



weekly worker

**The early CPGB and the
women's question: home and
the house cleaners' guild**

- Capitalist despair
- EDL and Tower Hamlets
- Italy's general strike
- 9/11 and Libya

No 880

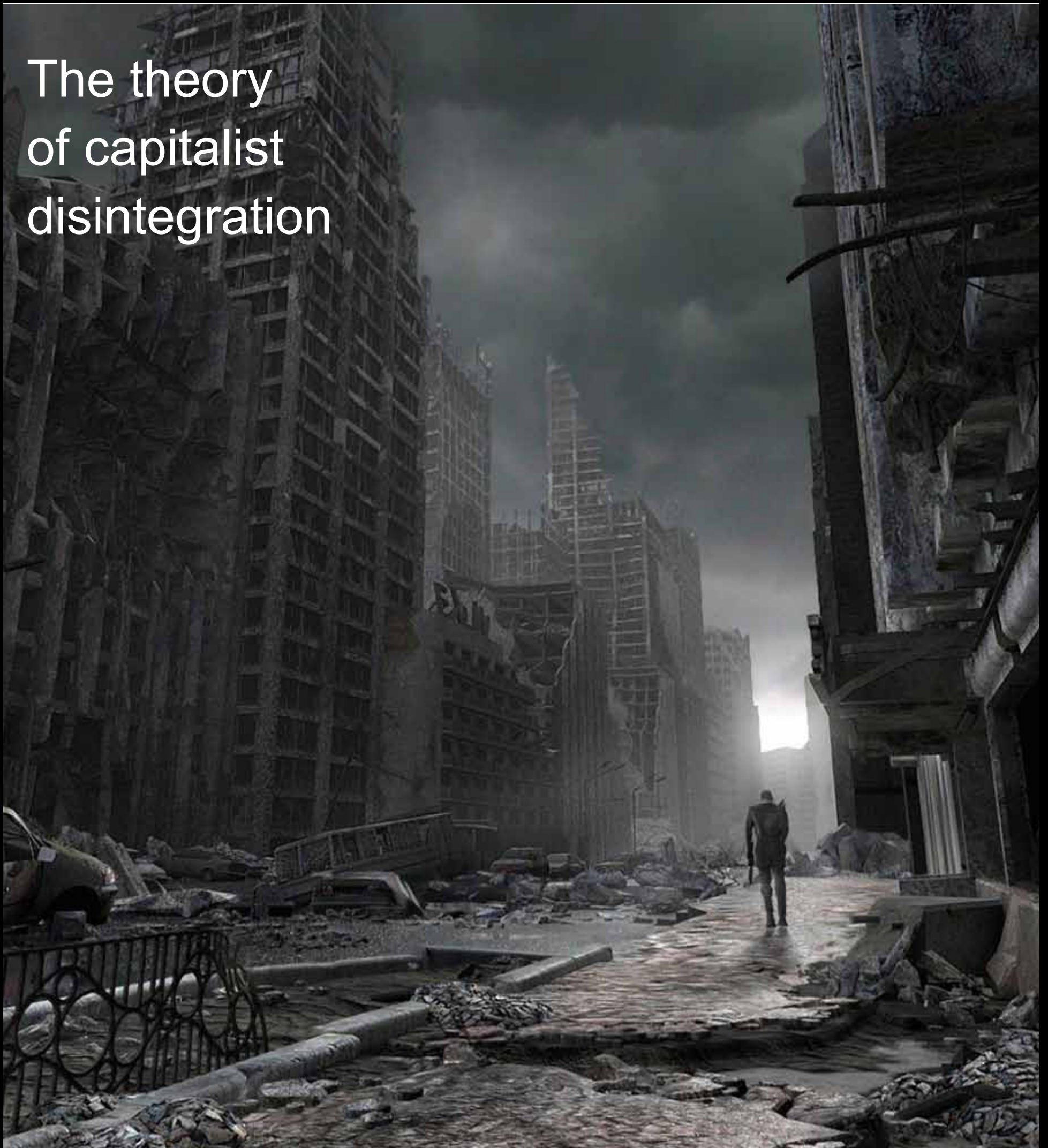
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The theory
of capitalist
disintegration



LETTERS



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

Left joke

In his defence of the closure of British industry as some sort of progressive efficiency drive which capitalism is undertaking for the benefit of humankind globally, nowhere is Arthur Bough more dramatically wrong than in the case of coal mining (Letters, August 11).

He talks of "those things which can now be produced more efficiently elsewhere ... in Asia, Latin America and increasingly in Africa." Does Arthur have any idea of the hell holes that coal mines are in precisely those places? The death and injury rates in Africa and China, for example? That he thinks Chinese coal mines, which slaughter our comrades in their tens of thousands, are "more efficient" than British mines is sheer madness. In Latin America the death and injury rate can only be described as carnage. Their coal mines are infamous for explosions, rock falls and inundations, with scant, if any, regard for safety and massive death, injury and disease rates.

Prior to the end of apartheid, South Africa saw 500 miners a year die in coal mines alone and they called it 'cheap coal'. It was in fact the dearest coal in the world outside of China in terms of deaths and injury. Sadly, the death and injury rate has not fallen appreciably since the end of apartheid.

Much of the coal coming into Britain comes from the ex-Soviet republics, whose coalfields are regularly wracked with explosions of methane gas - the control of which is a very basic science of coal mining. By far the most safety-efficient coal mines in the world were British and, yes, primarily as a result of nationalisation and a powerful trade union, which ensured safety levels rose steadily throughout its life.

It was also due to large inroads of workers' control and miners' independent safety rights, which were heavily protected by an armoury of legal statutes and acts hard fought for over the centuries. The right to carry a flame safety lamp gives workers the ability to detect gas in their own working areas and shut off all production and power then and there, without reference to anyone else - a right which, were it to exist in China or Russia, would save many thousands of lives each year.

When it comes to the assertion that the reason for the closure of British production in favour of overseas manufacture is that "the firms in those other countries have been able to produce those goods more cheaply than can British capitalists", Arthur is again utterly wrong, certainly when it comes to coal.

Britain was producing the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe and among the cheapest in the world. This it did, as I said, while engaging in the safest coal production anywhere in the world. In 1979 European Economic Community figures showed that the National Coal Board had the lowest production cost in Europe at £29 per tonne, compared to £45 in France and £41 in West Germany. On top of this government subsidies averaged at £1.62 per tonne in the UK, compared to £17.96 in France and £7.41 in West Germany (EEC documents quoted in *The miners and the battle for Britain*). The only coal which was and is cheaper to produce is Australian open cast, but it too receives a subsidy of more than double anything British coal ever received. So you're wrong, Arthur, and badly wrong.

It wasn't me advancing the cause of nationalisation of Bombardier;

that was Peter Manson. But Arthur is wrong about nationalisation of the mines and its impact. I am a fourth-generation coal miner and nobody can tell us nationalisation didn't bring a massive improvement in terms and conditions and health and safety, although it was a long way short of what we had demanded. The privatised coal industry today in Britain may be more productive than the old NCB, but at the cost of safety, hours of work, job control and union rights. Nonetheless, because of the continued, though weakened, presence of the National Union of Mineworkers and the fallback of strict legislation, private British coal remains the safest by far in the world.

I should add, by the way, that nowhere in these figures have I included the social costs of the closures and the switch from coal produced here. Were we to do that, we would be talking in ten of billions of pounds.

So finally we come to Arthur's question as to why, if British coal was so efficient, did British capitalism wipe it out. No, it wasn't "for the hell of it", but if Arthur thinks capitalism's sole motivation is profit, then he is rather naive. Control and power are of primary importance to the capitalists and we have witnessed many times in wars, strikes, etc the suspension of profit-making in order to retain their dominance of society. In this case, the trade union movement, represented in its best traditions by the NUM and the mining communities, was too strong. We represented a different vision of society, and a massive strategic economic and political clout (84% of all power generation).

The rolling back of the organised working class, shifting strategic production abroad and relying on finance and banking alone could not be done without defeating the miners and, by the time John Major came along, that meant wiping out the whole coal industry. Traditional British industry had the highest density of union membership and the highest gross membership, represented in mass, militant, class-conscious unions. Strike figures and combativity demonstrated over decades it was these workers and their industries which posed the biggest potential challenge to governments and ultimately the system.

Listening to Arthur, one could believe that the actions of capitalism in Britain were the best of all possible worlds and, hey, it spreads the work around and gives workers in the third world a chance to join us, so we should stop complaining. Best bet is to do nothing at all then: just put up with it, or set up a cooperative making "socially useful products". But not railway carriages or coal or ships or steel; clothes pegs might be an idea or perhaps some back-to-subsistence agricultural commune, while the workers on this island mark time and wait until the flush of revolution sweeps Asia, Africa and Latin America and we can be rescued.

Is it any wonder the British working class sees the 'left' as a joke?

David Douglass
South Shields

String 'em up

Henry Mitchell excoriates the participants in the recent riots and disturbances, a great outburst of "irrational" criminality from a thoroughly "sub-proletarian" layer of society (Letters, September 1). "It is not politics, but psychoanalysis, that is relevant to the understanding of rebel psychology," he tells us - we are spared, thankfully, any disquisitions on the authoritarian personality.

In fact, no level of opprobrium seems quite harsh enough for comrade

Mitchell: surely, he advises us, the Bolsheviks, had they been in power last month, would have "decisively crushed" these rapsallions, who have "excluded themselves from civilisation". The picture is grim - a social stratum irredeemably lost to vulgar consumerism and casual criminality, from whom we can expect literally nothing better.

Grim, and grimly familiar: all comrade Mitchell has done is reproduced the jeremiads of the rightwing gutter press (Owen Jones's *Chavs* compiles many of the variations) and give them a quasi-left tilt. What sings out, both from the pages of the *Daily Mail* and from Mitchell's missive, is a compulsive *hatred* for the perpetrators, which pre-empts any chance at useful suggestions of what to *do* about the evidently enormous weight of atomisation in what amount to the poorest communities in Britain.

Mitchell demands the workers' movement dissociate itself completely from these lumpen scum, though exactly why it would be a bad idea for us to win them for something *useful*, as opposed to petty criminality, is left unexamined.

James Turley
London

Rage

Henry Mitchell is critical of those who argue that the recent riots were political. Mitchell claims that the rioters were just "narcissistic groups, consumeristic and selfish, that put crime before the needs of the community".

Naomi Klein argues the contrary and I would have to agree with her (*The Guardian* August 18). She recalls the looting in Baghdad in the aftermath of the US invasion, which emptied libraries and museums, while workers stripped factories. At the time, she points out, the looting was thought to be highly political, reflecting the fact that the regime had no legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Klein goes on to cite Argentina circa 2001. The economy was in free fall and thousands of people in the rough neighbourhoods looted foreign-owned superstores. The looting had been preceded by the elite selling off the country's assets, stashing their money offshore and then passing on the bill to the people with a brutal austerity package. Once again the ruling elite lacked the respect of the people.

Similarly, here in Britain, we have seen the establishment exposed for its corruption. The MPs' expenses scandal showed how our ruling elite were prepared to grab as much as they could from the public purse. Then the banking crisis exposed the greed of the bankers, who played Russian roulette with the economy and pocketed huge bonuses. The Murdoch scandal showed that sections of our justice system could be bought and sold.

Cleary Mitchell is wrong to try and argue that the riots were not political. The rage that we saw on the streets is an expression against an unjust system. Whilst, however, the riots shook up the system, conscious, collective action is needed for any lasting change.

Jemma French
email

Distortions

Why does the *Weekly Worker* constantly rely on distortion as a tool in its sectarian and often childish reporting of other groups? Is it, as I concluded after reading Eddie Ford's article on the recent riots, that you have nothing to offer the movement in face of events such as these riots ('Aftermath of August, September 1)?

As far as I can see, you are placing the failure to provide answers for the class during the riots on other lefts. In so doing you resort to distorting, in

particular, the views of the Socialist Party in England and Wales by taking out of context 19 words from an article of 2,000-plus words. You claim the Socialist Party "complained that the police did not act effectively to defend people's homes and small businesses". What the SP article stated was not its view of the police, but that of local people.

Eddie then compounds this distortion by writing: "We take it then that SPEW's 'answer' to the riots, and to declining capitalism in general, is to demand more policing." I do not usually adopt the following sort of comment as a method of debate within the movement (although it does appear to be yours), but what a load of crap. Are you really saying that the contributor to *The Socialist* should not reflect the views of people caught up in an event?

It was quite clear that the views were those of local people and Eddie and the CPGB can assume, invent, whatever they like. But please try to retain at least a small degree of reality when it comes to important issues facing the working class. Reality in this case is that the views of the SP were outlined throughout the article and, in particular, within the list of programmatic aims and demands in the article's concluding paragraphs. Of course, you do not quote any of these.

You, the CPGB, the SP and I have expectations of the police and the other forces of the state. But an average person being firebombed or having her windows smashed may have other expectations. That person may think, 'I'm a taxpayer and aren't the police supposed to stop this rather than stand at the end of the street watching?'

In a socialist party of a mass, or neo-mass, nature I would start to consider putting forward ideas such as workers' defence forces. These can exist even now, but in limited form. Defence of meetings under attack from reactionaries or, as in the early days of Trotskyism, against the Stalinists. Also in the case of specific activities by reaction, as with the English Defence League at Tower Hamlets. But we are not yet at that stage of development where defence could be organised on the scale required.

The task before us is the building of a mass workers' party, which will involve argument, debate and polemical disputes. For this process to be of any use, we should be honest about our ideas and the ideas of others.

Terry Burns
email

Jarrow myth

My old comrade Dave Douglass reminds us that the wellspring of the Jarrow crusade of 1936 was "the massive levels of unemployment (more than 80% for males) in Jarrow and surrounding areas ... real, hard social deprivation", not the cynical machinations of either the workers' movement bureaucracy or the ruling class (Letters, September 1). If he had left it there, this would have introduced a useful element of balance into our assessment of the event. However, his wider attempt to colour Jarrow red is deeply unconvincing.

