

# weekly **worker**



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bureaucracy targets  
youth league demagogue**

■ Occupy London  
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## **Jim Creegan reports on Occupy Wall Street**





# LETTERS



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

## Dual duel

Dave Douglass's latest reply to me is an exercise in delusion and evasion (Letters, October 13). Dave deludes himself that nationalisation of coal was in some way done to benefit the workers rather than capital. He further deludes himself that there existed some meaningful 'dual power' within this haven for the British working class. Yet, on every occasion when any such benefit is tested, he has to accept that it did not exist and find excuses for why it did not.

He accepts that there was a surplus of coal, but says that it could have been removed if British coal had been priced lower, if a market had been created for it, etc. I agree that, had British miners, as Kathy O'Donnell argued, been able to create a market for coal, then there need not have been a surplus. But that is the point! For all Dave's claims about the benefits of state capitalism, and about the power of the National Union of Mineworkers and 'dual power', it did not have control over any of those things that mattered. And, as Trotsky pointed out, no capitalist, let alone a powerful state capitalist, is going to cede those kinds of control to any group of workers outside a revolutionary situation - ie, outside a situation of real dual power within society as a whole.

Dave goes on to talk about early retirement and shorter hours as a means to reduce the surplus production, but, of course, the consequence of that would have been to raise the unit costs of production and it would have undermined the very economic basis of low cost that he founds his argument upon. Nor am I unfamiliar with the arguments about social benefits but, as O'Donnell and other socialist economists have pointed out, it is only relevant if miners were unable to obtain alternative employment. During the late 40s, 50s and 60s, when the majority of pits closed and jobs were lost, there was little opposition, precisely because miners could quickly find alternative jobs.

Dave then gives us a picture of the NUM, having suffered one of the most crushing defeats of the working class in living memory in 1984-85, mystically coming back more powerful. Dave asks us to believe that by the time of Major the NUM had learned to use 'the force' so effectively that only complete annihilation of the industry by the dark side was sufficient to break its power.

Then, having laid out just how little real control the miners had over pricing, production, markets, etc, Dave returns to his role as apologist for state capitalism. Having explained at length how successive governments had viewed the mines in strictly capitalist, profit-and-loss terms, to the chagrin of the NUM, and insisted that loss-making pits be closed, he seems to forget all this in order to claim that nationalisation had meant "the lowering of the individual profit motive". He's forced to do this to explain the improvement in working conditions as being due to nationalisation rather than simply the kinds of changes that Fordism brought everywhere it was introduced.

But the contradiction of Dave's position is exposed in his last comment in relation to BAe. The NUM even in its prime did not have the kind of 'workers' control' that Dave says is necessary in BAe. So on what basis does he believe that an appeal to the Cameron government to nationalise BAe, under real workers' control, is likely to be successful? Surely, on the basis of Dave's previous argument,

the first thing they would want to do, faced with such a revolutionary group of workers, would be to close the industry down immediately.

The only way that workers at BAe could have the kind of control that Dave speaks about would be if they owned it themselves. Short of the revolution, the only way of achieving that is to occupy and turn the firm into a cooperative, along the lines that the Argentinean workers at Zanon and elsewhere have done.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Knockers

Mark Fischer is slipping if he feels the need to twist my words (Letters, October 13). I didn't say I "couldn't be bothered" to reply. I said: "I'll not bother responding to Mark Fischer in any detail again." There is a world of difference.

Having set out, in my letters of September 1, September 22 and October 6 an alternative view, a different perspective and other sources of evidence on the nature and motive of that march, I was happy to let readers decide for themselves what view to form about it, and leave it at that. Since that time, Mark comes back and kicks me in the shin, prompting this further reply. Considering that he is unable to come across any contrary facts in the whole of that correspondence, chances are he will likewise ignore any in this contribution too.

The Jarrow march in this region is hailed not as an establishment-approved, 'apolitical' demonstration, but one which is part of a deeply felt class identity and a symptom of class struggle and defiance. It is seen as an attempt by the impoverished and ignored peasants of the north to break the indifference of a distant southern ruling class. That is a million miles from the 'typically English' and safe scenario painted by Mark. Perhaps he and Matt Perry, and others like them, simply want to set some record straight, to prove how the march wasn't all that we thought it was. But Mark is trying to make the march into its opposite: a demonstration of *allegiance* to the system.

My only objection to Perry's work is that it is part of a current wave of academic debunking of dearly held icons of working class history. It follows closely a similar one on 1926, which I exposed in some detail in this paper ('Class, blackened faces and academic muddle', September 9 2010). Perry's work is clearly better researched and it remains sympathetic, yet critical. Whatever the motive, the result is one of diminishing class identity at a time of growing hopelessness among the class. My critique is not essentially of Perry, whose conclusions fit the march into a tradition of working class radicalism in the region, but of Mark, who leaves this conclusion out and goes on to gazump Matt's criticisms with little or no added evidence. So it is Mark who has adopted the disreputable polemical method, not me.

Which points does Mark ignore? Well, chiefly the fact that, despite his claim it was an anti-communist march set up in opposition to Wal Hannington and the NUWM, the men of Jarrow, along with Ellen Wilkinson and her comrades, had in the first instance gone to those very forces and people with a view to them organising it. That it was Wal and the NUWM who turned the Jarrow men down. How do you square that with the much vaunted assertion that they were anti-communist and anti-NUWM?

Many in Jarrow, thanks to the horrendous impact of unemployment, faced literal starvation, the highest death rate in the country and the second highest child mortality rate.

Paddy Scullion, one of the march's organisers, said their intention was "to expose the government to the people throughout the length and breadth of the country". Scullion says "he once or twice" chaired a meeting on a pit tip for Wal Hannington, while David Riley, the march steward, expressed solidarity with the NUWM hunger marches taking place elsewhere along the route. Both of these men were founders of the Class War Prisoners' Fund in the wake of the 1926 struggles, which they were deeply involved with.

The march comprised men well known for their left and communist sympathies, but tactically they disagreed with NUWM and the CPGB. Having been turned down by the CPGB and NUWM, and deciding to go ahead with a march in the teeth of opposition by the government and labour and union establishment, they did then start on a popular front-style protest, but the CPGB in this period can hardly claim the high moral ground on that issue. From here on in, there were disagreements with the CP, and one member, Fred Harris, was temporarily thrown off the march, though later readmitted. The CP attempted to take a leading role as the march entered London, and it was at this point that a public disassociation from them was made by Riley.

Mark suggests this is an establishment-endorsed march, ignoring the facts I set out illustrating ruling class and government condemnations of it. The government had wanted the march stopped and the cabinet discussed ways of doing so. They set up a misinformation body to feed the press with anti-march stories and make sure any coverage in the press talked of its futility. That special branch officers who monitored the marchers along the route, with a view to finding excuses to stop it, could only report on how well behaved and non-threatening the march was doesn't take away the role of the state in trying to prevent it happening.

Mark proudly proclaims: "... we reject the legacy of Jarrow and counterpose to it that of the communist-led National Unemployed Workers Movement" ('They obeyed the rules', September 29). However, the sum total was the same. As Lewis Mates says, "All hunger marches were basically legitimising the government of the day in their attempts to get it to provide work, which for many leftists is merely to line the pockets of the capitalists in capitalist society" (*North East Labour History* No38, 2006, pp171-79). That the marchers were mistaken in this tactic is understandable, but that they had borrowed it actually from the prevailing CP strategy is also fairly evident. So it's not a question of high principle and class division versus a strategy of PR populism.

Perry makes the very clear point that all of those on the march (with the exception of the Tory agent for the impoverished town) were militant trade unionists on the left. The 'non-political' tactic was only struck on, when all other efforts through the left, right and centre of the working class movement hit a brick wall. It was clearly a tactic aimed at dodging the 'far-left mob' tag, and gaining a national platform. No matter how ill-advised that may seem, it was never a sign of the political coloration or motive of the march, neither of the rank and file nor its organisers.

Despite the evidence to the contrary, Mark continues to assert that this desperate march was "officially lauded and actively manufactured by the establishment as the epitome of the plight of the depressed areas". So much so in fact that all the marchers, and their families back home, had their dole and benefits stopped for

the duration because they were not actively seeking work. Some kind of 'lauding', I'm sure.

Mark and others make much of the story that the Jarrow men cheered as the king passed in his carriage down the Mall. Knowing who these men were and their class credentials and political outlook, I cannot but conclude this was working class irony, which was clearly misunderstood by the professional press recording it. What is certain is that *none* of the men on the march who have ever told their stories were actually royalists - far from it. It is simply another stick seized upon to beat a march which was at odds with the prevailing CP authority of the period.

All four of the Labour town councillors who organised the march tore up their party cards in disgust at the obstruction and lack of support that organisation gave them, as did many of the marchers and their families in the town. They joined instead the Independent Labour Party, which they saw as *more* radical and principled. Is this the sign of an anti-communist ethos?

David Riley, leader of the town council and chief march marshal, said on his return: "I am not so ready as I was to support an ordinary march ... now I think we should get down to London with a couple of bombs in our pockets ... These people of Westminster ... do not realise that there are people living in Jarrow today under conditions which a respectable farmer would not keep swine ... We must do something so outrageous that it will make the country sit up. If people in other distressed areas ... would march to London with us, we should be such an army that government could stem the tide only by one way - by shooting us down - and they daren't do it."

That quote just doesn't match the image that Mark has tried to have us accept of the march and its leaders. That there were multifarious and contradictory elements in this march, that it was far from the red procession to shake the London establishment, as some of the marchers had originally hoped, is without question. Its purpose and complexion changed as it hit political disagreement, obstruction and bureaucratic control. All of that is true, but the people on the march and the workless masses back in Jarrow saw this as a militant working class demonstration, critical of capitalism in general and government policy in particular. That is still how it is perceived in the northern working class.

**David Douglass**  
Jarra lad

## Do the maths

Chris Knight relies a great deal on averages of various kinds when explaining the connection between human menstruation and the lunar cycle, which he then claims can yield 'exact' results, such as the average length of one being exactly the same as the length of the other (Letters, October 13). But the variation in length of menstrual cycles is actually what gives rise to the false assumption of synchronisation.

If woman A has a cycle of 25 days and woman B's is 30 days, the average is 27.5 days. After they each have three periods (75 and 90 days), they are 15 days apart. Wait another couple of months and, at 150 days, they synchronise. Basic arithmetic. If the researcher was looking for synchronisation, they'd stop watching now. But in another few months the women will be 15 days apart again.

Chris still maintains that synchrony of menstruation was the fundamental basis of the 'human revolution' by which women collectively undermined

the power of the alpha male through sexual control of men and self-denial to achieve material benefit. At no point are we offered any testable mechanism by which this synchronisation could be achieved, and scientists attempting to assess it are dismissed as "men in white coats". This seems to me a fragile basis for the explanation of nothing less than the origin of humanity. I am aware that some strands of feminist thought would be sympathetic to this mistrust of male scientists, but I do not believe that women playing 'nature' to a 'male culture' holds out any hope of progress.

Chris suggests that my criticism of the reactionary aspects of his theory means I am not interested in women's solidarity. Not so; I've just organised an event in support of the day of action (Saturday November 19) called by the feminist campaign group, the Fawcett Society, together with my local, women-dominated, anti-cuts group and a female Unison rep whose union's membership is predominantly female. I am strongly in favour of women taking conscious collective political action to defend our interests. I just don't believe the manipulation of men's sexuality is the way to do it.

**Heather Downs**  
Medway

## Fingered

I am gobsmacked that the *Weekly Worker* has virtually ignored the rapidly developing, worldwide movement sparked by 'Occupy Wall Street' - except to describe the "latest bit of political ephemera" such as the "square occupation movements" as "in truth quite often politically dubious" ('Not so memorable', October 13).

The action has been reported worldwide and 'Occupy' has now reached meme proportions. But, for some reason, the *Weekly Worker* alone ignores it and leads with the ever-so ploddy "It's that time of year again" on SWP pre-conference bulletins! ('The tiny cog and its mechanical mindset', October 13).

The degree of self-sacrifice being displayed by those taking part in Occupy Wall Street - and, I would suggest, the mass prison hunger strikes across the US - is inspiring forces across the globe. I would have expected all communists to applaud and support such actions and be at the forefront in offering Marxist solutions to the problems this movement is laying bare and taking on.

Come on, *Weekly Worker*, get your collective communist finger out now!  
**Tam Dean Burn**  
email

## Never away

I've followed with great interest the recent debates in the *Weekly Worker* about how Marxists should relate to the Labour Party.

A few months ago, I rejoined Labour after being in the political wilderness for nearly 17 years. I have the Socialist Party in England and Wales to thank for that. The awful experiences I've had with many organisations during that time, including SPEW and its mirror-image, Socialist Appeal, mean that I now have a very low opinion of all the far left. I've concluded that most of them do not live in the real world.

This contrasts with the active members of my Labour Party branch, who have their feet very much planted firmly on the ground. After all the anti-Labour propaganda I have written in my local newspapers over those 17 years, I have been pleasantly surprised by the friendly response of party activists to my renewed membership. It's as though I'd never been away.

**John Smith**  
Cambridgeshire



# OCCUPY

## A global act of refusal

The Occupy movement has energised politics, writes **James Turley**. But we must face up to the limits of spontaneity

It is not the first time that events on Wall Street have had major repercussions all about the globe. It is probably safe to say that it has never happened quite like this. A month ago, a few bands of North American activists - including the collective around Adbusters and radical hackers Anonymous - took to Wall Street to protest the manifest corruption of American politics by capital and high finance.

Now, 'copycat' protests have spread far and wide. The details change, as do the key demands; but hundreds of cities, on every continent, have caught the bug. The idea is simple - find a central, public and symbolically powerful location, and stay there. The squares and parks then become hubs of activity, as activists numbering very often in the few hundreds try to organise a propaganda effort to broaden support for their programme.

What is the programme? In the US, the central demand was initially for "a presidential commission on the relationship between money and power"; but the slogans that emerged hinge on the idea of the "99% versus the one percent" - that is, the dispossessed masses and the corporate ultra-elite who buy politicians like they would holiday flats.

This movement is spontaneous and diffuse and that character has positive and negative consequences.

The positives first of all: the Occupy movement demonstrates just how much comes naturally to people moving into struggle, no matter how politically naive they may be. There is an instinctive internationalism on display here; sometimes hundreds, sometimes thousands of people in all kinds of countries have discovered that their problems emanate from the same source, even when the nature of that source is left somewhat undefined.

