it was the workers of Petrograd in advance of the great masses in the Russian countryside; in Egypt, it is estimated that at most 25% of the population took part in the spring protests in some way - a not insubstantial fraction, to be sure, but a socialist revolution requires the support of the majority.

Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg's *The mass strike*, Barker argued that a major consequence of the opening of a revolutionary situation was the "interplay of politics and economics". This is true enough, but comrade Barker seemed to imply that our response should be to focus on the economic demands and wait for the politics to follow, though he did not come out and say it as such. He concluded by contrasting the revolutionary situation with the insurrectionary situation, when the question of taking power is immediately posed.

The debate initially consisted of some filling in of blanks; SWP student leader Mark Bergfeld reintroduced the idea of the party to the revolutionary process, albeit

in somewhat vague terms (ie, we need one - of some kind or another ...) I attempted to emphasise the international character of revolutionary situations - 1917, after all, came out of the general crisis issued in by the great war, and followed the Easter rising and major mutinies among the belligerents. Even 1968 had its roots in international dynamics.

As such, we should not focus unduly on the immediate economic demands in this or that workplace - in fact, quite the opposite. We should put forward the general interest of the working class, which means ultimately bringing the international dimension to revolutionary struggle.

On cue, SWP debating norms were enforced - the very next speaker drew on an inane dispute at his workplace over the quality of furniture in the staff room (Marxism clone interventions, as ever, are getting increasingly difficult to parody). Many other speakers returned to this example, incredibly. The monotony was partially broken by a contribution from Jeremy

Drinkall of Workers Power, who seemed to imagine that his defence of the transitional programme and soviet-fetishism would seem less stale and dogmatic if he spoke *really, really loud*.

In reply, Barker spent some time on comrade Drinkall, pointing out (partly) sensibly that in Britain our experience of soviet-type formations and councils of action is limited, and we may have to do without the demand (though, I must emphasise, there is much merit in building up the *idea* in the consciousness of the movement if we are prepared also to make broader propaganda for working class power - neither is likely to figure into the SWP's material soon, alas).

Unfortunately, he insisted also on rehashing that old chestnut about Lenin becoming a Trotskyist in 1917 and the Bolshevik Party growing from nothing to a majority force in a few months, a myth very soundly debunked by more recent scholarship. But after all, it is the SWP ●

Harley Filben

PENSIONERS

Care provision should be free, not for profit

Care for older people should not be dependent upon a cruel postcode lottery or private provision. **Eddie Ford** looks at the Dilnot report into the current state of care for the elderly

Old age should be something to look forward to - a time of greater relaxation with friends and loved ones, perhaps to pursue interests and activities so far neglected. In reality however, for many it is something to be dreaded. After a lifetime of wage-slavery, joyless and soul-destroying labour, their 'reward' is to be forced into impoverishment and denied a dignified life. And often suffering the added humiliation of having to forego their home, which they were hoping or expecting to leave to their children, just in order to receive any sort of care at all. Screwed from the cradle to the grave, you could say.

But now we have yet another government-commissioned report, published on July 4 - this time under the auspices of Andrew Dilnot CBE, a former director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.¹ Last year, this commission on the funding of care and support was charged with recommending a system of social care for the elderly in England that was "fair" and "sustainable" - the projection being that over-65s are expected to reach 12 million by the mid-2020s. Currently, one in three women and one in four men are likely to need long-term care, with nursing/residential care costs ranging between £25,000 and £60,000 a year - but some estimate that for about 1% of the population that cost could climb up to £400,000, whilst one in 10 will have to pay £150,000 or more. Under the present means-tested system, any individual with savings or assets in excess of £23,250 (which naturally includes the value of the house) has to fork out the total bill for residential/nursing care costs. Therefore *punishing* you for doing the supposedly right and responsible thing - that is, working hard for the bosses and saving your money, instead of frittering it away on booze, fags, Spanish holidays and video games. That will teach you to be prudent. Perversely, but inevitably, this created an incentive to give away your hard earned money - in some way or another - as fast as possible, so as to keep you under the £23,250 cut-off point. To some extent, this meant that the less money you had, the (potentially) better off you were. Not that this is a source of joy.

In contemporary Britain the 'care' older people often get is nothing short of criminal - exposed to a regime of routine neglect or worse. Something that a BBC *Panorama* documentary highlighted in April 2009, when it sent undercover investigators to work as carers in prominent companies like Domiciliary Care, Carewatch and Care UK - all, of course, aiming to make fat profits from the old age 'industry'. Needless to say, though you would think that such work demands a certain level of expertise, the training given to the staff by these viciously exploitative companies was barely above that need to work in a burger bar - with a salary to match. Hardly surprising, then, that the 'clients' at these institutions were regularly mistreated, whatever the subjective intentions of the staff.