First, the comrade makes great play of the fact that "'Red' Ellen Wilkinson, the town's leftwing MP and former founder member of the CPGB", was "instrumental" in the march's organisation. Frankly, I don't really see the point being made here - Wilkinson was already well on the political path that would see her take a ministerial portfolio in the 1945 Labour government. After the 1929 general election, she had been appointed by prime minister Ramsay MacDonald as parliamentary secretary to the minister of health. This is not

to deny she was on the left of the Labour Party, but then we actually have to be clear about the nature of the Labour left, don't we? Its relationship to the party's right has - thus far - been a symbiotic one, not one of irreconcilable conflict. Thus Wilkinson accepted the political paradigm of the pro-capitalist wing of the party and - although that wing certainly didn't support the Jarrow initiative - even its absence did not prevent it imposing strict political limits on its character. The left acted as its proxy.

For example, at the 1936 Labour conference one Lucy Middleton, parliamentary candidate and wife of the party's national secretary, criticised Wilkinson for "sending hungry and ill-clad men on a march to London". In her moving book on Jarrow - *The town that was murdered* - Wilkinson characterised this as symptomatic of "an attitude of official disapproval" - ie, the hostility of the labour bureaucracy to organised actions by the unemployed in general. Her response? "Wilkinson registered her surprise", given that Jarrow had been "100% respectable" (M Perry *The Jarrow crusade: protest and legend* Sunderland 2005, pp41-42).

Making the march "respectable" for the right wing of the movement necessarily entailed disassociation from communists and the genuinely mass National Unemployed Workers Movement that these disreputable elements led - as Perry also notes, the prominence of leading communists in the NUWM was a "recurrent excuse for refusing to work with [it] or mobilise a mass campaign against unemployment" (p41). It is this, not the supposed radicalism of the Jarrow action, that accounts for the hostility of the Labour and trade union leaderships.

By the way, Dave misunderstood my comment that Jarrow was "officially lauded": I was referring to how it is regarded today. I am well aware that the TUC and Labour leaderships opposed it at the time - obviously, as the Matt Perry quote above succinctly puts it, they would oppose *any* initiative to organise the unemployed, even in the supine, begging-bowl manner of Jarrow. Why? Because given the mass impact, success and deep implantation of the NUWM, an initiative in this field implied either an association or a direct competition with the communists - a link that the Labour Party apparatus, quite correctly, felt would only make it look pretty bad.

Comrade Douglass then wonders from where I get the strange notion that communists and NUWMers were barred from the march: "A number of local communists and well-known revolutionary socialists were on it the whole way," he tells us. If they were, they kept their heads down on pain of expulsion. Take the comments of Dave Riley, the Jarrow chief marshal, in the aftermath of an incident in which communists from South Normanton (a pit village near Chesterfield) publicly announce that they had collected £20 for the marchers.

A local Conservative Party official complained. Riley assured him - and the Chesterfield Tories who actually hosted the marchers in the town - that "This is the fourth time the communists have tried to gatecrash ... We are determined at all costs to preserve the non-political character of this crusade ... If necessary we shall call the authorities to assist us" (*ibid* p85).

Jarrow was framed as an apolitical alternative to the militant, communist-led mass movement that was the NUWM and an atmosphere of anti-communist witch-hunt prevailed on and around it.

Lastly, it is worthwhile pondering this. In the mid-noughties, British embassies around the world featured chronologies of the history of the British people - in other words, coagulated reactionary myths designed to bolster national chauvinist sentiments. On these sites, the 1930s featured just two entries: World War II and ... the Jarrow crusade.

Why, I wonder? Perhaps comrade Douglass will ponder that too.
Mark Fischer
 London

Neofolk

I just wanted to congratulate Maciej Zurowski for his article about the neofolk scene (‘Aiming at wrong target’, September 1). This is by far the most honest and accurate account I have read on the matter, but, more importantly, it advances a thesis that is both original and coherent.

I am not a communist myself and would have certainly held a prejudiced opinion of your publication before reading this article. Thanks.

Bertrand Boulanger
 email

Wonderful

Just wanted to say I thought Maciej Zurowski’s article was wonderful. For too long I have been exasperated by mindless anti-fascists winning (or losing) small battles, when the real danger is not in such fringe phenomena in music sub-sub-sub-scenes. Neither, however, is merely shrugging and denying any sort of thought on the part of the artist - whether right or wrong - a sensible answer, for one ultimately gets the most out of music as art through symbols in exciting thought, not inhibiting it.

Anyway, I thought I should tell you I find this the only well-balanced article I’ve read yet, whether from a left, right or neutral stance.

Mich Spapé
 HERR neofolk band

Sex strike

I was interested to see that some CPGB members have expressed misgivings about Chris Knight’s book *Blood relations* and his ‘sex-strike’ theory (‘Debate, controversy and comradeship’, September 1). In my opinion, this work is among the most reactionary pieces of biological determinism ever promoted by the left.

Considered to be progressive, if only by readers unfamiliar with anthropology, it is, sadly, nothing of the kind. The theory relies on sociobiology - the idea that society and culture derive purely from a biological base. Chris disguises this with a lot of talk about female solidarity, gender-bending picket lines and defeat of alpha-male dominance, but the underlying principles remain regressive. To see this clearly, consider a theory based on the idea that men would voluntarily undertake sexual abstinence for two weeks every month to manipulate women into gathering vitamin-rich berries. Would such a theory be taken seriously?

Is it credible that women (able-bodied, not pregnant or breastfeeding) couldn’t get their own meat? Even with the help of their brothers? The brothers, remember, have a direct interest in their sisters’ genes being passed on, no matter who the father is. What makes Chris think men prefer sex to meat, while women (who are, after all, the same species) only want the meat? Those manipulative, frigid women, tricking the idiotic men! Since the exchange of sex for meat is identified as the origin of the ‘human revolution’, it appears that women only become fully human by simultaneously becoming prostitutes.

According to comrade Knight, women go to all this trouble to get meat to feed their children. Why don’t men, allegedly so keen to ensure the

paternity of babies, show an automatic interest in keeping them alive once they’re born and voluntarily give their children meat?

Then there are lots of problems with empirical facts - eg, research has shown that women do not synchronise their menstrual cycles and nobody has presented a credible mechanism by which this could be achieved. Even in our society, where girls generally get good enough healthcare and nutrition to have their first period as young as eight, it often takes a few years to establish a regular cycle. Add to this Chris’s expectation of almost immediate pregnancy (if possible) and subsequent breastfeeding, which would result in no menstruation for years at a time, and it starts to look increasingly unlikely that cycles could be synchronised.

Evidence of human female polygamy (multiple partners) is shown by male and female being of similar size - like bonobos, but unlike gorillas. Gorillas are polygynous (each alpha male mates exclusively with several females). Males have small genitals because their sperm don’t need to compete inside the female. Bonobo males’ genitals are large to provide enough sperm deposited far enough inside the female to compete with all the other males’ sperm. The genitals of male humans are somewhere in between, indicating female humans were originally predisposed to be less ‘promiscuous’ than bonobos, but not as monogamous as gorillas, which doesn’t support the idea of original alpha-male exclusive dominance overcome by menstrual synchronisation, because visible menstruation developed in response to multiple male partners and because of large foetal brains supported by eating meat.

There seems to be some confusion around the idea of human behaviour having a material basis; just because we’re looking at sexual and reproductive behaviour, it doesn’t mean that sex is the only place we look for material causes of that behaviour. This was the great insight of Engels in his *Origin of the family, private property and the state*. If our examination of influences on human behaviour is as limited as comrade Knight’s, we inevitably end up with biological determinism.

This has been particularly unhelpful in discussion of gender and sexuality, because it leads to a belief in the inevitability of women’s oppression. The sex strike theory of human evolution holds no progressive potential.

Heather Downs
 email

Perplexed

I am somewhat perplexed by Moshé Machover’s remark in his otherwise excellent article, ‘Israel rocked by protests’ (September 1), that I am “unable to see the difference” between expressing satisfaction that Israelis are at last learning lessons from the Arab spring and the comments of a journalist that “At long last we have learnt something from the Arabs!”

By itself the remark can clearly be construed as implying that up till now Israelis have had nothing to learn from Arabs and that Arabs have had nothing to teach them. This is a viewpoint common to settler-colonial peoples and it was not so much a question of ‘reviling’ the comment as using it to illustrate that the July 14 protest movement in Israel is still held back by the politics of Zionism. But I disagree that it is “a typically appreciative remark”.

I can fully understand and sympathise with Moshé’s enthusiasm for what is happening in the Israeli protest movement and I share that enthusiasm, but to a more limited degree. The question is whether the movement can achieve even a limited victory without Israeli Arabs and

Palestinians living under occupation paying the price.

The proof of the pudding will be in whether the protest movement can transform itself into or help crystallise a political party that will encompass the demands of Israel’s Jewish poor and the Arabs living in Israel. Historically, the omens are not good and the question will be whether the protest movements in the Arab world and Syria in particular will continue to finish what they started or whether they will disintegrate, as in Libya.

Tony Greenstein
 Brighton

Lake campaign

Thousands of protestors came onto the streets of Orumieh, a city in north-west Iran, in the last week of August to voice their concerns about Orumieh Lake. They were chanting in Turkish, “Give life to Orumieh, let the river flow, cure its heart”. This demonstration was organised after the parliament (majles) declined to take this up as an emergency matter.

Orumieh is drying up and dying. The third biggest salt lake in the world has lost a large amount of water and area since 1998. This lake used to cover about 5,200 square kilometres, was 140 kilometres long and 55 kilometres wide. Now 60% of it has become salt desert, and the maximum depth of the lake has decreased from 16 to five metres. The drying up of Orumieh Lake will not only affect the tourist industry, but the combination of dry salt and the wind will also be catastrophic for agricultural land in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

Islamic Republic officials try to blame natural causes for this tragedy. They talk about drought and global warming, but a little research indicates that the regime in general and the Revolutionary Guards in particular are responsible for what local people call a ‘salt tsunami’. Ecologists in Iran believe that the building of 35 dams on rivers supplying water to the lake is the main reason for the drying up. Revolutionary Guard generals (sardars) now form a new capitalist class. These sardars built dams across the rivers for irrigation to produce different kinds of fruit and other agricultural products.

The people of Orumieh are very concerned about the future of the lake. If it dies, salt storms will change the ecology of the region. But the secret police and anti-riot units have suppressed peaceful demonstrations. Like anything else in the Islamic Republic, the decisions are made at the top. They always serve the profits of the ruling class.

Sadegh Afrouz
 email

Stop eviction

The date for the £18 million pound eviction of Dale Farm, a former scrapyard which is now home to 90 families, has been revealed to be Monday September 19.

Residents are calling on supporters to come to help them stop the eviction. They are also calling for legal observers and human rights monitors to come down to act as witnesses. Dale Farm is only a half-hour by train from London Liverpool Street station. The council has threatened to close roads in advance, so it is recommended that people come as many days before the eviction as possible. Sleeping space in homes is available, but please bring a tent if you can.

On September 19 Basildon council and the coalition government, who are financing this, will face a moral challenge to explain to thousands of people and the world’s assembled media why they are choosing to make over 100 children homeless and remove them from their schools.

Save Dale Farm
<http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>

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>.

Towards a New International Tendency

Friday September 9-Sunday September 11: Conference. Friday, 7.30pm: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday and Sunday, 10am: Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Sessions on: ‘Arab uprisings and European popular protests’, ‘Outline of a socialist programme’, ‘Work in broad organisations’, ‘Organisational culture in the socialist movement’ and ‘Organisational decisions’. Organised by Towards a New International Tendency: <http://tanit.co>.

Diggers festival

Saturday September 10, 12:30pm: Celebration of the life, ideas and actions of diggers leader Gerrard Winstanley, Old Pear Tree, Frog Lane, Wigan. Festival Organising Committee: 01942 886645.

London LRC

Saturday 10 September, 2pm: Meeting and AGM, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1. Organised by the Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.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.

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.

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.

Lobby the Lib Dems

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>.

Resistance - the path to power

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

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

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

Europe against austerity

Saturday October 1, 10am: Conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1 (nearest station: Kings Cross). 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.

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.

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.

10 years after

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

CPGB wills

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

ECONOMY

Capital's busted flush

The bourgeoisie has no answers to the continuing economic crisis, writes **Eddie Ford**

Over the last month the headlines have been dominated by the UK riots and events in Libya. However, nothing can hide the fact that the global economy stands on the brink of a severe recession, if not a calamitous slump. Far from the situation improving over recent weeks, it has further deteriorated - as reality overtakes the hype. Nothing has actually been *done* to prevent the spread of toxic debt or avert economic crisis. Instead, all we have had so far is just smoke and mirrors.

Almost despairingly, Josef Ackermann, head of Deutsche Bank, said the current levels of volatility "reminds one of the autumn of 2008" - the dark days following the Lehman Brothers disaster, when for a moment it looked like the entire capitalist banking/financial system was about to collapse. He also warned that "numerous" smaller banks will go to the wall if they were forced to book their losses on stricken sovereign bonds. Similarly, the Institute of International Finance - essentially a lobby group representing the big global lenders - has stated that there is a "growing risk" that the financial markets and the real economy could become locked in an intractable, self-reinforcing spiral downwards resembling that of 2007-09. So it looks like Credit Crunch 2 is almost upon us.

This new round of abject dependency was triggered by the latest unemployment figures from the United States. Released on September 2, they made for very depressing reading indeed. Though many analysts were expecting at least 75,000 new jobs to have been created last month, not a single net post was added in August - an omen of recession if ever there was one. Just to keep up with the growth in the working-age population, the US economy needs to add around 150,000 to 200,000 new jobs each month to bring the unemployment rate down. But it remained at 9.1% last month and official statistics for the second quarter revealed a sharp slowdown in economic growth to just 1% - marking a retrenchment since the end of last year, when growth averaged above 3%. Now there is growing pressure on president Barack Obama to launch a re-stimulus package for the economy and also on the Federal Reserve to initiate a new round of quantitative easing.

Inevitably, global markets plunged in response to the stream of bad news emanating from the US - coming as it did on top of the increasing concerns about Europe's continuing debt crisis and mounting evidence of a continent-wide drift towards recession. Hence we saw investor flight into assets perceived as risk-free. The FTSE 100 index went down by 3.5%, wiping out £49 billion and extending the losses since the publication of the US jobless figures to £82 billion. Markets elsewhere in Europe suffered even bigger falls, with Germany's Dax index of leading shares shedding more than 5% - its lowest level in two years. France and Italy also saw share price falls of around 5% and Japan's Nikkei index also fell 2.2% to a six-month low.

