



weekly worker

**British army torture in Basra:
the line of responsibility
goes right to the top**

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Either openly and
unambiguously side
with the cause of
the working class,
or, in the name of
god, go!



LETTERS



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

Sleight of hand

Terry Burns says, quite correctly, that we should always “be honest about our ideas and the ideas of others” (Letters, September 8). However, I am not sure the comrade is following his own advice.

He objects strongly to the criticisms in my article (‘Aftermath of August’, September 1) of the stance adopted by the Socialist Party in England and Wales during the recent riots, finding them “sectarian” and “childish” - especially the suggestion that the organisation wants to reverse the cuts to the police service or has illusions in the police as a body capable of defending working people’s interests. Apparently, I am guilty of “taking out of context” 19 words from the original online article by Sarah Sachs-Eldridge (‘Tottenham riots: fatal police shooting sparks eruption of protest and anger’ - <http://tinyurl.com/4ylhsyd>).

Comrade Burns states that this section of the article was not expressing SPEW’s “view of the police”, but was merely reporting those of “local people” - namely, that “there is widespread anger that the police did not act effectively to defend people’s homes and local small businesses and shops”. Instead, according to the comrade, we should consult the “list of programmatic aims and demands” in the article’s final paragraphs in order to ascertain SPEW’s real position.

Yet, at the risk of further offending comrade Burns, an examination of both the ‘offending’ passage and the demands acts more to expose SPEW’s congenial left reformism than disprove it. Yes, it may be true that SPEW was reporting on local people’s feelings, but it did so *approvingly* - albeit using the journalistic sleight of hand that is unfortunately so common on the left today. For instance, *Socialist Worker* is always full of ‘ordinary’ workers who just happen to spout the current SWP line on this or that. Similarly, SPEW’s “local people” and their views are a sounding board for the organisation’s own reformism. Presumably, to put forward a principled Marxist position on the riots would be a manifestation of unBritish ‘ultra-leftism’.

Hence we read in comrade Sachs-Eldridge’s article: “Given how widely predicted rioting was, there was also anger that police were not prepared to protect local areas. Many blamed government cuts to police services.” *Immediately* after that we have the following quote from Paul Deller of the Metropolitan Police Federation: “Morale among the police officers dealing with this incident, and within the police service as a whole, is at its lowest level ever due to the constant attacks on them by the home secretary and the government in the form of the reviews into police pay and conditions.”

Why would you quote Deller in such a manner if all you wanted to do was show what working class people were thinking and feeling? In reality, SPEW journalists are not so innocent. Quite obviously, the article was written this way so as to give the effect that ordinary local people, the MPF and SPEW all agree that police cuts are a regrettable thing.

Let us take comrade Burns’ advice and look at the article’s very first ‘programmatic’ demand: “An independent, trade union-led inquiry into the death of Mark Duggan. Scrap the IPCC. We need police accountability through democratic control by local people.” This demand flatly contradicts comrade Burns’ protestations that SPEW has no illusions in the police. If they were

made accountable in such a way, then surely it stands to reason that they would then be more willing or able to “act effectively” and “defend” working class estates - the implication is clear and does not need a particular imaginative *Weekly Worker* journalist to invent hidden meanings. And in this context, the demand in the final bullet point (“No to all cuts in jobs and public services”) can only be read to include the police.

But if comrade Burns could care to explain where I have gone wrong in my reasoning, then that would be most helpful for future debates on this issue.

Eddie Ford
email

Facile

When writing about the recent riots in terms of the sub-proletariat’s looting and burning rampage, I was responding to the facile idea, prevalent in trendy left circles, that the riots were ‘political’ and should be celebrated as such by the left (Letters, September 1).

My point was that the left is deluding itself precisely because the riots were not a conscious political act, but largely opportunistic self-aggrandisement. The point has been made repeatedly on the left that the riots were triggered by the cops shooting an alleged gangster in Tottenham. If you read the papers, black and white youth are knifing and gunning themselves to death every other day of the week in London, but, hey, where are the riots over that? If a cop kills an alleged gangster, the gangs don’t like the police to stray onto their patch - especially when there were also reports that the police had allegedly agreed a ‘passive coexistence’ policy with some gangs in north London.

James Turley raises the serious question as to whether rebel behaviour needs psychoanalysis when politics is the answer (Letters, September 8). The answer in terms of psychoanalysis is to be found, in my view, predominantly in attachment theory and research. But this is a thorny area for socialists and communists after decades of the vilification of psychiatrist John Bowlby (*et al*) by feminists who want to destroy the family. The left allowed David Cameron and the Tories to advance their agenda by arguing for stronger families and communities.

My argument is that the left needs to think again about how we are the real communitarians and thus that the families and communities we need to build are based on returning respect to men as husbands, fathers and sons. In areas of high unemployment it is often the women who are working and the men who are redundant: families are broken by grindingly insecure blue-collar work. The boys and girls lack a secure base within a stable family structure with two mutually supportive parents.

I agree with comrade Turley that only socialism can provide the basis to rebuild the social solidarity needed for stable families and communities. Rebel psychology stems from broken families. Thus my argument is against economism. Jemma French also makes the point that my critique was inadequate (Letters, September 8). The left has to be clear that rebel psychology can go either way - proto-fascistic, or proto-socialist - but it is not axiomatic that the hoodies looting, vandalising and burning down your estate and local shops are being political. It is not my hatred, comrade Turley; it is their hatred which is manifest in their aggression and destructiveness.

In other words, we are being intellectually and morally lazy to think that the rioters were revolutionaries. A pity that they did not join political parties en masse, but they didn’t. Why? Because the left has just as much failed these yobs as anybody else: the Labour Party through its

focus on the rich, the celebrities, the salariat; and the ‘confessional sects’ and the feminists engaging in ever decreasing circles of sectarianism and family-bashing, allowing the rightwing Tories the political space to offer their own ‘remedies’ for ‘broken Britain’ as hegemonic.

Henry Mitchell
London

Load of testicles

For Heather Downs, my 1991 book, *Blood relations*, is “among the most reactionary pieces of biological determinism ever promoted by the left” (Letters, September 8). Since my whole book was a sustained attack precisely on biological determinism, I am puzzled.

I note that the longest paragraph in comrade Downs’ letter is taken from a standard sociobiology textbook. It’s all about the relative testicle sizes of gorillas, bonobos and humans, the evidence (as she writes) “indicating female humans were originally predisposed to be less ‘promiscuous’ than bonobos, but not as monogamous as gorillas ...” Of all Heather’s points, that’s the one (unfortunately, the only one) which is both relevant and scientifically accurate. Yes, human males (and females) are biologically well designed for a certain degree of non-monogamy. But here’s the irony: argumentation of this kind, deriving ancestral social patterns from currently observed biological facts such as testicle size, is the very essence of the field once known as ‘sociobiology’. Is comrade Downs aware that she’s relying, here, precisely on that dreaded disciplinary field?

So on what grounds is all this so deeply reactionary? Apparently, my book “relies on sociobiology - the idea that society and culture derive purely from a biological base”. Well, that’s a hopelessly slipshod definition of ‘sociobiology’, which is (or was - scientists no longer call themselves ‘sociobiologists’) the application of ‘selfish gene’ theory from the animal world directly to humans.

Blood relations was a sustained attack on precisely that school of thought. It was an attack on sociobiology, as expounded by its rightwing ideological champions in the 1970s and 80s, turning their arguments upside-down. I explained how, thanks to the ‘human revolution’, our species - alone in the natural world - succeeded in transcending biological determinism. If comrade Downs didn’t read that part of my book, which part did she read?

Leaving my particular contribution aside, the fact is that anyone at all who is trying to explain the evolutionary transition from biology to culture has no choice but to do what the comrade condemns - namely, “derive society and culture from a purely biological base”. That’s because originally planet Earth featured only physics, chemistry and biology. Society and culture came later. Anyone doing evolutionary science - attempting to explain how society and culture first emerged - must derive the second somehow from the first. That’s true by definition. Hence my observation that Heather herself does precisely that when she derives ancestral human sexual predispositions from testicle size. Is there something subtly cultural about human testicles? Is this what makes their study politically correct in this comrade’s case, but not mine? Am I missing something? If not, then what exactly is comrade Downs’ problem here?

As for her positive suggestions, I am not impressed. She says that in hunter-gatherer societies, those women who happen to be sufficiently free of childcare burdens ought to go out and hunt for their own meat, assisted where possible by their brothers. There’s just

one small problem with this idea. It’s not what hunter-gatherers actually do. Far from it: a man who hunted and offered meat to his sister would in most contexts face accusations of incest. Women normally don’t expect that kind of thing from their brothers: instead, they insist that in-marrying males ‘earn their keep’ by hunting and bringing the meat home. A lazy husband, as Engels notes, would find the house “too hot for him”. He would likely be thrown out and sent back to his mother by the womenfolk acting in solidarity.

The obligation of in-marrying men to work continuously as a condition of their marital rights is called ‘bride-service’. It’s the fundamental hunter-gatherer economic institution. You don’t have to call it ‘sex strike’, but it amounts to the same thing. Women, in any event, make things crystal clear: if you don’t help out, you get no sex. Read Engels again. I’ve always thought that a scientific theory ought to explain the facts, not some ideological picture of how things ought to be in an imaginary world.

Chris Knight
Lewisham

Saxon plumbing

Early human birth control apart, there may be more than one kind of problem in finding arguments for a global egalitarian society in prehistory.

An early society of hunter-gatherers could indeed be ‘primitive communist’, but it might be a kind of communism that leaves a lot to be desired. Recent researchers into hunter-gatherer groups, whether Aborigine, Inuit or Pygmy, have found that the men do indeed hunt in bands and the achievement of their end is treated as a collective product - no-one owns the kill. However, when the hunt returns to the group, the meat is distributed according to seniority, not need. Women, on the other hand, have the role of gathering vegetables and fruit; then each woman cooks for an individual man, whom we would call her partner, and who is often from another faction or moiety of the group.

This social system binds men and women, families and factions, in a strong, communal framework defined by specific roles - bound by that and by the first attempt at explaining the world: animistic religion. With the emergence of private property, in herds or land, a few individuals and families became more powerful: that is, patriarchal.

If, though, we ask for a social system based on early human culture/biology, will we be trusted not to be hankering after a return to tribalism, strict gender roles or Saxon plumbing?

Mike Belbin
email

Dogma

Tony Greenstein still doesn’t get it. In a conversation with a Matzpen comrade, a former journalist acquaintance of his remarked on the Israeli social protest: “At last we are learning something from the Arabs.” I reported her appreciative remark in an article, as a hopeful sign; whereupon comrade Greenstein (‘Support the Israeli protest movement without illusions’, August 11) reviled it as a “racist” remark, as though she had said: ‘At last the Arabs have something to teach us’, and he chided me for reporting it “uncritically”.

Instead of apologising, Tony - who, unlike the Matzpen comrade, does not know the woman who made the original remark and was not present when it was made - now insists that “by itself the remark can clearly be construed” as racist and used to illustrate “a viewpoint common to settler-colonial peoples” (Letters, September 8).

It is indicative of Tony’s thinking that he distorts a positive remark so as to fit in with his dogma that the Hebrew nation will ever be irredeemably racist, irrespective of any regional transformations.

Moshé Machover
email

Co-op coal

Dave Douglass both misrepresents the argument I put forward against him and fails to answer the points made (Letters, September 8).

My argument was that the reason many things are now produced in other countries is that the capitalists in these countries can produce them more cheaply than can British capitalists. He presents this as me saying that these foreign capitalists are more efficient. I said no such thing and Dave has to chop another sentence later in order to make that argument. In fact, I gave a number of reasons as to why that could be, including the use of cheap labour - to which you could add lower safety standards if you wanted to be picky. Nor did I suggest that capitalism was doing this for the good of mankind. I made the point that so long as capitalism exists this will be the way that decisions on where to produce will be made. It’s not an argument, as Dave suggests later, for doing nothing, but for replacing capitalism!

Dave then concentrates all of his firepower on demonstrating that the efficiency argument that I had never made did not apply to coal. In fact, I admitted it was true that British coal was cheaper than foreign coal. However, I pointed out that the reason for closing pits was not due to the average cost of production being too high, but to there simply being too much coal being produced for the needs of the National Coal Board’s main customers - CEGB and British Steel. When it came to which pits to close in order to reduce this oversupply, then it was natural that the NCB would look first to those pits where the actual cost of production was highest. As someone with inside information, perhaps Dave could give us the actual figures for the cost of production at Cortonwood, or the other pits initially put up for closure, compared with those figures for France, Germany, etc. I think he knows that, in fact, as I said in my original letter, the UK average figure was only low because of the effect of the very efficient production at Selby and other super pits.

