



# weekly **worker**



**Putting revolution back on  
the agenda. Mark Kosman  
calls for a rethink**

- Labour and media
- COR conference
- Italy's crisis
- General strike

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# LETTERS



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

## Zionist Nazis

I have to agree with the analysis in comrade Greenstein's letter (July 7). Israel is a racist settler state, an imperialist entity established on land stolen from the Palestinians. Look on the reverse side of the flag of Israel and you'll see not the Star of David but the Nazi swastika; they are two sides of the very same coin. Indeed Adolf Hitler would have fully approved of the Zionist state of Israel if it meant removing Jewish people from Europe and transporting them to Palestine.

There is, of course, no question that the Nazi holocaust led directly to the establishment of the state of Israel and it is cited at every opportunity by the 'Israelis'. No mention, of course, of why only Jews and not gays, gipsies, those with physical deformities or learning difficulties - all victims of the holocaust - got homelands: not that these other groups would have wanted them anyway. (We communists were fortunate to get socialist homelands, even if these did not last as long as the Jewish settler entity.)

The fact is those Jewish settlers - many from the UK and USA, where the holocaust didn't occur - are in far more danger in Israel than they would be in their country of ethnic origin. This is because, like the British settlers in the Malvinas and other colonised nations, they are living on stolen land. This also applies, of course, to countries like the US, Australia and New Zealand, though ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population has resulted in the latter being marginalised.

Israel is indeed an artificial colonial entity surrounded by Arab states. Its racist nature is enshrined in its very existence as a 'Jewish homeland'. It does not take a mathematician to see that the 'right' of all Jews to live in Israel is a non-starter, but it does explain the continual expansion of this fascist state. Hitler had a word for it: creating *Lebensraum* or 'living space'.

All states should be secular and non-racist. So the ideal solution for Israel/Palestine would be a secular state, where people of all races, religions and those of no religious beliefs were all equal citizens with equal rights. That must be the goal - and ultimately a socialist Palestinian republic. Unfortunately, now that Israel exists as a separate state, we have to somehow contain and live with it, so a two-state solution may well be the only viable one in the near future.

Ultimately, all states based on race or religion - such as Israel, the Islamist republics and, of course, Britain, with its established church and unelected head of state, described as 'defender of the faith' - must give way to secular, socialist republics. In the meantime, we must look for practical compromise solutions, and the first step to a unitary, secular, socialist republic in Palestine/Israel may well be a two-state interim situation.

**Tony Papard**  
Battersea

## Magic away

Comrade Tony Greenstein tells us that "self-determination simply means the right to be free from national oppression".

What he proposes amounts, in effect, to reversing the present situation, in which the Palestinian Arabs are an oppressed nation, by according to them the right to self-determination, but denying it to the Hebrew (Israeli Jewish) nation. However - by his own definition - the

latter will then become an oppressed nation. (This is reminiscent of the apocryphal story about Khrushchev pointing the finger at Nixon: "In the US there is exploitation of man by man; in the USSR it is the other way around!")

His argument for advocating this reversal is the arbitrary assertion that the essence of the Hebrew nation is forever fixed in the oppressive colonial Zionist mould and that therefore no alternative identity will ever be possible for it, even following the overthrow of Zionism. Thus he claims, in effect, that the Hebrew nation will be an oppressor so long as it exists, and will exist only so long as it is a Zionist oppressor. No evidence is produced for this prophesy. Putting the word 'nation' in scare quotes, as Tony insists on doing when applied to the Hebrew nation, is unlikely to magic it away when Zionism is defeated. There is, however, evidence to the contrary: even now there are a minority of Hebrews who would identify themselves as such and who are non-Zionists or anti-Zionists.

Tony claims that the perspective of socialist unification of the Arab east is "abstract". But the boot is firmly on the other foot. His favourite slogan, calling for a "secular, democratic" unitary Palestine, is utterly abstract, because it is confined to the box of Palestine, created by imperialism, within which the Hebrew nation is by far the more powerful side. And, short of a socialist Arab unification, there is no possible means whereby the majority of that nation, its working class, might be induced to give up its dominance and overthrow Zionism.

**Moshé Machover**  
email

## Clapped-out

Yet another 'Join the Labour Party and pull it left' article that, as usual, fails to deal with the points continually made against this tired, failed tactic. I am referring, of course, to Michael Copestake's 'Bigger, better, more coordinated' (July 7), in which he argues that the RMT and the FBU should rejoin the Labour Party and that unions such as PCS, NUT, UCU, etc should also affiliate in order somehow to bring the union barons under control and to make the Labour Party act for the working class.

He opened his article with the recognition that the June 30 action "may only have involved unaffiliated unions". No explanation as to why no Labour-affiliated unions were part of that action, despite the TUC last September agreeing to mount coordinated action against the cuts. Despite Unite and Unison recently sounding off on how they will organise action and still, despite the support shown on June 30, not having fixed a date. Are Unison and Unite waiting to agree a separate shoddy deal with the government and abandon PCS, NUT, ATL and UCU? So, let's recap: the only united action so far has been by unions *not* affiliated to Labour.

Comrade Copestake then highlights the "near universal expression of disapproval by workers at the rallies [in the major cities on June 30], including booing and jeering, whenever a speaker made mention of Ed Miliband and his slimy stance". Ed Miliband won the Labour leadership contest due to the support of the trade unions and this is how he repays them? Peter Manson has previously begged up Ed Miliband, making great play of his willingness to address the TUC anti-cuts demonstration of March 26 and his intention to address the Durham Miners Gala. Whoops - he didn't address the gala after all!

Michael fails to explain why the barons in charge of unions already affiliated to the Labour Party have

not been brought under rank and file control and, bizarrely, why this is more likely to happen if still more unions join the Labour Party.

The same unions did not support John McDonnell against Brown or in the subsequent leadership contest. Why not? John, far and away, is more in tune with trade union members attending the March 26 demonstration and those out on June 30 than Miliband or Ed Balls. As for stating unions outside the Labour Party have no influence on its leaders - clearly neither do the huge unions already affiliated.

Michael then says, as has Peter Manson, that "Labour leaders have always betrayed workers", and adds: "because the union bureaucrats have allowed them to do so". Excuse me? Such union barons always put the election of a Labour government first above organising strike action. They do not like organising strike action under a Tory government because that spoils Labour's chances of getting elected and they will not organise action under a Labour government because that might allow the Tories back in! The most militant unions today are PCS and the RMT and it is no coincidence that they are not affiliated to the Labour Party.

Michael asserts that a Labour Party mark two will be just as bad as the current Labour Party. Well, that depends on what democratic procedures such a body has, compared with the carefully evolved anti-democratic procedures in use today that prevent rank-and-file Labour Party members having any real say over Labour Party policy and election manifestos.

Why hasn't the TUC called more anti-cuts protests (ideally in all the major cities for people to attend locally that cannot spare the time to go to London and back)? It's not as if March 26 was a huge flop - as I suspect they actually hoped would be the case, so they would have an excuse not to organise any more protests.

I will not be voting Labour at the next general election whilst they agree cuts are necessary. I do not support PCS affiliating to the Labour Party (most rank-and-file PCS activists are well against any such idea, being civil servants who were attacked by the last Labour government) and neither would my members. I want an explanation why a party winning the general election by a landslide in 1997 did so little for the working class and so much for the already super-rich?

Labour-affiliated trade unions have adopted the Labour Party's conference controlling practices precisely to stop their own rank and file bringing union tops to account. Look at how Yunus Baksh was treated by his own union! Affiliating to Labour will just bring the better unions under their stifling control of 'Don't strike - just wait for another Labour government who will also attack you'.

Looking for an alternative to the Labour Party is far more political, far more involving of ordinary workers, in having to face fundamental questions about power in society, and who should have it and in whose interests, than the outdated, utterly failed 'Join the Labour Party to pull it left' diversion.

That the unions backed Ed Miliband instead of John McDonnell really says it all (did any of them ask their members, I wonder, or allow John the chance to address them in the union magazines? I think I can say they did not).

That Miliband and Balls believed media assertions that the public did not support the June 30 strikes, when the public we met on our picket lines overwhelmingly did support us, shows how utterly out of touch the Labour

leadership are with ordinary people. We would not have seen the reality of that public support if we hadn't taken strike action and tested this. Where was Gove's army of parents taking over classes?

When your clapped-out old car keeps on breaking down, when it keeps on steering to the right as you try to get it to go left, there comes a point when it makes more sense to just get another - or invent a better mode of transport. Applying Michael's logic would have us all still driving model T Fords in 'whatever colour you like so long as it's black'!

Mark Serwotka or Ed Miliband? Mark by a mile.

**Dave Vincent**  
email

## Classic

Michael Copestake wrote a report about the June 30 strikes and demonstrations that waxed lyrical about the need for unions to apply pressure within the Labour Party: "It goes without saying [sic] 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."

As an ex-official of the Fire Brigades Union, I could disagree with this comment on so many levels, it is difficult to know where to start. Most obviously, pressure can be exerted on the Labour Party from outside; after all, Labour still needs union members' votes. Secondly, membership of the Labour Party presents little or no opportunity to exert effective influence. Unions like the FBU took the positions that they currently have on the Labour Party for good reasons, which were based on long, historic experience. The Labour Party, at both a local and at a national level, had proved entirely unmoved by FBU influence in many local disputes and most obviously in the national strikes in 1977 and 2002. It was the latter strike that led directly to the disaffiliation of the union. The red professor, Michael Copestake, clearly knows better than the majority of FBU members, because he tells them that they and the RMT should rejoin the Labour Party.

This amounts to breath-taking arrogance, when the position he presents is offered up without one substantial argument. So why has this line, to the right of an entire section of the UK working class, been adopted by the CPGB? Essentially, because of the earlier leftism adopted by the same organisation. Now we are told we must rejoin the Labour Party because in the past the CPGB has argued that there are no halfway houses and that the only relevant option is a Marxist party. Sorry, comrades, this is plain nonsense and it is similar to arguments put forward in the early 20th century by Fabians, who suggested that workers were best represented by applying pressure within the Liberal Party.

Fortunately, most trade unionists are not fools and are unlikely to be impressed by the appeal to join Labour under the leadership of the strike-opposing Mr Miliband. This latest example of CPGB line-dancing suggests that, for all the rhetoric about being different from other groups on the left, the CPGB still places agreement with the party's current line above understanding the movements within the wider working class. A classic sign of sectarianism.

**Chris Jones**  
email

## SPGB monks

The ongoing problem with the Socialist Party of Great Britain is that, like president Nixon of old, they are unable to chew gum and cross the road

at the same time (Letters, July 7).

A socialist alternative to the current capitalist economic system is not an event which happens in a cataclysmic, instantaneous flash of energy, transforming the globe from one system to another. It's also a simple matter of fact that the achievement of a global socialist system will not be achieved in time for tea and, unless you're going to feed the kids on stories of the sugar candy mountain, you'd best have a strategy for putting food on the table right now.

Letting your family starve to death in an act of social and class abstentionism, rather than fighting for as high a wage as union power and your bargaining position can achieve, isn't some fiery doctrine at all. Taking whatever the boss slings you across the table, without forming your workmates into a union and working class social unit to fight for collective standards, isn't revolutionary either. Far from appearing as some form of shining light of socialist purity, your workmates are likely to consider you somewhat of a gaffer's man. They will conclude that if you can't fight for the tea break, they wouldn't trust you leading the charge to the Bastille. Fighting for improvements in the standard of life, the rate of exploitation, standards of social existence now is not in any way counterposed to a revolutionary strategy to smash the capitalist system *per se*. Neither is this an "attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism".

What foolishness. 'Fight for a living wage' as a demand among low-paid workers in no way offers any support or endorsement for the wages system, as communist activists will make clear during the process of struggle. The fact is, we are not in a situation at this time, in this place, to fight for the 'abolition of the wages system' and the achievement of that demand sits at the other side of a different social system. Workers are quite capable of seeing the different strengths of the class and combining battles against greater impoverishment with longer-term aims of global common wealth and socialism. The SPGB's Alan Johnstone counterposes these as two alternative options of consciousness, which, of course, they are not.

I am quite capable of arguing through unions for shorter hours, safer conditions and better wages, while advocating the abolition of the wages system. We can demand changes in conditions right now and solutions achievable right now, while advancing ideas of a global communist society which can't be achieved until the balance of forces shifts irreversibly in our favour. Alan Johnstone, the SPGB and others, however, have drawn the conclusion that to argue for any improvements now is somehow in contradistinction to building the consciousness and the organisational forms needed to smash capitalism.

I just don't see that. It puts me in mind of an old Jehovah's Witness I worked with down the pit, who refused to pay into his miners' pension because he was convinced the day of judgement would arrive before he reached retirement age and it was therefore a distraction from his religious endeavour. I can assure Alan that an hour off the working day, a day off the week and a bumper pay rise right now will not detract from the struggle for the whole shooting match. Quite the contrary, not letting the bastards take any more out of our bones and communities than we absolutely must concede, making them give way every time we have the edge and lessening the load, are demonstrations of workers' power and class struggle.

Alan thinks it actually 'delays'



socialism and the chance to make real change. I don't follow that 'logic', if that's what it is. It simply opts out of the struggles that are actually taking place; it certainly won't earn you a place on the platform or the welfare club, at which you can seriously address alternatives to capitalism and how to get there. Neither do I think 'reforms' pave the way for revolution. Our standard of life and the terms we suffer under this system are questions of class survival and symptoms of our combativity, but they do not of themselves lead to revolutionary consciousness. The class war isn't an academic exercise; it's about real lives and real social hardship and conditions.

I do not wish to 'reform' capitalism; I wish to smash capitalism. But it's not an 'all or nothing' struggle. There are moving frontiers of control and moving front lines. If you don't know where they are or sit back impervious of the battles taking place in the here and now, it is no wonder the SPGB has remained like the monk on the hillside watching the world go by.

Incidentally, my Jehovah mate agreed to pay into the miners' pension, which he now draws, and Jesus still hasn't arrived, though he still waits at his gate each morning, a wee bit better off than he would have been.

Let me finish by commenting on Harley Filben's report on the Marxism conference's debate about what is and what isn't a revolutionary situation ('Marxism 2011: The situation is excellent ...', July 7). The Socialist Workers Party definition is extremely simple: any situation in which the ruling class loses control is a revolutionary situation. If it doesn't lose control, it isn't a revolutionary situation.

