



# weekly **worker**

**Washington paralysis:  
Jim Creegan looks at  
the politics of division**

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# LETTERS



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

## Predicament

The riots, which started off in London but have now spread to other parts of the country, throw up a predicament for socialists. Yes, we understand that the underlying motives are not only anger at police harassment and racist police killings, but also cuts to benefits, cuts to services and the rise in unemployment. Youth unemployment stands at nearly a million. Yet, unsurprisingly, most of the media has focused upon the looting.

Socialists should have a twofold position on this. We should stand shoulder to shoulder with those stealing necessities, such as food and bread, which is completely understandable; but I see no reason why we should support lumpen sections of society whose motives for looting is simply to enrich themselves. We should oppose the lumpen looting not because of bourgeois property values, but because this will only damage and divide working class communities, as will attacks on paramedics and firefighters, who themselves face cuts.

Our aim is to strengthen the workers' movement against the state, which is why we should oppose state involvement in the riots and continue to police the police, but also campaign for our unions to hold to account Labour MPs like David Lammy of Tottenham, who came out in opposition to the riots.

Additionally, we need to campaign for our unions to get involved in any defence campaigns in respect of the rioters. To do so, especially if we also set about the building of an unemployed workers' union as well, would only help to integrate the working class youth into the wider workers' and anti-cuts movement, thus strengthening our side in the battle against the Tories.

**Nat Rainer**  
email

## Guns down

The riots in London were sparked initially by an armed man being shot dead by police in Tottenham and it is unclear whether he threw his gun down first. Even if he did, the police may well have thought he might have other guns on him. This is a very clear reason why 'the right to carry arms' in the US constitution and, apparently, in the aims of the CPGB's programme is so dangerous.

I make no bones about being basically a pacifist, and I can't support this policy at all. As to a 'workers' militia', this also sits uneasily with me, but, I suppose, if it means a highly disciplined trained group with access to certain arms (not indiscriminate weapons) in very extreme circumstances - eg, to protect striking workers about to be shot - I could support the idea. Carrying arms generally will only make one a legitimate target - not only by the police or army, but anyone who feels threatened by those arms. Quite apart from the argument that people with guns can go crazy and we all know of tragic results of such incidents.

However, the riots which are now taking place have little to do with what happened in Tottenham, and certainly nothing to do with a revolution. It is mindless violence and looting and is causing ordinary working class people to walk in fear of often masked youths patrolling the streets, starting fires and looting shops. You wonder where this will lead next. By the time this is published, there may well be curfews announced, the army brought in, even martial law declared. No country can tolerate total anarchy

on its cities' streets, although the widespread culture of teenage armed gangs creating virtual no-go areas, along with the virtual disappearance of police 'walking the beat', has led to this situation, which is now fast getting completely out of control.

I'm sure many readers will see this as a 'revolutionary situation' or leading up to one, but I see it very negatively as the beginning of the breakdown of civilised behaviour - the very opposite of what socialists and communists should be seeking to achieve. If we are to bring about a change in society, where there are no deprived or disadvantaged sections of the population, then it must be done in an organised and ordered way, certainly not in this anarchic outbreak of violence, arson and looting.

Of course, these things are all symptoms of the collapsing capitalist system. Spending cuts, the collapse of banks and so on have led to a situation where large sections of society don't have the means to buy the luxury goods dangled before their eyes, but that is no excuse for looting and arson. Changing society and creating a more equal distribution of wealth must be done in an organised, orderly fashion first through the ballot box. Only if and when the parliamentary road is blocked should more direct action be taken. That would be through organised strikes and peaceful demonstrations to enforce the will of the people, not through the anarchy we are seeing in these violent riots. Remember that the police and army are composed of working class people, so they too must be won over.

I remind comrades again that violent revolution almost always results in a violent and brutal dictatorship, in which ordinary people are the victims.

I will watch with close interest what other comrades say in the *Weekly Worker* about these riots. My future association with the publication and the CPGB depends on the reaction, but I think the clause about 'right to bear arms' needs close scrutiny. The right of whom to bear which arms and in what situation? Give every maniac a gun? I don't think so. If that's your policy, comrades, I'm outta here fast!

**Tony Papard**  
email

## David XVI

David Cameron has announced that he will ignore any 'human rights' legislation that might prevent the prosecution of rioters. He seems to have forgotten that we have a supreme court in Britain, the European Court of Human Rights, and treaties guaranteeing the law. I am informed by a barrister and law professor that what Cameron proposes is completely unconstitutional and illegal.

Cameron should remember what happened to Louis XVI during the French Revolution. He lost his head and it rather spoiled his constitution. Does Cameron believe *L'état c'est moi*? If he cares to step outside the houses of parliament, he will see the statue of Oliver Cromwell, who explained most eloquently the status of government and of English law.

When it comes to looting, it's a fine old tradition of the British empire. And the looting we are currently witnessing pales into insignificance compared to that carried out by the banks, aided and abetted by the government.

But if Cameron wants a repeat of the French Revolution he can certainly have one (although we would certainly prefer a more orderly transition).

**Tom May**  
Guildford

## Leftism?

It is always a good idea when engaging in polemics to make sure you are

arguing against your opponent's actual position. But that is not the method of comrade Steve Freeman (Letters, August 4). Whether out of carelessness, sloppy phrasing or some other reason, he misrepresents the CPGB position on the Labour Party and what I wrote in my last letter in a number of ways.

● "Peter Manson explains that the CPGB is the only group on the left that has been serious about the Labour Party."

Not quite, Steve. In my previous letter I referred to "the CPGB's long-standing call for the left to adopt a serious attitude towards the Labour Party" (July 21). This general flippancy has resulted in two main approaches at election time, for example. The first has concluded that, because Labour is the mass party of the working class, we must always vote for all Labour candidates without discrimination. The second arrives at the opposite conclusion: Labour is a bourgeois party pure and simple, which precludes offering any of its candidates even the most critical of support. Both these approaches have been pretty widespread, but that does not mean there are *no* groups or individuals whose attitude to the Labour Party is serious.

● According to comrade Freeman, the CPGB claims "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."

On the contrary, it is an excellent thing for revolutionaries to take the initiative in forming all manner of working class organisations, ranging from trade unions and solidarity campaigns to political parties. But it is not a good idea for us to establish halfway-house parties. I chose my words carefully when I pointed out: "Revolutionaries who deliberately set out to establish a *party-type formation* that is not Marxist will have no option but to water down their Marxism" (emphasis added).

The reason for this is obvious. Unlike unions and single-issue campaigns, parties by their nature put forward a global programme for the running of society. But, in order to attract those to our right to join us in our new halfway-house party, we must be prepared to drop those aspects of our Marxist programme that they will not accept. In reality we cease to be Marxists. The same does not apply when we join non-Marxist parties with the aim of winning their members to Marxism - in this case we continue to campaign around our full programme.

However, it is taking things a bit far to suggest that a disagreement over halfway houses is "the main difference" between the CPGB and the now defunct RDG. I think it goes rather deeper than that.

● "Peter speaks about a republican socialist party as a 'necessary stage' in the formation of a communist party."

This reads as though it is the CPGB or myself who believe it to be a necessary stage, when evidently I was arguing the opposite: when communists take the lead in initiating halfway-house parties, it can usually be taken as a sign that they have in practice rejected the need for a communist party.

Comrade Freeman seems to have developed a new theory about the CPGB. Whereas in the past we had "a left-sectarian attitude to the political needs of militant workers", now we are "turning to the right" and Labourism. On second thoughts, though, Steve realises halfway though his letter that in fact "the CPGB's Labourism" had been there all along, but had in the past been "camouflaged by pseudo-revolutionary slogans

against compromise".

Very profound. Just what were those "slogans against compromise"? And what exactly was this "left-sectarian attitude to the political needs of militant workers" of ours? The only thing I can think of is our insistence that the left should unite in a single Marxist party - if that happened we would start to provide *real* answers to those militant workers. Or does comrade Freeman think it preferable for the left to remain divided in their dozens of sects? Should they perhaps dissolve themselves instead into a non-Marxist "republican socialist party"?

Why is engaging more closely with Labour or joining that party necessarily a sign of Labourism? When Lenin advised the newly formed CPGB to apply for Labour affiliation, was he urging communists to become Labourites? Steve may accuse the current CPGB of rightism disguised by ultra-leftism, but the boot is actually on the other foot. The ex-RDG is attempting to cover its rejection in practice of the need for a communist party with anti-Labour leftism.

**Peter Manson**  
South London

## Party peak

David Vincent's argument (Letters, July 21) that joining the Labour Party to pull it to the left would be a distraction is really sectarianism of the worst kind.

When capitalism was in the ascendancy, Vincent's argument would have held some plausibility. Now, however, capitalism is faced with long-term decline, not as a result of overproduction, as Marxism predicted, but as the consequence of industrial society reaching the great historical turning point of the peak in global oil production and thus the end of the cheap oil era.

The only obstacle I can see to the left eventually winning the leadership of the Labour Party is Marxist sectarianism and dogmatism - that is the same problem which impedes unity outside of Labour. Rather than splitting the working class with the formation of a new workers' party, the left should be patient and bide its time, and in the meantime work out a form of socialism that will be able to cope with the coming energy crisis.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Extreme

Your precise article on the decision of the Socialist Party in England and Wales to withdraw from Unison should raise some eyebrows ('Giving up on Unison', August 4). You note: "But ... the latest move seems destined to go the same way as all SPEW attempts to coax a replacement Labour Party into existence."

However, this misunderstands the basic flaws within this premise. Only a Labour Party based on real justice will succeed where Ed Miliband will perhaps not. This means workers' courts, public employment tribunals, a democratically elected, recallable and adequately stewarded police force, and a truly *extreme* form of justice.

Peter Manson only raises the issue of the Labour Party's failure on the issue of basic working class self-organised justice. Or, as Marx slyly retorted in the *Grundrisse*, "only *extreme justice* from the emaciated class can bring about this splendid day of *revolution*."

**Frank Lansbury**  
Hampshire

## Miner issue

Dave Douglass raises a number of false arguments in his letter concerning Bombardier (Letters, July 28). Firstly,

he talks about the workers at Derby already doing these jobs. That isn't true. This was a new contract for new work, and Bombardier lost. But even were that not the case, it would be irrelevant.

There are lots of jobs producing lots of things that British workers previously did which are now done by workers in other countries. The reason for that is that the firms in those other countries have been able to produce those goods more cheaply than can British capitalists. Sometimes that is due to capital being able to take advantage of cheap labour - eg, in China. Often it has simply been that foreign capital has invested in more modern, better equipment, and has introduced more efficient systems - eg, Germany. Sometimes it is a question of both - eg, China again.

To demand that workers who are already producing something in Britain should continue to do so is ridiculous. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were two million miners. If there had been no reduction in that number, then there would not have been capital released to produce all of the other things we now take for granted. Nor would there have been workers available to produce them. So long as capitalism exists, that is the way it will allocate capital - according to where it can maximise profits. To object to it doing that by allocating production to some other country, providing employment for workers elsewhere, is indeed to advocate a nationalist rather than socialist perspective.

Moreover, it is to argue not socialist politics, but merely trade union politics. Suppose this had been a military contract: would Dave be happy with the work continuing purely to save those jobs, if the end product were, say, armoured vehicles to be sent to the King of Bahrain? A socialist should not simply be for the limited goal of saving jobs. But a Marxist would not say, 'Well, too bad then - just close the factory down!' A Marxist would argue for a plan of alternative, useful production. Indeed I would argue that the workers should occupy and use that position to produce under their own control, developing their own plan for useful production that could be sold profitably, as thousands of other workers have done, setting up worker-owned cooperatives.

By contrast, Dave's demand for nationalisation under workers' control is pie in the sky. It is both reformist and utopian. Why does he think that this Tory government would have any inclination to nationalise this company? Even if it did, why does he think they would then simply hand it over to the workers to run, whilst shouldering the burden of risk itself? Of course it wouldn't. Moreover, as a former miner, he should think about what nationalisation of the mines actually brought. As with every other nationalisation by the capitalist state, it brought massive rationalisation, massive job losses and speed-up, repeated conflicts with the workers by a hard-nosed, capitalist management and, eventually after it had been made profitable through such policies, handed back to private capital.

I agree with him, however, that the process of evaluating contracts should be the same in relation to social costs. But there is an argument for saying that social costs should not be included at all. He's right that Andrew Glyn did that in trying to show that the National Coal Board's figures on uneconomic pits were wrong. However, you can't take social costs into consideration for anything other than the short run because it does not take into account that beyond that capital and labour will be re-allocated to more profitable production. More importantly, the



social costs argument can be used to divert from the real issue, which is that we should not accept that jobs should be lost due to capitalist rationality, wherever the work goes. Instead we should occupy, and establish worker-owned co-ops, thereby bringing the means of production under our control.

The problem with Dave's approach is that you end up having to explain things by appealing to very strange arguments. He says that the decision to close the pits had nothing to do with profitability, but of course it did. British coal may have been cheaper than foreign coal, but the point was that there was just too much of it. When the NCB's main customers, the CEEB and British Steel, moved to alternative fuels, there simply was not enough demand for coal to sustain existing levels of output. Moreover, although British coal on average was cheaper than much foreign coal, that was only due to the fact that the most efficiently produced coal at the big new mines was acting to bring that average down. It was not true of the less efficient pits. The truth of that can be seen from the fact that, long after the NUM had been defeated and the mines had been privatised, the private owners did not expand production either, but continued to rationalise.

But Dave has to explain this in terms of some unspoken conspiracy to dismantle British heavy industry just for the hell of it! Why would British capital do that? It exists to make profits. He's right that similar trends have occurred in other European economies, but fails to consider that the reason for that is not some unexplained conspiracy to deindustrialise, but the fact that capital is able to make higher profits elsewhere. It is for that reason that demanding the rebuilding of all those heavy industries that have already demonstrated that they were no longer globally competitive is utopian.

Even if Britain were a workers' state, it is unlikely that we would want to do that other than for some strategic reason, because it would be a waste of our resources. We are far more able to use our labour-power and other resources to produce other, more high-value goods, capable of paying higher wages, and to sell those products on the global market to purchase all those things which can now be produced far more efficiently elsewhere and which in the process have helped to build new powerful working classes in Asia, in Latin America and increasingly in Africa. As Marxists, we should welcome that historic development in the growth of the world working class.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Hyper-globalist

Having read D Douglass's letter, I noticed that it attempted to address certain issues related to globalism in a manner which was far too little and far too late. What he describes has been going on for at least 15 years. Large transnational corporations dominate the economic landscape and politics is framed by all politicians in such a manner to serve their interests. The race to the bottom is EU policy as well as Washington's. Where companies can't relocate they import labour.

With the Bolkenstein directive the race to the bottom becomes EU state policy. One cannot have a policy of resistance if one isn't first of all a proponent of regulation, whether it is in currencies, immigration, labour supply, hours worked, etc. To support an economic free-for-all in all spheres of human activity by asserting that first global resistance has to occur before national, as the *Weekly Worker* does, ensures it is one of the papers that is in support of hyper-globalism. Hence it ridicules demands for 'British jobs for British

workers' and in reality adopts Mandelson's line that the "populist, anti-immigrant, Europhobic, anti-globalisation language used by blue Labour" is essentially reactionary, conservative and backward (*The Guardian* July 27). In other words, workers shouldn't fight to defend what they have in the here and now, bringing to mind Trotsky's famous dictum that those who cannot defend workers' gains today have no hope in gaining any in the future.