Indeed, the Wall Street demo was inspired by the square occupations of the Spanish Indignados, who were in turn inspired by the Arab awakening that toppled Ben Ali and Mubarak. The Arab awakening itself demonstrates the enormous potential for protests to spread across borders.

Equally, there is that key slogan - 'We are the 99%'. We will have better reason than sheer pedantry to dispute the numbers here, but, however inexact and populist, this is the *germ* of class-consciousness, an awareness that we are not 'all in it together', but placed on opposite sides of a fundamental antagonism. It also acknowledges that the power of the masses lies in their numbers - if the 99% strike with one fist, they will surely launch their exploiters off the face of the world.

Sniffy comments about the small size of the 'core' protests, particularly on Wall Street and at St Pauls, and (from parts of the left) their left-liberal campaignist political character, rather miss the point. Both the London and Wall Street protestors have managed - via hard graft and media savvy - to get a degree of trade union participation in their movements. The underlying class antagonism is more obvious to the unions than it would be to the young radicals. The internationalist dimension is perhaps more surprising - the unions' enthusiasm for this wave of protest actually demonstrates how much work the labour bureaucracy has to do to repress the spontaneous solidarity of workers across borders.

The fundamental problem for these protestors is that the nature of their

activities has serious internal limits. It is not simply that protests of this kind - no matter how numerous - will not succeed in overthrowing capitalism. It is that the rather minimal demands that the decision-making process, in combination with the pre-existing political prejudices at work, throws up are almost equally impossible. Cautious overtures from the White House notwithstanding, there will be no commission on money and power; or, if there is, it will be used to kick the issue into the long grass.

What are these limits? First of all, there are the organisational questions. Overwhelmingly, decisions are arrived at by consensus; an individual participant has the power to block a majority decision until he or she is satisfied that the issue is resolved. The fundamental driving force behind the rise and rise of consensus decision-making is the fear of the 'tyranny of the majority', and experience of its concrete forms (eg, meetings packed by clone-activists of some left group).

This institutes a power of veto which is not enormously harmful when decisions are taken between handfuls of like-minded activists. It is enormously harmful when major and at least partially compromised organisations (trade unions included) get involved. Many people worry that the likes of the US Democratic Party will strangle the movement; but, with these organisational practices, the movement effectively hands its enemies the garrotte.

It is not simply the *de facto* veto. This is a movement, like many others in recent history, with an anarchistic hatred of formal leadership. Yet the result wherever 'leaderlessness' is tried is with absolutely rigid regularity not a true egalitarianism of authority, but *informal* leadership.

We live in a fallen world, where hierarchy is not simply expressed through rules, but *partially* internalised. Formal leadership, accountable to those below, is not a tyranny over the mass movement, but a defence against the tyranny of pre-existing relations of hierarchy (class, gender and so forth) that, in the absence of formal structures, select the most 'charismatic' - that is well-spoken and confident - individuals to be leaders. The result in the paradigmatic case of the London European Social Forum was that the whole affair was run as a stitch-up between the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Action, both organisations with a great deal of *savoir faire* as to how to get a 'good result' at a meeting.

The political character is then based on what can be agreed - or at least tolerated - by an increasingly diffuse cross-section of people. "This is not about left and right," Richard Seymour of the SWP was told many times at St Pauls. "These old ideas of political divisions are not necessarily relevant ... because this is about the 99%, this is about the have-nots, versus the have-yachts."<sup>1</sup>

There are three interlinked problems with this perspective. The first is that identifying the balance of forces is not a strategy. It does not tell us what we should *do* with the "have-yachts". Tax them? Expropriate the yachts? Hang them from lampposts?

The second, and consequent, problem is that the balance of forces is not simple. The one percent, it should be emphasised, is quite real - the top layer of the bourgeoisie exists almost in a parallel universe, and the mass

production of fictional values in the last period of financialisation has had the effect of accentuating the disparity.

But then, there are medium-sized concerns owned by a larger layer of capitalists, who, while hardly as flush as the transnational jet-set, still have a considerable stake in the system; and below them a large layer of small owners - the urban petty bourgeoisie, remaining pockets of small farmers and the managerial middle class - who are in a more ambiguous relationship to capital. A corner-shop owner may want the power of the corporate elite curbed; but in fact he is just as reliant on finance capital as Tesco. The working class, in turn, has interests antagonistic to, or at least conflicting with, around 30 out of the 99%.

Leaving the detailed politics unsaid does not magic away the differences; it does, however, negate the possibility of winning broader layers to a real political strategy, and thus exacerbate the centrifugal forces pulling the movement apart.

Finally, there is the point quite correctly made by comrade Seymour - the protests actually reconfirm rather than abolish the left-right divide, because it is *the political left* which has a history of standing up for the "have-nots" against the "have-yachts". The beyond-left-and-right idea is an attempt to sell this as a moral crusade, but the truth is that these protests are identifiably leftwing. The idea that political divisions are outdated is fundamentally premised on the basis that there is only the '100%', with poor and rich and state bureaucrat alike having their correct places in the social body, and is thus itself fundamentally a *rightwing* idea.

It would be stupid to pretend that these prejudices, however misguided, do not have a real basis. Put simply, the left has come out of a period of cataclysmic defeat, and has not come out fighting. The prejudices people have about socialist grouplets - at least partly founded on the disaster that was Stalinism - are endlessly reconfirmed by their actual encounters with socialists.

The problem which underlies all this, however, is the loss of any sense of history. My arguments on the flaws of consensus and leaderphobia could have been copy-pasted from *The tyranny of structurelessness*, published by the left feminist, Jo Freeman, in 1972.<sup>2</sup> The failure of the Social Forums to organise effectively, and the dissipation of the 'anti-globalisation' movement, is one example among many of the failure of movements based on a universally agreed act of refusal. These failures are forgotten, and so reappear as if new.

In order for the 99% (or whatever fraction we can muster) to prevail, it needs to decide whether to overthrow capitalism or reform it, and whether to overthrow the state or demand it mitigate corporate greed; it needs the rich experience of history - *our* history, the history of the left and the centuries-old fight for democracy - to make that call. This movement is of immense symbolic importance; but that significance will be forgotten unless its architects take seriously the need for a *party* ●

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. <http://leninology.blogspot.com/2011/10/visiting-occupy-london.html>.
2. [www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm](http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm).

## 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 October 20, 6pm:** Meeting, Cameron committee room, 3rd floor, Manchester Metropolitan University Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M15. 'The Arab spark'.

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

### Northern Communist Forum

**Sunday October 23, 3pm:** Meeting, 'How to beat the cuts', Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speaker: John Bridge (CPGB).

Organised by CPGB North: <http://northerncommunists.wordpress.com>.

### Radical Anthropology Group

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

**October 25:** 'Noam Chomsky's politics and linguistics'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

### Hardest Hit

**Saturday October 22:** National day of action against cuts in disability benefit: <http://thehardesthit.wordpress.com>.

**Belfast:** Debate, 1.30pm, Radison Blu Hotel.

**Birmingham:** Rally, 12.30pm, Victoria Square, city centre.

**Brighton:** Rally, 11.30am, Jubilee Square, Jubilee Street, Brighton.

**Bristol:** March, 12noon, College Green, Council House, Park Street.

**Cardiff:** March, 12.30pm, Cardiff Museum: [Wales@hardesthit.org.uk](http://Wales@hardesthit.org.uk).

**Edinburgh:** Rally, 11am, Ross Bandstand, Princes Street Gardens.

**Leeds:** March, 12.30pm, Victoria Gardens, Headrow.

**London:** Rally, 11am, GLA building, Queen's Walk, SE1.

**Manchester:** Rally, 2pm, Albert Square, outside Manchester Town Hall.

**Newcastle:** March, 10.30am, Bigg Market.

**Norwich:** March and rally, details to be confirmed.

**Nottingham:** Rally, 12.30pm, Market Square.

### Anarchist Bookfair

**Saturday October 22, 10am to 7pm:** Debate and controversy, Queen Mary's, University of London, Mile End Road, London E14. Speakers include: Ian Bone, Stuart Christie, Darcus Howe, Selma James, Chris Knight and Hillel Ticktin. Meetings on: UK riots, Arab uprisings, China's workers and capitalism's crisis.

Organised by Anarchist Bookfair: [anarchistbookfair.org.uk](http://anarchistbookfair.org.uk).

### Defend welfare

**Sunday October 23, 11am:** Conference, Somers Town Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London NW1.

Organised by Hackney Welfare Action: [welfareactionhackney@gmail.com](mailto:welfareactionhackney@gmail.com).

### Labour Representation Committee

**Tuesday October 25, 6.30pm:** Meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Guest speaker: George Binette (Camden Union) - 'Mobilising for action on November 30'.

Organised by Greater London LRC: <http://gl-lrc.blogspot.com>.

### Queer politics

**Tuesday October 25, 6.30pm:** Forum, Marx Memorial Library, Marx House, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 (nearest station: Farringdon). 'How does queer politics fit into self-organisation and class politics?'

Organised by Left Front Art: [www.left-front-art.org](http://www.left-front-art.org).

### Stop the cuts

**Wednesday October 26, 7pm:** Public meeting, United Railway Club, Railway Terrace, Rugby. Speakers include Bob Crow (RMT).

Organised by Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: [RugbyTUSC@gmail.com](mailto:RugbyTUSC@gmail.com).

### No evictions

**Wednesday October 26, 6pm:** Protest against post-riot evictions, Greenwich Council, Town Hall, Wellington Street, London SE18. Organised by Defend Council Housing: [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch).

### New College of Resistance

**Saturday October 29, 11am:** Conference, Kings College, Stamford Street, London SE1. Workshops include: 'The movement one year since Millbank'; 'Alternatives to austerity'; 'Gender inequality in education'; 'Building universities of international solidarity'; Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Laurie Penny, Alex Callinicos, Liam Burns (NUS president), Katy Clarke MP, Owen Jones. £6/£3.

Organised by Education Activist Network: [educationactivist@googlemail.com](mailto:educationactivist@googlemail.com).

### Don't buy into Israeli occupation

**Saturday October 29, 10am:** Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include Sarah Colborne (PSC), Bob Crow (RMT), Nina Franklin (NUT), Hugh Lanning (PCS), Alison Shepherd (Unison), Pat Stuart (Unite).

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: 020 7700 6192.

### Remember CLR James

**Sunday October 30, 2pm:** Celebration, Open the Gate cultural centre, 33-35 Stoke Newington Road, London N1. Register at <http://clrjameslegacy.eventbrite.com>.

Organised by CLR James Legacy Project, c/o HCVS, ground floor, 84 Springfield House, 5 Tyssen Street, London E8.

### 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.



## USA



Support from trade unionists too

# Hot autumn in New York

**Jim Creegan** reports on the occupiers who aim to take on Wall Street and examines the implications for left politics

Some things are predictably unpredictable. Marxists were right to assert, in the face of end-of-history gloating, that the class struggle will not disappear as long as capitalism exists. We are also better equipped than most to discern the gradual build-up of tensions between classes that are bound at some point to break out into the open, no matter how placid things may appear on the surface. When, where and by whom the spark will be lit, however, is virtually impossible to know in advance.

For three years the United States sank deeper into an economic morass, as a president, on whom millions had naively pinned their hopes for deliverance, betrayed the expectations for change he cynically exploited to enter the White House. The only challenge to business-as-usual came not from leftwingers or unemployed workers, but from elements of the petty bourgeoisie grouped around the Tea Party, financed by rightwing capitalists and determined to protect their increasingly perilous status and income at the expense of those beneath them. The hopes that surrounded the struggle of public workers in Wisconsin were temporarily dashed when the governor succeeded in ramming his union-busting bill through the state legislature, and resistance died down. But Wisconsin, it seems, was merely a prologue.

Now, amid the combustible international atmosphere of rebellion from Cairo and Tunis, to Athens and London, a spark has been lit that is already giving rise to numerous incendiary incidents at the centre of the capitalist world order, long considered fireproof. On

September 17, Occupy Wall Street, a hastily convened band of young people from all over the country, originally about a hundred in number, occupied a half-acre private square named Zuccotti Park, a few blocks from the stock exchange. Though politically amorphous and without specific demands, OWS is clearly an expression of gathering resentment against the crimes and vaulting arrogance of the American ruling class. Its main slogan, 'We are the 99%', expresses its intention of giving a voice to a majority it perceives as increasingly disenfranchised by a tiny financial and corporate elite. It aims to fight back against the latter's looting of the public purse and accumulation of fantastic wealth at the expense of a population more and more debt-burdened and without prospects of decent work.

In the four weeks since the occupation began, OWS has captured the attention of the national media, drawn thousands to its impromptu marches, attracted the (often hesitant) support of major unions, featured left celebrities such as Michael Moore, Naomi Klein and Slavoj Žižek on its speakers' platform, issued two numbers of its own broadsheet, *Occupied Wall Street*, and inspired similar actions in just about every one of the country's major cities, and many medium-sized cities and small towns besides. There are sizeable Occupy movements in normally serene places from Des Moines, Iowa to Portland, Maine. It is still too early to tell, but speculation abounds in the media, and fear grows in high places, that OWS may mark the beginning of a leftwing 'populist rebellion', the likes of which has not been seen in

the US since the 1930s.

## Origins

Occupy Wall Street is of indistinct origins. Its convenors included no organisation or political figure of national reputation. Like the rebellions taking place on other continents, it was promoted through informal social media networks like Facebook and Twitter. The original call came from outside the US. In July, a self-described 'situationist' magazine named *AdBusters*, published in Vancouver, fantasised in print about the possibility of 20,000 people descending on Wall Street to protest corporate domination and initiate a return to genuine democracy. They gave their fantasy a specific date: September 17. The Canadian magazine, dedicated to combating commercialism in the media with media-savvy techniques known as 'culture jamming', claimed inspiration from Tahrir Square and the popular assemblies in Madrid's Puerta del Sol.

Thousands, it seems, were awaiting their summons. As word spread over the internet, committees sprang up in various cities to promote the idea. A group of anarchist-inclined activists calling itself the General Assembly began to hold outdoor planning sessions during the summer in Manhattan's East Village. The General Assembly was open to allcomers.

On the appointed day, a group of about a hundred assembled a few blocks from Wall Street at a famous statue of a charging bull, meant to symbolise the (now-abated) dynamism of the stock exchange. From there they marched to the famous street itself. Turned away by the police, they ultimately settled in their present venue around the corner.

