



*Its impossible for any man to Dye
upon such Terms, we can hardly
live as it is*

weekly worker

**Classical Marxism and the
general strike: four-page
Jack Conrad supplement**

- LRC annual conference
- Morning Star 'anti-Semitism'
- European strategy needed
- Support the electricians

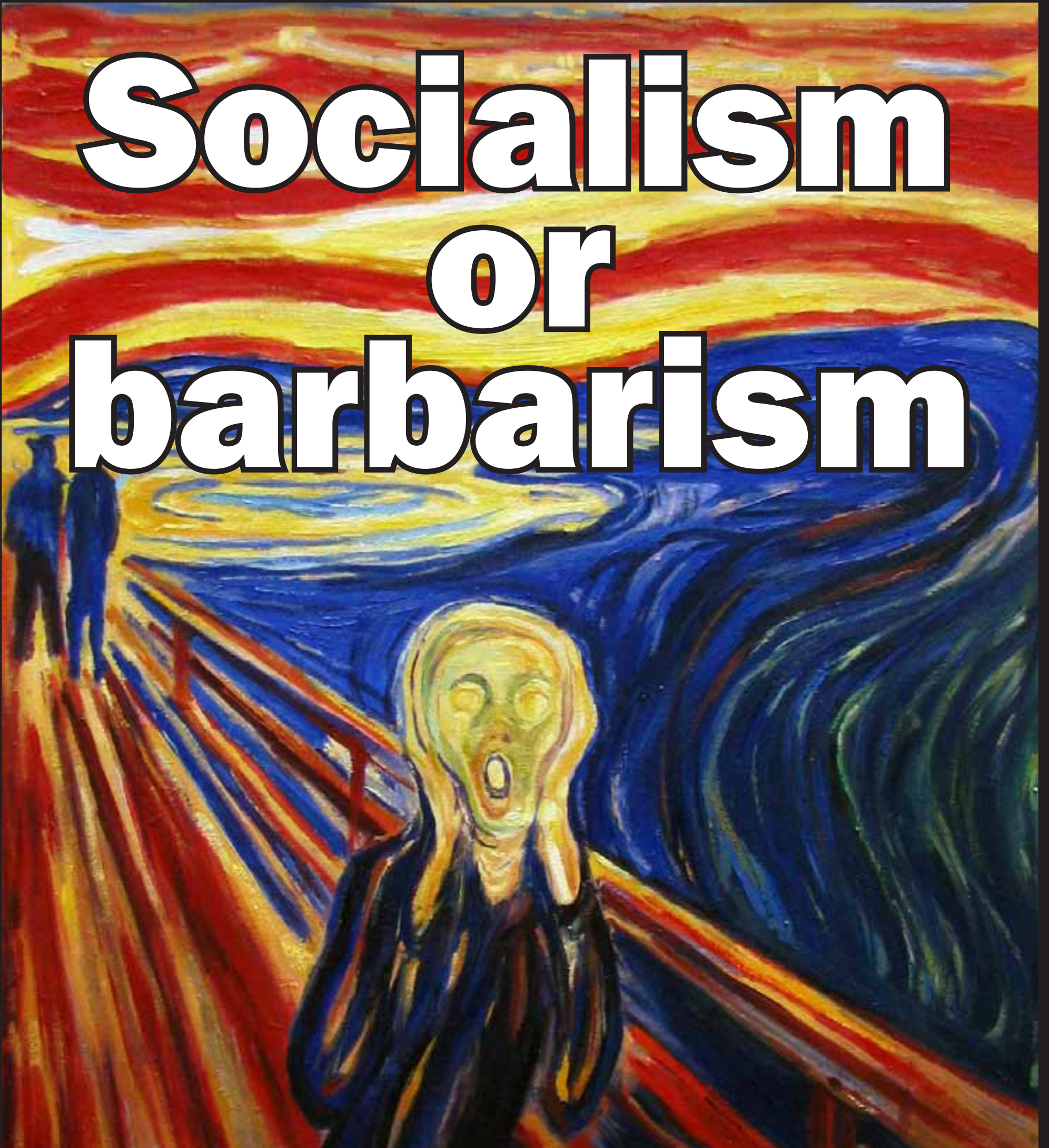
No 891 Thursday November 24 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

Socialism or barbarism



LETTERS



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

Not waving

Mike Macnair says: "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" ('Has capitalism reached the end?', November 17).

Not true. The technical solution to the crisis is straightforward. First, neutralise the sovereign debts of those economies whose current and potential growth means they are unsustainable. Second, the European Central Bank to act as lender of last resort, not just to the financial sector but to the EU state. Third, issue EU bonds, backed by the fiscal power of all euro zone states and the ECB. The problem is political: to get agreement for such a programme from national governments and nation-states.

Mike quotes the cases of Austria and Hungary as instances of other countries where there is suspicion of inability to repay sovereign debt, but no-one doubts that Austria could pay its sovereign debt. Like the Netherlands, whose bond prices have also fallen this week, it is one of those core northern European states that has emphasised fiscal responsibility. They are under attack rather because of their inability to print money, because of their falling growth, and because, as small economies, if the euro were to fail, it would be devastating for them. It is an indication of how capital is using its normal methods to force governments to quickly resolve this situation.

Mike puts forward Carmen Reinhart's argument that monetising the debts of the peripheral economies would require "financial repression, forcing banks and savers to hold state debt at rates of interest below inflation". He sees this as an argument against my own advocacy of monetisation of the debts. But it is not much of an objection. What characterises current conditions is the large amount of money hoarding already taking place. It's estimated there is \$15 trillion sitting in bank accounts in the US alone, waiting for current uncertainty to subside before it is invested. The same is true throughout the globe. Not only is no such repression required to convince owners of this money to keep it on deposit at virtually zero interest rates, but a look at global bond markets shows a considerable willingness to purchase bonds in places, such as the US, UK, Japan and Germany, with yields already way below inflation.

In the UK, it is difficult to get a deposit account paying much more than 3% gross, implying a net loss, given 5% inflation, of around 3% per annum. When the government put out an inflation-linked savings certificate, paying 0.5% above retail price index, earlier this year, it sold out within a couple of months. Bank of New York Mellon is charging its clients to deposit their money with it! No sign of repression required there.

I didn't argue for monetising the whole of the euro zone debt. Back in 2009, I suggested that quantitative easing could be used in the UK to stimulate inflation so as to depreciate the value of the debt. The fact that the Bank of England has been happy to accept inflation at more than double its target rate for three years confirms that this method is indeed being used to deal with UK debt. When the Greek debt crisis arose in 2010, I also argued that the other euro zone economies could simply absorb this debt, paying it off, and thereby avoiding a default.

As I pointed out then, a condition for that would necessarily be that those countries insisted upon some kind of fiscal oversight, which could only come from fiscal and political union.

Markets are very useful tools. They tell us what people are actually thinking and what they believe, not what they say they believe. About a week after I had put forward this argument, a solution something like it was put forward in the first Greek bailout. Markets throughout the globe soared. It transpired that, in return for the bailout, the Greeks would have to implement austerity, and the money printed by the ECB to buy Greek bonds would be sterilised by withdrawing an equal amount from elsewhere in the system. Markets crashed. We have seen something similar recently. In August and September, global markets fell sharply as the debt crisis re-emerged. In October, with a growing belief that a solution was to be found via the European Financial Stability Facility, and a move towards fiscal and political integration, and QE, markets once again soared. Now, as the politicians seem to be delaying in bringing that about, the markets are falling.

Given the vast amount of money hoarding, and the clear willingness of the owners of this money to place it on deposit anywhere they feel safe - ie, backed by a stable, solvent state and a central bank prepared to print unlimited amounts of money to buy bonds where necessary - it would not be at all difficult for an EU bond to attract sufficient capital to cover existing sovereign debts (not all of which needs to be covered anyway), and to facilitate the recapitalisation of European banks, where necessary. The ECB might have to buy up 20% of those bonds, but that is not at all the same as printing sufficient money to simply monetise the whole of the euro zone's current sovereign debt.

Mike is also wrong in his analysis of the 1970s. Stagflation was not the consequence of this policy, but was the consequence of attempts at Keynesian intervention in conditions when the long-wave boom had ended. Moreover, if Mike thinks the problem is tax havens, he is wrong. If capital can put in place technocrats in Italy and Greece, it will have no problem imposing its will on Switzerland or the Cayman Islands. I think Mike is taking a far too legalistic and parliamentary view of the way capital operates here. This is the problem with his refusal to understand the nature of the conjuncture within the long wave. Rather like the catastrophists of the Marxist movement in the post-war period, he refuses to accept the facts about the current condition of capitalism, preferring to stick with the 80-year-old dogma that capitalism is in its death throes. So he now argues that the long-wave boom from 1949-70 was abnormal. But there have been as many such abnormal periods of capitalist growth since 1780 as there have been periods, such as that from 1974-99, where growth has been below trend.

In the periods of upswing such as now, Keynesian and other technical solutions are possible, as means of cutting short cyclical recessions. In the periods of downswing they are not. Furthermore, Mike talks about the need for "the working class to take over the process of making the fundamental decisions about investment and economic activities". But, were they to do so, then as a solution to many of the problems of Europe at the present time, many of the policies that would be needed would indeed look very Keynesian! Simply allowing workers to make the decisions does not abolish the law

of value or change the nature of the problems facing European economies competing in a global capitalist economy.

Arthur Bough
email

Drowning

The debate with Arthur Bough has essentially led to two opposing views. The first view, propounded by Arthur, is based on Kondratiev's long-wave economic theory and argues that the global capitalist economy is at the initial stages of a new wave of economic growth and prosperity (Letters, November 10). The second view, based on MK Hubbert's peak oil theory and supported by myself, is that the global capitalist economy is reaching the end of growth.

Arthur's claim that he broadly agrees with Hubbert is either fraudulent or opportunist, because he accuses me of putting forward Malthusianism, since Malthus and Ricardo both had their own version of peak oil in the form of peak land. To me, this clearly suggests that Arthur is only vaguely familiar with Hubbert's theory, or is simply unable to grasp its relevance. The rational side of Malthus's arguments were always hidden by the reactionary side. Malthus's theory of population growth outpacing the ability of land to produce enough food did not come true - not because his reasoning was necessarily wrong, but rather because industrialisation of agriculture, resulting from the discovery of oil and gas, made it possible to increase food production, which Malthus could not have foreseen.

The end of growth thesis does not claim that no growth anywhere will ever take place from now on. It simply means that today growth will be secondary, limited and weak, while stagnation and will be primary, and long-term.

Tony Clark
email

Too Russian

Ben Lewis was right to point to the success of the *Historical Materialism* conference, with more Marxists than you could poke a stick at ('Debating the republic and extreme democracy', November 17). I don't really believe that 750 people would fit into the Brunei lecture theatre for the Arab revolutions, but it was certainly a very good session and Adam Hanieh's material on the Gulf was a revelation. However, there were certainly that many enthusiastic people for David Harvey's Isaac Deutscher prize lecture.

It all does point to a resurgent interest in a wide variety of Marxist or *marxisant* thinking. The feel was very international. There was a good range of ages. And, although some of the papers were undoubtedly very abstract or difficult and academic, there were plenty of signs of an interest in engaging with the real world. In particular, the *Socialist Register* plenaries were very useful - a good advertisement for the last (2011) and new (2012) editions of the book - and I would point to the strong and electrifying performance of Costas Lapavistas arguing for a Greek withdrawal from the euro.

The *HM* conference is now the major international gathering for Marxists (or at least 'Marxist intellectuals') and the *HM* editorial team should be congratulated for the work they put into it.

The Socialist Workers Party showed that they still have far more intellectual capital than other groups on the left. It's not just the strong connection between members of the SWP and the journal, from its origins up to now - and indeed it now looks

like the journal is being edited by a productive alliance between members of the SWP and various autonomists. Rather, the SWP has sufficient weight of its old cadre (many now retired, so I guess that's the 1968 generation), together with young academics and PhD students. OK, they might not be horny-handed sons and daughters of toil, but that's the modern class composition in a period of mass higher education for you.

The rest of the organised left was marginal. The Fourth International has some international heft and I had a pleasant sighting of Martin Thomas, Ben Lewis himself and 'so that's James Turley', while Workers' Power stuck close to the Comintern sessions so they could give their party line a nice exercise. We all really need to shape up and take part in some of the arguments being put forward at *HM*.

Ben, I thought, demonstrated much patience in his session and generosity in his report. Three members of the SWP who spoke in the session, including the chair, just couldn't resist the temptation to be humorously dismissive of Ben's politics and his association with the *Weekly Worker*. And I was myself amused by one of the SWP comrades clearly getting cross that someone could say something positive about Kautsky without spitting (and maybe crossing themselves, just in case they get infected by 'rotten politics').

The deeper point for me isn't about the importance of the 'democratic republic', but the role of the Russian Revolution and the traditions that spin out from it and the lessons to be learnt. That was why having such a strong strand of discussion on the Comintern was important. The Comintern meetings looked like the pursuit of generally oldish men (Ben and a few others apart), so it raises the question of whether the new generations of Marxists are going to be as obsessed as we are. The whole 'Russian question' needs debate - have we been too 'Russian'?

Matthew Caygill
email

Bewildered

Labour Party Marxists' motion met with bewildered incomprehension at the Labour Representation Committee's annual conference last Saturday. It was the only motion which was voted down. But when LRC chair John McDonnell MP moved the national committee statement, reminding us that the New Labour government had paved the way for the Con-Dem coalition, he seemed to be endorsing our point - that Labour governments are not automatically a good thing. If they are loyal to capitalism and "the existing constitutional order", we said, they "create disillusionment in the working class" and "lead to Tory governments". Obvious.

Instead of careerist bourgeois politicians hungry for the perks of office, the representatives the working class needs are committed socialists, champions of extreme republican democracy, willing to make do on a skilled workers' wage, put themselves under the discipline of the party, and play a leading role in mobilising and strengthening the workers' movement until it is strong enough to divide and defeat the capitalist ruling class and its state. Where a principled opposition will strengthen the workers' movement, an Ed Miliband government intent on a 'less quick, less deep' austerity programme in the interests of British capitalism will only weaken us.

The LRC conference, however, was overflowing with nostalgia for 1945 and welfare state reforms, like the NHS and council housing,

supposedly "won by Labour". No, comrades, those reforms were won by the working class, whatever government 'delivered' them. The 'welfare state' was not a Labour Party invention, in any case. Didn't Bismarck concede male suffrage to a militant German working class? Didn't Liberal prime minister Lloyd George launch the beginnings of the UK welfare state in 1906? Wasn't the architect of the 1945 concessions a certain Liberal, Lord Beveridge? And the Tory governments from 1951 did not dare to dismantle the welfare state. In fact, they built more council houses than Attlee's Labour government.

What counts is the organisational and political strength and combativity of the working class. That will be strengthened by principled opposition to a capitalist government, or weakened by Labour participation in a capitalist government.

Stan Keable
Labour Party Marxists

Odd

I attended the Labour Representation Committee's AGM at the weekend and several things struck me. One was the nagging suspicion that even in my late 30s I probably count as a 'youth' member of the LRC, with the exception of the two comrades who also attended as delegates from the fledgling Labour Party Marxists. The second was the apparent lack of leadership. Having previously seen SWP and Socialist Labour Party conferences, I was waiting most of the day for the party line to come down from the stage when it came to the various resolutions; but it never did.

This was most odd and outside of my experience of the left. The LRC's leader, John McDonnell MP, just seemed to disappear after doing his 10 minutes. What followed was a series of motions being presented quickly - the sense of the clock ticking and business to be done in an office pervaded. To work this quick has its advantages - debates are certainly short - but, given the importance of subjects, would it have been too much trouble to book the hall for a couple of days?