Significantly, banks were among the biggest losers, with the partially nationalised Royal Bank of Scotland's shares down more than 12% - a contributory factor being that it is widely thought to be extremely vulnerable to liability claims made by the US federal housing finance agency over the subprime mortgage



Capitalists in despair

scandal. Meanwhile, shares in Lloyds and Barclays fell by 7.5% and 6.7% respectively. The Stoxx Europe 600 banking index fell to its lowest level for 29 months.

Correspondingly, gold prices reached new highs. German government bonds made strong gains too, as did - yet again - the safe Swiss franc; *too* safe, in fact. So on September 6 a worried Swiss National Bank announced that it was setting a minimum exchange rate with the euro, saying that it will no longer tolerate a rate below 1.20 francs per euro. Indeed, the SNB declared that it was prepared to buy foreign currency in "unlimited quantities" if necessary, as the franc's overvaluation posed an "acute threat to the Swiss economy" and "carries the risk of a deflationary development".

Just as alarmingly, though quite predictably, the bond yields on Italian and Spanish government debt this week started to creep up again to the 'danger zone'. It was only a month ago that the European Central Bank launched a frantic rescue mission and bought up some €22 billion-worth of Italian and Spanish government bonds. Yet now, once again, the nightmare scenario is resurfacing - having to bail out Spain and Italy, to one degree or another, in order to salvage the ailing euro zone project. Or just let them go under. Both options are unacceptable, of course, but life itself will eventually force the European Union leaders - sooner being more advisable than later - to make some sort of decision either way.

Slowdown

There is chronic indecisiveness everywhere in the EU. The nervous and increasingly febrile markets can sense a storm coming, a feeling reinforced by the fact that there has been a steep slowdown in the euro zone economy during the second quarter due to a combination of government cuts and a drop in consumer spending.

Eurostat, the EU's official statistics agency, stated on September 6 that the combined GDP growth of the euro zone's 17 member-countries slowed to 0.2% in the April-June period - down from the 0.8% experienced

in the first three months of the year. Furthermore, EU officials expect growth to slow down even more as a result of high oil prices in the first half of the year and the general financial market turmoil - some expecting the euro zone economy to only grow by 0.1% percent in the third quarter and come to an actual halt in the fourth.

But the reality may be even worse than that. A closer examination reveals that France's growth rate, if that is the right term, ground to a complete halt in the spring - with government officials rushing around like madmen to soothe investor concerns that the country could be the next major economy to lose its coveted triple-A credit rating. In Germany, the supposed powerhouse of the EU, the economy 'grew' by just 0.1% between April and June - and the estimate for German economic growth in the first quarter of the year was revised down to 1.3% from a previous estimate of 1.5%. News that Germany's ruling party lost another regional election on September 4 only helped to cast further doubt over Europe's ability to agree on a viable solution to the debt problems.

No wonder alarm bells are ringing - something has to be done. In particular, more voices are being raised doubting the wisdom of pushing ahead with all the various austerity programmes, which look more and more like an act of collective economic suicide. Hence the president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, warned that the drive to cut national deficits across Europe could "sink" the region's economic recovery - as the hope that perhaps we can somehow "muddle through" by a magical emergence of "financing and liquidity" rapidly fades away. More stridently still, Christine Lagarde, the IMF's managing director, starkly declared that the global economy faced a "threatening downward spiral" if it did not abandon fiscal austerity and instead switch to "growth-intensive measures". More concretely, Lagarde said it was essential to recapitalise banks so as to "avert contagion" and "withstand the risks linked to the debt crisis and weak growth". In other words, do an about-turn before it is too late.

Not being miraculously immune

from the economic retardation in the US and the euro zone, the UK is also sliding into recession - with chancellor George Osborne looking less like a wonder boy every day. The services sector, which accounts for about 70% of the economy, suffered its worse slowdown since the 2001 foot-and-mouth crisis, according to a survey. The seasonally adjusted index, which measures activity across the sector, fell to 51.1 in August from 55.4 in July - worse than even in the weeks following the Lehman Brothers collapse.

To add to the misery, more UK high street shops face closure after a dive in consumer spending left retail sales down in August, compared to the same month last year. Thus new data from the British Retail Consortium shows a fall of 0.6% in sales last month, which could prove fatal for many shops after a slow spring and summer. The BRC blamed a decline in "consumer confidence", high inflation and a "squeeze" on personal finances. And we all know that forecasts for GDP growth have been steadily falling since data showing the economy grew by just 0.2% in the second quarter - with UK manufacturing experiencing in June a 0.4% decline in production, and the trade gap rising to £8.87 billion. Not looking good, captain George.

What does all this add up to? Quite simple really - an economy on course for a double-dip recession. Therefore, will Osborne will do a fiscal U-turn? After all, slower growth - if any - means lower tax receipts and higher bills for welfare, not exactly conducive to a muscular programme of deficit debt reduction. However, like the captain of the Titanic, Osborne insisted that the government would stick "unwaveringly" to its austerity plans - he would not be slowing down the pace of public spending cuts (or, it seems, introducing a drop in the 50p top rate of income tax). Though even Osborne was forced to admit that the long-term damage caused to the economy by the renewed credit crunch was forcing him to "revise down" estimates for growth that were already weak. But naturally he blamed the fourth downgrade since the coalition came to power 16 months ago on the legacy of Labour rule - maybe he will do that right to the very end, providing prime minister Miliband or Balls with some wry amusement as they wave the coalition government goodbye.

Marx

The recent economic crisis has laid bare the thoroughly irrational and self-destructive nature of capitalism - it stares at you in the face from every headline. In turn, this has generated a rash of existential articles in the mainstream press about Marxism and socialism in general - maybe it is not all quixotic madness peddled by starry-eyed utopians who have never adjusted to the real world.

Charles Moore, the ultra-conservative former editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, confessed that he was "starting to think that the left might actually be right" about the free market being a "set-up".¹ Yes, he writes, the "greater freedom to borrow which began in the 1980s was good for most people" - but "when loans become the means by which millions finance mere consumption, that is different". Rather, "as the left always claims", the global banking system is an "adventure playground for the participants, complete with

spongy, health-and-safety-approved flooring so that they bounce when they fall off" - and, he ruefully notes, "the role of the rest of us is simply to pay".

As for the plight of the euro, for Moore this "could have been designed by a leftwing propagandist as a satire of how money-power works" - a single currency is created and "no democratic institution with any authority watches over it". Rubbing salt in the wound, when the euro zone's borrowings run into trouble, "elected governments must submit to almost any indignity rather than let bankers get hurt". Sounding almost outraged, Moore asks: "What about the workers? They must lose their jobs in Porto and Piraeus and Panchestown and Poggibonsi so that bankers in Frankfurt and bureaucrats in Brussels may sleep easily in their beds."

Similar views were expounded by the misanthropically inclined philosopher, John Gray, on BBC radio 4. Karl Marx "may have been wrong about communism", Gray ventures, but he was "prophetically right" in his "grasp of the revolution of capitalism" - and not merely about "capitalism's endemic instability" and its "creative destruction", though in this regard Marx was "far more perceptive than most economists in his day and ours".² But "more profoundly", Gray argues, Marx "understood how capitalism destroys its own social base" - which is "the middle class way of life" - by plunging "the middle classes into something like the precarious existence of the hard-pressed workers of his time". Meaning, Gray moans, that "more and more people live from day to day with little idea of what the future may bring" and "in the process of creative destruction the ladder has been kicked away and for increasing numbers of people a middle class existence is no longer even an aspiration". As a consequence, Gray concludes, we - the middle class or otherwise - "have very little effective control over the course of our lives" and we end up living in a society that is "being continuously transformed by market forces"; where "traditional values are dysfunctional" and "anyone who tries to live by them risks ending up on the scrapheap".

Needless to say, the likes of Moore and Gray have no intention quite yet of deserting to the ranks of the proletariat. Their new-found, but highly selective, 'appreciation' of Marx is more a warning to the establishment to get its act together - or risk being swept away by the swinish rabble. When they look at the current left they just laugh - and, as the CPGB is the first to admit, they are quite right to do so. Moore, for one, believes that "conservatism will be saved, as has so often been the case in the past, by the stupidity of the left". Given our track record, his hopes are not entirely without foundation.

For all that though, such comments show the malaise that is afflicting official society - which is running out of answers. Nothing appears to be working and the bourgeoisie is scared of 'turning Japanese'. Capitalism is in a big hole, but all it can do is keep digging; more austerity, more cuts, more retrenchment. No viable plans, no future - a busted flush.

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Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* July 22.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14764357.

ITALY

Market logic challenged by eight-hour general strike

This week the increasingly moribund government of Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has faced simultaneous attacks on two fronts: from the speculators and the European Central Bank, on the one hand; and from a general strike by the most militant section of Italy's organised working class, on the other. **Toby Abse** reports

The September 6 strike primarily involved the CGIL trade union confederation, formerly dominated by the Italian Communist Party, as well as the more combative, but rather fragmented syndicalist *sindacati di base* - Cobas, Sincobas, USB and others - and dissident engineering workers from unions affiliated to the more moderate trade union confederations - the CISL's FIM and the UILM.

The pressure from the ECB, backed by Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, as well as Italian domestic capital in the form of the main employers' organisation, Confindustria, and the Banca d'Italia, for greater austerity and further attacks on workers' rights at present outweighs the pressure from the working class. The eight-hour general strike, which, according to the CGIL, mobilised around 60% of the workforce across the various regions and sectors, is the product of their increasing resentment at being forced to pay for the crisis and of their demands for less austerity and a greater measure of social justice in any sacrifices that might be imposed.

Nonetheless, the general strike, accompanied by numerous well attended marches and rallies, does change the balance of forces, with the popular masses rather than the feeble parliamentary opposition taking centre stage for the first time since the June referenda passed an overwhelmingly negative verdict not just on Berlusconi, but on the entire neoliberal project, of which water privatisation was but the most hated symbol - a project in which the largely ex-'official communist' Partito Democratico is in large measure complicit.

As the Lex column in the *Financial Times* puts it, "Italy, not Spain, will decide the fate of the euro zone", for "Italy is 'the hinge'" (September 6). Italy is indeed at the very centre of the euro zone crisis, even if the continuing problems of the far smaller Greek economy - whose astonishing 82.1% yield on one year government bonds is an indication of how near it is to default - are obviously a contributory factor. After some days of rather slow and feeble recovery in late August, the Milan stock exchange is once again in free fall. Friday September 2 saw shares plunge by 3.89% and Monday September 5 witnessed an even more spectacular 4.83% descent, with only a belated rally in the last half-hour of trading pulling the index back up from a catastrophic 5.5% drop.

The all-important spread between Italian and German government 10-year bonds was 370 at the close of trading, having reached 372 at one point, and the yield of the Italian bonds rose to 5.56%, the 11th increase in 11 consecutive days of trading (Spanish bonds have only risen for the last seven days). The major Italian banks were once again amongst the prime victims - with Unicredit's shares down by 7.30% (Unicredit's shares have fallen

42% since July 1) and Intesa Sanpaolo down 6.96%. Whilst the banks' very large portfolio of government bonds makes them particularly vulnerable, the Italian crisis is not just a crisis of the financial sector - Fiat Industrial was also down by 6.74%.

For the last month the ECB has been spending vast sums to prop up Italian government bonds (whilst no figures are available for Italian, as distinct from Spanish or other, bonds being supported, the ECB spent €54.8 billion in the four weeks ending September 2 on bond purchases under the Securities Market Programme) in the belief that Berlusconi had committed himself to pass the kind of austerity package demanded of him in their August 5 letter. The continual - almost daily - changes made to the package originally outlined in the emergency decree of August 12 have made ECB chief Jean-Claude Trichet and Mario Draghi (currently director of the Banca d'Italia, but designated as the new head of the ECB from November) lose all patience with the Italian administration.

It has become increasingly obvious that if this incessant dithering does not come to a very speedy end, the meeting of the ECB's board on Thursday September 8 may well pull the plug and refuse to continue to support the price of government bonds (such bond buying had already been suspended for five months prior to August 4). This barely veiled ultimatum led Italian president Giorgio

Napolitano to send an urgent public message to both the government and the parliamentary opposition late on September 5 demanding that the emergency package be approved immediately, but reinforced in a manner that gave it more "efficacy" and "credibility". The latest version of this package was voted through the Senate on September 7 in a bid to regain the favour of the ECB before the fateful meeting due the following day. There were yet more changes ahead of the final vote in the Chamber of Deputies, adding an extra €4 billion-worth of cuts and taxes, including bringing forward the increase in the women's pension age to 65 from 2016 to 2014.

If the pressure from domestic and international capital has been enormous, one should not underestimate the countervailing pressure that the CGIL's decision to call a general strike has already placed on Berlusconi's government. The ill-thought-out and probably illegal and unconstitutional attempt to attack public sector pensions aroused intense anger, not just amongst CGIL members, but also among the CISL and indeed the UIL - which, although it has always been the most servile of the mainstream confederations, has a disproportionate number of members in the civil service. It had been proposed to retrospectively cancel the validity of the years spent studying for university degrees or serving in the armed forces from the 40 years service qualification required for a 'seniority' pension, but the government withdrew this proposal in order to

avoid any risk of the CISL and UIL joining the CGIL in industrial action. Equally, the decision to withdraw the proposed abolition of the three secular public holidays on May Day, Liberation Day and the anniversary of the proclamation of the republic was clearly a capitulation in the face of the imminent working class mobilisation - abolishing May Day, so central to the tradition of the continental European labour movement, is a project whose implementation requires a totally atomised and quiescent proletariat.

It is also worth noting that the collaborationist line of CISL general secretary Raffaele Bonanni and his UIL counterpart, Luigi Angeletti, has been contradicted by the general secretaries of their affiliated engineering unions, Giuseppe Farina of FIM and Rocco Palombella of UILM, who both demand the scrapping of article 8 of the emergency budget, the section that effectively destroys national pay bargaining in favour of factory or company-level deals; otherwise, they state, their members will make it unworkable. This is clearly due to the pressure of the CGIL in general and FIOM in particular - a few months ago these officials were quite happy to make sweetheart deals with Fiat in both Turin and Pomigliano. Under CGIL influence, some rank and file engineering workers from these two unions went further than their temporarily rebellious general secretaries. In Bologna, Treviso and various Piedmontese towns members of FIM or UILM declared in advance that they would join the CGIL strike (even if they sometimes claimed theirs was a parallel strike, whose timing was purely coincidental, or limited their walkout to four hours rather than eight).