Dave then tells us about the benefits of state capitalist ownership of the mines, though apparently state ownership of the mines in Russia, eastern Europe and China does not seem to have had the same results. Of course, in telling us about the workers’ control introduced into the mines, which actually was little different to the system of mutuality introduced into car factories and elsewhere as part of the system of Fordism, Dave fails to mention that when it came to the most important requirement for such control, preventing the closure of pits, it was useless. It was not just useless under Thatcher, but had been useless when the even greater number of pits and job losses occurred in the first years after nationalisation. Nor did nationalisation and this workers’ control do much for miners’ wages during that time, which is why we had the bitter strikes of 1972 and 1974.

The one place where there had been something approaching workers’ control was in the cooperative-owned pits. But this was ended when these pits were also scooped up by the capitalist state. Yet Dave is scornful of the idea that workers really *should* have workers’ control over the pits, when he scoffs at the idea of setting up co-ops. But he’s wrong to do so because he then scoffs at his comrades

at Tower colliery in Wales who proved him wrong. Tower colliery was unable to be run profitably either by the state capitalists or by private capitalists. Yet its workers took it over and ran it themselves. They not only ran it profitably, efficiently and safely, but were able to increase the number of miners employed there, until it became physically exhausted a few years ago.

Those who argue the profitability line against closures, as Bob Crow did over Vestas, for example, should have the courage of their convictions like the miners at Tower. If a business really is profitable, then why would workers want to hand it over to the capitalist state and continue their own exploitation at its hands? If a business is profitable in the way that Dave argues about coal, then surely workers should seize the opportunity to end their exploitation and to take ownership of the means of production themselves.

Dave says he was not advocating nationalisation of Bombardier, but it's not clear what his solution to the situation there would be other than calling on the Tories to give them the contract anyway. Yet it's clear that, across the globe, workers have been able to operate efficient cooperative enterprises that really are under their control. Perhaps that is why Marx and Engels, who based themselves on solutions that the workers had already developed themselves, looked to such an approach rather than on reformist calls for help from the capitalist state. Perhaps that is why they were able to look to the building of international working class solidarity as the basis of the workers' response to capitalism rather than on calls for nationalistic solutions.

Arthur Bough
email

Capital idea

Having read Tickin's article on surplus capital, I should note that he's not the only Marxist who emphasises surplus capital (and the lack of investment opportunities) over rates of profit ('The theory of capitalist disintegration', September 8). David Harvey is another such Marxist.

However, I have also read other material that suggests that the emphasis on finance capital, financialisation, etc *à la* Hilferding may be quite overrated, to say the least. This also puts a dent on vulgar 'popular' discourse on the matter. Here I will mention another form of 'macro' capital (like industrial and finance capital, as opposed to the 'micro' variable capital, constant capital, money capital, productive capital, commercial capital, etc).

Two Russian Marxists - Michael Prokovsky and your very own comrade, Boris Kagarlitsky - introduce trade capital. The former ignored finance capital, while the latter said in an interview with India's *Frontline* that finance capital is merely subordinate to either industrial capital or trade capital at any given period of time. For example, neoliberalism is merely another period whereby it is subordinate to trade capital, and this in turn may explain more accurately tendencies towards export of capital (from classical Marxism on imperialism) and towards import of capital by the most developed capitalist countries.

I'd like to read an elaboration on the subordination of finance capital to one or the other form of 'macro' capital (again, industrial versus trade) in a given period, and how this plus surplus capital plays some role in particular crises.

Jacob Richter
email

British road

The essence of the *British road to socialism* is an alliance between the CPGB and a reformed or left Labour Party. The recent CPGB turn to the

right and advocacy of a reformed Labour Party is no more than a reminder or revelation of this totality. This is not to claim that the current turn is exactly the same as the old idea.

If the Labour Party is a workers' party, albeit with a degenerated bourgeois leadership, then such a CPGB-Labour Party alliance is an expression of a workers' united front. If the Labour Party is a bourgeois party supported by a section of the trade union bureaucracy, then we have a form of popular front. In this latter case the Labour Party is an enemy party, albeit with a grip over the minds of working class people who trust or believe Labour represents them.

Hence the phrase 'bourgeois workers' party' is vital, if only for its ambiguity, which conceals the class nature of the Labour Party. Labour actually has support and membership from bourgeois, middle class and working class people. But Marxism does not define the class essence of a party by its composition or who votes for it. The question is, which class does this party serve by its policies and actions, most clearly when in power? 'What does the Labour government do?' - not 'What does the Labour Party say?'

The Labour Party has a proven track record as a bourgeois party. In its most recent guise as New Labour it was in league with Rupert Murdoch, as it was years ago with Robert Maxwell, the press baron, who openly supported the Labour Party and stole his workers' pensions. This is not to claim that the Labour Party is the same as other bourgeois parties such as the Tories.

There is no equals sign between Labour and Tory. One cracks open the champers whenever the working class is shafted. The other cries buckets of crocodile tears if necessary. I will leave you to work out which is which (and the answer is not always obvious). To claim that the conservative and reactionary bourgeoisie and the liberal reformist bourgeoisie both serve the capitalist class is not to say they are the same.

Lenin treated the liberal bourgeois parties as worthy of the greatest invective. Partly this was because the liberals were posing as the friend of the workers, whilst hatching the most invidious plots and sell-outs. Workers could be deceived by the sonorous phrases of the liberals, not least when the Mensheviks were supporting and seeking popular fronts with them. Workers are not likely to be deceived by the Tories, but may have illusions in Labour.

In 1920 many saw the Labour Party as a workers' party. It had never taken power and revealed its essence. Lenin pointed out that this 'workers' party' was led by reactionaries in the service of the bourgeoisie. Lenin's corrective, taken out of context, has been set in stone as dogma. 'Bourgeois workers' party' conceals the class essence of the Labour Party. It 'unites' those who see it as bourgeois and those who think it is basically proletarian.

The two-party strategy of the *British road* is in essence a popular front. Its aim is for a left Labour government. Illusions in this are most dangerous at a time when Labour is likely to turn left. The militant workers need their own fighting party, not illusions that the Labour Party will fight rather than make left noises and sabotage any workers' struggles.

We need a republican socialist party, not Her Majesty's reformed Labour Party.

Steve Freeman
South London

EDL invasion

On my way to work last week, I saw a large congregation of short-haired white men, before them a flowing St George's flag. Seeing this caused me a great deal of concern, especially the words 'EDL: Bolton division'

written on said flag. These men were crowded outside the bar where I work and occupied much space within it. I'm ashamed to say that I covered my CPGB pin, as I briskly walked through the mob. I can tell you, being a single communist walking through an army of fascists is not a pleasant feeling - I had always hoped that, upon meeting the EDL, I would have a substantial number of comrades by my side.

Having made it to the staff room, I was greeted by the manager on duty, to whom I could only say: "EDL. Everywhere." She then informed me that the police had been called and until their arrival we should just try not to give them a reason to become violent. I was given the option of staying in the staff room if I so wished, but, as there were only two people at the bar - both foreigners and facing over 100 nationalist thugs - I decided this was no time for cowardice.

At the bar I was greeted by a sea of slack-jawed, dull-eyed faces, from which the words "Stella!", "Fosters!" and "Heineken!" emanated, and little else. I found it ironic that a group called the *English* Defence League had such a slender grasp on the concept of queuing. As such, I resigned myself to pulling pints at as fast a pace as possible, and keeping my head down. There was some chanting - mostly involving the words, 'England till we die' - but many of the people were quite polite when spoken to on an individual basis. Across the road, however, I was told that the highly intimidated Asian shopkeepers suffered a fair amount of shoplifting.

Once the bourgeois law enforcement had finally arrived, after half an hour, they were unsurprisingly little help, and it was then decided we would simply close. As they left, some of the nationalists expressed their confusion at such a decision. One older member said: "You're losing thousands by doing this. We've been making you money." I didn't bother explaining that what I earn doesn't go up with the bar's profits.

Simon Cornish
email

Plane view

Just look at the video 'In plane site' (www.brasschecktv.com/videos/the-911-files/911-in-plane-site.html). Stick with it. It lays the blame for 9/11 and the wars which followed on the US government, military and the arms industry and is pretty convincing.

I always thought this was a conspiracy too far, but the documentary is really mind-boggling. I won't write any more - just watch it. It's well-made and just over an hour long. I haven't watched the other videos on this site, but this one alone was enough to convince me that something very big is being covered up.

Tony Papard
email

Pension fight

The TUC have finally opted for industrial action in response to the refusal to soften the various elements of the proposed pension changes - a 50%-100% increase in salary contributions, loss of the final salary scheme and the raising of pensionable age to 66 and eventually 68. Unison, Unite and the GMB have finally agreed to start balloting members and therefore fall in with the other unions who have been urging action for months. They are the largest unions and as such are in a good bargaining position.

The attack on pensions is to 'reduce the national deficit'. Those of us still 'lucky' enough to have employment will now be paying a large chunk to the bankers and then living in poverty when we eventually retire. A bleak future for the workers, that can only be dispelled by political and industrial action and civil disobedience.

Eleanor Lakew
London

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Science of myth, magic and folklore

Saturday September 17, 11am to 5pm: Radical anthropology taster day, room V221, School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London WC1. Including sessions on: human origins; decoding fairy tales; hunter-gatherers and the moon; anthropology and the fight for another world.

Admission free. Bookstall space available. Being snack food to share. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: camilla.power@gmail.com.

For a secular Europe

Saturday September 17, 10.30am: March, Temple Place, London WC2. Oppose special privileges for religion and people of faith. The state must not accommodate religious prejudice and intolerance.

Supported by British Humanist Association, National Secular Society and Peter Tatchell Foundation: www.petertatchellfoundation.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>.

Afghanistan: time to get out

Wednesday September 21, 7pm: Public meeting, Unite offices, 211 Broad Street, Birmingham B15. Speakers include George Galloway).

Organised by Birmingham Stop the War: 07775 942841.

Breaking the silence

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

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

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.

Jarrow march 2011

Saturday October 1, 12noon: March, Jarrow Park. Recreating the Jarrow March of 75 years ago.

Organised by Youth Fight for Jobs: www.jarrowmarch11.com.

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.

Latin America 2011

Saturday October 8, 6.30pm: Lecture, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Noam Chomsky on solidarity with Latin America. Tickets £5: 020 8800 0155.

Organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

Rebellious media

Saturday October 8, & Sunday October 9, 10am: Conference, Central London (venue tbc). 'Media, activism and social change.'

Speakers include: Noam Chomsky; John Pilger, Laurie Penny, Johann Hari, Matthew Alford, Zoe Broughton, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts, New Economics Foundation, Open Rights Group, Spinwatch, UK Uncut and many more.

Organised by Radical Media Conference: www.radicalmediaconference.org.

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.

UNIONS

Side with working class or, in the name of god, go

The TUC congress represented a positive step towards united working class resistance against coalition attacks, writes **Peter Manson**

This week's three-day Trade Union Congress, which ended on September 14, marked a distinct step towards united, practical resistance to the government assault on public services, pensions and union rights.

With union delegates voting overwhelmingly for coordinated industrial action, Labour leader Ed Miliband disgracefully spoke against striking and repeatedly urged negotiations. Posing as the workers' friend, in effect he did the work of the Tories. Frankly, he looks like a loser. Affiliated unions and Labour Party members alike should tell this Judas in no uncertain terms: either openly and unambiguously side with the cause of the working class or, in the name of god, go!

The congress got off to an excellent start with the unanimously agreed composite on trade union rights. This called on the TUC to "develop an industrial strategy of resistance, so that workers are not left to fight alone against draconian laws and exploitative bosses. The TUC should respond to any further attempts to shackle working people's rights with a coordinated campaign and supporting action."

Of course, this motion did not specify what form the "industrial strategy of resistance" should take - no doubt this vagueness contributed to the unanimity. But Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and his GMB counterpart, Paul Kenny, were pretty clear in their calls for what McCluskey called "mass civil disobedience". Kenny said: "If going to prison is the price to pay for standing up to bad laws, then so be it."

It was significant that the composite was moved and seconded by two of the big three unions, Unite and GMB, which did not take part in the coordinated strikes against cuts on June 30.

