



# weekly worker

**Silvio Berlusconi remains in office, but his Bonapartist regime has come to an end**

- Israeli protests
- Musical counterculture
- Communist University
- Summer Offensive

No 879

Thursday September 1 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

[www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk)

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# Aftermath



# LETTERS



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

## Sparks' fight

On Wednesday August 24 I was proud to join 200 rank and file, grassroots electricians protesting outside Balfour Beatty's Blackfriars station construction project in London. It's a shame though that there were no Unite officials stood alongside us. Keep on keeping on ...

The dispute was sparked when eight major electrical contractors announced they would withdraw from the Joint Industry Board (JIB). They are Bailey Building Services, Balfour Beatty Engineering Services, Tommy Clarke, Crown House Technologies, Gratte Brothers, MJN Colston, SES and SPIE Matthew Hall.

Taking the piss or what, last year the chief executive of Balfour's gave himself an 8% pay rise, yet for us they propose three new grades for electricians: £10.50 per hour for a metalworker, £12 for wiring, £14 for terminating. The current JIB rate for electricians is £16.25 across the board. For the worst hit it's a 35% pay cut, coupled with major changes to other terms and conditions.

The Blackfriars protest followed a packed-out meeting organised by Unite rank and file activists from London and the south coast at Conway Hall, London on Saturday August 13. Five hundred electricians and pipefitters sent out a clear message to employers and the union that they will not accept the deskilling of their trade or the pay cuts to their national agreements.

The mood was electric - it was the biggest meeting since 2000. There was discussion from the floor and questions and answers to two London officials, who were really put on the spot over Amicus/EETPU failings in the past. The rank and file made it very clear that Unite needs to perform in this current dispute or the anger shown by many at the meeting will be vented against them. But the idea of forming a new union should not be considered. It had been tried and had failed miserably in the past. Now we are in the same union, we are far stronger.

A motion was passed unanimously that "Unite must immediately ballot members who are working for JIB firms who have been told that the terms and conditions will be changing in March 2012, and a campaign must be set up by Unite, distributing leaflets to all sites around the country opposing these attacks on our industry and to have regular feedback to the members."

It was agreed to call for unofficial action as soon as possible on large sites and that other sites should come out in solidarity, rather than wait for a ballot, as this would put the whole issue out in the open. When the employers go on the attack you can't always wait for a ballot. We can win this battle and turn over the eight firms who have threatened to pull out of the JIB agreement. We've done it before and we can do it again. The last time the electrical contractors attempted to cut wages by deskilling the electrical trade was 1999, which led to coordinated strikes on the Jubilee line, Royal Opera House, Pzifers and projects across the UK.

A national rank and file committee was elected by those in attendance on August 13. Further rank and file meetings will be held around the country in the coming months. There is a lot of anger and electricians won't stand for it - these grassroots protests will only get bigger and we will be protesting at major sites across the country until the employers change

their minds.

This new movement is on a high and we can spread the mood throughout construction. There will be attacks on other trades too. We should try and build things involving Ucat and GMB members as well.

The fight will be tough, but - together and united - we will win.

**Jerry Hicks**  
email

## Cut-price

According to *Labour Research* magazine (September), in July, the general union, Unite, announced the launch of a community membership scheme. On offer is cut-price membership of 50p a week for students, the unemployed and single parents in a drive to organise in local communities as well as workplaces.

This is a small, but very significant development. It will enable the unwaged to become active within the Unite union and the wider movement, including trades councils.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Sex exclusion

On August 29 the *Morning Star* ran a feature article on sex work with various contributions, but not one from the GMB sex workers branch - GMB 150 branch. You can see the article, titled 'What path to a better life?', at [www.morningstaronline.co.uk](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk).

Given this is a labour movement paper, we do believe it is appropriate to have the voice of trade union workers in that industry heard. Please write in to the paper at [letters@peoplespress.com](mailto:letters@peoplespress.com) and request that space be given to the GMB branch that organises sex workers.

**Anton Johnson**  
[www.left-front-art.org](http://www.left-front-art.org)

## Jarra lad

In response to the rather insulting and snooty dismissal of the Jarrow march in an 'Our history' footnote, which credits Mark Fischer as an authority, a word or two needs to be said ('The day of ragged processions is over', August 4).

Firstly, the march was motivated by the massive levels of unemployment (more than 80% for males) in Jarrow and surrounding areas. Real, hard social deprivation had this Tyneside population on the verge of literal starvation. This had been brought about by the general recession, but in particular by the closure of the Palmers shipyards, which employed most of the local male population. It had been added to by severe cutbacks in colliery workforces by 50% and in some cases two thirds, at the local pits. Remember that this followed bitter defeats and betrayals in the area in 1921 and 1926, with the colliery communities literally facing mass starvation, and the following decade did nothing to restore health and subsistence levels.

The situation was desperate and, at mass assemblies of the unemployed workers, the first proposals had been to march to London with guns and grenades in their pockets, gathering an army of armed workers on the way. I have this from at least three workers I interviewed who joined the march, and it is common local knowledge. It is not, of course, logged in any official records of the period, though David Riley, the march's radical leader, following the march's total failure, later commented that he "wished we had marched to London with 'bombs in our pockets'".

It is the reason for Alan Price's chorus: "If they won't give you half a chance / Won't even give you a second glance / Then, Geordie, with my blessing / Burn them down" ('Jarrow song').

This is unlikely to have been simply bravado. The Jarrow population is heavily Tyneside-Irish and at least some of the activists had been on active duty with the IRA - apart from the revolutionary politics which had inspired a generation of workers, especially the local miners, who also had explosives training.

It should be added that the Jarrow march was no "ragged procession" either. The men were marshalled into squadrons with NCOs and marched as a military unit the whole route.

'Red' Ellen Wilkinson, the town's leftwing MP and former founder member of the CPGB, who was instrumental in organising the march, at first approached Wal Hannington of the National Unemployed Workers Movement to jointly organise it. He and they rejected the plan for a specifically Jarrow march and urged instead Jarrow to be part of a national unemployed march taking place in October of that year.

This did not match the mood or patience of the town, and the Labour town council took over the organisation of a Jarrow march in the name of the whole town, winning the support of local Tory councillors and, of course, businesses which were also going to the wall. The march, while not now carrying guns, carried the hopes and aspirations of the workers of the whole region. I don't know where Mark gets the information that NUWM and CPGB members were excluded, because if that was someone's design it certainly wasn't fulfilled and a number of local communists and well-known revolutionary socialists were on it the whole way, as was Ellen herself, having left the party just eight years prior and still very much carrying the party whip.

That the march was accommodated at some strange venues is the fault of one glaring omission that Mark makes. Far from it being "officially lauded", both the TUC and the Labour Party condemned it and voted against any support for it. This was while it was progressing. Ellen took time off to attend the Labour Party conference and was horrified to hear the march and her participation condemned from the platform. Conference voted against support - and not, let us be clear, because it was too moderate. Circulars were sent out from the TUC and the Labour Party to all trades councils and Labour Party constituencies and wards *not* to support or accommodate the march and the marchers.

It was in those circumstances that other venues and means of subsistence for the starving marchers had to be found; it was not a question of choice or political cross-dressing, as Mark's footnote suggests. The marchers were wilfully deceived when they arrived in London, and were taken away from parliament on a river trip down the Thames, while their petition and resolution was summarily thrown out of the Commons with few supporters from any quarter.

The Jarrow march remains a symbol of the abandonment of the north by the largely rich and indifferent southern-centric ruling class it was meant to confront. It was meant to generate public awareness of the stark situation in Jarrow and towns like it. The men who took part in that endeavour are still regarded as working class heroes in this neck of the wood, and their class credentials are not tarnished by any mistaken strategy of their leaders, the indifference of the ruling elite or the ongoing treachery of the Labour leadership.

As for the Socialist Party's attempt to recreate the march, I don't like the fact that they chose to title it a Jarrow march. It doesn't come from Jarrow; there is no groundswell of militant opposition and renewed vigour in

Jarrow for action, which frankly only revived briefly during the war and was soon abandoned again when the need for warships was over. I don't think anyone from Jarrow is actually part of the planning. Were it a Tyneside march for jobs, I would have no objection to that, as, given planning and sound preparation, I see no reason why it couldn't attract a lot of support, debate and ongoing organisation.

It would pose again the recent debate about restructuring manufacturing and rebuilding the industrial framework, redeveloping proper apprenticeship and skills, giving youth a chance to work and communities some heart and wages again. Not because we like the lash on our backs or because we aspire to wage-slavery, but because industrial capacity puts on the agenda the chance to take control of our lives and fulfil our social and material demands and needs.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Where was he?

I know that Frank Lansbury has been studying the issue of working class justice for many years now, culminating in his self-published *Wearing your knee caps as earrings - a study of extreme justice in the north of Ireland*, but I take umbrage at his mealy-mouthed assertions in his letter to the *Weekly Worker* (August 11).

For the last few years (since the financial crisis and parliamentary expenses scandal) Frank has been calling for a 'justice squad' to promote his theory of extreme justice. Engels was quite clear, when discussing the Bavarian beer riots of 1844, that it is the duty of communists to be on the streets during civil unrest - but where was Frank? Finishing off his inquiry into civil disobedience in the long-running American TV show, *The Simpsons*? Doubtless there are many insights into the mind of the American worker to be found in the work of Matt Groening, but I'd like to finish with a quote which has featured often during bouts of looting and violence in Springfield: "What about the children?"

**Ross Unterwiler**  
Derbyshire

## Spoilt brats

The Socialist Workers Party line on the riots forgets that the violence and destruction of homes, property and businesses is deeply irrational and by no means represents any kind of political act. It is not politics, but psychoanalysis, that is relevant to the understanding of rebel psychology.

These rebels would rise up against a workers' government if they believed that the police were invading their patch and preventing them from carrying on their drug-dealing and gangsterism. The SWP and the CPGB should ask themselves if the Bolsheviks in power would have responded with jelly-bellied *Guardian* desire to understand the hoodlums, or would they have been decisively crushed, as surely as Kronstadt was perceived as a mutiny against the revolution.

The left should get real about these vacuous riots that told us more about the narcissistic groups, consumeristic and selfish, that put crime before the needs of the community, and are thus politically reactionary. Only the deluded ultra-left could believe that "pure joy and fulfilment" resulted from arson, theft and violence against the community (*Weekly Worker* August 11). Socialism is the vision of peace and solidarity, not violence and crime.

The result of the riots is a prime minister who appears weak, who tells us to 'hug a hoody', naive and out of touch. Thus the demand has been voiced to replace Cameron with

a 'stronger' leader, more capable of beefing up the Metropolitan police. There were calls to use plastic bullets, bring in the army, etc. The reactionary behaviour of the hoodlums feeds the agenda of the far right. The left appears even more out of touch than Cameron. Well done, lads and lasses, you have helped bring about a more authoritarian state, the cessation of freedom of movement, assembly, etc, and fear in just popping down to the shops, or going to a Wetherspoons pub to meet a friend for a drink: a great leap forward - not!

The subproletariat works in crime against the interests of the working class and its organisations. For all its faults, the Labour Party has reflected the sentiments of the working class and trade unionists throughout Britain: we are fed up with those spoilt brats who steal and rob and maim and commit arson; their agenda is not ours. We don't want them in our organisations - they have excluded themselves from civilisation - and democratic socialism is the next stage of civilisation.

**Henry Mitchell**  
London

## No better

James Turley argues that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's position on the media is better than that of the Socialist Party in England and Wales (Letters, August 11). That is only superficially true. If you look at what they are calling for now, it is the nationalisation of the media by a workers' government, but in reality their definition of this workers' government in the here and now is, and can be nothing other than, a Miliband Labour government. I take it that James doesn't agree with that or thinks that such a government would actually be "some form of workers' rule". In that case, as I said, the AWL's position is no better than that of SPEW.

I have to say that I was also amazed at James' argument in relation to the monopoly issue. The implication is that the existence of several capitalist papers means that the ideological monopoly of capital is thereby undermined. That is like saying that the existence of several capitalist parties, like the Republicans and Democrats in the US, or Liberals and Tories in the UK, is a guarantee of genuine pluralism! Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the left which so objects to this monopoly of ideas in the hands of media barons is by and large the same left that defends the even bigger, even more effective monopoly of ideas, in the form of state capitalist education - what Max Shachtman referred to as "capitalism's head-fixing industry".

To be honest, I think that if James thinks most workers buy newspapers - and in any case newspaper circulation has dropped significantly - for the ideas contained within them, then he is mistaken. Those who buy *The Sun* don't do so, mostly, for its intellectual stimulation. The biggest-circulation newspaper, the *News of the World*, didn't achieve that position for its in-depth political and economic analysis of current society, unless your definition of that is which celebrity is reported to be screwing some other celebrity.

James is right that I think that those newspapers should, where possible, be occupied by their workers and converted to workers' cooperatives, but my main answer is that the labour movement needs to get its act together and create its own popular, mass-circulation newspaper. That is the best means of challenging the ideas of the bosses, not giving the illusion that press plurality can achieve it and that the ideas propagated in *The Guardian* are any less bourgeois than



those in the *Daily Mail*, and so all we need do is ask the bosses’ state to legislate such a solution for us. We should seek to ensure that the labour movement not only create a mass-circulation newspaper, but that it provides good and extensive online coverage, and that we take advantage of the development of technology to create a labour movement TV channel as the precursor to establishing our own comprehensive media.

I have no doubt that, should workers be successful in developing their own media empire, the bourgeois state would be only too glad to use laws to break it up to prevent monopolisation, just as they would use other such laws to break up workers’ cooperative property that was deemed to be monopolistic. We should not provide them with the basis for doing so.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Lemons

Chris Stafford attacks the shift in CPGB policy of “winning the Labour Party to socialism” and says “this shift must be challenged by comrades in and beyond our ranks” (*Weekly Worker* August 11). If this means anything it is a call for a united front of all who want to overthrow the CPGB line on Labour. I respond positively to this call. We will see if Chris is serious. A united front doesn’t mean we have the same theory of what is wrong.

In his reply to me Peter Manson says: “Comrade Freeman seems to have developed a new theory about the CPGB” (Letters, August 11). My basic thesis is that the CPGB hasn’t completed its break with its Stalinist heritage. On the USSR the CPGB is roughly ‘Trotskyist’ in accepting that the USSR was not socialism. But on the party question the CPGB should be identified as neo-Stalinist. If Trotskyism and neo-Stalinism implies a contradictory formation, so be it. I am sure Chris Stafford won’t agree with this. But it is not a barrier to a united front against Her Majesty’s Labour Party and all who want to sail in her.

The hypothesis suggests that *on the party question* the CPGB has recently switched from its ‘third period partyism’ (1996-2009) to its ‘popular front partyism’. This is the continuity of an ultra-left line switching to the right. Peter sees continuity in the ‘before-after’ CPGB line as correct-correct. I think it is wrong-wrong. We can agree on continuity. Chris thinks the current line is wrong, but it is not clear what he thinks of the ‘before’ period.

Of course a hypothesis is not proof. Evidence has to be gathered and mobilised to prove it. This is beyond the scope of a letter. But it is important to set out where I am coming from in discussing CPGB policy of “winning the Labour Party to socialism”. However, let us park this hypothesis and move on. All CPGB members can unite in agreeing that it is wrong, ridiculous and off the wall. It doesn’t matter. We can discuss the issues with or without accepting such an extreme hypothesis.

