

weekly **worker**



**Papandreou's referendum
gamble plunges euro still
deeper into crisis**

■ Turkey's earthquake
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LETTERS



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

Enough said

I'm concluding this recent spate of correspondence mainly because I've said all I need to say. Also because the gutter-level, slanderous insult offered by Arthur Bough in his last contribution tells me it's time to wrap up (Letters, October 20).

I want to clarify that I am in fact a revolutionary communist, of the anarcho-syndicalist variety. I wish to see the working class gain power worldwide, I wish to see the state smashed and I wish to see direct workers' control of industry and society. However, I am not so foolish as to think movement towards these goals march at an equal pace, or that the frontiers of our challenge and control do not shift back and forth. Gains short, and sometimes far short, of our total objective can be made and have been made. I do not see the defence of these gains, or these short, incremental successes as reformist, or counterproductive. In the real world, the struggle to survive to make ends meet, to stay alive at work, to feed the kids, to keep a roof over our heads, to live in some kind of dignity in old age is the daily battle front of the class war.

It is with that knowledge that I challenged Mark Fischer on his snooty dismissal and vulgar designation of the Jarrow march. As he says, we do not have a disagreement on the politics of that march, its shortfalls, its misleadership and its failed strategy (Letters, October 27). But there was more to the march than those things. The contradictory elements, the background from which these arose, the quality of the men on the march, the appalling social conditions in which they and their families were living, the decade of defeats and betrayals from which it sprang, the role of the CPGB, TUC and Labour leaderships and the rotten compromises they offered all played their part. A spark of communist humanity in Mark's assessment and designation, a more rounded analysis and I wouldn't have felt the need to demonstrate the other side of the picture.

When it comes to Dave Walters and his promotion of 'left' nuclear power, I think we have actually reached a kind of reluctant consensus: yes, coal is being and will be burned, that there is a need to minimise the harmful effects of the industry and promote carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) and other clean forms of coal consumption. I recognise that nuclear will be developed despite those of us who object to it, and for that reason would probably call for an integrated energy programme under workers' and consumers' control, whilst I would still argue within that integration for the smallest possible role for nuclear and look to its phasing out.

I do not recognise or accept Dave's nightmare figures on effects of 'heavy metals' in coal and assume by "tailings" he is talking of something different from pit tips I was describing (Letters, October 27). These are totally inert heaps of colliery spoil, on which all sorts of vegetation has grown over decades and no danger has ever arisen. I have never encountered problems with heavy metal, and I suspect this feature must be linked to the rapacious and largely unsupervised US strip and opencast industry.

Dave is wrong (I hope) about CCS in Britain. Although the government has pulled the plug on Longannet, and this follows 40 years of similar indifference to developing clean-coal technologies, a major project is going ahead at Hatfield Colliery (the pit where I served as a union rep for

decades) and is due to be online in 2015. That scheme takes out 100% CO₂ and has many other 'green' benefits, which I described earlier.

The point is, this is the most efficient coal burning system in the world, and stops CO₂ ever being released. This could be the plimsoll line for all coal-powered plants worldwide - it only requires a political and social boot up the arse to make this happen. As Dave says though, with profit the sole driver, steering energy production to a more costly but socially responsible direction will be hard.

This brings me to Arthur Bough. During my long decades in the coal industry I was involved in every major national, area and regional struggle since 1969, and a thousand local strikes and rag-ups. I was in the forefront of every major picket operation, planned a number of them, faced long imprisonment for conspiracy and much else. I fought with armed scabs and cops.

Despite all this Arthur Bough says I am an "apologist for state capitalism". This is a highly provocative and offensive slander - nothing more. I will resist the temptation to get into the gutter with him by responding in kind.

Bough has an eccentric, one-dimensional, mechanistic way of analysing pricing, value and economic policy, which renders him incapable of seeing that 'profit' and 'surplus' are not fixed and static, but tools bent to the particular requirement of the state and capitalism in any particular period. He accepts that British coal was produced more cheaply than any of its competitors, but he argues we had a surplus of coal and this is why the pits were closed. If that were the case, why do they now import 70 million tons of coal from abroad, which is more expensive to produce?

The Thatcher plan was to defeat the National Union of Mineworkers, break up the nationalised coal industry and sell it off to her friends. In order to do this successfully unit costs and marginal cost pricing would replace the way 'profit and loss' were previously assessed, making it important to close down those collieries which could not individually be shown to be 'profitable'. This was determined not by the global price of competitors, but the internal average cost. So 'unprofitable' pits were actually just less profitable.

The whole coal industry would only be sellable if the NUM was shown to be broken and the workforce cowed and compliant. By 1992-93 it was clear this couldn't be served up, as militancy, resistance and strong trade unionism continued and as such the industry would be abandoned wholesale.

Arthur Bough just doesn't understand the process. British coal was the cheapest in the world until the political decision was made to smash the NUM and sell off the industry. Huge new mining developments had been planned in North Yorkshire, Doncaster, Wales, Staffs and Cleveland. Thorne Colliery in East Yorkshire had been projected to produce 150 million tons in its first five years. In every case the new coalfields were spiked, with the National Coal Board blaming ongoing NUM combativity, while Selby - the richest coalfield in the world, which had the lowest unit production costs anywhere and numerous untapped coal seams - was unceremoniously shut. This wasn't the placidly deunionised industry the prospective new coal owners had been counting on, so they walked away, and Major closed down the industry.

I have spent 10 years writing a huge book on this whole process from the rise of Thatcher to the Major closures and the miners' last stand. It

seems a bit pointless to have to pull facts and analysis out piecemeal and out of the total context in the way that Bough's cynicism has demanded. Since I won't be engaging in further debate with him, readers may wish to read this analysis and history of the period in its entirety in *Ghost dancers*, available from djdouglass@hotmail.co.uk or from Housmans, Freedom Bookshop and Waterstones.

David Douglass
South Shields

Mind and matter

Assuming that the Labour Party continues to exist during the present irreversible crisis and decline of the capitalist system, I am convinced that the right wing will lose their influence and control at a certain stage. What I am not convinced about is the argument that "Labour needs Marxism", pure and simple (*Weekly Worker* October 11). Firstly, with the many different versions of Marxism on offer, it is not clear which one Labour needs.

Also, on what level does Labour need Marxism? For instance, it's possible to argue that the need is on the political level: that is, the recognition that the class struggle of the working class is the struggle for socialism - although, of course, Marxism did not invent this idea. This, however, doesn't necessarily mean the Labour Party or the working class needs Marxism, particularly in a dogmatic form, on the level of philosophy, economics or theory of history, in the one-sided way it is usually presented. On these latter levels Marxism is only partially true.

Like previous schools of thought, Marxism to a large extent has been turned into a dogma which is unable to recognise the essence of what is really going on. Hence the present crisis was attributed, for instance, to overproduction by some Marxists, although we now know that the inability to restart meaningful growth as a result of stagnating oil energy resources is at its heart.

This is only one example where Marxism is shown to be one-sided. Another is the philosophical question regarding the relationship between being and consciousness. Quantum physicists claim that consciousness can influence reality at a quantum level. Where does this leave Marx's 19th century view on the relationship between mind and matter?

Marxism has both strengths and weaknesses, and most of its strength relates more to the past than the future; that is why the argument that Labour needs Marxism is very problematical. What Labour does need, however, is to be won over to the idea of a sustainable, democratic, socialist society. We need to get as many people on board as possible in regard to this view.

Tony Clark
London

Britain's road

A couple of weeks ago I got the chance to interrogate Rob Griffiths of the Communist Party of Britain when he came to Cambridge as part of his speaking tour promoting *Britain's road to socialism*.

Oddly, the CPB accepts the African Union, but not the European Union, which it wants to see broken up. Griffiths explained to me that the AU was different because it is a counterweight to the US and helps facilitate Chinese investment in Africa (he seems to overlook the fact that this has been dubbed 'neo-colonialism' in Africa).

Rob Griffiths also ignores the fact that workers' rights will be no better off at the hands of the British state. We all know what Cameron means

by renegotiation of our membership of the EU: withdrawal from the social chapter, etc. When I said that we should aim for a communist united Europe, he quoted Lenin, to the effect that a United States of Europe would be either reactionary or impossible. Before reading your article I had been unfamiliar with this ('Vile class-collaboration on display at Westminster Hall', October 27). Obviously, in his mind, the short-cut, reformist route to 'socialism in Britain' is much easier to achieve than aiming higher - for a revolutionary Europe.

Before the discussion started, I asked a comrade with sympathies with the Greek Communist Party (KKE) why she thought Greece should get out of the euro (and return to the drachma and the subsequent high inflation?). She told me that the sacrifice and subsequent suffering were necessary for the greater good, which I thought was just needless masochism.

Overall, the discussion was very lacklustre - hardly anybody questioned the CPB general secretary except me, and, apart from his lead-off and summing-up, Griffiths did most of the talking in between too.

Darren Cahill
Cambridge

I object

I object to Edith Bartelmus-Schulich's characterisation of the informal meetings of representatives of the four main political platforms in Die Linke as undemocratic, apart from transparency issues ('A better version of social democracy', October 27). This is similar to what should be occurring within any party's media. Quota sampling should be used for cooperation between tendencies, platforms and currents in an editorial organ. This would go a long way towards ensuring that key political positions are not censored from the party press.

Another statement that raised my eyebrows was: "This carefully arranged *Personaltableau* reflected the different fractions in the party. That's how mainstream political parties choose their leadership. A left party should do better." It's

rather rich when considering that the writer's own organisation probably uses the highly problematic slate system, which, according to one Pat Byrne, is supposed to "recommend a list that consciously includes a good balance of talents and personalities, [but] in practice has allowed leaders to secure their continuous re-election, along with a body of like-minded and loyal followers".

Ideally Die Linke should employ probability-proportional-to-size sampling in order to measure the relative strength of the tendencies, platforms and currents.

Jacob Richter
email

Print death

The news that *Tribune* has ceased publication in its 75th year comes as no surprise - it only sold around a thousand copies a week. An annual subscription price of £75 did not help and, as Royal Mail continues to increase its postage rates, this model can only get worse.

I agree with Towards a New International Tendency (Tanit) that the days of print editions of leftwing weekly newspapers are numbered. Like many disillusioned Marxists I refuse to donate a large portion of my meagre income to keep them in print.

The demise of *Tribune* has many lessons for the organised left, including the CPGB and its *Weekly Worker*, which only sells around 500 hard copies each week. Producing weekly papers such as *The Socialist*, *Socialist Worker*, *Solidarity* and the *Weekly Worker* is just pouring money into black holes. In 2011, people aged under 30, including the most radical anti-capitalists, do not buy newspapers, but rely on the internet and the i-phone.

It is time that the *Weekly Worker* jettisons its weekly hard copy and transfers to a web-only publication. The long-delayed update of the website says a lot. The money saved by shutting down the weekly hard-copy production should then be used to finance a professional web design and update the CPGB website.

John Smith
Cambridgeshire

Fighting fund

Printing cock-up

We apologise to subscribers for the late delivery of the last two issues of the *Weekly Worker*. Hopefully you are reading this on the usual day of the week (for most people Friday) - not the Saturday, or even Monday, that was the case with numbers 886 and 887.

The cause of the delay was that - for some reason that is still a mystery to me - we were unable to email the pdf of the paper to our printers in the correct format. In actual fact, the printers didn't notice the pdf error in the October 20 issue, and they delivered us the paper complete with blank spaces! We didn't think readers would appreciate that, so we had to get it reprinted on the Friday. On October 27 a similar error occurred, which this time was spotted. But by the time it was corrected it was too late for the printers and once more we took delivery a day late.

Anyhow, these things happen, and for once it was not down to cash. But it did cost us - the fault was down to us and we had to fork out for the reprinting. A pity, because that extra expense more than wiped out the surplus to our

October fighting fund. Thanks to some sizable donations in the last four days of the month, we notched up a total of £1,402 - easily exceeding our £1,250 target.

For that we have to thank JME (£44) and RP (£10), who provided their contributions via PayPal (they were among 17,698 online readers, by the way), and a number of standing order donors, including JT (£751), PM (£30) and EL (£20). Our October fund was boosted by £212 in those last four days.

And we have done just as well in the first three days of November - well, actually, we were £1 worse off, with £211 received since the start of the month! All of that came via standing orders - and how welcome they were. But we now need to make up the shortfall caused by that printing cock-up, so, just for November, I am raising the target to £1,350.

I know you can do it! ●
Robbie Rix

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

ANTI-CUTS

Keeping it small

Around 20 people attended the monthly meeting of the Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance (Saca) on November 1. This was the second time I have attended the “extended Saca steering committee meeting” and I am starting to understand the dynamics behind it - and they are not pleasant.

We are in what seems to be a major crisis of the capitalist system. We are facing the potential break-up of the European Union. The bourgeoisie is shitting itself, because they have no answers to the crisis. On November 30, millions of people will be on the streets of Britain, demonstrating against the pension ‘reforms’ - and so much more. Around the globe, thousands of people are taking part in the ‘Occupy’ movements, looking for alternatives to this decaying system. What kind of answers do we give them?

Well, Saca for one will not be providing any. It is tightly controlled by the Socialist Workers Party, which has organised the affiliation of various union branches and front organisations, so that as many of its local members as possible have a vote. Because the Socialist Party in England and Wales does not have enough members on the ground to challenge the SWP’s hegemony, it only ever sends a couple of people, who do not intervene much, if at all. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty normally sends two or three members, who put up a slightly more energetic fight (though on November 1 only one AWL member made it). The couple of reps from the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain are playing foot soldier to the SWP.

