



weekly worker

**Maoism with pretensions:
Alain Badiou and his
little red book**

- Press freedom
- US on the brink
- Iranian splits
- Summer Offensive

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**Bombardier
and the
reactionary
slogan of
'British jobs
for British
workers'**

LETTERS



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

Learn lessons

Much of the blame for the authoritarian nature of Soviet socialism and its dominance over many of the other socialist countries which followed, or were forced to follow, the Moscow line is laid at the doors of Joseph Stalin, and it is certainly true he carried these dictatorial methods to the extreme. Many good socialists and communists died in his purges and in the gulags. However the brutal nature of the Soviet regime manifested itself long before Lenin's death.

In a recent *Weekly Worker* article a comrade wrote about Lenin and Trotsky contemplating shooting one in 10 idle workers in the early days of Soviet Russia, and also about the massacre of whole families, including children, because some family members supported the white armies ('Putting revolution back on the agenda', July 14). There was also the unnecessary massacre of the tsar and his family, of course. However, the real turning point, when the intolerant and undemocratic nature of Soviet socialism was established, occurred in early 1921 in the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion by Lenin with the help of Trotsky's Red Army. This clearly indicates that even without Stalin the Soviet Union would have developed into an oppressive dictatorship, had Lenin and Trotsky both survived to remain at the helm.

The Kronstadt sailors, originally supporters of the Bolshevik revolution, issued the 15-point Petropavlovsk resolution, which stated that the soviets no longer represented the workers and peasants and demanded new and secret elections. It called for freedom of speech for anarchists and left socialist parties and the liberation of their political prisoners; for the right of assembly and to organise trade unions and peasant associations; that no political party should have special privileges or state subsidies; equalisation of remuneration for all workers except those in dangerous or unhealthy jobs; the abolition of Bolshevik Party combat detachments in the military and guards in factories and enterprises, and their replacement by those nominated by the workers themselves; freedom for peasants to cultivate their land and to own cattle, provided they did not employ hired labour. All progressive demands, which sought to restore the original values and aspirations of the socialist revolution.

When the Kronstadt rebellion was brutally crushed, along with other revolts and strikes by peasants and workers during the famine of 1921, then the course was set for the one-party dictatorship of what later became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Not even socialist opposition to the current CPSU line was to be permitted. The crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion certainly meant the end of any hope for a more inclusive socialist regime which took account of views of other leftwing parties. It in fact meant the one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, and because of the failings of inner-party democracy led the way to the brutal dictatorship of Joseph Stalin.

After Stalin's death in 1953 the Soviet Union became slightly more liberal, but remained a one-party dictatorship. It also continued to exert dominance over the socialist countries of eastern and central Europe with the crushing of rebellions and what it saw as deviant or counterrevolutionary developments. Only with Gorbachev were real reforms implemented, but

by then it was too late: the Soviet economy was in a dire state partly due to the enforced arms race with the United States, and socialism collapsed.

We must learn the lessons. The idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat could be forcibly exercised by one political party was a very dangerous one. In actual fact, although the CPSU had a mass membership, the most active members turned out to be dominated by careerists and opportunists just out to further their own prospects and that of their families.

At the time I felt the way to deal with these bourgeois infiltrators and tendencies was via Stalinist-style repression, such as the 'fraternal assistance' (ie, military intervention) which the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact countries used to crush the Prague Spring in 1968. I now recognise that these brutal methods - and those used inside the Soviet Union itself, such as the incarceration of dissidents in labour camps and mental institutions - just protected the bourgeois ruling cliques and the bureaucratic officials and party politicians, many of whom became corrupted by the privileges of absolute power.

Comrade Tony Benn has so correctly pointed out that if you entrust political power to anybody on your behalf you must also make sure you know how to take this power away from them if they misuse it. In the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries once the ruling Marxist-Leninist parties had become infiltrated and taken over by those more interested in the perks and privileges of power, or by genuine communists and socialists who had become corrupted by this absolute power, then there was no way of effectively reversing this process other than by mass action to overthrow the regime, which happened in the events of 1989-1991. I still think it was a great mistake that they threw out the socialist baby with the dirty bathwater of corruption. Indeed in many cases they kept the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats in place, so they now have the worst of both worlds.

Socialism in the Soviet Union was perfectly able to be reformed. Much was achieved even under the distorted form which existed: full employment, abolition of illiteracy, security in old age, good health services, equality for women, good education, low rents, homes for all, subsidised basic foodstuffs, etc. Other political parties could have been allowed to contest free elections. This would have allowed corrupt regimes to be voted out and for other socialist models to be experimented with. Such as, for example, the very successful Yugoslav system of worker and consumer cooperatives and individual publicly owned enterprises all competing in a friendly socialist market place as an alternative to the huge, often inefficient state monopolies producing everything under the laborious five-year Stalinist production plans.

The term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is an unfortunate one and should be discarded. For one thing it suggests no human rights for minority groups. Political parties would be allowed to administer their own brand of socialism, but capitalism and the privatisation of industries and services would not be permitted under the constitution. So, while not a dictatorship, it would give stability for the basic socialist nature of society. The socialist constitution could be protected and safeguarded by an elected president aided by the state security services.

There is no reason why this formula for socialism could not have worked,

and why it could not work in future. It would open the way to progress towards communism. I personally feel, in view of the 20th century experience, that the state withering away, along with the need for money and other regulators, is such a utopian idea that, if it is possible, it is far into the distant future. I would be content to achieve a real socialist society. If, however, true communism is to come about, then it requires a great deal of maturity and willingness to take on the responsibilities of running society by the masses.

Tony Papard
email

Disappointing

In last week's paper, Dave Douglass, described my recent article as "abstract utopianism". This is a bit disappointing, considering that Dave is a committed revolutionary and that the whole intention of the article, 'Putting revolution back on the agenda' (July 14), was to show that communist revolution is a very real, not a utopian, prospect.

The fact that humans lived without property, hierarchy or alienated work for over 80% of their time on Earth in itself shows that there is nothing utopian about communism. And the fact that, since the decline of this hunter-gatherer communism, people have never stopped rebelling against hierarchical authority, shows that people will always be dissatisfied with class society.

In the past, scarcity always prevented such rebellions from recreating communist relations. But, now that we have the technology to end all significant scarcity, Marx's prediction of a "return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type" is a real possibility in the 21st century (*MECW* Vol 24, p357).

Unfortunately, the militarism of the 20th century produced horrific wars and Stalinist dead ends that have delayed any return to communism. This militarism and war was particularly effective at diverting popular discontent from the 1900s to the 1950s - a time when masculinity was very much about military values and a fear of feminine 'weakness'.

In answer to Dave's question about whether Maggie Thatcher suffered from this "masculinist militarism": Of course - rightwing women could promote it, just as leftwing men could oppose it. However, it required the huge social changes since the 1960s, combined with the failure to revive the cold war as the 'war on terror', to fatally weaken masculinist militarism. One recent result of this has been that the US was reluctant to repress the uprising against Mubarak. Another result has been that, without cold war-style discipline, governments are reluctant to risk the levels of state investment necessary to revive industry and end the present economic crisis.

The overall result is a capitalist system that can neither fulfil workers' expectations nor rediscipline them through scarcity and war. This situation puts anti-capitalist revolution firmly back on the agenda. Whether such a revolution will occur in five or in 50 years time is unpredictable. But the moment that working class struggles show that a practical alternative to capitalism is possible, this anti-capitalist alternative will spread like wildfire - spreading even faster and wider than the recent uprisings in the Middle East.

In the extreme poverty of the revolutions of the 20th century, the only practical anti-capitalist alternative seemed to be some sort of democratic management of alienated work. For example, in *State and revolution*, Lenin argued that workers' democracy should control everyone in society,

including any "workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism ... [and that any] escape from this popular accounting and control ... will probably be accompanied by such swift and severe punishment [by] the armed workers ... that the necessity of observing the simple, fundamental rules of the community will very soon become a habit. Then the door will be thrown wide open for ... the complete withering away of the state."

In other words, Lenin believed that by democratically imposing work-discipline, workers could create a genuine stateless communism. Anarchist activists in the Spanish civil war had similar beliefs. Yet the experience in Russia and Spain, and in the Israeli kibbutzim, shows that such self-managed work-discipline tends, instead, to lead to even more repressive social relations than those of capitalism.

Workers in the 21st century will never risk the upheavals of revolution just to create a more restrictive society than capitalism. Workers will only be attracted to revolution if it enables them to create a freer society than capitalism, a society without any alienated work - a genuine communist society. In other words, communism is now the only practical alternative to capitalism and we communists should not be shy about saying it.

Of course, this does not mean we should not also get involved in struggles over wages and jobs. But we should be honest with people and say that it is utopian to hope that British capitalism would ever recreate the secure, and therefore rebellious, industrial proletariat of the 1970s. Or, at least, it would only do so in order to hold back a future revolution - and, at such a time, it would be far better to abolish the miseries of wage labour than to try to consolidate them.

It remains to be seen whether my article was right to suggest that a future revolution will be centred more on the transformation of personal and gender relations than on workplace relations. But history has always progressed through unexpected social transformations and revolutions. And, whatever happens, future revolutionary movements will have to develop new ideas and tactics that are radically different from those of the 20th century.

Mark Kosman
email

Abysmal

I agree with David Douglass that the CPGB has "lost contact with rank-and-file workers and non-London attitudes" (Letters, July 21).

Trade union coverage in the *Weekly Worker*, to put it mildly, is abysmal. There is much going on within the union movement about which comment and analysis in the paper would be eagerly read.

Three stories that immediately spring to mind are: the election of Michelle Stanistreet to be the first female general secretary of the National Union of Journalists; the appointment of George Guy as acting general secretary of the construction workers' union, Ucat; and the possible merger of rail unions RMT and TSSA, which would create a union with more than 110,000 members.

A turn of the CPGB towards the trade unions and the workplace would certainly bring the London-centric *Weekly Worker* down to earth.

Alan Inkpin
Cambridgeshire

Dirty work

All the talk of saving the 200 (or so) jobs at News International makes me feel a bit uneasy. Socialists should really be arguing for workers in

journalism to start taking control of the media rather than simply doing the dirty work for the Murdoch empire.

That is why the battle taking place in South Yorkshire - where journalist workers are fighting not only in defence of jobs, but also against management attempts to seize control of the editing for themselves - is so important.

Socialists and trade unionists should show solidarity with these workers and go about trying to set up solidarity networks drawing in different layers of workers cutting across the so-called public-private divide. Such a vision would give the call for a general strike much more strength.

Michael Booth
email

Oppressor role

Comrade Moshé Machover should try to resist the temptation to put words into my mouth and deal with the arguments I do make, not those he wished I'd make (Letters, July 14).

Nowhere have I ever advocated replacing the oppression of the Palestinians with that of Israel's Jews. What I did do was try to make sense of what self-determination means in practice. No nation or group 'determines' its future other than in the negative, hence why I say that it is freedom from national oppression. No more and no less.

Whatever else they are, the Hebrew-speaking people - or more accurately Israeli Jews, because many Arabs speak Hebrew and many Jews do not - are not oppressed by virtue of their nationality or group status. It is for this reason that the question of self-determination is irrelevant. Far from having the right to self-determination, Israel's Jews continually try to determine the future of others.

Indeed if we look at what these theoretical abstractions mean in practice, then the first question to ask is 'What makes the Israeli Jews a nation?' What is the core of their national identity? There is an artificial dollar economy and Israel's military role as an outpost of western imperialism and western arms salesman. There is the Hebrew language, which many cannot yet speak and there is a territorial contiguity, although it is hopelessly intermixed with Arab Israelis. But these are the surface manifestations of Stalin's tick-box approach to nationality.

The key defining quality of Israeli Jewish 'nationality' - the quotation marks represent doubt, not fright - is the imperial and colonisatory role of that population. What defines 'Israeli' Jews *über alles* is their role as a settler people, the guardians of western interests. And it is this which comrade Machover doesn't get. To Moshé all nationalism is the same, whereas for Lenin and the Bolsheviks you cannot confuse the nationalism of the oppressed with the nationalism of the oppressor. Nowhere do I recall the slogan of 'self-determination for the Russian masses'. Russia was a prison house of nationalities that were oppressed. The essential component of Israeli Jewish 'nationality' has nothing to do with language, a cheap imitation of US culture, common roots, etc, but their roles as oppressors.

Moshé's position belongs to the economic traditions of Marxism, which thought that if you put to one side questions of colonialism then you could forge workers' unity. Militant - now the Socialist Party - best exemplifies this tendency. As a war was being fought in Northern Ireland, against which the loyalists

were ranged, in close alliance with the British secret state, Militant argued that the national question could be put to one side to engender ‘unity’. As the hunger riots of the 1930s demonstrated, such economic unity never failed to break down when social struggles emerged. That is why Moshé had an abstentionist position on the Falklands/Malvinas war in 1982 and didn’t see it as a question of British imperialism reasserting itself in the South American continent.

The right of self-determination for Ireland as a whole would not involve, contrary to loyalist scare propaganda, the oppression of the Irish Protestants, nor have they been oppressed in southern Ireland. Likewise the scare stories about the oppression of whites if blacks attained majority rule in southern Africa have been just that.