The first motion of the day about fairness in cuts surprised me when it passed. These folk were supposed to be the left, weren't they? Including delegates of organisations that are overtly and unmistakably from the communist camp. How exactly you can decide it is fair to cut one aspect of public expenditure over another? That can only be achieved via some kind of means testing, a practice loathed by those who experienced it in the 1930s, many of whom were probably in the room. The rest of the morning's motions largely passed me by as I was still trying to take in the first one!

Lunch time was an opportunity to do some eavesdropping on the conversations of various groupings around the building. Sadly, they revealed nothing newsworthy, except that the *Morning Star*'s bookstall had a copy of the infamous forgery and work of anti-Semitism, *The protocols of the elders of Zion* for sale. The bookstall was a rather bizarre affair, to be fair. Most of the books for sale were 'antique' - the sort of thing historians would love to fall upon but very little of current relevance.

In the afternoon, things got interesting. The New Communist Party (34 years on and still 'new') had a motion up with Gaddafi sympathies. The speaker moving the motion mentioned a whole bunch of other dictators - 'good' dictators, of course! - and called on that most revolutionary and communist of organisations, the United Nations, to "protect small nations". This was so wrong, it had to fail, as there is no

such thing as a good dictator, whatever he did in power, that could be called ‘progressive’ - not even his funding of certain left groups (perhaps they were on both ends of the ice-pick). Comrades from the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and LPM spoke against. After the votes came in, my skin crawled as the motion passed. We may all be comrades, but there are indeed some comrades whose comrade I’d like to say I wasn’t.

The commitment of the LRC and its affiliates to democracy was further put to the test by LPM’s motion, humbly suggesting that, if a Labour government were to be successful in implementing a socialist programme, it would need the support of the majority. That motion stands out as it was heavily defeated.

So are the LRC a dictator-loving bunch, dedicated to coming to power as a minority, which apparently doesn’t have a leadership that cares enough about the resolutions to stick around all day and attempt to bureaucratically stitch up the membership? All in all, an odd experience.

John Masters
 Hertfordshire

Step forward

So we have “six weeks to save the *Morning Star*”. The financial crisis of the left’s only daily socialist paper is not unexpected. For example, it is less than a month since the socialist weekly, *Tribune*, only narrowly averted closure.

The days of hard-copy printed versions of socialist newspapers are numbered. The only role for hard copies of the newspapers of leftwing organisations is to advertise their websites, during demonstrations and strikes, etc. The internet is the future. Many corporations are now ‘paperless’. Leftwing organisations should take a leaf out of the capitalists’ book and convert to online as soon as possible.

For example, in 1998, the International Committee of the Fourth International could see which way the wind was blowing, when they launched the highly successful World Socialist Web Site, which has 20,000-plus visitors each day. *Green Left Weekly* in Australia combines a lively weekly magazine with a website which is updated daily. Perhaps a weekly *Morning Star* magazine would be worth considering.

In most UK cities, capitalist daily newspapers are being changed into weeklies - the progress of the internet, in the face of the rapidly rising costs of newsprint and distribution, being unstoppable. I can see the *Morning Star* staggering on for a few more weeks or months; possibly kept going by a last-minute cash injection by Stalin’s granddaughter. However, it will only put off the inevitable. The closure of the *Star*, as a front for the Stalinist ‘tankies’ of the Communist Party of Britain, would be a major step forward for genuine communists.

John Smithee
 Cambridgeshire

Barking dog

On November 19 it was my dubious pleasure to attend the Korean Friendship Association’s international public meeting, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of the ‘great leader’, Kim Il Sung. It was international in the sense that three of the attendees were Spanish and one German, and public in the sense that bemused pedestrians were gawping at us from the window of the community centre in which it was held.

Attendees were mostly KFA members, along with a handful of New Communist Party members and a journalist from *The Independent*, who appeared to be feeling somewhat out of place. The speaker of the event was Alejandro Cao de Benós, a Spanish-born Korean citizen, member of the

Korean People’s Army and the only foreigner ever to work as an official of the government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Dressed in neat Mao suit, complete with a picture of the great leader pinned to his chest and sporting an extremely nice Rolex, Alejandro enthusiastically retold the history of North Korea, sticking so well to the official version that I was almost able to mouth along, having heard the same speech in many a documentary on the hermit kingdom.

The speaker then went on to explain the philosophy of Juche, or ‘self-reliance’, talk up the state of the Korean army (apparently equipped with the most advanced weaponry available and capable of nuking any city in the USA!) and discuss the fluctuations of relations with South Korea since the ‘sunshine policy’ ended with the death of president Kim Dae-jung (Alejandro claimed there had been a cover up of a US-backed assassination - “We have spies everywhere”).

The session concluded with questions and answers. Real discussion was mostly eschewed in favour of glowing reports on North Korean production (very efficient), technology (highly advanced) and its economic progress on the road to becoming an Asian tiger (any day now). Alejandro rattled off the basics of socialism in one country, complained that Marx was “too atheistic” and confirmed that Korea was following an independent path: “We have a slogan in Korea. The dog may be barking, but the train goes on. It means that the outside world could change 100 times but Korea will stay exactly the same.”

Of that I am in no doubt.

Leo Godwin
 email

Paranormal

Tony Papard chastises James Turley for making “the typical leftist mistake of dismissing as ‘loopy’ all things described as paranormal” (Letters, November 10). I would rather use James Randi’s dismissal of the supernatural and the paranormal as “flim flam”! Randi, a world-renowned psychic investigator, has written many books which expose all such phenomena - including UFOs - as not being verifi-

able when subjected to scientific tests. Some years ago Randi set up a foundation which promises \$1 million to anyone who “can show, under proper observing conditions, evidence of any paranormal, supernatural or occult power”. To date the prize remains uncollected.

Tony claims that that the existence of UFOs “is a well-known, documented fact”. The evidence refuting their existence is, however, far more compelling. Carl Sagan has contributed much such evidence in his many books, including *The demon-haunted world*.

Tony’s experience of cold reading appears impressive. Many others’ experiences do not impress but suggest that mediums are mainly charlatans. I was the victim of a cold reader who was able to give me details, including my age, health, profession, how my father died, his political leanings and mine, that my wife was a foreigner and that I drove a red car. The medium only got the last two details right; my wife - who has a German accent - booked the appointment by telephone, and I had parked my red car in clear view of the charlatan’s surgery!

I would suggest that it is Tony who “buries his head in the sand and refuses to examine the evidence”. I would recommend that he reads the works of the authors mentioned above, as well as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens *et al.* I would especially recommend Victor J Stenger’s *Physics and psychics: the search for a world beyond the senses*, from which I offer an apposite quote: “If [a scientific theory’s] prediction fails to be verified, the theory is discarded. How different from theories of the paranormal, which make no predictions that can be tested and are never discarded!”

Jim Dymond
 Aldershot

Homework

Could I suggest that Heather Downs (Letters, November 10) stops sounding off on the subject of the human revolution until she has found time to do a little reading?

Chris Knight
 Lewisham

Fighting fund

Supplementary

“Robbie Rix finally guilted me into paying for something I read for free online every week!” writes comrade JM. Thanks for your £10, comrade. I don’t want you to feel bad though - on the contrary, I want you to feel pleased because you’ve helped to support something worthwhile: the *Weekly Worker’s* fighting fund!

JM’s modest donation was gratefully received, but this week our November fund has been boosted by three tremendous gifts. Comrade TDB, like JM, made use of our PayPal facility to contribute no less than £200 (those two were among 16,358 who read us online over the last seven days). The second big one came in the form of a regular standing order from SK - an even better £230. And the third was a £100 cheque in the post from comrade SW.

I also received the £15 which OG added to her subscription, plus a further £175 in standing orders - the most generous of which was MM’s £75. All that makes this one of the best weeks I can remember for a very long time: no less than £730 all told. So that takes our running total

for November to £1,264. In other words we’ve already exceeded our normal £1,250 target, but we still need to make up that £100 shortfall from October. But £86 in six days should be a doddle!

I don’t want to be complacent though. We are always having to meet additional costs, sometimes planned for, sometimes unexpected. Like this week’s general strike supplement - definitely planned for, but landing us with an extra bill for printing and postage. Of course, the cover price remains the same, which is why we have to rely on our readers and supporters to make up the difference.

If you appreciate this week’s 16-pager, why not follow the example of all those mentioned above. Help us meet this week’s additional expenditure. Let’s see how much we can pull in by November 30 ●

Robbie Rix

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

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>.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, 6.15pm, St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). **November 29:** ‘How women initiated the French and Russian revolutions’. Speaker: Mark Kosman.

What kind of left?

Saturday November 26, 2pm: Meeting, ‘Towards unity’, room 7, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speakers from CPGB, Workers Power, Permanent Revolution and Marxist Revival. Organised by Manchester left activists.

November 30 strike events

Aberdeen: March, 11am, St Nicholas Graveyard.
Aylesbury: March, 10.30am, Kingsberry Square.
Banbury: March, 11am, Town Hall to join Oxford rally.
Basingstoke: March, 2pm, County Offices.
Bathgate: Rally, 10am, Fairway Hotel.
Bedford: Rally, 10am, Congress Hall (Salvation Army).
Birmingham: **March**, 11.30am, Lionel Street.
Blackpool: March, 12 noon, St John’s Church.
Bolton: Rally, 11am, Town Hall Square.
Bradford: Rally, 11am, Centenary Square.
Brighton: March, 11.30am, Victoria Gardens.
Bury: March, 11.30am, Peel Monument, the Rock.
Cambridge: March, 10am, Addenbrookes and Shire Hall.
Calderdale: Demonstration, 10am, town hall.
Canterbury: Rolling rally, from 10am, Abbots Barton Hotel.
Cardiff: March, 12 noon, City Hall, Gorsedd Gardens Road , CF10.
Chatham: Rally, 12.30pm, Command House, Gun Wharf, Dock Road.
Chester: March, 12 noon, University, Riverside Campus, Castle Drive.
Dover: Rally, 12 noon, St Mary’s Hall.
Dundee: March, 12 noon, Dudhope Park, west gate.
Edinburgh: March, Usher Hall, Lothian Road, EH1.
Falkirk: Rally, 12 noon, St Martha’s Hall, Hope Street.
Glasgow: March, 12.30pm, Shuttle Street, G1, to rally, 1.15pm, Barrowlands Ballroom, Gallowgate, G4.
Glenrothes: Rally, 10.30am, Fife House, North Street.
Great Yarmouth: Picket, from 6.30am, town hall.
Hastings: March, 11.30am, Hastings Pier.
Hertford: March, 11.30am, Hartham Common.
High Wycombe: March, 12.20pm, Bucks New University, police station and post office.
Huddersfield: March, 10.30am, St George’s Square.
Hull: Rally, 11am, Victoria Square.
Inverness: Rally, Mercury Hotel, Church Street.
Ipswich: March, 11.30am, Russell Road.
Kings Lynn: March, 12 noon, County Court Road.
Kingston upon Thames: March, 10am, university, Penrhyn Road.
Lancaster: March, 11am, Dalton Square.
Leatherhead: March,10am, Red House Grounds Park, off Station Road.
Leeds: Rally, 10.30am, Woodhouse Moor, junction Raglan Road.
Leeds: Rally, 12 noon, Art Gallery.
Liverpool: March, 11.30am, Derby Square and Pier Head.
London: March, 12 noon, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, WC2 to rally, 2pm, Victoria Embankment.
Manchester: March, 11am, Liverpool Road, off Deansgate.
Milton Keynes: Rally, 12 noon, Civic Centre.
Norwich: March, 11.30am, City College.
Oldham: March, 12 noon, Albion Street (close to Iceland).
Peterborough: March, 10.30am, Pleasure Fair, Meadow car park.
Portsmouth: March, 12 noon, Guildhall Square.
Preston: March, 11am, Avenham Park.
Reading: March, 11.30am, Irish Centre, Chatham Street.
Sheffield: Rally, 12 noon, Barker’s Pool, City Hall.
Sheffield: March, 1pm, City Hall.
Southampton: March, 12.30pm, Hoglands Park.
Southend: Rally, 11am, Plaza, outside Odeon cinema, High Street.
Swansea: March, 12 noon, Guild Hall, SA1.
Warrington: March, 11.30am, GMB Office, Town Hill.
Waveney: Rally, 1pm, Lowestoft United Reform Church.
Wigan: March, 12 noon, Whelley Labour Club.
Winchester: March,12 noon, Orams Arbour.
Wirral: March, 10.30am, Birkenhead Park gates, Conway Street.
York: March, 12 noon, Clifford’s Tower.

Justice for Miami 5

Thursday December 1, 6pm: Candlelit vigil, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Speakers include Miami 5 mothers. Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

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.

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.

LRC

Dreaming of 1945

The time for reformist timidity is long passed, argues **Maciej Zurowski** in his report of the Labour Representation Committee's annual conference

The Labour Representation Committee, rather than being a single tendency body, serves as an umbrella for a variety of groupings and individuals, primarily those in the Labour Party who consider themselves to be on the left. As such, it hosts an array of left Labourites, Marxists, Stalinists and Trotskyites, all of whom enjoy an uneasy alliance under what is essentially a 'British socialist' platform.

Nominally, its function is what Andrew Fisher, the opening chair at the November 19 LRC annual conference, held in the University of London Union, vaguely described as pushing the Labour Party "in a more socialist direction". In contrast to the staged and stitched-up 'conferences' of the ostensibly revolutionary sects - take, for instance, the Socialist Workers Party's annual rallies - the LRC's annual conference does provide *some* room for contending viewpoints, even if motions have to be proposed in three and a half minutes and subsequent contributions squeezed into two.

Labourite unity

And so, the first half of the day was kicked off by John McDonnell's typically eloquent account of the technocratic euro zone coup. Comrade McDonnell demanded we support direct action and Occupy protests, while simultaneously advocating sustained, traditional trade union and political party organisation to the new blood of resistance - this was echoed later on by an Occupy guest speaker who admitted that his movement might have "the energy, but not necessarily the brains, experience and leadership".

Beyond November 30, McDonnell argued, there should be more days of industrial action, and a dialogue about an unspecified "new model of society" should be held - a view that, for better or worse, no-one in the hall could disagree with.

Graham Bash of *Labour Briefing* spoke in a similarly crowd-pleasing fashion, rallying the assembled LRC members to a "fight for a Labour government ready to take on capital". It was unclear what type of Labour government he meant and how we would get it. Even more ambiguously, comrade Bash alluded to necessary "alliances with those who will not be with us all the way".

Despite the sometimes vagueness of their statements, most speeches from the straightforward Labourite camp were competent - although a breathless contribution from Hackney LRC offered vapid agitprop worthy of an SWP rally: capitalism is in crisis, we were thunderously informed (who would have guessed?), so it was time we "reclaimed our party".

If the latter was an instance of intellectual underkill, the Islington North CLP's motion was a textbook example of political sneakiness. Sound bites such as "Inequality is bad and is something that we should do something about" - a truism if there ever was one - should have rang everybody's alarm bells. The motion itself contained a lot of fluff about setting the budget in a way that does not hit black people and women the hardest, but effectively amounted to an underhand attempt at whitewashing cuts deemed to be 'fair'. A 'fairness commission' is what these slippery comrades would like to set up, and we are pretty sure they could even get



Stan Keable: reject gradualism

George Osborne to sign up.

