



weekly **worker**



**Euro storm clouds gather.
Will Angela Merkel come
to the rescue?**

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Austerity: mapping
the alternative



LETTERS



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

Labour again

Comrade Chris Strafford's latest missive on the question of the Labour Party, alas, *still* persists in the major misunderstandings of the CPGB's position common to all his interventions on the subject (Letters, September 22).

He seeks once again to prove that the hypothesis of a leftwing shift in the Labour Party is bunk by reference more or less exclusively to Ed Miliband and his parliamentary cronies. Sure enough, the good brother Miliband stands revealed as a vacillating pseudo-Blairite and our analysis proved decisively wrong.

The problem is that this was never the point. Indeed, in my reply to his last polemic on the subject, I responded to almost exactly the same line of argument: "If we had confidently predicted that Ed Miliband would come out in favour of waves of militant strike action, then Chris would be quite right to argue that our position has been shown to be a nonsense. Yet we did not say any such thing" ('Repackaging of a tenuous argument', August 11).

We have *still* not said any such thing - yet the indefatigable comrade Strafford insists on attributing this thesis to us. A year ago, myself and comrade Strafford opposed the CPGB's critical support for leadership hopeful Diane Abbott - but to read his material now, one would have thought that the CPGB had rather called for a vote to Ed Miliband.

To make things as clear as possible - a shift to the left in the Labour Party is not to be measured by whether or not Miliband takes a principled line on this or that (this week's left litmus test: the Dale Farm evictions). Political shifts in Labour make their mark rather in the relative *discomfort* of leaders as they inevitably take up their sell-out lines - that is how we discern the *pressures*, from both the objective processes of the British political cycle and the internal struggles of the party, incumbent upon the leaders.

Most significantly, the largest *Labour-affiliated* unions are balloting for united strike action on November 30. There is talk of civil disobedience and, more guardedly, of defying anti-union laws. Much of this will be hot air - what more would we expect from the labour bureaucracy? Relative to the abject quiescence of the Blair years, however, this is big news, and very definitely a *shift to the left*.

At the recent TUC congress which gave us these declarations and initiatives, Miliband - having made a bit of a tit out of himself over the June 30 strikes - had to submit himself to rather humiliating questioning on that matter. Now, at Labour conference, he carefully hedges himself against condemning the November 30 action, and produces a speech guaranteed to reanimate all the old 'red Ed' business in the rightwing press.

The idea of Tony Blair in that position is self-evidently absurd; not, I repeat, because Ed Miliband is more pro-working class *as an individual*, but because there are severe, historically variable, objective constraints for an organisation like Labour, open to pressure both from the bourgeoisie and the working class.

So on to the fundamental question, for the umpteenth time: the bourgeoisie has availed itself of no end of means to make the Labour Party a tame instrument of capitalist rule. Labour has played this role more or less uninterruptedly since its inception. But it is still *vulnerable* to pressure from the organised working class, and

thus to serious strategic intervention by the far left.

In the end, one does not have to make a detailed analysis of the 'bourgeois workers party' concept to make the fundamental political point. Unite, Unison and so on keep the Labour Party solvent and afloat - especially at times, like now, when big-money capitalist donors are less prevalent than they were. They should get some political bang for their buck.

Rank-and-file militants *in those unions*, moreover, should no longer be content with stitch-ups between Barber, Prentis, McCluskey on one side and Miliband (or whoever) on the other, but should take control of their unions to force pro-working class policies on Labour. This, of course, amounts to the overthrow the labour bureaucracy. Success will not materialise overnight - but it is, after all, one of the key conditions for revolution anyway.

What is Chris's alternative? "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." All very agreeable - but our job is *not* simply to react to struggle in an ad hoc way, but act according to a *strategy*, which aims to destroy the objective supports for bourgeois rule.

We have a strategy to neutralise one such support - the Labour Party. Like any hypothesis, there is no guarantee it will be proven correct - but Chris can only 'disprove' it at this point by falsifying our arguments. He certainly has not provided any serious alternative.

James Turley
East London

Fighting party

Dave Douglass rightly considers that "the whole strategy of the CPGB towards the Labour Party to have been ill-conceived then [in the 1930s] and even more so now" (Letters, September 22). Of course, the *British road to socialism* aimed at building a Marxist party of Great Britain hand in glove with a reformed or left Labour Party. This dates from the 1950s, but has its roots in the popular front period in the 1930s.

The *British road* is a two-party strategy combining an 'orange' with a 'lemon'. The 'Little and Large' of working class politics would form an alliance for power. This would be a popular front in which workers are subordinated to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Dave expressed hostility to this in his critical comment about "the 59th variety of 'Vote Labour without illusions'".

Chris Strafford takes up cudgels against the consequences of the CPGB majority's *British road* strategy (Letters, September 22). It is a courageous stand, but it reveals the weaknesses in his position. First he plants his flag of rebellion on the shifting sands of the Labour Party. He shows that Labour has not shifted to the left, as the majority predicted.

The Labour Party always shifts to the left and right and then back again. It is part of Labour's DNA. How else can Labour hope to fool and mislead the working class? If working class resistance grows, no doubt Miliband and co will adapt to that. The fact it hasn't done so yet will not dent the CPGB majority, who have a longer-term strategic view. If or when Labour does move left, will Chris admit he was in error and join the Labour Party?

The second weakness in his position is his alternative of 'fighting back' and 'revolutionary unity'. Chris predicts the workers will fight back. We will all join in that, including some in the Labour Party. But we need to learn from the Tories. They understand

the necessity for a party to enable a class to be fully armed. The party is the heavy guns, fighter-attack aircraft and helicopter gunships of the class struggle. The workers have no fighting party and are left with rusty rifles and a few old machine guns.

The strength of the CPGB majority position is that it recognises the central importance of party. Chris sounds more like an anarchist ducking the party question and substituting the vain hope of revolutionary unity. He will never storm the CPGB majority redoubt with anarchist or syndicalist ideas of non-party self-activity.

The militant section of the working class needs its own 'independent militant party'. This party must be independent of the bourgeoisie and hence independent of the Labour Party. It is the party of militant class fighters who want to get politically organised. The word 'militant' and not 'revolutionary' is used deliberately. We could borrow a phrase from the CPGB theses on Labour: "a united front for all pro-working class partisans" (ie, militants). It is the party of those who want to fight back, regardless of whether they are or pretend to be 'revolutionary' or not, communist or not.

Steve Freeman
South London

Straight talking

Comrade Eddie Ford (Letters, September 15) raised a number of issues relating to my letter in the previous edition of the *Weekly Worker* (September 8). He says he is not "sure the comrade [me] is following his own advice" to be "honest about ideas and the ideas of others".

Eddie bases this, as he did in his original article, not on what is written, but on his understanding of what the writer really meant. I can only consider the actual written words. If I have doubts about an author's views, I ask them for clarity - honest debate does not allow me to invent. So I may be naive when I quote others, but I do so in trust.

Comrade Ford tries to demonstrate how the writer of the original Socialist Party article on the riots is being less than honest. He implies that I conspire with the SP's dishonesty, but does not explain if this is a result of a deliberate act of deception on my part or through my aforementioned naivety. Am I bothered? No, I know I am attempting to be honest and, hopefully, achieving it.

The SP is accused of journalistic tricks in using others to express the SP's own reformist positions. But there is little proof of this, only assertions based on poor evidence. The Socialist Workers Party does it (again an assertion), so the SP must be at it too. Eddie's evidence is that the SP article quoted local residents, in the way that the SWP supposedly uses friendly workers, who complained about the police, as a way of promoting the SP's own views on the police. How does comrade Ford know this?

Even more damning, in comrade Ford's eyes, is that the SP journalist quoted a certain Paul Deller of the Metropolitan Police Federation, who commented on the level of police morale. Are the views of local working class people of no interest? Is the state of police morale of no interest to revolutionaries? I would have thought it would be.

Eddie continues his polemic when he asserts: "Quite obviously, the article was written this way so as to give the effect that ordinary local people, the MPF and SPEW all agree that police cuts are a regrettable thing." The article certainly quotes local people and the MPF, but where, other than in comrade Ford's assertion, does it state that the SP holds these positions

on police cuts?

I never set out to defend, support or even to give a rounded explanation of the Socialist Party's position on the riots or the police. I am not in a position to undertake such a task - I am not a member, supporter or regular reader of their paper. But, in the cause of honesty, I need to state that I am an ex-member of Militant and still hold to some of their ideas and methods. Equally, I have also developed new ones and rejected some of the ideas and methods accrued in my Militant days.

Comrade Ford accepted my implied challenge to find the actual, as opposed to assumed, SP position on the riots and police cuts. After consulting the demands raised in the article, he formed the opinion that my arguments were flatly contradicted by the very first programmatic demand - "An independent, trade union-led inquiry into the death of Mark Duggan. Scrap the IPCC. We need police accountability through democratic control by local people." Here, comrade Ford asserts, is the proof of the SP's illusions in the police.

But is it? In my view, it is quite the opposite. There is no call for a police or government inquiry; the call is for one that is "independent" and "trade-union led". If the SP's trust in the police is so obvious, why call for an independent and trade union-led enquiry and for scrapping the Independent Police Complaints Commission?

But, of course, the most damning of the SP demands is the call for "police accountability through democratic control by local people". Is this showing illusions in the police or a rejection of the present policing system? What's the alternative - a workers' militia? If so, where was the militia when working class areas were, in the CPGB's own description, being looted?

To ask this question does not imply that I have illusions in the police. As it happens, in the course of the riots, the police met almost all of my expectations. No real support for working class areas, property or communities. There were the usual repressive actions against the youth in particular and plenty of claims for overtime. It was reminiscent of the miners' strike. Given the resources - mainly a mass party with a suitable leadership - I would support a defence force, probably based on the trade unions, within working class communities.

Comrade Ford's final attempt to demonstrate that the SP support for illusions in the police is centred on his continuing assertion that the SP was calling for an end to the cuts in police spending. To prove this, he butchers the SP programme by supposedly quoting the SP's final demand of "No to all cuts in jobs and public services", making the following observation: "And in this context, the demand in the final bullet point ... can only be read to include the police."

Comrade Ford misplaces the demand and then gives it a very specific context relating to the police failure to defend working class communities. I question if it is given an accurate contextual setting. Reading comrade Ford's original article and his letter, the impression is created that the SP article in question centres on the role of the police. But it does not. The SP article consists of description and analysis of the riots, with the role of police occupying a small part. The demand is actually second to last within a longer list, the vast majority of which are unrelated to the role of the police.

I am still at loss as to how the demand, in his words, "can only be

read to include the police". The clever SP journalist has hidden the inclusion of anti-police cuts I think most comrades would not have noticed. When I was in Militant I was often charged by the right wing of trying to hide extremist ideas, never of hiding reformist demands. Is the problem caused by the word 'all'? If this is the case, I thought I would examine the CPGB reportage of an event.

In his report on the Labour Representation Committee's AGM, Stan Keable reported: "No cuts at all, no privatisations at all" - that is how John McDonnell MP set the militant mood of the Labour Representation Committee's annual conference." The report continues: "FBU general secretary Matt Wrack described the 'horrific' cuts as 'a general attack on our class ... This is not a war on the poor - it is a war on the majority' ... The FBU 'rejects the cuts agenda completely' ... The 'no cuts, no privatisations' policy was endorsed in resolution 9." And comrade Ted Knight is reported as demanding that Labour councillors "should refuse to implement cuts budgets and refuse to vote for a single cut" ('Cuts and rebuilding', January 20).

The CPGB does not distance itself from these quotes or others of a similar nature. What we have is simple reportage. If I adopt comrade Ford's methods, I would claim they are a clear statement of the policies and programme of the CPGB. Further, as they call for opposition to *all* cuts, they must include the police. I could go further by saying that, as they oppose all cuts, they would include MPs' wages and expenses. But I know this would not only be dishonest; it would be ludicrous.

Finally, I turn to this little gem from comrade Ford: "Presumably, to put forward a principled Marxist position on the riots would be a manifestation of unBritish 'ultra-leftism'." I will not give chapter and verse from the SP's 2,000-plus word article: suffice to say for me it manifestly did contain numerous items of Marxist analysis and positions. I will just note the following passage that is but one of many similar: "... contrary to reports from some politicians and media, the rioting and looting that took place was not just the result of 'outsiders' or 'hooligans', but was a spontaneous outpouring of the anger of sections of the local population, particularly young people."

Terry Burns
email

Blood feud

I was obviously not clear in my previous letter about Chris Knight's book, *Blood relations* (Letters, September 8). I do not believe that human behaviour is the natural or inevitable result of human biology. I wanted to indicate that, even if we do support an idea - such as that the whole process starts from the alpha male monopolising sexual access to all the females and those females resist this by synchronising menstruation - we must have some evidence that this would be possible.

Since Chris (Letters, September 15) bases his argument around the significance of menstruation, I tried to show that, even if we do want to pursue this line of argument (which I don't), we must answer the suggestion that menstruation is a response to having multiple male partners. If that is true, the alpha male could not dominate menstruating females because menstruation and alpha male domination would be mutually exclusive. It is fundamental to Chris's theory that menstruation can be synchronised. There are several studies which do not support that possibility. I only introduced

these examples in response to the original argument. I don't believe that reproductive biology is a useful area to examine for the origin of women's oppression in any case. In fact, quite the opposite.

Chris points out that, before human culture, there was only the natural world. It has been quite successfully argued, from Engels onward, that the manipulation of natural resources led to the development of class society and gender inequality. This is quite different from basing an argument about the social organisation of human reproduction solely on the biological characteristics of human reproduction. That is the kind of idea I described as 'sociobiology', which Chris says is an incorrect use of the word and he may well be right. I had never been challenged on my use of the word before.

