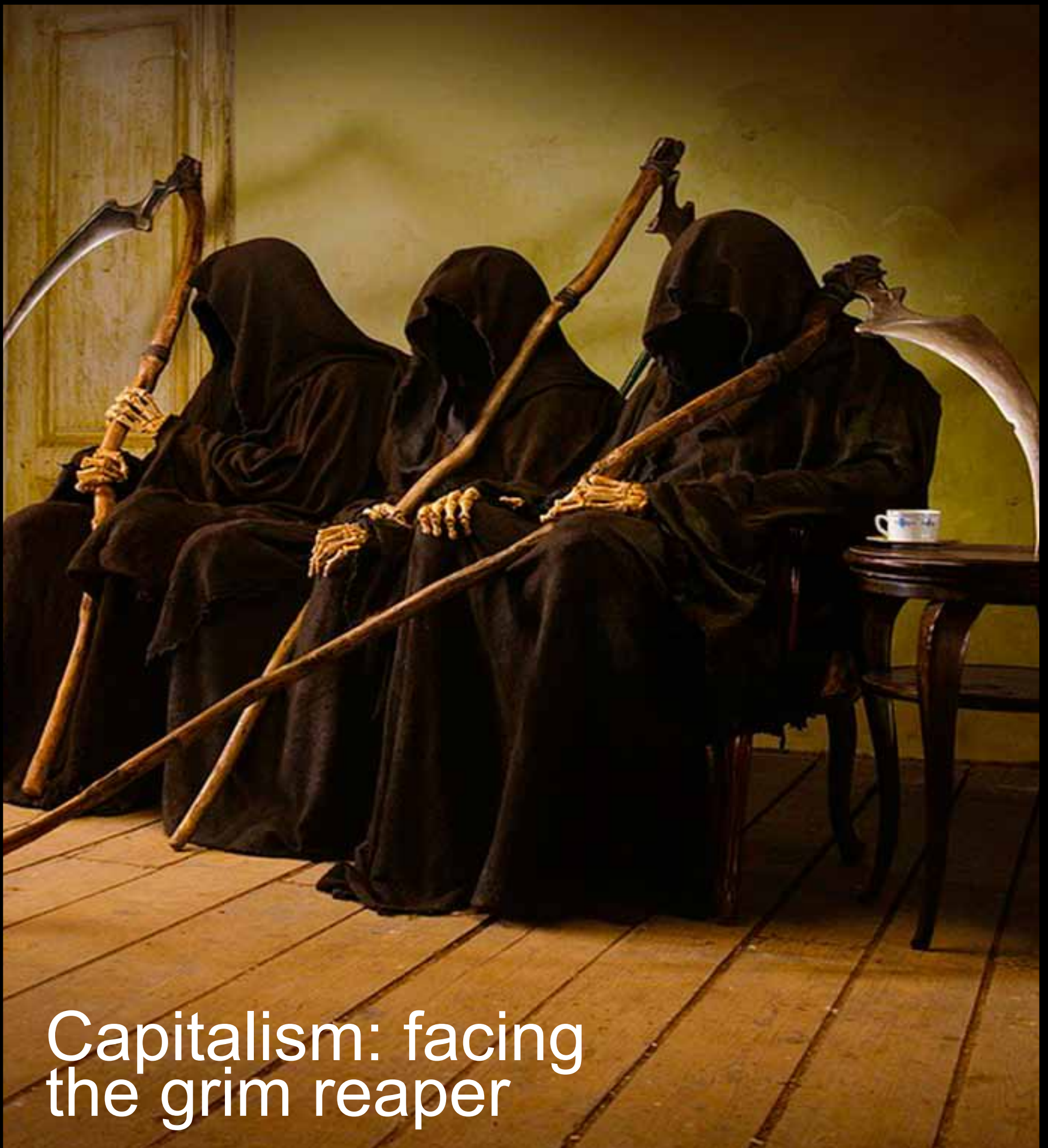


# weekly **worker**

**Student unions are not  
trade unions. Build unity  
around political ideas**

- Germany: Die Linke
- Dale Farm evictions
- Lenin: Labour tactics
- Berlusconi: sleaze

No 882    Thursday September 22 2011    Towards a Communist Party of the European Union    [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk)    £1/€1.10



Capitalism: facing  
the grim reaper



## LETTERS



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

## Moving right

As the months progress, it is becoming more and more clear that the Labour Party under Ed Miliband is moving to the left. We can see real attempts to reconnect with the trade union base, communities fighting cuts, young people being robbed of a future and travellers fighting for basic rights. This situation and the ongoing disunity and political confusion of the left really gives communists an opportunity to get stuck in the Labour Party and fight for democracy and socialist policies.

All is going as CPGB majority comrades predicted, right? Of course it isn't. Labour at a local and national level continues to demonstrate its willingness to attack the working class and repair its image and credibility in the eyes of big business, the rightwing press and the capitalist class.

Two recent statements by Miliband have hammered the last nails in the coffin of the hopes of a working class Labour revival and a shift to the left. Picking which side you are on in the desperate struggle at Dale Farm has to go down as a political litmus test for anyone even remotely linked with labour movement. Miliband and Labour did not offer support for the soon-to-be-destitute minority in Basildon. He did not even seek to support the United Nations offer of mediation, but followed the rest of the political elite by attacking the traveller families and supporting their eviction from a tiny piece of land.

At the TUC conference, Miliband could have offered a hand to the unions and their members in fighting the cuts and supporting working class resistance. Instead he chose to prove the rightwing press wrong in labelling him 'red Ed' by again attacking strike action and, with it, the electoral base of Labour. During his speech, he managed to come out with: "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." Later on, he said that the unions "can offer businesses the prospect of better employee relations, as you did during the recession" and, finally, "you know you will never have relevance for many workers in this country if you allow yourselves to be painted as the opponents of change". In short, the Labour Party will not fight and is preparing to distance itself from and attack workers that do resist.

These two recent statements by Miliband, along with the mountain of cuts from Labour councils, the continuing attack on party democracy and Labour's support for a severe austerity programme are concrete evidence of where Labour is and where it is going. It is brutally clear that Labour is not moving to the left, as predicted by the CPGB majority. It is not offering communists new space to battle inside Labour to organise, with workers joining to fight the cuts. The place of communists is to join working class resistance wherever it emerges and fight for a programme that can transform the disparate movements into a real force for change.

Majority comrades are simply left with exhortations to god to change the situation, as reality continually disproves their strategy and theses. Against the predictions of many comrades, the struggle against austerity is outside and against the Labour Party as much as it is against the Tory-led coalition.

The coming months will see the most serious strikes for a generation, with millions of workers taking action. Students will also be back out on the

streets, supporting the strikers and demonstrating against attacks on education. The anti-cuts movement is consolidating its campaigns and committees up and down the country are preparing resistance against austerity.

If we want to continue fighting through the left for revolutionary unity, then it will be within this movement, in the unions, our community anti-cuts campaigns and student unions, not the Labour Party. Communists must not fail to grasp this basic fact of the period because, if we fail, then isolation and irrelevance beckons.

**Chris Strafford**  
Manchester

## Jarrow heroes

Mark Fischer is certainly a hard man to please. After years of recounting the centrality of the Labour Party (which, if not dead in the 1930s, is certainly pushing up daisies now), he castigates Ellen Wilkinson for taking up office in the most leftwing government that party has ever produced (Letters, September 8). This in the same breadth as lecturing the rest of left as to why their rejection of Labour today, when it is a thousand times more rightwing, is ill-conceived. It's the 59th variety of 'Vote Labour without illusions'.

Ellen had been a young revolutionary firebrand in 1919-20 - a vociferous supporter of the Soviet revolution. She had been one of three Guild Communist Group representatives, which went on to form the CPGB and had been a leading writer for the *Sunday Worker* in 1926. The CPGB did such a good job convincing her of the centrality of the Labour Party that she, along with thousands of fellow-travelling reds, joined it and took up positions in it. Mark clearly sees this as evidence of how reactionary she had become - damned if you do, damned if you don't! I consider the whole strategy of the CPGB toward the Labour Party to have been ill-conceived then and even more so now, but that's another story.

Ellen could be described as something of a left communist in the early 30s, advocating the democratic basis of the soviets for a future workers' government, but, by the time of the Spanish civil war and the Jarrow march, her line was undoubtedly Stalinist.

My point in mentioning that it was Ellen, Jarrow's famously passionate left MP, who organised the march, together with its self-declared 'socialist' town council, was to demonstrate it was not some anti-leftist diversion. There is actually evidence that Ellen in fact jumped aboard the march when she realised it wouldn't be stopped, but that doesn't challenge the progressive aims and composition of the marchers and the community they represented.

At the risk of repetition, Ellen and the starving Tyneside workers had not rejected the National Unemployed Workers Movement - they did not frame the march as "an apolitical alternative to the militant, communist-led mass movement that was the NUWM" at all - and had gone to Wal Hannington with the view that the NUWM should organise the march. But *the NUWM turned them down*.

Mark is aware of Ellen's *The town that was murdered* - a book which made a huge impact on my father's generation - so will know of the conditions that prevailed. The men were starving and desperate when they conceived the march. The TUC and Labour Party sent instructions that it must not be supported. At this stage, the Jarrow leadership adopted the prevailing CPGB popular front strategy and, from then on, they were being led up the garden path. But that takes nothing away from

the heroism of those men, marching in utter wretchedness all the way to London and back. A little less 'holier-than-thou' purity and a bit more class sympathy in Mark's comments and I wouldn't have taken issue with him.

I wasn't aware that Dave Riley had tried to block communist support for the march, as I was led to believe there was very little of that in any case. Riley actually said at the time: "If I had my way, I would organise the unemployed of the whole country, as well as Scotland and Wales, and then march on London, so that they would all arrive at the same time. The government would then be forced to listen to us, or turn the military against us." That doesn't sound like a moderate with a "begging bowl" to me.

At the time, the march was regarded as direct action. It held the hopes and fears of the whole of Tyneside - 90,000 of them signed a petition in its support. Mark suggests it was some tame affair, but Baldwin's cabinet 'exposed' it, the fascists saw it as a prelude to armed insurrection (which is not entirely fanciful, as marching to London with arms had been discussed), Labour and the TUC condemned it, secret police infiltrated it, the Bishop of Durham "deplored" it, and the CPGB and NUWM tried to delay it and dilute it. Nobody says they were storming the Winter Palace, but it isn't the knack-kneed effort Mark and other revisionists of the event have tried to rewrite it as.

Certainly some Tory leaders in poverty-stricken towns along the route welcomed the march, though it is clear that Tory Party central office did not approve. Indeed the cabinet tried to have it banned, but was advised that there was no legal provision to do so. Instead, they used the national publicity bureau to channel the government's line into the press, to "expose the origin, motive and uselessness of the march" - interesting in the light of Mark's own attempts along those same lines.

Secret police memos of the period show that there is little film footage of the march because the home office had prevailed upon "each film company" to refrain from filming it. On their return to Jarrow, all of the leaders and most of the marchers tore up their Labour Party cards and three years later Jarrow exploded in political riots.

One of the sessions at Communist University this year was called 'They fuck you up, the left'. They do - and, in line with the fashion among current academics, they fuck up our history too, debunking all sorts of working class icons and moments. Mark has swallowed almost whole Matt Perry's *The Jarrow crusade*.

I have never alleged the Jarrow march was a turning point or revolutionary spark. It was a brave attempt by a working class community in the teeth of recent defeats and massive betrayals by their own organisations to take up the struggle of their class. That they weren't guided by Mark's infallible communist leadership is true, but there were other 'Jarrows' in which the party did have the lead - how much better did they prosper as a result? They didn't.

The Jarrow workers were right the first time, when they debated marching armed with guns and grenades in their pockets, picking up armed workers on the way from all the depressed regions and nations. Was there a political movement which would have matched that militant heroism at the time and seized that moment? No, there wasn't, and that was why the marchers took the course they did.

Matt Perry actually concludes: "The Jarrow march was inescapably a working class protest and stands in the tradition of popular radicalism" (p180)

- the part Mark doesn't concede, to his discredit. As for asking me why I think the Jarrow march was highlighted as demonstrating 'national character' in some official chronology of British history - it's a silly question, Mark.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## 0.1% in the know

Last week, Mike Macnair wrote extensively on the CPGB's new *Draft programme*, first mentioning "dialectical logic" and stating that: "The underlying contradiction in the society is one between the interests of capital and the interests of the working class" ('A hypothesis to change the world', September 15).

Not once were there concepts in this lengthy article discussing technological development, or the equally important techniques we use, or human development. Michael Lebowitz writes, quoting Marx on human and worker development, of contradiction as the new within the old, growing dialectically, being, becoming and new being.

Indeed, as Bertell Ollman so eloquently quotes from Marx's *Capital* in *Dance of the dialectic*, there are primary and secondary contradictions, a "cluster of contradictions inside capital". The primary contradiction in capitalist society and previous economic formations, as Marx and Engels make clear, is that between the productive forces (the growing new technology and human techniques within the old system) and the relations of production (capital, private ownership and bosses versus workers, labour and the forces of humanity).

The technology is now finally there, but human development and our techniques are not. We have to build human society (your communism), the new future human being, the new worker, within capitalism - the new within the old. That's dialectics! That means we have to focus on development within our communities - neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, etc - so that we become able to run our own various, independent and cooperative, everyday, face-to-face communities.

From now on, revolutionaries have to set a caring, sharing, loving example in our various communities.

However, look at the bitterness and sectarianism of much of the 'left'. Do you, reader, set that example all the time, every day? No wonder 'Marxism' is so isolated from youth, workers and our communities. Marx stood tall in the streets during the summer riots amongst the confused youth and others. Where were the 'Marxist' leaders? In the gutters or their offices, or ...?