Since the 1990s in the UK a capitalist offensive has been carried out politically by the Tories and New Labour against a weakened workers’ movement and fragmented communist movement. In these conditions revolutionaries must adopt a strategy with two tactics. First, there is a need for a revolutionary communist party and, second, a need for a workers’ party. The first is directed to communists alone. The second is a united front slogan calling for communist and non-communist workers to unite.

The CPGB and Revolutionary Democratic Group approached these questions with different strategies, tactics and slogans. The CPGB strategy calls for a Marxist party

and a reformed Labour Party. The RDG called for an international revolutionary democratic communist party and a republican socialist party. If there is to be a serious debate, then one set of strategic slogans can be contrasted with the other. If we call the two tactics ‘oranges’ and ‘lemons’, then we can compare ‘oranges’ and/or we can contrast ‘lemons’.

I will give provisional names to the CPGB and RDG party strategies as the ‘British road to socialism’ and the ‘republican road to world communism’. If we discuss the relative merits of the two oranges (Marxist party versus IRDCP) or two lemons (reformed Labour Party and the republican socialist party), we are having a partial debate extracted from the totality.

In its ‘third period partyism’ the CPGB contrasted its Marxist party orange with everybody else’s lemons. It was easy to show that the CPGB orange was much sweeter than all the other lemons - variously called ‘Labour Party mark two’ or ‘halfway house’. You would be forgiven for thinking the CPGB was all oranges and no lemons. However, this was false. When the CPGB turned to the right, it revealed its own lemon. Peter claims the CPGB lemon was there all along. In my view he is correct. But it was concealed under a smokescreen which is now banished, along with the words ‘Labour Party mark two’.

In the ‘third period’ the CPGB set the slogan of the ‘Marxist party’ against ‘republican socialist workers party’. Now the debate must move on - the ‘Labour Party mark two’ or reformed Labour Party versus what Peter called a ‘halfway house’.

This debate is not purely theoretical. It has practical consequences. It leads the CPGB into the Labour Party. Having ignored the lemon question for so long, the CPGB has now decided to bite the biggest, bitterest lemon at the wrong time. It leads comrades like me towards the independent, militant left.

**Steve Freeman**  
email

## Silly

Chris Stafford regards the Labour debate as “diversionary and doomed to fail” (‘Labour debate: diversionary and doomed to fail’, August 11). He argues that we must not repeat the mantras of decades long passed that have proven wrong hundreds of times and that we need a radical rethink.

No-one can say that it is impossible for the Labour Party to move to the left and take on capitalism at a certain stage. After all, the post-war Labour government did carry out radical reforms and introduced the national health service. People who oppose a pro-Labour Party strategy as a diversion do not understand that the situation which capitalism faces today has no historical precedent. It is far more serious than the conditions facing Labour at the end of World War II.

We certainly need a radical rethink. As students of the energy crisis know, the importance of peak oil is that it signals the end of growth in the global economy. Capitalism cannot thrive without constant economic growth. Therein is the problem for the bourgeoisie. What will Labour do when facing a capitalism in permanent decline with mass unemployment and an increasingly radicalised working class and middle class and when, like in wartime, the market is restrained and the state turns to rationing?

The main reason why the bourgeoisie were able to marginalise socialism in the advanced capitalist countries for decades was because they were able to steer capitalism to achieve stupendous economic growth. This possibility is no longer available to the leaders of capitalism, which, following from 2008, is teetering on

another financial collapse either this year or next. No society, no class, no party has faced what the world will soon face, so it is silly to be dogmatic about the role of the Labour Party in this new situation.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Splitters!

Minor embarrassment at Workers Power headquarters: internal struggles over the organisation’s line on the Libyan conflict have resulted in the expulsion of comrade Christopher Newcombe.

He is not the only member to have problems with the Workers Power line, shared by its oil-slick League for a Fifth International. There appears to have been a spirited, but curtailed debate on the issue at a recent conference, which affirmed the leadership’s line of combining support for the rebellion with opposition to Nato intervention. There is but one problem - as the minority comrades laboriously point out, this is in flat contradiction to every extant version of Workers Power’s programme (Newcombe has posted the minority document online - <http://l5ilo.blogspot.com/2011/08/libya-programme-first.html>).

Instead of seriously re-examining their programme, the leadership appears happy - in a depressingly storied tradition of Trotskyist sects - to bat down criticisms until the issue conveniently goes away. Perhaps, one of these days, we outside the WP/L5I ranks will be treated to yet another apparently *ex nihilo* announcement that the organisation has defended an incorrect line for a number of years, as we were when it ‘suddenly’ dropped the bizarre argument that the ex-Stalinist countries remained workers’ states - though ‘moribund’ rather than degenerated or deformed - even after everyone else accepted that capitalism had been restored, the capitalists included.

On another note, comrade Newcombe’s expulsion appears to result from that most modern of sins, a Facebook posting deemed insufficiently ‘on point’ by the leadership; presumably this is a second offence, the first being going into opposition in the first place. WP’s political committee is alleged to have convened a meeting specifically to discuss this stubbornly uncensorable (that is, uncensorable by left bureaucrats) medium. Lord only knows what resulted from this discussion; hopefully nothing quite so stupid as the SWP’s legendary warning to its own comrades in the early days of the internet against contributing to e-lists, but you never know.

It is certainly emblematic of yet another farcical consequence of the left’s bureaucratic organisation - the tendency for paranoid leaderships to burn their fingers in the white heat of technology. How much longer must we do this, comrades?

**James Turley**  
London

## Correction

My article (‘Washington paralysis: a geriatric disorder’, August 11) contains a confusion, for which I am responsible, between the annual US government deficit and total government debt. I wrote: “At 9.3% of GDP, the \$14.5 trillion overall US government deficit ... is indeed high by historical standards.”

The \$14.3 trillion figure represents total government debt - actually about 96% of a projected 2011 GDP slightly upwards of \$15 trillion. The 9.3% figure represents an approximation of the annual deficit for the fiscal year 2011 as a percentage of GDP - indeed high by historical standards.

**Jim Creegan**  
New York

# 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>.

## EDL not welcome

**Saturday September 3, 11am:** Demonstration - assemble corner Vallance Road and Whitechapel Road, London E1. Please note changed venue.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism and United East End: [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).

## Kill the bill

**Wednesday September 7, 6.30pm:** Demonstration, St Thomas Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Against Health and Social Care Bill, as it goes to its third reading.

Supported by Unite, Keep Our NHS Public, Right to Work and the Health Worker Network: [righttowork.org.uk](http://righttowork.org.uk).

## Lobby the Lib Dems

**Thursday September 8, 7pm:** Mobilising meeting, Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3. Speakers include Jack Dromey MP, Bob Crow, Jody McIntyre, Paul Brandon.

Organised by Birmingham Against the Cuts: <http://birminghamagainstthecuts.wordpress.com>.

**Sunday September 18, 11am:** Lobby, Granville Street, Birmingham B1. Speakers include Mark Serwotka, Billy Hayes, Christine Blower, Paul Kenny.

Organised by Right to Work: <http://righttowork.org.uk>.

## Open education assembly

**Saturday September 10, 2.30pm:** Conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Debate the date for the next demonstration, the tasks faced and the role of a demonstration in a broader strategy.

More information: [mark.bergfeld@nus.org.uk](mailto:mark.bergfeld@nus.org.uk) [mark.bergfeld@nus.org.uk](mailto:mark.bergfeld@nus.org.uk).

## 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>.

## For coordinated action

**Sunday September 11:** Rally, followed by lobby of TUC Congress for co-ordinated strike action against the cuts.

**11.30am:** Rally, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1.

**1.30pm:** Lobby of TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: [info@shopstewards.net](mailto:info@shopstewards.net).

## 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).

## Disarm DSEI

**Tuesday September 13:** Day of action, Excel Centre, 1 Western Gateway, London E16. Protest at the world’s largest arms fair.

More information: [info@dsei.org](mailto:info@dsei.org).

## Breaking the silence

**Thursday September 22, 7.30pm:** Meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Speaking out against 10 years of war in Afghanistan. Featuring: Michael Rosen, Logic MC, Jody McIntyre, and many more. Tickets: £8/£5

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

## Europe against austerity

**Saturday October 1, 10am:** Conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1 (nearest station: Kings Cross). Europe against cuts and privatisation. 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).

## Lobby the Tories

**Sunday October 2, 12 noon:** Demonstration for jobs, growth, justice. Assemble Liverpool Road, off Deansgate, Manchester M3. Speakers include: Paul Kenny (GMB), Len McCluskey (Unite), Christine Blower (NUT), Bob Crow (RMT).

Organised by TUC: [www.manchestertuc.org](http://www.manchestertuc.org).

## 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.



## SOCIETY

# Aftermath of August

Eddie Ford looks at the response to the UK riots, both from the establishment and the left

**S**tunned by the ferocity and magnitude of the recent riots, its world temporarily turned upside down, the dazed establishment has responded with a show of force - time to reclaim the streets. So far just over 2,000 have been arrested and over 1,300 people have appeared in court on various charges relating to the riots. In total, using the latest official statistics, the police have recorded more than 3,000 offences, including 1,101 of burglary in non-residential buildings, 95 cases of handling stolen goods and 48 reports of serious wounding.<sup>1</sup>

Predictably, but no less sickening for that, we have seen a vindictive and vengeful response from the authorities - throw the book at them. Detailed analysis of 1,000 riot-related cases heard by magistrates has shown a 70% overall rate of imprisonment, compared to the normal 2%. Public order offences are leading to sentences 33% longer than usual and those convicted of assaulting police officers have been jailed for 40% longer. Seven in 10 of those charged with riot-related offences were remanded in custody, as opposed to only one in 10 of those charged last year with serious offences. And so on.

Indeed, some of the saner members of the establishment are beginning to worry that the government's over-the-top reaction threatens to bring the whole criminal justice system into disrepute. They might have a point. Eoin McLennan Murray, president of the Prison Governors Association, has likened the magistrates courts to sharks who sense there is blood in the water - openly accusing them of embarking on a "feeding frenzy" of "disproportionate sentencing", spurred on by nothing else than "naked populism". Inevitably, McLennan Murray argued, this is leading to all manner of unfairness and injustice. The state must avoid "acting in an extreme way", he said.

McLennan Murray also made the point - quite correctly, of course - that putting minor offenders behind bars is a "risky strategy", given the fact that "prison isn't the sort of place where you learn the best way". And, needless to say, all statistics confirm that, once you have had a spell in prison, it is far more likely that you will re-offend - or even become a habitual criminal. Stung by the criticisms, the chairman of the Magistrates' Association, John Thornhill, replied that it was "just not the case" that normal sentencing was being ignored. Rather, he maintained - and this doubtless has a large degree of truth to it - the "vast majority of sentences have been imposed by the professional judiciary, not by the lay magistrates". That is, the magistrates courts have been swiftly passing on the cases before them to the higher courts - conveyor-belt 'justice'.

As a consequence, by August 19 the prison population in England and Wales had reached a record high for the third consecutive week, as the courts continued to jail hundreds of people deemed to have been involved in the riots. The total number of prisoners hit 86,821 and the prison population is now only 1,500 short of the "usable operational capacity". Yet Scotland Yard has warned that its investigations are "far from finished" despite the more than 2,000 arrests. The PGA has issued a statement saying that if people continue to be put behind bars at such a rate, the prisons will be "full" by mid-September. In fact, the PGA bluntly states that the super-punitive

approach adopted by the government has pitched the prison system into an "unprecedented situation" of crisis.

Already there are signs of strain - things are starting to burst at the seams. There has been a rise in attacks on prison staff - not something that we report gladly, no matter how much we abhor the brutal UK penal system. At Feltham young offenders institution, inmates broke on to the roof of the building and tore up the gymnasium. Clashes in Styal women's prison, Cheshire, saw "traumatised and psychologically vulnerable" women as young as 17 involved in confrontations with other prisoners.

Obviously, as the prison space literally runs out, so the potential for work, education or rehabilitation - already painfully inadequate, if not almost non-existent - will shrink to virtually zero. A vicious circle. The new influx of angry and resentful prisoners, especially if they had not been directly involved in the riots themselves but still got banged up anyway, will become institutionalised - with crime developing into a way of life. The very thing that the Tories and the rightwing press say they want to prevent - what hypocritical fools.

The government's vengeful crusade does not stop at sentencing, naturally. David Cameron has talked of evicting rioters from their council homes - and, of course, being homeless is always conducive to leading a crime-free life, right? Similarly, Iain Duncan Smith, the secretary of state for work and pensions, has suggested rioters could have their benefits stopped: another real incentive to keep on the straight and narrow. Theresa May, the home secretary - scarily enough - has told prosecutors to "name and shame" as many people as possible connected to the riots, in order to "teach them a lesson". The Howard League for Penal Reform commented that the effective lifting of anonymity for children will serve as a "double punishment" -

from now their names will be in the newspapers and the notoriety will cause problems if efforts need to be made to help them reintegrate into society or eventually get a job. Any job.

For an example of the state behaving in an "extreme way", we had the widely reported case of an 18-year-old who urged his friends on Facebook, possibly in a late-night post whilst boozed-up, to go on the streets of Nottingham and "riot". He was sent to a young offenders' institution for nearly three years and now might be fraternising with individuals who have committed a *real* violent crime - as opposed to mouthing off on a social networking site. What an achievement for the British 'justice' system. And if the government wants to continue imprisoning people who make foolish or insane comments on Facebook, then they better instruct the prison service to make room for at least another 100,000 inmates.

## Democratic rights

Quite clearly we are seeing a move against broader democratic rights. Immediately after the riots, David Cameron suggested - maybe in a moment of madness - that social media services like Blackberry Messenger, Twitter, Facebook, etc could be closed down "temporarily" to prevent a repeat of the troubles. Ernie Schmidt, Google's executive chairman - not that he has any self-interest in this matter, of course - quickly declared that such a move was likely to "backfire", highlighting how, when the Egyptian authorities under Hosni Mubarak turned the internet off to try and quell unrest, it merely "enraged the citizens" and "got them to leave their homes to protest". Google, the great democrats, it seems. However, it soon became apparent, even to Theresa May, that such an idea was crazy - and, backtracking furiously, she told the social networks

at a semi-emergency meeting that the government had no intention of "restricting internet services"; rather, she was just interested in "improving law enforcement online". So Cameron is not about to morph into Hosni Mubarak quite yet.

Self-evidently, the overwhelming majority of rioters were young, male and from deprived areas - often unemployed. Though sounding a bit like a study conducted by Monty Python's Department of the Bleeding Obvious, a Liverpool University urban planning lecturer, Alex Singleton, has found that the majority of people who have appeared in court live in poor neighbourhoods, with 41% of suspects in the most deprived places in the country. The data also shows that 66% of neighbourhoods where the accused live got poorer between 2007 and 2010, and 66% of those who have appeared in court are aged under 25 - with 17% aged between 11 and 17.<sup>2</sup> All this is backed up by a recent report from the Institute of Public Policy Research, which found that that in almost all of the worst-affected areas, youth unemployment and child poverty were significantly higher than the national average, while education attainment was significantly lower.