My main objection to the 'sex strike' theory is its reliance on reactionary ideas of sexually predatory men being economically manipulated by women whose sexuality is purely instrumental, used by women for material benefit. Adoption of this view will inevitably lead to the justification of similar behaviour in the present day as innate, natural and inevitable. That can never be progressive.

Heather Downs
email

Politics of coal

In reply to Arthur Bough (Letters, September 15) let's restate some facts on the political nature of the closure of the British coal industry.

The National Union of Mineworkers did not fight the closures on whether the pits were profitable or not; we fought the closures on the grounds that they could not be closed on such spurious and temporary conditions as the market selling price of coal at any particular moment in time. We could have got an agreement back in April 1984, when disagreement hung on one word 'beneficial'. Having taken out all references to 'economic' and 'profitable', the board said they would agree to work coal where it could be 'beneficially developed'. Arthur Scargill considered this to be a fudge and refused to accept any leeway on closing pits on economic grounds. My assertion was that, incidentally, British coal *was* the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world. So comrade Bough is wrong to say that coal is produced and brought here because it can be more cheaply mined abroad. Whether cheap labour, non-union or high-tech, it can't and it isn't.

The miners were engaged in a battle against a government whose central social policy was smashing the NUM, as a by-product wiping out the most 'marginal' of unit costs, in order to sell off a super-profitable, non-unionised coal industry, whose socially challenging teeth had been drawn. But the coal industry overall produced coal cheaper and more efficiently and safely than any other country in the world. Fact.

Obviously some pits were more profitable than others, but in mining this changes from one mine to another over a period of time, back and forth. Selby was only just starting production, so didn't in any case come into the equation in 1984, but there was nothing wrong with lower-cost Selby coal bringing down the overall cost to consumers - this was a single enterprise.

So the struggle *never* was about 'unprofitable pits' or us defending some archaic industry. We were fighting to keep our class position, as well as our social and economic position as workers. We all knew the longer-term solution was the overthrow of capitalism, but we were not engaged in an all-out struggle for class power at that stage. We would have needed a higher level of political consciousness among other industries'

workers for that. But that didn't mean we couldn't fight for demands short of the abolition of capitalism - and this is what this argument was all about in relation to Bombardier and jobs on this island. Defence of our jobs or their jobs isn't a "nationalistic solution" - it's a class defence, it's a defence of our incomes, our organisation, our rights to intervene and challenge society. If people who claim to be socialists can't see that I really despair.

Thatcher didn't succeed in the central task of de-unionising the coal industry and, after beating us in 1985, was left with a still highly combative NUM despite the loss of 100,000 jobs and 100 mines. Union struggles raged across the country post-1985. The vast majority of power generation in this country was still in the hands of a highly politicised, class-conscious union. The 'final solution' to the problem of the miners was to close the industry. It was at this stage that the questions of 'overproduction' and there being 'too much coal' came in. That was only the case because coal's market was confiscated in the wasteful and anti-social 'dash for gas'. Coal power generation and capacity was closed down and switched to new gas-powered stations.

At this time the world benchmark for profitable coal production was £1.75 per gigajoule. Only a handful of British pits were temporarily producing coal above this price. The bulk were operating at £1.30, and pits like Bentley in Doncaster were closed despite producing coal for less than 90p. The British Steel market remained a main consumer but was itself losing massive amounts of capacity in the same de-industrialisation process which was hitting the miners.

Truth was, no matter how efficient or super-profitable the pits now were, they would still close because that was the *politically* decided policy. Post-Major, the handful of pits that remained *were* super-profitable, with secured local markets or specialist coal, but none of them had secure futures, despite endless supplies of coal, because UK Coal, which owns three of the last five big mines (plus one they have in 'mothballs'), want out of coal mining. Their land portfolios offer them bigger profits than mining coal underneath the land it sits on. It requires capital investment and long periods until this pays off, and they don't want to wait. As they told Ian Lavery, the last NUM president, "This is a business, not an industry".

Supplies of gas lying off British coasts, which would have provided hundreds of years of domestic consumption, were burned off in power generators in a very few cases - and then only for a very brief period, while it was flowing slightly cheaper than coal power. Of course, it couldn't last, and after native supplies were exhausted, and demand across the world rose, so the spiralling costs of gas have driven millions to fuel poverty. The fact is, 70 million tonnes of coal are now *imported* into Britain to burn in coal power stations, at prices far higher than that which was available here. But on top of that all coal power generation faces massive added tax burdens, both as a punishment to consumers for using coal power and as supplement to offset the costs of so-called 'green' energy - which, if it was left to find its own 'market' level, nobody would buy because it's so inefficient. Not that it *can* be left to its own devices, as green power, for all its cost, cannot meet base load requirements of power generation.

Arthur misunderstands my references to workers' control and miners' freedoms. These were not 'introduced' in some plastic workers' participation scheme or anything to do with Fordism. I'm talking about ancient job controls and inroads of dual power into the mining process, which kept

control of team composition, manning, overtime, deployment and the way in which work is done in the hands of the miners and their union. This wasn't introduced with nationalisation, but was a feature fought for under the private coal owners since lang syne - and continued despite nationalisation agreements which stated they should end. But there is really no argument as to whether terms and conditions within the NCB were better than under the old coal owners: it's just too well documented.

This is not the place to argue about workers' cooperatives in coal mines - Tower worked, but others have ended in physical and financial disaster. Cooperatives, except in very particular circumstances, couldn't have worked because the economies of scale are too great and the market was already rigged against them.

Coming to David Walters (Letters, September 22) and his concern for the poor coal miners and support for nuclear power, this is the tune Harold Wilson sang in his 'White-hot heat of modern technology' speech in the 1960s, before he closed more coal mines than Maggie Thatcher. They seem to think nuclear power grows on trees, but let me assure you that the death, injury and working conditions endured by our comrades in uranium mines are far worse than anything we experience as coal miners in Britain. Uranium is also a fossil fuel and, believe it or not, it is limited. It is also a fact that (outwith the one tragedy of Aberfan), when the mines have a disaster, it is confined to miners and under the ground. When the nuclear industry has a disaster, it cripples the whole surrounding community and leaves a fatal legacy for a lifetime and beyond.

Coal kills on such a scale because it is essentially mined in places where union strength and social gains by the labour movement are weak or non-existent. This isn't the case in Australia, Canada or, by and large, Britain or New Zealand. It's not that the coal is any different; it's the strength of the workers' movement which is crucial here. Despite the recent disaster in Wales, only seven miners have been killed in Britain in the last six years. Too many - but still the safest coal mining in the world. As a matter of fact, mining comes way down the list of fatal occupations in Britain, behind deep-sea fishing, seafaring, diving, oil rigs, construction, docks and agriculture. Does comrade Walters aim to phase out such occupations? Of course not - what needs stopping are the accidents, not the tasks and skills.

Coal production has doubled in the last 20 years across the world. It is set despite the recession to double again in something like 10 years. New coal mines are being won across the globe. Coal *is* going to be mined - another fact of life. Instead of standing like Canute, we must ensure we assist in making sure this takes place in union mines with the highest attainable levels of safety and job control, and burned in clean-coal power stations with all the back-up of energy-saving and insulation we can combine in the process.

Dave should not think that renationalisation of the energy industry means automatically a public acceptance of nuclear power and a rejection of coal. Put to the test, most people will back clean coal and a regeneration of the coal industry rather than an expansion of nuclear power - or the never-ending encroachment of wind turbines and pylons for that matter. But, come that glorious day when workers are actually asked for their opinion, I can assure him that the mining communities will be demanding coal is a central feature of energy policy.

David Douglass
South Shields

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 29, 6pm: Meeting, Cameron committee room, 3rd floor, Manchester Metropolitan University Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M15. 'The capitalist crisis'.

Organised by Manchester Communist Students: manchestercommuniststudents@googlemail.com.

Radical Anthropology Group

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

October 4: 'Totem and taboo'. Speaker: Chris Knight. www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Reclaim the media

Thursday September 29, 7pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. After the Murdoch scandal - reclaim the media. Speakers: John Pilger, Michelle Stanistreet (NUJ general secretary), Gary McFarlane (Tottenham Defence Campaign).

Organised by NUJ members.

No to poverty pimps

Friday September 30, 12 noon: Protest, Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, Islington, London N1. Protest against Atos Origin, the company looking to recruit medical staff to carry out 'assessments' of people on incapacity benefit.

For more information: <http://benefitsclaimantsfightback.wordpress.com>.

Europe against austerity

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

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

Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.europeagainstausterity.org.

Jarrow march 2011

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

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

Cable Street anniversary

Sunday October 2, 11.30am: March, Aldgate East (junction of Braham Street and Leman Street), London E1. 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.

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.

Unite the fights

Sunday October 2, 3.30pm: Rally, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester M1. Speakers include: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Tony Kearns (CWU), Paul Brandon (Right to Work).

Organised by Right to Work: righttowork.org.uk.

Great British class survey

Tuesday October 4, 4pm: Seminar, room 915, Adam Smith Building, University of Glasgow. 'Class in Britain today: insights from the BBC's *Great British class survey*'. Speaker: Mike Savage. Organised by the Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movements.

War, anti-war

Wednesday October 5, 7pm: Film, Bishopsgate Institute library, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Fundraiser on the 10th anniversary of the Afghan war. Tickets £10 (Stop the War members £5).

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

Miscarriage of justice day

Saturday October 8, 10am: Conference, Arches Project, Adderly Street, Birmingham B9. Speakers include Kevin McMahon (United Against Injustice), Paddy Joe Hill, Dr Michael Naughton (Innocence Network UK), Sam Raincock and Michelle Diskin (sister of Barry George).

Hosted by West Midlands Against Injustice: www.unitedagainstinjustice.org.uk.

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.

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.

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.

PALESTINE

Zionist 'negotiating strategy' sham

What does Mahmoud Abbas expect to achieve at the UN? Moshé Machover analyses the Palestinian bid for statehood

On September 23, Mahmoud (Abu Mazen) Abbas, 'president' of the Palestinian 'Authority', appeared before the United Nations general assembly and, to the great acclaim of the majority of delegates, made a bid for the admission of the 'state' of Palestine as a member of that organisation.

I have put three words above in quote marks, for good reason. First, although Abu Mazen is often addressed politely as 'president Abbas', his official title is 'chairman of the Palestinian National Authority' (in Arabic there is some ambiguity, as the word *ra'is* can mean both 'chairman' and 'president'). In any case, even his entitlement to this title is dubious: he was elected as chairman in January 2005 for a term of four years, which expired in January 2009; but he has remained super-glued to his seat.

Second, the so-called Palestinian Authority (PA), of which he is (or was) chairman, is devoid of any real authority. Its main role is to keep the Palestinian people under control on behalf of Israel, and to engage with the latter in desultory negotiations in an endless 'peace process' (of which more anon).

Third, the so-called state for which he was demanding UN membership is non-existent: much less than a state, it is not even a Bantustan, but more like a series of disconnected Indian reservations, and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

In response to Abbas, Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, made a speech in his prime poisonous style, vehemently opposing Palestinian UN membership and inviting the PA instead to negotiate. This was seconded by US president Barack Obama, who, in an utterly one-sided speech, denounced the Palestinian bid as 'one-sided' and, as expected, promised to veto it in the security council. The invitation to negotiate was echoed by Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union.

In this article I propose to explain the background to this international charade and the motives of the various actors in it.

'Peace process'

First, Israel. For the Israeli leadership, the 'peace process' - or, as many Israelis (who have trouble distinguishing between long and short vowels) pronounce it, *piss process* - is a perpetual ratchet mechanism for buying time, while colonisation of Palestinian lands is extended and expanded.

The Israeli negotiating strategy, successfully applied for the last 20 years, is very simple. At each stage of the process, Israel puts forward new conditions. If the Palestinian side rejects them, the negotiations are broken off, and world public opinion is invited to blame Palestinian intransigence for the deadlock. However, if the Palestinian side capitulates to the new demands, then Israel finds a pretext for stalling. A favourite ploy is to create provocations such as 'targeted assassinations' of Palestinian militants. These are rarely reported by the international media, and never given any prominence, as they are considered routine moves in the 'war against terror'. Eventually, some armed Palestinian group retaliates with a bloody bombing inside Israel or an ill-aimed rocket barrage. This is invariably given lurid coverage in the international media.¹ Thereupon Israel breaks off the talks, because obviously one cannot nego-

tiate with such terrorists. Again, the Palestinians are blamed for the failure of the talks. Meantime, Israeli colonisation continues to metastasise.

After a while, there is another international initiative for resuming the negotiations. In the new round of talks, the previous Palestinian concessions are taken as a starting point, and Israel's conditions are ratcheted up. Right now the new Israeli ultimatum includes the following two demands. First, that the Palestinians subscribe to the Zionist doctrine that all Jews around the world are a nation, and



Binyamin Netanyahu

Israel is the nation-state of this alleged nation (rather than a state of its own citizens, or even of the Israeli Hebrew nation). Second, that the PA drop its insistence that the eventual settlement be based on the pre-1967 *de facto* border of Israel (the so-called green line). These two demands taken together amount to open-ended legitimisation of Zionist colonisation, past, present and future.

Israeli opposition

The dual aim of this strategy is to buy time for further Israeli colonisation, and prevent the creation of a sovereign Palestinian Arab state of any size, however mutilated. This policy is by no means new, and is common to all the major Zionist parties. Let me quote from a Matzpen discussion paper co-authored some time ago by comrade Emmanuel Farjoun and myself.