Or perhaps the failure to accord the Afrikaners the right to re-establish the separate Boer states of the Orange Free State and Transvaal also involved national oppression? It may be amusing, but Moshé’s Khrushchev-Nixon analogy is worthless and irrelevant, demonstrating only that Moshé cannot make the necessary differentiation between oppressor and oppressed. What Moshé is doing is repeating that old canard that all revolutions are hopeless because they end up with the oppression of another group.

In fact the Irish republican, the South African apartheid and Palestinian national struggles have been remarkably free of racism, despite the fervent claims of loyalists, Zionists and nats. The ANC did not advocate apartheid in reverse and republicans didn’t clamour for a Catholic ascendancy and nor do the Palestinians, despite the hysterical contortions of Zionism, long for the subjugation of Israeli Jews.

Moshé has a naive view of what revolution consists of. Zionism will not be overthrown like some medieval dictator. It is a powerful movement, which has effectively rewritten Jewish history and welded together most Jews behind both Israel and the western imperialist project in the Middle East, although today there is an unprecedented questioning of Zionism and Israel outside that country. It will take a struggle throughout the Arab east, the overthrow of existing social relations and the elimination of the parasitic ruling classes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, as well as their destruction in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, before Zionism too is threatened.

Comrade Machover is fond of pointing to the fact that there is no solution within the Palestinian ‘box’. I agree, which is why I don’t understand why, when revolution spreads to the entire region, Moshé is so intent on rebuilding that very same box. This is not so much nostalgia as a concession to social chauvinism. Why should the Israeli Jews, after the defeat of their sponsors and the elimination of the Arab regimes that Israel has protected, wish to retreat into the Jewish box other than to re-enact their Masada complex?

Yes, there are a minority of Israeli Jews (Hebrews) who identify with Moshé’s project, but they are no stronger now than they were when Uri Avneri, Tom Segev and others first put forward the Canaanite thesis that David Ben-Gurion derided.

The question of Arab unity and the role it has or has not played in recent events, its hold upon the masses and whether this is really a bourgeois chimera, whose time has passed, is another debate. However, I do not accept the Zionist thesis that the conflict in Palestine is really a conflict between two nations - the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians.

On the contrary it is precisely this mistaken notion, born of the racist and at times genocidal oppression of the Palestinians, that has caused the Palestinians not to take the path of black South Africans, but to instead argue for a new UN/US partition plan and to try to re-establish the Green Line 1967 borders. I would argue that this has been a key strategic error on the part of the Palestinians.

The struggle in Palestine for a democratic, secular state, as part of social revolution in the Arab east, is the struggle for one Palestinian/Israeli nation within the borders of what was the British mandated territory of Palestine. A nation that will be part Arab and part Israeli Jewish. The fight is not a national one, but one for equal rights, regardless of culture, language, religion or ‘race’. To even imagine, with the overthrow of Zionism, that one wants to recreate the conditions for a re-emergence of Zionism, which is what Moshé is arguing for, would be to support counterrevolution in Palestine.

Having driven a stake through the Zionist Dracula, Moshé would then like to resuscitate him as a vegetarian!

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Fit

After the ‘Declaration of the European Anti-Capitalist Left’, which was made public on June 18 on the International Socialist Tendency website (<http://tinyurl.com/3atg9ly>), I couldn’t help but find myself asking, what is the EACL?

On the left, and particularly in Europe, there are a number of internationals and tendencies, but where does the EACL fit into these? If anybody has either read the declaration or has knowledge of the EACL, can they please reply and let me know?

Mikhail Hall
Email

Cul-de-sac

Nobody, least of all myself or the Socialist Party of Great Britain, are for abdicating “fighting for as high a wage as union power and your bargaining position can achieve”. Nor would we support “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” (Letters, July 14).

Dave Douglass and myself surprisingly do agree when he states that he (and the working class, I will add) is well capable of “arguing through unions for shorter hours, safer conditions and better wages”. Dave may have overlooked my statement that “There is little wrong with people campaigning to bring improvements to enhance the quality of their lives and some reforms can indeed make a difference”, because I never couched it in his fervent, revolutionary rhetoric.

But where we differ is in the role of a *socialist* party. That is an organisation which has to transcend the sectional and nationalist battles of the trade union movement. The socialist party fights for the working class as a whole without distinctions, whereas a union represents and fights for its own particular members’ interests, which may well run counter to other workers’. Nor does the socialist party take national sides in global capitalist competition between one geographic area’s workers and another - a position that cannot be so lightly dismissed.

What will your first struggle be - bad housing, bad health, bad education? And just how are you planning to address it? We fully realise that, as a National Union of Mineworkers representative,

you were an able defender of the best interests of your members, but that role sometimes does conflict with society’s wider concerns - as indicated by your defence of coal-powered electricity rather than promoting renewable alternative means of producing and conserving energy.

The logical outcome of laying claim to “practical” solutions for those many social problems you list and for that restructuring of the traditional industries you demand will require political action by government intervention and capital investment, and when you appeal for the support of the working class, do you admit that it is doomed unless it involves either an alliance with the governing capitalist party or the establishment of socialism?

I oppose the idea that capitalism can be made more palatable with the right reforms. Nor do I think we should mislead fellow workers with such hopes. Socialists do not seek to attract support by advocating reforms, as no series of reforms can ever solve the problems inherent to capitalism. No-one is telling workers not to defend themselves or others, but it won’t necessarily have the revolutionary influence or effect that Dave believes and, assuming it will, it is simply self-deluding.

You may claim a papal infallibility in the righteousness of your demands, Dave, but things go awry. We must recognise that many reforms simply contributed to other problems arising. Who could have opposed the demolition of slum housing and the provision of inside toilets for all? A worthy demand for decent houses would be an example of well-meaning actions eventually leading to the wrong solutions of the sink council estates and soulless schemes.

While we are happy to see the workers’ lot improved, as I have already said, I will nevertheless reiterate that reforms can never lead to the establishment of socialism and tend to bleed energy, ideas and resources from that goal. Unions are economic weapons on the battlefield of class war but, unfortunately, trade union action on its own is unable to bring about socialism. Successful struggles may well encourage other workers to stand up for their rights in the workplace, but the victories are partial ones. Only by organising ourselves into a socialist party to do political battle in the name of common ownership will a general gain come to workers. A socialist party cannot be a popular reform party attempting to mop up immediate problems and be revolutionary at the same time. We cannot be a halfway house, nor accommodate our fellow workers who question our ‘impractical’ or ‘impossible’ policies, and spend their time looking for convenient compromises. There is no shortage of diversions, but for socialists it is all or nothing. No short cuts.

Dave, you are suggesting a dangerous detour that’s been advocated from the beginning of the labour movement and has always led to a *cul-de-sac*.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Unclean

Andrew Northall characterises the Socialist Party of Great Britain as a purist sect (Letters, July 21). If true, it might make us wonder what kind of ‘impurities’ have crept into Marxism over the course of the 20th century.

I got an idea of the kind of impurity we could do without in Marxism from Northall’s letter, where he characterises Winston Churchill as a shooter of striking workers. Perhaps that’s where the Bolsheviks got the idea from.

Stuart Watkins
SPGB

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.communiststudents.org.uk.

War on terror

Thursday July 28, 7.30pm: Meeting, Broad Green Centre, Swindon. ‘The war on terror - 10 years on’. Speaker: John Rees. Organised by Swindon Stop the War: 07584 046827.

Hunger strike solidarity

Friday July 29, 12.30pm: Demonstration, California Tourism Information Office, 15 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, London WC2. Solidarity with prisoners at Pelican Bay State (California), who began a 20-day hunger strike on July 1 to protest the cruel and inhumane conditions.

Organised by Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity: <http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>.

Asylum rights

Friday July 29, 12 noon: March, St Georges Square, Liverpool (opposite Lime Street station). March to UK Border Agency, Water Street, to hand in a list of demands from those suffering and denied human rights as asylum-seekers.

Organised by Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST): wastmanchester@yahoo.co.uk.

EDL not welcome

Friday July 29, 7pm: Meeting, London Muslim Centre, 46-92 Whitechapel Road, London E1. Build for the September 3 protest against English Defence League in east London. Speakers from various local community organisations, faith groups, trade union and activists.

Organised by United East End and Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Mad pride

Saturday July 30, 8pm: Benefit gig, 17 Sidney Road, Stockwell, London SW1. Fundraiser for the Campaign Against Welfare Benefit Cuts. Entertainment from Anakzeus, One True Dog, Son of Psycho Yogi, Dave Russell, Valerie and her Week of Wonders (featuring Jowe Head), Cathy Flower, MC Jason Why and VJ Flickering Light. Tickets £5/£2.

Organised by Mad Pride: www.madpride.org.uk.

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.

No to migrant prisons

Saturday July 30, 1pm: Demonstration, Muster Green Park, Haywards Heath. Protest against opening of new detention centre for children and families, run by the infamous G4S security firm. Called by Croydon No Borders: noborderslondon@riseup.net.

Freedom under fire

Wednesday August 3, 7pm: Meeting, Mahatma Gandhi Hall, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1. ‘Freedom under fire: the war on terror and the Arab revolutions from Afghanistan to Libya’. Speeches and presentations from George Galloway and Greg Muttit (author of *Fuel on the fire*) and poetry from Sanasino Al-Yemen. Organised by Central London Stop the War: www.stopthewarlondon.org.uk.

The longest strike

Sunday September 4, 11am: Rally, Church Green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk. Celebrate the longest strike in history. Students boycotted their school in 1914 to support their teachers, sacked by the rural squirearchy for organising agricultural workers. Entertainment and rally.

Organised by Unite: www.unitetheunion.org.

Defend Dale Farm

Saturday September 10, 1pm: Demonstration, Station Approach, Wickford, Essex. Protest against eviction of traveller community of Dale Farm and the Tories wasting £8 million to destroy their homes. Organised by Save Dale Farm: <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>.

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.

Resistance - the path to power

Monday September 26, 7pm: Labour Party fringe meeting, Crowne Plaza, St Nicholas Place, Princes Dock, Liverpool. Labour leadership must stop sitting on the fence, and fight back as part of the struggle of our class.

Speakers include: Tony Benn, Katy Clark MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, John McDonnell MP, Mark Serwotka (PCS), Michelle Stanistreet (NUJ), Matt Wrack (FBU).

Organised by the Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.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.

BOMBARDIER

British jobs for British workers?

The struggle for jobs at Bombardier must not be diverted by sectionalism or nationalism, urges **Peter Manson**

The July 23 demonstration of up to 10,000 people against the threatened closure of train-makers Bombardier, and consequent loss of over 1,400 jobs, was hugely impressive, especially for a town like Derby, with 230,000 inhabitants. Bombardier workers are determined that the plant shall not close and they have won broad support among the local population.

Naturally, in a struggle like this, that determination to resist the destruction of their livelihoods is fired by all sorts of ideas - backward as well as progressive. It is to be expected, for example, that trade unionists seeking to defend their jobs from competitors may react sectionally: *we* are better equipped, more skilful and more efficient - in short more deserving of the work - than any rivals. It is, of course, the duty of partisans of the whole class to combat such ideas; to nurture the idea that the struggle of the proletariat - not just in one factory, one town or one country - is global. It is their duty to champion working class unity in opposition to our class enemies: the owners of capital and their state.

Unfortunately, however, the organisers of the demonstration took a diametrically opposite approach: what they sought to promote was the unity of *Derby* in the fight to save Bombardier. So not only were there local and national union leaders on the platform, but representatives of capital in the shape of the chairman of Bombardier's British operation, Colin Walton, and the Conservative leader of Derby council, Philip Hickson.

Some union speakers seemed to adapt their speeches accordingly. Bob Crow, for instance, declared: "We need a different kind of society - one that invests in industry." Walton could hardly disagree: "The entire management staff is here to show our support with our employees," he said. For his part, councillor Hickson implied that the government knew "the cost of everything and the value of nothing". But it was not the occasion to remind the thousands listening that the council he heads is itself in the process of slashing its workforce to comply with his party's austerity drive.

Nationalism

Even worse, this Derby-sectionalism frequently spilled over into nationalism. As readers will be aware, the immediate cause of the Bombardier crisis is the failure of the company to win a £1.4 billion contract for rolling stock with Thameslink. Transport secretary Phillip Hammond announced in June that the contract had been awarded to German company Siemens. According to Tory rail minister Theresa Villiers, the Siemens bid represented the "best value for money for taxpayers".

Unsurprisingly, then, speakers appealed to the government's sense of patriotism. Unite general secretary Tony Woodley resorted to the use of that disgraceful phrase, "British jobs for British workers", while many other speakers also posed British interests as against those of Germany. Some referred to the words of chancellor George Osborne in March: "We want the words 'Made in Britain' ... to drive our nation forward. A Britain carried forward by the march of the makers. That is how we will create jobs and support families." This was thrown back in Osborne's face - why didn't

his actions match up to his words?

Certainly, the decision is causing the government some embarrassment - a broad, nationalistic coalition has emerged, from *The Daily Telegraph*, through the *Daily Mirror*, to the Communist Party of Britain's *Morning Star*, all expressing either disquiet or outright opposition. The Canadian-owned Bombardier is the last major train manufacturing company operating in Britain, after all, and the threatened job losses in Derby would reduce its UK workforce by almost half. Before privatisation in 1989 the company was part of British Rail Engineering Ltd and was acquired by the Canadian transnational in 2001.

