



# weekly worker



**Meet the new masters:  
Italy after the fall of  
Silvio Berlusconi**

- Occupy Sheffield
- New quake in Turkey
- HM conference
- CPGB aggregate

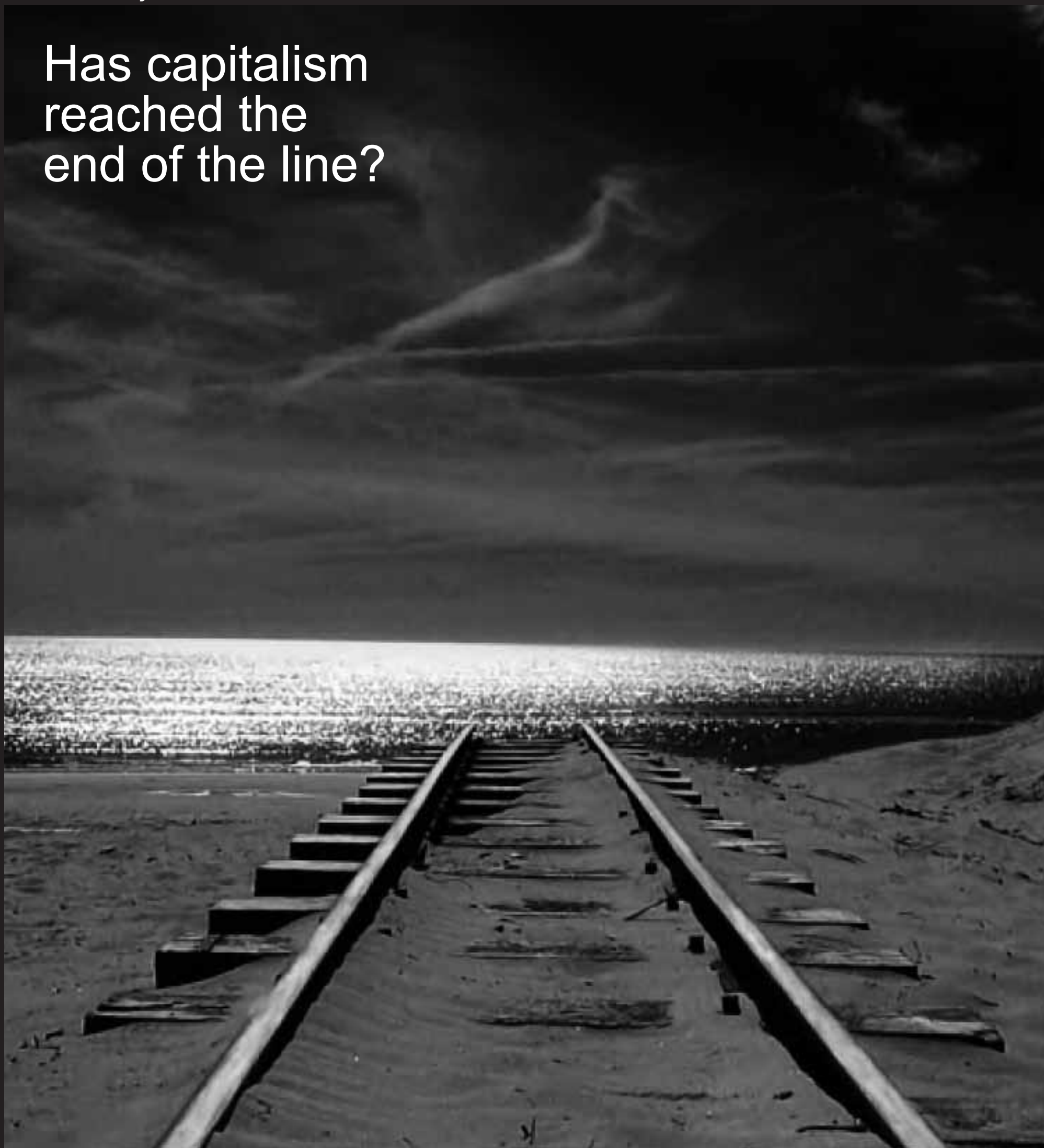
No 890 Thursday November 17 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

[www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk)

£1/€1.10

Has capitalism  
reached the  
end of the line?



# LETTERS



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

## Miner insult

Dave Douglass accuses me of a “gutter-level, slanderous insult” in my last reply to him. I think that’s a bit of an over-reaction. Nevertheless, if Dave took personal offence at what I said, rather than accepting it as political criticism, I apologise, because it was not intended as such.

I take it that what he was objecting to was my statement that, in defending and promoting the idea of nationalisation by the capitalist state, he was acting as an apologist for state capitalism. I have difficulty in apologising for that, however, because I don’t know how else to describe the promotion of state capitalism as a solution for workers’ problems - as opposed to the solution, proposed by Marx and Engels, of a revolutionary transformation of property relations via workers’ ownership of the means of production. Still less can I think of a different way of expressing that, when the person making the argument in favour of nationalisation by the capitalist state continues to do so on the basis of arguing that such nationalisation has in some way been done to benefit workers rather than capital, despite the evidence they themselves have presented, which contradicts that assertion.

Dave had gone to some length to elaborate the profit-and-loss basis upon which the National Coal Board conducted its activities, and upon which it made decisions concerning pit closures. Yet, having provided that evidence quite clearly, he then still went on to claim that the nationalisation of the coal industry had meant “the lowering of the individual profit motive”! I’m afraid that nothing Dave has said resolves this basic contradiction, including his own unsubstantiated insult that I have an “eccentric, one-dimensional, mechanistic way of analysing pricing, value and economic policy, which renders [me] 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”. In fact, the last part of this sentence surely undermines further his own claims about the benefits of nationalisation for workers, and his statement that it lowers the individual profit motive.

Nor does anything he says in this regard resolve the contradiction in his argument in favour of nationalising other firms, such as Bombardier and BAe. If, as he claims, the state closed down the coal industry for no other reason than it was the only way of defeating a militant workforce, he still has to explain why on earth that same state, with a Cameron-led government, would nationalise these other industries, given that they would have to have a far more militant, far more revolutionary and class-conscious workforce than were the miners, if these industries were to be able to force that state to concede any kind of meaningful “workers’ control” to them, as Dave insists upon.

Let me be clear. In saying that Dave’s arguments amount to apologetics for state capitalism, I am not in any sense impugning his revolutionary credentials or inclinations. I have no doubt that he wants to rip the head off capitalism, but that does not change the fact that, objectively, the arguments he raises lead in the opposite direction. People can simply be wrong without having in any way become traitors to their class. In demolishing the arguments of one of his Narodnik opponents, Lenin described them as “reactionary”. But, in a note to the

article, Lenin pointed out that, in doing so, it did not in any way change the fact that his opponent had proved himself over the years as a dedicated revolutionary.

As Dave says he does not intend to respond further, I will not pick up on the further contradictions in his argument relating to pit closures, as the arguments I have already put forward previously adequately do that.

It is one thing to oppose a reactionary return of state-owned property to private capital; it is another to advocate such state-capitalist solutions rather than a revolutionary transformation of property relations, by the establishment of worker-owned property.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Republican?

I have been puzzling over exactly how the CPGB plans to reform the Labour Party. I take it as given that the CPGB is not trying openly or secretly to reform it into a revolutionary Marxist Party. The only thing that makes any sense to me is a plan to reform the Labour Party into a republican socialist party. On the surface this seems like a damn good plan (I won’t bore readers with the negatives).

Then up pops a new group called ‘Labour Party Marxists’, which Mike Macnair tells us is “politically close to the CPGB” (‘Principled opposition, not constitutional cretinism’, November 3). It has put forward the following motion to the AGM of the Labour Representation Committee:

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

“The aim must be that the Labour Party should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme.”

This is obviously inspired by our great republican socialist traditions. It is hinting at republicanism combined with the aim of a full socialist programme. If this was passed by the LRC it would be a step towards a republican socialist party. No wonder Stuart King is gnashing his teeth because he fears and loathes republicanism.

But I can also understand his frustration. Why are Labour Party Marxists only hinting at or flirting with republicanism. There is a picture of the queen above the article, so we all get the message. Stuart recognises what these Marxists are up to and says it is bonkers.

Come on, Labour Party Marxists, have the courage of your convictions and use the ‘R’ word. Tell the Labour Party it must become republican socialist, not royalist capitalist.

**Steve Freeman**  
South London

## Expediency

Peter Manson reviewed the Socialist Workers Party’s latest pre-conference *Internal Bulletin* (No2) in last week’s paper (‘No ambition, no vision’, November 10).

In the bulletin the SWP central committee say, “The revolutionary left can seem tiny, irrelevant and marginalised”, and, yes, it is tiny. However, the SWP cannot be criticised for trying to build the party, as Peter Manson suggests, when he says, “How about trying to develop a winning

strategy for our class, not one that aims to make the SWP marginally less tiny?”

Who is to say which of the numerous left parties has the winning strategy? This is the type of attitude that is certainly not going to win any friends, if ever there were discussions to build the mass party of millions that the left needs. What sort of time frame does Peter Manson suggest it will take to build that party? I am sure other left groups would be quite pleased to recruit 100 members in one day. Once members are recruited, what happens to them after they have signed the membership form is another question. Of course, Peter Manson adds the caveat that he does not want to be mistaken about recruiting people to the left.

**Simon Wells**  
North London

## Sexgate

Heather Downs starts her critique of Chris Knight in the wrong place (Letters, November 10). Unlike comrade Knight, who first demonstrates a material chain of events that relates our ape ancestors to modern humans, she begins with how people ought to behave. Yes, our female ancestors did have an interest in controlling the bullying of alpha males, but the alpha male does not provision his sexual partners nor their offspring.

Over time, with bigger brains, first grandmothers, then aunts and sisters were recruited into the care and provisioning of offspring. But it took the human revolution to turn males from being the leisured class into a productive class. Only when the female-led coalition took control over female sexual availability and began the system of group marriage did long-distance big-game hunting become possible. This was done by men. But what they killed did not belong to them. There was a taboo against them eating their own kill. The meat belonged to wives and their kin.

The point is that the human revolution created a much more complex pattern of relationships, including the identification of the male as a father with emotional interests in his offspring. Humans made the leap from biology to culture and with that came greater trust between individuals, - and not forgetting language, art and ritual.

The social reality that came into being with the human revolution represents our creation as humans and was for the first hundred thousand years or so militantly egalitarian: practically everything was shared.

The ritual of sexual gatekeeping that offends comrade Downs was the common culture of both sexes. It was part of the mode of production - part of the tempo and meaning of life equally for both sexes; part of a shared power. It maximised human freedom within the bounds of the nature-given necessities that ruled their existence. And who knows what people did in the periods when they were not having heterosexual sex. Perhaps it wasn’t all about forced sexual abstinence.

They had all the faults that you find in humans today, including jealous outbursts, aggression and other forms of unacceptable behaviour. It was their success in dealing with these issues without recourse to laws, police or prisons that made them so civilised.

**Phil Kent**  
Haringey

## Stalin erred

The issue raised by Jack Conrad’s article, ‘Lenin and the United States of Europe’, for or against, is a dividing line amongst sections of the left (November 3). Yet the left need not be divided on this issue if it is approached

in the right way.

For Lenin, writing in 1915, the ‘United Europe’ slogan was subordinated to the slogan for the ‘United States of the World’. However, at the time he considered this latter slogan premature because “first, it merges with socialism; second, because it may be wrongly interpreted to mean that the victory of socialism in a single country is impossible, and it may also create misconceptions as to the relations of such a country to the others” (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, pp339-43).

Lenin regarded the world revolutionary process in a dialectical way. In this view, it is unnecessary to choose between socialism in one country and the world revolution, although comrade Conrad disagrees and charges Lenin with sloppiness around the issue of socialism in one country. Unlike Lenin, our old friend Trotsky demanded that communists choose between the two: “Either permanent revolution or socialism in one country” (*The permanent revolution* London 1962, p11). In practice, for Trotsky everything was either-or and he went on to found his Fourth International on this anti-dialectical basis.

No honest person can doubt that Stalin, whether you like him or not, defended Lenin’s strategic line to the letter, but, of course, this did not stop him from making tactical errors and committing crimes which sullied his reputation in the eyes of the more sensitive folk, although politics rarely attracts sensitive souls. However, there is a lesson for the left to learn from these old differences.