Then more recently, we had the distressing example of the Elmer Sands nursing home in Bognor Regis, the manager of which was struck off the nursing register last month for regarding it as "no better than a kennel" (which is doubtlessly unfair to kennel-owners).² Or the government inquiry last week, which found, to no great astonishment, that nearly 100,000 people are not having their end-of-life care needs met - and that the whole system was based on a 'postcode lottery', with, for example, Tower Hamlets spending five times more than Cornwall on palliative care. An extra cruel twist is that the privately owned care home you are in could go bust - like Southern Cross possibly, which runs 751 such establishments and now finds itself on the "brink of collapse". Leaving you terrified about what the future might bring, facing a traumatic upheaval or even potential homelessness³ - though, of course, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, whose members buy places in Southern Cross PLC homes, were more concerned that unless the firm acted quickly there was a real danger it would lose its "market share".⁴

The upshot is that old age for so many effectively means being thrown onto the scrapheap - abandonment in a degrading and frightening environment, to be increasingly patronised, or even treated like a downright idiot, just because of your years: a reflection of our undeniably ageist society and culture, which has become virtually institutionalised. All this was further confirmed by a report published on June 29, *Age of opportunity: transforming the lives of older people in poverty*, by the Centre for Social Justice⁵ - and a follow-up to its publication last year, *The forgotten age*. The CSJ was, of course, established in 2004 by the former Tory leader, Iain Duncan Smith, its remit being to seek "effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain" - so one could hardly accuse the CSJ of being a bunch of wild, leftwing subversives. In what makes for generally grim reading, the report talks about a "lost generation" of one million-plus pensioners left in isolation and loneliness - getting no state support whatsoever, despite having very limited financial resources. Not to mention the six million unpaid carers, which by the CSJ's calculations "saves" the state nearly £90 billion a year. *Very* cheap labour indeed - not that the report dwells on this point.

For the CSJ, a major housing "shake-up" is required - Britain is now faced by growing numbers of pensioners living in their own homes, but unable to meet basic repair and maintenance costs. The result, as they say, is "significant housing poverty among older home-owners, especially in the private sector" - meaning that "currently there are 3.2 million older householders living in non-decent private sector homes". Iniquitously, the report argues, the poorest older householders face a "perfect storm" because of the gradual loss of grants for repairs to crumbling private

homes, the failure of efforts to help the elderly release equity from their properties, inefficiencies in the grant system to help old people adapt their homes to cope with their disabilities, poor progress on home insulation, and so on. *Age of opportunity* states that there are 200,000 households in "fuel poverty" every winter.

So is it the Dilnot commission to the rescue of the elderly? No, of course not, even if some aspects of its proposals represent a limited advance over what we have now. Hence the report proposes to quadruple the means-tested threshold to £100,000, so as to "better reflect the rise in property prices seen over the last two decades", which is not without logic, and also to place a cap of between £35,000 and £50,000 on the amount an individual has to stump up for their own care - after that the state would pick up the tab. The cap will apply whether a person is receiving support in his or her own house or living in a residential home, the commission maintaining that the new cap and the increased threshold will mean no-one will lose more than 30% of their savings/assets in order to pay for care. Though it should be immediately noted that the cap will *not* include so-called 'hotel costs' for food and accommodation, by far the largest component for most people - thus making the cap far less generous, or progressive, than it might first seem. In mitigation, or justification, the report argued that care homes should introduce a "standard charge" for such charges/costs at around £7,000 to £10,000 per year - though why or how this would happen was left unexplained; as if care/residential homes are philanthropic charities, as opposed to profit-making businesses.

The report also offered the hope that, with the state paying for the high-cost cases, or the 'upper end' of the market, then the private insurance industry would be duly "encouraged" to develop policies which would cover any care costs below the cap. Additionally, all local councils are to offer loans to home-owners to pay care costs. The commission wants to see its proposals implemented by 2014. In an upbeat conclusion, Andrew Dilnot admitted that the package of reforms

recommended by the commission would add an initial £1.7 billion a year to government spending, rising to £3.6 billion by 2025 (currently just over £14 billion a year is spent by the government on social care). But he went on to state that this was equivalent to just 0.25% of total public spending and described it as a "price well worth paying" to take away the fear of having to sell your homes and spend almost all your savings on care when they get older.

Not a chance, and members of the commission are already sensing betrayal. In this age of austerity and vicious assaults on the living standards of the working class, even the Dilnot report's totally inadequate recommendations - as far as communists are concerned - will be strangled at birth by this wretched penny-pinching coalition government. To this end, the health secretary, Andrew Lansley, hypocritically thanked Dilnot for his "immensely valuable contribution" - but immediately noted that such changes would require a "significant cost" and hence must be "balanced" against other "funding priorities". Very prudent. Therefore, he declared, the Dilnot commission's report was merely a "basis for engagement" and announced another process of "consultation" - or, as one government source told the BBC, the report has been "kicked into the medium-length grass". Thanks, but no thanks. Nor is it exactly difficult to see which direction the government has in mind -

towards some form of a compulsory private insurance scheme, with a figure like £17,000-£20,000 being bandied about.

Dot Gibson, general secretary of the National Pensioners Convention rightly slates the Dilnot report for really having "created more heat than light when it comes to the social care debate." Nothing in its recommendations will end means testing, improve standards or prevent people from still having to sell their homes to pay for care. As everyone knows, the "current care system is in crisis", yet, as she says, "these recommendations won't go anywhere near putting that right."⁶

Dilnot suggests that the old should be made to pay for the care of other older people - yet in every other part of the welfare system the costs are borne by society as a whole. Care for the elderly should be no different from the NHS - it should be free at the point of use and provided on the basis of need. Communists certainly reject all 'solutions' based on the private sector, which not only pursue profits as their main goal, but always degenerate into soulless - and very costly - nightmares in terms of the quality of care and human fulfilment. Domiciliary Care, Carewatch, Care UK, etc, prove that beyond doubt. For us, it is an obscenity to claim that society cannot afford to ensure that people's winter years are satisfying, comfortable, stimulating and fully integrated with the rest of society. And if Cameron, Duncan Smith and Dilnot say that the capitalist system cannot afford to do this then our answer is simple. Their system should go ●

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Notes

1. www.dilnotcommission.dh.gov.uk.
2. *Daily Mail* July 1.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13761790.
4. http://tinyurl.com/6et288e.
5. www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/default.asp.
6. www.maturetimes.co.uk/Dilnot-Commission-misses-golden-opportunity-to-bring-fairness-into-crisis-ridden-social-care-system



Dot Gibson: slates Dilnot

OUR HISTORY

On the brink of a general strike

Having taken a lead in the Hands off Russia movement (see *Weekly Worker* June 23), the newly formed CPGB threw itself into the struggle of Britain's miners. At the end of August 1920 this strategically important section of the class voted in favour of an all-out strike. Their two demands were a wage rise to restore purchasing power and a sizeable reduction in the price of domestic coal. The Communist Party assessed the prospects in the lead article of *The Communist* of September 9 1920.