At first, the encampment appeared to differ little from other mini-protests by activists in recent years. This changed as a result of the protestors' decision not to let themselves be ignored. On September 24, they marched uptown to Union Square, blocking traffic along the way. The police arrested over 80 people, freely swinging their batons. Widely televised images of a police commander indiscriminately dousing four unresisting and already corralled female marchers with pepper spray shocked many television viewers and created wider sympathy for the protest. The men and women in blue were slightly more restrained the following Saturday, when they nevertheless arrested at least 700 protestors who were marching over the Brooklyn Bridge. Many thought the cops had falsely led demonstrators to believe they had permission to march in the bridge's traffic lane in order to trap and handcuff them there.

## New features

The Brooklyn Bridge arrests also backfired. On October 5, major New York unions - transport workers, schoolteachers and municipal employees - joined OWS for the biggest march to date. The tens of thousands of workers who swelled the route did so with the endorsement not only of their local branches, but of the national leadership of the AFL-CIO.

Endorsements at the local level were not proffered without misgivings. Some bureaucrats voiced their congenital aversion to anything not completely under their control, in addition to their fears that association with a movement containing radicals might estrange them from the Democratic politicians whose favours they habitually seek (but

seldom get). Yet such considerations were apparently outweighed by the desperation of a labour movement so moribund that its leaders feel compelled to seek support and energy even from sources they are wary of. That wariness, however, was evident from the fact that some bureaucrats stopped short of a full mobilisation of the rank and file for the event.

Zuccotti Park presents an aspect that is in marked contrast to leftwing gatherings of recent years. Conspicuously absent are the familiar pre-printed placards and newspaper hawkers from what remains of the organised far left. There is rather a proliferation of signs, some quite professional-looking, but most crudely hand-lettered and containing highly individual messages, running the gamut from more to less radical. "Feed the people, eat the rich!" exclaimed one placard; "Our tax code could be fairer," ventured another. Drum circles are a constant feature. Especially on weekends, the park is surrounded by a crush of photo-snapping and largely friendly tourists.

Absent also is the feeling of doing one's political duty before supper that till now pervaded many leftwing demonstrations. Zuccotti campers, of a far lower average age than the usual marchers, are convinced they have started something momentous, and intend to see it through to the end. They also evince an eagerness to talk politics and exchange ideas not witnessed since the 1960s. They appear to have shaken off the resignation and ennui of intervening decades.

Forbidden by city authorities to pitch tents, the campers sleep in the open. Electronic amplification equipment of any kind being also



prohibited, the participants have taken to repeating the words of each speaker, phrase by short phrase, in chorus so that everyone can hear. This ‘people’s mic’ expedient quickly grew into a kind of incantatory ritual, forcing the audience to listen closely to the speaker’s every word, and binding it together through group repetition. ‘General assemblies’, in which problems are discussed and decisions made, are held twice a day. Participants have developed their own set of hand signals: wriggling fingers pointed upward signify approval, downward-pointing ones, disapproval; holding fingers level with the ground indicates neutrality. The assemblies are proud of the fact that they operate not by majority rule, but by consensus.

## Caught off guard

Student radicals of the 60s (of which I was one) enjoyed an advantage that allowed them to seize the initiative: the confusion of the ruling powers in the face of their ever-bolder actions. The authorities had long coped with labour radicalism and leftwing parties, but were totally unprepared for militancy amongst white, middle class students. They oscillated for a long time between repression and conciliation before coming up with a coherent counter-strategy.

The authorities are repeating the same pattern now. After having clubbed, arrested and pepper-sprayed protestors, the police pulled in their horns and allowed OWS to march unhindered through the city’s ultra-posh Upper East Side, home to the likes of Rupert Murdoch and David Koch, among other leading CEOs. The day before, New York’s billionaire businessman mayor, Michael Bloomberg, said that OWSers would be allowed to camp out and “express themselves” as long as they like, within the limits of the law, of course. A few days later, Bloomberg made an attempt to evict the campers, this time under the pretext of cleaning up the park. When the campers themselves showed up brandishing mops and brooms, and were joined at 7am by thousands, including many trade unionists, pledging to resist eviction and confront the police, Bloomberg backed down again, to the exhilaration of the park.

During the week of this writing, police invaded a similar encampment in Boston in the middle of the night, knocking down several members of Veterans for Peace and detaining about 100 people. Boston’s mayor, while defending the police, was making conciliatory noises similar to Bloomberg’s the next day.

The same kind of vacillation is evident on the national political stage, onto which the issue of OWS has been unceremoniously thrust. Leading Republicans were quick to condemn. Eric Cantor, the majority leader of the House of Representatives and Tea Party mouthpiece, at first voiced his concern over “growing mobs”. Herman Cain, a black pizza-parlour magnate seeking the Republican presidential nomination, called OWS “un-American” for being “anti-capitalist” and “anti-market”. The Republican frontrunner, Mitt Romney, taxed the protesters with the pro-forma Republican accusation of “class warfare”, a phrase they trot out when non-millionaires show signs of fighting back. But within a week Cantor had backtracked, saying the protesters were “justifiably frustrated”. And in a televised debate among Republican candidates, Romney also called OWS anger “understandable”.

Republican toing and froing is a measure of the extent to which the OWS intervention has changed the tenor of national politics. So long as the Republicans could convince people that the source of their woes was “big government”, as opposed to the class power it serves, politicians like Cantor

and Romney could conceal the true servility of their actions. But, once the “one percent”, as OWS refers to the richest Americans, were explicitly targeted, denouncing the protestors too stridently placed Republican bigwigs in the unenviable position of open defenders of wealth. Such a stance seems particularly untenable after a recent *Washington Post*/Bloomberg News poll revealed that over half of the “self-identified Republicans” surveyed favoured raising taxes on families earning over \$250,000 a year.

For their part, the Democrats have reacted with what the *New York Times* described as a “wary embrace”. The left fringe of the party, the Progressive Caucus, gushed predictably. But an even more mainstream Democrat like House minority leader Nancy Pelosi said “God bless them”, and continued: “The message of the protestors is a message for the establishment everywhere. No longer will the recklessness of some on Wall Street cause massive joblessness on Main Street” (*The Weekly Standard* October 6). The pro-Democratic *New York Times* published a ringing endorsement of OWS on its editorial page.

True to form, Barack Obama was more equivocal, saying he understood OWS’s anger at many of the abuses committed by the banks, but added that he also believed in a “strong financial sector”.

## Analogue

OWS puts the Democrats in a bigger bind than the Republicans. With presidential approval ratings at all-time lows, the party in power has few flints left for kindling popular enthusiasm for the 2012 presidential election. Growing anger at the oligarchy is the one key crying out to be played. Yet to do so would cause serious problems with the ‘one percenters’ of the party’s donor base. Hence, the leadership’s preference for a few mild jabs at ‘fat cats’, followed by a wink and nod to the corpulent.

Now, however, OWS is independently modelling the most plausible strategy by which the Democrats can hope to save themselves. This has led some among them to ponder avoidance of the collective suicide that shunning OWS might lead to next November. Given the movement’s shapelessness, some hope that it can be made to serve the Democrats as a sort of leftwing analogue to the Tea Party. But the left-Keynesian Robert Reich, secretary of labour to Bill Clinton in the 90s, resists such facile symmetries:

“... if Occupy Wall Street coalesces into something like a real movement, the Democratic Party may have more difficulty digesting it than the GOP [‘grand old party’] has had with the Tea Party.

“After all, a big share of both parties’ campaign funds comes from the Street and corporate boardrooms. The Street and corporate America also have hordes of public-relations flacks and armies of lobbyists to do their bidding - not to mention the unfathomably deep pockets of the Koch Brothers and Dick Arney’s and Karl Rove’s SuperPACs. Even if the occupiers have access to some union money, it’s hardly a match.”

After pointing out that the Democrats had long ago abandoned any pretence to leftwing populism, and that Obama is about as far from a populist Democrat as it is possible to be, Reich concludes: “This is not to say that the occupiers can have no impact on the Democrats. Nothing good happens in Washington - regardless of how good our president or representatives may be - unless good people join together outside Washington to make it happen. Pressure from the left is critically important.

“But the modern Democratic

Party is not likely to embrace leftwing populism the way the GOP has embraced - or, more accurately, been forced to embrace - rightwing populism. Just follow the money, and remember history” (‘The Wall Street occupiers and the Democratic Party’ *Common Dreams* October 9).

## Radical impulse

Yet OWS’s lack of political definition could prove to be a weakness *vis-à-vis* the Democrats, whose main value to the ruling class is their ability to channel the energies of incipient rebellions into harmless electoral campaigns. The movement’s attitude toward Obama is less than sharply defined. Neither his name, nor that of the Democrats, is often mentioned in their paper or on their placards. By taking to the streets, the movement is indeed stating that normal electoral politics have not worked, and that change will only come about as a result of actions like their own.

Their radical impulse is only implicit at this point, however. The occupiers’ weakness is evident in the marked contrast between their *élan* and militant spirit, on the one hand, and the uninspired nature of the demands many come up with when pressed. Although the OWS general assembly has not yet arrived at a set of concrete proposals, many will mention such things as the Tobin tax (a proposed assessment on financial transactions), or the restoration of the Glass-Steagall Act (which once forbade financial speculation on the part of banks), as if such minor legal tinkering would be sufficient to rein in the power of the corporate leviathan, whose toes they are beginning to tweak. Even more serious demands to address the urgent needs of the millions they aim to speak for - sharing out existing work with no loss in pay, a massive programme of useful government jobs for the unemployed, debt and mortgage relief for ordinary people - are rarely mentioned.

Such omissions bespeak a political naivety also reminiscent of the 60s. OWS seems to suffer from the underestimation of the power of its enemies, combined with a correlative overestimation of their own potential. Too ready with easy analogies, some think that the corporate stranglehold on politics can be undone by means of a single, sustained mobilisation, like those that brought down Mubarak or Ben Ali, and vow to stay assembled until their goals are met.

Such a conflation of the political power of an individual dictator with the deeply entrenched, multifaceted dominance of an entire class reinforces the movement’s tendency to substitute spectacle for durable organisation. If, indeed, corporate power is as easily conquered as many in the movement seem to think, then it is not unreasonable to believe it can be dealt a major defeat in a single, spontaneous outpouring of popular anger, which has no need of hierarchies or permanent organisation, and which can remain leaderless and arrive at all its decisions by consensus.

If, on the other hand, present corporate arrogance is viewed not as some sort of political *déravage*, but merely a more blatant manifestation of the power of history’s most formidable ruling class, then the struggle to break its power must be conceived as a protracted effort, as opposed to a single event. Then consensus decision-making cannot be used to settle the differences between the factions that inevitably arise in the course of a more drawn-out combat, but whose existence cannot be allowed to stand in the way of action, either. Then the need will be acknowledged to sustain the movement after the tumult and the shouting of the ecstatic moment dies - as it must - and for an organisation to guide such a movement through the partial victories and defeats that define

the arc of any serious struggle.

Whatever one may think of the Slovenian intellectual superstar, Slavoj Žižek, his October 9 address to the encampment was, at least in part, an attempt to bring some of the wisdom of the past to the fledgling militants of a country said to be trapped in an eternal present. Lacing his speech with the wise saws and modern instances that have become his trademark, Žižek said that the movement now being born must be more than a carnival, about which participants will reminisce over a pint in middle age; that the enemy was not greed, but the system; that one does nothing to oppose the system by refusing to shop at Wal-Mart or becoming a vegan; that the movement had a long and difficult path ahead; that its participants must get over their aversion to taking orders, so long as they agree with the purpose for which the orders are given.

## Past and present

Comparisons with the 1960s having been duly made, it is also important to note the essential differences, especially in the respective political and social environments of the two eras. There is, in fact, an ironic dissonance in the movements of both periods between ideology and social content.

The 60s hardly conformed to a classical Marxist, class-struggle scenario. In western countries, at least, most of the malcontents were educated youth in rebellion against an imperialist war and a conformist society they felt they had no place in. In the US, they were joined by radicalising blacks, Latinos and other minorities, in arms against their relegation to society’s lowest rungs. The main agents of radicalism were those either too educated - or too poor - to be part of the consumer society. It was said at the time that, if earlier revolutionaries aimed to set up a workers’ and peasants’ republic, a seizure of power by the ‘new left’ would result in a republic of lumpenproletarians and PhDs.

Conspicuously absent from the brew of discontent was the white working class. There were, to be sure, significant episodes of worker unrest, especially in the early 70s, when the rebellious mood of the time spread, if only briefly, to the industrial and union arenas. It was also mainly working class youth of all hues who turned against - and sometimes dispatched - their officers in Vietnam, beginning in the late 60s.

But the class as a whole enjoyed a higher standard of living than ever before, and saw their rising wages as a ticket into the middle class. They therefore tended to regard the boys and girls already at university, and on their way to middle class careers, as pampered and contemptuous of the goals for which their parents had sacrificed. They saw no percentage in rocking the imperial boat. What emerged into the 70s was a highly petty-bourgeoisified society, in which workers were largely quiescent and yesterday’s firebrands went on to respectable, middle class careers, mollifying their radical consciences with organic gardening and postmodernist identity politics.

The irony, however, is that the most conscious middle class rebels of the time ultimately came to consider themselves Marxists of one variety or another. This identification derived less from their own situation than from the fact that Marxism, even if in some vulgarised or distorted form, remained the dominant leftwing discourse - a result of its centrality to previous struggles, the existence of the USSR and China, and its adoption (at least in name) by the more radical anti-colonial revolutions of the day. Especially after the principal ‘new left’ organisation, Students for a

Democratic Society, fell apart in factional discord in 1969, Maoist and Trotskyist groups could appeal to ‘new left’ refugees by presenting themselves as the genuine Marxists that many were then trying to be.

Today, as the American-centred world order wanes, the film of petty-bourgeoisification is being played backwards. Paul Mason, a BBC correspondent specialising in coverage of revolts the world over, has commented on the prominence among the discontented of the ‘unemployed PhD’. Mason notes that, whereas a university education used to be thought of as the guarantee of a comfortable middle class existence, university graduates now finish their education under mountains of debt and in intense competition for a shrinking number of jobs.

This situation puts them increasingly in the same boat as workers, whose income has also been on the decline for many a year. In 1970, Richard Nixon’s venom-spewing vice-president, Spiro Agnew, incited construction workers (‘hard hats’) to assault anti-war demonstrators in lower Manhattan. Today, in the same neighbourhood, construction workers are regularly visiting Zuccotti Park with words of encouragement - one of many signs that old resentments between the educated and the less educated, tirelessly exploited by Republican demagogues to whip up resentment against ‘elitists’, is becoming a thing of the past, as the common enemy of both comes more clearly into view.

