

weekly worker



**Forging unified class action:
Dave Vincent reports on the
build-up to November 30 strike**

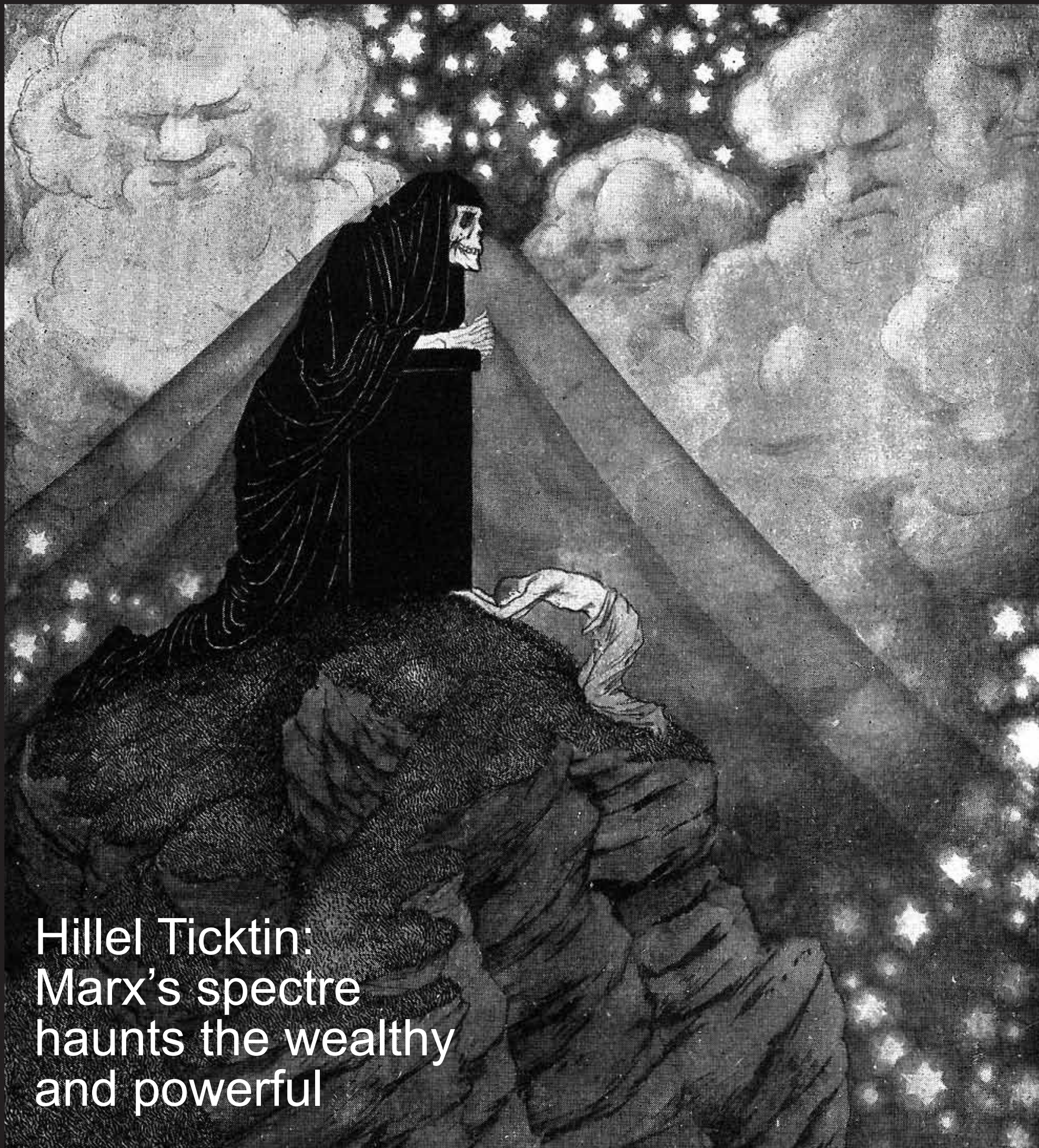
- Ireland's ULA
- Egyptian elections
- Germany's Die Linke
- AWL social imperialists

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**Hillel Ticktin:
Marx's spectre
haunts the wealthy
and powerful**

LETTERS



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

Slipped up

I am of the opinion that Jack Conrad made a bit of a slip-up when he wrote: "It is not a neat either-or. Through, or out of, the training provided by separate economic struggles, the conditions are created for the political movement through which the working class confronts the state. Strikes affect the immediate employers" ('Classical Marxism and the general strike', November 24).

I would say that less often than many would care to admit (up to the point of rarely) do raw political consciousness and raw political struggles actually arise from mere labour disputes - along with other economic struggles. The Occupy protests have demonstrated this, since the unions have been at the tail.

Although the iron law of wages was junk, Lassalle had a point in emphasising political organisation above collective bargaining organisation. In today's terms, there are certainly iron laws and, agitational speaking, an 'iron law of disproportionate immiseration' sounds more rhetorically powerful than the academic 'relative immiseration' or 'relative impoverishment'.

1. In the 'trickle-down' best of times, workers' rising incomes are worse in proportion to those above them and they are immiserated further by consumer debt slavery and the disproportionate effects of inflation.
2. When rates of profit fall during recessions and otherwise, workers fall into precarity and their incomes are subject to disproportionately immiserating pressure coming from the reserve armies of the unemployed.
3. During depressions, the absolute impoverishment of workers' incomes towards subsistence levels is in full effect.

As for mere labour disputes, much of those can be resolved by absorbing all private-sector collective bargaining representation into free and universal legal services by independent government agencies.

Jacob Richter
email

Build it

Reading Jack Conrad's article reminded me of the pre-1920s communist movement in America, which avoided involvement in 'reactionary' unions. It maintained its revolutionary integrity by calling for the immediate arming of those involved in struggle. It issued glittering declarations which scolded workers in the strongest terms, highlighting the inevitability of the armed revolutionary overthrow of capitalism as an immediate aim.

This was perhaps understandable in a context in which revolutionary Russia had cast off the yoke of tsarist oppression and the global imminence of a revolutionary overthrow of society seemed certain. That comrade Conrad replicates such an approach in 2011 is testament to his failure to draw any of the necessary conclusions from his 'analysis'.

Comrade Conrad replicates the mechanistic approach of the museum pieces of old, counterposing involvement in the struggle for revolutionary consciousness with the direct struggle and involvement in the fight for day-to-day reforms (however partial) - an approach entirely at odds with the Marxist tradition. For comrade Conrad, we must presumably stop at nothing short of the European strike wave driven by a party of harden, ideologically pure Communist Party members. How, you

ask? Presumably, 'if you build it, they will come'.

BD
email

Inept Stalin

Jack Conrad's article, 'Lenin and the United States of Europe' (November 10) brought the usual response from the Stalinist camp: namely Tony Clark's letter, 'Stalin erred' (November 17). The mere mention of Lenin's name linked to the infamous theory of 'socialism in one country' (even in the most abstract sense) is enough to spark off a frenzied polemic, attempting to give credence to the political and theoretical musings of comrade Koba.

Tony then proudly announces that we should all be eternally grateful to Stalin for defending Lenin's strategic line to the letter. But that is the very crux of the problem! By mechanically defending Lenin's line, come hell or high water, Stalin showed us his total bankruptcy and political ineptitude by failing to develop Marxism. The result was defeat for socialism in China, Germany and Spain, and complicity in the rise of Nazism, costing the lives of countless millions of Red Army personnel and Soviet civilians.

Tony rounds off his defence of Stalin with a back-handed and crass dismissal of the criminal destruction of vast sections of Soviet society, as the remaining embers of the 1917 revolution were smothered by the final victory of the moribund, technocratic committee men.

Ironically the victims, which we 'sensitive folk' remember, had the imagination, enthusiasm and talent - politically, economically, militarily and in the fields of literature, science and sport - to begin to lay the foundations of a socialist society in the USSR.

Colin McGhie
Glasgow

Betrayal

John Bridge's article ('Socialism or barbarism', November 24) does not address the issue of imperialism. Is it now interchangeable with capitalism as a term (I seem to remember it dropping out of Hillel Ticktin's verbiage as well)? This intellectual as well as emotional disconnect between imperialism and barbarism is a betrayal. The very essence of imperialism is barbaric and so much more in the oppressed and violated countries. The very term 'capitalism', without such qualifications, is a suggestion of equality between nations. That is a farce that the left should have nothing to do with.

The mention of Zimbabwe as an opportunity for the working class utterly dismisses Zimbabwe's role as a target of imperialism and therefore an opportunity for the UK to reclaim what it lost. This refusal to analyse imperialism is objectively pro-imperialist. This position only defends the working class nominally and not really, and it belittles the possible fate of both China and Russia, who are creditor nations (with many resources) for the overwhelmingly armed and increasingly debt-ridden USA.

The overriding concern of communists is not to bury imperialism as a concept but as a reality. The rise of China and Russia is an objectively anti-imperialist development. Much of the left see it as inter-imperialist rivalry but that analysis is ludicrous. Is this why the term 'imperialism' has been abandoned?

Paul Anderson
email

Distorted

We know that communism is the ultimate goal of Marxists and it is to be achieved after the transition from

capitalism to socialism, when the state and all its artificial regulators wither away, to be replaced by a fully self-governing and self-regulating society, where there will be an abundance of goods and services for all: "From each according to their ability; to each according to their needs." However, the 20th century experience in the Soviet Union and elsewhere teaches us some practical lessons which we as communists must learn from.

Once was an unashamed Stalinist who believed in a strong one-party socialist state (or a coalition dominated by the Marxist-Leninist party), crushing all opposition to socialism. I felt that this was the way class contradictions could be eliminated and a classless society created, and that through the party, the soviets and the people's mass organisations (youth, women's, trade unions, etc), the masses would become used to managing society and eventually all the artificial regulators of the state would indeed prove unnecessary and fade away. This enforced one-party state was seen by me as training the masses for the classless, disciplined, self-governing society of communism.

The reality was rather different. Bureaucratic Soviet-style socialism led to opportunists and careerists masquerading as communists, applying for and gaining party membership and eventually taking control. They dominated and outnumbered many genuine comrades, many of whom also became corrupted by the privileges of absolute power. This led to mass disillusionment and apathy from the masses. I saw this myself on visits to the German Democratic Republic and elsewhere - the privileged elite, in effect a new ruling clique or class, of party members and state bureaucrats with access to luxuries, while the masses were disempowered and living with shortages and often inferior goods. It is inevitable with an imposed one-party system that people with selfish motives will pose as communists, infiltrate the party and soon gain control.

The basis of a distorted form of socialism was indeed laid in these countries, with full employment, good public services, security in sickness and old age, good education and health services; but true socialism, and eventually communism, was never going to come about without massive reforms of the system.

I now believe it will take much longer to achieve such a self-governing, self-regulating society and that it must come about naturally. It cannot be enforced by a one-party dictatorship, for instance. So I now envisage a much more gradual evolution towards communism, with many different political parties and groups given the chance by popular vote, under a socialist constitution, to try out various socialist models. Eventually, class contradictions will start to wither away and these various political organisations will meld into a self-governing, self-regulating society, whereupon the state and all its paraphernalia will start to wither away. Also, by the formation of cooperatives, small communes and collectives, communism can come about gradually in smaller communities and slowly spread throughout society, with Marxists leading the way by example.

