



weekly



worker

Lars T Lih's Lenin: the aim of emulating German social democracy was fully realised

- SPEW and Unison
- Abdul Omer Mohsin
- Donnacha DeLong
- US debt deal

No 877 Thursday August 4 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

A media regulator
with teeth:
are you crazy?



LETTERS



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

Deception

There are a number of things I would take issue with in James Turley's article ('Politics of press freedom', July 28).

Firstly, in relation to the position of the Socialist Workers Party, and its call to break up the Murdoch media empire, I would argue that this is a reactionary or at best a naive, reformist demand. Marxists do not respond to the existence of such monopolies by calling for a return to some previous, 'free market' form of capitalism. Lenin made that clear in *Imperialism*, in responding to the advocacy of such a course by Kautsky. Such monopolies arise out of free competition. Our solution is not a move backwards, but forwards towards socialism, which in the here and now can only mean arguing for workers to take over these monopolies, and to run them as worker-owned cooperatives.

Secondly, in relation to the position of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, you say that its position is better than that of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, because it is based on writings by Lenin in November 1917, and because it says that it is only advocating nationalisation under the auspices of a workers' government. Let's take the latter first. Its calls for a workers' government here and now are meaningless. The whole basis of Trotsky's *Transitional programme* is that the demands within it can only fulfil their function as being transitional between a reformist consciousness and a revolutionary consciousness if they are adopted within the context of a revolutionary situation. On the workers' government, he says:

"Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organisations possible? Past experience shows ... that this is, to say the least, highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances ... the petty bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere at some time becomes a reality and the 'workers' and farmers' government' in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat."

In fact, if we look at what the AWL is arguing for, it is that the Liberal-Tories be kicked out, and that a Labour government replace it. That is not a workers' government, and nor could it be in Trotsky's terms, for the simple reason that we are not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation! What the AWL's demand actually means for those living on planet Earth is for a Miliband government and the existing capitalist state to nationalise the mass media, and that is a thoroughly reactionary demand. You yourselves accept the idea in principle of nationalisation by the capitalist state, not just in this instance, but in others, but Trotsky says about such a position:

"It would, of course, be a disastrous error, an outright deception, to assert that the road to socialism passes, not through the proletarian revolution, but through nationalisation by the bourgeois

state of various branches of industry and their transfer into the hands of the workers' organisations" (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/xx/mexico03.htm).

And this is the problem also with the first part of the AWL's argument, basing itself on Lenin, writing about the situation in Russia in November 1917. It seems to have escaped the AWL's attention, and you do not seem to have picked up on it, that Lenin was writing at the time of a workers' revolution, of the establishment of soviets, of an actual workers' government and indeed of a workers' state. There are many policies that are appropriate to such conditions, but which are not acceptable for Marxists to raise within the context of an existing capitalist state. The Bolsheviks, under the conditions of a workers' state, for instance, argued for the implementation of import controls via a monopoly of foreign trade, as well indeed as the introduction of immigration controls. But it is not acceptable for a Marxist to raise such demands within the context of a capitalist state.

When Marx, in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, opposed the statist policies of Lassalle in relation to the demands for the capitalist state to intervene in this way, he also pointed out that such demands were not made any better by tagging on to them the call for democratic control, which was meaningless. Trotsky echoes Marx when he points out that it is ridiculous outside a revolutionary situation to demand workers' control over bourgeois property - and property owned by the capitalist state is bourgeois property. He writes:

"If the participation of the workers in the management of production is to be lasting, stable, 'normal', it must rest upon class-collaboration, and not upon class struggle. Such a class-collaboration can be realised only through the upper strata of the trade unions and the capitalist associations. There have been not a few such experiments: in Germany ('economic democracy'), in Britain ('Mondism'), etc. Yet, in all these instances, it was not a case of workers' control over capital, but of the subservience of the labour bureaucracy to capital ...

"... Workers' control through factory councils is conceivable only on the basis of sharp class struggle, not collaboration. But this really means dual power in the enterprises, in the trusts, in all the branches of industry, in the whole economy ... What we are talking about is workers' control under the capitalist regime, under the power of the bourgeoisie. However, a bourgeoisie that feels it is firmly in the saddle will never tolerate dual power in its enterprises" (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/310820.htm).

Now again I ask, is there anyone resident on planet Earth who believes that we are in such a situation of dual power?

The reality is that in practical terms the only way that workers can exercise control is if they are the owners of the means of production, and the only way that can be achieved in the here and now is by the workers establishing their own cooperative property. They may do that by a variety of means - from obtaining credit and buying them up, to occupying existing firms and obtaining the transfer of that property legally into their hands, as the workers at Zanon did. But any attempt to make workers believe that a socialist transformation can be achieved by the capitalist state nationalising property is, as Trotsky says, "an outright deception", and any attempt to persuade them that workers' control is possible whilst

ownership is not in their hands, can only lead to class-collaboration, not class struggle.

Arthur Bough
email

Psychos

In his podcast on the Norway massacre, while defending the right to bear arms, which would have meant people could have defended themselves against the fascist Breivik, the CPGB's John Bridge said this: "We know that people sometimes just flip out and start killing people."

Um, do we? Breivik is quite probably a psychopath, and we know he was planning this atrocity for ages. Had a half-trained psychologist been able to observe the man for a while, they would probably have identified something seriously wrong, with its origins in his life history. Maybe he would have killed a lot of people even without the influence of far-right ideas - we will never know. But I would emphasise the role of irrational and fascist ideas rather than any psychological issues that Breivik has.

Mental 'illness' is a social phenomenon created by concrete interactions between people, not something which just strikes out of the blue and makes one reach for the nearest assault rifle. People in tribal societies get depressed when a family member dies, but you won't find anyone with *depression* or 'schizophrenia' - though you will get altered states of mind induced during rituals/drug ceremonies. In fact, rates of 'schizophrenia' are highest in the poorest and most oppressed sections of capitalist society, like young black men.

Many of these people are just trying desperately to retain some autonomy and humanity in the face of conflicting demands on them, a repressive nuclear family and alienated society, and grinding poverty. Symptoms start to occur which result in the individual being labelled 'schizophrenic', and being doped up on drugs or committed to an entirely dehumanising institution (removing the problem), or in times past subjected to electro-shock treatment.

To return to the point, people with 'schizophrenia', which is what we are generally referring to when we talk about madness, are on average only very slightly more likely to be involved in violence than anyone else. And, given confusion, delusions, society's reaction to these individuals and the possibly violent communities these individuals may be in, that would hardly be a shock. Breivik seems more like a psychopath than a schizoid to me, to the extent these labels are meaningful.

Psychopathy indicates a complete lack of empathy caused by a total failure to develop interpersonal attachments, and is associated with parental neglect and abuse. Some estimates put the rate of psychopathy at 1% of the population, which means they're all around you. Obviously, they don't all flip out and start killing people. But they *can* perform awful violence coldly and without emotion.

Breivik also became a proponent of an irrational, nationalist and militarist doctrine of cultural superiority, which is creeping across Europe. In the Netherlands, people are saying this atrocity means we should kick out the Muslims, to stop more such individuals taking matters into their own hands.

I sincerely hope that when we have achieved a (mostly) human existence in socialism, we will no longer need to carry our rifles *everywhere*, just in case someone goes Judge Dredd. I mean, do you know how much those things weigh?

By the way, the Swiss battle rifles

are automatic during militia service, then sent back to the factory and converted to semi-auto before being returned to their owner.

Laurie McCauley
email

Myopic

Let's recap on all the hoo-ha about Britishness and selfish British workers campaigning to save their jobs. The closure of the last rail carriage-making firm, Bombardier, has been announced and tens of thousands of direct, associated and ancillary workers are doomed to long-term and permanent unemployment.

The already blighted communities, hard pressed from previous mass industrial closure and run-down, have been given an added, terminal kick in the guts. The question was raised at a Coalition of Resistance conference, which by its title suggests they would have some interest in this matter. A resolution condemning the closure and loss of jobs was put. The CPGB, Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power *voted against the resolution*. They put no alternative resolution. In retrospect and much after the horse has bolted, my old comrade Peter Manson comes up with an excellent amendment which could have been put by the CPGB at the conference, *but wasn't* ('British jobs for British workers?', July 28).

On the face of it, this is a disgraceful position. Without the bullshit, if you were a worker at Bombardier, wouldn't this read as if those self-declared 'workers' vanguards' actually do *not* condemn the closure and are *not* against it? How else could you read it? The reason for voting against? The resolution wasn't 'pure' enough. There are all sorts of politically correct tulips we have to tip-toe through so as not to appear chauvinistic and nationalistic because the work has gone to Germany.

Peter Manson tells us of efforts to defend these jobs: "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." Let's just call the workers at Bombardier *British workers*, not because I or they support the British state or 'British capitalism', whatever that might be, but because they live in Britain and actually were already doing the job. That the German workers aren't actually doing these jobs seems neither here nor there. German workers are not having existing jobs taken from them; this is additional work for them at the expense of the workers already doing the work.

'We' have to accept that that's the way the game is played, it seems. We have to recognise that under capitalism workers will lose their jobs and companies will go under. It seems the existing set-up is quite fair then; certainly fairer than demanding the work stays here and the last outpost of this form of manufacture stays in existence. To challenge this outrageous autocratic system is, we are told, to postulate all sorts of "backward" ideas of superiority.

The workers at Derby, however, don't give a monkey's that the company they work for is Canadian or that the jobs have gone to Germany. They are pissed off that the valuable job they did has been whisked away by unforeseen hands in a game where they have no influence over the rules. The work they did provided a valuable much-needed, socially useful article that they were skilled at making and brought in the bacon.

Why is it politically incorrect to mention that the rules by which this decision was made were indeed fouled by uneven application of social costs? Why weren't social costs offset

against the price being tendered, as they are in other EU countries? Isn't that a fair question?

When Thatcher came to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers, she used the argument of unviable pits and cheap foreign coal. The purpose of the endeavour, of course, had nothing whatever to do with finance or profitability and, when we were forced to examine the relative costs, we could easily prove British coal was the cheapest on offer anywhere. Not that this was the point, but simply to demonstrate another agenda was being played out here and, in my view, still is. The British manufacturing working class is being systemically exterminated. It is a process already well underway in important sections of other European manufacturing countries too. It's not just here, although at this point on this issue other European economies have managed by use of the existing rules to prevent closure of this particular form of manufacture.

Peter asks why it is better that the social costs I spoke of in Britain be borne by Germans instead. Well, they shouldn't and won't be, and that's the obvious point. The social costs I speak of will not be paid in Germany and France on similar 'native' tenders because they are deducted from the final bid price making their bids cheaper and therefore *the jobs are retained*. There is nothing wrong with that. I'm not complaining about that, and neither are the workers. What's wrong is that *it's not being done here* and, worse, to argue that *it should be taken into account here* is some kind of racist advocacy. You want workers to accept that different rules apply here than elsewhere in the interests of not being somehow selfish or 'nationalist'. It is a nonsense our comrade workers in Germany or France or Italy would never tolerate, and that doesn't make them nationalist, sectionalist or chauvinistic either.

Peter talks of the splendid march of 10,000 workers in Derby fighting to save Bombardier. Did the CPGB turn out with its banners demanding nationalisation under workers' control? Such a slogan, of course, demands the *continuation* of the work at Derby, which effectively means 'British jobs for British workers', by the way. This demand would mean a challenge and defiance to the EU structure and rules, which would also make an interesting additional slogan and leadership. It would need to be linked to occupation of the factory, a work-in, solidarity action on the railways, taking the carriages and running them, mass public support in using them.

To a cretin, this would look like little British nationalism again, but it would be nothing of the sort. What would be the point of nationalising the plant and continuing to produce the carriages if no-one was going to use them? This strategy would only make sense if indeed the work stayed in Derby and the carriages were continued to be produced and utilised. Such a strategy would have to be imposed by the organised strength of the whole labour movement. But, before we get carried away, remember how this debate started: *none* of this was offered. Instead we got a direct negative to the demand of stopping the closure, a *de facto* acceptance of the closure. The implication that fighting to save jobs and production in Britain is 'sectionalism and nationalism' is a truly bizarre conclusion based on too many years of liberal middle class PC overindulgence, which now renders much of the self-declared 'far left' myopic and subject to political visual distortion.

To declare, as Peter does, that demanding the British government

invests in jobs in Britain “stinks of nationalism” leaves us at rather a dead end. Instead Peter and the so-called ‘left’ offer jam tomorrow, and it is very thin at that. I notice a total avoidance in all the programmes quoted by Peter of any reference to restructuring and reconstructing manufacturing here. To demand that basic coal, steel, shipbuilding, construction, maritime marine, engineering and other forms of manufacture be rebuilt, so that we, the working class, at least have the potential to take it into our own hands and control. This is a strategic consideration in the global class struggle and not simply a partisan one.