The general strike seems to have been as successful as could be hoped for, given the official hostility of the other confederations. It seems to have been particularly successful in bringing Rome to a virtual standstill - the metro was entirely closed on the morning of September 6 and, according to the Roman bus company Atac, 50% of its drivers were on strike. The response on the railways seems to have been a little disappointing, even if management figures, claiming that 94% of long-distance and 60% of regional trains ran, may be somewhat exaggerated.

Attendance at the various demonstrations and rallies organised by the CGIL in all the main towns and cities seems to have been very respectable - 60,000 marched in Milan, 30,000 in Naples, 25,000 in Turin, 15,000 in Genoa, 15,000 in Florence, 20,000 in Palermo, 50,000 in Mestre. Whilst the Turin march included many pensioners and public sector workers, there were also thousands of factory workers, mainly FIOM

members clearly not intimidated by Fiat's attempt to destroy the union at Mirafiori.

This contradicts the slanderous claim made in a press release from FIM-CISL that "Once again participation in the strike has seen a situation of *piazza antagonista* [hostile city square], with many students and groups from the social centres and few metal workers". In fact the Torinese supporters of the USB, far from dominating the main demonstration, held a separate march, some of whose participants threw red paint at the headquarters of the Banca d'Italia. In Palermo, some autonomists, understandably but unwisely, burnt the banners of the CISL and UIL to demonstrate their disgust at these confederations' collaboration with the bosses and the government, but these actions were clearly disavowed by the CGIL.

Whilst the Partito Democratico belatedly gave the strike its official backing and PD leader Pier Luigi Bersani participated in the Roman demonstration (even if some women in the crowd shouted at him, 'Let's block the emergency budget'), its right wing continued to oppose it. Of course, the hostility of the former Christian Democrats in the PD, who remain close to the CISL, is unsurprising - Matteo Renzi, the extremely self-regarding mayor of Florence, who is notorious for his anti-union policy of forcing shop workers to work on May Day, ostentatiously boycotted the local march, attended by all the other regional PD leaders.

Although in many ways the speech of CGIL leader Susanna Camusso at the Roman demonstration struck the right notes, attacking Maurizio Sacconi as "the worst minister of labour in the history of the republic", defending May Day and demanding the cancellation of article 8 of the emergency budget, she praised Napolitano's appeal, which suggests her habitual willingness to compromise with the bosses is not far from the surface, even when she is pushed left by a militant crowd.

A one-day strike, however successful it may have been in terms of turnout, will evidently not be enough. Further strikes, whether sectoral, coordinated or general, will be needed if the partisans of austerity are to be defeated and, given that Italy is on the receiving end of a European austerity drive coordinated by the ECB, successful resistance requires action by the working class movement on a European scale. Whilst it is worth noting that Rifondazione is already publicising schemes for a European day of action against austerity on October 15 and Cobas is sending Piero Bernocchi to London on October 1 to participate in the 'Europe against Austerity' conference organised by the Coalition of Resistance, it will require far more than a few speeches at poorly attended rallies if we are to challenge the bankers and industrialists - who do organise in a serious fashion at the continental level ●



Susanna Camusso: pushed left

CRISIS

The theory of capital

More and more people are saying, 'Marx was right'. But can the present crisis of capitalism be explained by the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, famously discussed by Marx? Profits are high and there is a massive overaccumulation of capital. This is edited version of the speech by **Hillel Ticktin** to Communist University 2011

I want to concentrate on the crisis in Marxism itself. But, having said that, I will contradict myself by saying that it is not possible to talk about Marxism and the crisis simply in the abstract - one has to apply it. So I will have to discuss to some degree the current situation.

Most people will have either read the *Financial Times* or come across its reports on the crisis in other papers. I have never read so much gloom. You get a sense, which you do not find amongst Marxist writers, that the system is in real trouble. Charles Moore in *The Daily Telegraph* has written that the left was right and the right was wrong.¹ Coming from someone like that - given how rightwing he is - one has to say such people have lost their self-confidence. That was very obvious from a recent front page of the *Financial Times*, where it is concluded that nobody wants to invest - everyone is taking their money out of companies, the stock exchange, etc, and just putting it into the bank to gain interest.² Someone who came from outer space reading this would be convinced that capitalism was finished.

If you read the details, it would appear that Mellon - one of the major banks in the United States, which accepts deposits from so-called 'high-net-worth individuals' - have had such an enormous flood of depositors that it is now charging them for taking their money instead of paying interest. And yet the flood goes on. That is the nature of the present crisis; it is not the same as 1929. Now the capitalist class is refusing to invest - a situation that has existed for some time. In one sense there has been one continuing crisis since 2007, involving a large overhang of capital which is not invested. The issue really is the huge levels of surplus capital, but now the situation has worsened. Money is being put into banks - put into the third world, put anywhere - so as to get it out of the line of fire.

This demonstrates the fear that something will spark a downturn of considerable proportions and it is what comes through in the *Financial Times* reporting. It is a crisis of confidence. It was Roosevelt in 1933 who said: "We have nothing to fear, except fear itself." It is interesting that they are afraid when the working class is not advancing. They are not afraid of the working class directly: they are afraid for the system. Charles Moore's statement amounts to surrender.

Rate of profit

Marx never examined the problem of surplus capital - the term is not used in *Capital* itself. The concept is discussed more - as a concept - later, by Hilferding and Lenin himself. In fact if one simply refers to the three classic causes of crisis used by Marxists in the last 50 or 60 years, then one cannot get to the nature of what is happening today.

The main Marxist theory of crisis that has been put forward is the falling rate of profit - the idea that the rate of profit falls with the rising organic composition of capital, other things being equal. The organic composition of capital is the ratio between constant capital and variable capital - in other



Capitalism's future?

words, it amounts to the number of labour hours in relation to constant capital (that includes raw materials, although many people look at it simply in terms of fixed capital). The argument, therefore, is that the rate of profit must fall over time, because, as productivity rises, there is an increasing use of machinery and raw materials in relation to the number of workers employed. So the number of workers will go down in relation to inanimate capital, hence the surplus value actually produced must itself go down.

It has historically been true that the organic composition of capital tends to rise. There is no question that it is true - but it is not true always. There are times when productivity leads to a reduction in constant capital - this has sometimes occurred during the post-war period. That is the nature of rising productivity.

Productivity in China is 12% of that of the United States and is a major reason why today capital is no longer going into China to the degree it did previously - and in fact is flowing back to the United States. Low productivity does not mean that Chinese people do not work hard, but that the level of machinery per worker is relatively low in China, compared to the United States.

The effect of that is that over, say, 300 years you could expect the rate of profit to fall or eventually come to a point where surplus value - value itself - would be abolished, because there would be so few people actually working and machines would be making machines. In socialism you would expect machines to be making machines, but if capitalism lasted - which it will not - for another 300 or

500 years you would eventually still arrive at the point where surplus value was no longer being produced. That is the logic.

The argument that crises are caused by the falling rate of profit is the major one held on the left. It is a viewpoint held by some as an orthodoxy that is almost absolute. It is the viewpoint put across in journals of the Socialist Workers Party and in the Marxist-humanist writings of Andrew Kliman.³ It was put forward by the Revolutionary Communist Group from 1973 onwards and then adopted by *Capital and Class* to a large degree. It is hard to be on the left and not adopt that viewpoint, as you have to be able to argue in detail as to why it is incorrect.

In very general terms, it is obviously true that the falling rate of profit is part of Marxism. If you accept the labour theory of value, then a rising organic composition of capital must lead to a decline in the rate of profit. But it does not automatically follow that this is the cause of crisis. Marx does not discuss it in those terms. As for Lenin and Trotsky, it is obvious that they did not regard it as a major cause of crisis. Luxemburg mentions it, saying it will take as long for the rate of profit to fall to zero as for the moon to fall from the sky. So she too is pretty clear that it does not play a role in crisis.

There is an orthodoxy, which came into being in the 1970s, put forward by David Yaffe in particular, which presented the whole thing in a mathematical form. That Marxism should explain the decline in the rate of profit and then crisis in such terms is very odd, since Marxism fights precisely against such notions. The whole question of crisis was removed

from the arena of class struggle and turned it into a technical issue.

One of the arguments used in favour of crises being caused by the falling rate of profit was that it was not a reformist proposition. Well, it is perfectly true that the only way in which capitalism can end crises is to abolish itself. If one argues that within capitalism there will be an ever declining rate of profit until it reaches zero - if that is the case, capitalism has an automatic enemy, as it were: itself. Which David Yaffe repeated *ad nauseam*. But, as I said, it does not necessarily follow in the short term. It follows in the long term, but the long term could be 300 years.

Let us look at the arguments in volume three of *Capital*. Firstly it is noticeable from the language, the sentences and the paragraphs that this volume is clearly a draft, unlike, for example, volume one. When Marx talks of the decline in the rate of profit owing to the rise in the composition of capital, he stresses the importance of the rise in productivity. He makes it very clear that increased productivity is the objective justification for capitalism itself - it makes socialism possible. In the process of fulfilling its historic mission, it raises productivity and at the same time the rate of profit falls - but the two are inexorably bound together.

The problem, however, is that when productivity rises it does not follow that the rate of profit falls: it may or may not. Because, after all, if productivity is raised the cost of the means of production goes down, or can go down. The tendency of the decline in the rate of profit can be completely offset, precisely because productivity has been raised in the production

of the means of production. You would expect that to happen. Marx goes through the different ways that productivity rises, the ways in which the fall in the rate of profit will tend to be offset.

One process

In other words, the people who support this kind of absolutist view of the falling rate of profit tend to ignore the fact that this process is really one. It is not just that, on the one hand, you have a decline in the rate of profit and a rising organic composition of capital and, on the other hand, rising productivity. It is one and the same process: they cannot be separated. You are necessarily raising productivity, which is offsetting the tendency. It causes it to slow down over historic periods, and it follows that at any one time the rate of profit may not be falling or it may be falling so slowly as to have no effect.

Those chapters of *Capital* were put together by Engels. That is not to say that he put them together wrongly: as long as you understand Marxism, it does not make much difference. But if you do not and if you do not know the dialectical nature of Marx's arguments you might interpret these chapters simplistically: on the one hand, the rate of profit falls; on the other hand - quite separately - there are offsetting factors. But, as I have said, they are an integrated whole. That is the way Marx argues. The fact that the two aspects are put separately has unfortunately misled people.

Now, one of the arguments put forward was that to propose causes of crisis other than the falling rate of profit must be wrong, because they lead to reformism. As somebody trying to examine the theory in a scientific way, I regard it as absolutely stupid to say, 'This argument is not reformist; therefore it is right.' That was argued very strongly in the 70s and it is symptomatic of a degeneration of Marxism. So, for example, the arguments of Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe were ruled out of order, because they were said to be automatically reformist. The late Andrew Glyn, a theoretician of the Militant Tendency, may or may not have tended towards reformism, but that is really irrelevant. The question is whether his theory is or is not correct. That is the way we have to work: we have to identify the truth and not begin by saying what may or may not lead to reformist conclusions. A theory arising from a reformist viewpoint would tend to be wrong, but that does not mean it is necessarily wrong.

That kind of false logic goes back hundreds of years, but it has particularly been employed on the left, which has been ruined by Stalinism. It always judged the end product by whether it was good or bad for itself. That was really the only criterion. However, people are still arguing in this way today. I myself recently had an exchange with somebody who is very well known in Marxist philosophy and Marxist theory, who argued exactly that way - that certain arguments should not be considered because they have a reformist outcome.

Another argument against the

capitalist disintegration

falling rate of profit as a cause of crisis is that it does not tell you at what point the rate of profit is actually to be considered low. In the United States it has tended to be around 12%, but if it dropped to 10%, or 5%, does the capitalist class stop investing? When does the rate of profit show itself and why does it show itself? Nobody has even asked the question. Once one goes through different aspects of the argument, it does look rather weak.

How does one calculate what has happened to the value which has been extracted? The calculations made by governments and financial agencies relate to price, not value. How does one arrive at value quantities? One way is to take, for instance, the self-serving Okishio's theorem, which just says price equals value. That is a pretty dubious statement. It is necessary to establish what the *objective* relationship between prices and values is. If you reject that, you just cannot calculate values.

The next point is that, even if you could calculate values, how do you actually get to the point where it is possible to do so? As we know, much of the profits of many companies are put into various offshore havens. They are not on the books. How are you to make your calculations if you do not have this information? In general we do not know what real profits actually are. It is standard practice for companies to conceal profits in order to reduce their liability to taxation or, alternatively, to enhance them in order to achieve a higher share price. You would need a forensic accountant to be able to work out what the rate of profit really is. Simply looking at national statistics does not tell you very much either. It may or may not give you a tendency, but it will certainly not reveal the values involved.

I have been through all this in some detail for the simple reason that it is the standard viewpoint on the left that the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is *the* cause of crisis. This leads people to infer that there has been a recent profit slump. But why we should think the capitalist class has been having a very bad time when it thinks it has had a good time I do not know. That we should say their profits are low, when they say their profits are high, is very, very odd. In America, wages have in fact been going down over the last 30 years. It does not make sense to say that somehow wages went down, but so too did profits.

Surplus capital

Taking into account the real class struggle and the reality of the current relationship between the capitalist class and the working class, profits without question have been high. The problem for capital has not been the amount of profit: it has been the lack of investment opportunities, which have decreased over time. There are huge sums of money, which have nowhere to go, and they are bigger now than ever. It was also a problem in the 90s: money was invested in east Asia, but all that collapsed; then investments were diverted into long-term capital management funds, which collapsed, and into the dot-com boom, which collapsed.

So it is not so much a question of 'unnecessary bubbles', as they put it, but huge sums of money which have nowhere to go, which create bubbles and which have to collapse. That is much more what one is actually talking about, not simply a falling rate of profit. One can, of course, always isolate oneself in one's own little

bubble and insist that the underlying problem is the falling profit rate. That, as far as I can see, is what Andrew Kliman is doing, for example. He tries to argue that the rate of profit appears to be higher than it is because of declining taxes or whatever.