What communism requires, of course, is for the masses to take on the onerous responsibilities involved in such a society, and this cannot come about overnight or even in the 74 years that the Soviet Union existed; certainly not under the conditions of a Stalinist bureaucratic state which is not only inefficient, but riddled with corruption and full of opportunists. This became obvious after the fall

of socialism, when former so-called 'communists' in places like the USSR and Yugoslavia clung on to power and changed their party labels and political opinions overnight - often resulting in terrible nationalistic wars, ethnic cleansing and even genocide.

As for the 'socialism in one country' hypothesis, this could never really work, though could the USSR ever really be described as 'one country'? It was a federation of many countries, and indeed the Russian Federation still is. Comrades in the CPGB (PCC) fully recognise the need for a Communist Party of the EU and of working together in solidarity with comrades in other parts of the world. Without such internationalist solidarity, of course, the capitalist countries will much more easily be able to isolate and crush any attempts to build socialism, much as they ganged up against the fledgling Soviet Union after 1917.

Tony Papard
Battersea

30 years behind

Contrary to the official line given at the Korean Friendship Association gathering, it appears that the North Korean train may not be travelling on in quite the manner we are led to believe (Letters, November 24).

Obviously, one has little to go on, given the nature of the 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea', but the seemingly official view here in China is that 'North Korea is like China was 30 years ago' - a phrase I have seen written in the press and heard repeated on a regular basis while living here. Others I have spoken to have been more specific in stating that they believe North Korea will shortly adopt Deng Xiaoping-style 'reform and opening' policies - possibly coinciding with the accession of Kim Jong-Un.

If the number of Chinese companies trading, both officially and unofficially, with North Korea from the border town of Dandong is anything to go by, China would have a clear vested interest in such reforms. It should go without saying that none of the apparently likely options - North Korea in its current Stalinoid form, the onset of 'market socialism' or unification with South Korea engineered by western powers - are particularly appealing for communists.

Geraint Biermann
China

Tribune

I am pleased to report that People Before Profit has managed to successfully get nominated a candidate for the parliamentary by-election in Feltham and Heston, in the London borough of Hounslow. Our candidate, George Hallam, will be standing under the description of 'London People Before Profit'.

We are keen to test our level of support outside of our home London borough of Lewisham. Following the campaign, we will take a view on standing a London-wide list for the Greater London assembly elections. We are in discussions with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition about offering their supporters and activists an opportunity to join us and running a joint list to avoid any clash. People Before Profit note that Tusc stood in two local by-elections in Southwark and gained very poor results.

We are concerned that Tusc has a very low political profile and very narrow appeal. If those supporting workers in struggle, opposing cuts to jobs and services, can gain 5% of the vote across London, we have the chance of getting a tribune elected to the GLA, or two spokespersons if we can get 8%. We would suggest that anyone elected holds office for only a year and accepts only the 'London living wage'. We would welcome

hearing from those also considering running a list for the GLA elections.

We are hoping to build on our existing level of support in the area, with a view to offering local residents the opportunity to form a local borough People Before Profit group. Local people may also want to join us in considering standing in a GLA constituency seat.

The by-election has been triggered by the Labour Party, following the death of the sitting MP. The election will be held on December 15 and has been called in what must be the shortest possible legal requirement. I will be raising concerns with the electoral commission at the undue haste and speed with which the election has been called - giving only three days in which to get nominations in!

Nick Long
London People Before Profit
Nicho_long224@o2.co.uk

Unrepresented

If Tusc had chosen to stand in Feltham, we would have given way to them. But, in their absence, we felt somebody must stand up for trade unionists and socialists who are no longer represented by the Labour Party.

We cannot run the risk that popular anger with the political and economic establishment - which runs high especially in a constituency so poorly represented by the late and unlamented Alan 'Mr Expenses' Keen - should be channelled into votes for far-right fascists or populists like the British National Party and UK Independence Party. The disappointing record of Brighton's Green councillors in refusing to set a needs budget and implementing most Con-Dem cuts also means we cannot delegate the task in hand to a party which has failed to live up to the initial radicalism of Caroline Lucas MP.

We are completely behind the totally justified coordinated strikes being mounted by public sector workers in defence of their pensions and against cuts. These are the product of neoliberal austerity, not any genuine financial crisis in any of the pension schemes. Unlike most of the Labour Party, which has followed Miliband and Balls in opposing the strikes (with the minor, but honourable exception of the half-dozen MPs and slightly more councillors who signed a letter to *The Guardian*), we were on the picket lines on November 30.

We are also in total support of the Occupy movement and believe that workers, pensioners, the unemployed, the disabled and others on benefits should not pay for the bankers' crisis. We believe that those on very high salaries should not just be paying a 50p tax, but something akin to what they paid before 1979, and we are in favour of higher corporation tax, a Tobin tax and a tax on bankers' bonuses as well.

Toby Abse
email

Bet on war

The *Wall Street Journal* of November 28 informs its readers how to make money without working - a system called capitalism.

If there is a war in the Middle East, there is big money to be made by betting against Israeli bonds. The *WSJ* says: "A \$100 million bet against the bonds for three months, combined with a hedging position in US treasuries, would cost \$750,000 ... the trade would make at least \$5 million, and potentially much more, if a crisis erupts in the Middle East."

War is profitable! Make your bets now! Why would anyone possibly want to protest against Wall Street?

Earl Gilman
email

IRELAND

ULA must take itself seriously

On November 26 4,000 demonstrators marched in Dublin against the December 5-6 budget. This budget marks year two of a four-year plan to slash public spending and raise taxes - all part of stringency measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund/Euro-pean Central Bank 2010 bailout.

The numbers on this year's demonstration were tiny compared to last November. Then a mass demonstration was organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. An estimated 150,000 braved snow and ice to show their opposition to the strategy of draconian austerity. Militant speeches were given by the president of ICTU, Jack O'Connor, and its secretary, David Begg. Both pledged their active and wholehearted resistance to the IMF/ECB deal and vowed to defeat it.

Now things are very different as far as the union bureaucrats are concerned. Last year a Fianna Fáil/Green government was in power. Deeply unpopular because of the banking bailouts and political corruption, it was teetering on the verge of collapse and an election was imminent. Labour Party leaders were promising to stand up for the ordinary people and to resist all cuts if they were elected. It was clear that they would enter government with the rightwing Fine Gael, but Eamonn Gilmore, the Labour leader, promised that his party would protect the poor. ICTU leaders urged the working class to vote Labour.

The February 25 election saw Fianna Fáil, the dominant party since the creation of the state, reduced to a miserable rump. They were punished by an electorate wanting change. But the Fine Gael/Labour coalition has simply taken over where FF left off. Its budget will cut lone parent allowance completely for many mothers as well as slash child benefits. Financial support to organisations for the elderly, disabled and other vulnerable groups is to be axed. Hospital funding, now at dangerously low levels, is to be slashed still further. At the same time VAT will increase by 2%, meaning another hike in prices. A household tax is to be introduced which will affect homeowners and tenants alike. In other words, the lives of the majority will become even more difficult than they already are. There is deep unease and dread among the population at the moment. Media reports and radio phone-ins give a sense of a despairing working class. Suicide figures are soaring in this current crisis - with reports of approximately 150 suicides or attempted suicides every day.¹

In the midst of this period of working class suffering, overseen by Labour and Fine Gael, the ICTU still supports Gilmore and co. Eugene McGlone, the new ICTU president, speaking at Saturday's demonstration, bemoaned the government's short-sightedness and its failure to appreciate that austerity policies do not work. He appealed to their sense of fairness and decency and proposed the adoption of the ICTU's pre-budget submission which is "based on reality, not pie-eyes schemes".² This document proposes various measures for economic growth with very modest suggestions for an increase in corporation tax. It aims to rehabilitate Irish capitalism in the middle of an unprecedented world depression. Not that the government will take much notice of the ICTU's

appeal.

The demonstration on Saturday was originally to be a United Left Alliance event. But, worried at the lack of union support, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party created yet another campaign - the Alliance Against Austerity - and pulled in Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) and some sections of Sinn Féin. This was all done without any involvement or input from the ordinary membership. We were left in the dark for weeks as to whether a demonstration would even take place and there was very little work done to build it.

This decision to go for a broader campaign did not leave the ULA in a better situation politically, as the rally was dominated by the likes of McGlone. The DCTU did not mobilise significant forces and the march was made up mainly of the left, particularly the ULA and its constituent parts. But the ULA had no speaker in the main rally. And, to add insult to injury, when the speeches were finally over, DCTU vice-chair Mick O'Reilly announced that the main event was now over and would be followed by a ULA assembly. Anybody who wanted to stay for that could. He and his comrades folded up their banners and left, making it clear that they wanted no further part of this gathering. This caused confusion and a lot of the crowd understandably thought it was all over and left.

There followed what was meant to be an open mike session. The chair announced people should contact the organisers and give their names to take part - everybody would have their say. In fact it was almost completely orchestrated and dominated by the SWP. Although a couple of Socialist Party members spoke, including MEP Paul Murphy, the other contributors were in the main SWP - or any 'Joe Soaps' they thought would not say anything controversial. Names were carefully filtered under the supervision of SWP leader Kieran Allen.

Needless to say, although one of the first to put my name forward, I did not get to speak. I waited and asked and asked and asked, but, alas, there was always an excuse. But what was particularly significant was the lack of any real political contributions, let alone debate. It was agreed that there would be a message of solidarity sent to

workers in the north on November 30. It was also agreed that a protest would be held outside the Dáil on the day of the budget. But no discussion, just vox pops from selected contributors.

The ULA stands at a crossroads. It needs to become a real organisation as soon as possible or die. This means it has to open up democratically and begin to function as a political party. At the moment there is still complete control from the top and most branches are not meeting. People will not join an organisation that hardly meets and has little or no democracy. Measures to create transparency and accountability voted through at the national assembly in June have never been implemented. Most people I spoke to on the demo were agreed that something needs to be done to save the project. We have seen plenty of unity projects come and go. This time we have made a huge step forward with five TDs. We have an opportunity that must not be wasted.

Supporters of Joan Collins TD and others are pushing for the implementation of the assembly decisions on democracy and there are rumours that there will be a conference in January. It seems to me that the SWP in particular needs to curb its enthusiasm for creating campaigns from which it hopes to recruit to itself. Instead its members need to take themselves seriously as revolutionaries. We have hundreds of campaigns, but no united working class party. We need politics, not lowest-common-denominator slogans. The only answers for today's crisis are revolutionary ones.

The demonstration last Saturday was small because of lack of confidence and leadership among our class. Rather than creating yet another 'anti-cuts' campaign the ULA must take the lead ●

Anne Mc Shane

anne.mcshane@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. Irish Times May 6.
2. www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/budget_submission_summary.pdf



Kieran Allen: control freak

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Northern Communist Forum

Sunday December 4, 3pm: Friends House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Discussing *From Lenin to Stalin* by Victor Serge. Organised by CPGB North: <http://northerncommunists.wordpress.com>.

Radical Anthropology Group

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

December 6: 'Neanderthals and the symbolic revolution'. Speaker: Camilla Power.

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.

Keep Our NHS Public

Thursday December 1, 7.30pm: Meeting, 'Where next after November 30?' Whelley Labour Club, Northumberland Street, Wigan WN1.

Organised by Wigan and Leigh Save Our NHS/Keep Our NHS Public: WiganSaveOurNHS@gmail.com.

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.