Dave Douglass
South Shields

CPGB Labourism

Chris Jones’s letter identifies the attitude of militant workers to the Labour Party (July 14). This runs into contradiction with the CPGB line on Labour. He argues the CPGB had a left-sectarian attitude to the political needs of militant workers when it was active in the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance and Respect. If the CPGB is aiming to become an active part of the Labour Party, it is turning to the right.

In response Peter Manson explains that the CPGB is the only group on the left that has been serious about the Labour Party. Hence Chris is accused of taking up “cudgels” on behalf of

militant workers “against the CPGB’s long-standing call for the left to adopt a serious attitude towards the Labour Party” (Letters, July 21). This is incorrect on two grounds.

First, Peter’s claim that the CPGB is the only section of the left which is “serious” about the Labour Party is surely a bit of braggadocio. He is speaking only to CPGB members, perhaps to bolster morale or silence the doubters. But you can’t win an Oscar by boasting you are the world’s best actor. It depends on what the other actors think of the claim.

Second, Chris did not take up cudgels against the CPGB’s “serious” attitude, but against its wrong attitude. He is pointing to the obvious contradictions in the CPGB’s theory of ‘halfway house’ parties - not least the claim that it is OK to join working class organisations, but not ‘set them up’. This is apparently the main difference between the CPGB and Revolutionary Democratic Group.

Peter’s second argument is about CPGB continuity. I am sure he accepts the CPGB has changed its position, not least because of polemics against an ultra-left faction in the CPGB reported in the *Weekly Worker*. But Peter argues that “our current approach to Labour represents a continuation, not a break”.

This is not an argument against what Chris says. He argued that the CPGB’s former position was ultra-left or left-sectarian. Now CPGB members

want to become part of Labour. Every Marxist knows that switching from left sectarianism to right opportunism is not a break. It is a continuation of the old mistakes by other means. So in this sense Peter’s argument about CPGB’s line as ‘continuation, not break’ is correct.

The CPGB must break with Labourism. This is not achieved by getting involved in Labour Party activity for unclear or dubious aims. In the past the CPGB’s Labourism was camouflaged by pseudo-revolutionary slogans against compromise. The change of line is merely clearing away that old garbage. Compromise is in the air. As the fog clears, many will be startled if they see the CPGB sitting in Miliband’s Labour Party, the enemy of militant working class struggle.

Peter is right to point out to CPGB members that this is continuity of method. Labourism carries on in a new form. The Labour Party is opposed to a republican socialist party because it is neither republican nor socialist. If Marxism is now the servant of Miliband and co, it must develop some ‘Marxist’ theory against it. Peter speaks about a republican socialist party as a “necessary stage” in the formation of a communist party. Hence he sees the need to impose limitations on the leading role of communists.

Steve Freeman
South London

SUMMER OFFENSIVE

Comrade Williams and the world of things

Since I penned last week’s column, we have had a good seven days in our annual fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive. New money now in comes to £2,395, taking our running total to £16,061. With over two weeks to go before the end of the campaign - including the eight days of Communist University, our annual school - it’s looking good for the £25k overall target by August 20.

The campaign that runs within the SO this year - to raise an extra £300 a month in standing orders to support this paper - also saw an increase, thanks to new regular donations from YM, JM and NJ. The running total now stands at £224 extra promised every month (despite an unfortunate downwards adjustment, a result of one comrade having second thoughts).

Around £360 was added to the pot this week by the party comrades who staffed some of the booze, book and second-hand clothes stalls at the Hackney WickED arts festival over the (extended) weekend of July 29-31. They report an exhausting, but fun time amongst the 20,000-30,000 attendees at the successful event - indeed, such a success that rumours abounded this year of a corporate take over by Red Bull, the manufacturer of the aggressively marketed energy drink that tastes like a Tizer/cough medicine cocktail ... in this writer’s opinion (he added hurriedly, for legal reasons ...).

That said, my attention was drawn this week to a possible donor to this year’s campaign who one might regard as being thoroughly saturated in the same crass corporate world of officially sponsored arts and media. Yes, comrades, Robbie Williams - once part of the hugely successful boy band, Take That - has, according to a Canadian website, used his blog to out himself as a communist: “Capitalistic conspiracy? I’m with

you. The system is destined to explode and I think it’s sooner rather than later ... If we could get communism to work without corruption ... I’m in. The Rolls Royce Phantom is the ultimate symbol (for me any way) of our desire for ‘stuff’ and it’s all ‘stuff’... Bullshit when you break it down. Consume, consume, consume ... we’re at the tipping point, my friends” (www.winnipegfree-press.com).

In the same posting, our comrade Williams goes on to confess his pain over this “Rolls Royce Phantom” temptation of his, as it would be a “vulgar display of wealth” - the (admittedly beautiful) machine costs £490,000 and he asks his blog readers to vote on whether he treats himself to it or not.

Now, it’s easy to be dismissive about this and make cynical, but facile points about the guilt pangs of the rich, how verbal radicalism of this sort might win you a ‘shock-horror!’ headline or two if you have a new album to promote. (I have no idea whether the bloke has or not - and, please, if you’re a fan, don’t write in ...). That is not a Marxist approach, however.

This paper has been criticised by the crasser elements of the revolutionary left for its nuanced approach to the death of Diana, princess of Wales, for instance. Also, in a perceptive article, Eddie Ford commented on the “not entirely dissimilar ... wave of anguish generated by the equally sudden, shock death of Diana Spencer” that marked the demise of that pop Peter Pan, Michael Jackson. As an individual, Jackson was “a sad masterclass in alienation and estrangement”, comrade Ford wrote. Indeed, “rather than an enviable superstar in charge of his own destiny, Jackson was more a slave to celebrity culture and its addictive, gaudy trappings. Hence his crazily self-indulgent spending

patterns, akin to a decadent monarch or aristocrat of old” (*Weekly Worker* July 2 2009).

As Marx wrote in his *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844, “the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion to the devaluation of the world of men” - ie, the reduction of human beings and their intrinsic human capacity to produce stuff of use - whether that happens to be a widget or a pop song - to a thing, a commodity, something that can be bought and sold in an alienated form.

All of which is a long-winded manner of urging Robbie Williams - as an aspiring communist - to turn his back on his ‘phantoms’, forego that *thing*, his lusted-after Rolls Royce - and donate the near half million he would squander on it to this year’s SO. (I’m sure one of our comrades was advertising a Ford Cortina for sale a little while ago - I’ll pass on the details if Robbie feels he really needs a set of wheels ...).

This paper champions genuine Marxism. This is a politics that has viable answers to a generalised crisis that grips us as a species; it is not the revenge project of one particular class on the rest of society. Our readers (there were 11,386 of them online last week) - many of whom are still in the ranks of other left groups rather than our own - recognise that about us and that is who we appeal to in this fight to support our paper and our annual fund drive.

It would be nice to be able to report a substantial cheque from a ‘comrade RW’ next week that took us over the £25k target - or even way beyond it. But the actual comrades we are relying on are reading us now; working class partisans and militants who form the backbone of our common movement.

Just over two weeks, comrades - £9,000 to go!

Mark Fischer

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

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

Glasgow against the cuts

Monday August 8, 7.30pm: Mobilising meeting to unite the fights, STUC offices, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow.
Organised by Right to Work Scotland: righttowork.org.uk.

Coalition of Resistance

Saturday August 20, 12 noon: National Council meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Help build the autumn of resistance.
Organised by Coalition of Resistance: coalitionofresistance@mail.com.

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.

Europe against Austerity

Saturday October 1, 10am: Conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1 (nearest station: Kings Cross). European-wide conference against cuts and privatisation, which will assert the primacy of human need over the demands of finance. This resistance needs to be international, and coordinated. Supporters include: Attac France, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (France), Sinn Féin (Ireland), Committee Against the Debt (Greece), Cobas (Italy), Plataforma pels Drets Socials de Valencia (Spain), Attac Portugal, Joint Social Conference.
Registration: £3 unwaged, £5 waged, £10 delegate.
Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.europeagainstausterity.org.

Cable Street anniversary

Sunday October 2, 11.30am: March, Aldgate East (junction of Braham Street and Leman Street), London E1. Remember the historic victory and send a powerful message of unity against today’s forces of fascism, racism and anti-Semitism. Part of an anniversary weekend of events, including stalls, street theatre, music, exhibition, book launch, discussion and film.
Organised by the Cable Street Group: cablestreet36@gmail.com.

Rebellious media

Saturday October 8, & Sunday October 9, 10am: Conference, Central London (venue tbc). ‘Media, activism and social change.’ Speakers include: Noam Chomsky; John Pilger, Laurie Penny, Johann Hari, Matthew Alford, Zoe Broughton, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts, New Economics Foundation, Open Rights Group, Spinwatch, UK Uncut and many more.
Organised by Radical Media Conference: www.radicalmediaconference.org.

10 years after

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

Latin America 2011

Saturday October 8, 6.30pm: Lecture, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Noam Chomsky on solidarity with Latin America. Tickets £5: 020 8800 0155.
Organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.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.

SPEW

Giving up on Unison

Members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales employed by two local councils in London have resigned from Britain's largest public sector union. Peter Manson sees a parallel in SPEW's abandonment of Labour

The July 20 issue of *The Socialist* casually reports: "Bromley council Unison's officers and stewards have resigned from Unison *en masse* and are to join the union, Unite. After long and dedicated service to Unison their decision was not a light one. They are calling on all the council's Unison members to join them. This now leaves Bromley council in south London without a single council Unison representative."

So the largest proportion of unionised workers, belonging to the biggest public service union, is now unrepresented. What is there to crow about in that? Bromley is one of the Unison branches placed under "regional supervision" - ie, controlled dictatorially by the bureaucracy - following the witch-hunting of branch officers who are members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. But instead of continuing to lead the fightback from within Unison, the SPEW comrades have abandoned ship and gone over to Unite.

Incredibly, one of the defectors is Kathy Smith, until two weeks ago the branch chair, who had just been elected to Unison's national executive. *The Socialist* notes that she had stood "on a clear anti-witch-hunt platform, demanding the lifting of the bans on holding office imposed on Glenn Kelly and three other London Unison activists - the 'Four' - and the lifting of the regional supervision of branches." Why on earth has she thrown in the towel?

The Unison Four were found guilty by a union kangaroo court of causing 'racial offence' after they issued a leaflet critical of the standing orders committee (SOC) at the beginning of the 2007 annual conference. Specifically the leaflet carried a cartoon of the proverbial 'three monkeys' ('See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil') and the union bureaucracy absurdly alleged that this was a racist attack on Unison's black membership and, in particular, the black chair of the SOC. Although the accusation of racist intent was later withdrawn, the allegation of causing offence was upheld and the four, including Bromley branch secretary Glenn Kelly, were banned from holding office for up to five years.

The four - Onay Kasab, Suzanne Muna, Brian Debus and comrade Kelly - decided to take their case to a state employment tribunal and in March this year finally won. The tribunal found that "all the claimants were unjustifiably disciplined contrary to section 64 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidated) Act 1992" (this followed an earlier setback, when a tribunal ruled that the four had not suffered discrimination because of their views). But the leadership would not back down, and refused to lift the bans. So, instead of stepping up their campaign within Unison, in at least two branches the comrades have decided to look for greener pastures - that is, a union where SPEW had a better chance of winning branch positions in the here and now, albeit one with a smaller membership.

In her statement comrade Smith points to the inaction of the leadership-imposed Unison officials in fighting the Bromley council attacks on the workforce - this on top of the attempt to "effectively strangle the rights of



Always with the masses?

the branch and its members and its ability to resist the cuts". They have "sat back and not led a single campaign in defence of members". And she says that "it has been shocking to find out from senior officers of the council that these union officials have been regularly meeting with our Tory employers".

I wonder how many union organisations there are where officials fail to fight the bosses effectively, preferring negotiation to mobilisation, and pay little or no heed to democracy. Of course, this is a particularly blatant and despicable case, but does that really justify walking away? Of course not. It is the duty of revolutionaries to fight where the mass of workers are, irrespective of the obstacles. Our movement has seen a whole history of militants, particularly communists, being subject to bans. There have been many examples of comrades overcoming all such adversity - for instance, the largest union confederation in Spain, the Workers' Commissions, started life in the 1970s as part of the fascist 'Vertical Syndicate', the only 'union' allowed under Franco's dictatorship.

But our SPEW comrades are rather less patient. *The Socialist* reports what apparently caused comrades Smith and Kelly to abandon Unison: "When Kathy attended her first NEC on July 13, she tried to carry out her mandate. She proposed that if the position of the union is that it would not break the law then it should lift the bans, as the union

has been found guilty in a court of law of illegally imposing them. She also complained that there is no right in the rule book for branches to be taken into regional supervision and that under the rules the NEC must not do anything that is not within the rule book ... Unfortunately the NEC was not even allowed to debate these issues and she was simply told it wasn't a matter for the NEC."