SWP comrades are using the outrageously undemocratic method of ‘consensus’ to keep a tight grip on proceedings and block anything they do not like. Take November 30. Tens of thousands of people from all over South Yorkshire will come to Sheffield to attend a rally organised by the regional trades union council. Ridiculously, this rally at noon is going to last all of 30 minutes. Quite rightly then, Saca comrades discussed organising something else for that day. At our October meeting, the AWL’s Camila Bassi made the very sensible suggestion that we hold a Saca meeting in the afternoon, where we could discuss the way forward for strikers and the anti-cuts movement. Although there was a lot of nodding when she spoke, nothing ever came of it - so I picked up on it again at the latest meeting.

SWP member after SWP member tried to rubbish the idea. “Every group will be doing their own thing on the day,” said the chair (judging by the amount of ‘advice’ she got from leading local SWPer Maxine Bowler, I would guess she is also a member). Comrade Bowler thought that “people will have these discussions at the picket lines” and her comrade, Ben Morris, said that “people will mill about too much - you won’t get them into a meeting”.

He then suggested that Saca should instead help organise a demo through the city centre

back to the rally point, to be followed by a second rally - this time called not by the regional TUC, but “local trade union branches”. Oh, and by the way, there had already been a (non-advertised) meeting where this was agreed, he announced. In other words, SWP members with any sort of union position had got together a few days earlier and made their own plans, looking for Saca to rubber-stamp it.

Still, there was a big minority present who thought that we could surely do both: “We should try to politically engage the tens of thousands of people who will come to Sheffield by putting on an interesting debate in the afternoon,” said Lee Rock, acting PCS branch organiser in the local department for work and pensions. “For example, we could discuss if ‘All out, stay out’ - for a week or however long - is really such a good slogan.”

The SWP chair only reluctantly allowed a show of hands: Eight people were in favour of putting on a meeting, about the same number were against. In any normal meeting, the chair would have at least counted the votes. But not so in Saca: “There is no consensus on this, so there will be no Saca meeting,” she announced and went on to the next agenda point.

A similar method was used to prevent an item entitled ‘The way forward for Saca’ from reaching any concrete or coherent conclusions. Sam Ross, a young anarchist who had briefly been a member of the SWP, had tabled a discussion paper that correctly outlined many of Saca’s problems: chiefly, it is incredibly small and has no actual profile of its own. His answer - to link up with various local disputes and actively invite them to Saca - is a step in the right direction.

In fact I think we should go further: we urgently need to start the process of building a real political alternative. We could begin by uniting the various national and local anti-cuts groups into a single, much more powerful organisation (a motion along those lines fell off the agenda last time and was not re-tabled for discussion - no wonder the independent mover has not been keen to attend Saca meetings again).

Also, we must start to actually talk about politics at these meetings. Myself, comrade Bassi and a handful of other comrades supported a modest proposal to start the monthly 90-minute meetings with a political opening of a maximum of 30

minutes. But again, the chair simply moved on when SWPers (and one CPB member) argued against it. You see, Saca “has only one purpose and this was identified at our first public meeting: it is an umbrella that brings together different campaigns,” as Dick Pitt put it.

If this really was the main purpose of Saca, clearly it is failing badly. Otherwise, it would surely attract more than 20 people to its regular organising meetings - and surely its hardly ever updated website might have registered more than 9,995 visits (embarrassingly, there is a counter). Clearly, as things move on and change, we have to do the same. At a time when the level of attacks increases and the European bourgeoisie is in turmoil, we have to raise our game. Who cares what decision was made at the “first public meeting”? Is it set in stone?

In reality, Saca is merely a tool that the ‘organised’ left (chiefly the SWP) can utilise in order to advertise and push forward their own meetings - or worse.

For example, at the October meeting, SWPers said that Mark Serwotka would be available to speak at a Saca meeting on November 10. Much time was allocated to discussing who will book the room, who would approach more speakers, etc. At the November 1 meeting, SWP member Ben Morris then dished out the leaflet for the event: Miraculously, it is no longer a Saca meeting, but is now organised by the SWP’s latest front campaign, Unite the Resistance.

The leaflet lists a long line of trade union branches supporting the event and comrade Morris breathlessly informed us that he was just about to “send the invoice for the printing costs to Saca when it turned out that union branches had already donated enough money”. But, funnily enough, the leaflet does not even mention Saca. When I asked about this, I was told by a clearly embarrassed comrade Morris that “Saca hadn’t agreed a firm donation yet”. But they were supposed to pay for the printing ...

Call me cynical, but it seems to me that the SWP is not interested at all in building Saca or any other anti-cuts campaign. The smaller these groups around the country stay, the larger the SWP and their various front organisations can loom ●

Tina Becker

tina.becker@weeklyworker.org.uk

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>.

Northern Communist Forum

Sunday November 6, 3pm: Seminar, based on Victor Serge’s *From Lenin to Stalin*. Friends House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. 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).

November 8: ‘Why don’t apes speak?’ Speaker: Chris Knight. Traveller solidarity

Saturday November 5, 11am: Meeting - ‘Dale Farm: building the traveller solidarity movement’ - 3rd floor, Cityside House, 40 Adler Street, London E1.

Organised by Traveller Solidarity Organisation: savedalefarm@gmail.com.

Grass Roots Left

Saturday November 5, 12 noon: National conference, Comfort Inn conference room, Station Street, Birmingham B5 (opposite New Street station). Fighting for a bottom-up, member-led opposition.

Organised by Grass Roots Left: www.grassrootsleft.org.

Welcome Jarrow marchers

Saturday November 5, 12 noon: Rally, Temple, Victoria Embankment, London WC2. Jarrow marchers arrive in London. Organised by Youth Fight for Jobs: www.youthfightforjobs.com.

Reinstate Abdul Omer

Monday November 7, 9am: Picket, Radius House, 51 Clarendon Road, Watford. Support victimised Unite convenor Abdul Omer at his employment tribunal.

Organised by Reinstate Abdul Omer: reinstateomer@hotmail.co.uk.

Financial crisis and Arab revolution

Tuesday November 8, 5pm: Seminar, room 915, Adam Smith Building, Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movements, University of Glasgow. Speaker: Yassamine Mather.

Organised by CSSTM: gziinfo@udcf.gla.ac.uk.

Historical Materialism

Thursday November 10 to Sunday November 13: Conference, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Dozens of international speakers.

Organised by *Historical Materialism*: www.historicalmaterialism.org.

Don’t deport Proscovia

Friday November 11, 9am: Demonstration, Taylor House, Rosebery Avenue, London EC1 (near Angel tube). Support Ugandan lesbian activist at asylum appeal hearing. Amnesty now for all immigrants.

Organised by Movement for Justice: karen@movementforjustice-org.ccsend.com.

Support census refusers

Friday November 11, 10am: Demonstration and vigil, magistrates court, Bodhyfryd, Wrexham. Support Judith Sambrook and others who refused to complete census forms in protest at involvement of weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin in processing data.

Organised by the Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum: wrexhamsaw@yahoo.com.

Alternative Lord Mayor’s show

Saturday November 12, 11am: Parade, Mansion House, London. Action for democratic reform of the Corporation of London. March to occupation at St Paul’s, where a people’s mayor will be acclaimed.

Organised by Art Uncut: artuncut.org.uk.

Save our services

Saturday November 12, 1pm: Meeting, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester M1.

Organised by Manchester Coalition Against Cuts: <http://coalitionagainsteuts.wordpress.com>.

No to academies

Saturday November 12, 10am: Midlands conference, Birmingham and Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3.

Saturday November 26, 10am: North West conference, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1.

Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: <http://antiacademies.org.uk>.

Give our youth a future

Saturday November 12, 1.30pm: Rally, Windrush Square, Brixton, London SW2, for march to Max Roach Park.

Organised by Lambeth Save Our Services: www.lambethsaveourservices.org.

Unite the Resistance

Saturday November 19, 10am: National convention, Royal Horticultural Halls and Conference Centre, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1. Speakers include: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Matt Wrack (FBU), Annabel Lincoln (Wall Street protest), Kevin Courtney (NUT), Zita Holbourne (Black Activists Rising Against Cuts), Nikos Fotopoulos (Greek electricians union).

Organised by Unite the Resistance: uniteresist.org.

Labour’s resistance

Saturday November 19, 10am to 4.30pm: LRC annual conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Justice for Miami 5

Thursday December 1, 6pm: Candlelit vigil, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Speakers include Miami 5 mothers.

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

CPGB wills

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



Think big

ECONOMY

Referendum gamble plunges euro still deeper into crisis

European leaders are stumbling from one crisis to another, writes **Eddie Ford**

George Papandreou's sudden announcement on November 1 that he is to hold a referendum on whether to accept the latest austerity measures demanded by the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika has sent the euro zone spiralling into still deeper crisis. Stunned, the markets and European leaders let out a collective cry of anger over this 'reckless' and 'irresponsible' action that threatened to sabotage the deals arrived in Brussels in the early hours of October 27. Why can't the Greeks just do as they are told?

The troika certainly wants its pound of flesh - and a lot more besides. In order for Greece to qualify for the next tranche of €8 billion in bailout loans - authorised by EU finance ministers on October 21, pending last-minute finalisation by the IMF - the Athens government has to impose on the masses a fresh round of savage cuts. Like further cuts in public-sector wages of between 20% and 30%; the scrapping of bonus and incentive schemes; the placing of some 30,000 public sector workers on 60% pay for one year pending their dismissal; the suspension of collective wage bargaining; the cutting of pensions and lump-sum retirement payments; the lowering of the tax-free income threshold from €12,000 to €5,000 a year; and on and on it goes.

If the Eurocrats were to get their way, then Greek workers would be reduced to a virtual slave class - a fate which the bourgeoisie would like to see extended to Portugal, Spain, Italy, etc. The Greek working class movement has other plans, of course - which is why Papandreou has deemed it necessary to try and pre-empt their resistance through a referendum, that favourite device of dictators and bureaucrats.

High risk

Papandreou said it was essential to win a "clear mandate" from the Greek people; otherwise the austerity measures might be considered illegitimate. More to the point, they would not stand a snowball's chance in hell of succeeding. Greece is already wracked by an endless succession of strikes and demonstrations, and fears are rising amongst the euro establishment that the country is rapidly becoming

'ungovernable'. Even worse, the 'Greek disease' of working class struggle and resistance has the danger of becoming a dreadful contagion.

Yet, crazily, it is the very medicine being dished out by the troika that is killing the patient. Under the impact of its vicious cuts regime the Greek economy is being further depressed, thereby increasing the deficit rather than decreasing it - which in turns adds to the pressure from the EU leaders for still further austerity plans and programmes. A vicious cycle. The budget deficit this year is likely to be higher than last year's 10.5%, partly because interest charges are high and rising, and partly because the economy, which has contracted by 15% in the past three years, is still getting smaller. There is no 'recovery plan' for Greece - more like a death sentence.

Playing a high-risk game, Papandreou revealed that the referendum would also deliver a verdict on whether Greece should retain its membership of the euro. Obviously, as with all such referendums, the wording and timing is absolutely crucial. It is certainly not beyond the bounds of possibility that Papandreou could win. After all, whilst the majority of Greeks are implacably opposed to the austerity programme, about 70% also say they want to remain part of the euro zone. No matter how distressing this might be for 'official communists' and left reformists, there is no desire amongst the masses for the return of the drachma - rather, just to end the attacks on them, euro or no euro. Papandreou now faces a crucial, make-or-break confidence vote in parliament on November 4 and with only a two-seat majority - thanks to defections from his ruling Panhellenic Socialist Movement - his government could well fall and then snap elections would have to be held.

Either way - referendum or fresh elections - Greece stands to lose the bailout cash, meaning that within days the government will be unable to pay public-sector wages and pensions (those that remain), keep the trains running, collect rubbish, etc. As a direct consequence, the banking system would collapse and the country would default - either leaving the euro 'voluntarily' or being kicked out. That, of course, would not be the end of it - indeed, it would almost certainly be just the beginning.

Alarmed, if not terrified, the French and German governments issued a stern statement, saying they wanted the "full implementation"

of the Brussels agreement "in the quickest time frame" - oddly forgetting to request that the oceans be turned into pink lemonade as well.

Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel held (yet

more) emergency talks on November 2 with officials from the EU and IMF in Cannes, in a frantic attempt to hold the euro zone together and formulate a response to Papandreou's referendum call.

This meeting was due to take place just hours before both leaders were to meet Barack Obama, who is flying to France for the G20 summit to be held over November 3-4 - the emergency summit, we are told, to end all emergency summits. Until the next one. Needless to say, the United States administration - as its own economy continues to stagnate - is in near despair about European developments. A collapsing euro zone would ensure that any US recession will be much deeper and longer-lasting than otherwise.

Looming

Inevitably, the European stock markets suffered sharp falls in the wake of Papandreou's referendum call. The FTSE 100 fell 2.2% and the German market lost 5%, while France was down 5.4%. There followed substantial losses in Japan and Hong Kong.

Bank shares, naturally, were among the worst hit and among the biggest losers was the French bank, Société Générale, which already needs to find an extra €3.3 billion if the recent European-wide stress tests conducted by the European Banking Authority are anything to go by (probably not - just up the figure). So SocGen lost 17%, while Italy's Intesa Saopalo fell 15%. US banks were also hard hit, as the Dow Jones index dipped by as much as 300 points at one stage.

Of course, the stock market woes were fed by other problems apart from Greece. Thus we had the collapse of the US financial brokerage, MF Global, which is now filing for bankruptcy protection (which would postpone its obligations to creditors, giving it time in theory to 'reorganise' its debts or sell parts of the business). MF Global disclosed last week that it has a "net long position of \$6.3 billion in a short-duration European sovereign portfolio, including Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland" - which, to translate, means that it bought bonds last year thinking their price would rise and their yields fall, the opposite of what actually happened. Or, to put it another way, it had lent a sum (to governments whose ability to repay all they owe is moot) equivalent to five times the value of the equity capital it holds as protection against potential losses.