Stop climate change

Saturday December 3, 12 noon: Climate Justice march. Assemble Blackfriars Bridge, north end (slip road west into Embankment), London SE1, for march to parliament. Part of global day of action to coincide with UN conference in Durban.

Organised by Campaign Against Climate Change: www.campaignccc.org.

Crisis in the euro zone

Saturday December 3, 1.30pm: Meeting, 'Which way forward for European workers?', Colliton Club, Colliton Park, (opposite County Hall), Dorchester DT1.

Organised by Dorset Socialists: www.dorsetsocialists.org.uk.

Don't attack Iran

Monday December 5, 7pm: Public meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include George Galloway, Tony Benn, Lindsey German and Abbas Edalat.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.com.

After November 30

Tuesday December 6, 7pm: Public meeting, 'After November 30, how can we bring down the government?', Friends Meeting House, 73 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers: Martin Smith, Alex Callinicos, Regi Pilling, plus rank and file electrician.

Organised by Socialist Workers Party: www.swp.org.uk.

Aims of Occupy

Tuesday December 6, 7.30pm: Meeting, 'The occupation in Leeds', Weetwood room, Headingley Enterprise and Arts Centre, Bennett Road, Leeds LS6.

Headingley against the cuts: nwcore2011@gmail.com.

Colombia Solidarity Campaign

Tuesday December 6, 7pm: Meeting, 'Fighting AGA's La Colosa project', Apple Tree pub, 45 Mount Pleasant, London WC1.

Organised by Colombia Solidarity Campaign: www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk.

Home away from home

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

Organised by Praxis and London Hosting: www.praxis.org.uk.

Stop the War: Graphic History

Friday December 9, 6.30pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. With Jeremy Corbyn MP (STWC chair), Lindsey German (STWC convenor), Kate Hudson (CND). To attend, contact Francis Boutle Publishers: info@francisboutle.co.uk.

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

End violence against sex workers

Friday December 17, 6.30pm: Meeting, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Maria Exall (CWU/TUC general council), Ana Lopes (International Union of Sex Workers).

Organised by GMB Sex Work and Adult Entertainment branch: www.gmb.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.

NOVEMBER 30

Forging unified class action

Dave Vincent reports on the build-up to the big public sector strike**No damp squib**

If any *Weekly Worker* reader does not understand the pensions issue, it is this simple: public sector workers will pay more per month (in my case £60 extra) towards their pension, work years longer and get less in retirement. This extra money is not going towards our pensions - it is going to pay the deficit caused by the bankers. I have worked in the civil service since I was 16, back in 1974. I am 53 now and have paid for my pension for 37 years. My retirement age was to be 60. It will soon be 65 (MPs get full benefits after just 15 years service!)

It took my union, the PCS, two years of constant appeals to get the unity we saw on November 30. It was Britain's biggest ever strike, where numbers out are concerned. The 1926 General Strike had about 1.7 million out at any one time. November 30 saw up to two million public sector workers out from 30 unions.

But it was PCS alone that held a one-day strike that then caused 1.3 million other trade union members to threaten a March strike. At that time it was the Labour government that backed off from threats to raise our retirement age from 60 to 65.

It was PCS that invited a leading National Union of Teachers official to address our May 2010 conference. PCS argued for wider unity at the 2010 TUC congress, got the motion carried, but then saw major unions continually fail to name the day. PCS invited Unite general secretary Len McCluskey to address the 2011 PCS conference and signed a joint working agreement to the delight of delegates. Then PCS, NUT, University and College Union and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (their first ever strike) went ahead with joint action on June 30. That set the scene for the 2011 TUC, where once again there was agreement for unified action - but this time it was acted upon.

I was the sole speaker at the 2011 PCS conference who wondered whether the June 30 action would be a success and whether we should wait for Unite and Unison to come on board. But my delegation voted for

the NEC's strategy after hearing the debate, then worked hard to deliver that action. I did not get new members joining in advance of June 30, but did see a few resignations - members who decided to opt out of the fight.

This time, however, in the build-up to November 30 we had new members joining, including a couple of longstanding militant non-members, and even a couple of ex-members coming back in. Very good though the support for June 30 was, it was even better in my branch on November 30. I saw more members volunteer to come on the picket lines this time.

As a rank-and-file PCS rep, when you go around your workplace you can tell the mood of members in the way they react to you when they know you are pushing for a strike! When support is only about 60:40, some members try to avoid eye contact, as they have decided they are not taking action, but do not want to discuss their reasons. Those supporting are mainly reluctant rather than enthusiastic.

But this time, going round my workplace handing out my strike bulletins, members wanted me to stop so they could talk about how angry they were and how much they wanted the strike to go ahead. I have no doubt that it was the unity of so many trade unions that really inspired members to come on board. They sensed our collective strength. I condemned those unions who for so long put the electoral concerns of the Labour Party way above those of their members. But I am pleased they came over on November 30 - although a little wary about how long this unity will last.

New ideas

I know the *Weekly Worker* does not have much regard for one-day strikes and I agree with you that the Socialist Workers Party's 'All out, stay out' call will not be taken up. I agree working class activists need to debate where we go after November 30 and the need to go further than trade unionism and Keynesian, reformist demands. That debate must be had and maybe the wrong conclusions will be drawn this time compared to those the CPGB

would prefer. That said, the CPGB and others should not underestimate the ideas workers will start to form as a result of this strike.

For starters, two million workers will have understood, maybe for the first time, the old maxim, 'Unity is strength' - something they have rarely seen applied over the last 40 years. What a lesson for newer, younger trade union members and those who had become rather jaded at the constant disunity of the movement.

What about the members of unions who decided not to be part of November 30 (the FBU, RCN - why, I ask?) and the pressure they may now bring to bear on their union tops? Looking wider still, millions of people will now have seen that only the unions can really fight the cuts.

We have to make the demand, 'Fair pensions for all' rather than the more selfish-sounding 'Hands off my pension'. We need to counter the media onslaught, which tries to make private-sector workers resent those in the public sector because we have had some kind of pension - and have dared to fight to retain it. We need to say, 'Join a union and fight for a fair pension too'.

Thatcher had the tactical astuteness to attack the unions one by one, keeping them divided. Cameron and co must be stupid or totally arrogant to take us all on at once.

When Francis Maude suggested we could all have a 15-minute walkout, paid, to make our protest, clearly he thought this would get the more backward members arguing along the lines of 'Why should we lose a day's pay when we can make our point for nothing?' But not one out of over 1,000 members I represent has made that point. In fact, Maude's idea created even more anger.

Stung by the support for action, he then threatened to further change the anti-union laws to make action even harder to win. But he will face two problems doing that. One, trade union members will soon argue that if the Tory anti-union laws make legal ballots near impossible to win, why not just take illegal action? Two,

people (not just trade union members) will contrast the complaints about 'low' turnout in union ballots with that in local and general elections. Our unions won their mandates to call action - where is the coalition government's mandate for these cuts?

Employers prevent union reps having workplace meetings to discuss collective action, and the anti-union laws insist on postal ballots precisely to reduce solidarity and in the knowledge that as a result many members will not even return the form. But members who do not vote know they received a ballot paper and usually overwhelmingly abide by the majority result.

No to Labour

What of the lamentable Labour Party? Miliband and Balls criticised the June 30 action and ended up trying to be 'balanced' by urging both sides to have real talks and make genuine compromises. Such as ...? But many public sector workers vote Labour. Who thinks those taking action will not remember the total lack of support for their action from leading Labour Party figures?

The *Weekly Worker* report of the Labour Representation Committee fills me with disgust at the left posturing of the LRC, which wants a Labour government in power - no matter how bad - which will implement 'fair' cuts. And what would they be? I doubt it will be cuts in bankers' bonuses or big business being made to pay more tax.

How come the LRC (and the Labour Party) do not support the PCS Alternative - that instead of the misery caused by making £93 billion of cuts to the public sector over four years we should collect in £120 billion *per year* in tax currently evaded or avoided? We can also scrap Trident renewal and withdraw troops from Afghanistan. All that would mean not a service needs to be cut nor a job lost. There are other alternatives too and I have not even got to suggestions such as the Robin Hood tax, investing in climate jobs, etc, that are also worth consideration.

The only conclusion to be drawn is that the LRC (and the Labour

Party) is not interested in defending working class people if it means taking on the super-rich and getting adverse media publicity spoiling their chances of becoming overpaid MPs implementing 'fairer cuts'. A disgrace.

I also do not know why PCS is being so cautious about standing their own anti-cuts candidates (or supporting others from other organisations or unions with similar aims). Twice I have been opposed by the Socialist Party and SWP at successive PCS conferences when I have argued for opening up our political fund to support candidates (even Labour MPs such as that good friend of PCS, John McDonnell) with similar aims to those of PCS and for PCS members in a constituency (not the NEC) to decide whether to support a candidate.

All three main parties are anti-strike, pro-privatisation, pro-war. They support cuts and support the filthy rich. All three main parties had MPs fiddling their expenses. They have all been playing the 'diversity game', but increased numbers of female and black MPs just produced 'equal opportunities in action' - the new intake were just as likely to fiddle their expenses as their old-guard, white, male colleagues.

I also have a problem with the special pleading of groups like Black Activists Rising Against Cuts. If the government promised to exempt black people from the cuts would that be all right? The same applies to women (who happen to be more affected by public sector cuts because they make up a majority of the workforce). *All* the cuts are unfair, *all* are unnecessary. So we must fight as a united working class, not as separate oppressed groups looking for special exemptions.

Standing independent candidates on the basis of anti-cuts, and committed to a worker's wage and recallability, would become popular if we started to do it. I accept candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and so on are hardly getting anywhere, but that is not to say they never will if the left would just stop splitting. Independent candidates are not a halfway house. There are problems with not being in a party with a cohesive policy and a clear working class identity and support, but better a bunch of independents listening to their constituents than the sorry, corrupt system of patronage and bribery that is supported by all three main parties.

Standing independent candidates would be a welcome change to the slick careerists we see nowadays. It would have to get more people involved, would get more people having to think through how we ensure the working class get power and would open people to revolutionary politics far more than 'Vote Labour'.

Two million public sector workers understand the need for unity. As the *Weekly Worker* constantly argues, when is the far left going to show the same awareness and stop trying to set up numerous fronts selfishly aimed at recruitment to their own group rather than forging unified working class action? Rebuild working class confidence and self-activity, educate, agitate, organise and worry about who joins what later after we've given Cameron, Clegg, Miliband and co a long-overdue bloody nose!

We have waited a long time, we have often despaired of fellow workmates ever understanding the need to get active and political (but kept trying) and now it is beginning to happen. Let's not screw this up ●

EGYPT

Out to roll back the revolution

The military and the Muslim Brotherhood are only temporary allies, argues **Eddie Ford**

Ever since Hosni Mubarak was ousted in February the army has clung on to power in Egypt.

If anything, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces led by field marshal Hussein Tantawi has spent the intervening months entrenching its political control: Mubarakism without Mubarak. Not that we should be astonished, since the military has long thought that it can run the country as a fiefdom - with its own gleaming shopping malls, banking conglomerates, fancy villas and hotels and all the other manifestations of super-privilege. *Army capital dominates capitalism in Egypt.*

In the build-up to the elections, which began on November 28, the junta unleashed a vicious wave of repression, as the protestors flocked back to Tahrir Square - including the use of government-hired goons, a tactic notably deployed by Mubarak in a desperate attempt to stave off the inevitable. Then thugs on camels tried to force demonstrators out of Tahrir Square, whilst on November 29 an "unidentified group" entered the square and attacked protestors. But now the elections have begun.