And this "new within the old" (Engels) happens in every nesting system in a cosmos of nesting systems, sourced in relations within and between atoms; planets, stars, spiral galaxies, eco-systems, trade unions, businesses, animals. Even you, dear reader, and the CPGB are systems!

Mike's programme-fetishism clearly has no grasp of the dialectic or method, just like 99.9% of all so-called 'Marxists' who know little about Marx.

**Steve Masterson**  
London

## Phased out

The problem is not with Dave Douglass's parsing of the cost of coal in the UK or, for that matter, why pits close and why coal is or is not imported to the UK (Letters, September 15). This avoids the real issue: coal kills, and kills more than any other form of energy ever known to have been developed by humans.

What Dave wants to do - and has been doing rather well, I might add - is *defend the continued use of coal* instead of developing a programme that *phases out* coal altogether (at least outside the uses in metallurgy, where it is not so easily replaced).

The world needs to relinquish the use of coal for energy production generally, where we can, and especially in electrical generation, where it does the most harm. We need a programme that can both replace coal with non-fossil forms of energy, such as nuclear, and at the same time defend the incomes and standards of living of those made redundant: namely coal miners and some lorry and train drivers.

As socialists, we can do this with a set of campaigns, beginning with the renationalisation of the energy sector.

**David Walters**  
left-atomics.blogspot.com

## Fighting fund

# Healthier

The entire capitalist world may still be embroiled in ever more entrenched economic problems, but the *Weekly Worker's* finances are now healthier than they have been for some time.

The reason for that is down entirely to the astounding success of our Summer Offensive campaign to increase the paper's regular income in the shape of standing orders. We set ourselves the target of winning an extra £300 and we achieved that with a little bit to spare - and what a difference that has made to our fighting fund. No longer does our £1,250 monthly target seem all but out of reach. On the contrary, now I am entirely confident of making it.

Take September. Thanks mainly to those standing orders, we already have £1,143 in the kitty, with just over a week still to go to raise the remaining £107. Of course, we should not content ourselves with merely reaching our goal - we should aim to smash right through it!

Over the last seven days those SOs brought in a small matter of £368 - thank you, SP, MKS, JD, MM, SK, RP and SP. And thanks especially to those among you who answered our appeal by increasing your standing orders. Another 'thank you' goes to comrade AC, for his £15. Like 13,000 others, AC reads us every week online (in fact there were 13,005 visitors last week), but he was the only one of them to show his appreciation.

Regular readers of this column will know that I am always complaining about the paucity of gifts via our website. Maybe next year our Summer Offensive should target our internet readers. Or maybe not. Anybody got any better idea to draw in more donations from that source?

**Robbie Rix**

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



## MINERS

# Four victims of industrial demise

David Douglass looks at the background to last week's tragic events at Gleision pit in south Wales



**Dangerous, but bonding**

Nowhere is the legacy that Thatcher left the coalfield areas more tragically illustrated than the woeful Gleision pit inundation. Here we have proud men, four of whom lost their lives, who were desperate to earn their living and support their families in the only way we know how, opening up what is basically an abandoned mine. Working totally conventional methods, using hand-held boring machines, shot blasting and hand-filling, they sought the surviving pillars of coal (see photos at [www.minersadvice.co.uk](http://www.minersadvice.co.uk): 'The collieries of Wales').

While a shaft height of 75cm is not anything new to many of us from the older coalfields, the lack of any sort of investment other than sweat, graft and wooden timbers, and a knife's edge of profit and loss make for a volatile mix. The temptation to work pillars of coal left in to support roofs and hold back water is something which visited us in the worst days of private mining in the early 1840s. These pillars hold back hundreds, sometimes thousands, of millions of gallons of water from worked-out mines in the whole region - the thinner the pillar gets, the more certain an inundation.

This much is speculation - the disaster enquiry will confirm or disprove it - but I think it is odds on to have been the cause. Early reports that heavy rain had caused the inundation never rang true: even the basic pump system used at this mine could cope with any amount of rainwater. Although we pitmen do not know for certain, we feel it has got to be mine water that broke through probably weakened dams.

While none of us wanted to admit it, we more or less knew there was no hope for these men - the silence told us that. Underground pipework runs for hundreds of miles at all levels down the pit, and the international mining distress signal is made by banging on the pipes - the noise and vibrations run throughout the workings, alerting everyone that there are survivors. In this case there was no banging.

The pit was mining anthracite, the world's most sought-after coal seam, for its super-calorific value and low

ash content. It can fetch double or more the price of normal coal, and the men at this pit were clearly supplying a strong local market, which earned them a good living. Something like 20 of these little drifts and 'day holes' exist round the country, often worked by families of miners or their friends. They are run on a shoestring and are often non-union - periodic visits from the mines inspectorate can never replace a strong miners' union.

However, the main culpability lies not with non-unionism, but with the lack of a modern coal industry - or any industry in which to work. Safety is expensive - any complaint might drive the pit to closure, so many keep shtum, when they know damn well the clock is ticking. What contracts the men were working under is unclear: they may well have been 'self-employed' or operating some 'share scheme' based solely on output. That a disaster fund has been set up for the victims' families suggests there was no other source of income provided for at the mine.

We are proud that Wayne Thomas, National Union of Mineworkers general secretary in Wales, was at the pithead from the beginning. It is believed we had one member at the mine, a mate of Wayne's and a veteran of the old Tower colliery.

Tower was a workers' buyout, run by the union at the pit, and worked decades without a single accident or death. It had been a political victory, with a guaranteed market for its specialist coal won through nationwide labour-movement lobbying and community opinion. The security of Tower's market (and, of course, the miners' hard work and skill) ensured there was scope for investment - and safety. At Gleision seven or eight men, one of whom was the owner, struggled in appalling conditions to win 200-300 tonnes a week, all off the shovel, for local dealers.

Of course, coal mining is a dangerous job. Under the old National Coal Board, a strong union, with the support of a powerful labour movement, forced legislative protection and a high safety standard. Safety got steadily stronger over its entire life (which did not mean

accidents and tragedies never happened). Even with privatisation in 1993 and the repeal of many mine safety laws, there was still a strongly policed safety culture enforced by the NUM, and independent rights of safety and inspection.

However, as the private companies have abandoned more and more mines, further reducing the dwindling number of miners, so the pool of mines and available work has decreased and miners have become more and more desperate. The recent announcement of a couple of hundred jobs at the reopened Hatfield colliery saw thousands and thousands of applications from unemployed miners across the country; the same thing happened with the opening of Adventure mine in south Wales.

Even the offer of work in dangerous day holes and small drifts like Gleision is a temptation. It is pit work - work we have been bred to do; it is security, odd though that seems now; and it is a decent living. Mining has never been just a job though, and that element cannot be ignored. Mining is a challenge, a hard, physical test of sinew and mental strength - and there is the comradeship, which is rather habit-forming, although I do not expect non-miners to understand that. Our hearts go out to the families of these poor working men, too proud to sit on the dole, too skilful to give up.

The answer, of course, is not to walk away from the six or seven large commercial mines we have left - even private ownership is not actually characterised by this method of work and the likelihood of accidents. Instead we need the reopening of a modern British coal industry, secure in investments and markets. That probably can only be done in concert with the nationalisation of the energy industry, with the maximum achievable standards of worker, consumer and community control.

Rising gas prices, fuel poverty, the threat posed by nuclear expansion, and the destruction of land and seascapes by wind turbines may soon pose the question of clean coal again. We have to insist that the NUM and the working class drive this agenda and set the conditions in which it will operate ●

## ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Communist Students

**Thursday September 22, 6pm:** Meeting, Cameron committee room, 3rd floor, Manchester Metropolitan University Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M15. 'The student protests: a year on'.

Organised by Manchester Communist Students: [manchestercommuniststudents@googlegmail.com](mailto:manchestercommuniststudents@googlegmail.com).

### Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, 6.15pm, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube).

**September 27:** 'The origins of culture and society'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

[www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### Breaking the silence

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

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

### Defend pensions

**Saturday September 24, 1pm:** Open meeting for Unison members, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Build for a massive turnout and 'yes' vote in the strike ballot.

Organised by George Binette (Camden), John McLoughlin (Tower Hamlets) and Paul Holmes (Kirklees). All personal capacity. More information: 07905 826304.

### East London pride

**Saturday September 24, 1pm:** March, Hackney town hall, Mare Street, London E8. Gays and Muslims, unite!

Organised by East London Pride: [info@eastlondonpride.org.uk](mailto:info@eastlondonpride.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 Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

### Oil and Iraq

**Wednesday September 28, 7pm:** Public meeting, The Forum (in the Cube), Millennium Plain, Norwich. Speaker: Greg Muttitt, author of *Fuel on the fire*.

Organised by Norwich Stop the War: 01493 664499.

### Europe against austerity

**Saturday October 1, 10am:** Conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1 (nearest station: Kings Cross). Europe against cuts and privatisation. Supporters include: Attac France, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (France), Sinn Féin (Ireland), Committee Against the Debt (Greece), Cobas (Italy), Plataforma pels Drets Socials de Valencia (Spain), Attac Portugal, Joint Social Conference.

Registration: £3 unwaged, £5 waged, £10 delegate.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance: [www.europeagainstausterity.org](http://www.europeagainstausterity.org).

### Jarrow march 2011

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

Organised by Youth Fight for Jobs: [www.jarrowmarch11.com](http://www.jarrowmarch11.com).

### Cable Street anniversary

**Sunday October 2, 11.30am:** March, Aldgate East (junction of Braham Street and Leman Street), London E1. Unity against today's forces of fascism, racism and anti-Semitism. Part of anniversary weekend of events.

Organised by Cable Street Group: [cablestreet36@gmail.com](mailto:cablestreet36@gmail.com).

### Lobby the Tories

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

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

### 10 years after

**Saturday October 8:** Mass assembly, Trafalgar Square, London, to mark 10th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan.

Speakers include: John Pilger, Tariq Ali, Brian Eno, Jemima Khan, Tony Benn, George Galloway, Caroline Lucas MP and many more.

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

### 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 Cuba Solidarity Campaign: [www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk](http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk).

### Rebellious media

**Saturday October 8, Sunday October 9:** Conference - 'Media, activism and social change.'

Saturday, 10.45am: Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. Sunday, 9.30am: Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Noam Chomsky; John Pilger, Laurie Penny, Johann Hari and many more.

Organised by Radical Media Conference: [www.radicalmediaconference.org](http://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.



**ECONOMY**

# Facing the grim reaper

Everyone can see the danger of a crash, from the IMF to the *Financial Times*. But, asks **Eddie Ford**, where is the Marshall Plan or New Deal?

**O**ver the last week there has been a further escalation in the crisis facing the euro zone, with the chances of Greece avoiding a default - whether orderly or disorderly - now seeming more unlikely than ever.

After a teleconference on September 20 between Greek ministers and the 'troika' of the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Union, it was announced that the 'debt inspectors' would return to Athens next week to resume their review of Greece's austerity programme. This review had been suspended on September 2 in order to allow time, it was said, for Greek officials to present the inspectors with a draft of their budget proposals - "concrete facts and figures". According to the Greek constitution, the government has to submit its 2012 draft budget to parliament on the first Monday in October and this plan will go to a vote by the end of that month.

An official statement told us that "good progress" had been made on September 20. But fear is spreading among Greek officials, and beyond, that they will fail the 'inspection' - deemed to be not cutting deep enough or fast enough. More pain needed. If so, this would severely jeopardise the chances of Greece receiving its next tranche of €8 billion as part of the overall €110 billion bailout package from the troika members. Should this money not be forthcoming by mid-October at the latest, then Greece faces imminent bankruptcy, with the government no longer able to pay public sector wages, pensions, etc.

So it is getting near crunch time for Greece - and perhaps the euro zone as a whole. If Greece defaulted, panic - and the dreaded contagion - would inevitably spread, which could sound the death-knell for the entire euro project. And without the euro what would be the point of the European Union? Clearly, the Eurocrats and the capitalist ruling class are facing the danger of a calamity.

Of course, the troika wants its pound in flesh Greece - and much more besides. That is, the Greek government *must* accelerate its privatisation programme and force through even more vicious cuts: get those books balanced. Either that or not get any more bailout money. Therefore Greece's international creditors are demanding that 100,000 public sector workers be laid off by 2015, but also that pensions be cut immediately. Furthermore, another 50,000 state employees must have their pay slashed.

In other words, a perfect recipe for chaos and social unrest. Greek workers can barely afford to live as it is, while youth and students are particularly affected - the unemployment rate for those between 15 and 24 is 42.5%. Strikes, protests and resistance are breaking out everywhere. For instance, school students have recently staged demonstrations because of the shortage of text books at the start of the academic year - the government says it cannot find the €10 million it needs to print them. Additionally, 5,000 teachers' posts are unfilled - it cannot afford to finance their salaries.

However, Greece is locked into a vicious circle - the austerity programme crippling any chance of economic growth. It is expected the economy will shrink by a minimum of 5.5% this year and will contract



**Death awaits**

for a fourth consecutive year in 2012, primarily due to the cuts regime - tax revenues will be squeezed, as more demands are placed on social security spending. Absolutely predictable. Showing the extraordinary serious nature of the crisis facing Greece, finance minister Evangelos Venizelos announced on September 11 the imposition of an 'emergency' property tax - to be collected through electricity bills! Explaining this unorthodox method of tax-collecting, he frankly admitted it was the "only measure that can be enforced immediately". Really showing his desperation, Venizelos also implored wealthy Greeks to do their 'patriotic' duty and pay their taxes.