Communists stand against this tide of authoritarianism and irrationality. The CPGB, it almost goes without saying, does not advocate rioting and looting. To do so would be to embrace the politics of despair, if not nihilism - and in reality would amount to the junking of our communist programme, which outlines a *positive* vision of universal human liberation. But we attempt to fully understand the causes and origins of the riots, so we can provide answers for society; an alternative to an increasingly dysfunctional capitalism. The plain, unpleasant fact is that very large numbers of youth face a bleak future indeed, possibly a lifetime of flitting between unemployment and soul-destroying, chronically low paid work (ad-hoc, temporary, casual, etc). So they have nothing to look forward to. No wonder then that rioting for some of them brought a moment of joy or release - even if it was only fleeting. But, as with many drugs, after the highs come the lows.

Official society is in crisis, desperately clawing around for solutions, yet unable to find them. At present, it appears cheaper and easier just to lock up young people, terrorise them even, then actually give them some sort of future. Reversing the regime of cuts and austerity is ruled out in advance by the ruling class, determined to launch naked class war on the working class.

## Left alternative

So step forward the left? Tragically, no. The left has got the riots wrong. Hence we had the obviously nauseating example of the Pavlovian left reformists of Socialist Party in England and Wales, which complained that the police did not "act effectively to defend people's homes and local small businesses and shops" and "were not prepared to protect local areas", perhaps due to cuts in police numbers.<sup>3</sup> We take it then that SPEW's 'answer' to the riots, and to declining capitalism in general, is to demand more policing? It has obviously not occurred to it that the main function of the police, as an organ of the bourgeois state, is to uphold existing property relations - not protect working class

communities.

But the Socialist Workers Party has got it all wrong too - *very* wrong. The comrades cretinously dress up the riots as a straightforward rebellion by the dispossessed, something that actually points the way forward, it seems. Accordingly, we read in *Socialist Worker* that during the riots "the streets weren't the police's any more", but rather "belonged to the angry, disenfranchised and the poor". In fact, we discover, the riots represented the "biggest urban uprising in Britain for decades" - as "years of burning anger poured out" and the "police surrendered the streets across London".<sup>4</sup> Anarchy in the UK, as blessed by the SWP.

If only we could attribute such infantile nonsense to merely a bad day at the *Socialist Worker* office - maybe the air conditioning broke down and the editors became overheated. But just look at the SWP central committee's motion to the forthcoming party council, the delegate body which "has power to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC" between annual conferences. The motion asserts that the "riots that swept across large parts of Britain were an explosion of anger and rage" and "have nothing to do with criminality or gang culture" - absolutely not. It then proceeds to inform SWP comrades that "across many parts of the world we are witnessing a rising curve of militancy and resistance" - like the Arab revolutions, general strikes in Greece, mass strikes in the US and China, movements of the poor and unemployed in Spain and Portugal, etc. "Britain is no exception", the SWP CC stridently states, so in "the space of nine months we have seen two waves of mass demonstrations and riots" ('CC document for party council, September 11 2011').

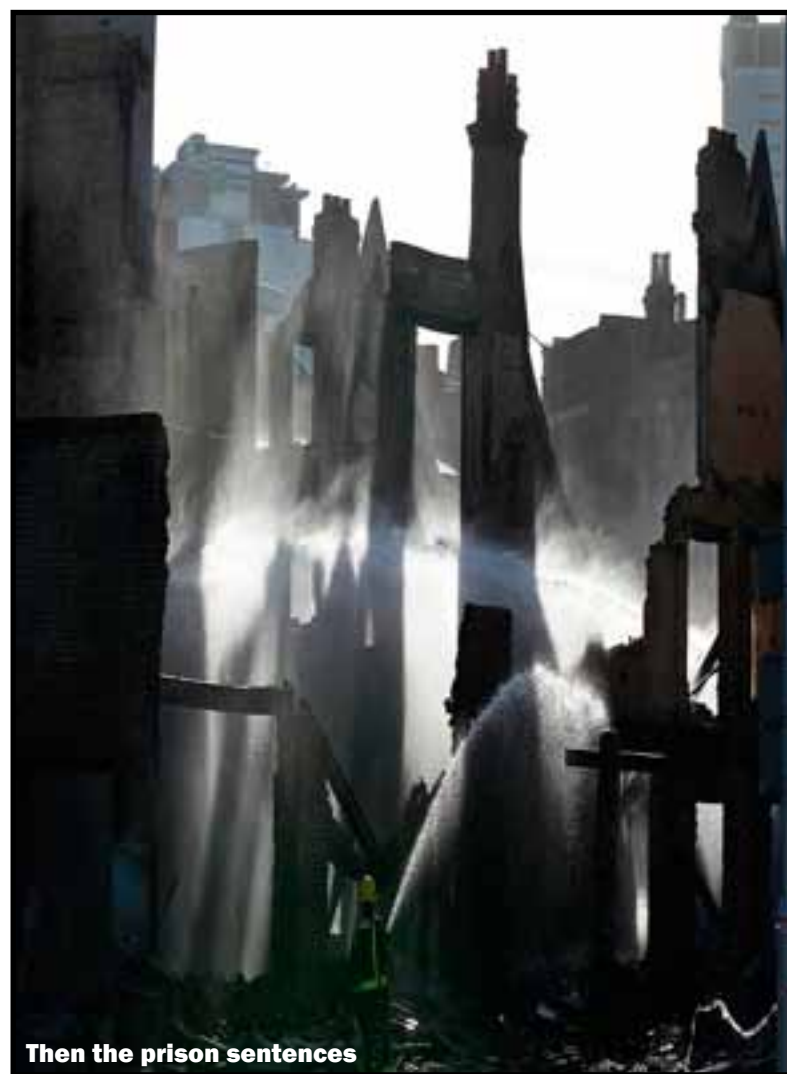
Self-deluding idiocy, the flipside of SPEW's craven, legalistic reformism. Once again, the SWP comrades are collapsing before spontaneity - bowing to the rioters. Many ordinary people were at the receiving end of the riots. In other words, the working class were just as much victims of the riots as they were its instigators. Yes, the riots might have *begun* as a (peaceful) political protest in Tottenham against the police killing of Mark Duggan - but that quickly degenerated into individualistic and criminal looting. A simple fact which communists have no interest in prettifying. Frankly, it is a fantasy to believe that the riots can be likened to organised working class political action.

Not that we in the CPGB deny for a minute that the riots could be a sign of things to come. But this is hardly something to rejoice in, more a danger signal that the working class is becoming further atomised and demoralised - and a reminder that the left has failed to provide any kind of viable alternative to the Tory programme of managing capitalism in crisis ●

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## Notes

1. *The Guardian* August 21.
2. [www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/mar/29/indices-multiple-deprivation-poverty-england#data](http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/mar/29/indices-multiple-deprivation-poverty-england#data).
3. [www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12498/08-%2008-2011/tottenham-riots-fatal-police-shooting-sparks-eruption-of-protest-amp-anger](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12498/08-%2008-2011/tottenham-riots-fatal-police-shooting-sparks-eruption-of-protest-amp-anger).
4. *Socialist Worker* August 13.



Then the prison sentences



## ZIONISM

# Israel rocked by protests

Moshé Machover looks at Israel's July 14 movement



Unprecedented

The Arab revolutionary awakening has rattled Israel's leaders. To lose one major ally may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose two in quick succession looks like a disaster.

Not long before the Arab spring, Israel had seriously damaged its relations with an important regional ally, Turkey. Having regional ambitions of their own, Turkey's rulers were not amused by Israel's bullying on the high seas and its truculent refusal to apologise for murdering nine Turks on board the *Mavi Marmara* in May 2010. Then, by the end of January 2011, the entire Arab world was in turmoil, and Israel was evidently about to lose its key Arab collaborator, Hosni Mubarak. This was ominous for Israel's entire strategy as regional hegemon, local enforcer on behalf of its global imperialist senior partner.

On the underside of this gloomy cloud, Israel's prime minister Binyamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu detected a silver lining. At least in the short term, the decline in US control of the Arab world can be turned to Israel's advantage as a selling point for the unique value of Israel to the west. While a revolutionary tempest rages all around it, Israel remains tranquil, a reliable "island of stability, economically and diplomatically" in a sea of instability. This sales slogan was repeated as a mantra by Bibi and his *hasbarah* (propaganda) machine.<sup>1</sup>

He spoke too soon. On July 14, eight Israeli students set up tents on Rothschild Boulevard, in a prosperous part of Tel Aviv. They were protesting against exorbitant rents and the unavailability of affordable mortgages. The protests spread like wildfire. Tent cities sprang up in a much less prosperous part of Tel Aviv, and in dozens of other towns. Demonstrations held every Saturday escalated, including a joint Hebrew-Arab demonstration in Jaffa on August 13,<sup>2</sup> and by mid-August hundreds of thousands of Israelis marched in the streets - the largest protest movement and most massive demonstrations in Israel's entire history.

Very soon, the demands raised by the protestors became more general. By far the most popular slogan, chanted and displayed on banners and posters, was "The people demand social justice". Other popular slogans were: "The answer to privatisation: revolution", and (my favourite): "The market is free, we are slaves". Demands are raised for "A welfare state", for reducing indirect taxes (VAT) and increasing direct taxes (such as income tax) on the rich.

Mutual solidarity ties have been established with current struggles: that of the social workers who have just ended their strike - many of them frustrated with their compromising

union leadership; and the physicians, whose five-month strike ended on August 26 and who had also set up a large tent in Rothschild Boulevard (inhabited mainly by young interns). The substantial salary increases conceded by the government are largely due to the social protest.

The protest is supported by 90% of Israelis. It is led mainly by students and white-collar workers who are described by the media, somewhat misleadingly, as 'middle class'. In fact, the demands raised by them indicate that they feel they are being proletarianised, and display solidarity with the poor. The prevailing spirit is that of egalitarianism, self-activity and grassroots direct democracy.

A 'Vision document', prepared and circulated by leaders of the movement, lists six "principles", the first of which is "minimising social inequalities (economic, gender-based and national) and creating social cohesion".<sup>3</sup> The mention of "national" inequality is especially noteworthy: it refers to the discrimination against the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, approximately 20% of its population. Initially, this is as far as the protestors were prepared to go on the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's military occupation and colonisation of Palestinian territories were deliberately not mentioned, because this issue was felt to be too divisive.

### Savage neoliberalism

The Israeli protests are overtly inspired by the Arab awakening, especially by the movement in Egypt. Many posters say simply: "Mubarak, Assad, Netanyahu", and one of the frequent chants is "Tahrir Square is here in this town" (the Hebrew is more punchy, and it rhymes: *Kikkar Tahrir - kan ba'ir*). There is much admiration for the courage of the Arab masses. A typical appreciative remark made by an Israeli journalist: "At long last we have learnt something from the Arabs!"<sup>4</sup> During a screening in the Rothschild tent city of a video on the Cairo protests, the crowd cheered and joined the chanting with "The people demand social justice".

However, in content these protests are more akin to those in Greece and Spain: the main demands are socio-economic. The political elite is excoriated because it serves the super-rich and is indifferent to the suffering of the poor and the anxieties of those being impoverished.

The background to this is the fundamental change in Israel's socio-economic and political structure since the late 1970s. A proper discussion of this would require a long essay, but here is a brief outline.

Before the change, Israel had what can be described as a heavily

subsidised, bureaucratic, state-capitalist welfare economy. This was analysed and described in detail in an article I co-authored in 1970 with two comrades.<sup>5</sup> At that time, only half of the Israeli economy was in private hands. The rest was equally divided between two public sectors: that of the *Histadrut* (corporatist trade union federation), and the state - both dominated by the Zionist labour bureaucracy. The internal capital accumulation (the reinvested surplus value) was virtually zero, but there was a large, unilateral inflow of capital: part collected, mainly in the US, by Zionist fundraising 'charities'; part as German reparations;<sup>6</sup> and a growing part as US government loans and grants - payment for Israel's role as regional watchdog. This inflow, essentially a western subsidy, was mostly channelled through the ruling Labour bureaucracy, which allocated part for investment in both the private and public sectors, and part for maintaining a relatively high standard of living and public welfare, resulting in a distribution of income that was less unequal than in most capitalist countries. Thus Israeli society, including the working class, was *directly* subsidised thanks to the regional role of the Zionist state.

The difference between then and now is dramatic. Almost everything in sight has been privatised (including the kibbutzim, former paragons of collective property and production, albeit ethnically exclusive). Welfare expenditure has been drastically slashed. On the other hand, internally generated capital accumulation is robust (even during the present global recession), but wealth is extremely concentrated: about 40% of the economy is owned by 10 tycoon families.<sup>7</sup> In Israel's extremely harsh neoliberal economy, income distribution is highly unequal. The Gini coefficient, a standard statistical measure of inequality, assigns to Israel's income distribution a score of 39% - higher than that of Egypt (34.4%). For comparison, the figures for Sweden, UK and US are 25%, 36% and 40.8%, respectively. On another measure, the ratio between the average income of the top 10% and that of the bottom 10%, Israel scores 13.4; in other words, persons in the highest 10% income bracket have on average an income 13.4 times greater than the average income of the 10% bottom bracket. The corresponding figure for Egypt is only 8 (Sweden, UK and US score 6.2, 13.8 and 15.9, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

Israel still receives a hefty subsidy from its imperialist senior partner. But by far the largest part of it - US military aid of about \$3 billion to \$4 billion per annum - bypasses the civilian economy and underwrites Israel's military expenditure and the expenses of colonisation. The

civilian economy, of course, benefits *indirectly*, because a substantial part of it is geared to military-related and colonisation-related activity. However, Israeli workers no longer feel that their standard of living is subsidised thanks to Israel's regional role and its colonising ventures. On the contrary, many feel that government spending on colonisation and pampering the settlers is at the expense of social spending inside Israel.

### Predicted provocation

Nevertheless, the protestors at first hesitated to bring up the connection between their socio-economic demands and larger political matters, such as occupation and colonisation. However, these issues, which were avoided because they might be divisive, were eventually forced on them by events.

When the protests escalated, it became clear that the government would need some military or 'security' conflagration in order to divert attention from socio-economic conflicts and try to exploit the patriotism of the majority of protestors in order to put an end to the movement.

One such event is expected after September 20, when the Palestinian Authority is planning to seek UN recognition and membership for the aborted, stunted embryo of the Palestinian 'state'. It is known that Palestinian grassroots organisations are planning massive anti-occupation protests following that date. Although these are intended to be non-violent, Israel will no doubt respond with its customary brutality, and raise the temperature perhaps to explosion point. This would serve as the required diversion. But September 20 is too far away. Something more immediate was needed, and indeed predicted.

For example, radical video-blogger Lia Tarachansky posted on August 5 a video, towards the end of which she stated that "many predict Netanyahu will try to squash the movement by starting a military operation". She further pointed out that indeed "Early on Thursday [August 4] Israel escalated its air attacks on Gaza".<sup>9</sup>

Such escalations are a standard Israeli ploy for provoking an armed confrontation. These air attacks, so long as they are not massive, are rarely reported by the media, as they are considered, and claimed by Israel's *hasbarah*, to be routine targeting of "terrorist bases".