Labour Party Marxists delegate Stan Keable took the opportunity to alert even the most somnambulant socialist in the house to the motion's treacherous content. But, in a surprising and highly unfortunate development, the motion was carried. That's right - 'Labour's resistance' had no trouble voting for a motion that Ed Miliband might have slipped in when he thought no-one was looking. The climate thus set, MP Katy Clark could get away unchallenged when she naively stated that now even the Blairite Progress group was "changing" and coming out "in defence of the workers" - as if the leftist posturing of career politicians in opposition was some act of great significance. The Tories, argued Clark, just don't provide the "growth that we need" - and that's about as militant as it got.

Following this, not even NEC candidates Gary Heather, Christine Shawcroft and Patrick Hall could shock us when they announced that they would not publicly condemn Labour councillors who implemented cuts. Further contributions, advocating good old bureaucratic voluntarism as a method to overcome the organisation's poor gender balance ("we need to be more inclusive"), gave this part of the conference precisely the soft-left sheen that it deserved.

Marxist confusion

The only left groups to submit motions in their own name were the New Communist Party, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, and the new kids on the block, Labour Party Marxists. The good news first: the AWL's very decent motion for Europe-wide working class unity and against EU withdrawal was carried by 72 votes to 60, with several dozen abstentions. That's no mean feat, seeing as the hard left in and around LRC is still considerably tainted by nationalism and, in more than a few cases,

nostalgia for Stalin's failed national-socialist model.

Despite pleas to abandon this "divisive" motion, one contributor from the floor correctly pointed out that the time to raise the question of Europe is now - in fact, with the background of the euro zone crisis, there has never been a more pressing time. This, we are happy to conclude, must have dawned on more than a few LRC comrades, giving the organisation a position on Europe that is now to the left of the SWP/Alex Callinicos line. Of course, we have many points of contention with the third-campist AWL, but we do welcome the call to "organise public meetings and debates about Europe across the country". If the LRC leadership makes this a reality, such events would provide us with plenty of opportunity to debate the AWL's less appetising Atlanticist birthmarks.

On to the bad news: a motion by tankie survivors, the New Communist Party, which painted Gaddafi's regime in quite agreeable colours, was carried by an impressive majority. Gaddafi provided a decent living standard for his pool of wage-slaves; he gave generous famine relief to other African countries. You've heard the song before, and it would not be worth further reciting, were it not for the fact that the motion also managed to call on that principled anti-imperialist body known as the United Nations to "defend the sovereignty of small nations".

"There's been a lot of compromis'in' on the road to my horizon," sang Glen Campbell in his country pop classic, 'Rhinstone cowboy' - words that must ring particularly true if your theoretical road led from studying Marx and Lenin to endorsing Gaddafi and the UN. Is the fawning before Gaddafi's achievements just plain, second-camp 'idiot anti-imperialism'? Or have these people actually arrived at the conclusion that the working

class will never emancipate itself and can therefore only hope to be policed by benevolent autocrats?

Whatever the case, the NCP was not alone in fostering illusions in bourgeois forces. It was when arguing against the Libya motion that the AWL came into its own, pushing its trademark 'We don't call for imperialist intervention, but refuse to condemn it' line. Sometimes (most times?) Nato invasions create favourable conditions for working class struggle, we were told once again; so who are we to condemn the imperialist bloodbath in Libya? One AWL comrade gave us an allegory on the way: if the police attack fascists at a demonstration, he claimed, we don't call upon them to stop because, after all, that's where the repressive state apparatus hits the correct target. According to his twisted logic, it follows that we don't oppose imperialist mass murder if a dictator is removed in the process.

Labour Party Marxists

Labour Party Marxists submitted a relatively brief motion, which rejected Labour governments that are backed by a minority of the population, loyal to the constitutional order and do not have a "realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme". Such Labour administrations merely pave the way for the next Tory government and further attacks on the working class. The idea that no workers' party should administer capitalism in the hope of handing down some reforms is, of course, socialist ABC dating back to way before the Second International. Short of being able to implement a "full socialist programme" backed by the majority of the people - which by definition involves breaking up the institutions of the capitalist state - it should continue to act as a party of extreme opposition.

In the run-up to the LRC conference Stuart King, a member of the Permanent Revolution group, referred to the LPM's motion as a combination of "ultra-left abstentionism and parliamentary cretinism" which fails to address the question of the state and the armed people. I am in no position to tell whether the comrade's remark was a genuine misunderstanding or a disingenuous put-down, though it is hard to imagine how a rejection of Labour governments that are "loyal to the constitutional order" could have escaped him. A political group which explicitly rejects the constitutional order, you would think, must aim to break up that order: ie, smash the state, including its extra-parliamentary institutions. How else could you interpret that formulation?

Either way, Labour Party Marxists can be grateful to the comrade for providing a test run ahead of the conference, illustrating how someone could 'misunderstand' what is being said in the worst possible way. Far be it for me to insist that one should, as Hitler recommended, always tailor one's speeches to the biggest fool in the hall, but with only three and a half minutes to move a motion - let alone one coming from a new group that not many will have heard of - it is imperative to take great care about one's choice of words.

Although the LRC has, as we have seen, more than its quota of reformists, Labour Party Marxists might have won over a good section of those present by a more comprehensive motion. A clear statement on the tasks of the working class vanguard operating in and outside the LP - rather than just a list of things that socialist should *not* do - may have gone a long way to clearly distance the group from Socialist Party of Great Britain-type utopians, who, with pure hearts and arms folded, have been waiting for the masses to vote for socialism for over 100 years.

LPM members appeared acutely aware that they will be judged by what they proceed to do and say in the forthcoming months. In my opinion, this should include an elaboration of their position on the state question. But they are on the right track - LPM comrade Jim Moody was elected onto the LCR's national committee - but they will need to make their positions understood to many, including in two-minute sound bites.

Pedantry aside, the reason why the motion was not carried was, in all likelihood, due to concerns from the right wing of the LRC, not from its left. For all their socialist speechifying, the overriding leitmotif of the organisation is, before everything else, to get a Labour government elected. Despite the historical experience of the 20th century and, it stands to reason, against their better knowledge, the comrades hope that bad Labour governments will be followed by less bad ones, until one day - hey presto - we get a socialist one.

In this gradualist approach, our Permanent Revolution comrade does not differ significantly from the traditionalist Labourites who extolled the virtues of the 1945 Attlee government - you know, the NHS and all that - in speaking against the LPM motion. How much more, one wonders, must the European economy deteriorate to convince these comrades that there is just no point in dreaming of another 1945? ●

SCANDAL

Anatomy of an embarrassment

The appearance of *The protocols of the elders of Zion* on a *Morning Star* bookstall has provoked a storm of criticisms. **Harley Filben** wonders what all the fuss is about

Those attending the Labour Representation Committee annual general meeting on Saturday were privileged enough to witness a minor scandal unfold before their very eyes.

Early on in the proceedings, the chair read out a statement from the comrades of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain. It had come to their attention that a book on their stall had "caused offence" to a person or persons unknown, and the comrades would like the meeting to know that said book was strictly available for purposes of historical research, but nonetheless it had been a mistake to bring it along. "What was the title?" a voice cried out from the floor in response to this barely comprehensible statement (the CPGB's John Bridge, as it happens). The chair claimed to not remember.

Of course, by then at least half the people present were quite aware of the text in question - none other than a vintage edition of *The protocols of the elders of Zion*,¹ notionally the records of a meeting of the Jewish elite concerning their plans to dominate the world. The *Protocols* were cooked up in 1903 by the Russian tsarist state to stir up pogroms, as it often liked to do, and they became a set text for all the anti-Semites in the world. "They are based on a forgery, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* moans and screams once every week," Adolf Hitler famously remarked of them in his *Mein Kampf*: "the best proof that they are authentic."²

It should be emphasised that selling a copy of such a text is no crime - not under British law (so far as I know) or indeed under the loose binding ethics of the workers' movement. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was obviously enough right about the *Protocols*' lack of authenticity; but no attempt to understand the political elements of anti-Semitic reaction in the first half of this century that did not undertake to read the 'source material' for this set of conspiratorial myths could be called serious. The *Protocols* - and other texts, such as *Mein Kampf* - are extraordinarily important parts of the historical heritage of humanity; and all the more important in that they pertain to a part of that history that most people are keen to avoid repeating.

The crime, here, is twofold: firstly, the insistence upon the part of some on the left of making a royal hoo-ha over the fact that some CPBer donated a 'bad' book to their stall. The stink was (perhaps unintentionally) provoked by Dave Osler, a left blogger notable among other things for his distaste for reactionary anti-capitalism, and the left's concessions to it. It was he who parted company with an unknown sum of money to purchase the antique 1925 edition of *Protocols* (it had already been taken off the stall, apparently after a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty indicated its presence), and immediately posted a picture of his prize to Twitter.³ Before long, the scandal had made it to the avowedly pro-imperialist *Harry's Place* blog⁴, to a shocked intake of breath.

For the various diseased elements that hang around *Harry's Place*, there can be no innocent reason to own or sell on a copy of the *Protocols*. The rote repetition of hysterical Zionist slanders (against all parts of the left that do not view the Muslim world in general, and Palestinian militants in particular, as a seething pit of Jew-hatred) that passes for debate on that

blog is of course utterly impervious to reason.

One particularly 'interesting' argument to have arisen in the comment thread is that it would have been better to have *Mein Kampf* on the stall than the *Protocols*. After all, the former is the honest exposition of the views of Adolf Hitler; the latter, however, is mendaciously attributed to a band of Jewish conspirators that did not exist. The corollary of that argument gets to the nub of why the scandal is so repugnant - that is, if that is a dividing line between *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols*, then presumably somebody (at a leftwing meeting, no less!) would be in danger of naively taking the rambling conspiratorial musings of the tsarist secret police at face value.

There is wide precedence for this kind of argument on the left, unfortunately - and not always from plain old renegades after the *Harry's Place* fashion. Members of the Socialist Workers Party, motherlode (in the idiotic Eustonite narrative) of "left anti-Semitism", have called for holocaust denial to be banned, and access to *Mein Kampf* restricted to "duly accredited students". The 'official communist' movement, of which the CPB is the largest remaining British fragment, has been only too keen to call for state bans on fascism and racism. Indeed, *Searchlight* - the principal source of such calls today - was founded by Gerry Gable, who left the CPGB over its shift towards support for the Palestinian cause.

All share a fundamentally elitist conception of political development. Bad ideas, apparently, are like cancer - if you do not cut out the first tumour in sufficient time, it will spread until the body is consumed. This is a perfectly amenable perspective for the likes of the CPB, for whom the monstrous Stalinist regimes represented some form of socialism. It is equally appropriate to the Eustonites, who have given up in every meaningful sense on the ability of the masses to change anything.

For the SWP, founded on the fuzzy

but admirable principle of 'socialism from below', there is a flat-out contradiction here - but, nonetheless, the utterly stunted level of political education typical of the organisation leads to that kind of attitude. Only accredited students can read *Mein Kampf* - and only activity 'accredited' by Alex Callinicos can be undertaken by an SWP comrade.

Which brings us to the second aspect of the crime: the CPB's cowardly and hypocritical response. Every move possible has been made to distance the organisation from that tattered old book; firstly, the incomprehensible message from the chair at the LRC conference itself, and subsequently in contributions from CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths to the *Harry's Place* comment thread.

Every cheap lawyer's trick is mobilised - no anti-Semitic literature has ever appeared on a CPB stall; a *Morning Star* stall is quite a different thing from a CPB stall (the grain of truth here is that, indeed, the *Morning Star* is not so much the paper of the party as the CPB is the party of the paper); and anyway, the redoubtable comrade Ivan Beavis removed the offending item as soon as he was challenged over its presence.

Comrade Griffiths gets himself into yet more hot water by bringing up the criticisms apparently offered by the CPB to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation upon some anti-Semitic speech delivered by a CPRF delegate to the duma. The CPRF is an acutely reactionary nationalist organisation, with some real affinities to fascism - anti-Semitism is in its DNA, and it has been involved in physical assaults on gay pride marches and such. The CPB is happy to maintain 'fraternal links' with this odious organisation, and one Yuri Yemelianov has been invited to the CPB's weekend school, called with no apparent sense of irony 21st Century Marxism.⁵ The bottom line is that Griffiths has no stomach for the real argument to be had here, which is with the idea that the very presence of a 'proscribed' text on a

general stall of second-hand literature is absolutely nothing to be ashamed of.

Identity politics

As well as the aforementioned elitist anti-intellectualism, this retreat is of a piece with the horrified jeremiads of the *Harry's Place* regulars in another crucial respect. This is the increasing penetration of the most degraded forms of identity politics into the left. Griffiths may have been a determined, if politically moribund, opponent of Eurocommunism in the struggles in the old CPGB; but the lasting legacy of the Euros is primarily expressed in the persistence of deflected identity politics on the left, to which he here capitulates.

As such, this little flap over the *Protocols* was very much of a piece with the LRC event itself. It was not long underway before the likes of Susan Press began bemoaning the small number of women comrades present. She counted one woman to every five men (which seems a fair enough estimate to me): this simply wasn't good enough, and the LRC had to work at being more 'inclusive'. The paucity of comrades from minority-ethnic backgrounds was also bemoaned.

The issue is that the LRC has gone more or less as far along the road of 'inclusiveness' as is possible. The depredations of New Labour are bemoaned in every speech to the conference. Yet there is one mechanism that the LRC has, consciously or otherwise, inherited from Tony Blair and his (often ex-Eurocommunist) courtiers: the gender quota. The LRC's national committee is divided up according to the most labyrinthine rules, a mixture of directly elected 'executive' posts, one ballot of affiliated organisations and another of individual members.

The latter ballot has to produce eight men and eight women. Given the effort involved to get this precise balance in place, it is unsurprising that we individual members were presented with 16 candidates for 16 posts, with no need for a ballot to take place. One's mind boggles at the electoral mathematics that would be required to ensure a 'balanced' outcome in any vote on the issue.

The LRC has operated this system for years; yet, at the end of the day, it has proven unable to attract any more women to its meetings than is typical of left meetings generally. A worthy motion recognising the especially sharp consequences of attacks on living standards for women is unlikely to change much in this regard.

The LRC - and all who share this methodology - fundamentally mistake a structural problem in contemporary capitalist society for a procedural one that can be solved with intelligent group-architecture and vigorous assurances that sexism is combated within the organisation. To put it briefly: we live in a country in which women are formally equal to men, and informally unequal. The foundation of a political organisation conscious that capitalism should not be taken at its word on the women's question is a step towards overcoming the informal means by which women are kept 'in their place', but it does not achieve it in itself; a shared statement of political purpose does not create a tiny 'kingdom of freedom' in which all the old crap is flushed away.

The 'natural' course of political activity in this society is for the most

articulate, charismatic and confident individuals to assume authority over the rest of us. This tends to reassert the traditional informal hierarchies - it is white, middle class men who, on average, come out ahead of everyone else.

To fight against that, however, two things are necessary: firstly, general political education, which should be understood not as the rote learning of quotations and concepts, but the activation of individuals as confident political agents able to take their own intellectual and political initiative on diverse questions; and secondly, wide-ranging debates on the particular issue of women's oppression, involving women and men. This will necessarily involve quite scathing criticisms of most extant versions of feminist theory, and ultimately a tenor and level of debate which is not at all 'inclusive' to the easily offended or politically naive (general political education is there in part to overcome such prejudices).