Mixed with the pro-Derby localism and British nationalism has been the assertion, not least on the left, that the decision to deny Bombardier the contract on business or 'best value' grounds was plain wrong. Writing in the *Morning Star*, the Labour MP for Derby North, Chris Williamson, bluntly declares: "... there is no basis for ministerial assertions about Siemens offering better value for taxpayers The fact is that Bombardier has a superior product in the Aventra, with its tried and tested lightweight bogie, a wheel framework which is a requirement of the Thameslink specification. By contrast, Siemens has not developed an equivalent, posing a serious risk to the deliverability of the project" (July 23-24).

Strange that the government overlooked all that, isn't it? In the same edition of the *Star*, CPB chair Bill Greenshields is equally baffled, referring to the Tories' "apparently inexplicable decision to invest abroad during an economic crisis". Somewhat contradictorily, however, he adds that this is "entirely in line with its determination to make ordinary working people pay for the crisis and ensure the transnationals get richer". Presumably he means German, not Canadian, transnationals.

Comrade Greenshields cannot resist a poke at the European Union: "EU public procurement and liberalisation rules allowed the government to declare Siemens as best value for money." Unlike Chris Williamson, however, he does not deny that on strictly commercial grounds this may have been an accurate conclusion. But those German capitalists are just not playing fair: "Siemens undercut the

bid ... by virtue of its workers' lower wages and conditions" (a somewhat dubious claim).

In any case, "Many governments ignore these rules. Germany has consistently awarded just under 100% of all rail contracts internally ... France places 100% of contracts to French firms ..." Obviously, everyone should look after 'their own'. If those foreigners are cheating, why should 'we' play fair?

Arch-Europhobe Brian Denny went further in an earlier article: "... French and German governments have largely ignored these EU rules and illegally loaded the contracts to take into account the economic and social impact locally, clearly benefiting the host country" (my emphasis, July 5). As a result, "work is transferred forever to Germany and this country's skills base is further eroded".

Leaving aside the implication that only Britain's "skills base" is worth defending and expanding, I am not sure that "forever" is the right word - it is estimated that the contract to manufacture 1,200 new carriages for Thameslink will take just four years to complete. (This poses another question, by the way: if the failure to win this one deal will result in such decimation, what does that say about the overall demand for rolling stock?)

Comrade Denny, a leading figure on the CPB's extreme nationalist wing, is not sure who to blame the most. On the one hand, "... the Con-Dem government share the EU's mania for 'liberalisation' and privatisation as weapons to attack social railway, jobs, pay and pensions and deliver lucrative contracts to monopoly capital." On the other, "... while British governments remain enslaved to EU public procurement rules designed to benefit finance capital at the expense of member-states and their citizens, no industry is safe."

He does not, however, make the undercutting claim against Siemens. Rather, he complains that the socioeconomic cost has not been factored in. Writing in *The Socialist*, Steve Score makes the same point:

"... they have not taken into account the wider costs of massive unemployment - extra benefits paid out and lost taxes" (July 20). Once again, it is rather unseemly for 'internationalists' to use such arguments - they imply that "the wider costs of massive unemployment" would be of less concern to German workers if Siemens had

lost out.

Similarly, comrade Score complains about the cheaper finance available to Siemens: "The bids had to include the cost of financing the investment, which put Bombardier at a disadvantage compared to Siemens, as it has a poorer credit rating." This is all very well, but it does nothing to combat the notion that 'we' must compete for work against potential rivals and that there will be winners and losers as a result.

The Socialist does make some sound demands, however: "Open the books to inspection by the unions and the workforce! Nationalise Bombardier under democratic workers' control and management to save jobs! For an expansion of the rail network and public transport on the basis of public ownership and democratic control!" These are absolutely correct - but they obviously should be made in parallel to similar demands in Germany and other countries, not bolted onto an article that buys into the notion of Derby workers being done down by those Germans.

One struggle

This brings me to the letter from David Douglass we published last week. Comrade Douglass is "sadly coming to the conclusion that the CPGB has adopted some weird, ultra-leftist, utopian *superinternationalist* logic, which renders any struggle to save jobs in the British Isles private industry reactionary and 'nationalist'" (July 21).

He explains: "Superinternationalism means you can't defend or fight for anything produced here - ie, in Britain, by the workers here - because this would be *de facto* 'British jobs for British workers'. So if the company decides to keep your plant open, OK, but if they don't, you can't demand that they do, as this is chauvinistic and nationalist."

Comrade Douglass also cries foul, in the same way as all the others quoted above: "The contract was won, incidentally ... because the cost of manufacture here had not been offset against social costs - the dole, welfare payments, benefit entitlements and loss to the ancillary and wider economy - as it is throughout the rest of Europe. That it wasn't signals an agenda which has been in place for the last 30 years and increasingly means the slow, tortuous death of manufacturing and growing impoverishment of British workers."

Well, David, since you are not questioning the competitive contracting process itself, surely you must accept that those "social costs" will have to be paid by whoever loses out. That is the point. It is completely wrong to accuse the CPGB of "branding workers on this island who are fighting for the jobs they do and skills they have as chauvinistic and nationalist". No, it is an excellent thing that workers are prepared to fight.

However, as I have already pointed out, while it is understandable that workers whose livelihoods are under threat should resort to nationalistic arguments, it is totally opportunistic, not to say *counterproductive*, for 'communists' to employ those same arguments.

Comrade Douglass asks: "... I would like to know what your concrete demand would be if you worked in that plant. Yes, occupy it, but to what end?" It is pretty

straightforward to find the answer in our *Draft programme*:

"Faced with plans for closure, mass sackings and threats of capital flight, communists demand:

- No redundancies. Nationalise threatened workplaces or industries under workers' control.

- Compensation to former owners should be paid only in cases of proven need.

- There must be no business secrets hidden from the workers. Open the books and data banks to the inspection of specialists appointed by and responsible to the workers" (www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1002562-section-3.7:Nationalisation).

This should be viewed in parallel with section 3.6. ('The unemployed'), where we demand: "The right to work at trade union rates of pay or unemployment benefit at the level of the minimum wage." In other words, we recognise that under capitalism demand for certain forms of production will decline and competing businesses will sometimes go under. But workers collectively should not be made to bear the cost. And the word 'collectively' is key. We include in that workers wherever they are: in Britain, Germany or any country. It is despicable for members of the working class movement to connive with the capitalists to uphold British jobs at the expense of German jobs.

That is why our comrades voted against the CPB-inspired motion on Bombardier at the July 9 Coalition of Resistance conference. Despite the deletion of "words which might have implied support for a 'British work for British workers' policy" (COR website), the motion still stunk of nationalism. It condemned the government's "refusal to invest in jobs and a British manufacturing base to its economy" and specifically its "decision to give the £1.4 billion Thameslink rolling stock contract to Siemens in Germany instead of to Bombardier in Derby". We should "force the Con-Dem government ... to U-turn, invest in industry and keep the jobs in Britain Derby [sic]".

The motion also extolled the virtues of the CPB-inspired, national socialist "policies of the People's Charter", including: "Legislate to compel the re-investment of a percentage of profits in British industry", "Limit export of investment capital", "Take back into public ownership essential industries ... to put them and their profits to work for the British people".

It proposed a utopian Keynesian platform to make capitalism work fairly and efficiently: "Reduce working hours, not pay, to create more jobs ... and so more spending power - to stimulate the economy, increase tax revenue and reduce the number of people forced to live on benefit."

In my view, CPGB comrades should have attempted from the floor to amend all the British nationalist reformism out of the motion - which, like the others, had not been published in advance. The chair readily accepted the amendment to delete the most offensive phrase, after all. But, failing that, I cannot blame them for voting against such an obnoxious platform.

Yes, David, we support and encourage workers who decide to resist the Con-Dem attacks. But we want then to do so armed with a principled, global programme ●

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Derby: class united with class

ECONOMY

Facing debtgeddon

Greece has defaulted in all but name and the US treasury is only days away from running out of funds.
Eddie Ford looks at the ongoing crisis

As readers will know, after what amounted to an emergency meeting of the euro zone leaders in Brussels on July 21 - described by one participant as the "most chaotic summit ever" - the inevitable happened and Greece received a second bailout. Either that or let the country slide into total economic annihilation, thus threatening the entire euro zone project - or worse. Unthinkable. The total contribution from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, via the European Financial Stability Mechanism, will now rise from the €110 billion agreed last May to over €200 billion. Of course, given that Greece's total debt stands at €355 billion, and is getting bigger every day, this is like putting a sticking plaster over a gaping wound. But, as panic spread, a quick fix seemed better than no fix.

In a move to further assuage market anxiety, the summit leaders also announced a major overhaul of the EFSM's €440 billion bailout fund, substantially easing the terms of rescue loans. Significantly, from now on the beefed-up EFSM mechanism will be able to assist countries that are not technically in a bailout situation through "precautionary" credit lines and by giving it the ability to recapitalise any struggling bank in the euro zone. Obviously, this expansion of the EFSM's powers was carried out with Spain and Italy in mind, as a preventive measure against the dreaded contagion. All hands to the euro zone deck. In some respects, this is tantamount to the creation of a European Monetary Fund. Some have even described the new EFSM as a modern-day equivalent to the Marshall plan, though maybe more in hope than expectation.

Anyway, to break down the various figures arrived at in Brussels is not an entirely straightforward task. As one EU commission official admitted, they include a lot of "estimates" and "assumptions" - or wishful thinking to you and me. Essentially, the new money is €109 billion in loans from the euro zone and the IMF to be dished out over the next three years; of which €20 billion or so is to be used to buy back Greek bonds and another €20 billion to recapitalise Greece's banks. The €109 billion figure includes an estimated €28 billion which is supposed to come from the proceeds of privatisation.

However, if Athens fails to deliver on this - whether as a result of determined resistance from the Greek workers' movement or some other reason - then the euro zone/IMF will need to step in to make up the difference: in other words, give the Greek government another 'mini-bailout'. Must keep the show on the road. Furthermore, the Greeks will get an additional €45 billion on top of the €109 billion in the shape of the euro zone/IMF loans still left over (or waiting to be paid) from last year's initial €110 billion bailout, and which to no-one's surprise proved to be inadequate. Needless to say, the new Greek loans will be offered at lower interest rates - at around an average of 3.5% - and the repayment periods will be extended from 7.5 to anything up to 40 years (these new loan conditions will also be applied to Portugal and Ireland). Almost on the never-never, you could say. If only ordinary Greek workers or small enterprises could



Dollar: no longer safe option

get a personal loan on such generous terms.

Perhaps more contentiously, or dubiously, private creditors (banks, insurance companies, pension funds, etc) are expected to contribute €50 billion to the debt relief plan. This will involve around €37 billion in assorted bond rollovers/swaps and a projected €12.6 billion or more in the form of debt buybacks, enabling Athens - at least in theory - to 'retire' debt at heavily discounted prices. It almost goes without saying that the envisioned private sector rollovers and swaps, just like the sparkly new restructured loans to the Greek government from the euro zone/IMF, will be offered at lower interest rates - something between 4% and 5% - and have longer maturities in the region of 15 to 30 years. Which, of course, is bad news indeed for the private investors/speculators who under these proposals are supposed to take a 'hair cut' - ie, make a loss.

Overall, it has been roughly calculated that these various bondholder programmes will lead to a 21% reduction in the bonds' value; a substantial hit in anyone's books, let alone profit-hungry investors. Even more to the point, the credit rating agencies - cardinally the terrible triumvirate of Moody, Fitch, and Standard and Poor - will regard such a development as Greece defaulting upon its current debt obligations. Fitch has already announced that this will indeed be the case and that - barring a miracle - Greece will get 'officially' classified as a defaulter some time over September-October when the new terms and conditions for the private creditors start to kick in (ie, get worse). Naturally, the same for Moody's, who bluntly stated that the likelihood of a Greek default is "virtually 100%", and expressed deep concern that Greece's "stock of debt will still be well in excess of 100% of GDP for many years", meaning it "will still face very significant implementation risks to fiscal and economic reform".

Therefore, no flies on the euro zone leaders and officials, they also announced at the summit that an extra €35 billion will be made available as "collateral support" to the European Central Bank when Greece

is declared to be in "selective" or "restricted" default - to use the more up-beat EU-speak. Similarly, euro zone representatives optimistically maintain that this 'managed' default will be extremely "short-lived", so that the collateral support fund will remain untouched - fingers crossed. Equally, and hardly surprisingly, the euro zone leaders have been at pains to insist - in a bid to avert wholesale private investor panic - that the bondholder 'hair cut' would be limited to Greece.

Yet it is clear that the Greek bailout is built largely on sand, especially given that private sector participation is, of course, voluntary and largely predicated on the 'pledges' - if you can call them that - presented to the summit by the International Institute of Finance, which represents the main private bondholders. Hence, as things stand now, no-one really knows who exactly will deliver what exactly and when. Yet even if all the debt buybacks, rollovers, swaps, etc actually happen in the way they are supposed to - a highly dubious proposition - Greece's level of debt come 2014 would still only have been cut by some €26 billion (barely 13% of the total). In purely cold-hard fiscal terms, the current debt situation for Greece is simply unsustainable - suggesting that there will be more bailouts and handouts, call them what you will, in the not so distant future. Furthermore, as if things did not look hopeless enough, all of the 17 governments and parliaments of the euro zone have to endorse the bailout deal for it to go through. Slovakia, to name just one, has already intimated that it could lead a revolt against the agreement.