After suffering decades of dictatorship, it is only natural that millions of ordinary Egyptians are eager to vote - want to decide the future of their country. Of course, these elections are a huge concession by the military regime - which is claiming credit for them and their orderly nature. But they are also high-risk. Not because the left will make any kind of significant showing. It won't. But because they could easily lead to all manner of uncontrollable consequences.

US and UK imperialism would have liked to have seen the continuation of the Mubarak regime (perhaps with his son, Gamal, succeeding him). With Mubarak gone, imperialism would be quite happy with military rule fronted by a puppet civilian prime minister. Such an arrangement could be relied upon to introduce 'stability' and the 'rule of law' - *their* 'rule of law'. Their ultimate aim being to roll back the democratic revolution that began with the uprising against Mubarak and is still unfolding as part of the larger pan-Arab national movement, which by very definition is an explosive rebellion against the imperialist-imposed order in that region. Therefore, for US-UK imperialism the 'Egyptian problem' has to be neutralised.

Complex elections

The results of the elections will not be known for some considerable time. Out of a total population of about 80 million, there are around 45 million eligible voters - plus several million more abroad who can also cast a ballot in their local Egyptian embassy. The entire electoral process is diabolically complex, bureaucratic and interminably protracted - just as intended, of course. No doubt the tortuously Byzantine electoral process helps to dampen down the democratic enthusiasm of the masses. And the potential for fraud and gerrymandering is vast.

Hence the elections are being carried out in three staggered phases with nine governorates voting over two days in each round for the lower house of parliament (people's assembly). There are 6,700 candidates and 47 registered political parties/organisations. The first round includes the major urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria. The second

is on December 14 and will feature Giza, Suez and the important upper Egyptian cities of Aswan and Sohag. The final round will be on January 3 and includes the whole of the Sinai peninsula, as well as Egypt's western desert and parts of the Nile delta.

Seven days after each round there will be run-off elections for those constituencies where no individual candidate achieved 50% of the vote, which will surely be most of them, and the final results will be announced on January 13. After that, the whole merry-go-round will start all over again with elections to the upper house (the shura) on January 29. Then there will be presidential elections, in theory anyway, sometime in March or April. By the time it is all over, the whole process will have taken four months.

The elections are being conducted using a mixture of 'first past the post' and proportional representation. In each constituency, electors vote once for a party list by PR and twice for individual candidates - who can either represent a party/organisation or be classified as independent. Furthermore, the two ballots for individuals are separate - one to choose a "professional" candidate and one for a "worker or peasant" candidate.

This is a hangover from a Nasser-era law stipulating that half the 508-strong parliament must consist of "workers and farmers". A regulation, needless to say, that is wide open to abuse - meaning that a winning candidate could be disqualified on some essentially arbitrary definition of their profession or purported economic-sociological background.

Eventually, if the system works as planned, one-third of those in the lower house of parliament (166 MPs) will be elected using the majoritarian system and the other two-thirds will be elected using party-list PR. Naturally, the elections to the shura have similar rules, though 90 of the body's 270 members are directly appointed by the president - not elected. Similarly, there are 10 unelected, 'nominated' seats in the lower house.

At the end of all this electoral rigmarole - which will give pleasure

only to psephologists - the Egyptian masses will be presented with a parliament that is toothless and short-lived, given that its primary purpose is to form a special constitutional assembly that will draw up a new constitution in 2012. Once a new constitution is approved in a national referendum, new elections will be held in 2013 for the presidency and, in due course, a fresh parliament as well. As for the 'parliament' itself, it cannot actually form a government or choose ministers - which is to say that it is totally void of any *real* powers and exists just to provide a cover for the military.

There are numerous other ways in which the Egyptian electoral system acts against democracy. For example, to register as a political party requires a relatively substantial amount of money, which *ipso facto* makes it extremely difficult for organisations not connected to big business or the army (or both). So registering was all but impossible for smaller groups, particularly those of the left.

Meanwhile, of course, the junta will remain safely in power - busily consolidating its control over political life. So in that sense, whether you vote or not, or whoever you vote for, there is only one result - an army win.

Rival blocs

So far, the government has not yet released any official figures on voter turnout. But observers from the Muslim Brotherhood said that the vote for their Freedom and Justice Party in the nine governorates which voted was between 30 and 32%, and in Cairo that figure was around 27%. Many of the polling stations have gender-segregated voting.

Clearly the FJP is well organised and has its eyes on winning around 30% of the seats in parliament. It is also bending over backwards in order to burnish its 'moderate' credentials - it selected a Coptic Christian, Rafiq Habib, to be its vice-president and claims it is "open to all Egyptians, Muslims and Copts alike".

The main battle is between various loose-floating electoral coalitions or blocs. The MB is organised around

the Democratic Alliance and includes the Justice Party, New Tomorrow and Al-Karama (Dignity), whilst the Free Egyptians Party heads the Egyptian Bloc, composed of secularist and left-leaning parties such as the Social Democrat Party, Freedom Egypt and Tagammu (National Progressive Unionist Party).

There are two other blocs, one being the Islamist Alliance - which consists of Salafist or ultra-conservative parties like the Al-Nour Party of Light, Authenticity, and Building and Development. The other electoral coalition is the Revolution Continues Alliance, containing groups like the Socialist Populist Alliance Party, Egyptian Socialist Party, Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution and Egyptian Current Party (interestingly, the latter includes those segments of the MB's youth wing which broke away from the parent organisation).

Finally there are a series of 'non-aligned' parties, including Al-Adl (Justice Party), which likes to describe itself as a "non-ideological" movement trying to strike a "third way" between Islamism and liberalism/secularism - not to mention al-Wafd, one of the country's oldest political parties, but tarnished by its participation in previous sham elections held by Mubarak. The latter's National Democratic Party was officially banned/disbanded by the military government.

However, after Egypt's supreme court overturned a lower court decision that could have barred the *felool* ('remnants') of NDP party from standing for public office, several Mubarak-era acolytes and cronies have formed their own parties - including former NDP secretary general, Hossam Badrawi, and it is quite likely that their candidates would do well in rural areas, where local power-brokers have long been affiliated to the NDP and naturally do not want to cede political control.

But, hardly surprisingly, this 're-legalisation' of the NDP has not proved to be popular with the Egyptian masses - the memory of oppression and torture is too fresh. Therefore in an effort to appease

protestors, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces promised to enact a "treachery law" that would trump the decision of the supreme courts and stop ex-NDP members from running. Confusion still reigns as to how they will implement this law or ban, if at all, which presumably would require the reprinting of millions of ballot papers. You can bet your last Egyptian pound that ex-NDP apparatchiks are standing and a good number will be elected.

Muslim Brotherhood

Despite the decades of oppression it suffered under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, the MB had the relatively open space of the mosques with which to spread its message and, even more importantly, develop an *organisational structure* and a political *chain of command* - a 'luxury' denied to the opposition secularist and left parties.

Most expect the FJP to secure the largest bloc of seats, but not win an overall majority - unlike Tunisia and Morocco, where 'moderate' Islamist parties have come to power. However, the MB will be expecting to be part of a *governing* bloc of parties and choose the prime minister. From this vantage point it will challenge the army ... and expect it to compromise. Some commentators predict that the MB and its allies will gain around 65% of the parliamentary seats and hence have a "stranglehold" over power. Many rightly worry about what this will mean for women's rights and the Copts. But there is also the prospect of a struggle between parliament and the military. Internationally an MB-dominated government would doubtless have far-reaching consequences, especially when it comes to the Camp David peace deal with Israel.

There is a certain irony in the MB's electoral success. As everyone knows, it was not exactly the instigator of the anti-Mubarak revolt or the Arab spring in general - initially it was hardly anywhere to be seen. By instinct, the MB was initially hostile to the movement that gathered around Tahrir Square, if not fearful - and for good reason, given the overwhelmingly secular and modern-looking nature of the first protests. Indeed, the MB's lack of consistency and intransigence was exposed - at first it dismissed negotiations with the Mubarak regime and then agreed to them.

The MB and the military council share a common aim - the throttling of the democratic revolution. The MB has continuously agitated for elections since the fall of Mubarak precisely to marginalise the most radical elements in Egyptian society. The first step was the referendum on amending the constitution back in March, with MB pushing for staggered elections. In this way, the MB's *de facto* alliance with the military is designed to restore order.

Communists make no bones of the fact that the MB is a totally reactionary organisation - it is no friend or ally of Egyptian workers. Of course, communists are quite prepared to do deals with the devil if necessary - including Islamists. The difference being, though, that we will never foster illusions in their progressive potential. Quite the opposite. While we may strike together with them against a common enemy, the forces of communism and the forces of political Islam represent radical opposites ●

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Elections: but not as we would want them



GERMANY

Left rhetoric and r

The 1891 Erfurt programme adopted by the Social Democratic Party of Germany was regarded as a 'return to Marxism', writes **Ben Lewis**. If only the same could be said of Die Linke's 2011 version

"Everything that is superfluous in a programme weakens it," wrote Friedrich Engels, commenting on the draft of German Social Democracy's Erfurt programme.¹ If this was true of the 1891 programme draft, then it applies a thousand fold to the programme agreed on by the recent Erfurt congress of the German left party, Die Linke.

Weighing in at almost 30,000 words, the new programme is rather more akin to an extended commentary on the current economic and political situation in Germany and across the globe. Needless repeating itself on several occasions (opposition to sanctions on the unemployed appears at least three times), the text could have surely been substantially cut before publication. Moreover, by referencing passing phenomena like current EU treaties, recent wars/governments, latest developments in genetic engineering (!) and so on, large parts of it will soon be out of date.

Getting through it is a bit of a slog, and it also requires much reading between the lines to work out just what is being said and why. One wonders how many of Die Linke's members will take the time to sift through the document in its entirety. Nonetheless, its acceptance is now contingent on a poll of the party membership. While we will not know the result until mid-December, it is almost certain that the programme will receive overwhelming support.²

Edith Bartelmus-Scholich's report from the Erfurt congress was a welcome addition to our paper.³ For, as we will see, while Die Linke suffers from many of the opportunist and short-termist maladies of its sister parties elsewhere, it is at least an attempt to establish a mass leftwing political alternative. Its fate is of utmost interest to working class partisans everywhere.

Comrade Bartelmus-Scholich and others have kept *Weekly Worker* readers up to speed on developments and controversies in and around the united party that was founded in 2007, but we have not written anything on its programme for quite some time.⁴ Analysing the new programme, and focusing on its central strategic concepts will throw some light on where Die Linke is currently at and - crucially - where it is looking to go.

Ambiguity

At first sight, Die Linke's programme appears rather promising. It opens with Bertolt Brecht's wonderful poem, 'Questions of a worker who reads', and proclaims that Die Linke is a "socialist party that stands for alternatives, for a better future" (p4). Later on we are also told that "capitalism is not the end of history, but a stage in the development of humanity" (p20). Yet if this really is the case, then how does this document point beyond capitalist society by linking today's struggles with that "better future"?

Unfortunately, the programme lacks any such structure. There are, amongst others, chapters on 'Where we come from, who we are', 'Crises of capitalism - crises of civilisation' and 'Democratic socialism in the 21st century', plus sections on various policy areas, but the final section is rather fluffily entitled 'Together for a change in politics and a better society'.