Manifesto

Fellow workers - the executive committee of the Communist Party feel it incumbent upon themselves to advise you to watch with ever increasing vigilance the series of crises - industrial and political - through which we are now passing. Despite all the lying and deceit of the capitalist newspapers, the Council of Action, representing on this rare and refreshing occasion the underlying spirit and determination of the organised masses of the country hitherto unknown, have prevented yet another open attack upon Soviet Russia.

The declaration of the Miners' Federation for a general strike to commence on or after September 25 presents to us a first-class industrial crisis, which may have far-reaching effects on the development of the organised labour movement. The transport workers and railway workers have shown unhesitating loyalty to, and solidarity with, their allies, the mineworkers. The Triple Alliance¹ will now have an opportunity of showing whether the confidence reposed in it by organised labour in general has been justified.

We hope and urge that trade unionists employed in every section of industry will not be led away by the studied propaganda of abuse and misrepresentation employed to destroy the miners' worthy and commendable effort to determine the price of the commodity, for the production of which they are mainly, if not entirely, responsible. They who control supplies must inevitably control prices, and the mineworkers undoubtedly can give or withhold the necessary supplies of coal ...

We desire to warn the revolutionary trade unionists and communists against the possibility of intervention on the part of the government in this dispute, which will mean the abandonment in part, or in its entirety, of the miners' claim. Signs are visible on all hands that the master class has lined up with more solidarity than ever in order to prosecute the class war against the legitimate demands of the mineworkers in particular and of trade unionists in general ...

Our duty, therefore, is clear in recommending to militant trade unionists that they cannot hope for any radical improvement in their economic status unless and until they have broken the power of the capitalist and landlord class, who live their vicious and indolent lives at the expense of the productive members of the community. Things are reaching a stage in which the workers must definitely assume control of their lives and conditions

by controlling the factories and workshops, running industry and transport for themselves - the working class. The majority of the working class despise the present government, as well as all other capitalist governments.

The militants must be prepared, therefore, to take advantage of every industrial and political crisis in order to strengthen their position and to encourage and inspire their fellow wage workers with a desire for the definite and conclusive overthrow of bourgeois civilisation, based as it is upon unemployment, prostitution and exploitation of the wage workers.

The Communist Party urges the toiling masses to prepare by every means in their power - through trade union branches, the existing trades councils and the newly appointed Councils of Action - to assume responsibility for the control of the resources of the country which is rightfully theirs and for the administration of the means whereby they live.

Russia has shown us a magnificent example and has given to us an encouraging and inspiring lead that we must follow, if we are to break the bonds of capitalism which keep us in wage-slavery and subjection. Italy and its splendid, organised proletariat is on the threshold of momentous developments in this direction. Germany, Austria, disillusioned Poland draw nearer to the establishment of soviet governments. There is no country in the world where the workers could so easily become the masters of their own destiny as in Great Britain, and we, therefore, appeal to our revolutionary comrades in every trade, in every occupation, in every industry, to be loyal, to be vigilant and unceasing in their efforts for the final overthrow of the capitalist regime.

The workers alone can free the working class.

***The Communist* September 9 1920**

But the miners were abandoned by the reformist leaders of the Triple Alliance transport and railway unions. These forced the Miners' Federation back into negotiations with the employers. There were no concessions on offer - just the now familiar trick of a productivity deal, referred to as the 'datum line'. Under the signatures of its chair and secretary, comrades Arthur MacManus and Albert Inkpin, the party urged the miners to steel themselves for a bigger fight to come.

An open letter to the miners

Without strike or lockout, without the stoppage of a single wheel, [the miners] have been out-manoeuvred, forced to retreat from a discussion of the terms they put forward, forced into discussion of the terms put forward by the owners ...

The barrage sent up by the capitalist press in the last week of August and the first week of September made such a noise that few people realised how strong was the miners' position. They were really unassailable. All the curses of the kept press were as ineffective as the curses of these creatures usually



Durham miners: vanguard

are. The bad house of capitalism was shrieking because it was trembling. The miners' case was on a basis of rock ...

They were basing their claim on the human needs of labour ... Every member of the working class understood something of the miner's life and so was willing to back him in almost any claim for increased wages ... The workers knew that the cost of living had gone up by 30% since the miners' last increase and ... in spite of the newspaper barrage, the workers realised as clearly as could be that the reduction of 14s 2d in the price of coal was a move *on their own behalf and against the coal-owners*, the coal profiteers and government; on that alone they were willing to back the miners in their strike. The workers of the country knew full well that the government had cheated the miners over the Sankey Report² ... they knew that the government would try to cheat both them and the miners once again. In a word, their whole attitude was sympathetic.