The emerging configuration of rebellion, then, seems much closer to the classical Marxist image. Professionals-in-training are, in fact, becoming something like the ‘new working class’ that Ernest Mandel and others wrote about in the 70s, instead of the new petty bourgeoisie they actually became in that period.

But hereby hangs the second irony. At the very time when it would seem most apposite, the discourse of Marxism - genuine or bogus - has little currency among today’s leftward-inclining young. They flounder in a theoretical void; their outlook consists of a hodgepodge of confused and half-formed ideas, ranging from liberal to anarcho-libertarian, that have multiplied in the gap left by the ‘death of communism’. It is the task of Marxists to re-infuse this movement with the only outlook capable of explaining contemporary reality; to counter the notion, still widespread, that Marxism is Stalinism. But we must approach this task in all humility, without expectations that anyone will bow to our superior wisdom, and unburdened by the formula-mongering pedantry that has substituted itself for political thought among the few sects that have survived a 40-year hiatus in social struggle.

There is yet a third irony here. It is in the land of historically low class-consciousness - America, the backward - that a newly arisen movement is, even more clearly than Arabs or Europeans, penetrating the often mystifying veil of politics to point its finger squarely at the class enemy, the “one percent”. The illusions of protestors notwithstanding, Zuccotti Park will fade as winter sets in. But it probably will not fade so fast from the public mind, and similar eruptions are likely to follow. It could very well be the beginning of the sea-change in consciousness that the Socialist Workers Party incorrectly read into the ‘battle of Seattle’ in 1999.

The difference consists in prevailing economic conditions. No Marxist can possibly accept the amorphous politics of the occupiers as the end-point of the movement’s consciousness. Only a fossil, on the other hand, can fail to perceive the occupations as a potential new beginning ●

## ITALY

# Black Bloc allowed to wreck protest

The spontaneism of the 'horizontalists' was completely exposed in Rome, writes **Toby Abse**

**T**he Roman demonstration on Saturday October 15 was by far the largest of the 950 anti-capitalist protests in more than 80 countries that took place on that day all around the globe. The centre-left daily *La Repubblica* estimated the crowd at 300,000; as is customary on such occasions, the police estimate was lower - 70,000-80,000, according to Giuseppe Pecoraro, the prefect of Rome.

Whatever the precise figures, a crowd of this size was a very remarkable phenomenon, given that the event was organised not by a large trade union confederation or a major political party, but by the Comitato 15 Ottobre - a loose confederation inspired by the Spanish Indignados. Such a massive mobilisation was an indication of the very widespread popular anger against the bankers and the mainstream politicians linked to them in the wake of Italy's deep economic and political crisis and involved a far greater variety of people than those attracted by the relatively small Occupy London event near St Paul's, which got more support on Facebook than in the real world.

However, the impressive Italian demonstration was also the most violent of all the protests, even if the aggressive section of the crowd, a galaxy of anarchist and autonomist groups popularly known as the Black Bloc, seems to have accounted for about 500 people at the start of the demonstration. It may have had the support of around 3,000, probably including some angry young people - generally unemployed or casually employed - won over on the day in Piazza San Giovanni, where the march reached its chaotic conclusion. The planned but abandoned final rally was superseded by the symbolic burning of a carabinieri van, on the back of which was spray-painted in white the slogan "Carlo vive ACAB" (a reference to Carlo Giuliani, killed by the carabinieri in Genoa in July 2001; the acronym stands for 'All cops are bastards' - Italian anarchists and autonomists have a penchant for English language slogans).

The outcome was completely predictable. Large demonstrations require careful stewarding. The reason why the million-strong demonstration at the close of the European Social Forum in November 2002 did not degenerate into the "sack of Florence" predicted by Oriana Fallaci, the notorious rightwing journalist renowned for her Islamophobia, was the impressive stewarding by the CGIL union confederation, particularly the Livornese dockers. Incidentally the latter ensured that the Socialist Workers Party's ludicrous attempt to replace striking Fiat workers at the head of the march came to a rather more rapid and ignominious end than professor Callinicos could have foreseen.

However, last Saturday there were no stewards. This was not the result of any accident, any lack of forethought or any piece of incompetence. This lunacy was quite deliberate. Those inspired by the Spanish Indignados insisted weeks in advance that the demonstration must be totally spontaneous and free from any hierarchy with nobody imposing their will on anybody else. The appalling consequences of this craziness were compounded by another very conscious decision taken by the advocates of the 'horizontal' approach. Political parties were given firm instructions to march at the back of the procession: even this



**No stewards**

represented a degree of compromise by the Indignati, as the most impassioned advocates of the Spanish approach had at first tried to exclude political parties, or at least the banners of the political parties, from the demonstration. Members of the union representing Fiat workers, Fiom, were also sent to the back and, while the rank-and-file Cobas union was nearer the front and was able to protect its own section of the march against the Black Bloc, it was not strong enough to displace it at the head.

This hostility to political parties in general, as opposed to the establishment parties associated with the bankers, was extremely foolish, as parties have a degree of internal cohesion, group loyalty and discipline that often enables them to give a lead in a potentially chaotic situation where an atomised crowd of individuals would, understandably, be prone to panic. Whilst Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) is far weaker now than it was in 2001, it should be remembered that it was a massive mobilisation of party members from all over Italy that to some extent limited the violence inflicted by the state on the day after the carabinieri killed Carlo Giuliani.

Needless to say, whilst political parties like the PRC, Sinistra Ecologia Libertà and Italia dei Valori (IdV) dutifully took their place in the rearguard and the contingents of militant trade unionists did not impose their own stewarding on the demonstration as a whole, the Black Bloc showed absolutely no hesitation in placing themselves near the front of the demonstration and in effect assumed a leadership role in a far more vanguardist fashion than of any of the Marxist groupings of which the Spanish Indignados and the Italian Indignati are so critical.

On this occasion - unlike the spontaneous riot in central Rome in December 2010, when a crowd of largely student protestors exploded with anger at the unexpected news that prime minister Silvio Berlusconi had survived what everybody assumed would be a fatal confidence vote - there does seem to have been a marked degree of coordination on the part of the various components of the Black Bloc (it is extremely unlikely that the instigators were reacting to Berlusconi's wafer-thin majority in the October 14 2011 confidence vote, even if they may have hoped to win more support amongst the crowd in its wake). How far the actions of the

Black Bloc were planned in advance or arranged at the last minute by text messaging is impossible for an outsider to judge.

Moreover, significantly, the Black Bloc did not lead a breakaway march towards the forbidden Red Zone of Rome, within which the police and carabinieri were conducting a massive operation to protect the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, Berlusconi's official and private residences and various other likely targets, but remained within the main body of the march. Sometimes they took off their balaclavas and other identifying gear to merge into the crowd of peaceful protestors - tactics strongly reminiscent of Autonomia Operaia during the demonstrations of the movement of 1977. There is, however, no evidence of the 1977 tradition of using firearms - as opposed to iron bars, wooden poles, Molotov cocktails, smoke bombs and fire crackers, all of which were employed with great gusto last Saturday.

## Counterproductive

The behaviour of the Black Bloc was completely counterproductive in terms of the aims of the demonstration's original organisers, who sought to build the broadest possible mass movement against the bankers and the austerity policies they are imposing on the Italian and other European governments.

The Black Bloc's action has already given the Italian government a wonderful excuse for intensifying repression against all the strikes, demonstrations and occupations scheduled for the coming weeks - starting with a month-long ban on marches in Rome, which will, for example, limit Fiat strikers to a static assembly during their one-day walkout on Friday October 21 (PRC leader Paolo Ferrero is amongst those who have come out clearly against this ban). But it would be inaccurate to characterise the violence that occurred as random hooliganism - while there was some incidental looting, this was not the work of apolitical criminal gangs bent on economic gain of the type we saw in London in August.

The anarchists' slogans were clearly political and a response, albeit a crude one, to the current crisis. The slogans 'Fuck austerity', 'Smash capitalism', 'Eat the rich' and 'Eat the bankers' appeared - in English - along the walls of Via

Cavour and Via Labicana, as the Black Bloc passed through. By and large the choice of buildings to be attacked had a far greater logic than that displayed by those who attacked carpet showrooms or barber shops in Tottenham this summer - the Banca Etruria, the Banca Popolare del Lazio and the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro may not be the leading Italian banks, but were presumably the closest to the approved route. The destruction of McDonald's in Via Appia or the attack on a branch of Manpower - an international symbol of casualisation and low-paid jobs - in Via Labicana all fitted into a generic anti-capitalist ideology.

Other targets included the five-star Hotel Boscolo and, whether or not the looted Supermercato Elite was really quite as upmarket as its name implied, it was not a corner shop. Burning down offices of the ministry of defence may not have been a universally acceptable form of protest against the Italian armed forces' involvement in Afghanistan or Libya, but it is not equivalent to the random firebombing of the homes of people on benefit that occurred in some of the London riots.

What is less certain is whether the anarchist/autonomist alliance merely sought to attack symbolic targets and engage in ritual confrontation with the police, particularly the carabinieri, or whether there is any truth in the claim put forward by Giovanni Bianconi in an article in *Corriere della Sera* that the *movimento antagonista* was actually aiming at an insurrection (inspired, not by the pacifism of the Spanish Indignados, whom they hold in total contempt, but by the wilder elements in Greece). Whether any of the Black Bloc seriously thought that they could lead a crowd of 300,000 into an all-out assault on the state on the spur of the movement will probably never be known.

Given the inevitably one-sided accounts of violent incidents on any demonstration in the mainstream press, it should be emphasised that, while 70 demonstrators were injured, only 10 policemen, according to *La Repubblica*, or at most 30, according to the *Corriere*, were hurt. This suggests that in the final clashes the security forces' response was fairly ferocious, even if some demonstrators were injured by the Black Bloc. It is worth pointing out that the centre-right *Corriere* had to admit that its photographer, Carlo Lannutti, ended up in hospital after being truncheoned during a police charge (rather than as the result of any attack on the media by the Black Bloc, which often demonstrates an aversion to photographers). Furthermore, the police asked doctors at San Camillo hospital to identify the wounded before treating them, but the medical staff firmly and courageously refused, correctly stressing their overriding duty to offer immediate medical assistance to all those who needed it.

Nonetheless, whatever the culminating excesses of the police, whose behaviour during the earlier stages of the demonstration was suspiciously restrained (some have suggested they had orders to let the Black Bloc cause havoc unmolested), some of the anarchist behaviour towards the more pacific majority of the demonstrators was absolutely inexcusable. One member of Sinistra Ecologia Libertà lost a couple of fingers as a result of an incident caused by a Black Bloc bomb, which to some extent explains the speed and vehemence with which SEL

leader Nichi Vendola denounced the behaviour of the Black Bloc.

## Three conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from all this? First, it is essential to stress the utterly counterproductive character of the Black Bloc's adventurist and substitutionist tactics, which only unleashes intensified state repression - both interior minister Roberto Maroni and IdV leader (and former policeman) Antonio Di Pietro have now come out in favour of reintroducing the Reale laws of the 1970s. These in effect gave the carabinieri licence to shoot to kill if somebody refused to stop when asked to do so by officers, as well as extending the police considerable powers to hold people without charge for relatively long periods. The Black Bloc's antics could also lead to less hardened and experienced demonstrators withdrawing from political activity, in the same way as Autonomia's disgraceful behaviour destroyed the movement in Italy in the course of 1977-78.

Secondly, if hard autonomism (which rather than classical anarchism is the predominant ideology of the Black Bloc) is an obvious danger to the workers' movement, the soft autonomism represented by the leaderless, 'horizontal' activism of the Spanish Indignados, the Italian Indignati and their British equivalents in UK Uncut and some local anti-cuts groups is also a big problem. Whilst it may claim success for small-scale, symbolic actions like the blocking of Westminster Bridge, it is just not fit for purpose when it comes to demonstrations involving tens or hundreds of thousands. It could easily have tragic consequences for those who are deluded into believing that it is possible to change the world without taking power, if either the state or the Black Bloc or both refuse to participate in a Gandhian game.

Thirdly, there is very little hope of any lasting gains in a context of state repression and desperate manoeuvring by a weakened Berlusconi, unless Rifondazione rebuilds a mass membership through an orientation towards the movements rather than the institutions. Whilst there is clearly some value in having local or regional councillors acting as tribunes of the people, the holding of such posts is not an end in itself - there is no point in hanging on to municipal or regional office by one's fingertips, if to do so requires coalitions with parties of the centre-left.

Whilst the medium-term objective of the reunification of all communists in a single party may be laudable in itself, the 'intermediate stage' - the Federazione della Sinistra alongside the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani - is continually dragging the PRC away from the movements towards a subaltern alliance with parties to its right. The call to abandon the federation made by the left currents within the PRC - the International Marxist Tendency's Falce e Martello and the Committee for a Workers' International-affiliated Controcorrente - may be justified.

However, the sectarian refusal of such organisations as Marco Ferrando's Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori and the Fourth International's Sinistra Critica to rejoin the PRC after the departure of Vendola's right wing, seems more and more ridiculous, given their own failure to build a substantial organisation that could challenge or replace the PRC, and makes the task of the existing left wing of the PRC more difficult than it need have been. ■



## SOUTH AFRICA

# ANC bureaucrats target youth league demagogue

The South African Communist Party has no answer to Julius Malema's black nationalism, writes **Peter Manson**

The African National Congress disciplinary hearing against Youth League president Julius Malema resumed at the weekend, with the majority faction around president Jacob Zuma determined to inflict a resounding defeat on the ANC black nationalist wing which Malema heads.

The ANCYL leader stands accused of "sowing dissent", and "bringing the ANC into disrepute" for criticising Zuma and calling for the overthrow of president Ian Khama in Botswana. In 2010 Malema was fined R10,000 (£800) by the ANC and ordered to attend an 'anger management' course and a 'political school' for having the temerity to insinuate that Zuma was worse than his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki. This made Malema guilty of "sowing disunity".

The 30-year-old 'youth' leader claims, with apparently good reason, that he is being "persecuted" - and not just by the ANC, but by the whole South African establishment. Last month he was found guilty by an 'equality court' of "hate speech" for singing a former Umkhonto we Sizwe freedom song, which includes the words, *dubula ibhunu* ('shoot the boer'). At least he found himself on the same side as the main ANC factions over this, including the South African Communist Party - veterans of the liberation struggle are unanimous that the song, now part of their common heritage, was directed against the apartheid ruling elite and in no way implies hatred for Afrikaners.