"The decisive majority of the Zionist leadership, both in the government and in the ... opposition, is resolutely opposed, as a matter of fundamental principle, to the establishment of any kind of independent Palestinian state.

"First, the Zionist legitimisation for the existence of the state of Israel as an exclusive Jewish state has always been entirely based not on the right to self-determination of the Jews who live in this country, but on the alleged 'historical right' of all Jews around the world over the whole of the 'Land of Israel.' From this viewpoint, recognition of the existence in Palestine of another people, the Palestinian Arab people, which has a legitimate claim in it would undermine Zionism's legitimisation and self-justification.

"Second, the Zionist leadership indeed takes into account the eventuality that within the framework of a settlement Israel may be obliged to withdraw also from parts of its conquests west of the Jordan river. But from a Zionist viewpoint any withdrawal from any part whatsoever of 'the historical Land of Israel', especially west of the Jordan, is - in principle - temporary and contingent on transient conditions. From this viewpoint, Israel must reserve the ability and right to reconquer these territories, if that becomes politically possible or militarily necessary. But in international politics there is a

huge difference between conquering part of another state and conquering the whole of a 'third state' [ie, a Palestinian state between Israel and Jordan]. The world would be much more likely to accept, under certain conditions, an Israeli reconquest of part of Jordan (or of Greater Syria), than the total erasure of a sovereign Palestinian state. The establishment of such a state would therefore impose a severe constraint on Israel's political and military strategy.

"Third, the Zionist leadership is worried that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, however small, may be the starting point of a historical process whereby that state would expand step by step at Israel's expense. The Zionists in fact know from their own experience all about a process of this kind: at first they agreed to the establishment of a small Jewish state within the borders recommended [in 1937] by the Peel Commission, and later within the borders of the [UN] partition plan of 1947, but they expanded the borders further and further, step by step."

In this context, we quoted the words of a famous Israeli leader:

"Fundamentally, a Palestinian state is an antithesis of the state of Israel ... The basic and naked truth is that there is no fundamental difference between the relation of the Arabs of Nablus to Nablus and that of the Arabs of Jaffa to Jaffa ... And if today we set out on this road and say that the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights, then it will not end with the West Bank. The West Bank together with the Gaza Strip do not amount to a state ... The establishment of such a Palestinian state would lay a cornerstone to something else ... Either the state of Israel - or a Palestinian state."

Our discussion paper was written in August 1976 (and published in *Matzpen* in February 1977), when the first Rabin government was in office. The leader we quoted was Moshe Dayan (as reported in *Ha'aretz* December 12 1975). *Plus ça change* ...

Indeed, no Israeli government has signed any legally binding commitment to the creation of a Palestinian Arab state. In particular, the Oslo accords of August 1993, signed by the second Rabin government, contain no mention of a Palestinian state (they also contain no commitment on Israel's part to halt its colonisation of Palestinian lands).

Abbas's UN bid is not remotely likely to give the Palestinians in the foreseeable future a state in any substantive sense. At most, it will result in a symbolic act of international recognition of *notional* Palestinian statehood, of the Palestinians' *right* to have a state. But even this symbolic international legal act is more than Israel is prepared to countenance. Hence Netanyahu's vehement opposition.

US position

In our discussion paper, comrade Farjoun and I explained also the American position, which has not changed since then:

"The minimal demand, which even the most moderate current in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) cannot give up (so long as it exists as an independent actor), is the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state in the occupied terri-

tories, which would exist for an entire historical period alongside the Zionist state of Israel.

"The Americans for their own part could accept this demand in order to tranquilise the [Arab] national ferment. From a purely American viewpoint, as from that of the moderate current in the PLO, a compromise that includes the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state under US protection would be acceptable. But in practice such a compromise is precluded by the resolute Zionist position and the special position of Israel in the American set-up in the region."

The total, apparently slavish, US support for the Israeli position (illustrated for the hundredth time by Obama's veto threat) is often explained by the great influence in Congress and the US media of the pro-Israel lobby (consisting of some important Jewish organisations and a much larger fundamentalist Christian network). But this 'Israeli tail wags US dog' explanation is at best only part of the truth, and it begs the question as to why that lobby is allowed to wield such influence. There is no sign that any major US capitalist interest group, including the dominant military-industrial and oil complex, which commands huge political and financial resources, makes a really serious effort to counteract or limit the effects of pro-Israel lobbying (billionaire George Soros is a rather isolated exception²).

In fact, Israel is the most reliable American ally - in effect, a junior partner - in the Middle East, and is even more indispensable now, given the downfall of some Arab protégés of the US, and the general instability in the region. So the Obama administration is torn between its reluctance to arouse anti-American rage among the masses of the Arab world and beyond, and its commitment to Israel, obliging



Mahmoud Abbas

it to block the PA's UN membership bid by a veto in the security council. To save the US this embarrassment, its EU camp followers (led by Nicolas Sarkozy and Catherine Ashton) have devised alternative plans: to persuade the PA to withdraw its bid for full UN membership, and apply instead for non-member-state status (like that of the Vatican). This can be granted by a two-third majority in the general assembly, where the US has no veto. Failing that, if the PA insists on its full membership bid, the issue can be kicked into the long grass of endlessly prolonged deliberation among members of the security council.

Why Abbas went to UN

It is impossible to believe that the Ramallah-based PA has not cottoned on long ago to the Israeli negotiating strategy and realised that the 'peace process' is leading nowhere except to the expansion of Israeli colonisation and theft of Palestinian land and

resources. No-one can be that stupid. The reason why Arafat, and later on Abbas, and their clique have persevered in collusion with this pretence is - apart from their pathetic pro-US commitment - the considerable privileges in status granted by Israel to its favourite collaborationists, and the material benefits derived from their control of various funds, including grants from the EU (in this, Tony Blair has played a significant role as pander).

But even collaborationism has its limits. The Abbas leadership has been so discredited among its own people that it was rapidly losing control. Here the Arab awakening has played a crucial role in raising the expectations of the Palestinian masses. No Arab leader whose mandate on power has long expired can feel secure. In desperation, Abbas played the UN gambit. In the short term, it has won him fairly wide, open support in the West Bank, and covert support in the Gaza Strip, where the rival Hamas leadership has suppressed any open pro-Abbas manifestations.

Hamas is by no means alone in its sceptical attitude to Abbas's UN gambit. Palestinian opinion generally is deeply divided. While many Palestinians point out the advantages - symbolic, diplomatic and legal - of internationally recognised statehood, many others are worried about the disadvantages. They point out that the likely outcome would be freezing the Palestinians for the foreseeable future in possession of a symbol devoid of any reality, without actual control of any territory, borders and resources such as water; and unable to halt further Israeli colonisation. The Palestinian refugees outside the occupied territories would remain in limbo.³

Our response

Let me end with a few words about the position that, in my opinion, socialists should take towards the whole issue.

We should certainly be critical of the motives behind Mahmoud Abbas's initiative, as well as of his utterly compromised and politically bankrupt Palestinian Authority. More generally, the so-called two-state 'solution', to which the PA is committed and on which the present UN membership bid is based, is a dead end as far as Palestinian liberation is concerned, and will not provide a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁴

However, right now socialists, especially in Israel and in the west, should direct their main attack against the moves by Israel, the US and its camp followers to block Palestinian UN membership. Whatever we think of the PA and its UN bid, the hypocritical positions of Netanyahu, Obama, Sarkozy, Cameron and Ashton are a thousand times worse ●

Notes

1. On the systematic pro-Israel bias in British TV reporting, see G Philo, M Berry *More bad news from Israel* London 2011. Israeli attacks are invariably described as 'retaliation'. Palestinian revenge is invariably described as 'starting a new cycle of violence'.
2. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_soros and his article, 'On Israel, America and Aipac' *New York Review of Books* April 12 2007.
3. For a position of profound scepticism by Palestinian nationalists (including Karma Nabulsi) towards the Abbas initiative, see <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/09/20119881338104223.html>. For a more robust Palestinian nationalist criticism, see G Karmi, 'A token state of Palestine' *The Guardian* September 24.
4. See my article, 'Breaking the chains of Zionist oppression', *Weekly Worker* February 19 2009.

ECONOMY

Euro storm clouds gather

World leaders are now frantically trying to cobble together a plan to prevent a catastrophic collapse of the euro zone, writes **Eddie Ford**. But it could be too little, too late

After months of vacillation and denial, reality is beginning to sink in. Genuine fear, if not panic, is spreading that the euro zone project is not far from total collapse and that the world is on the brink of a major recession - maybe even something far worse. Like a calamitous slump or depression on a scale unseen since the 1930s, when a traumatised Europe saw the rise of fascism and after that World War II. Without immediate and dramatic global action, the world could be convulsed by cascading defaults, bank runs, failed states, rampant unemployment, general immiseration and profound social unrest.

Perhaps summing up the *Zeitgeist*, Alessio Rastani, the now infamous stock market trader, almost cheerfully told a dumbfounded BBC News 24 presenter that the euro zone is "toast" and that, apparently, nothing can be done about it - "Goldman Sachs rules the world", not governments.¹ He also admitted that he and his colleagues "dream" of moments like this, as the economic crisis - and possible complete crash of the banking/financial system - provides them with plenty of opportunities to make *loads* of money. Rastani also advised anxious viewers to "be prepared and act now" unless they want to watch their savings and investments disappear down the drain, though what he expects ordinary workers to do (set up their own hedge fund?) was left unstated.

Now, at the very last minute, there are frantic attempts to cobble together some sort of plan, *any* plan, to avert a catastrophic collapse of the euro - which would send the world spinning into chaos. Jean-Claude Trichet, head of the European Central Bank, urged government leaders to "demonstrate their sense of direction" and a spooked Barack Obama - terrified of the implications for an already recession-hit United States - declared that Europe's financial crisis is "scaring the world" and that the actions taken so far by its leaders "haven't been as quick as they need to be". But there is an oppressive sense that events are running out of control and that it could all be too little, too late.

Greece is currently at the centre of the storm and the spectre of bankruptcy looms over the country. As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Union troika have still not decided whether or not to release the next tranche of bailout money, waiting for its 'debt inspectors' to complete their "review" of Greece's finances. If not, then the Greek government will run out cash as early as October 8 - finding itself unable to pay public-sector workers, pensions, etc.

Addressing business leaders in Berlin on September 27, Georgios Papandreou, the embattled prime minister, said Greece would "fulfil its obligations" and even hailed the country's "superhuman" efforts to cut its budget - that is, further attack the working class. On the same day, in an act of appeasement to the troika, the Greek parliament voted to back the emergency property tax so as to plug an immediate €2 billion budget black hole. The tax will cost the average family €800-€1,500 a year, and will be collected through their electricity bills. With

unemployment at 16% and average monthly wage at €650-€800, many Greek workers - whose purchasing power has been slashed since the crisis - will simply be unable or unwilling to pay this new tax; but if they do not, they run the risk of getting their electricity cut off. A whole raft of other brutal cuts and attacks are now in the pipeline, as part of Papandreou's €27 billion "mid-term fiscal plan".

However, for the government's "superhuman" efforts to attack the Greek working class, none of this might be enough. Some workers still have a job of some description and others continue to draw a pension on non-starvation levels. Unacceptable to the troika, it seems. They have yet to be convinced that Athens can be relied on to impose ever more rounds of draconian cuts on an already bled-dry Greece. In other words, the message for Greece - and other ailing euro zone countries like Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland - seems to be: the medicine is not working; therefore take a double-dose of the very same medicine.

Over the weekend of September 16-18, the IMF, World Bank and G20 finance ministers issued a series of tough-sounding communiqués and statements promising "decisive action" and "bold action" to do "whatever necessary" to prevent Europe's growing debt crisis taking a further nose-dive - the "phased" deadline for agreement on a rescue package for the euro zone will be the EU council meeting in Brussels at the end of October and the G20 government meeting in Cannes at the beginning of November.

The first "bold" and "decisive" proposal which is under "active consideration" is a 50% 'haircut' (write-down) of Greek sovereign debt - up from the original 21%, which drove down shares in Greek banks to a 19-year low. Or, to put it another way, they are preparing for an 'orderly' or 'controlled' Greek default on its €315 billion debt - despite George Osborne stupidly denying that there was any such plan.

Obviously though, if Greece was to default without sufficient back-stop support, the financial system could well freeze over and business 'confidence' would collapse, as it did after the implosion of Lehman Brothers three years ago. Banks would stop lending, trade would grind to a halt and another recession would inevitably result. For instance, French banks have lost 50% of their value over the last three months and have considerable amounts on money invested in Greece - hence they run the very real danger of taking a

catastrophic hit from any possible Greek default. Indeed, they could be more or less wiped out, which would trigger an immediate economic and political crisis of seismic proportions.

Desperate

Therefore, there is increased talk about significantly enhancing the European Financial Stability Facility mechanism (bailout fund), given that its current lending capacity of €440 billion "pales in comparison with the potential financing needs of vulnerable countries and crisis bystanders", to use the words of IMF managing director Christine Lagarde. That requires a "big bang" plan to dramatically increase the size of the European bailout fund to tame financial markets and - in theory - bring the sovereign debt crisis under control. Meaning that the EFSF fund could be "leveraged" upwards to €1.5 trillion in loans from the ECB - some have even talked of €4.5 trillion.

Thus the EFSF will effectively be turned into a bank - which, armed with a pristine triple-A rating and access to virtually unlimited ECB capital, could lend money to countries and banks in trouble. Of course, if this were to happen, the EFSF would be doing quite something different from its original remit. Namely, from now it would take on the main risk of lending to those struggling to borrow from normal commercial sources, like the Italian government, and in the process its powers - both political and economic - would vastly increase.