Not many things in life are either-or. We must learn to distinguish those which are and those which are not. The question of European unity is not an either-or issue. There are positive sides to it and negative sides. On the plus side, it promotes European integration and, on the other, it may strengthen the power of capitalism - that is, in the normal course of things. But with capitalism reaching the end of growth, we are no longer living in the normal course of things.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Fees and cuts

One year after breaking into the lobby of Tory HQ at Millbank, on November 9 students marched through London again, the central themes being tuition fees, soaring youth unemployment and the restructuring of higher education. Attendance was around 8,000-10,000 (though police estimates put it at much less), significantly lower than last year. This should be expected with the National Union of Students’ lack of any real mobilisation for the demonstration and the left’s lack of strategy. Most of the building and careful planning for the day had been on the part of the police, who mustered horses, dogs, at least three helicopters and thousands of officers - it seems that even in these times of austerity no expense is spared when it comes to putting on a show of intimidation.

The Met had spent the week before November 9 warning that baton rounds and rubber bullets had been authorised in an attempt to appear tough on public order (although this may have backfired in terms of the press coverage). Despite the provocative policing, however, there were relatively few disturbances on the day - there were a small number of arrests when a group broke off to set up camp in Trafalgar Square, which the police deemed illegal.

As the march proceeded along The Strand towards the City, morale was boosted by a display of solidarity from construction workers, who signalled their support from the scaffolding of a building site. There were cheers

and applause, as the chant went up: “Students and workers, unite and fight!” There were more expressions of mutual solidarity, as the march passed by a group of electricians, engaged in a struggle against employers who want to drastically slash their wages. Some of them had been at the wrong end of a police kettle and vicious assault a few days earlier.

We then found ourselves diverted away from St Pauls and onto an alternative route to the Moorgate campus of London Metropolitan University, one of the hardest hit by the cuts of any university in the country. As the end point was reached, the police, who had surrounded us from the start, closed in briefly before protestors filtered away either to join the Occupy squatters or make their way home.

The problem for the student left now is how to avoid a situation where in a year’s time, after the government has forced yet more marketisation down our throats and we are still just as divided, there are only 5,000 on the streets protesting. Waiting for objective conditions to create some sort of spontaneous uprising is absolutely no strategy at all. The battle against the hike in fees and scrapping of the education maintenance allowance was lost last year, but we still have to fight a rearguard battle against further attacks. But most of all we need to inspire students not just with a vision of a better education, but of a better future.

There is a vast discontent with the current order, sparked by a system that is patently failing. This has translated into a yearning for an alternative, including on campus. It is down to the revolutionary left to demonstrate that the Marxist alternative is the only viable one and to mobilise students around that. However, much of the left views the student movement as analogous to the trade union movement, and believes that their job is primarily to ensure that students unite around fees, rents and so on. The problem with this is that, unlike workers, students do not have a common class interest and in fact are not divided from their university and college administrations by antagonistic class interests. As a result student militancy tends to be episodic and inconsistent.

Higher education is driven by *ideas* and it is in this area that revolutionaries ought to concentrate. We need to win as many as possible from the individualistic path of merely purchasing the training necessary to pursue a career towards the hugely more ambitious aim of uniting in order to create a world fit to live in through the struggle for human emancipation - the logic of the class struggle against capitalism.

But how can this be done if the rival groups aim merely to recruit to their own particular sect? Unity is an absolute necessity and it means more than simply marching alongside each other for one afternoon. It means building an organisation together, fighting alongside each other, engaging in debate and working out a strategy and programme to bring down this wretched system.

The left often talks about how the cuts ‘must’ be fought, whilst the actions of the groups suggest that we lack any idea of the gravity of the situation. Without meaningful unity the capitalist class will succeed in making the majority pay for the economic crisis. If their attacks are successful (and in higher education many have already been implemented) they will set back our movement for generations to come. And they will ensure that education remains a commodity bought by the few in order to acquire greater earning power.

**Callum Williamson**  
London



# OCCUPY



Ninty-nine percent: not quite

## Non-political politics

Michael Copestake has been talking to the occupiers at Sheffield Cathedral

**R**emarkably there are now 21 ‘Occupy’ camps dotted across the urban landscapes of Britain’s cities. The largest and most prominent is, of course, the one in London outside St Paul’s Cathedral, and one could be forgiven for not being aware of most of the others, which have not attracted or been given the same attention in the media. On Saturday November 5 - a date perhaps chosen deliberately - the Sheffield incarnation of the Occupy movement appeared and pitched its tents on the open yard of Sheffield Cathedral.

The camp itself was set up following, I was told, “discussions online”, which then led to a meeting outside the town hall and a discussion and vote on which location to occupy. The council and police were apparently least unhappy with the choice of the cathedral and neither church nor state has attempted to shift them since. The dean has officially denied them permission to use the yard - partly for insurance purposes, I was told - but nevertheless has taken the line that the church feels the protestors raise “genuine grievances”, now the standard church response, it seems.

The camp itself presently consists of some 30 or so individual or two-person tents, a portalo, a medium-sized tent with cooking facilities, a small one at the entrance covered in political and campaign literature of one sort or another, and a larger marquee filled with all sorts, from books to chairs, to musical instruments. The outside wall of this larger marquee is covered with large text versions of the official statements that the occupation has so far produced, various slogans against corruption and inequality, and entreaties to the people of Sheffield to join in/express solidarity.

The occupiers hold a variety of politics and are unlikely to produce a concrete programme or much in the way of proposals for action for that reason. The preponderance of single-issue leaflets and my own conversations with the occupiers indicate strongly that these are mostly unaffiliated people or those who support single-issue campaigns of one type or another. The organised left makes sporadic appearances, particularly the Socialist Workers Party, whose comrades have occasionally set up a stall just outside

the main tented area.

When I asked people what they thought of the far left they did not really have much to say. The fact that I was a member of a communist organisation did not mean much to most present either - as far as they are concerned, all ‘parties’ have failed and the far left is just as much a part of this failure as the mainstream. All this is very much ‘anti-politics’ and, in common with most of the occupations in the developed world, is against structure and leadership, whether elected or not. I was even told that it was considered bad camp etiquette to “preach” your own political views to other people. Capitalist politics is so obviously corrupt and malfunctioning that it seems many view the creation of a space without politics as the answer. This is a testament to the failure of the Marxist left to provide an alternative, democratic politics, programme and organisational form in a period crying out for all three. The unity of Marxists remains the urgent responsibility of the left, one it continues to unrepentantly shun.

Insofar as political views are expressed by the occupiers, they take the general form of a scream of outrage and disgust at capitalist society and its problems, but without anything in the way of solutions. There is an instinctive understanding that the majority suffers at the hands of the minority, opposition to the government’s cuts programme, support for the upcoming November 30 strikes and certainty that the mainstream parties are committed to and dependent on the existing system. But politics to these people means only bourgeois politics and they cannot contemplate the construction of any political organisation that functions in a different way from the mainstream parties. Corruption and incorporation into the system is seen as inevitable, so why bother?

The attitude they take towards capitalism (or rather corrupt “corporatism”, as they refer to in their official statement - a phrase that is taken, unconsciously or not, from libertarian groups in America, who are usually for a ‘small state’ and a free market) is moralistic and uncertain. One man was at pains to explain to me that the Occupy movement is not against capitalism as such, but rather greed, and that

what they wanted was “capitalism with a conscience”. When I expressed my doubts about this possibility, he remarked that we could all do without using money at all and that he himself had not had a bank account in nearly 30 years. Upon my questioning the feasibility of this approach for the masses, he then suggested credit unions - if people must remain part of “the system”, that is. A sort of abstentionist economics to accompany the abstentionist politics - we all just opt out as individuals.

Others, however, have very clear ideas of the reforms they would like to see implemented (by some, as yet unknown, agency). A levy on financial transactions, or Robin Hood tax, has support, and others believed that the regulators of the City of London and the banks should be appointed from outside that particular sphere. The official statement says that, in order that it may remain free from “the system”, the Occupy movement does not call on the existing powers to do anything. So the demands are addressed to nobody and no agency is identified which can bring about change - except “the 99%” - and it is not understood how they can do so. I put it to more than one of the occupiers that, if anything, the camp was more of a discussion forum than a political project, to which I received expressions of general agreement.

It is, of course, welcome that many well-intentioned individuals, some of whom are involved in their first activity that could be called political, are thinking and talking about an alternative social and economic arrangement (‘order’ or ‘system’ do not seem appropriate words), just as it is positive that there is agreement around the deficiencies of capitalism, even if it goes by another name. Certainly the camps reflect a much wider social discontent, but they are unable to define and focus these feelings, or translate them into proposals for action with definite aims. Even in countries where the situation has been much more dire, as in Egypt, or where Occupy has been of a much larger and more militant character, as in Spain, the movement has not been able to articulate anything approaching a substitute for a revolutionary, democratic-centralist party, armed with an emancipatory programme ●

## 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 20, 3pm:** ‘The Russian Revolution and women’s liberation’. Speaker: Anne Mc Shane. 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 22:** ‘Woman’s biggest husband is the moon’. Speaker: Jerome Lewis.

### 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](http://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>.

### LGBTQ rights

**Saturday November 19, LRC lunch break:** Meeting - ‘LGBTQ liberation and left tokenism’. University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

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

### The Precariat

**Monday November 21, 5pm:** Seminar, 916 Adam Smith Building, University of Glasgow. Speaker: Guy Smith (University of Bath).

Organised by the Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movement.

### Stop detaining children

**Monday November 21, 10am:** Protest against dawn raids, UK Border Agency reporting centre, Festival Court, 200 Brand Street, Glasgow G51.

Organised by Unity Centre: [info@unitycentreglasgow.org](mailto:info@unitycentreglasgow.org).

### Get out of Afghanistan

**Tuesday November 22, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, committee room 9, House of Commons (St Stephens entrance), London SW1.

Organised by Afghanistan Withdrawal group of MPs.

### Fare Deal

**Wednesday November 23, 7pm:** Rally to re-elect Ken Livingstone, Camden Centre, Euston Road, London WC1.

Organised by Ken for London, 39 Victoria Street, London SW1.

### Resistance riddimz

**Friday November 25, 7pm:** Fundraising gig, LSE student union, The Quad, Houghton Street, London WC2. Fundraiser for the Fortnum and Mason 145 and others arrested during protests. Performers include: Lowkey, Logic, Jody McIntyre, Gary McFarlane and many others.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: [www.defendtherighttoprotest.org](http://www.defendtherighttoprotest.org).

### Close Campsfield

**Saturday November 26, 12 noon:** 18th anniversary demonstration at Campsfield immigration removal centre, main gates, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxfordshire OX5 1RE. Over 10,000 innocent people have been imprisoned in Campsfield since November 1993. Bring banners, drums, etc.

Organised by Campaign to Close Campsfield: [www.closecampsfield.org.uk](http://www.closecampsfield.org.uk).

### No to racism

**Saturday November 26, 10.30 am:** St Andrew’s Day march and rally. Assemble St Andrew’s in the Square (off Saltmarket), Glasgow G1. March to Glasgow Film Theatre, Rose Street, Glasgow G3 for rally at 12 noon.

Organised by Scottish Trades Union Congress: [www.stuc.org.uk](http://www.stuc.org.uk).

### Latin America 2011

**Saturday December 3, 9.30am to 5pm:** Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Mothers of the Miami Five, Robin Blackburn, Victoria Brittain, Frances O’Grady (TUC) and many from Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, etc. £10 waged, £6 unwaged.

Organised by Latin America Conference: [www.latinamericaconference.org.uk](http://www.latinamericaconference.org.uk).

### Don’t attack Iran

**Monday December 5:** Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Abbas Edalat (Campaign against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran), George Galloway, Lindsey German, Tony Benn.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

### Home away from home

**Friday December 9, 10am to 4.30pm:** Conference, Praxis main hall, Pott Street, London E2. Creating networks of community support for migrants excluded from accessing accommodation and sources of support.

Organised by Praxis and London Hosting: [www.praxis.org.uk](http://www.praxis.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.



## ITALY

# Technocrats and bankers take over

As the entire establishment falls in behind the new cabinet of bureaucrats, writes **Toby Abse**, Italian workers must prepare for the attacks that lie ahead

The jubilation of the Rome crowds after the resignation of prime minister Silvio Berlusconi on November 13 is likely to be very short-lived, especially their working class components. The new cabinet headed by banker Mario Monti, formed on November 16 and consisting entirely of unelected bureaucrats, is determined to follow the instructions of the European Central Bank/European Union/International Monetary Fund troika to the letter and make the mass of Italians pay for the failings of capital.