Sure enough, two weeks later, on August 18, eight Israelis, civilians and soldiers, were killed by persons unknown who crossed the Egyptian-Israeli border in Sinai, near Eilat. The perpetrators were alleged by Israel to have come all the way (about 250km) from Gaza, although no real proof was produced. And no-one in the media thought to connect this incident with the Israeli escalation of August 4.

Israel responded to this incident by more massive and deadly bombing of Gaza, and, as usual, Palestinian militants responded with missiles shot into Israeli towns. Though unguided, these missiles caused some damage, killed one Israeli civilian and injured several others.

So here we have it: escalating military clashes, as per requirement.

### Torchlit demo

Did it work for Bibi? Not really. The protestors decided not to cancel the next demonstration, scheduled for August 20. But as a mark of respect for

the victims of the August 18 incident, a majority decision was for holding a silent, torchlit march. In addition to the usual social and economic demands, the silent protestors carried anti-war slogans, such as "No to the war of peaceful [ministerial] armchairs" (a reference to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, whose official name was the oxymoron, 'War for the peace of Galilee'), and "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies". In that march, red flags outnumbered blue-and-white national ones.

Members of a small, sectarian Trotskyist group chanted slogans against war and the arms industry. This was resented by the vast majority, including many leftwing radicals, not because of the content of the chants (which was only opposed by a few rightists) but because that group ignored the majority decision to keep the march silent.<sup>10</sup>

In the mass meeting at the end of the march - held while the sectarians were standing apart from the crowd of demonstrators, and shouting their slogans - one of the speakers was an Arab from the Galilee. He told the crowd about a demonstration of solidarity with the movement that had taken place in the Arab town of Arabeh that same day, and was received with applause. He went on to speak about the problems in the Arab sector, saying these should be part of the protest - applause again. That was too much for 10-15 rightwingers who tried to burst forward and silence him. Quietly but firmly, members of the crowd stopped them; and then the crowd numbering 5,000 or more started chanting in response: "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies".

It is doubtful whether military provocations will put a stop to the protests. However, it is quite likely that the movement will split into at least two camps. One will continue to avoid 'political' issues. The more radical camp will make the connection explicitly. One thing is certain: Israel is no longer socially tranquil. Class struggle is on the agenda ●

### Notes

1. 'PM calls Israel an "island of stability" in the region' *Jerusalem Post* January 31 2011. "During his meeting with Merkel, and in a subsequent press conference, Netanyahu stressed the fact that Israel is the only stable country in the Middle East and therefore the west must bolster ties with it. 'We are an island of stability in the region,' Netanyahu told Merkel" (*Haaretz* February 1 2011).
2. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT7RkhwOqQs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT7RkhwOqQs).
3. *Haaretz* August 9 2011.
4. This remark was reviled by Tony Greenstein as "racist", on the grounds that "Arabs have always had a great deal to teach Israel's Jews" ('Support the Israeli protest movement without illusions' *Weekly Worker* August 11). The journalist, of course, did not deny this; she only expressed satisfaction that Israelis are finally prepared to learn. Sadly, comrade Tony is unable to see the difference.
5. H Hanegbi, M Machover, A Orr, 'The class nature of Israeli society' *New Left Review* No65, January-February 1971. Other versions of this article were published elsewhere. See for example <http://matzpen.org/index.asp?u=other&p=chap2-05>.
6. See <http://tinyurl.com/etznz>.
7. 'Israel's connected conglomerates' *Financial Times* August 17.
8. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_income\\_equality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_income_equality).
9. Watch this video at <http://tinyurl.com/3qt24nc>.
10. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rifO6k-XGqM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rifO6k-XGqM). The man with the megaphone shouts: "Why should I care about Arabs?" See also <http://tinyurl.com/3ro6sf5>.



## ITALY

# Facing a hot autumn

Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi remains in office, writes Toby Abse, but his Bonapartist regime has come to an end

Italy's largest trade union centre, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), has called a one-day general strike for Tuesday September 5. The walkout comes exactly a month after Italy ceased to have any real control over its economic and fiscal policies and was brought under the direct control of the European Central Bank and a European Commission dominated by France and Germany - rather like a company on the verge of bankruptcy being taken into administration or receivership. It may indeed be the case that the August 5 letter from ECB president Jean-Claude Trichet to the Italian government is similar to other letters already sent to those in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus and Spain, but these governments had respected confidentiality rather than engaging in a partial leak, as Berlusconi did.<sup>1</sup>

Arguably what occurred in Italy was more blatant than similar effective losses of sovereignty in Ireland, Greece or Portugal, or, it might be suggested, in Spain. In the case of the latter, premier José Luis Zapatero decided to appease the markets in a more conventional fashion by calling an early general election and announcing he would not stand again - although some might argue that the recent statement by Spanish leaders announcing their intention to change the constitution to incorporate a fixed 0.4% cap on the budget deficit indicates Spain is being subjected to similar pressure.

It is interesting that the clearest statement about Italy's current situation from forces with parliamentary representation has come not from the former 'official communist'-dominated Partito Democratico, but from the leader of the populist Italia dei Valori (Italy of Values), Antonio Di Pietro, who said: "Italy is under the tutelage of the EU and a country under tutelage is not a free and democratic one." Less surprisingly, the clearest from a non-Italian has come from the Irish Socialist Party MEP, Paul Murphy, who pointed out that there had been "a massive shift away from democratic accountability since the start of the crisis" and added: "There needs to be a check on the enormous power of the ECB, which is unelected, and has basically held a government to ransom".<sup>2</sup>

Italy first became a prime target for speculators in early July. At first it seemed as if an austerity package - of a sort that was diametrically opposed to the pre-election tax-cutting bonanza that Berlusconi had in mind as a way of regaining popularity after his four referenda defeats - would put an end to the panic. However, neither the unprecedented rapidity with which this grim package was passed by both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (within three days, becoming law on July 15) - with the contemptible collusion of the Partito Democratico, which just made some pro forma protests about its socially unjust nature, whilst doing nothing to obstruct its enactment - nor the temporary solution to the Greek debt problem devised by the July 21 European summit was enough to save Italian government bonds from speculators. At least some of these were engaging in 'short selling' - in effect betting on an Italian default and the collapse of the entire euro

zone. Although the origins of this speculative attack were probably transatlantic, if usually well informed commentators in the *Financial Times* are to be believed, the problem was clearly exacerbated by the decision of the Deutsche Bank to sell the majority of its portfolio of Italian government bonds - a tactic emulated by other European banks, albeit on a lesser scale.

## Obsessions

Once the July 15 austerity package was passed, Berlusconi's attention reverted to his usual obsessions - his prime concern was to start the parliamentary journey of a new law popularly known as the 'long trial' which would both entitle defendants, or their lawyers, to call as many witnesses as they chose, without the existing restrictions on potential witnesses on the grounds of irrelevance or repetition, whilst preventing the use of evidence from closely related trials, in which a guilty verdict had already been reached. The immediate purpose of this bill is to wreck the

prosecution's chances of getting a conviction in Berlusconi's ongoing trial for giving a \$600,000 bribe to David Mills in return for false testimony in earlier court cases, but these provisions would also wreck thousands of other unrelated trials, including many that involve the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta.

Berlusconi's image outside Italy has hardly been improved by this and other scandals, while his finance minister, Giulio Tremonti, also lost his own aura of respectability as a result of the continuing row over the accommodation in Rome provided for him by his former political lieutenant, leading to comments about the suitability of an apparent tax evader to head the finance ministry. Whilst such conduct was doubtless inappropriate, it seems so trivial in comparison with the crimes and misdemeanours of Berlusconi and his old associates, Cesare Previti and Marcello Dell'Utri, that one is bound to wonder whether those calling on Tremonti to go were in fact

motivated by political or personal animosities rather than a principled adherence to any ministerial code of conduct.

The weeks slipped by without any sense of serious governmental concern about the national finances (as distinct from those of the premier and his finance minister), and by late July Berlusconi was under increasing domestic pressure - including from opposition parties, president Giorgio Napolitano, the main employers' organisation, Confindustria, and the Bank of Italy - to make some public statement about economic policy. He had been maintaining a deafening silence on the question after it had become apparent that his hopes of bringing in tax cuts before the general election due in spring 2013 had been dashed by the turbulence of the markets, whose demands for a reduction in both Italy's budget deficit and massive accumulated debt, now approaching 120% of GDP, made such giveaways totally impossible. The last five trading days in July saw a 5.3% fall on the Milan stock market.

On July 27 an appeal for a change in economic policy (or *discontinuità*, which some interpreted as code for Berlusconi's resignation) and a 'pact for growth' was presented by an unusual assortment of economic interest groups ranging from Confindustria and Abi (the Italian bankers' association) to the two biggest trade union confederations. Given the prevalence of the rhetoric of social partnership in the mainstream media, it needs to be firmly stressed that this appeal was organised by Giuseppe Mussari, the leading figure in Abi, and Emma Marcegaglia, the president of Confindustria - in other words, the representatives of large financial and industrial capital - with the representatives of small business and the trade unions playing a rather subaltern role.

Despite his initial reluctance to bow to pressure from the 'social partners' (*parti sociali*), Berlusconi was pushed into agreeing both to make an official statement to the Italian parliament on what was scheduled to be its last sitting before a five-week holiday and to holding a meeting with the *parti sociali* to at least consider their proposals (something which the opposition had already agreed to do on the same day). At this stage the pressure that Berlusconi was facing, and to a very large extent resisting, was essentially domestic. In the event neither Berlusconi's statements to both houses of the Italian parliament on August 3 nor his meeting with the 'social partners' the following day were of any avail in halting the downward pressure of the markets. Berlusconi's lacklustre speech, claiming that Italy's economy was fundamentally stable and containing very little that was new in terms of specific policy measures, was read out rather mechanically from an uninspiring text, very evidently drafted by a committee. The response was a further large stock market fall. Even worse, the spread between Italian and German 10-year government bonds reached a new record of 389, while the shares of the

leading Italian banks Intesa Sanpaolo and Unicredit fell by 10.35% and 9.33% respectively.

## Humiliating

Ultimately Berlusconi's obstinate refusal to change course led to the extremely humiliating position of being put under direct pressure from the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, which refused to buy any more Italian government bonds unless he obeyed their instructions to the letter. He attempted to give the impression that he was now at last being treated with the respect he deserved in a series of telephone conversations with European leaders eager to devise a common response to what was a European, and indeed worldwide, crisis. But this obvious propaganda exercise was only taken at face value by the notoriously subservient team of newscasters on the increasingly surreal RAI 1 evening news. It soon became evident that Berlusconi had only been contacted after Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy had reached a common position to be imposed on Italy via the ECB.

Berlusconi rapidly had to make it clear that he intended to balance the budget by 2013, rather than 2014, the year mentioned in the austerity package passed by parliament on July 13. It has been widely suggested that the confidential letter sent to him by Trichet, which he has so far refused to make public, despite numerous and repeated opposition requests on the grounds of wider national interest, actually required huge steps towards achieving the objective by 2012. The primary rationale behind the original package had been to postpone the worse of the cuts until 2013-14 in the belief that their unpopularity would be borne by the next government, not the current one. Since the next government might well be a government of the centre-left, the electorate would hopefully repent of its abandonment of "the greatest prime minister Italy has ever had", as Berlusconi has modestly described himself.

Pressure from the ECB led to a second austerity package on August 12, exactly four weeks after the first. This has so far taken the form of a governmental decree and will have to be ratified by both houses of parliament within the next few weeks. The decree was passed at a cabinet meeting in the evening after the closure of the markets for the day, demonstrating Berlusconi's continuing fear of the latter. Many suspected that the general European recovery after the speculative assault on France earlier in the week might be no more than a 'dead cat bounce' and the further spectacular collapse of August 18 suggested this could be the case, now that worries about the German growth rate have added to the concerns about the French banks' exposure to southern European bonds.

The new package's scale - €45 billion in additional cuts and taxes - is a clear demonstration that the previous one proved ineffective, a story that is eerily reminiscent of the pattern of cuts packages in Greece, Portugal and Ireland over the last year or two. Predictably workers and pensioners, not the wealthy, were targeted, despite a lot of discussion about a one-off wealth tax earlier in the week. The unjust and vindictive



Napoleon Berlusconi



nature of the package - singling out those unlikely to have voted for Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà - can be seen in the provision for a two-year delay after retirement in the payment of the lump sum redundancy payments traditionally given to public sector workers at the moment when they become pensioners. Another equally outrageous assault was the clause withholding from public sector workers the payment known as the 13th month (traditionally an automatic bonus) in the event of their departments failing to meet governmental targets. Even those fond of the principle of payment by results might have imagined that it would have been the people at the top of the organisation who might be penalised, not the most humble employees.

In addition three public holidays - May Day, Liberation Day and the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic - are to be abolished. Religious holidays, protected by the Italian state's treaty with the Vatican, are unaffected. Leaving aside the absurdity of increasing the number of working days at a time of rising unemployment, this is an obvious symbolic assault on the rights of the working class celebrated on May 1; and on the notion of a republic based on the anti-fascist resistance, whose celebration on Liberation Day Berlusconi has ostentatiously boycotted and has always been a source of annoyance to those of his cabinet (such as defence minister Ignazio La Russa) who had spent their youth beating up leftwing activists and praising the Duce.

The pension age of women in the private sector will now be raised towards 65 at a greatly accelerated pace, starting in 2015 and reaching the upper age limit in 2027 (a provision already brought in for public sector workers).

Whilst much has been made by the government and more rightwing media of tax increases on higher incomes, a large part of these goes undeclared. While the Bank of Italy has estimated that in 2008 around one million people earned more than €90,000, only just over 500,000 taxpayers declared an income exceeding that amount in 2009. The figures for the sale of luxury cars back this up. In 2007, about 450,000 luxury cars were sold and even after the world financial crisis the 2010 figure was still around 350,000. It seems unlikely that there is just a small group of luxury car owners who buy a Mercedes every other year, even in a society of conspicuous consumption; it is far more likely that a larger group does so more irregularly. The average incomes declared by many are not remotely credible<sup>3</sup> and tax evasion is clearly occurring on a massive scale.<sup>4</sup> But this budget, like all of those dreamt up by Berlusconi and Tremonti, places the burden on workers in large workplaces, whose tax is deducted at source.

The introduction of a 20% tax on unearned income from investments (other than state bonds, which will continue to be taxed at a lower rate), bank accounts and so forth, can hardly be regarded as a punitive wealth tax either, even if this increased rate is a bit higher than the very minimal existing 12.5% tax on unearned income. Any serious wealth tax would have to be a property tax that singled out buildings whose existence could not be concealed and unsurprisingly no such tax has been introduced.

The package in its original form involved €8.5 billion of cuts in ministerial spending and €10.5 billion in regional and local spending in 2011-12, whilst the 20% tax on unearned income and the one-off tax on higher incomes in the private sector were supposed to raise €1 billion each. The one-off tax on higher

earners was abandoned after a seven-hour meeting between Berlusconi, Tremonti and representatives of the Northern League on August 29, whilst a further attack on pensions was proposed instead - time spent on military service or studying for a degree would no longer count towards the 40 years service required to qualify for full work-related 'seniority' pensions, something which would impact disproportionately on public sector employees such as teachers. The amounts covered by increased national taxation are relatively small, so the package implies either more local taxes or massive cuts in public services of a kind that have not as yet been spelled out in any detail.