The third June 30 absentee and main public sector union, Unison, moved the composite motions on both the coalition attack on public sector pensions and its swingeing cuts package. The overwhelmingly agreed pensions motion demanded that the general council "ensure" that "the TUC continues to coordinate opposition to the government's proposals, including support for further coordinated negotiations and for further industrial action as necessary, coordinated as far as possible among the public sector unions".

The left-led Public and Commercial Services union had put in a motion which read: "Congress expresses its concern at the pathetic response of the Labour leadership and instructs the TUC general council to press for support for future action in defence of the agreement signed with the last Labour government." After the word "pathetic" was changed to a more diplomatic "unsatisfactory", this was included in the agreed text. But the composite left untouched the PCS-drafted instruction to the general council to "give full support to industrial action against pensions cuts, including action planned for this autumn, and maximise its coordination". Also included in the composite were Unite, the NUT, National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women



Ed Miliband: Judas

Teachers, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Fire Brigades Union, amongst others.

On the general assault on public services, PCS, the Communication Workers Union, University and College Union and NASUWT all put in separate, militantly worded motions proposing united strike action. The resulting composite instructed the general council to "support and coordinate campaigning and joint union industrial action against attacks on jobs, pensions, pay or public services". Such coordination should include "either national, sectoral or regional activity, either one-off or discontinuous".

Also agreed was a motion from the TUC women's conference calling on the general council to "build support for coordinated industrial action in defence of public service jobs and conditions in line with TUC policy".

So, at least on paper, there is now a crystal-clear commitment to resist the various attacks from the coalition government through united strikes, and there is no doubt that within a few weeks - probably towards the end of November - there will be another day of action, this time involving up to 2.5 million workers, compared to the 750,000 who struck in June. With the big three all now committed to a strike ballot, more than a dozen unions may be involved.

In this context it is worth mentioning that the Socialist Workers Party has revived the grandstanding slogan, 'All out, stay out'. The internal *Party Notes* reports that the SWP has agreed a detailed position on the current situation, which includes this section: "We don't turn our back on any form of action, but the scale of the attack and the crisis in society mean that sectional or partial strikes are utterly inadequate. Our slogan is 'All out and stay out'. We want a general strike and then continuous action" (September 12: www.swp.org.uk/party-notes).

Once again it must be emphasised

that calls for an indefinite general strike, isolated to Britain, in the absence of an armed working class and without a steered, mass class party aiming to seize power, are just childish posturing. It is true that current TUC plans are "utterly inadequate" against the background of the coalition government's austerity drive, but they are real and they do represent a step in the right direction.

First and foremost our movement must be equipped with the necessary *politics* - but the SWP only looks to building its own confessional sect. Showing what the 'All out, stay out' slogan is really about, its central committee has the target of increasing SWP membership by 1,000 this year.

No different

Leaving aside the SWP's big talk and petty ambitions, the TUC demonstrated that Ed Miliband is no different from the other Labour misleaders who have gone before him. Spluttering and bumbling, the Labour leader repeated his opposition to the planned strikes: "I fully understand why millions of decent public sector workers feel angry. But, while negotiations were going on, I do believe it was a mistake for strikes to happen. I continue to believe that." Instead of taking the side of those under attack, like Ramsay MacDonald, Clem Attlee, Hugh Gaitskill, Harold Wilson and Neil Kinnock he urged nationalistic class collaboration: "Of course, the right to industrial action will be necessary, as a last resort. But, in truth, strikes are always the consequence of failure. Failure we cannot afford as a nation." Unions were told to take up their "real role" as "partners in the new economy". Absurdly, treacherously, he said: "... what we need now is meaningful negotiation to prevent further confrontation over the autumn."

In the following brief question-and-answer session, Association of Teachers and Lecturers president Mary Bousted, whose union was one

of the four that walked out on June 30, told Miliband what he already knew: "Just for information, the government are not prepared to negotiate" - except about "how to implement the changes they have decided" already.

And PCS president Janice Godrich, a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, challenged Miliband to "stand up on the side of hundreds and thousands of workers whose pensions are under attack". Would he "defend the negotiated settlement" agreed by the unions with the last Labour government? And if so would he "support trade unionists taking industrial action to defend that deal"?

Obviously not: "What I'm going to say is that the best thing that can be done is to avoid industrial action happening by a government willing to properly negotiate," said Miliband. "That is what needs to happen."

Comrade Godrich was right to call on him to take sides - although you might think that a SPEW member would consider it misplaced to make a demand for solidarity on the leader of just another "bourgeois party". And no doubt SPEW will have very much regretted the cheers that greeted Miliband's renunciation of one of New Labour's primary aims: "... I value the link between the trade union movement and the Labour Party. It is why I will resist any attempt to break it." This huge applause - which stood in stark contrast to the jeers in response to Miliband's statement that the Tories are "cutting too far and too fast" - surely shows how foolish it is to write off Labour as a key site for struggle.

There were, of course, many weaknesses on display at the TUC. For insistence not a few motions were premised on the sectional notion that cuts must be opposed because of their "disproportionate impact" on low-income families, women, black workers, the disabled, LGBT people ... It was an accusation made in motions from Usdaw and other unions, the TUC women's conference and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender conference, and incorporated in subsequent composites.

The logic of this argument is that the cuts would be acceptable if only they were 'fairer' and all workers were affected equally: ie, if there were special protection to mitigate the extra impact on the above groups only. Surely we can all put up with a *little bit* of sacrifice?

Of course, a number of motions did reject the cuts in their entirety and placed the blame on the ruling class, or sections of it - at least in their original form. The FBU motion had read: "The chaos created by the major banks and financial institutions should be ended through full public ownership and the creation of a single, publicly owned banking service, democratically and accountably managed." During compositing, however, the meaning of this demand was completely negated by its incorporation in the motion on an "alternative economic strategy", calling for "improved access for industry to capital and finance to continue investment in UK manufacturing, *including through the creation* of a publicly owned

banking service, democratically and accountably managed" (my emphasis - note the removal of the word "single").

What began as a militant, anti-capitalist demand in the interest of our class was thus transformed into a nationalistic call to run British capitalism more efficiently. A pity the FBU still allowed it to go forward.

Nationalism

A similar nationalism was present in the composite deploring the government decision to award 'preferred bidder' status for the Thameslink contract to the German company, Siemens, rather than Bombardier in Derby. Not only did the successful motion state that the "British-designed Bombardier train" was "superior to that offered by Siemens", but it also committed the TUC to a policy whereby, "wherever possible, UK taxpayers' money is spent supporting the UK economy".

Mind you, when it comes to British nationalism, there was nothing to top the motion from that most proletarian of TUC affiliates, the Professional Footballers Association, calling for "a united Great Britain football team in the Olympic Games in London in 2012". Football and the Olympics, it declared, "allows the people of Britain to focus on what unites us and serves as a reminder of the great achievements that have come about when we have pulled together in the national interest." While there are, of course, "those who are against such a union", on this "special, once-in-a-generation occasion", the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish should "put aside our differences" and "ensure that we see Great Britain at its best".

Of course, this was passed - as was every motion put before congress.

In other decisions, the CWU resolution opposing the British National Party and English Defence League was amended in a disastrous way by Unison, so that the resulting composite not only gave support to Unite Against Fascism, Hope Not Hate, and One Society, Many Cultures, but came out in support of "the campaign to ban the EDL/SDL/WDL from holding demonstrations and rallies".

Talk about shooting yourself in the foot. The workers' movement should stand for free speech and assembly - not because we want to defend the 'rights' of the BNP or EDL, but because we know that state bans we accept will eventually be directed against the working class.

On a more positive note, international motions were agreed opposing the "war on terror", calling for the rapid withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan and stating that the attack on Libya was "misjudged" and "military action should be halted immediately"; and that international efforts should be focused on securing a peaceful political settlement to the conflict. Another motion reaffirmed support for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and for disinvestment from, and a boycott of the goods of, "companies who profit from illegal settlements, the occupation and the construction of the wall" •

BANKS

Tinkering at the edges

The Vickers report confirms that it is the system itself that is bankrupt, writes **Eddie Ford**

To much fanfare, September 12 saw the unveiling of the 358-page report by the Independent Commission on Banking, issuing its recommendations almost three years to the day after the catastrophic Lehman Brothers collapse.

The official remit of the ICB, which was set up last year, was to examine how taxpayers could be “protected” from any future banking crises - ie, not have to bail out the banks every time they dug themselves into a hole. As we all know, the last credit crunch led to the nationalisation of Northern Rock and the part-nationalisation of the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds - with the government now owning stakes of 83% and 41% respectively. The bankers mess up; we pay. Welcome to the free market of the 21st century.

Sir John Vickers, the warden of All Souls College, Oxford, who heads the ICB, has been dubbed the “competition guru”. He declared that the report was “fundamental” and “far-reaching”, despite the fact that it does not call for the break-up and separation of the banks - a demand backed by Vince Cable, for one, when he was in opposition. Not sounding quite so radical now. In fact, hype aside, even the ICB admits that in reality its proposals for reform are “deliberately composed of moderate elements” - we mustn’t terrify the bankers or the markets. The supposed ‘wealth creators’, who, of course, are nothing of the sort; rather, exploiters of productive capital.

Further diminishing its radical credentials, the Vickers report gives the bankers until 2019 to implement all the reforms - in order to coincide, or so it argues, with the international capital rule changes being introduced by the Basel Accords (agreed by the members of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision) which - in theory - will see the setting up of risk and capital management requirements designed to ensure that a bank holds capital reserves appropriate to the risk the bank exposes itself to through its lending and investment practices.¹

Without wanting to be too cynical, one could be forgiven for thinking that such a far-off deadline will give the bankers plenty of opportunity to avoid and undermine even the relatively modest reforms outlined in the Vickers report. Especially when you consider that the changes envisaged are essentially voluntary or ‘self-regulatory’ - no big stick to beat them into line if they fail to comply with the various recommendations. Just hope that they act like gentlemen and do the decent thing.

The ICB’s main and most discussed recommendation is to “ring-fence” retail banking from ‘casino’ investment - meaning that the retail banks would be the only institutions granted permission to provide “mandated services”, like taking deposits from and making loans to individuals and small businesses. The report also says that the different arms or sections of banks should be made into “separate legal entities” with independent boards.

In this way, the ICB calculates that up to £2 trillion of assets - including all the domestic high street banking services - could find itself behind this ring-fence or “firewall”, given that that the aggregate balance sheets of the UK’s banks comes to over £6 trillion and that between one-sixth and one-third of these should be protected from investment banking operations.

As for the other significant recommendations, they include the contention that UK retail operations must hold equity capital of at least 10% of their risk-weighted assets and that the large banking groups should have primary “loss-absorbing” capacity of at least 17%-20% - including unsecured bank debt that regulators could require to bear losses (so-called ‘bail-in’ bonds) and contingent capital or ‘cocos’ (ie, contingent convertibles)² that can also absorb losses. The report also wants to help customers easily switch current accounts, calling for a free redirection service to be formed by September 2013.

Costs

John Vickers counselled against taking a “pick and mix” approach to the ICB’s proposals - it had to be implemented in full to be effective.

Fingers crossed, he optimistically predicted that from 2019 onwards - or whenever his proposals finally get acted upon - it would be “easier” and “less costly” to “resolve banks that get into trouble”; needlessly risky activities and operations could be closed down far quicker. Overall, he maintained, the ICB’s package will “reduce systemic risk” and the ring-fencing will “strengthen”, not weaken, the flow of credit to businesses and consumers - as, apparently, it will “insulate” UK banks from “global financial shocks” and end the need for government guarantees, thus reducing the damage to public finances.

So, yes, Vickers concluded, the new ring-fence will raise costs for banking groups, particular for those activities outside the ring-fence. But all that this does is return risk-bearing to where it rightfully belongs in an ideal capitalist world - with the investors and speculators, not the

downtrodden taxpayer.

Overall then, the estimated cost to the banks of implementing the ICB’s reforms is somewhere between £4 billion and £7 billion. Vickers stated, or hoped, that the cost would be about one-tenth of 1% to ordinary retail customers, with the banks themselves absorbing some or most of the extra costs. Indeed, on the BBC’s *Today* programme, Vickers drew an explicit link between this estimate and the £7 billion that the fat cats of the big five high street banks actually paid themselves in bonuses last year; so, naturally, all they have to do is give up these bonuses and the reforms could be made without any increase in costs to mortgage and current account holders. And then watch the squadrons of pigs flying majestically across the sky.