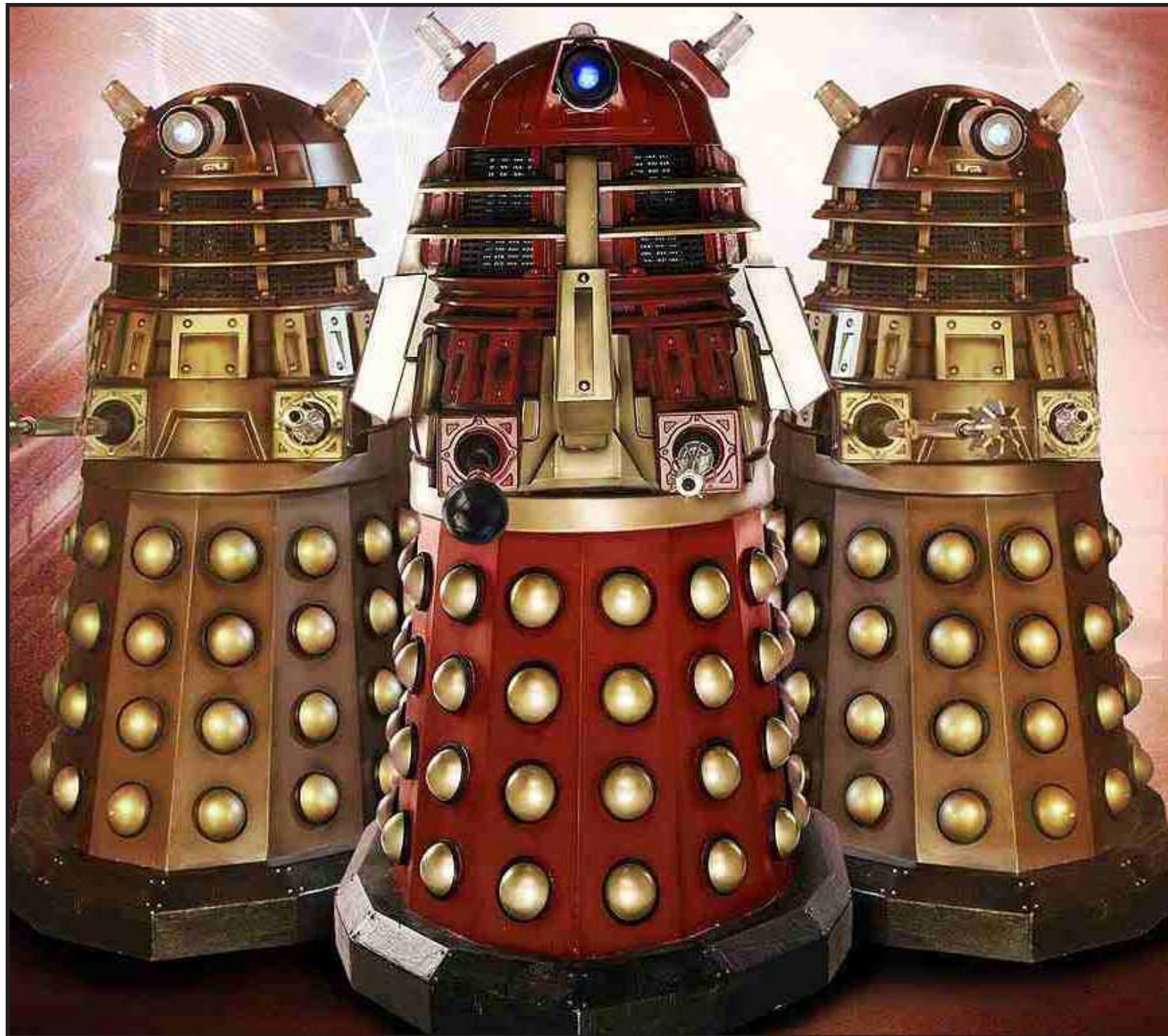
Berlusconi's resignation on Saturday evening was greeted by the majority of Italians with an enthusiasm equal to that which followed the first overthrow of Mussolini on July 25 1943. Jubilant crowds rapidly gathered in central Rome - largely summoned via Facebook by Popolo Viola (the 'Purple People' protest movement) and the Indignati and certainly owing no allegiance to the leaders of the opposition Partito Democratico, who probably regarded all the wild celebration as rather tasteless, even if they had enough political cunning not to say so publicly.

A well organised choir of professional singers put on a spirited performance of the 'Hallelujah chorus' from Handel's Messiah, in addition to the more predictable mass singing of the partisan anthem 'Bella Ciao' and of Verdi's 'Va pensiero'. The singing was interspersed with energetic chanting of "Buffone!", "Mafioso!" and "Silvio! Silvio! Vaffanculo!", as well as the symbolic throwing of low-value coins at Berlusconi's car (a conscious re-enactment of the scenes that greeted the downfall of his original political patron, the corrupt Socialist prime minister, Bettino Craxi, whose flight into Tunisian exile is, as many have pointed out, not an option available to Berlusconi now that their mutual friend Ben Ali has had to flee to Saudi Arabia).

Berlusconi was the first prime minister in the entire history of the Italian republic to have to leave the Quirinale presidential palace after handing in his resignation by an ignominious back entrance to avoid a crowd celebrating his departure - and it should be noted that many Christian Democrat premiers were far from universally popular.<sup>1</sup>

However, whilst those of us from the generation who celebrated Margaret Thatcher's resignation will understand the feelings of the thousands who spontaneously came out on to the streets to enjoy an hour or two of carnival, Berlusconi's fall did not come about in the way we might have hoped - through a crushing electoral defeat or an overwhelming general strike - but as a result of pressure from the troika.

It was Black Wednesday (November 9) that marked the point of no return. There was a certain degree of truth in the *Evening Standard's* apocalyptic front page headline, "The descent into chaos begins". That day did mark the moment when the complete collapse of the euro zone, triggered by an Italian default, became a real possibility. When the interest rate on Italian 10-year bonds clearly



Meet the new masters

breached the 7% barrier, president Giorgio Napolitano realised that a promise about resignation in a few weeks of the sort Berlusconi had made the previous evening was just not good enough, that the markets were - rightly and very understandably - sceptical, that Berlusconi's word was absolutely worthless, that he might well wriggle out of this allegedly binding commitment, as he had from so many others over his 17 years in politics and his five decades in business.

Napolitano, the 86-year-old former communist, who had generally been incredibly indulgent to Berlusconi, finally plucked up the courage to tell him that Italy had days, not weeks, to get a budget through and that he had better be serious about resigning. Some have suggested that Berlusconi was shocked by the rapidity with which his own Mediaset shares were falling in value and felt that hanging onto his personal fortune and the chance of bequeathing it to his five children was worth more than a few more weeks or months in office. It seems unlikely that Berlusconi, for all his rhetoric, was seriously concerned

about the fate of the Italian economy or the euro in any abstract sense - such considerations would have suggested a speedy resignation in July or August as the honourable course (although any notion of honour is, of course, alien to him).

## Bourgeois bickering

Whilst Berlusconi may well have realised on Wednesday that his time was up and that he would have to give way to Monti, the 68-year-old rector of the Bocconi private university and former European commissioner, a large chunk of Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà party (PdL) were keen to fight on to the end. This grouping suggested that Berlusconi either get Napolitano to accept a senior PdL figure as his successor or demand an early election in January or February. The hardliners included most of the former Alleanza Nazionale group, whom Berlusconi's foreign minister and former Socialist Party member, Franco Frattini, has called "fascists".

The bitter internal arguments

within the PdL during the last week would suggest that, were Berlusconi to completely retire from the political stage, his personal creation, the PdL - which is a strange fusion of the already anomalous Forza Italia with some of the remnants of neo-fascism - would fall apart, with many of the more moderate elements being likely to gravitate towards the conservative Christian Democrats (Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro), who, despite their murky connections in Sicily, retain a patina of respectability amongst their European counterparts of a kind that Forza Italia and the PdL have never attained. Whether it is a fear that the PdL cannot survive his retirement or simply a reluctance to ever completely give up on the possibility of his own return to the prime minister's official residence, Palazzo Chigi, after another election, Berlusconi seems to have gone back on his apparent willingness to quit politics altogether. "Tomorrow I will redouble my efforts in parliament and institutions to renovate Italy," said Berlusconi on November 13, "reforming its institutions, judiciary,

tax system ..."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the future of the PdL may hold, there seems to have been a decisive rupture between it and its alliance partner, the Lega Nord. The Lega made it clear that it will not participate in or give any support to a government led by Mario Monti, but instead will take up a stance of intransigent opposition. Whilst one of the questions on which the Lega will oppose Monti will be the planned abolition of seniority pensions, linked to the number of years of continuous employment (an issue of considerable importance to the Lega's own electorate, since there are proportionately far more of this category of pensioners in the northern regions than in the southern ones, where invalidity pensions are much more predominant), in other respects the Lega's position has some resemblance to that of British Conservative Europhobes, in that it is hostile to the power of the ECB and the Brussels bureaucracy without opposing neoliberalism as such.

Regardless of both its xenophobic ideology and concerns about issues that



impinge on the economic prospects of its voters in retirement, the Lega is also influenced by a very cynical calculation that opposition may allow it to regain the electoral support that it has very clearly lost over the last year or two because of its continuing support for Berlusconi; whilst many Lega supporters may evade some of their taxes, their general, if at times hypocritical, belief in 'law and order' means that they are not enthusiastic supporters of Berlusconi's all-out attack on the magistrates, and their own falling living standards have made them much less indulgent towards Berlusconi's sleazy entourage - endless stories about southern Italian pimps and Moroccan prostitutes tend to reinforce their deepest prejudices about both southerners and Arabs.

One has to acknowledge that Monti has some considerable merits by the standards of the Italian political class. Nobody would dispute his intelligence or his competence - it is no accident that, having served one term as an EU commissioner as a result of nomination by Berlusconi, he served a second term as a result of a confirmation by the former communist, Massimo D'Alema. It is also worth remarking that as an EU commissioner he was willing to evoke anti-monopoly rules against Bill Gates and Microsoft, showing a far greater consistency in the application of his neoliberal free-market principles than many governments, which have allowed the American monopolist to walk all over them.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst it is impossible to believe that anybody as prominent in the Italian political, economic and academic establishment could have succeeded in completely avoiding underhand dealings at any stage in his career and, as the Berlusconi press has pointed out with great relish, he has on occasions worked for Goldman Sachs, a firm whose conduct in many areas has, to put it politely, aroused intense controversy, he certainly has a reputation for personal honesty and integrity that places him at the other end of the spectrum from Berlusconi. A man that enjoys the trust of both the European and Italian establishment.

Monti's regular attendance at mass and commitment to conventional family life seem as sincere as Romano Prodi's - he will not be the kind of Italian prime minister whose sexual antics made him a regular feature of the *Metro*, the free sheet given out to London commuters which is not known for its acquaintance with the finer points of the Italian party system. There is absolutely no danger that 'Super Mario' will be continuously compared to Nero and Caligula in the way his predecessor was and Italy's negotiating position in any EU or G20 discussions ought to be markedly improved if its leader is not seen as a clown by his German, French and American counterparts.

## 'Left' support

So far the most enthusiastic supporters of Mario Monti have been the PD (which, of course, includes former 'official communists'), together with the Unione di Centro (Union of the Centre).

For Monti to remain in office until 2013, rather than merely 2012, as he is demanding, probably requires the support of the PdL or a major part of it, but it is worth remarking on the enthusiasm of the PD for such an obvious stalking horse for the ECB and IMF - they cannot be taken in by his claims that, whilst he is demanding "sacrifices", there will be "no blood and tears".<sup>4</sup> However, the PD has nothing to gain and everything to lose if it associates itself with a programme of unremitting neoliberal austerity.

It is worth noting that, whilst the CISL and UIL trade union confederations joined the employers' organisation, Confindustria, and

various other economic pressure groups representing bankers, cooperatives and so forth in unreserved support for Monti, Susanna Camusso of the largest union centre, the CGIL, refused to join in the chorus. Although she went along with the 'national interest' line ("Due to the emergency situation, we understand that there is no solution but that of a transitional government, able to give answers and restore credibility, to the markets and to the country"), she went on to say, "We don't give blank cheques to anyone" - once "requests are fulfilled", there should be elections (presumably in 2012 rather than 2013).<sup>5</sup>

The one party on the centre-left that has shown some hesitation about unrestrained support for neoliberal austerity has been Antonio Di Pietro's 'anti-corruption' Italia dei Valori party. Some readers may have noticed that a small minority of both the senators and the deputies voted against the neoliberal austerity package last weekend.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the Italian mainstream press tended to ignore this no doubt unwelcome opposition for the most part, *Corriere della Sera* very briefly noted the opposition of the IdV on November 14. Some might see this as simply the ultimate expression of the IdV's unyielding anti-Berlusconismo, but it clearly fits Di Pietro's initial opposition to the proposed Monti government, which he originally, and totally correctly, labelled as one of "social butchery".