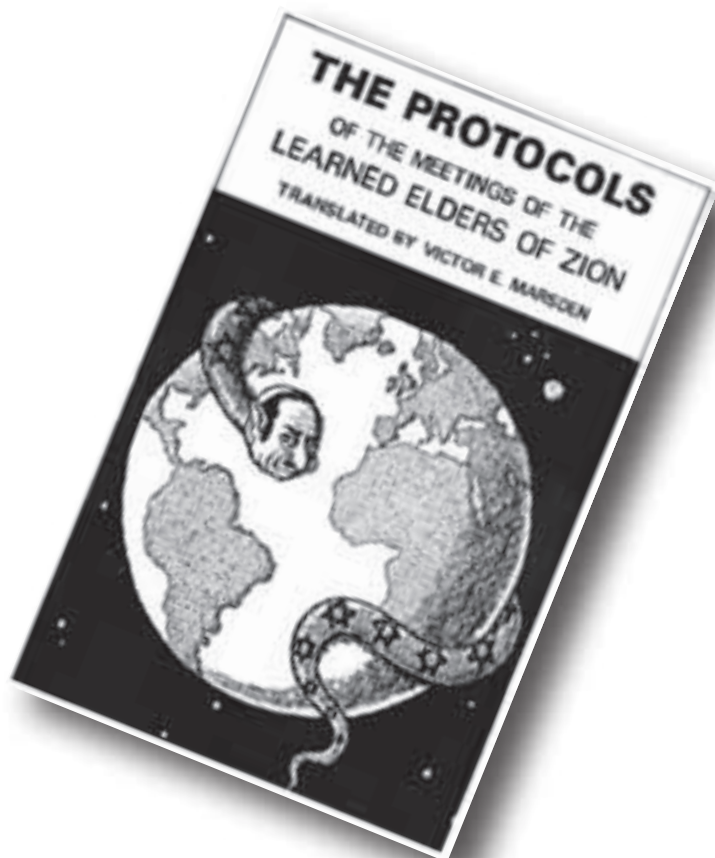
Indeed, such serious debates have happened. The post-1968 rise of the new left coincided with, and was in important respects provoked by, second-wave feminism, gay liberation and (particularly in the US) the civil rights movement and its revolutionary offshoots. The discussions that came out of this curious agglomeration reflected both the strong and the weak points of their components; some of the resultant political programmes were useful in important respects, others misleading, and others still slightly wacky.

However, the institutionalisation of identity politics and the failure of the new left to produce a lasting legacy has left us in a position today where hard political polemic on these matters has largely been subordinated to the prissiness of enraged liberalism. For the average Trotskyist group, it is now enough to add 'feminist', 'anti-racist' and so forth to 'socialist' in one's self-description to resolve the issues. Yet Jews have been oppressed and exploited for hundreds of years, and women for tens of thousands; it is extremely naive to think that not being sexist and not being racist is an adequate response. Neither is the SWP's preferred alternative, which is to borrow the work of some ephemeral trendy intellectual as and when it is politically convenient (Ariel Levy's 'raunch culture' theory being a relatively recent example).

The prevailing anti-intellectualism on the left not only fails to produce a programme capable of grappling effectively with some of the most delicate and complex means of capitalist domination; it positively aids the penetration of these means into our own movement. The CPB may be mortified with embarrassment that the *Protocols of the elders of Zion* ended up on its bookstall - but the only real embarrassment is our collective failure on the far left to deal with the issues at all seriously ●

Notes

1. Widely available: an edition with some interesting explanatory material can be found at http://ddickerson.igc.org/The_Protocols_of_the_Learned_Elders_of_Zion.pdf.
2. A Hitler *Mein Kampf* p240 (available at www.archive.org/details/MeinKampf_483).
3. <http://yfrog.com/gy4nhwoj>.
4. <http://hurryupharry.org/2011/11/19/morning-star-selling-the-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>.
5. Yemelianov himself does not have any outrageously racist statements to his name, at least in English, but his distinctive views on good old comrade Joseph Stalin are not without interest: http://marxism.halkcephesi.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=70.



Learn from the history of this forgery

UNITE THE RESISTANCE

Appearances are everything

Peter Manson reports on the SWP's obsession with numbers regarding its latest recruiting front

I have to say that the November 19 Unite the Resistance 'convention' was a big disappointment in terms of putting forward a coherent programme to defeat the coalition austerity attacks on our class. Yes, there were some inspiring speeches and some individual experiences were usefully exchanged, but there was no attempt by the organisers, the Socialist Workers Party, to direct the event towards a serious, *winning* strategy.

It must also have been a big disappointment to the SWP too. After all, the central committee had been prioritising the mobilisation of its membership to attend for a good couple of months and had been hyping up the centrality of UTR internally: "If we achieve our goal of getting 1,000-1,500 people to attend the convention, it will give us a firm base to move on and attempt to push for further action ..." (*Pre-conference Bulletin* October). The idea, it informed its members, was to lay the foundation for a new rank-and-file movement able to challenge the trade union bureaucracy (although how this is supposed to happen through the SWP mobilising its own comrades, supporters and contacts is beyond me).

Unfortunately, however, nowhere near the 1,000-1,500 target figure turned up. There were 1,000 seats laid out in the vast Royal Horticultural Hall (25 rows of 40), but a good third of them were unoccupied throughout. I was sitting near the front, yet there was a bank of about 10 seats that were vacant next to me. Anybody who arrived late could find a seat in any part of the hall (plus a second one alongside, where they could park their coat and bag).

The photographs on the *Socialist Worker* website cleverly disguise the actual attendance, although for a day or so Right to Work published a couple that gave the game away. For the SWP the truth must be made to fit the prediction and the comrades settled on well over 1,000 as the claimed attendance. So the internal *Party Notes* reports: "Unite the Resistance is becoming an important vehicle in helping build the fightback ... Close to 1,200 people attended the convention (1,187, to be precise)." That certainly meets the 1,000-1,500 target, doesn't it? However, only "Nine people joined the SWP" - another disappointment, to be sure (*Party Notes* November 21).

When the chair of the morning session announced, "1,000 people have now walked through the door", I was a little incredulous. But when in the afternoon we were told that more than 1,200 had taken part, this was clearly totally at odds with reality. Even if we add a generous 100 to take account of those who might have been wandering around the stalls or having a cup of tea, the attendance would be no more than 750. So at least 400 people were invented by the SWP.

You might ask, what does it really matter whether there were 700 or 1,200? On one level you would have a point. But I have discussed the attendance at length because it is important to understand what the SWP is about. The comrades are not actually concerned primarily with defeating the coalition assault and advancing the organisational strength of our class. No, they are concerned with enlarging and increasing the influence of the SWP, and to that end appearances count for everything.

That is why they go to enormous lengths to pretend that those attending were 'ordinary trade union militants',



Not what they want us to see

not - heaven forefend - overwhelmingly SWP members and supporters. Yet the CC had been campaigning internally for weeks to get as many of their "7,127 registered members" to show (*Pre-conference Bulletin* October). I would estimate that 400-500 obliged. But the only speaker I heard who mentioned the SWP was construction worker Steve Kelly in the final session - he commended the left groups (specifying the SWP, Socialist Party in England and Wales, and Socialist Appeal) for giving the electricians' dispute some coverage, unlike the mainstream press.

By way of illustrating the proportion of SWPers at the 'convention', let me report a conversation I had during the lunch break. "Excuse me," a certain Sadie Robinson said, "Are you a member of the SWP?" When I replied in the negative, she went on: "Oh good, I'm a journalist at *Socialist Worker* and I'm trying to interview people who aren't members of the SWP." When I pointed out that I am, however, editor of the *Weekly Worker*, she replied good-naturedly: "Ah. It might not get past the subbing process" - and went off to seek out a more suitable non-SWP.

Everything about the event was SWP. Martin Smith was scurrying about throughout trying to organise replacement speakers and so on; the 'conference arrangements committee', which selected speakers from the floor and, according to a handout, was "made up of three lay trade union members belonging to different trade unions", consisted of SWP comrades. Six of the 11 stalls were run by the organisation and its fronts: the SWP itself, Right to Work, Unite Against Fascism, Defend the Right to Protest, Bookmarks and Education Activists Network (the others were the University and College Union, Anti-Academies Alliance, Save Bombardier, One Million Climate Jobs and Socialist Resistance).

We can win

Why, you may ask, did the SWP not put on this event using its Right to Work anti-cuts campaign? After all, the 'convention' was all about opposing the cuts, wasn't it? There were sessions on 'Building the November

30 strikes', 'The global struggle against austerity', 'Organising in our communities against austerity' and 'Where next for the movement?'

Who knows what the thinking was - surely the CC does not seriously believe that a non-trade union body can set up a mass rank-and-file, cross-union movement. Nobody will think UTR is just the SWP under another name, will they? But Alex Kenny, a left member of the National Union of Teachers executive, who opened the event, said it was "very useful to get rank-and-file activists together" for "this rally".

But the first platform speaker was a leading SWP comrade who knew the line: "This *convention* is about sharing ideas about how we can win," said Sean Vernell (my emphasis). But it almost goes without saying that there was virtually no genuine exchange or debate, certainly when it came to the rallies in the huge hall (there was one parallel meeting in the afternoon in a café downstairs - more about that later).

Apart from comrade Vernell and Karen Reissmann, the final platform speaker of the day, (plus National Union of Students executive member Ruby Hirsch, a last-minute substitute) none of the others were SWP comrades, as far as I know. Speakers like John McDonnell (fresh from the Labour Representation Committee conference) and Mark Serwotka gave their usual competent, militant (and uncontroversial) performances, and a range of lesser names told us many times what we all knew: the government and the capitalist class is attacking us and we must fight back together.

On the forthcoming strikes, comrade Serwotka warned the government: "Back off or we will do it again and again until we win." You cannot fault the sentiment, but *how exactly* are we going to win? At least he was more sophisticated than Leia Petty of Occupy Wall Street, who led the assembled SWPers in chanting: "I - I believe - I believe that we can win!" Excuse me while I cringe.

All out, stay out

SWP speakers throughout the day, from both the platform and floor,

gave their own, simplistic, answer to the question, 'How are we going to win?' That 'answer' takes the form of the slogan, 'All out, stay out', of course. However, there was actually something approaching a debate on this question in the smaller meeting mentioned above.

The session in the café was entitled 'Organising in our communities against austerity' and featured speakers from Right to Work (Paul Brandon), the National Shop Stewards Network (Rob Williams) and the Coalition of Resistance (James Meadway). If these comrades had any ideas on 'organising in our communities', they were not letting on. They spoke, quite naturally, about the national and international situation. The other two platform speakers were Lee Jasper of Black Activists Rising Against Cuts and Richard Rieser of Disabled People Against Cuts - presumably they were representing the black and disabled 'communities'.

Comrade Williams of NSSN is, of course, a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and unsurprisingly he held out the example of Liverpool in the 80s, stressed the importance of the recent Jarrow march and hyped up the role of the NSSN itself, which is "acting as a lever on the trade union movement". But he did express his disagreement in passing with the 'All out, stay out' slogan.

It was this that provoked the nearest thing to a debate, with comrade Brandon and a range of SWPers from the floor doing their best to justify the slogan. According to the RTW national secretary, it is "absolutely perfect". But his defence of it concentrated on the first part, the 'all', rather than the 'stay': it was attempting to unite workers, students and all sections, he said.

Julie Waterson's argument was straightforward: "One-day strikes can't win", so it has to be "All out, stay out". Other SWP speakers from the floor argued along the lines of "It's the doing that makes it happen. It isn't a case of waiting for the TUC"; "Are we at the stage of a 24-hour strike or a 48-hour strike? That's not how it works"; "I don't think you can be radical enough"; "People are asking what to do after November 30. You

need to be a little bit angry yourself. How can we win?"; "Go in and show that optimism"; "The debate about after November 30 is not academic. When we come out, we stay out."

I have done my best to summarise the points, but, as readers will see, they are pretty insubstantial and voluntaristic. Neil Cafferky of SPEW and NSSN asked: "Are we saying we start to run transport?" (cries of "Yes!"); while comrade Williams in his reply emphasised the need to "raise demands in a way that builds momentum". He wanted to know whether the SWP was suggesting that workers should stay out on November 30 and not go back on December 1. There was no clear answer, of course.

If I had been called to speak I would have pointed out that the slogan is actually a call for an immediate, indefinite general strike and in such a situation it is not just a question of running transport, but *every aspect of society*. If everyone was on strike we would have to ensure that people were fed, patients were treated, the elderly cared for ... In short we would have to take over. However, as, like SWPers, I am not an anarchist, I know that this is impossible without the leadership of a mass revolutionary party capable of leading millions.

I would have pointed out that, while it was positive that we were having a comradely exchange between members of the SWP, SPEW and Counterfire, this minimal cooperation must be taken to a far higher level. How about uniting our separate, competing fronts under one umbrella and, centrally, how about uniting *politically* in a single, democratic-centralist Marxist organisation determined to build that mass revolutionary party?

Inaction plan

None of this is part of the Unite the Resistance 'action plan' - drawn up no doubt by the SWP central committee ("We sold 4,000 copies of the Action Plan," states the November 21 *Party Notes* - who is this 'we'?). Subtitled 'The alternative to unemployment, austerity, privatisation and cuts', this 20p leaflet contains no proposals for 'action' - just a series of demands: tax the rich, end tax evasion, stop spending on war, create one million climate jobs ... Many of these are eminently supportable - for example, a "maximum of a 30-hour week with no loss of pay" and "Scrap all stop and search laws" - but overall it amounts to a Keynesian programme to achieve "a more equal society based on cooperation".

In the final session the chair stated that the possibility had been discussed of calling a conference in the new year, at which a UTR leadership would be elected and motions debated. In the meantime, we were asked to accept an interim committee of a couple of dozen comrades, whose names and unions were read out (but not, of course, their political affiliation).

Karen Reissmann was the most coherent speaker in this session, but she was all at sea when it came to the SWP's new recruiting slogan. At first, since it was important "to show we're serious", she talked about escalating strike action - first one day, then two, then three ... But, seemingly oblivious to the contradiction, she ended by urging, "All out, stay out on November 30." After which, there should be "more strikes when we're 'All out, stay out'!" ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

ELECTRICIANS

Unite behind the sparks

Craft workers and labourers must find common cause, urges **Gerry Downing**

On August 13, 500 electricians, pipefitters and supporters packed into London's Conway Hall to launch the struggle against wage cuts and repudiation of national agreements by eight of the main building employers. The eight were Balfour Beatty, NG Bailey, Crown House, Gratte Brothers, MJN Colston Ltd, Spie Matthew Hall, Shepherd Engineering Services and T Clarke plc, but Colston has since pulled out of the offensive.

The companies want to impose three new grades for electricians: metalworking (£10.50 per hour), wiring (£12) and terminating (£14). At the moment the Joint Industry Board (JIB) rate for all electricians is £16.25 across the board. Wages in the building industry are set by annual agreements between the unions (Unite, Ucat and the GMB) and the JIB - in this case the Heating and Ventilation Contractors Association (HVCA).