Talk about giving up the fight before the battle has begun.

According to Labour Representation Committee and Unison member Marsha Thompson, "No-one can now be found who will admit in public to believing that formal disciplinary action was the correct response to the production of that leaflet." The witch-hunt against SPEW has effectively ended, she says. That is why the comrades are "badly wrong" to have deserted what is "the largest local government trade union by many a mile. As important as local organisation is - and it is vitally important - none of the fundamental problems which we face in local government can be resolved other than nationally. Socialists who want to change things for the better are, if working in local government, better placed to achieve this as Unison members than in any other trade union. Outside of Unison you choose to have no say over the negotiating position of the majority of national negotiators. As hard as it may sometimes be for Unison activists to feel that we can positively influence our leadership, it would be a

hundred times harder outside Unison" (various email lists, July 21).

Comrade Thompson states that no comrade should let "feelings about their personal treatment ... come before the interests of our class". She goes on to point out that "The vast majority of people in Bromley who leave Unison won't join Unite - they just won't join anything."

So is she right? Well, we have the example of Greenwich, comrade Thompson's former branch, where another member of the Unison Four, Onay Kasab, has long been treading the path now taken by comrades Kelly and Smith. Soon after he was barred from office, comrade Kasab joined *both* of the other two main unions that represent council workers, Unite and GMB. Greenwich militants at first believed 'Kas' was simply covering himself. After all, he had been a thorn in the side of Greenwich council for many years and had reason to fear that management might take advantage of the Unison witch-hunt to target him for dismissal. But, while retaining his Unison membership, he more or less openly began campaigning for workers, including those belonging to Unison, to join Unite. Eventually he was expelled for "poaching" Unison members.

That was in March 2011. But the following month he was elected Unite branch secretary. Despite SPEW protestations of innocence, its comrades had been encouraging Unison members to switch. A few

dozen of those around the former Unison branch leadership did so, to the extent that by April 26, when the newly established Greenwich Unite branch held its first meeting following a merger of its white-collar and blue-collar sections, the left swept the board. *The Socialist* reported at the time that comrade Kasab won 132 votes, while his rightwing opponent got just 12:

"When the result was announced, virtually the whole room erupted into cheering. This sent a clear message - workers do not forget a fighting record, no matter the slurs or slanders. It also sent a clear message to the Unison witch-hunters, who used undemocratic methods to impose their administration of the Greenwich Unison branch and who have expelled Onay from Unison. When the question is put to workers to decide, they will choose fighting leaders."

The article concludes: "Rebuilding Unite in Greenwich is now an urgent task. This will be done in the teeth of the battle against the cuts. What is clear from the campaign is that there are hundreds of workers who will now be joining Unite very quickly as a result of this election. Workers over the last few weeks took Unite forms, while saying that they would only be joining if Onay was elected" (May 1).

Many Greenwich Unison militants had previously believed that comrade Kasab had been acting alone, without the support of SPEW. But this article - and then the defections in Bromley - removed any last doubts that the organisation as a whole had decided upon this course.

It is a course that has a certain parallel with SPEW's actions in relation to the Labour Party. When members of what was then Militant Tendency, SPEW's forerunner, were witch-hunted by the Labour Party machine, the group subsequently declared that this proved Labour was now no longer any kind of working class party and set out to persuade anyone it could to form a Labour Party mark two. It gave up on the possibility of the unions being made to fight for workers within Labour. Now, it seems, SPEW has given up on the possibility of Unison being made to fight effectively for the members. Unite is to be a 'Unison mark two'.

But, despite the upbeat article quoted above, the latest move seems destined to go the same way as all SPEW attempts to coax a replacement Labour Party into existence. Greenwich Unison has a far larger membership than Unite - I am told that, while Unison's membership stands at between 2,000 and 3,000, Unite has about 1,000. Unison has far more members than Unite and GMB combined. But even this tells only half the story. Less than 50% of Greenwich council staff are members of *any* union.

So can we expect this new SPEW policy to be replicated across the country? Will all SPEW Unison comrades switch to Unite, taking a few hundred supporters with them across the country? And what happens if SPEW then becomes the subject of a witch-hunt by their new union's bureaucracy? Will it give up on Unite too? ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

UNITE

Kavanagh's shameful letter

Force the union to act in defence of Abdul Omer Mohsin, urges A J Byrne

This is the text of the letter written by a Unite union bureaucrat to sacked bus driver and union activist Abdul Omer Mohsin, as posted on the internet by Brent TUC:

July 8 2011

Dear Omer

I hope you are keeping well.

It has been brought to my attention that you have paid no union subscriptions since December 2010 and are currently therefore in arrears of £228.82.

You will be aware that Unite has taken a decision to support your claim to a tribunal in spite of advice received by our lawyers about the poor prospect of a successful outcome and even of the danger of costs being awarded in the event of losing.

Unite has paid substantial amounts of money to you in terms of hardship.

You will be aware that you need to maintain your membership position if you wish the union to act on your behalf. Will you please therefore make arrangements, without delay, to forward your backdated subscriptions to the membership register department, Unite the Union, 218 Green Lanes, Finsbury Park, London N4 2HB. You will also need to make immediate arrangements to recommence your membership if you wish us to continue to support you.

Yours sincerely

Peter Kavanagh

regional secretary (acting)

This is surely one of the most spiteful and vindictive letters ever written by a trade union official to a victimised member. It is a complete fraud, full of so many distortions, half-truths and dissimulations that its message amounts to a total lie about what has happen to Socialist Workers Party member Omer.

It was obviously sent in response to the Facebook posting on Gerry Downing's site of my article, 'The hounding of Abdul Omer Mohsin by Unite the Union' at 12.35pm on the day the letter was written (a version of this article appeared in the *Weekly Worker* on July 14). It contained the following sentence: "Anyway, it seems that other union rules were ignored: Omer should have been written to, to inform him of the arrears before expulsion."

Let us analyse Kavanagh's shameful letter in some detail:

"I hope you are keeping well."

We might conclude from the tone of this letter that he was hoping to produce the exact opposite state of health. It was clearly written to increase the psychological pressure on Omer. The Facebook post had detailed his very fragile state - he had collapsed twice just over a week previously, after he had been given the bum's rush by one S Higgins, the appallingly brutal bureaucratic stand-in chair of the regional industrial sector committee meeting at Chelmsford on June 29.

Omer had previously written to Kavanagh informing him that he was suffering acute stress because of the prolonged investigation by the acting regional secretary into his branch over payments made to Omer and the subsequent withholding of monies collected for him using this excuse. This was a delaying tactic which produced nothing at all, except to defer by several months the union's 'support' for Omer.

If the intention of the letter was to push Omer over the top yet again, it had the desired effect. Omer suffered another panic attack, accompanied by

racing heart beat and an ambulance had to be called.

"It has been brought to my attention that you have paid no union subscriptions since December 2010 and are currently therefore in arrears of £228.82."

As Kavanagh was the central Unite figure dealing with Omer's sacking, he was aware of when he got sacked and that he had been unemployed ever since, so should have been on unemployed rates. When Omer enquired of the membership register department, he was told he owed £16.00, not £228.82.

The Facebook post had commented: "The ignorant bureaucrat [who we now know was S Higgins] refused to sign the expenses sheet, saying Omer was not a union member and should not even be at the [Chelmsford] meeting, as he had not paid his union dues since he was sacked - what backstabber went to the trouble to dig that out?" Now we know who that backstabber was who verbally informed/instructed Higgins to do the dirty on Omer. However, he was so anxious to dump on Omer that he forget to enquire what the records actually showed; or did Omer not 'officially' inform them of his sacking, so Unite did not know?

"You will be aware that Unite has taken a decision to support your claim to a tribunal in spite of advice received by our lawyers about the poor prospect of a successful outcome and even of the danger of costs being awarded in the event of losing."

During Christmas 2010 retired Unison member John Tymon, who had been shop steward, housing convenor, branch secretary and finally president of local government union Nalگو in Brent, met Omer and discussed his case. Tymon wrote to Unite members and other trade unionists involved with the case: "I have just made a social call to Omer and I was shocked and disgusted at the way his case is going." Although Thompsons Solicitors had been given the case, Tymon discovered that the most basic work had not been done. Thompsons' Ellie Reeves was appointed, but not provided with the most basic information, so that prospects could not be assessed.

Tymon found Abdul Omer in very low spirits. He had tragically lost his only daughter only months previously, he had no money, had not eaten properly for days, was at risk of losing his home and whatever sleep he grabbed was in an armchair between cups of coffee. He felt deeply hurt by the fact that those he had supported for so long had deserted him.

Tymon spent the next three months with Omer doing what Unite officers were being paid to do, but had grossly and wilfully neglected. He even had to chase up Unite officials. He listed the witnesses, obtained statements from them and typed them up. They recalled detailed accounts of several meetings and events, which he then sent to Thompsons, who were now seeing the full horrors of Abdul Omer's case for the first time. He arranged meetings for himself and Abdul with the solicitors and finally met counsel.

After three months of hard work they briefed the barrister appointed by Thompsons to assess the case on February 18 2011. This was the first proper legal assessment of Abdul Omer's case. Having read all the information, the barrister was convinced that the case was a winner,



Abdul Omer Mohsin

but was worried that the long delay might have weakened the case for reinstatement. So we are entitled to ask which lawyers gave Kavanagh the advice which contradicts the barrister's opinion and what the details are.

Tymon comments: "... any organisation, whether trade union or other organisation representing workers, that will stand idly by and fail to defend the very best of its fighters, particularly when they are framed up, as is the case with Abdul Omer, cannot lay claim to represent workers, and must be picketed and pilloried, until they are forced to stand up and fight. Otherwise our task must be to rid Unite of such cowards."

When Omer was sacked on March 30 2010, Unite immediately applied for interim relief - ie, protection of earnings, which the bus company, Sovereign, would have to pay - but they withdrew the application soon after. This was obviously done following advice from those dealing with Omer's case, the regional industrial organiser (RIO), Wayne King, and Peter Kavanagh. These two had organised the annulment of the parity agreement of the Sovereign drivers with London United which Omer had negotiated and which would have resulted in a hike of £4,000 per annum for this workforce, one of the lowest paid in London. Omer discovered the process for annulment was already in train when he went to clear his locker following the loss of his appeal.

This is in contrast to the actions of the RMT, which pressed for and won interim relief from London Underground for its two sacked union activists, Arwyn Thomas and Eamonn Lynch. The *Evening Standard* reported: "Employment tribunals ruled that Arwyn Thomas and Eamonn Lynch, both from south London, should be paid their £45,000 salary until full hearings take place" (May 4). This judgement obviously helped to win the employment tribunal later. But the RIO, Wayne King, insisted that the evidence relating to trade union activity should not be part of Omer's defence in his disciplinary hearing or appeal. By extension he argued it therefore should not be part of the employment tribunal case either. According to King, it would harm the chances of victory in the tribunal if the union won protection of earnings.

John Tymon's intervention thwarted that plan. The barrister confirmed that the withdrawal of Unite's claim for interim relief and

delaying tactics in securing industrial action harmed the chances of victory, as it seemed to indicate that the union did not believe it could win. As is shown by Kavanagh's letter and the union's actions, Unite does not want him to win reinstatement either via a tribunal or through industrial action and have put every obstacle in his path to prevent him doing so.

As to the threat of costs being awarded against Unite, according to Emplaw.co.uk, "An award of costs is especially likely if the tribunal considers that 'the party in bringing the proceedings, or he or his representative in conducting the proceedings, acted vexatiously, abusively, disruptively or otherwise unreasonably, or that the bringing or conducting of proceedings was misconceived' (at one time the power to award costs arose only where conduct was 'frivolous or vexatious', but over the years it has been gradually, but considerably, widened to get to the current position)" (www.emplaw.co.uk/lawguide?startpage=data/2004rule38.htm).

But Kavanagh believed he had manoeuvred matters to such an extent that Omer's whole case, based on the previous history of victimisation because of union activity, would be ignored. All the evidence of company manoeuvres and the whole reasons behind the sackings would not be examined, the union would surreptitiously convey to the tribunal its desired outcome and a rightwing judge would obligingly concur. The lawyers and barrister would be misinformed and so be unable to put Omer's case in full. But Tymon's intervention has scuppered this plan, although Kavanagh does not seem to be aware of this.

"Unite has paid substantial amounts of money to you in terms of hardship."

Up to when Omer came to the London Grass Roots Left meeting on Monday July 11 he had received just £3,000 from Unite, but all monies had dried up from all sources by then, which is why the possession order was issued against him for non-payment of his mortgage.