However, by November 13 Di Pietro had partially capitulated to an intense and highly orchestrated campaign in the mainstream bourgeois press. He is now willing to fall in behind a Monti government, but still envisages it as a short-term expedient with a limited programme rather than offering unconditional support for up to 18 months, as the PD leaders are currently doing.

The left social democratic Sinistra Ecologia Libertà has been far less critical of Monti than the IdV. Even if SEL leader Nichi Vendola has not shown the same gushing enthusiasm for him as some, he refuses to look reality squarely in the face and attempts to ascribe to the incoming Monti government a programme based on 'social justice', corresponding to SEL's immediate demands for a wealth tax and so forth, rather than facing up to the attacks on pensions and workers' rights that are far more likely to be on the agenda.

Rifondazione Comunista remains alone in its principled opposition to what it instantly characterised as "the government of the bankers". Social opposition from trade unionists, the unemployed, students, pensioners and others will doubtless mount - perhaps an orientation towards the working class and the movements will allow Rifondazione to revive at the expense of SEL, whose current line has to be forcefully condemned - it is a sad day when the liberal, Antonio Di Pietro, is clearly well to the left of those who until 2008 were happy to call themselves 'communists' ●

## Notes

1. The extensive footage on YouTube will not only raise all our spirits for years to come, but haunt the narcissistic media mogul until his dying day. The man who managed to ban Nanni Morretti's *Caimano*, a satirical film about him, from state television until a few months ago knows that such visual images will outlive him and may well colour posterity's view of his years in power.
2. *Financial Times* November 14.
3. It is interesting that Monti's "flagship anti-trust case against Microsoft" has been described as "a case study in futility" by Allister Heath in his rather hostile article, 'Even Super-Mario may not save Italy', in which he states: "They call him Super Mario, for reasons that aren't quite clear" (*City AM* November 14). This is a very disingenuous statement, since everybody knows that he got the nickname by standing up to Gates.
4. *La Repubblica* November 15.
5. *Financial Times* November 14.
6. I am grateful to Stuart Richardson of Socialist Resistance for bringing this to my attention.

# Neglect and chauvinism

The second Van earthquake has once again exposed the Turkish state's twisted priorities, writes **Esen Uslu**

Since the 7.6 magnitude earthquake of October 23, numerous lesser aftershocks have continued to hit the devastated Van province. The gradually reducing magnitude of tremors led the government, and overly centralised government-appointed officialdom, to believe that the worst had passed and a more relaxed approach was the order of the day.

In their wisdom they started to make optimistic statements. The minister for environment and urban planning, Erdoğan Bayraktar, held a press conference and advised people that the worst of the aftershocks expected would be at most 5.5 magnitude, so it was safe to move back into homes and other buildings that were not seriously damaged.

The governor of the mainly Kurdish Van province, Münir Karaloğlu, echoed the minister's call, even if the structures in question were slightly damaged. The authorities organised teams of engineers to visit properties, inspect them from the outside, make a judgement on the level of damage, and advise people accordingly either to stay away or return to their property.

Given the deeply ingrained mistrust of the local population towards officialdom, not many took their advice seriously and they voted with their feet and stayed outside. However, some public buildings passed through the same type of superficial inspection and were given a clean bill of health. Some were hotels used by rescue workers, civil servants temporarily posted to Van and journalists following the earthquake story. One of these hotels had even been used to accommodate the entourage of the president, Abdullah Gül, during his tour of Van.

A stunning answer to the government's 'official optimism' came on November 9 with a 5.6 magnitude earthquake on a fault line to the south of Van city. Although this was less severe than the October 23 quake, 27 damaged buildings collapsed. Twenty-five were empty, thanks to the prudence of the occupiers. However, the remaining two were hotels which had been damaged on October 23, but were deemed safe by the inspectors, and quickly 'repaired' with plaster and a coat of paint. Forty people died under the rubble, adding to the 600-plus death toll following the initial earthquake. Among them were Japanese aid workers, as well as some quite prominent reporters of the mainstream media.

Government ministers again headed into the earthquake zone and, while they were 'overseeing' the search and rescue effort, angry citizens started to shout, boo and hurl abuse, reminding them of their callous and negligent advice. The governor also got his share of abuse, and was called on to resign.

The ministers and governor



Yet more victims

quickly turned on their heels, whereupon the police immediately attacked the protesting quake victims with batons and pepper gas. The victims were dispersed, but the gas affected the search and rescue workers, who were forced to halt their efforts, as they desperately tried to wash their eyes and recover their breath. Even the coy mainstream media felt obliged to report the incident, and several videos of the police brutality quickly appeared on various internet sites.

When the press started to dig, it became clear that, while the state was unable to organise the efficient delivery of aid, it had no problem in mobilising its forces to suppress 'unrest'. As a part of its initial response to the October 23 earthquake the ministry of internal affairs mobilised its rapid reaction force, while the ministry of defence did its bit by sending in the gendarmerie. It turned out that in the first few days after the quake security forces had even raided houses to arrest four 'terrorists'. The war against Kurdish freedom fighters never stopped.

## Freezing

The second quake came during exceptionally cold weather and snow. The inadequacies of the canvas tents and makeshift tarpaulin shelters provided to the homeless were quickly exposed. For many families the only protection from the frozen earth was an inch of Styrofoam board taken from the rubble.

Many resorted to charcoal stoves to heat their tents, resulting in a number of deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning, including entire families. Others died from hypothermia or severe respiratory diseases - children and the elderly were most badly affected. Public kitchens were set up in the government-organised tent cities, but the hundreds who had no other means of obtaining hot food were forced to stand in long queues for hours in the freezing weather.

The twisted priorities of the government became apparent. The tent cities and kitchens were actually for *controlling* the population, not

primarily for rendering assistance. In pursuit of 'victory' over the Kurds, the state was prepared to sacrifice those who would not submit to such control. Opposition groups were quick to offer advice to the government: why not let the earthquake victims stay at the publicly owned seaside resorts reserved for the summer holidays of top officials during the winter?

People who could afford to do so started to leave Van - the press reported that bus tickets could only be purchased after a week-long wait. When the government realised that people were voting with their feet, it started to arrange coaches to take people away itself. As a result Van city quickly became deserted. The governor made a public plea for further aid, stating that only one official building remained operational. Even the recently constructed emergency management centre had suffered heavy damage.

However, the governor never contemplated resigning - or using the police to track down the profiteering criminals responsible for unsafe constructions. Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has claimed that those responsible for declaring damaged buildings safe after superficial inspections would be brought to justice, but he will not consider taking action against those guilty of the original negligence and breach of safety regulations.

However, the government was quick to condemn the Kurdish-backed Peace and Democracy Party for causing "disturbances" and allegedly failing to assist the central authorities while they were "striving to solve the problems of the needy, disregarding their origin as Kurds". They continued to stop aid trucks destined for PDP-controlled municipalities, which had been organised by various NGOs and civic initiatives, confiscating their contents under the pretext that they might fall into the "wrong hands".

So, while the second earthquake struck on a different fault line, it once more revealed the state's own fault line running deep across Turkey - official anti-Kurd chauvinism, fuelled by negligence and incompetence ●



## CRISIS

# Has capitalism reached

Mike Macnair spoke to the November 12 CPGB aggregate on the Marxist understanding of the crisis. This

The 'euro zone crisis' - in reality merely an effect of the 2008 financial crash - has now brought down two more governments, in Greece and Italy: politicians replaced by direct government by bankers. The global financial structure teeters on the edge of the abyss. One result is deep pressure on the structure of the European Union. Towards full federalism? Towards a pure free-trade zone? Or towards a 'two-tier Europe'?

Meanwhile, there is a real fear that the crisis will trigger not just the fall of governments, but 'revolutionary crisis', or the entry of the masses on the political stage. This fear is reflected by determination to block any flashpoints that might be the spark which lights the prairie fire. The most recent symptoms are the police action against the 'Occupy' camps in New York and Portland and the soon-expected action against that in London; and the government's more or less desperate attempts to minimise the November 30 strike action by offering limited concessions, combined with threats: the 'carrot and stick' approach.

But what is missing is any real alternative to the staggering system.

## Greece

In Greece, a 'government of national unity' headed by a technocrat, former central banker Lucas Papademos, has been formed, and a similar process is unfolding now in Italy under another EU technocrat, 'Super' Mario Monti. As the *Financial Times* pointed out on November 12, events in Greece and Italy appear to represent a stark choice between (a) government run by central bankers essentially appointed by France and Germany and (b) political democracy.

The choice is not quite as sharp as the *FT* presents it though; in reality both Pasok and New Democracy want Greece to stay in the euro and plan to implement the austerity proposals. The referendum proposal of outgoing Greek PM Georgios Papandreou was in essence a way to put New Democracy, Greece's centre-right party, on the back foot, and had the desired effect, albeit at the cost of Papandreou's job. The response of the French and German governments and world money markets to the referendum proposal pressured New Democracy into entering coalition talks. Before, ND had hoped to repeat the stunt pulled off by Fine Gael in Ireland - running a fraudulent election campaign against austerity, only to implement the same cuts if elected.

The problem is that the political regime of bourgeois parliamentarism provides too much opportunity for what academic economists call 'free-riding', and this has to be overcome in a way which does not let the masses into the political process. A referendum would have been a carefully controlled choice between two alternatives, with the media framing the whole debate. But there was some risk with the Fine Gael-type tactic that New Democracy wanted to pursue, of an election returning not a government of the right, but an increased vote for the Greek Communist Party (KKE), which would be rather problematic for the European Central Bank.

That would probably not be a step forward for the Greek working class. The KKE is committed to a policy of economic autarky; pulling out of the euro zone and rebuilding the national economy, which would either lead to total collapse or a rapid return to the

cuts policy of Papandreou.

But this too leads nowhere. The latest unemployment figures from Greece were just below 20% at the peak of the tourist season, meaning this winter a rise to 30% is likely, comparable to US unemployment during the depths of the 1930s slump. Even the *FT* (again, November 12) concludes that it is very unlikely the latest bailout package will have the desired effect.

## Italy

In Italy a national unity government is in the process of being formed, but the political regime has suffered the same problem of 'free-riding' among bourgeois politicians, in this case within the governing coalition headed by Berlusconi. While the Lombard League, the northern nationalists who want to split Italy up, played hardball in negotiations over cuts, the other parties of the right who represent Italy's south are more accurately described as clientelist bosses than ideological politicians; austerity threatens the patronage they provide to their client chains and to organised criminals.

The economic situation in Italy is slightly different to Greece, as Italy has not yet had a big downswing in the real economy, though financial speculators have downgraded Italian debt. If the cuts demanded by the EU are implemented, such a downswing is inevitable, but for now Greece is in a much worse situation.

In Italy there is no equivalent of the KKE and the threat from the left is currently minimal; the Italian Communist Party has morphed into a version of the US Democratic Party, and become deeply involved in managing capitalism. Rifondazione Comunista, which was not long ago a significant force, imploded over Italian participation in the Iraq war as well as the participation of Rifondazione in a Blairite-style government. The right wing of Rifondazione have gone off in its own direction. Another fragment is in coalition with the Italian equivalent of the New Communist Party: ie, a small Stalinist sect. Two smallish factions emerged from the left, the Partito Comunista di Lavoratori (Communist Workers Party) and the Mandelites of Sinistra Critica (Critical Left). Neither is as large as Britain's Socialist Workers Party. Hence in terms of influence in society the Italian left has gone in a short space of time from being massively stronger than that in Britain, to being arguably even weaker.

Now Italy too has a leader installed from Brussels. Some have characterised this transition from a bourgeois-democratic regime to a technocratic government as Bonapartist, but it is more accurate to say that these governments are direct representatives of the creditors, as if the Bank of England were to appoint the UK government on the basis that parliament could not agree to its proposals. In the *Weekly Worker*, Toby Abse has described Berlusconi as a Bonaparte, but we must be wary of throwing around such terms loosely ('Bye bye, euro too?', November 10). Berlusconi's coalition government was closer to those which ruled Italy under the monarchy prior to World War I, in that it relied on extensive clientage chains and regional groupings to maintain its hold on power.

Suspicion regarding unpayable sovereign debts has now moved to Austria and Hungary; there has been

no real political impact yet, but it is increasingly clear that these countries will need bailing out too if a default is to be avoided. Commentators are talking far more openly about the collapse of the euro altogether, or the reduction of the euro zone to France, Germany and the Benelux countries - or even without France.