But the euro project suffered another hammer blow on September 20, when Standard & Poor declared a "negative outlook" on Italy and downgraded its credit rating. S&P took the decision after lowering its annual growth forecast for Italy to just 0.7% between 2011 and 2014 and questioning whether Italy's own austerity plan would deliver the €60 billion savings that the government is aiming for. Italy's debt-to-GDP ratio currently stands at 120%.

Readers will know that Italy follows euro zone partners Spain, Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Cyprus in having its credit rating downgraded this year. Outside of the financial press, events in the latter country have been curiously under-reported. Bluntly, Cyprus is now a basket case. Needless to say, the island has received several credit rating downgrades due to the exposure of its banks to toxic Greek debt. Almost incredibly, on July 11 a massive munitions explosion in a southern Cypriot naval base virtually destroyed a sizeable chunk of the island.

The blast knocked out the island's largest power station, which supplies more than 50% of the national grid's total electricity supply. Unsurprisingly, there was an instant energy crisis - which fed into, and deepened, the developing economic crisis. Rebuilding costs alone will be around €1 billion and the economy as a whole will be hit by two or three times that amount.

Disaster loomed for the government, the only 'official communist' administration in the western world. The president of Cyprus is Dimitris Christofias, a Moscow-trained member of Akel (Progressive Party of Working People), which stands for an "independent, demilitarised and non-aligned" Cyprus and a "federal solution" to the Greek-Turkish divide.

In dire straits, Cyprus needed a bailout - and quick. Which it got. But not from the IMF or ECB, but rather from *Russia*. In fact, in the words of Russian finance minister Alexei Kudrin, it was a "friendly agreement with no strings attached" - in stark contrast to the onerous austerity and financial-sector reform measures demanded by the EU, IMF, etc of Cyprus's euro zone neighbours. So the Cypriot newspaper, *Phileleftheros*, reported that Russia will bung Cyprus a €2.5 billion loan at an annual interest rate of just 4.5% - a good 10% below the market rate. It goes without saying that Moscow's actions were not motivated by a spirit of pure altruism. Vast amounts of Russian oligarchy money is deposited in Cyprus, which - perhaps not coincidentally - is also a haven for money-laundering.

## Out of control

There is a palpable fear that the world is edging towards another credit crunch. Again, like in the dark days of 2007-09, banks are refusing to lend to each other. Money is drying up. Scared stiff by the implications, on September 15 the world's major central banks (Bank of England, US Federal Reserve, ECB, Swiss National Bank and Bank of Japan) announced that they will pump "unlimited amounts" of US dollars into European banks unable to access international money markets.

Sounds drastic - but is it enough? Events still seem to be slipping out of control, "unlimited" dollars or not. In an attempted display of leadership, US treasury secretary Tim Geithner flew to Poland on September 16 to attend the EU conference - yet another emergency summit. He emphasised Washington's fears of a second "financial meltdown" and pressed for the €440 billion

European Financial Stability Facility mechanism be scaled up. Reading the riot act, Geithner asserted that the EU needed to end "loose talk" about the break-up of the euro and work far more closely with the ECB on creating solutions - not to do so, he warned, posed a "catastrophic risk" to the financial markets.

Geithner's message was echoed by senior IMF officials - who bluntly told the EU to get its "act together". According to its latest estimates, the *best* we can expect from the economies of the developed world is "weak" and "bumpy expansion" - GDPs are predicted to expand at an "anaemic pace" of 1.5% in 2011 - even China's growth rate is forecast to ease back slightly in 2012. Everything seems to be grinding to a halt.

The IMF blamed such factors as "major financial turbulence in the euro zone". It also cited the Japanese tsunami and the rise in oil prices prompted by the unrest in north Africa and the Middle East as two of a "barrage of shocks" to hit the international economy in 2011. The IMF openly stated that the world risks being plunged back into recession, with policy-makers in the euro zone losing control of the sovereign debt crisis and the US economy taking a nose-dive as a result of "political impasse" in Washington, a "deteriorating housing market" or a slide in shares on Wall Street. Specifically, it expressed extreme anxiety about the US facing a "very sluggish recovery of employment" - presently unemployment stands at 9.1%.

Yes, president Barack Obama announced his \$447 billion jobs package (the American Jobs Act) at the beginning of September and then on September 19 unveiled his plans to "kick-start" economic growth and cut the US deficit. He righteously declared his intention to save more than \$3 trillion over the next decade, with roughly half coming from tax increases. This would involve, apparently, closing down loopholes and introducing a 'Buffett rule' - named after the billionaire speculator, Warren Buffett, who recently noted

that he and his wealthy peers pay relatively less tax than the people who work for them. Obama suggested, in a possible threat to the American way of life, that those who earn more than \$1 million a year should pay the same rate of tax as those who earn less.

Yet Obama, as he well knows, has absolutely no chance of getting his proposals through Congress. The Republican majority, driven semi-mad under Tea Party influence, have already accused him of outlining a blueprint for "class war" - denouncing his administration's "insistence on raising taxes on job creators" and "pitting one group of Americans against another", to use the words of John Boehner, the Republican speaker in the House of Representatives. Many of Obama's most vociferous critics in Congress are already convinced that he is a crypto-Islamist-communist - and that was before the 'Buffett rule'. In reality, of course, Obama is engaged in a process of political positioning for next year's presidential elections - throwing down the gauntlet to the Republicans in a grand gesture. Meanwhile, unemployment and inequality reaches new heights in US society.

We have the same dismal picture in the UK. Unemployment now *officially* stands at over 2.5 million - the number of youth jobless having risen sharply by 78,000 to 973,000. The IMF has cut its growth forecast for Britain for the third time in nine months, and has warned chancellor George Osborne (remember when he was a fiscal wonderboy?) that further "underperformance" would warrant a policy U-turn - ease off on the cuts and try to stimulate growth. Osborne, naturally, has rejected any talk of a "plan B", claiming that any change in strategy would undermine the government's "credibility". Curiously enough though, numerous reports are circulating that some ministers are "discussing" how to inject money into the ailing economy, arguing that up to £5 billion in extra capital spending could be used to finance various infrastructural projects - roads, railways, broadband, etc. But no plan B under George's watch - never, never, never.

The Tory and Liberal Democrat 'master plan' is in tatters. Their expectation, or hope, was that by the time of the next election in 2014 there would be a roaring upturn. Meaning that the country had gone from pain to economic growth again, thus justifying the austerity measures and the coalition government's whole *raison d'être*. Look, things are working and we can be generous again. This has already been shown to be totally illusory. Come the next general election, the Tories will hardly be popular, while the Liberal Democrats will be facing a wipe-out.

Everyone can see the danger of a crash, from the IMF to the *Financial Times*. But instead of solutions from authoritative leaders, there is only short-term expediency - no Marshall Plan no New Deal. Definitely no Keynes. Just walking in front of the train instead. What irrationality. This is tantamount to collective suicide, given the very real danger that in the next recession it will be *countries* going down - and dragging the banks and other financial institutions down with them ●

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## GERMANY

# Die Linke booted out

After 10 years, the German left party has been voted out of the Berlin city coalition government, reports **Tina Becker**. But instead of criticisms of its participation there are calls for a show of false 'unity' to win back support

There was only one winner in the September 18 regional elections in Berlin: Die Piratenpartei (Pirate Party). At its first electoral outing in Berlin, it achieved a surprising 8.9% of the vote and will send 15 representatives to the regional parliament.

When it was formed in 2006, it concentrated almost exclusively on its opposition to the campaign of the powerful music industry against 'piracy' on the internet (hence the name). Initially, it did not expand its programme much beyond demands for 'web freedom' and its opposition to ongoing attempts by the German government to censor internet content deemed terrorist, pornographic or illegal in some other sense.

But in 2009, the group made the decision to become more serious, expand its programme beyond the internet and take part in elections. With considerable success: the membership exploded from a few hundred to 12,000. Its campaign in Berlin made the other parties look old and washed out. Die Piratenpartei members created their own election placards at home, demanding for example, 'Privatise religion!' The call for the separation of church and state went hand in hand with the demand to make it easier to organise referendums and for the end of 'state secrets'.

Those elected have pledged to write a daily blog about their experiences in parliament, promising to publicise all of the city's contracts and other material deemed 'secret'. According to pollsters, the Pirates took tens of thousands of votes from the established parties: 17,000 from the Greens, 14,000 from the Social Democrats (SPD) and 13,000 from Die Linke. Interestingly, they also managed to bring on board 23,000 previous non-voters.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the group does not have a rounded or viable programme - and, of course, it is not a socialist organisation. It does not even see itself as a left party, stating: "We are outside that straight line that goes from the extreme left to the right".<sup>2</sup> But it was certainly regarded as a breath of fresh air in the muggy political atmosphere of Berlin.

For 10 long years, the 'red-red' government coalition of SPD and Die Linke ran the German capital. It closed down nurseries, cut benefits and privatised 120,000 council flats. Die Linke voted to part-privatise the Berlin tram system, campaigned against national wage parity for public sector workers (who still earn considerably less in the east) and spoke out against efforts to bring the company that supplies Berlin with water back into public ownership. It also helped to privatise a part of the main Berlin hospital - leading to worse working conditions and lower wages.

Naturally, the SPD was punished for its role in mismanaging the city: its vote dropped by 2.5%, although it remains the largest party. It will probably continue to govern, either with the Greens or the Conservatives (CDU) - negotiations are still ongoing. Die Linke, however, received a bigger slap: after its 2001 high of 22.3% and the 13.4% achieved in 2006, it is now down to 11.5%. The party's whole election campaign was perceived as a desperate attempt to cling onto government. There was not even a hint of self-criticism of some of the unpopular measures it oversaw.

Add to that a few silly mistakes and you have an electoral catastrophe. For example, one of Die Linke's main election posters railed against rising rents. But two weeks before the election, tens of thousands of council tenants received demands for steep rent increases. The bourgeois press had a field day.

### Bourgeois government

Many members of Die Linke are highly critical of the actions of their Berlin comrades while in government. Unfortunately though, *participation* in bourgeois government is now hardly disputed by anybody in the party.

A confused, opportunistic argument is put forward by Sozialistische Linke, the party platform dominated by Marx 21 (the Socialist Workers Party's German section, which used to be called Linksruck). In its analysis of the elections it writes that "since 2006, Berlin Die Linke has made good progress in government". It criticises only a couple of policy decisions, as well as the fact that prospective candidates critical of those decisions were not "given good seats on the party's electoral list" (and why exactly should the majority do that?).

Sozialistische Linke continues: "We fight for Die Linke to be successful in government or in opposition, depending on the political circumstances." In its typically obscure way it concludes: "This also means we need to criticise any praxis in government or opposition that has not been up to scratch." The Marx 21 comrades have a lot to lose and therefore choose their words carefully: a couple of their members were elected to the German Bundestag in 2009 and dozens more work as parliamentary aides.

And Antikapitalistische Linke (which is dominated by the soft Stalinist Kommunistische Plattform around the charismatic Sahra Wagenknecht) mainly criticises the fact that comrades in Berlin "did not act according to national policy", particularly over water. No word about the problem of government participation itself.

For our part, we believe that working class parties should never take up seats in a bourgeois government. Once they can convince a *majority* of the working class of their ideas, we are in a qualitative different situation. We would seek to form a government in order to carry out our minimum programme *in full* and begin to put into practice measures outlined in the maximum programme. But Die Linke is a long way away from that.

Just like in Berlin, the party has overseen draconian cuts and closures in the regional governments of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg. And how could it be any different? In government, Die Linke has been forced to manage capitalism, which especially in this period of crisis means

cuts, cuts and cuts again.

### Eurobonds

Thanks to its powerful export industry, Germany seems to be coming through the economic crisis as the best of a bad lot. There is regularly talk of an "upswing". But scratch the surface and a very different picture emerges. For example, while the official unemployment figure currently stands at 7% (2.9 million), there are another 4.2 million people in Germany who are officially classified as *unterbeschäftigt* (underemployed). In other words, another 10% of the workforce scrape by in precarious temporary jobs, have been sent onto training courses by the state or are forced to take up one of the hated 'one euro jobs', where the long-term unemployed are forced to work for €1 an hour or risk losing their benefits.

The situation in the east is worse still. In Berlin, 13.3% are currently unemployed. There are no official figures for underemployment there, but one can guess. Real wages have been going downhill for years and many employers have used the crisis to squeeze the most out of their workers: collective wage agreements are being cancelled by the employers at an alarming rate.

Why don't the unions fight back? "It feels like we are only here to manage decline," one trade union activist in Die Linke told me. Many people desperately cling on to their job - even if it is being casualised. There is very little fighting spirit on display - better a temporary job than none at all. The German unions are being broken. It is not happening as dramatically as under Margaret Thatcher in Britain, but it is no less effective.

It is no surprise then that many people feel that Germany should not have to bail out the Greek economy. The leading German tabloid *Bild-Zeitung* has run headline after headline railing against the increasing size of what is known in Germany as the *Euro-Rettungsschirm* (emergency parachute). According to a survey conducted by *Die Welt*,<sup>3</sup> 66% of Germans are against another Greek bailout if they have to pay.

Die Linke quite rightly opposes the proposed package: "It will only save

banks, insurance companies and hedge funds," says Klaus Ernst, chair of the party. The German export surplus has helped to create those massive debts in the rest of Europe and therefore "Germany is partially to blame for the crisis".<sup>4</sup>

The bourgeois leaders, however, are quite aware that they must act. They do not have a solution to the crisis, of course. But they know that the crumbling economies of Portugal, Greece and Italy will drag Germany down with them if nothing is done. Although the SPD will vote for the package in the Bundestag next week, it has been pushing for the introduction of Eurobonds, managed by a new euro zone treasury. Chancellor Angela Merkel seemed to flirt with the idea for a while. But the CDU now firmly rejects the idea of "socialising the debts of the other countries". (in reality, that has long been happening).