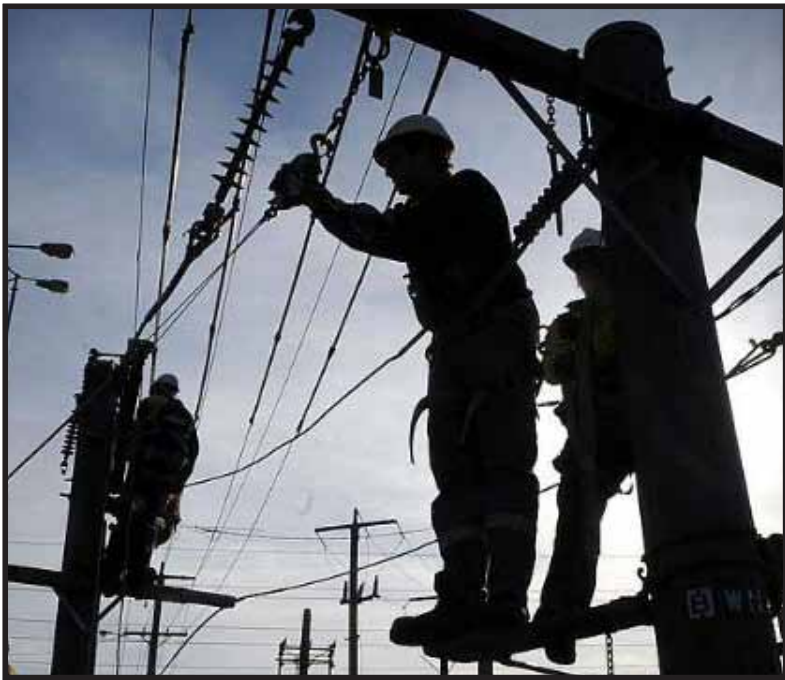
The initiative for the August 13 meeting was taken by rank-and-file activists within the London Construction and south coast branches of Unite. It was inspired by the success of the Grass Roots Left movement, which came out of Jerry Hicks' rank-and-file challenge for Unite general secretary last year. Hicks was on the platform of the meeting, spoke inspiringly (chants of "Jerry, Jerry, Jerry") and was unanimously elected to the Rank and File Committee (alongside two electricians, two pipefitters and one for the civil) set up to pursue the struggle, although he does not work in the industry himself. His principle of mobilising the ranks against a recalcitrant Unite bureaucracy and calling for strikes and walk-outs independently of the union bureaucrats whilst pressurising for strike ballots was clearly inspiring to the mass of the meeting, many of whom spoke with anger and bitterness at the treachery of the bureaucracy in the past.

Two Unite officials were on the platform and their equivocations and backsliding speeches were vigorously attacked by several speakers. They had a few supporters only, whom the chair had to defend against the obvious anger and militancy of the meeting.

The mobilisation of the masses independently of the Unite bureaucracy forced the union to act, but with extreme reluctance. Unite national officer for construction Bernard McAulay was forced to apologise for a leaked email calling the Rank and File Committee a "cancerous group". One 'Brian the Dog' posted a vitriolic attack on the Socialist Unity blog: "Jerry Hicks, who does not work, let alone work in the construction industry, has in a blatant act of opportunism and ultra-leftism somehow managed to get himself elected onto a rank and file construction workers committee" (October 15). That "somehow" might have been by unanimous acclaim!

Then the real problem emerges: "Hicks and his usual groupies need to be exposed for the hijacking of what is an extremely important dispute. This is all about positioning himself for being third time lucky for what he believes is his birthright - general secretary. Also once again we see him and his groupies attacking full-time officials ... The problem is that a leopard doesn't change its spots!"

So the problem is not just Hicks and the Rank and File Committee or even the dreaded "groupies", but the fact that walkouts and independent mobilisations have seen



Need for widest solidarity

the dispute slip out of the hands of the bureaucrats and "hijacked" by the ranks - an appalling vista for any true bureaucrat. And there is a real danger that a leadership is emerging for a permanent rank-and-file group along the lines of the Grass Roots Left in the construction industry, where it is so sorely needed. And another 'groupie' of the dispute is Brain Higgins, who provides what assistance he can in producing the literature along the lines of the *Building Worker*, that scourge of the Ucat bureaucracy in the past.

The mobilisations have been nationwide and impressive, covering London, Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow and elsewhere. On November 9 demonstrating construction workers were disgracefully kettled by police to prevent them joining up with the student protest in London.

Unite commenced balloting the largest firm, Balfour Beatty, on November 16 and the deadline for the 'sign or be sacked' ultimatum to the 1,000 sparks is December 7. The ballot closes on Tuesday November 29 - surely timed to avoid any possibility of coordinating the electricians' action with the November 30 mass strike day across the public sector. But the Rank and File Committee has put out some excellent propaganda urging a walkout from that day, so the official Unite plan might well backfire.

Of course, rank and file committees are needed at every site. But winning this dispute needs a bit more than that. It needs an orientation to the entire labour force on site. And the vast majority of these are immigrant labourers, super-exploited and treated like the very scum of the earth. Some 20 years ago east European, mainly Kosovan, labourers replaced the Irish on the Cricklewood Broadway and other such hiring fairs nationwide.

According to a 2006 report for Ucat, *The evasion economy* by Mark Harvey and Felix Behling, false self-employment in the British building industry is almost three times worse than any other advanced country, including the notorious US construction industry. Employers escape all their social responsibilities in this imposed health and safety nightmare, where the minimum wage is totally ignored. Workers, often recruited in eastern Europe, believe they have no option but to accept such conditions. The government turns a blind eye in order to help their friends in the industry who contribute so

generously to Tory Party coffers.

Another Ucat report, *The hidden workforce building Britain*, speaks of "working in slavery-like conditions, workers waiting in car parks to be hired and being paid cash in hand at rates below the minimum wage" and further details the "dangerous and unregulated nature of such work". The report was welcomed by George Guy, Ucat's acting general secretary, who pointed out that "workers in the construction industry have lower levels of protection than workers in sectors covered by the Gangmasters Licensing Agency (GLA)".

The report calls for "a single, independent labour inspectorate, which would be based on the model already created by the GLA and would cover all industrial sectors".

It argues that this "beefed-up body" should have "sufficient resources to dramatically increase its levels of proactive inspections in order to ensure that there is a major crackdown on exploitative employers".

Surely the Sparks' Rank and File Committee can come up with something far better than this to attract the support of these workers. They should champion their cause by demanding direct employment, which would ensure full sick and holiday pay, pension provision and proper health and safety standards as the only way to organise the whole site. The corrupt Unite/Ucat/GMB practice of appointing convenors at the start of the job (the Olympics site being a prime example) must be fought against and stopped. Often the shop steward is hired by the site agent on a manager's wage, the union immediately recognises his bone fides and he then polices the site on behalf of management to make sure it is *not* organised. Horror stories of legitimate safety complaints being met with threats of violence by these management-union thugs are legion. The failure to organise the Olympic site in any proper fashion needs to be examined.

In this author's view a grievous blow was struck against an already reeling workers' organisation on the sites by the 'British jobs for British workers' dispute, where craft unionism began to dominate and foreign workers were disgracefully portrayed by the likes of Amicus/Unite general secretary Derek Simpson in alliance with the *Daily Star* as the main enemy. No dispute ever received more support from the gutter press and, whilst socialists managed to fend off the advances of the far right, nonetheless the disgraceful picture of Simpson in the *Daily Star* fronting its campaign

- alongside two models, adding insult to women to the injury to foreign workers - has set the movement back considerably.

Let us champion the cause of the builders' labourers and begin to unite the class again. This dispute links up with two other campaigns that were already seeking to turn the tide - the Blacklist Support Campaign and Justice for Shrewsbury Pickets. Blacklist Support has had some success - exposure of the blacklist, campaigning for victimised construction workers Dave Smith and Frank Morris and some employment tribunal victories.

As the Shrewsbury Campaign points out, "The construction industry is notorious as the most dangerous industry to work in. More workers are killed and injured in construction than any other industry. On top of that, over 2,000 workers die from exposure to deadly asbestos every year. Over 3,300 building workers have been denied work and blacklisted for daring to speak out against these disgraceful conditions, and for trying to prevent even more deaths and injuries." ●

Gerry Downing is national secretary of Grass Roots Left and is writing in a personal capacity

Remember 1972

Wednesday December 7, 7pm: Film and discussion, Twelve Pins, Finsbury Park, London N4 (next to Finsbury Park tube). Coverage of the historic 1972 builders' strike, featuring interviews with Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson. Speakers include: 1972 striker, blacklisted workers, striking electricians.

Organised by Justice for Shrewsbury Pickets: www.shrewsburypicketscampaign.org.uk.

A flag tainted with brown

Over the weekend of November 26-27 capitalist ministers, nationalists, anti-Semites and homophobes will be speaking under the banner of '21st century Marxism', an event hosted by the 'official communists' of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain.

Those going can look forward to such inspirational speakers as Yuri Emelianov, representing the red-brown Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The CPRF, known in Russia as Putin's loyal opposition, came out of the ruins of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Gennady Zyuganov, who, along with 'national Bolshevik' Aleksandr Dugin, reoriented the party on ultra-nationalist, chauvinistic lines. Its cadres joined with other 'patriots' in violently attacking the "unhealthy" Moscow Gay Pride in 2006.

As comrade Boris Kagarlitsky explains, "For socialism, the party leaders have substituted the slogan of 'great-power patriotism', and the press organs they control are full of racist and anti-Semitic attacks ... the Communist Party of the Russian Federation not only gives fervent support to the genocide in Chechnya, but regularly helps the government to implement its economic policies ... In essence, the actions of the leaders of Russia's 'official communist' movement would be better suited to members of a fascist party" (www.marxists.de/russtoday/kagarlitsky/russlefttoday.htm).

In the same year the CPRF got involved with the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, which amongst other things calls for the mass expulsion (pogroms) of migrants from Russia. In 1998 CPRF deputy Albert Makashov declared that the "yid" had seized Russia in order to "drink the blood of the indigenous peoples" and, along with 13 other 'communist' deputies, released a statement which said: "People are outraged by the anti-Russian invasion. They do not hide their bewilderment at seeing that organs of power, means of mass communication, are more and more in the hands of a non-indigenous nationality, individuals with dual citizenship, who enriched themselves unfairly at the expense of the people."

The South African Communist Party is represented by its general secretary and higher education minister, Blade Nzimande. The SACP is an integral part of the African National Congress regime, which has instituted widespread attacks on workers, and privatised essential services. 'Comrade' Nzimande, who likes to flaunt his wealth, this week led the SACP contingent amongst ANC MPs in voting for the draconian Protection of State Information Bill, which threatens those who publish, pass on, relay or even hold information that the authorities regard as secret with lengthy prison sentences. Nzimande dismissed those who oppose the bill as "a minority who are cynical about us". Apparently the bill's

opponents, including the Congress of South African Unions, are engaging in "titillating, white, suburban politics".

The gathering will also see the Chinese state - represented by professor Cheng Enfu, director of the Marxism and Economics Institute at Shanghai University - lauded and excused by British Stalinists. Over recent years the CPB has attempted to get closer to China, no doubt hoping to plug the black hole that is the *Morning Star*. Earlier in the year general secretary Robert Griffiths led a delegation on an official visit and concluded that "the country's example is one that needs to be studied in depth by the left. The Chinese communists remain as sharply realistic in applying Marxism in China as those who founded their party 90 years ago" (*Morning Star* September 20). This is the same party that crushes any opposition, like the striking workers in the Zengcheng district of Guangzhou who in June were brutally attacked by paramilitary police using armoured vehicles.

We should not be surprised at the company the CPB keeps. After all, it has been willing to ally with the xenophobic right in Britain. Only last month international secretary John Foster joined forces with representatives of the UK Independence Party and Conservative rightwingers at the 'People's Pledge congress' to defend 'British interests' against Europe ●

Chris Strafford

ECONOMY

Fear and positioning

As the euro zone heads for possible disaster and ‘economic Armageddon’, writes **Eddie Ford**, both the US and UK governments have also admitted failure

George Papandreou and Silvio Berlusconi have both gone, replaced by unelected technocratic administrations that directly serve the interest of the bankers and finance capital. Hardly a step forward. Democracy is clearly an optional extra as far as the Eurocrats and capitalist class are concerned. Now Spain has a new government in the form of the rightwing Popular Party (PP) headed by Mariano Rajoy, who won a landslide victory on November 20, thanks to voters’ desperation to see an end to sky-high unemployment and general economic misery.

However, if anyone thought that this flurry of political ‘readjustment’ meant that the crisis in the euro zone was about to be resolved - or at the very least ameliorated to a more manageable level - then they need to radically rethink. In fact, the overall slide towards disintegration and disaster is gathering momentum, as it becomes increasingly apparent that there is no rescue plan in the offing, nor any white knight saviours on horseback - like China - charging across the horizon.

Greek ‘unity’

Following a meeting in Brussels on November 22 with Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the Euro Group - which assumes day-to-day political control over the workings of the euro currency - the new Greek prime minister of the interim or ‘unity’ government, Lucas Papademos, informed a press conference that the country needed the next tranche of €8 billion in bailout money from the International Monetary Fund, European Union and European Central Bank troika “no later” than the beginning of December; it just could not wait until mid-December, as previously believed (or hoped). If not, the government goes bust.

But the delay in payment continues. Juncker and his troika colleagues insist that the money will not be authorised until the three parties supporting the emergency government sign a ‘letter of intent’ promising to enforce the vicious austerity measures demanded by the troika - show us you mean it. Papademos has stated that he “expects” the party leaders to “do their duty”. At present, with elections pencilled in for February, the ‘unity’ government consists of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, New Democracy (ND) and the populist, right-nationalist Popular Orthodox Rally - which, amongst other things, wants to ban all immigration from outside the EU, immediately deport all illegal immigrants, permanently block Turkey’s access to the EU and refuse recognition of Macedonia.

In a display of demagogic brinkmanship, ND leader Antonis Samaras last week stated that, while he was naturally “strongly committed” to a regime of ‘fiscal consolidation’ and ‘structural reforms’, the austerity plan needs to be “revised”. And, being a man of honour, obviously, there was surely no need for Samaras to actually put his name to this ‘letter of intent’ - his word being good enough. Clearly, Samaras wants to sufficiently distance himself from the austerity measures in an attempt to boost ND’s popularity ahead of the elections, whenever they are eventually held, hoping to form a majority government. Then brutally implement the cuts programme, regardless of what he may have said

beforehand.

Absolutely no way, just not good enough. European commission president José Manuel Barroso ordered Samaras on November 22 to stop playing “political games” and just do as he was damn well told - giving him a one-week deadline to sign the letter. Apparently, Juncker and his fellow euro zone finance ministers intend to decide at a November 29 meeting in Brussels whether Greece qualifies or not for the next payment.

Meanwhile, the trade unions have called for another 24-hour general strike on December 1, with more action possibly planned for December 7. The Greek working class is not going to meekly wait for the butcher, whatever apron he may be wearing.

Spanish slide

Of course, the appointment of ‘Super’ Mario Monte to the position of Italian prime minister did not magically assuage the markets and government borrowing costs remain dangerously high, with the yields (interest rates) on 10-year bonds currently flat-lining at around 6.5-6.6%. Far too high to be sustainable, even if Fabrizio Saccomanni, director-general of the Bank of Italy, has maintained that Italy could cope with such high borrowing costs - unless, that is, they stayed at these high levels for a “considerable period”. In which case ...

Now, ominously, Spain is replicating the same pattern seen in Italy and Greece - Mariano Rajoy has not stopped the rot. Spain’s 10-year bond yields have reached 6.57% and show every sign of creeping up to the 7.0% figure, an indicator of *deep* trouble. And the possible need for a bailout. Step forward, contestant number four. Spain’s parlous state was highlighted on November 22 at an auction of short-term debt. Although buyers were found for €2.98 billion of three-month bills, the average interest rate more than doubled to just over 5.11% from almost 2.3% a month earlier - meaning that Spain was paying the highest interest in 14 years to sell short-term debt.

Delivering its verdict, the Fitch rating agency said the new government must “surprise” the markets with a “radical” fiscal and structural reform programme if it is to “improve expectations” of its “capacity to grow” and in turn cut debt within the confines of the euro zone. Gary Jenkins, head of fixed income at Evolution Securities, commented that it “doesn’t look great” for Spain - or indeed any other ‘periphery’ countries - with the “continuing trend towards ever higher yields to get anything done”; a broader malaise that is afflicting the euro zone as a whole.