In order to understand this, we really have to understand what has been happening to capital. We have to understand the historical nature of capital over the last 150 years, and the strategy adopted under conditions where the problem has actually been surplus capital. The orthodoxy on this question within Marxism was derived from Lenin, who did argue effectively about the significance of surplus capital, mainly in terms of monopoly capital.

Monopoly in orthodox economics concerns a declining curve in relation to the market. In other words, production is controlled in order to keep commodities at a particular price. Today there is not a situation where a large number of firms compete with each other: there are a limited number of firms, which basically collude - whether as a cartel or politically, it makes no difference. The result is that they only produce a certain amount in order to maintain or raise their profits. This in turn limits the amount of capital invested. That is basically the theory put forward by Lenin and it is hard to argue against it.

Whether that is the whole reason why there was a shift to finance capital is not the question. Lenin was trying to explain imperialism and he explained it in terms of the growth of surplus capital, which leads to finance capital, which then leads to the export of capital and the conquest of various countries around the world. Since then we have learnt that, while Lenin was right, most of the exported capital did not in fact go to the third world. Effectively it financed the development of the *developed* countries - most typically Germany and the United States.

Hilferding's theory, which Lenin took as his starting point, was actually wrong. His overall concept of finance capital was correct, in terms of the banks lending money on a large scale to companies and then controlling the companies. But the trouble with the argument was that German industrial companies did actually continue to develop and the control of the banks in Germany, as today, was relatively limited, compared to the situation in Britain.

Banks over here will give you a loan over 18 months at a high rate of interest. In Germany the tendency has been for loans to extend to, say, 20 years, which means the banks do not control the company in the short term, as they do in this country. Britain was in fact the classical finance capitalist country - then it became junior to the United States. But this was not the case with Germany in the way that Hilferding and Lenin thought it would be. They did not realise that Britain had already been through the same stage as Germany - the banks had financed the development of industry. In other words, it was Britain which was the finance capitalist country.

The argument was - and I think it was correct - that the development of finance capital and imperialism stopped a possible long-term depression - Cecil Rhodes said, 'Either we go imperialist or we face a revolution.' And it has to be said that it worked - whether or not an aristocracy of labour came into existence, as Lenin believed. The trade cycle with its downturns

became much less important in the period of imperialism's development and the standard of living tended to rise in the developed countries. We can therefore say that this was a way out for capitalism. It was barbaric - millions of people were killed in the process - but it worked. The system was maintained, the rate of profit was raised, capital could be exported. A similar purpose was served by war. The point is that capitalism has found a way out of crisis in the past through imperialism and war.

Other aspects

Let me deal briefly with the other two aspects of crisis, as expounded in Marxist theory: underconsumption and disproportionality. There is no question that the export of the production of the means of production - 'department one' goods - which occurred under imperialism, would impact on the demand for investment goods.

Marx does say that, in the last analysis, it is the low income of the majority which is crucial in understanding crisis. Exactly what Marx means by that is something else, but underconsumptionists like Paul Sweezy usually quote it. I do not think that there is any question that underconsumption plays a role in crisis - whether it is the ultimate or sufficient cause is another matter.

However, if one comes to the conclusion that underconsumption is the cause of crisis, then that is what one ought to go through with: one ought not to say that it is reformist and therefore reject it. Luxemburg believed that underconsumption was key and she was no reformist - nobody can accuse her of that. In the history of Marxist theory it has clearly been possible to adopt an underconsumptionist viewpoint and remain a revolutionary. But the theory is wrong simply because demand can manifest itself as demand for the means of production (department one goods) instead of for consumer goods (department two).

In the early years of the 20th century the ideal capitalist economy was considered to be one where there were *no* consumer goods. Although this is an absurdity and such an economy could not possibly exist, with such a model investment in the means of production could continue to increase indefinitely, thus providing some sort of equilibrium and a means to achieve stability. Part of demand must be for the means of production and part for consumption, and capital can shift from one to the other, and has tended to do so.

Imperialism and war production also aided this process very successfully up to a point. However, the essential problem at present is the end of the role of war in this regard. Afghanistan and Iraq were puny and trivial in terms of demand. If enough helicopters are shot down, it might help, but there are not enough. Iraq was a low-intensity war, using guns and artillery, rather than large, expensive weapons, such as cruise missiles. So such wars cannot be a solution at the present time. In addition imperialism is not what it was. Today, opium cannot be forced on China, nor can the same rate of surplus value be extracted - and, of course, China is not a mere dependency any longer.

When Marx describes crisis, it is not simply in terms of a downturn, but much more in terms of a general understanding of capitalism. He says: "The world trade crisis must

be regarded as the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy."⁴ And that, of course, stands directly opposed to any simplistic version. We are talking about *all* the contradictions of bourgeois economy and in this context it is very obvious when one looks at the particular problems in the United States - the absurdity of having to raise the debt ceiling - or the possible dissolution of the euro zone: the fact that they cannot come to a decision on anything.

What is a contradiction? A contradiction involves the interpenetration of opposites. As long as the capitalist economy does allow the interpenetration of opposites, it can go on. Marx talks of a crisis occurring when the poles of the contradiction cannot interpenetrate, when they are in conflict. That is where we are now. So the logical solution to a crisis - in which the working class does not take power, that is - is disintegration. We are seeing that very obviously today: whether it is in riots, in what is happening to the EU, or national states, or economies around the world, disintegration is the logic in the present stage of capitalism.

How then can the working class act under those conditions? Well, clearly a crisis does two things: on the one hand, it creates the conditions under which the working class *can* take power. On the other hand, the ruling class loses faith in itself - and that appears to be happening, rather obviously. Ultimately what they are scared of is that the system will actually go down - they do not know what that means, given that the working class is not standing directly opposed to them. The ruling class can no longer rule in the old way: that is one of the conditions of a revolutionary situation. Of course, in Greece and a number of other countries that might be true in a very profound way.

Stalinist ruin

The question though is the effect on the working class. Here I think what is crucial has been the role of Stalinism in preventing the working class existing as a class and preventing the formation of a working class party: in ruining Marxism. As long as the left cannot come to terms with Stalinism, it will never form a party which is able to lead the working class. Stalinism was a strategy of the ruling class - they did not want it or invent it, but they used it and it did destroy the possibility of the proletariat forming itself as a class over the world.

The great thing, however, has been the destruction of the Soviet Union. I am deliberately saying this because I know that some people will hate me for it. Of course, it is perfectly true that the position of many people in the former Soviet Union is now worse. I do not think that alters the fact that the existence of the USSR was the primary reason why the working class could not organise.

Although social democracy was crucial in 1919, it later became *dependent* on Stalinism. It could not have survived without what was in effect the support of the Soviet Union. The concept of 'planning' (planning which was not planning, which did not work) came from the Soviet Union. But in Britain the concept was adopted by Labour governments. The whole bureaucratic apparatus was worshipped.

As long as Stalinism remains the incubus around the left, as long as people on the left refuse to actually take up this question, we will get nowhere. Who on earth wants to have a society which is even remotely like the Soviet Union? It would be better to have capitalism. At least there would not be mass murder on the kind of scale that took place in the USSR.

Apart from its horrific nature, the fact is the Stalinist parties consciously acted to stop any real movement of socialism and consciously fought the left. In particular countries they actually wiped the left out. But in the later period, it was simply the fact that their policy was always one of compromise. Compromise with the bourgeoisie, because the Soviet Union wanted that - we know that is what happened in 1968.

The essential point is that if we look at the present we look at crisis. It certainly is a crisis of the type described by Marx - one that undercuts the capitalist system. You would expect the working class to be able to rise and take power, but it clearly cannot do that today. For that to happen there has to be the formation of a Marxist party. But at the same time it has to destroy all acceptance of any aspect of Stalinism, all references to it in its practice. It must try to come to terms with what has existed, and what should exist ●

Notes

1. 'I'm starting to think that the left might actually be right' *The Daily Telegraph* July 22.
2. 'BNY Mellon to charge on \$50m-plus deposits' *Financial Times* August 4. According to Wikipedia, Bank of New York Mellon has \$1.2 trillion under management and "25.5 trillion assets under custody and administration".
3. See <http://akliman.squarespace.com/crisis-intervention>.
4. *MECW* Vol 32, p140.

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GERMAN COMMUNISM

A victorious debate

The 1920 Halle congress of the Independent Social Democrats of Germany (USPD) was a turning point for our movement. It was also a moment of triumph for Grigory Zinoviev. This is an excerpt from **Ben Lewis's** introduction to a new book, *Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle*

Between October 12 and 17 1920, the debates fought out at Halle shaped the entire future of the German workers' movement. Two opposing motions were placed before the 392 mandated delegates. They dealt with two simple, yet profoundly controversial questions. Firstly, should the USPD affiliate to the Communist International, born in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution? Secondly, should the USPD fuse with the young Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus), or would this mean sacrificing its autonomy to an organisation that had just recently split away from it?

The German workers' movement was enormously powerful. In 1920 the USPD had something close to 800,000 members and a press which included over 50 daily papers. This strength can be traced back to the success of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Between the 1880s and 1914 the SPD had served as a model for the workers' movement internationally. German social democracy was not so much a political party as another way of life, devoted to the political, cultural and social development and empowerment of the working class. It ran women's groups, cycling clubs, party universities and schools, published hundreds of newspapers, weekly theoretical journals, special-interest magazines such as *The Free Female Gymnast* and much more. By 1912 it had become the biggest party in the Reichstag, polling over 28% of the popular vote.

But the SPD's expansion had also planted the seeds of opportunism and revisionism that would later undermine it from within. As the party grew, so did the gulf between its revolutionary theory and the routine of putting out newspapers, organising in trade unions and contesting elections. The goal of human emancipation was increasingly relegated to Sunday speeches and annual festivals. An increasingly detached and largely unaccountable bureaucracy of over 15,000 specialist full-timers developed, in which many party trade union leaders and functionaries saw no further than the struggle for higher wages and better conditions. In other words, the practice of the labour bureaucracy was becoming the norm, finding theoretical expression in the writings of Eduard Bernstein. This former star pupil of Marx and Engels was now questioning the very basis of Marxism itself.

War and collapse

When on August 4 1914 the SPD Reichstag fraction treacherously voted for war credits, many in the international movement were catatonically shocked. But other parties in the Second International soon followed the German lead: with few exceptions, each party sided with its own government.

Even the great internationalist, Karl Liebknecht, had gone along with party discipline in voting for the war credits. But like the 13 other deputies who had expressed their opposition in a private fraction meeting the previous day, he had put the unity of the party first in the hope that it could be rapidly won back round. But the German war government's politics of *Burgfrieden* (civil peace) necessitated the SPD right ruthlessly enforcing



Kiel 1918: revolutionary sailors

a crackdown on the party's critical elements.

For its part, the SPD leadership proceeded with caution, attempting to drive a wedge between the radicals and the more moderate, pacifistic opponents of the war by washing its hands of the former. Thus in May 1916 Karl Liebknecht was sentenced and conscripted for his tireless opposition. Meanwhile Karl Kautsky, an inveterate peacemaker, was able to continue editing the SPD theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit*. Just a year later, however, he would be removed.

Yet these attempts to sever the different elements of the opposition only partially succeeded. With influential left lawyers like Hugo Haase deluged with cases in defence of anti-war activists and conscription objectors, the different shades of the anti-war socialists entered into much more of a dialogue with each other. And, the longer the war continued, the more instances there were of workers taking action against its deleterious effects. This inevitably found expression in the SPD itself. In December 1915, 20 SPD deputies refused to vote for further war credits. Staying within the remit of 'self-defence' by focussing their attacks more on the bellicose talk of annexations than the war itself, these deputies' opposition was often a far cry from that of the internationalist wing of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, who had founded the *Gruppe Internationale* in 1915 - later known as the *Spartakusbund*.

But, when 20 rebellious deputies from the SPD parliamentary fraction refused to vote for further war credits in December 1915, the centrist oppositionists began to gain the ear of wider layers of the party. By March 1916, when Haase spoke out against the renewal of the state of siege he found some considerable support. Thirty-three deputies were expelled from the fraction. By January of the next year, they were out of the party as well. Three months later, in April 1917, the USPD was born.

Some 120,000 members defected to the new organisation. It was a veritable melange, including Luxemburg, Bernstein and Kautsky. Its main slogan was still "Peace without reparations and annexations".

For their part, the Spartacists were clear that they were only in the USPD

as a way of influencing those elements breaking with *Burgfrieden* and war socialism. Others, like Kautsky and Bernstein, were at first strongly opposed to the formation of the USPD. Their rather limited aims were to achieve peace and to uphold the values of the old SPD. They eventually agreed that the struggle for peace had to come first, even if this necessitated temporarily working alongside the Spartacists.

Russia

The USPD's foundation was in many ways bound up with the Russian Revolution. The fall of the tsar in spring 1917 had electrified public opinion in Germany. During the negotiations to found the USPD, Haase spoke of the "light coming from the east". But soon the October Revolution would demand an unambiguous stance, as would the disintegration of the kaiser regime.

By late September 1918 Germany's defeat was obvious to the military top brass, the emperor's court and leading industrialists alike. General von Ludendorff pressed for urgent action. They had to broaden the government to include the SPD in what admiral von Hintze dubbed a "revolution from above" in order to head off a "Russian October".¹

Initially hesitant, the SPD leadership eventually decided to join the new coalition of Progressives, National Liberals and the Centre on October 4 1918. But on October 16 there were mass demonstrations under the slogan: "Down with the government, long live Liebknecht!" Then, on November 3, a sailors' mutiny in Kiel made toppling the government a real possibility. In response, on November 4 the SPD's executive committee announced that the kaiser's abdication was under discussion. Its supporters in the working class were urged "not to frustrate these negotiations through reckless intervention".²

But the line could not be held. Bavaria was the first state to become a republic. Numerous petty princes and fiefs were swept from power. By November 8 most of Germany had fallen into the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

On November 9 the revolution had reached Berlin. Prince von Baden sent in the *Jägerbattalion* (light infantry)

to suppress it, but the soldiers refused to move against the crowd. Von Baden hoped that the regime could be salvaged if the kaiser abdicated. He himself resigned as chancellor in favour of Friedrich Ebert, general secretary of the SPD. While the workers' and soldiers' councils represented a burgeoning alternative power, the response of the two workers' parties were to prove decisive at all levels.