MF Global's ignoble demise closely follows that of the French-Belgium bank, Dexia. Though both these financial institutions are not big enough to cause an immediate domino effect throughout the system, they might be acting like canaries in a coal mine. An ill-omen of what is to come.

More seriously still, there is the looming catastrophe that is Italy. At the beginning of the week the yield (interest rate) on Italian government bonds reached a new euro-era high of 6.33%, a potentially calamitous situation in a country which already has a debt mountain of close to €2 trillion. Normally, anything above 6% means the warning signs are flashing wildly; and 7% - now a distinct possibility - would surely see Italy

join Greece, Ireland and Portugal in the bailout club. At this rate, if nothing dramatic is done, bankruptcy stares Italy in the face. In which case, Greece would be the least of the euro zone's worries.

Just to complete the happy picture, Portugal and Spain seem to be going down the plug-hole too. The financial press has been full of reports that monetary contraction in Portugal has intensified at an alarming pace and is mimicking the general pattern seen in Greece before its economy spiralled out of control. In the words of Simon Ward from Henderson Global Investors, Portugal "appears to have entered a Grecian vortex", registering a decline of 8.4%, and Spain is not far behind. A mix of fiscal austerity and monetary tightening by the ECB earlier this year appears to have tipped the Iberian region into a downward slide.

But everywhere you look the news is grim, with no respite in sight. The German government has slashed its growth outlook by nearly a half. Belgium's central bank said the country's economy "stalled" in the third quarter, growing by the slowest pace over a quarter since 2009. The news adds pressure on the Belgian 'government' (after over 500 days of failed negotiations the country still has no agreed coalition cabinet) to accelerate fiscal consolidation in order to cover budget gaps.

Overall, and most critically, financial analysts have noted that the cost of borrowing for Germany had been falling sharply - hitting its lowest point in six weeks at 1.736% - as jittery investors hastily dumped risky assets and flocked to those perceived as the safest in the euro zone, which perhaps is not saying much these days. The spread, or difference, between the 10-year bond yields of Italy, Belgium and France as against Germany has hit record highs.

Post-Brussels

The Brussels summit of October 26 now seems like a long time ago - the dim light that appeared to have flickered at the end of the tunnel has now darkened to the point of occlusion. Of course, even before Papandreou's unwanted announcement, the markets had crashed back to earth. Utterly predictably, it soon became apparent that the European leaders had once again kicked the can down the road. But you cannot buck reality forever.

Instead of real cash backed up by a coherent and viable strategy, the rescue plan for the euro zone seems more based on the never-never. The much lauded €1 trillion capacity of the enhanced European Financial Stability Facility, four times its remaining €250 billion lending capacity, depends almost entirely on relatively "favourable" market conditions - and the willingness, more importantly, of various overseas investors such as sovereign wealth funds to commit more capital: eg, China. From some of the hype surrounding the Brussels deal, you might be lulled into believing that China is about to come to the rescue of the euro zone - if not the world. European leaders met with Chinese officials immediately after the Brussels summit. They hoped that

their agreement for a €106 billion recapitalisation programme for European banks and a 50% 'haircut' (write-down) on private bondholders would persuade the Chinese the time was right to buy up European sovereign debt - maybe make a small contribution of around \$100 billion from its foreign currency reserves of \$3.2 trillion to the EFSF (or any new fund set up in collaboration with the IMF).

Forget it. Hardly surprisingly, the Chinese government is not exactly enthused by the idea of bailing out heavily indebted euro zone countries - too big a risk, Greek referendum or not. Soberly, the official Xinhua news agency stated that Europe must address its own financial woes, as China cannot take up the role as the "saviour" of the euro zone.

Recession is beginning to look unavoidable. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has slashed its growth forecasts for some of the world's biggest economies and said that "without decisive action the outlook is gloomy" - warning of a "marked slowdown" in the euro zone area, with "patches of mild negative growth" likely in 2012. Hence growth is projected at 0.3% next year and will remain weak in the US too - while emerging markets will see slower growth than before the financial crisis began. Overall, the G20 states will slow to 3.8% in 2012, compared to 3.9% this year - and a repeat of the financial crisis of 2007-09, the OECD added, could wipe at least 5% off the major economies' GDP by the first half of 2013. Furthermore, official figures showed that unemployment in the euro zone had climbed to a 15-year-high of 10.2%. Young people are being hardest hit by the lack of jobs, with youth unemployment at 29% in Italy, 43% in Greece and 48% in Spain.

Things are no better in the UK. Yes, GDP expanded by 0.5% from July to September. But a separate report released at the same time indicated that activity in the manufacturing sector shrank at the fastest pace for two years in October, suggesting the UK could fall back into negative growth before the end of the year. The headline reading on the Markit/CIPS UK Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index dropped to 47.4, well below the 50-mark that divides contraction from expansion and much lower than 50.8 the month before. Leading Jonathan Loynes of Capital Economics to conclude that there is a "good chance" that the economy will contract in the fourth quarter. Against a background of high inflation, the ongoing fiscal squeeze and the escalating euro zone crisis, he thinks the UK economy at best will be "stagnating" by 2012.

To put it another way, the UK is now officially stuck on a slower recovery path than after the great depression of the 1930s, its economy now 4% smaller than it was at its peak in the first three months of 2008 - having recovered 3.1% from its lowest point in the third quarter of 2009. But with no Plan B the UK, like the US, stands on the brink of a double-dip recession ●

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Angela Merkel and George Papandreou: happier times

TURKEY

State fault lines exposed

Esen Uslu reports on the tremors that devastated Van province and examines the horrors perpetrated by official bureaucracy

The October 23 earthquake that hit Van province on a nice, warm Sunday at midday had devastating consequences. However, they could have been far worse, had the quake hit in the middle of a night or on a working day - or during cold weather, when more people would have been inside their homes. It was the most severe earthquake in Turkey since 1999.

To date there have been more than 600 confirmed deaths, about 2,000 serious injuries and still quite a number of missing people - presumed to be dead, somewhere under the debris of collapsed buildings. The epicentre was just north of the mainly Kurdish province near the eastern shore of Lake Van, along a little known fault line that passes through the Tabanlı village. Erciş, a town on the north-eastern shore of the lake, and Van city on the eastern shore, as well as several villages lying between them, were badly affected.

Many of these villages contain traditional houses and animal shelters, built without proper foundations from thick stone and mud-brick walls. Their timber joists support compact-earth flat ceilings. This type of construction was well known to be prone to collapse in the event of an earthquake, and that is what happened - inhabitants were crushed by the heavy walls and ceilings, and many who were not instantly killed were suffocated by the dust.

However, the greatest number of deaths occurred in Erciş and Van city, where more modern constructions crumbled. Many of them were official buildings, such as schools, dormitories, health facilities, etc, constructed following a competitive tendering process. Virtually all of them were built with utter disregard for building regulations - for the sake of quick profits.

Following the 1999 earthquake, building regulations were strengthened, but it seems all such rules in Turkey are destined to remain on paper. Many newly appointed young teachers as well as students were killed in halls of residence or meeting halls. Most of the buildings that collapsed were reinforced concrete structures. Regulations state that such structures should use only ribbed steel reinforcement bars, together with concrete quality that has a certain minimum compressive strength. They should have been designed to withstand huge lateral forces.

What is more, urban planning and the selection of building sites ignored geological surveys and soil mechanics. For example, in Van the ramshackle structures on the shore of the lake were cleared by the municipality, since the sand on which they were built could not provide strong enough foundations. However, a couple of years later, the central state bureaucracy bypassed the local administration, and constructed several official buildings on the notoriously unsuitable site.

In their wisdom Turkish officialdom as well as politicians always seem to find ways of avoiding the 'burden' of regulations. Neither municipality departments nor the central state bureaucracy has the necessary teeth to deal with this non-compliance. Corruption, political nepotism and a lack of openness and accountability are the norm. The price can now be counted in human life and suffering, but everyone knows that no official



Building regulations ignored

will be held responsible for this gross misconduct and negligence.

The naked greed of 'quick buck' capitalists knows no bounds. Many of the high-rise buildings along the main streets in both urban areas have small shops on the ground floor. Some of the most prestigious locations were occupied by car dealers, who merged several small shops into a single showroom by removing some of the columns supporting upper floors - without even notifying the municipality, let alone seeking building permission.

Anti-Kurd chauvinism

In early summer the covert peace talks between the Turkish state and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) ended in failure. Since then both sides have been intensifying their attacks. In the increasingly tense situation a major incident occurred on October 19, just a few days before the Van earthquake. A well coordinated series of guerrilla attacks on army posts on the Iraqi border killed 24 soldiers and wounded several others. In response the army sent out 22 battalions into the mountains, where there was vicious fighting.

The government was quick to grasp the opportunity presented by the earthquake to portray itself as the saviour of ordinary Kurds - it was determined not to let Kurdish freedom fighters exploit the shortcomings and failures of the Turkish state. Everyone from the prime minister to local army units and NGOs was flown into Van. The mainstream media highlighted the heroic efforts of rescuers and the influx of aid into the region.

However, the creaking state machinery, institutionally neglectful and bigoted against Kurds, was not easily brought to life. The all-powerful governor (appointed by the central government to each province) has long refused to cooperate with the elected mayor, who belongs to the Peace and Democracy Party (the electoral name of the Kurdish freedom movement)

and did not see any reason to change his ways. To date they have not even met. The central bureaucracy did not provide even a single seat for the elected representatives of the people on its emergency bodies.

But it is not only the rival political forces that do not trust each other. There was also antagonism between the specialist rescue teams trained by rival fiefdoms and many expert volunteers were badly treated as a result. However, in the end the crews' sound sense of cooperation won the day. They managed to dig about 180 survivors out of rubble despite the interference of the competing bureaucracies.

On the other hand, the required heavy construction machinery, ambulances and transport were made available and disrupted services were quite quickly operational again. The local hospitals in Van and in the neighbouring provinces shared the burden, and serious cases were airlifted to Ankara. These aspects of the rescue effort indicate the development that has taken place in even the poorest regions of Turkey over the last 20 or 30 years.

Despite this, the mistrust of Kurds created such unbelievable imbalances in the distribution of resources that many outside observers were astounded by the sheer stupidity of the situation. The Red Crescent (as the Turkish Red Cross is known - the name itself reveals the problem) has no distribution centre east of the Euphrates river - ie, in the Kurdish provinces - despite the fact that the region is known as a primary earthquake zone. As a result, for days winter-grade tents could not be distributed, since they had to be airlifted from warehouses in Ankara. While the airport remained operational, it could not handle large cargo planes. There is not a single civilian airport in the region with that capability.

The soft Islamist government at first turned away aid offers from 'Christian countries' and Israel, while it accepted aid from Azerbaijan and Iran. After

a couple of days it was obliged to acknowledge its shortcomings, and invited aid from elsewhere. However, the bottleneck created by the lack of airlift capability slowed everything down. Now, more than a week after the disaster, there are still villages where people have no proper shelter, with the harsh winter of the eastern Anatolian highlands looming.

Usually after an earthquake in Turkey, people's humanity comes to the fore. There are campaigns to send goods, donate money and organise volunteers.

However, this time the ongoing war and the anti-Kurd, chauvinistic propaganda organised by the state had an ugly effect. The social media such as Facebook was full of bigotry, as were the comments sections of newspapers - articles commented on the lessons the unruly Kurds should learn from the divine retribution represented by the earthquake. Popular television presenters joined in this chorus and Islamists played a particularly disgraceful role in fanning the 'fire and brimstone' flames (there is no 'hate crime' or anti-discrimination provision in the Turkish penal code).

Of course, a large section of the Turkish population was strongly opposed to this venom and politicians were quick to react. But bigotry is deeply ingrained - some went to such depths as to send packages containing stones and bearing spiteful messages instead of blankets.

On the third day of rescue operations came news from the war front: the expeditionary forces of the Turkish army killed more than 35 guerrillas, and 24 badly disfigured and burnt bodies were brought to a morgue in a neighbouring province for identification. One commentator aptly remarked: "Why rescue children from the rubble, only to kill them later in the mountains?"

The state has taken advantage of the increased military activity to stage mass arrests of alleged Union of Kurdish Communities supporters. This time the net was cast wide and among those held were the prominent left

academic, Dr Büşra Ersanli, who was nominated by the BDP for the inter-parliamentary commission to prepare a new constitution; Ayşe Berktaş, a well known peace activist; Ragıp Zarakolu, a leftwing publisher; and his son, the academic Deniz Zarakolu. They were detained in early-morning raids; their homes were searched, and after a couple of days' detention a compliant court remanded all of them in custody under the pretext that they might flee the country or interfere with evidence.

Threat to workers

Turkey is in a very dangerous place, geologically speaking. The Eastern Anatolian and North Anatolian fault lines coincide in Kurdistan and there are several others on the Aegean seaboard. Except for the environs of Konya (where, incidentally, Nato carries out its bombing exercises) the whole of Turkey is prone to earthquakes. Every few years a major disaster happens. So you might expect every technological and economic precaution to be taken.

But, no, this is Turkey, where the fault lines of society run deeper still. For example, the campaigns of the late Ottoman/early republican era to expropriate the non-Turkish bourgeoisie and bring about the Turkification of capital led to the Armenian genocide and the mass exodus of the Greek Orthodox population of Anatolia.