Last year the *Weekly Worker* argued that the euro should be defended at all costs despite the consequences of such a policy for countries like Greece. Having prioritised this, they then went on to ignore the tumultuous events of June in Greece, denounced as nationalist all demands which call for an exit from the EU, having shown in practice to be acolytes of Brussels. Contrary to the reality that millions in Greece have demonstrated against all politicians by waving Greek flags, many have openly called for a return to the drachma and politicians have difficulty now showing their faces in public due to popular anger.

Resistance where issues are acute may take priority over areas where they are not. A coordinated revolution encompassing Eritrea and Switzerland or Latvia and Norway at one and the same time are for people who have no link to living social struggles.

Those who assume internationalism is the globalism of the transnationals and that all controls - in particular import controls or immigration controls - are reactionary have made their peace with those transnationals.

**VN Gellis**  
email

## Expose them

Eddie Ford's article on the Budget Control Act is, of course, correct in stating that the act represents a vicious attack against the working class ('Sugar-coated Satan sandwich', August 4). It is symbolic that it comes on the 30th anniversary of the air traffic controllers' strike in 1981, whose smashing by Ronald Reagan marked an intensification of the capitalists' assault on the working class.

This act may well turn out to be an equally significant turning point. The tragedy - crime, to be more exact - then was that the official labour movement barely lifted a finger in defence of the striking union. And it promises to do even less against this latest assault, aside from issuing anguished statements.

I write to take issue with comrade Ford's seeming enthusiasm for the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "Most of those Democrats who opposed the debt deal," he writes, "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'."

That sounds lovely, but I'm afraid that the CPC is no more truthful or reliable than other capitalist politicians. For example, their vote against the final budget bill was just one more charade in the months of political theatre, since by then it was clear that the bill was going to pass without their help. At an earlier stage in the process, however, on July 30, the entire CPC voted for the plan of Harry Reid, the Senate Democrats' majority leader, which not only called for trillions of dollars in cuts, but went along with the Republican right wing in not increasing taxes on business or the rich - exactly the kind of 'unbalanced' scheme the liberals claim to oppose.

Curiously, comrade Ford observes that the CPC platform is "strongly

supported by the Communist Party of the United States of America." That is undoubtedly true, and should have served as a warning sign, since the Stalinists made their transition to counterrevolutionary defenders of capitalism back in the 1930s. The CPUSA has served in effect as a loyal tendency inside the Democratic Party for over half a century.

Comrade Ford does a fine job in exposing the anti-working class character of the budget bill. But it is equally the responsibility of communists to expose the false friends of the working class, and that includes all the Democratic Party politicians and factions.

**Walter Daum**

League for the Revolutionary Party, New York

## Same mistake

Arthur Bough (Letters, August 4) objects to a number of formulations in my article on the media ('Politics of press freedom', July 28).

One is a matter, somewhat, of cross-talk. I agree that the context of imminent workers' rule is important to understanding Lenin's positions on this question. Furthermore, I do not dispute that the 'workers' government' formulation leaves much to be desired - in fact, I am likely far less favourably disposed to it than comrade Bough (I would refer him to Mike Macnair's commentary on it in *Revolutionary strategy*).

Nevertheless, the admission on the part of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty that press nationalisation is only *potentially* progressive under some form of workers' rule, however ambiguously defined, is at least an advance over the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which seems wholly unconcerned with the matter.

I take issue with Bough's indifference to the matter of monopolisation: "Marxists do not respond to the existence of such monopolies [as Murdoch's] by calling for a return to some previous, 'free market' form of capitalism." That is perfectly true when it comes to the simply material products of society. There is no sense in breaking up Tesco into a thousand competing franchises; indeed, there is not much sense in it being separate from Sainsburys. The veneration of 'small enterprise' is the most obviously petty bourgeois of all utopias.

Equally, there are things that are so naturally monopolistic - basic infrastructure and so on - that there is a compelling economic logic *even from the point of view of capital* that they should be publicly owned.

The press, however, is a special case, because we are not dealing with the production or distribution of indifferent material goods, but with *ideas*. When you or I buy a newspaper, we are not interested in the *paper*, but the words and the pictures; in short, in the ideas. That control of the media is an element of bourgeois political supremacy is supremely obvious, now of all times; indifference to the monopolisation of the media means indifference to an aspect of the ruling class political regime, and thus abstention from a key arena of struggle.

Thus, comrade Bough makes the *same* fundamental mistake as the SPEW. The latter's all-purpose solution to capitalist monopolisation is nationalisation under democratic control; Bough prefers, under capitalist conditions, to call for cooperative ownership (not a bad idea for some *parts* of the industry, probably). Neither, however, is able to grasp that the press is *not just another industry*, but a distinct political question in its own right - thus the solutions they serve up are fundamentally economicist.

**James Turley**  
London

# ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Communist Students

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

### Riots, recession, resistance

**Thursday August 11, 7pm:** Public meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Lee Jasper, Symeon Brown, Andrew Murray, Clare Solomon, Zita Holbourne, Viv Ahmun, Josie Fraser, Merlin Emmanuel, Aaron Kiely.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance and Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts: [www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.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: [www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk)

### EDL not welcome

**Saturday September 3, 11am:** National demo against English Defence League. Assemble Weavers Fields, London E2.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [uaf.org.uk](http://uaf.org.uk).

### The longest strike

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

Organised by Unite: [www.unitetheunion.org](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

### Europe against Austerity

**Saturday October 1, 10am:** Conference, Camden Centre, Biddborough 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.



**ECONOMY**

# Stock market panics and the danger of another recession

The loss of its triple A credit rating is symbolic of the decline of US hegemony and therefore of capitalism as a system, argues **Eddie Ford**

**O**bviously, the decision by Standard and Poor's on August 6 to issue a "negative" outlook on the United States government and hence downgrade its credit rating by one notch from triple-AAA to AA+ status was a political humiliation for the Obama administration. A humiliation doubtlessly compounded by the finger-wagging it received from the Chinese bureaucracy, which hypocritically lectured the US about its "debt addiction" - a bit like a drug-dealer scolding a user for having a bad habit.

This was the first time, of course, that S&P has ever made such a judgement since it first began rating the credit-worthiness of US railroad bonds in 1860 and it has indicated that another downgrade is possible within the next 12-18 months. Which would trigger another round of economic and political panic as sure as night follows day. There is also the real possibility that other credit rating agencies will follow suit.

Explaining its decision, S&P stated that the "political brinkmanship" in Congress over the debt deal had made the ability of the US government to manage its finances "less stable, less effective and less predictable". Meaning that there is now a *chance*, however tiny, that the US government could default on its debt obligations - enough to induce anxiety in investors. Furthermore, S&P declared, and not without logic, that the \$2.1 trillion debt reduction plan (ie, vicious austerity) frantically scrambled together last week "fell short" of what was necessary to get the country out of its hole. Therefore, it had no choice but to downgrade the US due to the fact that the "majority of Republicans" continue to "resist any measure that would raise revenues" - a stance, it argues, that has been "reinforced", not alleviated, by the passing of the Budget Control Act. Growth is needed, not just an endless round of cuts, cuts, cuts.

Frankly, communists find it hard to disagree with S&P's assessment of last week's deal. That is, by effectively adopting the Republican programme, which rules out any economic stimulus measures such as tax rises on the wealthy or 'quantitative easing', Barack Obama has taken the country to the brink of a possible double-dip recession or far worse - and perhaps damaged his chances of winning next year's presidential election by alienating his electoral/political base (working class, blacks, Hispanics, etc). Whether it was an act of cowardice or suicide will be for future historians to debate.

Naturally, at the very start of the week the markets plunged in reaction to S&P's damning judgement, and that was on top of the estimated \$3 trillion that had been wiped off the value of world shares the week before. Indeed, on August 8 the stock



**No new hegemon in view**

market had one of its worst days since Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, triggering off the 'credit crunch' and the near collapse of the global financial/banking system. Only what had previously been derided as 'socialist' state interventionism and a package of emergency Keynesian measures, also regarded as hopelessly outmoded, salvaged the day for capitalism. But now, of course, the ideological orthodoxy from Washington to London is austerity and 'balancing the books', begging the question of what measures the ruling class will deploy if faced by Credit Crunch 2.

Anyhow, in the ensuing bloodbath

Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds - both bailed out by the government, of course - lost about a third of their value, creating a £35 billion loss for the taxpayer (and continued job losses, needless to say, for ordinary bank workers). The price of oil slumped in the New York futures markets as dealers, quite logically, anticipated lower demand from a stuttering global economy. There was a triple-point fall in the FTSE 100 index over August 8-9 - marking the first time in the 27-year history of the blue chip index that the market had lost 100 points or more on four consecutive days. In fact, being down more than 20% since

its July peak, the FTSE 100 index 'officially' entered the bear market - generally defined as when there is a price decline of 20% or more over at least a two-month period - by this measure there have been 10 previous bear markets in stocks during the last half-century. The investment group, Vanguard, urges its clients to stay calm and remember that even in a bear market "you may be better served by adhering to your long-term investment plan".<sup>1</sup> Fat chance.

Gold spiked to an all-time high at \$1,771 an ounce, as investors took refuge in the relatively safe haven - for now - of gold, with other ports of call being the Swiss

franc and Japanese yen; to the point, indeed, that these suddenly "massively overvalued" currencies were "coming like a hammer" against their respective economies (potentially crippling exports, etc) and as a consequence had to be devalued virtually overnight.<sup>2</sup> The law of unintended, but quite logical and foreseeable, consequences under capitalism.

In another crisis-management step, the US federal reserve issued a statement saying it will keep interest rates near zero until at least mid-2013 - previously, it had talked more vaguely about keeping borrowing costs low for an "extended



period”. But the Titanic is still heading towards the iceberg. Needless to say, the federal reserve did not announce that there would be a third round of quantitative easing - which over the last two and a half years saw \$2 trillion pumped into the US banking system. Do nothing and wait for that magical Harry Potter moment that will somehow make everything all right again - that seems to be the message.

Euro panic

Feeding into this generalised panic was the continued crisis in the euro zone. Specifically, the well grounded fear that debt contagion was spreading inexorably from the periphery to the core, with Italy stepping into the firing line, closely followed by Spain. In the case of Italy, the interest rate yields on government bonds (the amount needed to service public debt) had reached a crippling 6%, so that the country was having to run faster and faster to stand still. Clearly an unsustainable position, inviting default and bankruptcy, and the nightmare scenario of the European Union finding itself having to bailout the euro zone’s third largest economy and the eighth largest in the world - an impossible-seeming task, given the near intractable problems posed by the Greek bailout. Or just let Italy go under, hence destroying the euro zone project - also unthinkable. Too big to fail or too big to bail out?

Therefore, the European Central Bank mounted a desperate rescue mission on August 8 and purchased a so far undisclosed amount of Italian and Spanish government bonds - having the effect that the rise in demand lifted their prices. Most think that the initial ECB bond-buying operation came to about €5 billion - a drop in the ocean of toxic debt, of course. However, RBS economists estimate that the ECB and its bailout fund, the European Financial Stability Facility mechanism, will eventually have to own at least €850 billion-worth of Spanish and Italian bonds in order to safeguard - relatively speaking - those countries; thereby transferring significant risks to the balance sheet of a highly conservative organisation that has traditionally stuck to its remit of controlling inflation.

Even then, the ECB’s ‘rescue’ operation is at best a short-term fix - a little finger jammed into the huge fiscal dam. Yes, Italy’s 10-year bond yield fell to around 5.3% and Spain’s fell even further to 5.15%. But no-one thinks that these falls will last for long. Sooner rather than later the yield rates will start to creep up again, vulnerable to any economic/political instability in either the euro zone or the US.

Under the terms of an agreement struck after last month’s emergency summit in Brussels, the ECB’s bond-buying powers are meant to be assumed by a reformed and beefed-up EFSF mechanism - something like a EU version of the International Monetary Fund. But its powers have yet to be ratified by the European parliament and member-states - a tortuously long process that could take months, if it happens at all. Given the dire and extenuating circumstances then, it was judged that the ECB should ‘override’ the EFSF and call the bond-buying shots for now.

Unsurprisingly, this ‘unconstitutional’ decision revealed deep frictions within the euro-establishment - Germany’s Bundesbank, and the German government as a whole, was opposed to measure, unhappy that the ECB had chosen to considerably extend its powers and remit. But desperate times require desperate measures. That was certainly the view of ECB president Jean-Claude Trichet, who declared that Europe faced its worst crisis since the war.

However, the Italian job - or bailout - comes at a heavy price for

the working class. According to the Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*, Trichet sent a letter to prime minister Silvio Berlusconi at the end of last week dictating the terms on which the ECB was prepared to buy Italy’s increasingly costly debt, the slight dip in bond rates notwithstanding. The measured demanded by the ECB include more privatisations, including those of companies currently owned by local authorities, which must be set in train immediately, and, of course, sweeping ‘reforms’ of the labour market. In other words, the ECB seeks to drive down the living conditions and standards of Italian workers.

Following the statement from the US federal reserve and the ECB intervention, August 10 saw a market rally. But this will almost certainly turn out to be short-lived - watch this space. Indeed, in many respects, the indications are that we are witnessing a near classic bear market rally, also known in the trade as a “dead cat bounce”.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese Nikkei 225 has been typified by a number of bear market rallies since the late 1980s, but this had not affected the long-term stagnation that has characterised its economy.

After all, one of the key reasons behind the massive sell-off over the past few days has been the fear that the US - the world’s biggest economy - may be falling into recession. Something confirmed in the federal reserve statement, which expected “a somewhat slower pace of recovery over coming quarters than it did at the time of the previous meeting” (though it attributed *some* of the slowdown to “temporary factors”). The fed added that economic conditions were “likely to warrant exceptionally low levels for the federal funds rate at least through mid-2013” and had looked at a “range of policy tools” to promote a “stronger low-inflation recovery”. These unnamed tools would be employed “as appropriate” in the light of “fresh information” on the economy - more steady-as-she sails complacency, in other words. But the facts speak for themselves. The US economy grew at its slowest pace in the first half of 2011 since the recession ended in June 2009. The manufacturing and services industries barely grew in July. The unemployment rate remains above 9% percent, despite the 154,000 jobs added in the private sector in July.

The reality is that the US economy is scraping along the bottom, flirting with a double-dip recession - maybe a slump of calamitous proportions. Ditto, to some degree, the UK. Forecasts for GDP growth have been steadily falling since data showing the economy grew by just 0.2% in the second quarter - with UK manufacturing experiencing in June a 0.4% decline in production, and the trade gap rising to £8.87 billion. Delivering a further blow to George ‘fiscal genius’ Osborne’s plans for recovery, on August 10 the Bank of England downgraded its UK growth forecast for 2011 from 1.8% to about 1.5% - wildly optimistic in and of itself. Meanwhile, Osborne insists - like a man in total denial - that the government’s austerity measures are “working” because the UK has retained its triple-AAA credit unlike the US.

What is to be done? Many mainstream economists are saying that the ECB “must go nuclear to save Europe” - as opposed to weakly staggering from one emergency stop-gap measure to another. Take action. The EFSF’s current €440 billion budget needs to hiked to as much as €2.5 trillion, even the setting up of an additional “anti-speculation stabilisation fund”. Then, for instance, the ECB needs to launch quantitative easing on a “massive scale” to head off a wholesale euro zone debacle - if necessary purchasing half the entire stock of Italian and Spanish debt at one fell swoop. For Stephen

King, the HSBC’s chief economist (not the horror novelist), the ECB should forthwith drop its “ideological opposition” to quantitative easing and embrace “easy money” in “exactly the same” way as the US federal reserve apparently does. In the view of King, the euro zone will have to embrace closer fiscal and political union in the end or face the same sort of “fiscal anarchy leading to financial implosion.” A stark message indeed.