Despite everything though, the spectre of contagion refuses to be banished. Rattled by recent events, the markets delivered their preliminary verdict - by sending Italian and Spanish bond yields back to the levels seen before the July 21 second bailout; meaning, of course, that the borrowing costs for these two countries sharply rose. That in turn increases the chances that Spain and Italy will be plunged sooner rather than later into a calamitous sovereign debt crisis of their own that could dwarf the problems faced by Greece, Ireland and Portugal - all of which at

the end of the day are minor players in the euro zone drama. Such market volatility is an ill omen for the euro and the EU as a whole.

Catastrophe

Whatever the best laid plans, or otherwise, of the euro zone bureaucrats, catastrophe looms across the Atlantic. A catastrophe that is sketched in for August 2 and could send the euro zone, and the world, into a potentially unrecoverable financial/economic tail-spin, no matter what happens in Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Italy, etc.

As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, the stand-off between the Democrats and Republicans in Congress over the debt limit has not been resolved - though a debate on the legislation, and a possible vote of some description, is to be held on July 28. Indeed, if anything, the acrimony and bitterness has escalated over the last week, with the Democrats and Republicans warring over rival debt plans. Barack Obama has called for a "balanced approach", to which John Boehner - the Republican speaker of the House - responded by saying that what Obama wanted was a "blank cheque", whereby Washington gets to "spend more and you pay more" and impose tax increases that "will destroy jobs".

Looking haggard, Obama at the start of the week appeared on prime-time television to warn that the Republicans' so far utterly unyielding approach to the US debt crisis was a "dangerous game" and called for a spirit of "compromise" - on both sides. Yet the reality is that in the squalid battle to resolve the impasse, one way or another, Obama has agreed to large chunks of the Republicans' Tea Party-inspired slash-and-burn programme, which would see the very poorest hit the hardest (Medicare, Medicaid, etc) and the wealthy retain their tax perks and benefits. To such an extent that many Democrats feel betrayed by Obama's attempts to bend over backwards for the Republicans and their ever shriller demands. So on July 26 the Democrats' Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, challenged the Republicans to back his own plan - which involved no tax rises at all, but government cuts coming to some \$2.7 trillion over a decade. The essential Republican programme in all but the fine detail.

But that was not enough for the "rightwing nutters" in the Republican Party, as Vince Cable not inaccurately described them. No way. In fact, the crazies - just like the 'left' Democrats - are also sensing betrayal, raising violent objections to Boehner's suggestion that the \$14.3 trillion debt limit be temporarily lifted for six months: no surrender. Summing up the Republican mindset, Congressman Dan Burton informed Al Jazeera that Obama "believes in a socialistic, European-type, socialism approach to government" - because he wants to "put more of a burden on the taxpayers". Yes, rightwing Republican suspicions have been confirmed: Obama is a crypto-socialist or worse, and some of the senior Republican leaders might well be pinko fellow-travellers as well. Civil war beckons for the Grand Old Party?

However, Boehner's idea of temporarily raising the debt limit was too much even for Obama, who - not without logic - likened it to

"kicking a can down the road": that is, it amounted to sticking your head in the sand and hoping the debt problem will magically go away. Forget it. Showing the extreme seriousness of the situation, with the Democrats and Republicans polarised as never before, for all of Obama's backsliding to the right, the White House on July 27 issued a terse warning, saying that the president might well veto the House Republicans' debt limit proposals when they are fully unveiled the next day (or whenever).

Yet the clock is ticking, and if an agreement to raise the US debt limit - or some other sort of deal - is not reached by August 2, then the US will suffer a catastrophic default and the US treasury will run out of money to pay 'non-essential' bills and wages (schools, parks, libraries, etc). An occurrence that would have seemed unimaginable only a few months ago. Such a default would lead to interest rate rises and, disastrously, the possible downgrading of the US's triple-A status with the credit rating agencies - according to Standard and Poor, there is a "50-50 chance" of that happening over the next few months. Such an eventuality could send the entire US economy into a deep recession, and would set off an almost immediate global chain reaction effect: it could even herald an unprecedented economic slump. Thanks to the dual debt crisis, we are now facing what some have called 'eurogeddon' and 'dollargeddon'. They might not be exaggerating.

In which case, British chancellor George Osborne can wave goodbye to his 'recovery' plans - already turning to dust. The preliminary GDP estimate for April to June showed the economy growing by a mere 0.2%. Although this was slightly better than some of the gloomier forecasts, it is rather lower than the 0.5% growth seen in the first quarter, which came after a 0.5% decline in the fourth quarter of last year. Rather unpersuasively, to put it mildly, the Office for National Statistics attributed some of the "weakening in growth" to a range of one-off events: the royal wedding, the additional bank holiday, the unusually warm April, the impact of the Japanese tsunami on global supply chains ... Excuses, excuses - not for nothing has Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, accused Osborne and the government of being in a state of "total denial" about the economy.

As a consequence, City economists and various think-tanks warned that the grossly misnamed Office for Budget Responsibility would have to "revise down" its 1.7% growth forecast for this year. Credible rumours are circulating that there is a rift developing between Osborne and Cameron over how to "kick-start" the economy, with the chancellor like a stuck record arguing for tax cuts to an increasingly unimpressed prime minister. Maybe Cameron is beginning to realise that Osborne might not be such a financial/fiscal genius after all.

More ominously still, US-style fears are growing that Britain could lose its triple-A status too unless the economy picks up sharply in the third quarter. All the signs are that the UK is slipping into a double-dip recession, courtesy of the coalition government's suicidal austerity plan. But Osborne, of course, has no plan B ●

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MEDIA



Politics of press freedom

Rather than relying on bureaucratic solutions, argues **James Turley**, the left needs a dynamic approach to the

Prior to the outrage in Norway, the news agenda had been dominated by the phone-hacking scandal, and the chaos into which it pitched the entire establishment.

The left press was no exception. The wanton depravity of the Murdoch media and the incestuous networks of patronage that stand revealed as a key operating mode of the establishment have rightly come under scrutiny from our side - in the *Weekly Worker*, and also throughout the papers of our comrades on the left.

With parliament in recess, and a momentary let-up in shock revelations, it is a good moment to think more systematically about the political problems raised here. The left has criticised, in some detail, the operations of the police and the corridors of power long in advance of the present crisis - and, while there are severe deficiencies in the political approaches favoured by the left at large on these issues, we must all sharpen our critique of the capitalist media.

After all, if we picture the present scandal as a black hole, into which all manner of forces and institutions are pulled with irresistible force, it is the media which form the singularity at its centre. It might have been something else, of course (as in, for instance, the Watergate scandal); but it still remains to be explained how it is that the capitalist media have accrued sufficient power to trigger a generalised political crisis among the ruling class.

Lurking behind all this is the clichéd but nonetheless true proposition that 'knowledge is power'. The media have obviously a very important role to play here; but it is necessary to dispense in advance with two common errors. The first is the notion, held among the more conspiratorially minded sections of left liberalism (but also rightwing conspiracy theorists, such as Alex Jones), that the media effectively brainwash people: they begin with a lie and lull a docile populace into believing it.

Secondly, there is the simple inversion of this position: the very apparent partiality of the media is merely an epiphenomenon of something more fundamental, and not of any note in itself. This is part of a more general economic deviation from Marxism: questions of the state and democracy - in other words, the

concrete forms of capitalist *political* rule - are to be subordinated to the 'real' action, typically though not exclusively assigned to the direct struggle of worker and boss at the point of production.

For Marxists, neither of these views has any truth to it. The 'brainwash theory' is simply a cop-out explanation that does not describe the reality of the capitalist media; the vulgar 'Marxist' theory is one of many casualties of the last few weeks, whereupon the very real importance of the media became utterly obvious.

Knowledge economy

We must start from a considerable level of abstraction. As long as one class has ruled another, it has been necessary to control the flow of information. In feudal Europe, for example, the Catholic church set itself up as a kind of filtration system, hoarding the intellectual products of classical antiquity, promoting those that shored up its own power and ideology and repressing all the rest. By maintaining a monopoly on the reproduction of information, the church maintained itself as a powerbroker in the European state system.

Some of the results are well known - the persistence of geocentrism, Galen's views on physiology and other profound errors well past their sell-by dates. The more fundamental result - the continued subordination of broad masses to the political-economic assemblage of feudalism - should not escape notice.

In capitalist society, things are more complex. The capitalist class relies, in order to sustain itself, on a flow of economic and political information amongst its own members. It also, however, brings into being the proletariat - a popular class of a historically unprecedented type, with no power other than its collective organisation, which is driven even more radically to arm itself with information about the society it inhabits and reproduces through its own sweat.

The mass media appear to us, in 2011, as fairly straightforwardly a means of capitalist control. Yet their very existence is also a concession to the working class. Like all ruling class concessions, they are something of a poisoned chalice; but the principle embodied in the popular press, in a

highly deformed way, is democratic: free, equal citizens should have equal access to information about the goings-on in society. Analogous is the principle behind extending literacy - it has democratic potential, even if we are only taught to read deformed and apologetic accounts of history, economics and so forth.

This can be dramatised briefly and effectively in the history of *The Sun* - this keystone of the reactionary gutter press started life a century ago as a strike bulletin, and as *The Daily Herald* remained a quasi-official journal of the labour movement until it hit its terminal crisis in the 1960s, leading to the name change and the Murdoch buy-out. At its peak, the *Herald* was the largest-circulation daily newspaper in the English language.

More impressive still is the example of German social democracy in its revolutionary phase - a party which organised millions of workers equally organised a great swathe of publications, national and local, agitational and theoretical. The strongest workers' movement in Europe knew very well it needed a press worthy of its ambitions, and during the period of Bismarck's anti-socialist laws developed a complex apparatus to smuggle papers into Germany from exile, the famous 'red postal service': knowledge is power.

Because its power lies wholly in collective and conscious activity, the working class needs democracy - both to challenge capitalist rule, which in the end negates democracy, and to rule itself. The cornerstone of democracy is substantial political freedom - including the right to free association, and most crucially of all the right to free speech and freedom of publication. The issue of press freedom was the first matter to which the young Karl Marx addressed himself, before he was even a communist; it remained a mainstay of the movement he founded well beyond his death.

Nationalisation?

As communists, then, our primary goal with respect to the media is to ensure our ability to agitate and propagandise freely amongst the class. The particulars change: this or that medium comes to dominate others; political regimes mutate according to their own logic. The fundamental democratic *principle* does not.

It is this principle which must govern our response to the particular matter of

the Murdoch scandal. Unfortunately, given the left's crippling economism, it too often does not. The Socialist Workers Party is content to raise one or two pretty minimal demands: the break-up of the Murdoch empire, and prison sentences for the Murdochs and Rebekah Brooks.

With the former, one would not want to argue; and, while calling for jail time for *anyone* leaves a sour taste in the mouth, it is certainly correct to demand that these oleaginous barons should be put in the dock and the full extent of their corruption brought to light in court. Given all that these three seem to have been up to, prison sentences would be an inevitable consequence.

Yet there is surely more to be proposed here; jail those three, and five more will spring up in their place. The media as a collective institution remain untouched. In this connection, we turn to the Socialist Party in England and Wales, whose headline article on the subject carries the sub-heading, "Nationalise the media to allow full and democratic freedom of discussion and decision-making".¹

In that bald form, the demand is obviously nonsensical. Nationalising the press tomorrow *tout court* would hand it over to David Cameron, who is hardly a friend of "full and democratic freedom of discussion". Of course, this is not precisely what the comrades mean. Cited instead is "the need, in the first instance, for the democratic nationalisation of the printing presses, television and radio under democratic popular management and control - beginning with the state confiscation of the resources of News Corporation ... This will not result in a monopoly for the government or one party, but allow access to the media in proportion to political support."

The fundamental issue, however, is the same. In order for proportional access to be to our benefit, we first have to build political support, for which *general* freedom of publication is essential. The *Weekly Worker* is put out by a small group, but punches well above its weight in terms of readership. *The Socialist* could do the same, were it not so bereft of controversy and deathly dull. 'Proportional access' is a recipe for bureaucratic reproduction of the existing relation of forces.

For both of our publications, it is not proper for production to

be accountable to some ill-defined mechanism of "popular control" - but rather for them to be under the *political* control of our respective organisations. Peter Taaffe appears simply to have lifted the Militant tradition's all-purpose solution to everything - nationalisation - and dropped it without a second thought on one industry which certainly should not be nationalised.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has also come out strongly in favour of public ownership of the media, albeit with a number of caveats, and more auspicious sources in the writings of Lenin, that result in a much stronger case. The AWL calls for "public ownership of all large-scale media resources and capital (printing presses, newspaper and TV offices, studios, broadcasting technology, distribution networks, etc) and their allocation for use by different organisations and groups, according to support in the population".² The model for allocation is broadly similar to SPEW's, though it is closer to Lenin in its particular details.