That was the strength of the miners' position four weeks ago ... The miners held the strategic position; they had only to hold tight; the press barrage would have exhausted itself, leaving them unharmed, and bit by bit the government would have been forced to discuss the one and indivisible demand; they would have bluffed, no doubt, but finally they were bound to yield to the miners. A situation with potentialities for labour would have been created.

What has happened? The opportunity of mastery over events has been frittered away. Point after point has been given to the enemy. The strongest positions have been flung away. They dropped the 14s 2d - they dropped it for a sort of understanding that prices would not be raised at once. Then they found they could not get their 2s. The government had cheated them, and then began the alienation of the workers generally.

The question of output was put forward. It was urged with all skill and advocacy by the prime minister, inspired by the owners who had been whispering in Downing Street from the very first. Presently the Federation yielded again - wisely this time, perhaps - for, once they had abandoned the 14s 2d, they had thrown away their strongest position. *The conference postponed the strike.* The government and the owners proceeded once more to drive a hard bargain, knowing that the threat of a strike was now empty - at any rate, of a national strike backed by all the forces of the Federation. And, last of all, driven from point to point, distrusting the Triple Alliance, without any feeling that they had a movement behind them, distrusting even their ability to call again the strike they had once postponed, the miners' conference in something like despair agreed to submit the owners proposal to a ballot vote of their members.

It is, it has been, a melancholy business. It is necessary for the rank and file colliers to note exactly what were the lessons as well as the fundamental causes which led to the debacle. We need not ponder over minor matters, though there are obviously a number of things in which defective machinery, defective leadership, defective tactics went far to destroy the conduct of the campaign.

The chief defect of the Triple Alliance goes more deep than these. *It is the fact that the Triple Alliance is in the main run by reformist leaders.* A Triple Alliance strike means a general strike, and a general strike means perhaps a revolution! No-one but a revolutionist will face the possibility of revolution.

No-one but a revolutionist faced with the prospect of casting the country into a general strike will persist in a demand for 2s, or anything similarly small. Every strike leader feels his responsibility. But what nerves him to

decide is revolutionary outlook; what unnerves him is a reformist outlook. So long as the Triple Alliance is not controlled by a revolutionary - or at any rate a militant - rank and file, just so long will the leaders of it, when brought to the brink of the strike, shrink from the responsibility involved in a general stoppage.

And now that you have examined the causes of defeat, let us see what this 'datum line' means. This 'datum line' which has to be reached before wages are advanced is simply payment by results on a national scale. As capitalism develops, as the big boss becomes bigger and bigger, he meets the advance of trade unionism by new methods of super-production. 'Greater output' is now the formula by which the employer is going to sweat money out of his wage-slaves and coin their blood for profits ...

Again, the Miners' Federation is the vanguard of British trade unionism, and a defeat of the vanguard affects the whole movement. Feeble though it may be from a communist standpoint, the class solidarity of the British workers is beginning. They are beginning to respond, they are emboldened by the victory of a section, and when a section loses they feel the shock of defeat. The miners' defeat will be felt through the whole movement ...

What ought the miners to do? It is well to recognise defeat; it is well to face it clearly and admit it. But, that done, what is the next step?

Remember that so long as the owners have the power over production there will be no advance possible. Whatever you put before them, however strong your case may be, they will fool you and fool you again. *The owners will fool you as long as they have control.* That is why they made the government offer to have a general strike, an insurrection - anything sooner than allow the miners to control the price.

Therefore, the next movement in the mining industry must insist on control, control of prices, control of conditions, control by the workers.

A renewal of the struggle will take place soon. Of that there is no doubt. What is doubted is whether it will be unsuccessful like this one has been.

In order to win the next struggle, the following period must be spent in overhauling the machinery, of the Federation, of the districts, of each pit. At every election of a lodge secretary the candidate should be tested by their fitness in, and capacities for, a general strike.

Remember that the owners will fool you unless you get control.

Remember that reformist leaders will shrink back at the last minute.

Remember these things and choose men who, understanding that a strike may lead to revolution, will not on that account shrink back •

***The Communist* October 7 1920**

Notes

1. The Triple Alliance, set up originally in 1910, consisted of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, the National Union of Railwaymen and the National Transport Workers' Federation.
2. The Sankey Commission recommendation to nationalise the coal industry was not implemented.

JUNE 30

Bigger, better, more coordinated

Rank and file pressure must be brought to bear not only within the unions, writes **Michael Copestake**, but on the Labour leadership too

The June 30 strikes involving up to 750,000 public sector workers may only have been for one day, and may only have involved unaffiliated unions, but they gave the Labour tops much pain - a condition that will be intensified if, as we are led to believe, the next round of mass strikes in the autumn goes ahead with affiliated unions included. That Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and the entire shadow cabinet distanced themselves from the strikes (a Tory "trap", they argue) provoked anger amongst many trade union leaders and Labour members alike - once again highlighting the contradictory nature of the Labour Party.

The results of the strikes in terms of impact were generally good. The claims of government and sections of the press to the effect that 'no-one will notice' were shown to be false and the government could not credibly paint an overall picture of 'business as usual'. There was an excellent media profile. Some 28% of both state and private schools were fully closed and another 5,000 or so were badly affected; emergency service call centres in London were left without staff and many benefits workers also took strike action. Court hearings and driving tests were postponed, though border controls and airports were not disrupted seriously. The Public and Commercial Services union and the government put the figures for PCS members on strike at 200,000 and 110,000 respectively. No matter what the truth, all picket lines across the country were said to have been in high spirits - and with good reason.