Another logical element of the rescue package, if we are to believe what we read in the financial press, is for a massive recapitalisation of banks - or more bailouts, to be more direct. Banks holding large amounts of European sovereign debt have come under pressure from investors concerned about defaults. Thus the IMF has said it would "develop mechanisms" to assist "troubled" financial institutions working across national borders - and not just French banks, of course. UK banks may have comparatively smaller holdings of Greek bonds, but they too would face deep trouble if panic spread to Ireland and Spain. Furthermore, the ECB can lend to countries short-term by buying their bonds on the markets and if absolutely necessary could flood the euro zone with liquidity (ie, print money).

Some, particularly Nicolas Sarkozy, have also mooted the idea of bringing forward by a year the date (currently 2013) for turning the EFSF into a permanent European Stabilisation

Mechanism and, ultimately, a European Monetary Fund. Then there is the great big elephant in the room - Eurobonds. Many investors, for obvious reasons, are keen for their introduction and on September 28 José Manuel Barroso, the head of the EU commission, logically argued that Eurobonds would be "advantageous" for "all" the member-states once the euro zone is "fully equipped with the instruments necessary to ensure both integration and discipline" - as necessity demands that "monetary union should be completed by economic union". Forwards towards greater European integration or degenerate backwards to autarky and national currencies.

But all these plans could come to nothing. Opposition to the euro zone rescue package, insofar as you can call it that, is already developing - especially to the creation of an 'über-EFSF'. Throwing a potential spanner into the works, Andreas Vosskuhle, head of Germany's constitutional court, thundered in *Frankfurter Allgemeine* that politicians do not have the legal authority to sign away the "birthright" of the German people without their explicit consent. If Germany is intent on "giving up core powers" to the EU/EFSF/ESM, he argued, then the country "must give itself a new constitution" - meaning that a referendum "would be necessary". Meanwhile, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble said that any plan to leverage the EFSF fund up to €2 trillion was a "stupid idea" that would "endanger" Germany's holy triple-A status. Standard and Poor's has already hinted that Germany might lose its pristine rating if the euro zone rescue machinery is greatly expanded, asserting that there is "no cheap, risk-free leveraging option for the EFSF any more" and that all the various options under discussion have "potential credit implications". Indeed, S&P went on, we have almost "run out of road" - so watch out, Germany: the good times of easy credit might be over.

Angela Merkel is confronted by a crucial vote in the Bundestag on September 29 over the *original* proposals to beef up the EFSF, up to and including the quadrupling of the fund. It is no exaggeration to say that a defeat for Merkel on this issue could signal the beginning of the end for the euro - and it could be a quick death. Unsurprisingly, a poll this month showed 76% of Germans are opposed to granting any further aid to Greece and are against the move to raise the country's contributions to the EFSF pot. Raising the stakes, Merkel bluntly warned that German failure to assist Athens could result in a "domino effect" - contagion - which could rapidly spread throughout the euro zone. "We have to be able to put up a barrier," Merkel told TV viewers, adding that she wanted Greece to keep the euro and remain within the euro zone. Not a popular message.

Merkel needs 311 of her coalition's 330 MPs to vote for the EFSF and bailout if she is to command an absolute majority and not be reliant on votes from the opposition. Failure would almost certainly trigger a vote of no confidence and the possible collapse of her government - with the euro zone project possibly going down with her and the Christian Democratic Union-led government. And the

parliamentary arithmetic is looking precarious for Merkel. Wolfgang Bosbach, the CDU MP who chairs the parliamentary committee on internal affairs, has stated that he will vote 'no' on September 29: "How are we going to deal in the long term with those states in the euro zone who are hopelessly indebted and are not in the position to finance themselves?" he asked. A good question.

Abyss?

Dark storm clouds are gathering everywhere. Yes, at the beginning of the week there was a surge in the markets, acting on the conviction - or desperate hope - that the EU leaders have a 'master plan' up their sleeves and will unveil the glorious details after the Bundestag has voted for the revamped bailout fund on September 29. Yet it goes without saying that if this 'master plan' reveals itself to be nothing of the sort - or if Merkel loses the votes on September 29 - then the markets will inevitably plunge downwards again, maybe into the abyss.

We now read in a study published on September 26 by the International Labour Organisation that the world's major economies are heading for a "massive jobs shortfall" of at least 20 million by the end of next year if governments do not change their tack.² India and China, the report said, were both "laggards" with less than 1% annual growth in total employment. The latest figures for other G20 countries show four with growth rates below 1% (Italy, France, South Africa and the United States), while two others (Japan and Spain) have seen a fall in total employment in the past year. Since the beginning of 2008, Spain, South Africa and the US have undergone the biggest falls in employment among the G20 countries. Spain and the United States also saw the biggest rises in unemployment rates, followed by Britain. At current rates, the ILO predicts, it would be "impossible" to recover them in the near term and there was a risk of the number doubling by the end of next year.

We are going towards permanent mass unemployment - a price worth paying, it seems, in order to balance the capitalist books. At the Labour Party conference, Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, worried about Britain - and the world as a whole - entering a Japanese-style "lost decade" of economic stagnation. But the grim reality is that this is the most *optimistic* scenario on offer.

Whatever the case, Osborne's plan has busted apart. A sick joke, in fact. The UK government borrowed more money this August than at the same time last year, with the Office for Budget Responsibility reporting that public sector net borrowing was £15.9 billion - £1.9 billion higher than in August 2010.³ Rising unemployment and diminished tax receipts made sure of that. So much for the nonsense about the coalition government 'slashing the deficit' and all the rest of it. All pain, no gain - with a second round of cuts to come: keep on taking the medicine that is doing you down ●

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Notes

1. <http://youtu.be/aC19fEqR5bA>.
2. *The Guardian* September 26.
3. <http://tinyurl.com/6jrm88a>.

Angela Merkel: coalition in danger

AUSTERITY

Mapping the alternative

The workers' movement must begin to act on a European scale, argues **Mike Macnair**

The International Monetary Fund meeting in Washington at the weekend is widely reported to have come up with a larger sticking plaster for the euro zone debt crisis. The package is said to involve a 50% write-down of the value of Greek government debt (ie, a partial default); the quadrupling of the European Financial Stability Fund 'fire-power' - ie, its ability to lend to countries in trouble, mainly by technical means; and the recapitalisation of the euro zone banks, presumably by governments putting money into them (private investors are not likely to).

The result of this 'official leak' is that European bank shares rose sharply on Monday and Tuesday, pulling stock market averages with them, before falling back on Wednesday. We have seen over the past months a series of short rallies in the stock markets as 'solutions' are offered, which rapidly peter out, and this looks like the latest.

If the new plan is actually agreed, which is questionable, and if it succeeds, which is even more doubtful, its practical effect would be a very limited 'haircut' for creditors, but a large hit for north European middle class and working class taxpayers and public service employees and users.

The 'haircut' is limited because this is not a general write-down of debts, but only of the Greek government's, which are actually rather small-scale by comparison with those of governments elsewhere (or the massive private debts which still burden UK and other housing markets).

The hit for the north Europeans comes from the nature of the scheme. An orderly general write-down of debts would at the end of the day penalise savers, pensioners, rentiers and rentier institutions (churches, endowed charities and so on). A 'disorderly default' meltdown would have extreme and unpredictable effects. This scheme, in contrast, would make the Greek partial default 'orderly' and erect a 'firewall' against 'contagion' affecting Italy, and so on, by committing large amounts of north European government funds. If the funds were merely borrowed or printed, the effect would be the 'contagion' in the financial markets the plan seeks to avoid. So the working class and the working middle classes (as distinct from the present recipients of private pensions) will be expected to take the hit in the form of yet more 'austerity' measures.

So more 'austerity' is coming. In this situation, the Coalition of Resistance has launched an excellent initiative: this weekend's Europe Against Austerity conference. Since it is perfectly obvious that the capitalist regimes are (with some difficulty) endeavouring to coordinate their responses to the crisis on a European scale, it is not merely desirable, but essential, that the workers' movement should try to coordinate our response on the same scale. Otherwise we are likely to be 'defeated in detail'.

What should come out of this conference immediately is an agitation for a Europe-wide day of action of the same sort as the proposed November 30 common strike day, but on a European scale. This is a small step. A big European day of action would symbolise unity of the European working class against the austerity agenda. It would improve the confidence of our class in every country and serve notice on the



Organise continent-wide

capitalist governments that we are not willing to play their beggar-my-neighbour game of blaming 'lazy Greeks' or whatever.

Budget alternatives

But then the further question is posed: what policy should the workers' movement put forward on a European level to deal with this crisis? What is the working class alternative?

The question is posed because the austerity-mongers are only likely to be defeated by a very broad movement of solidarity. The austerity-mongers do not wait quietly for such a movement to appear. On the contrary, they intervene actively to promote division. From one angle, they blame the crisis on 'profligate governments'. From another, they attempt to set the 'indigenous' population against migrants.

From a third, they appeal to the domestic financial management of the petty bourgeoisie, employed middle class and skilled workers (who have some ability to save) as a model for the financial management of the state; and against the 'spongers' receiving welfare benefits.

From a fourth angle, they attempt to separate workers in the private sector (who have already suffered substantial wage, job and pension cuts in the first round of the crisis) from workers in the public sector who are to be the immediate target of austerity. Of course, they do not mention to the private sector workers the probable consequences in unavailable services, queues and the increased costs they will pay for privatised health, education, etc.

To build broad solidarity it is necessary to offer an alternative to these austerity-monger arguments, not merely to deny them. Hence, it is necessary not only to build broad solidarity and effective resistance, but also to promote an alternative vision in response to the financial crisis.

Much of what the left has written has been simple reporting of the attacks and resistance - last week's *Socialist Worker* centre-spread provides an example (September 22). To the extent that it has gone beyond this, by and large the left has proposed a policy of 'returning' to a nostalgic version of the economic order of the

1950s-70s. This has several aspects. The simpler is the demand to tax the rich more heavily to pay for keeping the welfare state intact - a recurring line of the SWP since around 2000, if not before. The more complex is the demand for a return to Keynesian demand management and allowing the state financial deficit to continue to rise in order to stimulate the economy.

Both ideas are shared by some capitalists as well as by the Labour leadership - even if in less full-blooded form than they appear in, for example, *Solidarity* (September 22, September 28). Warren Buffett, as well as a group of French capitalists, have notoriously argued that they should pay more taxes. Keynesian or semi-Keynesian arguments against the austerity policy routinely appear in the pages of the *Financial Times* and similar publications.

These ideas therefore have the attraction of being a 'line of least resistance'. They are 'respectable' and 'realistic' in a way that advocating the revolutionary overthrow of the state regime and rapid transformation of the economy towards some form of socialism is definitely not.

The problem is they are less realistic than they appear. In reality, to actually implement either policy would involve an overthrow of the current international state system. The capitalists may overthrow this system themselves if its problems get much worse: the big losers if they do will be the US, UK and their populations. The process of doing so will probably involve for everyone a drive towards war.

Surely, you may well say, this must be untrue. After all, in the 'golden age' of 1950-70 capitalism not only survived, but did far better than it has been doing recently, with regimes of Keynesianism and welfarism, higher taxation, a higher wage share, and more extensive regulation. And the transition from the welfarist-Keynesian 'consensus' of the 1950s-70s to the financialism of the 1980s and after did not involve the overthrow of any of the central imperialist states (many other countries did experience the overthrow of their nationalist or Stalinist regimes).

The reason is that the instruments of financialism were already present in the international state system created

in the 1940s and entrenched in the constitutional orders of the central states, the United Nations and the first General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). What changed with the rise of financialism in the 1980s was thus not a change in the constitutional orders of the central imperialist states and the global state system as such. It was merely that non-constitutional, economic concessions to the European workers' movement and to the 'third world' nationalists, which had been made because of the 'threat' of the Soviet bloc, began to be withdrawn.

Tax the rich?

The simpler case is the demand to 'tax the rich'. Back in 2009 the SWP responded to the budget with the proposal to "Take all the cash from the super-rich": "Britain's 1,000 most super-rich individuals are still swilling around in £258 billion ... All their money should be taken off them. This, along with stopping military spending, could be used to fund our jobs and services, and ensure that ordinary people do not bear the brunt of the recession."¹ I made the point in response that £258 billion is only slightly more than half the annual state tax take of £496 billion which was projected in the 2009 budget - small beer which would at most address the problem for a year or two.²

The more serious problem with 'Tax the rich' is reflected in a series of news items. The scale of the Greek government deficit is to a considerable extent due to the scale of tax avoidance and outright evasion, through the Greek wealthy (and upper middle classes) keeping assets 'offshore'.

At the beginning of this year Nicholas Shaxson's *Treasure islands: tax havens and the men who stole the world* was published in Britain. It is a striking journalistic exposé of the tax haven phenomenon and its scope. Meanwhile, this week's *Financial Times* is running a series on 'tax wars': the tax loopholes created by double taxation treaties, and so on. Buffett complained that he pays a lower rate of tax than his secretary: not because the law is drafted that way, but because Buffett can afford to pay high-grade tax avoidance advisers.

Germany and Britain have entered into utterly unprincipled deals with Switzerland: the Swiss pay blackmail

money to the British and German governments, but get to keep the anonymous bank accounts which are used not only for tax avoidance and evasion, but also to launder the bribes paid to 'third world' kleptocrats and the funds they have stolen from their own states.