Still, we should be sceptical about how closely an analogy can be drawn with the writings of Lenin the AWL cites: a draft resolution on press freedom dated November 1917, and an article on the same issue from a couple of months earlier. Given the economic chaos that followed the collapse of tsarism, the rationing of resources (such as paper and printing materials) was very clearly necessary. It may perhaps be necessary after our own revolution; but the material basis for mass communication has changed drastically, with cheaper, smaller digital equipment replacing the old hot plates and - obviously - the emergence of the internet.

The latter certainly should be socialised, on the basis that it is an infrastructural 'natural monopoly' after the fashion of roads or sewers; but the idea that one then needs to 'allocate' access to web space is simply technologically defunct with the relevant overheads having long approached zero.

The AWL is quite clear that it is only a "workers' government" that could put this into effect, which - despite certain ambiguities in the slogan - is to its credit. This then poses the question of immediate demands, which for it are as follows: support for workers' struggles in the media, including protest actions (they



Freedom

media

cite *Sun* printers refusing to handle the now infamous ‘Mine fuhrer!’ front page that never was, which compared Arthur Scargill to Hitler during the miners’ Great Strike); workers to take over threatened publications for themselves and form producers’ cooperatives; and finally the creation of a mass-circulation labour movement press.

All these things are very supportable - in particular, there certainly is a dying need for our own mass media. There is a gaping hole in the list, however, which is most peculiar, given that Lenin’s September article analyses it extensively: advertising.

Advertisement and subsidy

If it is a peculiar omission in view of Lenin’s obvious concern, it is also a vitally important one. In legal-formal terms, a corporate newspaper is no different from a communist paper; both are published on the initiative of a discrete group of people, who organise production, promotion and distribution according to their own division of labour. Yet the papers of the left languish, with circulation at best in the low tens of thousands; capitalist papers regularly sell in the millions.

The difference is the subsidy from advertisers. Papers can be sold at below-market prices and promoted widely because they are propped up by enormous external revenue streams primarily from advertisers. Advertisers get two things for their money - first of all, an implied veto on bad press for their products; and more generally a threat to withdraw the subsidy, should the paper’s content or conduct be deemed inappropriate.

It was the flight of corporate advertisers that finally put paid to the *News of the World*; but it is equally true that a *Morning Star* box-out which offered those same companies “the best rates in the business” would most likely come to nothing, because of the paper’s support for the official workers’ movement.

The result is a twofold distortion of public discourse: the subsidy allows the *positive* promotion of ideas well beyond their ‘natural’ social weight; and it allows the (*negative*) censorship of views deemed to be too dangerous. The obvious demand, then, is phrased best by Lenin: “why cannot democrats who call

themselves revolutionary carry out a measure like declaring private press advertising a state monopoly, or banning advertisements anywhere *outside* the newspapers published by the soviets in the provincial towns and cities and by the *central soviet* in Petrograd for the whole of Russia? Why must ‘revolutionary’ democrats tolerate such a thing as the enrichment, through private advertising, of rich men, Kornilov backers, and spreaders of lies and slander against the soviets?”³

Back to first principles: our aim is the most complete freedom of the press and media. Our plan has to be to overcome all the obstacles to this - legal and most particularly economic. There is no problem - even, in fact especially, under workers’ rule - with capitalists publishing pro-capitalist newspapers. We can defeat their reactionary ideas all the better if they are out in the open.

The problem lies in the overwhelming domination of the media by corporate bean-counters, backed by cartels of advertisers. We want to ensure that the media are, on the largest social scale, just that and nothing more - ‘neutral’ channels to be used as widely as possible, without structurally distorting communication as they do under capitalism. Making nationalisation or public ownership an end in itself, as do SPEW and to a lesser extent the AWL, is unhelpful in the extreme. We do not want to nationalise every chip shop, and *a fortiori* we should not want state enterprises to print every local paper.

Our approach should instead consist of the destruction of the means by which the capitalist media dominate, on the one hand, and the reconstruction of an alternative workers’ media, on the other. In a fair fight between Marxism and the hysterical gibberish put out by the *Daily Mail*, there is surely no contest. But such a fair fight will never happen until we turn press freedom from an empty abstraction into a reality - by demolishing the capitalist monopoly over the press ●

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Notes

1. *The Socialist* July 13.
2. *Solidarity* July 20.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/28.htm.

Still on outside

Unions remain banned by Rupert Murdoch. **Julia Owlerton** reports on the NUJ’s attempt to get back into *News International* and the inadequacy of the union left

In 1986 Rupert Murdoch moved his papers from Fleet Street to Wapping and in the process sacked more than 5,000 production and clerical workers, eliminating the powerful print unions in the process. But the National Union of Journalists was banished from Wapping as well - Murdoch set up his own company ‘union’ under the name of the Human Resources Committee, which later morphed into the *News International Staff Association* (Nisa).

Every employee of *News International* automatically becomes a member of Nisa and actively has to opt out - leading to almost 100% membership levels. There is no subscription fee, which means that Nisa is dependent on the employer for meeting any costs incurred in the course of its activities. For the first few years, meetings of its executive were “coordinated, attended and minuted by members of New International Human Resources Department” and the company had been “involved in both the provision and funding of training for Nisa officials and representatives”. The membership list is not even made available to Nisa officials, so that “any mailings to the membership have to be undertaken by the employer”.

So reads the report of the certification officer of the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), who in 2001 ruled that Nisa is clearly not an “independent trade union”.¹ And yet, under the draconian anti-trade union laws, it is almost impossible for the NUJ to get into Wapping. The obstacles are tremendous: 10% of NI employees have to seek derecognition not just of Nisa - but the entire collective bargaining arrangements in each of the different companies in the NI empire.

Those applying to the CAC must give notice of the approach to the employer and open themselves up to penalisation from their bosses. The request is only deemed permissible if the CAC is persuaded that “a majority of the workers in each unit are likely to support the derecognition”. And even then the workers and employers are still supposed to try to “reach an agreement”.

Failing that, a ballot will be held - but only Murdoch and his ‘union’ will have the right to address the workforce. The workers who initiated the derecognition or the NUJ do not get direct access to the employees. If it ever comes to such a ballot, 40% of those eligible to vote must take part before a majority vote for derecognition of Nisa is considered valid. As a reminder: at the recent elections for the PCS union executive, only 10.8% of the eligible membership took part - and that is nowhere near the worst ever turnout for a union vote.

Nevertheless, getting the union back into *News International* is regarded as one of the main tasks for the NUJ in the wake of the hacking scandal. It has organised stalls outside Wapping, given out hundreds of leaflets and set up surgeries nearby. The results, I am told, are mixed: there are many new membership applications, but hardly anybody turns out for public meetings.

Apparently some journalists

have joined up because they believe it might help them secure a better redundancy package - and who can blame them? So, despite these union recruits, it remains doubtful whether recognition is very near, especially in the current climate of fear. Most former *News of the World* workers still do not know what will happen to them and if they will get decent jobs at other outlets. NI employees fear that Murdoch might well use the opportunity to ‘streamline’ other titles, too. All in the spirit of ‘cleaning up his own house’, of course.

At the moment, the only time the NUJ can represent a member working for *News International* is in individual cases - eg, redundancies, grievances and disciplinaries. “Unionised workplaces have a different culture,” writes Donnacha DeLong, new NUJ president. “A well-organised union provides a counterbalance to the power of the editors and proprietors that can limit their excesses. The collective can tackle stress and bullying and prevent people getting desperate.”²

However, comrade DeLong is probably a bit over-optimistic when he writes that “the NUJ could have stopped this happening.” He quotes the NUJ *Code of conduct*,³ which in his view would have somehow stopped the *News of the World* from becoming the rightwing pile of crap that it was.

This is unlikely. After all, the NUJ is allowed to operate at Associated Newspapers (*Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday*) and Express Newspapers (which publish the *Daily Star* and the *Express*) - and look at the bile those papers spew out every day. Though to be fair, the NUJ chapel at the *Daily Star* famously forced the editors in 2006 to pull an anti-Muslim ‘Daily Fatwa’ page.

Looking for answers in the NUJ’s *Code of conduct* ignores the tremendous pressure on journalists who work in most bourgeois newspapers, not just the nasty tabloids: in the race for profits and higher circulation, there is constant demand on the writer to deliver exclusives. It is a highly individualised job, with often very little solidarity between colleagues (who are potential rivals in the hunt for the next scoop). Add to that the fact that the newspaper business is very much in decline and you get massive job insecurity. Also, it is extremely questionable whether even the strictest adherence to the NUJ’s *Code of conduct* would prevent gutter journalism. It is in fact not dramatically different from the *Editors’ code* of the Press Complaints Commission. It cannot be stressed enough that the PCC, contrary to the powerful image it has in society as a seemingly independent guardian of journalistic standards, is nothing of the sort. It has been set up by Britain’s newspapers themselves and is run by their editors.

While the NUJ talks about obtaining material “by honest, straightforward and open means”, the PCC goes into even more detail and states that “the press must not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by using hidden cameras or clandestine listening devices; or

by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, messages or emails; or by the unauthorised removal of documents or photographs; or by accessing digitally held private information without consent.”

But both codes also allow for exceptions to the rule - even the NUJ thinks it is OK *not* to be “honest, straightforward and open” when it is in the “public interest”. In such undefined circumstances an NUJ journalist may “intrude into anybody’s private life, grief or distress”.

Needless to say, most publishing companies have broken the *Editors’ code* plenty of times, but, of course, do not expect any repercussions. This is why the NUJ also wants to replace the PCC with a “serious regulatory body,” writes NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet (my emphasis). It should “provide for serious penalties for media organisations which broke the code, as well as offering a reliable mechanism to deal with complaints from the public.”⁴ But surely what is needed is not quasi-governmental censorship, but organisation and militant collective action by workers within the media industry.

At recent NUJ Left meetings, I have come across members of the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain and a number of leftwingers. As in many other unions, the focus has been extremely limited: I was actually told by an SWP member that its main task is to make sure that “the right doesn’t get hold of the union leadership” and so meetings are normally “rather dull”.

Surely, this crisis provides us with an incredible opportunity to grow and put forward radical solutions that go beyond tweaking the NUJ *Code of conduct* or calling for “more regulation” by the state.

There was a lot of nodding at an NUJ Left meeting when Donnacha DeLong raised the need to abolish the Press Complaints Commission and replace it with “something else” - at the moment, “we are not sure what”. He said he was impressed with the Irish equivalent, the Press Council, which seems “independent of government and independent of the media”.

But even a cursory glance at the council’s website shows how wrong the comrade is.⁵ It is made up of members appointed by the government. Its chairman, Dáithí O’Ceallaigh, used to be the Irish ambassador to London, Belfast, the UN and the World Trade Organisation and is now director general of the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin.

No democrat, socialist or proponent of free speech ought to put any trust in such a monstrosity ●

Notes

1. ‘Not so Nice for Nisa’, 2001 article by Carolyn Jones of the Institute of Employment Rights: www.powerinaunion.co.uk/news-international-staff-association-murdochs-in-house-union.
2. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jul/08/nuj-news-of-the-world.
3. www.nuj.org.uk/print.php?id=174, July 20.
4. *Ibid*.
5. www.pressombudsman.ie.

IRAN

Reformists crave reconciliation

The Iranian regime is deeply divided, but what are the prospects for the democracy movement that filled the streets in 2009-10? National chair of Hands Off the People of **Yasmine Mather** spoke to **Mark Fischer**

Given its potential importance, it seems odd that there has been so little said in the western media about the ongoing conflict between Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the supreme religious leader, Ali Khamenei. Why is this?

It can perhaps be explained by the attitude of the US administration, which seems to be playing a waiting game. Obviously, they will have followed these disputes, but they expect the system to disintegrate without much intervention from the US and at the moment they have other countries to worry about in the region.

However, this is a serious, ongoing struggle which shows no signs of abating and has actually started a process of political differentiation within the green movement between leaders looking for 'reconciliation' with the regime and the more militant, intransigent sections of its base. A number of developments indicate the scale of the crisis.

Just a month ago, Hamidreza Tarraghi, a member of the conservative Motalefeh party, announced that Iran's supreme leader, ayatollah Khamenei, had appointed a panel to investigate "legal violations committed by the current administration". Over the last two years, the majles, Iran's Islamic parliament, has repeatedly accused Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government of violating the constitution. The Iranian president has countered by asserting that his administration is among the most law-abiding in the history of the Islamic Republic.

However, since Ahmadinejad's well-publicised dispute with Khamenei over the appointment of ministers, every word that has passed the lips of the Iranian president has prompted criticism from the Islamic Republic's clerical elite. Most recently, 100 MPs presented the speaker with a petition to summon him before parliament to answer questions over 'irregularities', such as the delay in establishing new ministries and accusations of being part of a so-called "deviant current" - the term used to describe the ideas of Ahmadinejad's controversial chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. Meanwhile, a number of Ahmadinejad's closest allies, including his nominee as deputy minister for foreign affairs, have been arrested and accused of financial corruption or links to the "deviant current".

When ultra-conservative clerics called for the abolition of co-education in universities for the new academic year, Ahmadinejad attempted, bizarrely, to position himself amongst the 'modernisers'. He called for the immediate cancellation of plans to segregate the sexes at selected universities and called the move "shallow and unwise" on his website.