The SPD's behaviour can be explained by the fact that it essentially considered the revolution completed by November 1918. Germany had become a democratic republic³ and peace had been restored. The right to vote for all men and women over 20 had been guaranteed, pre-war labour regulations reintroduced and an eight-hour day enforced.

With initial success, it sold itself to the population at large as a kind of caretaker government upholding 'order' before elections to a national assembly. This was conceived as the sole legitimate form of government, resting on the pillars of the old bureaucracy and the army supreme command. Their 'socialism' was framed firmly within the capitalist constitutional order.

The SPD was unsure whether the workers' councils would cooperate with Scheidemann's government or would themselves become an alternative centre of power. Thus it had to direct the councils into safe channels. Doing this required left cover from USPD supporters. The USPD was therefore pushed into joining a provisional government.

The USPD rank and file were in many ways the 'men of the hour' in November 1917. They had established strong roots, particularly with the militant shop stewards' movement. But, given its divisions and its short existence, the USPD had no clear vision of what it wanted. For this reason, the SPD was confident that it could win the softer layers of the USPD - the 'centrists'.

Eventually, the USPD leadership accepted an invitation to enter government on the condition that bourgeois politicians would be there merely as "technical assistants". The new government consisted of three people's commissars from each party: Ebert, Scheidemann and Otto Landsberg for the SPD; and Hugo Haase, Wilhelm

Dittmann and Emil Barth for the USPD.

None of these commissars was a departmental minister. Trusted socialists were assigned to keep an eye on the bureaucrats, but the results were farcical. At a time when the new government was colluding with the Entente imperialist states to keep German troops in eastern Europe so as to contain the Russian Revolution, Kautsky - appointed as a USPD representative to watch over foreign policy - was sent away to investigate historical documents on the origins of World War I!

It was similar in other areas of government business. The 'socialisation' commission produced no real results at all. Controlling the army also proved impossible. Groups like the *Freikorps* were tolerated on the Polish border.

The mass of the USPD membership came to oppose their party's participation in the provisional government. The three USPD people's commissars found themselves increasingly isolated from their membership. This led to growing calls for a USPD party congress - all were ignored. And when, on December 24, the SPD commissars ordered an attack on the People's Naval Division in Berlin without the knowledge, let alone the consent, of their fellow USPD commissars, Dittmann, Haase and Barth felt compelled to resign.

Despite this, the leadership still refused to heed calls for a party congress, claiming that the coming January elections took precedence. The Spartakusbund of Luxemburg and Liebknecht then decided split from the USPD and establish the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Spartakus). This was clearly a premature move.

Realignments

Polling just under 38% in the January elections, the SPD opted to join a bourgeois coalition government with the Centre Party and the German Democrats. But this coalition dismally failed to deliver on many of the SPD's promises. For example, the eight-hour day had been a great achievement, but it had been introduced without a corresponding wage increase - the average weekly wage of a worker fell to levels not

seen since 1913.

Now in opposition, the USPD benefited from the resulting discontent. Between November 1918 and March 1919 200,000 new members swelled its ranks. Governmental unity with the SPD had proved a disaster. So what next?

The USPD's prospects of unity 'to the left' were beset with problems. The KPD(S) was viewed with suspicion. Following the turmoil of the so-called 'Spartacist' uprising of January 1919, its membership was scattered and subject to repression. Within months three of its best leaders - Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches - were murdered by those with whom they had cooperated in the same organisation just a few years prior. It is thus unsurprising that many rank and file KPD(S) members drew understandable, yet erroneous conclusions: reject working alongside the SPD supporters of the butcher Noske in the unions and the factory councils, boycott the national assembly elections, and so on. But this did not win them much of a hearing with the USPD rank and file or the working class more generally.

By the USPD's second congress in May 1919, a definite shift to the left occurred around the question of international organisation. A motion was passed, calling for the "reconstruction of the workers' international on the basis of a revolutionary socialist policy in the spirit of the international conferences in Zimmerwald and Kienthal".⁴ However, the guarded wording of the motion was insufficient to clearly break with the plans of Kautsky and others to reconstruct the Second International at the Berne conference in February 1919. Revealingly, the motion did not mention the newly formed Communist International, established in March 1919 by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Many in the USPD considered this move premature. Yet, having seen Kautsky's conception of 'socialist' foreign policy in the November government, and having heard of plans to revive the Second International, USPD members increasingly changed their minds.

Come the USPD's Leipzig congress of September 1919, international issues were to dominate the agenda. Unity prevailed on domestic questions, and a new 'Action programme' was decided upon. Although making nods in the direction of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the new programme was framed in a typically centrist way so as to smooth over differences and placate both of the USPD's wings. KPD(S) leader Paul Levi likened the new programme to a "lump of clay that one can make into a face or a gargoyle at will".⁵

Unity evaporated when discussion turned to the international situation. Three positions were represented. For the left, Curt Geyer and Walter Stöcker in particular were clear: the USPD should immediately and unconditionally affiliate to the Communist International. The USPD was moving towards Comintern, and affiliation was the next logical step.

Hilferding proposed a resolution which criticised Comintern and called for the formation of a new international alongside what he deemed the revolutionary parties of the Second International. For him, Bolshevism needed "action" and thus unconditional affiliation would render the USPD "the whipping boy" of the Bolsheviks.

A middling position was represented by Georg Ledebour, who feared further splits in the movement. He wanted to work with the communists in the hope of overcoming the schism in the workers' movement by creating an international of all 'social revolutionary' parties to resolve this matter alongside Comintern.

The debate was fierce. But, following a whole day of negotiations behind the scenes, Ledebour won the day. Both Hilferding and Ledebour had withdrawn their resolutions to propose a new, joint one which incorporated substantial aspects of Ledebour's viewpoint. It called for a break with the Second International, naming Comintern as the only international the USPD wished to join. However, it called for "negotiations" between the parties of the Second International and Comintern, not immediate affiliation. This delaying procedure was clearly aimed at undermining Stöcker, who adamantly refused to withdraw his resolution for immediate affiliation. The tactic worked. Immediate affiliation was defeated by 170 votes to 111, and the 'compromise' motion passed by 227 votes to 54.

In the immediate aftermath of the congress, some members of the USPD right initiated rumours of secret meetings between the USPD and the KPD(S), and decried the influence of 'putschist agents'. Now, Comintern had to intervene from Moscow against the leftists in the KPD(S): ultra-leftist and syndicalist illusions had become an obstacle to unification in a much bigger revolutionary organisation. The USPD left and the KPD(S) still seemed a long way apart.

2nd congress

Yet the USPD continued to grow at the SPD's expense. The latter's record in government, combined with its willingness to use the army and forces like the Freikorps to suppress the council movement - both before and after the attempted March 1920 coup d'état led by Wolfgang Kapp and General Walther von Lüttwitz - resulted in a rapid decline in its support base. Between the January 1919 and June 1920 elections the SPD's share of the vote fell from 37.9% to 21.6%. The USPD's increased from 7.6% to 18.8%. Once again, the SPD asked the USPD whether it would form a joint 'workers' government'. However, the USPD refused. The Centre Party, the national-liberal German People's Party and the liberal German Democratic Party proceeded to form an unambiguously bourgeois government.

Comintern sought to turn up the heat on the USPD. The Executive Committee of the CI wrote several letters and articles to establish just what was actually going to be done about affiliation. The USPD right's prevarication soon became apparent. One 'open letter' from the ECCI went unpublished on rather spurious grounds: running such articles in the run-up to the elections could only assist the KPD. On another occasion a "lack of paper"(!) was blamed for the failure to print ECCI correspondence.⁶ Meanwhile, from Norway to Italy the impulse towards genuine Communist Party unity initiated by the Russian Revolution ensured that more and more sizeable parties were pledging support for the new international. The USPD leadership felt it had no other choice: it had to go to Moscow for Comintern's 2nd congress in July 1920.

Twenty-one communist parties across the world were officially present there. To much fanfare, ECCI chair Grigory Zinoviev opened proceedings by proclaiming the death of the Second International and celebrating Comintern's transformation from the "propaganda society" of its founding congress of 1919, into a "fighting organisation of the international proletariat".⁷ Further progress required "clarity, clarity and once more clarity".

Drafted by Zinoviev, the conditions for affiliation to Comintern were stringent. Leaders like Kautsky and Hilferding were named as traitors,

from whom the workers' movement should decisively break. The necessity of maintaining an illegal party apparatus alongside a legal one was uncompromisingly insisted upon.

Published for the first time on August 24, the 21 conditions eventually agreed upon initiated much debate, particularly among the German, French and Italian parties. Historian Robert Wheeler has, it should be pointed out, usefully distinguished between a "first and second wave"⁸ of responses in the USPD.

The first came from the party press, which almost entirely came out negatively. The same can be said of the USPD *Reichskonferenz* of September 1920, attended by the USPD central committee, *Beirat* (advisory committee), representatives of local party organisations, newspaper editors, Reichstag fraction members and representatives from the local state parliaments. The debate polarised between those 'for' and 'against' Comintern and the Russian Revolution. Amidst talk of 'you' and 'us', this conference of party officials rejected the conditions.

With the Halle congress only six weeks away, the USPD right was confident that its majority amongst the functionaries would be reflected in the party as a whole.

Then came the "second wave". Leading representatives of both tendencies addressed hundreds of mass assemblies, with members thirsting for the arguments. Pamphlets, bulletins and flyers were hastily produced. Local party organisations called congresses to debate and adopt resolutions on the 21 conditions. Most supported the conditions. The gulf between the party functionaries and the membership was most evident in Berlin. While all eight editors of *Freiheit* - naturally including its editor, Hilferding - opposed affiliation, 16 out of 18 USPD organisations voted in favour of the 21 conditions. This pattern was repeated nationally. In the referendum which selected the delegates to the Halle congress, 57.8% voted in favour of Comintern affiliation, 42.2% against.

Martov

In such circumstances, it is hardly a surprise that there was such a charged atmosphere in Halle, where "two parties" were present, divided by a walkway in the middle of the hall "as if a knife has cut them sharply in two".

While the left had won a clear majority of delegates in the party referendum, the next five days of proceedings were not so much about those present at the congress as about those outside. Militants from across the whole world looked on. Two speakers, both from the Russian movement, were particularly anticipated.

The first was Julius Martov, the intellectually rigorous, if politically indecisive, leader of the Menshevik Internationalists. A co-founder of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, he cut his teeth alongside Lenin in the St Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class and then on the editorial board of the underground newspaper *Iskra* (*Spark*). Breaking with Lenin and his supporters at the 1903 congress, Martov became one of the main leaders of Menshevism, renowned for his love-hate relationship with the Bolsheviks. Martov's sophistication of argument and cutting polemics make him stand out from other Menshevik leaders like Fyodor Dan, Pavel Axelrod or Georgi Plekhanov.

Martov's approach in Halle is best summarised as 'Neither Moscow (Bolshevism) nor Berlin (SPD), but international socialism' - a split in the USPD would condemn it to the wilderness of groups and sect-

lets, as opposed to real parties. The Bolsheviks were perilously basing themselves on the spontaneous, visceral anger of a population suffering from the privations of the war and the economic crisis. (This hostility to Bolshevik 'spontaneity' was a common feature of Martov's perspectives throughout his career.)

The second eagerly awaited speaker had come to fight the corner of the USPD left - Grigory Zinoviev. History, to put it mildly, has not been very kind to him. From historical character sketches to Hollywood movies, he is mainly remembered for his opposition to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, his ruthless 'Bolshevisation' of Comintern and his capitulation to his eventual killer, Joseph Stalin. As with other key Bolshevik figures who fell victim to the Stalinist counterrevolution, it would appear that Zinoviev was not only *physically* liquidated by Stalinism, but *historically* too.

This is a problem. Both the far left and the academy have tended to base their interpretation of the Russian Revolution and its degeneration almost exclusively on the decisions and actions of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. This downplays the role of the masses and reduces the Bolshevik Party to mere minions of the 'great leader', Lenin. Understandable for cold war warriors or those in thrall to the 'cult of the personality', but utterly insufficient in terms of historical analysis.

As an organisation determined to turn the world on its head, the Bolsheviks sought to 'bring the revolutionary message' to the people. Zinoviev particularly excelled in this. Most of his writings remain closed off from an English-speaking audience, but it can certainly be agreed that he lacks the depth, nuance and sophistication of a Trotsky or a Lenin. It is his strengths as an agitator and orator, his ability to respond to real people's concerns and to tell compelling narratives, that distinguish him. His intervention as ECCI chair at the Halle congress is perhaps his greatest, often overlooked accomplishment. Readers can judge for themselves, but surely even his most determined detractor must admit that his speech sparkles with passion, wit and intelligence. Speaking for over four hours in his second language, his speech both shocked and impressed the German bourgeois press, which described him as "the first orator of our

century". Much of the speech was off the cuff. Time and again Zinoviev responds to questions and interjections, including from some of European social democracy's leading figures.

This is precisely what makes the Halle congress so extraordinary. The intensity of debate is striking. The delegates were fully acquainted with every nuance and shade of opinion in the movement. Every alleged opportunist act of the past was dragged up, every catch-all platitude seized on from the floor. Heckling aside, the congress record makes for incredibly inspiring reading - a painful reminder of how far today's left has moved away from the healthiest parts of its history in terms of organising congresses which allow time and space for discussion and polemic. Nowadays we get three- or four-minute contributions.

After two more days of impassioned debate, 234 delegates voted for affiliation to Comintern and fusion with the KPD(S), soundly defeating the 158 votes against. Once the result was announced, the right wing walked out.

Despite the split, this was an enormous victory. In December, around 400,000 USPD members joined the KPD(S) to form the United Communist Party of Germany (VKPD). Hundreds of thousands of class-conscious workers were united behind the banner of an openly communist organisation with an openly communist programme. The German workers' movement had returned to the revolutionary traditions of its past on a higher level ●

Notes

1. E Waldman *The Spartacist uprising of 1919* Marquette 1958, p70.
2. J Riddell (ed) *The German revolution and the debate on soviet power* New York 1986, p38.
3. In Marxist terms, of course, Germany in 1918 was a long way from a 'democratic republic' in the sense of Engels's understanding of popular rule embodied in the Paris Commune of 1871.
4. P Broué *The German revolution 1917-1923* Chicago 2006, p337.
5. RA Archer (trans) *The Second Congress of the Communist International* Vol 1, London 1977, pp282-83.
6. Quoted in 'An alle Mitglieder der USPD' in *Die Kommunistische Internationale* No12, summer 1920, p325. The letter appealed to the USPD rank and file to send its own delegates to Comintern's Second Congress.
7. RA Archer (trans) *The Second Congress of the Communist International* Vol 1, London 1977, p187.
8. RF Wheeler *USPD und Internationale: Sozialistischer Internationalismus in der Zeit der Revolution* Frankfurt am Main 1975, p233.