Some Tory MPs are arguing for an early repeal of the 50p tax bracket introduced in the 2009 budget. They claim it will make Britain less attractive to high earners, and bring in little revenue because of increased avoidance and evasion. The Lib Dems reject this proposal, but on symbolic grounds - that reducing tax on the rich at a time of austerity would look bad. Their alternative, not part of the coalition agreement, is a 'mansion tax' on high-value houses. The chief merit of such a tax is that it would be a lot harder to avoid/evade than income tax (let alone capital gains tax and inheritance tax, which are close to being voluntary for the rich). The point is that, under the existing global legal order, the arguments for repeal actually have validity.

So how do we 'tax the rich' effectively? How do we even eliminate the loopholes? The answer is that to do so requires actually shutting down 'offshore': that is, the systematic violation of the sovereignty of a series of states guaranteed by UN treaties - and, in reality, by US backing. To do so would be seriously unhelpful to the UK budget, because the City of London's financial operations are, in fact, part of 'offshore'; and income tax on City incomes is a substantial component of the UK tax take.

At the level of the 'real economy' Britain imports vast quantities of food, since its agriculture cannot feed the population. The balance of 'visible trade' is in structural deficit, as it has been for decades - 95% of the fruit and 50% of the vegetables consumed in the UK are imported.³ In 2005 the UK imported £6.6 billion of agricultural products and £18.5 billion worth of processed foods. It exported £1.16 billion in agricultural output and £8 billion in processed foods. Since food is - in relative terms - low-value, we are not talking about a small difference here. There is thus a yawning gap in the UK's domestic food supply, which is made up by imports.

In total, with other products, UK material imports totalled £270 billion, while material exports amounted to £210 billion. The deficit of £60 billion is at least partly made up by the UK's financial income from the City of London and from remitted profits: that is, from the UK's role in the world imperialist system.⁴ The food imports are therefore - at the end of the day - paid for by the 'invisible earnings' of the City, through income tax on City earnings redistributed to civil servants, NHS workers, local government workers through block grants, and in various forms of subsidy to other capitals.

The question posed is, therefore: is it worth British workers accepting being made very substantially worse off, and at the same time preparing for war with the United States, for the sake of a demand that the rich should pay higher taxation? The problem is not that the rich should *not* pay higher taxation; it is that the slogan comes up against entrenched institutions - the tax havens, double taxation treaties, and so on - created by US power in the post-war settlement, and still backed by the US and UK (a good many tax havens are actually UK colonies).

More immediately, it comes up domestically against the constitutional doctrine in IRC (Inland Revenue Commissioners) v Duke of Westminster that individuals are entitled to arrange their affairs to minimise tax and that taxing statutes must be construed in the way most unfavourable to the IRC. This doctrine could in theory be overturned. But not by merely legislating to change it: in this field, as in some others, the judges are like Humpty Dumpty: "When I use a word ... it means just what I choose it to mean." The doctrine is, moreover, given a semi-spurious constitutional foundation in article four of the Bill of Rights 1689, "That levying money for or to the use of the crown by pretence of prerogative, without grant of parliament, for longer time, or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal." To overthrow the doctrine would therefore require coercion of the judiciary and probably also of a large part of the broader legal profession.

It is not that we should not consider as an element of socialist strategy the need to create political legitimacy for coercing the judges and the lawyers, or to create military power which can stand against US blockade ('sanctions' and so on). Rather, there are two issues. The first is that it is clear that no single country could stand off US displeasure without receiving the sanctions treatment which crippled the Zimbabwean and Iraqi economies and is in the process of crippling the Iranian economy - and this is, if anything, clearer of Britain than of 'third world' countries, which have economies less immediately dependent on imports.

The second is that going up against the US for the sake of a radical overturn of social relations and building a new society would be worthwhile. But going up against the US (and sacrificing Britain's status as US sidekick and licensed offshore centre) for the sake of the rich paying a bit more in tax? The game isn't worth the candle.

Back to Keynes?

A return to Keynesian demand stimulus poses the same problems in a more immediate sense. The immediate response to the 2008 crash was, precisely, a temporary return of Keynesianism to respectability, with governments taking on massive debts and pouring liquidity into the financial system in the hope that it would feed through into the 'real economy'.

To some extent these stimulus packages actually worked. Continued very low central bank interest rates and 'quantitative easing' - ie, printing money - in the US and Britain did avert meltdown and allow a partial recovery. Massive government infrastructure spending in China kept its economy growing substantially, and with it the economies of China's suppliers.

Nonetheless, this policy met with political opposition and a reaction in financial markets. Regular *Weekly Worker* correspondent Arthur Bough argues on his blog that the political opposition is simply an ideological error on the part of the Tories and the Republican right (and presumably also the German Christian Democrats and other north European 'hardliners', though he does not mention these), reflecting dysfunctional political institutions and perhaps the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie; and that the financial markets are merely responding to the uncertainty caused by this failure of leadership.⁵

This argument is at least partially dependent on comrade Bough's prior argument that we are in the middle of a 'Kondratiev long-wave upswing', with the result that there is not in any real sense a 'crisis', but merely a 'slowdown' in Europe and the US, reflecting a need for restructuring in the light of the rise of Asian

capitalism.⁶ As I have said before, I think Trotsky's original objections to the idea of the Kondratiev long cycle were sound; in my view the destruction of the strategic autonomy of the British empire in 1940 and the explicit agreements made during that summer to hand over British overseas assets and debt claims to the US and to act in future as a subordinate of the US were the key to the 'golden age' long boom in the 1950s and 60s, together with the massive destruction of fixed capital in World War II and the very extensive state defaults afterwards.

The central question, however, is why there should be the 'crisis of bourgeois leadership' in relation to the economy. It seems to me that the answer is at root the same as that in relation to tax. That is, the post-war settlement under US leadership created entrenched institutions - essentially offshore and international money markets - through which US 'superimperialism' (Michael Hudson's expression) operated.⁷ These mechanisms were mitigated by the geopolitics of the cold war, but, as the forms of mitigation proved both to make the working class too powerful in the late 1960s-70s and to weaken the US relative to other capitalist states, they began to be abandoned.

But the institutions of offshore and international money markets take on a life of their own. (The phenomenon is perhaps analogous to al Qa'eda, originally a CIA-sponsored formation for the purposes of the war in Afghanistan.) To get rid of them or return them to a fuller subordination would require coercion and the overthrow of the treaty regimes created in the late 1940s.

Now consider the crash of 2008 and the response: that is, to replace unpayable bank debts with sovereign debt. After this response it is entirely rational for money market speculators to suppose that some sovereigns will prove unable to pay their debts, and hence to bet against the value of these debts. Given the scale of global financial market operations, which has for years been totally out of proportion to productive economic activity and on a scale comparable with the state financial operations of the larger states, the result is inevitably high volatility in these markets. It is not irrational in this context to imagine, as the Tories did, that there could be a run on the British gilt markets if austerity were not adopted. It may have been wrong, but it is not stupid.

It is also quite clear that British capital in its majority (by wealth) preferred a Tory government, complete with the austerity policy, to the possibility of a Labour government. This was reflected in party political donations in the run-up to the 2010 general election and in the extraordinary press campaign to denigrate Gordon Brown as an individual and to blame Labour for 'fiscal irresponsibility' (a very marked about-turn from 2008). Murdoch and co are only partially autonomous actors (as we saw in the collapse of the *News of the World* when advertising was withdrawn). The ideology of the petty bourgeoisie was exploited for this purpose, but it is unlikely that it was the real driving factor.

Let us therefore suppose a Labour government introduces a fully Keynesian turn based on expanded deficit finance or printing money - the policy of leftwing advocates of 'back to Keynes'. It is quite ridiculous to suppose that this turn would not be met by a run on the gilts market and a large-scale flight of capital. This, in turn, bring us immediately up against the need to proceed to exchange controls, systematic violations of Gatt II, expropriations and a short-term move to directive planning - all this after the left has spread the idea that a Keynesian turn would not involve a revolutionary crisis, and by doing so

has disarmed the workers' movement when crisis does, in fact, appear.

The real reformists - as opposed to leftists pretending to be reformists for the sake of an imagined 'united front' - are aware of these issues, even if their arguments would not be those I have used. They would simply say that 'the markets' represent real absolute limits on what can be done. See, for example, Ed Balls' speech to the Labour conference. The fake-reformist line remains unpersuasive beyond the far left, its immediate periphery and the former periphery of the old 'official' Communist Party, for whom the wish is the father to the thought.

Socialist alternative

The European workers' movement is presented with the austerity drive and 'crisis of bourgeois leadership' at a moment when it is weaker than it has been at any time in the last 130 years. Union membership density is low. The mass parties have been hollowed out at the base and their leaderships to a large extent turned into apostles of a 'kinder, gentler' financialised regime, together with nationalism and bureaucratic control. The idea of socialism remains in the shadow of Stalinism, not only in the memories of the older generations, but in the experience of the younger generations of the functioning of the organised left groups and their inability - thanks to their bureaucratic centralism - to unite.

To say this is to say that the euro zone crisis and the austerity drive does not *prima facie* pose the question of the working class in the near future taking political power and ushering in socialism. The workers' movement is simply too weak, irrespective of whether theorists like comrade Bough or Bill Jeffries of Permanent Revolution, who claim that this is a pure financial crisis under global long-boom conditions, or those who see a deeper structural crisis are right.

If the 'crisis of bourgeois leadership' tips over into generalised meltdown matters will be different: the question of power will be posed, whether the workers' movement is ready for it or not. The most likely outcome would then be the creation of authoritarian nationalist regimes, but the one chance of avoiding that outcome would be for the weak workers' movement to pose a radical reconstruction of society as an alternative.

The immediate future is therefore one of a combination of defensive struggles, with efforts to rebuild the workers' movement. Nonetheless, it remains necessary to pose the question of an alternative social order and how to get there in order to rebuild the movement. The weakness of the movement results at the end of the day precisely from the fact that its dominant ideas of alternatives (nationalist, class-collaborationist and bureaucratic) have so spectacularly failed - but the advocates of these ideas remain in leadership positions and the ideas themselves have spread to such an extent that they dominate the far left which once opposed them.

Posing the alternative of a socialist reconstruction of society is therefore not an alternative to the immediate tasks of defensive struggles around individual 'austerity' issues and against governmental 'austerity' programmes. Nor is it an alternative to the equally fundamental task of efforts to strengthen collective self-help against the effects of the austerity measures: to build up the trade unions at the base, to organise the unemployed, and to develop cooperatives and mutuals. In the period of welfarist 'affluence' these elementary tasks of workers' organisation have been allowed to wither away or - like the unions and the Co-op - reduced to bureaucratically controlled institutions.

Arthur Bough makes this aspect

of the rebuilding of the workers' movement the be-all and end-all. He draws arguments from Marx's writing at the time of the First International, when - until the 1871 London conference - Marx was attempting to hold together an alliance with the Proudhonists, who were arguing precisely this line: workers' self-help through cooperatives, as opposed to political action.

The problem is not that socialists should ignore or oppose cooperatives. Firstly, it is that the initial wave of cooperatives came at a time when land values were tending to decline (which they did between, roughly, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1847 and the introduction of planning laws, agricultural subsidy and mortgage interest relief during and after World War II). Since then access to land has been very much more tightly rationed by the ruling class; by the 1980s the cost of keeping even trades and labour clubs in existence was leading to their being sold off to property developers.

Secondly, the problem is that the capitalist class and its state do not consistently recognise property rights and the state certainly does not refrain from interference in the economy in the interests of major capitalist bribe-payers. Comrade Bough's own 2010 review of Nicole Roberts' history of the cooperative movement in Britain makes the point: the state intervened against the cooperative movement and - by regulatory legislation - continues to intervene in favour of bureaucratic managerialism in cooperatives.⁸ However difficult to achieve anything by political action it may seem, political action is the necessary accompaniment of both defensive struggles and cooperative self-help.

Nor is posing a socialist reconstruction of society an alternative to posing defensive demands like the restoration of trade union freedom; or, in the sphere of the budget, an end to overseas imperialist adventurism and cuts in military expenditure.⁹ Rather, it is a necessary accompaniment to defensive struggles, cooperative self-help and defensive demands.

Europe

Another society is possible: one in which, instead of being driven to competitive 'growth' ending in cyclical crises, we aim for the fullest possible development of every human being: communism. The transition to such a society involves the rule of the working class: that is, the subordination of the private producers to the wage-earners, tending towards a society in which nobody gets anything other than a living wage and open access to public resources like the internet, education, health, housing, etc.

We collectively have written more about this aim in our *Draft programme*. I have written about immediate steps in this direction as a response to the financial crisis in previous articles.¹⁰

Europe and united working class action in Europe is central to this possibility.

The reason why that is so is the reverse side of the points I have made above against 'tax the rich' and a return to Keynesianism as strategies. Karl Kautsky argued in *The class struggle* (1892) that the nation-state was a sufficient scale on which the working class could reorganise society as a cooperative commonwealth. The idea descended into 'socialism in a single country'. Kautsky was already wrong, and the experience of the 20th century has proved the idea wrong. All countries are integrated in the world trade and financial system to a point at which 'sanctions' can cripple their economies.

In reality, the capitalist class does not rule through independent nation-states, but through a global hierarchical system of states. Before 1914 this system of states was centred on the UK; after the prolonged death agony of the British empire since 1945, it has been centred on the US. National solutions run up against the institutions of this world hierarchy, as I have shown in relation to 'tax the rich' and 'return to Keynes'.

If the working class can develop common action on the scale of Europe, that is a whole different ball-game. A European 'cooperative commonwealth' would not be immune from US-led attack or blockade; but, unlike the former tsarist empire which became the USSR, it would start from high levels of productive capacity and of proletarianisation. A socialist Europe could be a real beacon for the world.