There is considerable uncertainty about what a Greek collapse or disorderly exit from the euro would entail. Could it be the equivalent of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, freezing world financial markets, wrecking the banks and causing a desperate race for solutions? It is not clear where the money would come from in such a case. In the banking phase of the crisis, states borrowed heavily from the financial markets to bail out the banks. Now those financial markets lending to states are freezing up, bringing the banks to a standstill in the process. There is no clear solution to this crisis within the framework of the charter of the United Nations: ie, the existing system of state sovereignties.

The current situation in Europe is like a game of 'pass the parcel', only one in which the 'winner' finds out it contains a ticking bomb. Suppose that Greece exits the euro and defaults; because this has been seen as likely for several months, the value of Greek government debt has been adjusted accordingly, and in itself this may not be that disruptive. But there is still a mass of bank loans hanging over the heads of Greek businesses and people, and whether these are repaid in euros or drachmas is important. If Greece exits the common currency but repays its debts in euros, then, exchange rates aside, this will have zero positive effect on the Greek economy. Not only would everyone still go bust, but this would happen quicker, because contracts written in euros would still need to be paid in euros, rapidly driving the cost of rent, mortgages and so on above the average wage, as has occurred in Hungary with mortgages made out in the Swiss franc.

The alternative, of making contracts repayable in drachmas, also appears likely to trigger meltdown. If we hypothesise that one drachma would be worth about 20% of one euro, this would amount to an immediate 80% default on private debt owed by Greek citizens. The result would be the same problem of private debt as in Ireland, but on a more general scale and without any possibility of the state bailing its banks and companies out.

As things stand, it is difficult to see a way out, and even mainstream economic commentators are depicting the capitalist class as apparently suicidal. The problem, however, is not the mood of the capitalists, but the institutional arrangements they set up post-1945, allowing the growth of offshore tax havens, and in the 1970s, discarding exchange controls. Hence many of the instruments which would otherwise be available for managing the crisis no longer exist.

For example, Carmen Reinhart, co-author of the celebrated book on financial crises, *This time is different* (Princeton 2009), is quoted as arguing that 'monetisation' of the debts is possible.<sup>1</sup> That is, central banks should print more money and raise inflation, which will erode the value of the debts. Among Marxists, Arthur Bough has suggested similarly that the capitalists *could* solve the problem by monetising debts. But Reinhart recognises that for monetising the debts to work there has to be 'financial



Only alternative: working class taking over

repression', forcing banks and savers to hold state debt at rates of interest below inflation.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s this policy was attempted without the instruments of financial repression - particularly exchange controls - in place. Even the much less developed offshore financial operations of that time meant that the result was 'stagflation': inflation without economic growth. Today, reinstating these instruments requires the demolition of the offshore financial system. And this, in turn, means both repudiating General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organisation treaties, and systematically violating the sovereignty of the 'offshore' states - which implies the overthrow of the UN charter. So this crisis poses some very big issues for the capitalist class.

John Authers in the *Financial Times* of November 12 saw a ray of hope in growth figures suggesting China might have a 'soft landing'; if inflation remains low, the Chinese government will be able to invest heavily in the economy. This would stimulate growth more widely (as, in fact, Chinese stimulus did after the 'credit crunch'). How it would work would be that China would buy masses of raw materials, so mining companies, steelmakers, etc, would buy new machinery, and what follows is an export-led revival of Germany, Japan and the US, based

on their machine tools industries. The risk Authers sees is the scale of the property bubble in China, which makes the 2005-07 bubble in the US pale in comparison. The consensus view of economists in 2007-08 was also that the US economy was heading for a 'soft landing'; what happened, of course, was the crash.

## Pressure

The more likely option at present is disorderly defaults and a new banking crisis more severe than 2008-09, which will be unavoidable before either any hypothetical Chinese stimulus kicks in or any clear course of action can be agreed by states sufficient to resolve the sovereign debt crisis. This is reflected in an extraordinary feature of the present situation: the US and Britain (or more exactly, the US's political agents in Britain, like Cameron, Osborne and Blair) are pressing for the euro zone to turn itself into a centralised state.

The turn is extraordinary because the policy coming out of this source since the end of the cold war has been that a European state is unnecessary and undesirable and what is desirable is a large free-trade area in which states compete to offer better tax and regulatory environments for business.

Cameron and Osborne at least retain an element of this policy. What they seek is to force Germany to go down the road of a centralised state



# ed the end of the line?

is an edited version of his speech



in the euro zone, while retaining the system of free-market competition between states provided by the Maastricht and other treaties for the larger EU, and if anything reducing the central regulatory powers of the EU institutions. This 'two-speed Europe' would give Britain what it has always sought from Europe: a free-trade area without Britain being bound by any common regulatory rules.

Even so, a euro zone state would be in the highest degree unlikely to accept such a solution. This unwillingness is reflected in EU commission president José Manuel Barroso's recent insistence that the single-market regime could not survive a euro zone break-up. It is also reflected in the episodic spats between Britain and other EU countries over the EU's utterly marginal token 'Tobin tax' proposals - according to Osborne, 'a bullet aimed at London's heart' - and other proposals for banking regulation, which would shut the City out of euro zone business. So pressing for further euro zone integration is a high-risk policy for London.

It cannot be a policy the US has adopted with any enthusiasm either. It is bound to lead to considerable political 'turbulence', to say the least, and if it succeeded would end in making the world more 'multipolar' after a period in which the US has had no real potential rivals.

The explanation is the sheer

severity of the risk to the global banking system (referred to by Paul Mason in the November 11 *Guardian* debate cited above). A euro zone state in which (in essence) the state debts of the zone countries became state debts of the euro zone as a whole offers a chance of avoiding a disorderly series of defaults and meltdown of the international banking system.

The problem is that the real alternative within capitalism to a meltdown of the international banking system is a wind-down of the same system to allow 'financial repression'. And the US and UK as states have heavy interests in maintaining this system. It is a mechanism through which global surplus value, channelled through offshore financial operations, is skimmed by London and New York. In the case of the US, the mechanism allows the US to run continuous and enormous budget deficits on the basis that the dollar is the global reserve currency and the US is the global super-cop, so that investment in the US and US funds is relatively safe, even if it is not that profitable. For the UK the problem is more acute.

## Britain

Last week yields on British government bonds fell to ultra-low levels. That is, Britain is seen as a safer place to keep 'floating' money than almost the entire rest of Europe. However, this is plainly driven by

fear elsewhere - with France recently downgraded, and Germany on the hook for euro debts - rather than confidence in prospects of growth for the UK economy. In fact George Osborne and David Cameron have spent much of the last week talking the economy down.

This was partly political manoeuvring prior to the November 30 strikes, and an attempt to move the agenda away from stories about greedy bankers and shift it back to the election-winning narrative of 2010: 'We're all in it together' and warnings against becoming another Greece or Italy. At the same time, the Tories are concerned about a disorderly break-up of the euro zone, which would be a disaster for the UK, in spite of what the Eurosceptics may say. There is a massive risk to the financial markets which have become the core of Britain's relative prosperity over the last 30 years - this is quite genuine, in spite of the marked rise in inequality.

One aspect of public hostility to bankers and City salaries is that people do not understand where the money is actually coming from. As far as its material flows of trade go, the UK is in permanent deficit. Particularly in terms of food, in which Britain imports 40% of all food consumed here.

The deficit in material trade is made up for by the 'invisible earnings' of the financial sector. London's position as a tax haven, and centre of a world network of tax havens, has provided the basis for the relative prosperity just mentioned. The effect is that the City of London skims financial flows from throughout the globe, taking a slice of the profits of capital from pretty much every country in the world, including China, which has large foreign direct investment flows into tax havens run out of London. Needless to say, these small states are not being covered in factories; the money is reinvested in its country of origin, but in this way avoids liability to tax in China.

The state then skims from the City, with income tax rates of 50% on City salaries. The highest earning 1% pay just under a quarter of the total UK income tax take; for another way of looking at it, the financial sector has been claimed to produce £66 billion in total tax - around 15% of the total tax take. Given the UK's permanent deficit in visible balance of trade, the existence of the NHS and other state services are dependent on this skimming from the City for transactions which may have nothing to do with Britain, as with the example above. If, hypothetically, the City of London's financial operations were to be shut down tomorrow, the cuts currently being made by the coalition government would look like peanuts.

## Occupy

There is mass resentment of what is going on; but not, as yet, mass willingness to take action about it; or any idea of an alternative (except among the nationalist right).

The Occupy movement has become global in reach, but not mass in scale. Though modelled on the Arab spring and events in Egypt, it has not become a mass movement of the sort which threatens to overthrow governments. In Britain it has been, temporarily, the focus of widespread public hostility to bankers and City salaries, which extends even to the House of Lords. Lord Garton has put forward (for the second time of asking) a bill making it a legal requirement for decisions

of company remuneration committees to be voted on in a binding vote by a meeting of shareholders before implementation, and to be balloted on (without binding effect) by all employees; companies would also be required to publish the ratio of earning between the highest paid employee and the lowest paid 10%. The bill has been ignored by the media, and has little hope of being made law; but it is indicative of how widespread such sentiment is.

In the Occupy movement this hostility has been expressed in the idea of the '99% against the 1%', which makes for a nice slogan, even if it is largely politically meaningless: as James Turley pointed out in this paper, it is not so easy to turn the '99%' into a political force ('A global act of refusal', October 20).

Governments are well aware that the policy of austerity - dumping the speculative losses of 2008-09 on the working class - is creating a high risk of smashing the political legitimacy of the states affected. They are therefore ultra-sensitive about preventing any spark which might light the prairie fire of working class resistance and create real political instability.

The original New York camp has now joined Portland in being closed by the police on obviously fake 'health and safety' grounds; attempts in several places to set up camps have been blocked; and strong signals have been given that London will go in the next few days.

In a different way, we saw the same agenda on display in the heavy-handed policing of recent demonstrations by students and by electricians.

An opposite symptom of the same phenomenon is that the coalition government has felt the need to make defensive manoeuvres - ie, concessions - in the run-up to the November 30 strikes. This has included Francis Maude's insulting offer that if workers go on strike for only 15 minutes, they will still be paid and will have 'made their point', which reeks just a bit of desperation.

In the US the trade unions have begun to wake from their slumber, giving support to the movement started by Occupy Wall Street. The Republican governor of Ohio recently put forward a proposal outlawing strikes and collective bargaining in the public sector, slashing pensions amongst other attacks. The proposal went to a state ballot and was roundly defeated after a big trade union mobilisation to turn the vote out. So far these are localised, small-scale acts of resistance, far from a mass strike movement or street movement, but they are encouraging signs nonetheless.

## Alternative?

The growing crisis of capitalism, and most sharply the Occupy movement itself, pose the question of what the alternative is. So far, all we have heard from the representatives of that movement is silence, or the non-alternative of various utopias. For example, green utopias, of a retreat to localism and petty production, which would, if actually carried out, require cutting the world's population by 75%. Or Keynesian utopias - while it is not impossible for capitalism to take a Keynesian turn, this would require the destruction of the offshore system; which in turn requires the overthrow of the United Nations charter and present system of state sovereignties that offshore is built around.

A third utopia, as favoured by Greece's KKE and the Communist Party of Britain, is economic autarky, supposedly emulating China and the other 'socialist countries' of Cuba, Venezuela *et al.* Hardly models of democratic planning or proletarian internationalism. Worthy of note is the comment by Jin Lee Kun, supervisory board chairman of the China Investment Corporation, a sovereign wealth fund managing over \$400 billion worth of assets. Jin told Al-Jazeera that the crisis of European economies is "purely because of the accumulated troubles of the worn-out welfare society ... the labour laws induce sloth and indolence rather than hard work".<sup>3</sup> Thanks, comrade! Meanwhile, Raul Castro wants to adopt China as a model for his own country; a 'capitalism with Cuban characteristics' is already in the works.

What is the job of communists in this situation? On the one hand, we must participate as much as we can in mass movements like the strikes on November 30. We should be supporting the movements which exist around these issues in our localities; around cuts, taxation, workers' rights and so on. Equally we must help in the task of rebuilding the labour movement at the most elementary level, of trade unions, shop stewards' committees and so on.

But fundamentally there are no answers to this crisis being offered either from the side of capital or the left - which can only offer the false alternatives of national autarky, a green utopia or a return to Keynesianism (which would necessitate the forceful overthrow of the US, and hence a rapid turn to militarism).