Chancellor George Osborne gave his stamp of approval to the Vickers report. For him, it meant that UK banks could remain competitive, seeing how the government wants Britain and the City of London to be the “pre-eminent global centre for banking and finance” - it is businesses as usual in UK plc, almost like the good old days pre-2007. Well, maybe not. Naturally, Osborne had every intention of sticking to the report’s timetable and promised that legislation would be passed before the end of this parliament - a meaningless commitment, given that the time frame for the ICB’s recommendations takes us well beyond the next general election.

Naturally, there were discontented grumblings about the Vickers report from the usual suspects - such as the perpetually unhappy Confederation of British Industry. Predictably, and robotically, the CBI’s deputy director, Dr Neil Bentley, expressed concern that if ring-fencing went ahead then the UK would find itself “going it

alone” in the big, bad world - thus “damaging businesses”, “threatening growth” and in general posing a risk to British “competitiveness”. Pull back now before it is too late. In response, Martin Wolf - ICB member and a prominent journalist for the *Financial Times* - described the notion that the UK should desist from introducing ring-fencing just because no other country at this time is bringing in similar measures as a “ruinous” outlook that is tacitly premised on an indefinite taxpayer subsidy to the banks.

Crisis prevention?

There was another sort of criticism: just how would the proposed reform package prevent the type of failures we saw at Lehman, Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, Northern Rock, etc?

The ICB had an answer. Northern Rock, for example, failed because only 23% of its funding was from retail deposits, with the majority being wholesale funding. But if the ICB’s plan had been in operation back in 2007, then liquidity reforms and more attentive supervision would have restricted significantly its ability to pursue a strategy of rapid growth financed through wholesale funding - and the ring-fence would have complemented this with wholesale funding restrictions and by requiring greater equity capital. Furthermore, the ICB imagines, macro-prudential tools would also have leant against the rapid growth in credit provision that was central to its strategy. Ditto for the RBS in the view of the ICB: ring-fencing would have “isolated” its speculative European Economic Area banking operations from its global markets activities, where most of its losses arose.

Or so the ICB and John Vickers dream. Communists tend to agree, for once, with Brendan Barber - the general secretary of the Trade Union Congress - who thought that the report was “merely tinkering around the edges”. We also think that David Fleming, Unite’s national officer, was right to be singularly unimpressed by the report - believing it effectively “kicks the overdue reform of the banking sector into the long grass” and that the ICB’s ring-fence/firewall “will not in any material way impact on the behaviour or culture at the top of the banks, where this crisis was born”.

More bluntly, the ICB’s reform proposals are pie in the sky. The world will not stand idly by until 2019 while the UK in glorious isolation gets its banking act together - we are in crisis now. Fear and panic is spreading throughout the euro zone, not dissipating, and will have near immediate and massive repercussions for the UK’s banking/financial sector.

We had another intimation of this over the last week, when the markets freaked at the suggestion by Philipp Roesler, the German minister for economic affairs, that an “orderly default” by Greece could no longer be ruled out - even that squeezing the country out of the euro zone should be considered as the “last step” to protect the project as a whole.

It did not end there. Roesler’s sentiments were endorsed by leading figures in Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union and its coalition partner, the Bavarian Christian Social Union. Inevitably, the markets plunged and in the bond markets the yield on 10-year Greek debt hit a new record high of 25% in trading - making the country’s debt situation even more

impossible than it was before. What next?

Alarmed, Merkel hit out at any ‘defeatist’ talk of a Greek default - orderly, disorderly, chaotically or otherwise. Without specifically mentioning Roesler, the German chancellor urged her coalition partners to exercise “great caution” in voicing their views on Greece and to be aware of the “consequences” of loose talk. If not, she asserted, they could be “be putting the euro zone in a grave situation” - perhaps even leading the euro to its death.

The internal spat over the handling of the Greek debt crisis comes as Merkel has been trying to mobilise support from her coalition partners for a crucial parliamentary vote at the end of this month on expanding the European Financial Stability Facility’s bail-out powers and, critically, its funds. And the vote is looking close - very close. Several MPs of her ruling coalition have threatened to vote against a bill endorsing the July 21 decision by the euro zone leaders to beef up the EFSF mechanism. Last week a trial vote showed that the coalition was still short of more than 20 votes from its own ranks for the bill to pass and if the same happens during the upcoming vote in the Bundestag, the government will be forced to step down and call a re-election two years before its current term expires. Potentially throwing the euro zone into even greater crisis.

If things did not look bad enough, Italy is slipping deeper into debt and crisis. Holding another auction, the government raised €3.85 billion in five-year bonds - Italy has about €1.9 trillion of debt and must raise about €70 billion by the end of the year to sustain itself. But the yields on its debt reached another record high of 5.6%. Running faster and faster to stand still, until there is no option but to stagger backwards. Showing the desperation of Italy’s plight, it seems that the Italian finance ministry has met delegates from China’s largest sovereign wealth fund, China Investment Corp.

It is understood that Giulio Tremonti, minister of economics and finance, asked the Chinese delegation to consider buying Italy’s sovereign debt and making “strategic” investments in Italian companies. In return, senior Chinese official Wu Xiaoling said on September 13 that Beijing was ready to work with Europe to “boost” market confidence - going on to make reassuring noises about how the Chinese government will “continue to support Europe’s measures in maintaining a stable euro”.

With or without the euro, inside or outside the euro zone, the European ruling class wants to make the working class pay for the crisis. Clearly, at the very least a continent-wide fightback is required - one struggle, one fight. We in the CPGB will do everything we can to build this resistance movement through the creation of EU-wide organisations of our class. Only if the proletariat is able to challenge for power across the continent will we have a hope of ending the chaotic rule of the market and opening up the possibility of a new world order ●

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Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basel_III.
2. <http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=cocos>.



Sir John Vickers: reform

PROGRAMME

A hypothesis to change the world

Mike Macnair explains the thinking behind the new version of the CPGB's *Draft programme*



Detailed programming

Firstly, I am going to discuss the relationship of programme to the question of party. Secondly, I will look at programmes in general, including the history of workers' party programmes, so as to place our own partyist project in that context. I am not going to discuss in detail the content of the new version of the CPGB *Draft programme*, or the changes we have incorporated.

There is a historical dialectic relating to the question of programme and party. However, the history does not play out exactly in the form of the dialectical logic. The underlying contradiction in the society is one between the interests of capital and the interests of the working class. That contradiction is reflected not necessarily in the class-consciousness of the working class, but in active management by capital to keep the working class under control.

This question constantly enters into the political economic decision-making of capital - the class war is not something which the working class invents. The capitalists wage war on the working class all the time by constantly managing them. In turn the existence of organisations of the working class is a reactive response to that war.

Organisation

There are four levels of this dialectic of class struggle. The first level concerns the workers' immediate organisations: strike committees, tiny workplace formations to defend workers' interests. The first phase of trade unions has usually taken the form of organisation in a single plant, a single locality - these are useful organisations for conducting an

individual struggle or strike. It may extend beyond that, becoming a wave of strikes, for example, and the highest form of this sort of organisation are soviets or workers' councils. But this is still an elementary form of organisation for conducting a single struggle.

Such a form runs up against a limit, which is imposed by the class struggle. At the end of the day the workers have to go back to work - you cannot stay out on strike forever. The capitalist class is organised both on a national and on an international level and this exposes the limits of the workers' immediate forms of struggle. As a result, organisational forms evolve to the second level: that is, unions equipped for prolonged struggle, operating on at least a national scale - the American trade unions originated as *international* organisations, which attempted to organise north and south of the US-Canada border.

In creating a union an attempt is being made to overcome the limitation of the immediate organisation of the working class by creating something more permanent. This allows strike funds to be built up from small contributions, specialist negotiators and lawyers to be employed, national trade union newspapers to be produced, through which struggles can be linked and strikes conducted on a national scale. Ideally we would want to see trade union organisation and strikes on an international scale. The fact that we do not is partly a matter of the active intervention of capital to control trade unionism, but trade unions also come up against an internal limit.

The limit which is posed by the class struggle in relation to a trade

union is that, in order for it to function as a union, it cannot be a party. If it turns itself into a political party it ceases to function as a union. Trade unions have to include Tory workers, even though there may not be very many of them. They have to include all workers in the trade or industry, even if they have pro-bourgeois politics.

The gist of economism is the claim that the trade union struggle comes up against the capitalist state and therefore the workers are radicalised and understand the class nature of that state. So if we launch people into struggle, they will, through this understanding, become revolutionaries and seek the overthrow of the state. However, it does not actually work like this. In reality, when the trade union comes up against the state, the consequence is that workers seek a political organisation to represent the interests of the working class as a pressure group within the state order - the third level.

In Britain the trade union leaders broke from the First International and went into the Liberal Party in order to win the legalisation of their organisations. The next step was that the Tory Party, in the form of the judiciary, struck back through an interpretation of the act passed by the Liberals which rendered it completely ineffective.

The working class, therefore, objectively seeks independent political representation within the capitalist order. In a sense there is already an objective dynamic toward working class political representation as a pressure group within the capitalist order in the form of Lib-Labism - of the relationship between the trade union leadership and the Liberal Party

(or the relationship between the trade union leadership and the Democratic Party in the United States).

This is a deformed form of political representation of the working class within the capitalist order, but it can, and very commonly does, take the form of the creation of a 'labour party'. I place the phrase in quote marks, because there are ambiguities and contradictions in the actual history of the British Labour Party: it is a party set up to represent labour, but is actually a pressure group within capitalist society.

It can perfectly well be the case that such a party devolves into something else. Take the German Social Democratic Party. It started out as a party through which the working class tried to express its own interests, up to and including taking over the state and replacing capitalism, and mutated into something like the Labour Party over the course of time. In the same way some communist parties have moved into the political space of either the US Democratic Party (Italy) or the Labour Party (France). The Lanka Sama Samaja party - Trotskyist at its foundation - was transformed over the course of the 1950s into a Labourite party.

The formation of a broad party of labour, which aims to represent the interests of workers within the framework of capitalism, arises from the objective logic of the class struggle, aiming to overcome the limits of trade unions.

The fourth level then arises logically when the working class thinks about its *independent political* interests - that is to say, its interests over and above the problem of struggling against the class war waged by the bourgeoisie. The idea that the working class should take over and remake the society in a way which corresponds to its own interests.

Logically this is the final stage, because it follows from the limits of Labourism/social democracy, from the limits of representation of the working class by a pressure group. Those limits are the consequence of the fact that the capitalists intervene to manage or to control the working class. The capitalists have institutions of their own: the international state system, nation-states, the judiciary, media, constitutional limitations on the power of elected bodies - like the UK monarchy and House of Lords, but equally like the presidency and Senate in the United States. It is all very well trying to represent the interests of the working class as a pressure group within the framework of capitalist society, or within the capitalist nation-state system, but the levers of power remain in the hands of the capitalist class.

Therefore the question of a Communist Party is logically posed. It is logically posed, but as a matter of history things work out differently. In many cases we have had the formation of parties which aimed to be communist, without having previously gone through the stages of the construction of basic workers' organisations, of national trade unions, of a party of political representation

of the working class within capitalist society. As I say, parties can devolve from communism into Labourism, because the logic is still there.

Party

This logic poses the question of programme. Why? Precisely because the point of a Communist Party is that the working class is to take over and remake the society in ways which are consistent with its own interests. But in order to say that, you have also to say something about how it will happen.

The necessity of a party relates to the same issue. A party is a political group within the society - it can be called a faction, as George Canning did in his 'Epitaph on the ministry of all the talents', which expresses Tory hostility to political parties *per se*:

The demon of faction that over them hung,
In accents of horror their epitaph sung,
While pride and venality joined in the stave
And canting democracy wept at the grave.

His hatred of parties (what he calls 'factions') is a hatred of democracy. A party is a group which makes proposals for how the whole society should organise itself. There is not here a counterposition between a reformist party and a communist party, except in so far as it is perfectly possible to have a reformist party without a programme at all. But there cannot be a communist party without a programme. If, as in the case of the Socialist Workers Party, there is no programme, what results is a sort of enraged liberalism, which represents only a scream of hatred against the existing order and can lead absolutely nowhere.

What is the history in terms of the Marxist movement in this respect? The political line of Marx was in a sense to try and reproduce Chartism. Marx and Engels not only saw Chartism as an organisation of the working class, but characterised its six points as representing the working class taking over.

In the First International, Marx sets out to support the construction of an organisation of the working class as an international class, with the most minimum possible aims: organising itself and uniting as an international class, identifying itself as an independent class and then setting out on that basis to discuss its programme. Actually the bulk of what happens in the First International is discussion of what the policy of the working class should be.