The preamble ('This is what Die Linke stands for') is probably the closest thing we get to a relatively clear formulation of demands: for a "democratic economic order", including "decent work for all, but less work for the individual", a minimum wage, the abolition of the draconian 'Hartz IV' unemployment laws, better pensions, healthcare and education, and a just tax system. There is also the call for "the expansion of civil rights and the democratisation of all areas of society", and for common social and ecological standards across the European Union. The preamble also specifies support for political and general strikes as working class tools of struggle.

Most of these demands are eminently supportable. While, as we shall see, some of them are devoid of any content, and still others appear rather Keynesian in orientation, they are at least demands to strengthen the position of the working class in the here and now. However, the programme is characterised by vague platitudes and generalities.

It is quite clear that the historical section could be substantially cut. Lengthy historical expositions should have no place in a party programme. Party unity should not revolve around particular historical interpretations, but contemporary politics. While of huge interest, such questions are best discussed in pamphlets, party meetings and the party press (Unfortunately, Die Linke still does not have a paper).

Manage or supersede?

It would appear that the party wants to be seen to 'look both ways' on some key questions, not least on whether it is the capitalist system and generalised commodity production as a whole that needs to be overcome or just certain manifestations of it. Indeed, there are inconsistencies and outright contradictions in the way capitalism is portrayed.

For example, one passage broadly describes capitalism as a system based on the extraction of value from those who sell their labour for wages. Yet at several other points it is not this system, not private property and not the political power of the capitalist class as a whole which is attacked, but rather "unrestricted capitalism" (p58), "the neoliberal political model" (p56) and "deregulated financial markets" (p15).

Moreover, the text also proclaims that Die Linke is committed to "a long emancipatory process, in which the *dominance* of capital is overcome through democratic, social and ecological forces", eventually leading to a "society of democratic socialism" (my emphasis, p5). This is to be achieved through the management of capitalist excess by banning hedge funds (p29), etc, combined with Keynesian tinkering aimed at "boosting internal demand" (p28).

Society will gradually be pushed to the left through a fairer distribution of wealth: managers' salaries will be capped at 20 times those of the lowest-paid workers (p27), there will be a 5% wealth tax on millionaires and financial markets will be "tamed and brought back to their actual function" (p22). As if to underline how this document is very much the child of compromise



'Yes' to opportunist fudge

of the contending factions within the party, the programme also states that "Some in Die Linke demand a basic income" (p33) and that there is ongoing discussion on this question.

There are passages where it is almost possible to trace the composing that has taken place between the different factions, as well as places where compromises have been arrived at over specific formulations. This has produced the pervading ambiguity. For example, Die Linke is "fighting for a change in direction of politics, which opens up the way to a fundamental transformation of society that overcomes capitalism" (p5). The 'realo' wing would interpret this as implying a long period of coalition government alongside the SPD and maybe the Greens, which, by some twisted, reformist logic, would pave the way for a new, higher society at some indefinite point in the future. On the other hand, the left will surely stress the "fundamental transformation of society" rather than the short-term "change in direction of politics".

Now, some might assert that, given the strategic rivalries within Die Linke, such compromises might represent the only way forward. Yet there is a problem here: not only do such statements provide 'left' cover for the plans of the right wing, but the ensuing confusion and lack of clear programmatic commitments also has severe consequences for the *accountability* of the leadership to its membership in its future actions. You can almost see some of these phrases being rolled out to justify further government coalitions - certainly at state level. I am reminded of Paul Levi's acerbic description of Independent Social Democracy's left-centrist programme in 1920: "a lump of clay that one can make into a face or a gargoyle at will".⁵

(The difference, of course, is that the USPD was far to the left of today's Die Linke.)

Social state of law?

But if the programme is unclear as to whether capitalism should be abolished or merely reined in and controlled, it is at least unambiguous that this process will *not* involve the working class majority conquering political power.

True, there is the vague statement that "capitalism can be overcome if we succeed in winning majorities" (p20 - why this is in the plural is rather perplexing). Yet there is a big difference between arguing that a transition to a higher form of society requires the conscious support of the majority and claiming that "democratic socialism" can be achieved within the 'democratic' structures of the German constitution and a 'social *Rechtsstaat*' (a constitutional state, what the Americans refer to as a 'state of law').

Rather than envisaging some kind

of *break* with the anti-democratic institutions of the bourgeois constitutional order, the programme seems to imply that its goals can be achieved within them. The demands to "expand municipal democracy" amount to very little beyond calling for greater use of referenda to supplement "representative parliamentary democracy" (p33).

There is nothing proposed that could actually expand, that could make more generous Germany's rather *unrepresentative* democracy (annual elections, abolition of the Bundesrat and a single chamber, representatives on a worker's wages, etc). And, while the programme calls for the abolition of the intelligence services, it again falls well short of its 1891 namesake by merely agitating for (undefined) "democratic control [*Kontrolle*]" of the army and the police, not the arming of the people.

Indeed, the Erfurt programme of 2011 even goes as far as to champion the "separation of powers", espoused, amongst others, by that well-known working class partisan, the Baron de

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Reformist illusions

Montesquieu! It might call for the “democratisation of the judiciary”, but does not take up the demand for the direct election of judges contained in the 1891 version. Rather, it wants them appointed by electoral colleges to ensure that they “represent all social layers appropriately” and administer justice “in the name of the people” (p35).

This overlooks the fact that the very essence of the ‘rule of law’ is the sanctity of private property and the associated inequality that comes with it. It is the very basis of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie as a class. Such loyalty to the current order is given a certain left gloss by the statement that, in Die Linke’s view, “the *Rechtsstaat* and the *Sozialstaat* (welfare state) form a unity” (p20).

Some of the formulations seem to have been drawn up with the purpose of heading off criticism from the left: eg, “By fighting for left reform projects today ... we simultaneously act for our socialist goal” (p26). No Marxist could dispute this, providing that the “socialist goal” is working class power and an alternative constitutional order. But, however militantly we fight for reforms in the here and now, if our overall outlook is loyal to the constitution, and thus reformist, then we in no way bring that goal nearer. One figure often quoted in the text - Rosa Luxemburg - drew attention to this very point: reformist and revolutionary politics are not two different paths to the same destination. They are different paths but, as in January 1919, lead to very different places.

In government?

However, for all that the programme says on working conditions, the role of neoliberalism, the burden shouldered by women in society and so forth, it only has a couple of paragraphs to offer on perhaps the greatest bone of contention both *within* Die Linke and in German society more generally: the question of government participation. Die Linke certainly does not place itself in the tradition of radical German Social Democracy or the KPD by demanding that it will only form a government with majority support for a full socialist programme.⁶

It states that the terrain of national government is “decisive” for a change in politics (p56). True, government participation is only sensible if it is based on a “rejection of the neoliberal model of politics” and brings about a “social-ecological” change of course. But there are no other caveats, just the usual platitudes: “Die Linke aims for government if it can achieve an improvement in the living standards of the people.” In this way, so the logic goes, the “political power of Die Linke and the social movements can be strengthened” and the feeling of political powerlessness that exists amongst many people can be forced back” (p56). Not true, of course. ‘Left’ administrations presiding over the capitalist system have historically demoralised and demobilised the working class, opening the door to the return of conservative and reactionary administrations.

There are, at least, some clear (if rather hollow) pledges that Die Linke will not take part in any national government that “carries out wars or allows combat missions of the German army abroad” or “presses ahead with armaments and militarisation”. This is a little naive, given that the programme wants to *reform* the existing US-led imperialist order, not abolish it. Nor will Die Linke participate in a national

government that “makes worse the public sector’s fulfilment of tasks”. But it does not promise not to help drive forward privatisation at state level, as it has been doing in Berlin.

The programme stresses internationalism and, in welcome contrast to some on the British left, calls for cooperation across the European Union. By the same measure, though, Die Linke bemoans the “violence and wars” that are often carried out in violation of the United Nations charter. Yet, as Mike Macnair has argued, a ‘law-governed world order’ based on the UN charter “fundamentally misunderstands the nature of law as a social institution, and as a result, international law”,⁷ and as such the call for a law-governed world order is not an alternative to the havoc wreaked upon the world by US-led imperialism: it is merely another form of the same thing. The fact that the new Erfurt programme goes into such detail about how to “strengthen” and “reform” the UN den of thieves says much about the limits of Die Linke’s internationalism.

Things take a rather bizarre turn with the pledge to establish a ‘Willy Brandt civil corps’ of German doctors, technicians and so on, rather than armed forces, to dispatch humanitarian aid abroad.

Reaction

One thing I thought comrade Bartelmus-Scholich’s Erfurt report overlooked (perhaps understandably, given that it was a programmatic critique) was the rather odd reaction of the German bourgeois media to the convention.

Despite the fact that the programme amounts to a rather uninspiring, reformist fudge of the differences within the party, the German media condemned the programme for its ‘extremism’. Naturally, this is to be expected from those like Axel Springer’s ‘lazy Greek’-bashing rag, *Bild*. But more serious publications, like *Der Spiegel*, argued that in Erfurt the party “cemented its radical course of opposition”.⁸ If only that were true. *Der Spiegel* claimed that policies such as the legalisation of “soft drugs” and opposition to all German armed forces missions abroad meant that Die Linke was “increasingly isolating itself with radical positions”.

Der Spiegel was not the only one to kick up a fuss on the question of drug legalisation. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to snipe at a party still capable of taking the votes of its leftwing supporters, the SPD referred to it as “absurd”. The well-known Die Linke rightist, Porsche-driving co-chair Klaus Ernst, responded as you might expect: legalisation was for the “long term”, he said, not a proposal for the here and now.

This brings me to another rather frustrating aspect of the programme. Without explanation, it splits up its policy points into three categories: “immediate”, “perspective” and “long-term”. This rather slippery device further compounds the confusion. For example, Die Linke’s call for a grant for all students taking their first course in higher education is relegated to a “perspective” for further education courses. While the programme “opposes all privatisation” of the railways, the demand for the whole network to be in public hands is a “long-term” one, like the legalisation of drugs.

What does it mean exactly? That drugs will be legalised when Die Linke has formed a government? Or only when the new society ‘beyond’ capitalism has been achieved? And

in the meantime we do not call for it to happen?

Responsibilities

I wholly agree with comrade Bartelmus-Scholich’s assessment that Die Linke has a crisis of strategy, and that the rhetoric from the German section of the Socialist Workers Party about the programme’s “clear anti-capitalist character”⁹ either reflects rather cynical attempts at manoeuvring within the official party structures or utter ignorance as to what constitutes a genuinely anti-capitalist - ie, Marxist - programme (maybe it is a mixture of both).

Comrade Bartelmus-Scholich is certainly correct to argue that “the party lacks a strategy for opposition”. This is a pity, because Die Linke quite clearly still has enormous potential, and in the current climate could grow substantially and become a real political force. Yet if the leadership lacks a strategy for opposition, then this is doubly true of the party’s left.

It is certainly to be welcomed that Die Linke permits different platforms to operate. This allows the revolutionary left some space - however limited - to intervene in the important strategic questions being raised within the party. Great responsibility thus falls on the shoulders of Marxists to form a clear, principled opposition to the leadership’s constitutionalism, class-collaborationism, Millerandism and general reformist illusions.