Yet all these half-baked schemas, self-evidently, are totally inadequate - even the sad fantasies of deluded people. The EU/euro zone is too fractured a body, riven with antagonistic contradictions as it is, to ever organise anything on the scale suggested above - let alone provide a *real* solution to the crisis.

New hegemon

Some have argued, both on the left and right, that the US downgrading is meaningless - just a storm in a teacup. We think this is a *profoundly* mistaken view. No, the downgrading is symbolic of the economic decline of the US. The prestige of US imperialism has taken a severe denting. There is idle talk of a new reserve currency to replace the dollar, maybe the Chinese yuan. Just forget it - it is not going to happen, simple as that. The US emerged as the strongest country on earth after World War II, with half of the world’s industrial production and the nexus of political connections - sheer clout - to get what it wanted. And behind that, of course, it had the armed force to enforce those political decisions if necessary. It remains the world’s sole military superpower.

What country or bloc could rival or replace the US as the global hegemon? China is a non-starter, especially given the fact that it has massively lent to the US and hence has absolutely no interest in a US recession - which would have a disastrous impact on its own economy, and in turn pose a possible threat to the political supremacy of the misnamed Communist Party of China. Despite the claims to the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, Socialist Action and other Stalinites, the CPC party-state machine is incredibly fragile and could easily fall to pieces. If its economy slowed down, or went into reverse, then the Chinese bureaucracy would find extreme difficulty in subjugating the masses and maintaining its own cohesion - an essential requirement if it is to successfully function as the sweatshop of the *world* capitalist economy, into which it is inextricably locked. And the signs of Chinese slowdown are there - industrial output grew at a slower pace in July, while inflation unexpectedly quickened, putting the central bank in a bind as it tries to keep prices in check without dragging down an economy facing increasing threats from abroad.<sup>4</sup> China to the rescue of capitalism? It just goes to show that the leaders of the capitalist world have no viable strategy. How about the EU ‘taking on’ US imperialism as a new contender? To ask the question is to get the answer - only with a new Napoleon would that be a possibility.

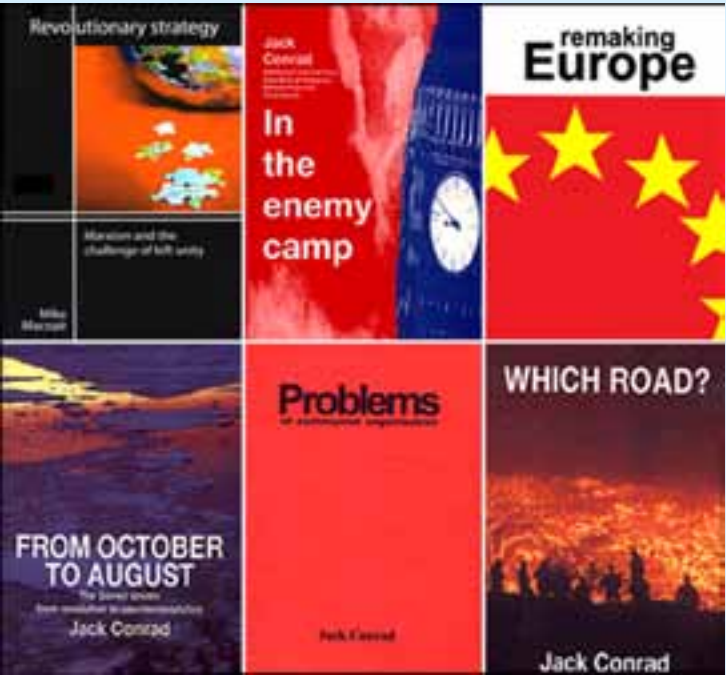
Only the working class can provide an alternative to capital’s irrationality and horrors - no other force can replace the US as the world’s hegemon. Our class must come to power if we are to chart a course to a new civilisation, and only if that occurs first on a continental scale will that power be able to survive - a workers’ Europe being the most feasible candidate ●

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Notes

1. <http://tinyurl.com/4xbaunv>.  
2. *Wall Street Journal* August 5.  
3. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market\\_trend](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_trend).  
4. <http://tinyurl.com/44qq5yj>.

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## USA

# Washington paralysis: a geriatric disorder

Jim Creegan looks at the battle of the budget ceiling and the intransigence of the Tea Partiers

If these reports from the US were fiction instead of fact, the writer might justly be ridiculed as a hack whose stories consist of slight variations on a single plot: Democrats and Republicans argue over policy; Obama and the Democratic leadership initially toss a few rhetorical bones to the liberal-Democratic base and then step in to settle the argument on Republican-friendly, or at least corporate-friendly, terms. Congressional Democrats are prevailed upon to swallow their misgivings and accept a rotten deal in the name of political expediency.

The writer is not, however, responsible for this tediously repetitive storyline. It merely describes the actual course of every major Congressional debate since Obama came into office: around the healthcare bill of 2010 (see *Weekly Worker* April 15 2010), concerning tax and spending proposals in the same year (*Weekly Worker* January 13 2011), and now in the battle of the budget ceiling. The only difference in this case were the obstacles that arose on a familiar political path leading to a more or less predictable outcome. The debate had about it the quality of a formulaic cliff-hanger, to which the ending is obvious, and only the particular tribulations of the protagonist along the way provide suspense.

The sparks flew not over the substance, but rather over the particulars, of putting into practice what has become a transatlantic consensus for dealing with the continuing crisis originating in 2007-08: spare the plutocrats and savage the plebs.

At 9.3% of GDP, the \$14.5 trillion overall US government deficit (the difference between expenditure and revenue) is indeed high by historical standards. The main cause is a severe shortfall in tax revenues due to the great recession. Compounding the problem are the unrescinded tax cuts enacted under Bush, the bankers' bailout of three years ago and the cost of the four foreign interventions now in progress. The main driver of projected long-term debt, which some say will swell the deficit to 100% of GDP by 2021, is the mounting price tag of medical care for the elderly and indigent in a system that, due to the administrative expenses of private insurers and high drug prices, costs roughly twice as much as the far more comprehensive healthcare schemes of other advanced countries.

The federal government, however, faced no emergency comparable to Greece or Portugal. Whatever the credit rating of US treasury bills, they constitute the only financial market large enough to absorb the enormous dollar surpluses of China and others. Far more pressing than government debt are the needs of the country's 25 million jobless and underemployed. The 23% of homeowners behind on their mortgage payments, and facing possible foreclosure, along with the 48 million Americans - about one in six - forced to rely on food stamps, also find themselves in a somewhat tighter corner than the feds. Many state and municipal governments - which, unlike Washington, are not permitted the luxury of deficit spending - have been hit much harder by the fall-off in tax receipts, combined with



In decline

reduced federal allocations. With coffers near empty, they are often unable to maintain the most essential public services - schools, libraries and fire departments. The disparity in distress between the government and the people has led many liberal economists, with Nobel laureate Paul Krugman leading the chorus, to urge Congress and the administration to spend now on relief and stimulus measures, and worry about budget-trimming later on.

To a government not in thrall to the money power, a wide range of deficit-reduction measures would have been possible. Restoring tax rates for the top income bracket, now at 35%, to their 1960s level of 90%, or even to their 1970s level of roughly 70%, would lop off a huge slice of the deficit at one stroke. Rising medical costs could be contained by negotiating lower drug prices with the big pharmaceutical companies.

But such solutions were 'off the table' from the beginning, and hardly ever mentioned in the mainstream media. Both parties are convinced that the answer to hardship is more hardship. The Republicans, emboldened by their capture of the House of Representatives in November, and spurred on by Tea Party fanatics in Congress, are on an all-out budget-slashing rampage. But Obama also made it abundantly clear that he, too, had hitched his star to the austerity bandwagon. He had already announced a freeze on the wages of federal employees and appointed a 'bipartisan' deficit commission, headed by a rightwing Republican, Alan Simpson, a rightwing Democrat, Erskine Bowles, and advised by Peter Peterson, an investment banker and anti-social spending crusader of long standing. The president offered no new government stimulus package to replace the inadequate one put in place

shortly after he came to office, now largely exhausted. Republicans and leading Democrats were thus divided only over the extent and packaging of the austerity to be imposed - the Republicans favouring deep cuts and strident government-bashing, the Democrats preferring slightly less drastic reductions and a rhetoric of 'shared sacrifice' between oligarchs and everybody else.

## Their way

The Republicans saw in the Congressional vote required to raise the debt ceiling an irresistible opportunity to do it their way. The crisis was entirely of their making. For nearly a century Congressional approval has been required for the government to borrow more in order to cover expenses already incurred, and thereby avoid default on payments to creditors. The budget both houses of Congress had approved for the fiscal year 2011 contained expenditures totalling \$3.82 trillion. Since revenues added up to only \$2.17 trillion, there was a \$1.48 trillion gap that had to be covered by borrowing in excess of a pre-established \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling. A by-your-leave from Congress was therefore needed. In years past, getting such approval was a pro-forma matter. This time, however, Republicans in the House of Representatives used their newly won majority to block approval, insisting that any borrowing above the debt ceiling be matched dollar-for-dollar by future reductions in federal spending without any increase in taxes.

Obama had a number of options had he chosen to fight back. Congressional liberals argued that the 14th amendment to the constitution, which states that US public debt "shall not be questioned", gives the president the power to override the debt ceiling by executive order. An obscure statute

also grants the treasury the authority to mint platinum coins. Obama, it was argued, could have ordered that two such trillion-dollar coins be struck, deposited in the Federal Reserve and used to pay off the debt. Such measures would have been extraordinary, but so too was the Republican attempt to hold the government hostage over a routine procedural vote. Any such countermeasures on Obama's part would have been feasible politically only if combined with a strong public campaign against obstruction from the 'Grand Old Party'. The president, however, has lately been disinclined to such barnstorming.

Obama instead saw the impasse not as an affront, but an opportunity. Echoing Republican rhetoric about the need to "live within our means", he responded by offering Republicans a "grand bargain" for reining in future government spending.

Obama's offer was tendered in private talks with the Republican speaker of the House, John Boehner, so the details were sketchy. In general, though, Obama proposed to reduce federal outlays by \$4 trillion over the next 10 years through a combination of spending cuts - some in the military budget, but most in social programmes - and rises in revenue. The cuts reportedly outnumbered tax increases by three to one. Obama outdid the Republicans by placing on the table reductions in Medicare and social security, the two core government social welfare programmes that even Congressional Republicans shied away from tampering with this time round. They were chastened by the widespread popular disapproval of a plan put forward in April by Tea Party-backed representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, to turn Medicare into a private-sector voucher plan.

Among Obama's proposals were the introduction of means-testing for Medicare, an increase in the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67, and the downward revision of the formula used to calculate cost-of-living rises for social security recipients. Yet, for all its rightwing audacity, the president's proposed compromise was rejected by Boehner in the end because he could not sell it to the newly elected Tea Party caucus in the House, which was influential enough to kill any measure not to its liking.

## Fig leaf denied

The 'grand bargain' failed because Congressional Tea Partiers were determined to deny Obama even the fig leaf Democrats typically employ to obscure the rightwing content of their actions. The president did not seek this time to rescind the Bush tax cuts for those earning above \$250,000 a year, as he had tried to do (unsuccessfully) in last year's budget fight. He did, however, aim to 'balance' the spending cuts contained in his proposal with revenue increases obtained by closing a few of the more outrageous, if less than fiscally important, tax loopholes now enjoyed by the patriciate. He proposed to do away with a deduction corporations and individuals are permitted to take for the depreciation of their private jets; the 'carried interest' provision, which permits hedge-fund managers to pay only the 15% long-term capital-gains tax rate on the millions many

collect in yearly bonuses, instead of the normal income-tax rate of 35%; and, last, the elimination of some of the enormous subsidies and tax breaks now enjoyed by the top five energy companies, which reported record profits this year. But the House Tea Party caucus would have none of it, insisting that all future savings come from spending cuts alone, and forcing Boehner to suspend negotiations.

There then ensued a series of elaborate tractions involving the White House and Congressional leaders, the specifics of which I will not bore readers with. But a general pattern was evident throughout. The Republicans presented a number of proposals, and passed measures in the House designed to test the resolve of Obama and the Democrats, who rejected them. One - the so-called Cut, Cap and Balance Act, called for a balanced-budget amendment to the constitution, stating that federal expenditure never be allowed to exceed revenue - a law that would render the federal government inoperable. Another proposal called for a temporary budget fix that would expire before the 2012 elections - obviously a ploy intended to embarrass Obama during his re-election campaign.

But after each Republican provocation, Democrats - whether in the person of Obama, in combination with influential Republican senators (the 'gang of six'); whether represented by the party leadership, or by their own bills in the House and Senate - came back to the Republicans with a proposal more in keeping with the latter's demands than the previous one, each time to be turned away because their capitulation was insufficiently abject. Obama at one point publicly stated that he had demonstrated his willingness to compromise by defying the wishes of many of his own party rank and file, and complained that the GOP was so bent on exploiting the situation for narrow party-political advantage that it did not know how to say yes.

This game of grovel-and-be-kicked continued until the very eve of the August 2 default deadline, although few expected that default, with its disastrous consequences for the US and world economies, would actually be allowed to take place. Both parties showed no hesitation about exaggerating the danger in the hope that the public would react with relief rather than anger to the bad news that was to come. The imbroglio was finally resolved at the 11th hour on unmistakably Republican terms: massive future spending reductions with no tax increase of any kind on corporations and the rich. Boehner boasted that he had obtained 98% of what he wanted. Paul Krugman's *New York Times* column the next day was aptly headlined "Obama surrenders!"

The plan finally adopted kicks the deficit-reduction can some distance down the road, but under circumstances that make draconian cuts inevitable. It immediately increases the debt ceiling by \$400 billion in order to stave off default, and provides for a second \$500 billion increase in February. Automatic spending limits that will reduce the deficit by \$917 billion over the next 10 years will be put in place on October 1. Most of the cuts will

come from ‘discretionary spending’ - on transport, basic research and education. The military budget will also be trimmed by \$350 billion, but this reduction is not as great as it seems. John Boehner personally intervened in negotiations to make sure that this amount was reduced by \$50 billion from the \$400 billion cut initially proposed. By no means all of the sacrifice, moreover, will be borne by the Pentagon; veterans’ benefits, including medical care, will also fall under the axe. An extension of unemployment benefits was not included in the package, as initially demanded by Democrats.

Most significantly, the plan creates a 12-member ‘super-committee’ composed in equal parts of Republicans and Democrats from the House and Senate, appointed by their respective party leaders. The committee will be charged with finding \$1.2-\$1.5 trillion in additional savings over the next decade, which can come from entitlements - Medicare and Medicaid - as well as discretionary items. Shortfalls can also theoretically be made up through tax increases, though Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has already vowed to appoint only members of his party willing to pledge in advance not to vote for revenue hikes. The Democratic names being mentioned as super-committee candidates, Max Baucus and Kent Conrad, are two ‘blue dog’ Democrats, among the most rightwing in the Senate.