This means that every situation where the class is defeated was never a revolutionary situation or else they would have won. Anywhere where we win even for a short time must have been a revolutionary situation because the ruling class lost control!

Talk about being wise after the fact. What utter nonsense. Surely, a revolutionary situation is one in which there is the *possibility and potential* of the ruling class losing control? That we don't always follow through, for any number of reasons, doesn't mean it wasn't a revolutionary situation; it simply means we blew it.

That being the case, May 1968 in France and 1926 in Britain were indeed revolutionary situations - defeated not so much by the strength and confidence of the other side, but treachery, poor organisation or timidity on our own.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Mughals

According to the bourgeois media in India, a corrupt government like that of the United Progressive Alliance has not been seen before.

Prime minister Manmohan Singh is unhappy about this because he wants to maintain the international view that his government is one of liberalism - in fact he is the main agent of international liberalism on Indian soil. The acceptance of corruption would mean that the rate of investment of foreign capital in our country would decrease. The UPA government would be blackened internationally.

In fact there is no contradiction between corruption and the interests of bourgeois liberalism. This circus of bourgeois liberalism. This circus of thieving, embezzlement, immorality and illegality *is* liberalism. Liberalism

means supporting corruption. It means dishonest businessmen, corporate clans, bourgeois feudal politicians, bureaucrats who loot the national wealth. That's why our prime minister is not interested in acting against corruption.

Poor Indians, move onto the offensive. The Mughals oppressed you, the British oppressed you, the whole of Europe oppressed you. Now your own country's bourgeois feudalists are oppressing you, along with the international imperialists. Did you get economic independence? 80% of Indians earn below \$1 a day.

**Sanjib Sinha**  
Kolkata

## 1-2-3-4

Holding a stall for the CPGB at Shoreditch's 1-2-3-4 festival last Saturday made me sincerely appreciate the phrase, 'market research'.

The Socialist Workers Party, whose comrades were present at last year's event, wisely stayed away, along with their separate Right to Work and Unite Against Fascism identities. Therefore the only other 'political' stall was Greenpeace. 'Greenpeace' and 'Red war', as someone amusingly pointed out.

One potential contact we made was with an Italian comrade who is a member of the UK wing of a breakaway group from Rifondazione Comunista. He told us he was an advocate of European-wide left unity, away from political regionalism and sectarianism. I also spoke to a disillusioned SWP member who shared our disdain of the insular nature of the left.

**Claire Fisher**  
email

# Summer Offensive

## Halfway through and gathering pace

**T**wo new standing order pledges have come in over the past seven days - £15 each from stalwart supporters JS and GS. These are significant donations, as they take us over halfway to our initial target of raising an extra £300 a month in regular income for the *Weekly Worker*.

And - neatly enough - we reach this milestone in the fourth week of the two-month Summer Offensive fundraising campaign (the *Weekly Worker* drive is at the core of our annual SO - a finance campaign that encompasses all the party's work and which this year has as its target £25,000 to be raised by August 20, the last day of our annual school, the Communist University). So *new* standing orders are at £165 a month - but there is plenty more out there to be won.

Comrade JS also set an example to others with an additional donation of £30 via our normally rather neglected PayPal website button, as has TB. SK contributes a magnificent £230 and LA adds £30 to his score so far. Comrades have also been stumping up their fees for Communist University, which also goes into the pot - including a £50 donation from JR towards the travelling costs of a young comrade attending the event from Holland. An example that others could follow - and which helped take us to a pleasing £2,123 this week.

Halfway in, we now have a running total that has surpassed the psychologically important £10k barrier. With £10,008 in hand we are well placed as the second half of the campaign begins and, as the experience of our 26 previous SOs teaches us, the pace of the fundraising gathers as we head towards our Communist University.

Speaking of which, this coming week will see a more or less complete timetable for this school available on our (still lamentably makeshift) website. Comrades will see a richly diverse spread of speakers covering subjects from the unfolding Arab revolution (prominent Israeli socialist Moshé Machover and Mohammad Reza Shalgouni, leading member of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers Iran/Rahe Kargar, present this session); through the latest thinking on our Neanderthals cousins and the human revolution (Camilla Power, University of East London and the Radical Anthropology Group); to comrades from American group Platypus on 'Capital in history' and 'Marx's critique of political economy'. A session I am looking forward to in particular is the one we are putting together on the soiled culture of the revolutionary left.

Comrades who read this paper on a regular basis will be well aware of what this will address - the left's propensity for expulsion and

excommunication as a substitute for political dialogue and clarification; its snarling hostility to other trends in the movement based on little more than a fight for 'market share' in recruitment rather than deep political differences; its cavalier attitude to what are meant to be its core principles when this or that sect starts to sniff the big time, etc.

But we don't want this to be a therapy session (one comrade has suggested we adapt Larkin for its advertising puff - "They fuck you up, the left sects. They don't mean to, but they do ..."). Comrades from a number of political backgrounds who have fallen foul of bureaucratic regimes of various stripes will discuss why the left is the way it is, what accounts for its self-defeating philistinism and how we can move beyond the sects and their paralysing culture.

Keep an eye on the website in the coming seven days for comprehensive listings. Last week, some 12,785 of you did just that, the vast majority logging on to read a paper that has become part of their weekly political routine. Your regular financial support for that vital political project - at whatever level you can give (and, I remind comrades, this includes embarrassingly *large* standing orders as well as the more modest) would be a tremendous contribution.

**Mark Fischer**

# ACTION

## CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

## Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact [info@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.communiststudents.org.uk](http://www.communiststudents.org.uk).

## 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-studio Peanut: [postalter@gmail.com](mailto: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: 'Congolese general elections 2011 - democratic or undemocratic?'

Organised by Congo Support Project Manchester: 07405 685861

## Organise the protest

**Monday July 18, 6pm:** Meeting, room V111, Vernon Square campus, Penton Rise, London WC1. London organising meeting for the Tory and Lib Dem conference protests. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn and Mark Bergfeld (NUS).

Organised by Right to Work: [www.righttowork.org.uk](http://www.righttowork.org.uk).

## 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](mailto:Joanna.Trotter@bristol.ac.uk).

## Uncelebrated anniversary

**Tuesday July 19, 6pm:** Rally, Old Palace Yard (opposite House of Commons). Tell Cameron we will not tolerate a second year of his Big Society.

Organised by Unite: [www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org).

## Save Bombardier jobs

**Tuesday July 19, 7pm:** Meeting, the Quad, Market Place, Derby. Support Bombardier workers.

Organised by Right to Work: [www.righttowork.org.uk](http://www.righttowork.org.uk).

**Saturday July 23, 10am:** March, Bass recreation ground, Derby.

Protest at plans to axe 1,400 jobs. Speakers include: Bob Crow (RMT).

Organised by unions representing the workforce. More info at: [www.rmt.org](http://www.rmt.org).

## Choose youth

**Thursday July 21, 12 noon:** Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Alliance of national youth sector organisations and trade unions working to save youth services.

Organised by Choose Youth: [www.chooseyouth.org](http://www.chooseyouth.org).

## 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>.

## Marxism 21

**Saturday July 30, 1pm:** Discussion forum, INCA (General Confederation of Labour), Italian Advice Centre, 124 Canonbury Road, London N1 (nearest station: Highbury and Islington). 'Capitalism in crisis: causes, consequences and cure'. Speaker: Gerry Gold (author, *A house of cards: from fantasy finance to global crash*). Organised by *Marxism 21*: [http://nongae.gnu.ac.kr/~issmarx/eng/eng\\_index.php](http://nongae.gnu.ac.kr/~issmarx/eng/eng_index.php).

## 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](mailto:ben@hopoi.info).

## Europe against austerity

**Saturday October 1, 10am:** European conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. A step towards coordinating the resistance and European-wide action against austerity. Details to be announced.

Conference initiated by the Coalition of Resistance: [www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk).

## 10 years after

**Saturday October 8:** Mass assembly, Trafalgar Square, London, to mark 10th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan. Speakers include: John Pilger, Tariq Ali, Brian Eno, Jemima Khan, Tony Benn, George Galloway, Caroline Lucas MP and many more.

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

## 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.



**HACKING**

# Death in Wapping

The *News of the World* scandal has revealed the true relationship between the media and politicians, writes **James Turley**



**And good riddance**

It has probed, at best semi-legally, into the private affairs of well-heeled celebrities, politicians and royals major and minor; yet Rupert Murdoch's media empire has suffered its first major body-blow in decades at the hands of a dead teenager.

The *News of the World* is no more; its final edition, equal parts journalistic defiance, flatulent self-justification and business as usual, came to pass last Sunday. The steady drip of allegations concerning the practice of phone-hacking - accessing the mobile voicemail messages of others illegally - has turned inexorably into a torrent. Rupert Murdoch had a choice: either lose his most loyal lieutenants or a paper he had already come to regard as an encumbrance. On the surface, it was a no-brainer.

Yet the *Screws* is not the major casualty here. Until recently, the story was pushed forward primarily by *The Guardian*, almost alone at times (though *The New York Times*, BBC and muckraking fixture *Private Eye* did contribute too). Now, notables are desperate to put the boot in. Ed Miliband has gone from hob-nobbing at Murdoch's summer party barely a month ago to angry parliamentary sabre-rattling. The Tories, after much hand-wringing, have had to go along with it.

The rest of the rightwing press, previously suspiciously reticent about following the story too closely, has been compelled to go on the offensive. The police, several years too late, now have two separate investigations on

the go.

As the hacking affair gathered steam from 2009, it increasingly highlighted how close the relations between Murdoch, the government (of whatever stripe) and the state apparatus had become. Everyone, it seemed, was equally desperate to bury the affair. Murdoch's media clout was, in the phrase of the day, 'too big to fail'. Now, all those allies are queuing up instead to bury Murdoch. The significance of this past week lies in how it has reduced this mutually profitable triple alliance to shreds.

Murdoch will not save it by sacrificing the *News of the World*. Some have been led to wonder, in fact, if the grizzled patriarch is going a little soft in his dotage. In particular his determination to protect his son, James, and News International chief executive Rebekah Brooks - in charge at the *NotW* at the time of the Milly Dowler affair (the murdered teenager into whose phone the *NotW* allegedly hacked) - amounts to two massive hostages to fortune.

It is simply inconceivable that Brooks did not know what was going on under her watch (though perhaps conceivable, even now, that the police will fail to pin it on her); it is hardly sound business sense on the part of James Murdoch to sign off on several six-figure out-of-court settlements without inquiring as to what Gordon Taylor was £700,000-worth of angry about. Murdoch senior is famed for his utterly ruthless business sense; keeping Brooks safe in particular

looks increasingly like an ill-advised outbreak of sentimentality on his part (though there is also the matter of how much dirt she has on him).

## News International

The fallout for Murdoch's British operation is already immense. The list of illegal activities exposed now not only goes beyond phone-hacking, but also beyond the *NotW* newsroom. *The Sun* allegedly accessed the private medical records of Gordon Brown's family, for a scoop on his son's cystic fibrosis. *The Sunday Times* is said to have hired actors and con-men to 'blag' all manner of Brown's personal information, including bank details and tax records.

Even worse, Murdoch's potentially lucrative bid for overall control of BSkyB, of which he currently owns 39%, is now a dead duck - the Tories and the Liberal Democrats both backed the Labour motion calling for it to be halted. And even before the debate Murdoch threw in the towel. Under the rules, however, News Corp could renew its planned bid of £7.8 billion, though few expect public anger to have cooled sufficiently even by then. The takeover of BSkyB would have made him billions every year; instead its ignominious collapse sent BSkyB share prices tumbling.

Still more significant is the death of his special relationship with the British government. It is often assumed that Murdoch's interventions in politics are motivated by a fanatically reactionary

streak; in fact, it is almost entirely about the narrow matter of his bank balance. In the 1980s, he needed the powerful print unions out of the way, so he curried favour with the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and cheered her on in her attacks on organised labour. In 1995, not willing to be saddled with continued support for a dying Tory government, he started doing business with Labour's Tony Blair. Once given 'the offer they cannot refuse', politicians can be kept onside with the carrot of official support, and the stick of slandering and merciless attacks.

The latest iteration of this pattern would have been the BSkyB deal - under these circumstances, it would have looked exactly like what it is: simple political corruption. Bourgeois politicians, despite their present bout of anti-Murdoch posturing, remain by and large cowards. It is just that now it takes more spine to back Murdoch than oppose him.

Shutting down the *NotW*, meanwhile, has made him a whole tranche of more humble enemies - the paper's erstwhile staff. It would have been easy enough, perhaps, for the newsroom journos to blame *The Guardian* for their woes; but perhaps the most encouraging sight in the whole affair has been the very minor, but nonetheless real, glimpses of solidarity among them *against* their bosses.

After the closure was announced, staff on *The Sun* stopped work - if only for an hour. *Screws* journalists

are quite unanimous in their attitude to their betters. "Brooks or *NotW*?" tweeted one; "Murdoch's ditched the wrong red top."

For all these reasons, those who consider this a storm in a teacup, to be resolved by the launch of a Sunday edition of *The Sun* and a slow return to business as usual, are wrong. What is at issue here is a process of reconfiguration in the media, and its relation to other branches of society. It is no longer possible for the media barons' political schmoozing operations to be an open secret - because it is no longer a secret at all.

The bourgeois media will, of course, remain a key buttress for capitalism; yet Murdoch is in a sense the last of a breed - an individual of immense economic and cultural power operating a protection racket on the great and the good. It is unlikely that another, similar individual will replace him as a global powerbroker.

## Media changes

Partly this is an effect of structural changes in the media. The empirical evidence is irrefutable: the printed newspaper is in decline. The *NotW* was the largest circulation paper in Britain, and by some estimates in the English language, full stop; yet it sold about 2.5 million copies a week, a third of its circulation in its 1950s golden age. *The Guardian*, which pursued the story, languishes at around 200,000 - and recorded losses of over £130 million last year.

There is the technical matter



of the ‘new media’. In particular, old-fashioned print and broadcast media outlets are having an uneven experience in learning how to make money out of the internet. Costs are cut and the newsrooms shrink; an ever smaller number of journalists are expected to fill an ever larger number of column inches (once extra web content is factored in). This is the central thesis of Nick Davies’s *Flat earth news*, which argues that economic pressures have led to a wholesale degradation in the quality and accuracy of journalism, with a very substantial proportion of copy recycled from agencies and PR releases.