Rajoy’s government is now frantically scrambling around to find ways to shorten the paralysing hiatus set to last until mid-December, when the new government is finally able to take formal charge under Spanish law. One top PP official, Miguel Arias Cañete, ventured that the administration will “have to go beyond strictly legal requirements because the markets are not going to wait”. True enough. HSBC strategist Madhur Jha gloomily concludes that the “double whammy” of surging borrowing costs and a slide back into recession risks inflicting “serious damage”, pushing public debt above 86% of GDP over the next three years - it being evident to him that over the last few weeks the “window of opportunity is rapidly closing for Spain and other peripheral

countries”, unless something is done to “negate all talk of a euro break-up”.

Now hard rains are falling on Belgium too - the start of the Benelux contagion? Suddenly investors have appeared to lose confidence in a country that has not had an ‘official’ government for 18 months - hence the yield on Belgian 10-year bonds rose to 5.10%, the highest since 2002. Which takes the spread between Belgium’s borrowing costs and Germany’s to around 315 basis points, a euro-era high. There are also added fears about Belgium’s long-term growth prospects after its GDP completely stalled in the third quarter (ie, at an unimpressive 0.0%). Previously, above-average growth had allowed Belgium to put off austerity cuts. You could see why, given that such measures could literally lead to the break-up of the country, with regionalist and separatist tensions running high. Amid continuing deadlock, the caretaker government of Yves Leterme is now in the process of trying to hammer together a budget for 2012, which at the moment looks like the 2011 budget recycled. Not something that enamours the markets. Overall, Belgium now looks like the riskiest sovereign issuer in the euro zone after Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain - the so-called PIIGS.

As time goes by, it becomes painfully obvious that the destiny of Spain, Italy and others - even Belgium - lies almost entirely in the hands of Germany and France, the AAA creditor core, the EU authorities and the ECB; they will decide whether the ‘distressed’ countries get thrown a lifeline or just get pushed further into a downward spiral of austerity, depression and possible economic-social catastrophe. Having said that, it is just as obvious that the sheer size of Spain’s and Italy’s borrowing needs - leaving aside Portugal, Belgium, etc - leads to the logical conclusion that projects to simply enlarge or ‘leverage’ the European Financial Stability Facility are totally inadequate. Instead, the logical deduction is that the ECB and Germany can provide the financial firepower necessary to prevent the euro zone sliding into the abyss, in the process dragging down the entire world economy.

Stability bonds?

Therefore, there has been increased pressure upon Angela Merkel to give some ground on the ECB and the question of Eurobonds - or should we perhaps say “stability bonds”, as recently suggested by Barroso and the EU commissioner, Olli Rehn? For instance, David Cameron in a speech to the UK trade conference on November 10, said that the ECB should now act as the lender of last resort, given that Italy’s “current state is a clear and present danger to the euro zone” and that the “moment of truth” is approaching.

Turning up the heat, Barroso met Merkel on November 22 in a further endeavour to get her to drop her implacable opposition to Eurobonds. His plan is to see the ECB launch a massive quantitative easing programme in order to mop up large quantities of sovereign debt, quickly followed by the creation/introduction of Eurobonds - thus enabling weaker countries, or PIIGS, to borrow with the security of Germany’s credit rating behind them.

However, prospects do not look good. The German government appears to be digging in. So Michael

Meister, the finance spokesperson for Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union, asserted that Germany is “sticking” to its current plan for the euro zone crisis - namely, austerity and ‘structural reforms’ as the short-term solution to the crisis, supposedly, along with bank recapitalisation and a swingeing ‘haircut’ (write-down) on Greek debt. For the longer term, it seems that Germany wants changes to the EU treaty so as to bind euro zone members closer together - more union, not less.

Tensions between France and Germany have become especially acute - the former nigh-on desperate for the ECB to take a bigger role in the rescue of the currency union. The nightmare might come true and France could lose its precious triple-A credit status. Already, its government bond yields are climbing at a fairly alarming rate - getting to 3.48%. A bond auction by France on November 24 will be closely watched to gauge the markets’ confidence that the country can sort out its debt situation. Many market analysts have warned that it might not be the steady sale usually expected from a country with a coveted triple-A - it is now all about “fear and positioning”, explained one analysts who works for Citi, the New York-based international financial conglomerate.

Just to make Sarkozy even more jittery, Moody’s rating agency warned that France’s creditworthiness was open to question. In his weekly note, Alexander Kockerbeck - Moody’s investors service analyst - wrote that if the high borrowing costs persist for an extended period it would have “negative credit implications” for France’s triple-A credit outlook. Further elaborating, Kockerbeck sketched out how France faces “significant downside risks”, the chance being that higher taxes and lower spending will “undermine” the economic growth it needs - or is expected to attain - in order to ‘balance the budget’ by 2016, as originally pledged.

Events in Europe are plunging the US administration into despair, fearful of the consequences. After all, a report published by the US commerce department showed that real disposable income fell 2.1% in the third quarter after declining 0.5% in the prior three months and that GDP grew at an annual pace of 2% in the period, down from the previous estimate of 2.5%. Anxious, Barack Obama lambasted EU leaders for suffering from a “problem of political will” - warning that unless they get their act together, then the world is going to continue to see “market turmoil” and instability.

US and UK failure

Yet, in some respects, the US government is in no position to talk, having reached its own impasse. Even though it came as no great surprise, to put it mildly, the 12-member, bipartisan, bicameral Congressional ‘super-committee’ charged with overseeing cuts in the budget deficit finally admitted on November 21 that it had “failed” to come to any agreement on how to reduce the country’s \$15 trillion deficit by \$1.2 trillion - whether through spending cuts or tax rises or a combination of both.

The Bush-era tax cuts proved to be the kryptonite that defeated the ‘super-committee’. In June 2001, president Bush signed into law one of the most sweeping changes in US tax history - favouring in an

obscenely disproportionate way the mega-wealthy. The Republicans on the ‘super-committee’ dug in against *any* agreement that did not extend the current Bush-imposed income-tax rates. Democrats, on the other hand, held out for higher rates on families with taxable income over \$250,000 a year - which for the Republican right made them crazed crypto-communists.

In theory, this predictable failure to reach a consensus means that *automatic* spending cuts will come into operation in 2013 - amounting to \$600 billion over 10 years with regards to the defence budget and domestic spending. Talking tough, Obama has threatened to deploy his presidential veto to prevent the Republicans from blocking these automatic cuts. Financial chaos reigns in Capitol Hill, contributing to the very “market turmoil” that Obama rebuked the EU leaders for inducing by their non-action.

Failure has hit the shores of the UK too. On November 21 David Cameron acknowledged the obvious fact that tackling Britain’s debts was “proving harder than anyone envisaged” - although such an outcome had been precisely “envisaged” by just about every serious commentator. Cameron told the Confederation of British Industry that “we are well behind where we need to be” and that the government does not have a “silver bullet” to return the country to the glorious path of growth - now tell us something we don’t know. To add to the gloom, next week in his autumn statement George Osborne will have no choice but to respond to the latest statistics produced by the Office for Budget Responsibility and cut his forecasts for economic growth both this year and next. Slower growth or no growth, needless to say, ensures that the government receives less money in tax revenues and has to spend more on benefits - therefore government borrowing goes up, not down. Not exactly rocket science, you would think.

Or, to put in plain language, the coalition government has not got a hope of closing the deficit by 2014-15. Some City analysts predict that the chancellor will not eliminate it until 2017-18. Many expect the OBR to cut its growth forecast for this year from 1.7% to about 1% and next year’s forecast is likely to fall to just 0.6% from 2.5% - a huge drop. And all this is based on the *best-case* scenario, whereby the euro zone does not completely collapse into “economic Armageddon” - using the words of Vince Cable on November 17, when he reminded us that the treasury and the Bank of England are making “contingency plans” for such a calamitous eventuality.

But for all that, like a blind puppy, Cameron was adamant that he was “sticking to plan A” and that reducing the deficit was “line one, clause one and part one” of the government’s strategy for the economy. Given that the overriding priority is to keep the markets sweet and prove your determination to ‘balance the books’ - as the Greek working class know all too well from bitter experience - Osborne could next week signal plans for *new* cuts after the current spending round ends in 2015. Keep on kicking the working class - until it bites back ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

IRAN

War on Iran has started

Statement from Hands Off the People of Iran

Hands Off the People of Iran unequivocally condemns the ratcheting up of sanctions on Iran in the aftermath of the much-heralded report of the International Atomic Energy Agency on that country's nuclear capability on November 8. The report did little more than confirm the assessment that Hopi arrived at some time ago: that at worst Iran may be interested in the so-called 'Japanese' option. This is nuclear development that stops just short of the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon - but only by a month or so. But this is something that has been commented on many times before.

Despite the fact that this report contained little or nothing that was new (it was little more than a compilation of UK satellite pictures and the pre-existing reports of the CIA and other western intelligence agencies), imperialist leaders have fallen over themselves to express horror and outrage at these 'new' findings:

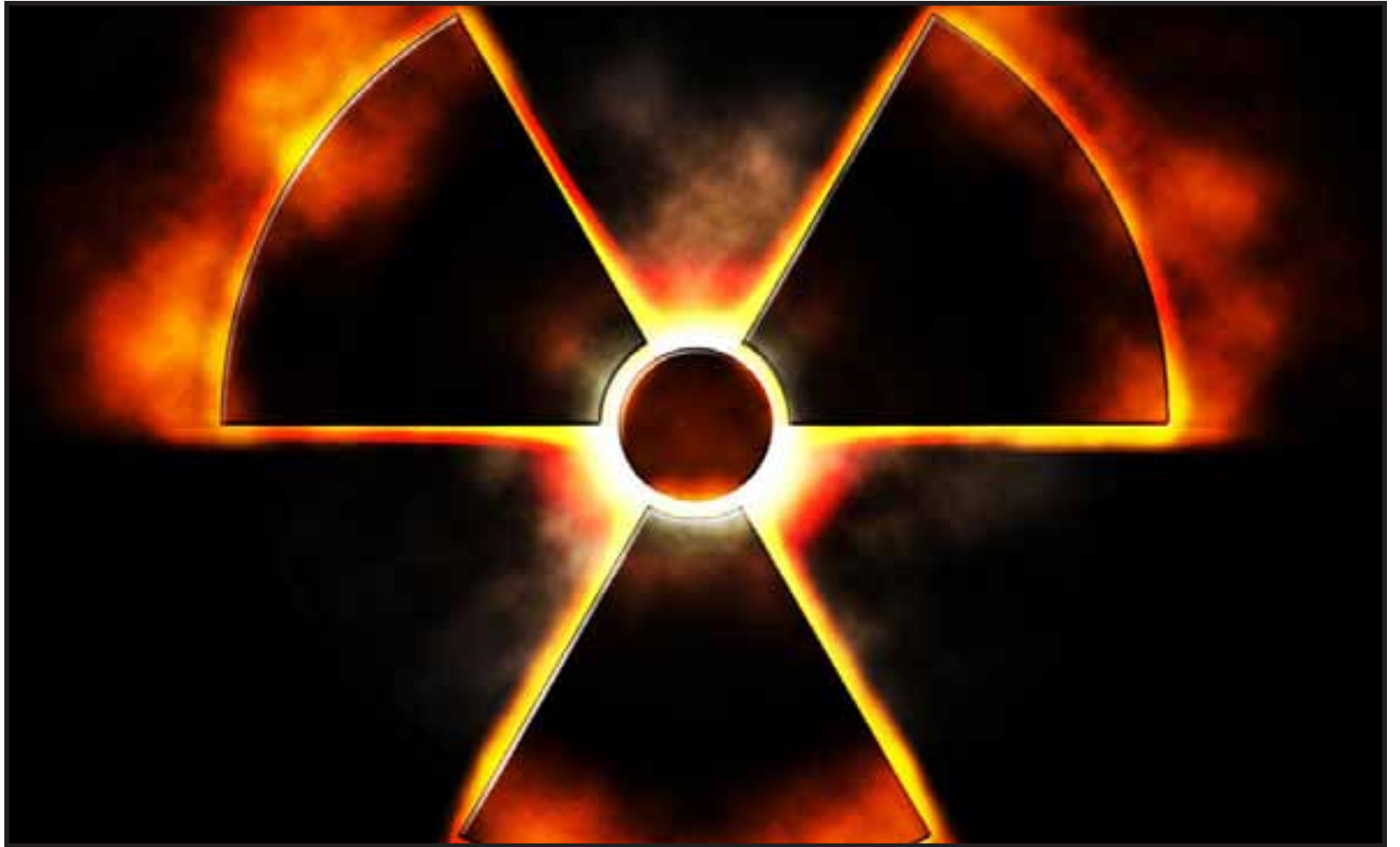
- French president Nicolas Sarkozy urged "unprecedented" sanctions on the country.

- Chancellor of the exchequer George Osborne announced that from November 28, all UK credit and financial institutions were obliged to cease trading with Iran's banks, a move that apparently represented "a further step to preventing the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons". This is the first time the UK has cut off an entire country's banking system from London's financial sector.

- US secretary of state Hillary Clinton welcomed the opportunity the report presented for a "significant ratcheting-up of pressure" on Iran through the imposition of new sanctions. US actions include measures to limit Tehran's ability to refine its own fuel, as well as targeting the financial interest of the Revolutionary Guards.

Even this was not enough for the rabid Israeli regime, which frothed about Iran having a nuclear weapon within a year and made ominous noises about military action. Israel feels politically vulnerable, given the current upheavals in the Arab world. An Iran with nuclear capability challenges its regional hegemony in a broader sense, but there is also a very practical concern. Iran's missile delivery system is sophisticated enough to deliver a conventional payload to Tel Aviv - hence the November 7 explosion/assassination at the military base in Bid Ganah, some 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of Tehran. Amongst others this killed major-general Hassan Moqaddam, a key figure in Iran's ballistic missiles programme: according to *Time* magazine, a "western intelligence source" laid the blame at the door of the Israeli spy agency, Mossad, and warned that "there are more bullets in the magazine".

On one level, the western powers are in a weak position when it comes to convincing the wider population that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. The debacle of Iraq - and farcical claims around Saddam's supposed "weapons of mass destruction" - have prompted many commentators to dub the IAEA's report "Iran's 45-minute moment" (a reference to the nonsense peddled about Iraq's supposed capability to drop bombs on strategic European targets in that time frame). Of course, from the point of view of Iraq's barbaric rulers, if such weapons had existed it would have



Nuclear weapon capability ... but kept a month away?

been a fairly obvious military response to the invasion of their country to use them. Similar claims today about Iran's nuclear ambitions will raise many a sceptical eyebrow.

The veracity of the report will also be called into question when it is recalled that the current IAEA director general, Yukiya Amano, has often been accused, on solid grounds, of pro-US bias. According to diplomatic cables published by Wikileaks last year, US diplomats favoured his nomination, as he was "in tune with the US position regarding Iran's nuclear programme" - a revelation that will help undermine the US/Britain's charges against the regime.

However, on another level the case for imperialist intervention has undoubtedly been bolstered by the relatively 'clean' regime change in Libya (so far ...). The overthrow of Gaddafi by western-backed insurgents is widely perceived of as a 'good war', in stark contrast to the quagmire of Iraq; the inability of the anti-war movement in this country to mobilise large numbers onto the streets in opposition to the intervention is a mark of this.

The current low level of anti-war mobilisation is a big problem for all those who oppose the imperialist interference in the Middle East, for we should be clear that *the war on Iran has already started*. It is unlikely to take the form of military invasion and occupation at any stage - the experience of the running sore of Iraq has chastened the imperialists on that front. What we will see - *are* seeing - is war pursued by other means:

- **Cyber warfare** with its unforeseen consequences (last year's attack on Iran's nuclear plants and a number of major industrial complexes by the sophisticated piece of malware, Stuxnet).