What were the components of the First International? First, the French workers' movement, which was substantively Proudhonist. Then there was the British trade union movement and the third component was the Bakuninists, who came in late, but actually had broad support. There was an attempt to form a workers' party out of the First International, but the reality was that the trade union leaders took fright.

On the one hand, they were pulled

towards the Liberal Party by the promise of electoral reform, of trade union legalisation and so on. On the other hand, they were pushed away from the International by the Paris Commune and by Marx's response, by the civil war in France and by the enormous, European-wide witch-hunt.

Marx and Engels were determined to push forward the idea that the working class should intervene in bourgeois politics. They won by a narrow majority, but the result was a *de facto* split. The Proudhonists had been wiped out and the British trade unions had withdrawn, so they moved the headquarters of the International to New York - otherwise they would in reality have been in the minority against the anarchists - and it survived for only another seven years before collapsing.

In response to that there develops a process of trying to construct national parties, most notably in Germany. Its real leaders are not Marx and Engels, but Bebel and Liebknecht. These national parties are being constructed as communist parties from the outset. Even within the Lassalleian framework, the General German Workers' Association (ADAV) had a section in its constitution outlining a world beyond capitalism. The Eisenach party, which Bebel and Liebknecht constructed out of a left split in German liberalism and drew towards affiliation to the International, adopted a semi-Marxist political programme.

Unity is achieved between the Eisenachers and the Lassalleian ADAV. They adopt the Gotha programme, which is half-Lassalleian, half-Marxist. The unified Gotha party grows dramatically, as German social democracy develops. It is rendered illegal by the anti-socialist law, but continues to grow in spite of this. In France the Parti Ouvrier is formed - for whom Marx writes the first part of its programme.

What is the character of programmes, such as that of the Parti Ouvrier? Generally speaking, we have a short description of general aims, an outline of the logic of the class struggle, posing the question of workers' organisation, of the working class taking power.

Step two in the programme of the Parti Ouvrier, the Eisenach programme, the Gotha programme and Erfurt programme is a set of democratic demands. The working class proposes the reconstruction of the state as a democratic republic with a militia. It calls for freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of association - a whole series of demands of that sort.

After that we have a list of economic demands, which are not presented as 'transitional'. They are not characterised as demands to alleviate the unpleasantnesses of capitalism either. They are demands to strengthen the position of the working class within capitalist society, by improving its conditions of existence: the eight-hour day, free universal primary education, etc.

So it is a three-part structure. Marx says of the programme of the Parti Ouvrier that the third part consists exclusively of demands raised by the movement itself. Why do we not just recapitulate that? This is very much the idea of the left: we call for the working class to organise itself on the basis of the most minimal platform - those few demands raised by the movement itself. That will trigger the organisation of a workers' party and this party will discuss the adoption of a programme.

The problem is exactly the active intervention of the bourgeoisie within the existing workers' parties. The proposition is, as we have constantly pointed out to people who want to create another Labour Party, that there is no point, when such a body already

exists. Such existing general workers' organisations have been rendered under the control - imperfect, but nonetheless control - of the capitalist class, as instruments of the capitalist management of society.

The consequence of this is that we are forced to put forward a fuller programme. It is not just that we confront more complex questions than were confronted in the 19th century. It is also the fact that we are not engaged in the formation of a general workers' party, which will formulate its own policies. We are engaged in trying to pose a strategic alternative to Labourism, to the idea of a party which represents the interest of the working class within the capitalist order, but goes no further than that.

In addition, of course, we have had the experience of Stalinism. It is no good just saying, 'We are for socialism', when the immediate response is, 'You mean Stalinism? I am not sure I want that. Go back to Moscow.' The consequence of Stalinism is that it is not good enough just to say that our general aim is socialism: we have to say more about the transition, more about what immediately replaces capitalism than the programmes from the period of Erfurt, etc.

Draft

The structure of our *Draft programme* is in fact based on the structure of the Bolshevik programme.

First, we deal with the nature of the epoch in six substantive subsections - outlining the fact that we are in a historical process, the transition from capitalism, and the contradictions which that involves. We are clear that this transition can only be global.

Secondly, we move on to capitalism in Britain - we are not writing a programme of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Thirdly, there is a large set of immediate demands, whose aim is the same as it was in the programme of the party which created the Erfurt programme, and in the programme of the Bolsheviks: to strengthen the position of the working class within capitalism. As it happens, the immediate demands contain what would have been a separate section on democratic demands in the programmes of the Second International.

The view of Marx and Engels - whether it was right or wrong is debatable - was that if the democratic demands in their totality were won, that would amount to the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the replacement of the political rule of the bourgeoisie with the political rule of the working class. The working class then proceeds to reorganise society. The economic initiatives it takes and how it goes about reorganising society are a matter of tactics, but the first step is to replace the political rule of the bourgeoisie with that of the working class.

We have in a sense gone back to that idea, in that we have set out our democratic demands at considerable length and they are upfront, heading the list of immediate demands. We begin with the issues of political democracy not because we believe that, if we win, say, a workers' militia and the right to bear arms, that will amount to the overthrow of the capitalist regime on its own. No, each individual demand can be won in theory within the framework of capitalism, just as Switzerland, for example, has a militia system.

But the creation of political democracy in the full sense - not in the sense of bourgeois democracy, with its judicial review, separation of powers, etc - has as its logical consequence that the working class starts to run the society. As for the economic demands, they do not amount in their totality to socialism - they are demands simply to strengthen the working class.

Fourthly, we discuss the character of the revolution and the role of the different social classes within it. We think it is illusory to state that Britain has become a society with just workers and bosses - there is, on the contrary, a large petty bourgeoisie and a substantial professional/managerial middle class.

This part of the programme also deals with the working class constitution - its implementation would undoubtedly and unambiguously amount to the working class taking over. Then there are proposals for economic measures. The general shape of these proposals is given by the fact that there remains a substantial petty bourgeoisie.

The aim is the immediate socialisation of everything which the capitalist class cannot run without subsidy - there is in reality an elephantine public sector. Here we pose the question of rapid movement towards a fully democratic self-management - rotation and election of managers, freedom of information and full democratic rights within the workplace. As for the remaining private sector, for all practical purposes it will consist of small enterprises, which we do not propose to forcibly expropriate, as long as they comply with working class legality.

The fifth section deals with the global transition to communism, which we talk about in the most general terms. We discuss the necessarily democratic character of socialism - but it is a transition, not the desired end. We talk in the most general terms about the transition precisely because the way things evolve will depend on circumstances and the decisions of the masses themselves. What we need to say is merely an outline.

Section six of the *Draft programme* discusses the nature of the Communist Party that must be built, and we have appended a set of draft rules. There is a common confusion relating to this - people say, 'Why the hell are you drafting rules for a party that does not exist?' But the point is, if there was a unification process on the left and such a party was brought into existence, it is vital to make clear our proposals on how it should operate.

In fact this is true of the whole document. It is a *draft* programme because it consists of our proposals - it is not a question of 'Vote for this or we walk out'. They are our proposals for the programme of a serious, united Marxist party. For the same reason, we put forward draft rules and a draft constitution.

If there were a serious unification of the left on such a principled basis, it would rapidly balloon to twenty, thirty thousand. The far left is used to thinking in terms of organising small numbers, but the proposals in the draft rules are based on the prospect of organising thousands in a way which is democratic, allowing people to self-manage their practical work at the base and demanding accountability and responsibility of the leadership.

Two illusions

Two more matters, which are interconnected.

The first concerns soviets and the second transitional demands. We have included soviets - councils of action - in this programme, but we have them there as a subordinate element - as a useful way of conducting the class struggle. They are something which *may* play a role in the constitution of the future state. We do not regard soviets as a magic solution - the belief that 'All power to the soviets' will solve everything.

This aspect is not orthodox Trotskyism, but it is orthodox Trotsky - as in *Lessons of October*, for instance. However, the British and maybe the European far left fetishises the soviet form, which is regarded as the solution to the problems of democracy. Soviets

are also envisaged to a large extent as a means whereby the working class can be won. By fighting within the soviets the small group can transform itself into a large party - which is, of course, false history in relation to the Bolsheviks: the RSDLP majority was already a mass party in February 1917. They had been cut down in terms of absolute numbers by mass repression, but to have 17,000 members on your books in circumstances where anybody who appeared to be a member of the Bolsheviks was immediately conscripted and sent to the front - or shot - represents a mass organisation.

We do not think that soviets are either a magic wand to create a mass revolutionary organisation or a solution to the problem of democracy: if there are soviets, but no freedom to form parties, factions, etc, that would be the equivalent of early-period Stalinism. If there are soviets which meet once a year to elect an executive committee, and once a month to elect a presidium, that is also Stalinism.

Soviets - as in the constitution of 1918, long before Stalinism - could be geographical representative bodies, which exist in every city and in the countryside, not the representatives of factory committees. The 1918 constitution, as written by the revolutionary Bolsheviks, takes that form precisely because the working class as a class includes the unemployed, women in the home, pensioners, etc. The conception of soviets as a federation of factory committees, etc, which is widespread on the Trotskyist left, does not succeed in organising the working class and does not succeed as a form of workers' democracy.

The second matter relates to transitional demands. It has never been really possible to satisfactorily explain what transitional demands or, for that matter, a transitional programme mean. It was a fudge in origin, resulting from a dispute at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern over the nature of the programme. It starts out as a fight between Bukharin, who argues for the abolition of the minimum programme and for maximum programme only, and Lenin, who is arguing - as in fact he did in 1918 in relation to the revision of the party programme - that the minimum programme cannot be abolished, because we may lose power and certainly the people in the west European countries say they cannot do without the minimum programme.

Somehow these two positions were brought together by a drafting commission, which came up with the formulation, 'transitional demands'. What they are is not explained. But Trotsky took them from the trade union programme of the Comintern and they are very largely the product of the KPD - the German Communist Party - and this is combined with an idea of his own, which was present in *Results and prospects*. In this book he says that, with the decline of capitalism, the distinction between the

maximum and minimum programmes disappears and instead there needs to be a programme for the immediate introduction of socialism.

He does not use the word as we do, to mean the immediate phase which follows capitalism. Socialism, we say, is a synonym for working class rule, for the dictatorship of the proletariat - the transitional period which is initiated by the revolution. But Trotsky does not mean that: he means the collectivisation of everything, the abolition of money. So the transitional programme is transitional to general socialisation.

The sliding scale of wages, for example, actually means rationing in kind - it only makes sense if you work out what the worker's shopping basket is and you index the wages against that. By proposing this rationing of the worker's shopping basket, you are actually proposing the immediate abolition of money.

The sliding scale of hours is somewhat less problematic, but if you think of it as a programme for the society as a whole, rather than just for the public sector, it actually amounts to the immediate abolition of small capital, the immediate expropriation of the petty bourgeoisie.

It is for that reason that Trotskyists have been unable to actually make any real use of those parts, of that core conception, and so 'transitional demands' and 'transitional programmes' constantly collapse into something else. They are supposed to be a bridge between the present consciousness of the masses - ie, reformism - and a consciousness of the need to overthrow capitalism. But, as Workers Revolutionary Party guru Gerry Healy once pointed out - correctly - it is necessary for communists to say something that the masses do not already believe in order for their present consciousness to be shifted. The problem with so-called 'transitional programmes' and 'transitional demands', which do not enter into any contradiction with the consciousness of the masses, is that they wind up as common-or-garden reformism or economism.

One of the fundamental principles of our *Draft programme* is that we need to say upfront what we would do if we win the majority. We are setting out what we believe that majority should do and we are clear that by doing this they will overthrow capitalist rule and begin the construction of the future society. That is the point of a programme: it is not a way of tricking the masses into making a revolution.

There is no doubt whatsoever that what we are proposing will be changed and amended once a Communist Party is actually forged. But you cannot change and amend something that does not exist - you must start with a hypothesis, which is changed in the light of experimentation. And our hypothesis - our *Draft programme* - is about the way the working class can change the world ●

Powerful weapon



The updated *Draft programme* of the CPGB was agreed at a special conference in January 2011. Here we present our political strategy, overall goals and organisational principles in six logical, connected sections, and show in no uncertain terms why a Communist Party is the most powerful weapon available to the working class. Our draft rules are also included.

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IMPERIALISM



Remembrance Sunday: national unity

Double standards

In 2003, Baha Mousa was arrested with nine other Iraqis by British troops in Basra. Two days later, he was dead; in the intervening time, according to the coroner, he had suffered 93 distinct physical injuries.