It is Davies, as it happens, who was the lead journalist on *The Guardian* investigation; the phone-hacking affair seems to be a peculiar case of this general trend. What has come out is an industrialisation not just of the raw material of news copy (as with the centralisation of press agencies), but of the underhand tactics necessary to conduct investigative journalism.

Emblematic here is one of the most recent revelations: a low-level police officer in Exeter, looking notables up in the police computer system and selling the information to a private investigator based in nearby Exmouth. The latter individual in turn

sold the information to a wide network of clients, including investigators on the payrolls of various news organisations; police in Plymouth dug all this up before the whole affair was summarily buried on penny-pinching grounds by a judge.

Equally, the apparently routine practice of buying titbits off police officers acquired an industrial character, with the close, semi-formalised cooperation between Murdoch papers and police forces. It was this mass production of ‘investigative’ journalism which led to the disastrous, but apparently unconscious, decision to hack Milly Dowler’s mobile - and now the death of one of the last newspapers to conduct large-scale investigative journalism, albeit of a particularly sensationalist sort.

## Problems and solutions

Given this context, we should be cautious about joining in wholeheartedly with the present anti-Murdoch hullabaloo.

It may be an often insufferable paper, whose first editorial was a cowardly attack on the victims of Peterloo, but *The Guardian* team has done a real service in committing to the kind of serious, sustained

investigative journalism that is increasingly consigned to history under the pressure of the decline of print news; and for taking as its target a media behemoth that behaves at times like a mafia family. Yet in order to get anything on such individuals and organisations it is - in practice - almost invariably necessary to resort to underhand methods.

Voicemail hacking may be a product of modern technology, but ‘suborning public officials’ - ie, slipping a source a fistful of notes for some dirt - is as old as journalism itself. The defence mechanisms of large-scale corruption must very often be penetrated by means of petty corruption.

The trouble with the practices at the *News of the World* is nothing to do with the particular crimes for which people may or may not go to jail. It is that this great industrial apparatus is dedicated, ultimately, to making a handful of people an awful lot of money; and this aim equally means voyeuristic harassment of celebrities and systematic bribery and blackmail of governments and the state.

This has a profoundly distorting effect on the nominal aim of news journalism - to bring the truth to light, and empower the people to informed civic activity. The ‘souvenir pullout’ of the last *News of the World*,

anthologising its favourite scoops, exemplifies this - no less than three entries each for celebrities taking cocaine and others having sex with prostitutes. This is not news. It is a low-calorie news substitute. The tabloid editors claim they are giving the people what they want - in reality, they are *telling* the people what they *should* want, by engineering their output to a cynically commercial calculus.

We should, in the first instance, oppose with utmost vigour the moves towards statutory regulation of the press. Given all that has come out, the notion that we can trust the state or the judiciary to defend in sublime indifference legal and ethical media standards is utterly laughable. To constrict tabloid gossip-mongering would equally be to constrict the entire left press (and, indeed, *The Guardian*, which is routinely technically guilty of seditious libel). It is a pseudo-solution to the wrong problem.

The solution is rather to destroy the power of capital over the press - turf out the moguls and their cartels of advertisers, which amplify the collective voice of the bourgeoisie to drown out all others. Nick Davies’s book doubts the direct political clout of advertisers, but that is not the real point. Advertising amounts

to a colossal subsidy, which allows particular outlets to enjoy influence well in advance of their ‘natural’ circulation - something like the BBC licence fee, only for capitalist oligarchs. Media outlets should be run on the basis of the money they can raise from their readers and viewers.

It is also worth asking the question: if journalists and other media workers controlled their papers, websites, etc collectively, would the state of the press be so dire? Did anyone in the *NotW* newsroom really get into journalism to give us “Ricky coke shame” or “Cheating Roo beds hooker”? Would the majority of actual news copy be recycled from the Press Association wire? Probably not - so we are for the workers in this industry, in the newsrooms and the printshops, taking control of the papers themselves.

In Wapping 25 years ago, the idea of even limited working class control over the media was killed off for a generation. Now the *News of the World* has died on the same patch of east London, it is time we got that idea back ●

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# Time for Labour rethink

Miliband is just as responsible as Cameron for News International corruption, writes **Michael Copestake**

It was six weeks before the 1997 general election that *The Sun* newspaper - at the behest of its proprietor, chief executive and chair of the News Corporation monopoly Rupert Murdoch - lent its support to Tony Blair’s New Labour.

This was the culmination of a two-year project by the Labour leadership to woo the media baron that began in 1995 shortly after the election of Blair as Labour leader. Never again, they thought, must *The Sun* be the one ‘wot won it’ for the Tories following Neil Kinnock’s defeat in the 1992 general election. This offensive, in combination with the business-friendly ‘prawn cocktail offensive’ in the City, the PR popularity of Blair’s New Labour and the stench of death from the *ancien régime* of John Major’s Tories, more or less ensured that the Murdoch press would be backing Blair - seeking to influence the Labour government in key areas in return for its continued support.

This became a lasting relationship, helped in no small part by the fawning attitude of Blair himself towards the rightwing press and its sensitivities, and the drawn-out period of directionlessness exhibited by the Conservative Party. For 12 long years the Labour leadership basked in the glow of Murdoch’s approval.

It was during the 2009 Labour conference that one side filed for divorce. With Gordon Brown floundering and a Tory Party reviving under David Cameron, Murdoch could see which way things were going. News Corporation’s opening volley was an attempt to exploit a handwritten letter of condolence that prime minister Brown had sent to the relatives of a soldier who had been killed in action, a letter which had contained spelling mistakes and was written with a large, black felt pen, a result of Brown’s partial-sightedness. Though somewhat of an own goal due to its sheer

callousness, it was a sign of things to come. Beneath the surface, the phone-hacking scandal, which has now erupted around the *News of the World*, was already brewing, with as far back as 2006 Tony Blair himself applying pressure on the now vocal anti-Murdoch MP Tom Watson to keep hush on the matter. Gordon Brown too courted Murdoch for his support and was a personal friend to Rebekah Brooks - not that this helped him in the end, which, when it came, left him furious and upset.

Certainly Labour has a conflicted relationship with the capitalist media - one characterised by fear and dislike on the one hand and dependence on the other. Even under present circumstances, where current Labour leader Ed Miliband has effectively declared war on the British wing of the News Corporation empire - calling for the head (well, the job) of Rebekah Brooks and the killing off of the now abandoned buy-out of the BSkyB shareholdings by Murdoch - it is hard to see the Labour rightwing leadership extricating itself entirely from the mess. Labour has been completely dependent on maintaining good relations with big business in general, but in particular the media. Miliband might now bridle at what he calls the “unhealthy” relationship between politicians and the media - but this is clearly a pose he has decided to adopt only in the last week or two.

Because of the bitter legacy of the 1986-87 Wapping dispute - 6,000 printers were sacked - under Neil Kinnock the Labour Party officially refused interviews with organs of News International and the 1987 Labour manifesto contained a vaguely worded commitment to “place limits on the concentration of ownership” of the media. Needless to say, Kinnock was viciously attacked for this, with *The Sun*, at the forefront of the baying press pack. The

strategic defeat for the working class that occurred with the defeat of the miners, printers, dockers and steelworkers and four successive Tory general election victories persuaded the big guns in the trade union bureaucracy to give their backing to Tony Blair and New Labour.

New Labour’s ‘realism’ was in fact bootlicking of the worst sort - even Kinnock, who had taken the lead in purging Militant Tendency in the mid-1980s, was mortified by the overtures made to Murdoch by the Blair team under Alastair Campbell. Apparently Kinnock laid the blame for his 1992 electoral loss at the door of *The Sun*. Campbell, himself a former *Mirror* journalist, traditionally a Labour-supporting paper, therefore considered it essential to win over, or at least neutralise, the rightwing press, crucially *The Sun*. This was presented as the Labour Party getting savvy with the modern mass media and public relations techniques - in reality its politics were being determined by what was acceptable to the capitalist media that could never quite trust the Labour Party even when led by Blair. The role of the trade unions, its history, its base in the working class engender deep suspicion. To reassure, to show that it can be trusted, the Labour right must uphold the interests of capital and therefore attack and disappoint its own base. That includes constant attacks on internal democracy, albeit in the name of democracy, and imposing more and more bureaucratic controls over ranks and file MPs, councillors and members. As a result the Labour Party tends to atrophy at the base and therefore the right becomes ever more dependent on the capitalist media. A vicious circle.

The labour movement once had its own media. Eg, from 1912 there was the *Daily Herald*, which in 1933 reached a circulation of over two million and was credited

with being the world’s best selling newspaper. However, starved of advertising revenues and under increasingly rightwing editors, circulation gradually declined. In 1964 the paper was relaunched as *The Sun* - it was sold to Murdoch and News International in 1969 and, as they say, the rest is history.

While Labour, just like the Tories and Liberal Democrats, had an interest in playing down the phone-hacking scandal before it extended beyond the realms of the ‘celebs’ and even royalty, once kidnap and murder victims like Milly Dowler, relatives of dead soldiers and so forth were shown to have been targeted, the front bench had to be seen to take the lead, such was the public outrage. Of course, this does not mark a qualitative break, Miliband will continue to rely on the rightwing media, it is just that for the moment News International has become toxic in the popular mind.

The Labour Party’s current chief spin doctor, Tom Baldwin, successor to Alastair Campbell, is therefore a bit of an embarrassment. He is a former *Times* journalist.

His appointment was seen as an advance in one sense - while Campbell was never employed by a Murdoch company, Baldwin could provide more direct insight and key contacts with News International personnel.

The leadership continues to believe their papers can be made to ‘work’ for Labour. Which is why the leadership, just like the Tories and Lib Dems, will content itself with calls for public enquiries, parliamentary committees and further police investigations. Instead what the left should be demanding is that the Labour Party launches its own media machine, not just websites and occasional in-house glossies, but mass publications, which can only be driven by a *daily* electronic and print paper. The finances are there with the trade unions and the cooperatives. There are countless honest journalists eager to expose capitalist corruption, lies and hypocrisy. There is certainly an audience out there that has become completely disenchanted with the mainstream bourgeois press and media ●



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## COALITION OF RESISTANCE

# Voting down unity while talking unity

Dave Isaacson reports on the July 9 conference of COR and the limits of the anti-cuts campaigns

Following on just after a week from the impressive strikes by the PCS, NUT, ATL and UCU unions on June 30, you would have thought that the Coalition of Resistance's second national conference was well positioned to build upon that fighting spirit and lay out plans for taking the anti-cuts movement onto the next level. Unfortunately these aims can only very partially be considered to have been achieved on July 9. Indeed there were a number of missed opportunities and worrying signs that much of the left is unprepared, and in some cases unwilling, to do what is necessary to meet the challenges ahead.

In many ways the conference provided a snapshot of the general position of the left at this moment *vis-à-vis* the broader working class fightback against the cuts. We have just seen around 750,000 workers take coordinated strike action for a day, backed up by militant and upbeat rallies and demonstrations across the country, and joined by workers involved in local disputes such as Unison council workers in Birmingham, Southampton and Doncaster. There is clearly a growing mood amongst workers that if the Con-Dem cuts are going to be defeated then sustained and militant action is a must. Hanging around until the next election and voting Labour back in is fast being exposed as a non-option to those who previously favoured that route. Both because the damage done by then will clearly be massive, but more fundamentally it is evident to ever more people that the Labour leadership does not offer a credible alternative. Miliband and Balls attack the strikers because they too offer a programme of cuts, which if they got into office would provoke further industrial action.

Opinion polls show higher support for strikes than for a long time, with roughly even splits between those supporting and opposing the pension strikes. For example the Ipsos Mori poll of June 19 had 48% of people answering each way.<sup>1</sup> Support over the last period has tended to be much lower, at around 20% - 30%. We have also seen five union conferences vote in favour of the idea of a one-day general strike (including PCS, NUT and CWU) and the left-sounding rhetoric threatening action from the big players - Dave Prentis of Unison and Len McCluskey of Unite.

All in all, it is clear that the government can expect significant opposition from workers and the trade union movement to its attacks. While some union leaders clearly hope that they can win concessions for their members through threats and limited action, a significant number of rank-and-file workers are increasingly aware of the need for sustained militant action by millions.

Yet the left, through the anti-cuts movement, is actually having very little impact at present. It is the trade union leaders, with their own agenda, who are calling all the shots right now. On June 30 and March 26 the left groups, through their various anti-cuts campaigns, played minor

bit-parts. Politically these campaigns have been content, on the whole, to take a supporting role, echoing the line of the union bureaucracy, giving it a left or socialist gloss.

Last Saturday's COR conference reflected this and showed that there is much to do before we are ready to give effective leadership to the masses of people who want to see the cuts stopped. The organisers claimed an attendance of 300 people, with four-fifths of these classed as "delegates". This is well down on the figure of 1,300 who attended the first COR conference last autumn. It was hoped that after the inspiring strikes of June 30 we would have seen something of an influx from those involved in action and others wanting to follow suit. Unfortunately this was not the case. Indeed the conference was overwhelmingly composed of activists who have been on the left for some time. There were a fair few 'independents' alongside members of groups such as Counterfire, Green Left, Socialist Resistance, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, Workers Power and the Socialist Workers Party.

### Unity

The SWP has its own anti-cuts front, of course, in the form of Right to Work. As well as COR and RTW, there is the National Shop Stewards Network anti-cuts campaign, dominated by the Socialist Party in England and Wales, plus the CPB's People's Charter. The existence of so many competing campaigns is very obviously a huge weakness. The needless replication of basic work and senseless confusion caused is something that must be overcome.

This question of unity was one that came up a number of times

throughout the conference. When moving motion A from the COR steering committee on 'The way forward', COR secretary Andrew Burgin commented that there were five national anti-cuts campaigns - "There should be one!" he correctly insisted. He said that "we need to find a way of meshing these together". Yet the motion itself committed COR to no concrete action in this regard. The most it had to say was that COR "will continue to seek the broadest possible unity in coordinating the campaign against the austerity measures, to provide a national framework for the campaign" and "to organise in the communities and workplaces with others against all cuts".