Eurobonds cannot rescue capitalism in decline either, though they at least are an attempt at more rationality. The European Union and the Euro logically point the way towards more European-wide cooperation. That does not mean socialists should actively call for the introduction of Eurobonds, as, for example, the leadership of Die Linke now does. They are not an alternative to the rescue package, as the comrades seem to imply. As if those bonds would not be used mainly to "save the banks, insurance companies and hedge funds".

Clearly, the Keynesian answers put forward by Die Linke's leadership need to be challenged. Instead, we need our own vision for a united Europe. We have to wrest the project of European unity away from the bankers, bosses and bureaucrats and push for our own vision of a Europe from below.

### 'Lack of unity'

Of course, not everybody in Die Linke agrees with the leadership's support for Eurobonds. And there are plenty of other debates going on in the organisation.

For example, the party is in the middle of discussing the draft of a new party programme, which will be voted on at a conference in Erfurt at the end of October. Key areas of disagreement are: how to deal with the experience of 'real existing socialism' (especially East Germany), Keynesianism, the deployment of German soldiers abroad and the circumstances in which Die Linke can participate in government. But these differences are not properly debated in the party. In effect, they are played out in the distorted arena of the bourgeois media.

For a start, there is no actual space for it. Die Linke still does not have its own newspaper - or any other forum in which these huge disagreements could be discussed. It is a big plus that political platforms are allowed to freely operate (attempts by

the leadership to abolish them a few years ago were soundly defeated) and they have been issuing statements on many of the disputed issues. Debates over the political direction of the party are also taking place locally in the branches, of course. And undoubtedly, the Erfurt conference will

also see interesting contributions. In my experience, some of them will be clear and to the point, a few more will be deliberately murky and most of them will be just confused. But this is quite different from the healthy culture of open debate that is so desperately needed in Die Linke - and in the rest of the left, for that matter.

A few weeks before the Berlin elections, the party sent a birthday card to "our dear comrade" Fidel Castro, in which it praises "the gains of socialist Cuba, which has set an example for so many peoples all over the world", without a single critical word. The card was signed by party leaders Gesine Löttsch and Klaus Ernst - digitally, as it turned out. While Löttsch (who is from East Germany) defended the wording she didn't write, the Bavarian trade unionist Ernst distanced himself in embarrassment, calling the card "a mistake".<sup>5</sup> How the card got into the public domain is anybody's guess.

Then there was the '*Mauerbau-Skandal*' surrounding three Die Linke members in the regional parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. After a discussion about the building of the Berlin wall, all parliamentarians stood up to remember the victims that were killed when trying to flee East Germany - apart from the three Die Linke members. They were trying to protest against the "blanket demonisation" of East Germany - but, of course, they simply came over as a bunch of sad, left-over Stalinists (which they probably are).

Much of the Berlin election campaign was overshadowed by these 'scandals'. This has led the left and the right to conclude that the bad results were mainly due to the "lack of unity" within the party and the "internal power fights" - not the unpopularity of the Berlin government. Ironically, the membership is strangely 'united' in that analysis (though the right blames the left for it and vice versa).

Unfortunately, this has led many comrades to draw the conclusion that *less debate* in Die Linke is needed and that those critical of the majority should shut up and rally behind the leadership. At the press conference after the Berlin count, Klaus Ernst mused that "a party where there seems to be infighting is not attractive. We have not been seen as a united organisation, because we didn't always talk about each other in a positive way. The party leadership is united in this: we need to stop the infighting."<sup>6</sup> Sozialistische Linke too calls on all members to "fight for the joint goals of Die Linke and not publicly argue about internal party issues".<sup>7</sup>

In our view, the opposite is true. Die Linke urgently needs a publication where the different views can be *openly* debated, before the working class. Without such clarity, it will be impossible to defeat the right.

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### Notes

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Gesine Löttsch: don't debate



## STUDENTS

# Organising for an alternative vision

Student unions are not like trade unions, argues **Mike Macnair**. Unity must be built primarily around politics, not 'student issues'

**A**cross England and Wales university students are starting their courses with 'freshers weeks' and existing students are returning. The Scots universities have already started. Autumn 2010 saw large, militant demonstrations against the new arrangements for university fees and a broad wave of student occupations, which petered out over the Christmas vacation. This year Edinburgh University anti-cuts campaigners have kicked off with an occupation against the Scots government's plan to charge fees to English students at Scottish universities. This is a narrow issue which is not likely to relight the anti-fees movement.

Meanwhile, last year's president of the National Union of Students, Aaron Porter, has set himself up in business as a consultant advising universities on the "challenges and opportunities" of the new funding regime, at the relatively very low rate for management consultants of £125 an hour. If university managements have any sense the business will fail.

Will there be student militancy this year? And, if so, about what? Fees? Cuts and department closures? Room rents? Or, as in the wave of occupations in January 2009 over the Israeli attack on Gaza, some international issue? The answer is that both *whether* there will be student militancy and, if so, what the trigger will be, is quite unpredictable.

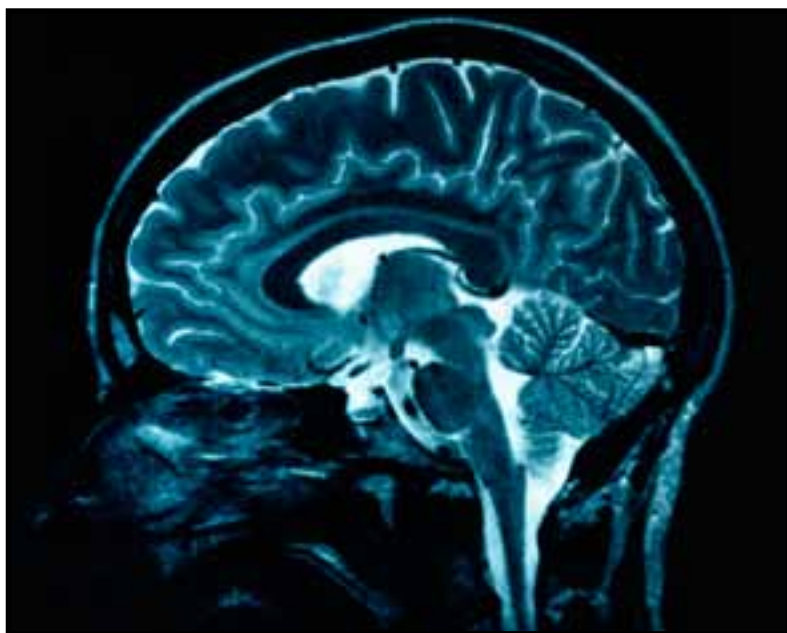
## The left

In spite of its aspiration to organise the workers' vanguard and lead the working class as a whole, the British far left is heavily involved in student politics and dependent on student recruitment. This has been the case since the 1960s.

The dominant approach of the far left to student politics is borrowed from its approach to the trade unions. The idea is that the National Union of Students and the individual student unions in the universities and colleges can be considered as in some sense analogous to a trade union. In a trade union the left can organise in the first instance round making the union do its job of defending members' interests properly - conceived as mobilising the members rather than selling out to management. This is the formal basis of the various 'broad left' formations in the unions.

Transposed into student politics, this approach has been markedly unsuccessful. The latest incarnation is the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, which grew after last autumn's occupations. It attracted around 100 to its June conference ... and accusations that it had been hijacked by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.<sup>1</sup> A 'left slate' of candidates at the NUS conference in March did badly: the AWL, unsurprisingly, claims that this results from the fact that the slate was stitched up between the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Action group's Student Broad Left, and that it adopted minimalist policy ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The reality is that student politics is markedly unlike trade union politics.



Learning to think

On the one hand, student militancy is *not* primarily concerned with students' direct material interests: the 2010 movement against higher fees was about *future*, not present, students; the movement round the attack on Gaza campaign was even more obviously altruistic. In addition, though students in the 'new universities' and colleges are hardest hit by government 'education reforms', the wave of occupations of autumn 2010, though it did include some of these institutions, remained centred in the 'old universities'.

On the other hand, student politics is very episodic in character: a year-cohort may be very militant, but then give up as rapidly as it mobilised. The converse of this is that the apparatus of the student unions and the NUS is under at most highly episodic pressure from their 'base', and the politics of the NUS conference and elections are even further removed from the concerns of the 'membership' than trade union equivalents. Why?

The necessary first step in approaching the issue is to grasp theoretically the political economy of the class location and dynamics of students under developed capitalism. Secondly, grasping the dynamics of student politics requires an understanding of the relationship between universities and the state.

## Classes

To begin with political economy and class. It is a bad error of 'new left', 'Hegelian Marxist' readings of Marx, to imagine that the tendency inherent in capitalism towards polarisation of society into two antagonistic classes is completed and hence that everybody is either bourgeois or proletarian. It is true that the antagonism of the two polar classes is the fundamental dynamic element in the social order. But there remains an extensive middle stratum in the society: the petty proprietors, a class as a class owning some means of production, but insufficient to merely live off the labour of others. This class takes the form mainly of peasants and artisans in the 'third world'; mainly of managers, professionals, etc., in the

'first world'.

What almost invariably goes along with reduction of class relations to the two polar classes is that, in spite of the 'Hegelian Marxism' of this view, its supporters fail to grasp the interpenetration of the classes. There is, as Marx put it in *Theories of surplus value*, a wage element in the capitalist's receipt of surplus value. Conversely, every worker who is paid more than bare subsistence costs receives an element of the social surplus product in the wage. The classes are in that sense interpenetrated.

This, in turn, leads to a fundamental point that Hal Draper makes in his *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* (volume 2: *Politics of social classes*). The proletariat shades into the middle class and the middle class shades into the bourgeoisie. Skilled workers are proletarians in a certain sense, but can become petty bourgeois. Certain sorts of information technology specialists, for example, can move very rapidly between working for somebody as skilled workers and working as consultants selling services, as opposed to their labour-power.

An associated problem is that of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour. At a very basic level of the material division of labour addressed by pre-Marxist political economists, this distinction revolves around whether what is produced increases the total material surplus product - particularly food, etc. Yet under capitalism productive labour is more accurately defined - as Marx in places defines it - as labour which produces profit. Marx says, for example, that a singer who sings for her own pleasure is not working productively, yet a singer who sings for a capitalist selling musical performances is a productive worker: she is producing surplus value for that capitalist.<sup>3</sup>

Another point follows from this. The singer's skills, which make her performances saleable, are, under capitalism, means of production. They can be used to produce profit. It is for this reason that the IT specialists may be able to exploit their skill to set up independent businesses. But even if they do not do so their wages

may include an element of rent: the capitalist who employs them is not only hiring labour-power, but is also hiring the worker's intellectual property.

## Students

Within this framework, how are students and universities located? The best way to start is to take the example of BPP - a private, profit-making organisation that was relatively recently authorised to issue degrees in accountancy and law. BPP is selling to its clients - the students - a body of intellectual property rights which take the form of access to the guild corporate knowledge of lawyers or accountants. The acquisition of those intellectual property rights will enable students to take up jobs as trainee solicitors, trainee accountants, and so on. Potentially, when they have completed their training, they can then become petty proprietors selling legal or accountancy services on the market.

They will not all do so. For example, around 50% of those who get law degrees will go on into the profession. Around half of those will not go beyond being employed as assistant solicitors or other employed lawyers, and in substance these people are skilled workers. The other half will go into business themselves (a very few ascending to the heights of partnership in one of the global mega-law firms, becoming part of the capitalist class).

BPP employs academics, maintenance staff, cleaners, etc - all of whom they exploit in what is a perfectly normal market operation. The relationship between BPP and the students to whom it charges fees, in contrast, is simply that of the purchase of a service - ie, it is not a class antagonism. That is not just true of BPP - it does not make any difference to the nature of the underlying political-economic relationship that most of higher education is provided by endowed charities and state institutions. The student of higher education is buying a skill.

What of humanities students? Where do degrees lead them? They lead to the 'milk rounds', the employers' hiring fairs, and then to managerial, professional or administrative jobs. Being a student sometimes permits you to climb the ladder or the greasy pole to improve your assets as a trader - whether that is simply as a seller of labour-power plus rent for skills, or as a small business operator.

Not everybody is actually going to succeed in this, nor does any particular degree automatically lead to this outcome. At one of my former employers, for a large chunk of law graduates the 'first employment destination' turned out to be in fast-food services. Not all students are going to end up as skilled white-collar workers. Yet it remains the case that the transaction between the student and universities, in substance, is the sale of exploitable intellectual property by the university to the student.

What are the consequences of this? Firstly, students are not a class

and do not form a fraction of a class either. In the first place they are not a fraction of the working class because a section of them are going to wind up elsewhere. Not all students are going to wind up in the middle class either. Further, the student-university relationship is not that of the worker and exploiter. Being a student is a life-cycle position. Being hard up as a student is also a life-cycle position - a gamble on getting better off at the end of the day. In substance this is the same thing as an apprenticeship. Although the relationship between students and staff is hierarchical, it is not one of class antagonism.

The relationship between the students and the administration is no more of a class-antagonistic relationship than when I go into Tesco to buy food. Surplus is not extracted from students, unless in the case where the degree being 'sold' is useless and does not get anybody anywhere. But this case is no different in principle from any other fraudulent sale of worthless goods.