However, primary accumulation based on pillage under the protective umbrella of the state was unlikely to allow the development of a normal capitalist culture, and Turkish finance capital was nurtured for a very long time in the protective greenhouses of the state. The 'outsider' capitalists of Anatolia, known colloquially as "Anatolian tigers", were a quite recent phenomenon. The state has been wary of any civic initiative, since it fears the organisation of the working classes. Consequently the legal books are full of laws, ordinances, rules, regulation and codes that are destined to remain on paper - unless required for a quick profit. The building regulations provide a notable example.

Since 1949 Turkish building codes have required earthquake-resistant structures. As I mentioned earlier, these were further amended after the 1999 earthquake. A special tax was introduced in that year to finance the demolition and replacement of the weakest buildings, and the strengthening of others. To date not a penny has been spent from the funds set aside for that purpose.

It has been revealed that in Adapazari province 700 damaged structures were due to be demolished after the 1999 quake. They are all still standing. Several have been 'repaired' literally using paper to cover over the cracks and let as cheap accommodation to university students. An estimated 3,000 people live in those condemned buildings, which the locals call "ghost houses".

Consider the situation across the vast former shanty town areas surrounding Istanbul and other industrial centres, where structures similar to those collapsed in Van were erected with the same disregard for science and conscience. A major earthquake hits the Marmara region every 30-40 years and a new one could wipe out whole working class areas.

In Turkey democracy is a matter of life and death in more ways than one ●

INTERNATIONALISM

Lenin and the United

Jack Conrad takes issue with the attempt to recruit Lenin to the CPB nationalist camp

Members of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain sometimes try to give themselves orthodox Marxist credentials in an attempt to fend off criticism from the left. An example of this came on the eve of the October 24 Commons vote on a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. The *Morning Star* editorial fielded a well-worn quote from VI Lenin in order to justify its support for rightwing Tory moves to begin the UK's disengagement. Lenin, we are told, concluded that a "United States of Europe would either be reactionary or impossible".¹

It would, of course, be easy to brush aside such attempts to recruit Lenin's shade into the Europhobic camp and come out with a reply along the lines of 'What Lenin said in 1915, in the midst of World War I, has little or no relevance to the situation in Britain nearly a century later'. But that would be wrong. We consciously inhabit and draw strength from our movement's history and achievements in theory.

Even if we think Lenin displayed a one-sidedness, or was simply wrong in 1915, those of us who consider correct theory vital for the success of the workers' self-liberation movement - especially those who call themselves Marxists - are obliged to approach a thinker, and revolutionary politician, of Lenin's stature with the utmost seriousness. Objections and disagreements must be put forward after much thought and in a fully considered manner.

Bolsheviks

Before dealing with Lenin's article, 'On the slogan for a United States of Europe', it will help if some background is provided. The Stalinite editors of Lenin's *Collected works* say that the slogan for a United States of Europe "gained wide currency" during World War I and was promoted by bourgeois politicians and the "Kautskyites, Trotskyites and other opportunists".² This is indeed true. By the same measure it is also true that the slogan had a prior life - moreover, the Bolsheviks, under Lenin's leadership, deployed it as part of their first collective response to the outbreak of inter-imperialist war.

After he managed to get from Krakow in Poland to Berne, and the safety of neutral Switzerland, during August 1914, Lenin drafted a set of theses which were approved by the ad hoc Bolshevik leadership gathered there - Zinoviev, Bukharin, Shilovsky, etc. 'The tasks of revolutionary social democracy in the European war' included the demand for the "United States of Europe".³ This very same formulation was carried over into the manifesto of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party central committee - again drafted by Lenin.

In this manifesto, as before, it was stressed that the slogan for a United States of Europe did not imply the coming together of existing, monarchical, Europe. The Bolsheviks presented a *revolutionary democratic* way out of the carnage. Without the "revolutionary overthrow of the German, the Austrian and Russian monarchies" the slogan of a United States of Europe is "absolutely false" and "meaningless", Lenin explained.⁴

The Hohenzollern and Hapsburg monarchies in Germany and Austria were, of course, only half-democratic. Behind the façade of parliament lay autocracy. As to Russia, the tsar's duma was nothing more than a

pathetic fig leaf - Bolshevik deputies who expressed militant opposition to the war found themselves clapped in jail. Exile in Siberia awaited.

Hence the Bolshevik demand: "propaganda for republics in Germany, Poland, Russia, and other countries" and "transforming of all the separate states of Europe into a republican United States of Europe".⁵ Naturally such a "republican United States of Europe" went hand in hand with other key elements in the minimum programme, such as self-determination for Europe's colonies in Asia and Africa and the oppressed nations languishing in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires.

The Bolshevik slogan for a "republican United State of Europe" did not spring out of thin air. The slogan was part of the common culture of the pre-World War I Second International. A loose parallel might be drawn with the pan-Africanism of the Organisation of African Unity. Before the "winds of change" in the 1960s actually reproduced a series of petty states - and therefore vested bureaucratic interests - *within* the arbitrarily drawn old French, Belgium and British colonial boundaries, the likes of Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré envisaged a petty bourgeois African socialism stretching from the Cape to Cairo.

Kautsky

I am not sure exactly who originally coined the "republican United States of Europe" slogan. Suffice to say, within the Second International differences over it reflected broad factional alignments and philosophical inclinations. Hence in his *The national question and social democracy* (St Petersburg 1909) the Austro-Marxist, Otto Bauer, writes of "a United States of Europe" in essentially evolutionary terms. It is "not an empty dream", but the "inevitable end of the road on which the nations set foot long ago".⁶

Rosa Luxemburg, Alexander Parvus and others could be cited. But it seems clear to me that the moving spirit behind the republican United States of Europe slogan was the Second International's leading theoretician, Karl Kautsky. Eg, in his April 1911 article, 'War and peace', Kautsky argues in favour of linking anti-militarist propaganda to a United States of Europe. The United States of Europe is thought of as an alliance "with a common trade policy", a single parliament, a single army, etc.

Not that Kautsky preached pacifism and social reformism. On the contrary, the Kautsky of 1911 is convinced that "a European war is bound by, natural necessity, to end in social revolution". That is why the most far-sighted sections of the ruling class strive to "preserve peace" and seek measures of "disarmament". They dread war because it will bring revolution. "War", argues Kautsky, "is followed by revolution with inevitable certainty". This is not the result of some devious "social democratic plan", but "the iron logic of things".

Industrial capital has given way to finance capital and brought to a halt all measures of social reform. Nevertheless despite the difficulties of realising the United States of Europe, "efforts to peacefully unite the European states in a federative community" are by no means hopeless. "Its prospects are bound up with those of the revolution," maintained Kautsky.

Whether revolution arises from

"competition in armaments" or from "war" itself, there will in any case be an "international revolution". Even if revolution "does not arise from reaction against the burden of armaments" or "against the horrors of war", but from other causes, and even if at the outset it is not international, but restricted to a single state, it "cannot remain so for long under present conditions". The revolution is "bound to spread to other states". As this takes place, Kautsky believes that the "United States of Europe" and eventually the "United States of the civilised world" progressively comes into being.⁷

Switch

Obviously, having been content to repeat the "republican United States of Europe" slogan in 1914, Lenin began to rethink. His first objections, in 1915, appear secondary, or technical. He expressed himself keen at the RSDLP's conference of groups abroad, held in Berne, to put the slogan on hold, "pending a discussion, in the press, of the economic aspect of the matter". So far, the discussion had been "purely political" - the economic aspect had, by implication, been neglected.⁸

However, a blistering criticism soon followed. *Social Democrat* No44 - the Bolshevik central organ - carried Lenin's article, 'On the slogan for a United States of Europe'. What was his argument?

Propaganda backing the *republican* United States of Europe "expressly emphasised" that the slogan was meaningless "without the revolutionary overthrow of the German, Austrian and Russia monarchies". Lenin said he did not quarrel with such a presentation of the question "within the limits of a political appraisal". In other words, he rejected the charge that the republican United States of Europe slogan "obscures or weakens" the "slogan of a socialist revolution".

To counterpose democracy and socialism is to fall head first into economism - still dominant on the left in today's Britain. "Political changes of a truly democratic nature", especially a political revolution, "can under no circumstances whatsoever either obscure or weaken the slogan of a socialist revolution". Quite the reverse. In Lenin's opinion, they always bring it closer, extend its basis and draw in petty bourgeois and semi-proletarian masses into the struggle for socialism.

The republican United States of Europe slogan - if accompanied by demands for the revolutionary overthrow of the most reactionary monarchies - is "quite invulnerable as a political slogan". However, there still remains, argued Lenin, the "highly important question of its economic content and significance". From the angle of the economic conditions of imperialism - the export of capital and the division of the world by the leading powers - a United States of Europe "is either impossible or reactionary."

Britain, France, Russia and Germany controlled vast tracks of the planet either directly in the form of colonies and dominions or indirectly in the form of semi-colonies. These powers (bar Russia) also exported capital in huge sums so as to exploit the world and extract super-profits - from which elite state officials, high clergymen and "other leeches" gain their fat sinecures.

That system of plundering the

majority of the world's population by a handful of great powers represented the highest stage of capitalism. Britain, Germany, France and Russia could no more renounce their colonies and spheres of influence than they could the export of capital, argued Lenin.

Following this line of reasoning, Lenin insisted that a United States of Europe under capitalism must be tantamount to an "agreement on the partition of colonies". Furthermore, such an agreement between the great powers is itself impossible except by way of a trial of strength. And that in plain language means war. Germany was growing economically four times faster than Britain and France. As to Japan, its economic growth was 10 times more rapid than Russia's. Hence the *redivisionist* inter-imperialist contest and its attendant slaughter.

So temporary arrangements were possible, conceded Lenin. In that sense a United States of Europe is possible "as an agreement between the European capitalists". But to what end? Only for the purpose of "suppressing socialism in Europe" and jointly "protecting colonial booty" against Japan and the United States: ie, great powers denied their 'fair' share of colonies.

Compared to the USA, the United States of Europe "denotes economic stagnation" and signifies the organisation of reaction. Under capitalism a United States of Europe would retard the more rapid economic development of the USA. Lenin also wanted to strike a blow against the Eurocentric prejudices that frequently passed for common sense in the Second International: "The times when the cause of democracy and socialism was associated only with Europe have gone for ever," he declared. Lenin concluded on the basis of the above arguments that the slogan for a United States of Europe "is an erroneous one".⁹

Lenin elaborated upon the *economic* argument against the United States of Europe in his *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Much of the raw material for this pamphlet came from *Imperialism* by the British liberal anti-imperialist, JA Hobson (first published in 1902).

Hence we find Hobson approvingly quoted by Lenin when he warns that imperialism - the conquest of colonies and the export of capital on a huge scale - carried the risk that western Europe would end up like the south-east of England, the Riviera or the "tourist-ridden" or residential parts of Italy and Switzerland - "little clusters of wealthy aristocrats drawing dividends and pensions from the far east", surrounded by professional retainers and tradesmen, personal servants and workers in the transport trade, while all the real work would be done in Asia and Africa.

Hobson specifically held out the danger of an "alliance of western states, a European federation of great powers, which, so far from forwarding the cause of world civilisation, might introduce the gigantic peril of a western parasitism". Hobson admitted that the "situation is far too complex, the play of world forces far too incalculable, to render this or any other single interpretation of the future very probable". But the influences which govern the imperialism of western Europe today are "moving in this direction", and unless "counteracted or diverted", point towards some such "consummation".

Lenin enthusiastically concurs:

"The author is quite right: *if* the forces of imperialism have not been counteracted, they would have led precisely to what he has described. The significance of a 'United States of Europe' in the present imperialist situation is correctly appraised".¹⁰

So what is Lenin's own political perspective? Essentially it lay in making revolution in one's own country. Not in some messianic nationalistic fashion, but as the beginning of a process that can only be completed on a global scale.

Not surprisingly Lenin argued against the United States of the World as an immediate slogan in 'On the slogan for a United States of Europe'. Such a state form of the unification and freedom of nations is associated with socialism. But as an immediate slogan it would be wrong for two reasons. Firstly, it merges with socialism. Secondly, it may be wrongly interpreted to mean that the "victory of socialism in a single country is impossible".

Politics and economics

This second point was squarely directed against Leon Trotsky, who - as his splendid biographer, Isaac Deutscher says, had "seemed to imply that revolution could break out in Russia only simultaneously with a European upheaval".¹¹ Trotsky, we should add, denied the charge and defended the slogan of a United States of Europe throughout World War I ... and beyond.

Lenin feared that if erected into a rigid, self-fulfilling prophesy such an insistence on a simultaneous European revolution could excuse revolutionary fatalism and breed passivity. "Uneven development," states Lenin, "is an absolute law of capitalism." Hence the "victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone".

After expropriating the capitalists and organising its own socialist production the victorious proletariat of that country would "rise against the rest of the world" and attract to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries. The use of force is not ruled out in order to spread the revolution abroad: "A free union of nations in socialism is impossible without a more or less prolonged and stubborn struggle of the socialist republics against the backward states." Finally, Lenin once again stresses, the "democratic republic" will be the "political form" of the dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat and the oppressed classes.

This argument on the possibility of a victorious socialism in one country is, of course, now famous - infamous. Having discovered it nearly 10 years later, Stalin went on, in 1924, to use this very passage quoted above in order to justify his theory of socialism in one country against what he dubbed Trotsky's "theory of the simultaneous victory of socialism in the principal countries of Europe".¹²

It has to be admitted that Lenin's formulation about the victory of socialism in one country is open to such a nationalist interpretation - if one shamelessly ignores the corpus of his writings which take for granted the necessity of socialism being international. Evidently on that basis what Lenin meant - and here Trotsky agreed - was that in all probability the proletariat of one country would seize state power ahead of others and might

States of Europe

have to survive in isolation for a short period of time before revolutions arose elsewhere. No country should wait for others. Revolutionary initiatives in one country takes forward the struggle in others. But in the face of a counterrevolutionary Europe revolutionary Russia could only but succumb or turn into its opposite.