The outspoken ANCYL president has been a thorn in the side of the ruling ANC and its SACP ally for his characterisation of South Africa's huge inequalities as almost exclusively racial. For Malema the problem is the continued dominance of "white monopoly capital" and white privilege in general. The solution lies in the expropriation of white wealth - the ANCYL has focussed in particular on land ownership and the country's mines, demanding their nationalisation - and the acceleration of pro-black 'affirmative action'.

Of course, Malema himself is amongst those who have benefited substantially from 'black economic empowerment' (BEE) - the 'positive discrimination' whereby state employment and state contracts are 'colour-coded'. Companies applying for state tenders must demonstrate they have a high proportion of black senior managers and directors - they must be at least partially 'black-owned'. In this way the 'formerly disadvantaged' - or at least a tiny minority of them - are offered access to lucrative tenders that were previously the exclusive property of white capitalists.

As a result there are large numbers of 'BEE millionaires' - of which Malema himself is one. He has a lavish lifestyle, allegedly owning a R16 million (£1.3 million) house and driving expensive sports cars. He also owns the Malema Ratanang Family Trust - it is said that deposits into this trust fund are made by businessmen who are awarded tenders by the government of Limpopo, Malema's home province. The ANCYL and its president insist that such matters are not the business of the prying media: "The ANC Youth League is of the



**Julius Malema: tenderpreneur**

conviction that personal finances are private ..." (statement, July 25). And, in any case, "The president of the ANC Youth League has on several occasions assisted orphanages, contributed to the education of students in universities and bought wheelchairs for needy and physically disabled children ..."

Ironically, similar defences have been put forward to ward off accusations of nepotism by the Zuma wing of the ANC, including the state president himself - whose son, Duduzane, has been involved in dubious BEE deals. According to ANC MP Mduduzi Manana, "To suggest that because the president is in a powerful position implies unfettered access to business deals by his family is inaccurate at best, and misleading at worst. The raising of the business interests of the president's immediate and extended family borders on witch-hunting and denying the president's family members the right to participate in the economy."

### Common

In a sense then, both ANC wings share a common interest. But what divides them in reality is their attitude to international (largely 'white-owned') capital. Zuma *et al* know that South African capitalism cannot exist in isolation and that good relations must be maintained with the transnational corporations which dominate the economy. So long as they 'black up' these corporations are welcome partners.

But this is insufficient for Malema, who points to the massive, racially based inequality inherited from apartheid (and intensified since). This stance understandably strikes a chord with the dispossessed - with the millions of unemployed shack-dwellers, who are, of course, overwhelmingly black. For them what has changed? Yes, they are no longer subject to arrest for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but what about economically? It is true that, just as a small minority of blacks have enriched themselves, a minority of whites have suffered relative impoverishment. But overwhelmingly blacks are poor and whites are not.

So the ANC leadership has resorted to bureaucratic methods to 'settle the argument' in its favour. Malema has responded in kind - for instance, last month the ANCYL leadership

disbanded the pro-Zuma KwaZulu-Natal regional executive of the Youth League, which has sided with Zuma.

Despite the fact that they are opportunistic 'left' demagogues, Malema and the ANCYL leadership have been able to step into the 'radical' space that ought to be occupied by the SACP - which explains why the exchanges between SACP and ANCYL leaders have become increasingly bitter and extreme. According to SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande - who, incidentally, is also the ANC minister for higher education - Malema is being used by what the SACP dubs "tenderpreneurs". He is "part of this populism that is sounding left and workerist, but actually [has] the hidden agenda of acquiring wealth by selfish and unlawful means" (*The New Age* June 27).

In reply Malema declares that the Communist Party "should be leading a struggle of the working class", but instead it has become a mere "lobby group within the ANC" - a not entirely inaccurate assessment. The SACP claims that the ANCYL has an ulterior motive for demanding the nationalisation of 60% of South African mines - the "tenderpreneurs" like Malema will gain financially, it alleges.

Pointedly referring to Nzimande as "the part-time general secretary of the South African Communist Party", the ANCYL labels this an "old and tired conspiracy" and ridicules the claim that the Youth League leaders "are bought by mining companies that are failing and need a bailout". The ANCYL has never said that "government must buy mines or spend government resources for the state to take ownership and control of mines. On more than a thousand times, the ANC Youth League has said we should utilise legislation to take over control and ownership ..." The implication is that there should be no compensation.

Putting on its "workerist" face, the ANCYL concludes: "The biggest beneficiary of nationalised mines will be the working class and the poor ... through better salaries, jobs and organic community development and upgrading" (statement, June 28).

The two organisations are equally at odds over the Youth League's "economic freedom mass marches" planned for October 27 and 28,

which will support the campaign for nationalisation and demand more employment opportunities for youth. Nzimande has called on young people not to participate: "We are not going to be supporting any march whose intention is malicious and to undermine the authority of the ANC and the government," he said. This was echoed by the Young Communist League: "South African youth must not be part of the march aimed at undermining and destabilising our government and the ANC" (statement, October 18). The marches are to end not only at Union Buildings in Pretoria, the seat of government, but at the Chamber of Mines and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

According to the ANCYL, "It is indeed shocking for a general secretary of a communist party to defend the interests of white monopoly capital" by opposing the marches (previously Malema dubbed SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin a "white messiah" for opposing the transfer of wealth to blacks through nationalisation). Embarrassingly for the SACP, several unions and the general secretary of the Congress of South African Unions, Zwelinzima Vavi - himself an SACP member - have come out in support of the marches.

### Proto-fascist

The SACP is totally disempowered by its absurd attachment to what it openly admits is a cross-class alliance pursuing the so-called "national democratic revolution" (NDR). This is supposed to be gradually deracialising society and strengthening the poor and working class. Since it has patently failed on both counts the SACP has become an easy target for the 'pro-worker' black nationalism of Malema. The hapless SACP has been reduced to implying that this "alliance partner" is a "proto-fascist".

In a party publication last month Nzimande wrote: "Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the liberal offensive ... is being reinforced by what we have described as the new tendency within our own movement. It is a tendency whose sole mission is to capture all of our organisations in the alliance in order to pursue a narrow, selfish agenda of accumulation, including the building of a kleptocratic state."

He continued: "It was in this context that the SACP in 2008 boldly (and correctly) began to characterise this rightwing, demagogic tendency for what it was and is. We pointed out its underpinning class support, and characterised it as a 'new' tendency that had certain proto-fascist features."

Nzimande then went on immediately to condemn the demonstration outside Luthuli House, Johannesburg by supporters of Malema before the start of his disciplinary hearing on August 29: "The trashing, mayhem and destruction caused by elements of this new tendency in the ANC Youth League in Johannesburg last week further shows the extent to which the tenderpreneur element is willing to go to discredit our movement in order to advance its narrow accumulation interests. Such behaviour shows the extent to which the 'new tendency' is willing to even mobilise the lumpen elements within our society to achieve

its own selfish interests" (*Umsebenzi Online* September 7).

Nzimande was desperately exploiting the fact that Malema supporters burnt images of both himself and Jacob Zuma. The ANCYL recognised that this was not a wise move in Zuma's case and promptly apologised for the excesses of its members - but there was a significant silence when it came to the burning of Nzimande's image.

The SACP is paralysed by its adherence to the NDR and is therefore unable to mobilise its working class support to act in its own interest - which would inevitably "undermine the authority of the ANC and the government". So instead it focuses not on capitalist exploitation itself, but only on those features which are universally condemned. This year the SACP's annual Red October campaign is highlighting corruption, as explained by Nzimande:

"The SACP is of the view that in a capitalist society, where private accumulation is a dominant feature in society, all individuals in influential leadership positions in society are susceptible and often objects and subjects of corruption." However, having correctly identified the endemic nature of corruption within capitalism - there is a very thin line dividing what is regarded as normal practice and what is corrupt - Nzimande concludes: "No matter how much mechanisms are put into place to fight corruption in government, these will not succeed unless mechanisms are put in place to seek to fight corruption in all of society and its various institutions!" (*Umsebenzi Online* October 19).

So what are these "mechanisms" that will miraculously "succeed" in combating corruption, I wonder? In the case of South Africa the BEE agenda itself, as the SACP recognises, is directly responsible for giving corruption new outlets - in some cases transforming it almost into an art form. But, since the SACP is prevented by the NDR straitjacket from promoting the independent interests of the working class it has no alternative to buying into the tinkering - and innately corrupt - 'black empowerment' template.

And, just as BEE supposedly delivers "empowerment" on an individual basis, so society as a whole can be transformed by changing the behaviour of individuals, it seems: "Is it not important that *all* political parties, including our own liberation movement, should lead by example, and begin to pose the question of whether all people occupying leadership positions in these parties, and society as a whole, including trade union or NGO leadership, and their spouses, should be allowed to hold both their essentially public offices and also have private business interests? Should they all not be expected, through the law, to publicly declare all their business interests?"

So there we have it: the SACP's 'Red October' is reduced to demanding that those in public office should be compelled to declare their business interests. No wonder the likes of Julius Malema are winning such support among the impoverished masses ●

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## ECONOMY

# Big bazooka or water pistol?

As the European leaders gather in Brussels on October 23, it could be last chance saloon for the euro zone, writes **Eddie Ford**

**A**t the G20 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors in Paris on October 15, Tim Geithner, the United States treasury secretary, apparently said there were "six days to save the world" - the asteroid is approaching. So by the time you read this article you should know whether or not his prediction has come true. Unless, of course, you were too late ...

What Geithner really meant was that the entire euro zone project was in very real danger of imminent collapse unless European leaders came up *soon* with the "bold" and "decisive" action they have been promising for weeks now. Failure to do so, obviously, would have catastrophic consequences for the world economy, heralding a new depression. Then it would just be a question of exactly how *many* banks and financial institutions collapse, and in turn how many new 'failed states' were created in the process. One thing that is absolutely guaranteed is that under such calamitous conditions it would be the working class which gets hammered into the ground by a despairing bourgeoisie out to save its own skin - either that or the mutual ruination of all classes, as Karl Marx warned in the *Communist manifesto*.

More specifically, Geithner believes - not without reason - that only the construction of a massive financial 'firewall' can protect the euro zone against contagion from a Greek default, a prospect that draws closer with every day that passes. In the view of the US administration, for far too long the French and German governments, the 'powerhouses' behind the euro zone - or at least that is how it seemed up to now - have dithered and dallied over the Greek question, almost treating it as a little bit of local difficulty rather than a crisis with potentially deadly global consequences. One way or another, vast amounts of money need to be pumped into the chronically ill euro zone economy, so as to 'neutralise' the Greek problem and prevent Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland spiralling downwards into greater debt and possible default. Not to mention the small matter of buffering up German and French banks, especially the latter, which, of course, have lent billions of euros to Greece, Ireland, Portugal, etc - the sick men of Europe - and hence are extremely vulnerable to a further outbreak of contagion.

### Make or break

In other words, make or break time for the European Union's banking/financial system - and maybe for any prospects of a recovery in the US, which is sliding into recession or even worse. Call it "shock and awe" or a "big bazooka" - even going "nuclear", as advised on August 8 by Stephen King, HSBC's chief economist<sup>1</sup> - but the big guns need to be brought out, not a water pistol. Yet are there any signs of this actually happening?

Not so far. Even though there are only six days left to save the world, which you would imagine might impart a certain degree of urgency to proceedings, the Paris conference contented itself with issuing a standard 'Don't panic' communiqué calling for "further work to maximise the impact of the European Financial Stability Facility in order to avoid contagion". That is, boost the EFSF mechanism's bailout fund to at least €2 trillion, rather than the measly €440 billion currently available - that barely buys

you a sticking plaster these days - and recapitalise the banks, probably through some system of state-backed guarantees.

The communiqué went on to commit the G20 nations, in theory anyway, to ensuring that the International Monetary Fund has "adequate resources" to deal with the problems confronting Europe - meaning that the IMF, in the words of its managing director, Christine Lagarde, has been asked to devise "instruments that are more flexible" and "more short-term", thus allowing countries that are in "good economic health, but in difficulty" the chance to "resist" contagion. Officials also told Bloomberg that they are considering naming up to 50 banks deemed "systemically important" to the world economy and therefore more deserving of extra capital. Finally, the Paris communiqué said that the upcoming (and delayed) emergency EU meeting on October 23 at Brussels must "decisively address the current challenges through a comprehensive plan" - which, it seems, will be presented with much fanfare and the loud popping of finest French champagne to the G20 summit meeting at Cannes on November 3-4 hosted by Nicholas Sarkozy. Well beyond six days by anybody's calculation.

However, Wolfgang Schauble, Germany's finance minister, immediately poured cold water over the idea that the Brussels meeting would produce a "miracle cure", saying that a "final package" would not be in place until the Cannes summit. Keep moving the deadlines forward for one more drink at the last chance saloon. Unsurprisingly, Schauble's comments dismayed the markets, with the result that on October 18 the Dow Jones industrial average plummeted 247 points by the close of trading, oil prices dropped downwards again (after a temporary stabilisation) and the euro fell for a second day against the dollar. This flight of cash from risky-looking European banks has been an accelerating trend over the past two months, as investors seek more traditional safe havens - ie, funnelling their money into US treasuries, notes and short-dated paper alike.

There is a certain irony, of course, to this recent flow of cash to US government bonds, as the unfolding economic crisis has in part been driven by a fear about the quality of these very same assets - especially after Standard & Poor's August downgraded the US government's credit rating by one notch. With impeccable logic though, most investors reason that, as the US is the world's only superpower - forget China and nonsense like that - then, for all its current deep economic difficulties, there is next to no chance of it suddenly going down the tube. Unlike the euro zone. The mighty dollar, backed up by the even mightier US military, is still your best bet.

Schauble had even more bad news for the finance houses. He bluntly stated that German and French banks must accept *at least* a 50% 'haircut' (write-down) on Greek debt. Such a message is a direct rebuttal to the intense lobbying by Deutsche Bank for only a limited write-down on loans to Athens - something around the original 21%, as agreed in July by EU leaders, when they approved the second bailout deal for the country. Furthermore, as alluded to at the Paris meeting, Schauble insisted that the

banks needed to be "better capitalised" and "better regulated". That is the "best way to ensure that we don't have an escalation in the crisis due to a collapse in the banking system" - an apocalyptic scenario. Therefore, Schauble argued, the euro zone needs a "bomb-proof" firewall to protect the vulnerable countries; not easy, as he readily admitted, when banks had lost trust in each other and were refusing to conduct 'normal' lending.