## Feuding

The fading of Berlusconi's power is demonstrated by the internal feuding within his party, the PdL, that has broken out in the wake of the austerity decree. Former minister Antonio Martino has called the measures "unacceptable", complaining they both increase taxes and fail to address the problem of Italy's lack of economic growth. A group of about 20 PdL deputies have been devising counter-proposals, which in effect attack the decrees from an even more neoliberal position - opposing the increased tax on higher earners, advocating an increase in everybody's pension age to 67, demanding the privatisation of 700 municipal enterprises within 18 months and so forth.

Roberto Formigoni, the PdL president in Lombardy, has been critical of the austerity package both because of the swingeing cuts in funding to regional and local government and because of the tax increases it imposes, which contradict Berlusconi's promise that the PdL would never "put its hands in the pockets of Italians". Instead he advocates the sell-off of state television, stating: "Today a public RAI no longer has any sense. Put on the market, it is an enterprise that would rapidly find buyers - I give a name at random: Murdoch - and could yield between €4 billion and €5 billion."<sup>5</sup> It is not clear whether this is extreme neoliberalism - a bit unlikely in somebody notorious for funnelling Lombard regional resources and contracts to dodgy 'not for profit' outfits linked to the reactionary clerical organisation, Communion and Liberation - or if it is designed to provoke Berlusconi personally, given that he and Rupert Murdoch, one-time business partners, have become bitter enemies in recent years. In short, Formigoni may be in the process of detaching himself from his current secular patron in the wake of the PdL debacle in the Milanese local elections in May.

Berlusconi himself is trying to blame the austerity package on Tremonti and appears to be open to accepting some opposition proposals. The modifications already agreed on August 29 demonstrate that his priority is a settlement of personal accounts with his increasingly unpopular finance minister rather than giving consistent backing to measures which were decided at a cabinet meeting that he himself chaired and formed the basis of a decree that he asked Napolitano to sign without delay. Whilst Berlusconi is claiming he will not resort to votes of confidence and that minor changes are acceptable, provided the overall figure of the package remains the same, such arguments and divisions within the governing party will not increase confidence either within Italy or amongst foreign investors that the premier is capable of seeing the measures through parliament within the short time scale the nervous stock markets, impatient with the convoluted and labyrinthine

negotiations that have traditionally characterised Italian politics, now require. The committee stage of the bill started in the Senate on August 22 and it is due to go to a plenary session of the Senate on September 5, to be followed by its rapid passage through the Chamber of Deputies. Even this timetable may not be enough to appease the markets and further delay as a result of the continuing internal wrangling (both within the PdL and between the PdL and the Northern League) may well provoke another major crisis.

Berlusconi's clinging to the premiership has clearly weakened Italy's situation in recent months, since his resignation would undoubtedly have been seen as a positive sign by the markets and lessened the speculative attack on Italian government bonds. However, it would be very foolish to deny that there is a more general crisis of the euro zone, which has now spread to France, whose banks hold a great deal of Italian and Spanish as well as Greek and Portuguese bonds; or that negative developments in the USA, such as the deadlock over increasing the national debt, the downgrading by Standard and Poor's or the slowdown in American growth rates, have also contributed to the recent worldwide turbulence on all the stock exchanges of the advanced capitalist countries. The European Union as a whole is clearly heading for recession, as the growth rates for the second quarter of 2011 make all too plain. Italy's 0.3% is rather better than the EU average of 0.2% and clearly better than France's and Portugal's zero growth as well as Germany's and the Netherlands' 0.1% and Spain's and the UK's 0.2%.

The proposal of Merkel and Sarkozy for a sort of euro zone economic government and pressure on all zone countries to incorporate a clause about balanced budgets in their constitutions - something which has already been demanded of Italy in Trichet's letter - only offers a partial solution in view of Merkel's refusal to adopt Eurobonds, at least in the immediate future, and their Tobin tax proposal has filled the bankers and speculators with horror.

## Left response

It also needs to be emphasised that any post-Berlusconi government of national salvation of the type that both the Partito Democratico and Pier-Ferdinando Casini's Union of the Centre favour might prove the worst possible solution for the working class, as any temporary broad coalition that would not have to face the electorate as a bloc would be very likely to carry out the most reactionary programme of privatisation, liberalisation and savage cuts that the ECB and Italy's own bankers and industrialists could devise. Whilst the PD has been forced to some extent to protect itself against competition to its left from Nichi Vendola's Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL) and make some noises about the need to curb tax evasion, tax the rich and impose fewer cuts on the poor, its enthusiasm for a broad coalition is likely to outweigh any vestigial belief in social justice.

SEL's own record of participating with corrupt politicians in a regional coalition in Puglia hardly lives up to its leftist rhetoric at the national level, where, having no representation in either the Chamber or the Senate, it is not being put to the test. Although Giuliano Pisapia's recent interview with *La Repubblica* may represent the personal position of Milan's SEL mayor rather than the collective position of SEL as a whole, this appalling endorsement of a technocratic solution to the capitalist crisis deserves to be quoted at length. He supports a *governo tecnico* (technocratic government)

"formed of people who have capacity and experience in the economic field. Beyond a credibility at the international level, this would take us outside the receivership on the part of Europe in which we are living. On the question of who to chose, I trust in the wisdom of president Napolitano - it is a guarantee for everybody. Only somebody who has no interest at stake - such as protecting the forces he represents or collecting consensus in view of future elections - can be the right person to guide the country out of the crisis."<sup>6</sup> No *Financial Times* or *Sole 24 Ore* columnist could have put the anti-democratic position of the ruling class across with more eloquence.

Whilst Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) has throughout the current crisis opposed any class-collaboration, it seems to have increasing difficulty in producing and distributing its daily paper, *Liberazione*, which is far less impressive in terms of size and coverage than it was before the PRC's loss of parliamentary representation and the defection of what became the nucleus of SEL.

Within the trade union movement, two of the three major unions, the CISL (traditionally Christian Democratic and still having a clearly Catholic identity) and the UIL (associated with two now defunct parties, the social democratic PSDI and the Republicans, placing it in the secular centre), have consistently collaborated with the current Berlusconi government, as well as eagerly pursuing sweetheart deals with 'no strike' clauses in Fiat's factories - deals consciously designed to exclude the CGIL-affiliated FIOM from the factories in a manner reminiscent of the late 1950s.

Even the formerly communist-dominated CGIL under Susanna Camusso's leadership has been far too willing to work with Confindustria - signing common programmes that involve a commitment to privatisation and then repudiating parts of them in interviews is not a convincing line. In fact FIOM's heroic rearguard defence of workers' rights at Fiat's plants in Turin and Pomigliano have often been sabotaged by the CGIL's dominant faction, which often wishes that its own metalworkers were as acquiescent to the demands of the ruthless Fiat bosses as the engineering workers' unions affiliated to the CISL and the UIL. Moreover, Camusso,

utterly disgracefully, ensured that the CGIL joined the CISL and UIL in signing an agreement with Confindustria in June that in effect undermined the workers' rights that FIOM had sought to protect.

Nonetheless, Camusso has had to respond to pressure from both the union confederation's employed members and the large pensioners' organisation affiliated to it, which expect the union bureaucrats to defend wages, conditions and pensions from the kind of attack embodied in the decree that Berlusconi's cabinet passed on August 12. The effective abolition of national pay bargaining and the ending of three public holidays seem to be the key issues that have pushed her towards calling a general strike, set for Tuesday September 6. She has also emphasised that an attempt will be made to involve the CISL and UIL in coordinated action.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the response of the CISL and UIL leaders to the August 12 decree could hardly be described as enthusiastic, it ought to be emphasised that on a number of recent occasions they have not joined the CGIL in protest strikes and their initial reaction to Camusso's letter, inviting the CISL and UIL to join the CGIL's walkout, was quite hostile.

Sections of the PD reacted to the general strike call with acute hostility, arguing that it pre-empted the role of parliament - which is precisely why anybody genuinely concerned with the welfare of Italy's workers, pensioners and unemployed should welcome it wholeheartedly, given that no group in the parliament elected in 2008 can be trusted to defend the poorer sections of the population with any consistency. Whilst it would be foolish to exaggerate the impact of a one-day protest strike, industrial action early in September might trigger the kind of hot autumn that the economic and political elites are anxious to avoid ●

## Notes

1. See Barbara Spinelli, 'Mostrarci quella lettera' *La Repubblica* August 17.
2. *The Guardian* August 22.
3. *Repubblica* August 14 gives detailed figures.
4. The Bank of Italy has further estimated that the Italian state is cheated out of €120 billion every year. It believes that entrepreneurs and the self-employed hide 56% of their income and that the super-rich declare only a piffling 17% of their property to the tax authorities.
5. *La Repubblica* August 17.
6. *La Repubblica* August 14.
7. Interview with *La Repubblica*, August 14.

# Head to head in Halle

"We 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.

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

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## CULTURE

# Aiming at wrong target

Maciej Zurowski investigates reactionary musical counterculture and looks at the anti-fascist response



**Death in June: undoubtedly neo-Nazi**

**W**arning! Attention, everybody! It looks like for the first time since the 80s, London's ethnic communities must fear for their safety when certain rock bands come to town. As the Love Music, Hate Racism website warns us in bold letters, the Slimelight club in Islington, North London has booked a "set of acts with fascist ties" for October 2011. These include Peter Sotos, who "has written tributes to Joseph Mengele (also known as the Angel of Death in Auschwitz) and whose self-produced fanzine contains references to 'Nazi triumphs', with frequent and lurid references to the abuse of children and women."<sup>1</sup> Scary stuff.

But that is not all. Despite protests by Love Music, Hate Racism and other anti-fascist groups, the Slimelight club has already hosted a fascist concert on June 25. According to LMHR, the artists on the bill all had "a long association with fascism and racism" and "seek to attack our celebrated multicultural society". Did neo-Nazis go on a violent rampage through Islington's Upper Street? Did they abuse women and children? After all, "the well-known Nazi organisation Stormfront" stated on their website that "their members will be attending the event", and a report in the *Islington Gazette* quoted Unite Against Fascism joint secretary Weyman Bennett as finding the prospect of such a concert "worrying". Even Labour MP Emily Thornberry got in on the act, saying that "these peddlers of poison" had no place in Islington.

Truth be told, LMHR could have been a bit more thorough with its research. Stormfront, for instance,

is not actually a "well-known Nazi organisation", but a far-right internet discussion forum with headquarters in West Palm Beach, Florida. As such, it provides an illusion of community to 'racially aware' misfits the world over, but it would be wrong to say that it has "members" who might collectively goosestep to the concert. "I was a bit tempted to go to the gig just to see what would happen," a London-based Stormfront user nicknamed 'Saxon Assassin' admitted, "but after actually looking up the bands involved I think I'll skip it". Then came the damning verdict: apparently, the musical programme on offer was "no more racially conscious than *Springtime for Hitler*".

The original post that 'The Falcon' published on Stormfront on May 28 looked as if it had been inspired by an April 13 article from the anti-fascist website *Who makes the Nazis*, to which it linked. "I wouldn't have heard about the gig were it not for the economic migrant lobby [ie, the left]," a surprised forum user crudely commented. Somewhat better informed, a different contributor suggested that it "must be a slow news week over at Love Music, Hate Racism ... Slimelight have been putting on gigs for years that could all in some tenuous way be 'linked' to fascism". If the 'well-known Nazi organisation', Stormfront, is anything to go by, then London's far right would have barely registered the concert had it not been for the anti-fascist coverage.

In the end, absolutely nothing happened - and perhaps, nothing was going to. Leaving aside that Islington's yuppie mile, Upper

Street, is hardly a prime target for white racist assault, it is difficult to imagine the goths that pranced towards Slimelight that night chasing anybody down the road - the opposite scenario seems a more plausible proposition. Contrary to the impression one might have gathered from the LMHR pamphlet, the bands playing at Slimelight were no violent Nazi skinhead combos, but acts from the neofolk milieu. An outgrowth of industrial music and post-punk, neofolk blends traditional European folk influences with experimental arrangements and electronic textures to varying degrees. Because of its fondness for the apocalyptic and the irrational, it is mainly consumed by darkwave and goth audiences.

## Totalitarian

Slimelight regulars vented their anger at LMHR's "totalitarian" campaign at *None so deaf as those who will not listen*, a Facebook discussion group set up by Slimelight owner Mayuan Mak when LMHR continued to delete his comments from its website.<sup>2</sup> Most posters displayed a convincing political inarticulacy, their vocabulary betraying a conventionally liberal rather than fascist mindset. The extreme left is just as bad as the far right - that was the predictable tenor. The ensuing furore gave Mak the opportunity to present himself as a patron saint of London's alternative community, and in a letter to the *Islington Gazette* he posed as a law-abiding model citizen. Challenging anti-fascists to document any actual incitement to racial hatred promoted by the targeted bands, he demanded that the hate laws which "many people have suffered and died for" be used

against those deserving punishment - such as Islamist nut-job Abu Hamza, for example, whose prison sentence Mak was quick to cite as "the way forward".

In fairness, Love Music, Hate Racism misquoted him as saying that "fascism is an art form as well". In truth, he said that "art can be fascist too"<sup>3</sup> - not at all the same statement. But let us turn our attention to the artists on the bill. The openers were named Joy of Life, though you would not come up with that name if all you had to go on was their dreary 1980s indie rock. What tied them to the other acts - Sol Invictus, Freya Aswynn and 6 Comm - was their linkage to the pioneering neofolk band Death In June, on whose record label they had debuted.

Tony Wakeford, a founding member of Death In June and front man of Sol Invictus, may have been overcome with nostalgia when well-meaning socialists picketed his concert outside Slimelight. Once upon a time, he was one of them: Wakeford's status as a card-carrying member of the Socialist Workers Party secured his punk group Crisis numerous performances for Rock Against Racism, the 1970s predecessor of Love Music, Hate Racism. Crisis vocalist Doug Pierce, meanwhile, was a member of Tariq Ali's Trotskyist outfit, the International Marxist Group - a connection that allowed Crisis to play at events such as Workers Against Racism.

In contrast to the intuitive socialism of The Clash, Crisis songs featured immortally literal lines, such as "urban terrorism is no substitute for building the revolutionary working class party". In theory,

the band members' respective central committees could not have been more thrilled. But, as Pierce remarked in hindsight, "there is no pleasing some people".<sup>4</sup> By 1980, Crisis routinely complained how the leftwing organisations still distrusted the band and their unruly punk fans: "We feel more alienated playing at their events than at normal gigs," Pierce lamented. Cheques they had been promised never arrived, and funds raised by Crisis through gigs were not donated in the band's name. According to Wakeford, the group felt thoroughly "used and patronised" - a familiar feeling to anyone who has ever been an obedient foot soldier to an arrogating party leadership.