The panel will present its recommendations to Congress for an up or down vote before the end of November. If they are voted down, automatic across-the-board spending reductions will kick in. Half will come from the ‘national security’ budget and some from social security. Medicare and Medicaid will be spared. The automatic-cut mechanism, by including the military budget so dear to Republicans and social security, supposedly important to Democrats, is obviously designed to discourage a ‘no’ vote by Congress. Both Congressional chambers must, in addition, vote on a balanced-budget bill by December 31. If carried, the legislation would, according to constitutionally established procedure, be sent to the states for ratification; two-thirds of state legislatures would have to approve it before it could become law. There is no chance of this happening, and the bill proposing the amendment will be unlikely to get through Congress in the first place. The provision was put in the debt-ceiling plan by Republicans to draw national attention to the balanced-budget idea, which they obviously intend to make a major issue in their 2012 campaigns.

## Keynes interred

Manufactured though the budget crisis was, its outcome punctuates with an exclamation mark a shift that has been going on in American politics for the past 35 years. Until the 1970s, Democrats and Republicans were more or less committed to the use of fiscal and monetary policy to maintain near full employment and a certain level of consumer demand. In the face of the most acute economic distress in the country since the great depression, both parties are telling the people not only that they can no longer look to the government for relief, but that the current recession will be used as a pretext to undermine the safety net even further. In the words of Obama’s former chief of staff and present mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, “Never let a crisis go to waste”.

This shift is particularly significant for the Democratic Party, which has historically invoked the Keynesian legacy to maintain the allegiance of unions, minorities and the less well-off. Conventional political wisdom has it that, by tacking right, Obama

is simply following in the footsteps of Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council in the 1980s. Then, it is said, the Democrats devised a strategy to seize the political centre from the Republicans by adopting major elements of their politics: tax reduction, gutting the poor allowance (welfare), free trade, business-friendly attitudes. The Democrats thereby aimed to relegate their adversaries to the rightwing fringe. Their trajectory supposedly followed a similar movement in popular sentiment. Recent soundings of public opinion, however, lend little support to the notion that Obama is merely chasing middle-of-the-road votes. They reveal that not only the Republicans, but also the president, are several degrees to the right of the American people.

## More jobs

*The New York Times* of August 5 reports that, although most Americans support deficit reduction (an easy thing to be for), they consider the creation of jobs more important by a ratio of two to one. A Pew Research Center survey released in June shows respondents favouring a scale-down of overseas military commitments (65% to 30%), limiting tax deductions for big corporations (62% to 34%), raising taxes on income over \$250,000 a year (66% to 31%); on the other hand, they disapprove of raising the social security retirement age (59% to 36%), and reducing aid to the poor (54% to 40%). The results suggest that Obama is attempting to win the approval of a group much more restricted than the general public.

Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, an economics professor at Drake University, writes: “The wrangling during the current budget negotiations ... is prompted not so much by a clash of differing opinions on the two sides as it is a competition over the same or similar position by both parties - a competition to win the hearts and minds of the Wall Street bigwigs. The Republicans are angry because they feel that the president has broken the traditional rules of the bipartisan game, and has staked out their customary position on the right. And Mr Obama is incensed because the Tea Partiers ... are not playing by the conventional rules, and are not providing him with the tax cover he needs in order to justify his ‘bigger than the Republicans’ cuts in social spending” (*Counterpunch* July 22).

Indeed, Obama was out to prove that he and his party was better able to advance the ruling-class agenda than the GOP. Wasn’t attacking social security, after all, something that George W Bush had tried and failed to do? Obama’s conduct was widely characterised in the media as a Nixon-goes-to China move. Just as only an American Tory like Richard Nixon could make peace with the communist ogres in Beijing, so only a politician with ‘progressive’ credentials can command enough authority among the majority of the people to undo the social legislation that Democrats have historically trumpeted as their crowning achievement.

Grumbling in the Democratic ranks, getting slowly louder since Obama took office, grew during the budget battle into a muffled roar. In the House vote on the bill, Democrats divided evenly, 95 for to 95 against. The majority of the black and progressive caucuses voted ‘no’.

Yet there is less to their opposition than meets the eye. Knowing he had enough votes to secure the bill’s passage, Obama signalled through Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi that he understood the representatives’ need to oppose the bill for the benefit of their constituents in 2012, when they must all stand for election, and so would not hold their ‘no’ votes against them. None of these disgruntled Democrats, nor any other

prominent party politician, has given a hint of going beyond this kind of cost-free opposition or showing the starch of their Tea Party opposite numbers. No-one, for instance, is talking seriously about opposing Obama from the left in the Democratic presidential primaries that will begin in January - a move the president would no doubt look less kindly upon. It appears as if Obama has been able to survive this ordeal with his base intact. If anything will cost him a second term in 2012, it will be the same low voter turnout due to lack of enthusiasm that figured in the Democratic loss of the House of Representatives in November.

(There was also a subtler hint concerning the limits to criticism leading Democrats were willing to tolerate. The television network, MSNBC, functions as a left-liberal counterpoise to the notoriously foul and prevaricating Republican propaganda platform, Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch. All of its evening news-show hosts - Lawrence O’Donnell, Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz - throw left jabs at the president from time to time, but all from the standpoint that Obama is a well-meaning progressive deficient in the required gumption and/or negotiating skills.

But one newly hired host, a Turkish-American named Cenk Uygur (also host of an online programme called *The Young Turks*), was less willing to pull his punches. Uygur, whose nationally televised 6 o’clock hour of interviews and comment enjoyed solid viewer ratings, began to suggest with growing boldness that the occupants of the White House and Democratic Congressional offices are calculating politicians rather than the timid bumbler portrayed by their loyal critics, and that they are just as slavish as Republicans to corporate power. He soon received a summons from MSNBC’s CEO, Phil Griffin, who told Uygur he had just been to Washington, where he had received phone calls from certain unnamed individuals objecting to Uygur’s tone. Griffin continued that, while it was fun to be an outsider, we at MSNBC are ‘establishment’.

Viewers were surprised upon tuning in a few months later to find Uygur’s place taken by the consummately opportunist black politician, Al Sharpton, who had earlier stated on television that he would never “criticise the president”. The station had offered Uygur a much less visible weekend time slot, which he turned down. No-one knows for sure who made the mysterious phone calls, but many conjectured that they were placed by a highly influential Democrat, at a prominent DC address, who obviously regarded calling members of his party inept as one thing, but imputing to them deliberate class motives as quite another, especially on national air.)

## Frankenstein’s monster?

The Tea Party caucus in the House of Representatives emerged from the budget negotiations as the only real wild card, and as a new actor on the American political stage. Its conduct sheds some light on a question previously discussed in this paper: is this amorphous, rightwing current primarily an attempt to put a popular face on a ruling class agenda, or is it an expression of untethered middle class rage? No definitive answer is yet possible. The group’s big-money backers are still there. The caucus, headed by 2012 presidential candidate Michele Bachmann, has 60 declared members, and is influential beyond its numbers in the 435-seat lower chamber. Its members are better financed on average than other Congresspersons, and are particularly adored by the oil and gas industry. The ruling class, like other classes,

contains right and left clusters of opinion.

Yet the rage is there too. There emerged during the debate an unmistakable tension between Tea Partiers, on the one hand, and the mainstream Republican leadership and Wall Street, on the other. House speaker John Boehner, a corporate hack through and through, appeared personally happy to do a face-saving deal with Obama. Every move of his in that direction, however, was stymied by Tea Party intransigence. They would accept nothing short of what they ultimately got: spending cuts with no tax increases whatsoever for corporations or millionaires. And even the expenditure reductions of the final bill were not draconian enough for the 66 sore winners among House Republicans, including many Tea Partiers, who wound up voting against it.

For its part, Wall Street, which had heavily backed many Tea Partiers in November, grew nervous as default approached. The leading political arms of big business - the National Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable - sent a joint letter to Congress suggesting that the avoidance of financial Armageddon was perhaps worth the price of a few sops to Obama. The Tea Party caucus was still unmoved. In stark contrast to ‘progressive’ Democrats, many of its members seem imbued with a sense of mission that transcends daily polling numbers and contribution cheques. A number have signed a pledge circulated by the anti-tax crusader, Grover Norquist, to oppose any legislation calling for tax rises - and aim to keep it.

What drives these dead-enders? It is certainly understandable how racialism and xenophobia, the distinct undertones of which are often an embarrassment to Tea Party leaders, can exercise a firm grip on frenzied middle class minds. The notion of a balanced budget, however, does not seem to carry a comparable emotional charge. It must be viewed as a component of a larger ideology of unvarnished possessive individualism, not incompatible with racialism, but not merely a camouflage for it either. In the minds of the middle class strivers who find inspiration in the writings of Ayn Rand, the amount of money and possessions one has accumulated is the supreme measure of individual creativity and worth. In their view, tax revenues spent on social programmes take money from themselves and the deserving rich they seek to emulate, only to put it into the pockets of the undeserving poor.

It is tempting to regard such ideas as a transparent rationale for the selfishness of comfortably situated white people anxious to hang on to what they have. But material interests, as we know from Marx, harden over time into ideologies that can become a power in their own right. Such, it seems, is the case with some Congressional Tea Partiers. The unbridled individualism they espouse may seem to many Europeans, as it does to many Americans, a remnant of 18th and 19th century bourgeois consciousness. It still resonates, however, in the dollar republic, and has a certain purchase within the ruling class itself, which in any case finds it useful.

Only when the true believers take their ideology seriously enough to stand in the way of bank bailouts, or court financial collapse, do they threaten to step out of their assigned role as Igor, Dr Frankenstein’s deformed but dutiful laboratory assistant, and become a Frankenstein’s monster. Because the stubbornness of the Tea Party caucus contributed ultimately to an outcome not objectionable in ruling class circles, there has yet been no deep split amongst Republicans,

but that could change.

The budget ceiling crisis was a debacle way out of proportion to the differences involved. Never in recent decades was there so much sound and fury over a temporary fix between two parties that are in basic agreement. The fight was driven by an appetite for narrow political advantage unrelated to major policy differences and untimpered by the larger sense of purpose, like the struggle against communism, that once inclined the rival bourgeois parties to compose their differences more amicably.

Obama’s (perhaps fatal) flaw as a politician is that he seeks to restore the old bipartisan spirit at any price when the foundation for it no longer exists, and major private-sector players contemplate little else but the bottom line. Only the danger of total meltdown forced an uneasy compromise. The Tea Party, with its ‘individual *über alles*’ mentality, in a sense embodies the spirit of the time.

## Default

Although default was avoided, no long-term problem was solved and no-one can really be said to have come out on top politically. The affair was an alarming symptom of distress at the imperial hegemon’s heart - not of cardiac arrest, certainly, but at least of arrhythmia.

The malaise can only deepen. From an economic standpoint the final bill will slow down the accumulation of government debt, but hardly eliminate it. And despite its pro-austerity tilt, the ‘super-committee’ set up to preside over future budget cuts could well find itself gridlocked just as Congress was, if the Tea Partiers on it remain as adamant as the have been so far.

It is also difficult to remember a time when such an intense furore inside the Capital Beltway has been so remote from the concerns of the country outside it. Ordinary Americans do not yet clearly perceive the class attack behind what they see as an arcane and unseemly row among politicians, but they know that little of benefit to them will emerge from the squabbling. Few any longer give credence to the ritually repeated Republican mantra that slashing spending and lowering taxes will unleash business confidence to ‘create jobs’. The country has just passed through a period in which the oligarchs have used billions in tax windfalls and bailout money to hire workers in low-wage countries, buy back their own stocks, award themselves bigger bonuses, invent new swindles and do just about everything but hire more workers at home.

Congress, and especially its Republican wing, has hit the bottom in public esteem, with disapproval ratings in the 70s and 80s. The Tea Party has also fallen into greater disrepute. With higher negative poll numbers than at any time since it started, it is broadly perceived as the main culprit in the affair. Obama has emerged perhaps less damaged than the other players, but doing a deal on Republican terms has made him appear weak in the eyes of core constituents.

It is difficult to predict what hopeful portents - or what rough beasts - will spring from the pervasive feeling that existing political forces in the country have reached the point of exhaustion. But big investors, casting a cold eye on a country with mounting debt, next to no economic growth and a government estranged from its people and divided against itself over trifles, are voting with their portfolios. Last week, one of the three top rating agencies, Standard and Poor’s, downgraded the US government bond rating from triple A to double A-plus for the first time in history, and the Dow Jones industrial average, after falling by 500 points last week, plunged more than 600 points on the day of this writing ●



## RIOTS

# A fleeting moment of power, pure joy and fulfilment

Our movement needs to provide hope for a generation of young people who have lost all hope - that can only be done by making real our vision of working class rule and socialism, argues **Peter Manson**

**A** positive and progressive rebellion against deprivation or unashamed and backward criminality? The reaction of the left to the riots in towns and cities across Britain has been polarised between these two extremes.

As readers will know, what started as a peaceful protest outside Tottenham Hale police station on Saturday August 6 was violently transformed after several hours and eventually sparked full-scale rioting and looting, first in London and then in major conurbations the length and breadth of the country. The original demonstration was against the brutal killing by police of Mark Duggan and their subsequent lying excuses and justifications.

As the ruling class bemoaned the fact that they had lost control of the streets, the authorities' disgrace at their inability to prevent massive destruction, arson and theft turned to angry threats. After huge police reinforcements on August 9 managed to contain most of the violence in London (but not elsewhere), David Cameron assured the police that they would have all the material resources they needed - water cannons, armoured cars, baton rounds. The Tory MP for Croydon Central, Gavin Barwell, said the use of the army should be considered.

For his part, Ed Miliband remarked that the imposition of a curfew should not be ruled out, while Labour's former deputy leader, John Prescott, implied that the wearing of hoods and scarves to hide the face should be banned. In similar vein there were many expressions of frustration at the inability of the police to monitor or control the spreading of messages using Blackberry Messenger (BBM). Not only are these messages encrypted, but they are free to send, allowing people to communicate rapidly amongst ever expanding contacts.

David Lammy, Labour MP for Tottenham, called for the BBM network to be shut down during the crisis, while Blackberry's manufacturer said it would try to cooperate with detectives to identify ringleaders. Perhaps it will be able to think of a way of removing the encryption from now on or maybe consider how it could charge for each message (after all, raising the price of alcohol has really stopped binge drinking, hasn't it?).

It is, of course, typical of the bourgeoisie to resort to attacks on our rights and freedoms - to dress as we like, to communicate freely, to drink beer or lager - when, even momentarily, they lose control. But the ruling class is ideologically bankrupt, and is totally unable to address rationally the huge social problems its own system produces. Capitalism in decline cannot but cause deepening alienation, most sharply felt amongst the economically and socially dispossessed and excluded.

As the whole left has pointed out, this alienation can only be exacerbated by round after round of spending cuts - although it is an exaggeration to claim, as Ken Livingstone did, that the cuts have *caused* the riots. According to the Socialist Workers Party, "the riots would not have happened without the



**Carnival of destruction**

attacks being launched by the Tory-led government".<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, this is too easy an explanation. There are surely much deeper causes at work. Today's capitalist society is more and more focused on generating artificial needs and as a direct concomitant produces more and more alienation, hopelessness and despair. As the world of things expands, the world of people shrinks. Having hated school, being unemployed, or having a dead-end job, it is quite understandable why young people turn to petty criminality, hedonism and join street gangs.

So how should we assess the actions of the youth? They have wreaked wanton destruction - and it is by no means just big department stores or the police that have been targeted. In fact it is largely working class people and small shopkeepers who have been worse hit - violently assaulted, their homes burnt, their property stolen or destroyed. Despite the spark of Mark Duggan's killing, the rioting has largely been without any political content. The best that it can be called is nihilism. There is a layer of young people who are angry, who couldn't give a damn and get a huge buzz from lashing out, fighting the police and trashing anything they happen to fancy trashing and getting their hands on whatever they can. A fleeting moment of power, a fleeting moment of pure joy, a fleeting moment of fulfilment.