Hence, the social relations of which students are part do not in themselves support a mass movement around students' material conditions. That is not just a matter of there being no relationship of class antagonism: it is also a matter of the diversity of material existence for students being so great: science students spending hours in labs have very different lives to humanities students.

Amongst workers, of course, there is also diverse life experience. It is very different to work for Barclays Bank as a clerk or even as a cleaner than it is to work as a miner. Yet there is class antagonism between the worker and the employer, and this creates common ground for permanent trade union organisations. However, the social relations that students enter into mean that their material conditions and interests themselves do not provide the basis for student politics.

## Universities and state

What does provide the basis for student politics is the second point: the relationship between universities and the state. The universities in the modern sense were promoted in 19th-century Germany as part of state-building and student politics emerges alongside this process. Student politics did not appear in the English system until much later - in fact there were no universities in the modern sense in England until the later 19th century, with major reforms to Oxford and Cambridge and the emergence of the 'red brick' civic universities. The same goes for the USA. It is only in the later 19th century that there came into being systematised institutions with exams, etc - and alongside this the emergence of student politics.

What drives the emergence of modern universities is the expansion of the state bureaucracy. The idea emerges that a bigger state bureaucracy is needed and that this requires more people trained to take up managerial and administrative positions. The fact that the institutional form emerges in

Germany is actually an accident - the multiplicity of statelets in 18th-century Germany created duplicate bureaucracies, and the different principalities had been competing to set up academic institutions. In France, in contrast, the *grandes écoles* were set up to provide training for the state bureaucracy and the form of the modern university spreads from there to the university sector. Everybody else copied these forms.

The jobs which the universities were training students to do as bureaucrats or colonial officials did not involve specialist skills like running a lathe or simply general literacy, but rather the skill of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty.

To train in this very general skill, what is required is that students are brought into artificial conditions of uncertainty: in the sense of debating issues to which there is no straightforward, 'orthodox' answer. How this was done was by building on the teaching of the classics. We spread the teaching and researching of classics into the teaching of history, modern languages, national literature, etc. This was possible because precisely in the study of the classics there is uncertainty about what these old texts mean. We artificially create that uncertainty by promoting debate within the universities - otherwise known as 'academic freedom'.

In due course, employment of graduates in the state bureaucracy came to be supplemented by employment in corporate bureaucracies as well. The demand is still premised on this skill of making decisions in conditions of uncertainty, where there is not an obvious answer. The techniques of developing the skill remain the same. This is why we continue to see the existence of humanities subjects, which are of no direct use to capital or the state. It is the skills these studies develop which are in demand from employers. It is also why we continue to have a degree of academic freedom; and why humanities and social science students are encouraged to read ideas which are well outside the political consensus, from the right as well as from the left, and to argue contrary and divergent positions.

That in turn has the consequence that there is student political life in those universities which have large humanities departments. Their studies themselves encourage humanities and social science students to think outside the tramlines of conventional politics. In the 'hard sciences', in contrast, much more emphasis is placed on the acquisition of specific knowledge and specific skills. In institutions dominated by this sort of specific (scientific, technical and pure vocational) training activities, there is not an independent and inherent dynamic towards student politics.

## Training careerists

A subset of this activity is the development and training of the next generation of the 'political class' - not really a class, but a social stratum - of corrupt careerist politicians who monopolise electoral representation. Before the ascendancy of trade unions and Labourism, this role was mainly played by the Oxford and Cambridge Unions and similar debating societies in other universities (the Oxford and Cambridge Union Societies are a late survivors of a form which used to be widespread). These institutions mimic the procedures of parliament.

Since World War II the bourgeoisie has ruled with the support of the labour bureaucracy. Hence, we also see in student politics an institutional mimic of the labour bureaucracy in the form of the student unions. In Britain, these are not, in fact, trade unions in any sense. They are in substance state-sponsored cooperatives, whose structures mimic those of the labour bureaucracy. In France 'student

unions' are appendages to the political parties or union confederations that have sponsored them, mimicking the party-divided character of the French trade union movement.

The National Union of Students thus plays the role of a training ground for the next generation of political professionals and bureaucrats. Jack Straw and Charles Clarke, for example, were both presidents of the NUS. Lesser examples are very numerous.

Radical student unionism and the wave of occupations in the 1970s could be described as the ideological mimicking of workers' action against the Industrial Relations Act, etc.

## Driven by ideas

In order to train students in the abilities they will need to be successful politicians, labour bureaucrats, administrators, civil servants and so on, it is necessary to open up the range of political ideas that can be discussed. A consequence of this is student politics. However, this politics is not primarily driven by student material interests, but by ideas.

Another consequence is that groups which are marginal to the mainstream political consensus can have much larger representation in student politics. Higher education in the arts and social sciences precisely involves thinking outside the range of the consensus, in order to create artificial uncertainty. It is impossible to do this educational job and not encourage students to consider 'extreme' political ideas.

Precisely because student politics is driven by ideas, it can equally be the case that it is a centre of the left (as it has been in recent years in Tehran) or of the right (as has happened in Caracas recently). In fact, one of the big bases of the German Nazis was on campuses - the Communist Party of Germany, in contrast, was much weaker among students in the 1920s. There is no natural affinity of student politics with the left. There is, however, an opening in which it is possible to intervene - even on a mass scale - on the basis of ideas. This can be seen in the influence on students of the ideas of radical trade unionism of the 1970s, in the ideas of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Vietnam campaign in the middle and the end of the 1960s and, for that matter, the ideas of 'identity politics' (and the associated ascendancy of 'postmodernism' in the academy) that were prevalent in the 1980s and early 1990s.

## Criticisms

I wrote much of the theoretical argument I have just made in February 2008, with a view to opening a discussion on the issue.<sup>4</sup> There was not then a great deal in the way of critical response. Comrade James Turley made some criticisms within a framework of partial agreement at the Communist Students conference that month and wrote up his argument for the *Weekly Worker* in April.<sup>5</sup> Ed Maltby offered a sharp attack, in response to Communist Students' intervention at the 'Reclaim the campus' conference of the AWL's Education Not for Sale front, in his AWL blog in May 2008.<sup>6</sup>

Comrade Turley drew attention to a number of tendencies towards local conflicts between students and university managements: over room rents; over department closures and privatisations (in Glasgow, a long-running occupation over the closure of a building finally won at least nominal concessions from the university management in August<sup>7</sup>); and over speech and behaviour controls (drugs; monitoring of Islamists; in the past, as in May 68, sex issues). He also suggested that these tendencies can support the production of solidarity between students and

campus workers, who *are* in a class-antagonistic relationship to university managements.<sup>8</sup>

He concluded: "What there is not, however, is any objective tendency towards a generalised national campaign on immediate material issues. However dismal things get on particular campuses, unity on a national scale must take the form of unity around ideas. There is no short cut: students need to be activated as political agents as such, not as fighters in an imaginary class struggle."

Paradoxically, this claims *more than* my original article did. It is perfectly possible - as the fees movement in autumn 2010 showed - for student militancy to be activated by a 'student issue' on a national as well as on a local scale.

Comrade Turley's other points are legitimate; and I did not mean in my original article to suggest that student communists should not take such struggles seriously. My fundamental points were the limited ones that student unions are not in any useful sense analogous to trade unions, with the result that 'student trade unionism' and student broad leftism do not have the sort of purchase that broad leftism has in the trade unions; that student activism can be (as in Caracas recently or in inter-war Germany) a base for the right, not the left; and that student militancy is *as likely* to be activated by issues affecting the society as a whole as by ones affecting students as such - this was shown by the movement around the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2009 (or, for that matter, student mobilisation round the anti-war movement in 2002-04).

Ed Maltby's piece was a typical piece of AWL frothing-at-the-mouth polemic. Nonetheless, it is very symptomatic of the internal logic of the thinking of the far left on this issue (though, as we will see below, the Socialist Workers Party is rather more sophisticated). After the initial hyperbole it contains two elements. The first is a misreading of Lenin's 1902 pamphlet *What is to be done?*, which is more or less standard and not worth discussing here.<sup>9</sup> The second is a positive argument for the AWL's approach through its ENS front.

We are told, first, that "Of course students have common material interests, which are under threat at the national level as the result of the government's politics - in the UK notably the lifting of the cap on fees - and there is a huge potential for massive student movements around these demands!" - and that "events in student movements from France to Canada to west Africa (not to mention the 1990s Campaign for Free Education in this country) prove the exact opposite - that the major student movements of today, the ones that are really threatening to governments, are concerned with students' conditions of life."

Secondly, "a large number of local, individual struggles are brewing which need to be taken up, but also ... these individual attacks all form part of a general, political strategy on the part of the capitalist class and its government; and ... the only way that these battles can be successfully won is through a national student strike movement based on the French model, to inflict a national defeat on the government."

These words were written in May 2008. In January 2009 a substantial movement of student militancy broke out - not around immediate 'economic' issues affecting students, but around the Israeli attack on Gaza. Meanwhile, Sarkozy's 'reforms' were *not* defeated by the mass movement, but merely delayed.

Comrade Maltby proposed a two-stage approach. First, build a mass militant movement around "material" or "economic" issues, leading to a national student strike movement.

Only once such a movement has been built can socialists intervene in it to fight for their ideas. This two-stage conception is reflected in AWL students' idea of the basis for unity as being purely round the 'material' issues, which led comrade Maltby to regard Communist Students' proposals to ENS as ultra-left - "bizarre" and "hopelessly abstract" and so on.

Come September 2011 and the AWL is complaining about the NUS elections stitch-up between Socialist Action and the SWP. On the one hand, the complaint is that it was minimalist in platform, about *what can be agreed* on the 'student issues'. In this it follows comrade Maltby's method - build the broad movement first. On the other, the complaint is that the SWP and SA excluded the AWL from the executive slate on the "irrelevant" issue of the AWL's semi-Eustonism on the Middle East. Middle Eastern politics is, of course, so "irrelevant" to British student politics that it provoked a large militant movement in January 2009.

## SWP

Dan Swain of the SWP has written a substantial article on the student movement in the April 2011 issue of *International Socialism* journal.<sup>10</sup> This is not in any sense a response to my argument, or even to the arguments of the AWL. It is, however, a serious and thoughtful piece. It is largely descriptive and historical in character, but the facts and history are valuable. It grasps correctly that students are "at a transitional point in society, between childhood and full incorporation into the world of work"; and that "Students are not directly exploited in the way that workers are". Hence it recognises also that student organisations are distinct from trade unions, and it recognises the inherent volatility of student activist movements (as did the 1975 article by Alex Callinicos and Simon Turner on which it draws<sup>11</sup>).

After the description and history, however, comrade Swain does not grasp the nettle of 'student trade unionism' and the application of the 'broad left' model: unsurprisingly, since the SWP has been in practice applying this model in the NUS. Instead, he argues that "Precisely because students do not have a direct relationship to the means of production, a student strike is not as effective as a workers' strike. As [fellow SWPer] Mark Bergfeld, a socialist on the NUS executive, is fond of pointing out, a thousand students can stop a train, but a thousand train drivers can stop a country." Conclusion: "that the only force for carrying through a real transformation of society lies elsewhere and that students who seriously want to solve their own problems can only do so by becoming part of a revolutionary organisation that relates to the aspirations and struggles of that class." So join the SWP!

This argument reflects the SWP's underlying syndicalism and sectionalism. It is *true* that it is only the working class that has the potential to change society. But this potential does not arise because workers have "a direct relationship to the means of production" and "a thousand train drivers can stop a country": without solidarity from other sections and working class communities, the train drivers would soon be forced back to work. It arises because the working class is *separated from* the means of production and therefore *needs* organisations to mobilise solidarity in order to defend its most immediate interests.

The sectionalism of the SWP is politically reflected as sectarianism: willingness to cooperate only with forces to its own right and with a view to the only alternative being to join the SWP. But the SWP, though it is the biggest of the far-left groups, is by

the standards of mass politics - and even of student mass politics - just one among many far-left groups one could join. The SWP's policy *reinforces* this fragmentation, and by doing so undermines the impact the left could make. The same is, of course, equally true of the equivalent policy of the AWL, and so on.

## Aim higher

Students need to aim higher than 'student trade unionism' and broad leftism. The conception of 'moderate demands and militant action' is a dead end. It leads only either to the direct actionists' 'Riot now!' - or to collapse into the 'moderate demands', to which the right wing are willing to agree.

Take the case of the purpose of education itself - posed by the 2010 fees struggle. Education at all levels is not and should not be merely training to fill your future assigned role in society. It is, and should be, the provision of the means of access to the riches of choices and culture which the society is capable of providing. Governments ration it out and give it grudgingly in order to keep the poor in their place. Higher education is, and should be, education for power: for the ability to form your own rational opinions and participate in social discussions in the face of imperfect and contradictory information and uncertainty. This is a political right, an aspect of citizenship.

This political character means that HE should be available freely to all who want it. There are, of course, practical prerequisites - for example, it is no use trying to do a humanities degree without prior effective literacy or a science degree without fairly well-developed prior maths; but the real prerequisites are a lot lower than the hurdles which are set by the annual competition for university places. This approach, then, means fighting for an expansion of HE, not the mere maintenance of what already exists. It means in particular an expansion of adult education and mature access to university education.

What is involved in aiming higher is an alternative vision of society. For the Con-Dems, the vision of society is of one purely governed by the capitalist market: in which everything has a price and nothing a value. The alternative is a society whose aim is the fullest and most rounded possible development of every human being. The name of that aim is communism.