Some may well wonder what revolutionary would attach such importance to being name-checked when making a donation. But even so a range of interviews give the impression that Crisis were as sincerely committed to the party line as their teenage hearts allowed them to be. And just as many apparatchiks, in their heart of hearts, imagine themselves as a future Trotsky or Lenin, Crisis envisioned themselves as official soundtrack composers for the great revolutionary crisis, which is, of course, always just around the corner. To the extent that they are not politically controlled, the self-seeking modes of social interaction that characterise capitalist societies are bound to be carried over into relationships between revolutionaries; Pierce and Wakeford, it appears, used the left to gain exposure no less than the left groups used Crisis to advance their respective sect interests. The bureaucrats, however, were made of baser wood than the young punks:



Crisis became disillusioned and left the building.

## Guilty have no pride

That's when Wakeford and Pierce began to take an ever-increasing interest in the 'other side'. It would be an understatement to call that interest unhealthy by the time they recorded their 1984 debut album as Death In June. *The guilty have no pride*, went the album title, and lines such as "the once proud brownshirt soon betrayed by engineers of blood, faith and race" were put to a rudimentary sub-Joy Division/Bauhaus soundtrack of droning bass lines and martial drums. Those familiar with fascist sub-currents such as Strasserism were not left guessing as to what game was being played here: the 'left' factions of the NSDAP - from Röhm's SA to Strasser's breakaway Black Front - were whitewashed of racism and idealised as national *socialist* movements betrayed by Hitler's supposed counterrevolution. Accordingly, Death In June's *Brown book* album (1987) contained the SA anthem 'Horst-Wessel-Lied', sung like a funeral dirge.

Death In June's persistent use of fascist themes in lyrics and artwork is often seen as mere flirtation with taboo subjects: a desire to shock, a morbid fascination with the dark side of history, or, as some fans suggest, no more than gay men sublimating their fetishistic sexual fantasies into art. But despite his continued evasions and deliberate confusion stirring elsewhere, Pierce was quite unmistakable in a 1995 interview: "In search of a *political view for the future* we [the early Death In June] came across National Bolshevism, which is closely connected with the SA hierarchy. People like Gregor Strasser and Ernst Röhm, who were later known as 'second revolutionaries', caught our attention" (my emphasis). And, broadly speaking, their artistic preoccupations have remained in the strange and depressing universe of *völkisch* mysticism, Germanic runes and the occult.

While his band-mates abstained from organised politics, Tony Wakeford became a fully paid-up member of the Nick Griffin-led, Strasserite 'political soldier' faction of the National Front. He was quickly dropped from Death In June when this fact emerged, possibly with a view to the growing goth scene's first stabs at mainstream chart success (*Temple of love* anybody?). Founding band member Patrick Leagas persevered for another two years; after a 1985 concert in Bologna, during which the band performed in Nazi-like uniforms, a woman from the audience walked up to Leagas shouting, "I hope your mother hates you".<sup>5</sup> This was devastating enough for the sensitive Leagas to quit DIJ - but not devastating enough to keep him from forming the electro combo 6 Comm, which delighted the Slimelight audience on June 25 2011 with songs from their retrospective *Like Stukas angels fall*.

Wakeford's next project, Above the Ruins, gave us darkwave 'protest songs' against race mixing and contributed a track to the National Front benefit album *No surrender*. This outfit, in turn, was the nucleus of the equally dreadful, but influential Sol Invictus. Like Death In June, Sol Invictus have since subsisted in an obscure rightwing bohemia of neo-pagans, occultists and 'radical traditionalists' of one sort or another. Wakeford became involved with the esoteric fascist 'think'-tank Iona and, like numerous neofolk artists after him, became deeply infatuated with Julius Evola, the 'radical traditionalist' philosopher from Mussolini's Italy. Evola, author of *Revolt against the modern world* (1934) and *The Aryan teachings of struggle and victory*

(1941), was so contemptuous of the masses that even the 'Reichsführer SS' Heinrich Himmler considered him a "reactionary": when working for the SS think-tank Ahnenerbe in the 1940s, Evola was put under observation.

## Decline of the west

In contrast to white-power rock of the Skrewdriver variety, which is not known for beating around the bush, the music of bands like Death In June and Sol Invictus thrives on ambiguity and has little agitational value. The acoustic strumming and Burzum-styled 'mystical' keyboard lines, interspersed with cinematic samples and assorted atmospherics, are hardly the stuff that sharpens you up for a bit of the old ultra-violence.

Death In June's introvert, often haunting songs are informed by the gloom and sense of loneliness commonly expressed in darkwave. Fans usually interpret the melancholy as despair at the human condition, the poetic references to war and struggle merely reinforcing this basic premise. A song such as 'Rose clouds of holocaust' ("the angels of ignorance fall down from your eyes, rose clouds of holocaust, rose clouds of lies") in no way flirts with holocaust denial, they say, since Pierce explained in an interview that the word 'holocaust' also means 'burnt offering' - quite a relief!

Arguably, the melancholy and despair represent neofolk's aesthetic appropriation of the cultural pessimism that informed the 'conservative revolutionaries' of the Weimar republic. One of Death In June's best known songs is 'Death of the west' (1985). Like much later neofolk, it expresses an aversion to materialism and 'bourgeois decadence' akin to that which informed authors such as the Freikorps favourite, Ernst Jünger, and the more highbrow Oswald Spengler, whose influential philosophical treatise was not so coincidentally named *The decline of the west* (1918; revised 1922). The 'German socialism' that Spengler envisioned as an antidote to corrupt capitalist democracy was one where orders would be given and obeyed, where everybody would have their strictly allocated place in society, and where classes would collaborate for the common good - not unlike the ideas that fascists such as Doug Pierce's beloved Ernst Röhm championed, as they opened the gates to unprecedented barbarism.<sup>6</sup>

To these reactionaries, democracy was synonymous with the rule of money: theirs was an anti-capitalist critique from the right - or, rather, from the past. Like some of their Marxist contemporaries, they identified parliamentary democracy as the bourgeoisie's preferred form of rule. Unlike them, they advocated the rule of a 'naturally superior' neo-feudal elite over all other classes to contain the excesses of capitalism. Because they conflated capitalist democracy with egalitarianism, their premise was not only erratic, but diametrically opposed to Marxist thought: to be sure, they feared the rule of the working class more than anything. Whenever they cared to criticise the really existing fascist regimes, in which they found their closest political match, they lambasted their 'mob character', effectively deeming them not aristocratically rightwing enough. As is widely known, fascism in power soon forged alliances with the national bourgeoisie, running roughshod over even the most timidly anti-capitalist fancies.

What is more, some individuals in the neofolk scene are rather well acquainted with the theories of the *nouvelle droite* ('new right') and particularly those of Alain de Benoist. De Benoist, a French intellectual who fancies himself as the Antonio Gramsci of the right,

would in fact be better described as fascism's answer to the neo-'Gramscians' of 1970s left academia. De Benoist therefore advocated a 'war of position', as outlined in Gramsci's *Prison notebooks*, though without the complementary 'war of manoeuvre'. After World War II and that unfortunate gaffe known as the holocaust, cultural work would be the only way forward. Activists would covertly infiltrate the superstructure and gradually influence certain groups into adopting key concepts of fascist ideology; won over by largely aesthetical means, these would then form a hidden army prepared to strike on the Great Day. Until then, open political work would be futile.

## Declassed bohemia

It is easy to see why some underground musicians might find such a concept appealing. To a certain type of artist, the glamour of producing culturally subversive work - let alone in the name of a movement so dangerous it dares not speak its name - is everything they could wish for. It allows someone like Doug Pierce to shroud himself in mystery and keep people guessing: is he 'really' a fascist, as the lefties say he is - or merely the misunderstood artist that most of his fans make him out to be?

The perpetual controversy keeps the cash flow going and, although real mainstream success is not on the cards, Pierce has certainly found a niche that pays the rent. A nod and a wink here, a cop-out there - unlike Wakeford, who is known to get nervous when denying his dubious political associations past and present, Pierce positively enjoys sending out contradictory messages and fabricating ambiguous sound bites in interviews. To aggravate anti-fascists is dead easy, after all. And, as far as his fans are concerned, not even Pierce's solidarity visits to the neo-fascist HOS militia in the midst of the Balkans conflict represent a clear political statement. For Pierce is an *artist*, and apparently artists are above politics.<sup>7</sup>

For all those curious to learn about the Death In June 'family' and their associates in detail, there are websites such as *Who makes the Nazis*, which aims to expose "fascist presence in 'transgressive' musical subcultures". Musicians' political histories and personal links are documented with almost Stasi-like precision - any suspicious information is meticulously collected and catalogued. Who shared a bill with what fascist band in the past? Who appeared alongside whom on what compilation album? What band's ex-guitarist shared flats with a rightwing skinhead back in the 80s? In contrast to the characteristically crude Love Music, Hate Racism write-up, the good people running *Who makes the Nazis* know their subject well. However, the 'guilt by association' method they employ has its limitations.<sup>8</sup> The same goes for the notion that, once an individual has internalised and puked up enough hackneyed reactionary ideas, the sum of it all equals fascism and is bound to spread like a virus. Likewise, the uncritical acceptance of the new right's belief that fascism can take over simply by means of cultural infiltration leaves a lot to be desired.

Take, for instance, David Tibet of experimental folk outfit Current 93, a close associate of Death In June and guest contributor to many of their albums. In a 1988 interview<sup>9</sup> Tibet expresses his disenchantment with "spiritually and morally corrupt" western culture and society, which he perceives as "tedious" and merely striving for "shallow pleasure". "When you see people in the street," he laments, "their shoulders are bowed in defeat. They realise they are living completely meaningless lives and there's nothing to look forward to."

Tibet's alienation with the hollowness of late capitalist culture is surely one that he shares with many on the left, but he simply lacks the tools to identify any relationship between culture and its socio-economic base. Culture, to him, is some free-floating, autonomous force that continues to exist in its present form only because those docile sheep in the street don't possess enough willpower to overcome it.

If you will, it is here that Tibet's outlook, coupled with millennial angst and an intense interest in mysticist mumbo-jumbo, has points of intersection with fascist thought, and it is not difficult to see why Tibet and Pierce, when introduced, got on like a house on fire. Yearning to create art that stood in contradiction to capitalist mediocrity, they were both looking for authenticity in traditional and pre-modern thought, counterposing the eternal, the mystical and the metaphysical to the mundane, misunderstanding capitalism's commodity fetishism as 'materialism' - much like the traditional elites and disenchanting sections of the middle classes had done, as they turned to *völkisch* romanticism at the turn of the 19th century.

## Faceless crowds

However, as dandy mindsets go, Tibet's is not unusual. Snobbish elitism and a complete detachment from the masses had been a hallmark of countercultural pop rebellion ever since the 1960s. "Those people never had any power and they never will have" is how Sir Mick Jagger explained his motivation behind the Rolling Stones tune, 'Salt of the earth' (1968). As France saw the biggest mass strike in modern history, Jagger sneered at the "common foot soldier" and his "back-breaking work" - only one entry in his almost consistently reactionary lyrical oeuvre. Likewise in the 80s, British workers were engaged in an all-out class war against the Thatcher government rather than leading "meaningless lives" and "hanging their shoulders in defeat", but from David Tibet's candlelit bohemian hideout, they all just looked like the "faceless crowd" depicted in Jagger's song.

Neofolk's spiritual path was paved by artists such as Jim Morrison, the Nietzsche-fixated 'shaman' of narcissistic gloom pop. In the 70s, David Bowie, Joy Division and others introduced murky, fascist flirtations into that particular arena, and you might argue that the sum of their cultural pessimisms and aesthetical derailments does not place them a million miles away from Death In June and Current 93. Likewise JJ Burnell of The Stranglers - like Doug Pierce an admirer of the reactionary Japanese author, Yukio Mishima, and guilty of *Euroman cometh*, a solo album crammed with 'Eurocentrism', unreconstructed 19th century nationalism and plenty of unintentional humour. You may even want to file indie-pop luminary Björk in the 'brown book'. Did she not, after all, join forces with David Tibet for the 1991 song 'Falling' - and is Björk's mythologisation of her 'mystical' Icelandic home not somewhat akin to neofolk's Nordic fantasies? To make matters worse, Steve Ignorant of Crass, the anarcho-punk band *par excellence*, not only supplied guest vocals to Current 93's *Dog moon rising* album, but featured on a Current 93 recording alongside Boyd Rice, who is known as a sinister "social Darwinist" to industrial music fans and as an "unemployed, alcoholic fascist" to his ex-wife, Lisa Crystal Carver.<sup>10</sup> And, in any case, were not Crass hostile to the organised left, whilst adhering to an outright Proudhonist type of anarchism - as racist 'national anarchists' do these days?

So where do you draw the line? What if most musicians simply do not screen their collaborators and drug buddies for political beliefs? What if 'meta-fascism' blends so easily with the common outlook of declassed bohemia that it simply dissolves in a swamp of amorphous self-indulgence? At *Who makes the Nazis*, writers are at pains to make out who is "definitely" a fascist and who is just a fellow traveller, eccentric or imposter. But, despite the often intriguing cultural analysis and obsessive evidence-collecting, their attempts to identify a point where quantity becomes quality clearly give them a bit of a headache. Maybe that is because fascism never really had a coherent ideology - rather, it took any resentments, prejudices and fragments of reactionary thought that happened to cross its path and tossed them into its grubby, populist rag-bag. As Leon Trotsky remarked in reference to German national socialism, its ideological "beggar's bowl" preserved "whatever had met with approbation" during Hitler's early speeches. Hitler's "political thoughts were the fruits of his oratorical acoustics ... That is how the programme was consolidated".<sup>11</sup>

## Aesthetical mobilisation

This is not to claim that fascism has no distinct character that renders it qualitatively different to other types of reactionary politics - it is just that this difference is less clearly defined by what it *thinks* as by what it *does*.

Chauvinism and extreme racism were the hallmarks of fascist thought in the 20th century, but were not unique to them. What distinguished the fascist movements was their mass base and the street-fighting divisions they sent out to smash working class organisations. To gain mass appeal, fascism had to radicalise sentiments already held by broad sections of society: the selective anti-capitalism of the middle classes, directed solely at big business and international finance capital; their simultaneous fear of the working class and of Bolshevism; the indignation of the unemployed university graduate; the demobbed German officer's bitterness over the lost war and the 1918 revolution, mythologised as a 'stab in the army's back'; the latent anti-Semitism that permeated all of the above. It is true that the writings of Spengler and Evola had a place in fascist libraries and kept the odd Nazi intellectual busy. But how many exasperated Germans who turned to the NSDAP will have read *The decline of the west*, when most of them had not even read their copies of *Mein Kampf*?

Had the Nazis attempted to disseminate *haute* fascism through cultural brainwashing techniques, they would have waited a long time. But instead of recognising the sub-Gramscian strategy for the dark horse that it is, the anti-fascists simply seem to accept the post-fascist 'aesthetics are everything' premise, according to which cultural warfare can be an effective substitute for political organisation and mass mobilisation. What is clearly missing from books such as the German-language *Ästhetische Mobilmachung*,<sup>12</sup> which deals with the politics of neofolk in exhilarating detail, is the most critical question of all: does the strategy work? In reality, the moment 'cultural fascism' leaves its ivory towers and attempts to influence the mainstream, it becomes indistinguishable from conventional rightwing thought: in his column in *Le Figaro*, Alain de Benoist polemicised against further immigration, but in support of multiculturalism on the grounds that it preserves the 'identities' of immigrants - a view that even the Labour Party right could agree with.