Quite plausibly, the demand for further write-downs could force several governments, including Angela Merkel's administration, to nationalise or part-nationalise various financial institutions. Doubtlessly some comrades will hail this as a 'socialist' advance. Belgium, for one, has come under particular pressure in recent weeks following concerns that it will need to spend billions of euros rescuing its banks despite already pumping €5 billion into Dexia bank to prevent its total collapse. According to rough, back-of-the-envelope calculations, up to 30 banks in the euro zone may need an extra injection of capital after the writing-off of Greek debt. The US investment firm, BlackRock, concluded after an investigation into the Greek banking system - or what passes for it - that some of the country's major financial institutions will need to be "temporarily" nationalised when and if an 'orderly' default is finally agreed upon.

Revealing the tensions within the German government, Merkel told senior members of her own Christian Democratic Union that the Brussels summit would find ways to ensure the EFSF is used "effectively" to withstand the threat of a "credit event", or sovereign debt default, in one of the weaker countries. But Merkel is still adamantly opposed to the idea of leveraging up the EFSF via the European Central Bank, though this is precisely what the French government has been agitating for. Having said that, Berlin and Paris seem to be reaching agreement that Europe's banks should be recapitalised to meet the 9% capital ratio that the European Banking Authority is demanding. We are also hearing that the overall recapitalisation required will be closer to €100 billion rather than the €200 billion recently mentioned by Lagarde - the bazooka seems to be getting smaller. French and German banks, we are told, can meet the new capital ratio target on their own without recourse to state funds, let alone the EFSF. Other countries' banks, however, may need financial support.

It is now being reported that Merkel expects the Brussels meeting to agree on a policy of taking legal action against countries that "flout" EU budget deficit rules - possibly in a move to ameliorate the disgruntled banks, which have hypocritically moaned about the 'feckless' behaviour of countries like Greece, Portugal, Ireland, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps putting the cat among the pigeons, Jacques Delors, former EU president (along with three other prominent European economists), has argued that in order to restore confidence it is necessary to have a "financial surge" of Eurobonds issued by the EFSF in the short term, and after that "union bonds" issued by the European Investment Bank.<sup>3</sup> Thus equipped with tools "offering real protection against speculative attacks", Delors maintains, the EU

will have issued a "dual signal", whose "clarity and breadth appear to be the only factors capable of restoring confidence and dynamism in these difficult times". Needless to say, for the current German government the very idea of Eurobonds - let alone "union bonds" - is anathema.

### Bankruptcy

As for Greece, it has been convulsed by a 48-hour general strike on October 19-20, with virtually every sector of the economy affected. Public and private sector workers are marching together and encouragingly, for the first time, small business owners and shopkeepers are taking part - all out, Greek-style. The strike is timed to coincide with a parliamentary vote on two bills that outline a regime of yet *more* tax hikes, pay cuts and job losses - as demanded by the EU and the IMF. Get more blood out of the stone.

George Papandreou's ruling Pasok party has a four-seat majority, but some of his backbenchers have threatened to vote against the measures - so it not beyond the bounds of possibility that his government could fall, sending the euro zone into further crisis. Meanwhile, Greece has yet to receive its next tranche of €8 billion in bailout money and is due to run out of cash by November 10 - meaning that the government will be unable to pay public sector wages and pensions, run trains, collect rubbish, bury the dead, print school text books, etc.

But try telling that to the EU, IMF and ECB troika. By all accounts, its 'debt inspectors' are becoming increasingly exasperated by Athens' failure to implement the economic and structural 'reforms' deemed necessary - not enough pain; therefore no cash. Merkel is even considering, it seems, setting up a permanent team of international lenders in Greece to monitor its debts on virtually an hour-by-hour basis - talk about humiliation. But the long and the short of it is that Greece is only days away from bankruptcy and default. The besieged Papandreou hit out at the troika, and the euro zone leaders as a whole, for their failure to come up with a "viable solution" to the debt crisis - bitterly complaining that Greece is "not Atlas who can bear all of Europe's problems on its shoulders" - "not even Germany" could do that.

Without the clear emergence of a "comprehensive plan" on October 23, the markets could plunge in despair - in which case, November 3-4 could be too late. Moody's warned on October 17 that in the next three months it might deliver a "negative" verdict on France's credit rating, meaning that the country could lose its triple-A status. In the opinion of Moody's, the "deterioration in debt metrics" and the "potential for further contingent liabilities to emerge" - like a significant increase in its contribution to the EFSF or

having to bail out one or more of its own ailing banks - are all factors that threaten the "stable outlook" of the government's debt rating: the country just has less financial leg-room than it did during the financial crisis of 2008-09. And what is true for France could well apply to other countries - such as the UK, most obviously.

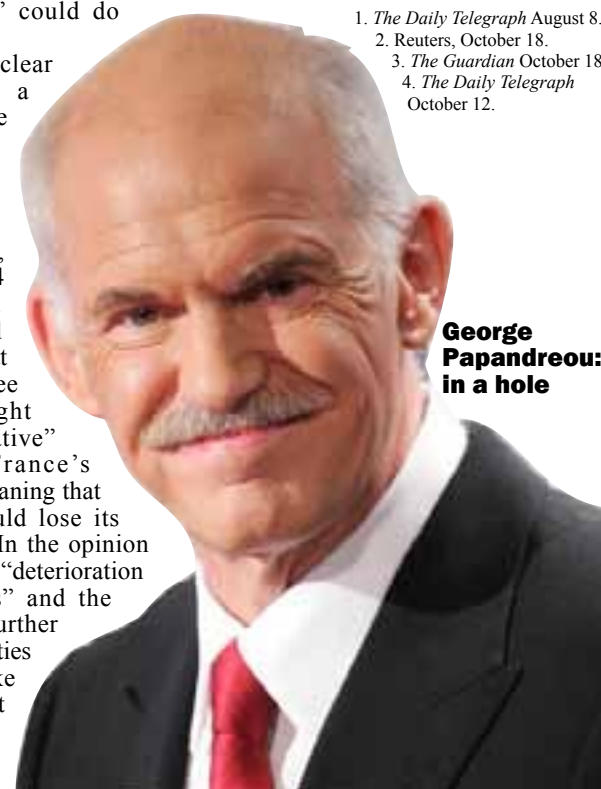
Forebodingly, a few days before, BNP Paribas - France's biggest bank - was downgraded by S&P because of its "weakening financial profile". Concretely, the difference between France's borrowing costs and those of Germany is set to reach the highest level since 1995 - an ominous indicator as to the extreme ill-health of the euro zone project. Of course, S&P further downgraded Spain's credit rating by one more notch on October 13, citing "increasingly unpredictable financing conditions" that could squeeze a private sector already pressured by struggling economic growth. Similarly, on October 18 S&P downgraded 24 Italian banks and financial institutions, explaining that "renewed market tensions" in the euro zone's periphery - and the overall "dimming" of growth prospects for the EU as a whole - have led to a further worsening in the "operating environment" for Italian banks.

Next in the credit firing line could be the UK. A recent report by Legal and General Investment Management declared that Britain's credit rating is "likely to be reviewed in the coming years", as it becomes obvious that the government will miss its growth forecasts by a wide margin and hence runs the danger of falling back into recession.<sup>4</sup> Rubbing salt into chancellor George Osborne's wound, LGIM expects the country's debt-to-GDP ratio to remain on an "explosive path" and believes that it is impossible for the government to meet its growth targets for the simple reason that this would require the "biggest private sector boom ever" - in order to compensate for the largest fiscal squeeze since World War II, the private sector will have to grow "not just at its fastest rate in one year, but for four in a row". Now how likely is that? ●

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### Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* August 8.
2. Reuters, October 18.
3. *The Guardian* October 18.
4. *The Daily Telegraph* October 12.



**George Papandreou: in a hole**



# Lessons from history

Robert Griffiths and Ben Stevenson **The Communist Party 1920-2010: 90 years of struggle for the working class and humanity** CPB History Group, 2010, pp44, £3

The introduction to this pamphlet from the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is, at first glance, a strange concoction. Strange, that is, until the reader has perceived the ideological constellation upon which this 'history' is constructed.

Robert Griffiths (CPB general secretary) and Ben Stevenson (executive committee member) refer to the 'cottage industry' that has grown up around the history of the 'official' CPGB. They write: "The crucial flaw in these bourgeois, liquidationist and anti-communist accounts - apart from them not being written from a Marxist dialectical and historical materialist perspective - has been their fundamental misunderstanding of the role and record of communists, collectively and individually" (p2). They add: "It is not surprising, then, that the narrative they strive to present is one of a party which is the cat's paw of the Kremlin, incapable of asserting independent political thought or action."

This is downright misleading. The dominant trend in this 'cottage industry' has been of the opposite stamp: downplaying the international affiliations of the CPGB in favour of emphasising its native, British traditions. For example, Kevin Morgan writes of Harry Pollitt: "It might disturb our cruder notions of both Englishness and communism, but how very English a phenomenon was Stalinism in the shape that Pollitt gave it."<sup>1</sup> Nina Fishman, who had been a member of Democratic Left (the organisation set up by the Eurocommunist faction of the CPGB that attempted to liquidate the party), argued: "Further research is likely to show that, at the municipal and community level, party activists continued to make positive contributions: a radical, progressive, democratic aspect of CPGB life which has been insufficiently emphasised by historians."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Griffiths and Stevenson constantly enshrine the same methodology, emphasising the native, rooted nature of the CPGB's activity (and there are huge, undigested blocks of text that simply record this activism), as against its problematic international affiliations: for example, in relation to the cold war, they argue: "Many thousands of party members were active trade unionists, as required by party rules, often occupying key positions as shop stewards, convenors, branch and district officers and full-time officials at district and national level. Industrial organiser Peter Kerrigan impressed on them the need to win the respect of workmates by being efficient in their job and conscientious in fulfilling their trade union responsibilities. Such an approach, combined with the re-emergence of economic downturns and oppressive management, helped communists to combat cold war prejudices within the trade union movement" (p24).

This method spreads through Eurocommunist-inclined historians such as Fishman, the 'official' communism of the likes of the CPB, across to Socialist Workers Party historians such as James Eaden and David Renton. They argue: "No matter how opportunist or sectarian its leadership, the CP remained a mass workers' party. Among its ordinary members there was a real desire to change the world. Communists often



Harry Pollitt: disappointed

acted against or despite their formal politics, and the majority played a positive role, building trade unions, and also often promoting the interests of the rank and file."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in all these accounts, in spite of their formal politics and suspect international affiliations, CPGB members could and did play a positive role in the domestic class struggle. That the CPGB, despite geographical and sectional limitations, was, through most of its history, an important section of the advanced part of the working class (in contrast to Trotskyist organisations to its left and latter-day pretenders such as the CPB) is not up for dispute. What is up for question is the progressive nature of this often relatively depoliticised 'activity', which itself played a not insignificant role in the attempted liquidation of the CPGB that proceeded through the 1980s. Despite the bluster of Griffiths and Stevenson in regards to the 'cottage industry' and the never-ending guff about the 'ultra-left', there is nothing particularly unique in the CPB's perspective on CPGB history, in that it shares a similar methodological underpinning in the politics of defeat and disorientation.

## Uncomfortable

To attempt a serious debate around the CPGB's history, some uncomfortable truths have to be faced by Griffiths and Stevenson (despite the no doubt spluttering indignation that such 'revelations' will provoke among a core of elderly members and sympathisers).

Thus we are told in relation to the post-war eastern European show trials against 'Titoism': "Once again, despite private reservations, most communists in Britain and around the world believed that erstwhile comrades in Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were in fact saboteurs, imperialist spies and 'Trotskyist agents' in league with Tito. The party in Britain paid a price for such blind loyalty, losing some allies on the left, while performing somersaults as Tito fell out of favour and then back in. It later became undeniable - especially once state, party and Comintern archives were opened - that these and previous show trials stemmed from the arbitrary abuse of power, involving severe breaches of socialist legality and gross violations of human rights" (p22).

However, in specific relation to the Soviet purges of the 1930s, we are offered a more uncomfortable mix of truth and awkward Stalinist apologetics: "The show trials of former Soviet and Comintern

leaders such as Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin did little to check the growing popularity of the Communist Party and Marxist ideas in Britain ... At the same time, the hostility of the imperialist powers towards the Soviet Union was well known in working class and progressive circles. Within the labour movement, the followers of Trotsky - who had been expelled from Russia - were regarded by many who came across them as anti-communist, anti-Soviet oppositionists, disrupters and defeatists. When respected lawyers, politicians and diplomats from the US, Britain and elsewhere attended the Moscow show trials and confirmed that the defendants had indeed confessed to being members of a 'Trotsky-fascist' campaign of espionage and subversion, Britain's communists were not alone in believing that such plots had indeed existed" (pp15-16).

As we have seen, the CPB now thinks that such trials "stemmed from the arbitrary abuse of power". So if that was the case, was it wrong for the CPGB to support the show trials of the 1930s? Griffiths and Stevenson, more concerned with an extended justification for those actions, do not tell us. Similarly, if "respected lawyers, politicians and diplomats" were prepared to do the Soviet bureaucracy's intellectual dirty work, others in the labour movement (not least Trotsky and his followers) were prepared to stand up and state that the show trials were a cacophony of lies and hysteria. The CPGB did have a choice to make, even if the intellectual space in which to make that choice (and thus potentially move against the Soviet bureaucracy) was incredibly narrow, and thus highly unlikely in the circumstances of the 'official' communist movement at that point.

In a similar vein, the above quote says that the followers of Trotsky were regarded as "anti-communist, anti-Soviet oppositionists, disrupters and defeatists". Was this a correct belief? This is not an unimportant question, given that many Trotskyists lost their lives due to the malice of such judgements. In fact, judging by the contemporary rhetorical bullshit of the CPB around disruptive incursions of the 'ultra-left', we can all guess the answer.

A more straightforward set of myths and evasions is evident in the section that deals with World War II. Griffiths and Stevenson state: "Britain's communists threw themselves into the fight for maximum production [following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941].

While the party continued to argue for higher pay, its policy was to settle industrial disputes as quickly as possible and establish joint production committees with shopfloor participation. Sometimes, notably in the coal industry, party members found themselves representing strikers in heated disputes with their comrades in official full-time positions in the union" (p18).