The most important thing communists can contribute, and our most fundamental responsibility, is to put forward a Marxist understanding of situation we are in and spread basic Marxist political ideas as the only real long-term alternative to a capitalism which, even if it avoids meltdown this time round, will only stagger to another financial crisis as long as the world order created in 1945 remains in place.

To get out of the diabolical cycle of repeated crises and deepening inequality, the working class needs to take over the process of making the fundamental decisions about investment and economic activities. It needs political democracy for any such decision-making to be possible. It needs to act at least on a European scale: no nation-state on its own is in a position to 'buck the markets', even when these markets are in deep trouble, and nationalist autarky policies would collapse in European countries even more quickly than they have in the 'third world'.

We are as of now a long way from the real possibility of the working class taking over. But at the end of the day this is the only real way out; and we need, while participating in the mass movement, to patiently explain why crises like the present, not the aberrant stability of 1950-70, are the normal outcome of capitalism; and to take every opportunity to promote the Marxist strategic orientation of the working class taking over ●

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## Notes

1. *The Guardian* November 12.
2. 'The liquidation of government debt' (March 2011): [www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2011/res2/pdf/crbs.pdf](http://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2011/res2/pdf/crbs.pdf).
3. *Financial Times* November 12.



## CONFERENCE

# Debating the republic and extreme democracy

Ben Lewis reports on some interesting exchanges at the 'Historical Materialism' weekend

The eighth annual *Historical Materialism* conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies last weekend was a genuine success, with four days rammed full of papers, plenaries and discussions. While it is hard to tell just how many attended over the four days, an indication of the total is given by the fact that 750 people came to the final plenary on the Arab revolutions. This session saw particularly good speeches from the American International Socialist Organisation's Ahmed Shawki, who spoke on the Arab spring and US imperialism, and Adam Hanieh, who spoke on counterrevolution and the Gulf Arab states.

I gave two talks: one as a discussant on a special *Revolutionary History* panel devoted to the history of the early Comintern, and a paper on 'Karl Kautsky's defence of republicanism', which explored Kautsky's 1904 work *Republic and social democracy in France*.<sup>1</sup>

The panel had a total of four speakers and it touched on some thought-provoking questions in relation to the German Revolution and its many paradoxes. Mike Jones of *Revolutionary History* was in particularly fine form and, while I think he occasionally overstates the case in defence of Paul Levi's expulsion of the 'left' from the early Communist Party of Germany (KPD), he was absolutely right to endorse Levi's focus on winning the rank and file of the Independent Social Democrats (USPD).

In the time available to me, I also concentrated on the question of the KPD and the USPD, arguing that some of the KPD's weaknesses resulted from the fact that it was born both too late and too early. Only with the Halle congress of October 1920 - ie, as a result of the struggle to win the USPD rank and file - could the KPD be seen as a mass party. As in my November 10 *Weekly Worker* article, 'From Erfurt to Charlottenburg', I also sought to locate some of the KPD's shortcomings at the level of programme.

I gave my main paper in a session on Karl Kautsky entitled 'Seedtime of Comintern'. My co-panellist was the independent scholar and author, Lars T Lih, who explained Kautsky's (and Lenin's) concept of world revolution through the prism of Georgi Lukács's 1924 *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought*. It is perhaps testament to the work that Lars and others have put in that a whole panel was given over to the thought of Karl Kautsky and his ideas as the "seed" of communist politics. In the face of so many recently translated documents (for example, in Richard Day's and Daniel Gaido's *Witnesses to permanent revolution: the documentary record*), only the most dogmatic can deny Kautsky's role as a revolutionary writer and politician.

One little-known work that must force us to rethink the usual narrative on Kautsky is *Republic and social democracy in France*, which I argued was popular in the Russian movement because of its defence of *Marxist* republicanism against those in the Second International who held *bourgeois* republican illusions in the French Third Republic. Kautsky's contribution was to underline how,

for Marxists, republican agitation does not cease with the removal of a monarch, but continues until the working class come to power. As such, the Marxists needed to articulate a different constitutional order to the French Third Republic, which was commonly known as a "monarchy without the monarch".

Moreover, by making this case, Kautsky was simply following in the footsteps of both Marx and Engels. They viewed the Paris Commune, the democratic republic of 1871, as "the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Engels),<sup>2</sup> the "political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour" (Marx).<sup>3</sup> I then compared this 'state of the commune type' with Kautsky's later understanding and application of the minimum programme during the German Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

### SWP v Cliff

Given that such an approach is rather unorthodox on today's far left, one thing I regretted was that I did not take more time to anticipate some of the criticisms that this would provoke. After all, it is common currency on today's far left that the need for a minimum programme and the struggle for a republic is a waste of time.

The Socialist Workers Party's John Rose, for example, wondered why I made such a fuss about Kautsky's republicanism. "So what?" he wondered, especially when the experience of Germany in the early 1920s shows that republics do not necessarily equate to working class power. George Paizis wondered whether the key difference between the soviet form and the democratic republic - a distinction Kautsky could not have been aware of in 1904 - was that the former smashed the state and replaced it with something else. Another comrade suggested that republicanism was all well and good for places like tsarist Russia, but not for countries without absolutist monarchs.

Ottokar Lubahn, one of the leading historians on Rosa Luxemburg, highlighted the significance of the question of the republic - not just for Engels in 1891, as I had pointed out - but also in relation to Luxemburg's later struggle to bind the party to republican agitation. In further evidence of the party shifting to the right, and minimum demands being conflated with maximum demands, she was sidelined by the party leadership, Kautsky included. The slogan was deemed too "radical" for the party's day-to-day work, not least in the party's joint work with the trade union leaders.

This is exactly the point. The question of republicanism matters because for Kautsky "when he was a Marxist" - as for Lenin, Marx and Engels - the democratic republic (annual elections of officials, recallability, workers' wages for bureaucrats, the armed people, etc) was the culmination of the demands of the minimum programme: ie, *the rule of the working class*. This is why the soviets are merely a *form* of the democratic republic. It is the *content* that is paramount.

Interestingly Tony Cliff made exactly the same point in *State capitalism in Russia*. The SWP

founder took a rather different view from that of comrade Rose and used the Engels quotation above, along with several others from both Engels and Marx, to contrast "the real content of workers' states to Stalinist bureaucracy". According to Cliff, the dictatorship of the proletariat was "Marx's and Engels' conception of a workers' state: a consistent, extreme democracy".<sup>5</sup>

And indeed, as I pointed out to comrade Paizis in my response, we should not forget that the Paris Commune resulted from the equivalent of an election to a local city council, which then proceeded to *dissolve* the old means of rule: ie, to "smash the state". Such a route to power is perfectly conceivable in today's conditions too, but it presupposes majority support. For example, as the December 1918 programme of the Spartacus League put it, "The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League."<sup>6</sup>

The historian, John Riddell, whose interventions always cause me to think, made some excellent points from the floor about how the early Comintern and its affiliates had not been able to fully assimilate "Russian lessons". As somebody who has spent a lot of time researching and translating Comintern documents, he argued that some of the basic tenets of strategy that the Bolsheviks had drawn from the Second International - not least the fight for the democratic republic - had been either overlooked, forgotten or buried. In this sense, I could only agree with his assertion that the Second and Third Internationals need to be studied together, not as separate phenomena. Indeed, it strikes me that the contemporary left's particularly crude interpretation of the Third International, combined with its disdain for the *revolutionary* traditions of the Second International, have in part led us to where we are now - ie, organised in a swathe of competing *sect* projects with next to no immediate prospects of revolutionary party unity.

Moreover, given the fact that the English record of the Fourth Congress of Comintern has only just been made available in English (thanks to the translation work of comrade Riddell himself), the notion that left unity today must be built on the basis of the "first four congresses" of Comintern appears even more absurd...

These sessions were thoroughly rewarding, and the organisers should be congratulated for facilitating such important discussions. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to present these ideas and engage in a discussion with leading SWPers like John Rose, along with other leading members from groups like Workers Power, the International Socialist Group, Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Such

discussions really do not happen anywhere near enough.

While the debate got at times rather heated, the atmosphere was always friendly, which shows what can actually be done if the left breaks with its current *modus operandi* and actually starts to talk to each other properly. We have a lot of work to do if we are to rise to the many challenges thrown our way. If we can discuss extremely important questions of our *history* in this manner, then surely we can do the same for the political questions that face us today. This can and must happen not just amongst the 'intellectuals' on the left, but at a rank-and-file level too •

### Notes

- 1 . The first three parts of that seven-part series can be read in *Weekly Worker* April 28, May 19 and May 26.
- 2 . F Engels, introduction to K Marx *The civil war in*

France London 1941, p19.

3 . K Marx *The civil war in France*: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm).

4 . See 'From Erfurt to Charlottenburg' *Weekly Worker* November 10 for a more detailed account.

5 . T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia*: [www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1955/statecap/ch02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1955/statecap/ch02.htm).

6 . R Luxemburg, 'What does the Spartacus League want?' (December 1918): [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/14.htm).



**Capitalism is widely questioned, Marxism is increasingly popular ... but the left is uselessly divided**



## AGGREGATE

# Marxist education not rote learning

Communists in the CPGB will be prioritising the study of the fundamentals of Marxism, focussing initially on Marx's political economy, to combat the Keynesian quackery prevalent on the left, reports  
**Alex John**

**C**CPGB members gathered for an aggregate meeting in London's Conway Hall on November 12 for a discussion on the fast developing global economic crisis and the stepping up of political education in our organisation, opened by comrade Mike Macnair.

Comrade Mark Fisher also led a discussion about the need to establish a "culture of security" in our organisation and on the left generally. However, paradoxical though it might appear, our politics, including political differences, should be totally open.

Mike Macnair's elaboration of the nature of the crisis which is shaking global capitalism at present, and the ruling class fear that the slightest spark of resistance may ignite a prairie fire of revolt, is presented elsewhere in this issue. He followed this by emphasising the importance of comrades equipping themselves with a rounded education in the fundamentals of Marxism, and the priority which the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB proposes to give to the study of political economy in the coming period.

A weekend school is in preparation, to be held probably near the end of January, on the themes of political economy, crisis theory and Keynesianism. However, difficulty has already been experienced in finding appropriate speakers. The interaction which was common in the 1960s and 70s between Marxist academics and left organisations, said comrade Macnair, now seems to be the exception. With the decline of the left, academia has largely withdrawn into itself, away from political practice, typified by the journal *Capital and Class*, which has now become purely academic.

In the intervening weeks, CPGB cells and discussion groups should prepare by organising collective study of basic Marxist political economy texts - and he recommended two titles: *Marx's Capital* by Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho; and *The economic doctrines of Karl Marx* by Karl Kautsky.

While the ruling class is showing that it has no solutions to the crisis, we reject the horrors of green Malthusian population culling; but most of the revolutionary left has forgotten its Marxism and is only able to present stale Keynesianism - a utopian recipe for saving capitalism, not its overthrow and replacement by socialism. The effective application of Keynesian solutions, said comrade Macnair, would require overturning the hierarchical system of existing states, and the defeat of the US military which underwrites the existing global order.

Our communist education work has fallen behind events, he said. It is paradoxical that, faced with the greatest capitalist crisis since World War II, the left, and the workers' movement as a whole, is fragmented, weak and confused. The workers' movement must be rebuilt. Every attack on the working class must be

resisted. In the context of participation and intervention in this struggle, our big job, the major task of the left, is to develop the Marxist alternative. And the big job of Marxist education is to develop comrades capable of thinking on their feet, thinking for themselves.

We are not talking about 'training', said comrade Macnair: teaching particular skills to enable a person to carry out specific set tasks. The word 'education' derives from the Latin 'educare', meaning 'to lead out'. Comrades need to be familiar with the vocabulary of Marxism and to master the "general toolkit of basic Marxist ideas" - not so that they can parrot the latest central committee slogans by rote, but to enable them to form their own opinions, to make their own decisions.

In the books we publish - like Jack Conrad's *Fantastic reality*, or comrade Macnair's own *Revolutionary strategy* - we not only strive to develop new theory, but also to recapitulate existing theory. In our *Weekly Worker* articles, he said, we strive to engage with current debates. A major difficulty in developing a Marxist alternative understanding of the crisis is that the meanings of all the basic Marxist concepts of political economy - like class, value, money, for example - are disputed on the left. The available introductory texts on Marxism should be read with caution, with an awareness of the political trend which produced them, whether the Socialist Workers Party's Chris Harman with his state-capitalism theory; Ernst Mandel; David Harvey - who still carries a 'people's front' residue from his Maoist period; or the 'official communist' Emile Burns' *Introduction to Marxism*, written at the peak of the 'official' CPGB's Stalinism.