The Europe Against Austerity conference could begin to set this as a goal. Not an immediate goal; but a goal which could begin to re-inspire the workers' movement with the sense that an alternative is really possible, not just a dream. Maybe it will not. Maybe it will cling to the blind-alley lines of least resistance round nationalism and Keynesianism. But what an advance it would be if the movement really began to act on a European scale and to pose the question of a socialist Europe as an alternative to the Europe of austerity ●

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Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* May 2 2009.
2. 'Budget: spinning, not turning' *Weekly Worker* April 30 2009.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/food/food_matters/foodmiles.shtml.
4. Figures from www.uktradeinfo.com/index.cfm?task=eubackcast.
5. The long series, 'The economy of analysis', is still running: <http://boffyyblog.blogspot.com>.
6. Present, with references to earlier posts, in the argument cited in note 5 above.
7. M Hudson *Super imperialism: the economic strategy of American empire* (New York 1972); N Bukharin *Imperialism and world economy* (1915).
8. <http://londonbookclub.co.uk/?p=847>.
9. See my 'Crisis and defensive demands' *Weekly Worker* January 8 2009.
10. 'Responding to the crisis' *Weekly Worker* October 16 2008; 'There is an alternative' *Weekly Worker* March 24 2011.

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LABOUR

Off-colour Blairites

It is a commonplace these days that politics - like more or less everything else - has been ruined by spin and PR. The roll-call of villains and debacles is well storied: Alastair Campbell, Andy Coulson and even the makers of the dodgy Iraq dossier have gone down in the public memory as people declaiming on the good society from a position of amoral hypocrisy.

The more subtle side-effect, however, is that an idea just doesn't cut it any more unless it can be reduced to a catchy sound bite. Thus the proliferation of colour-coding in mainstream politics: in rough order of appearance, we have had the Orange Book Liberal Democrats, Red Tories and Blue Labour (one is prepared to let the Greens off, since 'green' actually means something in politics).

The conference season has now dumped another two of these things on us - a series of left-leaning Labour also-rans have launched a Red Book, while the great and the good of Blairism have given us a Purple Book. So now, it seems, the Labour mainstream is divided between red, blue and purple factions, from left to right respectively.

In keeping with the current weakness of the Labour left, it is probably safe to say that the 'red' book is going to be the least politically significant of the lot. It compiles what amounts to a series of left-liberal Keynesian verities (which it calls "ethical socialism"), demanding an "ethical approach to profit" and rather more insidiously an "ethical foreign policy".

The Purple Book, put out by the Blairite think-tank, Progress, cobbles together the musings of Blairites great and small, from new MPs like Rachel Reeves up to and including the Prince of Darkness himself, Peter Mandelson. The key political line of these people is (supposedly) "the small state", and contributors bend over backwards to put their views into some kind of intellectual tradition (RH Tawney comes up a lot).

Nonetheless, the headline proposals have a dreadfully familiar ring to them. Take a proposal from Alan Milburn, former health secretary and Tory collaborator, to force schools that fail three years running to conduct a referendum among parents on the subject of the school's ownership. Even on the most superficial level, this is quite obviously backdoor privatisation in the Thatcher-Blairite mould.

Leaving it there is insufficient, however. Let us consider this demand in the context of all the guff about the small state. How is it going to work? The same way all such privatisations do - with bottomless government subsidies to private providers. Milburn also champions the idea, popular on the American libertarian right, of education vouchers - a parent would be able to take their child, as well as 150% of the cost of a state education, to an 'alternative' (ie, private or religious) school. This, of course, amounts to *yet another* public subsidy.

Milburn's idiotic proposal is a good example because it at least superficially squares up with older right-libertarian arguments for a 'small state'. That, however, can hardly be said for Caroline Flint's proposal for "housing asbos" (anti-social behaviour orders), which would prevent evicted social housing tenants from living within five miles of their former home. This is just a melange of two of the most self-evidently counterproductive policies of New Labour, and a perfectly Blunkettesque



Peter Mandelson: purple

lurch into right-populist demagoguery.

Such are the times that even these reactionaries have to admit that the market does not necessarily solve every problem perfectly. Yet they are very much on message when it comes to the key economic issue of the day - Labour, argue old goblin Mandelson and bright young thing Tristram Hunt, should stop pussyfooting around on the matter of cuts, and say openly and clearly what would be cut and why.

"Our starting point must be the acceptance of this uncomfortable political reality that the public has accepted the government's explanation of the financial crisis," writes Hunt: that is, reckless spending by Labour has caused all the difficulties. There is no point trying to convince the population otherwise with boring things like graphs, because "politics is not an empirical social science: it is about people's perceptions and emotions, their hopes and insecurities." In other words, the people are fickle and dense, and must be manipulated; only high-flying historians like Tristram Hunt are concerned to base their perceptions on how things actually are.

There are two major significances to the Purple Book. Firstly, it is a reminder that the Blairites have not gone away. David Miliband and Peter Mandelson still lurk in the shadows (by all accounts, that is where Mandelson likes it best), stirring things up and looking forward to a future takeover.

Ed Miliband may have contributed the foreword, and indeed he is probably on board with many of its distasteful suggestions; yet this is a veiled attack on him from the right, for his indulgence of Blue Labour, for sneaking into 'David's job' off the back of union votes, for his history as a Brownite ... It is another step in the protracted war of position between the two principal factions of the Labour right.

The distinction is a fine one, but significant. Blair's political project was to liquidate the Labour Party as the Labour Party. He considered

the breakdown of Lib-Lab politics - indeed, the party's very foundation - to be a great step backwards for 'progressives'. Brown and his epigones are pro-capitalist, rightwing undesirables, but they are tribally loyal to Labour.

As long as the forces pulling Labour apart are weaker than the ones holding it together, this is not a significant difference. However, we live in interesting times. The economy is headed for disaster (well, *more* disaster). George Osborne has no plan B, and his plan A - the austerity programme shared with much of the advanced capitalist world - is very visibly failing to restore economic growth in this country. Similar policies are failing more catastrophically in Greece and elsewhere. This is the stuff 'national governments' are made of - and the likes of Peter Mandelson and David Miliband will be queuing up to play the part of a Macdonald or Snowden. After all, Alan Milburn has already helped the government out on 'social mobility'.

The other significance is a certain change in *style* from classic Blairism. These are the same odious policies we remember from the Blair era, but then they emerged fully formed from the offices of various technocratic polling gurus and spin doctors. Even very mild leftwing opposition to them was met with sneers about how out of touch the north-London granola set was with 'real' people's 'real' opinions - which was another way of deferring to the technocrats, who, of course, had intimate knowledge of polling data and so on.

Now the likes of Mandelson feel the need to *intellectually* justify that project - a task made all the harder, given that the classic Blairite mix of bureaucraticism, privatisation and authoritarianism makes sense only from a perspective of clinging onto power - and more importantly, bourgeois backing - at any cost. Nonetheless, it is a task they must attempt - the 'purples' are trying to put the knife into the 'blues', and the latter, however bizarre its mix

of labour-movement pride and little-Englanderism may be, *does* rest on some kind of serious intellectual project. Maurice Glasman is not *just* another careerist policy wonk.

So, against all the odds, there *is* something encouraging about the appearance of this vile book - it at least testifies to the fact that the level of debate in the Labour Party is inching out of the apolitical-technocratic gutter. The ideas flying around the different factions in the party mainstream may be bunk, but at least they are ideas.

In a sense, they have to be - neither the Ed nor David Miliband factions have sufficient control over the

Labour apparat to discipline the other in that manner, nor can they fight things out, as Brown and Blair often did, in Whitehall. The appearance of these fads testifies that Labour is *beginning* to open up; the question is how long it will take one faction or the other to weld the door shut again.

It is unfortunate, then, that nobody is using this space - such as it is - to argue for socialism. Purple and blue Labour alike advance criticisms of "free-market capitalism", but in the former case it is merely the least convincing smokescreen in history, and in the latter a *reactionary* critique. The "ethical socialism" of Red Labour simply amounts to the same Keynesian sweet nothings familiar from decades of Labourite lack of imagination. (This programmatic timidity has in any case not stopped New Labour scaremongers from portraying Red Labour as a return to the 'hard leftism' of the 1980s.)

Substantially the same politics, without the tiresome liberal canards, are raised by the Labour Representation Committee and others. The public political profile maintained by Socialist Appeal is inherited wholesale from the Militant tradition of Trotskyist left social democracy; in any case, they are more interested in building their sect than building a Marxist (or even more minimally socialist) opposition to the domination of the pro-capitalist right.

We should not let Labour's uninterrupted history of treachery lead us to think that this was always the case. Factions in the Labour Party have frequently argued for different versions of a socialist transformation of society, from Marxist supporters of the early CPGB to reformist socialists of the Independent Labour Party. One could even consider the bureaucratic socialism of the Fabian Society under this general rubric.

Today, capitalism is all but falling down around our ears. Yet never before has there been such a paucity of lefts willing to argue for an alternative *society*.

James Turley

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Head to head in Halle

"We are on the field of battle. The audience in the hall is divided in two sections; it is as if a knife has cut them sharply in two. Two parties are present"



- Grigory Zinoviev's description of the Halle congress of the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) in October 1920.

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LEFT

Leninist assumptions and cult hierarchies

Simon Pirani was part of a panel of three who addressed the CPGB's Communist University under the title of 'They fuck you up, the left'. This is an edited version of his speech

I was a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party from 1972, when I was a teenager, until 1985. For a year before that I was in the Young Communist League, along with friends from school, and after I left the WRP I was in its largest offshoot until the early 90s. Since then, although I have been active in politics, including writing about contemporary Russia and a book about the Russian Revolution, I have not been a member of any organisation.

I am going to talk not about the particular politics of the leftwing groups, but about their culture. In other words, the way they operate, the way their members live their lives. This includes the relationship between members of the group and other people; what we might call their 'moral code'; and the often unspoken assumptions that group members have about the way they behave - about big things, such as work, family, enjoyment, friendships; and about smaller things, such as the way we speak, the way we dress, etc.

It is very easy to think of things we do not like about the behaviour of leftwing groups. An obvious example is the way members of some of them unquestioningly repeat the party line and behave intolerantly towards those who do not accept it. I would argue that these symptoms are part of the culture of these groups in a wider sense.

Context

Leftwing groups, including those that resemble sects, operate in a society dominated by a ruling class that is hostile to their aims. Inevitably they are profoundly influenced by the morals and culture of that society, and find it difficult to counter that influence.

This is partly because they limit themselves almost entirely to political questions and do not think about or discuss morals and culture. They do not think about how we live and how we behave, and so everything remains on a superficial level. In my opinion the movement to communism cannot be defined merely as a political movement: it is something much deeper than that.

Arising from this context, there are cult-like and highly negative aspects about the vast majority of the groups - including some that were relatively successful in their own terms. An example that recently struck me is that of the Black Panther Party of the United States, an organisation I absolutely worshipped when I was 13-15 years old. To me these were the guys who were really doing it. They were at the centre of the beast and defying the state. They had a much stronger influence, and were much better anchored in local communities, than any of the groups most of us were involved in. Nevertheless, from the discussion now going on among former members, and publications by them, what is very clear is that a culture of intolerance and authoritarianism, hierarchical relationships within the group, subordination of women to men - that was all there in the Black Panther Party. I am picking that

example deliberately because, of the many groups of the 70s and 80s, that is one that comes out looking pretty heroic.

I think there is a problem with the legacy of Bolshevism - although there is also plenty of evidence of hierarchy, authoritarianism or intolerance in anti-Leninist groups, such as anarchists. What I would say about Leninist groups, including Trotskyists, is that the ideological assumption that the Bolshevik Party was the model to follow - and usually completely misunderstood versions of what the Bolshevik Party was and did - is used to reinforce hierarchies. In the 70s and 80s the Leninist groups consciously embraced the idea that they were a vanguard: bringing ideas to relatively ignorant working class people; in Lenin's words, quoting Kautsky, bringing consciousness to the working class "from without".

Now such groups are much less significant than all sorts of other types of organisations and movements, and generally I think that is a good thing. But then, certainly, the groups had this belief, which seems to me to be a glue that held together many of the very negative things about them.

Once you reject the assumption that the working class needs these ideas to be brought to it in this particular way, the reason for the groups to operate in that manner - and indeed to exist - is called into question. This vanguardism also underpins a lot of reactionary nonsense about the role of strong individual leaders.

WRP

The WRP exhibited many of the tendencies I have mentioned in a very extreme way: authoritarianism, hierarchical relationships, etc. It was also quite extreme in the sense that it had at its centre a group of about 100-200 people (of which from the age of 16 or so, for about 10-12 years, I was one) - so-called 'professional revolutionaries', who, in most cases, lived very much as a sect.

When I say 'as a sect' I am not talking about sectarianism in the political sense, but about being cut off from family and from former friends, and living a life dominated by a small range of political tasks. This was underpinned by a lot of rubbish about self-sacrifice, Bolshevik discipline, etc.

The other extraordinary aspect of the WRP was that its leader, Gerry Healy, was not only an authoritarian bully in public: he also conducted a string of abusive sexual relationships with women members of the organisation in private. Healy was expelled from the WRP in 1985 on the grounds of (1) this sexual abuse; (2) quite serious violence against one person conducted in private; and (3) behaviour of which the entire organisation was aware - groundlessly accusing another member of being a police agent was the particular example that was mentioned; it was the sort of thing he did absolutely routinely.

In relation to the sexual abuse, we are talking about serial rape, such as might be practised on girls by their fathers or uncles, or within institutions such as the Catholic church; and for



Simon Pirani: culture

which perpetrators might expect long jail sentences in cases where they are caught and tried.