This is an incredibly optimistic spin on a period in which this "fight for maximum production" in the cause of the 'people's war' meant that some CPGB members actively scabbed on industrial disputes. Other CPGB members certainly represented strikers and found ways of subverting the 'produce or perish' imperative of King Street, but in doing so they were acting *against the party line*.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there was a significant rank-and-file rebellion inside the CPGB in the run-up to and during its November 1945 congress, much of which can be read as a protest against the actions of the party leadership during the phase in which it had loyally backed the imperialist war effort. This opposition does not merit a mention in the pamphlet - presumably because it jars somewhat with the attempt to establish historical precedents for the CPB's own opportunist practices.

In terms of the adoption of *The British road to socialism* in 1951, Griffiths and Stevenson write: "In January 1951, the Communist Party's executive committee published a new programme ... for discussion. Its main propositions had been extensively discussed and agreed with Stalin and the Soviet leadership, although the most significant features had already emerged in previous British congress resolutions and party publications" (p23). "Emerged" is a formally correct characterisation of this process, although what this paragraph is carefully hedging around is the fact that the CPGB did not have a special congress of its membership to debate the adoption of a parliamentary road to socialism.

Thus we can largely concur with Morgan's judgement: "For several months a handful of party leaders met in secret conclave, guided only by the advice they received from Moscow and never dreaming to consult their own British party membership."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one does wonder why a special congress was not called, as the post-war rebellion against 'Browderism' and related issues had, it seems, ebbed away by 1951. Judging from party journals such as *World News and Views* from the period, either this opposition had been defeated and gone underground; or, at the very least, the leadership felt confident and secure enough to exclude such arguments from the public life of the CPGB (in direct contrast to 1945).

Griffiths and Stevenson go on to state: "Within three months, more than 150,000 copies of *The British road to socialism* had been distributed. It stimulated a huge debate throughout the labour movement ..." (p23). This "huge debate" must be doubted, as the *BRS* failed even to inspire much discussion inside the CPGB, judging from the contributions made in the run-up to the April 1952 congress (intended to rubber-stamp an already adopted *BRS*), where the fundamental strategic shift of the CPGB towards ginger-group reformism was barely mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

Pollitt himself was privately

disappointed at the seemingly perfunctory debate at the congress. He remarked to his executive committee comrades in a meeting on May 10 1952 that, although he thought the congress had been "one of the best", there had not been enough political discussion and the absence of criticism and self-criticism and the discussion around the *BRS* "had been disappointing in the extreme".<sup>7</sup> One only shudders to think what the worst congresses must have been like. None of this should be particularly surprising, given that the manner of this programme's 'emergence' and 'adoption' would have militated against any genuine and burgeoning welcome in the ranks of the party and the labour movement.

## Differences

There is some evidence that sections of this pamphlet are being used to settle differences of opinion inside the CPB - or at least to police the rhetoric of the left-leaning sections of the organisation. For example, in relation to the CPGB's popular frontism of the 1930s, Griffiths and Stevenson argue: "It is a self-serving myth peddled by ultra-left anti-communists that the CP in Britain, or in France for that matter, abandoned principled positions in order to chase after middle class allies for the people's front" (p14).

Unfortunately, these "ultra-left anti-communists" would probably include CPB members such as Andrew Murray, who has strongly hinted that principled politics were at least an issue in the era of popular frontism. Back in 1995 he argued: "More generally, certain shifts in the party's attitudes in the late 1930s did lay the basis for the subsequent growth of reformist and chauvinist ideas within the party. The appropriation of the cultural symbols of the ruling class and of the giants of bourgeois history, the prolonged strategy of alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie shifted the party onto new terrain, often more immediately fruitful but often also away from the fight for socialism as the party's real *raison d'être*."<sup>8</sup> Murray's work has actually been included in the somewhat anorexic 'Further reading' section (p44), presumably so that CPB members can ruminate on their very own 'ultra-left' to their heart's content.

As an attempt to try and muscle in on a broader debate about the historical meaning of the CPGB, this is a pretty desperate affair, mired as it is by an effort to establish the legitimacy of the CPB by reference to the bad old ideas and practices of the past, and caught as it is in a movement between the geriatric hacks of yesteryear and a reasonably muscular (if flawed) academic debate ●

Lawrence Parker

## Notes

1. K Morgan *Harry Pollitt* Manchester 1994, p128
2. N Fishman, 'Essentials and realists: reflections on the historiography of the CPGB': [www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN11ERF.html](http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN11ERF.html)
3. J Eaden, D Renton *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920* Basingstoke 2002, p112.
4. See L Parker, 'Their finest hour?' *Weekly Worker* December 9 2010.
5. K Morgan *op cit* p170.
6. Fred Westcott's claim that there "was a great deal of discussion within the party prior to the adoption of the *BRS*" is not backed up by any other source. Westcott was district organiser of the East Midlands CPGB at the time - see F Westcott *Shaking the chains* Chesterfield 2002, p271.
7. CP/CENT/EC/02/08, notes on discussion by George Matthews and James Klugmann.
8. A Murray *The Communist Party of Great Britain: a historical analysis to 1941* Liverpool 1995, p79.



## REVIEW

# Leaving your front door unlocked

Lionel Shriver We need to talk about Kevin Serpent's Tail, 2005, pp496, £7.99

**L**ionel Shriver, the author of the literary (and now cinematographic) blockbuster *We need to talk about Kevin*, is an American. And, like many Americans in the post 9/11 era, she is fearful.

In the afterword to the book which was first published in America in 2003, she admits that her biggest fear is children, or rather, parenthood. Reflecting on pregnancy, she remarks: "Since just about any stranger could come knocking nine months later, coitus without contraception is, as Eva [her central character] observes, 'like leaving your front door unlocked'." The novel is a testament to this, and what many people would describe as a seemingly irrational, immature or specifically *female* response to what should be the most natural thing in the world.

But, as with all texts, there is a subtext. This review will try to argue that what seem to be irrational fears such as Shriver's are largely the offspring of a system that is corrupted, broken and fundamentally in decline.

Constructed through letters written by Eva, a liberal American with an Armenian heritage, to her estranged husband, a bastion of Republican certainties, it reveals the intensely personal journey of a middle class couple conceiving, giving birth to and raising a child, Kevin Khatchadourian, who becomes the sole perpetrator of a high-school massacre in 1999. The plot itself is a mother's worst nightmare, but Shriver's use of it does not intend to insinuate that her personal fear is justified; it is used to explore the 'what if' syndrome that most parents must secretly foster.

*Kevin* has ballooned as a word-of-mouth phenomenon across the world - translated widely in Europe, as well as in the Middle East and China. However, for the purpose of this review I will solely concentrate on its position within America, where the story is set, and where, in my opinion, it currently holds the greatest weight and social significance.

The public's response to *Kevin*, Shriver remarks, was twofold. Firstly there was the liberal response, which chalked Kevin up to be a bad seed, evil from birth, suggesting nothing that his mother could have done would have changed his maniacal trajectory. Secondly came the more conservative, Republican reaction, which finger-wagged that parents only get the children they deserved. Shriver remarks that she is happy with these two responses, as they cover the full 'nature versus nurture' argument she intended to provoke.

However, both arguments are limited. The family unit is a symptom of wider society; the nuclear family itself has been crafted over centuries by an increasingly paranoid ruling class and is in itself 'unnatural'. By this I mean it does not allow humans to develop and grow in a positive, upwards spiral; rather it imprisons them in a cage crudely hewn by those desperate to control them. Eva's sickly guilt, mixed with a stubborn craving for maternal redemption, and Kevin's own destructive actions are both desperate responses to this societal abomination. Lynne Ramsay, the director of the film adaptation, sees this perhaps more clearly than the book's author: "One of the subtexts is the façade of the functioning American family."<sup>1</sup>

The story behind the publication of the book is rather telling in terms of America's obsession with high-school killings. Shriver submitted the manuscript to her New York agent



Lionel Shriver: American decline

"right after 9/11, in that hilarious little window when everyone thought Americans would never read or watch anything violent again". Consequently, it remained 'unpublishable' until 2003, after which the *New York Observer* printed an article "describing all these women on the Upper East Side biking a little-known novel to each other and convening coffee klatches to discuss it". And from there it grew, and grew.

It is interesting to see how it was first picked up by what one would presume were middle class mothers - not that this novel is in any way what one could call in a derogatory manner 'Hampstead ladies lit-fic'; rather it panders to a specifically middle class, American paranoia which, when targeted towards women, seems to have been irresistible to these 'yummy mummies'. It is also likely that in liberal New York its message would have seemed more palatable than down in the southern, overwhelmingly Republican and Christian states, for reasons discussed above. Eva must appear to be the ultimate demon to them - and reading and talking about *Kevin* might even be considered 'sinful' to some.

The specific paranoia of the American government, presiding over the most recent capitalist superpower to begin to find its political and economic (if not cultural) hegemony slipping, has resonance within its wider society, and more specifically amongst its middle classes, who have more to protect than the lower echelons, and more to lose. This is another reason for the enduring popularity of *Kevin*, as Shriver toys with the empty shell middle class life has become.

Kevin, through his words and actions, sheds the harshest light on his family's paranoid and vacuous nature. Of his father, Franklin, Kevin remarks, "Mister Plastic? ... It was all cheery chirpy, hot dogs and Cheez Whiz. A total fraud, you know?" As is notable amongst Republican families, "the patriarch often [teaches] his children unconditional obedience to the existing civic authorities";<sup>2</sup> and Kevin rebukes this ritualistic attitude that many (commonly middle class) parents employ, which, rather than allowing the child to learn, grow and feel loved, is usually seen by the child for what it is: an expression of the

state's stifling ideology imposed upon the family unit. "Their 'patriotism' has little to do with the founding fathers, the constitution or any of the other symbols they happen to evoke. It is rather a public affirmation of the kind of people they happen to be."<sup>3</sup> And, as Eva remarks, "I did warn [Franklin] that children are unusually alert to artifice".

If we move from the context of Kevin's massacre, which contains problems which affect the majority of American families, and on to the 'what if?' scenario that affects the unfortunate minority of families, the high school slayings, it will become clear how the two are intrinsically linked. If we take a society that is in decline, we can only but find its symptoms.

The American school system itself has become a symptom of the infamous proliferation of high-school shootings, which began in the mid-90s. Virginia Tech, site of a famous real-life massacre, has been described as a "gigantic warehousing-cum-policing operation"<sup>4</sup> in response to the societal paranoia surrounding the killings, and in fact nearly every US college has its own dedicated police force. Kevin's fictional school, Gladstone High, is no exception: "Gladstone High had taken on a battened-down, military atmosphere, except the McCarthyite presumption ran that the enemy was within," Eva shrewdly comments. Kevin ironically states that if "they keep this up they're just gonna give kids ideas."

Chillingly, now it seems that, with the decline of America, and despite the desperate attempts of the government to create an external evil in the guise of the Taliban as a replacement for the communist threat of the 70s and 80s, American (specifically middle class) society is now mostly afraid of itself. This could be one explanation for the popularity of teenage TV shows such as *Buffy the vampire slayer* and *Roswell High*, which espoused the notion of the evil monster/alien, who gradually becomes interchangeable with the good/human characters.

In a deadly combination, this perceived threat exists alongside an increasingly dehumanising method of education, designed to produce well-rounded business men/women, as well as young adults who are ill-equipped

to look at their society as a whole, and therefore unable to challenge its hegemonic capitalist structures. Bertell Ollman, an American Marxist lecturer, finds the root of modern childhood alienation to be the recent proliferation of exam culture in high schools: "Exams mediate all social relations in the educational system in a manner very similar to the way money - that other great mystifier and falsifier - mediates all relations between people in the larger society, with the same dehumanising results."<sup>5</sup>

Kevin, it seems, is aware of, and antagonistic towards, this method. As Eva discovers, "Kevin's papers always follow the assignment excessively to the letter. Whenever they are marked down, it is usually for being too short. There is nothing wrong with them. They are factually correct. Their spelling is accurate. On those rare occasions his teachers jot vague notes about how he might 'take a more personal approach to the material', they are unable to pinpoint in his essays this is precisely lacking." In obviously reducing and dehumanising his schoolwork, Kevin is mocking the educational establishment.

It will not be obvious to many people how these problems in an American child's life could actually create mass murderers. Indeed, many people would actively oppose the idea that the state could influence a person to such a violent end. The key to grasping the link lies in the concept of alienation. As Hegel comments, "By alienating the whole of my time ... and everything I produced, I would be making into another's property the substance of my being, my universal activity and actuality, my personality."<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that alienation is more than the bourgeoisie claim it to be - put more plainly, if a human is exposed to a society that treats them as a resource to be exploited or controlled, then they will react negatively and unpredictably - sometimes, as in Kevin's case, through an attempt to destroy the world that surrounds them. Interestingly, however, the liberal-minded Eva does not see it this way: "I certainly had no interest in an explanation that reduced the ineffable enormity of what he had done to a pat sociological aphorism about

'alienation' out of *Time* magazine."

Finally, we come to the controversy surrounding American gun culture. Michael Moore would have you believe that the Columbine massacre was all Charlton Heston's fault, that the pro-gun culture espoused by the National Rifle Association is chiefly to blame. Of course, it does not help, especially when the association visited Columbine directly after the shooting in an uppity ideological attack on the anti-gun movement.

However, the easy availability of guns only aids, and does not cause, violent crime in America. Over four in 10 households in America now have a gun, which amounts to 59.1 million people. But in Shriver's novel, Kevin uses a crossbow. Eva believes that "his choice of weapon was meant to ensure to the best of his ability [the massacre] would mean nothing at all". But she is incorrect in saying so - it in fact perfectly shows that the removal of guns from American houses will not abolish murder.

*We need to talk about Kevin* is a brilliant novel, and the film is equally tense and full of loaded questions. Shriver herself gives no answers to them, and neither does Ramsay. It is only through placing the texts within the disintegration of their culture - a society where the Tea Party appear to be the logical conclusion to an ever darkening American Dream, where the supposed source of strength and enlightenment, the family and the school, become hollow shells that create "monstrous" fears and actions - that its questions begin to be answered ●

Claire Fisher

This review originally appeared on the *Red Mist* website. See <http://redmistreviews.com/?p=686>.