- **Political assassinations** of Iranian physicists/scientists allegedly involved in the nuclear programme (murders that are used by the Iranian regime to justify its own political

executions).

- **Swingeing sanctions** that, while barely troubling the rich and powerful, dramatically impoverish ordinary Iranians and actually endanger their lives (sanctions have affected everything from aviation to surgery and dentistry).

These sorts of tactics betray the strategic goal the US and its allies have in mind. Ideally for them, a repetition - in a 'tidier' form - of the Libyan scenario. That is, that pressure from imperialism engenders splits in this deeply discredited regime and its possible collapse/paralysis. Then indigenous opposition forces spearhead regime change, with the active aid and encouragement of the west. Clinton has spoken openly of her administration's hopes for the implosion of the regime. There is solid ground for her optimism. Fraught divisions exist at every level of the theocratic regime, most dramatically in its top echelons with the ongoing conflict between supreme leader ayatollah Khamenei and president Ahmadinejad, and continued joint conflict with timid reformists such as Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi.

The Obama administration would have been encouraged in this by recent developments in the Iranian opposition movement. A pro-war/anti-war-pro-sanctions debate is now dominating Iranian political discourse generally and has engendered a split into two major trends in this opposition. First there are those such as Mohammad Khatami who totally oppose the war, despite their criticisms of the regime. However, this does not flow from any sort of principled or consistently democratic position; rather, it is inspired by nationalism. Khatami has called for "national unity" in the face of this crisis and offers the supreme leader advice about 'changing course'.

Far more worrying has been the significant section of the opposition (including some who could be politically designated as 'soft left',

but mainly composed of liberals) who appear to be almost egging the Americans to launch a military strike. The example of the Nato bombing of Libya is looked to by these forces as a positive example of 'humanitarian intervention'. Although there does not appear to be the appetite in Washington for air strikes, the US's ally in the region, Israel, remains politically unstable and bellicose: witness the recent statement by Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak that "We do not expect any new UN sanctions on Tehran to persuade it to stop its nuclear defiance. We continue to recommend to our friends in the world and to ourselves not to take any option off the table."

The stance of Hands Off the People of Iran is crystal-clear. We implacably oppose the sabre-rattling of the imperialists and demand that all sanctions on the country are lifted, that all threats of military action be rescinded. We call for this not because we have any illusions in the loathsome regime in Iran. It starves its own people; it denies them basic human rights; it endangers their lives through its elaborate games of brinkmanship with the US and its powerful allies. Unlike some politically demented leftists, we say that nuclear weapons in its hands would be a defeat for the forces of democracy and radical social change, as well as a profoundly destabilising development in the region.

No, we oppose the warmongering - whether it takes the hard form of assassinations, threats of military action, or the 'soft' option of sanctions - because we do not have any illusions in the loathsome regimes in place in Washington, London or Tel Aviv either. The intervention of these powers and their allies has nothing whatsoever to do with the promotion of 'democracy' - indeed, the regimes the imperialists impose often have features that are significantly worse than the previous team of oppressors of the people. Hopi insists that democracy can only

come in Iran from below - from the struggles of the workers', women's and students' movements. It will never fall from the sky in the tip of a US or Israeli bunker-buster.

We look to those like the working class and anti-capitalist activists, left intellectuals and students who met in an anti-capitalist conference in Iran on November 4. Many of the contributions emphasised the need to strengthen the workers' struggles, the underground left/workers' groups and the fight for left unity - "It is a shame that hero worship of certain intellectuals acting as semi-gods has harmed unity amongst the forces of the Iranian left," said veteran labour activist NA. Military action against Iran, whether overt or covert, whether air strikes or sanctions, only acts to disorganise and disorientate these forces for change. This is why the threatening military backdrop to the conference was discussed by participants and Clinton's bellicose statements noted. This is why Hopi contributes to their struggle for freedom by fighting against any imperialist attack on their country.

The imperialists want change in Iran via a palace coup or politically neutered opposition movement. Hopi says genuine democratic change must come from below, through the initiative, elan and thirst for change of the masses themselves! ●

- No war, no sanctions on Iran!
- For a nuclear-free Middle East as a step to a nuclear-free world!

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>.

STRATEGY

Socialism or barbarism

The left must reorganise and reorientate, argues **John Bridge**. Otherwise the consequences will be dire

Any discussion of the cuts and how to fight them has to be premised on a recognition of how profound the crisis is. For example, are George Osborne and David Cameron just using some minor fluctuation in the global economy as a welcome excuse to attack the working class, to further roll back the social democratic settlement that Thatcher attacked in the 1980s? Is this what our rulers are doing in the core capitalist countries?

No, the capitalist class is not making a fuss about nothing. Indeed there are many mouthpieces of the high bourgeoisie who are asking, rhetorically, is capitalism reaching its end, has Karl Marx been vindicated, etc? The former editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Charles Moore, says he is "starting to think that the left might actually be right". Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England, has said that this is the "most serious financial crisis we've seen since the 1930s, if not ever". Are they exaggerating simply in order to attack the working class? Of course, that is the central part of their 'solution' - but I do not think they are exaggerating.

What is notable, however, is that the bourgeoisie clearly does not have a viable answer. For example, in 2007, when the subprime crisis started to threaten the whole banking system, I found it entirely unsurprising that George W Bush suddenly underwent a 'road to Damascus' conversion. From being a militant free marketeer he suddenly became a state interventionist. Private losses were nationalised. It was even said in America that Bush had become a convert to Keynesianism, even some sort of socialist or Marxist. Such was the massive scale of the state's rescue package. Quite frankly the ruling class looked at the abyss that was in front of them and acted through the power of the state to prevent a meltdown.

No, what amazed me was the stubbornness of the rightwing Republicans, who opposed the proposed measures put before Congress. There were editorials in the *Financial Times* asking if the Republicans knew what they were doing. Did they not know what happened last time? In an attempt to get them to act they were ominously reminded of the 1929 crash, the rise of Nazism and World War II. This is not hyperbole.

There are those comrades on the left who say, 'Capitalism is in crisis - that is great news for us. Now we have the opportunity to get a hearing at last.' However, I think we should take a rather different approach. Capitalism's crisis underlines the *responsibilities* of the left. The crisis is not only a crisis for the ruling class: it is a crisis for society, a society in which the working class forms a clear majority. Take Zimbabwe: does it offer a great opportunity for the left? No, people are desperate. People have to expend all their time and all their energy just to feed themselves and their families, just to keep a roof over their heads.

In other words, a capitalist crisis contains not only the possibility of the left organising the working class so it can act in a decisive way and make the transition to communism. It also carries with it the inherent danger that if the left does not actually take its responsibilities seriously then we face what Rosa Luxemburg famously called 'socialism or barbarism'. I am not a pessimist. No genuine revolutionary, no genuine Marxist is. But there are more features of barbarism inherent in this present



Capitalist crisis produces suffering, pain and want

crisis than there are of immanent socialism. I doubt that many comrades actually anticipate that in 2012 or 2013 we will find ourselves basking in a socialist Britain in a socialist world. In 1929 many millions did believe in a socialism of some kind or another. While many of those socialisms might have been entirely illusory, substantial sections of the working class had an idea about an alternative society. So there was a shared class language, a shared class outlook. More than that, workers were organised to achieve their ends in powerful trade unions, co-ops, political parties, etc.

We all know the twofold tragedy. Through the trade union, parliamentary and party apparatus social democracy became incorporated into the state: in effect it served to deliver palliatives so as to maintain capitalism. As for the 'official communist' parties, because of Stalin's counterrevolution within the revolution they were rendered pliant instruments of Soviet foreign policy. In Germany the most powerful working class on the face of the planet was destroyed as a result of the failures of social democracy on the one side and 'official communism' on the other. Barbarism spread like a cancer over the face of Europe.

When we hear about the potential collapse of the Greek, Irish, Portuguese or Italian economies and the break-up of the euro zone, we need to soberly recognise that this is no cause for celebration. Economic collapse brings not only unemployment, increased migration, pay cuts and speed-ups, but the real danger that what remains of working class self-organisation could disintegrate. A possibility added to by authoritarian government attacks and the utterly pusillanimous nature of so many of today's trade union leadership.

So capitalism's crisis provides opportunities for the left - that is indisputable. But it also demands - in Britain, in Europe and across the world - a break with sect-building,

constitutionalism, movementism, left nationalism, economism and all forms of mechanical thinking.

China

Some bourgeois commentators, some on the left too, say, 'This is a crisis for western capitalism, but not Brazil, Russia, India and crucially China.' We have all read the articles and editorials about the Brics and global power inexorably shifting from the west over to the east. Hence the argument that, while we in Britain might have to suffer under austerity for the next five, 10, 15 or 20 years, China, given its impressive growth rates, given the enormous surpluses it has accumulated, will go from strength to strength and take other countries, such as those in Africa and Latin America, with it in an ongoing and unstoppable boom.

I think this analysis is badly flawed. China is a big country with a huge population. It is investing in many countries and purchasing raw materials on a staggering scale. China is now ranked as the world's second largest economy, having sped past both Germany and Japan. However, while there is clearly big-power rivalry between China and the US, there is also Chinese dependence on US markets. If America imposes sanctions on China because it has set the renminbi exchange rate 'intentionally low' against the dollar, this could have devastating consequences. Even without such an occurrence there are growing concerns in business and political circles that China faces a so-called 'hard landing' in the near future.

China, it ought to be emphasised, is no monolith either. The strong state is a sure sign of weakness. China is vulnerable. National, regional and class wars could easily break out. We saw this in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe - where the US was fostering all sorts of dissident parties and groups. Of course, when it comes

to China the US today is doing no such thing. The Obama administration wants a stable China in its own interests. Anyway, there is no serious prospect of China overtaking the US and the renminbi replacing the dollar as the global reserve currency.

I remember having a short conversation a few years ago with Paul Mason of *Newsnight*. He had just returned from China. He said it reminded him of 1960s Britain in terms of workers going on strike. They are less and less afraid of the secret police and more and more assertive when it comes to local action. Living standards are miserable, but going up. But because of the growing gulf between rich and poor, because of corruption, because of systemic oppression, because of the growing confidence, expectations and organised power of the workers, China is a social powderkeg. The chances of a revolutionary explosion are much more likely in China than it in Germany, Japan or the US.

Decline

Karl Marx, of course, wrote about capitalism going through periodic crises. But here he was saying nothing original. Adam Smith and David Ricardo were well aware that capitalism had upturns and downturns. It took a real fool like Gordon Brown to claim that the system had overcome boom and bust. And there were equally stupid bourgeois economists who insisted that dot-com companies could carry on growing without ever making a profit.

It was like the madness over house prices - some people believed that they could only go up. Hence borrow all you can from the mortgage company and you could not possibly fail. So it is obvious what to do: buy, buy, buy. After all, there is always going to be a shortage of houses. However, capitalism does not work on the basis of demand: it works on the basis of *effective* demand. In effect the housing

boom was merely an extension of the credit system. The credit system can in theory expand indefinitely. But in the real world expansion always comes to an end; often the rot begins with a little bankruptcy here, or a little political overturn there.

Anyhow, the real profundity of what Marx had to say lies not in the obvious truth that capitalism goes through a series of upturns and downturns. Marx knew from writers such as Edward Gibbon that social systems go through their birth and maturity and then into their period of decline. But he was able to apply this insight to capitalism and scientifically reveal the secrets of its birth, the workings of its mature forms and the beginnings of the malfunctioning that come with decline. For Marx, amongst the symptoms of decline were the separation of capitalist ownership and management, monopolisation and the growth of the countervailing power of the working class.

Though I am only repeating Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, over many years I have been met with incredulity by various comrades on the left when I say that capitalism is in decline. Quite clearly capitalism is still growing, they say. Look at how many workers there are now around the globe. Look at Brazil, Germany, Iran, the Asian tigers ... or whatever the latest 'miracle economy' is. Capitalism in decline? What a joke.

But it is necessary to go deeper, beyond superficial appearances. Since the late 19th century capitalism has shown a distinct turn away from market competition and towards monopoly and the state. Capitalist imperialism went hand in hand with the incorporation of the labour bureaucracy, massive arms spending and world war. True, Keynesian economics became the accepted common sense of the bourgeoisie in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s and is often, lazily, linked with peace, rationality and the good times. In reality Keynesianism, with its government manipulation of the money supply, heavy taxation of profits, demand management, nationalisations and full employment, was the continuation of the organised capitalism which began in earnest during World War I and was taken to new heights in World War II.

Keynesianism is not an example of mature capitalism: it is capitalism that is overcoming barriers to the expansion of production, while piling up one new contradiction after the other. In his polemic with Eugen Dühring Engels talks about socialism staring in at us from every window: while Keynesianism is not socialism, it is certainly not classic capitalism. For the left it *should* be absolutely clear that Keynesianism was a manifestation of decline, not because GDP was decreasing, obviously, but because capitalist forms such as the market, money, the reserve army of labour and the law of value itself played an ever decreasing role.

Keynesianism is notorious in capitalist circles for the number of strikes it produced. In reality most of them were not recorded; they were of such short duration. Because there was relative full employment the workers could exert their collective strength with relative ease; leading to what might be called elements of dual power in workplaces and eventually a profits squeeze. Management protested, whenever the need or opportunity arose, that it had lost the right to manage. We know their answer. After trying arbitration boards, turning trade union convenors

into full-time, isolated, officials and taking away the collection of union dues from shop stewards by docking pay, they abandoned Keynesianism, allowed unemployment to rocket and turned to financialisation. So while 1950-60s Keynesianism can be viewed as a relatively civilised form of managing the decline of capitalism, there can be no doubt that it proved unsustainable from a capitalist viewpoint.

However, despite financialisation and neoliberalism and the claims that you can't buck the market, the fact of the matter is that capitalism is still in decline. Anybody who thinks that there is a real competitive market for, say, electricity is a fool. Chris Huhne recently lectured the six big energy companies about their monopolistic prices and told them they must make sure their customers know they can switch to a different monopolist. It is the same with the railways, gas and so on - there is no free market. There is the pseudo-market of an organised capitalism which shows clear signs of entering an extended period of stagnation and perhaps worse.

So a Marxist analysis does not begin with essentially superficial questions such as GDP or the number of workers on the planet. What needs to be discovered, what needs to be grasped are fundamentals such as the law of value. Is this law, which lies at the heart of capitalism, extending its reach? Is it penetrating deeper and deeper into society, or is it in retreat? The only honest answer is that it is in retreat. It is quite clearly still giving way to an organised capitalism, and what that means is that capitalism tends to anticipate the new, higher system, albeit in negative ways.

Anybody who has read anything about the last Labour government will know that it spent a fortune on the NHS, school buildings, etc. But what did it get in return? Something like an extra 3% in performance, however weirdly such things are statistically assessed. People who work in the NHS will tell you that these institutions are run like the old Soviet Union. Well, at least in the sense that they are constantly having to hit targets and file reports. The unintended results exactly replicate how bureaucrats and workers alike behaved in the old Soviet Union - connive, falsify and cheat. In the Soviet Union, if a plant was told to double the amount of steel cable it produced without extra inputs, managers and workers would connive together to 'meet the target': the cable might be twice as long, but it was also twice as thin - often being unusable for its intended purposes.

There is a similarity here with the way the NHS and education are run. And that tells an increasing truth about this society as a whole. In other words, organised capitalism is a malfunctioning capitalism. 'Solutions' devised to manage decline actually speed up decline.