Nine years later, an inquiry into his death - and the treatment he and the others suffered at the hands of the British army - has finally concluded. It reveals what any intelligent observer would expect - Iraqi civilians were subject to repugnant physical brutality, to the apparent indifference (or, more likely, with the active collusion) of the chain of command.

This has caused something of a stink in the British establishment. As well it might - not long ago, we were still being treated to smug statements from the great and the good that we were a civilising influence on our American allies, who were perhaps too quick to resort to wanton brutality and 'enhanced interrogation techniques'. Like every other part of the British state, the armed forces have a peculiarly exalted self-image; it is supposed to be a bastion of those great British values of moderation and prudence, morally upright and valourous.

Thus, those at the top of society are falling over themselves to condemn the behaviour of those soldiers nine years ago. "The British army, as it does, should uphold the highest standards," opined David Cameron. "We should take every step possible to make sure this never happens again." Foreign secretary William Hague, meanwhile, was on hand to point out that "torture" - the ruling class usually prefers 'mistreatment' or some other euphemism, when referring to its own actions - is not a particularly effective way of getting information out of people.¹ That is true, of course, but it seems nobody told the British high command in Basra.

The Tory leaders thought it a good idea to get their condemnations in early, in order to set the terms

in which this atrocity is discussed. They serve fundamentally to restrict the issue to the narrative of a 'few bad apples', combined with 'poor oversight' from those charged with keeping the rank and file on their best behaviour. The army can thus be seen to put its house in order, and swear - on its unimpeachable honour - that no such disgrace shall ever happen again ... or at least until we have forgotten about this one.

In fact, this is all so much risible play-acting. The army, in the first instance, is a machine for taking ordinary working class men and women and turning them into trained killers who will do the job they are told to do without remorse. Even if it were the case that the various responsible officers were completely in the dark about the torture taking place on their watch, we would have to ask - were the direct perpetrators torturers in their civilian lives? Were they recruited from maximum security prisons and institutions for the criminally insane? It is not terribly likely (the oh-so-honourable British army does not recruit among such people); so this sociopathic violence is a product of the brutalising experience first of military training and then of combat experience.

The army aims - in many cases, successfully - to cultivate all the seeds of sadism and misanthropy it can find in its recruits, until they bloom into an active desire for violence. The result, according to one of Mousa's fellow detainees, is a competition among soldiers to see who can kick a prisoner the greatest distance across a room. 'Upholding the highest standards', indeed ...

As noted, however, it is completely implausible to sustain a plea of innocence on the part of the army chain of command. The phrase 'military discipline' did not enter the everyday lexicon for nothing; it is safe enough to assume that, if there was not a direct command to

brutalise these prisoners, somebody high enough up the military career ladder to matter allowed it to happen. One major Michael Peebles admitted ordering soldiers to hood detainees and keep them in stress positions - but he claimed he was unaware that these techniques were illegal, and told the soldiers not to go "over the top" - so that's all right, then.

Equally, it is safe enough to assume that Mousa and his fellow victims are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Again, let us assume that the 'few bad apples' theory of torture obtains; are we really to accept that the distribution of 'bad apples' is such that they should all end up in the first battalion of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment? No doubt there are many more battered corpses in Iraq, which have been written up by army bureaucrats as less suspicious deaths.

So does the Mousa inquiry's report recommend a root-and-branch clear-out of the military branch, radical restructuring of the armed forces, more rights for squaddies and perhaps protection for whistleblowers? Of course not. Broad immunity from prosecution was granted to soldiers who agreed to testify in the inquiry - their testimony cannot be used against them, even if it reveals that they lied in previous proceedings (notably the court martial that resulted in the conviction of corporal Donald Payne.)

As for the army, it will take more steps to ensure that soldiers are aware of the legal ins and outs of different 'enhanced interrogation techniques'. That is about it - although it takes the right honourable Sir William Gage 20 pages of repetitious 'recommendations', drowning in military jargon, to arrive at such a profound conclusion.² We can certainly rule out any but the most tokenistic prosecutions. Even Payne was only sent down for a year for "inhumane treatment", and acquitted of manslaughter. (Is the British state suggesting that Mousa died of natural

causes?)

Compare the reticence about prosecuting 'our boys' (let alone the top brass who preside over this torture apparatus) to the recent vogue for throw-away-the-key sentencing of those individuals who dared to pinch a pair of trainers in the recent riots. More pertinently, compare the fate of three men - Munir Farooqi, Israr Malik and Matthew Newton - convicted of various offences related to their attempts to recruit jihadi militants.

Newton got six years, Malik a minimum of five, and Farooqi a whopping four life sentences. None have ever killed anyone; it is not known whether their recruitment efforts yielded any success, or whether they were simply toytown jihadis of the *Four lions* variety. Indeed, somewhat revoltingly, the paucity of hard evidence is cause for celebration for one detective chief superintendent Tony Porter, whose words should unsettle any democrat. He says: "This was an extremely challenging case, both to investigate and successfully prosecute at court, because we did not recover any blueprint, attack plan or endgame for these men" (that is, no evidence of actual wrongdoing).

"However," he continues, "what we were able to prove was their ideology. These men were involved in an organised attempt in Manchester to recruit men to fight, kill and die in either Afghanistan or Pakistan by persuading them it was their religious duty."³ There you have it - a man has got himself four life sentences on account of his *ideology*.

The direct link between the two cases, which accounts for the wild disproportion in the severity with which they have been treated, is in the end the ideological imperatives of the British state. It *needs* us to believe - whatever the rights and wrongs of this or that war - that fundamentally the British military is a force for good.

It organises great mass rituals to bond civilians ideologically to itself; most prominently the annual Remembrance Sunday jamboree, but also *The Sun's* Help for Heroes charity. When the realities of war - which inevitably involves brutality and dehumanisation - strike too close to home, that ideological compact is threatened, and the state's management of the scandal is based primarily around damage limitation.

The state reserves the use of legal muscle for those at odds with this cosy consensus - let us say, those distributing fiery leaflets preaching holy war; in short, for those whose political beliefs place them in the most direct opposition (the advocacy of military resistance) to their country's pursuit of disastrous military adventures. Such people must be punished severely and publicly, *pour encourager les autres* - but also so that broad masses can be brought through yet another ritual (of condemnation of terrorism and treason) designed to cement their bond with the state.

Communists, needless to say, are not fooled. The atrocities that took place in Basra were not perversions of a fundamentally noble cause, but perfectly fit the profile of a singularly rapacious imperialism, and especially the profile of Britain - which once exploited and plundered a quarter of the planet in much the same manner. The rantings of Islamist militants are toxic, certainly, but would not have half the appeal they do, were the greedy eyes of the imperialists not on the Middle East.

We declare that the main enemy is at home - the British state ●

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Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14839925.
2. www.bahamoussainquiry.org.
3. *The Guardian* September 9.

CRICKET

Batting and bowling for Iran's workers

Around 40 people attended last Sunday's third annual solidarity cricket match between Hands Off the People of Iran and the Labour Representation Committee - and raised well over £500 for Workers Fund Iran in the process.

Bathed in sunshine, the picturesque corner of leafy Islington that was Wray Crescent pitch made for a wonderful cricketing environment. But many were unfamiliar with the geography of north London and thus arrived slightly late. However, both teams were eventually able to field 12 (!) players each. After a quick inspection of the pitch, the umpires (*Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson and Graham Bash of *Labour Briefing*) led the two captains out and after winning the toss LRC skipper Sean McNeill opted to make the most of the sun and bat.

With the pressure on after losing the first two matches to Hopi, things could have hardly started any worse for the LRC. There were more ducks in the LRC batting order than in the nearby pond: skipper McNeill was caught and bowled by Hopi regular Rob 'the shrew'; Miles Barter was brilliantly run out by wicketkeeper Steven Evans; Jim Gleeson chipped up a catch to yours truly at cover and Conor Ryan was clean-bowled by the lanky left arm seam bowling of Luke McKenzie. All went without troubling the scorers. The LRC 11 were four wickets down without reaching double figures. It looked as if it would be game over before the spectators had finished their first beer.

True to form, the Hopi slip cordon, led by the particularly vociferous Nick Wrack (secretary of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), did not miss an opportunity to remind the LRC batsmen of the trouble they were in! But the underdogs gradually played themselves back into the game. LRC joint national secretary Andrew Fisher patiently absorbed the nippy bowling of Hopi debutant Lloyd Roderick (aka 'the Llanelli express') and at the other end Rory Macqueen steadily accumulated runs in what was a stoic and intelligent innings.

When comrade Fisher fell, others offered further resistance: not least Labour Party Greater London Authority member Murad Qureshi - and Graham Bash, who by this time had discarded his umpire's jacket and padded up. Some nice stroke play belied the lack of match practice of this former Leyton boys opener (circa 1960!). But when Rory Macqueen chipped up a catch to midwicket for 46, the LRC innings finally came to a close. Tantalisingly short of a much-deserved half century, comrade Macqueen's knock constituted more than half of the LRC's total of 83. The other big scorer was a certain 'E Xtras' - runs garnered by the LRC thanks to Hopi's occasionally wayward bowling.

After enjoying an (overwhelmingly liquid) lunch, Hopi openers Gav Jacobsen and Tristan Kennedy sought to avoid losing early wickets and to slowly accumulate runs. This they did, pausing only for regular alcoholic refreshments brought out by their team mates.

Maybe it was the beer that undid



Play up and play the game

comrade Kennedy, who was trapped leg before wicket by the LRC's Macqueen soon after. In came Nick Wrack. He looked solid, but was then controversially given out caught behind by first-time umpire Liam Conway of Communist Students, who was now standing in for comrade Bash. And after a promising start Steven Evans got a bit over-excited and smashed the bat onto his own stumps off the bowling of LRC newcomer Emily Hilton. Cue tumultuous laughter amongst the crowd and a hint of optimism amongst the LRC fielders.

Hopi had already lost two key players to the demands of wage-slavery and only had 10 batsmen to call on to finish the job. Comrade McNeill rallied his troops: a few more wickets and they could sneak it against the odds. And the momentum continued to swing towards the LRC. Hopi's key man, comrade Jacobsen, slightly miscued a shot and was brilliantly caught by Andrew Fisher off Macqueen. The score was 55-4 with only five Hopi wickets left. Game on.

To turn up the heat even more, McNeill reintroduced his early bowler, Joe Flynn. But his plan backfired. Perhaps keen to get off the field and enjoy a few more solidarity beverages, new batsman Luke McKenzie was in no mood to hang around. He smashed comrade Flynn to all corners of the ground: three consecutive fours were followed by a sneaky two and then ... two enormous sixes! Twenty-six runs came from those six balls - and it was all over bar the shouting. Hopi came home with five wickets and

seven overs to spare. Following his two earlier wickets and an excellent catch, comrade McKenzie's hitting left nobody in any doubt as to who would claim the man of the match award.

With the sun still shining and the ale still flowing, the players opted to organise a 'beer match' after the official proceedings (a 'just for fun' encounter where the losing team buys the winners a round). This 10-over 'slogathon' saw players from Hopi and the LRC in the two scratch teams, with several spectators joining in as well. This game was a rather closer affair, with my team just falling four short of the total of 52 accumulated by rival captain, comrade Macqueen. Both sides defied the elements - and cricket etiquette - by playing the last two overs in lashing rain.

The weather may have turned grim, but the mood was anything but. The match was played in the usual comradely spirit, and was not lacking in its comedy moments. Old friends were able to mull over the events of the day, and new friendships were forged.

This annual event has become a key part of the extremely important work done for Workers Fund Iran, raising crucial cash for Iranian working class militants operating under extremely difficult conditions. This and other events (like the forthcoming Berlin marathon on September 25) really help to raise the profile of the charity and the important political message it embodies: working class political independence; no to imperialist war and sanctions on Iran; no to the Tehran theocracy.

During the course of the day there

was talk of a football tournament jointly organised between Hopi and the LRC: watch this space!

In addition to the £500-plus raised, we are expecting sponsorship donations from trade union branches and leftwing organisations. If you would like to show your support for this excellent initiative, then please

get your union branch to donate to Workers Fund Iran or send in a contribution yourself. Email office@hopoi.info for more information.

See you next year! Surely Hopi can't make it four on the bounce? ●

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Fighting fund

Generosity

Another big boost to September's fighting fund came in the form of a brilliant £200 cheque from LP, who was unable to attend the CPGB's Communist University this year because of family illness.