It is important to underline that most members of the organisation were completely unaware of this sexual abuse. It was inflicted on people in secret. However, we unknowingly created the conditions for it by our acceptance of things we were aware of: a hierarchical structure; tolerance towards bullying by individual leaders; intolerance towards people who were outside the group; the deliberate ritual humiliation of members in large meetings - particularly senior members with whom Healy was picking a fight for one reason or another; the expulsion of all those who voiced substantial political disagreement and some who did not - that goes almost without saying; and the use of violence.

Just to explain what I mean by 'violence', it was of the intimidatory type that is used within families - pushing and shoving, etc. It was sometimes a bit more serious than that, but not as serious as the violence used by some national liberation movements against internal dissent, up to and including torture and murder. Such extreme violence has also been used in the course of internal conflicts by so-called socialist organisations that run into political trouble in circumstances of armed struggle and repression. I often think that if the WRP had existed in a context in which guns were available some of its lunacies might have ended up being expressed in people turning guns on each other, as happened, tragically, in some of the fragments of the Irish Republican Socialist Party.

We set out to fight oppression - that is why people joined the organisation - and we ended up creating a machine for disciplining, humiliating and at worst abusing ourselves and other people like us. So destroying that machine in 1985 was a great thing. At another meeting recently I stated

that expelling Gerry Healy, which led to the break-up of the WRP in its old form, was "the most revolutionary thing the WRP ever did". I was criticised for saying it, but I think it was right, so I am repeating it here.

Lessons

The importance of the particular case of the WRP is that it shows the depths of the problems created by cultures of authoritarianism and discipline; and by the cult-like nature of the groups.

Obviously not every section of the Catholic church has priests who abuse young male members of their congregations. But an atheist could

very well construct an argument that the Catholic church's very nature prepares the ground for that to happen. I think there is a parallel. There is circumstantial evidence of behaviour similar to Healy's - albeit on a smaller scale - by leaders of other political groups. Obviously a factor here is the sect-like quality of the groups. In so far as a number of Trotskyist groups, particularly in rich countries, ended up like this in the 1970s, that is relevant to the history of Trotskyism in general, although it is only one small aspect.

I would be the last to suggest that there are not other aspects of that history that are more important: Trotsky's critique of Stalinism; the Trotskyists' role in the USSR - until they were defeated and silenced there - and in those countries where they achieved substantial influence in the labour movement, such as France, Bolivia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, etc.

Neither would I say that the sexual abuse, or the culture of authoritarianism and discipline that made it possible, is the whole story of the WRP. It was involved in the class struggle in many ways: the WRP - and the groups that preceded it in the 1950s and 60s - conducted significant activity in the labour movement. For example, during the crisis of the Communist Party that followed the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the group carried out a lot of important union activity among miners, shipworkers, carworkers, etc. In the 70s and 80s, WRP members of my own generation played an important part in various trade union struggles.

That was the contradictory nature of the WRP and, I expect, many groups - a politics that appeared anti-capitalist and in some sense revolutionary was married to a culture that was deeply anti-revolutionary. That culture is absolutely inimical to any movement towards communism ●

Fighting fund

Laurels and hardy

Despite this week's disappointing total of only £158, our September fighting fund has surpassed the £1,250 target with two days to go. As of September 28, we already have £1,301 in the kitty.

This success augurs well for our ability to reach that monthly target on a regular basis - thanks overwhelmingly to the excellent response to our appeal for extra standing orders over the summer. However, the fact we have only an extra £51 this month - despite the appeal bringing in pledges for over £300 a month - is slightly worrying. It's as though those comrades who haven't been making their donations by standing order think they don't have to bother any more.

This is borne out by the fact that the entire £158 mentioned above comes from those SOs. That's right - not one contribution by post or

via PayPal, despite the fact that we had 12,013 online readers last week. (Mind you, for some reason that last figure is almost exactly a thousand down on the previous week - an aberration, I hope, rather than an indication of our readers deserting us.)

Of course, the last two days of September's fund could see some last-minute gifts. I hope so - please get out your card and click on the 'Make a donation' button on our home page. We don't want to rest on our laurels, after all. Rather we need to build on the hardy success of our appeal not only in covering our running costs, but in upping the quality, size and presentation of the *Weekly Worker*.

Robbie Rix

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

JARROW

They obeyed the rules

On Saturday October 1, Youth Fight for Jobs - a front group of the Socialist Party in England and Wales - will set out from Jarrow, a small town in Tyne and Wear, to march the 300 miles or so to London, where there will be a demonstration on November 5. The action is being packaged as an attempt by YFJ at "recreating the Jarrow march of 75 years ago" in order to highlight the large rise in youth unemployment today.¹

We have previously written on the increasingly important question of unemployed organisation and, specifically, what tradition we should look to learn from in this complex and challenging field of work.² As regular readers will know, we have been very clear about our stance - we reject the legacy of Jarrow and counterpose to it that of the communist-led National Unemployed Workers Movement.

Now history is a contested arena - and not simply between our class that the ruling elite. Comrade Dave Douglass has twice taken up the polemical cudgels against us on behalf of the original Jarrow march.³ However, in last week's paper the comrade dismissed as a "silly question" the challenge I posed to him in my original reply - how to explain the fact that, while the militant mass actions of the NUWM have been systematically expunged from history, the tiny Jarrow stunt has been *embraced*, officially *lauded* and actively *manufactured* by the establishment as "the epitome of the plight of the depressed areas" in the 1930s.⁴

Given the prominence of Jarrow, perhaps the comrades of the SP/YFJ believe it is a clever piece of marketing to brand their own march in this way - and there is no question that, despite the political criticisms we would have of the YFJ's platform of demands, it is way to the left of the politics of the 1936 action and deserves the support of all working class activists. Claiming the mantle of Jarrow is an important political mistake, however. This event was framed as a direct, more or less explicit, *alternative* to the type of militant, class-war unemployed movement we actually need to be agitating for. Why do we say this?

First, because of the anti-communist ethos that surrounded an action that was strenuously promoted as 'non-political'. Known members of the CPGB were excluded from the march and chief marshal Dave Riley even promised "if necessary [to] call the authorities to assist us" in enforcing this ban. This paranoia had objective roots. The Labour Party in conference in Edinburgh that year attacked local MP Ellen Wilkinson for her involvement with the march "on the grounds that hunger marches were associated with communist organisations such as the NUWM and their use might lead to disorder and disrepute".⁵

The organisers of Jarrow thus rejected the offer of Wal Hannington, the communist leader of the NUWM, to merge with the north-east contingent of its sixth national hunger march partially because of their fears of being associated with the militant actions of that movement and the 'extreme' political stance of its leaders. Also, the political nature of the platform of Jarrow '36 itself dictated a 'go it alone' stance.

In contrast to demands of the NUWM, which were national and addressed the needs of unemployed workers across the country, Jarrow actually represented a sectional response framed to bring to the attention of the authorities the dire



Hunger march: respectable

state of the town after the closure of its largest employer, the Palmer's shipyard, and to plead for *Jarrow-specific* measures of relief and aid.⁶ As such, as much as we empathise with the despair and desperation that sparked the protest, its demands were narrow and inward-looking.

The nature of this political platform - which was more akin to charity-mongering than militant class action - informed the whole method and demeanour of the march. To emphasise its 'non-political' nature, the two agents tasked with making sleeping and feeding arrangements along the route came from the Tory and Labour parties. The home office - drawing on favourable special branch reports detailing the expulsion of communists and the general non-militant ethos of the marchers - recommended that they be allowed to have tea in the House of Commons, since "the marchers show

every sign of being orderly [and] it would be a good way of encouraging and placating them".⁷

As part of their official welcome in London, the marchers were placed at an advantageous vantage point opposite the Duke of York steps when the king, Edward VIII, passed down the Mall and they "showed their enthusiasm by cheering lustily", according to a special branch report.⁸

Stevenson and Cook conclude that, aside from genuine concern for the terrible plight of the unemployed in the town, "the Jarrow marchers also became a folk legend because they obeyed the rules; they conducted their march in cooperation with the authorities and did not seek to challenge them. Above all, they disclaimed any political intentions and clearly rejected communist involvement."⁹ Despite the general 'revisionist' project of these two

professional historians in relation to the 1930s as a decade, it is hard to disagree with this assessment.

Lastly, it has to be stated that the crusade achieved absolutely nothing tangible - not even for the town that was its narrow focus. Indeed, the men's supplicant approach simply aroused contempt from the establishment. The prime minister of the day, Stanley Baldwin, refused to meet them, as he felt it would establish a dangerous precedent. Their petition was formally accepted by parliament in a simple sentence, which then went on with its previous business. The marchers even had their unemployment benefit stopped while they trekked down the country, as they were *ipso facto* judged not available for work in Jarrow! The day after the petition flopped, they were given £1 each for their fares and their troubles then packed off back

to despair and destitution up north.

A 1936 Scottish NUWM hunger marcher, John Lochmore, noted that "the Jarrow march which took place at the same time as ours equally was of significance, but over the years the media and the establishment have put it to the fore and virtually ignored the NUWM march."¹⁰ In truth, the Jarrow crusade of 1936 only has *any* significance whatsoever because of the ideological use to which its politics have been put by the ruling elite and the labour movement bureaucracy - to 'disappear' the militant organisation of the unemployed.

We wish the comrades of the YFJ success on their march and protest. However, they should not be seeking to 'recreate' the example of Jarrow. We should repudiate it and look to critically assimilate the lessons of a movement that sent both the authorities and the official leadership of the workers' movement into apoplexy: the National Unemployed Workers Movement ●

Mark Fischer

Notes

1. www.youthfightforjobs.com.
2. 'Lessons of the NUWM and UWC' *Weekly Worker* January 28 2010.
3. *Weekly Worker* September 1, September 22 2011.
4. J Stevenson, C Cook *The slump: society and politics during the depression* London 1979, p184. The authors characterise this as "rather curious", given that the Jarrow crusade was "one of the smallest hunger marches" to make its way to the capital in the 30s.
5. *Ibid* p185.
6. The Jarrow petition was presented to the House of Commons by Ellen Wilkinson, who said: "I beg to ask leave to present to this honourable house the petition of Jarrow praying for assistance in the resuscitation of its industry ... The town cannot be left derelict, and therefore your petitioners humbly pray that his majesty's government and this honourable house should realise the urgent need that work should be provided for the town without further delay." There were a total of 12,000 signatures.
7. J Stevenson, C Cook *The slump: society and politics during the depression* London 1979, p185.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid* p188.
10. I MacDougall (ed) *Voices from the hunger marches* Edinburgh 1991, p327.

Hideous capitalist system

The pledge taken by the first national hunger marchers in October 1922 captures the revolutionary temper of the movement:

"I, a member of the great army of the unemployed, being without work and compelled to suffer through no fault of my own, do hereby solemnly swear with all the strength and resolution of my being, to loyally abide by, and to carry out the instructions of, the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement, with the deliberate intention of pressing forward claims of the unemployed, so that no man, woman or child suffers hunger or want this winter.

"Further, realising that only by the abolition of this hideous capitalist system can the horror of unemployment be removed from our midst, I here and now take upon myself a binding oath to never to cease from active strife against this system until capitalism is abolished and our country and all its resources truly belong to the people."¹

The NUWCM (after 1929, the National Unemployed Workers Movement) had been formed the year before this march, centrally by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the years to come, the movement was to

become genuinely mass and impact significantly in the social history of Britain between the wars. Its highest-profile actions were the six hunger marches (1922, 1929, 1930, 1932, 1934 and 1936), although it is important to remember that the organisation undertook mountains of detailed local work, organising actions and protests, representing unemployed individuals in dealings with the local authorities and simply giving advice.

However, the hunger marches represented the movement's militant politics vividly dramatised on the streets and, in particular, the 1932 action was momentous. Three thousand marchers organised in 18 disciplined contingents tramped from economic black spots such as the north of England and the south Wales valleys to present a million-strong petition to parliament demanding the immediate scrapping of the hated means test. The marchers had to fight their way across the country to London's Hyde Park, constantly harassed by police attacks and *agents provocateurs*. The national government was intent on "battering the participants, whilst portraying them as criminals and communists financed by Moscow". Tragically, the CPGB's disastrous 'social fascist' line objectively

aided this caricature - its crazed sectarianism against the official trade unions and Labour Party meant that it "was isolated even within the labour movement" - with inevitable consequences for the organisations closely associated with it, such as the NUWM.²

The marchers were greeted by 100,000 people when they reached Hyde Park on October 27 ... and by a ferocious assault from the 70,000 police who had been mobilised to teach the protestors a lesson. Fifteen thousand of them were injured - 75 seriously - and the clashes continued for days.³

Of course, the rightist political evolution of the NUWM subsequently tracked that of the CPGB and the world movement of which it was a component. By the time of the last hunger march in 1936, the party's popular frontist rapprochement with the rest of the workers' movement enabled it to mobilise huge rank-and-file support for the action and bring together over 250,000 to greet the marchers when they arrived at Hyde Park in November. Political degeneration was becoming apparent, however. A Lancashire march leader commented: "... we have been welcomed by Unionist [ie, Tory] and Liberal mayors, and ministers

of religion and all kinds and creeds have helped" - something that, even if confined to particular contingents of the 1936 national march, would have been simply unthinkable in the movement's early years.⁴

Significantly, however, and despite the CPGB's opportunist overtures, even this action received no official support from the trade union movement or the Labour Party leadership. In the minds of the bureaucracy, the whole question of the organisation of the unemployed was for ever tainted by those early years of the NUWM and its thoroughly unrespectable, militant and revolutionary agitation and mass impact. That is why, as a 2005 book on Jarrow notes, the prominence of leading communists in the movement was "a recurrent excuse for refusing to work with [it] or mobilise a mass campaign against unemployment"⁵ ●

Notes

1. W Hannington *Unemployed struggles* London 1979, p81.
2. R Croucher *We refuse to starve in silence: a history of the National Unemployed Workers Movement 1920-46* London 1987, p140.
3. See the laughably biased 1932 Reuters report at www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH2fWBCRC0g.
4. P Kingsford *The hunger marches in Britain 1920-1940* London 1982, p212.
5. M Perry *The Jarrow crusade: protest and legend* Sunderland 2005, p41.