The problem of 'student trade unionism' and broad leftism is not just that it does not work. It is that it makes communist (socialist) students *silence themselves* as advocates of a real alternative social order ●

## Notes

1. <http://anticults.com/2011/06/09/open-letter-grave-concerns-over-ncafc-5-june-conference-3/>; [www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/06/10/ncafc-conference-hard-facts](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/06/10/ncafc-conference-hard-facts).
2. *Solidarity* September 12.
3. *Capital* Vol 1, London 1976, p1044.
4. 'Driven by ideas' *Weekly Worker* February 14 2008.
5. 'Consolidating the gains': <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=881>; 'The campus and the state' *Weekly Worker* April 24 2008.
6. ENS, 'Student economism' and Communist Students, May 27 2008 ([www.workersliberty.org/blogs/edwardm/2008/05/27/ens-student-economism-and-communist-students](http://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/edwardm/2008/05/27/ens-student-economism-and-communist-students)). See also the arguments of Dave Isaacson and Ben Klein of CS about the conference, dated May 15 2008: <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=496>.
7. Various views of the settlement at <http://freehetherington.wordpress.com/2011/08/14/student-protesters-declare-victory-as-glasgow-university-sit-in-ends>.
8. With the partial exception of Oxbridge academics, whose institutions are technically cooperatives of the academics.
9. See LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered* Leiden 2006 *Introduction* chapter 5, and my review (*Weekly Worker* August 31 2006); also R Larsson *Theories of revolution* Kristianstad 1970, chapter 6, 'Revolutionary economism', on the theories closest to those of the modern far left.
10. [www.isj.org.uk/index.php?id=723&issue=130](http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php?id=723&issue=130).
11. [www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/callinicos/1975/02/students.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/callinicos/1975/02/students.htm). For some odd reason Callinicos is not on the index at [www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/index.htm).



**DALE FARM**

# Proper sites, not eviction

Travellers must be free to follow the lifestyle of their choice, writes Peter Manson

**T**he European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has called for it to be halted. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights agrees. But still the establishment insists that the eviction of the 52 traveller families from Dale Farm in Essex must proceed and their community broken up.

The 10-year stand-off with Tory-controlled Basildon council has come to a head because of the point-blank refusal of either Basildon or nearby districts to grant permission for another legal traveller site anywhere in Essex. Of course, council leader Tony Ball does not admit that a decision has been taken not to allow any more such sites (he does say that Basildon has far more than its 'fair share'). He prefers to talk of the Dale Farm residents' "criminal" behaviour in refusing to abide by court orders for them to leave what is, after all, a "green belt" site. But Basildon seems to have no compunction in allowing the development of the green belt at several other locations, one of which is to be used for an upmarket housing estate.

As everyone knows, the particular tiny corner of the green belt that is Dale Farm was previously a scrapyard before the travellers purchased it. The BBC website features 'before and after' aerial photographs of the plot, which show that in 1999 a third of its area was piled high with hundreds of old bangers. Dale Farm is actually situated alongside a legal travellers' site and has the effect of doubling its size by extending it into the adjacent field.<sup>1</sup>

The extra space was needed because travellers were being evicted from other sites. In January 2004, for example, families were forcibly removed from Twin Oaks in Hertfordshire (from land they owned, as at Dale Farm) and they relocated to the illegal site in Essex. In his high court judgement of May 6 2008, which gave Dale Farm residents temporary permission to remain, Justice Collins stated: "I have seen a video which shows how the bailiffs employed by [Hertfordshire] council (who, it seems, this council proposes to use if enforcement can take place) acted. The conduct was unacceptable and the evictions were carried out in a fashion which inevitably would have led to harm to those affected ... The police presence at Twin Oaks failed to curb the excesses of the bailiffs."<sup>2</sup>

Justice Edwards-Stuart, who on September 19 granted the last-minute injunction halting the evictions from Dale Farm until at least September 23, voiced similar apprehensions. He was concerned that bailiffs "may go further" than the terms of the enforcement notices. But this victory will be a short-lived one, if the political and legal establishment gets its way. He told the Dale Farm representatives: "I appreciate it is a deeply unpleasant situation, but unfortunately this is a road which is reaching its end and there is sadly no mileage in prolonging the agony."

In response the residents issued a statement on September 20, which urged Basildon council to "take this time to fulfil its responsibility to find and approve a legal and culturally suitable site for the Dale Farm community. Dale Farm residents and supporters urge Basildon to take up the offer made by the Homes and Communities Agency for land and funding in the Basildon area."<sup>3</sup>

The reference to the Homes and Community Agency concerns its offer



**Let them stay**

of the use of land it owns in nearby Pitsea. But John Baron, Tory MP for Basildon and Billericay, launched a campaign amongst the local population to prevent its use - backed up by a council '(dis)information bulletin'. Permission to use the land was withheld on the grounds that some unexplained "disturbance" might ensue. Every attempt to find the families - many of whose children have never lived anywhere other than Dale Farm - an alternative site has been thwarted. The council has been playing to, and exacerbating, anti-traveller prejudice amongst its *Daily Mail*-reading voters, with the result that parents have been withdrawing their children from schools attended by Dale Farm kids.

It was the despicable John Baron MP who on September 7 asked in the Commons whether the prime minister agreed that the travellers "should be in no doubt that the government fully support Basildon council and Essex police in reclaiming this green belt land on behalf of the law-abiding majority". The answer was never in doubt. Cameron condemned the "illegal development" and said: "I completely agree with the way in which he put his question." He made it clear that Basildon council will receive government cash to help with the estimated £18 million eviction costs.

Even more disgracefully, Labour leader Ed Miliband also jumped on the anti-traveller bandwagon. Employing his usual slimy phrasing, he avoided a direct response to the question he was asked and said: "The law does have to be upheld right across the country, whatever background people are from, wherever people are." In other words, Miliband too agrees that these families should be thrown onto the street.

## Oppressed group

Back in 1976, an official report estimated that there were some 40,000 travellers, or gypsies, in England and Wales, three quarters of whom had nowhere they could lawfully stay. This resulted in a government scheme whereby central

funding was given to councils to provide sites. They were obliged to "take into account" the "need to accommodate gypsies" in planning applications. But, as Justice Collins commented in his 2008 judgement on Dale Farm, "This was all swept away by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994." From now on, "planning applications should be determined solely in relation to land use factors".<sup>4</sup>

In February 2006 another change was signalled by the Labour government as part of its 'respect' agenda. It aimed to "increase significantly the number of gypsy and traveller sites in appropriate locations with planning permission, in order to address under-provision over the next three-five years" and to "identify and make provision for the resultant land and accommodation requirements".<sup>5</sup>

In December 2007 a government task group reported that "the scale of the problem" was in reality "small". In contrast to the situation in 1976, now 75% of travellers lived on authorised sites, whilst the remainder "only require about 4,000 pitches, or less than one square mile of land across the country". In relation to Dale Farm, the report concluded that if the agreed policy were "implemented with vigour by central and local government", then the £18 million needed to evict the residents could be saved, and "the life chances of this most deprived ethnic minority group greatly enhanced". The report concluded by urging that "the task of providing sufficient suitable sites is addressed with the utmost urgency".<sup>6</sup>

All to no avail. Planning permission for Dale Farm was rejected, as was the appeal to secretary of state Ruth Kelly. The Labour minister regretted that the "very special circumstances" needed to outweigh the "damage" to the green belt were absent. Obviously the fact that 50 families would be made homeless was not considered sufficient qualification. True, Kelly thought it "reasonable to assume" that eviction would result in "interference with the appellants' home and family life", but (readers are advised to have the sick bucket ready at this point)

the secretary of state felt that such "interference" had to be "balanced against the harm to the green belt and to highway safety" - not to mention the "protection of the environment".

Nevertheless, a two-year extension of the residents' right to remain was granted in 2005 - supposedly to allow the council to find a permanent alternative. But, unsurprisingly, Basildon was 'unable' - in fact unwilling - to come up with anything. Understandably, "the claimants remained on the land in breach of the enforcement notices and the criminal law". But, as Justice Collins bluntly stated, "there was nowhere in the district or indeed in the region where they could lawfully reside in their caravans".<sup>7</sup>

It is an absolute disgrace that the establishment refuses to resolve the "small problem" of allowing travellers access to land - even when they buy it, as at Twin Oaks and Dale Farm. I do not agree with the assertion of Ann Czernik in the *Morning Star* that "the forced eviction of Dale Farm travellers is the biggest single incident of institutionalised racism in Britain".<sup>8</sup> But I certainly agree with the sentiment behind what she writes. However, travellers are not in general objected to because of their ethnicity: they are objected to because of their unorthodox *lifestyle*. The state is reluctant to come to terms with the fact that the nomadic preferences of this oppressed group render them less susceptible to control in a number of ways. It will not willingly accept that they should declare their autonomy and opt out in this way.

It is excellent that dozens of activists have rallied to the cause of Dale Farm residents, helping them to erect the formidable barricade across the site entrance. Of course, the travellers and their supporters would be no match for state forces determined to eject the families by any means, but it will not be so easy for the establishment to swallow the embarrassment and opprobrium caused by the "harm" to children and old people feared by Justice Collins that a violent assault on their homes would inevitably produce.

While I would not discount a forcible eviction, there is no doubt that the government, council and media would prefer to continue their propaganda war against the "criminal" actions of the travellers in attempting to remain in the homes they own. In this way they hope to wear down the residents and that more and more of them will simply leave the site.

The *Daily Mail* is already crowing that "Dale Farm travellers finally move on (to set up a new illegal site down the road in Luton)".<sup>9</sup> In fact it turns out that a small number of the travellers who turned up at Stockwood Park near Luton on September 20 are from Dale Farm. Others, who had previously moved to the adjacent legal site, have actually gone in the opposite direction and returned to their homes in the illegal section, apparently believing that the council will now see reason in the light of the injunction. As I write, there is talk of the barricade being dismantled as a goodwill gesture.

What is really needed is for the authorities to withdraw their reactionary objections and allow all travellers the right to follow the lifestyle of their choice. Let Dale Farm residents stay in the homes they have built, or, if they prefer, settle on the land offered by the Homes and Communities Agency - in which case they should be given full compensation for the loss of their homes and the continual harassment they have suffered •

## Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-14983284.
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3. http://dalefarm.wordpress.com/2011/09/20/dale-farm-solidarity-statement-on-basildons-botching-of-the-eviction.
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5. Circular 01/2006 issued by the office of the deputy prime minister.
6. dgllaw.co.uk/files/DaleFarmJudgment090508.doc.
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## OUR HISTORY

# Supporting Labour to destroy Labourism

**T**he communist attitude towards the Labour Party had been a controversial issue since before the foundation of the CPGB. On August 1 1920 the first congress voted narrowly in favour of affiliation to the Labour Party, but the application was rejected by Labour's national executive six weeks later.<sup>1</sup>

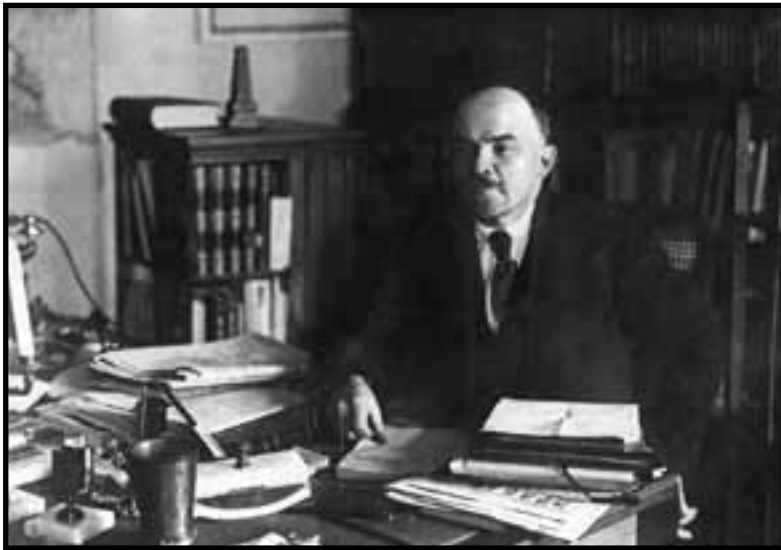
William Paul, who had spoken against affiliation at the congress,<sup>2</sup> was given the important post of CPGB delegate to the Communist International. There, he had the chance to discuss with Lenin how the party could best take on Labourism. His *personal* account of their meeting was published in the CPGB's weekly paper. As the comrade makes clear in his piece below, swamped as Lenin was in "mountains of work", he was happy to rely on the British comrade to "write up his case for the press" rather than take to the field himself in a "good dialectical duel" with Paul and others, in the form of open polemic in the press of the Communist Party in Britain.

## Lenin on communist tactics in Britain

Lenin ... proceeded to discuss the attitude of the Communist Party towards the Labour Party in view of the much talked of forthcoming general election.<sup>3</sup> His views on the subject showed that he abhors the type of revolutionary who has a canalised, or single-track, mind. Lenin looks upon every weapon as necessary in the conflict with capitalism. To him, as a good student of old Dietzgen,<sup>4</sup> every weapon, every policy and every problem must be examined in terms of its relations to the needs of the moment and the means at our disposal. This explains why he does not go out of his way to extol one particular weapon. He clearly realises the value of revolutionary parliamentary action, but he also understands its limitations as a constructive power in the creation of a workers' industrial republic. To Lenin the test of the real revolutionary communist is to know when to use a given weapon and when to discard it.

Talking on the Labour Party. Lenin said he was very glad to learn that it had refused to accept the affiliation application of the Communist Party. It was a good move to have applied for affiliation, because the refusal of the Labour Party to accept communists in its ranks showed the masses exactly where the Labour Party stood. Henderson had thus unwittingly paid a great tribute to the growing power of revolutionary communism in Britain by being afraid to have aggressive communists in his organisation; and the Labour Party, by its own action, in turning down the Communist Party, had plainly indicated that there was at last a fighting group in Britain which had attracted good mass fighters to its ranks.