In fact Unite did no more than issue an appeal to branches to help Omer and then the London and South East region pledged to match any funds raised from its branches. The bulk of the £3,000 was collected in Scotland and the Midlands by SWP members and other left individuals on the strength of the official appeal. Less than £500 was raised from branches in his own region, so that was all that Unite matched from central funds.

However, Unite had no shortage of funds when it came to looking after one of its own treacherous bureaucrats. The *Dear Unite* website and a subsequent *Guardian* article shows where the true interests of the union leaders lie - in defending their own privileges: "It's just been revealed that ex-general secretary [Derek] Simpson was paid £510,659 last year. This was made up of £361,347 in severance pay, £97,677 in gross salary, and more than £51,000 in housing benefit and car allowances." (www.dearunite.com/2011/07/simpsons-golden-wheelchair.html). It is not known whether Kavanagh wrote a letter to Simpson complaining of the cost to the union.

Apparently it is outrageously excessive when Unite spends less than £500 on a union militant to keep him going for a year and a half, but perfectly acceptable to hand out £500,000 in a year to a useless

bureaucrat, who spent his life dumping on the membership. We will leave it to the readers to decide who got the "substantial amounts" and who was in need of hardship assistance.

When Omer came to that London Grass Roots Left meeting he was at his wits' end. Indeed his case had now been publicised in the *Weekly Worker*, but still he could not pay his mortgage; he was three months in arrears, threatened with a repossession order and facing imminent homelessness, but had nowhere to get the £1,050. He was hiding in his house, afraid to turn on the lights and fearful of the next knock on the door. Shamefully at first we still treated it as business as usual, making plans to launch a new appeal in the unions, etc. But Socialist Fight's Charlie Walsh intervened in the end with a typical outburst: "If we had a victimised member like that in the old Workers' Revolutionary Party, we would make sure he could survive and pay his bills. I will give £100 now - that's what's needed". Gerry Downing promised to match it and the following morning launched an appeal based on the two donations. Within two or three days money to cover the entire mortgage arrears was raised and the SWP leadership were shamed into promising to fund Omer's mortgage until his hearing in November.

It must be stressed that Omer won this particular battle because he 'played the field': he appealed to, and participated in, a wide range of organisations outside the remit of the SWP, according to his political sympathies and preferences; and fortunately he found militants prepared to push his case independently of the SWP and the Unite bureaucracy and regardless of the disapproval of that latter corrupt organisation. It is worth recording those initial donors (some are retired or low-waged) and their organisations:

Charlie Walsh (Socialist Fight, Grass Roots Left and Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group): £100; Gerry Downing (SF, GRL and IRPSG): £100; Natalie (Workers Power and GRL): £50; anonymous (Free Mumia Abu Jamal campaign): £100; Carol Foster (SF, GRL and IRPSG): £50; John Tymon (GRL and IRPSG): £50; Sheila Cohen (GRL): £50; Tushar Sarkar (GRL): £50; Bridget and Ant (J7, Free Mohammed Hamid): £100; Michael Holden (IRPSG): £50; Amanda Logan (SWP): £100; Graham Campbell (SWP): £100; Ben Rickman: £60; Chris Ford (GRL): £50.

There were many more SWP and other donations later, but as yet we only have the details of these initial vital ones.

Nothing will move the Unite bureaucrats apart from a public campaign and a revolt of their members; it is to the members of his own union in the two bus garages of Edgware and Harrow that he must orient now: they hold the key. We (all his genuine political supporters in all political groups and none) must launch a support group modelled on the Defend Yunus Bakhsh campaign. The employment tribunal found Yunus was unfairly dismissed by Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Trust because of trade union activities in July 2010 after a vigorous model public campaign by the SWP and a wider range of other trade unionists.

Omer needs a campaign of lobbying and public meetings, etc, to demand an official ballot for industrial action for his reinstatement after a full campaign explaining the whole case to all the members ●

MEDIA

A regulator with teeth: are you crazy?



What is going to replace the Press Complaints Commission?

Talk about a hostage to fortune - as soon as this writer detects a "momentary let-up" in the phone-hacking saga,¹ we get a new crop of developments.

Another senior News International figure, former *News of the World* managing editor Stuart Kuttner, has now been taken into police custody. Meanwhile, even with parliament in recess, Ed Miliband continues to needle at the government for full disclosure of its meetings with News International big-wigs, having offered such disclosure on the part of the Labour Party. The political calculation is clear - Murdoch and co will have spent a lot more time over the past couple of years with Cameron and his allies than Labour figures. (Starry-eyed hacks used to suggest Blair had a kind of 'political alchemy' - but you cannot get more alchemical than turning the humiliation of media ostracism into a political advantage.)

And after the carnage in Scotland Yard a couple of weeks ago, it is now the turn of another dubious institution to see heads roll. Baroness Buscombe, the odious Tory peer who heads up the Press Complaints Commission, has been pressured into announcing that she will not seek to extend her contract, and in all probability will leave her post in the autumn. The PCC's role in the phone-hacking affair has been frankly embarrassing: it even went so far as to chide *The Guardian* for its irresponsible victimisation of the *NotW*. Let us say that subsequent events have not shown this stance in a very positive light.

A crisis of the PCC is an inevitable result - that it has not already been comprehensively tampered with, or even abolished in favour of statutory regulation, has in part to do with the more spectacular events (the decapitation of the Metropolitan

Police, the Murdochs facing cross-examination by parliament) and the Westminster summer holiday. Buscombe may well be the last establishment mediocrity to chair this craven creature of the media barons.

Its obsolescence is highlighted on another front by the vindication in court of Christopher Jefferies, the idiosyncratic landlord repackaged by the gutter press as the psychopathic murderer of architect Joanna Yeates. The press routinely gets away with doing such numbers on the perpetrators of high-profile crimes. The problem in this case was that, er, he did not actually do it. Jefferies has just won libel damages from practically the entire tabloid press - including the *Mail* and *Express*. On top of that, *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror* were found guilty of contempt of court, and levied (rather pathetic) fines.

There is much to say about this remarkable case - if ever libel law did not act just as a means for the powerful to silence opposition, it was surely here - but, for present purposes, what is of note is that it was the criminal and civil law that stood up to the Fleet Street lynch-mob, and certainly *not* the PCC. Given that it is controlled by the people who make money out of such stories, how could it? In a sense, poor old Peta Buscombe is to be pitied; she has only administered her institution in the manner in which it has operated since its creation. Alas for her, this cosy arrangement has been shot to pieces by events.

The bottom line of all this chaos is that it has put a question on everyone's lips: what is the future of press regulation? Numerous answers are proposed - David Cameron and other politicians have called, at one end of the scale, for statutory regulation, by Ofcom or some new body; others propose a new, more muscular model

of self-regulation, which would entail a new PCC-type body with the ability to levy fines and otherwise discipline its members. Popular among news organisations is the 'lope on more or less as before' strategy, on the basis that it is the least unpalatable of all the choices.

In fact, there are fundamental problems with all the so-called 'options' on offer here. Statutory regulation simply hands a great swathe of powers gift-wrapped to the state. The implications are pretty ominous; we need only cast our minds back to the BBC's battle with Blair over the death of David Kelly, which led to the corporation's humiliation and exacerbated its tendencies towards cosiness with the establishment. Given all that we have learned about the close personal links between the media barons and the political elite, meanwhile, it is naive to imagine that this will put an end to the power of the former.

The National Union of Journalists leadership seems to favour the second option: a "self-regulatory body [which] 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."² NUJ president Donnacha DeLong has expressed admiration for the 'Irish model', which broadly conforms to this idea. The union is also keen to push its own members' code of conduct as the basis for beefed-up 'self-regulation'.

In reality, this is a miserable compromise. We should not forget that the PCC itself was the result of a previous attempt to give self-regulation of the press some bite; the Irish Press Council itself is a somewhat more nightmarish version, with equal representation given

to various establishment notables - former ambassadors, political bureaucrats, lawyers and the like - and the industry itself (with one poxy seat for the unions). If the PCC had had equivalent power in the last five years, remember, it would not have punished Murdoch, but the *investigators into phone-hacking!*

That leaves the favoured option of the barons - 'keep calm and carry on'. In fact, ironically enough, this is truly the least worst of the possibilities - no further power is accrued to the state. Seeing as the PCC is obviously little more than a mechanism for the press money-men to, as the vernacular puts it, cover their asses, it is in fact preferable that it should not have any real power to discipline dissenting journalism - which, as *The Guardian* investigation has shown, is the closest the press gets to self-regulation anyway.

Yet the *status quo ante* is utterly discredited for good reason. On the left, we should not be satisfied with a 'return to normalcy' in any form, which would mean the return to the cosy lash-up between the political, bureaucratic and media elites that has subverted what passes for democracy for generations.

The reason these answers fall short is that they are answers to the wrong question. When the bourgeois establishment asks what to do about press regulation, it is *in reality* asking how it can manage this crisis in a way that does not threaten - or, ideally, strengthens - the ruling class's ideological hegemony. By adopting the given form of the debate, the NUJ - and, implicitly, those organised left forces in the NUJ which have manifestly failed to challenge that form - is in fact absorbed into a fundamentally *bourgeois* discourse, which is rigged in favour of bourgeois

outcomes.

Our question is the *inverse* of the bourgeois one - how can we make sure that the ruling class *does* end up the weaker for all this? What is the *working class* approach towards the press? Clearly, the NUJ - despite its political naivety - has a role to play here. While its argument that a strong NUJ chapel in Wapping might have prevented the disastrous abuses of the Wade-Coulson era is quite overblown, there is nonetheless the *potential* for a conscious collective life among journalists that could set the terms of the trade in its professional form. That the union has at least 'seized the day' and made itself a real presence in the phone-hacking affair is an encouraging start.

Yet to truly weaken the hold of the bourgeoisie on the press and media more generally, it is necessary both to attack *politically* that hold at its root and to build up the political presence of our own side. The former means breaking up the media oligopolies and destroying the advertising cartels that prop them up; the latter means having our own media and journalistic practice completely separate from that of the bourgeoisie.

Posed by both tasks is the party question - we need a political organisation that can fight for fundamental change in the state and economy in order to challenge the Murdochs of this world in a fundamental way. We also need an organised political division of labour in order to develop our own press into something of a genuinely mass scale and readership. The labour movement in this country once had the *Daily Herald* - European social democracy in its highest phase published in almost every language to many millions of readers. The *Herald* was the largest-circulation paper in the world at its peak. In the dissemination of ideas, and the development of a distinct cultural life, the organised working class has *potential* power without equal.

Codes of conduct of the NUJ-style 10 commandments variety are ultimately of limited use here. We communists have no problem with hacking David Cameron's phone - provided that something politically useful results from this 'crime', rather than cheap tittle-tattle. Trotsky put it best in *Their morals and ours* - the ends justify the means, as long as the ends are themselves justified. Let the masses judge whether their press fulfils this maxim - not judges, bureaucrats or the flunkies of bourgeois press barons.

Put another way, there is no ahistorical code of 'press ethics' which can come out of this farrago - but there is a *communist* ethic, of unflinching and ruthless war on exploitation and oppression, which has quite as many applications in the newsroom as on the barricades. We are not out to restore the honour of the press, or faith in parliament, but to transform both institutions beyond recognition ●

James Turley

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. 'Politics of press freedom' *Weekly Worker* July 28.
2. www.nujppr.org.uk/site/page.php?category=news&id=5125&msg=NEWS&finds=0

INTERVIEW

First they came for the anarchists

“Any information relating to anarchists should be reported to the local police” - that is what the good citizens of Westminster were being urged in a notice recently issued by the Metropolitan Police. After all, they are told, “anarchism is a political philosophy which considers the state undesirable, unnecessary and harmful”.¹ Yes, that’s right - one year into the coalition government and several months into the Con-Dem austerity programme, the cops have staged their first clumsy attempts at neo-McCarthyism.

However, the Met’s ‘counter-terrorist focus desk’ got more than it bargained for: anarchists bombarded it with, quite literally, “any information” relating to their political philosophy - including leaflets, pamphlets and printouts from Wikipedia.

Following an article in *The Guardian*, the humiliated thought police retracted the “unfortunate wording” - anarchism is now deemed a “legitimate political view” - but they did not go so far as to amend the basic thrust of their original notice, urging aspiring block wardens to grass on those who may have “caused criminal damage to business premises and government buildings in Westminster” on March 26 2011.²

Much though the Met’s ham-fisted appeal to betray thy neighbour may have prompted ridicule among Londoners, the matter should not be taken too lightly. Calls for increased powers to supervise whoever the state considers ‘extremist’ are crescendoing all over Europe these days, with the bourgeois right predictably exploiting Anders Breivik’s massacre in Norway for its own ends.