In London some 30,000 attended a strike day rally, 5,000 in Manchester, 2,000 in Sheffield, 3,000 in Brighton, 4,000 in Bristol, with many more all over the country. A feature of the day was the near universal expression of disapproval by workers at the rallies, including booing and jeering, whenever a speaker made mention of Ed Miliband and his slimy stance. Miliband, while not directly condemning them, said that the unions should get back round the negotiating table - even though it was clear that it has been more a case of the government demanding surrender over pensions: workers must work longer, pay more and receive less. Between the government axe and the neck of the public sector workers there is only thin air, and Miliband knows it.

One bizarre aspect of the media coverage was the now infamous and downright weird interview in which Miliband, assuming that he would be edited down to only a single sound bite, gave the exact same answer almost word for word to at least six different questions in order to get his precisely contrived 'middle of the road' position across.

The only union leader of any note to stand with Miliband against strike action has been Chris Keates, head of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, who claims to believe that the unions must be seen to have exhausted every available option in order to win the battle for public



Unions should use their strength in the Labour Party

opinion. Given that every option short of striking has been exhausted, this view does not carry much weight at a grassroots level. What is interesting is the extent of support for the strikes not just from the labour movement, but from a good proportion of our class in the face of adverse propaganda.

The opinion polls are mixed, but make for an interesting snapshot of the state of play. *The Economist* has noted that strikes by teachers provoke an ambiguous response. On the one hand, people are broadly sympathetic when it comes to the reasons for the strike and believe in teachers' right to withdraw their labour, but when they are asked about the inconvenience, support dips. And, of course, that is the quandary for public sector workers - it is, by and large, not the government that is inconvenienced when they strike, but the public. This dilemma gives the government some leeway in its attempts to create a division between workers in the state and private sectors - most of whom do not receive occupational pensions

that match up to even the inadequate ones that teachers and civil servants have won. Private sector workers are affected by public sector cuts as users, not providers, and for them the question is not posed as a sectional or trade union matter, like a struggle over wages and conditions. They have a class interest, of course, but where is the party able to represent this?

Presently, 76% of *Guardian* readers polled online believed that Ed Miliband should have supported the strikes, but, as the right of the Labour Party will point out, the online readership of *The Guardian* ain't going to swing a general election.¹ Meanwhile, Progress, the reliably sickening, New Labour think-tank funded by Lord Sainsbury (who is presently withholding money from the party itself), went all nostalgic about the 'good old days', when there were 'proper' workers going on strike, not these overpaid, middle class 'white collar' workers.

Its website commends Miliband for having "got his betrayal in first".²

Except of course, as the author points out, the unions involved last Thursday - PCS, NUT, ATL and UCU - are not affiliated to the Labour Party. Certainly the whole situation would be even more awkward for Miliband if the striking unions *were* affiliated. Unlike during the mid-90s to early 2000s, when Tony Blair managed to persuade sections of the capitalist class to stump up substantial sums of money for the New Labour project, today funding by the unions is vital. However, it will not be easy to force the Labour leaders to side with the workers and back their strikes - after all, they have never done so in the past.

It goes without saying that next to no influence can be exerted on Miliband and the Labour leadership by non-affiliated unions, which is why there should be no more talk of disaffiliation - quite the reverse in fact: RMT, NUT, UCU, etc must rejoin, and PCS, NUT, UCU, etc must take their place alongside them. Strands on the left - not least the Socialist Party

in England and Wales - oppose this on the grounds that Labour is now a bourgeois party and the unions would be better served to dump it and set up a mark two. This is completely off the beam. Miliband's squirming over the strikes makes it perfectly obvious that Labour is not like the Tories and Liberal Democrats - no matter how much the Blairite right would like it to be. In addition, such comrades are missing the central point. Labour leaders have always betrayed workers because the union bureaucrats have allowed them to do so. It would be exactly the same if the unions under their current leadership started from scratch and set up a new party.

There are no neat little side steps to get round the problem of the Labour Party. The problem is actually one of working class organisation as a whole - not least that of unresponsive and unaccountable union leaders. Sectarian interventions to get leftwingers elected on the basis of social democratic ideas are not just insufficient, but positively toxic for the movement as a whole. Then there is the total absence of a single Marxist party, whose work both in the trade unions and in Labour around an alternative programme for the whole of society would immeasurably strengthen the fight for the democracy that the workers' movement requires in order to control its own organisations and, eventually, take power. In that light the CPGB demands that trade union officials are recallable, that no union official receives more pay than the average for the workers in their union. We also demand that the bans and proscriptions in the Labour Party are lifted, that party conference is made sovereign, that MPs too be paid a worker's wage.

The concentration of working class influence in the Labour Party that the affiliation of every union would bring must be matched by the corresponding concentration of Marxist forces in a genuine Communist Party. The independent interests of the working class must be posed in every area. The left is quite right to call for bigger, better and more coordinated strikes against the cuts. But it is wrong to neglect the parallel struggle to transform working class organisation, not least within the Labour Party.

Action of general strike proportions might well cause the collapse of the coalition government, but its replacement by a Labour administration overseeing gentler, more gradual cuts would not be much of a gain. It was rank-and-file pressure in the unions that got 500,000 onto the streets of London on March 26 and 750,000 out on strike on June 30. We need more of the same - not just to ensure that the autumn sees millions out on strike, but to force the union leaders to utilise their political and financial power within Labour and decisively defeat the openly pro-capitalist right wing ●

Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/poll/2011/jul/01/ed-miliband-lost-credibility.
2. www.progressonline.org.uk/columns/column.asp?c=709.