Challenge for left

Let me return to the left's responsibilities. Is it rising to the challenge? Unfortunately the answer is no. In fact the left is failing on almost every count. I will use the example of the Socialist Workers Party because it is the largest left group outside the Labour Party and its approach is typical.

Take its approach in the Irish Republic, one of the weak links of capitalism. Everyone knows that the sovereign debt crisis hit that country in the first wave. There were huge demonstrations in Dublin. The left was almost handed TDs as a result of the profound political crisis the economic situation generated. The Socialist Party and SWP in Ireland got together to stand as the United Left Alliance - not a marriage of love, but a marriage of convenience. What politics did they stand on? Something eerily reminiscent of the 'official communist' Alternative Economic Strategy from the 1970s and 80s. The idea is that Ireland should borrow money on a massive scale to stimulate the economy. However - what a wheeze - if the ULA managed to form a government in the Dáil it would immediately repudiate the resulting debt mountain - that is, assuming anyone would actually lend to Ireland in the first place. Basically the ULA government would put two fingers up to the international capitalist system and embark on a socialist adventure in splendid isolation. Comrades, you cannot

be serious.

That the SWP in Ireland put forward this programme is shocking. That someone with the talent and experience of Alex Callinicos attempted to justify it on the basis of, well, 'this is not the 1970s' is doubly shocking. Yes, we know that this is 2011, but the SWP used to direct well aimed polemics against the Alternative Economic Strategy showing that it was based on a nationalist fallacy. Keynesianism, even left Keynesianism, could not succeed in isolation and would certainly not lead to socialism. Either there would be flight of capital, imperialist sanctions or internal rebellion by the desperate, starving people. As for socialism, it is by definition international. So is comrade Callinicos seriously arguing that an Ireland or even a Britain could extricate itself from the global economy without absolutely dire consequences? Of course, if you are an 'official communist' and your model is the Soviet Union, eastern Europe or China in the 1970s or 80s, you would say 'yes'. But to revamp, to relaunch this national socialism now strikes me as plain crazy. What do they want - an Irish version of Albania?

History has definitively shown us that socialism in one country does not lead to communism. The Soviet Union collapsed into chaos, most of eastern Europe is now in the EU or awaiting membership. As for China, it has taken a long and hugely costly road, not least in terms of human suffering, from an extremely backward capitalism to being a kind of colonising semi-colony which supplies the United States with cheap goods. Wherever the Chinese regime is going, it is not to communism, that is for sure.

All out, stay out?

Alex Callinicos comes out with the excuse you might expect - a sneaky version of Trotsky's *Transitional programme*. Now I understand why Trotsky put forward such a programme in 1938. He had less than 10,000 comrades globally and World War II was looming. He saw the tasks in front of him and in these circumstances fell back on spontaneity in the hope that a general strike strategy would produce the social revolution.

That is where the SWP comrades are today too. What the working class needs is not consciousness. We cannot actually convince the majority of the population that we are right, that our programme is needed and socialism is a good idea. So instead get people involved in action. And, as one action leads to another, higher form of action, a one-day strike to a general strike, people will be led, step by step, to confront the state and the overthrow of capitalism. That is what the SWP seems to believe.

Nobody should deny that involvement in strikes, occupations and demonstrations teaches. I have no quarrel with that. But the idea that you will arrive at *socialist consciousness* primarily through such struggles is quite illusory. The general strike strategy rests in essence on tricking the working class into taking power. So after November 30 the SWP will be saying, 'A 24-hour strike was all well and good, but what we really need is: all out, stay out.' This grandstanding slogan is mainly designed to show the anarchists and other leftists just how revolutionary the SWP is. When you ask them how long we should stay out, they do not actually say indefinitely, because even they realise that is not practical at the moment. They might say 'for a week' if you pin them down.

Well, the Chartists in the 19th century had a similar slogan: it was called the 'holy month'. This was then taken up by Mikhail Bakunin and the anarchists. Basically the idea was that, once sufficient funds had been accumulated, a general strike would be called and capitalism would be brought to its knees. Engels argued strongly against this perspective. Rhetorically, he asked if the bourgeois state was really going to allow the workers to steadily accumulate sufficient funds to keep themselves going indefinitely without wages? But, if they could manage such a feat of organisation why go to the bother of staging a general strike? If you are that strong, why not just take power?

The reality is that if you attempt to

use a general strike for revolutionary purposes you have to be armed and ready for insurrection. The SWP knows this perfectly well, so if it is serious about 'All out, stay out', it should be preparing for confrontation not so much with the police, but the army - maybe sections will come over to our side, but we would still have to be equipped to take on the state's armed forces.

However, I do not think 'All out, stay out' is serious. On the contrary, the slogan is a classic case of leftist posturing, designed to showcase the SWP's militancy at rallies and demonstrations. It is not about the SWP soberly shouldering its responsibilities. The comrades view the present situation merely as an opportunity for the sect to grow. Last year's perspectives document produced by the SWP central committee did not envisage the working class coming to power. It did not envisage resolving the crisis in a positive fashion. It did envisage carding up 2,000 recruits. Pathetic.

European unity

So what is the way forward? First of all, we should wholeheartedly welcome November 30. There will be more workers out than since the 1926 General Strike (the paradox of the General Strike is, of course, that more workers came out after it had been called off by the TUC than were actually on strike during it).

Anyway, November 30 will be, in terms of at least the public sector, a class-wide action. And it will be supported by many people who are not in work but who are still members of the working class - pensioners, the unemployed, students and so on. Do we want to be going to demonstrations and rallies on that day and competing over how long the next coordinated strike should be? A one-day general strike, a two-day general strike? An indefinite general strike? Actually we need to be more ambitious.

A European-wide one-day general strike is a logical next step. Not because that in itself will cause the bourgeoisie to surrender. No, the significance of such a call is that it fits in with a grand strategy that can realistically see the working class coming to power and staying in power by spreading the flame of socialism from Europe to the rest of the world, not least to the US. November 30, and repeating such action on a European-wide level, is, of course, symbolic. Life as the bourgeoisie knows it will not come to an end. But symbolism can be profoundly important. An all-Europe protest strike against austerity and against rule by the bankers symbolises not just our opposition to the EU of bureaucrats and bosses, but our conviction that it is *necessary* for the working class to unite into a single Communist Party of the European Union. Fighting for this perspective is to take our responsibility seriously.

Let me stress that we are not talking about some larger version of the left-nationalist Communist Party of Greece or some social democratic copy of the French Communist Party or Die Linke in Germany. We need a mass party, a party where there is unity in action, but freedom of criticism, a party which operates democratically, where factions can be formed. In other words a Marxist party that has nothing to do with Stalinism, popular-front class-collaborationism or the narrow-minded, bureaucratic control-freakery of the confessional sects.

The threat of barbarism is real - and not only through prolonged stagnation, hyperinflation or a spectacular collapse of the euro zone. The offloading of economic crisis from one power to another brings with it the possibility of war. We already have had Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Next year, or the year after that, could see Iran blitzed by Israel, yet more 'humanitarian interventions' in the Middle East, maybe even a US-China clash over Taiwan. Then there is the ecological crisis and global warming. Everything tells us that the working class must come to power.

And, as I have already argued, the place where the working class can consolidate that power is Europe. Here it would be able to demonstrate to the rest of the planet that socialism marks a far higher level of civilisation than capitalism. So Europe is key ●

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 readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

Elected by
bankers for
bankers

Democracy against capitalism

The ascension of self-styled technocrats to political power is the latest proof that capitalism is antithetical to democracy, argues James Turley

The most remarkable feature of the current coverage of the new governments in Italy and Greece is the unashamedness of the terminology.

For years, ‘technocrat’ has been an insult. Those people for whom Tony Blair was just too much of a card-carrying lefty would routinely refer to the New Labour approach to government as technocratic - indeed, they were quite correct to do so, and if it was not quite so true of the Thatcher administrations, it was because the latter were governments rather of truly bloodthirsty ruling class warriors.

Now that ‘Super’ Mario Monti and Lucas Papademos have become rulers of Italy and Greece respectively, effectively appointed over the heads of the local population by the European financial system, ‘technocrat’ is suddenly a buzz-word. These grey men, surely, are what is needed to reassure the increasingly unhinged markets; as the rightwing commentator Christopher Caldwell notes in the *Financial Times*, “the present crises - of inequality, growth, debt and currencies - demand a degree of economic predictability that liberal democracy is having trouble providing”.¹

It has become commonplace to describe the austerity-mad regimes that increasingly cover the Earth as governments of the bankers. Indeed, it is true enough, after a fashion. In the case of Monti and Papademos, it is quite literally a fact. Both are experienced banking bureaucrats. So we face a situation whereby a debt crisis initiated by bank bailouts is to be fixed by ... direct agents of the banking system.

Indeed, things are even more bitterly ironic than that. Both these esteemed premiers have a history of working for Goldman Sachs, the great vampire squid of high finance, which conspired with the Greek government of the day to sufficiently fiddle its finances to ensure entry into the euro. Now, its tentacles extend directly into the heart of government.

Negation of democracy

It barely needs saying that this arrangement is a direct snub to any conceivable interpretation of democracy. What does need renewed emphasis is that this is merely a peculiarly naked instance of a quite timeless truth - *capitalism despises democracy*.

The bourgeoisie is a minority class. It can by definition only maintain its dominant role in society by rigging the political game; it has developed inordinate resources to do so in its 300-year ascendancy. The English revolution of 1640-88 did not usher in mass political freedom; rather, the old aristocracy transformed itself into a class of rentier capitalists and proceeded to rule over a very minimally constitutional democracy. Even the rest of the bourgeoisie had to fight tooth and nail to get the vote

in 1832.

The French Revolution became a beacon to democratic revolutionaries; but the chaotic early political history of the republic ultimately issued in the ascendancy of Napoleon. Only with the autocratic rule of Louis Napoleon and large-scale state subsidy and credit did capitalism truly achieve dominance in France. Likewise, it was the initiative of the Prussian Junkers which firmly and finally established industrial capitalism in Germany.

If democracy cannot be crushed, it can be smothered. The authentically democratic spirit of the American revolutionaries of 1776 was choked off in the first instance through the separation of powers, which diluted the force of the popular will, and also by the maintenance of the slave system in the south.

None of this should surprise any Marxist. Capitalism is distinguished from previous class societies fundamentally by the generalisation of the wage relation. Under feudalism, for example, the direct application of coercion and force was necessary to exploit the peasantry. Capitalism, on the other hand, extracts surplus in the form of surplus value - that is, an element of the labour performed by the worker which is not reimbursed in wages. This does not negate the need for the *state*, contrary to various foolish ‘anarcho-capitalists’ - force, or the threat of force, is necessary to enforce contracts and debts (among other things).

The dynamic, then, is towards the *separation* of the bourgeoisie as such from the *direct* exercise of political power. This is, in fact, necessary for capital to speak with one voice - different forms of capital (financial, industrial, etc), different *sizes* of capital (small, medium and big monopoly capital) and different branches of industry might have very different immediate interests, which then need to be resolved into a strategy for administering the state.

The ‘ideal’ result is the representation of different capitals according to their relative mass; it is visible in microcosm in the City of London Corporation, which accepts block votes from companies based on the number of employees they have. There is also the necessity for some level of political freedom *among the capitalists themselves*.

The working class

Capitalism has performed two immense services to the cause of democracy, however. In the first instance, it throws up its own gravedigger, the working class upon whose labour it is parasitic.

The crucial feature of the working class is its *separation* from the means of production, and with it the central means by which power can be exercised in capitalist society on an individual level. All the power possessed by the working class consists in its ability to act in an organised, collective and disciplined manner. The more organised an action, the more deeply it penetrates into the mass of the class around it, the more it will achieve.

All restrictions on democracy and political freedom are inimical to the interests of the working class - which puts them very much in the interests of the bourgeoisie. The fight for what elements of democracy we have - broadly universal suffrage; *de facto* freedom of collective association and, to a more limited extent, of the press (not, it should be stressed, *de jure*); comprehensive education - all are the result of the most determined struggle by the mass of the working class and its allies.

Not coincidentally, now that the workers’ movement is as weak as it has been for over a century, all these gains are being rolled back. The result of the great struggles of the 1980s was, in part, enormous restrictions on trade union activity. Today, one can barely go out on a demonstration without

the intimidation of massed ranks of police, armed with truncheons, riot shields and the Serious Organised Crime Prevention Act.

Even universal suffrage, supposedly the hallmark of liberal ‘democracy’, is rendered more than a little ridiculous in the age of Mario Monti. It is not difficult to imagine the direct rule of Mervyn King in Britain, should the markets tire of David Cameron, or any potential successor.

Even in ‘normal times’, the bourgeoisie fights back with every means at its disposal. The ‘rule of law’ assigns enormous power to an utterly unaccountable caste of lawyers and judges. The maintenance of standing armies and police forces concentrates armed force in the hands of the bourgeois state, which are then duly used to put down popular dissent at home and abroad. Any and all forms of reactionary ideology - patriarchal, racist, national chauvinist and whatever else is to hand - will be picked up and given the material basis they need to survive and thrive. Press freedom is perverted by the concentration of media power in a cartel of moguls and advertisers; freedom of working class organisation by the cultivation of a parasitic labour bureaucracy; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

The struggle for democracy *is itself* a class struggle of the exploited and oppressed against the exploiters. It is a shame, then, that it has become such a commonplace on the left to consider democracy in some sense a historical task of the bourgeois revolution. The direct blame for this misunderstanding lies with Karl Kautsky, who argues in *The social revolution* that the democratic tasks of the proletarian revolution amount to adoption of the “democratic programme for which the bourgeoisie once stood”.² This became Second International orthodoxy, crystallised in the formula of the ‘uncompleted tasks of the bourgeois revolution’.

Lenin and the Comintern did *not* in

fact break with this understanding, but rather modified it - with the emergence of the soviets, there was now such a thing as ‘proletarian democracy’, to be rigorously distinguished from ‘bourgeois democracy’. The problem with this distinction is that it simply does not work - democracy is the rule of the majority, and bourgeois society is by definition rule of a minority. In the hands of today’s orthodox Trotskyists, it becomes a faintly ridiculous piece of scholasticism, which is used both to distinguish themselves from supposed Kautskyite centrists (ironically enough) and to provide justification for economistic political projects.

As for the original Kautskyite version, its closest modern analogue would be the excuse used by, for instance, the Communist Party of South Africa for its participation in bourgeois governments - that is, the need to complete the ‘national democratic revolution’ that toppled apartheid. In the name of democracy, it rubber-stamps the likes of the new secrecy bill that imposes draconian punishments on whistleblowers and journalists who report proscribed stories.

The second great favour bestowed on democracy by the bourgeoisie is, oddly enough, embodied in the persons of Mario Monti and Lucas Papademos - periodically, it renders it abundantly clear to the world just how shallow its commitment to democracy really is. A strong, organised workers’ movement armed with a revolutionary and democratic programme would be able to topple these desiccated bankers with little difficulty. Until the left starts to take its democratic responsibilities seriously, however, that is a most unlikely outcome ●

james.turley@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1 . *Financial Times* November 18.
2 . <http://marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1902/so-crev/pt2-1.htm>.

Subscribe here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum every 3 months... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/€28	£50/€55	£200/€220
Europe	£30/€33	£60/€66	£240/€264
Rest of world	£60/€66	£120/€132	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer:
3 months for £5

I enclose payment:

Sub

£/€

Donation

£/€

Total

£/€

Date

Name

Address

Post code

Email

Tel

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

To

Bank plc

Branch Address

Post code

Re Account Name

Sort code

Account No

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed

Name (PRINT)

Date

Address