## Notes

1. *The Observer* October 2.
2. J Creegan, 'Tea Party tempest' *Weekly Worker* March 18 2010.
3. *Ibid*.
4. E Ford, 'Right to bear arms, not commit murder' *Weekly Worker* April 19 2007.
5. B Ollman, 'Why so many exams? A Marxist response': [www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/why\\_exams.php](http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/why_exams.php).
6. GWF Hegel, 'Philosophy of right' (1920): [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/prindex.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/prindex.htm).

## Fighting fund

# More than one

**L**ast week our internet readership increased substantially, compared to the recent average - 15,293 people visited [cpgb.org.uk](http://cpgb.org.uk), which is well over 2,000 more than the previous week.

Good news, of course. But - wait for it - 15,292 of them didn't think of getting out their credit or debit card. Yes, I know you've heard me go on about that before, but I have to say that one out of more than 15,000 is not a high percentage. But I am grateful to that one, though - comrade JD, who donated £10.

We also received three cheques in the post over the last seven days - pride of place going to comrade TU for his fantastic £50. The other two cheques were from PL (£25) and FS (£20). And where would we be without those standing orders? Among them last week was the

recently increased regular gift from MM: he now transfers £75 into the *Weekly Worker* account every month. There were also SOs from DW, SP, MKS, SP and JD.

All that adds up to exactly a £250 increase in October's fighting fund, taking the total up to £705. But we need £1,250, so there are just 10 days left to win £545. I know we can do it, but only if all those comrades meaning to donate do so straightaway. The easiest way, of course, is by making use of our online PayPal facility - let's hope rather more than one comrade will do that this time around!

Robbie Rix

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



## OUR HISTORY

# Their fight is our fight

**T**he 1920-21 jump in unemployment was dramatic. In the 12 months from September 1920 numbers out of work in Britain rose from 250,000 to two million. The newly-formed Communist Party of Great Britain responded with revolutionary dynamism.

In October 1920 the London District Council of the Unemployed was formed to coordinate the activities of 30 local committees.<sup>1</sup> Its organiser was Wal Hannington, a leading CPGB member. The chair and secretary were also Communist Party members.

This new organisation was clear that the united action of all workers - employed and unemployed - was the key to fighting the wage cuts and job losses imposed by the ruling class. They mobilised thousands to lobby the Labour Party and TUC, urging them to back protests and industrial action against unemployment.

In response to this pressure, a special labour movement delegate conference on unemployment was held on January 27 1921. The reformist leaders on the platform refused speaking rights to the LDCU and avoided commitment to action by securing an adjournment "to allow the membership to be consulted".

At the reconvened conference a month later these leaders limited discussion to their own, official motions, thereby ensuring that the fight was conceived of entirely within the parameters of parliament and legality.

This 1921 article by comrade Hannington in the party's weekly begins with his assessment of the event.

### Advice to the unemployed

The much talked of labour conference on unemployment came and went and the hopes of the great army of workers were once again frustrated by the yellow trade unionists, led by Thomas and Clynes.<sup>2</sup>

When I picked up my paper in the morning, and read the resolutions to be submitted, I realised the outcome of the conference, but I still had a little hope left, thinking that the delegates would at least put up a fight in favour of direct action. Not a bit of it; Thomas and Clynes told them what to do, and they obeyed like good disciples.

The Labour members of the House of Commons are instructed to point out to the government the inadequacy of merely extending the Unemployment Insurance Act (how statesmanlike), as if the government does not already know how inadequate it is.<sup>3</sup> Mr Clynes protested against the statement in the king's speech that the problem of unemployment cannot be solved by legislation. Evidently the king is more versed in Marxian economics than Clynes.

And then, once again the elected representatives of the London District Council of the Unemployed Organisations were refused a hearing, but at least I succeeded in turning the conference into a bear garden for 20 minutes.

The conference finished at 12.30pm, leaving the problem precisely as before. In the afternoon 10,000 of the unemployed demonstrated throughout the west end of London, realising with heavy hearts that the trade union leaders, with their somewhat comfortable environment, are betraying the poor wretches who are on the streets, selling their homes up weekly in order to sustain their half-starved wives and children.

I definitely accuse the Labour leaders of cowardice. What have they done since the conference on January 27 to test the feelings of their members on ways and means of turning their resolutions into acts? They have refused to carry out their own resolutions.

At the time of writing we have in London a very effective unemployed organisation. Each borough sends two delegates to sit on



Wal Hannington: fighter

the London District Council. Our demands are:

- Work, or full maintenance at trade union rates of wages.
- With a view to absorbing some of the unemployed in useful industry, the immediate establishment of trade between Great Britain and Russia, and the full and complete recognition of the Soviet government.

We know that unemployment is a necessary part of capitalism. A continual supply of cheap labour-power is indispensable to capitalist production. But we say that, when capitalism is responsible for nearly two million men and women being cast upon the scrapheap, at the mercy of the landlord and the profiteer, then capitalism must shoulder the responsibility of its own shortcomings, and maintain our families whilst we are on the streets through no fault of our own.

Today the government is expending thousands of pounds daily in suppressing the independence of Ireland by force. Where does the excessiveness of our claim come in? We do not ask a Black and Tans one pound a day, but only just maintenance at trade union rates of wages.<sup>4</sup> The Labour Party's trifling demand is for 40 shillings a week for a married man. Basing it at pre-war rate, it amounts to about 17 shillings. This is an insult to the unemployed. If the British government paid to every man and woman unemployed today one 16th of its weekly expenditure on the war, it would work out at very nearly £4 per week. If it is worth spending £56 million a week on destroying human life, it is worth one 16th of that for the preservation of life.

Now let us have a look at the second claim - trade with Russia. Why is the government so reluctant over this? The one main reason is that Russia is now in the hands of the workers; they own and control the means of production and distribution. In other words, they are striving to build up communism, wherein the masses shall enjoy the highest standard of living possible. And the capitalist governments know that by trading with Russia they will consequently be aiding a system of society that will one day stand out as a shining example to be copied by the rest of the workers throughout the world.

Now we arrive at the question of making our voice heard and putting our demands into effect. The mere passing of resolutions with nothing to back them up will accomplish nothing. But by the use of the industrial weapon - the strike - the unemployed workers can put the fear of god into the hearts of the capitalist class.

The man inside the workshop has got to realise that our fight is also his fight. He has got to realise that he is not immune from unemployment - any day he may be cast upon the scrapheap. Can he not see that we are being used as a weapon to beat down the standard of living of our class? The mouthpieces of big finance and capital, chairmen of huge trusts and combines, are openly declaring war against the standard rates of wages.

I want to ask the unemployed trade unionist: Are you going to stand idly by, while the parasite class openly declare war against you, your wives and children, while the funds of your organisations are being exhausted weekly by the payment of out-of-work pay to the unemployed members?

Do you realise that the workshop conditions and all the things that you were once so proud to say you fight for as a trade unionist are being filched from you daily? I say to you, with all sincerity and honesty, if you are going down at all, for god's sake go down fighting. If you do not, you will brand yourselves as a body of cowards, deserving of the humiliation you receive.

The unemployed are now organising their forces for a big move. The clarion call is being sent out to all the unemployed organisations, right throughout Great Britain, with a view to calling a national conference to consolidate the movement, and make it an effective fighting organisation which no government or Labour Party can subjugate.

In the meantime, I want the unemployed to interest themselves in the literature of the Communist Party, and learn the great principles of communism and become a potent factor in society, instead of a human machine to be used or discarded according to the whims and fancies of the employing class. Understand that 'knowledge must precede all intelligent action'.

Surely you are not content to drift on in hopelessness and despair without asking yourself the question: Why am I at the bottom of the social abyss, while another class that have never soiled their hands with one day's hard work enjoy all the beauties and luxuries of life? Realise, comrade, that no leader can lead you out of bondage: it has to be the work of the masses themselves ●

### The Communist March 12 1921

The call for a national conference to consolidate the movement was answered just one month later, when representatives from 70 local committees set up the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (the forerunner of the National Unemployed Workers Movement) and appointed Hannington as its national organiser.

### Notes

1. See *Weekly Worker* August 4.
2. JR Clynes (1869-1949) rose through the ranks of the Gasworkers Union to become a rightwing member of the first Labour government in 1924. Jimmy Thomas (1874-1949) was National Union of Railwaymen general secretary, and also served in the 1924 administration.
3. The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 extended unemployment benefits to the majority of manual and lower-paid non-manual workers from the age of 16. The act was amended in 1921 to stipulate that males under 18 and unemployed women workers would receive less than males over 18.
4. The Black and Tans (named after the colour scheme of their uniforms) were ex-army 'hards' and criminals who were granted sentence reductions if they volunteered for service in Ireland. These counterrevolutionary attack dogs of British imperialism were responsible for countless acts of barbarity against the Irish people, including the notorious burning of the centre of Cork in 1920.

## 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.

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# weekly worker

## US and Iran find common diversion

# Strange political symbiosis

**T**he familiar pattern of fraught United States-Iran relations has been repeated once again by the furore around the alleged plot of Iran's Revolutionary Guards to bomb the Saudi embassy in Washington and kill the ambassador. The renewed threats of military attack by the US in retaliation for this should also come as no surprise.

Those who possibly had a hand in initiating this (probably a rogue faction of the Revolutionary Guards) and those who have seized on it (the Obama administration) clearly have a keen shared interest in keeping the threat of war and conflict very much alive.

A week after the US attorney accused Iran of this dastardly plot, the threat of US retaliation continues to dominate the Iranian press and media, as the various factions of the Islamic regime contend with their different interpretations of the accusations and the motivations of the accusers. Last week, almost every trend in the religious state from the 'reformists' to the conservatives denied the allegations. The one significant exception was the president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and his allies in a section of the Revolutionary Guards.

This prompted speculation in Tehran that Ahmadinejad, or at least staff close to him, might have had a hand in the apparently botched Washington debacle. In Tehran both supporters and opponents of the regime are in agreement that a faction of the Revolutionary Guards must have been involved in this plot if it had any legs whatsoever as a theory. By October 17, this speculation had gained such momentum that Ahmadinejad felt forced to make a statement denying any role and condemning such adventures. However, on the day foreign minister Akbar Salehi called for an internal inquiry, Ahmadinejad immediately responded by dismissing the idea out of hand.

In all this mess and with fingers pointing at the president, it is no surprise that the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, announced this week the possibility of actually abolishing the post of president and returning to a system in which the supreme leader rules via a prime minister. Clearly the conservative-supporting factions of the regime are infuriated by the incompetence of those involved in the 'plot' - one paper from this political spectrum commenting that the choice of a stupid second-hand car salesman to front it was typical of some people (clearly implying their assumption that Ahmadinejad and his supporters in Al Quds were involved).

Iran's leaders have claimed that the US needed a diversion from the Occupy Wall Street protests. Yet, as students in Tehran have pointed out, in turn the Iranian leaders themselves had every reason to embark on yet another adventure abroad to divert attention from internal problems. This news breaks in the midst of a major financial scandal in the country. A \$2.6 billion fraud has shaken the government and already the heads of three of the country's major banks have been ousted; the governor



**Iranian Revolutionary Guards: plotting?**

of Bank Melli has fled to Canada. Nineteen people have been arrested for a scam involving the fraudulent creation of bank letters of credit by the Amir Mansour Aria investment group and 20 members of Iran's parliament have signed a petition to impeach economy minister Shamseddin Hosseini over the affair.

With the 'reformists' ousted, political conflict within the ranks of the conservative wing of the religious state (between Ahmadinejad and the supporters of the supreme leader) have reached such a level of intensity that half of the Islamic parliament accuses Ahmadinejad and his chief of staff of masterminding the fraud.

While bank officials and associates of Ahmadinejad are stealing billions, the majority of Iranians are finding life increasingly unbearable, as inflation spiralled to 18.3% in September, while job losses and unemployment mount. In this situation the Islamic leaders might

be regretting having drawn attention to the Wall Street protests: this week the slogans on Tehran campuses have been 'Occupy Bank Melli!' and 'Occupy Ferdowsi Street!' (where most of the major Iranian banks have their headquarters).

Meanwhile, 6,000 workers at the Mahshahr petrochemical company are on strike in protest against unscrupulous contractors; the majority of the population cannot afford and refuses to pay utility bills. Almost every industry, every financial institution is feeling the effects of US/UN sanctions (the national airline is now facing more of the same from the International Air Transport Association). The new academic year has started with major student protests on university campuses - students inspired by the Arab awakening are making their voices heard. The Azari nationality is rebelling against the government for its failure to save Lake Urumiyeh - a major environmental

disaster. Faced with all of this, the Iranian state clearly needed something to distract attention from its domestic travails.

The brutal truth, however, is that the US is in no better a position. The two wars it has waged in Iraq and Afghanistan have left Iran's Islamic republic in a relatively strong political position in the region. In the aftermath of the Arab awakening, and following the fall of Iraq, rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has taken on new dimensions. This expresses itself not simply along Shia/Sunni fault lines, but also in terms of *Realpolitik*.

The trace-marks of this rivalry can be spotted throughout the region, from Afghanistan to Iraq and Lebanon. Each side supports competing reactionary forces and, of course, the US should take all the 'credit' for this geopolitical meltdown. Yet in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the 1920s, and at a time when youth's rebellious voice can be

heard challenging the basic tenets of the capitalist system in every major financial centre in the US, from New York to Chicago, to San Francisco, what better way to defuse this crisis other than to engage in yet another military adventure (or at least threat of one) in the Middle East? (The US has now lodged an official complaint against Iran and the case will go to the United Nations security council in the near future - an ominously familiar pattern begins to emerge).

Clearly the clumsy Iranian plot in Washington was not new or particularly ominous. The culprits have been arrested and there was no 'clear and immediate danger', as the relevant phraseology goes. Yet some in the US administration, including secretary of state Hillary Clinton, are still talking of the need for retaliation against the Iranian state. Why?

Well, it cannot be any coincidence that the current crisis erupted just a week before Congress was to discuss sanctions against Iran's central bank. Reports from Washington indicate that the Obama administration is now 'actively' considering their implementation and has joined Republican congressmen in baying for revenge for the alleged Iranian assassination plot. A move like this would severely cripple Iran's already enfeebled economy and potentially provoke an even more hysterical response from Tehran.

So now, once more, there is talk of attacking Iran - but this time no-one is mentioning Iran's allegedly ominous nuclear capability in justification. The economic situation in both Iran and the US might have more to do with the sabre-rattling and the edging of both sides towards the precipice. As this paper - and Hands Off the People of Iran - has repeatedly made clear, despite the real strains and conflicts between them, the two reactionary ruling elites in Washington and Tehran also share a strange political symbiosis at this stage in history ●

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