JUNE 30

LONDON

Grounds for optimism

The June 30 London demonstration, which made its way from Lincoln's Inn Fields, through Parliament Square and down to Westminster Abbey, was a lot bigger than I expected. An estimated 30,000 striking workers hit the streets. In terms of the energy and class composition, it felt rather like a smaller re-run of March 26, the TUC-organised demonstration, albeit this time in glorious sunshine.

While the strikers formed the overwhelming majority, there were many familiar faces from the student movement, Unison members who had taken the day off, pensioners, anti-cuts activists and even some school kids. Unsurprisingly, the official union placards featured rather bland slogans like 'Fair pensions for all'.

My sales of the *Weekly Worker* were nothing to shout about: I sold about 10 in total and handed out around another 25 - not very many at all. I know from speaking to paper sellers from other left groups that they had similar experience. This probably reflects something about where the movement is at the moment: while the militancy and energy of the strikers cannot be questioned, this energy has not - yet - manifested itself in a discernible thirst for political ideas. Although one or two people buying the paper told me it was their first time, the majority were already familiar with the *Weekly Worker* and its approach. Given the far left's current divisions and general isolation (something once again evident), it is perhaps no surprise that many currently seem content to follow the lead of their unions. Yet this is only the *beginnings* of something with a lot of potential.

Unable to get into the packed official rally, I listened to the speakers at the overflow further down the road. Several speakers - many from in and



Larger than expected

around the far left - climbed onto the trailer stationed in front of a nearby pub and struggled to make themselves heard over a rather unpredictable PA, powered by a spluttering generator. This might have made the atmosphere rather raw, but the same could not be said of some of the speeches.

Julie Waterson of the Socialist Workers Party delivered a speech which was rather more inspiring than the SWP's 'Cameron must go' placards. She rightly emphasised that this unfolding struggle was essentially one to defend gains won by our class in struggle. This earned the scorn of one NUT official in my earshot. He told those around him that they should get some "decent" speakers

who would not come out with "such nonsense". But the crowd, some of whom were soaking up the speeches in the beer garden along with a well-deserved pint, liked what she had to say. Her call for further coordinated strike action in the autumn were met with cheers.

The Socialist Party's James Kerr highlighted the marked absence of his union. He demanded that Unison top dog Dave Prentis "put his money where his mouth is", urging a one-day public sector general strike in October (cue more cheers). While such a protest strike would, of course, be welcome (and is much more grounded in the real world than the likes of SWP/Workers Power's demands for

indefinite, "all out, stay out" action), it is surely more than within our capabilities to draw in the private sector too. Not only could this tackle head-on the government's attempts to drive a wedge between the public and private sector over pensions: it could also be a further step towards rallying our class as a whole.

While less politically experienced, some of the newly qualified teachers who spoke made some very good points about the enormous work burden - coupled with the astronomical debt looming over them like the sword of Damocles. One of them pointed out the urgency of organising: "If the government is not stopped now, they will come for us again".

Both Austin Harney (Labour Representation Committee and PCS) and Steve Hedley (Rail, Maritime and Transport union) took Ed Miliband to task for his supine ramblings about the strikes being 'wrong'. Perhaps missing the point somewhat, comrade Harney said that even *Neil Kinnock* had supported the miners until violence broke out on the picket lines. But where was the violence here, he asked - the unions had "jumped through hoops" to meet the requirements of the law on balloting, etc.

As the crowd began to disperse, the 'strikers' assembly' was in full session on the lawn, the UK Uncut football match between Bankers City FC and Public Sector United kicked off in the park around the corner, and some even made their way to the Greek embassy to 'kick off' in a rather different fashion.

As I made my way home on a bus much delayed by the protests in the city centre, the well-oiled wheels of the gutter press had already been set into motion. The *Evening Standard* decried "unanswered 999 calls", poor abandoned children and all the rest of it. Their side is certainly prepared.

In the run-up to what will hopefully be a rather hot autumn, we must ensure that our side is too. That means not hiding behind seemingly radical, short-termist quick fixes and phrasemongering, but giving this militant sentiment expression in the unions, organising strike and solidarity committees, turning up the heat on the Labour Party misleadership and pressing the Trades Union Congress for all unions to strike together come the autumn. This and other similar actions can and must be used as a springboard to rebuild, reinvigorate and re-inspire our movement from top to bottom ●

Ben Lewis

MILTON KEYNES

Important step forward

The strikes in Milton Keynes showed signs of the potential for involving wider layers of workers in future action. Many onlookers were enthusiastic in their support.

Along with other members of the Coalition of Resistance, I visited a number of the PCS union's picket lines in the morning. We met workers from the department for work and pensions, revenue and customs, and the foreign and commonwealth office. The courts were also affected (one was closed), but there were no picket lines there. The picketing was particularly strong at the benefits centre and tax office at Bowback House on Silbury Boulevard. Pickets at the jobcentres in both central Milton Keynes and Bletchley reported that this strike had been the best supported in years in terms of the very low numbers of PCS members going in to work.

The couple of schools I visited were closed despite being unpicketed, and there was a strong turnout from members of the National Union of Teachers for the combined rally in Campbell Park. While many schools were shut for the day (primary schools being most affected), others were providing little more than a

glorified babysitting service run by senior staff. There were, however, reports of ATL members referring to their unions 'conscience clause' in order to excuse their refusal to strike.

Around 100-150 strikers and supporters turned up for the rally called by the NUT and PCS. This may seem small in comparison with other towns, but for Milton Keynes, where the left is very weak, the fact that we had a rally at all is a step forward. After listening to speeches from PCS rep Simon Boniface and NUT rep Graham Hussey, those assembled then decided to embark on an unplanned march through the centre of Milton Keynes. Up the road 300 people packed out the rally in Northampton's Guildhall.