Nevertheless in ‘On the slogan for a United States of Europe’ Lenin is hardly at his best. Leave aside the sloppiness around the “victory” of socialism in one county, Lenin rests the whole weight of his case against the republican United States of Europe slogan on a rigid conceptual separation between the political and the economic. Politically he says it is a good slogan. Economically bad. True, capitalism has put in place such a structural separation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ spheres. It is though, argues Ellen Meiksins Wood, “the most effective defence mechanism available to capital”.¹³

Previous modes of production - such as feudalism and Asiatic despotism - are completely bound up with political force. ‘State unit’ and ‘economic unit’ are indistinguishable. The position of exploiter is inseparable from their political (military) power and consequent place in the hierarchy. Surplus is extracted from the direct producer either by custom, backed by might, or simply obtained through employing naked military force. The exploiter has nothing or very little to do with production itself or even supervising production.

It is capitalism which creates a separate sphere of economics by discarding the former extra-economic means of exploitation - conventional labour duties, tithes, royal tribute. Social obligations and functions are discarded too. The business of the capitalist is business.

The extraction of surplus value, can in principle be achieved through purely ‘economic’ mechanisms. Private property becomes absolute. Having been ‘freed’ from the means of production, workers must sell their ability to labour to the capitalist - who now monopolises the means of production. So, although the coercive force of the political sphere is still necessary in order to stand guard over property and the general conditions of production and reproduction, the inescapable need to gain a living, provides, in normal circumstances, all that is required to persuade the worker to make themselves available for exploitation.

That is precisely why the capitalist market is a political as well as an economic space. By taking up the struggle for democracy and giving it a definite social content, the working class thereby begins to challenge not only the state, but the conditions of its own exploitation. As a rule Lenin experienced no problem whatsoever in recognising that. Hence for him the task of Marxist politicians was to lay bare the economics in politics and the politics in economics.

Self-determination

In that light Lenin’s numerous writings on the right of nations to self-determination oddly contrast with his rejection of the republican United States of Europe as either being “impossible” or “reactionary”. Leftist critics - eg, Luxemburg, Bukharin and Pyatakov - maintained almost exactly the same thing when it came to “self-determination”. Self-determination of small nations under the conditions

of imperialist capitalism was either a “reactionary utopia” or “impossible”. “So long as capitalist states exist,” writes Luxemburg in her Junius pamphlet, “there can be no ‘national self-determination’ either in war or in peace.”¹⁴

On the contrary, Lenin replied, the demand was perfectly feasible. He used Norway’s separation from Sweden in 1905 as proof. Furthermore, he insisted, if they were to achieve anything serious, not least socialism, Marxists must champion the rights of oppressed nations, especially against the great powers. Not to do so is to abandon the fight for socialism.

Self-determination is a demand for the equality of rights between nations. No serious Marxist imagines that the right to self-determination is limited to oppressed nations alone. There is no need, for example, to get into a complete tangle about whether or not Scotland is, or is not, an oppressed nation. The right to self-determination is nowadays exercised by all advanced capitalist powers, certainly to the degree real measures of democracy have been won from below. Marxists merely demand that that same right be extended to all nations. The bottom line must be the right to secede. Those who do not stand by this right are condemned by Lenin as chauvinists.

However self-determination is just that. The *right* to leave. National self-determination does not guarantee equality of population, of military hardware, of economic development or anything of the kind - a stupid argument fielded by stupid people *against* the national rights of both Palestine and Israel. Self-determination simply means the right of a nation to determine - through a referendum or by electing deputies - its own future. Palestine should have that right - and so too should a non-Zionist Israel - even though the latter would remain for some time militarily and economically much the more powerful state.

Nor does self-determination suggest, or hint at, advocating breakaways and the establishment of a multitude of dwarf states. Lenin touches upon this in ‘Socialism and war’ - the pamphlet he and Zinoviev jointly authored in 1915.¹⁵

“The championing of this right”, the right to self-determination, “far from encouraging the formation of petty states, leads on the contrary to freer, fearless and therefore wider and more universal formation of large states and the federation of states”. The two insist that such states “are an advantage” to the masses and that workers, in the *oppressed* nation, must “unfailingly” fight for the “complete” unity of the workers of the oppressed *and* oppressor nationalities, “including organisational unity” - Alan McCombes, Tommy Sheridan, Colin Fox and other such comrades in Scotland might care to take note.

It is one thing to oppose a United States of Europe brought about by blood and iron. But there is no need to conflate that with the republican United States of Europe won through revolution and completed by the voluntary agreement of the people. If there is a general right to freely merge into larger and larger state units and federations, surely that applies as much to Europe - which is ripe for socialism and has long established economic and cultural ties - as it does to any other corner of the world.

Motives

So why did Lenin perform an

180-degree about-turn between 1914 and 1915 on the republican United States of Europe slogan? Undoubtedly there were numerous reasons - including, I suspect, psychological factors - besides those of economic analysis, political programme and factional calculation.

But let us begin with the obvious. There existed many out-and-out reactionary advocates of a United States of Europe. Germany was not untypical. Here such people ranged from conservative Humboldt university professors and influential figures in the imperial high command to social chauvinists. A modern-day version of Charlemagne’s Holy Roman Empire appealed to those beguiled by romantic national historiography and obedient to Hegelian state worship. Bayonets, artillery bombardments, poison gas and brutal conquest were the methods they excused, or directly oversaw, in order to achieve their chosen ends. However, unity brought about in such a way could only but multiply existing social oppression and national grievances many times over. Their Europe was to be born swaddled in chains.

German military strategy, in the words of Friedrich von Bernhardi, a junker general, writing in his 1912 bestseller, should seek to finally settle scores with France in the west and expand territorially deep into tsarist Russia in the east. After the crushing victory continental power would be consolidated through a “Central European Federation” - with at its core a Greater Germany incorporating Austria, Holland, South Prussia, etc.¹⁶ From this ‘fortress Europe’ Germany proudly steps forth - fulfilling its god-given destiny - as the world’s leader. The narrow-mindedly commercial Anglo-Saxon powers, Great Britain and the US, are henceforth reduced to their more fitting place.

In good measure the German ruling classes turned to imperialism in an attempt to put off socialism. The Social Democratic Party achieved remarkable electoral successes after Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws were lifted. The 1912 election in particular “frightened all the forces of the establishment”, notes the US historian, Paul Kennedy. The results, which were a “stunning victory” for the SDP, provoked pan-German calls from big industrial capital, the great landowners and Lutheran newspaper owners for a “coup d’etat from above”. Plans to curb the Reichstag’s already severely limited powers were certainly given a more than sympathetic hearing “in court and army circles”.¹⁷

However, German socialism was far from united and far from single-mindedly revolutionary. German armies fighting in the trenches of Flanders were complemented and given succour on the home front by rightwing social democrats such as Gerhard Hildebrand. This socialist empire builder had, even before the outbreak of war in August 1914, vigorously promoted the idea of a “United States of Western Europe” (he excluded Russia), fronted, of course, by Germany. His united Europe would fend off the “great Islamic movement” rising in Asia and teach the “African negroes” the virtues of hard work and industry. The “African people require guidance and care”, he said, “for an indefinite time to come”.¹⁸

The August Bebel-Karl Kautsky leadership quite rightly expelled Hildebrand from the party. Yet with the declaration of war Hildebrandism

- to use a phrase - almost instantly infected the majority of the SPD’s parliamentary faction. Rosa Luxemburg, half in mourning and half in defiance, described the SPD as a “stinking corpse”.

Other equally disgusting personifications of social chauvinism can be cited from Russia, France and Britain. Longuet, Guesde, Vaillant, Chernov, Plekhanov, Hyndman, Snowden, etc. Meanwhile Lenin sifted through a vast mass of books, journals and papers in the well-stocked libraries of Switzerland to find the political ammunition he needed in order to expose not only the predatory war aims of the belligerent powers, but to polemically demolish rightwing social democracy. Suffice to say, the views of Hildebrand and his ilk on *their* united Europe were useful for “understanding the tendencies of opportunism and imperialism within social democracy!”¹⁹

Besides the united Europe advocated by the generals and the social chauvinists there were, however, other plans for a united Europe - crucially those still emanating from former comrades who Lenin now scornfully referred to as the Kautskyites. Lenin was determined to draw a clear line of demarcation that would completely separate off the Bolsheviks and the principled internationalist left from the Kautskyite renegades.

To avoid a split, Kautsky, for example, refused to condemn the SPD majority when the entire Reichstag fraction voted to finance the war. Nor did he rebel when the right acted as the kaiser’s loyal recruiting sergeant. Indeed he asked for understanding and himself urged social peace in Germany for the duration of the war.

Kautsky alibied the right and held out the prospect of re-cementing unity with them once the war finally finished. Obviously, in so doing Kautsky betrayed himself and, of course, the great cause of socialism. What made him a particularly dangerous source of social contamination, though, was not only his past reputation as an outstanding Marxist theoretician, but also the fact that he still continued to speak in the name of an authoritative Marxism.

Such a centrist stance was not isolated to Germany. Far from it. Every country had its centrists and, whether they stood on the right of that spectrum or on the extreme left, what marked them out for Lenin was their unwillingness to countenance an irrevocable political and organisational schism with the social chauvinists *and* those who defended them. In Russia this amorphous and ever shifting centrist trend included Jules Martov - the leader of the Menshevik Internationalists, who would, in 1918, gain an overall majority in the Menshevik Party - and so-called independents, most notably Trotsky.

Psychological

Here I think we must bring into our account psychological as well as factional considerations. The relationship between Kautsky and Lenin before 1914 might be described as that of star pupil to learned teacher. Lenin expressed his disagreement with Kautsky on this or that episodic issue. However, he considered Kautsky the worthy intellectual leader of the Second International and sought wherever possible to secure such invaluable support in the inner-party struggle against the Mensheviks. Kautsky often wrote

about Russian affairs and in general sided with the Bolsheviks - eg, over the worker-peasant nature of the Russian Revolution, election tactics and combining insurrection with a general strike in 1905.

Kautsky’s miserable collapse in 1914 hit Lenin like a bolt from the blue. He could hardly believe the news when it came. Nevertheless he quickly fought back hurling invective against Kautsky for all he was worth. The strategic goal in Lenin’s mind was, though, a complete and absolute rupture with such centrists, as well as the social chauvinists. The Bolsheviks intransigently raised the call for a Third International and for turning the inter-imperialist war into a civil war of social liberation. To begin with the Bolsheviks made little headway. Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin’s wife, writes amusingly of the situation of the Zimmerwald left in 1916, when it consisted of “The Dutch left plus ourselves, plus the German left, plus nought”.²⁰

The general mood internationally - as revealed by the socialist conferences in London, Berne and Zimmerwald - was for arriving at a broad consensus around inoffensive slogans such as “peace” and harmless resolutions pointing out the errors of social chauvinism.

It was in this context of murderous world war and the left’s continued conciliation with centrist and rightwing traitors that Lenin turned against the republican United States of Europe slogan. Lenin decided to associate the slogan with Kautsky and those who refused to break with the right. It became intertwined with Lenin’s undeniably correct campaign to draw lines of demarcation.

Surely, however, he overcompensated and drew a line that was far too defensive on this occasion. In so doing he gave away a highly serviceable political weapon. Post-1914 Kautsky might have come to give the slogan a “pacifist reading”. But, if the slogan had been supplemented with the call for revolutionary civil war throughout Europe and other key planks in the minimum programme, such as self-determination for the colonies and oppressed nations, then, yes, even in the darkest days of World War I, it would have carried a powerful message.

Workers throughout the European continent share a common history and can together make a common contribution towards finishing the world revolution ●

Notes

1. *Morning Star* October 23.
2. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 39, Moscow 1977, p776n.
3. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p18.
4. *Ibid* p33.
5. *Ibid* p18.
6. Quoted in VI Lenin *CW* Vol 39, Moscow 1977, p619.
7. *Ibid* pp384-85.
8. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p158.
9. *Ibid* p343.
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 22, Moscow 1977, pp280-81.
11. I Deutscher *The prophet armed* Oxford 1979, p237.
12. JV Stalin *Works* Vol 6, Moscow 1953, p391.
13. E Meiksins Wood *Democracy against capitalism* Cambridge 1999, p20.
14. R Luxemburg *The national question* New York 1976, p290.
15. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, pp295-339.
16. F von Bernhardi *Germany and the next war* London 1914, p106.
17. P Kennedy *The rise of Anglo-German antagonism 1860-1914* London 1980, p453.
18. Quoted in VI Lenin *CW* Vol 39, Moscow 1977, p112.
19. *Ibid* p113.
20. N Krupskaya *Memories of Lenin* Vol 2, Letchworth, nd, p171.

POLEMIC

Principled opposition, not constitutional cretinism

Mike Macnair explains what is wrong with 'a Labour government for its own sake'

Labour Party Marxists, a group within the Labour Party which is politically close to the CPGB, has put forward the following motion to the AGM of the Labour Representation Committee:

"The Labour Party should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme."

"The Labour Representation Committee does not aim for a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class and lead to Tory governments."

Comrade Stuart King of Permanent Revolution has described this motion as "surely the craziest to come out of the CPGB stable for some time! The LP has never had the support of 'a clear majority of the population'. Even in 1945 it only got 48% of the vote. Is [LPM] suggesting that with a 150-seat majority Labour should have abandoned its 1945 manifesto, remained in opposition and put the Tories into government? That policy really would have been rewarded by the voters!"