Perhaps reflecting its desire to burrow away in the depths of Die Linke in order to gain influence, the Socialist Workers Party’s German section describes the programme as a “good basis to win new members to Die Linke”.¹⁰ Having officially dissolved themselves into a support network for the publication *Marx 21*, the comrades’ strategy appears to consist of hoovering up new recruits to Die Linke by being the best fighters for its (utterly inadequate) Keynesian politics - all the while seeking to push that programme incrementally, almost imperceptibly, to the left.

However, by describing the new document in such positive terms, the German SWP comrades at least appear to recognise the need for a programme. Tony Cliff’s approach has always been that a programme is something to be avoided, since it ties the leadership’s hands and limits its ‘flexibility’. When challenged on this, SWP comrades will usually quote Marx’s letter to Wilhelm Bracke: “Every step of the real movement is worth more than a dozen programmes.”¹¹ Poor old Charlie Marx. But how do our SWP comrades square this circle? How do they simultaneously greet Die Linke’s Erfurt programme, while rejecting programmes more generally?

The real Erfurt

The Erfurt programme of 1891 is as far from the rightwing SPD of the 20th century as it is possible to get, and it should be viewed as *ours*: an integral part of the classical Marxist tradition.

Written by August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, and enriched by Engels’ feedback, the 1891 Erfurt programme’s structure, demands and methodology reflected the approach of Marx and Engels. Unlike the Erfurt programme of 2011, it had a clear, logical order that outlined the tasks of the epoch and listed a set of radical democratic and economic demands to pave the way to working class rule, thus genuinely beginning the transition to the “better world” which Die Linke says it aspires to.

The 1891 Erfurt programme was not without its problems, blunders and omissions. Yet, updated for modern conditions, its *method* can inform a programme to help Die Linke become what Oskar Lafontaine has called a “movement for democracy”. Immediate demands for the election of judges, the total separation of church and state, the replacement of the standing army with a people’s militia, self-determination and self-government of the people at all levels - these can and must form part of our class’s weaponry in the 21st century.

And one key pillar of the Erfurt programme was its emphasis on the need for the working class to win majority support in order to reshape society. This is hardly irrelevant to the debate over the ‘red holding lines’: ie, under what conditions Die Linke could consider participation in a coalition government. For revolutionaries, there are key principles that have to be fulfilled. Not this or that pledge to refrain from engaging in foreign wars or cutting social welfare, but a break with the whole constitutional order on the high tide of mass mobilisation, organisation and militancy.

As things stand, Die Linke has not rejected the aim of becoming a party ‘fit for government’ - no doubt, its leaders hope, alongside the SPD. If such a coalition was formed, it would be a disaster on a far greater scale than Die Linke’s participation in state governments.

It is quite right for Marxists and revolutionary socialists to join Die Linke; but only if they fight for the basic principles such as working class independence. Of course, the main obstacle to the formation of a coherent opposition is the disorganised and sectarian nature of the far left itself. Either it stands aloof, not willing to get its hands dirty, or it plays the bureaucracy’s game and sees things through rose-tinted glasses. Yet a left that is not afraid to speak out for

working class power could really make headway, and perhaps prevent the demise of yet another left unity project lured by the temptation of running the capitalist state. Any such opposition would do well to draw upon some of the lessons of Erfurt 1891 ●

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Notes

1. Quoted in V I Lenin, ‘Material for the preparation of the programme of the RSDLP’: www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1902/draft/04mar07.htm.
2. www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/programm_der_partei_die_linke_erfurt2011.pdf.
3. E Bartelmus-Scholich, ‘A better version of social democracy’ *Weekly Worker* October 24.
4. In 2006 I attended a joint ‘programme convention’ of the merged forces in Hannover. See B Lewis, ‘On the road to social democracy’ *Weekly Worker* October 5 2006. I would love to admit that I was wrong to choose such a title, and that things have changed for the better, but unfortunately that is not the case.
5. RA Archer (trans) *The Second Congress of the Communist International* Vol I, London 1977, pp282-83.
6. Martin Thomas of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty neatly summarises the British left’s Labourite variant of this: “In Britain the fall of the government would probably mean it being replaced by Labour. That would be a step forward. The new government, though under Ed Miliband pro-capitalist, would be more easily pushed by working class pressure, and that working class pressure, against a Labour government, could more directly shake up and transform the labour movement ... To take the working class forward politically, the negative call for ‘kicking out the Con-Dems’ or ‘smashing the Tories’ has to be linked to a clear, positive call for a Labour government, not a new coalition, and for the unions and the working class to organise for sharp demands on the Labour leaders” (*Solidarity* November 23). Just three years ago, of course, AWL leaders declared the Labour Party a “stinking corpse” (*Solidarity* April 10 2008).
7. M Macnair, ‘The war and the law’ *Weekly Worker* September 25 2003.
8. www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,793414,00.html.
9. <http://marx21.de/content/view/1549/32/> The comrades do at least preface this comment with “in spite of a few breaches”.
10. <http://marx21.de/content/view/1549/32/>.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/letters/75_05_05.htm.

Fighting fund Alternative

George Osborne’s autumn statement on November 29 merely confirmed what everyone knew - Britain’s economy is stagnating, its debt is increasing and most people are getting worse off. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, by 2016 the average family will have less disposable income than 10 years earlier. It’s a marvellous system, capitalism, isn’t it?

And, of course, the answer is ... more of the same. A one percent cap on public sector salaries, for instance, following a two-year pay freeze. And the removal of £2 a week in child tax credit. But, as the November 30 strike proved, increasingly workers are no longer willing to put up with the austerity assault. What they need now is, yes, encouragement, but most of all a *political alternative*.

Almost uniquely on the left the *Weekly Worker* not only tells the truth about what that alternative must be. We also demand that the left looks at itself honestly, admits to its impotence and takes steps to overcome the debilitating sectarianism that has kept us in separate grouplets, leaving our

class without a vehicle to advance its own independent interests.

To keep putting out that message this paper needs to overcome its own financial concerns. That is why we call on our readers and supporters to donate £1,250 every month to our fighting fund. I am pleased to say that in November we beat that target by over £200 - we raised £1,467. We have more than made up for October’s shortfall. Thanks mainly to our standing order donors, but also a nice £50 cheque from CG, an extra £203 came in over the last seven days.

We want to continue expanding our readership (last week we had 17,457 online readers), so as to be able to win the argument on the left for the type of organisational steps we all need to take - unity within a single, democratic-centralist Marxist Party. Then we would be serious about an alternative.

Robbie Rix

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

CRISIS

Marx's spectre haunts the wealthy and powerful

The ruling class has no workable strategy for rescuing the system, argues Hillel Ticktin

The depression - called some years ago the 'third great depression', following on the long depression at the end of the 19th century and the great depression of 1929 onwards - is now official, as it were. Martin Wolf's recent article in the *Financial Times* produced a series of statistics showing that the present downturn has already lasted longer than previous downturns in the last century. His arguments are, of course, statistical and bound within orthodox economics, even if he leans to a moderate Keynesian analysis.¹

Engels had predicted that downturns would become worse at the end of the 19th century, but he was proved wrong because of the turn to imperialism on the part of the great powers. However, it is clear that his observation of the underlying tendency was basically correct. In turn, the various depression-era economists of different persuasions now look more credible. The Keynesians, however, may have had their day, given the refusal of governments and a section of the ruling class to move in their direction.

The earlier interventionist policies in 2008-09 have now been replaced by stringency and austerity. It is not that the insights of the Keynesians have not been recognised, but their policies are regarded as too dangerous to follow. Hyman Minsky has had his moment. Perhaps the greatest triumph of the Keynesians since the adoption of the Bretton-Woods agreements has been the recognition that their policies would work, but are so dangerous to capitalism itself that they have to be avoided at all costs.

It is paradoxical that the situation is so dangerous that the rich have to pretend that their wealth is playing no role in capitalism. We not only have the absurdity of trillions of dollars being held privately in various banks, but we now have one bank, the Bank of New York Mellon, charging for the trillions it holds, knowing it cannot be invested anywhere.² "It is the world's largest custodian serving the world's largest investors."³

The problem the Keynesians attempted to solve lay in the difficulty of selling due to low incomes. Today, the rich are not even spending their money on yachts or luxury cars or castles, but saving it, and the amounts are so great that governments cannot compensate for their lack of investment without taxing the rich, who are financing political movements against taxation. Finance capital itself has been so concentrated that in the USA six investment/commercial banks - Bank of America, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley, Goldman-Sachs, JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo - hold assets worth 60% of US GDP, and "dominate the financial industry".⁴ At the same time, the government is implementing austerity measures directed against the majority of the population. The rich have got richer and the government is making the poor poorer. In the USA, at least, it is abundantly clear that the government could solve its fiscal problem through a rise in taxation on the wealthy.

The riots in Britain - preceded as they were by student protests and semi-riots - were rationalised away by the Conservative government, loyally supported by a rightwing

press. No level of state repression, under the British prime minister's name of 'tough love', against a recalcitrant population will alter the growing, though inchoate, demand for 'regime change' under conditions of growing inequality. The question is not whether there will be a powerful movement for the replacement of the market by a society rationally planned in the interests of the ordinary population, but how much longer it will take to develop. Marx's spectre of communism is very much the ghostly presence feared by the wealthy and powerful, even if they do not understand what shape it will take.

No doubt the crisis will continue to take on a series of forms, from the initial financial implosion to the present-day threat of sovereign default and continued low growth. The present euro crisis is insoluble because it is a microcosm of the general crisis, which itself has no solution. However, its forms are specific. We have the expression of German nationalism, representing the first time that the German bourgeoisie feels it can shake off the heritage of the last world war and Nazism, and express its interests directly and clearly. The clash between France and Germany, Sarkozy and Merkel, has been relatively low-key, but it is there nonetheless. However, the Germans have found that it is not easy. The less prosperous countries of the euro zone are not prepared to accept German dictation of the economic terms of survival.

There is no obvious reason, in any case, why the terms of trade between Germany and any particular country in the European Union should be what they are. Why are agricultural goods relatively cheap, compared with machinery or automobiles? Only believers in the market accept market prices as fair, just or somehow correct. The commentators effectively argue that those countries whose industry is less developed should adopt a tight fiscal policy, given their need to import industrial goods from Germany. Such a policy cannot work under any circumstances. The only result, to be welcomed, will be the establishment of a uniform policy of economic repression sufficient to proletarianise the 'middle class' and drive the working class across the euro zone to forms of direct action.

The persistent failure of the euro zone to adopt a credible policy is indicative both of its divisions and of the real lack of a solution.⁵ However, the German bourgeoisie really has no choice, unless it wants to lose the common market, stable economic relations with its neighbours and a relatively low-value currency. The proposed expulsion of Greece with its subsequent default would impoverish the population even further and create havoc among European banks, and is therefore a crazy solution. Even if the banks are saved before that event, and the default cauterised as a result, the knock-on effect on the bonds of the other countries - by now including practically all the Mediterranean members, plus Ireland - will be enough to make Germany avoid that way out. Apart from anything else, it will force the formation of a French zone, as opposed to a German one. As the country which will lose most, apart from Greece, the German bourgeoisie



Worshipping the market

cannot take that line.

In reality, because a default or an exit from the euro zone will be globally destabilising, Greece is in a strong position and its government could have taken a much stronger line. Its government, however, is pusillanimous, reflecting the nature of its bourgeoisie, which has sent its money out of the country. Indeed, the way the bourgeoisie uses tax havens to shelter its money or to avoid tax or both plays a big role in the destabilisation of much of the world economy.