Only one motion sought to set out the beginnings of a tangible process through which unity could be achieved. This motion came from Communist Students and was the last motion to be heard on the day (though it nearly wasn't heard at all - see below). The motion read as follows: "Conference believes that the existence of several competing anti-cuts campaigns - all of them with essentially the same message - weakens our movement's ability to resist the coalition's austerity programme. Conference resolves to mandate the Coalition of Resistance steering committee to contact Right to Work, the National Shop Stewards Network, the People's Charter, local anti-cuts groups, trades councils, etc with a view to organising a united anti-cuts conference before the end of 2011."

Entirely straightforward and supportable for anyone who wants unity in the fight against cuts, you might have thought. Well, it is not that simple. As he returned to his seat after introducing the motion, Ben Lewis of Communist Students and the Communist Party of Great Britain was told by Right to Work chair Paul Brandon that he had spoken well, but the motion had "no chance". He was right, and it certainly was not just RTW that had no

interest in seeing it passed. It was overwhelmingly voted down. While all the groups are happy to say that they would like unity in the abstract, in actual fact they are in favour of maintaining the division of the movement into separate campaigns. The leading figures within COR do not want to share a campaign with the SWP or SPEW, and for both of these groups the feeling is mutual. The disunity of the left groups imposes itself on the anti-cuts movement.

The anti-cuts campaigns can and will negotiate and form limited agreements with each other. We were informed of some of these by comrade Burgin, when he spoke against the CS motion that would have taken us a step closer to the unity he claims to want. Apparently COR meets on an almost weekly basis with the People's Charter and cooperates closely. It also meets with the NSSN and RTW (with which it has a negotiated accord). Whilst this is certainly better than a situation in which the campaigns refuse to talk to each other and routinely organise competing events, etc, it is clearly insufficient. The disunity persists. It is also profoundly undemocratic that all of these negotiations take place behind the backs of the members of the campaigns involved in them and are not as a matter of course reported on - we only heard about them from COR's secretary in a speech against a unity conference. Such a conference would place the question in the hands of the anti-cuts activists themselves and take it away from the leadership cliques who benefit from disunity.

By maintaining their own distinct anti-cuts fronts the left groups behind them avoid a serious discussion over their political differences and get a relatively competition-free pool from which to fish for recruits. To date the main reason that COR has been different is that the key motivating group behind it (Counterfire) is simply not big enough to dominate in the way the SWP and SPEW are able to control their fronts.

What we did see at this conference, though, was an emerging alliance of 'moderation' around Counterfire, Socialist Resistance, the Green Party and the People's Charter. In political terms this is an alliance of the right within COR and these comrades converge around the belief that they must not do anything that will irk the trade union bureaucracy.

### General strike

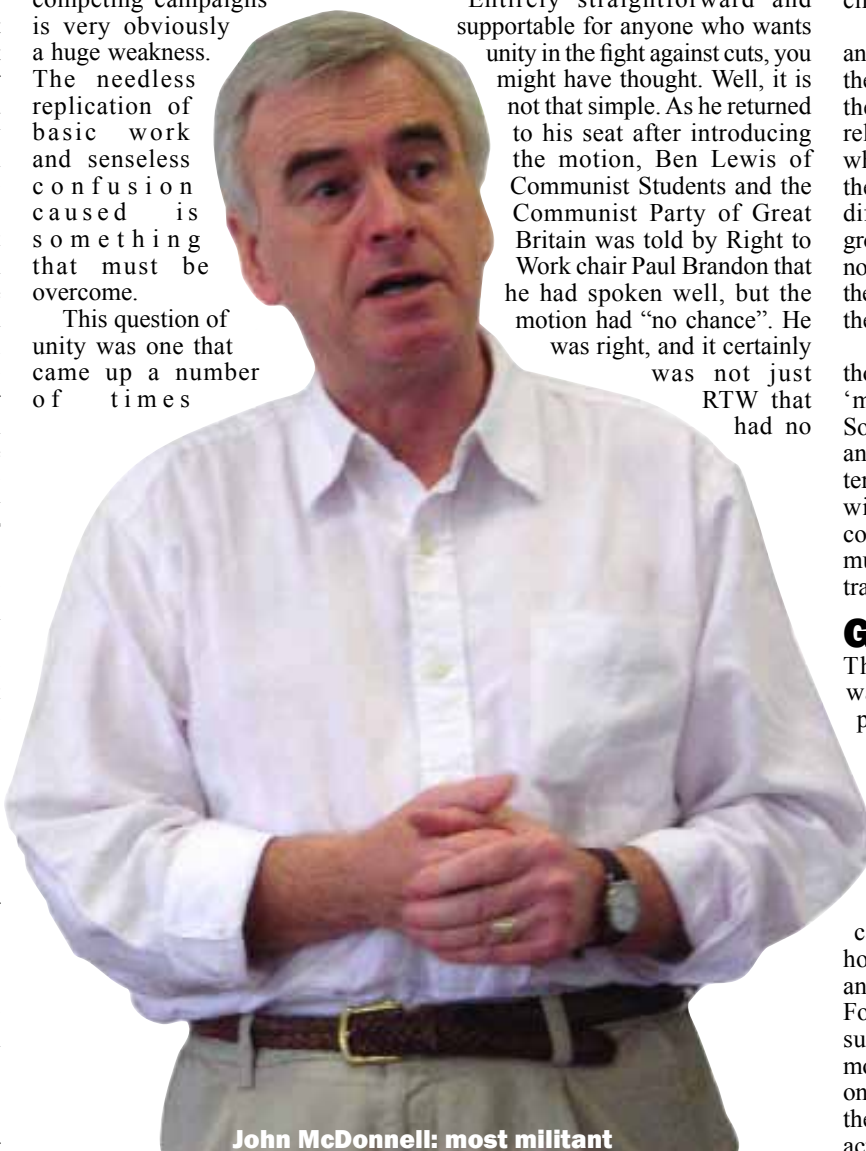
This insistence on moderation was evident throughout, but most prominent in the discussion of two motions which made calls for the promotion of a general strike. The first of these was from the SWP, which had a token presence, and its motion ended: "... as a step towards the scale of action needed to stop the Con Dems we call on the TUC to coordinate a 24-hour general strike against the cuts and attacks on wages and pensions." For us in the CPGB this is a perfectly supportable call for the necessary mobilisation of masses of workers in a one-day protest strike in order to bring the maximum number of people into active opposition to the cuts.

The second general strike motion, from Workers Power, was rather more simple. It read: "This conference raises the call for a general strike to stop the cuts package and bring down the coalition government." That is clearly different both in its scope and aims from what the SWP's motion was calling for. Obviously to "bring down the coalition government" it would have to be an indefinite strike, and would inevitably pose before the movement the question of state power. What Workers Power did not mention, either in the motion, its motivation, or the leaflet it gave out on the day, is what alternative government such a general strike would usher in to replace the coalition. The pro-cuts Labour leadership? Surely not. But what else is there? COR? Or perhaps Workers Power itself? To ask these questions is to answer them. None of them are serious alternatives. "We are not saying all we need is a general strike," said WP's Rebecca Allen, but the motion really did say nothing else. To challenge for state power the working class needs a hegemonic, mass revolutionary party, not a tiny sect. Without even considering the need for such a party a call for an indefinite general strike is merely utopian - and symptomatic of a general *strikism* not uncommon on the left, which fetishises a useful tactic and turns it into an incoherent strategy.

Both opponents and supporters of the two motions ignored this distinction and treated them as though they were the same. NUT national executive member Alex Kenny spoke against the SWP motion and started by saying that he thought that a general strike would be good, but to call for one now lacked perspective. Yet his own union has only just voted in favour of one - a call backed by the entire national executive he sits on. Similarly, Liam Mac Uaid of Socialist Resistance claimed, in his speech against the WP motion, that a call for a general strike would not get through a normal functioning union branch - only to be reminded by a heckler from the floor that his own union branch had just passed one! "There's a story behind that," he mumbled, abacked.

Comrade Kenny and others argued that the 300 or so people in the room could have no impact on what the trade union movement does. Leaving aside the fact that most were supposed to be "delegates" representing wider forces, if we are so insignificant then what is the point? Well, the argument is that we are here to support the action the unions organise, but not make unasked for demands of our own. Comrade Kenny then confused the SWP motion he was arguing against with a call for an indefinite general strike, saying that he was "not sure our movement was yet ready for state power."

The rightist confusion in seeing these two motions as essentially the same was mirrored by their leftist backers. Workers Power wanted to composite them and glossed over the differences between them. The SWP (whose recent flip-flopping between calls for a one-day general strike and the slogan, "All out, stay out", were examined by Peter Manson last week<sup>2</sup>) was happy to vote for both motions



John McDonnell: most militant



and excitedly murmur, “All out, stay out”, when John McDonnell MP said, “We want to bring people out and keep them out until our demands are met” in his closing plenary speech. However, the model motion SWP members are now pushing in their union branches limits itself, like that at the COR conference, to the sensible call for a one-day general strike. One of the first plenary speakers, Zita Holbourne of Black Activists Rising Against Cuts, and a member of the PCS national executive, had also said that we needed a general strike. Yet these sentiments were not reflected in the votes, when only 20-25 ‘delegates’ voted for these two motions. Perhaps if the conference had attracted some of the newly radicalised workers in the PCS and NUT, then the votes would have been different.

As far as their own strategy is concerned, it does not seem like the leaders of COR have much to say beyond supporting any action the trade unions call and pushing for another national demonstration. A number of Counterfire supporters have made the argument that what was remarkable about June 30 was not so much the industrial action (which, of course, was great), but the street demonstrations and rallies on the day, which were able to draw in people from beyond the unions who wanted to show their opposition to cuts.

The most important next step, then, is organising another national demonstration. There is a clear difference between this and, say, the position of the SWP, which place much more import on strikes.

Of course, the Counterfire line dovetails well with the position upheld by Lindsey German, John Rees, Chris Bambery and Chris Nineham throughout the anti-war movement. Then the strategic vision was never lifted above building the next national demonstration or conference. While the anti-war upsurge clearly caused massive problems for Tony Blair that dogged him for the rest of his time in office, it did not stop the war in

Iraq or Afghanistan. And the focus on national demonstration after national demonstration simply led to demoralisation and diminishing returns. On top of this, the genuine anti-imperialist politics that were needed were frequently dumbed down or brushed under the carpet within the Stop the War Coalition in order to keep the movement ‘broad’ and not put off potential allies. Principled campaigns such as Hands Off the People of Iran were refused affiliation so that supporters of the Tehran regime would not be put off. The aim was limited to ‘Blair must go’, not regime change in the UK and beyond. Broad to the right, narrow to the left.

But the comrades have much less chance of winning mass support for a campaign of that nature against the cuts than they had in the anti-war movement. STWC was able to become the organisational focal point for the mass mobilisations against the Iraq war, but in the anti-cuts struggle it is the trade unions - not COR or any other anti-cuts campaign - that will be the organisational backbone. The only way that can change is if a politically distinct force, which is not afraid to challenge the trade union bureaucracy (including its lefts) when it misleads the struggle, is able to win layers of rank-and-file workers to a perspective of its own. Such a force would have to have a formidable revolutionary organisation, such as a united Communist Party, at its heart in order to make headway.

It now looks like those who ran STWC, who now make up much of COR’s leadership, are set to map this strategy onto their section of the anti-cuts movement. It was only the off-message plenary speakers, Ted Knight and John McDonnell, who said that what we needed was to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism. “I don’t just want to bring down the government - I want to bring down the system,” declared comrade McDonnell in the most militant speech of the day.

## Internationalism and democracy

One positive feature of the conference was a recognition that resistance to the cuts needs to be coordinated across international borders. This took concrete form in the call to build the October 1 European Conference Against Austerity in London. This conference had already been initiated by COR and is backed by various left groups across Europe.

This recognition of the international nature of the battle against capitalist austerity is an important step towards the coordinated action across frontiers that could be so powerful in defending our class. Indeed a working class alternative to capitalist rule will also have to be at least continental in scale, if it is to survive for any length of time - there are no national roads to socialism. It is vital that the October 1 conference provides plenty of space for debating strategy thoroughly, rather than simply presenting us with a seamless procession of the big names of the left from across Europe.

There was an emergency motion proposed by the CPB opposing the job losses at Bombardier in Derby which caused some consternation. Typically, considering its Stalinist authors and the strategy of a British road to socialism, it was laden with nationalist sentiments with no reference to the need for international coordination. However, after Dot Gibson of the National Pensioners Convention called for the removal of one reference to “a callous disregard for workers in Britain” the bulk of conference was prepared to accept the rest. Amongst others, comrades from Workers Power, the SWP and CPGB voted against. Clearly there is a fight to be had to defend the workers at Bombardier, but passing motions which pander to the ‘British jobs for British workers’ sentiment is certainly not the way to do so.

After the lunch break, but before the bulk of the motions were discussed, the conference was broken up into

small groups for workshops. I attended the workshop on the crisis in the euro zone, where an interesting discussion was had and a comrade from the Radical Left youth in Greece made some particularly pertinent points about the importance of coordinating action across Europe. However, due to the amount of time given over to workshops and a ridiculously long list of plenary speakers there was very little time for conference to actually discuss motions - the main business of the day. Also it is not possible, of course, to attend more than one workshop. The discussion is only heard by a fraction of the conference.

It would have been far more democratic to forego the separate workshops and some of the plenary speakers and extend the time allowed for debate on the conference floor. Many of the workshops covered issues that were related to motions being discussed anyway (internationalism; unions; privatisation; anti-racism; the environment) and the points made could have usefully been shared with everybody. Such an approach would have allowed more speakers to be involved in the discussion of motions (most had no more than one speaker for and one against) and for speakers to be given time to develop more complex arguments.

There were other organisational problems which impinged on the democratic process too. The absence of any working microphones at the beginning meant that the conference was nearly an hour late in starting. As alluded to earlier, the motion from Communist Students was nearly not heard at all. When we got to conference it was not included in the motions document, although it had been submitted by a paid-up, affiliated body before the deadline. Only after some persuading did the organisers allow it to be discussed. Even then the chair repeatedly, but inaccurately, referred to it as a “late motion”.