Even in the marginal subcultures in which 'cultural fascism' has attempted to gain a foothold, its successes



# CULTURE

have been humble for the past 20-odd years. Despite the concerted effort of far-right newspapers, such as Germany's *Junge Freiheit* and neofolk magazines such as *Sleipnir*, the European darkwave scene has proved overwhelmingly immune to politicisation. Some newer industrial bands, such as the insufferable Von Thronstahl, are more explicitly fascist than the likes of Death In June. But, for all their underground popularity, they are consumed in much the same way as any other darkwave band, the listeners' interest rarely extending beyond the momentary thrill of the forbidden.<sup>13</sup> "There are some far-right people who think that neofolk is the thing," wrote a fan on Mak's *None so deaf*... Facebook group, "but they are very few and generally not well received in the neofolk scene"; and furthermore: "I remember seeing a few years back far-right neofolk fans on Stormfront bemoan the fact that neither neofolk fans nor artists are receptive for their ideas."

But let us assume for a moment that fascism really is some kind of ideological virus bound to infect people's minds upon mere exposure; I will even grant that 'meta-fascism' might resonate with the world-weariness and latent elitism of the darkwave crowd. What then, precisely, would the extreme right gain from the support of an insular and fundamentally self-absorbed subculture that does its best to segregate itself from the rest of the world? It would hardly constitute the beginning of a triumphant march through the institutions - and more likely an act of self-sabotage. Too strong is the scene's distaste for concrete politics, mass movements and physical violence to provide fertile ground for fascism.

In order to catch on, a fascist movement must resonate with broad sections of society when these are at the point of desolation. In that respect, a formation such as the English Defence League - anti-Muslim, populist and hostile to the left - may just be spot on. The EDL elevates the creeping decline of imperialism and Israeli Zionism into a millennial 'clash of cultures', aggressively asserting the 'liberal values' of the west against the 'barbarism' of Islam. And, perhaps most importantly, the EDL does not shy away from violence. In other words, it is everything that the meta-political 'new right' is not: the seed of a fascist movement fit for the 21st century.

Much though esoteric rightists delude themselves that their ideas are eternal, transhistorical and 'natural', they are in reality ideological expressions of a social class in specific historical conditions. Tales of a Jewish 'world conspiracy', paganism and other such candyfloss-brained baloney are unlikely to strike a chord with western societies in the 21st century. The defence of 'our way of life' against Islamic extremists, trade union comrades and political correctness, however, might just do the trick. The biggest problem of the *nouvelle droite* has always been fascism's lack of political substance. Divorced from social realities, devoid of street-fighting squads and lacking a mass base, it really is reduced to little more than obscure, metaphysical drivel.

An acquaintance who was involved in the protests against the Slimelight concert asked me whether such an event would not risk pulling some people rightwards. My reply was: if at all, then immeasurably less so than permanent exposure to the *Daily Mail* and the Murdoch media, disguised as common sense and read by millions every day. Three weeks after our conversation, Norwegian fascist Anders Behring Breivik massacred several dozen leftist teenagers with the calm determination of an SS *Einsatzgruppen* officer. In his

manifesto, he cited the *Mail* scribe and *Londonistan* author, Melanie Phillips, the radical Islamophobic *Gates of Vienna* blog and other such contemporary rightwing texts rather than Evola, Jünger or Spengler. His paranoia of "cultural Marxism", meanwhile, is common currency with Andrew Breitbart, Glenn Beck and other Fox News luminaries.

## School of libertinage

Just a few words about Peter Sotos, whose forthcoming Slimelight appearance LMHR also chose to oppose. Pioneer of a sub-current of industrial music christened 'power electronics', Sotos's declared mission was to record the most extreme music of all time - and he complemented his band Whitehouse's ultra-invasive noise fest with the most extreme, misanthropic lyrics he could think of. Industrial pioneers Throbbing Gristle, whose leader Genesis P Orridge obsessed over Charles Manson, Hitler, Aleister Crowley and everything else that his teachers might consider shocking, had laid the groundwork. Driven by an extreme version of libertarianism, Sotos went further and celebrated sadistic Nazi death camp wardens and child pornography.

Like Throbbing Gristle, he was tilting at windmills, unaware that the humanist values he so despised were the mere facade of a social system built on exploitation, oppression, violence and war. Barack Obama, the hope-and-change man of liberal America, has inflicted more death and misery upon the world than the likes of Peter Sotos could ever dream of. Boyd Rice, industrial music's resident misanthrope, looks like a boy scout next to David Cameron and the class that he represents. In their minds, Sotos and Rice might feel quite at home in the *120 days of Sodom* - except that in the real world evil is not the triumph of the libertine's will, but the wholly unglamorous, monotonous and barren by-product of class society.

LMHR was possibly a little late in its denunciations. Peter Sotos's main body of work, including the misanthropy fanzine cited on its website, dates back to the 1980s, making it hard to realise what kind of danger this concert is supposed to pose. "If left unchallenged, the actions of these individuals give confidence to fascist and racists, providing an illusion of mainstream acceptance of their vile views" is LMHR's generalisation. Does anyone at the organisation actually believe that Peter Sotos's graphic explorations of rape, serial murder and paedophilia will endear him to the far right - or give the far right "an illusion of mainstream acceptance"? You would have thought that the precise point of his act, consumed as a curiosity by fans of the bizarre and confrontational, is to evade mainstream acceptability as much as possible.

For the popular frontist LMHR, the language of liberalism is, sadly, too often used in its 'anti-fascist' campaigns, holding up "our celebrated multicultural society" against the cheerless delusions of Tony Wakeford *et al.* 'Proletarian internationalism', after all, might scare off fellow travellers such as the liberal, Emily Thornberry. It is just that all the inaccuracies and half-truths, the deliberate suppression of information and the ensuing atmosphere of hysteria do more harm than good. "These people totally discredit themselves by refusing any discussion," observed a Slimelight regular correctly - and just like the punk group Crass grew increasingly hostile to the left when Red Action randomly took out skinhead youths at their gigs, the philistine anti-fascism employed by LMHR is bound to alienate the alternative scene from the left rather than cleanse it of reactionary influence.

Anti-fascists could do worse than refocus their energies not just on the

growing Defence League movement, but primarily on the system that breeds fascist degenerates. Fascism, after all, is a punishment for our failure to make revolution - and our struggle against capitalism must inevitably involve a struggle against the liberal hogwash which popular fronts tend to uphold when contrasting the 'legitimate democratic forces' of the bourgeoisie with 'extremists' and 'hate'. Those who are offended by neofolk/post-industrial music and wish to keep it in relative obscurity, meanwhile, would be well-advised to simply ignore it as much as possible. In the end, the dodgy gigs at Slimelight are just the dying breath of a cultural revolution that never was ●

## Notes

1. Love Music, Hate Racism, 'Say no to Nazi bands in north London': <http://lovemusichateracism.com/2011/06/say-no-to-nazi-bands-in-north-london>.
2. The Facebook blurb stated among other things: "We are not best informed at the Slime office to verify truth, authors' bias or ulterior motives in order for us to assess the information that they have passed to us. In response we have requested publicly online for any negative and positive information, verifiable against a published, reliable source, not just rumour or hearsay, to assist us, the local authorities and lovemusichateracism.com to come to an informed decision on whether this concert should be held. We have now been told by lovemusichateracism.

com they have no interest in reading any information that we gather from Slimelight members/regulars [or any other source, it would appear]."

3. [www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/online\\_campaign\\_attacks\\_controversial\\_islington\\_gig\\_1\\_914659](http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/online_campaign_attacks_controversial_islington_gig_1_914659).
4. [www.occidentalcongress.com/interviews/intdoug\\_06.htm](http://www.occidentalcongress.com/interviews/intdoug_06.htm).
5. Five years earlier, a fascist terrorist bombing killed 85 people at Bologna's main central station and injured many more. At this time, the local government was dominated by the Italian CP.
6. In Spengler's words, what was needed was "a mighty politico-economic order that transcends all class interests, a system of lofty thoughtfulness and duty sense". In other words, Spengler wanted a class society without class antagonisms - a political paradox that calls for an external enemy on which to project suppressed contradictions.
7. In an interview about his early punk days in Crisis, Pierce explained the origins of his cynical approach as follows: "We wrote with that marching rhythm in mind the song 'White youth', which we thought was about 'unity and brotherhood' [the song ends with the repeated verse, "We are black, we are white - together we are dynamite"], but much to my surprise some smartarse in the *New Musical Express* was soon saying that it was a white supremacist anthem ... That was key in realising that, no matter what you wrote, if it was any good it could be interpreted any way, anyhow, anywhere. A Death In June prime directive!" ([www.occidentalcongress.com/interviews/intdoug\\_06.htm](http://www.occidentalcongress.com/interviews/intdoug_06.htm)).
8. The comrades at *Who makes the Nazis* would also be well advised to be more critical of information from Searchlight, whose relationship with the truth (and the MI5) is not uncontroversial. The organisation has furthermore been known to call for state bans against

'extremists'.

9. The interview can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=20XSDKbFj2w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20XSDKbFj2w).
10. A *Who makes the Nazis* article on Boyd Rice can be found at [www.whomakesthenazis.com/2010/10/just-say-non-nazism-narcissism-and-boyd.html](http://www.whomakesthenazis.com/2010/10/just-say-non-nazism-narcissism-and-boyd.html).
11. L. Trotsky *What is national socialism?* (1933) [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330610.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330610.htm).
12. *Ästhetische Mobilmachung* is a fairly interesting account (if you speak German), but to be taken with a pinch of salt, given that the authors hail from the 'anti-German' end of the 'undogmatic' left. Centred around papers such as *Jungle world*, the pro-US/pro-Israel 'anti-Germans' make it their business to detect 'fascism' and 'anti-Semitism' everywhere. See [www.unrast-verlag.de/unrast.2.5.5.html](http://www.unrast-verlag.de/unrast.2.5.5.html).
13. On a side note, some may be surprised to hear that the neofolk website *Heathen harvest* considers the communist-themed martial industrial act, Vae Victus, to be "very enjoyable". Candidly noting that band leader Peter Iolin considers himself to be a "revolutionary socialist", the website gave his debut EP a positive review. See [www.heathenharvest.com/article.php?story=2008083110530947&query=](http://www.heathenharvest.com/article.php?story=2008083110530947&query=).

## Red Mist

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## Summer Offensive

# Best in years

The first task of the final column in this year's Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising drive (which ended on August 21), is to congratulate all comrades who took part, at whatever level. At the SO celebration meal in our Communist University on the eve of the conclusion of the campaign, comrade Jack Conrad was able to report that we had raked in just over £29,000 - and subsequent to that provisional figure, after we had totted up cash that had been sitting uncounted in various accounts, collection tins and the CPGB box number, we discovered that our final total was actually a magnificent £29,684.

Apart from the amount raised through payments, sales and donations received at Communist University, we also received last-minute cheques in the post from comrades DL and MEM (£100 each), TG (£75), RI (£50) and MM (£30). Comrade MEM was at pains to specify the worth of the *Weekly Worker*, of which he is an online reader (one of 35,977 visitors to our website since the last edition of the paper, by the way).

In fact we have had a double success in this year's campaign. Remember, our original target was £25k, which we have caned by an additional £4k plus. However, the SO also had a mini-campaign running inside it to raise an additional £300 a month in regular standing orders to the *Weekly Worker*. And that won out too. Towards the end of CU comrade MZ stepped in to take us over the finishing line with a monthly £10, and there was a further £8 (actually £25 a quarter) from comrade DT waiting for us in the post. Those two additions allowed us to end the campaign with a total of £313 - again, a great achievement and well done to all comrades.

We used to be in the habit of referring to this annual financial campaign as a "purge", despite

the fact that the word "has become a discredited one in our world communist movement" (*The Leninist* September 3 1988). Looking back, we were making our point in such provocative terms partly for the outrage it caused in some quarters - the factions we were grappling with in the 'official' Communist Party of those days either looked on the 1930s purges in the USSR as a reason to distance themselves from communism altogether, or, grotesquely, actually approved of them.

We explained what we meant by the term with a quote from Lenin that emphasised that a successful purge meant "a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty bourgeois egotism" rather than a mass physical annihilation of the party comrades (*CW* vol 29, p432).

The SO shows us what is strong in the organisation, and so needs nurturing, and what is weak, and so needs attention. Quite apart from its financial success, this year's campaign has been a good one in this context. At the risk of being a little schematic, we can pick out three features.

● What might be dubbed as the sympathising readership periphery of the *Weekly Worker* continues to expand and has become more actively partisan towards the paper. This confirms the correctness of our original decision to put the paper, and the development of its format and reach, right at the heart of this year's fund drive. Now this has been a slow process. Of course, it has relied on the consistent quality of the analysis and commentary that appears in these pages, a regular high standard of output that has impressed and started to subtly influence even people who start out as what they imagine to be implacable opponents. This is a huge achievement - the small and frequently embattled team who produce our paper deserve the

thanks of the whole organisation.

● Unevenness is inevitable in any political organisation. In ours, however, this have become far more pronounced and problematic over the past years. It was reflected in our members and closer supporters both in the debates and contributions at Communist University, as well as participation in the SO. There were a number of members - including very new comrades - who excelled; there are a number who barely took part at all. This is something that we must *politically* address over the coming year - we need to "work harder on ourselves", as one comrade put it in the feedback session at the end of CU.

● I have mentioned the encouraging involvement of younger comrades in this year's campaign, with a number showing a great deal of grit and inventiveness to make a dent in their individual targets. At the celebratory meal we gave prizes to individual comrades to mark their personal achievement and two of the three all-female winners were comrades SM and EO, both of whom fit into this demographic category rather than our more grizzled layers (comrade YM won the award for the highest sum raised - a fantastic £3,180).

We need a programme of systematic development, but - given the degraded levels of thought in today's revolutionary left in general - younger members and supporters need particular attention. This not only applies to the comrades' theoretical development, but also our culture of work and party tasks.

Nevertheless, this is one of the best Summer Offensives for years, a campaign we can be all be proud of. It provides a great springboard for the party's work for the coming 12 months - both financially and politically ●

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**CU 2011**

# Debate, controversy and comradeship

Danny Hammill reports on this year’s CPGB summer school

Without doubt, this has been a tumultuous year. We had the Arab spring, the continuing economic crisis, the exposure of the corrupt relations between the UK political establishment, the police and the media, and the recent riots. All this and more should surely mean that increasing numbers of people, confronted by an obviously malfunctioning world system, are looking for *answers*.

Therefore, in that sense, the CPGB’s annual Communist University - held in south London over August 13-20 - could not have come at a more auspicious time. With so much to discuss and debate, it is more a question of what to leave out than to include. As anyone who has attended will readily tell you, our CU is distinctive from the various other left schools and conferences in a number of ways - most notably the Socialist Workers Party’s Marxism, which always precedes our gathering.

Crucially, the CPGB positively aims to seek out *differences* of opinion among comrades - to bring them into the open sunlight. But we do so not in order to ridicule them or launch an ideological heresy-hunt, a monstrous trait of the confessional sects that litter the left. Instead, the CPGB has consistently promoted the open clash of contending ideas - the *only* method by which we can arrive at the truth. From some of our left critics you would get the distinct impression that this is some sort of peculiar idiosyncrasy on the part of the CPGB, rather than the very foundation stone of Marxism - based as it is on the principles of *scientific* socialism, of free and fearless inquiry. Marx said that the dialectic “does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary”. In essence, that is the ethos that we try to inculcate at all levels of the organisation. History has taught us that today’s minority or ‘eccentric’ viewpoint can be tomorrow’s common sense or majority opinion.