In contrast to anarchists, we communists identify the state as an outgrowth of class society, not the other way round. That said, we cannot think of anything more “legitimate” than the desire to abolish the “undesirable” and “harmful” capitalist state - and we are prepared to defend any section of the left against its tentacles.

Maciej Zurowski spoke to **Donnacha DeLong**, anarchist and new president of the National Union of Journalists, who had just returned from a picket line at BBC studios.³ **How seriously do you take the ‘anarchist scare’ incident - is this the prelude to something more sinister or just a few clueless cops churning out a leaflet that barely anyone reads?**

I think it reveals a level of ignorance in the police that’s unsurprising, but worrying. The police have been acting for years as a political force - since the miners’ strike and, in terms of the Met, the Wapping dispute. The right to freedom of assembly has been violated again and again, so it’s a short step from saying that you’re not allowed to do something to saying that you’re not even allowed to think it and freedom of opinion disappears as well. It didn’t start with anarchists: Muslims have seen the criminalisation of much of their community before this - not just Islamists, but a variety of political activity by people who happen to be Muslim: eg, the sentences following the arrests at the Gaza demo last year. **How did anarchists react to the news, and why do you think the**

Met’s statement was retracted so swiftly?

Social media exploded with this story as soon as it was confirmed. It started circulating on Twitter, I think, on Saturday night, and by Sunday it was all over Twitter and Facebook. Anarchist groups like the Solidarity Federation and Alarm [All-London Anarchist Revolutionary Movement] have put structures in place to deal with the media and that showed through strong and accurate quotes from the former in *The Guardian* and, fairly surprisingly, the latter in the *Daily Mail*.

As to why it was retracted so quickly, I can only guess the law of unintended consequences came into effect - they didn’t realise how quickly this would spread and what kind of reaction there would be. A front-page story in *The Guardian* was undoubtedly unexpected. Also, when you ask for “any information relating to anarchists”, there are people who are only too happy to cooperate. I’m guessing a lot of people had very full inboxes on Monday morning - there’s a lot of information available about anarchists.

Anarchists are often associated with the black

bloc, whose spontaneous actions are regarded as merely notoriety-seeking and undemocratic by the bulk of the labour movement: mass protests are derailed and broken up because of the actions of a tiny minority. Is this a misleading stereotype?

Yes, any generalisation based on the activities of an obvious few is a stereotype. There are hundreds, if not thousands, more anarchists in the UK who are active in a variety of different ways who never mask up and never smash windows or anything else. Anarchism is a very broad movement, and includes ideas drawn from pacifist Christians, like Tolstoy, as much as insurrectionists like Bakunin.

I’d also quibble with the idea that black bloc actions derail mass protests - that didn’t happen on March 26, for example: the main march walked all the way from A to B and then went home. The actions of others had minimal impact on the march itself. Other mass protests, like the G20 protests in 2009, were largely organised by anarchist groups.

Neither support nor condemn the actions of the black bloc - it’s not my

chosen form of activism, but it’s not up to me to criticise the actions of others in the movement.

The ‘circle-A’ has long become a part of pop culture and seems almost cuddly these days. How likely is it that a moral panic can be created by evoking an ‘anarchist threat’ in 2011?

I think states have long had difficulty maintaining anti-anarchist panics. They’ve tried; probably the earliest one specifically about anarchists was around the Haymarket affair in the US in 1886. There were quite a few around the wave of assassinations at the turn of the 19th century - particularly the assassination of US president William McKinley in 1901.

However, to maintain an anti-anarchist panic requires a high level of disinformation that’s difficult to keep up. The fundamental idea of anarchism - that people should be free to control their own lives without interference - is an attractive one. The more common reaction is one of pessimism - ‘It’s a nice idea, but it’s never going to happen’ - which hardly sustains a moral panic ...

Also, the Met are making a fundamental mistake. This island has

a long and proud tradition of freedom of speech and thought that goes back to the origins of the modern British state. People will accept controls on actions, but start trying to criminalise ideas and you’ll run into opposition - not just from anarchists, but from a broader base of opinions.

Following the massacre in Norway you tweeted: “Finally the Met’s national domestic extremism unit starts looking at real extremists”. Why do you welcome measures which are bound to be directed against us in the end?

I didn’t - these measures *have* been used against us for years. The unit has existed for quite a while and has, up to this point, focused far too much on animal rights, environmentalist, other leftwing protestors and journalists. The comedian Mark Thomas was on their domestic extremist spotter card, and every protestor in recent years will be aware of the Forward Intelligence Team and their cameras.

The reality is that the concern of the forces of the state is, and always has been, more focused on protecting property than on protecting people. Thus, protestors who attack commercial property or disrupt the normal functioning of the capitalist economy are seen as dangerous enemies of the state. On the other hand, groups like the English Defence League have largely slipped under the radar because they march in relatively unimportant places from an economic point of view and, when they attack property, it’s small, independently owned shops and the like that are not important in the grand scheme of things. The fact that they present a serious danger to people doesn’t seem to have mattered up to this point.

I don’t support the measures. I think the national domestic extremism unit is dangerous, but I’m just glad that, if it does exist, it focuses on an organisation that is actually posing a threat to innocent people.

Marxists and anarchists have some irreconcilable political differences. However, if the capitalist state comes for the anarchists, we will defend you unconditionally. Will you do the same for us?

Absolutely. Any attempt to criminalise ideas should be resisted. What’s needed now is greater cooperation and organisation between all groups opposed to the current government. I’m under no illusions that we’re in a pre-revolutionary situation and we’ll either get a socialist state or no state at all in the next few years, but I do think it’s conceivable that if we organise together in our local communities, cooperate to take the trade union movement back to where it was in the 70s and build a mass movement to disrupt the normal functioning of this country, we could topple this government.

I think the Met have given anarchists a great opportunity to engage the public and show people what anarchism is really about •

Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/2011/jul/31/westminster-police-anarchist-whistleblower-advice.
2. www.guardian.co.uk/2011/aug/01/grass-war-met-police-anarchists.
3. www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/aug/01/bbc-strike-heat-and-anger.



Donnacha DeLong: fight together

ECONOMY

Sugar-coated Satan sandwich

Obama has signed up to a vicious cuts programme that takes the US to the brink of a double-dip recession. **Eddie Ford** examines the debt deal

Only hours before Washington was due to run out of public funds, resulting in a catastrophic default for the United States government, the Senate finally agreed by 74 votes to 26 to pass the Budget Control Act and hence raise the debt ceiling limit. This, of course, followed the earlier vote in the House of Representatives, which assented to the new legislation by 269 votes to 161.

Failure to do so would have triggered wholesale panic on the markets, with private investors dumping the dodgy dollar and taking refuge in the relatively safe haven of the Swiss franc and gold - a trend that has already been noticeable in recent months.¹ Such a default, obviously, would have immediately endangered the US's precious (and essential) triple-A status with the credit ratings agencies and almost certainly set off a calamitous chain reaction, tipping the world economy into crisis and possible deep recession.

However, communists will not be throwing their hats in the air to celebrate the wisdom and responsibility of the Congress majority in passing this so-called 'compromise package'. The Budget Control Act is an emergency stopgap measure to be implemented at the expense of the working class, which will be hammered by a vicious programme of cuts. As things stand now, getting on for one in six are dependent on government food stamps - eking out a wretched existence in the wealthiest country on the planet. Yet we have just witnessed a *de facto* billionaires' coup, aided and abetted by the Congress majority and designed to bail out an administration - and political system - that ultimately serves the selfish interests of the super-rich.

So the debt, currently standing at \$14.3 trillion, will now be raised by an additional \$2.4 trillion in several stages; the first tranche being \$400 billion in order to prevent an instant default. As part of the deal, in what is presumably a concession to president Barack Obama, this process will carry through to the end of next year - meaning, of course, that he will not find himself in yet another congressional showdown on the debt in the middle of his re-election campaign. Then again, this concession could well turn out to be a poisoned chalice, as the fact that the ceiling is being raised in such a staggered fashion creates chances for endless political/legal trench warfare - maybe future gridlock.²

Centrally, the debt deal is predicated on the US government making 'savings' over the next 10 years of between \$2.1 and \$2.4 trillion - the latter figure being symbolic, of course, as it is the equivalent of the extra monies raised for the debt. This involves an initial round of cuts amounting to \$917 billion, though 'only' \$21 billion will be saved during 2012 (Medicare and social security will be exempt during the *first* round of cuts) - much to the displeasure of many conservative Republicans, naturally. But it almost goes without saying that there will be no tax rises for the wealthy or the closing of loopholes.

The legislation calls for the creation of a 12-member, bicameral, bipartisan 'super-committee', whose members will be appointed over the next two weeks. They have to agree on the £1.5 trillion-worth of cuts that will come on top of the initial \$917 billion over the

next 10 years. So far, most of the cuts are 'discretionary', but those *known* include \$21.6 billion in student loans, \$18.1 billion in various subsidies to graduates from poorer backgrounds, \$20 billion from front-line education spending (ie, sacking teachers), and so on.³ Not to mention \$350 billion in defence cuts.

This deficit-reduction package has to be agreed by November 23 - another looming deadline. The workings and politicking of this 'super-committee' are guaranteed to be highly charged and equally as contentious. For instance, and predictably, the Republicans are signalling that their appointees on the committee would be pledged to resist *any* measures that involve tax increases - in the words of senator John Cornyn, party leaders are "not going to select anyone who is going to vote for taxes". Needless to say, the Democrats on the committee - depending on which wing or tendency of the party they come from - might have a different opinion.

However, if this 'super-committee' fails to come to agreement - a more than distinct possibility - then the new legislation includes *automatic* procedures to reduce public spending by \$1.2 trillion. The nuclear option. Under this contingency, rather ironically in many ways, about half of these savings would be earmarked for defence - a somewhat sacred cow for most Republicans, of course, including Tea Party supporters. That would come on top of the \$350 billion for 'security' already identified in the first round of reductions. Therefore we have the not unpleasant possibility that, ideologically speaking, conservative Republicans and Tea Party 'radicals' could well end up shooting themselves in the foot.

The whole debate around the debt limit has inevitably stirred up anger and bitterness of every sort - a political hornets' nest, in fact. Something revealed, to some extent, by the voting patterns in Congress over this issue. In the Senate, six Democrats and 19 Republicans opposed the deal from the 'left' and right respectively - believing that it either went too far or not far enough. As for the House of Representatives, this was even more the case - with Democrats evenly split on the legislation, 95 for and 95 against, whilst 174 Republicans voted for the measure and 66 opposed it. A far from united picture.

Tea Party

For the "rightwing nutters" (Vince Cable) in the Republican Party, composed of a sometimes uneasy alliance around the Tea Party and the more mainstream conservatives, the deal represented a sell-out to the forces of 'big government', if not crypto-communism; with Barack Obama, presumably, acting as a stand-in for JV Stalin.

Summing up their attitude, representative Mick Mulvaney, a member of the 60-member Tea Party caucus in Congress, declared that Washington's spending "still has us sprinting toward a fiscal cliff". Mulvaney and his associates even want to amend the US constitution so as to include a commitment to "balance the budget". In other words, making it a constitutional *requirement* for Congress not to spend more than its income. A bat-crazy idea that is an anathema, of course, to mainstream Democrats and Republicans. Paradoxically, but logically, such a



In the dollar you can trust?

constitutional amendment - not that it stands a snowball's chance in hell of ever happening - would grant *more* power to the president, not less - so much then for 'limited' or 'small' government.

But that is the Tea Party for you: a thoroughly irrational bloc riven with inescapable contradictions - and who mainly articulate, if that is the right word, the desperate interests of the middle class, small business and small farmers (who themselves receive massive tax breaks and subsidies from the government). This fissiparous grouping blames almost *everybody* but capitalism for its predicament: blacks, Jews, Wall Street, bankers, unpatriotic speculators, Obama, reds, freemasons, the Illuminati, giant lizard men, aliens ... Somewhat amusingly, albeit in a grim way, one slogan prominently heard at Tea Party rallies has been, "Keep your government hands off my Medicare" - seemingly unaware that Medicare is in fact a government-sponsored programme. Yes, the *very* confused and enraged petty bourgeoisie.