All of this fuss could easily have been sorted out prior to conference if the motions, which had to be

submitted by June 24, had been made available to delegates via the COR website. Only seeing the motions for the first time on the day itself might have meant having to read them while listening to the proceedings (perhaps the hour’s delay was intended as ‘preparation time’). I am sure that comrades will have been very busy in the run-up to June 30, but democratic norms are vital. In future we can, and must, do better.

One motion from Lambeth Save Our Services, and proposed by Stuart King of Permanent Revolution, sought to shift the way COR is organised and, as comrade King argued, “put it in the hands of the local groups”. There were some valid suggestions put forward in this motion, such as ensuring that the national committee meets every two months (it has met twice in the last eight months) and that the steering committee which currently meets during weekday working hours should change this arrangement to make it more accessible. However, the motion made no provision for the affiliated national political bodies and campaign groups which play a key role in COR to directly send representatives to the national committee. This provision was included in a steering committee motion, so when this was passed the Lambeth SOS motion fell.

Its general thrust of seeking to rely on the local anti-cuts groups to overcome democratic concerns and the issue of unity is also misguided. These problems originate at the top of the anti-cuts movement, in the way the national left groups operate. While local groups must certainly be part of the fight for unity and democracy in the movement, the problem is a national one and the left must look to its own practice if it is to be overcome ●

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## Notes

1. <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/archives/3679>.
2. ‘From Tony Cliff to Alex Callinicos’ *Weekly Worker* July 7.

## WORKSHOP

# Missing perspective

It is a shame that the discussion at the workshop on ‘Unions and the anti-cuts movement’ was so brief. Following interesting openings from Joe Malone (Fire Brigades Union), Cat Boyd (Public and Commercial Services Young Members) and Jon Duveen of the National Union of Teachers, the brief exchanges broached some of the important questions with which the anti-cuts movement is grappling.

The PCS and NUT comrades noted the mass pressure from the rank and file to name the next day of action following June 30. Excellent. Cat Boyd spoke about the “industrial and the political battle”, yet she proposed rather little by way of the latter, beyond organising ex-students now working in the public sector and taking up the question of youth unemployment.

Comrade Malone wondered whether one-day strike action would be sufficient. This prompted an excited response from Jeremy Drinkall (Workers Power). Upholding the need for a general strike to kick out the Con-Dems, he brought news of a new joint strike committee in Lambeth, aimed at raising strike support funds through a levy. Again, excellent. But the comrade seemed to imply that this

could simply be replicated up and down the country at the drop of a hat, and that that “people can go out indefinitely” (ie, until the government falls). As another WP comrade put it, this could “deliver the general strike without the TUC, if necessary”. Drinkall breathlessly told us to do “what they did in Tunisia”.

The rightist mirror image of this position came from Stuart Richardson of Socialist Resistance. He argued for more of a focus on the attack on pensions (“Unless we defeat the pensions drive it will be difficult to stop anything”), and questioned, as many of us must have, whether he was actually living “in the same Britain” as the comrades from Workers Power. As later became evident though, he and his comrades are even opposed to calling for 24-hour generalised protest action in the autumn. Maybe this reveals what he means by a “focus on the pensions”: ie, an approach dictated by some of the more conservative layers of the bureaucracy.

I was one of the first to indicate my desire to speak. Yet workshop chair Chris Bambery (fresh from his free transfer from Right to Work and the central committee of the Socialist Workers Party)

took me as one of the last. *Plus ça change* ... I stated that one-day, generalised protest action is certainly on the agenda. Dismissing it overlooks the real anger that exists, as was seen on March 26 and June 30. However, I argued, this was different from calling for an indefinite, all-out general strike (cue looks of incredulity from WP and SWP comrades). We should not play with slogans. What we agitate for must intersect with real masses of people and be informed by a strategy that is designed to develop the strength and confidence of the class. The posturing of sects is no more than clowning. It will have no effect in the real world.

Of course, “one day will not be enough”, if by that we mean the fall of the Con-Dem government. But this is the wrong way of posing the question. Against the SWP comrade Ray Morrell, who naively suggested that the *News of the World* debacle jeopardised the “weak coalition”, I argued that this government could not simply be “blown over.” We have to rebuild the workers’ movement from the base upwards following decades of retreat.

I then asked the trade union speakers - all from non-Labour-affiliated unions - how they felt

that rank-and-file anger could be manifested *politically*. As we had heard, it was making itself felt to the trade union leaders. But could it not also be expressed in the Labour Party? Would it not be an idea to join with other unions and have an impact on Labour itself, fighting against the scab approach of Ed Miliband and arguing for a pro-working class leader like John McDonnell?

There is a tendency in those in and around the Coalition of Resistance to downplay the significance of the trade unions and the Labour Party. In response to comrade Richardson, for example, one comrade from Glasgow spoke of May Day as the near irrelevant preserve of the “unions and the old left”.

By the end of the session, the FBU speaker had already left, and Cat Boyd’s short response did not deal with the Labour Party question. However, comrade Duveen did respond. He said that affiliation currently had “no mileage”, and that the “history of the Labour Party shows that it will not be the vehicle for change”. As a member of the CPGB, I am well aware of the record of the Labour leadership. But that was a rather different point to the one I was

making. Seemingly oblivious to the utter disasters of the recent past, Duveen was convinced that the unions needed to establish a “new workers’ party” - ie, a Labour Party mark two.

And so the workshop ended and we traipsed back to the main hall - all very frustrating. It should be obvious that these sessions are no use in facilitating a serious exchange of views. Comrades are spoken *at*, different left groups and tendencies put forward a few pinched points and then off we go again - none of us much wiser.

For me, the discussion underlined the absence of the left’s *political* strategy for the anti-cuts movement. On the one hand, there are those who endow almost every action with revolutionary content (SWP and Workers Power). On the other, there is the popular frontism inherited from Stop the War Coalition (Counterfire, Socialist Resistance, Green Left). Quite apart from their short-termism, both of these approaches fail to put forward concrete proposals to rebuild the workers’ movement from the base and connect that with a long-term, political vision ●

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## ITALY

# Euro zone crisis spreads from periphery to core

Toby Abse looks at the interplay between economics and politics after 'Black Friday'

Until Friday July 8, the general view of those observing the crisis of the peripheral countries of the euro zone had been that the expression 'PIGS' had become an acronym for 'Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain', with Italy, the third largest economy in the zone, being considered far less vulnerable. Now, however, it is as though the expression has reassumed its southern European connotation.

Whilst one credit rating agency, Moody's, had already reclassified Italy downwards, the majority of informed observers felt this was an excessively harsh and perhaps rather eccentric judgement. However serious the sovereign debt crises of Greece, Ireland and Portugal are, these countries, which have already received bail-outs, have economies that are relatively insignificant compared with the euro zone or the European Union as a whole. A similar problem in Spain would be cause for more concern and might trigger a more general crisis, but even Spain was not considered absolutely central to the whole structure in the way that Italy, one of the major founding members of the original European Economic Community, is.

July 8, predictably branded 'Black Friday' by the Italian press, saw the Milan stock market tumble by 3.47% and on Saturday comparisons were already being made in the more serious Italian dailies with the events that led Italy to leave the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1992. The dramatic events of September of that year led Italy to devalue her currency and impose some rigorous austerity budgets in both 1992 and 1993. These attempted to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis through attacks on pensions, health spending and other social benefits and through a tripartite deal on wages between the government, the unions and the employers' organisation. However, the lesser degree of integration between the European economies 20 years ago meant that the Italian developments had less significance for the entire EU (or EEC, as it was still called in those days), even if the Italian events of 1992 were intertwined with the low point of John Major's government, when the pound collapsed and both Italy and the UK exited from the EMS at the same time.

Last weekend saw frantic efforts to stabilise the situation. The depth of Germany's concern about developments in Italy can be seen by the fact that German chancellor Angela Merkel spoke to the Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, about his budget programme by telephone on July 10, despite her well known loathing for the Italian premier. After making the call, Merkel said in Berlin: "Italy must itself send an important signal by agreement on a budget that meets the need for frugality and consolidation. I have full confidence that the Italian government will pass exactly this kind of budget." Despite Merkel's efforts, the July 9 ruling by the civil court of appeal in Milan, ordering Berlusconi's Fininvest to pay €560 million in compensation to CIR - his hated media rival, which owns *Espresso* and *La Repubblica* - for bribing judges to give Fininvest

control of the Mondadori publishing group in 1991, did not improve Italy's international media image. The subsequent outbursts against the judges by both Berlusconi and his daughter, Marina, were so counterproductive that president Giorgio Napolitano, who some days before had in effect forced Berlusconi to remove from the budget a clause specifically designed to pre-empt the court's verdict in this particular case, pleaded with the premier to keep silent in the 'national interest'.

The reopening of the markets on Monday July 11 saw a further and greater fall on the Milan stock market, this time of 3.96%. The eight-hour emergency summit of European finance ministers in Brussels that day - which discussed Greece as well as Italy - had no immediate calming effect and may even have increased the degree of anxiety whilst it was taking place. Indeed, the sharp fall in Italy had an effect on all the major stock exchanges, particularly those of the euro zone (Paris lost 2.71%, Madrid 2.69% and Frankfurt 2.33%), while even New York went down by 1.20% and London by 1.03%, despite many Anglo-American traders paying more attention to the troubles of News International than the ups and downs of Italian bonds.

Whilst Tuesday July 12 saw a slight recovery in the Italian stock market, with a rise of 1.18% by the close of trading, this only cancelled a small fraction of the losses made since July 8 and the outlook remains very unsettled. Tuesday was a very turbulent day indeed and at the start of trading the marked negative trend was continuing - the general index of shares was down a further 4.7% at 10am Italian time, and at one stage the spread between Italian and German 10-year bonds rose to 347, before closing at 285. Trading in the shares of Unicredit - Italy's biggest bank - had to be suspended for a period due to the speed with which they were falling. Tuesday's auction of one-year government bonds (Bot) worth €6.75 billion was a success in terms of demand - even if the interest rate that has to be paid has risen to 3.67%, the highest since 2008. It is widely believed that this was in large part due to a massive intervention by the European Central Bank, which was anxious to avoid Italian state bonds following Greek, Portuguese and Irish ones on the road to junk status.

The main factor

behind the general stock market crash, which has had a particularly devastating effect on the shares of the major Italian banks (Unicredit fell by 7.85% on Friday July 8 and a further 6.33% on Monday July 11, whilst the Banca Intesa Sanpaolo went down by slightly less, 5.46%, on Friday, only to suffer more on Monday with a 7.74% drop), is a rapid increase in the spread between the Italian government's 10-year bonds and their German equivalents. Fifteen percent of these bonds are held by Italian banks, so their shares fell more than those of other companies. The gap between the German and Italian bonds had only been 143 points as recently as April 1, but it had been growing for several weeks. This trend has now accelerated. Friday saw the gap widen from 219 to 244 in a single day and on Monday Italian bonds seemed to go into freefall, with the gap increasing from 244 to 303 at the close of trading.

It is difficult to work out what has caused the sudden speculation against the Italian economy. It is true that the Italian public debt as a percentage of gross domestic product is a high one at 119% (in 2010) as well as being large in absolute terms (€1,600 billion, compared with Greece's €350 billion), but this is not a sudden development. It had reached 121.8% of GDP back in 1994 and, after much controversy during the later 1990s over this issue, Italy was nevertheless allowed to join the euro, despite this percentage being far above the officially permitted maximum. Italy's debt had gradually fallen to 103.6% of GDP by 2007, but, like public debt in most advanced countries, it has increased with each year since the world financial crisis. According to Christine Lagarde, the newly appointed managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Italy's crisis was "essentially market-driven". In fact she declared: "Some of the Italian numbers are excellent. Its primary deficit is one of the lowest" (*Financial Times* July 13).

It might be argued that the speculation has political rather than strictly economic causes, or at any rate that it is a reaction to political arguments over short-term economic policy within the government. Berlusconi's current finance minister, Giulio Tremonti, has sought to gain a reputation as a fiscal hawk and a paragon of neoliberal orthodoxy - quite a reinvention, given his earlier notoriety for very creative accounting in the budgets he produced

for Berlusconi's second government and the protectionist diatribes against globalisation that he wrote some years ago. Berlusconi himself has probably paid even less attention to the country's finances - as distinct from his own - than he did during previous spells in office, although even then they were never his prime concern. But whether, given such unfavourable world conditions, he can be held responsible for the rise in national debt is debatable.

However, it is clear that since his ignominious defeat in all four of the June 2011 referenda (coming immediately after his party's loss of its former stronghold in Milan) he has made a desperate attempt to regain some popularity by attempting to bamboozle Tremonti into cutting various taxes that bear down on his own traditional base. Whilst in the past Umberto Bossi, the leader of the Northern League, tended to side with Tremonti against Berlusconi in any such conflicts (presenting them as a clash between northern rectitude and southern wastrels and spendthrifts), the Lega, equally concerned about its own losses in May's local elections, has now enthusiastically endorsed Berlusconi's desire to loosen the fiscal reins. Awareness of such arguments within the Italian cabinet probably did nothing to boost Italy's standing on the international markets.

The feud between Berlusconi and Tremonti has taken on an even more personal dimension over the last few weeks. Marco Milanese, a *Popolo della Libertà* deputy and Tremonti's right-hand man over many years, has been caught up in the wide corruption scandal involving the P4 secret society, leaks about which started to dominate the pages of *La Repubblica* after the referenda results, even if the magistrates' investigations have been going on for some time. Tremonti, whose main residence is in Milan, used to stay in a Roman property belonging to Milanese whenever he had to be in the capital on parliamentary or ministerial business. Whilst there seems to be some controversy as to how much rent Tremonti paid and whether it represented the market value of the property, there is no serious evidence that Tremonti was involved in the much more extensive pattern of wrongdoing alleged against his political lieutenant.

Although the P4 in general has done further damage to Berlusconi and led him to once again attempt to bring in a gagging law criminalising the publication of wiretaps in the press, there is some suspicion that Berlusconi has been inflating Tremonti's very peripheral involvement in a bid to smear and discredit his own finance minister, whose policies he finds inconvenient at a time when he is anxious to play any populist card he can and whom he fears as a credible centre-right candidate for the succession, should he be forced out of Palazzo Chigi, the prime minister's residence.