The Milton Keynes COR group had drawn up a joint leaflet with the trades council, which we distributed on the day to both strikers and passers-by. Many strikers took a copy of the *Weekly Worker*. There was widespread recognition that further action that drew in other unions was essential. In our post-strike organising meeting Milton Keynes COR evaluated our intervention on the day and discussed how we could put ourselves in the best position to

provide solidarity to workers striking in the autumn. We had reps from the NUT and PCS there and decided to seek to involve other unions and groups in a public meeting on the question of pensions as part of a plan to mobilise people for further action later in the year.

The June 30 strike action represented an important step forward for the anti-cuts movement - both in the action taken and in the numbers of people mobilised to take a stand in opposition to the cuts. The strike, contrary to the views of leading Labour figures such as Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, is a vital weapon in the armoury of the working class, as it goes into battle to defend itself from the government's attacks.

It will take organised and militant action on a mass scale and the development of a genuine alternative (certainly not a government led by Ed Miliband!) by the working class movement. As Unite leader Len McCluskey, speaking at the PCS conference, said, "This is a capitalist crisis and they must foot the bill." He argued for the formation of "joint strike committees where we can" and

went as far as arguing, "We need to work together ... to mobilise ... behind a different vision of how society should be, putting people before profit and ... putting socialism back on the political agenda in this country." Members of Unite - not to mention other big unions such as Unison and GMB -

need to ensure that these words are matched with action and that the next time coordinated strike action is taken those involved are counted in the millions, not hundreds of thousands ●

Dave Isaacson

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COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

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Four unions: more next time

SOUTHAMPTON

All in it together

On June 30 I was at Peter Symonds College in Winchester, where 600 students walked out on the day of action against tuition fees and cuts to the education maintenance allowance last November.

The strike there last Thursday was pretty solid and forced the college to close for the day. The vast majority of the NUT members voted for action and the teachers on the picket lines said that most of those colleagues were solid. The staff I talked to were indignant at having 10% of their pay going towards a pension that they are having to wait longer and longer to receive. There was also a general feeling that this was about more

than pensions and was not your average industrial action.

The pickets did not see what they were doing as simply an act of self-preservation (they were not the spoilt and self-serving workers depicted in the *Daily Mail*). There was a belief that there is an alternative to austerity and that this is what the fight is about. What I heard from them sounded very much like old Labour - progressive taxation, public investment and welfare provision.

The idea that the capitalists can be made to pay their 'fair share' within capitalism is one that we as communists see as misguided (tax avoidance figures speak for themselves). However, it

can only be welcomed that people are rejecting the ideas of neoliberalism and looking for alternatives.

Furthermore, I witnessed an encouraging appetite to fight on, as union members prepare for the likely follow-up strikes in the autumn. For those taking part there was no doubt as to the worthiness of their cause. My former economics teacher, whom I was glad to see on the picket line, was saying, "Most people will be made worse off by this sustained ideological attack on the public sector".

In other words we, our class, are all in it together ●

Callum Williamson

PLYMOUTH

Bigger picture

The strike made a big impact in Plymouth. The vast majority of schools were fully or partially closed and there was standing room only at the joint meeting of the three teachers' unions at the Plymouth Albion Rugby Club.

ATL members' representatives were at pains to point out that this was the first day of strike action in their organisation's 120-year history: their mode of address to their fellow workers as

"colleagues" jarred not a little, but was forgivable, given their newly discovered radicalism and unfamiliarity with the practice of workers' solidarity. While representatives of the teacher unions kept to the parochial and anecdotal, it was left to a guest speaker from Plymouth's PCS to sketch in the bigger picture of the influence of global capital that lies behind this cynical raid on workers' pensions.

Teachers then went on to join up with the PCS. The march, which wound its way from the Guildhall around the city centre, was well attended, with several hundred in good spirits. Passing motorists indicated their support, as did the vast majority of people we encountered en route. So much for Michael Gove's rubbish about strikers forfeiting the respect of their communities ●

Daniel Trevenna

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 readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name _____

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weekly Worker

For a federal republic

Independence fight looms

The issue of Scottish independence, which seemed to recede as the economic crisis started to bite in various peripheral economies in Europe, has been propelled back onto the agenda by the Scottish National Party's crushing victory in the Holyrood elections in May.

That made some kind of referendum on Scottish secession from the union more or less inevitable - barring a most unlikely total collapse of Alex Salmond's administration in the short term. It is yet another headache for a Westminster government already feeling a little tense in the temples, and the practicalities of a campaign for independence are coming to the fore.

Most recently, ComRes conducted a poll of English adults on the question. This is not exactly a hypothetical issue; the Westminster parties, and the Tories in particular, are liable to throw every imaginable obstacle in the way of the SNP, and Michael Moore (the minister for Scotland, not the firebrand left-liberal filmmaker) has already suggested rather craftily that, as the union is an English issue too, the English (and Welsh) should have a say in any referendum.

Well, the results are in - a little under half favour maintaining the union, with 36% supporting Scottish independence. Exactly what that implies really depends on who you ask - the BBC, which commissioned the poll, emphasises the 48% against independence and the 45% in favour of a nationwide referendum.¹ This is clearly the interpretation favoured by ComRes, who read into it a mandate for giving England and Wales their own poll on the issue.