True, rioting represents a collective rebellion at one level and some may say it is a positive that so many reject the state's authority. But the same can be said about the anti-social gangs that lurk on our council estates. They attempt to replace the state's authority in a tiny area with that of their own, but the result is generally thoroughly unpleasant. It could also be said that looting effects some kind of minimal redistribution of society's wealth, but the rioters were hardly Robin Hoods. The designer clothes and trainers they stole are for their own use - either that or to be sold on the black market.

But the SWP can *only* see the positives: "At some point people pushed to the wall will turn and fight back. That is what is happening now, just as it did during Margaret Thatcher's reign in the 1980s, the great slump of the 1930s and the great depression of the 1880s - all periods which saw riots in Britain."

All well and good, but does rioting take our movement forward? While the comrades rather feebly admit, "to stop the Tories more is needed", they enthuse: "Riots are an expression of anger. As Martin Luther King said, they are 'the language of the unheard'."

And looting? Another SWP online article reads: "Karl Marx was exactly right when he talked about expropriating the expropriators, taking back what they have taken from us. That's what looting by poor working class people represents and in that sense it is a deeply political act."<sup>2</sup>

"Deeply political"? That is plain crazy. No-one can deny that people react to the circumstances they find themselves in, including the current social and political order. But to rejoice in the ransacking of corner shops is to plumb the depths of idiocy. A "deeply political" act is usually considered to be one guided by an active political agenda.

When it comes to the violence of the rioters, the SWP is in denial: it "was aimed at the police who carry out violent attacks on working class communities on a daily basis, especially against black male youth". Well, *some* of it was, as the SWP knows full well, but most of the victims (including the four killed) were not members of the police. Most of those mugged, assaulted on the streets or forced to flee their burning homes were the 'ordinary workers' to whom the SWP usually tries to appeal.

And a further article explains just how considerate the rioters were: "In Hackney the riot lasted for hours on Monday. Hundreds of young people were running from the police, but a

bus was blocking their way. They surrounded it and suddenly realised the driver was still inside. Two young rioters knocked on the door and beckoned for her to get off. When she left the bus everyone clapped. Only then did they trash it".<sup>3</sup>

No, that is not meant to be a joke.

By contrast the Socialist Party in England and Wales correctly asserts: "The vast majority of people do not condone the riots and condemn the burning of homes, post offices and council services." But the online article goes rapidly downhill from there, taking a diametrically opposite stance to that of the SWP: "There is widespread anger that the police did not act effectively to defend people's homes and local small businesses and shops. Given how widely predicted rioting was, there was also anger that police were not prepared to protect local areas. Many blamed government cuts to police services."

SPEW even approvingly quotes a representative of the Metropolitan Police Federation: "Morale among the police officers dealing with this incident, and within the police service

as a whole, is at its lowest level ever due to the constant attacks on them by the home secretary and the government in the form of the reviews into police pay and conditions."<sup>4</sup>

This is as nauseating as the SWP line is stupid. It should be ABC for socialists that the prime role of the police, as an organ of the state, is not to protect working class communities, but to uphold existing property relations. Instead of appealing for the forces of law and order to tighten their control, we should be looking to our own resources.

But that is the problem with both the SWP and SPEW. It is all very well making a series of demands on the government, most of which are highly supportable. But what should we do? Instead of placing your hopes in either lumpen gangs or the state's armed bodies of men, what about the power of organised workers?

The example of Turks and Kurds in Dalston is a positive one. In one part of Kingsland Road residents succeeded in driving away the rioters in the late evening of August 8. Although the media refer only to shopkeepers defending themselves, there were more people involved than a few kebab and coffee shop owners in this traditionally leftwing community.

The left should be looking to build permanent self-defence units. We need to provide our own protection against rioters, looters, English Defence League hoodlums and - yes - police thuggery. But most of all the working class needs to provide hope for a generation of young people who have lost all hope - that can only be done by replacing this sick society with a society that breaks with the market, profit, greed and production for the sake of production. We need to win the youth to our vision of working class power and socialism, and we need to prioritise the fight for the weapon we need to make it reality - a Communist Party ●

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## Notes

1. SWP statement: [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25645](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25645).
2. [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25692](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25692).
3. [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25681](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25681).
4. [www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12498/08-08-2011/tottenham-riots-fatal-police-shooting-sparks-eruption-of-protest-amp-anger](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12498/08-08-2011/tottenham-riots-fatal-police-shooting-sparks-eruption-of-protest-amp-anger).

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# LABOUR



**Labour: dead for the working class?**

# Diversiory and doomed to fail

Labour is not moving to the left or opening up, says **Chris Strafford**. We need a rethink and a plan B

In October last year comrade James Turley confidently announced: “Now that Labour is in opposition, however, there is a good chance it will shift to the left - in some ways, it already has.” A claim echoed in numerous articles, discussions and meetings by the CPGB majority.<sup>1</sup>

Yet after over a year of Labour in opposition can anyone honestly claim that the party has moved to the left? It has been a year of dithering at the top, insignificant increases in membership and the implementation of savage cuts by Labour councils for working class communities. Labour is waging war hand in hand with the Tories against the working class. We are not witnessing an opening up of the party or the democratic reforms that could enable trade unionists, the left and the masses to organise within the party in defence of the working class. In fact we are seeing further attacks on

democracy and a Labour Party that is at all levels lining up against workers entering into struggle.

In 1919 former dockers leader James Sexton MP said: “By a strike as a means of political action, they would be going in a direction which would bring a big risk of breaking up their organisation, letting loose forces they could not control, and asking for civil war in the country.”<sup>2</sup> Even the most leftwing of MPs and Labour leaders have consistently opposed the class struggle. Remember that the darling of the left, Tony Benn, sent armed police to break the Windscale strike in 1977. The current Labour Party leadership is doing nothing new in condemning strike action, as it did in the lead-up to June 30. The strikes gave the working class a very valuable lesson: the Labour Party has again lined up with the class enemy and will seek to sabotage our resistance when we fight

back. Workers are learning this lesson. Will the communists?

The uprisings in the Middle East, the general strikes in southern Europe and the emergence of the anti-cuts movement in Britain are carried out independently from, and in many cases against, the traditional reformist parties that claimed to represent the working class. With the prospect of the biggest strikes for a generation in the autumn, communists need to pursue a policy to strengthen and generalise the fightback. We must not repeat the mistake of diverting the movement into the hands of the Labour Party and the bureaucracy.

## Trade unions

Ben Lewis in his short report on last month’s Coalition of Resistance conference asks: “Would it not be an idea to join with other unions and have an impact on Labour itself,

fighting against the scab approach of Ed Miliband?”<sup>3</sup> This is one of the more interesting arguments that the CPGB majority has used. Get all of the unions to be affiliated to the Labour Party in the hope they would make their voices heard. A somewhat strange demand, as the Labour link is consistently being deployed to stymie action in the affiliated unions. Instead of having a few unions that do act independently and do take serious national strike action, we would be left with more unions that increasingly mirror Unison and Usdaw.

Arguing for unaffiliated unions to join the Labour Party is at present a distraction from the real tasks at hand. If further affiliations are successful they will only bolster the bureaucratic prison working class resistance is trying to escape. It would strengthen the leaders who occasionally talk left but offer no action beyond prayers for a

Labour government. Which might cut a bit less over a few more years than the current government. Furthermore such appeals rest on the idea that the Labour Party is the party of the working class. The Labour Party has always been the political expression of the trade union bureaucrats, who in substance have an identical approach to Miliband and Balls. Giving the trade union leaders a greater say in Labour policy will be no more than a new coat of paint for the attacks.

Labour Party democracy has always been somewhat of a chimera that has sent revolutionaries on a long march to nowhere. Only four years ago at the Bournemouth conference what was left of the old structures was obliterated - contemporary resolutions can no longer be submitted and voted on. Instead such issues will be dealt with by the national policy forum. This attack removed any chance of



little communist groups having any serious impact in the Labour Party, as even the most leftwing of CLPs lost their means of addressing the national membership.

Ed Miliband is set to further reduce the influence of the unions and affiliated bodies in what will be the biggest shake-up since 1918.<sup>4</sup> The new measures would reduce the unions' 50% vote at conference and see Unite, Unison and GMB general secretaries losing a large proportion of their block vote. There would also be a new membership tier, enabling people who register as party supporters to vote in elections for a new leader. This attack on democracy is supported by the right wing in and outside the Labour Party. It also goes some way to demonstrating that even out of office the Labour Party does not automatically move to the left, nor open up so that the left can make an impact. We must not repeat the mantras of decades long passed that have proven wrong hundreds of times; we need a radical rethink.

In workplaces and the unions communists have clear tasks. Rebuild working class solidarity on all fronts, redouble our efforts to bring together all workers into assemblies, whether they belong to a union or not, and set about the creation of communist cells in workplaces to spread our ideas and participate in the fight against the bosses. We need to lay the foundations of a movement that is not simply waiting to be called out on strike or on a march around London, but can act and think for itself. A small example of the kind of solidarity we need to implant in the every workplace can be found in the recent wildcat strike in the Royal Mail in London.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the CPGB majority calls for us to turn to Labour, we must remember that a more urgent task is to rebuild a basic level of class solidarity and that "what workers in Britain need, if they are to overthrow capitalism and build socialism, is a Communist Party, not a reformed Labour Party".<sup>6</sup>

## United front

Pericles once warned Athenian citizens in the build-up to the Peloponnesian war: "I am more afraid of our mistakes than our enemy's plans." The same warning needs to be extended to those that struggle for a socialist revolution. Believing that the Labour Party can be transformed into a revolutionary organ is a recurring mistake in our movement.

It is necessary to restate that the united front must be a temporary agreement between sections of the class that are in reformist and revolutionary organisations. It is not always a mistake either to ditch or build on tactics and positions adopted for a different period. Yet on the united front the left has consistently tried to transform the understandings of the majority of the Communist International into theoretical camouflage for opportunism. The best example of this is the attempt by John Rees and the Socialist Workers Party to paint the cross-class Respect as a united front of a special kind. A position rightly exposed and demolished by writers in this paper. Now these same comrades are attempting to commit an equally mistaken and backward re-imagining of the united front.

The majority comrades argue that under British conditions the Labour Party will serve the same function as the soviets did in Russia. For this to happen they argue for Labour to be captured and transformed into a "permanent united front". This is supposedly done through Labour general committees. James Turley argued that what "Labour offers us is a *potential* building block for working class power".<sup>7</sup> A strategy

whose only notable adherent is the Labour Briefing group. At Communist University in 2005 Graham Bash explained that the "centrepiece of the building of the revolutionary party is the struggle within the rank-and-file bodies of the Labour Party and trade unions, as embryonic and potential forms of proletarian state power".<sup>8</sup> In that sense he and several comrades have adopted a Bashite illusion on how the Labour Party can be used for revolution. Fortunately the majority comrades have not yet gone as far as the Labour Briefing group in taking the new line to its logical conclusions.

## Permanent

The "permanent united front" position that comrade Turley defends in his response to my previous article is mistaken and backward. His errors on this are not surprising, considering that, when I debated the comrade at the 2011 Communist Students national conference, he did not know that he had voted for this, or even know it is contained in our recent perspectives document.<sup>9</sup> Comrade Turley is mistaken when he says that I dismiss this revision of the united front simply on the basis of Comintern decisions. In assessing what tactics are useful to maintain and to reject from previous struggles we should test how they can move us forward in the present. The united front must be a temporary agreement in order for revolutionaries to clearly distinguish our programme and our vision from that of the reformists. By discarding this approach the CPGB majority has started down the road of communists simply acting as a leftwing tendency in Labour - the long road of reversing the break in the movement between reformists and revolutionaries finishes in the dead end of liquidation.

No doubt the irony of this turn is not lost on many readers, considering that those same proponents of permanent unity *within* Labour today fought a bitter struggle against the trajectory of the Eurocommunist-controlled CPGB to work as a leftwing ginger group in that party.

The united front method was developed to overcome the isolation of the communists, the Soviet Union and national parties, during a period of intense reaction. As Trotsky pointed out, "The possibility of betrayal is always contained in reformism. But this does not mean to say that reformism and betrayal are one and the same at every moment. Not quite. Temporary agreements may be made with reformists whenever they take a step forward."<sup>10</sup> It is in a non-revolutionary period that parties of revolution must be built by breaking the hold of social democracy and Labourism over the working class. That is, we must demonstrate to the widest sections of our class that only a Marxist programme can win more than temporary gains.

It is with this in mind that comrade Turley rightly points out it was a strategy that saw the period after 1921 as a pause. Trotsky and the revolutionary currents of the Comintern correctly saw a revolutionary situation on the horizon. The war threat, the rise of fascism, the popular struggles in the colonies and maintenance of a politically organised working class did point to a second October. You do not have to look far to see that Trotsky and his co-thinkers were correct. There was a revolutionary situation caused by World War II, yet these movements broke out and were smashed not by the capitalists, but by the remnants of the Second International and the Stalinists. The French Stalinists, capital's fifth column, are an example of treachery that stymied and diverted the revolutionary spirit of the class. As workers took control of factories, the PCF moved against them, acting as the gendarme of Charles de Gaulle and the Allies.

It would be mistaken and

hypocritical if I were arguing that the Comintern strategy from the 1920s should simply be superimposed on today's conditions, as comrade Turley seems to think. Just a cursory glance at my previous article would reveal that I argued: "Schemas cannot simply be transplanted from history; they must face up to today's reality."<sup>11</sup> Under current conditions and the absence of a communist party of any serious size or weight amongst workers, no communist organisation could form a united front with trade unions or the Labour Party. Holding such a position is on a par with believing that there are fairies at the bottom of the garden. However, this does not lead to the position adopted by the CPGB majority of engaging with Labour small in number and hamstrung by the numerous and growing anti-democratic measures within Labour.

There are important lessons on the limits we must impose on communist work within organisations like Labour and the trade unions. For example, communists can stand and argue for revolutionary politics in the unions. Something that can be done largely free of bans and expulsions. Is this the case within Labour? Are there any moves to open up the party to the left? Could we organise with "complete liberty" as communists within Labour?<sup>12</sup> No. Comrades within Labour would be isolated and forced to push left Labourite politics by the structural limitations in which they operated. Recognising such a basic fact of reality quashes any ideas that working within Labour is no different from working within the unions.

What the CPGB majority is arguing is nothing more than worn out and repackaged appeals to 'capture' the Labour Party. Obviously such fantasies have not been realised and will not be: instead, as Ralph Miliband explained, "it is the obverse phenomenon which has very commonly occurred: namely the 'capturing' of the militants by the Labour Party. This is not only true at the parliamentary level, though it is there that it has been most obviously true. But it has also occurred at the grassroots: people on the left who have set out with the intention of transforming the Labour Party have more often than not ended up being transformed by it, in the sense that they have been caught up in its rituals and rhythms, in ineffectual resolution-mongering exercises, in the resigned habituation to the unacceptable, in the cynical acceptance and even expectation of betrayal."<sup>13</sup> It is possible that individual communists may go native - that is the case with any organisation, including Labour Party Marxists, or even the likes of Socialist Appeal, that enter Labour with confused politics, very few activists and crucially no base or support within the working class.