The 'Introduction to Marxism' section on the Communist Students website ([http://communiststudents.org.uk/?page\\_id=5836](http://communiststudents.org.uk/?page_id=5836)) is "not very good", said comrade Macnair. Our recently restarted London Sunday evening seminars are using Lenin's text on 'The Marxist doctrine', written in 1913 and 1914 for *Granat* - the major Russian encyclopedia at the time (these weekly seminars are presently limited to members and close supporters until we have found a suitable central London public venue). The strength of Lenin's *Granat* entry is that it was written just before the August 1914 split in social democracy with the start of World War I. It gives a broad Second International overview of Marxism, uncluttered by the disputes of later decades. But, of course, said comrade Macnair, that is also its weakness. Nevertheless, it provides a good starting point.

First in discussion, comrade Manjit Kaur thought the situation was "more serious than the 2008 crisis", and that we should have no illusions in Keynesian solutions. Default on the state debt by Greece, Italy and then France would bring "major changes in the world economy". In 2008, states had bailed out banks, but now it is whole states which are in



**Education: not banging ideas into heads**

trouble. The Occupy movement, she said, may be small at present, but it represents the tip of the iceberg of popular discontent. If there are bank queues of people unable to withdraw their deposits, which is likely by January 2012, if not sooner, then it could quickly mushroom into a mass movement.

Comrade Kaur warned against the "hot-house training" of comrades to intervene with Marxist solutions in discussions on the crisis, saying

that "older CPGB comrades have transferred a negative attitude" towards other left groups. Some younger comrades display arrogance and "look as if they have been hot-housed", she said.

Comrade John Bridge agreed with a lot of comrade Kaur's comments, and spoke against "rote learning of slogans". The type of education we need is quite different. We must "draw out, not hammer in". We need comprehensive education to facilitate

a rounded view. Our immediate concentration is on political economy, but we cannot downgrade our emphasis on politics and democracy. We aspire to "an educated working class which can think on its feet". The choice of the *Granat Encyclopedia* entry for London seminars was "to find out what level comrades are at", he said. Answering comrade Kaur's speculation about bank queues, "If we thought the occupy movement was going mass," he said, "we would be holding this aggregate down at St Paul's."

Comrade James Turley expressed doubts about the value of trying to give comrades a "philosophical grounding" in Marxism. Debating issues of Marxist philosophy, he thought, had a tendency to divide the left. Each group had its own hobby horse. While the Socialist Workers Party fetishises Lukács, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has a thing about Gramsci. Comrade Alex John disagreed: while favouring our immediate emphasis on political economy, this cannot be a substitute for an all-round approach. Comrade Turley's concern to avoid the supposed divisive effect of debating philosophical issues was ill-founded, he said. "Marx was against philosophy; he spoke of the end of philosophy." The task is not to learn Marxist philosophical dogmas, but to free ourselves from the dogmas of philosophers.

Comrade Sarah McDonald emphasised that education goes hand in hand with political interventions, and the art of speaking in public and intervening in political debate can only be learned by doing it. We should seek to educate, not to antagonise, she said, and regretted the *Weekly Worker*'s unremitting use of the acronym 'SPEW' in contexts where we were not specifically critiquing the nationalism of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. This gives Socialist Party members an easy excuse to dismiss us and makes it more difficult for them to be receptive to our arguments.

*Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson, however, argued that SPEW deserved the title. They had brought it upon themselves by first accepting, then advocating, the nationalist-inspired creation of a separate organisation in Scotland. The acronym is a handy way of reminding them - and us - of this important defect in their politics.

A number of other comrades spoke in discussion. Replying, comrade Macnair commented that "humility is the problem" for Marxists, not arrogance. Instead of proclaiming their Marxism, many on the left water it down so as to accommodate those to their right. In economics, comrades must "learn the language" in order to be able to "handle the substance". If we are to "argue from history", we must learn history. Lastly, there is no contradiction between reading, studying and discussing, and going out to intervene politically ●



## OUR HISTORY

# Call for ILP to join Communist International

In last week's paper, we saw how the Communist Party of Great Britain attempted to orientate to the Independent Labour Party, the relatively large left reformist group that had been instrumental in the formation of the Labour Party. This group was then in a period of flux and political re-evaluation following the inter-imperialist carnage of World War I and the formation of the Communist International.<sup>1</sup> The majority of ILP members saw the old Second International as hopelessly compromised by the fact that most of its affiliates supported their own side, their own bourgeoisie, during the bloodbath of 1914-18 and the ILP formally disaffiliated in the spring of 1920.

However, despite the efforts of revolutionaries in its ranks, the 1921 ILP annual conference decisively rejected affiliation to the Third International by 521 votes to 97. Following the vote, around 200 supporters of the defeated left faction - including leading figures such as Emile Burns, Rajani Palme Dutt and Shapurji Saklatvala - left the ILP and joined the Communist Party. Instructively, however, they did *not* leave the Labour Party itself. In 1922, for example, Saklatvala was actually elected the Labour member for North Battersea (he lost his seat in 1923, but regained it in 1924).

Undoubtedly, this was the correct decision. The Russian Revolution had imparted a powerful momentum towards the international unity of Marxists and it was necessary to draw a sharp line of demarcation against the social imperialist parties of the Second International. However, as recognised by the Communist International, British conditions were unique and particularly challenging.

The new Communist Party remained numerically small, although composed of the class's best fighters. Unlike the Marxist social democratic parties across much of the rest of Europe, the Labour Party had never embraced the politics of class war. However, as a federal party it allowed organisations such as the British Socialist Party to freely operate, and it retained the loyalty of the mass of class-conscious workers, not least through the affiliation of the big battalions of the trade union movement. Clearly, balanced tactics and a long-term perspective of work were needed to deal with the particular tasks and problems this posed.

The central pillars of Labour's system of bans and proscriptions was put in place during the 1920s, as the rightwing sought not only to drive out the communists, but intimidate and silence honest leftwing voices too. In comparative terms the purging of Militant Tendency in the 1980s was almost a storm in a teacup. The CPGB was a constant thorn in the side of the Labour leadership. Through the National Left Wing Movement and its paper *The Sunday Worker*, the party was able to conduct a real dialogue



League of Nations: a den of warmongers

with the Labour left. Circulation of the paper, edited by open CPGB member William Paul, reached 100,000 at its peak. The NLWM was a real united front between communists and the left of Labour, which hugely extended the influence of communist ideas. The Labour bureaucracy responded with mass expulsions and the closure of many CLPs.

Although they never came close to a majority, motions to allow communist affiliation received substantial votes at Labour Party conferences throughout the 1920s. Communists continued to work as individual members of the Labour Party, though they had been barred from individual membership since 1924.

The NLWM (1925-28) fell victim to the 'third period' turn, of course. As for the ILP, its 1932 special conference voted to disaffiliate from Labour - following the disastrous Ramsay MacDonald government and the formation of a National Labour-Liberal-Tory coalition. In 1932, the ILP's membership stood at

16,773; by 1935, it was down to 4,392, and, though it took a long time coming, it formally dissolved itself in 1975.

Anyhow, the stirring manifesto of the Left Wing Group - issued on the eve of the pivotal 1921 conference and republished in the CPGB's *The Communist* - challenged the ILP to stir itself "from the apathy that is devastating your opportunist organisation" and to plunge itself into the "restless activity of a revolutionary movement". In effect the forthcoming split had already happened.

## Manifesto of the ILP Left Wing

Comrades of the ILP, At the party conference you will be called upon to decide the future international relations of the ILP. MacDonald, secretary of the Second International, which the ILP definitely repudiated last year, has not dared to ask the party to follow him in his allegiance. MacDonald, Mrs Snowden, and other prominent figures in the ILP

whose faith remains in the Second International, and who privately scoff at the Vienna proposals, will nevertheless use their influence to secure the party's approval of the Vienna venture.

Their motive is quite simple. As

long as the ILP can be kept out of the Third International, there is hope for a return to the Second International. The Vienna proposals will be the means of restoring credit to the bankrupt Second International ...

Comrades, do not let yourselves be deceived. An 'all-inclusive' international is no longer possible. The Vienna proposals may attract some new sections, such as the British Labour Party, the German Majority Socialists and the Belgian Socialists. These sections may go to Vienna because they know that their own organisation, the Second International, has completely broken down. But the sections now affiliated to the Third International will have nothing to do with Vienna ...

Comrades, how can you place your faith in what at best can be nothing but a revival of the organisation you have already repudiated? In facing the decision between Vienna and the Third International, look also at the world situation.

Surely you have learned something from the dismal failure of the League of Nations, from the tyranny in India, from the terror in Ireland? Surely you understand the merciless character of the class war revealed in this imperialism and the systematic attack on wages that is now in progress?

Surely you realise that only the international alliance of its class-conscious elements can save the workers' movement and secure the downfall of capitalism? If you do, then you will no longer hesitate: you will vote for immediate affiliation to the Third International, and thus take your stand with the revolutionary workers throughout the world.

Comrades of the ILP. We summon you from the apathy that is devastating your opportunist organisation to the restless activity of a revolutionary movement. We summon you to join in the last great campaign against capitalist imperialism, in the task of establishing world communism!

**The Communist March 26 1921**

The manifesto was signed by EH Brown, Emile Burns, HS Button, W Coxon, Helen Crawford, R Foulds, P Lavin, HR Lay, JT Walton Newbold, Marjory Newbold, CII Norman, JR Payne, Shapurji Saklatvala, Mark Starr, C Williams, AV Williams and JR Wilson.

## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* November 10.

## Powerful weapon



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

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REVIEW

Love, mud and misery in Yorkshire

Andrea Arnold (director) *Wuthering Heights* 2011, general release

E mile Brontë’s visceral creation, in which struggling humanity faces the alienation and poverty of Yorkshire country life over 200 years ago, is given a powerful moving image realisation in this most recent version of her work.

The fascination of the subject matter does not pall even after all this time. Sadly, this film only covers around half of what was Emily Brontë’s only novel; in doing so it portrays just the chronologically first section of the story. But the theme of revenge that is at its core shines through.

It might seem rather strange to those familiar with the novel that the story is here told by Heathcliff, while the book’s narrators, servant Nelly (Simone Jackson) and Mr Lockwood, are respectively demoted or removed altogether from the storyline. Part of the reason for this, especially with respect to Lockwood, is the excision of the later part of the tale, something shared by most film versions.

Here, we commence with paterfamilias Mr Earnshaw (Paul Hilton) bringing home a vagrant boy from Liverpool, whom he calls Heathcliff (Solomon Glave). As we know from the novel, this had been the name of a son of the Earnshaws who died in childhood.

As soon as he arrives, Brontë has characters berate Heathcliff as a ‘gypsy’, but she also has him speak ‘gibberish’. ‘Gypsy’ has long been used as an omnibus term of denigration. The fact that here Heathcliff is a black, probably African youngster fits exactly with his evident outsider status and matches the spirit of Brontë’s characterisation to a T.

Thus is the scene set for the contrasting love and abominations that Heathcliff is to experience. Earnshaw senior’s teenage son, Hindley (Lee Shaw), detests him for stealing his father’s affections; conversely, his daughter, Catherine (Shannon Beer), grows close. This plays out in Hindley

brutalising Heathcliff, while Catherine feels his pain. Catherine and Heathcliff gambol about the fields, heathland and rocky outcrops together, becoming inseparable playmates: sex does not appear to be an overt complication.

Overall, Andrea Arnold’s direction is decidedly to go with the flow in terms of the drear nature of Georgian country life. Much of the time the farmhouse at Wuthering Heights is surrounded by a sea of mud and quite possibly has some compacted earthen floors. Illumination that can only come from the sun or from poor substitutes such as penny candles or rush lights must of necessity curtail family and social activity. Early rising to carry on the drudgery of farming around Halifax is the concomitant of early sleeping.

While *Wuthering Heights* may not actually have been shot in ambient light, it does give an impression that it has. A general murkiness surrounds the farm and this mood echoes the bad treatment that Heathcliff receives once Hindley inherits the farm from his late father. Possibly having been enslaved before Mr Earnshaw found him, as slash scars across his back seem to suggest, Heathcliff now almost becomes one again; Hindley has him lashed by a farmhand when he thinks he is not working hard enough on the land.

When Catherine is taken in by nearby scions of a higher echelon of society, the Lintons, she is separated from her quondam soulmate, who mopes and falls more under Hindley’s sway in the absence of his would-be protector. When she comes back to the farm a month or so later, Catherine has aped the Lintons, taking on airs and graces and the clothes to go with them, which prompts Heathcliff into a peremptory bout of bad manners that cause him more pain and suffering at the hands of her brother.