The *Scotsman*, meanwhile, opens its article on the subject by saying that "support for Scottish independence is as strong in England as it is north of the border, according to the latest polling evidence". Alex Salmond clearly agrees: "We welcome this poll, as it shows that the ordinary people of England are quite relaxed about Scotland becoming independent."²

So who has it right? Should Salmond be jumping for joy or crying into his beer? The truth is that it is a bit of both. It truly is quite statistically remarkable that support for independence is indeed more or less identical north and south of the border. Polls in Scotland place support between 25% and 38%, and clear opposition consistently at about 45%-50%. The ComRes figures are comfortably within those ranges.

Salmond should certainly be encouraged that the English people do not, at first glance, appear to be a solid bloc of unionists; government strategists, meanwhile, will wonder where all this apparent goodwill for Scottish nationalism has come from, and will have work to do in order to get the English more convincingly on side.

The SNP should be worried, however, that this work may not be all that difficult. Much of the favourable sentiment for independence will be a deflection of narrow, English-chauvinist interests - particularly, the tendency for MPs to bray about Scotland receiving 'too much' money



Alex Salmond: many hurdles

from Westminster will be at the fore of many people's minds. That spurious economic logic may be outweighing an ideological commitment to the union in the minds of some.

Indeed, there is a real material basis for this phenomenon, and it is partly the same basis as for Scottish nationalism. The long and painful process of deindustrialisation has resulted in an enormously lopsided geographical and institutional distribution of economic activity. Put simply, money flows into the City of London, is half-heartedly skimmed for tax takings, and flows back out. The result is that London as such is an economic unit unto itself, in a very unequal relationship with the rest of the country.

Against the background of the real existence of a Scottish national question, it *appears* as though England exploits and oppresses Scotland, and there is thus a real basis for Scottish nationalism to become a more serious force than it has previously been. Conversely, there is a real basis for a backlash, for English people inside and especially outside the capital to

grow resentful of the 'unfair' benefits for Scotland and Wales.

Those people *will* be susceptible to a change in tack from the political class, and such a change is inevitable, as the battle heats up. Even if Salmond somehow neutralises an all-Britain referendum on the union, that hardly exhausts the means of obstructing Scottish self-determination. Salmond enjoyed support north of the border from the Murdoch press in May - how long will that last? We should expect a barrage of unionist propaganda from these quarters and others. Should all this fail, legal-technical pedantry will be brought to bear - and then there is the small matter of negotiations over North Sea oil, public finances ...

The idea of an all-Britain referendum on Scottish independence is dangerous because it is based on a half-truth. It is quite correct that this is not only a question for the Scottish, but also for the English. National borders are ultimately an encumbrance for the working class - another means by which the bourgeoisie can keep itself in charge. The relations between the different British nationalities have

very real political consequences for all of us, and it is quite correct for the English working class to take a serious political interest in these affairs - just as women's liberation is also a question for men, racism for whites and so on.

The left has generally failed on this question in two ways. Most prominently there is a recent history of left nationalism in Scotland itself, particularly in the form of the Scottish Socialist Party. That organisation committed itself to the goal of an "independent socialist Scotland"; over the years, the formulation has become increasingly front-loaded, and an independent *capitalist* Scotland is basically seen as a step forward by the comrades. The logic of such nationalist projects engenders, in fact, quite the opposite result - demobilisation, defeat, and reliance on patronage from Brussels, as opposed to London. Any left organisation caught giving cover to that kind of disaster is doomed to failure - that is, if the SSP had not already spectacularly imploded anyway.

The opposite error is economism - specifically, the failure to understand that there truly is a democratic question here, that even if independence would solve exactly none of the Scottish masses' problems and exacerbate not a few, it is nonetheless theirs to claim if they want it. (Abstention on the national question is an old ultra-leftist error, but it has other uses - the Socialist Workers Party, for instance, went from open hostility to Scottish nationalism to dismissing its significance as a mere 'tactical issue' precisely so it could paper over its differences with the SSP majority.)

The communist position on this is quite clear - Scotland has the right to self-determination. If the Scottish masses truly get behind separation from the union, then it is the job of communists and all working class forces to see that this demand is realised. Michael Moore's idea is an attempt to dress up the denial of self-determination in pseudo-democratic verbiage - in fact, it is the antithesis

of democracy, the reinforcement of the power of the bourgeois *state* over popular sovereignty.

It is nevertheless not our job to *advocate* separation. In some circumstances, this may be sadly necessary; it was certainly necessary to oppose the colonial 'union' of Britain and Ireland, and the various reactionary compromises - 'home rule', the maintenance of the union in the Six Counties - that have succeeded it, for example.

Scotland is not an oppressed nation. It participated in the British empire (in some quarters more enthusiastically even than the English), and it has benefited from the resultant superprofits accordingly. That this is no longer obvious is due, as I have said, to the obscene centralisation of economic power and political authority in *London*, and it makes no more sense to call Scotland oppressed than it does to call Yorkshire oppressed. To argue anything else is simply to peddle historically illiterate left-nationalist obscurantism.

The present union between England, Scotland and Wales (not to mention the Northern Ireland statelet) is not a voluntary union of peoples. It is a union of crowns, won in blood and fire centuries ago. Any democratic resolution of this issue means attacking the British state *as a whole*, whose denial of self-determination to Britain's national components is only one of innumerable affronts to democracy.

Communists aim for the unity of all British workers against the state that governs us all, and the capitalist class that exploits us. We demand a federal republic of Scotland, England and Wales - that is the way to win a union of three nationalities based on solidarity and fraternity, not the market and the threat of force ●

James Turley

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Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-13995097.
2. The Scotsman July 5.

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