He usually provides us with a cash boost at our annual school, which he was very disappointed at having to miss in 2011. Thanks for your usual generosity, comrade, and don't forget - there's always next year's CU! In the meantime the *Weekly Worker* is publishing many of the opening presentations (this week's article on programme by Mike Macnair is based on his talk, for instance).

The other gift that came in the post this week was a little more modest, but just as welcome nonetheless. Thank you, PM, for the extra fiver enclosed with your resubscription. We also received two donations via our online PayPal facility, from TR (£20)

and KO (£10) - two of our 13,383 internet readers over the last seven days.

And, of course, we mustn't forget this week's standing orders, which added up to another £155 - £45 of which from comrades who answered our Summer Offensive appeal for increased regular donations. That's made up of a new £25 donation from DT and two £10 increases (DV and DW).

Thanks to all those comrades, our September fund total has more than doubled and now stands at £760. We need £1,250 by the end of the month. Any of you internet readers fancy helping us get there? Just click on the 'Make a donation' button.

Robbie Rix

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

OUR HISTORY

Getting started in Caerphilly

The young CPGB entered its first parliamentary battle in the Caerphilly by-election of August 1921. The death of Alfred Onions, a rightwing Labour MP and official of the South Wales Miners' Federation, produced a three-cornered fight between communist, Labour and Coalition (Tory-Liberal government) candidates.

The campaign was a lively one and not simply in the campaigning energy brought to it by the young Marxist party, evocatively described by TA Jackson below. The local council clerk had refused the CPGB candidate's agent the required election documents. He also, totally illegally, refused to release a copy of the electoral register. At the start of the contest, Bob Stewart, the CPGB candidate, still languished in prison for his part in a miners' demonstration, and was only released part way through the campaign. However, a welcome boost came when the entire local Labour Party committee in Bedlinog resigned and pledged themselves to work for the CPGB.

The party's weekly paper carried TA Jackson's account of the battle - the article is by turns moving, then pacy and probably slightly hyperbolic. However, his ultra-confident style undoubtedly reflected the mood amongst the most advanced militants of our class - a gut feeling that the successful establishment of a united party of Marxists in this country had unleashed a talent, an energy and a pugnacious *esprit de corps* that had for too long been squandered in the sects. There was everything to play for ...

Up the reds!

To write the story of the Caerphilly by-election is not easy. The stage is too crowded, the issues too vast, and the upshot too complex to permit a description in a few cold or flaming words. Those who viewed it from a distance will see in it nothing but an arithmetical proportion of voters, and a majority for the official Labour candidate. Those who were in it and through it will remember it for long as the Red Raid on Caerphilly - the raid which made the valleys of East Glamorgan ring with the shouts of 'Up the rebels!' and which taught the children in the streets shouting at their play, 'We'll keep the red flag flying here!'

Having no machinery we had to take to the streets. When there was a place to hold a meeting we held one and when the 'Boys of the Bolshie breed' hold a meeting in a proletarian quarter the result is a foregone conclusion. Before the election campaign we had some 20 communist voters in the division; at the 'showdown' - after the Coalition had carted up in their 80 cars every reactionary whom the fear of the red flag had terrified into unwanted exertion and after the Labour Party had bullied, cajoled, whined and wheedled, finishing with the frenzied SOS, "Don't let the Coalition in!" - we had roused and rallied 2,592 votes for communism and the slogan "All power to the workers".

With a month to work in and a straight fight against either of them the Communist Party would have swept the deck clean of everything opposed to it.

When I say that we triumphed in the streets, I state what is obvious in the result. The Coalition had their press, the Labour Party the chapels



The reds are coming

and Co-op halls to make propaganda in. Except for the two Sundays over which the campaign extended - on each of which we held indoor meetings - the whole of our work was done in the open. A little canvassing was done - necessarily very little from the size of the area to be covered and the want of the requisite number of canvassers. Those we had worked like carthorses with splendid effect; but they were swamped in the flood the Labour crowds were able to mobilise. The Coalition, meanwhile, conserved their strength in the bourgeois quarters.

So enthusiastic and apparently unanimous were the cheers that greeted our speakers that quite a number of proletarians conceived the notion that Bob Stewart was as good as elected. Their enthusiasm carried into the pit was contagious and our audiences swelled to enormous dimensions. And, however big might be the great gun on the Labour platform, when our boys had to speak in competition with them it was the rarest of rare things for our audience to be the smaller. As for the Coalition, they abandoned the streets altogether, so furious was the storm of proletarian contempt roused by their efforts.

While it was wrong to interpret this oratorical success as a portent of electoral triumph, it would be absurd to write it off as of no importance. In point of fact it was the outstanding fact of the election. That 'Bolshevik' speakers would venture into the open at all was sensation enough. That they should without waiting to be accused, boldly adopt the title as a badge of honour and go on to hold their own with anything and everything in the nature of argument, opposition and interruption was, to many, simply astounding. Crowds came first of all out of sheer curiosity; they remained from interest and returned night after night with intensifying enthusiasm.

The official Labour speakers, and in a lesser degree those of the Coalition were well known by repute. Those of the Communist Party were unknown men - except in a few cases, and those known only to a few of the Independent Labour Party. Before the election closed the Communist Party speakers had earned on all sides the repute of the finest team of speakers ever sent into an election. And those who knew all of them intimately agreed that each one of them

excelled himself and when a team that includes - to name only a few of the better known - William Paul, William Gallacher, Helen Crawford, Joe Vaughan, Bert Joy, Walter Newbold, Harry Webb, Arthur MacManus and the candidate, Bob Stewart, himself - when these and others like them excel themselves, only those who know them at their best can imagine the sort of meetings to which Caerphilly was treated.

I record for what it is worth the opinion of a not unfriendly journalist with whom I fraternised during a thirst spell: "Your members are too good; and they are doing their work too well. They are smashing up whatever chance the Coalition crowd had of working the patriotic stunt, and at the same time these are creating a real fear that the Coalition will slip on a split vote. You are frightening the Labour crowd into working as they had never worked before, and at the same time you are making voters whose class-consciousness is just far enough roused to make the name 'Labour' attractive, but not enough to make them whole-hog communists." The result certainly lends plausibility to that view.

Ramsey MacDonald in the spleen of his mean soul has asserted that we conspicuously avoided any attack on the Coalition. No lie could be grosser or meaner. Harry Webb challenged a Coalition speaker who interrupted him to debate and a meeting was arranged for Abertridwr. The hour arrived, but the Coalition speaker was missing. William Paul taunted a Coalition MP on his platform in Caerphilly and played with him before one of the largest crowds I have ever seen in the open. Gallacher's massacre of a group of Coalition speakers headed by Captain Gee VC was a thing to dream about for a lifetime, and the happiest hour Bob Stewart has spent for a long time was the one during which a Coalition MP who had challenged him had to sit listening to his reply.

It is a lie to say as Macdonald says that we avoided tackling the Coalition; but there is a reason for his utterance. The only communist speech he listened to was driven into him by Sandy Ritchie, the Lanarkshire miner, whom fate had pitched alongside of him at Taff's Well. That speech was, as it had to be, about the Labour Party in general and Ramsay MacDonald

in particular - it will be a long time before Mac forgets it; he will never forgive it.

Apart from open-air meetings and a little canvassing, we employed the weapon of literature. First of all was *The Communist* on sale at the regular price. Then two issues of an election supplement to *The Communist*; the first sold at a penny, and the second distributed gratis. For these latter, chief credit is due to the indefatigable AE Cook. Then there was the election address consisting of an abbreviated version of the address to the workers of Caerphilly from *The Communist* of August 13.

The great practical problem was the folding and enveloping of this address in time for one to be posted to each elector and this was made possible by a team of as fine a band of real workers as could possibly have been gathered together. There were not many of them, but they came from all the surrounding districts - from the Rhondda, from the Western Valley of Monmouthshire, from Cardiff, from Bristol, Sheffield and London and under the command of comrades Brown (of Shipley), Dai Davies (of Bargoed), Hawkins and Shaw, they worked wonders. They were of all ages, all proletarians and (if truth must be told) mostly unemployed and therefore broke. They messed together in the committee rooms and a goodly number of them slept at night on the floor. To come home late, weary and hoarse from a round of meetings to find this proletarian bunch getting ready their 'shake-downs' for the night was like walking into a picture from John Reed's *Ten days that shook the world*. They were a great bunch of the real fighting stuff. Communism has reason to be proud of its rank and file.

Then there was the difficulty of transportation. To get from village to village in the Caerphilly division means climbing three mountains and crossing two bridges - except when you cross three bridges and climb two mountains. And they are real mountains - not "home-made mountains", as Ernie Brown christened the coal-tips! Our speaking campaign would have been physically impossible but for the transport available in the form of two cars, latterly supplemented by a motorcycle and sidecar. These were put at the disposal of the party by that most enthusiastic of Bolsheviks, Jim

Shand of Salford.

At least half of the votes we gained were made possible by Jim Shand. You will perhaps have seen references in the press to "Bolshevik emissaries rushing through the lanes of the Caerphilly division in expensive cars" - and in a way they told the truth. They were perhaps not specially expensive cars to start, but by the time they had bumped and thumped over some of the vilest roads ever discovered with eight or 10 crowded into what the maker fondly thought was space for six - the whole team keeping themselves cheerful with the 'Red flag', the 'International' and shouts of "All power to the workers!" or "Up the Bolshies!" - they will be expensive to mend. The only thing on our side that equalled Bob Stewart on the platform was Jim Shand's driving through the dark back into Caerphilly.

And now that it is all over and the result declared, what can we offer as our excuse for 'raiding'? We lost our deposits, we spent all the money there was, and all we had as individuals on top of it. What did we get in return?

We gained this. We went into an area in which the reaction and despair following upon the failure on the miners' struggle had left the workers hopeless and broken. We found the best men in the district loaded with debts, their jobs refused them, their homes threatened by the landlords greedy for arrears of rent (in the middle of the campaign our sub-agent, Dai Davies, had a judgment given against him in the county court, so that his work had to be done under the strain of fear of a distraint upon his home!).

Into this psychology of gloom and despair we carried our revolutionary slogans just when the miserable pigeon-livered 'Labour' crew were beginning to chant their chorus of 'Leave it to parliament - direct action is never any good'. We raided it - first we routed the gang of whiners and then we roused the enthusiasm of those who had lost heart and hope.

We put the light back into the eyes of men who were leaden with despair; and a spring into the walk of young men. We brought a resurrection of the fighting spirit. We shamed even the Labour crew into making a show of fighting and we left behind us not only a spirit and a will, but the beginnings of an organisation which will make the boss class remember with fury our Red Raid on Caerphilly.

When the poll closed at 8pm we held our meetings in aid of the Russian famine victims. After these had closed we waited in the streets or in the rooms for the figures - passing the time at a sing-song presided over by the inimitable Gallacher. And on the morrow we departed in Jim Shand's car to catch the train at Newport.

And, as we went through streets and lanes over the hills and down the valleys, at every sixth door a man, woman or child, or altogether, cheered at sight of the red flag flying and answered our slogan with shouts of "Up the red!" and "Bravo Bob Stewart!"