A couple of years go by and Catherine becomes much closer to Edgar Linton



Heathcliff: a slave takes revenge

(Oliver Milburn), eventually agreeing to marry him. Mishearing Catherine’s reason for not wanting to marry him, Heathcliff has little reason to stay. When he can, Heathcliff flees Wuthering Heights.

A common rendition of Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* as only a kind of love story is absent here, which may act as a useful restorative toward the novel’s original dual themes of love *and* revenge, and the harms produced as a result. By the end of this telling, Heathcliff has exacted vengeance on Hindley, who actually hurt him, and Catherine, whom he tragically and mistakenly felt sorely slighted by, but who was undeserving of the fate served her. We get sour, unsatisfying revenge, justified and unjustified.

Altogether, indeed, Arnold’s pitch is a better match to the world of the times portrayed so well in the original work than any imagining that forgets how pain can adversely affect the human soul ●

Jim Moody

Fighting fund

Star’s financial crisis

Out of the blue *Morning Star* editor Bill Benfield has announced to the world that there are “Six weeks left to save the *Star*”. He warned earlier this week: “if you do not respond, and soon, there may well not be a paper to support” (November 15).

Comrade Benfield explained that for the last three years the *Star* has been failing by an average of £3,000 to raise its monthly £16,000 fighting fund target, which has produced “a shortfall of over £100,000”. As a result “the paper is once again on the brink of financial meltdown” and requires “an additional £50,000 before Christmas - and the sooner the better - or our paper will not survive”. In fact, although “we can pay the wages this week”, there is “no certainty about next week”.

Things are really serious then. Of course, unlike the *Weekly Worker*, the *Star* employs a team of full-time workers - our journalists, editorial, design and distribution comrades are all unpaid volunteers. It is true that the *Star* has “formal support ... from a solid majority of the organised trade union movement” (not to mention “an enthusiastic and successful readers and supporters group within parliament”). But its outgoings are vastly greater than the *Weekly Worker*’s and, to add to its woes, it recently lost its “one reliable commercial advertising

stream” (ironically from a firm of “insolvency practitioners”) worth £45,000 a year.

It goes without saying that our paper has profound political differences with the *Morning Star*. Because the *Star* is reliant on “the organised trade union movement” - in reality the bureaucracy - its line on industrial questions reflects very closely, uncritically in fact, that of the union leaders (of both left and right). This does not result in a healthy, independent working class position, since the bureaucracy has a material interest in maintaining its intermediate role between labour and capital.

It is also a well known fact that the *Star*’s political line, particularly on international matters, is not determined solely by the interests of the proletariat. It has always had to reflect the needs of its international paymasters - the millions in “Moscow gold” were its reward in the past. Today, of course, the USSR no longer exists, but many strongly suspect that there is close connection between the paper’s obsequious reporting of “Chinese socialism” and the visits to Beijing of Communist Party of Britain general secretary Rob Griffiths and other senior CPB figures.

But we have no reason to doubt the severity of its financial crisis. It is, though, wholly undesirable that the paper should

depend on an exploitative elite whose interests are inimicable to those of the international proletariat. Nevertheless, we want this thoroughly compromised voice to survive and hope it raises the extra cash it needs. Opportunist ideas are best fought in the open through the clash of different opinions.

As for the *Weekly Worker*, our funds come entirely from our readers and supporters. We need £1,250 every month (although in November I have raised this target by £100 to make up for the shortfall in October) and I expect our readers will come up with the goods, as they usually do.

But we are lagging behind. While, rest assured, we are not threatened with closure, we have received only £534 so far, with over half the month gone. We had 18,302 online readers this week, but only one made a donation via our website (thank you, KM). We also received a handy £50 in the post from FG, together with £10 from AC. Finally there was a total of £73 in standing orders. Thanks to all of you.

Robbie Rix

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

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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# weekly worker

**November  
30 is already  
achieving  
concessions**

## Carrot and stick

Francis Maude's idiotic '15-minute strike' suggestion reveals a disquiet at the heart of the government, argues James Turley

The latest cabinet minister to make himself look extremely stupid - following the Liam Fox affair, Theresa May's cat gaffe and many others - is cabinet office minister Francis Maude, for his no doubt fraternally spirited and sincere advice to the trade union movement.

The context is, obviously, the upcoming November 30 strike, which will surely see more people walk out of work than during 1926, over the central issue of public sector pensions. Francis Maude does not want this to happen on his watch, as it were - he is probably right to guess that most of the union tops involved do not want it either. There is a problem, however: the letter of Thatcher's anti-union legislation means that, now several unions have successfully balloted for strike action, it would be unlawful to postpone the action without another costly and time-consuming ballot.

To get around that, Maude came up with an apparently ingenious solution - why don't the brothers and sisters walk out for a mere 15 minutes at some point on what has now become known as N30? Discontent could thereby be registered; the utterly convoluted law on trade union action could be upheld; and the government would even be so good as to not dock any pay. It is the perfect solution.

Except, that is, for the fact that it is an obvious stupidity. No matter how craven are the likes of brothers Prentis and McCluskey, it cannot be denied that there is real momentum behind this action - it is a symbolic protest, but symbols have their own power. Cutting the action down to a government-agreed bare minimum would not do much for its significance. If the union bureaucracy just wants a quiet life, it still has to organise millions of people for whom, in the near future, a quiet life simply will not be an option. Brian Strutton of the GMB surely summed up the mood: "We are asking members to vote for a strike, not a tea break."

Stupid it may be, but it is an idiocy born as much from the logic of the situation as the lack of basic brainpower in the cabinet. As a head of steam builds up around November 30, the government shows all the signs of discomfort. It veers from declaring that there is no money for more concessions to making them anyway.

A particularly tortuous attempt to square the circle was reported in *The Guardian* on November 11 - while there is, indeed, no more money on the table, unnamed Whitehall sources say, "We can look at extending things like the Fair Deal." The Fair Deal is (notionally) supposed to protect the pension rights of those forcibly transferred to the private sector (a pretty ominous-sounding 'concession' in itself); how, then, is this to be toughened up if somebody is not prepared to underwrite the existing pension schemes? Anybody with even a passing knowledge of how these things work must surely

conclude that the taxpayer is going to foot the bill in some capacity or other.

### Fear of chaos

The government's concessions are quite pathetic, given the scale of devastation planned. They genuinely are concessions, nonetheless; and the haphazard manner in which they have been advanced is quite telling. In the 1980s, the Tory government made a conscious and concerted effort to break the power of the trade unions and the workers' movement in carefully selected, often brutal confrontations.

In the context of mass upheavals in Greece and elsewhere, along with the very distinct likelihood of a further lurch into economic chaos, David Cameron and his cronies seem rather to be

worried about the social forces a direct confrontation would unleash, and are clearly attempting to smother resistance rather than crush it.

Not that they are above attempts at intimidation and repression. The carrot is ever accompanied by the stick; there are the threats of even more draconian anti-union laws, and indeed the ostentatious over-policing of student demonstrations (the November 9 outing in London saw 8,000 protestors flanked by 4,000 riot police, and arrests for 'offences' as mundane as possession of marker pens). At the moment, it remains intimidation.

So, what is the government so afraid of? It was certainly never in doubt that, given the scale of attacks on living standards, the masses would resist with whatever means available to them. If you kick a dog, it bites back; if you launch a full-frontal assault on the jobs, wages, benefits and anything else you like on millions of people, then a good portion of them will turn out on protests and participate in strikes. We are not strong enough, at present, to impose a full-scale victory (hopefully this will change), but nor are we so weak that there will not be a battle at all.

The government has every interest in the battle being fought according to rules it sets. Above all, it is afraid of things getting out of control. Indeed, we must ask whether the dark mutterings about new anti-

union laws are more than hot air. There is a saying on the American right: if you outlaw guns, only outlaws will have guns. Likewise, if effective trade unionism is rendered legally impossible (it should be noted that this is not the same thing as 'illegal': technically, *all* trade unionism is illegal on a strict interpretation of British law), then the strike weapon and others like it will be placed outside of legal *control*, not to say the control of the labour bureaucracy.

This is, in fact, quite as undesirable from the point of view of capital as it is from the point of view of the official workers' movement. A few crumbs are thrown to the November 30 strikers, and a few thousand cops are aimed at a small student protest, because the government fears things getting *out of control*. It fears the eruption of an unpredictable situation on the home front, and the effect that might have if it overlaps with the slow-motion train wreck taking place over the Channel. It is not difficult to imagine how that anthropomorphised abstraction known as 'the markets' would react to such a situation. Cameron can only afford so much chaos if he hopes to survive the next election.

### Class organisation

Such is the volatility of the situation. Yet the major tendency on the left is for individuals and groups to equate discomfort among the enemy ranks with an advantage for our side. This very often smacks more of wishful thinking than serious analysis, and ultimately leads only to demoralisation, demobilisation and defeat.

Certainly, it is wishful thinking in the present context. It should be stressed that the obvious and acute *discomfort* of the government is not a diagnosis of *weakness*. November 30 is not in and of itself a more serious challenge to its authority than the Murdoch scandal earlier this year;

the St Pauls occupation is simply too dominated by the usual suspects to provide much of an additional threat, and has not had much success in spreading to the rest of the country (in contrast to the better-rooted American protests).

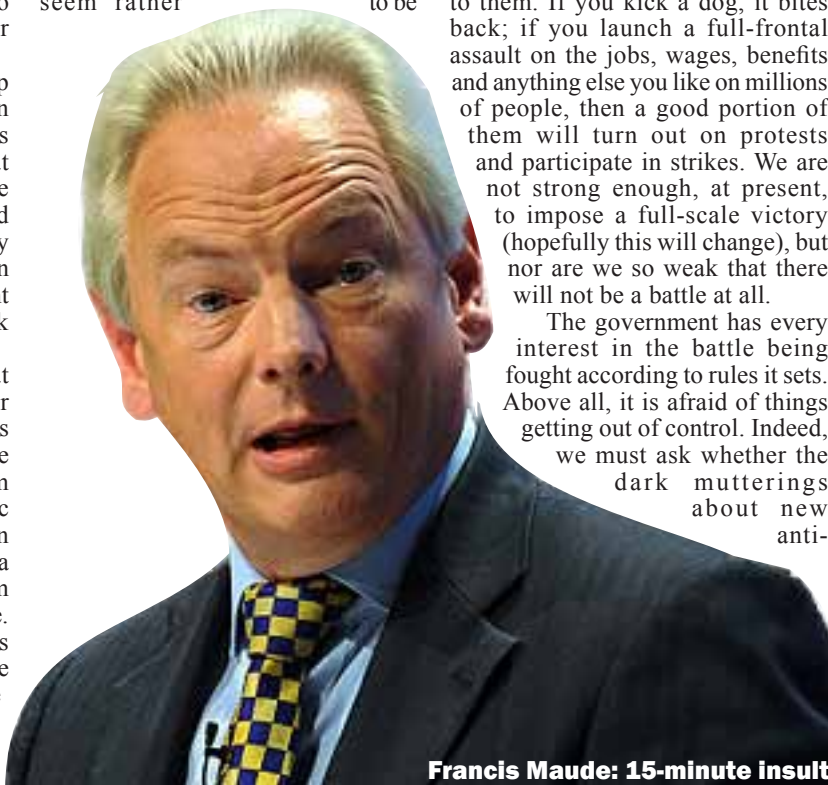
Conversely, the Con-Dem alliance is a sturdier thing than coalition governments are frequently made out to be. Cameron has Nick Clegg and co over a barrel; he is all that stands between them and political oblivion. Some threat exists from the Tory right, but not to the extent that it can beach a sitting government. The safest assumption is that the Tories and their lapdogs will serve a full term.

Secondly, in contrast to the fetishisation of 'wildcat' strikes and so forth common among anarchist-leaning comrades (including, alas, not a few Trotskyists), the fact is that the working class has no interest in chaos either. The working class derives its power in society from organisation - from disciplined collective action on as large a basis as possible. The most successful and positive illegal strikes have in fact been conducted on the basis of serious, if clandestine, organisation.

But the organisations of the workers' movement are *still* in historical retreat. We have not in any sense recovered from the disaster of Stalinism, and the Labourite constitutional cretinism of the bureaucracy has accelerated the pace of decay. It is necessary to build up the basic organs of defence of the working class.

More generally, it is necessary to have a longer-term view than simply turning the next strike or demonstration into 'the big one'. The left needs to articulate a coherent alternative to an utterly incoherent capitalism, and also a plausible way to get there. Right now, we have neither ●

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk



Francis Maude: 15-minute insult

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