Of course, continued Lenin, we must not forget that the Communist Party in its application for affiliation to the Labour Party very frankly put forward certain conditions which would have given it full freedom of action to conduct its own policy in its own way.



Lenin: humorous

We must never enter into negotiations with bodies such as the Labour Party without demanding full freedom of action. In this respect the Communist Party's attitude in applying to the Labour Party for admission to its ranks differed, most fundamentally, from such organisations as the Independent Labour Party and British Socialist Party, which formally accepted the Labour Party's constitution and policy. The strong stand taken up by the Communist Party, in seeking affiliation with the Labour Party, was no doubt arrived at as a result of the BSP policy, sharpened by the militant elements expelled from the Socialist Labour Party. It was a good omen for the future that these two groups were able to come together. And, it was a good thing that the ex-SLP men, who were so keen against affiliation with the Labour Party, realised the value of revolutionary discipline by refusing to split the new party because their own position had not been accepted. Likewise, when the Labour Party threw out the request for affiliation, it was the BSP element that was tested and it stood firm. To have passed through two such severe trials, and to have maintained the solidarity of the organisation, was a tribute to the seriousness of the comrades who had formed the Communist Party.

Lenin passed on to review the political situation in Britain. The next general election would be of paramount importance, and the communists ought to play a most important part in it. As Lenin favoured the policy of supporting the Labour Party, in order to assist it to capture political power, this subject was thrashed out in detail. Lenin advises the communists to help the Labour Party to get a majority at the next election in order to facilitate the general decadence of the parliamentary system. Already, he reasoned, there are thousands of people in Britain who feel that the parliamentary system of social representation cannot solve the problems which history has placed before it. These people had become discontented and disillusioned regarding the parliamentary system of social control as a result of the inability of that machine to cope with the vital tasks of modern society.

In other words, the passage of events was providing a series of concrete experiences which were educating the masses regarding the general breakdown of capitalism in the sphere

of social representation. The toiling masses, who had neither the time nor the inclination to examine social theories, always learnt their political lessons by undergoing concrete experiences. The task of the revolutionary communist is not only to preach his Marxist theories: he must prove that his theories are correct by compelling his opponents to act in such a way that they provide the practical lessons which enable the communist to test his theories before the eyes of the masses. The test of Marxist and communist theory is experience.

How then can the communists of England prove to the workers that the parliamentary machine has broken down and can no longer serve them or the interests of their class? Since the days of the armistice the parliamentary system in England has been on trial. During the past two years the political policy of Lloyd George had shown many workers how little they could expect from any parliamentary form of government manned by the capitalist class. Since the armistice, Lloyd George, Churchill, Bonar Law and co have had an opportunity to demonstrate what they could do, and their reign of office has been one trail of disasters so far as the workers are concerned. The Labour Party solemnly assures the masses that they could solve the problems confronting society if once they were in control of the governmental machine.

So far as Henderson, Thomas and the Labour Party are concerned, they only differ from Lloyd George in that they have never had an opportunity to control the government. Knowing, as we do, that Henderson, MacDonald and their followers cannot solve the immediate problems confronting the masses through the parliamentary machine, we ought to prove the correctness of our theory by giving the Labour Party a chance to prove that we are correct. The return of the Labour Party to power will accelerate the inevitable collapse of the parliamentary system, and this will provide the concrete experiences which will ultimately drive the masses towards communism and the soviet solution to the modern problems. For these reasons the communists in Britain ought to support the Labour Party at the next election in order to help it to bring on, ever faster, the crisis which will ultimately overwhelm it.

At this point, I interposed, and said

that, if the Communist Party officially assisted the Labour Party to capture political power in order to precipitate a crisis, it was just possible that the indignant masses, remembering that we had urged them to vote for the Labour Party, might sweep us away too when the social crash took place. Lenin pondered over this for a moment, and said that the Communist Party, in assisting the Labour Party to capture the government, must make its own case very clear to the masses. He then advanced the following argument which he pressed forward very strongly, and which he wishes the Communist Party to discuss.

He said the Communist Party could easily help the Labour Party to power and at the same time keep its own weapon clean. At the forthcoming elections the Communist Party ought to contest as many seats as possible, but where it could not put up a candidate it ought to issue a manifesto in every constituency challenged by the Labour Party urging the workers to vote for the Labour candidate. The manifesto should frankly state that the Communist Party is most emphatically opposed to the Labour Party, but asks it to be supported in order that Henderson, MacDonald and co may demonstrate to the masses their sheer helplessness. Such a manifesto, such a policy, would accelerate and intensify the problem now looming up before capitalism and its parliamentary system. But, above all, such a policy would provide the concrete experiences which would teach the masses to look to the soviet method as the historically evolved institution destined to seriously grapple with the manifold problems now pressing so heavily upon humanity.

We discussed this problem for some time and viewed it from many angles. I kept raising many points against Lenin's position until at last he, no doubt scenting a good dialectical duel, challenged me to debate the whole matter in the columns of *The Communist*. I readily assented to this, and asked him when he would have his first contribution ready. He looked round sadly at the mountains of work - work involving the solution of international problems - piled up in front of him. I at once said I would write up his case for the press, as I have done above. To this suggestion he heartily agreed.

I know, said Lenin, that it may seem awful to young and inexperienced communists to have any relations with the Labour Party, whose policy of opportunism is more dangerous to the masses than that of consistent and openly avowed enemies like Winston Churchill. But if the Communist Party intends to secure and wield power it will be compelled to come into contact with groups and organisations which are bitterly opposed to it. And it will have to learn how to negotiate and deal with them. Here in Russia we have been forced by circumstances to discuss and make arrangements with elements which would hang us if they got the chance. Have we not even entered into alliances and compacts with governments whose very hands reeked with the blood of our murdered communist comrades?

Why have we entered into such contracts and adopted such a policy? It is because we are realists and not

utopians. It is because, at present, international capitalism is more powerful than we are. Every move, each treaty, and all our negotiations with capitalist states, are but one side of the Russian soviet government's policy to conserve its strength in order to consolidate its power. Learn to meet your enemies and be not afraid. It tests your strength, it creates experiences, it judges the character of your members. And you may find that your most embittered critics are not in the camp of the enemy, but are the shallow doctrinaires to whom revolutionary socialism is a mere manual of phrases instead of a guide to action.

While we were talking, Lenin was continually interrupted by the arrival of cables, despatches and messages. He was frequently called to the 'phone. Despite these things he could return quite serenely to the point under discussion. I confess that I was slightly agitated when entering the Kremlin: bad news had arrived from the various fronts; Poland was acting strangely at the Riga conference; France had been indulging in one of her bullying outbursts; and Finland was on the point of signing peace. All these things, I imagined, would make it impossible for Lenin to settle down and have a quiet talk on the various details of the movement upon which I was anxious to have his opinion.

When I entered the room he was courteous, cool and tranquil. He eagerly entered into a discussion of many points in communist tactics, which, to some people, might have seemed almost trivial. Lenin is always anxious to hear of any new development in Marxism, and to him every aspect of the movement is important. I very timidly suggested the possible application of Marxist theory to a certain subject which had been monopolised by the anthropologists and ethnologists. He became enthusiastic over the problem which he quickly elaborated and extended, made several important suggestions, indicated where some good data could be found, and urged that the matter should be written and published. To Lenin, communism is a synthetic philosophy.

After having had a talk with Lenin, it is easy to understand why his quiet and humorous style fails to impress middle class intellectuals. People like Bertrand Russell are in the habit of meeting pompous bourgeois thinkers, whose ideas on social theories are so incoherent and vague that they can only express themselves with great difficulty. This ponderous and floundering method of struggling to deliver an idea is, in certain quarters, mistaken for mental ability. Lenin, on the other hand, sees problems so clearly, and is able to explain himself with such clarity and simplicity, that his conclusions seem to be the obvious deductions at which anyone would inevitably arrive. ●

**The Communist**  
**December 2 1920**

## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* September 21.
2. *Weekly Worker* April 14.
3. The general election referred to took place on November 15 1922. Bonar Law's Tories won it, with an overall majority over Labour and the Liberals. Walter Newbold was elected as a communist MP for Motherwell.
4. Joseph Dietzgen (1828-88) was a communist philosopher greatly admired by Marx and Lenin.



**ITALY**

# Mired in sleaze, Berlusconi reaches end of the road

Italy's crisis is not purely economic, writes **Toby Abse**. The corruption of the political elite has contributed to its credit downgrading



**Berlusconi: boaster**

Italy's downgrading from A-plus to A by the ratings agency, Standard and Poor's, on the evening of Monday September 19 is a clear indication of the rapid deepening of the country's interlocking economic and political crises.

In the words of Standard and

Poor's, "The downgrade reflects our view of Italy's weakening economic growth prospects and our view that Italy's fragile governing coalition and policy differences within parliament will likely continue to limit the government's ability to respond decisively to the challenging

domestic and external macroeconomic environment."<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the ratings agency also stressed that "Under our recently updated sovereign ratings criteria, the 'political' and 'debt' scores were the primary contributors to the downgrade". No doubt it was the fact that the new

ranking results from other than purely economic factors that led Berlusconi to comment that the downgrade was "dictated more by newspaper stories than by reality and appear to be negatively influenced by political considerations".

After the narrow escape from a

much-feared downgrade by the other leading ratings agency, Moody's, on September 16 - anxiety about which had caused the Milan stock exchange to lose 0.65% by the close of trading on a day when the general European trend was one of recovery - the decision by Standard and Poor's came as a shock to the Italian government, which had probably taken excessive comfort from Moody's decision to postpone a new assessment of the Italian economy until next month. Since there had already been a 3.11% fall in Milan by the close of trading on September 19, despite Italy's apparent respite from downgrading, the overall downward trend seems set to continue, even if the volatile state of the markets will lead to periodic bounces like the 1.91% upward movement on September 20.

It is now crystal-clear that the second emergency austerity budget pushed through both Italian houses of parliament in the first half of September did no more to placate the markets than the rapid parliamentary passage of the first in mid-July. As was the case with Greece, Portugal and Ireland, the demands for cuts will go on. This could well unleash a downward spiral, as each successive austerity package further reduces domestic demand and slows the growth of Italy's GDP, making it more and more difficult to pay off a growing debt, on which the interest due keeps rising. On September 19 the spread between German and Italian 10-year government bonds had reached 384 points - somewhat worse than the far from encouraging 361-point spread between German and Spanish bonds. Such a gap over any length of time will lead to unsustainable interest rates. At close of trading on September 20 the interest rate on 10-year bonds stood at 5.64% - just short of the 6% figure that is regarded as the danger signal in terms of risk of default.

It is widely believed that the Italian government's forecast of a 1.1% growth rate for 2011 has recently been revised downwards to 0.7% and the perhaps somewhat optimistic estimate of 1.3% for 2012 seems to have been reduced to 1%.<sup>2</sup> The latest International Monetary Fund forecasts are, of course, lower - they have just been reduced from 1% to 0.6% for 2011, and from 1.3% to 0.3% for 2012. This virtual stagnation in Italian GDP needs to be seen in a long-term context of low growth throughout the last decade, which cannot be ascribed to the events of 2008 alone.

The Italian economic crisis cannot be isolated from a much wider crisis of the euro zone. The increasing fears about a Greek default are now producing a domino effect, with Italy being seen as the next domino - the next candidate for a default and exit from the zone. Whether such speculation is unduly alarmist or not, this was the tone of discussion on Radio 4's *Today*, the channel's flagship news programme, on September 20, which could be taken as fairly representative of mainstream economic commentators. It is increasingly obvious that the European Financial Stability Fund, which has as yet not received the backing of the German parliament, will not be



sufficiently well funded to support Italy or Spain and may even have serious problems in coping with Greece's debt.

At present Eurobonds, through which the governments of the euro zone as a whole would take on responsibility for the debts of all the individual countries, have, somewhat predictably, the enthusiastic support of Italian finance minister Giulio Tremonti. While Eurobonds seem to provide an obvious solution, they are being resisted even by German chancellor Angela Merkel, leader of the Christian Democratic Union, not to mention the nationalist or neoliberal hawks amongst her coalition partners in the Free Democrats and the Bavarian Christian Social Union.

Berlusconi factor

However, the Italian crisis is not just a consequence of either years of high national debt and low growth or even of the turbulence in the euro zone, important as the factors outlined above are. The week since the Italian parliament finally passed the second austerity package has further dented the already low international credibility of prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian government as a whole and indeed Italy itself in the eyes of the markets, the European Central Bank and the premier's political counterparts in Europe.

This follows the release of transcripts of conversations between Berlusconi and Gianpaolo Tarantini, the 36-year-old convicted cocaine dealer - or, as the *Financial Times* prefers to describe him, "prosthetics businessman"<sup>3</sup>. Tarantini is said to have provided dozens of prostitutes for Berlusconi and the transcripts are of some of the 100,000 wiretaps collected by prosecutors. These have been published in Italy's two leading daily newspapers, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*, with some excerpts or summaries appearing in numerous foreign newspapers.