It is mistake to claim that opposition within the CPGB to working within Labour under current conditions comes down to an individualist and moralistic position that communists must never lie. The key problem for the handful of Marxists in the Labour Party is not that they cannot pass on secret reports of what are no doubt exciting CLP meetings, whilst lying to other party members about their real political affiliations. The key problem is that the politics they can legitimately argue without being expelled or censored is extremely limited. The insistence on complete liberty of agitation by Lenin, that I and others defend, is an absolute necessity if communist organisations are to have an impact within the movement and the Labour Party. I am not aware of Marxists in the Labour Party attempting to test such restrictions and where they have made interventions it has been to push rightwing versions of Marxism similar to the politics peddled by the existing Labour left.

Only mass action can change this

situation, but currently such action is being carried out beyond and importantly *against* Labour in power in town halls up and down the country. Whilst this is not a static situation, it is delusional to currently place Labour at the heart of resistance to austerity, when it is in fact a willing enforcer of capitalist attacks on the working class.

A further point needs to be made on Lenin's proposals to British communists. Comrades have attempted to use Lenin's advice and the CPGB's tactics in the 1920s as part of the foundations of the new position. It is correct to point to British exceptionalism and the creation of the Labour Party as somewhat unique. The exceptional organisation of the working class movement in Britain does require a serious approach to Labour and the unions. What is required is a struggle to overcome Labour, not to "reform", "transform" or, in the words of Jack Conrad, pursue "a long-term strategy aimed at driving out the pro-capitalist right and winning the Labour Party for socialism".<sup>14</sup>

Thanks to this mistake, coupled with the intentional ignoring of the subordination of the CPGB and the working class to the trade union bureaucracy during the 1920s, we end up at a backward position that a younger Jack Conrad correctly derided: "Of course, such 'British exceptionalism' was very limited. Affiliation was always viewed as a tactic, and a short-term tactic at that. There was never any Militant-style idea of winning the Labour Party, let alone winning it to take the lead in the fight for socialism."<sup>15</sup>

## A different way forward

Conrad *et al*'s new position is a shift away from seeing Labour as an obstacle to viewing it as a potential tool for revolution. A fantasy that only the moribund Communist Party of Britain and small groups of Trotskyists cling to. This shift must be challenged by comrades in and beyond our ranks.

Against the move towards Labour we must fight for a policy of embedding communists in everyday struggles. Though few in number currently, communists can have an impact if we seek to engage trade unionists and workers with a political alternative to Labour and Labourism itself. Our strategic orientation must be to the broad movement, the trade

unions, the anti-cuts committees and the divided revolutionary left. We have to move from simply reporting on the anti-cuts movement to playing an active part in its day-to-day running and actions. Here we can raise the politics that are necessary - what we are lacking is the tools to do so. As the CPGB we can take small steps in this direction. Our paper needs to be more outward-facing and we need to produce accessible pamphlets on topics such as the capitalist crisis to educate ourselves and others. We should be holding regular stalls and make an attempt to build regular communist forums with other groups.

The left at present is a cesspit of social democracy, opportunism, bureaucracy, petty Stalinist-style party regimes with competing sects that have no tangible base within the class. This isolation and sectarianism cannot be overcome by embedding ourselves in the Labour Party. What we need is unity on the ground, at the base of the unions, in workplaces and within the anti-cuts committees as a step towards forging a serious fightback. Practical unity, even on a small scale, can open up opportunities for discussions and steps towards the unity of revolutionaries ●

## Notes

1. 'Osborne the butcher' *Weekly Worker* October 2010.
2. C Rosenberg 1919: *Britain on the brink of revolution* Manchester 1987, p71.
3. 'COR conference: missing perspective' *Weekly Worker* July 14 2011.
4. See 'Ed Miliband plans to curb union hold over Labour' *The Guardian* August 3.
5. 'Wildcat strike at Royal Mail office gets the goods': <http://libcom.org/news/wildcat-strike-royal-mail-sorting-office-gets-goods-10062011>.
6. J Conrad *Which road?* (third edition), London 1991, p204.
7. 'Intervention, not incoherent abstention' *Weekly Worker* April 14 2011.
8. 'Labour and revolutionary strategy' *Weekly Worker* September 22 2005.
9. The debate can be heard at <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=6519>.
10. L Trotsky *The Third International after Lenin* (1928) : [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/index.htm).
11. 'Labour dead end and our strategy' *Weekly Worker* April 7 2011.
12. VI Lenin *Left wing communism: an infantile disorder*: <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm>.
13. R Miliband *Moving on*: <http://marxists.org/archive/miliband/1976/xx/moveon.htm>.
14. Quoted in report of CPGB aggregate, 'Winning Labour for the working class' *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010.
15. J Conrad *Which road?* (third edition), London 1991, p229.

## Head to head in Halle



**“W**e are on the field of battle. The audience in the hall is divided in two sections; it is as if a knife has cut them sharply in two. Two parties are present” - Grigory Zinoviev's description of the Halle congress of the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) in October 1920.

Would the USPD and its 700,000 members opt for the Third International or attempt to stay a halfway house, floating uneasily

between communism and official social democracy? The Halle congress would decide.

In the debate Zinoviev, Comintern's president and a Bolshevik since 1903, was pitted against not only the heavyweights of German Social Democracy. He also had to reckon with his Russian contemporary, Julius Martov, the intellectually rigorous and polemically steered leader of the Menshevik Internationalists.

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## REPLY

# Repackaging of a tenuous argument

James Turley responds to Chris Strafford

Comrade Chris Strafford manages to cram a goodly number of confusions, elisions and misstatements of our positions into his article - some of which are recycled from previous articles, some of which are (relatively) new. Correcting every minor point is clearly out of the question, so one must turn to the key questions raised by the comrade with regards to our strategy:

1. Is the Labour Party moving to the left (and is this an ordinary part of the British political cycle)?
2. Is the Labour Party a major site of struggle in the coming period of working class resistance?
3. Is the long-term transformation of Labour into a genuine 'party of labour' - that is, an alliance of all partisans of the working class, a 'permanent united front' - a viable and principled application of the united front?

Comrade Strafford appears to answer with a resounding 'no' to all these questions, although there are some points where his (annoyingly persistent) misunderstanding of the nature of our project in Labour leads him to bait straw-men and he may thereby have to accept a level of agreement, and still others where his attempts to hedge positions against the inevitable accusations of 'leftism' reduce him to incoherence.

We shall take the questions in turn.

### Moving left?

Comrade Strafford is disdainful of the idea that the Labour Party is moving to the left. Its year in opposition has been marked by "dithering at the top, insignificant increases in membership and the implementation of savage cuts by Labour councils" (true enough, though *any* increase in membership is significant, given its precipitous decline for a number of years). Ed Miliband's opposition to the June 30 strikes is cited too.

On one level, these are empirical facts (although his further statement to the effect that "even the most leftwing of MPs and Labour leaders have consistently opposed the class struggle", in a context which appears to cover all Labour MPs ever, is absurdly overblown). Yet the assessment is basically one-sided.

Ed Miliband 'dithers', addressing a mass TUC demonstration one day and rubbishing strike action the next. True: but did Tony Blair 'dither' in this way? Was he at all prone to respond to mass pressure from the working class? The answer is no - because, ensconced in No10 with substantial support from the ruling class and a substantial parliamentary majority, *he did not have to*.

That the Labour leadership is being *forced* to do anything at all is a function of *objective* conditions in the British political cycle, the relative weakness of Labour with its command of the state bureaucracy and attraction to the ruling class reduced. That, even by Labour standards, the shift to the left is anaemic has much to do with the decay of working class organisation over decades.

If we had confidently predicted that Ed Miliband would come out in favour of waves of militant strike



Labour Party: March 26 banners

action, then Chris would be quite right to argue that our position has been shown to be a nonsense. Yet we did not say any such thing. "The reality and logic of class struggle - and just the mere fact of being in opposition, of course - dictates that the Labour Party leadership has to be seen opposing the Con-Dem government and its cuts", wrote Eddie Ford ("Taking on redder hues?", March 31); I meanwhile made it clear that "when Labour tacks left, this is always fundamentally a pose" ("Intervention, not incoherent abstention", April 14).

To the rhetoric against Tory cuts, and reticence about exactly what Labour would cut, we may add Miliband's dalliance with blue Labour. Though the theorists of the latter are keen to stress 'conservatism', it is nonetheless of crucial importance that the great intellectual fad of the Miliband regime has been focused overwhelmingly on the project of rebuilding the traditions of working class organisation against 'finance capital'. Blue Labour may be a peculiar chimera and insist on considering itself 'beyond left and right', but objectively it repeats in an idiosyncratic way the reorientation to the class typical of Labour shifts to the left.

### Site of struggle?

We and comrade Chris agree that these poses are the bare minimum required to restore credibility with the labour movement more generally. So why should it matter that they take place at all?

This is to move on to the terrain of political priorities in the present period: because the significance of even anaemic shifts in the political profile of Labour has real and material effects on the class struggle. Labour may be a completely inadequate and congenitally treacherous mass workers' party, but a mass party it remains. We should expect, then, that the politics of the Labour Party and of the trade unions will have a profound effect on the shape of the struggles to come.

This is not some theoretical canard. It is a visible tendency *right now*. Look back at what has happened in

the anti-cuts movement so far. What are the headline events? June 30, March 26 - both initiatives of the trade union movement. June 30 may have been organised by non-affiliated unions, but their leaderships remain just as crippled by Labourism. Going forward, the next key date is to be a strike in the autumn, this time possibly involving Unison and other Labour-affiliated unions. If Prentis and co hold their nerve, it will be a seriously large strike.

As a counterpoint to this, there is the student movement - but the demonstrations visibly began to fizzle out long before the exam period; promising initiatives, like the London Student Assembly, followed suit. The anti-cuts campaigns and local committees, likewise, have not had the mass impact that many had hoped. The *tendency* is clearly for the official labour movement to assume ever more control over what is going on, which means that we must have an intervention directed at it.

So when Chris claims that the demand for affiliation of *all* unions to the Labour Party is a "distraction", he is in fact taking up an untenable position. He has two options - one is to *support* disaffiliations, the logic of which would be to consider it an advance even for Labour itself to sever its remaining links to the unions. The other is to consider the whole debate a chimera, which leaves him with nothing to say on a question which is likely to be posed ever more sharply in the coming months and years.

Every month, it is said, the RMT submits an affiliation cheque to the Labour Party. Every month, it is returned. The RMT is possibly the most consistently militant union in the country at this time (which, to be sure, is not saying much). If a mass campaign of union activists could create enough pressure on Labour leaders to accept that cheque, surely that would have a galvanising effect on the struggle, would put Miliband and his quisling allies under *more* pressure from our side.

The logic of Chris's argument is the exact opposite - a doomsday scenario. "If further affiliations are successful,"

he writes, "they will only strengthen the bureaucratic prison working class resistance is trying to escape." Yet the formation of the Labour Party was a concession to the rank and file from the labour bureaucracy that political action of the working class was necessary *at all*. That amounted to a chink in the armour of the bureaucracy, not a whole new suit of plate-mail. Ed Miliband certainly does not want 'undue' union influence on his policies, which might after all subject him to more indirect pressure from the masses. Neither, apparently, does Chris.

What, then, is all this a "distraction" from? "In workplaces and the unions communists have clear tasks," Chris tells us. "Rebuild working class solidarity on all fronts, redouble our efforts to bring together all workers into assemblies, whether they belong to a union or not, and set about the creation of communist cells in workplaces to spread our ideas and participate in the fight against the bosses." The first clause is worthy, but empty of concrete content. The second is a dodge; an attempt to ignore the political problems of the official labour movement by pretending that building assemblies and local committees is a separate matter.

Nobody could object to communist cells in workplaces - but what are they supposed to argue for on crucial questions like the Labour link? Chris declines to provide an answer, though his preference for disaffiliation is obvious.

### Our strategy

As for the CPGB majority view, stubborn misunderstandings remain. Again we are accused of focusing on Labour's general committees, a charge as to whose basis I must confess bewilderment. It is certainly not in the CPGB theses (*Weekly Worker* October 21 2010). Yet it does allow Chris to conveniently elide our position into that of Graham Bash and *Labour Briefing*, and ignore our long history of polemic with this current.

Onto the united front - alas, Chris has nothing more to say on our arguments than to dismiss them as

Bashite. He insists that he does not hold to the Comintern understanding of united fronts as strictly temporary out of dogmatic loyalty to old formulae, but where he attempts to offer another rationale he slides directly into classic leftist errors. A 'permanent united front' would mean permanent unity between revolutionaries and reformists, and would thus undo the cardinal division in the workers' movement; yet the logic of this is that united trade union work should also be impossible, and we are in the territory of classic left communism at best, or incoherence otherwise.

Attempting to shore up the distinction between Labour and union work in other ways, comrade Strafford argues that Lenin's insistence on "complete liberty of agitation" is not satisfied by the present conditions of work in the Labour Party. "Could we organise with 'complete liberty' as communists within Labour? No. Comrades within Labour would be isolated and forced to push left Labourite politics by the structural limitations in which they operated."

But even if the bans and proscriptions were as complete and rigorously enforced as Chris makes out - they are not - that is not the same thing as liberty of agitation, which (we have emphasised repeatedly) is not a test applied to individuals, but to the *party*. Will the *Weekly Worker* be forced, as a result of our Labour strategy, to disavow communism? No? Then *we*, as an organisation, retain liberty of agitation - it really is that simple.

If, alternatively, we define it as Chris does - that any individual comrade's work has to be characterised by complete honesty at all times - then the range of historical circumstances in which communists can conduct principled work *at all* is considerably reduced. To put it as bluntly as possible - if it was legitimate for Spanish communists to lie about their loyalties when agitating in Franco's Vertical Syndicate, then it is legitimate to lie to the petty Francos of the Labour bureaucracy. *Mutatis mutandis*, if Marxist intervention in the Labour Party can only make Labourites out of Marxists, then those communists who bravely conducted illegal mass work in Francoist Spain, and under other conditions of severe repression, can have succeeded only in recruiting to fascist corporatism. The reader may decide.

Of course, any reader who has made it this far into the debate will surely be vexed by a feeling of *déjà vu*. History has inched forward in the last few months; but arguments from the CPGB's anti-Labour minority have not. More discussion is necessary, but will not happen in any meaningful sense until our opponents see fit to respond to what is before them, rather than very slightly repackaging arguments and accusations that were tenuous to begin with. They could do worse than attempting a serious critique of our theses on the Labour Party ●

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## ZIONISM

# Support Israeli protest movement without illusions



Protests: learning from the Arabs

## Tony Greenstein argues that there is no such thing as the Israeli Jewish nation

**A**lmost unreported in the British press, there have been mass protests in Israel against the housing crisis. Some parts of the left will undoubtedly see in these the harbinger of social revolution. Instead of Zionism, socialism will be ushered in through protests against economic and social conditions.

The problem with this is that these are confined primarily to the most privileged Jewish sector of Israel, with little Arab involvement. The other problem, as is brought out in many media interviews, is that the occupation of the territories is barely mentioned for fear of dividing the social movement. The settlers have established a tent base on the periphery of the movement - physically and metaphorically.

Nor is the revolt of a settler working class and its underclass anything new. The white South African working class was far more militant in its heyday - so much so that in the 1920s Jan Smuts bombed them from the air! The Australian and Canadian working classes, whilst demanding the exclusion of foreign and Chinese labour in particular, were extremely militant. Militancy in itself is not a sign of socialist or class awareness. It is the precondition for such an awareness, but political factors will determine whether or not the settler working class is capable of reaching out to the most oppressed sections.