SOLIDARITY



Mind over matter

Runners at the 38th Berlin marathon raised €350 for Workers Fund Iran. Ben Lewis was there to cheer them on

It seems to be writing a fair bit about solidarity sport at the moment. Just two weeks ago I reported on our third fundraising cricket match for Workers Fund Iran, which raised £500 ('Batting and bowling for Iran's workers', September 15). Now I have more good news.

WFI is a charity that embodies the principle of proletarian internationalism. It raises funds for the embattled working class in Iran - a country with deeply-rooted working class and revolutionary traditions. The money collected is still relatively small, and our actions are still dependent on the initiative and energy of a small number of activists. However, the charity is growing in strength. Increasingly, fundraising is taking place on an international scale.

One such action comes through the efforts of a group of hardened Iranian activists. They have been raising money in a different, rather more physically demanding fashion than cricket. Coming from the USA, Italy, France, Sweden, Germany and Britain, they fly the flag for WFI by putting themselves through perhaps the ultimate of sporting ordeals - running the 42.195 kilometres of a marathon.

Now, while cricket is not without its risks (when batting, one should certainly 'protect one's assets', as the now famous bond trader, Alessio Rastani, would perhaps have it), our WFI marathon runners really do put their bodies on the line for the cause. According to some research, during a marathon more than half of the segments in the heart's main pumping chamber can markedly decrease in function. Add to that the dangers of water overconsumption and the infamous 'wall' most runners experience at the 30-kilometre mark (where the body runs out of glycogen and begins to consume fat), and one can appreciate the self-sacrifice and dedication such solidarity involves.

Indeed, following two whole days of running, poor old Pheidippides - the ancient Greek messenger sent from Marathon to Athens to announce the stunning victory of the Greeks over the Persians - is said to have collapsed on the spot from exhaustion after completing his final leg of 40-plus kilometres (the length of a marathon race). It is unlikely that the avenging of that ancient military defeat acts as some kind of inspiration to our Iranian comrades, as they pound the streets to the detriment of their health ... What is clear is that this is certainly not cricket.

Sporting the shiny new Workers Fund Iran running shirt ("We look far more professional than we actually are", a comrade from France told me) a total of

12 WFI runners joined around 40,000 other participants on the flat, fast route around Berlin, with its picturesque, historical surroundings. The race proved to be historic, with Kenyan ace Patrick Makau setting a new world record of 2 hours, 3 minutes and 3 seconds.

Amidst an excellent atmosphere, those of us who were not running set up a stall on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, about 38 kilometres into the race. Joining up with some comrades involved in the campaign to free Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, we issued leaflets in English, Farsi and German to make the public aware of events in Iran and the need for direct material and ideological solidarity. The reaction was largely positive. Several of Berlin's relatively large Iranian population stopped by to purchase one of our yellow cotton T-shirts, to make a donation or to discuss the current situation in Iran.

About four hours into the race, some of us then pulled one or two of the distinctive WFI T-shirts over placards and joined the crowd to cheer on our runners as they came past. An incredibly inspiring experience. As the time passed, the size and shape of the runners varied considerably, their speed gradually slowing to walking pace. A few of them were under visible stress. Yet it was truly inspiring to see the sheer determination on the faces of runners who knew they were a mere four kilometres from their goal. Some of them had trained for months, and their confident satisfaction was unmistakable.

Over the course of the next hour or so, all of our comrades came past, stopping only for a sweaty embrace and a photo with our placard. There were three debutants amongst the group, including a young couple who had clearly had a tough time of it. When I asked them about future marathon plans, they told me to ask them again in six months time!

Special mention must go to our comrade Joseph from Sweden. After having seen all 11 of our runners go past, we started to worry about what had become of him. A rather 'strongly built' comrade, he had managed to raise money by merely pledging to run the first five kilometres - many doubted he could even do this. However, he just kept on going ... and going. Whilst waiting around for him, some of his closest friends and comrades joked that he was probably in hospital. Yet at a time when the official route was closed, and Berlin council workers were taking down the barriers, he finally appeared on the pavement approaching our stall. Comrade Joseph may have been more than five hours behind the likes of Patrick Makau, yet he seemed to be

attracting almost as much media attention. He was dead last in the race, and several radio and television stations were keen to interview him. Had he trained? What was he doing this to himself for? As Nima from Sweden put it to me, all we need now is for somebody to *win* the race wearing the WFI colours - then our publicity will be unrivalled! (Any keen readers currently training at altitude in Kenya are requested to get in touch.)

For me, seeing those like Joseph push themselves to the limit underlined something about the marathon experience: it is predominantly a case of mind over matter. Of course, it helps if you have the lung capacity the size of Berlin's Tiergarten park, but the test is at least as much mental as physical.

After the marathon, our exhausted runners and their supporters all gathered for a celebratory meal. Their bodies may have been fatigued, but their mood was jubilant. Delectable Iranian food combined wonderfully with German beer, and many songs were sung in Farsi, Turkish and Kurdish. I was one of only two non-Iranians, but was made to feel extremely welcome. There were some excellent discussions with the comrades, who all spoke some English or German. I informed them of some of the actions WFI has been organising in Britain, and how it would be an excellent idea to coordinate future fundraisers as closely as possible.

So it was decided that WFI activists would concentrate on two marathons in 2012. The first will be in Vienna on April 15, the second in Venice next October. There are a number of interested first-time runners from Britain, and it is hoped that in Venice we can field a team of around 25-30 runners from around the globe - raising the banner of internationalism and raising much-needed funds in the process. Following on from the €600 raised at the Hamburg marathon in May, the runners in Berlin pulled in a further €350. There is no reason why we cannot raise a lot more in 2012.

I will be joining some other British comrades and friends in Vienna for my first ever marathon. Readers who know me might appreciate how much effort it will require to get into shape (especially after all that Iranian food!), so your sponsorship will be much appreciated. If you would like to be part of the WFI contingent at the marathons next year, or would like to find out more about what you can do for the charity, email office@hopoi.org ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

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weekly worker

Win unions to defeat Labour right

Miliband reassures capital

The *Daily Telegraph* described it as “a notable shift to the left”, but you could have fooled me (September 28). Ed Miliband’s vacuous speech to the Labour conference in Liverpool was pretty much what we always get from the party’s leaders – clear attempts to demonstrate to the ruling class that Labour can be trusted to safeguard its interests, mixed with sound-bite sops aimed at pleasing the party’s working class constituency.

On the eve of his speech the *Telegraph* editorial had warned Miliband that Labour must ‘repent’ of its past errors and recognise that “it is the business community – and only the business community – that will power a sustainable recovery” (September 27). But the paper did not seem to notice the centrality afforded by the Labour leader precisely to that “community” – I lost count of the number of times he said “pro-business” in his speech. (“All parties must be pro-business today,” he said as an aside – as if it was an obvious truth that capitalism, and capitalism alone, can offer social well-being and stability.)

And Miliband did his fair share of ‘repenting’ too. He claimed that Labour had been “wrong” to oppose some of the key elements of Thatcherism – the sell-off of council houses, the abolition of top-rate income tax and the anti-union laws (or at least the closed shop and strike ballots). He also tried to placate the “business community” with the admission that Labour had “lost trust on the economy” – the next Labour government will “only spend what we can afford”.

Rest assured, Labour will continue with the coalition’s disastrous, anti-working class assault: “We won’t be able to reverse many of the cuts.” In fact, “If this government fails to deal with the deficit, we will deal with it.” But that did not stop him claiming that the country needed to “change course” – there has to be cuts *with growth*, you see (the key phrase, repeated by all Labour’s leaders, to describe the coalition’s cuts policy is “too far, too fast”). As if Labour’s tinkering proposals on VAT, etc would effect a miraculous recovery in Britain, while capitalism globally slumps into another devastating recession.

Miliband’s speech was full of moral posturing – stuffed with meaningless verbiage about the need for a “something for something” society. He launched attacks on the usual easy targets – Rupert Murdoch, irresponsible bankers, “runaway rewards at the top” and, of course, welfare “scroungers”. He made the frankly idiotic proposal that the welfare system must do more to reward those who “contribute” to society. So people who are deemed to have ‘contributed’ – through voluntary or charity work, for example – would be able to jump the housing queue, ahead of, say, single parents (who, as everybody knows, “contribute” nothing to society by bringing into the world talented, capable human beings). Not that there are many council houses left for anyone, thanks



No support for November 30

to the Thatcherite consensus on the question.

But Miliband was careful to play to his audience in the hall too, railing against the minority of business “predators” – “How dare they say, ‘We’re all in it together’?” he asked (it was this section of his speech that concerned the rightwing media). And how about: “There should be a workers’ representative on every board”?

Then there was the patriotism that goes down so well with business and union leaders alike – although I am not sure what Ralph Miliband would have made of the claim that “My parents came to Britain and embraced British values”. It was Ed’s brother, David, who once said that his father would be “turning in his grave” if he could see his two sons today – Ralph was passionate about *socialism* (however he understood it), not nationalistic, Labourite “British values”.

All in all, Miliband did enough to please most union leaders. Unison general secretary Dave Prentis had pointed out on the eve of the speech that public sector workers fighting for their jobs and to protect services and their pensions “look to Labour now more than ever to support them and speak up for them”. Though he

demand support from the Labour Party and the Labour leader for the November 30 pensions protest strike, he put on a show of not appearing to be disappointed afterwards, claiming to detect in the leader’s utterances the recognition of “the role that every working person plays in creating wealth”.

Unite’s general secretary, Len McCluskey, thought that under Miliband Labour was once more becoming a “people’s party” – “a phoenix rising from the ashes” – while Paul Kenny of the GMB could not praise Miliband highly enough: he has “emerged as a senior politician with courage, conviction and honesty”.

Part of this reaction is, I am sure, connected not so much to the actual speech, but to comments made by deputy leader Harriet Harman in a pre-conference interview. She was asked by journalist Mary Riddell about Labour’s attitude to the November 30 day of action, and to strikes in general: “Would she support strikes if they were justified?”

Harman replied: “If they’re justified, then by definition. You shouldn’t be saying to people they can’t strike if they’ve gone through the processes in a just cause.” Riddell reported that Harman had warned how

important it was to “keep the public onside”. But, Riddell asked, “... if all factors come down in favour of action, strikes included, then they should go ahead?” The response was: “Well, I’m sure that will be Ed’s view – go on with the negotiations, make the arguments, but we’re not going to be on the side of the government behaving unreasonably ...” (*The Daily Telegraph* September 24).

This was enough for the *Morning Star* to start its report in the next issue in this way: “Unions gave a cautious welcome to a shift in Labour’s position on public sector strikes yesterday after deputy leader Harriet Harman indicated that the party would support them if the government remains ‘unreasonable’ during talks.” The *Star* article continued: “Labour leader Ed Miliband also toned down his anti-strike rhetoric since the TUC two weeks ago ... he urged ministers to engage in ‘serious’ negotiations to prevent a mass walkout in November” (September 26).

I am not convinced that a shift has taken place since the TUC. In fact, while Miliband spoke against the last anti-cuts day of action on June 30, and repeated his ‘disagreement’ with it at the TUC, he has so far said nothing at all about November 30. If, as one has to assume, Harman was putting forward the official line (and Miliband did, after all, start his conference speech with a tribute to “our fantastic deputy leader”), then you could say that the “shift”, for what it is worth, took place well before the TUC.

In fact Harman’s comments were not quite so clear-cut as the *Star* made out. At best, they were an indication that the leadership would maintain a studious neutrality on November 30. When has Labour *ever* officially offered its “support” for any strike taking place in Britain? Nevertheless, Harman’s comments demonstrate that the move to the left that *is* taking place within the unions, marked by their leaders’ militant rhetoric and action (despite their wishful thinking about Miliband), is making some kind of impact within the party, including the

leadership.

The unions’ influence was also noticeable in the agreed final version of the *Refounding Labour* document. As one conference delegate told me, any possibility of a drastic reduction in that influence has “surely been averted for now”, with the limiting of the proportion of the vote to be enjoyed by the new category of “registered supporters”. Once their number reached the 50,000 minimum, they would account for 3% of the vote to elect the Labour leader, taking 1% each from the unions, constituency Labour Parties and MPs. That 3% would theoretically increase proportionally as the number of supporters rose, up to a maximum of 10%.

It is typical of the Labour right to want to push through this kind of nonsensical change, allowing non-members to have a say, however small, in party business. But it all helps to cement the leadership’s control by diluting activist influence still further.

For example, there are only formal traces of internal democracy left in the running of conference. Most of the policy decisions are made by the adoption – take it or leave it – of policy forum reports: no amendments to these are permitted. Only eight “contemporary motions” are allowed – and the ones that get to be debated are arrived at by the CLPs and unions voting for four each. This year three motions were selected by both delegate categories, so only five in all were debated!

None of this bureaucratic control is set in stone, however. A large part of the blame for the current state of affairs must rest with the union’s own bureaucracy – the union leaders *consented* to Tony Blair’s massacring of debate and democracy. Just like in the Labour Party, union branches are often barely functioning, top-down bodies. The fight to defeat the Labour right must begin with the fight of the rank and file to win control of their unions.

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