If we can do what we did in Caerphilly with the odds there were against us, the triumph of the rebel workers is in sight. ●

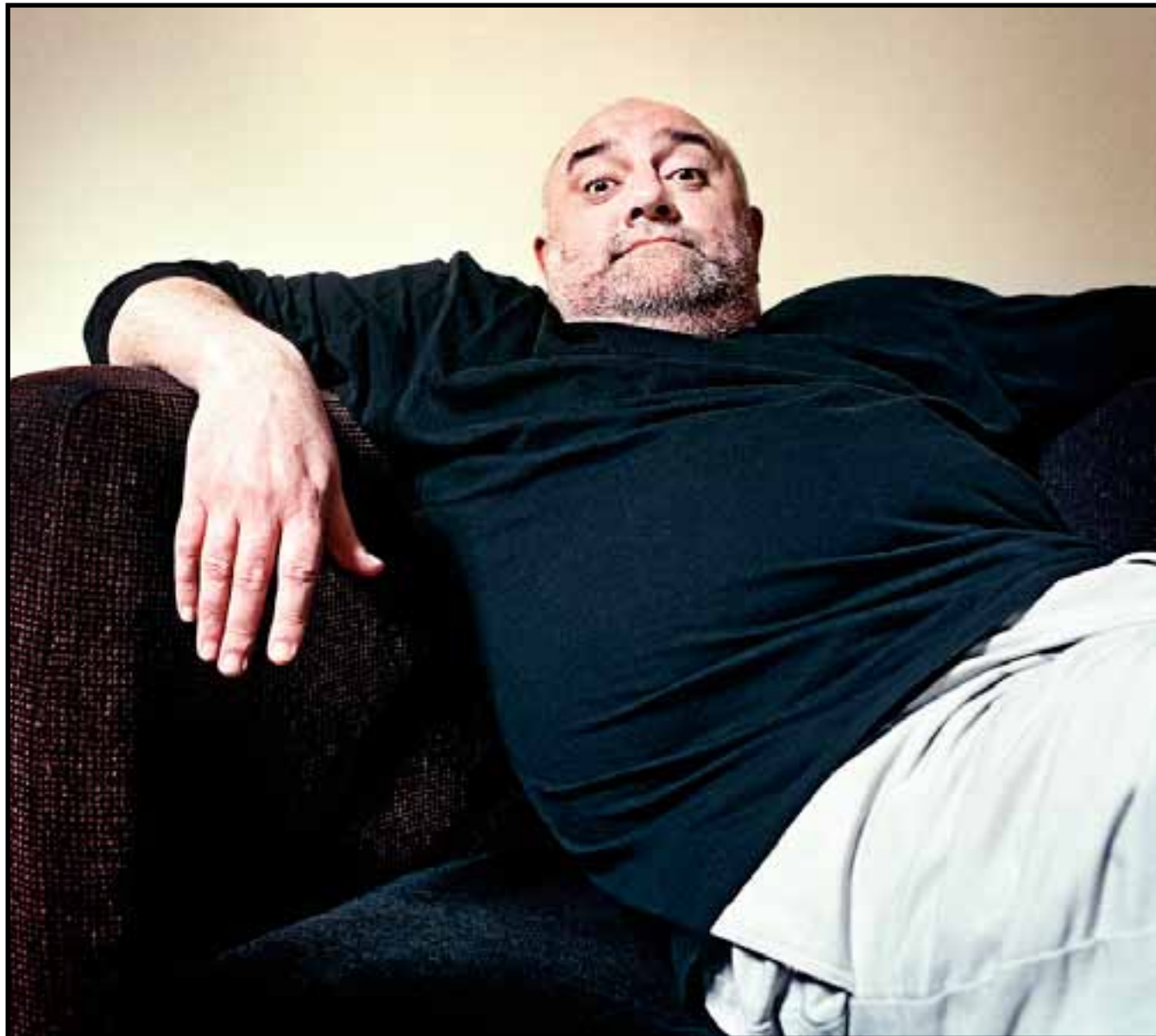
The Communist
September 3 1921

Labour held the seat with 13,699 votes, the coalition polled 8,958 and the CPGB got off the mark with 2,592. In the general election a year later the party gained two MPs who took the class struggle into the enemy camp.

REVIEW

This shit is actually true

Alexei Sayle *Stalin ate my homework* Sceptre 2011, pp304, £8.99



Maoist Scouser

Alexei Sayle was one of the leading alternative comedians of the 1980s. He enjoyed a career that saw him land a regular spot in the BBC's *Young ones*, the part of a disc jockey in *Doctor Who* and a cameo appearance in *Indiana Jones and the last crusade* - not to mention his performance of the timeless pop classic that was 'Hello, John, got a new motor?' Since then he has become a novelist and makes occasional appearances on panel quiz shows.

Before all that though, Alexei David Sayle - named after his maternal grandfather and one Alexei Maximovich Peshkov (better known to the world as the Russian novelist and revolutionary, Maxim Gorky) - was the only child of a family that differed from others in the neighbourhood: imagine a 60s childhood in Liverpool where instead of the Beatles you listened to the Red Army Choir and unlike all your mates didn't get to see Bambi for ideological reasons.

Alexei was raised in a communist household. His father and mother were both long-time members of the official Communist Party of Great Britain and this book - his first foray into non-fiction - is a trip down memory lane back to his childhood on Merseyside. It is packed with observations of leftwing culture and behaviour that are simultaneously humorous and cruelly serious. In short, an interesting stab at the social history of a dissenting lifestyle in the middle of the 20th century.

He recollects how unlike other families the Sayles took their holidays in Czechoslovakia or Hungary, and describes

his fascination at the shops that sold just one sort of pen, the strangely designed, three-headlamped automobiles, his membership of the Czech Young Pioneers and gradually realising back home in Liverpool that the things he heard, saw and did as a normal part of his family life were not exactly typical.

The book becomes even more interesting as the young Sayle gets into his teens, and wrestles with the problem of how to rebel against parents who are themselves rebels. The answer in his case was to become a Maoist. He was a founding member of a Maoist group in Liverpool, after coming across another young man who was "carrying pictures of Chairman Mao". The group later earned its official status as a *bona fide* part of the left by splitting over whether to join Reg Birch's Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) or the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). The majority, Sayle included, opted to become the Liverpool branch of the CPB (M-L).

As an interesting lightweight read that provides some insight into the left of 50s and 60s Britain, this book performs well, and goes some way to help understand what exactly it was that the rank and file of the old CPGB saw in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe; and how 'official communism' functioned as a kind of theocratic organisation held together by a common faith that the Kremlin knew what it was doing. A party where the classics of Marx, Lenin *et al* were adapted to meet the needs of the latest opportunistic turn by the ever flexible Rajani Palme Dutt. A big

revelation in Sayle's teenage years came when, upon becoming a Maoist, he and his fellow comrades set out to read the classics for the first time: "Halfway through Marx's *Wages, prices and profit* I suddenly thought to myself, 'Fuck me! This shit is actually true'" (p246).

An entertaining little book, and one that will hopefully be followed soon by the next instalment of Sayle's journey ●

John Masters

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name

Address

Town/city

Postcode

Telephone Age

Email Date

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

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weekly worker

Israel and Iran talk up threats

Diversionsary tactics

The world is only just beginning to realise the international consequences of the Arab awakening. Of course, Israel was the first to express concerns in the first days of the protests against president Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. It joined Saudi Arabia in warning the Obama administration that Mubarak's downfall would endanger the 'peace process' with the Palestinians.

Events in the last few weeks have proved them both right. First came the deterioration of Israeli-Turkish relations. For decades Turkey has been the single most important economic partner of the Zionist state. However, relations between this key Nato ally and Israel broke down after Israel refused to apologise for its deadly 2010 raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla that resulted in the death of eight Turks and a Turkish-American. In response, Turkey expelled several senior Israeli diplomats, suspended military cooperation and boosted naval patrols in the eastern Mediterranean.

To prevent a repeat of the provocation, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned Turkey would send warships to escort future aid boats leaving its territory for Gaza. His comments to Al Jazeera television were the first time Turkey had made clear its willingness to use force to protect ships attempting to break Israel's blockade of coastal Palestinian territory - a significant ratcheting up of tensions. Sensing its growing international isolation, Israel stated that such a move would be "grave and serious".

All this in a week when the storming of the Israeli embassy in Cairo created further serious difficulties between the two sides of the so-called 'peace process'. The move recalls the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran following the revolution of 1979 - something the clerical regime in Tehran was quick to recognise, as it rushed to praise the demonstrators.

While the new Egyptian government is doing its best to mend relations, there is no doubt that the US-sponsored Middle East 'peace process' is now dead and buried.

Following the fall of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, and the rocky nature of president Bashar Assad's Syrian dictatorship, the 'rogue state' Iran remains the US's main headache in the region. So it is no surprise that Tehran's nuclear programme is once again making headlines - Israel supporters Tony Blair and Dick Cheney cynically used the 10th anniversary of 9/11 to exaggerate the threat posed by Iran's nuclear developments. According to Cheney, "Iran represents an existential threat, and [Israel] will do whatever they have to do to guarantee their survival and their security."

The new director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, general Yukiya Amano, contributed to the scaremongering when he once again raised the issue of Iran's non-cooperation with inspectors. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France warned last week that "military, nuclear and ballistic ambitions constitute



Will Israel attack?

a growing threat that may lead to a preventive attack against Iranian sites, which would provoke a major crisis that France wants to avoid at all costs."

Sarkozy's intervention must have been music to the ears of Israeli leaders, who are once more openly talking of air raids against Iran's nuclear facilities. Of course, this is not the first time that Israeli officials have made such threats. However, like the politicians of that other religious state in the Middle East, Iran, Zionist leaders have a pressing need to divert attention from growing protests in their own country by identifying a foreign enemy for the nation to unite against - for Israel it is Iran's nuclear programme; for Iran, it is Israel's very existence (along with its 'secret' nuclear programme).

At the end of August, as the number of protestors in Tel Aviv could be counted in the hundreds of thousands, Israeli leaders urged the United States and other western countries to "present Tehran with a credible military threat to back up economic sanctions already in place".¹ On September 6, Israeli major-general Eyal Eisenberg said: "The Middle East is on the brink of a full-scale, cataclysmic war that will

feature weapons of mass destruction. After the Arab spring, we predict that a winter of radical Islam will arrive. As a result, the possibility of a multi-front war has increased, including the potential use of weapons of mass destruction."²

Of course, all this is nonsense. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Arab awakening is the absence of any prominent Islamic slogans in the protests. The only places where Islamic fundamentalism has been given any breathing space has been in post-Mubarak Egypt, courtesy of its US-backed military rulers. Secret negotiations are underway with the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, where US, UK and French imperialism have switched support from Gaddafi to forces that include their supposed mortal enemy.

For its part, Iran is also keen to divert attention onto the 'foreign enemy' at a time when renewed protests on the streets of major cities in Azerbaijan province echo recent demonstrations in Arab capitals. Tens of thousands have demonstrated in the Azerbaijani cities of Tabriz and Orumieh in protest at the government's failure to protect lake Orumieh, which has already lost half of its water volume over the last

few years, with grave implications for the region's agricultural land.

The extent to which this has become a hot issue was illustrated on September 9 when slogans about this ecological disaster were chanted by football fans. Larger, more conventional protests had taken place on September 3, for which the government blamed 'foreign agents' and their attempts to politicise an environmental issue! As if the disappearance of the lake and the potential displacement of 14 million people could be considered a *non-political* issue. Security and anti-riot forces used caged vehicles to house arrested protestors, while witnesses in Tabriz told reporters that security forces stormed a hospital to arrest those injured during street clashes.

The ructions in Azerbaijan were only a small part of the Iranian government's problems. In Kurdistan, the civil war that started 33 years ago continues to cost lives. Meanwhile, protests against the government's mismanagement of the economy have even spread to the bazaar, that bastion of the religious state.

This week the deputy head of the Workers' House, the only workers' organisation officially authorised by the Islamic state, warned that if job creation plans are not properly managed, the country will face a crisis of 1.5 million unemployed workers in the next two years. The state tried to ban the publication of the annual rate of inflation. However, this week Iran's central bank governor informed the press that it had climbed to 17.3% in August. In addition, according to the director of the supreme audit court, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, the government has so far borrowed 148,000 billion rials (some \$13.8 billion) to implement the subsidy reform plan.

So, like the Zionist state, Iran is desperate to divert attention from internal economic and political problems. Its elaborate 10-day air force exercise, entitled 'Defenders of the Skies of Velayat 3', is just being concluded. These 'war games' were

devised to test equipment, tactics and the ammunition of fighter jets in four stages. Iran's leaders are not planning on an actual conflict breaking out. However, they know the political value of talking up the danger of war.

Another major threat is represented by the latest proposed sanctions against Iran's central bank. On August 9, more than 90 US senators signed a letter to Barack Obama pressing him to approve the imposition of sanctions on this financial institution. The American legislators claim that the measure could potentially freeze Iran out of the global financial system and make it nearly impossible for Tehran to clear billions of dollars in oil sales every month.

This would amount to all-out economic warfare and if the sanctions were implemented (Iran has appealed to international financial institutions to try and prevent that), it is difficult to see the country's embattled economy surviving such an onslaught. This is happening in the context of the western intervention in Libya, which has once more encouraged Iranian supporters of 'regime change' from above. As this paper predicted, the imperialist intervention in Libya could have disastrous consequences for Iran - the social-imperialist left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who supported this in the name of 'humanitarian' aid for the Libyan people, will bear their share of responsibility if this turns out to be the case.

The Arab awakening has created an upheaval throughout the Middle East and neither Iran nor Israel is immune from its consequences. Let us hope the Nato intervention in Libya does not herald the beginning of the end of the Arab/Middle Eastern revolutionary uprisings ●

Yassamine Mather

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Notes

1. *Al Arabiya News* August 29.
2. 'Middle East on brink of full-scale war: Israeli general' *International Business Times* September 6.

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