Two weeks ago, the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, general Mohammad Ali Jafari, said that his force is now in charge of dealing with this "deviant current". Jafari also indicated that the Guards might allow the participation of

greens in next year's parliamentary elections, provided they accepted certain conditions: "Reformists who have not crossed the regime's 'red lines' would be allowed to run". This was a reference to former president Mohammad Khatami, who, together with another ex-president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, has used the rift between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad to call for "forgiveness" on both sides of the 2009 conflict. Apparently, Iranians who protested against the rigged 2009 presidential election results should forgive the supreme leader and in return he would forgive them!

Unsurprisingly, Ahmadinejad objected to Jafari's comments and retaliated by criticising "illegal" border crossings used by agencies associated with the Revolutionary Guards to smuggle goods into and out of Iran. According to the Iranian president, this is generating billions of dollars in illicit profits and he pointedly used the term "brothers" when referring to these smugglers, implying they were with security and intelligence services. Promptly, Jafari condemned these claims as "deviant."

The possibility of the Guards 'switching sides' and throwing their weight behind the reformists is a real one. It certainly appears as if Ahmadinejad is losing the support of his closest allies amongst their senior commanders. These are people who supported him in the elections of 2005 and 2009 in exchange for increased political and economic clout.

However, the RGs have always had divided loyalties. Some low-ranking officers support the reformists, while others are loyal to the president. However, more of the senior commanders have always backed ayatollah Khamenei as the supreme religious leader and in that respect nothing has changed. It now seems likely that Khamenei is trying to allow the return of some reformists - or at least what some call 'loyal reformists' - to the ruling circles in order to weaken the political faction loyal to Ahmadinejad in the 2012 majles elections and then the presidential elections of 2013.

On July 18, Morteza Motahari, a leading conservative MP, even went as far as to say all reformists with the exception of green leaders Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi should be allowed to participate as candidates in the coming elections. Clearly the enemies of the supreme leader's current enemy could become his friends!

How is all this impacting on the pro-democracy movement? And how does it relate to the recent political prisoners' hunger strike?

We must remember that the green movement is not a monolithic force. It is rainbow coalition of many trends with very different views. Its two main leaders are under strictly monitored house arrest and their position on the crisis in the regime is not actually widely known. Amongst their supporters the divisions are very clear.

It seems as if at the time of the hunger strike in late June, or possibly before it, Khatami and Rafsanjani had entered into a deal with the office of the supreme leader, looking for a way to forge 'reconciliation'. This would explain the reformist leaders' calls on the hunger strikers to end their protest in order to avoid an "escalation of the conflict", as they put it. However, the reformists are not united on this issue.

In early July, a senior reformist who is held in Evin prison, Mostafa Tajzadeh, warned against participating in any election that is not "fully open". Tajzadeh appears to be of the opinion that if Ahmadinejad and rival conservatives do not allow reformist participation they will fall out more among themselves. Tajzadeh claims that "the narrative of the green movement has changed the whole affair ... either the elections should be free for all parties or we should not participate and should leave them to play out the conflicts among themselves." However, it isn't clear what he means by "all parties". One assumes he is referring to 'reformist' Islamic parties who will not challenge religious interference in the affairs of the state.

The bulk of supporters of the green movement are totally opposed to any compromise with the supreme leader. Young militants, bloggers and women activists have wasted no time distancing themselves from Khatami and Rafsanjani. Many point out that after so many deaths, so many arrests, torture and rapes in prison it would be criminal to look for 'reconciliation'. One blogger asked

Khatami, why should those who have been tortured apologise to the supreme leader? What have they got to be sorry about?

Of course, although the whole notion of reconciliation has been criticised, many reformists are now excusing it by claiming it could create the conditions for the release of all political prisoners, freedom of the press, etc. Also, they make the point that, naturally, they will not just cave in and join the electoral process unconditionally - that would be simply a capitulation.

How do you see the protest movement evolving?

In some ways, this period is helping to clarify where everyone in the anti-dictatorial movement stands in relation to the Islamic regime and the role of the supreme leader.

These divisions first appeared in December 2009 in the demonstrations known as 'Ashoura'. The crowd were angry about political executions, the violence that greeted their protests from the regime's thugs. They started questioning the role of the supreme leader. 'Death to Khamenei', became the slogan of the day. Moussavi, and also to a certain extent Karroubi, as well as all the leaders of the green movement, did all they could to distance themselves from this slogan.

In fact, their next move was to farcically advocate 'silent' demonstrations. It is quite clear that many of these individuals realise the downfall of the supreme leader is tantamount to the collapse of the entire Islamic order. So clearly 'reformism' has now become a serious obstacle to any form of change, gradual or otherwise. However, the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators, indeed the majority of the country's population, do not share the 'reformist' leaders' conservatism on this issue. On the contrary, they want the overthrow of the entire religious state, even if they disagree about what will replace the clerical regime.

For Iranian youth, the issue isn't just Ahmadinejad's presidency, but the interference of the state in the every aspect of their daily life. So one can see how

recent events and Ahmadinejad's fall from grace have negatively impacted on the 'reformist' leaders, but not their supporters. Khatami and his allies want to return to the 'good old days' of 'reformist' governments cooperating with the conservatives as different pro-regime factions. But the population of Iran at large has moved on. They want a different regime, not simply different faces at the top. The green movement is at the crossroads and many of the ideas and slogans put forward by its leaders are being challenged.

How are they fighting back?

This leadership has been constantly campaigning against revolution. They keep repeating, 'We want peaceful, gradual change - we don't want violence'; 'Revolutions are violent and Iranians don't want more violence.' The young protestors of 2009-10 are now questioning many of these ideas. Websites, social networking and Twitter are being used effectively to scotch the idea that it is protestors who cause violence, as opposed to the state, its military and security forces.

A straw in the wind came when Moussavi's spokesperson, Amir Arjomand, claimed that his boss, who was at the time the country's prime minister, was not aware of the mass execution of political prisoners in the late 1980s (some 8,000-12,000 - mainly leftwingers and members of Mujahedin - were executed in the Islamic government's dungeons). Arjomand's comments were met with a storm of protest - not just from the traditional left, but mainly from young supporters of the green movement itself.

At a time of severe economic hardship, as the combined effect of sanctions and the end of food and fuel subsidies takes its toll, the market economy advocated by some green leaders is also being challenged. It is always difficult to predict what will happen in Iran. However, I have no doubt that if the leaders of the green movement decide to participate in another fraudulent election, they will thoroughly alienate the vast bulk of their young supporters.

You mentioned that the US may be playing a 'wait and see' game. But what about Israel?

The US isn't being totally passive. Sanctions are being ratcheted up gradually. Iran Air and a number of banks are on the latest US hit list. Again, as we have repeatedly emphasised, these impact on Iran's people far more than their rulers.

Israel is a different matter. There are once again rumours of a possible Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations. According to a former operative of the Central Intelligence Agency, Israel could launch a military strike on Iran before the United Nations general assembly votes to recognise the existence of a Palestinian state in the autumn. This would be a disaster for the pro-democracy movement - we must oppose it in every way we can ●



Ahmadinejad: isolated

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REVIEW

Maoism with pretensions

Alain Badiou **The communist hypothesis** (translators D Macey, S Corcoran) London 2010, pp279, £12.99

Even with the self-deprecatory title ‘Communist hypothesis’, this book promises more than it delivers. Verso has published it in a format which is clearly designed to recall the *Little red book* - the pocket edition of quotations from Chairman Mao. This was a compulsory possession for Chinese citizens during the Cultural Revolution period, part of the uniform of western Maoists at the same period, and adopted as a fashion accessory by a good many western leftist youth of the late 60s and very early 70s more generally.

Badiou is a Maoist, but no Mao: unlike Mao’s stylish (if misleading) aphorisms, he offers us Parisian left-academic, philosophical obscurity, and an extreme use of stipulative definitions - giving strange Badiouvian meanings to ‘truth’ and ‘truth procedure’, ‘event’, ‘state’, ‘fact’, and so on.¹ He is a philosophy professor at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, previously at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, and (for most of his career) at the University of Paris VIII (Vincennes-Saint Denis), whose philosophy department was dominated by leftists.

The book is a collection of essays and lectures: on May 1968 - one written in late 1968 and one for its 40th anniversary in 2008; on the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008 (classified as relating to May 68); on the Chinese Cultural Revolution (from 2002); on the Paris Commune (from 2003); and ‘The idea of communism’, a paper given to a (large) conference at Birkbeck College, London, with that title in March 2009. The book closes with a letter from Badiou to Slavoj Žižek, defending Mao (the French edition is said to include Žižek’s reply, but this is not in the translation).

The idea of Maoism as representing an unsullied international revolutionary centre died while Mao was still alive, when the People’s Republic of China adopted a policy of cooperation with the Pinochet regime in Chile after the 1973 coup, and supported South African intervention in the civil war in Angola. In reality, the Chinese leadership had already decided on a *Realpolitik* geopolitical realignment with the US in response to Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969. This decision-making process ended with the death of Lin Biao in September 1971 and the large-scale purge which followed. But this was not transparent until 1973-75. Even then, reality did not catch up with most western Maoists until after the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’ and rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping in 1976, and the marketising policy which began to emerge under the new leadership.

From then on western Maoism tended towards political collapse in a variety of directions - social democratic, left ‘official communist’, anarchist, and so on. (I disregard those former very numerous former Maoists who went over to the right, like former leftists of all varieties.) Badiou’s variant is to hang on to the idea of the Cultural Revolution and May 68 as conceived broadly in Bakuninist terms, while advocating a ‘non-party’ form of political organisation to give support to everyday struggles.

At various points in the book he cites positively the Organisation Politique, which in 1985 replaced the Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste (UCF-ML), which Badiou had participated in founding in 1969. The OP was heavily involved in defence of the *sans-papiers* (in English official language ‘illegal

immigrants’); it wound up in 2007, apparently broken up by a sharp debate in the French bourgeois media in 2006-07 over Badiou’s alleged anti-Semitism.² It turns out that ‘supporting struggles’ does not succeed in evading the problem of differences over high politics.

Badiou’s ‘communist hypothesis’ when closely examined turns out to reduce “the need to cling to the historical hypothesis of a world that has been freed from the law of profit and private interest” (p63) - or, as the global ‘social forums’ movement animated by the Brazilian Workers Party in the late 1990s-early 2000s put it, ‘Another world is possible’. But Badiou in fact offers us no reasons to believe this hypothesis. It is, rather, an act of faith authorised by the persistence of human aspirations to emancipation: as Lewis Ayres in his *Legacy of Nicaea* (Oxford 2004) justifies taking Nicene Trinitarianism seriously by its persistence “in spite of Hegel, fire and sword” (chapter 16), and with as little plausibility.

The ‘communist hypothesis’ is, moreover, quite clearly not the point of the book. The running themes are twofold. First, the eruption of ‘events’ (in the very limited Badiouvian sense) like the Paris Commune, the Cultural Revolution and May 68, creates new possibilities, and poses ‘points’ (the sense is again Badiouvian) at which there is a sharp choice between options, and defeat results from making the wrong choice. The history of failure of workers’ rebellions and therefore of communism (pp1-40) will end when the participants finally make the right choice and win.

Second, the underlying persistent problem is the existence of workers’ and leftist parties. In the first place, these parties organise reconciliation with the “capitalo-parliamentarist” ‘state’ (in quotes because the sense is again Badiouvian: “the set of constraints which limit the possibility of possibilities”, p243). This is illustrated from May 68 and after (pp43-71) and from the history around the Paris Commune (pp168-228).

Secondly, if victorious they produce the ‘party-state’ (ie, Stalinism).³ This is illustrated primarily from the Cultural Revolution (pp101-56). Badiou regards this not as an unusual form of Stalinist bureaucratic purge (the Trotskyist Peng Shu-Tse’s view at the time,

which has become generally accepted), but as a real attempt to overcome tendencies towards capitalism which failed because there was no

break with the party-state idea. But Badiou also sees the problem as originating in Marx’s ambiguous response to the Paris Commune - on the one hand anti-statist; on the other critical of the Communards as failing to produce an effective state (pp178-86).

The ‘new’ politics Badiou proposes as an alternative is expressed in various ways; among them a “combination of complex ideological and historical work, and theoretical and practical data about new forms of political organisation”, or “the era of reformulation of the communist hypothesis” (p66; original emphasis); “a practical alliance with those people who are in the best position to invent it in the immediate: the new proletarians who have come from Africa and elsewhere, and the intellectuals who are the heirs [such modesty! - MM] to the political battles of recent decades” (p99); or “a radical rupture with capitalo-parliamentarism, a politics invented at the grassroots level of the popular real, and the sovereignty of the idea” (p100).

Disregarding the neo-Platonist philosophical machinery (pp229-30), this is not a new politics at all. The case was in fact better argued without the Maoist *impedimenta* by John Holloway’s 2002 *Change the world without taking power*. It is, in reality, merely the anti-parliamentarist political abstentionism of the 1960s-70s ‘New Left’, deprived of the ‘wildcat strike’ phenomenon which gave that politics its temporary plausibility. Behind this in turn lie the ideas of the ‘left’ and ‘council’ communists of the 1920s. Behind those are Georges Sorel and the pre-World War I syndicalists. And behind them is Bakunin’s original critique of Marx and the ‘Marxists’, and their argument for working class political action.