"Interesting to see as well that the CPGB apparently now thinks that, once Labour has a clear majority of the population, it will have a 'realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme'. And the capitalist state, its corporations, its army, police, secret services, judges, etc will sit back while the full socialist programme to expropriate them is carried out? What a piece of parliamentary cretinism, worthy of the old CPGB's *British road to socialism*."

The identification of LPM with the CPGB is, of course, false; but the CPGB has no hesitation in solidifying with LPM's proposal. Comrade King's comment is no doubt an example of the type of hot-off-the-keyboard, unthought-through comment that flies around cyberspace; but it is worth a response, because it beautifully displays something very common on the far left: a combination of 'parliamentary cretinism' (his first paragraph) with 'anti-parliamentary cretinism' (his second). This widespread combination helps to explain the inability of much of the far left to think clearly about the Labour Party.

The motion is making a case for two points. The first is for real democracy - majority rule - as opposed to playing within the rules of the capitalist constitutional game. The second is that the workers' movement needs a *principled opposition* in parliament, which gives solid political backing to the organisations of the working class on the ground against the state, the judiciary and the media. This will be more useful to the workers' movement than a Labour government committed to managing the capitalist system in the 'national interest' - like those of Attlee, Wilson-Callaghan and Blair-Brown.

The case for this approach has three levels. The first is concerned with our aims as communists. The second is the nature of the capitalist constitutional game. The third is concerned with



Monarch: reserve powers

the present situation of the workers' movement.

The aim of socialism

In our *What we fight for* column we say: "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."

We take this point entirely seriously. In the first place, the working class as a class cannot defend its interests except through collective action and organisation - through trade unions, cooperatives, mutuals, tenants' associations and so on - and collectivist political parties. But this organisation is not like the 'natural' collectivities of family and so on. It involves the *voluntary* choices of individuals to join, to stay members and to be active. Neither Labour, nor the trade unions, nor co-ops, nor left groups can take their members for granted. Without democracy, these organisations will wither away - as, in fact, under the rule of the labour bureaucracy, membership and participation have declined; and among the far-left groups, the rule of the petty bureaucracies leads to endless splintering into ineffective groupuscules. All the more, the working class needs democracy in its state if it is to rule.

Secondly, the question of communism is posed because of the growing irrationality of capitalism as an order for organising human collective activities. The crisis which has moved from a property crash to a banking crash, to a crisis of state debts is the immediately obvious symptom, but there are many others: the tendency to polarisation between rich and poor on both national and global scales, the inability to act effectively on human-induced climate change, and so on. All

these are the necessary result of the dominance of *private* choices with a view to maximising profits.

The necessary alternative is that we should take fundamental choices about investment and economic activities collectively. But to take these decisions collectively is necessarily to take them democratically. This is the fundamental lesson of Stalinism. When information and decision-making power is monopolised by a minority (the bureaucracy), however much it may *claim* to be socialism, it is, in fact, a form of *private ownership* of the means of production - by the bureaucracy as a collectivity and by individual bureaucratic clientage chains. The results are *different* irrationalities from those of capitalism, but - as the fall of the USSR demonstrated - the differences do not represent a serious, permanent alternative to that system.

Democracy involves majority rule. It is more than just majority rule, because it involves the *right of all to participate in political decision-making*. But it does necessarily involve majority rule. It is for this reason that "victory in the battle for democracy" necessarily involves "the rule of the working class", which is the majority class. As long as the interests of the propertied minority are to be protected from majority decisions, there can be no democracy.

Precisely because democracy involves majority rule, the idea that one could create democracy without majority support is utterly illusory. A 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which was a minority dictatorship over a hostile majority - even a rather narrow majority - would rapidly become a 'dictatorship over the proletariat'.

Hence a Labour government (however leftwing), or a communist government, which did *not* have clear majority support among the population, *could not* introduce a full socialist programme. The result would

at most be Stalinism.

Note that this is not only true of a government elected with minority support (however large the Commons majority it received as a result of the first-past-the-post electoral system). It is, in fact, equally, if not more, true of a government which came to power through a general strike and was created by the national coordination of councils of action; or of one which was thrown up by an unexpected insurrection against a tyrannical regime created by a military coup, or grew out of a 'prolonged people's war' against such a regime.

Rules of the game

'Parliamentary cretinism' consists in the belief that the working class movement ought to abide by the rules of the capitalist constitutional game. The approach was originally developed in the Second International on the basis of false suggestions by Marx and Engels that the constitutional rules of the US, Britain and perhaps the Netherlands would allow the workers' movement, if it could assemble a majority, to take power without breaking the constitutional rules.¹ It was revived by the Eurocommunists on the basis that the experience of Stalinism and the lack of mass support for socialist revolution in the west showed that the workers' movement needed to give 'credible commitments' to what Eurocommunists called 'socialist legality'.

The idea is given a certain pseudo-plausibility in Britain by the fact that - as indicated above - the rules of the electoral game can give the largest *minority* a huge Commons majority and thus the (conventional, not legal) right to form the government. And this happened to Labour in 1945, and again in 1997. Suppose for a brief moment that we disregard the nature of socialism, just discussed, and accept as 'socialism' a regime

of bureaucratic statisation. Surely a Labour government with a large majority could bring in 'radical socialist change' in this sense?

The idea is a misunderstanding of the constitutional rules of the game, and was already such a misunderstanding when Marx and Engels made their suggestions.

'First past the post' is not democratic. In 1945 Labour obtained 11,967,746 votes, 49.7% of the popular vote, and won a huge parliamentary majority. In 1951 Labour obtained 13,948,385 votes, 48.8% of the popular vote. The Conservative vote recovered, but only to 13,717,850 votes, or 48.0% of the popular vote. Nonetheless, the Conservatives obtained a parliamentary majority. If you accept the rules of the game, the Labour Commons majority of 1945 might be a mandate for radical change; but the Tory Commons majority of 1951, where the Tories were not even the largest minority at the polls, would equally have to be a mandate for its radical reversal.

'First past the post' is, moreover, *part of a constitutional package*. You do not get to accept part and reject part. At the most immediate level, in reality, a Commons majority is not a *parliamentary* majority. The House of Lords was until recently dominated by hereditary peers. It is now a gerontocratic institution appointed by a patronage system. Even if it was elected, the electoral schemes on offer are designed to counterbalance the possibility of a radical (rightist or leftist) Commons majority.

Assume a majority was somehow obtained in the Lords. The queen retains extensive legal reserve powers. *Conventionally*, these are only used on the advice of the sitting prime minister. But this is convention, not law. As the Australian Labor government led by Gough Whitlam discovered in 1975, the difference is quite real: the queen in England, or her governor-generals in Australia, etc, *can* sack a government which has a clear lower-house majority and dissolve the parliament at the time most propitious for an opposition election victory.²

Assume the Lords passed the relevant acts to introduce a purely economic 'socialism' and the queen assented to them. It remains the case that legislation has to be 'interpreted' by the judiciary. In the judicial process, individual capitals are directly represented by paid agents, and *only* these paid agents can become judges.³ The result is that legislation is routinely interpreted to minimise its impact on capital.

I stress *routinely*. A few recent examples: in *Tiensia v Vision Enterprises* in 2010, the court of appeal interpreted the 2004 legislation providing for protection of tenant deposits so as to deprive it of all practical effect. In *Independent Schools Council v Charity Commission*, last month, the Upper Tier Tax Tribunal neutered the effect of the Charities Act 2006 on private schools. In *AXA General Insurance v Lord Advocate*, also last month, the supreme court of the UK said that it *would not* overrule an act of the Scottish Parliament which reversed a prior judicial decision and in doing so disadvantaged the insurance companies - but that it *could* do so, on

the basis that the insurance companies' 'human rights' were violated by the legislation, in an appropriate case.⁴

When push comes to shove, moreover, capitalist firms are perfectly willing to just break the law to get their way - as happened in the dispute over Sunday trading in the early 1990s - or to back elements of the petty bourgeoisie in doing so, as the oil companies backed the fuel duty protests in 2000.⁵

The point of all this is that it is not necessary to go on about the 1973 Chilean coup (as we on the far left did at great length in the 1970s) as a threat to a hypothetical socialist government. The *ordinary routine operation* of the British constitution shows that it is far from true that, as Engels wrote of France, Britain and the USA in 1891, "... the representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands, [and] if one has the support of the majority of the people, one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way ...". It was already untrue then, when in *R v Bunn* (1872) Brett J deprived the Trade Union Act 1871 of all its force by simply redefining *why* trade unions were criminal conspiracies.⁶

On the contrary, the rules of the constitution give effect to the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*: that the capitalist class is above the law and has a veto on the law.

Now in a sense this is to make a similar point to that which comrade King makes in his second paragraph. However, it is subtly but deeply different. Comrade King is repeating the standard far-left line about the danger of a coup (without mentioning Chile): ie, unconstitutional action by the capitalists, on the basis of the assumption (reflected in his first paragraph) that a "full socialist programme" means merely expropriations rather than the overthrow of the constitution and the creation of thoroughgoing radical democracy.

My point is, in contrast, that the introduction of a full socialist programme - or anything more than managing capitalism in the 'national interest' - substantively involves the overthrow of the *present* constitution: both because socialism can only be democratic if it is to be socialism (the first point), and because the existing, so-called 'democratic', capitalist constitution is *not* democratic, but minoritarian - specifically the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

How this bears on the question of a popular majority for a full socialist programme is this. Imagine a Labour government which came to power with a genuine intention to execute radical *economic* projects, but *without* majority popular backing for the overthrow of the *constitutional order* (even if we could call this overthrow 'root and branch reform', as did the radicals of 1640-41 to avoid the word 'revolution'). Such a government would rapidly find itself either overthrown in a *constitutional* way (like Whitlam, who was no hard-line leftist) or forced to toe the line of managing capitalism in the 'national interest' (like the first Mitterrand government in France in 1981-83).

This would happen because, even if the government had a clear *Commons* majority, it would have no *political legitimacy* for coercing the unelected elements of the constitution; and these unelected elements would expect to be able to veto the radical economic projects or water them down to the point at which they posed no threat to the continued rule of the capitalist class.

Where, in contrast, there was a clear popular majority for socialist change, which recognised the character of the present constitutional order as a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, this popular majority would necessarily extend well into the lower ranks of the state apparatus. It would provide

the basis to arm the working class and disarm the capitalists through the break-up of the coherence of the 'security forces'; to paralyse counter-offensives through unelected parts of the constitution; and to organise counter-mobilisations against 'Countryside Alliance' opposition, fuel duty protestors, and whatever similar rightist mobilisations of sections of the petty bourgeoisie the capitalists might promote.

The third level is the question of how we *get* to such a popular majority. And here is where the question of a commitment to principled opposition - as opposed to 'anything for the sake of a Labour government' - comes in, and so does the relation of the motion to our *present* circumstances.

No through-roads

The 'official' CPGB's *British road to socialism* projected the road to socialist transformation as running through the creation of an 'anti-monopoly alliance' or people's front, leading to a leftwing Labour or left coalition government. The programme of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain, now renamed *Britain's road to socialism*, still does so, with relatively minor refinements and updating.⁷

There are many problems with this document. Crucially, its defence of the idea of socialism in a single country commits *Britain's road to socialism* to utopian economic projects and reactionary nationalism, whose effect is to *weaken* the working class by dividing it. But for present purposes the critical issue is the document's attempt to construct a gradualist approach to the question of socialist government. We are first to get a 'leftwing' government; then, the responses of capital and the state core will force the mass movement to take action and the government to move further left.

In practice, this means that the masses are to be conned into thinking that they are getting a Labour government which will govern in the British 'national interest' - in a more leftwing way than prior Labour governments; but will find that what they are actually getting is a communist government aligned with Cuba, China, etc.

This is a project which has been tried repeatedly by 'official' communist parties much stronger than the *Morning Star*-CPB (which is a sect smaller than the Socialist Workers Party). It has invariably failed, with certain exceptions. The exceptions are essentially cases where the 'left' coalition government was a mere front for a Communist Party which based itself on Soviet troops (most of eastern Europe and North Korea) or on prior victory in civil war by internal communist armed forces (Yugoslavia, Albania, China). In the exceptional cases what was produced was, of course, Stalinism. In the usual case what was produced was something like the normal outcome of a leftwing socialist government: economic disruption, leading to loss of legitimacy, leading either to a coup or to constitutional restoration of capitalist order.

The underlying problem is partly the global relation of forces, and the fact that global capital disposes of the means to disrupt effectively the economy of any single country which goes up against it. It is for this reason that we in CPGB argue for *European-wide* action of the working class, rather than arguing like the *Morning Star* for withdrawal from the European Union in the illusory belief that the London offshore centre and its attached UK territory is somehow more progressive than the European capitalists.

But the more immediate problem is that of political legitimacy. Like a left Labour government which tried to bring in a purely economic 'socialism' of bureaucratic statisation on the basis

of a mere Commons majority, the *Morning Star*-CPB's 'left government' would find that it had not *prepared the political ground* for the struggle against the constitutional order and its unelected elements. If anything, the reverse: by representing the pre-1972 political order as *more* democratic than the political order created by EU entry, this line would *strengthen* loyalty to the monarchical-bureaucratic-judicial 'rule of law' constitution and make it *harder* to mobilise against these elements.

The standard Trotskyist alternative paradoxically displays the same problem in an opposite form. The form is the belief that, since at the end of the day the present constitution is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the fundamental questions will be decided 'out of doors' by mass action, especially strike action. But, like the CPB, the Trotskyists are very reluctant to address the constitutional questions directly.