India and China

There is little that is politically more absurd than the constant reference to the importance of China and its role as the next big power. The similar reference to India is equal nonsense. It is argued that China and India or

perhaps one or the other can save the world from its crisis. If it was not so commonly held, one could ignore it.

As regards India, we hear that "per head energy and protein intake has been falling for the last two decades, as the majority of the population is unable to afford enough food".⁶ Pankaj Mishra argues that the propaganda about India is closer to the myths produced by another country (presumably the USSR), "where statistics were shamelessly manipulated and a tiny, privileged elite dominating both political and economic life lorded it over the rest".⁷ The fact is that levels of productivity in China or India are a fraction of that in the USA, and they have no chance of catching up with the west, under capitalism.

In the case of China, it seems that it cannot now play the role that

it did in 2008-09, when it expanded the money supply in order to avoid a contraction and so played an important role in avoiding a deeper downturn. Its growth rate is predicted to halve. "Finance is not the only area in which Beijing's ability to launch a counter-cyclical economic stimulus has ebbed. The ability of local governments, if asked again by Beijing, to boost investments is questionable."⁸

Divisions

On the one hand, the capitalist class thinks that it has dispensed with a communist/socialist alternative with the end of Stalinism. On the other hand, it also knows that the despair of the white- and blue-collar workers can and will turn to action in order to overthrow a social system which has outlived its time, in order to replace it with one controlled from below.

The ruling class prefers to believe that such a society will be worse than capitalism, though there have always been some who are realistic enough to realise that the current inequality of wealth in the midst of massive poverty is insupportable.

In other words, the ruling class is divided, but all sections are concerned with the need to defend the system. At the same time, as in any time of global change, parts of the ruling class or its employees have begun to question their positions. In the UK, Marx has been quoted and some of his words supported by a series of establishment figures. None of them have become Marxist, and all would perhaps find reasons why Marx was wrong to want socialism, and indeed, no doubt, is still fundamentally wrong.

Charles Moore,⁹ biographer of Lady Thatcher and former editor of the rightwing *Daily Telegraph*, George Magnus of UBS,¹⁰ former advocate of the new right in the 80s, John Gray,¹¹ philosopher and leading light in the founding of a new private university in London, and Sam Brittan,¹² long-time leading commentator at the *Financial Times*, are some of the figures reported in the press commenting on Marx or the left. Lord Skidelsky, biographer of Keynes, wrote: “as more and more people find themselves with enough, one might expect the spirit of gain to lose its social approbation. Capitalism would have done its work, and the profit motive would resume its place in the rogues’ gallery.”¹³

When the present crisis was in its earlier phase, we previously quoted an advice from JPMorgan,¹⁴ to the effect that Marx might have had a point. The News International newspaper, *The Times*, wrote a sneering editorial in October 2008 in which it said that the world moves in mysterious ways and the fact that Marx’s *Das Kapital* had become a bestseller in Germany was particularly mysterious. It referred to the fact that Sarkozy, president of France, was photographed reading that work and that Pope Benedict had praised Marx’s analytical skills. The then German finance minister, Peer Steinbrück, as befits a social democrat, was apparently less taken with Marx, but was prepared to concede that some of his thinking was “not that bad”.¹⁵ However, it was implied that this was little more than a fashion which was bound to pass. Three years later, it seems that Marx has come to the fore yet again and News International is suffering its own crisis.

The fact that they are looking at Marx shows, in the first instance, a collapse of confidence, first displayed in 2007-08. This, in turn, can have three possible meanings. The first is that Marx is simply a convenient icon to express their fear of the long-term damage done to the system. It does not necessarily indicate anything about their support for the market. The second is that they recognise that the market has had its day, though they do not necessarily see an alternative. The third possibility is latent in the other two. It is that they have begun to shift politically towards the left, without supporting any party, but it is yet to show itself. Here the problem is the absence of any significant Marxist party, to speed up the process.

Murdoch scandal

The ruling class has lost confidence in areas of life beyond the economy, however basic that is. The whole ‘Murdoch scandal’ is much more than a question of the illegal hacking of phones.

One of the prime movers in the British parliament, Labour MP Tom Watson, had this to say in an interview on the question: “When I was first elected I was a completely naive and gauche politician. You look at the pillars of the state: politics, the media, police, lawyers - they’ve all got their formal role, and then nestling

above that is that power elite who are networked in through soft, social links, that are actually running the show.”¹⁶ This could have come from Bernard Shaw’s play *Major Barbara* and the sentiment is very much at the heart of any Marxist political understanding of modern society, which now stands vindicated through a direct investigation of one of the threads the ruling class uses to rule. The involvement of the police, civil servants, members of parliament and journalists, all apparently connected to the Murdoch family, simply confirms a picture long held by Marxists, and often regarded with contempt by liberals.

It is clear that both bourgeois ideology and the parliamentary political system are in trouble. In one country after another, scandals of various kinds are rocking the system. One has only to look back at Marx’s description of Europe in 1848, France in particular, to realise that the eruption of so-called scandals today is part of a more general discontent in society, which is leading to increasing division in the ruling class and an increasing loss of confidence.

In this situation, the UK leads the pack, though demonstrations and organised forms of protest may be more frequent and more powerful in other countries. The nature of the student demonstrations and the English riots over the summer of 2011, whatever their immediate background, are unprecedented in English history. As the former global imperial power and junior partner to its successor, the United States, the British ruling class has propagated an ideology based on the view that it has been the founder of modern democracy, taking it over, as it were, from the ancient Greeks (by contrast, the ruling class ideology in the United States rests more on the so-called ‘American dream’, of meritocracy winning out, even though there is much made of democracy). Hence the recent scandals of members of parliament enriching themselves through claims for expenses, and the clear connections between politicians, policemen, journalists, private detectives and the Murdoch empire have struck at the heart of that ideology.

Under increasingly harsh economic conditions, with the media constantly talking about reckless and consequently illiquid and insolvent banks, whose executives, unbelievably still earn millions in annual salaries, the ruling class and government have to find arguments to support the existing socio-economic system. Yet every day seems to provide reasons for changing it. The immediate implications of the ongoing Murdoch scandal lead to a demand for a more open and democratic political system, the control of companies and indeed the press by those who do the ordinary work, rather than a dictatorship of a single individual, like Murdoch, or the CEO of a bank or industrial firm. This is not socialism and it is not viable, or likely to happen, under capitalism, but it is the kind of question that arises and blows open the ruling ideology, in however inchoate a way.

Terminal?

It is almost as if the ruling class has decided to commit suicide. It is going for an economic policy which is at best utopian and at worst catastrophic. Austerity for the vast majority and increasing riches for the ruling class is only a viable policy under conditions where there is absolutely no challenge to the system, and ordinary workers are so weak, both healthwise and in terms of organisation, that they pose no threat.

There really is no alternative to the replacement of the capitalist system by a genuine socialist system, which in the end is the only rationally ordered or planned system, in which decisions

are made and controlled from below, not decided from above, however benign the ruler. Twist and turn as the beneficiaries of the system might, they have run out of strategies to delay change. As we have argued before, the ruling class has used finance capital/imperialism, world wars, cold war-welfare state and finance capital again as modes of survival. Finance capital has now imploded, while the colonies are now politically if not economically independent, the cold war is over and world war is no longer possible. The return to the welfare state without the cold war and Stalinism would only be the first step to loss of control, as became evident in the 70s of the last century.

Furthermore, it is clear that the global reach of the American empire is shrinking. The imperial power of the United States is in decline - and the decline of the leading capitalist power, without a successor in sight, can only herald the more rapid decline of the social system.

One might have predicted that there would have been a successor. There has been one such eventuality, after all, with the USA replacing the UK. However, Europe is engulfed in its own crisis, which is only expressing on a national scale the kind of inequality which exists in the society as a whole. There is no prospect of another country conquering the world, whether by force of arms or through finance capital, even if it had the industrial and military might of the United States without its debts. China, the country usually cited in this connection, is not in that position, and it does not even have the same drives or the same intensity of those drives, as modern capitalism.

So are we now witnessing the last days of the greatest empire the world has seen, the last days of a system which brought the world to a level of productivity so great that it made abundance for all a real possibility? The system was overthrown in Russia in 1917, and the world has been waiting for the potential replacement to show itself in a form other than Stalinism ever since. Delay is as good as a temporary defeat. In the end, Stalinism has been crucial to the preservation of capitalism, but it is no more and cannot be resuscitated. It is true that it is playing a negative role in Greece at this time and in a number of other countries, including China. It is less true of western Europe, however.

Subjective

As we approach the socialist future, the subjective plays an increasing role, as one might expect. In socialism, society is increasingly transparent and planning decisions are made by the population. The economy ceases to stand above mankind, and turns into the administration of things. Although we still live under capitalism, in spite of itself the ruling class has to rule and not leave the economy and society to an apparently impersonal market. However it is done - through governmental administration, through the parliamentary system, through the bureaucracy of the firm or through partially hidden ruling class institutions - the system is increasingly controlled.

In other words, before it comes to an end, there has to be a social-political form which stands in opposition to current political-economic forms. That does require a socialist party with intimate links to the working class. It has to be part of the majority of the society. It has to be trusted and it has to be internally democratic. There has to be a shift in consciousness towards socialism, in which the various doubts and slanders are discussed and dealt with.

As this shift has not occurred, capitalism is not directly threatened at this time. It is clear that there are threads leading to such a movement,

but they are as yet only weak and easily broken. In the 1930s Trotsky spoke of a crisis of leadership. In a sense that is what is needed today, but the leadership has to be based on the will of the majority and that is yet to show itself. In the 30s, socialism had more support, making Trotsky’s analysis more understandable, but he was only right in so far as one could say that there was no socialist party to lead. He had underestimated the power of Stalinism.

Where are we?

If there is no direct challenge to capital, that does not mean that it is not in systemic trouble. One cannot read a commentary on present political economy which does not speak of ‘lack of confidence’. This use of the word ‘confidence’ is understood to mean that capitalists do not see how to make money by investing in the economy, as opposed to keeping their money in the bank or under a mattress. Above we discussed the question of confidence in another context - that of the system itself - and I will look at the two meanings and their relation.

Today, cash is king, even though inflation is reducing its value. This is not the usual situation in a depression, when deflation increases the value of the money held, even if no interest is paid. There appears to be no short-term or long-term solution. After all, money could be invested in a long-term project, expecting a return in 15-20 years, if the rich had confidence in the system. Whereas the short term concerns immediate issues, most of which will be resolved one way or another within a finite time, the long term concerns the health of the system, whether it survives or not. In the post-war years there have been relatively long periods when the stock market was depressed, but then revived, as occurred under Thatcher.

The result is that the usual advice given by stockbrokers to middle class, as opposed to rich, clients is to work on a 20-year perspective, which is pretty useless to many of their customers, who are often over 60. There is confidence in the capitalist system, on the one hand, and confidence in the possibility of making money by investing in the economy, on the other.

However, some sections of the capitalist class - small- to medium-size businessmen - do not invest and attribute their market problems to trade unions, government regulation and particular monopolies strangling the market. They see the solution in a long-term clean-out of workers’ organisations, a reduction in the role of the government and the protection of the national market. The financiers of the Tea Party seem to be of this ilk. Their intellectual allies are often fanatical supporters of the capitalist system, which they see as being damaged by its enemies. To a degree their lack of confidence is exaggerated by their ideologically based belief in the market and the threat supposedly posed by others.