The most remarkable fact of the protests is that they are occurring at all. That in itself is a sign of the deep political malaise and economic problems that have beset the Zionist state. The other remarkable fact is that the Arab spring has clearly had a marked influence on the Israeli psyche, despite the fact that all we have heard from Israeli commentators has been a fear of Muslim fundamentalism and the gripe that 'At least Mubarak brought peace'. It is clear that this Zionist consensus and the continuous targeting of Israel's Arabs has not been as effective as the racists and the Netanyahu-Lieberman-Barak government hoped.

And this is important because the stock response from many 'socialists' is that we are really in favour of the military conquest of Israel - presumably by all those pro-American Arab regimes! What this protest tells us is that Israel's Jewish population, despite itself, is a part of the Middle East, not Europe. That its fate is bound up with the Palestinians, not apart from it. That a radical and far-reaching Arab revolution would have a very significant resonance inside Israel itself and this too is something the Zionist regime fears. We should not imagine that the Israeli Jews will always remain quiescent. Far from there being a separate Israeli Jewish nation, the Jews of Israel are very much a part of the region and

the people they live amongst and have expelled, despite their own desires.

But in its present form, although this is one of the most significant protest movements among Israeli Jews since 1948, it is unlikely to challenge even the present Netanyahu regime. For that to happen the revolutions in the Arab states would have to go beyond a change of ruling personnel to overthrowing the state itself - in Egypt last week we saw the velvet glove being taken off the army's mailed fist, as demonstrators were cleared out of Tahrir Square by thugs and the military.

There have, of course, been major protests before in Israel - the Black Panthers in the late 1960s, the Ashdod and seamen's strikes of 1951 and 1969, the dockers' struggles. The current protests have not broken with the pattern of protests within the Jewish community. These go back to the conflicts between David Ben-Gurion, later to become Israel's first prime minister, and the Gdud-Avodah work brigades in the 1920s, when for the first and last time a revolt by major sections of the Jewish working class also raised the question of Zionism itself.

And this is why, despite its crudity at times, the position of the International Socialist League for the mass protest in Israel, as outlined in its leaflet, *With the Arab masses, for a socialist revolution*, is correct when

it says that "The problem is that most of the Jewish working class in Israel is incapable of joining the struggle against Zionist oppression."

It is significant that the head of the racist Histadrut 'trade union' - in reality a scab organisation that was founded with the purpose of sabotaging any unity between the Arab and Jewish working class - has come out against the protests. As Histadrut secretary general Ofer Eini has stated, if the aim of the strikes is to remove Netanyahu, then he opposes them. This reveals the utter bankruptcy of Histadrut and what is left of the Zionist labour movement, faced with Israel's most overtly rightwing and racist government. Eini, who is an Israeli Labour Party MK, also reveals the bankruptcy of what is left of that party.

This protest is to be welcomed, but it would be dangerous to have any illusions in its potential. As long as it is incapable of challenging the state, which under Zionism is an object of awe and reverence, then it will be unable to challenge the fundamental features of Israeli society, not least the domination of Israel's economy by an oligarchy, a handful of ultra-rich families.

Hamas and Fatah are, of course, incapable of any response, such is the limited and reactionary nature of their politics. To them Israel is one undifferentiated mass. However,

the Arab masses, who have yet to complete their revolutions, have a duty to break from the nationalist and chauvinistic rhetoric of the Arab rulers, who proclaim their opposition to Zionism, whilst collaborating in practice. Instead they must reach out to their Israeli brothers and sisters to forge an alliance against imperialist domination of the region.

The Israeli Jewish masses have made it clear that the Arab spring has indeed given them hope and strength, but it has also revealed their weaknesses. On the *Israeli Occupation Archive* website Moshé Machover quotes uncritically from an Israeli journalist, who remarks: "At long last we have learnt something from the Arabs." In fact this racist statement betrays the fundamental weaknesses of this movement. Arabs have always had a great deal to teach Israel's Jews. Unfortunately the latter have never listened to anyone bar themselves. This statement betrays the political backwardness of Israel's protestors and its weaknesses.

But the fact is that possibly the biggest ever Israeli protest movement had to be inspired by the Arabs that Israeli Jews have long despised. That in itself is worth something •

## Notes

1. [www.israeli-occupation.org/2011-08-02/israeli-journalist-at-long-last-we-have-learnt-something-from-the-arabs](http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2011-08-02/israeli-journalist-at-long-last-we-have-learnt-something-from-the-arabs).



TIMETABLE

COMMUNIST  
UNIVERSITY 2011

OVERGROUND

Brockley

Saturday August 13 - Saturday August 20

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	10am - 12.30pm	2pm - 4.15pm	4.45pm - 7pm
Saturday August 13	Registration and access from 12.30pm	The Arab revolution - back on the agenda <b>Mohammad Reza Shalgouni</b> (founder member, Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran - Rahe Kargar) <b>Moshé Machover</b> (Israeli socialist)	They fuck you up, the left - expulsions, excommunications and the culture of sectarianism <b>Mark Fischer</b> - chair (CPGB) <b>Pat Byrne</b> (Towards a New International Tendency) <b>Andy Wilson</b> (ex-SWP, Association of Musical Marxists) <b>Simon Pirani</b> (author, <i>The Russian Revolution in retreat</i> )
Sunday August 14	Israel and the Arab revolution <b>Moshé Machover</b> (Israeli socialist) <b>Tony Greenstein</b> (Jewish anti-Zionist, founder member of Palestine Solidarity Campaign).	Frederick Engels and his <i>Origins of the family, private property and the state</i> : still useful today? <b>Lionel Sims</b> (University of East London and Radical Anthropology Group)	The Labour Party: past, present and future <b>Jack Conrad</b> (CPGB) <b>Graham Bash</b> (Labour Representation Committee - invited)
Monday August 15	The present crisis and Marxist theory <b>Hillel Ticktin</b> ( <i>Critique</i> )	The student revolt: its significance, limitations and chances of a quick revival <b>Ben Lewis</b> (CPGB) and <b>Aaron Peters</b>	The economic crisis and the growth of the left in Ireland <b>Anne Mc Shane</b> ( <i>Weekly Worker</i> correspondent, Ireland)
Tuesday August 16	Where is capitalism going? <b>Hillel Ticktin</b> ( <i>Critique</i> )	On matriarchy <b>Chris Knight</b> (Radical Anthropology Group)	Capital in history <b>Chris Cutrone</b> (US Platypus group)
Wednesday August 17	Marxism and other worlds: fantasy and sci-fi <b>James Turley</b> (CPGB)	Our Neanderthal cousins and the human revolution <b>Camilla Power</b> (Radical Anthropology Group)	Explaining the longevity of the Iranian theocratic regime <b>Yassamine Mather</b> (Hands Off the People of Iran)
Thursday August 18	Marx's critique of political economy: proletarian socialism continuing the bourgeois revolution? <b>Spencer Leonard</b> (US Platypus group)	What about Russia? Theories of the Soviet Union <b>Hillel Ticktin</b> ( <i>Critique</i> )	Book launch: <i>Zinoviev and Martov: Head to head in Halle</i> <b>Ben Lewis</b> (CPGB)
Friday August 19	Murdoch, News Corp and the fight for a workers' media <b>Peter Manson</b> (editor, <i>Weekly Worker</i> )	Beyond <i>Chavs</i> : imagining a working class politics for the 21st century <b>Owen Jones</b> (author and Labour Party member)	Visions of communism <b>Jack Conrad</b> (CPGB) <b>Chris Knight</b> (Radical Anthropology Group)
Saturday August 20	The Labour Party's development 1900-1980 and the mistakes of the left <b>Pat Byrne</b> (Tanit)	<u>1pm-3pm</u> (note - shorter lunch break)  The CPGB's <i>Draft programme</i> and our differences with the left. What programmes are, how they should be organised and why they are so important <b>Mike Macnair</b> (CPGB)	<u>3.30pm-4pm</u>  Evaluation of Communist University 2011



## DEBATE

# Defending Marxist Hegelianism against a Marxist critique

Chris Cutrone of the US Platypus group takes issue with Mike Macnair

I am writing in response to Mike Macnair's 2003 critical review of books by John Rees and David Renton,<sup>1</sup> cited in Macnair's critique of Platypus ('No need for party?' *Weekly Worker* May 12 2011).<sup>2</sup> I wish to refer also to my three letters and article in response.<sup>3</sup>

I find Macnair's analysis and critique of the political motivations and potential consequences of Rees's affirmative account of Marxist Hegelianism compelling and good. I agree with Macnair's conclusion that, despite Rees's former SWP/UK leader Alex Callinicos's anti-Hegelian Althusserianism, Rees considering "historical experience summed up in theory" was intrinsically connected to the SWP's concept of the party as one which "centralises experience", with all the problems such a conception entails.

I wish to offer a rejoinder to Macnair's idea that such problematic conceptions of theory and political practice have roots in Lenin, Luxemburg and Lukács, Macnair's analysis of whom I find to be false. Also, I do not think that Macnair quite gets Hegel, although I agree with his characterisation that "philosophy - as such - is *inherently* only a way of interpreting the world", and so limits Hegel's work for the political purposes under consideration.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, I agree with Macnair's interpretation of Lenin with respect to the purposes of his polemical defence of Marxist approaches to philosophy in *Materialism and empirio-criticism* (1908). Moreover, I agree with his central point that philosophical agreement cannot be the basis of agreement on political action.

However, as Nicholas Brown responded to comrade Macnair's question at the opening plenary on 'The politics of critical theory' of the Platypus convention in Chicago on April 29, it is not possible to 'Hegelianise' Marx, because Marx was more Hegelian than Hegel himself.<sup>5</sup> That is, Marx tried to achieve the 'Hegelian' self-consciousness of his own historical moment. The question is, what relevance has Marx's Hegelianism today, and what is the relevance of taking such a Hegelian approach to the history of Marxism subsequent to Marx?

## Lukács, Lenin, Luxemburg

I disagree that Lukács's "subject" of history is the point of view or relative perspective of the proletariat as the revolutionary agent that must assert its "will". Rather, I take Lukács to be following Lenin and Luxemburg (and Marx) quite differently than Macnair seems to think, in that the workers' movement for socialism is the necessary mediation for grasping the problem of capital in its "totality", that the workers must not remake the world in their image, but rather lead society more generally beyond capital. Hence, as Macnair characterises the approach of the Kautskyan "centre" of the Second International, the socialist workers' movement must be a leading, practical force in democratic struggles beyond the workers' own (sectional) interests in the transformation of society as a whole.

I disagree that Lenin made a virtue of necessity in the Russian Revolution after October 1917 and adopted a



Dialectical spiral

voluntarist (and substitutionalist) conception of the working class and the political party of communism. Rather, Lenin consistently criticised and politically fought against those tendencies of Bolshevism and in the early Third International. I do not think that Lenin's newly found 'Hegelianism' after 1914 was the means by which he achieved (mistaken) rapprochement with the 'left'.

The key is Luxemburg. I do not think she was a semi-sindicalist spontaneist/voluntarist, or that she neglected issues of political mediation: she was not an 'ultra-left'. I take her pamphlet, *The mass strike, the political party, and the trade unions* (1906), to have an entirely different political purpose and conclusion. It was not an argument in

favour of the mass strike as a tactic, let alone strategy, but rather an analysis of the significance of the mass strike in the 1905 Russian Revolution as a historical phenomenon, inextricably bound up in the development of capital at a global scale, and how this tasked and challenged the social democratic workers' movement (the Second International and the SPD in particular) to reformulate its approach and transform itself under such changed historical conditions, specifically with regard to the relation of the party to the unions.

Luxemburg's perspective was neither anarcho-sindicalist/spontaneist nor vanguardist, but rather *dialectical*. The mass strike was not a timeless principle. For Luxemburg, 1905

showed that the world had moved into an era of revolutionary struggle that demanded changes in the workers' movement for socialism. A contradiction had developed between the social democratic party and (its own associated) labour unions, or 'social democracy' had become a self-contradictory phenomenon in need of transformation.

Furthermore, I take Lenin's critiques of Kautsky for being "non-dialectical" to be very specific. This is not a critique of Kautsky 'philosophically' (although it does speak to his bad practices as a theorist), but *politically*. It is about Kautsky's non-dialectical approach to politics: that is, the relation of theory and practice, or of social being and consciousness, in and through the

concrete mediations of the historically constituted workers' movement. Kautsky failed in this. Lenin agreed with Luxemburg in her *Junius pamphlet* (1915) that the problem was Kautsky thinking that the SPD's Marxism (that is, what became Kautsky's USPD) could "hide like a rabbit" during World War I and resume the struggle for socialism afterward. Or, as Lenin put it in his *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (1916) and *Socialism and war* (1915), *contra* Kautsky's theory of 'ultra-imperialism', the world war must be seen as a necessary and not accidental outcome of the historical development of capitalism, and so a crisis that was an opportunity for revolutionary transformation, and not merely, as Kautsky thought, a derailment into barbarism to be resisted. This was the essential basis for agreement between Luxemburg and Lenin 1914-19.

I do not think the separation of the pre-World War I Lenin from Luxemburg is warranted, especially considering their close collaboration, both in the politics of the Russian movement and in the Second International more generally, throughout the period 1905-12 and again 1914-19. Throughout their careers, Lenin and Luxemburg (and Trotsky) were exemplars of the Second International left, or 'radicals' in the movement. They all more or less mistook Kautsky to be one of their own before August 1914. Also, Kautsky himself changed, at various points and times - which is not to say that Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky never changed.

But the question is the nature and character of such change, and how these figures allow us to grasp the history of Marxism. It is not about learning from their trials and errors, I think, but rather from the example of their 'consciousness', not merely theoretically, but practically. Moreover, the history of Marxism must be approached as part and parcel, and the highest expression, of the history of post-1848 capital.

## Hegelianism

Lukács's 'Hegelian' point was that "subjective" struggles for transformation take place in and through "necessary forms of appearance" that misrecognise their "objective" social realities, not in terms of imperfect approximations or more or less true generalised abstractions, but specifically as a function of the "alienated" and "reified" social and political dynamics of capital. Capital is "objective" in a specific way, and so poses historically specific problems for subjectivity.

The reason for Marxists distinguishing their approach from Hegel is precisely historical: that a change in society took place between Hegel's and Marx's time that causes Hegelian categories, as those of an earlier, pre-Industrial Revolution era of bourgeois society, to become inverted in truth, or reversed in intention. Marx's idea was that the "contradiction" of bourgeois society had changed. Thus the dialectical "law of motion" was specific to the problem of capital and not a transhistorical principle of (social) action and thought. Marx's society was not Hegel's. The meaning of Hegel had changed, just as the meaning of the categories of bourgeois society had



changed. Labour-time as value had become not productive (if not unproblematically) - as in Hegel's and Adam Smith's time, the era of 'manufacture' - but destructive of society; as a form of social mediation, wage-labour had become self-contradictory and self-undermining in the Industrial Revolution, hence the 'crisis of capital'.