The *Corriere* assured its readers that it had omitted "the heavier or more vulgar passages, as well as detailed sexual descriptions" contained in the phone calls, but clearly even this paper, despised on the left for the extent to which its reporters and commentators have pandered to Berlusconi in recent years, could not resist printing pages of excerpts and numerous photographs of the women concerned, including Lucia Rossini and Barbara Montereale in a photograph they had allegedly taken of themselves in a bathroom at Palazzo Grazioli (one of Berlusconi's residences).<sup>4</sup>

In one conversation, Berlusconi says to one of the women: "Oh to pass the days with my babes - I am just the prime minister in my spare time" - a remark that none of his opponents has any intention of ever allowing him to forget (similarly in September 2008 he lamented the fact that he was facing a "terrible" week because he had a series of international commitments, including meetings with the pope, the Italian president, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel - a remark hardly calculated to help him in his future dealings with the ECB). His friend, Vladimir Putin (who famously gave Berlusconi the huge bed in which he spent the night with Patrizia D'Addario at one of his parties), once said: "However much they nag signor Berlusconi for his special attitude to the beautiful sex - and by the way they nag him mainly because of jealousy - he has shown himself as a responsible statesman." But this view will not be shared by heads of government within the EU.

Whilst some of his remarks to Tarantini seem absurd boasting on the part of a man in his 70s (including "Last night I had a queue outside my door - there were 11 of them, but I only managed to do eight"), this story has gone round the world and will not help increase confidence in the seriousness of the Italian government in the eyes of assessors from Moody's or Standard and Poor's.

The most damaging remark of all remains a state secret. Berlusconi is certainly on tape saying something offensive about Angela Merkel. Nick Squires in *The Daily Telegraph* suggests "he made derogatory comments about the weight of Angela Merkel", but journalists in both British and German papers have maintained that

the remark about Merkel was so obscene they could not repeat it.<sup>5</sup>

It should be stressed that only a small proportion of the 100,000 conversations have been transcribed. Nonetheless, the full collection of tapes has been preserved and will be available to the defendants' lawyers, who presumably could choose to reveal more material, should they feel it assisted their clients' case. If Tarantini should ever fall out with his patron, the defendants may yet reveal some further bombshells. Tarantini received large sums of money from Berlusconi, which both he and the premier deny were blackmail payments, contrary to what investigating magistrates allege.

Mafia ties

Although the latest sex scandals have undoubtedly done nothing for Berlusconi's international credibility and contributed to the downgrading of his country's credit rating, the most serious threat to his legal standing remains the David Mills case. Contrary to many people's expectations, Berlusconi turned up for the September 19 hearing of his trial - he is accused of bribing Mills to the tune of \$600,000 to give false testimony at earlier trials in the 1990s.

Contrary to the stories put about by Mills and his allies in the British media, Tessa Jowell's 'estranged' husband has never had his conviction overturned. He was convicted and sentenced to four and half years imprisonment at the original trial, failed to get the conviction quashed on appeal and only finally escaped on a bizarre technicality, when in February 2010 the supreme court decided, for reasons that baffle most observers, that Mills had received the sum six months earlier than the prosecutor had claimed at the original trial and that therefore the crime was a handful of weeks outside the statute of limitations.

At this week's hearing, the magistrates decided, to Berlusconi's annoyance and consternation, that five defence witnesses, whose testimony had already been heard in front of an English court, did not need to be heard again. As a result, it is now perfectly possible that the first stage of the trial could be completed before February 2012, when the statute of limitations would kick in. Mills is due to appear as a witness on October 24, while Berlusconi himself is down to testify on October 28, and by December he could be convicted.

Whilst Berlusconi would undoubtedly appeal and the whole thing would be timed out, such a conviction in the lower court would put an end to his hopes of the Italian presidency and make it virtually impossible for him to continue as premier. Therefore, Berlusconi wants to get the so-called 'long

trial' bill, allowing defendants to call an almost infinite number of witnesses without any real criteria of relevance, on the statute book before his scheduled appearance in court. The effect of the legislation, which was passed in the Senate through the use of a vote of confidence in July and now needs to be voted through the Chamber of Deputies, would be to effectively sabotage the Mills trial - along with most of the others Berlusconi is currently involved in.

However, there are two rather more urgent matters that Italy's political Houdini needs to get round before October 28 arrives. On September 22, there will be a parliamentary vote on the arrest of Giulio Tremonti's former right-hand man, Marco Milanese, for a variety of alleged financial offences, to be followed on September 27 by another vote, this time of no confidence, on agriculture minister Saverio Romano, whom magistrates wish to investigate further for alleged Mafia involvement. It now seems almost certain that the vote on Milanese will be a secret one and there is a strong possibility that some of Tremonti's numerous personal enemies in Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà party, together with one faction of the Northern League, will vote for his arrest, plunging the government into crisis. Moreover, it will be even more difficult in present circumstances, when some northern mayors and many rank and file activists are increasingly anxious for the Lega to break with Berlusconi, for the party as a whole to give full confidence to a minister whose name has frequently been mentioned by Mafia supergrasses.

The front-page editorial of *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the daily paper of Italy's main capitalist confederation, Confindustria, is entitled "*Signor Presidente, l'Italia prima di tutto*" ('Mr President, put Italy first') and calls on Berlusconi to go now in the national interest.<sup>6</sup> Emma Marcegaglia, Confindustria's president, is quoted as saying that Italians are "fed up with being an international laughing stock".<sup>7</sup>

It is possible that this latter-day Caligula will fall, not because of his sexual adventures, but as a result of the close ties with the Mafia that have marked his entire career - combined with the fact that his increasingly evident criminal corruption has now become too much even for the Italian bourgeoisie ●

Notes

1. <http://img.en25.com/Web/StandardandPoors/RepublcofItaly.pdf>.
2. *Il Corriere della Sera* September 20.
3. See the very restrained account, by the standards of the Italian or the rest of the British press: 'Scandal fails to dent Berlusconi's support' *Financial Times* September 18.
4. *Il Corriere della Sera* September 17.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* September 15.
6. *Il Sole 24 Ore* September 21.
7. *The Guardian* September 21.

Head to head in Halle

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# weekly worker

**‘The Guardian’  
should be  
defended**

## Shoot the messenger

Bourgeois political power is not as unassailable as they would like us to think. Our rulers can be relied upon, periodically, to split. **James Turley** looks at the botched attempt of the Metropolitan Police to use the Official Secrets Act

Once again, *The Guardian* has found itself targeted because of its phone-hacking investigation. Waving around the Official Secrets Act, Scotland Yard had intended to take the newspaper to court in an attempt to force it to disclose how it obtained information that murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler’s mobile phone had been hacked. A police mole is suspected. Of course, as it turns out the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) thought the action inadvisable - not least because of the widespread protests against the police action from within the establishment, including from other sections of the bourgeois press.

*The Guardian*, and its investigative reporters, Nick Davies and Amelia Hill, had faced censure from the powers-that-be on this score already. The Press Complaints Commission famously told them to leave off *News International* and the *News of the World* several years ago - after all, it was just one rogue reporter involved in phone-hacking, and there was no way that honest men and women like Andy Coulson and Rebekah Brooks could in any way be implicated in the misdemeanours of their underlings...

That, of course, turned out to be a spectacularly misguided intervention, which ultimately cost the PCC boss her job and the commission itself its ‘good name’ (or what little remained of it after a couple of decades of similar cravenness). Whether or not the Met’s attempt to shoot the messenger will plunge that organisation into acute embarrassment remains to be seen.

After all, it failed in spectacular fashion. Perhaps the obstacles were simply too numerous. Alan Rusbridger, *Guardian* editor, promised to fight it out to the bitter end and, given the prestige Davies, Hill and their colleagues have won for the ailing daily, there is no reason to doubt him. The law on this point is, if not on their side as such, at the very least disputed. The Official Secrets Act is *assumed* to cover matters relating to the intimate affairs of state, not whistleblowers on police corruption; moreover, there are the competing claims of human rights law as regards freedom of the press and protection of sources. Finally, there is the ‘public interest defence’, which was probably more on the side of *The Guardian* too.

The man with the job of sorting this mess out was to be attorney general Dominic Grieve, who would have to countersign any attempt to prosecute the paper; in the event, the CPS saved him the headache, and forced the Met to climb down.

In this respect, *The Guardian* has every reason to thank its lucky stars. Grieve is a Tory MP, a committed Anglican, cool on the European Union, and has a record of opposing gay rights. He is unlikely to have any love for what - relatively speaking - is

the most leftwing of the major daily papers in this country. Moreover, having wormed his way up the judicial ladder, he is likely to have all the institutionally guaranteed biases towards the state typical of such people, as will any judge who actually was to rule on any case that made it to court as a consequence.

If his political instincts, along with the need (in the wake of the riots, and anticipation of protests against the government’s austerity programme) to restore some kind of authority to a deeply embarrassed Scotland Yard, pointed him towards prosecuting *The Guardian*, there would have been a whole other potential political shit-storm in siding with a blundering act of damage limitation on the part of the Met.

After all, Operation Weeting - when it is not launching scurrilous legal challenges to semi-dissident newspapers - is busily engaged in actually investigating the phone-hacking affair, burning up £200,000 a month as it does so. Even Scotland Yard should be capable of turning up some new revelation or another with that kind of money. Meanwhile, James Murdoch is likely to be recalled to the culture, media and sport select committee to give further evidence, which may itself turn up the heat on the scandal.

It is hardly remarkable that the Met has taken this opportunity - however ineptly - to perform a little housekeeping. There is every reason to suppose that, having been given a blank cheque to investigate the ins and outs of phone-hacking, these bureaucrats and oppressors would take the opportunity to seal up the leaks in their own organisation. Put bluntly, the Met has plenty to hide. It shoots men dead in cold blood; it then lets the killers off with a slap on the wrist. People still die, inexplicably, in its cells. It launches provocations

against protestors, and then confines distressed teenagers to a stretch of Whitehall in mid-winter conditions.

It gets away with all this through skilful media management - in other words, lying. If there is a copper with a conscience, access to confidential information and Amelia Hill’s phone number, then there is good reason for the chain of command to use every available means to find out his or her identity, and deal with the matter to the top brass’s satisfaction. Who knows what other embarrassing stories might turn up in *The Guardian*?

What is remarkable, rather, about this affair is that it happened *now*, after Milly Dowler, after Rupert Murdoch’s cross-examination in parliament, after the embarrassment - more to the point - of the Met’s two top coppers falling on their swords over the same weekend for their dubious roles in the subsequent cover-up. It is a politically inopportune time, and likely to cause headaches at all levels of government.

More ominously for the Met, it brought into being a grand united front in the bourgeois press. *The Independent* could be relied upon to spring to the aid of Rusbridger, Davies and Hill - but supportive editorials from *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* are of considerable symbolic importance, given their status as Murdoch papers. The tabloids, which have been quite tellingly reticent about reporting the hacking affair at all, also waded in - *The Mirror* called it “policing gone mad”, and even Richard Littlejohn, the *Mail*’s most belligerent bigot, could be found for once defending his arch-enemies.

Communists are quite clear which side we are on in this dispute: the attempt to use the Official Secrets Act to suppress investigative journalism, indeed the very notion of ‘official

secrets’, conceals a profound attack on democracy - even if the narrow matter of how Amelia Hill came to know that Milly Dowler’s phone had been hacked is hardly of world-historic importance in itself. For once, we are in total agreement with Richard Littlejohn: “We should put our rivalry and differences aside and defend *The Guardian*. You can’t have a free society without a free press. This isn’t just an attack on *The Guardian*: it’s an attack on us all. It must not be allowed to succeed” (*Daily Mail* September 20).

That much goes without saying. The broader, and more interesting, matter is the status of the ruling class consensus on this question. The police, it is quite obvious, defend the capitalist order through repression; the bourgeois press equally clearly defend capitalism on the level of ideology, of filtration of the great flux of human experience so it seems to confirm a certain ‘common sense’ about the system. The judicial apparatus has a foot in both camps: it both doles out repression and constitutes people through property relations as bourgeois subjects.

We Marxists are accustomed to enumerations of this type (in addition to the above, there are many more factors in the reproduction of capitalist power, from financial markets to the labour bureaucracy, the Lords to the primary school). We are accustomed to thinking of all these factors as a totality, which has the danger (when, like now, we are numerically and politically weak) of implying a smoothly functional system which has everything sewn up in advance.

Yet here the system was at loggerheads with itself: the ‘normal’ functioning of the bourgeois press caused an antagonism with the police, with the judiciary an ‘undecidable’

factor standing between them. This, in other words, was a *split* in the ruling class - modest, to be sure, and a temporary one, but real nonetheless.

Despite the lack of mass outcry on the issue (compared to the revelation that Dowler’s phone had been hacked), this is actually as bad as things have got for the ruling class in the course of this scandal. When it blew wide open, and the establishment was plunged for a couple of weeks into chaos, a consensus was nonetheless reached; senior police officers resigned, as did Murdoch executives, and parliament canned Murdoch’s bid for total ownership of BSkyB to rid itself of its share of the phone-hacking taint.

The bourgeoisie itself - in the form of *The Guardian* - undertook to reveal in gloriously revolting detail the level of corruption in the establishment which defends its rule. Not three months later, the same establishment acrimoniously breaks down on the matter of how to limit the damage. Far from being a perfect self-reproducing machine, capitalism - economically, politically and ideologically - propels itself towards fragmentation quite under its own steam.

That is the positive lesson from this affair - bourgeois political power is not as unassailable as they would like us to think. Our rulers can be relied upon, periodically, to split - and hand the advantage momentarily to the working class, which can exploit the divisions to considerable effect.

The negative lesson is that we are not in any kind of position, at present, to do so; the spat has been resolved, and will now pass into history. The left needs to unite and present a coherent alternative to this mess - otherwise the only beneficiaries of ruling class paralysis will be the right ●

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sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_ every month\*/3 months\*  
until further notice, commencing on \_\_\_\_\_  
This replaces any previous order from this account. (\*delete)  
Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_