Badiou makes a token denunciation of anarchism “which has never been anything else than the vain critique, or the shadow, of the communist parties” (p155), but this is completely without substance: what exactly in the *substance* of Badiou’s arguments is not already in Bakunin’s *Statism and anarchy*?

Not a new politics then, but an old and ineffectual one. However, it is worth discussing briefly *why* this politics is in the last analysis ineffective.

The basic problem is simple. We (‘we the people’; *a fortiori* ‘we the working class’) cannot be permanently on strike, on the streets, or occupying government offices. The reason is that if we were no-one would be

producing food and other material goods which we need to survive. So the revolutionary ‘event’, in the sense of a very intense period of mass political mobilisation, cannot but come to an end.

Equally, what lay behind the ‘rightist turn’ in China to which Mao responded by promoting the Cultural Revolution was the catastrophic *failure* of the Great Leap Forward. Badiou in his letter to Žižek defends Mao and his co-thinkers on this front, on the basis that Soviet policy forced economic autarky on China (pp265-66). But this does not in the least alter the fact that in the Great Leap Forward the Chinese leadership, borrowing from the ‘dialectical’ voluntarism of the first five-year plan, promoted wholly unrealistic *material* projects.⁴

The “set of constraints which limit the possibility of possibilities” is, then, not only the state in the sense of the political regime, but also *material* constraints.

Human emancipation does involve some emancipation from these constraints, in the sense that technical development enlarges the productivity of labour and our material powers, and by doing so makes communism *possible* after a very long period (since the end of the global ascendancy of hunter-gatherer society) in which it was *impossible*. But in this technical development “freedom is the recognition of necessity” in a narrower sense than Hegel’s tag borrowed by Engels.⁵ By recognising and grasping the (partial) lawfulness of the material world, we are enabled to manipulate it to human ends with increasing power. We achieve a wider range of possibilities, but only by an increased recognition of limits: we do not attempt to build road-bridges out of *papier-mâché*, etc. Equally, we do not promote Lysenkoism or the backyard steel plants, etc, of the Great Leap Forward.

To accept the material constraints and return to the political problem is to accept that we must not fetishise the revolutionary ‘event’, the strike or other form of direct action, at the expense of slower and more routine forms of politics. Going along with that, it means that we have to address the problem of permanent decision-making *institutions*, which will involve some organised division of labour.

This last does not mean a permanent *specialisation of function*: that is, that some people are always decision-makers and others always subordinate. We can, and must, construct institutional forms which involve the subordination of the decision-makers to those below - eg, through freedom of

communication and of information; and which tend towards *rotation* of the decision-making function - eg, through short-term limits for public and managerial office.

But, once we take this approach to the political problem, there is no reason to adopt the line of argument which explains Stalinism by Marx’s ambiguity on state power, or the fact that workers’ political parties have become agencies of the capitalist class by the nature of political parties *as such*. The exact reverse is the case. The anarchist, ‘left communist’, ‘New Left’, Badiouvian line fails to address the problem of the design of political decision-making institutions. By doing so it will never persuade the broad masses to live without such institutions, but only create the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ in its own attempts to organise - or end up as a tail of some other political force.

To address the design of political institutions, we need precisely a *political party* which engages not merely in denunciation of the *effects* of “capitalo-parliamentarism”, but in taking apart the institutional ways in which “capitalo-parliamentarism” works and arguing for an alternative to them. (And, for that matter, the Stalinist organisational conceptions of the trade union, party and small left group full-timers.) Such an organisation is a *political party* precisely because it poses the question of an alternative political order. If it poses this question, it is an attempt to create a party whether or not it calls itself such. If it does not - as is true of most of the far left Europe-wide - it is merely a pressure-group, whether or not it calls itself a party.

Badiou, of course, sets his book aside from such criticisms by claiming it is “a book of philosophy” and “does not deal directly with politics” (p37). To achieve this result he adopts a remarkably restrictive definition of ‘political text’: “A political text is something internal to an organised political process. It expresses its thought, deploys its forces and announces its initiatives” (p38). But this is yet another way in which *The communist hypothesis* must disappoint its readers: in spite of its episodic philosophical coloration, it is, in fact, a (self-deceiving) book about politics ●

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Notes

1. Since for most of these stipulative definitions we have to wait until the latter part of the book, towards the end of the essay on the Paris Commune and in ‘The idea of communism’, the obscurity is increased. Since any argument for the peculiar stipulations is to be found in Badiou’s *Being and event* and *Logics of worlds* (to which he cross-cites), a philosophical engagement with the peculiar forms of *The communist hypothesis* argument would be pointless.

2. Badiou’s original essay which attracted this debate and his response to part of it are at www.lacan.com/badword.htm. As translated there, the text, in spite of philosophical excess in expression, makes the perfectly sensible points that: (1) the holocaust does not morally license Zionist colonialism; (2) Zionist colonialism does not license the use by Islamists of the themes and tropes of classical anti-Semitism; and (3) identity politics is in general poisonous.

3. Badiou says that personality cults are a necessary element of the idea of communism (pp249-52) and condemns Khrushchev’s criticism of the ‘cult of the personality’ of Stalin, saying that “under the pretence of democracy, it heralded the decline of the idea of communism” (p251); so his attitude to Stalinism is pretty contradictory.

4. Cf D Priestland *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation* (Oxford 2007), especially the conclusion.

5. Discussion (among many other places) at www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/txt/davie07.htm.



Maoist, but no stylish aphorisms

OUR HISTORY

Solidarity with Ireland

The dramatic background to the Communist Party of Great Britain's founding congress over the weekend of July 31-August 1 1920 was the British state's ruthless war in Ireland.

The republic proclaimed by the 1916 Easter Rising was stillborn and its revolutionaries crushed by the British army. Its defeat prompted some in the international movement to suggest that the cause of Irish nationalism had exhausted itself.

Shortly after the uprising, Karl Radek¹ wrote in the organ of the Zimmerwald group² that the defeat of the revolt - and in particular its apparent failure to ignite a wider social uprising - signified, according to the title of his article, "The end of a song". It could only take the form of a "putsch", he asserted, as the national movement in Ireland was simply the form that the "agrarian" question took. Therefore, with the peasantry neutralised by reforms, the rebellion was now confined to a "purely urban, petty bourgeois movement, which - despite the great noise it made - had little social backing".³

Similarly, Trotsky declared the "historical basis for the national revolution" in Ireland had "disappeared" for the same reason: "... after the agrarian reforms of 1881-1903⁴ the farmers turned into conservative small property owners, whose gaze the green banner of national independence is no longer able to tear away from their plots of land".⁵

Lenin countered that a Marxist who conceived of the Easter Rising as a "putsch" - that is, "when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs" with "no sympathy among the masses" - could only be "a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon". Precisely as a living phenomenon, it "passed through various stages and combinations of class interests", only one of which was the 1916 rebellion.⁶

In the elections of December 1918, Lenin was proved correct, as the Irish people gave a landslide victory to Sinn Féin, the party of Irish independence. In 1919 the Sinn Féin MPs set up the Dáil Éireann, the Irish parliament in Dublin, and once again declared an Irish republic. Quickly, the British branded the Dáil an illegal assembly and issued warrants for the arrest of its members.

The liberation forces prepared for guerrilla war. The Irish Republican Army was formed from the Irish Volunteers⁷ and the Irish Citizens Army, Ireland's 'red army'.⁸ It seized weapons bound for the British and US military.

Britain poured thousands of troops into Ireland, including the notorious lumpen terror force known as the Black and Tans. IRA actions against military targets were answered by the indiscriminate burning of local villages, farms and factories, by rape, mutilation and murder. In Belfast, the unionists called for a 'holy war' against Catholics - 5,000 workers were driven out of their jobs in the shipyards and tens of thousands were forced to abandon their homes.

Irish working class militancy grew. Plants were taken over by the workers and run under the control of workers' councils; dockers blacked munitions bound for the British troops and railworkers



Black and Tans: terrorists

refused to move trains boarded by the Black and Tans. A three-day general strike secured the release of political prisoners on hunger strike.

Yet, despite the heroism of the people of Ireland, the working class in Britain stood aloof. This fatally undermined the struggle; if our class had acted in solidarity the British state might have been staring into the face of total defeat in Ireland - and confronting the prospect of a democratic republic with the stamp of the working class on its doorstep and its mystique of imperial might and omnipotence perhaps fatally undermined in the eyes of the colonial peoples it still oppressed round the world. In Britain too, a victory for Irish revolutionary republicanism could have electrified the workers' movement and put it in an immensely stronger position to settle accounts with its 'own' ruling class.

As Marx had put it in a 1869 letter to Engels, "The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general."⁹

In some ways, 'get rid of' is an unfortunate phrase - perhaps the translation is clumsy, but it implies the proletariat of England, Scotland and Wales divesting itself of an unpleasant and distracting *burden*. In fact, it is clear that what Marx intended to convey was the need for the working class of Britain to draw a sharp and impermeable line of ideological difference between *the bourgeoisie* and itself; without surrendering its political independence, it should enthusiastically throw in its lot with the struggle for Irish freedom.

The statement from the new CPGB's executive committee seeking to rouse the movement in Britain was informed precisely by that understanding.

Communists and Ireland

The news that comes daily from Ireland is in itself a summons to the

Communist Party of Great Britain.

The recurrent series of assassinations and "reprisals" is the most dramatic feature of the struggle. But of even deeper consequence is the slow strangling of the economic life of the Irish people. The closing of the railways, the destruction of crops and creameries are having - and are designed to have - the same effect upon Ireland as the wartime blockade upon central Europe.

Step by step the economic life of the country is being destroyed. Between September 1919 and September 1920, 90 villages and country towns were shot up and in many cases completely wrecked. Between June 1920 and October 1920, 30 creameries were destroyed. Over large areas rick-yards have been set on fire by the forces of the crown. The destruction of the hay makes the winter feeding of cattle impossible. Even rich rural areas are threatened with starvation.

A nation is being murdered under our eyes - not in Armenia, but within a hundred miles of our own shores - not by Turks or Kurds or bashi-bazouks,¹⁰ but by British men, carrying out the orders of a British government.

There are communists who say: 'This is true, but it is not our concern. This is a nationalist struggle and we are not nationalists - we are internationalists. This is a race struggle - our job is the class struggle.'

That is a hasty and a short-sighted judgement. In such a case as Ireland's - the case of a small nation held in forcible suppression by a great imperialist state - the national struggle and the class struggle are inseparable from one another. The struggle against imperialism for national independence is a necessary phase of the struggle against capitalism for the workers' independence.

Right through its history the domination of England over Ireland has been economic as well as political. It has been an exploitation as well as an oppression; and against that double tyranny the Irish have carried on a double war - for political and economic freedom - "for our lands and our liberties", as James Fintin Laylor phrased it.¹¹ James Connolly was shot (a wounded prisoner, carried

to the place of execution because his legs were shattered) as an Irish rebel. He gave his life for the freeing of Ireland. But he gave it too for the freeing of the working class. And the Irish republican movement today is the same movement for which he died.

Connolly himself had grasped very firmly the essential fact of the oneness of the two movements. It is the theme of half his writings. "In the evolution of civilisation," he wrote, "the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must perforce keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation." And again: "... the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland."

That is as true today as when Connolly wrote it. The republican movement is essentially a working class movement. There are, it is true, middle class men as well as bourgeois by the chance of birth. But they do not mould it. They are being moulded by it. The strength and vigour and inspiration of the movement lies in the workers and the workers' organisations.

Its ideals go far beyond mere political independence. Even those who are not communists or socialists of any kind have some vision that their job is not merely the ousting of the English government, but the overthrow of the English system - which is the capitalist system. And the workers themselves see in the establishment of the Irish republic the first step - the necessary first step - to the establishment of the Irish workers' republic.

The republican movement is a workers' movement. And it is the Irish workers upon whom the chief brunt of the Greenwood terror is falling.¹² The big majority of the men and women killed have been workers. The dwelling houses burnt have been workers' houses. It is the workers who go in want because of the burning of creameries and factories and crops. It is the Irish railwaymen who are being dismissed in hundreds because they refuse to transport the troops and the 'Black and Tans' who are terrorising their countrymen and devastating their country.¹³

The Irish workers are suffering grimly resolved to stay it out until the finish. And the British do nothing. Is it strange that the Irish speak of us bitterly, as men betrayed by someone on whom they should have been able to count?

They look for nothing from the Tories. They look for nothing from the Liberals. For they know the history of their own country, and they know that Liberal governments have been as prolific as the Tories in the matter of coercion bills. They remember 'Buckshot Forster'.¹⁴ They have not forgotten that Mr Asquith's government, in the year of the rising, shot 14 prisoners, arrested 3,226 men, deported 1,949, and suppressed 13 newspapers. They count Mr Lloyd George and Sir Hamar Greenwood very typical Liberals.

But from the British working class they had expected better things. They have heard talk from us of international solidarity. In practice they see British troops - the sons, many of them, of trade unionists - shooting Irish workers. They see Ireland coerced with munitions made and transported by British trade union labour. They see Irish railway men dismissed, and not a murmur from Unity House. They see every foul device of imperialist tyranny employed against them with at any rate the passive acquiescence of the British working class.