The *Transitional programme*, 'transitional demands' or 'transitional method' supposedly requires revolutionaries "to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."⁸

Broad working class masses are not generally engaged by the constitutional questions, and *working class* (as opposed to student) mass mobilisations almost entirely take the form of strike action over economic demands. Hence, Trotskyists' construction of 'transitional demands' operates on a strategy of transforming the economic struggle into the political struggle through 'generalising' these strike actions; this, in turn, will bring the need to create councils of action and politicisation through confrontation with the state.

This approach has the grave defect, which I have argued elsewhere, of providing no *coordinated* solution to the economic dislocation problems facing the masses which are posed by mass strike waves.⁹ More immediately, it has exactly the same political legitimacy problem - that it appears to be trying to con the masses into taking power - as does *Britain's road to socialism*. This legitimacy problem of 'strike wave socialism' has, like the failure of 'national roads' projects, shown up in history repeatedly. One of the more notable recent examples is that the enormous strike wave in May-June 1968 in France ended with - the *electoral* reaffirmation of the Gaullist regime.

The general-strikist strategy is implicit in Stuart King's characterisation of LPM's motion as "parliamentary cretinism". It is this *refusal* of the constitutional issues and implicit general-strikism that makes it an example of 'anti-parliamentary cretinism': it asserts that *under no circumstances* could the action of a Labour government be relevant to the implementation of a full socialist programme.

Where the Trotskyist left goes beyond general-strikism it collapses with remarkable rapidity into variant versions of *Britain's road* ... These are usually licensed by 'united front' theory; but can be explained by 'transitionalism', as in the case of the *Militant*/Socialist Party in England and Wales 'Enabling Act' conception, which would collapse through political illegitimacy more immediately than the *Morning Star*-CPB version. The extraordinary feature of the present-day SPEW is to marry this strategy to a project of *reinventing* Labour on the basis that the present party has

become purely capitalist ... so that SPEW could return to entry in a new 'old Labour' party.

Rebuilding the movement

The fundamental distinction between Marxist communism and earlier utopian forms is that Marxists believe that the working class could take over the running of society from the capitalists: and this would make possible a society which was not the 'barracks socialism' run by an unaccountable elite proposed by (some of) the utopian socialists.

The basis for this belief is that in the Marxist view the working class is defined by *separation from* the means of production, and so the working class as a class cannot defend its interests except through collective action and organisation - through trade unions, cooperatives, mutuals, tenants' associations and so on - and collectivist political parties. This working class collective activity under capitalism forms the basis of the possibility of the working class taking over the running of society as a whole - moving from self-organisation to the beginnings of a 'cooperative commonwealth'. The point is well made by Arthur Bough in the second part of his October 13 article in this paper, in which he moves from what has sometimes in his past writing seemed like an exclusive focus on co-ops to the idea of rebuilding the workers' movement as a whole.¹⁰

The organisation which is thrown up in strike movements has a strong tendency to be ephemeral. Rather, the sort of organisation which can create a solid workers' movement - and at the end of the day a real majority for socialism - is precisely the *ongoing* organisation of trade unions, co-ops, mutuals, workers' papers and so on, and workers' political parties. It is if the working class is *organised* as a class that it can project its own leadership of the society as a whole, and hence create a real popular majority for socialism - and that it *could* spread its ideas into the armed forces and face down the capitalists' paid agents in the unelected part of the constitution.

If we draw a simple balance sheet of where we are in relation to workers' organisation the answer is not strong. The Labour Party reached its apogee as a mass organisation in or around 1945 and has been withering away into a bureaucratically controlled shell ever since. The trade unions continued to grow in strength and to some extent in self-organisation down to 1974, when the Wilson Labour government's 'reforms' in the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act and Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act shifted power massively from the grassroots to the bureaucracy. Since then, they too have tended to wither at the base and in mobilising ability in spite of still having impressively large membership numbers.

The cooperative movement was weakened in a major way by the creation of the welfare state, and the Co-op has almost (not quite) been reduced to a bureaucratically controlled retailer. The 1960s-70s also saw the effective end of labour-movement press outside the far-left groups, as the bureaucracy settled for tightly controlled (and therefore unsaleable) journals and the illusory hope of getting a fair hearing through the capitalist/corrupt advertising-funded media. And so on.

The task facing the workers' movement if it is to counter the enormous shifts of wealth and power towards capital which have taken place since the 1970s is, therefore, to rebuild itself from top to bottom or, to put it another way, from the ground up, as a democratic, self-organising movement.

If we ask *why* the movement has withered, the answer is actually largely a story of the proactive intervention of the capitalist state and media to increase their ability to intervene in the internal affairs of the workers' organisations, in support of the dictatorship of a bureaucracy which is increasingly integrated in the general managerial-bureaucratic stratum in society as a whole.

As long as this process continues, the mere election of a Labour government is *guaranteed* to be a government further to the right than Blairism. It does, in fact, continue: Miliband's 'supporters' category is a first step in giving Rupert Murdoch control of who is Labour leader.

Reversing the process involves efforts to rebuild the movement at the most basic level on the ground. But not just such efforts. The movement on the ground needs the support of a political party which gives unambiguous solidarity - against government and bureaucratic regulation, against the judiciary and against the capitalist media - and constantly seeks to expose the corrupt character of these institutions as agencies of capital. To engage in such a political project necessarily also involves putting forward an alternative to the capitalist political order, at the level of both the British and the EU constitutions: working class rule, or socialism.

Such a project means committing to a role in the immediate future of principled opposition; because, as I have just said, any Labour government based on a coalition or minority rule, however leftwing the original intentions of the participants, will soon fall or be turned into something like or something worse than Blairism. Rebuilding the labour movement is only possible *from opposition*, and from willingness to oppose the dictatorship of the bureaucracy within the movement, which is a form of the intervention of the capitalist class in the movement.

For the LRC to commit itself to fighting for principled opposition and against the chimera of a 'left Labour government' without a real popular majority would, then, be for the LRC to commit itself to the *real, possible* struggle to rebuild the movement and to playing, as far as its small forces allow, the role of a political tribune in defence of the autonomy of the workers' movement from the capitalist state and media. It is this basic choice - between principled opposition in order to rebuild the movement and an illusory hope for a somehow more leftwing Labour government - which LPM's motion presents ●

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Notes

1. Eg, K Marx, 'La Liberté speech' (1872): www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/09/08.htm; F Engels, 'Critique of the draft Social Democratic programme of 1891': www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm.
2. Summary at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gough_Whitlam#Constitutional_crisis. The action was *politically* possible because Labor, though it had a majority in the House of Representatives, did not have a popular majority.
3. M Macnair, 'Free association versus juridification' (2011), *Critique* Vol 39, pp79-80.
4. *Tiensia* [2010] EWCA Civ 1224; *ISC v Charity Commission* [2011] UKUT 421 (TCC); *AXA v Lord Advocate* [2011] UKSC 46.
5. Sunday trading: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1993/nov/29/sunday-trading-bill>; fuel duty protests: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuel_protests_in_the_United_Kingdom.
6. M Macnair, 'Free association versus juridification' (2011), *Critique* Vol 39, p66.
7. Available at www.comunist-party.org.uk/home/index.php under the tab 'Socialism'.
8. L Trotsky *Transitional programme* (1938), section 3: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text.htm#mt.
9. M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy* London 2008, chapter 3.
10. 'The crisis is financial, it is not economic' *Weekly Worker* October 13. I certainly do not mean by this approving citation to indicate that I accept the arguments of the first part of comrade Bough's article or that I agree 100% with the second part.

FILM

Political naives and coffee cobblers

Jim Moody concludes his review of this year's London Film Festival

As usual, the London Film Festival has managed to bring excellent examples of current filmmaking to the annual event. These are a few more of the notable works it showcased.

360 (director: Fernando Meirelles): This film's storyline is derived from Arthur Schnitzler's 1900 play *Reigen* (*The round*), which scathingly portrayed Viennese class attitudes and sexual mores. His 'round' was a commentary on class through sexual encounters across class divides, and referred obliquely to sexually transmitted diseases. But this time 'round', *360* has no such fascinating aspirations. Previous filmic outings of the story, Max Ophüls's *La ronde* (1950) and Roger Vadim's 1964 version of the same title, seem to have been ignored, their narrative disregarded. Instead, we are treated to a fairly disconnected and unengaging display of excellent acting talent going to waste. Only Anthony Hopkins, as a grieving father searching worldwide for his daughter's remains, gets to make any kind of splash, with a good bout of monologue in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

A dangerous method (director: David Cronenberg): Brilliantly playing off each character's strengths and weaknesses, the two principals give a real flavour of the early days of psychotherapy. Like any able and lively-minded scientist, young Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) quite rightly has no fear of questioning the older Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen). But instead of intellectual jousting, thanks to Freud's standing on his dignity, Jung and Freud fall out. Part of this derives from one of Jung's patients, Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley), whom he treats at his Zurich clinic. Knightley's near-gurning at the beginning almost topples into a parody of mental illness, but she soon recovers Sabina's characterisation, as the young woman becomes first Jung's student and then his lover. Jung's bourgeois lifestyle, thanks to his rich wife, Emma (Sarah Gadon), permits his relationship with Sabina on the side, but things get interesting when he casts her off.

Bernadette: notes on a political journey (director: Lelia Doolan): Bernadette Devlin as was and what she became. In a historical tour of the Northern Ireland civil rights and republican movements, the younger Bernadette appears more militant than she does in later years, especially at the time she was a Westminster MP. However, Bernadette as interviewed in recent years by Doolan is quite honest, declaring that much of the time she was making it up as she went along in the early day.

More than a biopic documentary, Doolan has contrived to place something of the sweep of Six Counties politics through the troubles of the 60s and 70s to the present. In the earliest period, civil rights marches are laid into by police and British army, often with fatal consequences. Then we see the Provisional Irish Republican Army rise up to protect the nationalist population, something that Bernadette is not averse to, saying she does "not mind being in the shadow of a gunman". Assassination of a series of civil rights campaigners almost



Roman Polanski: carnage

included Bernadette, and she makes a point in an interview of listing those others who lost their lives to loyalist assassin's bullets. More recent years have seen the so-called peace process, with its flaws and limitations and the evident transformation of 'terrorists' into acceptable mainstream politicians. Bernadette now works in community projects because there is nowhere else to go.

Better this world (directors: Katie Galloway, Kelly Duane de la Vega): The title expresses the protagonists' desire for political change. Two naive young men, Brad Crowder and David McKay, were entrapped by FBI agent Brandon Darby into *thinking* of committing political violence that would see them convicted and sent to prison for two and four years respectively. Crowder and McKay were arrested during the 2008 Republican National Convention, after having accepted Darby's idea of bombing it in the face of police crackdown on legitimate protests; but they soon after abandoned this idiocy.

This 'conspiracy', set up by the Feds to smear all protestors, then allowed them to fit up Crowder and McKay *pour encourager les autres*. So-called justice then forced the accused to accept plea bargains rather than face the likely prospect of decades in dehumanising US prisons. Obscenely blatant, the US state is seen to be willing to use any means against perceived enemies. And louse Brandon Darby, who entrapped the pair and incited their 'crime', was set free as a bird: he has been transmuted into a mendacious, rightwing commentator.

Carnage (director: Roman Polanski): Nancy (Kate Winslet) and Alan Cowen (Christoph Waltz) are visiting Penelope (Jodie Foster) and Michael Longstreet (John C Reilly) in their apartment. Initially it is a very civilised occasion, considering the

Cowens' 11-year-old has bashed the Longstreets' own offspring in the face with a stick, causing serious dental damage, but it is not long before the middle class veneer starts to peel. Closely based on the 2006 Yasmina Reza play, *Le dieu du carnage* (*God of carnage*), the film reveals that these 'decent people' are pretty venal when it comes down to it.

Penelope's striving to keep a grip on proceedings is at extreme counterpoint to Alan's continual resort to his mobile phone, as if his professional concerns mean the others must dance attendance on him while he is detached from their surroundings. Scotch follows coffee cobbler and, as the alcohol takes hold, some home truths and ugly attitudes start to surface, then explode like depth charges around the apartment. This is a *tour de force* by all four players that resounds vividly, thanks also to a faithful rendition of the play, translated by Michael Katims.

Dreams of a life (director: Carol Morley): Based on the true story of a woman whose skeleton was not found in her flat above Wood Green Shopping City until three years after she had died of natural causes. All of those who had known 38-year-old Joyce Vincent were ignorant of her fate until the news hit the press. This was all the more remarkable, as she is described by friends, including ex-boyfriends, as a warm and delightful person. Morley takes aim well to get to the nitty-gritty of why Joyce drifted out of human contact, away from family as well as friends, and, shockingly, why her body was undiscovered for so long. Blending considerate re-enactment with interviews goes a long way to helping round out the person who was Joyce Vincent. Realities are unearthed, but inevitably we are still left with the unfinished, if not unvarnished, truth. Isolation and alienation and other such perfectly valid conceptual attempts to

complete the film have then to be the viewer's prerogative.

Once upon a time in Anatolia (*Bir zamanlar anadolu'da*) (director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan): This is the kind of police procedural that sets reality as the tone. Grinding through one night, detectives, gendarmes, a doctor and a prosecutor try to find a body buried in a field in central Anatolia, two hours drive from Ankara. Commissar Naci (Yılmaz Erdoğan) is losing not only face, but his rag too, while Dr Cemal (Muhammet Uzuner) and prosecutor Nusret (Taner Bırsel) exhibit more sangfroid, as they engage with suspect Kenan (Firat Tanis). But, despite running two and a half hours, the piece never stalls, thanks to the admixture of the characters' persistence, ennui and humour.