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.

Would the USPD and its 800,000 members opt for the Third International or attempt to stay a halfway house, floating uneasily

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

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

In publishing Zinoviev's largely forgotten four-hour speech and Martov's counterblast for the first time in English, this book helps to deepen our understanding of a crucial chapter in the history of the European working class movement.

The text includes introductory essays by Ben Lewis and Lars T Lih, alongside Zinoviev's fascinating diary entries made during his stay in Germany ●

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9/11

Ten years of blood and fire

The anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks coincides with a resurgence in 'liberal interventionism'. **James Turley** evaluates the bloody harvest of both

On September 11 2001, a motley crew of Islamist militants hijacked four planes in US airspace. Hours later, the tallest buildings in the country had been demolished, and thousands of lives had been snuffed out. One wall of the Pentagon had been reduced likewise to a smouldering wreck.

It has become something of a commonplace among bourgeois commentators with pretensions to profundity to claim that, on 9/11, 'everything changed'.

The persistence in the American, but more broadly western, psyche of this notion - that the attacks of that day represent a turning point in recent history - testifies that it is not *simply* a phantom. Indeed, 9/11 served primarily to accelerate and intensify a series of tendencies both in the US and the general world situation which had to some extent been obscured by a decade of post-cold war *pax Americana*. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and his comrades may not have changed history, but - to paraphrase Lenin - they succeeded in giving it a push.

Most obvious among these tendencies is the drive, inherent in the capitalist system, towards war. Another persistent myth is illustrative here - the notion that, far from being an ingenious atrocity committed by Islamist militants, the 9/11 attacks were staged in order to allow a conspiracy of neo-conservatives the political consent needed to launch wars.

Beyond the rather tortuous analyses of grainy video footage of towers falling in an allegedly 'suspicious' way, the most convincing argument for this eminently unconvincing hypothesis is the very obvious eagerness of the US state machine in the early part of the last decade to throw itself into a series of exemplary military operations. Whereas the engagements of the 90s - the first Gulf War, the interventions in the Balkans - were sold as limited and determinate police actions, the new epoch of 'war on terror' authorised any number of military assaults.

In the case of Iraq, in particular, attempts to tie Saddam Hussein's regime in any meaningful way to the 9/11 attacks were quite transparently tenuous from the get-go. *Something* was already propelling the US state to conduct itself in this way, whether or not we buy into the neo-conservative conspiracy theory paradigm (no Marxist, obviously enough, should be so silly).

The accentuated drive to war of the last 10 years is in fact part of a longer history, which for our purposes goes back to the endgame of the cold war; it is dictated both economically in the narrow sense and from the point of view of the *state*. On the economic level, the pursuit of the USSR to its grave went hand in hand with a shift in the imperialist countries away from substantial concessions to the working class to a sharp class offensive, epitomised by the governments of Reagan and Thatcher.

In the US and Britain (quite correctly considered the 51st state), this took the particularly accentuated form of assaults on material production and increasing financialisation of the economy (which in turn decimated the stronger, industrially based unions); the assault on living conditions exacerbated this tendency by making a great expansion of consumer credit necessary.



Twin Towers collapse

This set-up finally collapsed in 2007-08. Yet it has, in a sense, been trying to collapse since the late 1980s; there was the 1987 market crash on Wall Street, the 1998 crash in the east Asian economies and the 2001 dot-com bubble. The US and its immediate satellites, in each case, attempted to offload the economic pain onto others.

One of the key mechanisms for doing so is war, which has two salutary effects from an imperialist point of view: firstly, the movement of capital from affected areas to the 'safe havens' of New York and London; and, secondly, a backdoor economic stimulus from arms production. In 2001, not only did the internet bubble burst, but several enormous corporations (most famously Enron) collapsed under the weight of their own fraudulent financial finaglings. The US, it is fair to say, badly needed a war. By the end of that year, it had an excuse.

Coterminous with this is the matter of the US's standing as world hegemon. This in the last instance relies on military supremacy, which is slowly eroded by the decline of productive industry. A military victory at least shores up the *impression* of this supremacy, which obeys the same rules as the playground reputation of the school bully.

Mass destruction

As it happens, the US military budget remains truly monolithic; it certainly is able to impose spectacular military defeats on peripheral countries who refuse to play ball. The decline of US power is rather to be measured in the result of such victories, which have very obviously resulted (in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan) in the disintegration of social order into warlordism and chaos.

We should remember that, in Iraq, it was widely expected by more credulous apologists for the US that the removal of the Ba'athist regime would be followed by a serious attempt at reconstruction; the bourgeois press chattered with references to the Marshall Plan and the like. It was clear, within a year, that nothing of the sort was on the table.

The US spent the remainder of its disastrous time in *formal* occupation (US troops remain on Iraqi soil to this day) playing divide and rule amongst the warring factions and militias, in the process of which inevitably accelerating the tendency towards fragmentation. The story is only

different in Afghanistan inasmuch as the social order was already in an advanced state of decomposition to begin with (and thanks in no small part to US support for jihadi militias during the Soviet-Afghanistan war).

In short, the US is no longer in a position to impose order by military means - only chaos. This does *partially* achieve the aims of the playground bully - seeing another country reduced to a smouldering ruin under a torrent of US ordinance does at least engender a healthy sense of fear. The flipside is a recalcitrance among forces which may otherwise be sympathetic to US-led regime change, and cooler relations with those subordinate imperialist powers whose interests are violated by American military blunders.

The intensification of American military swagger, combined with the emergence of a new great enemy to replace the defunct Soviet menace, inevitably took its toll on ideology - emblematic of the emergence of the 'Bush doctrine' was the influence of the neo-conservatives. A trend which emerged out of a certain encounter between a decrepit Shachtmanite social-imperialism and the messianic conservatism of Leo Strauss, neo-conservatism emerged from a spell in the wilderness under Bill Clinton to become a hegemonic force under Bush.

It appears that neo-conservatives took quite seriously the notion that remaking the world in the image of the US was both achievable at the point of a bayonet and a decisive contribution to democracy. The millenarian Christians who made for important fair-weather allies had no such illusions - but equally appeared genuinely to believe that they could use the 'rough instrument' of US foreign policy to hasten the end of days itself (somewhat closer to the truth, it must be conceded). The business of state - oppression, butchery and exploitation - continued much as before; but finally it had not one but two ideologies irrational enough to reflect it appropriately.

Even before the advent of Barack Obama, the neo-conservative star was on the wane - the Project for a New American Century think tank had been wound up, and the most influential neo-cons had been rudely supplanted by so-called 'realists', such as outgoing defence chief Robert Gates, as Iraq became ever more obviously a gory embarrassment.

The left, already in a pitifully weak state after 10 years of unalloyed reaction, was in a sense revived, but also sent into tailspin by 9/11. The naked imperial hubris of the US and its British lapdog in the run-up to the Iraq invasion provoked an enormous mass movement in opposition; it was a formative experience for a generation of activists. Then there were the errors: some on the left veered into sub-Stalinist support for anyone prepared to make half a show of being 'anti-imperialist' (the Socialist Workers Party until around 2009 was a British example, but one could equally read cringing odes to the likes of Moqtada al-Sadr coming from left-liberal pin-ups like Naomi Klein). It was an embarrassing error.

Others flipped in the other, far worse direction of support, open or cryptic, for the war on terror. The idea of 'liberal interventionism' had already been treated to a few trial runs, particularly around the Balkan conflicts of 1992-99; the apparently

quick and 'clean' defeat dealt to Slobodan Milošević in the Kosovo war by Nato planes was reported more or less uncritically by the fawning media. Iraq, however, was a different model of liberal intervention altogether - the new wave of liberal and social-imperialists were required to grant many more hostages to fortune.

Diabolical

Luckily for the imperialists themselves, they had the perfect bogeyman with which to blackmail the Nick Cohens and Christopher Hitchens of this world - Osama bin Laden, avowed enemy of progress, enlightenment and reason; advocate of a new caliphate, which would propel all the world's Muslim populations back to the dark ages. Any political sacrifice could surely be justified in opposition to such a diabolical foe.

Of course, it mattered not to such people that Islamist extremists could deploy at best crude, home-made explosives and, where they had a military presence, second-hand assault rifles and the like, while that paragon of rationalism, George W Bush, had enough conventional ordinance to bomb the entire Middle East back to the stone age. The likes of Cohen could not grasp the idea that Islamists, like western governments, were subject to the constraints of *Realpolitik*; nor that the purported defenders of reason in

fact defended a system barrelling into ever more profound irrationality.

The irony of the 'cruise missile left', then, was that it attempted to defend reason in a profoundly *irrational* way - through impulsive moral judgements, where sober political analysis should have obtained (the 'high' point being Nick Cohen's astonishing position that to attempt to rationally understand the motivations of an irrationalist was a contradiction in terms). This theoretical irony - which afflicted the 'Marxist' variant advocated by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty quite as much as the naive liberal versions - rapidly became an all too real one, as the decomposition of post-Saddam Iraq accelerated, and the liberal interventionists were increasingly defined by mealy-mouthed support for undisguised imperialist barbarity.

Alas, the doctrine of liberal intervention is not as dead as it should be. Ten years on from 9/11, we have in a sense returned to the starting point; the imperialist countries have a model 'success' under their belts, a bombing campaign in Libya that did not turn into a quagmire (or at least not yet). The relief among worried bourgeois commentators is almost palpable - forget Iraq, they say; we can do it *right* too ●

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Fighting fund

Cash boost

The CPGB's 2011 Summer Offensive fundraising drive was highly successful in one area in particular: bringing in regular donations to the *Weekly Worker*.

A good number of our supporters responded to our appeal for more, or increased, monthly standing order donations in a very positive way. We had set a target of £300 a month in new money and the appeal ended with pledges amounting to £313. It has to be said, though, that a few of those comrades have yet to return their completed standing order form (or arrange payments directly with their bank), but already the extra cash landing in our account is making a big difference.

Take the first week of September and the start of this month's fighting fund. Over the last seven days no less than £230 has been received in standing orders - and more than a third of that results from new pledges. I am now much more confident that we will be able to raise the £1,250 we need each and every month - rather than enduring the disappointment of persistent shortfalls that have been a recent feature of this column. Not least if all comrades deliver on their promises!

The fund was also boosted by a (late) donation meant for the Summer Offensive from GD. Not to worry, comrade: now or last month, it makes no real difference. Your £100 addition to our coffers is a great help - thank you. Then there was the £40 from comrade

EJ - a donation made in exchange for a complete set of *The Leninist*, the paper that preceded the *Weekly Worker*.

So, all in all, a good start to our September fund. But a word of warning: a high proportion of those standing orders come in at the beginning of the month, so the next three weeks may not be quite so fruitful in that regard. But it goes without saying that we are still accepting cheques and postal orders - not to mention online donations via our PayPal link. But last week we received none of those, despite the fact that 13,094 internet readers came our way.

So let me end with a series of exhortations. If you appreciate this paper and read it online, then please do what you can financially to maintain and improve it. Click on the 'Make a donation' button. If you've still got some of those old-style cheques to use up, then pop one in the post. If you have made a pledge to take out or increase a standing order, then please delay no more. Just as good, if you haven't promised us anything, but want to donate, now would be a good time to begin helping us out.

We start this month's fighting fund with £370 towards our £1,250 target ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

OUR HISTORY

Home and the guild of house cleaners

Only one in eight members of the CPGB in 1920 was female. This proportion reflected the level of involvement of women in the labour movement generally - but also it represented a major obstacle to the party's work among a strategically important and oppressed section of the working class and wider population. However, perhaps also reflecting something of the cultural norms and attitudes of the time, it was a full 11 months before the first significant article on the communist approach to the women's question appeared in the party's paper, *The Communist*. This was bad, but it was not unique to the communists in Britain. In the ranks of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) at this time - the Comintern's largest section outside the Soviet Union - there were objections that, despite repeated resolutions on enhancing the role of women at successive congresses, little had been done to implement them.

That said, the Communist International and its constituent parties were to carry forward and further develop the best elements of the Second International's work among women, and with it some of its finest female cadre: for example, in Russia, Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand; in Germany, KPD founder and leading theorist Rosa Luxemburg and women's leader Clara Zetkin.

Despite its late appearance and brevity, the article by Leonora Thomas reproduced below is useful. Not only does it emphasise the central demand for the socialisation of domestic labour, stressing the specificity of women's oppression rather than simply being subsumed under some crude 'class' analysis; it is also lively and wittily argued.

Women and communism

If a woman, greatly daring, suggests to the male revolutionist that there is a woman's problem to be solved by revolution, she is met with one of two answers. The first and most common is that women are a damned nuisance. The second is that the women's problem is the same as the man's.

There is certainly much to be said for the first answer. The difficulties of the transition period of revolution would be less if there were no women; but, as matters are, it is worse than useless to funk the problem.

As to the second answer, only in so far as revolution is the only hope for women's emancipation is the problem the same as the man's. But, just because the woman's position under capitalism is different from the man's, she has even more to gain

than he has by the overthrow of that system.

Under capitalism women are, according to their class, either slaves or parasites. The agitation for the vote or the entry of women into industry and the professions has not altered women's position in the mass. The greater freedom and independence of a few middle class women does not affect the problem; and it was no desire for freedom that sent working class women into industry.

Observe the position of the latter. Economic circumstances forced the children of the workers into factories when they should have been at school, and economic circumstances keep the women in industry, after marriage. Conditions are no better in those homes where both man and woman are working, because wages under our present system are based on the family standard. The effect of the entry of women into industry has been either to reduce men's wages, as in the cotton industry, or to drive them out, as in the teaching industry. Working for wages has done nothing, and can do nothing, towards woman's emancipation except to put her in the position to join the ranks of the organised workers.