The response of the mainstream Republicans, or 'non-crazies', was quite different - triumphalist, if anything. Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader in the Senate, was in no doubt that the debt deal was a "Republican victory". Speaking just minutes before the vote, McConnell told dissatisfied Republicans that, "although you may not see it this way" at the moment, "you've actually won this debate". An ebullience that was reflected in an article that appeared in the *New York Post* by the conservative, John Podhoretz. If Obama loses next November, then "we'll look back on Sunday July 31 2011" as the "day he became a one-termer".⁴

On the other hand, despondency reigned among left Democrats - or those with any degree of social conscience. Typically, Robert Reich, the former secretary of labour under Bill Clinton, wrote that anyone who characterises the debt deal as some sort of "victory for the American people over partisanship understands neither economics nor politics".⁵ Rather, it "hobbles the capacity of the government to respond to the jobs and growth crisis" and "strengthens the political hand of the radical right".⁶ More seriously still, for Reich, by putting Medicare and social security potentially on the chopping block when it comes to the second round of cuts, the incumbent administration has "made it more difficult" for Democrats in the upcoming election cycle to point the accusing finger at the Republicans - after all, they will be engaged in the

same game of imposing cuts upon the poorest in society. And, continues Reich - quite correctly - by "embracing deficit reduction as their apparent goal", but just "claiming only that they'd seek to do it differently" than the Republicans, then the Democrats and the White House "now seemingly agree ... that the budget deficit is the biggest obstacle to the nation's future prosperity". As a result of all this, Obama - and the Democratic Party as a whole - runs the danger of alienating his electoral base: blacks, Hispanics, minorities, etc. Political suicide.

Some of the 'left' democrats in Congress were even blunter. The debt deal was an unacceptable and shameful concession to the crazies within the Republican Party. Communists agree. Jim McGovern from Massachusetts angrily stated that he did not go to Washington to "force more people into poverty"; doubtlessly true. Whilst his colleague, Emanuel Cleaver from Missouri, issued a righteous Tweet describing the deal as a "sugar-coated Satan sandwich".

Most of those Democrats who opposed the debt deal, it is worth noting - like McGovern and Cleaver - are members of the 83-member Congressional Progressive Caucus. The CPC is "organised around the principles of social and economic justice", a "non-discriminatory society" and "national priorities which represent the interests of all people, not just the wealthy and powerful". As an organisation, it advocates "universal access to affordable, high-quality healthcare", "fair trade agreements", "living wage laws", the right to collective bargaining, the legalisation of same-sex marriage, a complete withdrawal from Iraq, an increase in income tax rates on "upper-middle and upper class" households, tax cuts for the poor, an increase in welfare spending by the federal government, etc (a platform strongly supported by the Communist Party of the United States of America).⁷

Trying to reduce the pressure from his left flank, Obama's TV address from the White House raised the possibility - once again - of (marginal) tax rises for the wealthy and shutting down those pesky tax loopholes; clearly an attack on the whole American way of life for Tea Party types. He declared, not without justification, that it was "impossible" for the US to "close the deficit with just spending cuts" - going on to say that "we can't balance the budget on the backs of the very people who have borne the biggest brunt of this recession". There are hints, over-optimistic in all likelihood, that Obama could let Bush-era tax cuts for the top brackets expire in January 2013. Tax raising by stealth.

Of course, the Obama administration is haunted by the idea of the US losing its triple-A status with the credit ratings agencies - hence the supposed urgency of the debt deal. But, for all the frantic ushering into existence of the Budget Control Act, it still might be too little, too late - at least as far as the agencies are concerned. For Standard and Poor, the current deal falls short of the "optimal outcome" that the agency said would definitely safeguard the AAA rating: which was a \$4 trillion deal that included some work to tackle what it called "long-term issues". Hence its threat to lower the US's long-term rating "by one or more notches into the AA category" over the next three months "if we conclude

that Congress and the administration have not achieved a credible solution to the rising government debt burden and are not likely to achieve one in the foreseeable future". In the same vein, Fitch indicated that it would maintain the triple A rating "for now", but warned that the top rating "would be lost if debt levels continued to rise".

Decline

So the US administration is not out of the woods yet - far, far, from it. After all, the debt predictions were based on assumptions of economic growth of over 3% each year well into the second half of the decade. But the GDP figures for the first half of 2011 show the economy is grinding to a virtual halt. And figures from the commerce department's Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that US manufacturing grew at its slowest pace in two years in July, as new orders contracted. Thus, the economy grew at an annualised rate of 1.3% in the second quarter. Most economists, for whatever reasons, had forecast growth of around 1.8%. Also, disconcertingly, first-quarter growth was revised down sharply from 1.9% to 0.4% - meaning that, after the revision, the US growth figures now correspond to a quarterly increase of just 0.1% in the first three months of 2011, followed by a 0.3% rise in the second quarter. Furthermore, the BEA now says that the US recession of 2007-09 was more severe than previously reported, with the economy shrinking by 5.1% over that period, rather than 4.1%.

If things were not bad enough, the unemployment rate was reported to be 9.2% as of June - which the White House admitted was "uncomfortably high". The cold, hard statistics demonstrated that only 54,000 new jobs were created in that month by the world's largest economy. Of course, the last president to be *re-elected* with unemployment at such levels was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was faced with a rate of 7.2%.

But Obama is no Roosevelt. When you are in a hole, stop digging - or cutting in this case. Yet, Obama has signed up to a Republican-inspired cuts programme, even if the crazies hate it, that will suck more than \$2 trillion out of a still shaky - to put it mildly - US economy over the next 10 years. By doing so, he substantially increases the chances of killing off any recovery, if not positively inviting a double-dip recession. Yes, John Maynard Keynes has been put back in his box - replaced by retrenchment, austerity and cuts. Maybe slump and depression.

Which is not to repeat the arrant nonsense, whether from some on the left or the hysterical Tea Party right, that the US is turning into Greece. The US is the world's hegemon and there are no viable competitors for the title - forget China. Therefore the US can afford its current debt level, given the necessary will and political leadership. But we should not be surprised that, as capitalism declines - an obvious material reality - the bourgeoisie behaves more and more irrationally. ●

Notes

1. <http://tinyurl.com/3gnq2hu>; also see Financial Times June 1.
2. For possible gridlock or 'choke' points, see <http://tinyurl.com/4yj17ov>.
3. www.independent.co.uk/multimedia/archive/00631/USdebtG_631653a.jpg.
4. *New York Post* August 2.
5. <http://robertreich.org/post/8331408301>.
6. <http://robertreich.org/post/8331408301>.
7. <http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov>.

OUR HISTORY

The day of ragged processions is over

The boom following World War I was short-lived. In the 12 months from September 1920 unemployment in Britain rose from 250,000 to two million. Soon after its foundation, the Communist Party of Great Britain directed its members towards unemployed work and “where possible, [to] take the lead”.¹ In October 1920 the party’s weekly paper carried an account of an important development in Coventry.

Coventry unemployed: a soviet formed

Comrade J Stewart, Communist Party organiser for the Midlands, is doing good work at Coventry. At the request of the Unemployed Workers’ Committee he has been addressing huge meetings of unemployed, and his suggestions have already led to practical action which is having a marked effect on the town authorities.

At the head of 2,000 men he marched to the Deasy works and demanded to be allowed to address the men still at work there.² Opposition was useless and so, at the head of his army, Stewart marched into the works and held a joint meeting of employed and unemployed. The manager wished to speak first, but the meeting insisted on him waiting until Stewart had finished.

Stewart told them that unemployment could only be finally abolished by the abolition of the capitalist system, but suggested as an immediate step that the men already employed should reduce their hours of labour until all the unemployed were absorbed.

Tom Dingley³ also spoke, and then the manager said that the firm would do all in its power to do something for them. Stewart stated, both here and at other factories that were visited, that the men were coming back again and again until they could control the entire factories.

During the weekend more large meetings have been held at various works. Complete order is being maintained by a police force formed from the workers themselves, and the ordinary police are conspicuous by their absence. The mayor has called a town’s meeting to deal with the situation and “to consider the method whereby the growing volume of unemployment prevalent in this city may be overcome, and a full living wage be assured to all citizens willing to render service to the community.”

The men are in no mood to consider proposals of the usual charity dole order, and their demands are of a practical and far-reaching character, as embodied in the following resolutions: “Seeing that everyone willing to render useful service to the community has the right to enjoy all the benefits won by labour from nature, we demand that all workers shall have maintenance, whether working or not.

“We demand, as a practical solution to unemployment, that the civic authorities invite the Russian trade delegation to meet them in order to discover what commodities Russia is prepared to purchase from Coventry.

“We demand that a factory be taken in the interests of the community to produce such commodities, the workers to elect their own management.

“Further, we demand that the civic



Unemployed can be organised

authority uses its power to prevent private interests hindering the work of the workers’ and soldiers’ council.”

Comrade Emery has been elected secretary of the local soviet, and comrade Stewart has been instructed to assist the Unemployed Workers’ Committee to the best of his ability.

The old features of pre-war unemployed demonstrations are entirely absent from these manifestations. Here is no cringing body of half-starved men begging for bread, or, on the other hand, a crowd of potential rioters out for loot.⁴ It is an ordered demonstration by intelligent, organised workers that will not starve at the behest of capitalism; but that if production cannot be carried on by the present owners of factories and plant without inflicting suffering on large masses of the community, the workers can and will.⁵ Other towns, please copy.

Let those workers still in employment resolutely refuse to work a single minute over the time necessary to ensure employment for all. Control production instead of being controlled by it. If a single man in any industry seeks employment and cannot obtain it, it is a reflection on all his fellow workers.

The workers can stop unemployment; it is clear the capitalists cannot. It is up to the workers to make the attempt.

The Communist October 7 1920

“Full maintenance at trade union rates of wages” was the central demand of the communists. This was taken up in the form of marches by the unemployed to local boards of guardians, who were responsible for providing Poor Law relief to the unemployed.⁶ Often the march would end with an occupation of the board office until extra money was forthcoming. The following report describes the actions of the London unemployed.

The London unemployed movement

The Islington Unemployed Relief Committee is to be given the credit of starting the direct action campaign of the unemployed, which has now

assumed such large proportions in London and the neighbourhood.

The committee, when first formed, found itself faced with the difficulty of obtaining suitable accommodation for holding its meetings, or for storing and distributing the food presented by shopkeepers in the borough.

The South East Library in Essex Road, which during the war had been used by the food ministry for controlled purposes, was empty, and seemed an admirable place for the purpose. So the committee took possession and there the Islington unemployed still remain.

Apart from a summons for obstruction by taking a collection with a box, and another for chalking the pavement, there has been no trouble with the police.

The Islington unemployed are well organised. A demonstration recently to the guardian was lined up in military formation - ie, platoons of 20, with a sergeant in charge of each. These sergeants were elected from the men themselves, and are ex-servicemen.

In Edmonton, Tottenham, Walthamstow, Hackney, Southwark, Camberwell, Peckham and St Pancras similar movements are now organised. Town halls, public libraries and empty houses have been seized in all these places. A central committee, composed of delegates from the different localities in and around London, now meets at the library in Essex Road, Islington, daily.

All this is not to say that a revolution is in progress. Nevertheless, it is a very good sign that the unemployed have determined to make their discontent open and organised, instead of keeping it secret and shameful. Already local authorities have been compelled to take steps to remedy the existing distress far beyond what they would have taken, had the unemployed remained quiescent. They will be wise if they break through their present powers entirely and throw the whole blame on the government. They will be lucky if they escape being compelled to do so.

In all these movements the active spirits have been communists, themselves unemployed. They know how impossible it is to solve unemployment while the capitalist

system remains, but they realise also the necessity for organised action in order to drive the lesson home, and to ensure that something, at any rate, is done to alleviate immediate distress. Communist branches everywhere should neglect no opportunity of giving support and guidance to the unemployed movement. In most localities they are already doing so.

The day of ragged processions is over. The demands now being made are put forward by men who are resolute to redress their wrongs because they have not lost their self-respect. They are learning by bitter experience the communist lesson that only in a new order of society will unemployment be finally abolished. They are learning, too, how futile capitalism is to touch even the fringe of the problem.

The Communist December 9 1920

In 1921 the Party was instrumental in forming the National Unemployed Workers’ Committee Movement,⁷ a genuinely mass organisation which successfully mobilised the unemployed to defend their interests between the wars, years characterised by permanent high

levels of unemployment.