It now seems unlikely that Berlusconi will sack his finance minister - to do so

in present circumstances seems the quickest way to precipitate Italy's economic collapse. There is now considerable international pressure on Italy from the ECB, the EU and, behind the scenes at any rate, from the IMF to pass Tremonti's €40 billion austerity package by the end of July at the very latest. There is no doubting the depth and breadth of the attacks on the working class this will entail.

President Napolitano has put massive pressure on the mainstream opposition leaders - Pierluigi Bersani (Democratic Party), Antonio Di Pietro (Italy of Values) and Pier Ferdinando Casini (Union of the Centre) - to allow the budget to be passed as quickly as possible, whilst preserving the superficial formalities of parliamentary debate. The opposition will move a few carefully chosen amendments agreed amongst themselves, rather than a large number from each of the different factions, and go through the motions of opposing the budget, but will not debate it clause by clause in detail - let alone engage in systematic filibustering, as they have sometimes done in the past and might well have done in other circumstances as a way of capitalising on Berlusconi's weakness.

By July 12, there appeared to be an agreement between the government and opposition parties that the budget would be passed in both houses by Sunday July 18 at the latest. If this does happen at such breakneck speed, it will be an unprecedented development in a country where budget debates generally go on for weeks and sometimes months and will serve as a clear indication of massive pressure on the politicians from both the EU and the Italian ruling class.

However, it must be stressed that criticisms of the budget that the Democratic Party is agreeing to play down in the interests of national unity are in no sense leftwing. The largely ex-'official communist' DP is not attacking Tremonti for his shift towards a more orthodox neoliberalism, but because he has not gone far enough in that direction. The interview given by leading DP figure Enrico Letta to *La Repubblica* is a clear indication of how neoliberal and rabidly anti-working class the current DP line is. He stressed "the moment has arrived to start to speak of privatisations. I am thinking of the post office, the railways ... and the 20,000 enterprises involving local government bodies" (July 11).

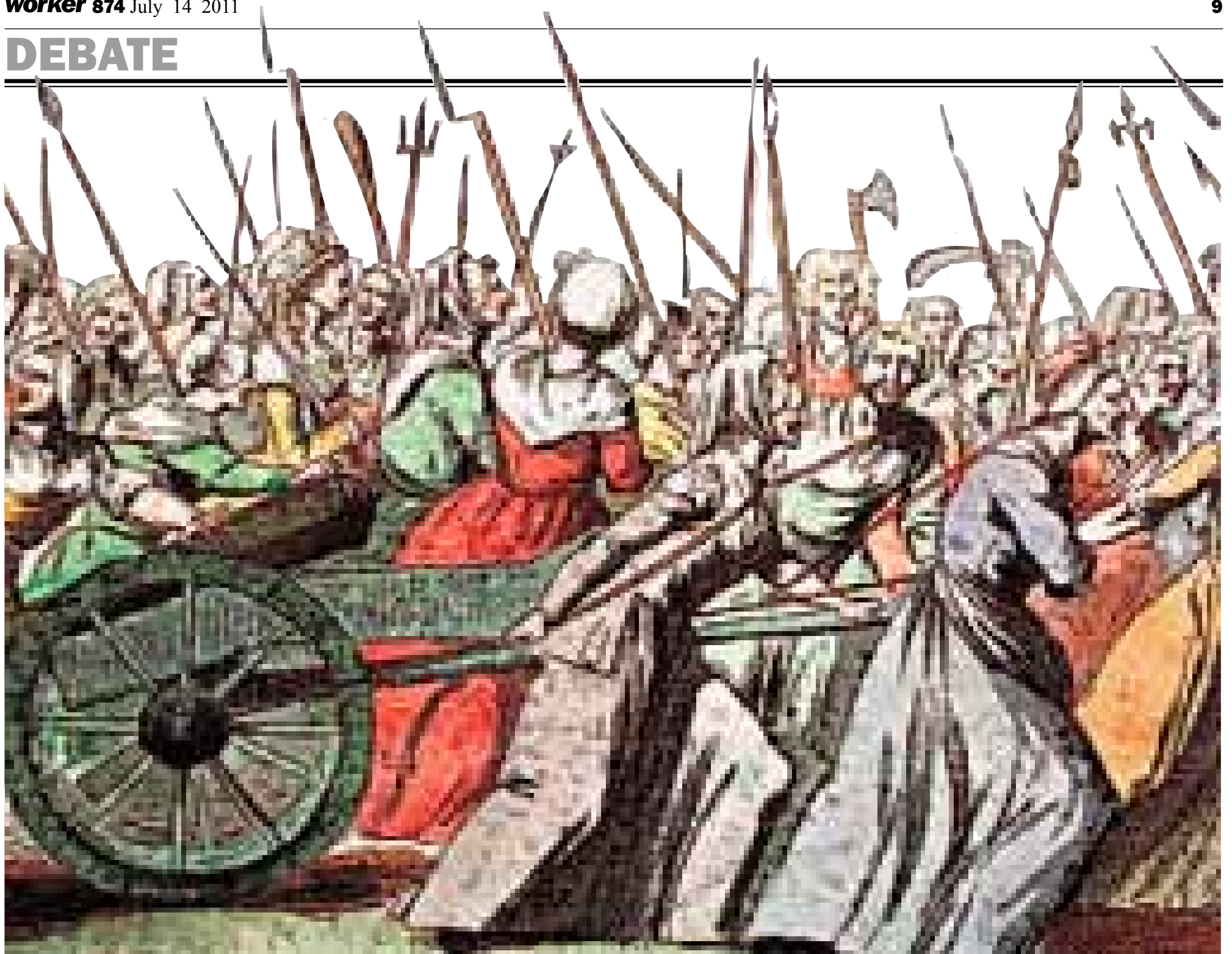
It is true that Berlusconi has undermined state provision in certain areas: for example, he has allowed the Catholic church - especially the front organisations, Communion and Liberation, and Opus Dei - to colonise parts of the health and education systems at the expense of the taxpayer through subsidised Catholic private schools or private hospitals. However, this has been driven more by a desire to buy Vatican support rather than an ideological commitment to the free market as such. A government led by the PD might well implement the dictates of the ECB and IMF not just with more consistency than Berlusconi, but with more enthusiasm than similar 'leftwing' southern European parties - Pasok in Greece, the PSOE in Spain and the PS in Portugal ●



**Silvio Berlusconi: not alone in anti-working class attacks**



## DEBATE



Marching to Versailles: women in the lead

# Putting revolution back onto the agenda

**Mark Kosman** argues that anthropological and historical evidence provide reasons to be optimistic about the future. But if we are to move forward in the 21st century it is necessary to rethink all aspects of the Marxist, feminist and anarchist traditions

In the 20th century, every attempt to go beyond capitalism ended in failure. Either people looked to socialist politicians, whose reforms made capitalism even more secure, or they supported revolutions that degenerated into repression and mass killing. Consequently, today, few people have much hope that humanity could ever successfully transcend capitalism.

But are capitalism's present problems putting anti-capitalist revolution back on the agenda? And could a future revolution liberate humanity in ways that past revolutions failed to achieve? To try to answer these questions, I am going to look at past revolutions with particular emphasis on the role of popular resistance and class struggle.

### Human revolution

The first ever revolution, described by anthropologists as the 'human revolution', was the transformation that created the first fully human societies in the form of communities of hunter-gatherers. The nature of this

prehistoric revolution can be inferred in various ways. For example, studies of contemporary hunter-gatherers show that their strong sense of 'moral community' is maintained by autonomous individuals who constantly resist any form of personal domination. This observation has led some anthropologists to suggest that hunter-gatherer egalitarianism, with its many communistic aspects, must have originated in uprisings against dominant males. There is also plausible evidence that these uprisings were led by women looking for collective support to ease their childcare burdens.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the process that actually created humanity can be seen as both a communist and a feminist revolution.

Such ideas are controversial and a hunter-gatherer lifestyle has many limitations compared to a modern way of life. Nevertheless, people in the simplest form of hunter-gatherer communities do insist that everyone shares everything and they do organise collectively without permanent leaders. They also 'work' significantly

less than people do in capitalist society and Marx himself observed that "the vitality of primitive communities was incomparably greater than that of ... modern capitalist societies".<sup>2</sup> So, whatever their prehistoric origins, we certainly have much to learn from "primitive communities" - not least of all the fact that we were able to live together in a broadly communist way for tens of thousands of years, so we can surely do so again.

These primitive communist relations did eventually break down, probably due to a scarcity of resources caused by over-hunting, overpopulation and climate change. This scarcity would have made it more difficult for people to trust each other and share things. They would then have started looking to leaders to adjudicate between different interests, enabling some males to assert dominance over everyone else. These more stratified hunter-gatherer communities then evolved into class societies and, eventually, into agriculture-based civilisations.<sup>3</sup>

The women and men who were

dominated in these class societies, whether as slaves or peasants, continued to resist this domination and their resistance was often a factor in the development and decline of various civilisations. But it was not until people could resist domination in conditions of reduced scarcity that they were able to create a genuinely freer form of society: namely capitalism. Indeed it required the huge population decline of the Black Death to change everything by reducing land scarcity and so increasing peasants' bargaining power across western Europe. This situation then compelled the lords to replace feudal dues with rent, enabling people to work for money rather than being dependent on a patriarchal lord.<sup>4</sup>

This shift away from personal dependence was particularly significant for women. For instance, it was now women who initiated many food riots, while insisting on the idea of a 'moral community' that was obliged to feed them and their families. The most striking example of such an uprising occurred during the French Revolution, when Parisian women

began calling the men 'cowards' and declaring, 'We will take over!' These women proceeded to march to Versailles with soldiers following them. The crowd then forced the king to return to Paris where, three years later, women were again major participants in the demonstrations that led to the abolition of the monarchy.<sup>5</sup>

Hunger and scarcity still discouraged people from sharing things or attempting any revival of communist relations. But workers continued to resist the new capitalist relations by indulging in drunkenness, absenteeism and strikes. This forced the factory owners to contain workers' resistance - first by raising wages and then by replacing these expensive workers with more productive machinery. Governments could also restrain workers' resistance by introducing welfare provision and by allowing the formation of trade unions and socialist parties. However, workers were still dissatisfied and, from 1905 to 1914, there were unprecedented international strike waves.

This unrest, combined with other



# DEBATE

disturbing social changes, such as the movement for women's suffrage, created considerable insecurity among the ruling class. They could divert some workers' discontent into nationalism, imperialism and masculinist militarism. But this just led to a situation in which, when confronted with inter-imperialist conflict, governments felt unable to back down, fearing national humiliation and domestic opposition.<sup>6</sup>

The result was the slaughter of the 1914-18 war, which was just the start of a century of hot and cold wars. These wars were very effective at creating a sense of purpose and community that countered any desire workers had for revolution. This atmosphere of war-induced counterrevolution was also effective at countering the growth of the women's movement. Of course, whenever nations faced defeat, such an atmosphere could rapidly transform into a revolutionary mood. But any subsequent revolutions were now crippled by isolation, poverty and masculinist militarism.

## Russian Revolution

During the 1914-18 war, women had initiated protests and food riots right across Europe. Marxists, such as Lenin, warned against such riots. But Marx himself had recognised that "great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment" and, in 1917, it was Petrograd's female workers who spread the idea of a general strike on March 8, International Women's Day. On that day, hundreds of women dragged their fellow male workers onto the streets, where the rioting crowds had no problems creating their own leaders. As Trotsky later recalled, the women took hold of the soldiers' rifles and "beseeched, almost commanded: 'Put down your bayonets and join us'", and, within five days, the centuries-old tsarist regime had collapsed.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, despite this achievement, hunger and scarcity still discouraged people from transcending wage labour. Instead, workers looked to socialist militants who set up elected workers' councils that soon tried to impose strict labour discipline.<sup>8</sup>

After the Bolsheviks took state power, many workers continued to engage in indiscipline and strikes. But this just drove the new regime to be even more authoritarian. Elected factory committees advocated forced labour for everyone and they readily used armed guards to maintain order.<sup>9</sup> As early as January 1918, Lenin was contemplating that "one out of every 10 idlers will be shot on the spot" and, during the civil war, both he and Trotsky advocated "concentration camps" for absentee workers. In appalling conditions of war and hunger, the regime was even more brutal to the peasantry. One Bolshevik eyewitness recalled: "Our red detachments would 'clean up' villages exactly the way the whites did. What was left of the inhabitants - old men, women, children - were machine-gunned for having given assistance to the enemy."<sup>10</sup>

After the civil war, a huge wave of strikes and uprisings scuppered Lenin's and Trotsky's plans to militarise labour. However, the Bolshevik regime still needed to industrialise to prevent its overthrow by a combination of peasant 'capitalists', disillusioned workers and western intervention. Consequently the Bolsheviks, now led by Stalin, chose to channel workers' frustration into a revived civil war against underdevelopment and peasant recalcitrance. Workers' strikes and peasant riots, both dominated by women, were at the forefront of resistance to this brutal policy. But starvation and repression crushed all resistance, enabling Stalin's monstrous dictatorship to survive at the cost of

millions of lives, including those of many Bolsheviks.<sup>11</sup>

This disastrous outcome discredited communist ideas for the rest of the century. Anarchists argue that they could have done better. But, when anarchist activists introduced workplace self-management during the Spanish civil war, scarcity and workers' indiscipline forced these activists in the same authoritarian direction as the Bolsheviks. The anarchist justice minister, García Oliver, tried to set up "concentration camps" and even the most principled anarchists, the Friends of Durutti, advocated "forced labour".<sup>12</sup>

Not surprisingly, many workers refused to risk their lives for this sort of 'socialism' and the vast majority of the Spanish republic's army had to be conscripted. Indeed, the refusal to fight was a major factor in preventing the republic from surviving long enough to drag Spain into the slaughter of World War II.<sup>13</sup>

## Nazi counterrevolution

Back in 1911, Churchill had argued that welfare provision would deter workers from turning to "revolutionary socialism" and, by the 1930s, his prediction had proved correct.<sup>14</sup> But the capitalist system was now at an impasse. If it conceded many more reforms, workers might make more revolutionary demands. On the other hand, if it tried to restore 19th century levels of austerity, then revolution was even more likely.

Unable to introduce either sufficient reform or austerity, global capitalism had no way to peacefully extricate itself from the great depression. The French and the American ruling classes were still able to contain huge strike waves with state spending. The German ruling class, however, could only prevent an eventual revolution by reviving the nationalism and masculinist militarism of the 1914-18 war and letting the Nazis take power.