Our CU endeavours to be as all-rounded and collective an *experience* as is objectively possible. Meaning that CU should, in no matter how fleeting or radically incomplete a way, be an anticipation of the communist future: act as an advert for communism, if you like. As repeatedly stressed throughout the week during the numerous sessions, communism is an eminently practical project - certainly not a demand for the impossible or nonsense like that. Our message should be stark and simple: unless we positively supersede capitalism, we will be convulsed by one devastating economic and ecological crisis after another, as the world slides into further irrationality.

Logically then, CU itself should embody in organisational form such communist practicality in however small a way - practice what you preach, no matter how imperfectly. Thus collective meals are prepared by participants using a flexible rota system. Notwithstanding the frustration that can occasionally arise from missing parts of a session if there has been a partial breakdown in organisational efficiency (which has been known to happen on occasion), this helps to foster solidarity and comradeship - not to mention the production of relatively high-quality food at a *very* reasonable price - a serious consideration, given that London is not exactly the cheapest place in the world. Equally as important, it is *fun*, as it involves a lot of play and experimentation - hallmarks of any genuine communist society, past and present. Indeed, if truth

be told, a lot of left schools often lack real fun - and, if it exists at all, seems to mainly consist of getting ridiculously pissed at every available opportunity. Not that CU is necessarily a festival of sobriety, of course - once the sessions are over for the day.

Another facet which deserves a mention is childcare. Some comrades were only able to attend for the full week because of the childcare facilities organised - many were happy to miss a session to do their stint. Needless to say, the presence of children gives the week more of the feel of a genuinely joyful communist household - one which we all want to live in, as opposed to the asphyxiating confines of the bourgeois nuclear family.

Whilst still on the subject of fun, there was an evening musical performance from comrade Steve Cooke on his amazing Roland Keytar - whose music blends sharp-witted lyrics with funk and acid jazz grooves, electronica and new wave rock (at least, that is what it says on his Facebook page!). Slightly disappointingly, there were no film nights, recitals of original poetry or organised games on other evenings - perhaps next year.

## Highlights

As for the actual sessions, all the presentations made by the speakers will shortly be available on the CPGB website (video and audio files). So we need only concentrate on those aspects of the week that generated some degree of controversy or threw a particularly acute light on the CPGB’s programmatic outlook where it differs from those of other left groups.

In this context, the session on ‘The Labour Party: past, present and future’ was of special interest. Regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know that there is a minority within the CPGB who believe that systematic work within the Labour Party is a waste of time - a diversionary dead-end that is doomed to failure. Indeed, comrade Chris Trafford believes the CPGB majority are completely misreading the situation for stating that Labour under Ed Miliband is likely to be forced to the left. Sadly, comrade Trafford could not stay for the whole session, as he had a train to catch. Naturally, it is only to be expected that further articles and polemics on this extremely important issue will appear in the *Weekly Worker*.

‘They fuck you up, the left’ - unsurprisingly, given some comrades’ experiences, this was one of the hits of the week. Pat Byrne (ex-Militant Tendency, Towards a New International Tendency), Andy Wilson (ex-SWP), Simon Pirani (ex-Workers Revolutionary Party) recounted grimly amusing stories about their treatment at the hands of respective sect leaders. However, as noted during the subsequent discussion, there was a noticeable tendency to throw out the Marxist baby with the sectarian bathwater. That is, to reject any sort of disciplined organisational structure - conflating democratic centralism with *bureaucratic* centralism. Though understandable, such anarchistic or individualistic inclinations need to be combated. Indicatively, comrade Pirani repeated the hoary old myth - so assiduously cultivated by academia - that the seeds of elitism, Stalinism, etc can be found in Lenin’s *What is to be done?*

Another session featured comrade Owen Jones, who has a long-standing and lively relationship with the CPGB. He is now a bit of a celebrity thanks to his book, *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class* - which has received relatively

widespread coverage in the mainstream press. He has even battled it out with the notoriously cantankerous historian, David Starkey, on BBC’s *Newsnight*. Anyway, a minor controversy emerged when the word ‘lumpenproletariat’ made an appearance. An early shorthand for ‘chav’. Not how Marx deployed the word, of course.

Hillel Ticktin is now a CU veteran. His analysis of capitalist crisis and Marxist theory has become especially pertinent, given the recent fear and panic on the stock markets - capitalism is in visible decline. His other talk on the Soviet Union was exceptionally interesting - what was the USSR exactly? Comrade Ticktin has consistently argued that it was an unviable social formation - the only question being how it managed to survive for as long as it did. Clearly, for comrade Ticktin - and the CPGB - the Soviet Union was not ‘state capitalist’. But neither was it a workers’ state of any kind. Obviously, communists need to continue the arduous, but essential task of grasping the Soviet Union’s inner laws of development and motion, not slap on ready-made, dogmatic labels. The *Weekly Worker* is one vehicle for such work.

Comrades from the Radical Anthropology Group, gave their usual inspiring talks (Engels’ *Origins of the family*, matriarchy, our Neanderthal cousins, the human revolution and visions of communism were all explored). Not for the first time, there were dissatisfied mutterings from a handful of CPGB comrades about the supposedly excessive attention paid to the RAG’s “just-so” stories about the revolutionary origins of humanity and our primitive communist past. But, to date, these comrades have yet to publish any material that challenges or refutes the logical, coherent stance of the RAG comrades. Time will tell.

Perhaps related to visions of communism, comrade James Turley gave an entertaining introduction on ‘Marxism and other worlds: fantasy and sci-fi’. Just as we continue to rediscover our magnificent communist past, thanks to the sterling work of the RAG comrades, so science fiction and fantasy at their most inventive can help us see the communist future.

There were two books launches at CU this year - first, comrade Ben Lewis’s *Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle*, co-authored with Lars T Lih. This book recalls an important moment in our pre-Stalinist communist history, but grievously neglected up to now - the October 1920 congress of the Independent Social Democrats in Germany. Then there was our *Draft programme*, with its *very* prolonged gestation period - now available to read in a convenient format.

Special mention should go to comrades Spencer Leonard and Chris Cutrone from the US Platypus group - who spent the entire week at CU. Among others fully participating were comrades from the SWP, Socialist Party in England and Wales, International Bolshevik Tendency and Socialist Fight.

Finally, it does have to be said that attendance at CU 2011 was a little disappointing - a noticeable number of our own supporters and members were absent. For whatever reason, there appeared to be an unusually high preponderance of weddings, births, illnesses and so on. Unlike the SWP’s Marxism, which saw an increase in numbers this year. Every effort must be made to ensure that next year’s CU sees a more impressive turnout - and even greater left participation ●

# 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

## Anti-imperialism does not equal pro-Gaddafi

# Fall of desperate regime

**A**s it threatened, briefly, to do this spring, the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi has collapsed. The forces previously known as the Libyan rebels have seized power in most of the country, including the capital, Tripoli - assisted, of course, by months of aerial bombardment by Britain, France and America.

Gaddafi's fall, though hardly completely unexpected, nonetheless took place with surprising rapidity. The civil war, which had raged ever since Nato support lent some kind of military muscle to the rag-tag rebel forces, looked for months to have reached a point of stalemate. Frustration was evident at all levels of the imperialist establishment; all the signs of debilitating mission creep (a UN resolution aiming ostensibly to prevent a massacre in Benghazi having given way rapidly to an open-ended mission to topple Gaddafi) were there, easily recognisable from the Iraq and Afghanistan disasters.

At least the belligerents were fully behind those misadventures; with the exception of Nicolas Sarkozy (in dire need of a 'Falklands moment'), David Cameron and a rather lukewarm Barack Obama, no other Nato leaders were able to muster much in the way of material or even political support to the bombing campaign. Outgoing US defence secretary and lifelong military-industrial apparatchik Robert Gates was driven to a caustic attack on the uneven commitment of Nato's member-states - not only to the Libyan mission, but to the equally ill-defined purpose of the alliance itself in the post-cold war era.

Now, suddenly, 'major combat operations are at an end'. I use the famous phrase of George W Bush advisedly. His regime was so hubristic and irrational that there is every reason to suppose that he genuinely thought that the 'hard part' was over in Iraq. The west may have shrunk away from sending in the cavalry this time around, and may hope that the relative lack of foreign 'boots on the ground' (except, of course, special forces and 'advisors', for whom different rules apply) will genuinely buy them some local goodwill.

Yet any sane imperial strategist will see many different possible outcomes, most of them disastrous. The best-case scenario for the US and its allies is a relatively orderly transition to a relatively stable government in the pockets of the west. The Transitional National Council will form the core of this new government; the state will have to grant some democratic concessions (given that it was, after all, a rebellion among a substantial section of the popular masses against Gaddafi's tyranny that started the whole farrago), but not enough to threaten western interests.

The TNC is a motley coalition of academics, liberals, royalists, Islamists and ex-Gaddafi cronies who saw which way the wind was blowing. It is perhaps not the perfect Party of Order, but strange times make for strange bedfellows. Any stable regime to come out of it would necessarily

entail significant restrictions on political freedom, if not to the degree enjoyed by Gaddafi; and it would have to sufficiently placate key constituencies of the rebel forces, not least the Islamists and tribal leaders. Given the ideologically protean character of Gaddafi - who claimed to be a pan-Arabist, a pan-Africanist and a pan-Islamist - it is likely that his erstwhile henchmen will have no problem adapting in particular to Islamism.

For even this to hold, it will be necessary for the rebels and Nato to wipe out the remaining pockets of support for Gaddafi, and ideally round up not only the man himself, but also those of his family members who still remain in Libya, particularly his sons, Saif, Mutassim and Saadi.

If any of these conditions are not met, the pressure could split apart the rebel coalition. In particular, a tidy end to what remains of the civil war is critically important: a split could then result in complete chaos after the fashion of Lebanon in the 1980s. In spite of the parade of ruling class triumphalism, this possibility is clearly not too far from the minds of our rulers - David Cameron has already mooted the possibility of 'peacekeeping' troops (yet more mission creep), and a leaked UN document proposes a few hundred unarmed military 'observers'.

## Propaganda war

For now, however, the imperialists can be said to have won the propaganda war. Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama have bombed Gaddafi out of power; the rebels, in some cases desperate for survival and in others keen for career advancement, have been reliant upon them militarily, and (for the moment at least) reliable as allies. Compared to Iraq and Afghanistan, at this early stage the Libyan campaign looks clean, (relatively) economical and effective. Perhaps most importantly, no western squaddies have returned home in body bags.

This poses the question of the left's tasks and its response thus

far. Marxism is resolutely opposed to imperialism, the main enemy of the international working class movement, combining oppression and exploitation of entire peoples - a nexus of all the abominable practices of capital and the state.

Sometimes - as with the Iraq war - imperialist adventures enjoy only ambiguous support from the outset, and Marxists have a large reservoir of discontent to tap into. In other cases, such as the continuing debacle in Afghanistan, broad support decays ultimately into almost complete opposition. As regards Libya so far - and, previously, in the Balkan conflicts - the left has had to constitute itself as almost the lone voice of disapproval, which, of course, only makes a principled anti-imperialist stance all the more necessary.

In fact, in broad terms, we have acquitted ourselves well. Among British left groups, only the Alliance for Workers' Liberty broke the ranks of opposition to the Nato intervention - *quelle surprise*. The AWL has already published a guardedly ecstatic article under the headline, 'Libya: the return of hope' (*Solidarity* August 24).

The unsigned piece is full of the usual complement of AWL dirty tricks - wildly overstating the repressive character of the Gaddafi regime (no better or worse, in reality, than most dictatorships); condemning those who took a straightforward anti-imperialist stance as being trapped in "nihilistic defeatism", while carefully avoiding any clear statement one way or the other itself; and the occasional lapse into straight-up delusion ("the Nato intervention helped [the rebels] by preventing the crushing of the uprising at a critical point", we are told without a trace of irony, as if that was the sole effect of six months of aerial bombardment).

As for the opposite temptation - varying formulations amounting to support for, or a 'united front' with, Gaddafi - that perspective has been more marginalised perhaps than at any point in recent memory.

*Socialist Worker* (September 3) - ran one article on Nato's cosying up to ex-Gaddafi henchmen, and another rubbishing the 'radical' pretensions of the old despot. The 'international' of the Socialist Party in England and Wales has likewise refused to allow opposition to Nato to lead them into the Gaddafi camp. Even the nominally orthodox-Trotskyist Workers Power, in theory committed to an 'anti-imperialist united front' in such situations, came out broadly with the same line (not without internal ructions on the matter). Only the most dogmatic clutches of Trotskyists and sundry Stalinist elements can be found siding to any extent with Gaddafi.

This is encouraging, and a change from the days when CPGB comrades would be howled down, in particular by SWPers, for raising broadly similar politics in relation to Iraq, Iran and so forth. It remains, however, basically on the level of instinct - an instinct in the past which has disastrously led sections of the left to fall in behind whoever happens to be against the US in a given theatre of conflict.

It remains to be theorised - and theorising it as such means ditching any and all conceptions of the 'anti-imperialist united front'. The idea, which has many versions with many names differing only in nuance, is for communists to throw themselves wholesale into the military struggle against imperialism, cooperating wherever possible with those bourgeois nationalist forces also in revolt; by doing so, the communists both aid the defeat of imperialism and break support away from the bourgeois forces by being 'the best fighters'.

There are two kinds of objection to this thesis. The first is empirical: to put it bluntly, this policy has failed, with remarkable consistency throughout its entire history, everywhere it has been tried. In several cases, it has resulted in physical liquidation of the left (as in the Iranian revolution). No matter what the crystalline clarity

of the Comintern's and Trotsky's statements on this question, a track record like that demands some kind of re-examination.

The other objection is theoretical. Capitalism is imperialist from the get-go - a state gains advantages by jostling for position in a world order dominated in the last instance by its hegemon (currently the US). The national bourgeoisie's disputes with the metropolitan countries are important to communist tactics, but fundamentally tactical, and it is frequently the case that nationalist forces would rather risk defeat than allow impudent communists to pilfer their mass support by agitation in the ranks. Considered from the class perspective, this is a perfectly natural response.

Communists instead must win the working class to take an *independent* position on burning democratic questions like those afflicting the semi-colonies. This is *a fortiori* the case for those 'in the enemy camp' - that is, the imperialist countries - where the various Trotskyist formulations of anti-imperialist united fronts and so forth amount to slightly ridiculous postures of the 'armchair general' type.

This is not merely an academic issue with regard to Libya. Decades of dictatorship have left this country with almost no working class organisation at all (the working class itself is small). As they have in Egypt, ruling elements will seek to push the country to an election in just enough time for it to be successfully rigged in favour of western interests. The working class cannot do anything without organisation - it must prise open the space to organise, win the maximum political freedom and (crucially) seek arms, in order to prepare for any number of depressingly likely worst-case scenarios. Then, perhaps, something can be salvaged from this bloodbath ●

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