We do not get to grips with the problem until we realise that the greatest factor in a woman's life is her sex and that the fact that she is a potential mother dominates all else. It not only concerns the home and social relations, but has its reaction throughout industry too. A woman's probable marriage and consequent departure from industry is an excuse for low wages and for blind-alley occupations. Her occupation is marriage.

And what does marriage mean to the majority of working women? In the *Daily Herald* recently women gave timetables of their day's work.¹ Their working day lasted in most cases from 6.30am to 10pm. The conditions of some are worse than others, but all are bad. Anyone with knowledge of mining villages knows the horrible round of unmitigated toil which is the lot of the miner's wife. Primitive housing conditions make matters worse, but better houses would not alter the fact that the average married woman works too long and has little or no recreation.

What is even more dreadful is her lack of communal life. Many women spend week after week, year after year, with no other human intercourse than that of husband and children. A terrible isolation, conducive to the retention of ancient superstitions and the dwarfing of the race.

The work of motherhood and housekeeping is arduous and highly technical, involving as it does several other occupations, such as cooking, teaching and nursing. For this the working girl has no training. In other times girls were trained by their mothers, so that any natural inability was to some extent minimised.

It is customary to disguise the deep social injury of this lack of training under the false sentiment of 'A mother knows by instinct'. As well as a man knows by instinct how to be a doctor.

This, then, is a woman's position under capitalism. Before marriage she is a wage-slave, usually under worse conditions than a man; after marriage she is a slave to a bad housekeeping system and forced to do work for which she is untrained and in many cases temperamentally unfitted, and she is shut off from any communal life.

What will be her position after the revolution? How will the revolution solve the problem?

The need for greater production and saving of available material will probably force a communal housekeeping system

even during the transition period. Women with the ability to do on a large scale what they did before on a small scale will quickly find their places. The others will be absorbed into occupations for which they are fitted and, as time goes on, the process of selection and training will alter the whole status of the women doing the work that was previously done in separate houses.

Those doing house cleaning will be organised in a house cleaners' guild, which will not be composed entirely of married women, but of all - men and women - who are engaged in any part of house cleaning. As members of the guild they will be entitled to vote for or be the delegates to the workers' committee, and so take a part in the government of the commune.

The sensible and economic organisation of what is now classed under the head of housekeeping will not only abolish slave conditions, but will also release an enormous volume of energy and ability to serve the community in other occupations.

'How about the children?' someone asks. A woman during her actual childbearing period will be exempt from any work which would injure the health of herself or the child. When the time comes for the child to go to school, the mother will resume her other occupation.

Under the capitalist system the children of the workers are taken from their mothers at four or five years to be educated by the state. The probability is that this time will be lessened, as the tendency is towards Montessori methods, and nursery schools.² This, of course, does not mean that the children will be separated from the mother; but for a certain period - four or five hours a day - the children will be with other children playing, and the mother will be working, perhaps in the nursery schools, perhaps at housework, perhaps as an architect.

So revolution will mean the 'breaking up of the home', but not in the sense that the users of that phrase imply. All social customs are a reflex of the economic system, and under communism the possessive impulse, which is largely responsible for our present social customs, will be restricted.

These are the developments which I think are bound to occur, but we ought to consider them, talk of them and prepare for them. Men are not revolutionists because they accept certain principles, but because they see that those principles applied to society would secure better conditions for them and their fellows. It is essential that women, whose interests are so largely confined to the home, should see that those principles have a direct reaction on the conditions in which they live their lives.

The Communist July 9 1921

In January 1922 the CPGB set up a women's department under Helen Crawford, who was also the 'women's representative' on the political bureau.³ The first CPGB women's conference was held in May 1924.

Notes

1. The *Daily Herald* was published from 1911 to 1964. Its origins were in a fight within the printers' union, the London Society of Compositors, launched for a 48-hour week. A daily strike bulletin called *The World* was started. On January 25 1911 it was renamed the *Daily Herald*, and was published until the end of the strike in April 1911. Radical trade unionists were inspired to raise funds for a permanent labour movement daily. Readers and supporters formed local branches of the Herald League, through which they had their say in the running of the paper. Oddly enough, the paper ended up as today's *The Sun* - a fate infinitely worse than death for a working class newspaper.
2. Founded in 1907, Montessori is a method of education that stresses the importance of placing the child's own interests, proclivities and activities at the centre of the learning process. The goal is to make the children independent and self-activating by presenting them with opportunities "to move, to dress themselves, to choose what they want to do and to help the adult with tasks" (www.dailymontessori.com).
3. Scottish comrade Helen Crawford was to play a leading role in the CPGB, in particular in her energetic organisation of the party's work amongst women.

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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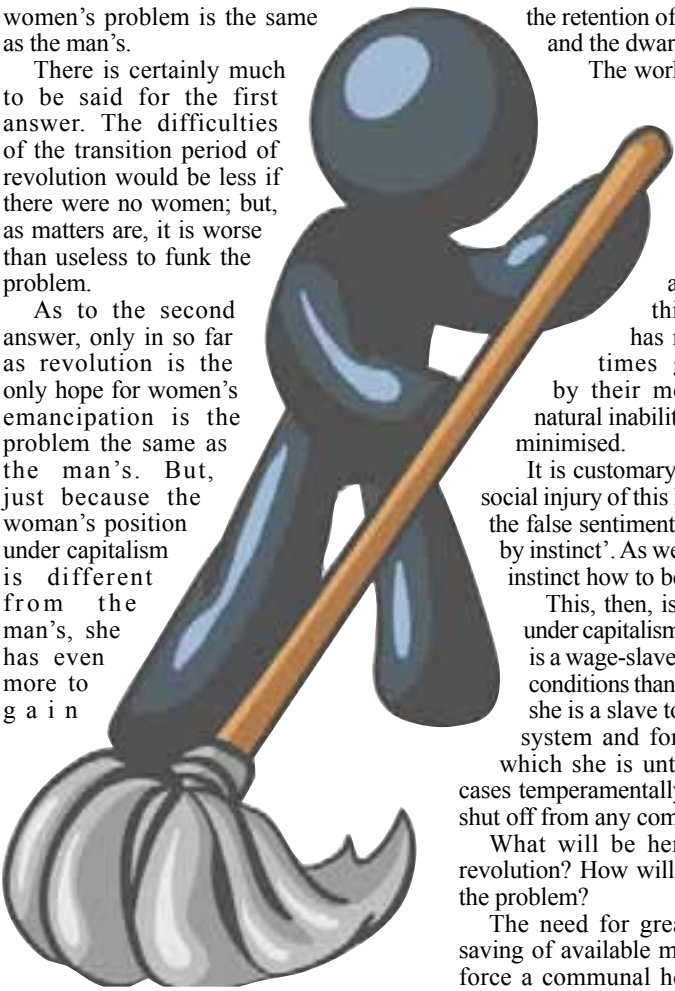
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weekly worker

EDL picking up 'ordinary' working class people

A triumphant victory?

Claire Fisher and Maciej Zurowski report on the English Defence League demonstration in east London and the response of anti-fascists

As readers will know, home secretary Theresa May responded to the English Defence League's intention to hold an anti-Muslim demonstration in Tower Hamlets and the proposed counter-demonstration of the left by banning *all* marches in five London boroughs in the month of September, including the City of London.

As it turned out, the police were unable (or unwilling) to prevent fascists and anti-fascists alike marching. The two contingents marched for just under a mile - simultaneously, but separately; the EDL moving from Aldgate station to London Bridge, and the counter-protest marching from the eastern to the western end of Whitechapel Road, with a section converging at the lower end of Brick Lane, 'blocking' the EDL from entering the borough of Tower Hamlets and from harassing its Asian inhabitants.

Arriving at the permitted 'static protest' organised by Unite Against Fascism at the corner of Vallance Road and Whitechapel Road, we endured familiar scenes of popular frontist speechifying emanating from a makeshift stage. Amongst the crowd of approximately 1,000 people were comrades from the Socialist Workers Party and smaller left groups, union activists with a variety of banners and a higher than usual presence from the local community - sections of the large Muslim population of Tower Hamlets view the EDL as a real threat.

From the stage, the SWP's Martin Smith, national coordinator of Love Music, Hate Racism and UAF 'national officer' (amongst his many guises), declared that the various meeting points the EDL had tried to organise had been "smashed" by community and union pressure. Attempts to use the Sainsburys car park down the road had been foiled by the UAF and local community groups lobbying the supermarket, while the RMT rail union had closed down Liverpool Street station, another proposed meeting point. Instead, he enthused, the fascists would not be shouting "E-E-EDL!", but "N-N-NCP!" - a reference to them being holed up in an obscure car park.

The following speeches by others on the left, trade union activists, Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians and 'community leaders', reinforced the overall message that the EDL ought to be opposed by all right-minded people. We had already decided we had seen all there was to see when we picked up twitter feeds which located around 1,000 EDL supporters first at Kings Cross, and then, all of a sudden, at Aldgate station. This piece of news prompted us to turn on our heels.

Aldgate station was by this time almost completely closed off and swarming with police. The official figure was 3,000 police out for the event, with the majority of them clearly tailing the EDL rather than the counter-protest. And it soon became

clear why - rounding a corner on Minories, next to Aldgate station, we finally saw the EDL protest.

The front of the march consisted of tanked-up football hooligans and lumpen elements violently shoving the coppers forward. It was unclear at that point whether the police were letting them march, or just couldn't stop them from getting to where they wanted to go. In hindsight, the trajectory of their progress, which led them away from the minaret-strewn Tower Hamlets, must have been a police tactic. As the kettling of the student protests had shown us all, if the cops want you to stay put, they usually see to it you do.

Watching the people who marched behind these trail-blazers from close range, it was interesting to note that many of them appeared placid, walking calmly, with young couples holding hands, smiling and acting in a generally respectful way. Rather than being limited to the petty bourgeois-lumpen bloc of Trotskyist formulae, the EDL seems to have picked up a following of 'ordinary' working class people. "Come and join us," some of them shouted as they saw us watching. According to the SWP's internal *Party Notes*, the EDL managed only to attract their "hardcore following", while "soft supporters" stayed at home (September 5). This is not what it looked like to us.

We noted among the crowd a small young Jewish contingent, an Asian face, Roberta Moore from the EDL's Zionist 'division'. Following her came an athletic builder type holding up the national flag of Poland. Rather than being driven by drunken hatred, it appeared to us as if some of these people were here out of a sense of community and solidarity, however distorted. Unity at the expense of an excluded scapegoat, of course, is one of fascism's oldest tricks - however inclusive the assembly might appear otherwise.

Major scuffles were continuously



Martin Smith: many hats

breaking out at the front, and later we found out that the march resulted in 60 arrests (all from the EDL contingent) - for assault on a police officer, common assault, drunk and disorderly behaviour and affray. At one point, a hooligan contingent surged out of the police ranks, trapping us against a wall for a short time. On Whitechapel Road, we noted a number of incidents, including a line of Asian youths standing silently, being stopped and rigorously searched by police.

Returning to our original starting point in Whitechapel, we found it was now serene, with tell-tale placards strewn on the empty streets, and SWP members languishing outside pubs, congratulating each other on their 'victory'. We spoke to an SWP organiser who was in dire need of getting some frustrations off his chest. During our absence the numbers of counter-protestors had been bolstered by Asian youths and anarchists, who had collectively defied police orders and started to march west towards Aldgate. The comrade told us he was jubilant when this happened, considering their defiance of the marching ban to be a brave and commendable act. Many rank and file SWP members enthusiastically joined the foray. However, once

down the road, the UAF leadership, armed with megaphones, directed the march to turn around, stating that their objective had been achieved.

Socialist Worker Online reported: "There is jubilation on the streets of east London. The EDL have scurried off home, without setting foot in Tower Hamlets. Anti-racists are now holding a 'victory march' down Whitechapel Road and returning to their rally point. Together they have filled the width of the road, and are being cheered by onlookers and crowds gathered around the East London Mosque. Within a few minutes they will be back at the rally point at Vallance Road, where their day began."

The comrade we spoke to, however, was not jubilant, unable to reconcile the "victory" the central committee had proclaimed with the feelings of the people he was marching with. "It's not right," he said, "that the CC should turn around a march that was started by the people, and not take their wishes into consideration. There are problems in this organisation." Later, he wryly added: "I'm not trying to recruit you - don't worry." In a real Communist Party, of course, he would be able to address any "problems in the organisation" openly in its press.

Whether this was a "victory" or not is hard to tell. One rather symbolic achievement was that both sides were able to defy Theresa May's anti-democratic ban on marching, if only for a few hundred metres. Placards were waved and slogans were chanted on both sides, despite police threats that this kind of behaviour would lead to arrest. At the time of writing, however, it is still unclear how exactly the 1,000-strong EDL contingent got from Kings Cross to Tower Hamlets. Were they, after all, able to catch tube trains to Liverpool Street once the RMT's half-hour closure of the station was over? Or did the Met give them a guided tour from A to B at ground level?

Having seen the EDL in action and up close, it is fair to say that a pitched battle would have ensued had both sides come head to head. The reader may decide who would have emerged victorious out of this particular confrontation. One gleeful consolation we take away with us is the story reported the next day in the press: upon leaving London, one of the EDL's hired coaches broke down. Pissed to the gills and wanting to get back home, they lost their temper and rioted until the cops arrived and arrested every single one of them. Another classic EDL coup!

We broadly agree with what comrade Jack Conrad said in the CPGB podcast of September 4: in order to counter reactionary politics in the long run, we will need a Communist Party that is capable of mobilising communities, just as the historical CPGB was able to mobilise the working class against Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s - not just physically, but politically (<http://cpgb.podbean.com/2011/09/05/edl-protests>). The self-evident, practical problem is that such a party does not exist at present, and we cannot pull one out of a hat at short notice.

What would be the alternative in present circumstances? Shall we allow groups such as the EDL to march triumphantly through Asian working class neighbourhoods without any opposition? Fascist groups tend to attract losers, and they do so by projecting an image of strength, unity and power. As evidenced by the precarious working class contingent within the EDL ranks, the army of losers may be growing in these days of economic crisis. As people feel the carpet being pulled from under their feet, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether the imaginary 'Islamic threat' is really of such importance to some of these confused protestors - or just a pretext to march alongside others ●

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