Having looked to other socialist parties for so long, German workers lacked the confidence to oppose the National Socialist takeover. Nevertheless, they still indulged in passive resistance and the new regime was forced to spend money on food, rather than the military, to prevent what the Nazi leaders called "revolutionary conditions among the people". The only way to contain German workers in the long term was to provide the higher living standards of British and US capitalism. And, in the depression, the only obvious way to fund this was to colonise eastern Europe and emulate the vast land masses and murderous racism of the British, American and French empires.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, these older empires feared losing out to a new German empire. However, they were also hesitant to force their reluctant populations into a repeat of the 1914-18 war with its mutinies and revolutions. Consequently, France's generals chose to implement a highly defensive military strategy. Then, when this strategy failed to withstand the German invasion of 1940, these generals rapidly surrendered, fearing what they called a "communist uprising in Paris". Britain and America subsequently held back from invading France and, instead, prioritised the bombing and blockading of German civilians for much of the war.<sup>16</sup>

British officials admitted that this blockading of Europe would "produce widespread starvation", just as it had during the 1914-18 war, when it had led to half a million deaths and then defeat and revolution in Germany. Hitler, however, blamed the Jews for all the humiliations and failings of German capitalism. He was also determined that, this time, Germany would not starve, so there could be "no revolution on the home front".<sup>17</sup>

Nazi officials consequently argued that any "attempts to prevent the population [in Russia] from starving ... would undermine Germany and Europe's capacity to resist blockade". These attitudes then led to the Nazis killing anyone, especially Jews and communists, who they feared might weaken national unity or make Germany vulnerable to another defeat.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this unrestrained brutality, fears of popular unrest did still prevent the Nazis from extending their use of mass starvation and poison gas to even larger sections of east European society. At the same time, fears of domestic unrest if the Germans retaliated with gas did also dissuade the British from acting on Churchill's proposal to "drench Germany with poison gas". And, towards the end of the war, further fears of unrest also encouraged moves to surrender in both Italy and Japan. Then, once the war was over, a huge international strike wave encouraged the Allied victors to introduce major reforms.<sup>19</sup>

If all this unrest had been more widespread and had been able to prevent the Allies from bombing and blockading Germany, Nazi policies might have been less murderous. And, crucially, German workers might also have had the strength and confidence to stage a repeat of their successful 1918 and 1920 uprisings against dictatorship. Indeed, many on the right, such as Baldwin, Chamberlain and even the anti-Hitler plotter, Stauffenberg, were very concerned about Germany 'going Bolshevik' during the Nazi period.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, many on the left failed to argue for a revolutionary end to the war. Instead they called for a more genuinely anti-fascist war effort. War is, however, an inherently reactionary, inhuman activity, as was shown by the way both Trotsky and the Spanish republic used executions to intimidate conscripts into fighting their wars. So any 'genuinely anti-fascist' war, led by the left, might well have been just as brutal and counterrevolutionary as the Allied war effort.

By 1945, the most devastating war in history had decimated and redisciplined much of the world's working class. Workers still wanted a better life and, as the influential Conservative, Quintin Hogg, said, "If you do not give the people social reform, they are going to give you social revolution."<sup>21</sup> However, unlike during the 1930s, national unity was now sufficient to prevent reform itself encouraging social revolution. Consequently, such reform, combined with military and other state-led investment, created an unprecedented economic boom that made revolution appear completely unnecessary in the west.

This boom, however, did little for the millions starving in the 'third world'. In countries such as China and Cuba, popular discontent was so great that only nationalist dictatorships, calling themselves 'communist', could disorientate people sufficiently to hold onto state power. Liberal politicians then exaggerated this 'communist' threat, enabling them to justify the repression of any 'third world' movements that threatened western profits.

The result was a series of massacres and conflicts during the cold war that killed more than seven million people in Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere. As in 1914, governments still feared national humiliation, and both Kennedy and Khrushchev hesitated to back down during the Cuban missile crisis. Che Guevara's nationalism was even more reckless, leading him to boast that "if the rockets had remained, we would have used them all and directed them against the very heart of the United States". Meanwhile, between 10 and 50 million died in

China, when Mao emulated Stalin's disastrous industrialisation policies.<sup>22</sup>

## 1960s revolution

Fortunately, by the 1960s, after 50 years of war-induced counterrevolution, non-Stalinist radical movements were beginning to develop in the west. Most significantly, by boycotting segregated buses, African-American women sparked the US civil rights movement that then inspired activists across the world.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, full employment and welfare enabled many younger women to rely less on male breadwinners, so they could begin to escape the patriarchal family and sexual repression. Indeed, all workers were becoming increasingly free of wartime discipline. They were also more secure and less willing to put up with the boredom of factory assembly lines.

This all came to a head in Paris, where the demands of students to be able to sleep together in university dormitories was a major issue in the protests of 1968. These protests then sparked a huge general strike, during which workers angrily rejected trade union calls to return to work.

Unfortunately, the financial hardship of the strike made it difficult for women with children to continue supporting their striking partners. Consumer capitalism was still holding out the prospect of a better life and French workers eventually accepted an offer of higher wages.<sup>24</sup> Yet, despite this setback, people in the west remained ill-disciplined and continued to go on strike, often in opposition to the unions' wishes. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, American conscripts killed hundreds of their own officers and US failure in the war, combined with youth, black and feminist rebellions, encouraged a growing anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist consciousness.

The American sociologist, Daniel Bell, warned that people were acting as if society had moved "beyond necessity".<sup>25</sup> And industrial production was now approaching levels that could end scarcity and create the basis for genuine communism. But, having looked to political parties for so long, workers lacked the confidence to take matters into their own hands and this enabled governments to roll back state provision.

The resulting recession and mass unemployment, often imposed by 'socialist' governments, made workers think twice about going on strike. The shift of industrial production to east Asia, combined with a revival of the cold war, then further disciplined western workers. In this way, capitalism succeeded in creating the false impression that humanity could never go "beyond necessity", or beyond scarcity - or, in other words, beyond capitalism.

This pessimistic conviction was further strengthened by the economic failures of the 'communist' countries, even though these failures were themselves a product of workers' growing power. In 'communist' countries, welfare and repression could contain any collective resistance. However, with little fear of unemployment, individual workers were still able to work slowly and resist management interference, and this exacerbated the enormous inefficiencies of the Stalinist bureaucracy.<sup>26</sup>

Gorbachev tried to motivate people to work harder by introducing market reforms. But, when this led to economic disintegration and strikes, the Russian elite was content to let industry collapse, so decisively weakening workers' power. Many Russian workers had believed that the introduction of the market, combined with democracy and workplace self-

management, would improve their lives. Instead, tragically, it led to economic devastation and an excess mortality of over three million.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile in China, unlike in Russia, the 'communist' regime could still undercut workers' bargaining power by employing millions of peasants in industry. This enabled the regime to attract international investment and create an economic boom that restrained any popular discontent. Having contained both western and Russian workers by deindustrialising, global capitalism now completely depends on this semi-Stalinist dictatorship in China. However, this potentially unstable regime will eventually face insoluble problems containing the many thousands of protests and strikes that occur there every year.

If similar unrest occurred anywhere other than China, it would create political problems far sooner. Consequently, industrial capitalists have hesitated to invest in places like the Middle East, leading to a lack of development that encouraged some Arab nationalists to resort to the Islamist terrorism of 9/11.

The national humiliation of this attack immediately motivated the US to return to the certainties of the cold war and launch the 'war on terror'. In this way, the US hoped to reassert its leadership, while, consciously or unconsciously, reviving its economy through arms spending and, at the same time, containing an international wave of anti-capitalist demonstrations.<sup>28</sup> The US military then had few problems overthrowing the Afghan and Iraqi governments. However, they have since had intractable problems controlling Afghan and Iraqi society.

After years of bombing and blockading Iraq, the US assumed it could impose privatisation and unemployment on Iraqi society far more easily than Saddam Hussein ever could.<sup>29</sup> However, US-imposed impoverishment just encouraged many Iraqis to support a brutal nationalist uprising against the occupation. At the same time, domestic opposition to high American casualties compelled the military to use so much violence to protect their troops that they created even more hostility to the US presence. On top of this, international opposition to the war also deterred the Americans from simply bombing and massacring the population, as they did in Vietnam. The result was that the US was forced to let Iranian-backed Shi'ite politicians take governmental power.

This defeat of US policy, combined with a decline of US control across both the Middle East and Latin America, shows that the 'war on terror' was unable to restore the cold war's ability to mobilise the western democracies in support of nationalism and war. This reluctance to support war not only inhibits any restoration of masculinist militarism; it also inhibits capitalism from recreating the post-war industrial boom.

Any such boom requires either the levels of state investment and full employment of the post-1945 period or, alternatively, a restoration of profitability through the imposition of pre-1945 levels of austerity. Either policy might work in conditions of wartime discipline, especially if, as in the cold war, any militant workers could be discredited as conspiring with the enemy. But, without this, either policy risks encouraging workers to mobilise against the system. So, instead, capitalists neglected industry and largely invested in the financial sector and private credit - and this inexorably led to the unprecedented crisis of 2008.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the 20th century, many workers accepted the miseries of capitalist work because they



believed their children might have better lives than they did. As the rise in living standards slowed, the availability of cheap credit then kept everyone on the capitalist treadmill for a while. But, now that western capitalism can offer little except austerity, just to repay bankers’ debts, its legitimacy is beginning to drain away.

In the crises of the 1930s, fascism or Stalinism could easily misdirect any anti-capitalist sentiment. But a lasting legacy of the 1960s, people’s lack of deference to authority, makes it difficult to return to such authoritarianism today. After years of defeat and individualisation, people still think that if they act no-one will join them, so why take the risk? Yet, once people feel compelled to act and they then start winning, their confidence will increase rapidly. This is what happened in 1917, 1968 and 1989, when, after years of low levels of struggle and with few revolutionaries expecting revolution, epoch-changing upheavals did break out.<sup>31</sup>

### Future revolution

For the past hundred years, war-induced counterrevolution helped contain wave after wave of class struggle. For the past hundred years, different government policies, from welfare provision to bank bail-outs, successfully kept workers depoliticised and passive. Yet, today, capitalism appears to have reached an impasse in which, if workers do launch another sustained wave of struggles, it is not clear how they could be contained. Any serious attempt to placate people through reforms risks a repeat of the post-war period, when job security promoted ever more worker militancy. Meanwhile, any serious attempt to rediscipline people with even more poverty and cutbacks risks completely discrediting capitalism, especially as modern technology is so hugely productive.<sup>32</sup>

Today, humanity has the potential to transform technology, in harmony with nature, to end all significant scarcity and to start creating a global communist society. Anything short of this, any attempt to democratically organise wage labour, as the Bolsheviks and Spanish anarchists tried to do, is far too contradictory to succeed. Workers will always resist such alienated labour, so it can never be organised rationally. As Marx said, alienated labour “is by its very nature unfree, inhuman, unsocial activity ... [so] an ‘organisation of labour’ is therefore a contradiction. *The* best organisation that can preserve labour is the present organisation, the free competition.”<sup>33</sup>

This superiority of the “free competition” - ie, the ‘free’ sale of labour - over any “organisation of labour” was shown clearly in the experience of the Israeli *kibbutzim*. Despite their racism, these cooperatives did demonstrate that people could work together ‘communistically’ without individual, material reward. But this work was always constrained by the need to produce and sell commodities and, therefore, the *kibbutzim* were incapable of creating a way of life that had any more freedom than capitalism. Consequently, in 2005, most kibbutz members voted to introduce a capitalist wage system.<sup>34</sup> This experience suggests that people in the 21st century will have little interest in revolution unless it completely liberates them from the alienation of working for an income - freeing them to just work for the sake of creativity or for the sake of others.

Back in the 20th century, people still had considerable interest in democratic parties that offered them the security of working for an income. But, now that capitalism can no longer provide much job security, workers are starting to lose faith in democracy. Of course democratic rights like free speech can be very useful to workers, but representative democracy has always shifted their struggles away from the workplace and community, into the isolated, passive act of voting. Indeed, in the months following the Russian Revolution, British politicians openly stated that they were extending the vote as a “buffer” or “substitute for riot [and] revolution”.<sup>35</sup>

Representative democracy has always reinforced the idea that ‘ordinary people’

need not take control of their own lives and that they could look to politicians and the state to do things for them. Consequently, faith in democracy has hindered workers’ ability to defend themselves after numerous election victories, whether of reactionaries like Hitler or progressives like Nelson Mandela. Indeed, workers’ faith in democratic parties was probably a more important reason for the failure of past revolutions than any lack of a genuinely revolutionary party. So, hopefully, today’s lack of faith in democracy will lead to a growth in revolutionary groups and movements that emphasise community and individuality more than formal democracy - just as hunter-gatherers do.

In a non-revolutionary period, such ‘ultra-left’ arguments seem impossibly optimistic. In future revolutions, however, the ‘impossible’ will become possible and ‘ordinary people’ will organise themselves in ways as unimaginable to us now as they were to people before the French or Russian revolutions.

One of the more ‘unimaginable’ aspects of both these revolutions was the way long-standing regimes were so easily overthrown, the moment that proletarian women took the lead. With similarities to the uprisings that may have created the first hunter-gatherer communities, these women refused to tolerate a situation in which society was failing to support them and their children.

Today, individualised childcare, combined with insecurity and overwork, still greatly restricts parents’ lives. This leaves little time for the indulgent, responsive attention that some hunter-gatherer communities easily provide for their children, attention that all young children require to become mentally healthy adults.<sup>36</sup> Since the 1960s, women have transformed their lives through better employment opportunities, enabling them to maintain their families’ living standards, even when men’s income was falling. But, if cuts in welfare and jobs put even more pressure on women, preventing them improving their lives as individuals, they may again look to collective and revolutionary solutions to their problems.

Workers’ resistance has transformed capitalism, just as peasant resistance transformed feudalism. But revolutions initiated by women might, perhaps, be the way to abolish capitalism, just as they abolished French and Russian feudalism. We could then start sharing everything, while also abolishing all imposition of authority and essentialist gender roles. This would return us to a higher form of the communistic relations of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, so fulfilling Marx’s hope that capitalism’s “fatal crisis” would lead to a “return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type”.<sup>37</sup>

The revolutions of the last century tried to move towards communism by prioritising the reorganisation of work and the economy. Not surprisingly, they failed, because the communistic values of trust, sharing and compassion are more likely to originate from the transformation of personal relationships and childcare than from the transformation of wage labour. Once we can prioritise these communistic values, we should then be able to coordinate unalienated production free from the external discipline of either a state or a market.