They are bitter; they have good reason to be bitter. They have not counted on our assistance. They will not ask for it. They will carry on the struggle themselves, whatever the cost and whatever the issue. But they know that we have betrayed them; and they despise us for it. They talk of us with contemptuous pity. And we deserve that they should do so. For we *have* betrayed them, and, in doing so, we are betraying the working class movement.

For us, if we were to connive at these things, to claim for our motto, 'Workers of the world, unite' would be merely to add hypocrisy to treachery. Not only the Irish, but the working class all the world over is looking to us. We are being weighed in the Irish balance and, if we are found wanting, not all the enunciations of orthodox formulae, not all the protestations of the purity of our communist faith will save us from contemptuous dismissal as faithful, though sometimes talkative, servants of the British imperial oligarchy. ●

**Executive Committee,
Communist Party of Great
Britain
The Communist, November 25
1920**

Notes

1. Like many other Bolsheviks, Karl Radek (1885-1939) was killed on the orders of Stalin. He had been expelled from the party in 1927 and readmitted in 1930 after the usual sordid farce of self-abasement. He was later accused of treason and confessed at the Trial of the Seventeen (1937, also called the Second Moscow Trial).
2. Despite the centrist leanings of the majority, the Zimmerwald conference in Switzerland (September 5-8 1915) marked what Lenin called "a step toward the ideological and practical break with opportunism and social chauvinism" that had overwhelmed the majority of the Second International at the outbreak of World War I.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1916/05/1916rising.htm.
4. Faced in the Commons with the Irish Party holding the balance of power between the Liberals and the Conservatives, Gladstone moved to conciliate it with the Land Act of 1881. This gave some security of tenure to the Irish peasantry and created land courts for establishing fair rents - far short of the demands of the Land League, however.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1916/07/dublin.htm.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm.
7. The Irish Volunteers were formed in November 1913 and subsequently split over their attitude to World War I.
8. In 1914 the Irish Citizens Army proclaimed its intention to "to arm and train all Irishmen capable of bearing arms to enforce and defend its [principles]".
9. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1869/letters/69_12_10-abs.htm. Emphasis in original text.
10. The *bashi-bazouks* were much-feared mercenary troops drawn from across the Ottoman empire. They were irregulars, so lived on the proceeds of their plunder rather than payment from the state.
11. James Fintin Laylor (1807-1849) was an Irish revolutionary and an outstanding journalist. Laylor and others split from the Repeal Association of Daniel O'Connell in January 1847 to form the revolutionary-democratic Irish Confederation. After the defeat of the 1848 rising in Ireland, some of its surviving leaders went on to form the Fenians.
12. Hamar Greenwood (1870-1948) was the last British chief secretary for Ireland, with a seat in the cabinet, from 1920 to 1922. It was on his watch that the notorious Black and Tans were unleashed on the Irish people (see note 13). Greenwood's name will live in infamy not simply for this, but also for his crass comment in 1920 after the centre of Cork had been torched by these attack dogs of British imperialism: "Sinn Féin rebels" and the people of Cork itself were to blame.
13. The Black and Tans (named after the colour scheme of their uniforms) were ex-army 'hards' and criminals who were granted sentence reductions if they volunteered for service in Ireland.
14. William Edward Forster (1818-86) introduced the Coercion Bill in the House of Commons on January 24 1881 to deal with the growth of the Land League. One of its provisions was that the Irish government could arrest without trial persons "reasonably suspected" of crime and conspiracy - a forerunner of internment in the 1970s. Suspicions arose that Forster used the bill to order police to fire on a crowd of demonstrators - thus, 'Buckshot Forster'.

SUMMER OFFENSIVE

Eager to debate with others

This has been a quieter, but still respectable, week in the Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising campaign. This year we have set ourselves the collective target of £25k - to be raised by August 20. We added £1,156 to last week's running total, to take us to £13,666. As a distinct strand within this year's SO, we are aiming to secure a minimum of £300 a month extra in standing orders for our paper. Two more commitments came in this week - CS has pledged a monthly £20, while JD has topped up his existing regular payment by £5. So our *Weekly Worker* campaign is running at £218 in new money - well done to all comrades.

The fight to achieve the SO target is very much linked to the work to build our summer school, Communist University, which will take place in south London from August 13-20 - when the *Weekly Worker* goes 'live' for seven days, you might say. The same brand of open, exacting and serious debate that finds its way into the paper every week animates our approach to the organisation of our school. Indeed, if you need further convincing of the superiority of the culture we are fighting for, in contrast to what dominates the revolutionary left as a whole, don't just read the paper (11,070 of you did so online last week, by the way): look at the range of speakers we have featured over the years, and the important differences in the revolutionary movement we have openly addressed, including within our own ranks.

The guidelines we provide to those chairing each CU session underline that they are not there to act as the human equivalents of pub chalk boards, where punters scrawl their name to get in line for a game of pool. It is a political role and we explicitly try to bring to bring in minority views, and those from outside our ranks - the aim is to organise the discussion so that the key points of controversy are given the time and space to be properly aired.

The contrast with the bulk of the left could not be starker. There is a story - possibly apocryphal, but also, sadly, quite possibly not - of a wonderful *faux pas* a few years ago at the Socialist Workers Party annual school, Marxism. A young and inexperienced comrade chairing a large session at the event was being shepherded through the experience by SWP old hands. In addition to whispered advice and instructions, the comrade was also on the receiving end of a steady stream of written notes suggesting announcements she could make to the meeting.

Another arrived and she dutifully read out its contents, no doubt to the consternation of its now departed author, Lindsey German. The gist of it was along of the lines of: 'Don't let any speakers from the sects in - make sure SWP comrades talk'. Priceless.

Now, whatever the precise veracity of the details of this incident, it tells a real truth about the philistine culture that is all too often on display at the SWP's public events - and indeed too much of the rest of the left. The expression of political and theoretical differences is almost treated as an attempt to disrupt the meeting. Not quite of the same order as persistent drunken heckling or a lunge to chin the speaker, but not far off.

The full Communist University agenda is now online. Highlights include:

- The opening meeting on 'The Arab revolution - back on the agenda', with regular *Weekly Worker* contributor Moshé Machover and Mohammad Reza Shalgouni, a leading member of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar).

- A 'structured conversation', chaired by yours truly and dubbed, 'They fuck you up, the left ...' This is a session on the undemocratic and confessional nature of the contemporary left, also involving Pat Byrne (Towards a New International Tendency),



Debate requires giving a voice

Andy Wilson (ex-SWP and Association of Musical Marxists) and Simon Pirani (active in the Trotskyist movement in the 1970s and 80s).

- Hillel Ticktin on both contemporary features of the capitalist crisis and what it portends for the future of the system as a whole.

- James Turley on sci-fi and fantasy in a session titled 'Future worlds'.

- Chris Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group and our own Jack Conrad give us their 'Visions of communism'.

- On the opening Sunday, the CPGB's Mike Macnair presents our new *Draft*

programme (copies will be available to buy in booklet form) in the session 'What programmes are and why they are so important'.

All are welcome to attend Communist University - even critically minded comrades, with strong opinions at odds with the majority of today's CPGB! Which, unfortunately, makes the event, like our paper, really quite unique on the left ●

Mark Fischer

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COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY 2011

Saturday August 13 - Saturday August 20

Speakers include: **Moshé Machover** (Israeli socialist) **Mohammed Reza Shalgouni** (Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran) **Owen Jones** (author of *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class*) **Camilla Power** and **Chris Knight** (Radical Anthropology Group) **Hillel Ticktin** (editor of *Critique*) **Yassamine Mather** (chair, Hands Off the People of Iran) **Jack Conrad** and **Mike Macnair** (CPGB) **Anne Mc Shane** (*Weekly Worker* Ireland correspondent)

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

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weekly worker

For the right to bear arms

Norway massacre and state bans

One can almost hear the sound of knees jerking, as calls are heard from sections of the left for the state to take action against the far right following the massacre in Norway. Of course, we on the left feel particular sympathy for the victims of the conspiracy-obsessed far-right nationalist, Anders Brevik. There are 68 of them at the time of writing - mostly youth members of the ruling Labour Party enjoying their annual summer camp on the tiny island of Utøya.

In the past many on the left have called openly for the police to ban English Defence League marches and for the BBC to no-platform the British National Party and, true to form, some have taken the opportunity of the Norway outrage to demand that the UK government reacts in the 'appropriate way'. For example, the multiculturalist One Society, Many Cultures group, set up in November 2009 and supported by the likes of Ken Livingstone, Billy Hayes and some small left groups, demanded: "We call on the government to integrate far-right and fascist terror into Britain's counter-terrorism strategy."

Noting Brevik's affinity with the EDL, it states: "The anti-racist movement in Britain has consistently warned of the links of far right groups such as the EDL and the British National Party's acts of terrorism and violence, and the climate of Islamophobia which has emboldened them. However, the EDL have been allowed regular protests around the country, many of which have ended in violence, mostly directed at Muslim communities and mosques."

In similar vein, Nick Lowles of Hope Not Hate, writes on the Socialist Unity blog: "Prime minister David Cameron has promised to learn any lessons of the appalling events in Norway to ensure that this country is 'more secure against horrific outrages like this'. He could make a start by ordering the home office to reclassify the English Defence League. Despite the violence and racial hatred whipped up by this street gang, the authorities refuse to label the group as 'far-right extremists'. As a result the police do not monitor the group like they do dozens of Muslim organisations and take little interest in its activities With evidence pointing to Anders Brevik's admiration for the EDL and an increasingly militant tone being taken by EDL units across Britain, surely it is time for the authorities finally to take this threat seriously."

Such calls are completely misguided. The state and its police are not neutral bodies committed to the wellbeing of the population. They exist to defend the interests of the ruling class and do not need any encouragement to move against those they consider "extremists". It is suicidal for the left to demand that they take on yet more powers - powers that will certainly be used against our class and its organisations. Laws already exist against terror attacks and mass murder, and we should certainly not be calling on the police to "monitor" organisations simply for expressing their opinions, no matter how repulsive.



Gun training in Switzerland: an obligation

But the left has been quick to draw an equals sign between Brevik and the EDL, given that for a time Brevik floated in the EDL milieu. The Socialist Workers Party has used this link to exhort everyone to join the September 3 counterdemonstration against the EDL in Tower Hamlets. It has also taken the opportunity to emphasise the necessity of the 'no-platform' tactic in relation to the far right and of chasing the EDL from town to town via the SWP-controlled Unite Against Fascism (curiously enough, the UAF website does not list the SWP as a supporting organisation). Using the language of New Labour, the SWP says that fascists "target everyone that stands up for tolerance",

and so we must "confront the racists wherever they raise their heads".³ Physical confrontation is substituted for a Marxist programme for society, and the need to win the battle of ideas.

We have no problem with self-defence. In fact, we militantly advocate it. But reactionary ideas are best defeated when they are out in the open. We are certainly confident in the truth of Marxism and its power to see off the pathetic nationalism, Islamophobia and racism of the far right.

Also misguided are calls for increased state controls on firearms. In fact this incident should lead us to the opposite conclusion. Hundreds of people were left defenceless to

prevent Brevik's 90-minute rampage, when it is clear that if firearms had been available he could have been taken out within minutes. It would be an excellent thing if groups like the Norwegian Workers' Youth League conducted arms training and had the means to defend themselves instead of waiting in vain for the arrival of the police.

Why is the call for the right to bear arms considered so eccentric by the left - a call supported even by that arch-revisionist, Eduard Bernstein? In Switzerland, for example, service in the national militia is mandatory and, once trained, individuals are obliged to retain their firearms in civilian life. Serving militia members may carry

their arms openly in public. The total number of guns in private homes is estimated at between 1.2 and 3 million.

At best much of the left, if it does not actively support the disarming of the population, is silent on the right to be trained in, and be prepared for, armed self-defence. On one level the alienation caused by capitalist social relations, combined with the ability of reactionary and extreme ideologies to influence the unstable, is always likely to lead isolated individuals to arm themselves to the teeth in order to take their revenge on society or a section of it (as we have so tragically seen, the target could be a section of the workers' movement, irrespective of the extent to which it is incorporated into the mainstream).

In most countries someone who really wants to get hold of and use a gun cannot be stopped - the scale of the global black market in arms on its own virtually guarantees this. Indeed, in Norway the vast majority of illegal guns are obtained as a result of theft, often from military facilities. The question, however, of arms and training in their use cannot be posed in a liberal, individualist fashion based on the behaviour of lone psychopaths or criminals - a response that only handicaps any attempt by the working class to form itself into a powerful, independent force in society. Instead there must be a culture of self-defence and arms training that is universal, and adopted by the working class as a whole. The monopoly on the right to bear arms by the state must be broken.

The more power held by the state, the less is held by the working class - that is the essence of the class struggle. A key part of overcoming this imbalance is for the working class to have the right to self-defence; to bear arms and to be trained in their use ●

Michael Copestake

Notes

1. www.onesocietymanycultures.org/2011/07/one-society-many-cultures-condemns-norway-attacks-and-calls-on-government-to-take-measures-to-eradicate-far-right-terror.
2. www.socialistunity.com/?p=8358.
3. *Socialist Worker* July 30.

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Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

Total £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____