Rebellion (*L'ordre et la morale*) (director: Mathieu Kassovitz): Over two decades ago, the French Republic sent gendarmes and army troops to New Caledonia to suppress a rebellion. This is the story of how metropolitan political concerns overrode sensitive

policing, leading to the brutalisation of French citizens. Thanks to political jockeying between president François Mitterrand and prime minister Jacques Chirac, the very limited revolt of a few Kanak islanders on Ouvea saw a massive over-reaction, with troop landings and large amounts of military materiel made available. Kassovitz himself plays the real-life counter-terrorism negotiator, Philippe Legorjus, who was appalled at the barbarities inflicted by the invading forces and an unnecessarily bloody end to a rebellion and hostage situation. Legorjus's book about the affair formed the basis for the film.

The black power mixtape 1967-1975 (director: Göran Hugo Olsson): This could have been subtitled 'From politics to drug dealing', since black power was destroyed by the feds' deliberate introduction of drugs into the ghettos. The mixtape itself is a curate's egg, its patchiness explained by their origin in disparate reports for Swedish television over the years in question. Nonetheless there are some fascinating moments from the politics of the time, not least the opining of a sinister Louis Farrakhan and the political nous of the Communist Party's Angela Davis during her persecution at the hands of the state. Rare footage of Stokely Carmichael at ease is a treat, too.

The Ides of March (director: George Clooney): Clooney's fourth outing as a director sees him playing yet another liberal presidential hopeful, full of idealism about settling international disputes without wars, and other such guff. Such are the dreams of the USA's Democratic masses, or at least were yet again before the present incumbent was elected.

It is as clear as day that time after time the Democratic Party and its candidates have as their main purpose the obstruction of independent working class organisation. That cynical groundhog day cycle is not even alluded to here. In its place we have false hope and false dawns. In the end, tawdriness reasserts itself even before he is elected: when governor Mike Morris (George Clooney) falls foul of the rule, 'Don't fuck the interns', he is saved by double dealing. There is some small saving grace in the by-play between campaign manager Paul Zara (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and young press secretary Stephen Meyers (Ryan Gosling) ●

Head to head in Halle



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IRELAND



Michael Higgins: Labour's poet president

No alternative posed

The election of Michael D Higgins as Ireland's ninth president was certainly a resounding victory for the Labour Party. At almost 40% of first preferences and over one million votes, he was undoubtedly the clear winner. His election, as well as that of Patrick Nulty in the Dublin West by-election, reflect interesting developments in terms of Labour.

What is significant is that both Higgins and Nulty are on the left of the party. Higgins is a veteran supporter of progressive causes and has more often been seen as a thorn in the side of the establishment. He has been a frequent critic of the Catholic church and a supporter of women's rights - even, it is said, an advocate of abortion rights. Nulty is a young community activist who describes himself as a socialist. He was one of the early signatories to Hands Off the People of Iran here in Ireland.

Of course, there is no doubt that neither was voted in as a rebel as such. Nulty has professed his opposition to health cuts and the household charge (yet another new tax); but he has also said he will abide by the party whip. Higgins ran an extremely sanitised campaign, which was more about his poetry than politics. In fact he consistently evaded difficult questions about where he stood on, for example, the church and the constitution.

Higgins' victory stood in contrast to the humiliation of Labour's coalition partner. Fine Gael's Gay Mitchell won only 6.4%. Mitchell - a crawl-thumping conservative and 'pro-lifer', who once described abortion as akin to "the holocaust" - was well behind Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness at 13.7%. So humiliated was the Fine Gael candidate that he could not even bring himself to turn up for the official announcement at Dublin Castle. This was a slap in the face for the largest governing party.

Sinn Féin, however, will see it as a step forward in its attempt to build an all-Ireland republican party. McGuinness's candidature had been greeted with horror

by establishment and media alike when it was announced in September. The level of vitriol was astounding, as journalists and politicians alike went on the attack. McGuinness was put under huge pressure to confess his membership of the Irish Republican Army and his alleged complicity in a number of killings. He went from respected Northern Ireland politician to mad gunman overnight. Deep indignation was expressed at his effrontery in coming south to stand for the presidency. His republicanism is a kind that is very unwelcome, it was said.

The other candidate to receive such interrogation was David Norris. Norris, who is an openly gay man, is a member of the Senate and well known for being a supporter of progressive causes (including, incidentally, Hopi). Norris was one of the first to throw his hat into the ring and got a lot of support. But then the establishment turned their attention to destroying his character and digging up his past. He has always said that he does not support an age of consent. This, we were told, was evidence of softness on paedophilia.

Another example was the fact that he had written a letter to an Israeli court pleading clemency for his ex-partner, who had been convicted of the statutory rape of a 15-year-old youth. And he had the nerve to write it on Senate headed paper. The real problem was not the letter, but the fact that it had been written for a gay man. The fact that the sex had actually been consensual did not matter at all. Norris initially withdrew from the race because of the scandal, but rejoined it after calls were made from the public for him to do so. But he remained deeply defensive and gradually his support fell away.

Fianna Fáil did not have a candidate - well, not openly. Instead, Fianna Fáil member Sean Gallagher, successful businessman and judge in Ireland's version of *The dragon's den* went forward as an

'independent'. He did initially gather a large degree of support from Fianna Fáil members and seemed on course to win. But he was spectacularly outed for corruption and bribe-taking by Martin McGuinness during a televised national debate just days before the election. We were all immediately reminded of Fianna Fáil politicians with their snouts in the trough.

In terms of the left, Ruth Coppinger for the Socialist Party/United Left Alliance did well in the Dublin West by-election, coming third with 21.1% of the vote. She tied with the Fianna Fáil candidate in what had been the constituency of Brian Lenihan, the finance minister. The SP is rightly very pleased with the result, but it is hard to know what it will mean for the ULA, as the sectarian antipathy between it and the Socialist Workers Party continues to hamper the project.

It was a bad day for Fine Gael and a good day for Labour - I believe that this will exacerbate tensions within the coalition. Also for the left it poses the need for us to immediately address the constitution in a radical way. The Socialist Party said that there should be no president and so the election was a sideshow not worth getting involved in. Like many I agree that the presidency should be abolished. But the way to do that is to campaign around the election, if possible standing a candidate. The vote shows that those who stand against the status quo are popular.

The central question in Ireland remains the economy and the failing capitalist system. Yet there was no presidential candidate standing for the only viable alternative - Marxism. Nor can we leave constitutional questions to liberals and republicans. These are issues for which the working class movement ought to have answers ●

Anne Mc Shane

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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As the system declines, so do ideas

Waking the dead

A Tory MEP has attracted derision for his loopy beliefs in the paranormal - but he is merely the tip of an iceberg of absurd mumbo-jumbo, argues **James Turley**

The European parliament, it is probably fair to say, is hardly an environment overburdened with mirth at the present time. The existing cohort of MEPs will therefore no doubt be keen to welcome the latest addition to their number, a Conservative deputy for the East Midlands by the name of Rupert Matthews.

Matthews has positively rocketed to notoriety, and on one level it is no wonder. He is possessed of a number of distinct personal quirks, which are commonly found together - he is a UFOlogist, a believer in the Roswell and Area 51 conspiracy theories, and a believer in Bigfoot. He is also a self-proclaimed 'ghost-hunter', a skill set he endeavours to pass on to others through his teaching arrangements at the International Metaphysical University (a mail-order 'college' where a set of fraudulent cranks endeavours to rip off a set of *aspiring* fraudulent cranks).

Matthews was propelled into this position by the resignation of Roger Helmer - triggered not by any personal scandals or suchlike, but by the Conservative Party's perceived deviation from the hysterical far-right views he endorses, including the full set of Europhobic prejudices and, on one memorable occasion (the recent riots), the demand that the army should be sent in and shoot arsonists "on sight".¹ Charming.

By the rules of the European parliament, his resignation triggers no by-election; so the good people of the East Midlands are stuck with the next-best placed candidate in the region. That man is Rupert Matthews. In political substance, as it happens, there is not a huge change here; Matthews is *also* a bilious rightwinger, but of a rather more *American* conspiracy-paranoia type. Fellow MEP Daniel Hannan describes him as an "energetic patriot",² and energetic indeed are his views on the Lisbon Treaty, which he imagines allows the European commission to deploy "Panzer divisions" on British soil without our say-so (one wonders, if the EU is such a menacing military threat, why it cannot afford tanks less than 70 years old).

Of course, his views are not, pound for pound, any more irrational than those of his predecessor. Both are fitting enough representatives of the petty bourgeois philistines who make up the readership of the *Daily Mail*, for whom every threat is an existential one. Torpedo the EU, or it will invade Britain! Shoot the rioters, or civilisation will collapse into anarchy!

Capitalism, like any other mode of production, 'works' by having the appropriate conditions available for its reproduction. Partly these are strictly economic (making sure enough people are fed to grow more food, so to speak); but ultimately any class society needs recourse to the state

and political forms appropriate to that society. It also needs ideological forms that win passive or active consent from the persons under its sway.

As capitalism falls further into decline, what should be a well-oiled machine begins to fall apart; political forms which solved one problem become an obstruction to solving another (the project of European unity being one very obvious example). Ideology, meanwhile, becomes more and more fragmented and irrational. The *Daily Mail* is the prevailing shorthand in this country for that irrationalism; from its pages spill ever more absurd chunks of pseudo-science, mangled statistics and Manichean accounts of minor political disputes.

The rise (and rise) of religious reaction is a very obvious factor here. Though the more small-c catholic irrationalisms of the Tea Party partly buck the trend, US politics remains imprisoned by a shock force of Christian reactionaries, many of whom border on the fascist in their views (the *Dolchstosslegende* - the belief that military defeat stems from the treason of liberals and other unworthies on the home front - is a prominent account on the American right of the disaster in Vietnam and then the attack on the twin towers).

Angels v aliens

And, indeed, all those on the right who scoff at Matthews' mystical idiocy but accept either the teachings of or some positive role for the Christian church should remember the famous admonition of Christ: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew vii:5).

Matthews believes that ghosts

haunt various locations around the world. Christianity is founded on an account of a man being executed, rising from the dead and making enigmatic visitations around the area for a few weeks before heading off to heaven. Matthews believes in aliens; Christians believe in angels. The difference is hardly enormous.

For that matter, irrationalisms interpenetrate; there is a whole new-age cult about angels, which speaks of them in much the same terms as some UFO cults talk about benevolent visitors from the firmament. There are Christian cults which believe that, come the end of days, god's chosen few will be gifted with the kind of powers one finds in Superman comics - flight, laser eyes, that kind of thing (the Wasilla Assembly of God became briefly infamous a couple of years ago thanks to personal links to Sarah Palin - again, it is a terribly *American* eschatology).

The fundamental difference is the sedimentation of history. Christianity, like most major world religions, goes back millennia (the youngest of the major faiths, Sikhism, was born in the late 15th century). It has established itself through billions of worshippers, and trillions (or more) individual acts of worship - the irrationality is repressed by the religion's reduction to its principal functions in society (heart of a heartless world, and so forth), and pervasive invasion of everyday life. The result is the well-known stereotype of 'progressive' Anglican clergymen who barely believe in god at all.

Yet, as the 'mystical shell' of wildly magical claims about the universe gives way to the 'rational kernel' of simply lulling the masses, the latter function decays too. It is founded on precisely the mysticism

it must brush under the carpet to remain relevant to an age where god and Mammon are one and the same. The repressed returns: in one form, as a religious fundamentalism which claims unbroken continuity with the founding acts of the religion; and in the other, as the proliferation of new sources of magic (ghosts, aliens and the rest).

Purgatory

'Traditional' religion, whether in its relatively sophisticated or dogmatic-fundamentalist versions, decries new-age loopiness not because it is a latter-day Golden Calf, but because it reveals very clearly that *all* religious beliefs are rather more earthly than they would like to admit.

It is worth turning to another recent farrago with a paranormal bent; on September 11, hundreds of people went to see the celebrity psychic, Sally Morgan, communicate with the next life at a theatre in Dublin. The next day, a disgruntled punter called into an RTE radio talk show to reveal that, from her spot in the cheap seats, she could hear a man feeding Morgan the information on which she was basing her 'readings'.

Morgan protests her innocence; rival psychic Derek Acorah wasted no time in twisting the knife (despite having been similarly embarrassed in the past himself). Yet this is simply one of the many ways in which the psychic circuit is widely known to be a colossal and cynical fraud perpetrated on the bereaved and the gullible. We *know* that the likes of Morgan and Acorah (and, presumably, Rupert Matthews) use a combination of cold-reading techniques and prior information-gathering to present a plausible illusion of an ectoplasmic netherworld just out of view. The

stage psychic has the same relation to the stage magician that the torturer has to the surgeon - broadly the same know-how is turned to less than benign ends.

From there, it is but a small step to the US televangelists who fleece millions to fund their 'good works'; and from there in turn, just another step to the Church of England, which thrives on the basis of enormous land-holdings and state beneficence; and from there, one more to the Roman Catholic Church, which has accumulated enormous material wealth in its one and a half thousand years of existence. Seen through the prism of the obviously ridiculous spiritualism of contemporary society, rather more august religious institutions begin to look like the cons they are.

So, for all his manifest stupidity, Rupert Matthews is a perfect representative of the spiral descent of capitalism into autocannibalistic irrationality. The Tory right is concerned that he will 'let the side down' in a country that will not forgive his loopy gaffes in the way that many Americans forgave Sarah Palin's. Their concerns may be well founded, for now - but Britain is not the country of hard-headed pragmatists it fancies itself to be, and there will be many more obscurantists and weirdoes in blue rosettes before the decade is out. For now, we can at least enjoy the fleeting spectacle of the encounter between the EU bureaucracy and Matthews's 'energetic patriotism'.

What could go wrong? ●

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Notes

1. www.economist.com/blogs/bagehot/2011/10/britain-and-eu-0.

2. *The Independent* November 1.

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