So, to conclude: is revolution back on the agenda and could it liberate humanity in ways that past revolutions failed to achieve? We cannot precisely predict the future, but the anthropological and historical evidence does support an optimistic response to both these questions. Readers of this article may have different interpretations of the same evidence. Nevertheless, our starting point must be that it is only by rethinking all aspects of the Marxist, feminist and anarchist traditions that we can develop new ideas that will be relevant to the revolutionary movements of the 21st century ●

### Notes

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3. L Sims *Weekly Worker* October 9 2008; SK Sanderson *Social transformation* Oxford 1999, pp34-51.  
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5. EP Thompson *Customs in common* London 2010, pp307-35; D Garrioch *Social History* Vol 24, pp231-32.  
6. M Micale *Hysterical men* Cambridge Ma 2008, pp162-70; WD Smith *European imperialism* Chicago 1982, pp82-108, 209-11; B Silver *Forces of labor* Cambridge 2003, pp126, 138-41; J Morrow *The great war* London 2003, pp16-18, 297-98.  
7. *MECW* Vol 43, p184; C Chatterjee *Celebrating women* Pittsburgh 2002, pp43-54.  
8. SA Smith *Red Petrograd* Cambridge 1985, pp88-94, 247-51.  
9. T Remington *Building socialism* Pittsburgh 1984, pp43-44; W Rosenberg *Slavic Review* Vol 44, pp225-26, 253.  
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, p414. With Lenin’s approval, Bukharin even made the appalling claim that “proletarian compulsion in all its forms, from executions to compulsory labour, constitutes, as paradoxical as this may sound, a method of the formation of a new communist humanity”. For more on this tragic period see *Beyond Kronstadt* at <http://libcom.org/library/beyond-kronstadt> (see notes 30, 32, 34 and 41 for quote sources).  
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12. M Seidman *Workers against work* California 1991, chapter 4 (especially around notes 72-81), pp6-7 (especially note 42).  
13. M Seidman *Republic of egos* Wisconsin 2002, pp38-40, 89-121, 150-58, 177-238.  
14. C Jones *Poverty, welfare and the disciplinary state* London 1999, p122.  
15. I Kershaw *Hitler 1889-1936: hubris* London 1998, pp576-82; T Mason *Social policy in the Third Reich* Oxford 1993, pp267-74; A Toozee *The wages of destruction* London 2006, pp8-10.  
16. A Orr *Mental Maginot lines* Notre Dame 2007, pp62-104; R Jackson *The fall of France* Oxford 2004, pp133, 200-8; T Ben-Moshe *Journal of Modern History* Vol 62, pp504, 529-36.  
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18. O Bartov *The holocaust: origins, implementation, aftermath* London 2000, p100; A Toozee *The wages of destruction* London 2006, pp476-85, 538-49; U Herbert *National Socialist extermination policies* Oxford 2000, pp213-29, 247-66.  
19. U Hubert *National Socialist extermination policies* Oxford 2000, p218; D Cesarini *Holocaust: critical concepts in historical studies* Oxford 2004, Vol 2, p203; J Paxman *A higher form of killing* New York 1982, pp128-36; A De Grand *Italian fascism* Nebraska 2000, pp126-27; RB Frank *Downfall: the end of the imperial Japanese empire* London 1999, pp97-98, 293-310, 345-54; B Silver *Forces of labor* Cambridge 2003, pp125-28, 148-52.  
20. M Leibovitz and A Finkel *In our time* New York 1998, pp49-52; M Sarkisyanz *From imperialism to fascism* New Delhi 2003, p222; E Mandel *The meaning of the Second World War* London 1886, p200.  
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24. M Seidman *The imaginary revolution* New York 2004, pp37-47, 67-71, chapters 4 and 5.  
25. K van der Pijl *New Left Review* No37, p25.  
26. H Ticktin *Origins of the crisis in the USSR* London 1992.  
27. S Crowley *Hot coal, cold steel* Michigan 1997, pp16, 193-p8; [www.unicef.org/newsline/01pr94.htm](http://www.unicef.org/newsline/01pr94.htm).  
28. H Ticktin *Critique* February 2005, pp3, 22-28; D Graeber *The shock of victory*: <http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=2007graeber-victory>.  
29. N Klein *The shock doctrine* London 2008, pp337-72. Significantly, it was threats of unrest by ordinary Iraqis that forced Saddam to abandon his privatisation programme and, instead, invade Kuwait. See also S Aburish *Saddam Hussein* London 2001, pp107-11, 259-62.  
30. J Holloway *Change the world without taking power* London 2002, pp193-205; H Ticktin *Weekly Worker* November 8, 15, 22 2007 and *Critique* February 2009, pp23-29.  
31. B Silver *Critical Sociology* Vol 31, p440.  
32. Politicians may use environmental arguments to justify cutbacks, but workers are unlikely to be persuaded. Indeed, until we can abolish capitalist alienation and so control our own labour, we can never rationally control that labour’s impact on the environment. Until then, green politics, like socialist politics, can offer little except austerity, limited reforms and authoritarianism.  
33. U Zilbersheid, ‘Abolition of labour in Marx’s teaching’ *Critique* February 2005, pp123-24.  
34. U Zilbersheid *Critique* December 2007; D Gavron *The kibbutz* Lanham 2000, pp154-60, 181-88, 260.  
35. B Harrison *Separate spheres* London 1978, p220. Workers’ struggles often require minorities to start things off. So any over-emphasis on democracy by the left just gives politicians a powerful means to denounce such struggles as undemocratic and, therefore, illegitimate.  
36. B Hewlett *Hunter-gatherer childhoods* New Jersey 2005, pp15-20, 31, 62-63, 407-15.  
37. *MECW* Vol 24, pp357, 350. A genuine rebellion or revolution is a movement that no-one can govern. If people then remain ungovernable they can disrupt any counterrevolution, so avoiding any need for a workers’ state or party to contain such counterrevolution. Interestingly, during the ‘genuine’ initial periods of the revolutions in France, Russia and Iran, the presence of women at demonstrations was very effective at preventing soldiers from shooting at the crowds. See also T Kaplan, ‘Female consciousness and collective action: the Barcelona case, 1910-1918’ *Signs* spring 1982.

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Become a Communist Party member

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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



# weekly Worker

## Reinstate Abdul Omer Mohsin

# Convenor hung out to dry

AJ Byrne slates Unite's inaction and SWP vacillation

**A**bdul Omer, then a member of the Sudanese Communist Party, fled Sudan in 1977. Following the counter-coup of Gaafar Muhammad Nimeiry against the communist-backed attempt at power in 1971, SCP leaders were being executed and members were forced into hiding. Omer was sent to Britain for medical treatment following a strike on his behalf by students at the University of Khartoum. They collected the money needed for him to go. He emerged from the plane weighing just six and a half stone and at death's door. He had been six years on the run.

Having joined the Socialist Workers Party, Omer was elected convenor at the Sovereign bus company - the only SWP convenor or shop steward in London buses, with its 23,000 drivers represented by some 83 union branches. No other left group has had one either since the mid-80s, such is the rightwing, bureaucratic dominance and collaboration with management.

At a rally during the campaign for pay parity in July 2008, Steve Hart, then Unite regional secretary, said, to prolonged cheering: "We are saying that it is not right that the driver of a No13 bus going down Oxford Street, employed by Transdev, gets 18 grand a year and he passes the No25 from East London Bus Group on 27 and a half grand a year. How can it be right that two drivers in the same street, driving the same buses, are £10,000 different in their basis pay?"

But the campaign for pay parity launched by Unite was dropped as soon as Bob Crow from the RMT agreed not to represent the 1,000-plus on the buses who had joined his union and the subprime mortgage crisis struck. However, Abdul Omer took the matter seriously as convenor and negotiated a deal which eliminated the £4,000 gap in pay between Sovereign drivers and the much bigger London United garages, owned by the same company. Drivers had walked out on a wildcat strike in Edgware over the imposition of new schedules, inspired by his leadership. They won total victory. Such action has been very rare on the buses over the last few decades.

This led to Omer's harassment by Sovereign. First he was suspended following an altercation over a Unite Against Fascism poster. Then, following his return to work, he was outrageously dismissed for making allegations of institutionalised racism against the company, when defending a black member facing disciplinary action. After Omer's sacking on March 31 2010, the union officials cancelled the agreement he had won on pay parity, with the result that Sovereign were able to win the 251 route from Metroline. The company was very grateful to Unite for their assistance.

On November 16 2010 the online journal *Permanent Revolution* reported a comment from Jerry Hicks, candidate for Unite general secretary: "Why is it that each attempt by [Omer] and his supporters to raise these issues is met with manoeuvres,

evasion and excuses to prevent any campaign? As we face an employers' offensive that is leading to many more attempts to attack our best activists at BA and beyond, when is Unite going to stand by our reps, beginning with a campaign to defend Abdul Omer Mohsin?"

Omer had asked for Unite's support in organising a campaign to stop the union-busting at Sovereign, including a ballot for industrial action to win his reinstatement. But the treatment that Omer has been subjected to is shameful, said Hicks. He went on to ask: "How can we allow one of our best activists to be isolated, victimised, sacked and then left with minimal financial support and no official ballot for action?" He pledged that if he was elected general secretary "defending the union and our representatives" would be "an absolute priority". He was, of course, defeated by Len McCluskey.

But the evasions and manoeuvres by regional industrial organisers at the behest of central leaders like Peter Kavanagh, regional secretary for London and the South East, and Steve Hart, now promoted to the new post of Unite political director,

have continued. For instance, they questioned payments to Omer from branch funds; it took several months to find there was nothing amiss.

A letter from Gerry Downing to the *Weekly Worker* last month stated that the capitulation of the SWP to the United Left meant that "The UL has become an open tool of bureaucratic oppression of all militants within the union to the unprincipled manoeuvres of the top bureaucracy" (June 23). We had less than a week to wait for that dire prediction to be confirmed. When I visited Abdul Omer in Hillingdon hospital on July 3, he told me the details.

The drivers at the two Sovereign garages of Harrow and Edgware had just seen off the attempts of the bureaucracy to get them to abandon the struggle to reinstate him by voting in a new convenor. Both garages soundly rejected this attempt. Omer then prepared for the important quarterly meeting of the regional industrial sector committee (RISC) on June 29 by getting the two branches to move motions demanding a campaign leading to a ballot for strike action (eventually!). They sent them to Steve O'Rourke, the chair of RISC, and to Kavanagh. He also wrote a letter to O'Rourke (copied to Kavanagh) basically complaining that his chances of mobilising the members and getting reinstated were diminished by the apparent reluctance of the union to fight for him.

When he got to the meeting, neither O'Rourke nor Kavanagh were present. The stand-in chair said the case could not be discussed, as he had not received the motions from the branches - someone had apparently 'forgot' to forward them. "But I have a copy here," Omer objected. "No, that will not do. I must get the motions in advance," claimed the hostile bureaucrat. So no discussion was allowed on the case of the sacked convenor.

But worse was to come. Omer had spent £43 getting to

the meeting in Chelmsford despite being on unemployment benefit, so he presented this expense claim to the acting chair at the end of the meeting. The ignorant bureaucrat refused to sign the expenses sheet, saying Omer was not a union member and should not even be at the meeting, as he had not paid his union dues since he was sacked - what back-stabber went to the trouble to dig that out? There was no question of taking a collection to defray his expenses - assuming union rules were deemed to override all natural justice in this monstrous way. Anyway, it seems that other union rules were ignored: Omer should have been informed of the arrears (around £15 at unemployed rates) before being excluded from membership. No-one even told him not to bother coming and so save the fare.

Omer's house was under a repossession order, as his mortgage was almost three months in arrears. And the stress of all these manoeuvres got to the old battler. He collapsed in Chelmsford town centre on his way back to the station and was taken to hospital. They said he had had a panic attack and discharged him. He collapsed again on the street in Harrow on Saturday July 2 and passed out. They told him he had a heart problem and was kept in hospital for two days. The doctor said the most probable reason for his collapse was stress. If it continued it could cause a massive heart attack. He will have to be monitored regularly by the hospital and his GP.

The SWP has always argued that Omer must keep Unite the union inside; he must not alienate the officers by denouncing their actions in public or they will abandon him, not represent him, and withdraw legal assistance from his industrial tribunal, etc. However, following the SWP's capitulation to the bureaucracy by agreeing not to criticise the "leftwing general secretary", matters could only get worse. Steve Hart shared a platform with the SWP's Ian Allison

at Marxism 2011 on Saturday July 2. Ironically they were debating 'How to build fighting unions'. Ian did not mention Abdul Omer at all, and neither did Steve Hart. But leading SWP member Pete Gillard was called to speak and he demanded that the union arrange a campaign to reinstate him. He did not mention the appalling events of a few days before on June 29. Two Grass Roots Left members, this writer and Billy McKean, put in slips to speak on Abdul Omer, but we were not called by SWP central committee member Michael Bradley, who vetted the slips. It was remiss of us not to stand up and shout out what had just happened and direct the anger of the whole meeting at Steve Hart, who simply ignored Peter Gillard's demand on Omer and went on to justify the union's sell-out of the BA dispute.

So is Abdul Omer to be hung out to dry - the result of bureaucratic treachery and cowardly capitulation? Maybe there is enough fight left in the anti-bureaucratic wing of the SWP to stop that happening, but if they fight the bureaucracy openly for Omer's reinstatement they will surely be expelled from the United Left.

The old fighter is out of hospital now and says he is still up for the fight. We must now demand that the entire labour movement rallies behind this redoubtable communist militant ●

### Appeal

**Abdul Omer urgently needs £1,050 to save his house from repossession. Donations from individuals and union branches can be paid to:**

**Mr Al Omer, Barclays Bank, account number 20408859, sort code 20-69-15.**

**Photocopies of Unite branch cheques should be sent to Peter Kavanagh at Unite - the union has promised to match branch donations. Solidarity messages to Omer at omermohsin2@yahoo.co.uk.**



Len McCluskey: left-talking

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