Notes

1. P Kingsford *The hunger marches in Britain, 1920-1940* London 1982, p19.
2. The Deasy Motor Car Manufacturing Company was heavily involved in aero-engine production during WWI and in 1917 an aeroplane design office was opened.
3. For a description of Tom Dingley’s pre-CPGB trade union militancy, see J Haydu *Between craft and class: skilled workers and factory politics in the United States and Britain, 1890-1922*, chapter 6, ‘Coventry: workers’ control and industrial relations reform’: <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft9t1nb603&chunk.id=d0e2366&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e2366&brand=ucpress>.
4. As unemployment soared, spontaneous organisations sprang up in some localities, mainly in the form of ex-servicemen’s groups. As Wal Hannington noted, these “had no clear working class policy and they appeared to be formed purely for charity-mongering purposes” (W Hannington *Unemployed struggles, 1919-1936* London 1979, p13).
5. The change in the nature of these committees is explained by the conscious orientation of working class militants and communists towards them. Again, as Hannington explains, “[we] realised that these embryonic unemployed organisations - which, after all, had risen out of the discontent of the unemployed masses - could be developed on proper working class lines ... All they needed was proper guidance and leadership” (*ibid* p15). The raw material for that leadership came from sacked and redundant activists of the wartime National Shop Stewards and Workers Committee Movement and, in particular, the best of its militants, who had joined the CPGB at its formation in 1920.
6. The Poor Law commission was established in 1833 and its recommendation in the report of 1834 formed the basis of the Poor Law Amendment Act. This established the hated workhouses. These were finally abolished in 1930, but many were simply renamed ‘public assistance institutions’ - on the eve of the 1939 outbreak of war, for example, almost 100,000 people (including over 5,000 children) still languished in former workhouses. The remnants of the Poor Law were only cleared off the statute books with the post-World War II introduction of the welfare state.
7. The officially lauded Jarrow Crusade of 1936 was “framed as a direct alternative to the NUWM and its high-profile hunger marches. It was overtly ‘non political’ - with the exception that it took the overtly political decision to exclude members of the Communist Party and NUWM” (M Fischer, ‘Lessons of the NUWM and UWC’ *Weekly Worker* January 28 2010). The nature of the action was illustrated by the fact that “the divisional agents for both the Conservative and Labour parties were sent ahead to prepare the way and support came from the political right as well as the left. At Harrogate, the Territorial Army took care of the Jarrow crusaders; at Leeds a newspaper owner gave food and drink; at Sheffield the Conservative Party were the hosts, and in Chesterfield it gave meals and accommodation and again in Nottingham” (P Kingsford *The hunger marches in Britain 1920-1940* London 1982, p219). This is something that the Socialist Party in England and Wales may care to dwell on, as it proceeds with plans to rerun the cynical Jarrow stunt later this year. Is this really the tradition we should be reviving, comrades?

COMMUNIST UN!VERSITY 2011

Saturday August 13 - Saturday August 20

Speakers include: **Moshé Machover** (Israeli socialist) **Mohammed Reza Shalghouni** (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)
Raymont Hall, 63 Wickham Road, New Cross, London SE4
Five minutes from Brockley London Overground station (East London line) - there are also Southern and First Capital Connect trains leaving London Bridge every 10-15 minutes. Details: <http://cpgb.wordpress.com>

Whole week, including self-catering accommodation: £170 (£110 unwaged), £200 solidarity; Whole week, no accommodation: £60 (£30); First weekend, including one night’s accommodation: £35 (£20); Day: £10 (£5); Session: £5 (£3)

REVIEW

Lenin's strategy: illusory or realistic?

Lars T Lih **Lenin** Reaktion Books, *Critical lives* series, London 2011, pp234, £10.95



Lenin: his aims were perfectly realistic

“Titles in the series *Critical lives* present the work of leading cultural figures of the modern period. Each book explores the life of the artist, writer, philosopher or architect in question and relates it to their major works.” So runs the series blurb; and the company Lenin is keeping here consists mainly of artists and literary figures, with Georges Bataille, Simone de Beauvoir, Walter Benjamin, Noam Chomsky, Guy Debord, Sergei Eisenstein and Jean-Paul Sartre coming closest to being political activists and writers.

Nonetheless, the series format has allowed Lars T Lih to produce a remarkable book. It is an outline sketch of Lenin's life and ideas, which also proposes what is in some respects a new interpretation of both and of their relationship. The book is both highly readable - one could almost say a 'gripping story' - and highly thought-provoking.

Regular readers of this paper will be familiar with aspects of Lih's work, since we have published transcripts of a number of his talks to Communist University and some other articles in recent years, as well as reviewing his much more narrowly focused study of *What is to be done?*, entitled *Lenin rediscovered*.¹ *Lenin* gives us something more like comrade Lih's overall view of the subject.

The book starts with the proposition that “VI Lenin” is a posthumous creation and the *Collected works* “the building blocks of an intellectual mausoleum comparable to the corporeal mausoleum that still stands in Moscow” (p7). In his life, he was born “Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov” and continued to use that name; signed articles (among other pseudonyms) “N Lenin” and letters “Lenin”. Lih argues

that it is necessary to follow the man in holding “Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov” distinct from the public mouthpiece for ideas, “Lenin”. Among other reasons, this allows us to distinguish, and therefore relate, Lenin's ideas and Ulyanov's emotional commitments to them: though for convenience he mostly uses simply “Lenin”.

A sketch of the family background sees the Ulyanov family as in a sense typifying the dilemmas of the later 19th century Russian intelligentsia and the state towards them. After defeat in the Crimean war, the tsarist state was forced to endeavour to “modernise”; and this involved the creation of industry and a highly concentrated industrial working class (which Lih does not mention in this context), and an intelligentsia which was naturally infected with western liberal ideas and therefore tended to be subversive of the state.

Vladimir Ilich's brother, Alexander (Sasha), was radicalised at university and was hanged in 1887 for participation in a plot to assassinate the tsar. Like many of Lenin's biographers, Lih sees this event as fundamental to Lenin's own political commitments. Lenin was, he says, looking for “another way, Sasha”. The result was that in the late 1880s to early 1890s Lenin “fell in love” with the writings of Marx and Engels. In particular he constructed an alternative to the strategy of terrorism on the basis of Karl Kautsky's 1892 exposition of the German Social Democratic Party's 1891 Erfurt programme (published in English as *The class struggle*).² This idea was plausible because the SPD had just come out of illegality, following the eventual failure of the 1878 Anti-Socialist Law. If the SPD could win out against repression in this way, why not a Russian equivalent?

Lih argues that this strategy was first expressed in the clandestinely circulated text *What the 'friends of the people' are and how they fight the social democrats* (1894),³ and that Lenin remained faithful to it down to his very last years and in a certain sense even then. He quotes the book's conclusion, and disaggregates it into three ‘acts’:

“When the advanced representatives of this class [the working class] assimilate the ideas of scientific socialism and the idea of the historical role of the Russian worker - when these ideas receive a broad dissemination - when durable organisations are created among the workers that transform the present uncoordinated economic war of the workers into a purposive class struggle:

“then the Russian worker, elevated to the head of all democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism”;

“and lead the *Russian proletariat* (side by side with the proletariat of all countries) by the *direct road of open political struggle to the victorious communist revolution*.”⁴

Lih argues that this “sketches out a world-historical drama” in three acts: first organise a socialist workers' party. Then this party can lead all the democratic forces to the creation of a democratic republic. Finally, the democratic republic allows capitalist development in the best possible form for the working class, and for the underlying class contradictions to be expressed and the question of communism to be (internationally) posed. “Lenin lived to see this entire drama played out, albeit accompanied with the shortfalls, ironies and frustrations that life usually hands out. Each decade of his 30-year revolutionary career corresponds to

one act of the drama - and one chapter of this book” (p47).

Thus chapter 2, ‘The merger of socialism and the worker movement’, covers developments and Lenin's ideas down to the 1903 congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and the split. Chapter 3, ‘A people's revolution’, focuses on the revolution of 1905, and the distinctive Bolshevik idea of democratic revolution ‘carried to the end’ by an alliance of the workers and peasants, but takes the story through the dog days of 1908-11 to the rising phase of the mass movement and Bolshevik influence in 1912-14. Chapter 4, ‘Three train rides’, discusses the world war (Lenin's journey from Krakow to Bern in August 1914), the 1917 revolution (the ‘sealed train’ from Zurich to Petrograd in April 1917) and the first year of the Soviet regime (the move of the Soviet government from Petrograd to Moscow in March 1918). Chapter 5, ‘Beyond the ‘textbook à la Kautsky’ addresses the disappointments of the civil war period, Lenin's illness and his attempts in his last writings to revise his strategic ideas to address the new circumstances.

Along the way we encounter a series of points against ‘standard views’ of Lenin and the history of the Russian Revolution, which Lih has argued elsewhere in more depth. Thus *What is to be done?* did not represent the inauguration of a new concept of the workers' party, or display Lenin as suspicious of the working class.⁵ 1914 did not make Lenin turn to dialectics (a common Trotskyist and New Left theme), and *Imperialism, the highest stage* was not radically innovative (contrary to Neil Harding's division of his *Lenin's political thought* (1979), which sees a radical transition between pre-1914

and post-*Imperialism* Lenin); rather, in 1914-16 Lenin appealed to Kautsky past against Kautsky present.⁶

The *April theses* did not represent a radical break with Lenin's existing strategy, but at most introduced a subordinate term of ‘steps towards socialism’, which may have been influenced by Kautsky's first comments on the Russian Revolution.⁷ Lenin continued to recommend Kautsky's pre-1914 works even after writing *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* in 1918.⁸ And the Bolsheviks did not have illusions in 1919-20 in ‘war communism’ as a form of transition to communism, as opposed to a (very defective) system of war mobilisation.⁹

Far from realistic?

The running theme of the book remains Lenin's political and emotional attachment to the original strategy, which Lih generally calls the “heroic scenario”. This language, and the emphasis on Lenin's *emotional* commitment to the “heroic scenario”, is a form of distancing which some reviewers have not picked up.¹⁰ In fact, Lih says explicitly that “All in all, Lenin's heroic scenario was far from realistic. Yet perhaps his utter confidence in it was the necessary illusion that enabled him [in 1917-18] to confront a situation of stormy political and economic collapse” (p203).

Lih never directly tells us *why* “Lenin's heroic scenario was far from realistic”. In fact, the first part of the book points to at least the first part of the scenario - the “merger of socialism and the worker movement” - having turned out to be perfectly realistic. So what was wrong with the scenario as a whole?

Some indirect indications can

be found in chapter 5, where Lih looks at Lenin's attempts at reconsideration of strategy in his last writings in their context. Here three problems are identified. First, revolution in the west had not materialised: hence Lenin argued that soviet power had to 'hold on' until it did (pp167-71). Second, the idea that 'steps towards socialism' by working class alliance with the rural poor against the kulaks would enable the modernisation of Russian agriculture had failed miserably and been abandoned well before the adoption of NEP. Here Lenin argued for gradualism (pp172-81). Third, the working class had proved unable to take over the administration of the state due to a 'cultural deficit,' and if anything the culture of the tsarist state bureaucracy was tending to infect the Communist Party. Here Lenin argued for 'proletarianisation': ie, bringing in more people directly from the factory floor; but also for mass education (pp181-88).

In his concluding chapter Lih adds an additional element. This is the point that (strange as it may seem) *Kautsky's and the SPD's* commitment to political democracy had an instrumental character. The 'merger of socialism and the worker movement' was a matter of spreading the Good Word of socialism - capitalised here because of the similarity to religious revivalism, to which Lih refers.¹¹ The means of spreading the word was agitational campaigns. "How much more effective would these campaigns be if the party could use the state to eliminate all rivals and to monopolise channels of communication? The Bolsheviks consciously adopted this strategy of state-monopoly campaignism" (p202).

History and politics

Lars Lih is a political scientist by formal training, who moved at an early stage of his research work into the history of the Russian Revolution¹²: in effect now, as an independent scholar, a professional historian who publishes both in academic journals and in left publications. In discussions where the issue is raised, he is careful to tell us that his historical work does not have direct present political implications: insofar as he seeks to inform the left about the history, he says, he does so with a view to us making our decisions on the basis of the historical facts rather than the standard myths.¹³

From this point of view it is perhaps neither necessary nor desirable to be more precise than the characterisation that "Lenin's heroic scenario was far from realistic" and the hints at an explanation of this in the last part of the book. But for political activists of the left, the problem is more urgent.

It is true there are now very few countries in the world characterised by the dominance of peasant-subsistence economy coupled with pre-modern state forms. But the "heroic scenario" as Lih describes it is derived from Kautsky's *The class struggle*. This was a work addressed to a country - Wilhelmine Germany - which was certainly not characterised by the dominance of peasant-subsistence economy coupled with pre-modern state forms. Much of the "heroic scenario" is the common coin of the anti-capitalist left in general, and *certainly* included is the 'third act' idea that the working class could take over the running of the state. If this is "far from realistic", then we should all follow Irving Kristol, Mario Vargas Llosa, and similar ideologues over to the right: because for all the faults of capitalist parliamentarism, Stalinism with a Putinite outcome is not a particularly attractive alternative - or even from a long historical perspective a real one.

The answer, I think, is that Lih's distancing from Lenin's strategy and in particular the statement that "Lenin's heroic scenario was far from realistic" is over-general. He says himself that the first part of the strategy - the 'merger of socialism and the worker movement' - broadly speaking worked: and, of course, the same is true in Germany and quite widely in Europe. Even in Britain, the Labour Party represented a deformed version of this development. The Second International had not attempted much beyond Europe, and the commitments to imperialism of

the reconstructed post-1918 SI were an obstacle, but mass communist parties *were* created in the cities of the colonial world.