One fundamental disagreement I have with Macnair's approach, in which I think I follow Lenin, Luxemburg, Lukács and Marx, is with the idea that the potential transformation of capitalist society involves the confrontation of two antithetical social principles, of the workers (collectivism) vs the capitalists (individual private property). Capital, as Marx understood it, is not based on the mode of existence of the capitalists, falsely generalised to society as a whole, but rather that of the workers. This is not a top-down, but a bottom-up, view - shared by Smith, for example. As Lukács put it, the fate of the worker becomes that of "society as a whole".<sup>6</sup> The contradiction of capital is the contradiction of the workers' - not the capitalists' - existence in society. For Marx, capital is a social mode of production and not merely a relation of production. As a mode of production, capital has become increasingly self-contradictory. As a function of capital's historical development, through the Industrial Revolution, in which the workers' own increasing demands for bourgeois rights, to realise the value of their labour, and not merely capitalist competition, played a key, indispensable role, bourgeois society became self-contradictory and self-undermining. That is, the workers centrally or at base constituted the self-destructive, social-historical dynamic of capital through their labouring and political activity. This development culminated in the crisis of world war and revolution 1914-19.

As Lenin put it in *The state and revolution*, the social relations of bourgeois society - namely, the mutual exchange of labour as the form of social solidarity in capital - could only be transformed gradually and thus "wither away," and not be abolished and replaced at a stroke.<sup>7</sup> The proletarian

socialist revolution was supposed to open the door to this transformation. The potential for emancipated humanity expressed in communism that Marx recognised in the modern history of capital is not assimilable without remainder to pre- or non-Marxian socialism.

As Marx put it, "*Communism* is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society."<sup>8</sup> This was because, according to Marx, "Communism is a dogmatic abstraction and ... only a particular manifestation of the humanistic principle and is infected by its opposite, private property."<sup>9</sup> Marx was not the pre-eminent communist of his time, but rather its *critic*, seeking to push it further. Marxism was the attempted Hegelian self-consciousness of proletarian socialism as the subject-object of capital.

As Lukács's contemporary, Karl Korsch, pointed out in 'Marxism and philosophy' (1923), by the late 19th century historians such as Dilthey had observed that "ideas contained in a philosophy can live on not only in philosophies, but equally well in positive sciences and social practice, and that this process precisely began on a large scale with Hegel's philosophy".<sup>10</sup> For Korsch, this meant that 'philosophical' problems in the Hegelian sense were not matters of theory, but practice. From a Marxian perspective, however, it is precisely the problem of capitalist society that is posed at the level of practice.

Korsch went on to argue that "what appears as the purely 'ideal' development of philosophy in the 19th century can in fact only be fully and essentially grasped by relating it to the concrete historical development of bourgeois society as a whole".<sup>11</sup> Korsch's great insight, shared by Lukács, took this perspective from Luxemburg and Lenin, who grasped how the history of the socialist workers' movement and Marxism was a key part - indeed the crucial aspect - of this development, in the first two decades of the 20th century.

The problem we have faced since then is that the defeat of the workers' movement for socialism has not meant the stabilisation, but rather the degeneration, disintegration and decomposition, of bourgeois society - without the concomitant increase, but rather the regression, of possibilities for moving beyond it. This shows that the crisis of Marxism was a crisis of bourgeois society, or the highest and most acute aspect of the crisis of capital: bourgeois society has suffered since then from the failure of Marxism.

## Crisis of Marxism

The 'crisis of Marxism', in which Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky took part (especially in 1914-19, but also in the period leading up to this, most significantly from 1905 on), and Lukács tried to address 'theoretically' in *History and class consciousness* and related writings of the early 1920s, was (the highest practical expression of) the crisis of bourgeois society.

This crisis demanded a Marxist critique of Marxism, or a 'dialectical' approach to Marxism itself: that is, a recognition of Marxism, politically, as being a self-contradictory and so potentially self-undermining historical phenomenon (a phenomenon of *history* - hence the title of Lukács's book, *History and class consciousness*), itself subject to necessary "reification" and "misrecognition" that could only be worked through "immanently". This meant regaining the "Hegelian" dimension, or the "self-consciousness" of Marxism. This is because Marxism, as an expression of the workers' "class-consciousness", was - and remains - entirely "bourgeois", if *in extremis*. While self-contradictory in its development, the socialist workers' movement, including its Marxist self-consciousness, pointed beyond itself, 'dialectically' - as consciousness of the bourgeois epoch as a whole does.

I follow Adorno's characterisation of the problem of workers' consciousness and the necessary role of intellectuals, which he took from Lenin, in his letter to Walter Benjamin of March 18 1936: "The proletariat ... is itself a product of bourgeois society ... the actual consciousness of actual workers ... [has] absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except ... interest in the revolution, but otherwise bear[s] all the marks of mutilation of the typical bourgeois character. This prescribes our function for us clearly enough - which I certainly do not mean in the sense of an activist conception of 'intellectuals' ... It is not bourgeois idealism if, in full knowledge and without mental prohibitions, we maintain our solidarity with the proletariat instead of making of our own necessity a virtue of the proletariat, as we are always tempted to do - the proletariat which itself experiences the same necessity and needs us for knowledge as much as we need the proletariat to make the revolution."<sup>12</sup>

The problem we face today, I think, is the opacity of the present, due to our lack of a comparably acute, self-contradictory and dialectical expression of the crisis of capital that Marxism's historical self-consciousness, in theory and practice, once provided ●

## Notes

1. "Classical Marxism" and grasping the dialectic' *Weekly Worker* September 11 2003.
2. See also Mike Macnair's "Theoretical dead end", May 19; 'The study of history and the left's decline', June 2; and 'Divided by a common language?' June 30.
3. See Letters May 19, May 26 and July 7; and my article, 'The philosophy of history', June 9.
4. 'Against philosopher kings', December 11 2008.
5. 'The politics of critical theory' *Platypus Review* No37, July 2011: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/07/09/the-politics-of-critical-theory/#q+a>.
6. G Lukács *Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat* (1922) part 1, 'The phenomenon of reification' in *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* Cambridge MA 1971, p91: [www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm).
7. See VI Lenin *The state and revolution* chapter 5, 'The economic basis of the withering away of the state', part 3, 'The first phase of communist society': [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm#s3](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm#s3).
8. K Marx *Economic and philosophic manuscripts* (1844), manuscript 3, section 2, 'Private property and communism': [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm).
9. K Marx, letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, 'Ruthless criticism': [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_09.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm).
10. K Korsch, 'Marxism and philosophy' (1923), in *Marxism and philosophy* New York 2008, p39.
11. *Ibid* p40.
12. TW Adorno, 'Correspondence with Benjamin' *New Left Review* September-October 1973, pp66-67.

## Summer Offensive

# Set to hit target

This bumper issue of our paper is the last to appear before our annual school, Communist University, and the last before our two-week summer break (*Weekly Worker* 879 will appear on Thursday September 1). It is also the last before the end of our intensive fundraising campaign, the Summer Offensive.

The SO actually ends in just over a week's time, when the final total will be declared at our celebratory meal. And we are looking set to surpass our £25,000 target, with £17,593 already in the kitty. True, seven and a half grand is a lot to raise in the last week, but we know from experience that large amounts will come in during Communist University itself. Many comrades - especially those from outside London - will come armed with their cheque books or cash. They will hand over their donations, buy food and drink, and snap up CPGB merchandise. All the profits count towards the total.

Among the goods they will be able to buy this year are two new publications: first, Ben Lewis's and Lars T Lih's eagerly awaited *Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle*, which describes the historic confrontation in October 1920 between leaders of the two wings of the Russian workers' movement; and the CPGB's *Draft programme*, as revised at our January conference.

Also available will be all kinds of literature, badges and T-shirts. Speaking of which, comrade AG has added to his own SO target thanks to the £189 already raised through the sale of

T-shirts he designed - including one featuring our CU logo, which is being raffled at Communist University.

That £189 was part of the £1,522 that we received over the last seven days, which also included a handsome £550 contribution from comrade TM. Then there were a number of donations made via our website (we had 14,852 visitors last week, by the way), not to mention the regular gifts to the *Weekly Worker* that landed in the *WW* bank account. As I say, it all counts.

A central part of this year's SO has been the drive to win new or increased standing orders for our paper. We set ourselves the aim of raising an extra £300 a month in regular donations. And we are very near that target now, following new monthly pledges from SP (£15 on top of his existing £5), LC (a new standing order of £12), AD and DO (£5 more each) FC (£2) and JB (£1). The extra monthly income for the paper now stands at an impressive £263 - we are almost there (although it has to be said that we still need to ensure that all of those pledges are translated into hard cash).

Now we are on the last leg we have to ensure that we complete the course - another £750 right now, plus an extra £40 per month for the *Weekly Worker*. And, of course, come along to CU yourself. Not only can we promise stimulating and controversial debate, but an opportunity to relax among comrades ... and help us meet those targets ●

**Mark Fischer**

# 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

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# weekly worker

It began  
with  
politics

## Tottenham protest sparked it all

Maciej Zurowski encountered angry locals and grinning cops

On Sunday afternoon, it looked as if the police had been instructed to use a new tactic to contain the public anger: grin. The area around Tottenham police station, which had been subject to severe rioting the previous night, was cordoned off by the boys and girls in blue, each of them sporting an unpersuasive, frozen smile. Gathering in front of the police line were those who have not got much to smile about these days: the overwhelmingly working class denizens of the impoverished north London neighbourhood, which had seen its last major riot during Thatcher's reign in 1985.

Emotions ran high, as people variously attempted to gather the latest news or simply express their feelings to the somewhat nervous coppers: "Mark Duggan was unarmed," shouted one voice. "He was handcuffed when they shot him," claimed another. A woman of around 20 forcefully walked towards the police line. Her flaming eyes would have been enough to make anyone step aside, but she drove the point home by pointing her index and middle fingers at the bobbies and imitating shooting noises. Not the most prudent gesture perhaps, but what might have earned her a truncheon blow under normal circumstances was merely met with more forced smiling.

"Murderers! You've shot a young father dead," the woman shouted, following the accusation with assorted expletives. As she walked off, two officers turned to each other and chuckled. You would have thought that homicide is not exactly a laughing matter, especially when you consider that 333 people have died under British police custody since 1998 and not a single police officer has been successfully prosecuted. But then that's just human defence mechanisms for you.

The more one listened to the crowd, the clearer it became that this was not merely about one particular incident. "All of this could have been prevented if someone had come out of that police station to talk to these people," one bystander argued, "but they just went: 'No, these are all gangsters and they can't be talked to'. You get a sense of how they view people in this neighbourhood." And, as one of many heated debates turned to the possibility of the deceased Mark Duggan being a drug-dealer, somebody argued: "But why are they dealing with drugs? Because you can make a grand a month, so why would you want to slave at McDonald's even if you got the chance to?"

Another bystander suggested that "you can see it in *The Wire* all the time: the guys on the top of the tree are all white, and the black dealers are just their foot-soldiers". But apart from that there was encouragingly little black-versus-white rhetoric. Before we knew, there was enough talk of local service cuts to fill an entire issue of *The Socialist*, and even bankers' bonuses entered the conversation. An elderly woman summed it all up when lamenting that "the poor get poorer



Tottenham: from political protests to riots

and the rich get richer - it's been going on for many years, but it's all getting worse now".

We spoke to locals to get an idea of the mood on the day after the initial riots and were confronted with many examples of what might be called mixed consciousness. Despite the fact that the government and police were viewed in a rather negative light and the austerity programme was identified as deepening social tensions by many, the overwhelming belief was that 'they' - the professional politicians - should do a better job.

**Could you sum up what has been happening here over the past few days?**

**Faisal:** On Thursday, a guy called Mark Duggan got shot about two minutes walk from here. Yesterday

around 6pm there was a protest outside the police station, and it seems that it has escalated into pretty much a full-scale riot.

**Derek:** A man was shot in Tottenham Hale on Thursday, and yesterday people were looking for answers - they wanted to know why. Apparently there were two or three hundred who came to the police station hoping to get some answers from the police, but they didn't get any. So then things just got out of hand.

**Joy:** My condolences go to the parents of who this happened to because I know what they are feeling now. We lost families in the same situation in Harlesden police station in 2007, and nothing came of it. The police cannot carry on like this. What they have done by batoning the girl outside the police station is wrong. They should have had the sense when the family turned up there to speak to them and sort out this matter in the right way. They just ignored the people and didn't want to come out of the station.

**Do you think it's understandable that people are so angry?**

**Faisal:** I can understand it, but I don't think it justifies all the rioting, which in my view was opportunistic. You'll always have an element that will look to kick things off, and then everybody else is destroying things.

**Derek:** I'm convinced that the people who came to the police station didn't want any violence. But then people came from Hackney and other areas to join the gangs and start looting and destroying shops. No-one condones what they have done - I think it was very wrong. There are things that need to be investigated, and it needs time until we hear the real truth about what happened. If people jump to conclusions and take the law into their own hands, it is very wrong.

But, then again, people were angry because the police were not listening. If you simply ignore 200-300 people, I think tempers will run high.

**Joy:** I think what happened yesterday is understandable. It's time that we

start putting our foot down now and stand up to these police here. They're not doing their job right. They're in these uniforms to protect their state and their own selves, not the public. People are angry because of what happened on Thursday, but they are also angry about many things that have happened in the past and that nothing has been done about. So if the law won't take it in hand, the public will take it in their own hands.

**Some media were quick to describe the man who was shot as a 'gangster' before any evidence was produced. What do you think about that?**

**Faisal:** The way I see it - if he was found with a gun ... no-one carries a gun for no reason, but I don't know the facts.

**Derek:** See, this is what happens when you start to put people in boxes. Most of the time, when anything happens in this neighbourhood - in the north London ghettos, if you like - then we quickly get stereotyped. It's all of us, you know, we're all gangsters and we're all bad people.

**Joy:** I don't think the man was a gangster. I don't think the guy had any gun with him. I think the police just wanted something to do on that day, so they just went around terrorising people. Lots of persons are out on the street, lads are walking and not doing anything, and they come and terrorise them.

**Do you think that people here have been angry for a long time - with the government or aggressive police presence?**

**Faisal:** I don't think it goes that far. I think the peaceful protestors were angry at the Mark Duggan situation. If you separate that from the rioters, who were basically just seizing on the opportunity - you know, 'Nothing else to do, everybody else is doing it, so let's join in' - then you can understand it. There is no political motive behind the riots. It's just young kids who'll see other young people doing it, so they'll get involved.

In Wood Green there was looting

that started at 2 or 3 in the morning. Police didn't turn up before 6am, so they had pretty much free reign to do whatever they wanted. In terms of police presence, they have probably adopted a stance of 'Let's just keep out of view in light of what happened with Mark Duggan'.

**Derek:** I would say that it's mainly the cuts that have caused the people in this neighbourhood very difficult times. So many things have been taken away because of the cuts, and I think that's what's still causing such a difficult situation here.

And, of course, it affects young people a lot: I know for a fact that most young people here are not working because opportunities have become very low in this neighbourhood, and it's getting worse. All these issues need to be looked at and dealt with if you want to solve this problem. So many youth clubs and youth centres have been taken away because of the cuts, and I think this contributes to this sort of unpleasantness.

One would hope that something meaningful will come out of the disaster, that they will start doing something about it. I hope that this will not become like Brixton in 1981, but I've been reading on Facebook and on Twitter that they are willing to take it further. I hope it will end at this, though, because it's very unpleasant.

We know that there needs to be cuts, but the way they are cutting it, that's the danger - and I think this is something that has to be discussed. When the riot started, people were looting shops for food! And that should take us to a different perspective.

**Joy:** I think this will build up and intensify. Because of what has happened, people will not back down until justice is taken. And I think justice should be taken with the police. Give the parents justice - I think they deserve that much. And, yes, there has been a more aggressive police presence here since Cameron came in. Cameron might want to do something about this because what he is doing is making matters worse ●

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