Worker-peasant alliance

The second element of the strategy - the worker-peasant alliance against absolutism - was certainly more problematic. In a sense, 1917 showed in this respect an *illusion of success*. The illusion came from the fact that the Bolshevik leaders took the soldiers as 'representing' the peasantry from which, in their majority, they were drawn. But the soldiers of a modern army are proletarians (of an unproductive sort) engaged in a complex collective task under management (officers), for which they are paid a wage; so that the situation of the soldiers was closer to that of the urban proletarians than to that of the real peasants.

Once the Bolsheviks had taken power in October, even though they 'legalised' the peasants' land seizures, they still immediately came into conflict with the peasantry because they had to extort food from them: otherwise the cities would starve. Of course, if the cities starved, the Red Army would be defeated and the whites would reconquer the peasants, just as the removal of the Roman exploiters in Britain after 410 led merely to their fairly rapid replacement by Saxon exploiters: but the constraints of the peasant way of life prevent them from recognising this necessity without coercion. Even a workers' state which had a cornucopia of tools and consumer goods to offer the farmers in exchange for food - which the Soviet regime certainly did not - would have to coercively extract tax in order to maintain the production of sufficient food surpluses to feed non-farmers.

This was an error already present in *The class struggle*, and in a certain sense in Marx's and Engels' writing on agrarian questions (with the partial exception of *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*). Kautsky (chapter 5) argues that the middle strata, including the peasantry, cannot "defend their interests as against the interests of the other classes ... In order to fight their battles, they are forced to unite with one or more of the other classes." This was at best a half-truth in Wilhelmine Germany, but certainly false in Russia. The peasants *can* defend their independent interests as a class. The problem is that, if they achieve full victory in doing so, the result is social collapse - and eventually the re-subordination of the peasants.

Relations with the peasantry would have been *easier*, though the idea of a class struggle of the rural poor against the kulaks would still probably have been misconceived under Russian conditions, if Russia had not been cut off from international trade, as it was by war and then by the response of both Germany and the Entente powers to the revolution.

Lenin believed before 1914 that proletarian revolution, at least in Europe, was on the relatively short-term agenda. This was not a matter of Lenin's unique optimism, but quite widely believed. Indeed, it entered to some extent into the calculations of the European states in deciding to go to war in August 1914. October 1917 was a gamble on the rapid extension of the revolution, at least to Germany. It did not happen - or, more exactly, the capitalist class succeeded in defeating revolutionary movements elsewhere.

Why this happened is a complex question which raises large issues about 'ripeness for socialism' - too large to be discussed within a book review. The issue is quite fundamental, and the point has been well taken by Trotskyist reviewers of Lih's *Lenin* that Lih underdevelops this side of the issue (and hence Lenin's interventions in the early Comintern).¹⁴

Culture and democracy

There is a sense in which Lih's discussion of the problem of the 'culture deficit' is the one which, for a modern leftist reader, creates the most 'strangeness'. We are not short of literate workers competent to do administrative jobs. In fact, Russia was *already* unusual in this respect in Europe

in 1917-18. Both Germany and Britain had brought trade unionists 'on board' in the management of production in the course of the war - a fact which may have influenced the idea that 'steps towards socialism' could help solve the massive economic dislocation affecting Russia in 1917.

There is a paradox, however, in this fact, which is the other side of the coin. Lih quite correctly identifies Kautsky's argument in *The class struggle* as involving an instrumental conception of democracy: the working class needs democracy *now* in order to carry on its struggle (chapter 5, section 9), but "Perpetual discontent is unknown in communistic societies" (chapter 5, section 12). The paradox consists in the fact that the very elevation of culture, which means many more people *could* play a role in political decision-making and state administration, precisely produces many more people who *could* play a role in the leadership of workers' organisations: and many more opinions and shades of opinion in circulation. The result is that, in carrying on workers' organisations without seeing democracy and discussion as part of the *ends* of the organisation, its hold on the loyalties of its members diminishes: and what we get is both the empty shells of mass organisations (trade unions, Labour Parties, etc) and the mass of far-left splinters.

The instrumental conception of democracy was a departure from Marx and Engels, for whom the struggle for democracy was their political starting point, and for whom it remained a necessary aspect of working class power. In fact, as a matter of logic, without democracy there can be no socialism or communism: since without democracy, political and administrative information and decision-making powers become *the private property of the individual state bureaucrats and bureaucratic groups*. This point was made by Marx in his 1843 *Critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state*.

At a guess the origin of the instrumental conception of democracy lies in the polemics which are at the historical root of the SPD between the Eisenachers, whom the Lassalleans criticised as soft on liberalism, and Lassalle, who argued (in correspondence with Bismarck) that the workers would favour a 'social monarchy' over democracy. In this context, to defend democracy as an *end* of the workers' movement might well have been identified as going back to the errors of the Eisenachers ...

All these are very large questions. It is the great merit of Lih's *Lenin* that - even if he does not address them directly - he forces us to think seriously about them ●

Mike Macnair

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

- Lih talks and articles: *Weekly Worker* December 18 2008, June 25, September 3, 10, 17 2009, January 14, September 16, October 7, 21, November 25 2010; *Lenin rediscovered* review: August 31 2006.
- www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/index.htm; German text at www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1892/erfurter/index.htm.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/index.htm. In the text I have followed the MIA translation of the title (from *CW*) for ease of reference rather than Lih's slightly different one (p45), since the *CW* version is standard.
- Lih's translation at p46, disaggregated at pp47-51. Slightly variant from the *CW/MIA* version; in particular the capitals are in both, but the italics in Lih, not *CW/MIA*.
- Lenin rediscovered* (Leiden 2006).
- 'Lenin's aggressive unoriginality, 1914-1916' (2009) *Socialist Studies* pp90-112.
- Weekly Worker* supplement January 14 2010.
- 'Lenin and Kautsky: the final chapter' (2008) *International Socialist Review* No59: www.isreview.org/issues/59/feat-lenin.shtml.
- 'Political testament of Lenin and Bukharin and the meaning of NEP' (1991) *Slavic Review* pp241-52.
- For example, S Bloodworth, *Australian Socialist Alternative* (www.sa.org.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=6866:demolishing-the-lies-about-lenin&Itemid=507&tmpl=component&print=1); P Hampton, 'Lenin the dreamer' (www.workersliberty.org/blogs/paulhampton/2011/05/22/lenin-dreamer-warts-and-all).
- Passim in Lenin*: 'Lenin and the great awakening' in S Budgen, E Kouvelakis and S Žižek (eds) *Lenin Reloaded* Durham NC 2007, chapter 15.
- www.yorku.ca/lefthist/bios/lih.html; cf also www.mcgill.ca/music/about-us/bio/lars-t-lih.
- Perhaps paradoxically, Lih is also a student of myth and drama as political forms in themselves (see the McGill bio at note 12); and in a sense the narrative of *Lenin* around the 'heroic scenario' reflects this approach.
- Eg, S Bloodworth (see note 10).

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a
Communist Party
member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

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

weekly worker

One industry, one union

Union mergers need democracy

With the RMT and TSSA moving towards a merger, Chris Strafford calls for democratic unity from below in the workers' movement

“While the railway companies are thus combining their forces, and consolidating their interests, railwaymen have allowed their forces to be split into innumerable sections ...”¹ This warning comes from the May 1911 edition of the *Industrial Syndicalist*, yet it is just as true 100 years later.

Appeals to unity are often made by leaders in the labour movement, yet very often what we see is disunity. We only have to look at the recent Coalition of Resistance conference, where aspiring bureaucrats and petty sect leaders talked of the desirability of unity in the anti-cuts movement - and then, out of their own sectarian interests, voted down a motion designed to take steps to bring it about.² We must therefore welcome the news that merger talks between the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association are moving forward. On July 22 the two unions announced that they were now in formal discussions to merge and will welcome the involvement of other unions.³

Sectionalism is a blight on our movement and puts unions in the sorry position of pitting this or that group of workers against each other - both nationally and internationally, as the reaction to the threat against Bombardier workers aptly demonstrates. Yet the working class in Britain and internationally has a long tradition of attempting to combat sectionalism, by uniting into strong industrial unions. The RMT and its forerunner, the National Union of Railwaymen, were supposed to organise workers in the entire industry.

In 1913 the NUR was born out of the turbulent pre-war working class movement. The new union brought together the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers' Union and the United Pointsmen and Signalmen's Society. With this unity railworkers became a pillar of the triple alliance, which also included other transport workers and miners, that mounted effective joint actions. But, thanks to World War I, a conservative labour movement leadership and the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, unity was undermined and the mass movement fell away.

What was, and is still, needed, however, is for the working class to break away from the politics of trade unionism. So much of the left clamours for favours from the bureaucracy in the hope of gaining positions here and there and seats on union executives. Yet after decades of this sectarian behaviour we have not moved forward and the bureaucracy is even further entrenched. In the context of the financial crisis, the austerity attacks on our class and the revolts in the Middle East and protest general strikes in southern Europe, there is an urgent need for a rethink.

The RMT and TSSA unity talks



A single union for all rail workers

come on the back of a series of disputes and victories on the London Underground and for maritime workers. On August 1 the Equality Act 2010 (Work on Ships and Hovercraft) came into effect after a long campaign. This outlaws discrimination against EU nationals working on British-flagged ships. The reinstatement of RMT rep Arwyn Thomas, who was unfairly dismissed by London Underground management, was won by militant action in what was more than just a fight for a victimised trade unionist: it was a test of strength. The government knows that if it can defeat the most militant sections of the organised workers' movement its assaults on our jobs, conditions and services will be easier to push through. Thomas was one of three RMT reps sacked because of their involvement in the fight against cuts on the Underground - Peter Hartshorn

and Eamonn Lynch were reinstated earlier in the year.

These small victories have laid the foundation for stronger resistance in the battles ahead. This, along with the RMT's class-based approach to the Bombardier dispute,⁴ is a positive rebuttal to the trade union bureaucrats (not to mention the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, with its 'British job for British workers' line). Bringing the rail and transport unions together can strengthen this process if it is done with transparency and democracy.

The trade unions have been leaking members following the defeats our class suffered in the last decades of the 20th century, resulting in the consolidation of the bureaucracy within the unions. In order to reverse this situation, we need to step up the fight for effectiveness and real unity. Communists are against all kinds

of sectionalism and fight for "One industry, one union". As we say in our *Draft programme*, "Industrial unions are rational and enhance the ability of workers to struggle."⁵ Instead of a situation where several unions compete for members against each other, with leaders individually stitching up isolated sections, the organised working class needs to push in the same direction.

However, the merger process must be accompanied by moves to democratise our unions and make their leaders accountable. For example, the 1993 merger of the National Union of Public Employees, National and Local Government Officers Association and the Confederation of Health Service Employees into Unison was a top-down stitch-up, placing in charge a leadership which has made an art of stifling action and lining their own pockets with huge salaries, pensions,

perks and expenses. Nevertheless, it brought together over 1.3 million workers into a single union, with obvious potential as an instrument of working class power.

A big question for any new rail and maritime union is, where is the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (Aslef) - and indeed Unite - in these merger talks? Both have a considerable membership in the transport industry, with members facing identical attacks to those of the RMT and TSSA. Even with the offer by RMT and TSSA to open up the talks at some later date, Aslef may prefer to remain aloof - while Unite is likely to consider itself too big and important.

The whole process must be conducted out in the open as far as possible rather than done in secret behind closed doors. Once a deal is hatched, no doubt it will be presented to the respective conferences to be rubber-stamped, with rank-and-file involvement kept to a minimum. Open meetings leading to a democratic congress by transport workers discussing unity could enthuse members of all unions about the process and help overcome sectionalism.

We must demand that Aslef and Unite join the unity talks immediately. We must demand that the leaderships and their proposals be open to scrutiny, fully debated and amended as necessary. Giving workers a say in how their fight is fought will increase our effectiveness, as more workers stop simply relying on the union leadership and start thinking collectively and acting in solidarity ●

Notes

1. *Industrial Syndicalist* No11, Vol 1, May 1911.
2. 'Voting down unity while talking unity' *Weekly Worker* July 14.
3. www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/taxonomy/term/156.
4. www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/node/2322.
5. *CPGB Draft programme* 3.8. Trade unions: www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1002562.

Subscribe here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum £10 every 3 months ... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/€28	£50/€55	£200/€220
Europe	£30/€33	£60/€66	£240/€264
Rest of world	£60/€66	£120/€132	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer:
3 months for £5

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:

Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

Total £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310

sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*

until further notice, commencing on _____

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

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____