The more serious section of the capitalist class, which controls finance and industry, recognises the lack of opportunity and the limits to demand at a time of mass unemployment and the increasing proletarianisation of the middle class. Its problem is that its investments are longer-term and require a limited reflation, but this section is worried that such reflation would become more general and could not be controlled. In other words, it continues to uphold its strategy of the last 30 years, in which it turned to finance capital, and so low growth and anti-welfare state measures. Finance capital, however, has imploded and hence the strategy is no longer viable. This section has been talking, therefore, of investing in industry, but it is worried that this could increase the confidence of the working class, and hence is holding back.

Today, more than ever, business confidence, so-called, is dependent on confidence in the capitalist system itself, even though the individual investor may not think like that. There is no strategy available to the capitalist class which has any kind of realistic chance of success, other than going for the growth of productive industry, but the bourgeoisie is afraid that this will produce a return to the 70s, with a powerful working class demanding concessions, and ultimately the supersession of the system.

As a result, the capitalist class is not only divided, but at sixes and sevens, with no real solution in sight. No leadership is possible because there is nowhere to lead other than to failure, disaster and possible catastrophe for the capitalist class itself. The most successful leader at this time will be the one who is able to understand the dilemma before him or her and takes the longest road to that result.

Conditions mature

The logical outcome of the present impasse is that the rightwing parties in government will lose their majorities. In a relatively short time we may expect that so-called centre-left parties will be in government in Italy, Germany and France. The Greek and Spanish ‘socialist’ parties’ willingness to accept the instructions to go for austerity sets the pattern for all such parties. Their discrediting, *en masse* as it were, will deepen the general dissatisfaction with the parliamentary-style democratic process, given that existing alternative parties will have cut the standard of living, supported by the media. There are already a number of countries with substantial far-right parties and no doubt there will be more.

Unfortunately, the left has not been able to establish itself anywhere, thus far. In Portugal, where it made a substantial breakthrough in previous elections, its vote halved in the middle of 2011, during the general elections. The attempt by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) in France and also the United Secretariat to dissolve itself as a Trotskyist formation and form an anti-capitalist left has failed in France and Portugal. They have, no doubt, learned their lesson.

It is clear that the ruling class has no strategy for the maintenance of the capitalist system. It is not able to rule in the old way. The first condition for revolution, as enunciated by Lenin, is in place ●

Notes

1. M Wolf, ‘Britain must escape its longest depression’ *Financial Times*, September 1.
2. BNY Mellon, according to its own website has \$1.3 trillion under management and \$26.3 trillion under custody or administration: www.bnymellon.com/about/companyprofile.html.
3. *Ibid*.
4. J Cassidy *How markets fail* London 2010, p354.
5. Wolfgang Munchau argues that the optimum solution is a fiscal union, but that it may not happen or happen in time. Instead he argues that there could be a minimal political solution, but it would be monstrous (‘A euro zone quick fix will create a political monster’ *Financial Times* October 10).
6. Quoted in P Mishra, ‘India’s Tommy Hilfiger utopia is a bluff that will soon be called across the globe’ *The Guardian* September 10.
7. *Ibid*.
8. J Kynge, ‘The cracks in Beijing’s edifice’ *Financial Times* September 10.
9. C Moore, ‘I’m starting to think that the left might actually be right’ *The Daily Telegraph* July 22.
10. G Magnus, ‘Financial bust has bequeathed a crisis of capitalism’ *Financial Times* September 13.
11. J Gray, ‘A point of view: the revolution of capitalism’ *BBC News Magazine* September 4.
12. S Brittan, ‘Mistaken Marxist moments’ *Financial Times* August 25. Although Brittan takes a critical line on Marx, he appears to appreciate his depth.
13. R Skidelsky, ‘Life after capitalism’ *Project Syndicate* 2011: www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/skidelsky37/English.
14. M Cembalest and H Olsen, ‘Eye on the market’, item 6 - a commentary written for JPMorgan clients, October 7.
15. *The Times* October 20 2008.
16. Interview in *The Guardian* G2, August 3.

AWL

Zig-zagging social imperialists

What determines the Alliance for Workers' Liberty line is its support for 'democratic imperialism', writes socialist blogger **Arthur Bough**

When the 'Arab spring' blossomed in February, I warned about Marxists being carried along on a euphoric wave of bourgeois-democratic sentiment.¹ These revolutions were similar to the revolutions of 1848, which ended badly for workers, and gave Marx and Engels pause in recommending to workers that they should line up as cannon fodder for the bourgeoisie.

In our lifetimes we have seen similar events that also ended badly for workers. In 1979, a wave of euphoria for the uprising against the shah of Iran swept through the left, which failed to warn of the danger that was presented by other bourgeois forces, particularly the mullahs. The left adopted the attitude of 'My enemy's enemy is my friend', rather than adopting the position, developed by Marx and Engels, and later by Lenin and Trotsky, that the working class should focus on defending its own interests, developing its own independent organisations and maintaining a strict separation from the bourgeoisie. As Engels and Lenin, in particular, made clear, our aim is not bourgeois democracy, but socialism. We defend bourgeois-democratic freedoms not as an end in themselves, but only in so far as they facilitate the independent organisation and struggle of the workers.

Trotsky says in the *Transitional programme*: "Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilising the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulae of democracy (freedom of press, the right to unionise, etc) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie's agents (Spain!). As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones; factory committees, it may be supposed, will appear before the old routinists rush from their chancelleries to organise trade unions; soviets will cover Germany before a new constituent assembly will gather in Weimar. The same applies to Italy and the rest of the totalitarian and semi-totalitarian countries."²

In the 1980s, as a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's predecessor organisation, the Workers Socialist League, I wrote many documents and spoke at conferences supporting the majority position over the Falklands war, against the Thorne group, on these issues. It has remained, for me, one of the redeeming features of the AWL that it did not fall into the trap, like much of the left, of what they call "idiot anti-imperialism" - acting as cheerleaders for any movement that portrayed itself as 'anti-imperialist', no matter how reactionary that movement was. In the debate over the Falklands war, the position of the majority was to oppose vigorously Thatcher's war, whilst, at the same time, refusing to support Argentina, so long as the war remained one only of general Leopoldo Galtieri's invasion of the Falklands.

The AWL, since that time,

have moved ever further from that position, towards a policy of supporting 'democratic imperialism' whenever it is in conflict with some authoritarian regime. In Russia the AWL supported Yeltsin, who acted as imperialism's stooge. In Kosovo, it refused to oppose the imperialist war against Serbia, and supported the reactionary movement of the Kosova Liberation Army. In Iraq, although opposing the imperialist invasion, it refused to call for opposition to the occupation. The AWL then asked why Marxists would oppose Israel bombing Iran! It has given uncritical support to the demands for self-determination for Tibet, a movement headed by reactionary feudal-clerical elements, and again backed by imperialism. In Libya, in contrast to its visceral hostility to the 'insurgency' in Iraq, on the basis that its "clerical fascist" nature could provide no real freedom for Iraqis, the AWL gave uncritical support to the 'rebels' - an unhealthy broth of reactionary elements, from the clerical-fascist jihadists, who make up the backbone of the street fighters, to the former regime elements, who make up the 'bourgeois-democratic' front elements of the Transitional National Council, with its close links to imperialism.

This is a far cry from the AWL's professed adherence to the idea of a supposed independent 'third camp' of the working class, standing in opposition to the opposing camps of the bourgeoisie. When the minority in the AWL, led by David Broder, did propose the idea of building such an independent working class position in Iraq, opposing the occupation, to try to place the Iraqi workers at the head of such a movement, they were vilified! The AWL has travelled the same road as all its third camp predecessors - what Trotsky described as "a petty bourgeois sanctuary"³ - such as James Burnham and Max Shachtman, becoming apologists for 'democratic imperialism'. It has led them to supporting even those reactionary forces that are imperialism's direct allies.

Varying positions

A comparative analysis of the AWL's varying position in a number of instances demonstrates the point. The organisation argued it was not correct to raise the demand for troops out of Iraq, because it would mean the coming to power of the clerical fascists. Yet, in Afghanistan, it was equally clear that, if the USSR left, there would be a devastating civil war, and one group or another of clerical fascists would come to power. Nevertheless, the AWL still called for Soviet "troops out". In Kosova, as it has done in Libya, it argued that Marxists could not stand by whilst civilians were massacred. So, it refused to oppose the imperialist war against Serbia. Yet when Georgia unleashed a similar devastating attack on South Ossetia, massacring thousands of civilians, the AWL opposed the Russian intervention to prevent those atrocities. The key difference was that the AWL places the USSR and Russia in the camp of non-bourgeois-democratic regimes, which are, therefore, to be opposed. Serbia was also in that camp. But, Georgia, despite itself being far from a model of bourgeois democracy - its president, Mikheil Saakashvili, is even frowned upon by

western politicians - is in the camp of 'democratic imperialism'.

This social imperialism characterises the whole AWL approach, not any concern to be on the side of an independent working class or even moral revulsion at civilian massacres. In justifying its position of refusing to oppose the imperialist war against Libya, the AWL misquoted Trotsky in relation to the Balkan wars: "An individual, a group, a party, or a class that 'objectively' picks its nose while it watches men drunk with blood massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive."⁴

Even on its own, it is possible to interpret this quote differently. Instead of justifying the intervention of imperialism, a Marxist would interpret it as meaning that it was necessary to speak out against such atrocities, to rouse the international labour movement to come to the aid of those being massacred, etc. That would be the implication of an independent, working class, revolutionary internationalism. If workers were attacked by a rapacious employer, such as at Grunwicks, Marxists would call on other workers to support them. They would not advise workers to place their faith in the impartial intervention of the capitalist state, if it recommended they trust in some industrial tribunal.

But, it is necessary to understand the context of Trotsky's statement. He was *opposing* the approach the AWL takes. He was speaking out against the use of such atrocities, by opportunists, to cherry-pick which interventions they will oppose and which they will not. The rest of the quote from Trotsky, that the AWL missed out, makes that clear:

"On the other hand, a party or the class that rises up against every abominable action wherever it has occurred, as vigorously and unhesitatingly as a living organism reacts to protect its eyes when they are threatened with external injury - such a party or class is sound of heart. Protest against the outrages in the Balkans cleanses the social atmosphere in our own country, heightens the level of moral awareness among our own people ... Therefore an uncompromising protest against atrocities serves not only the purpose of moral self-defence on the personal and party level, but also the purpose of politically safeguarding the people against adventurism concealed under the flag of 'liberation'.⁵

Trotsky opposed the kind of opportunist policy of the AWL, which is manifest in its repeated, undeclared popular fronts with 'democratic imperialism' and its allies. In his response to the Palestinian Trotskyists, who wanted to abandon the position of 'The main enemy is at home', in regard to 'democratic imperialism', as World War II approached, he made this quite clear:

"That policy which attempts to place upon the proletariat the unsolvable task of warding off all dangers engendered by the bourgeoisie and its policy of war is vain, false, mortally dangerous. 'But fascism might be victorious!'; 'But the USSR is menaced!'; 'But Hitler's invasion would signify the slaughter of workers!'; and so on, without end. Of course, the dangers are many, very many. It is impossible

not only to ward them all off, but even to foresee all of them ... The workers will be able to profit to the full from this monstrous chaos only if they occupy themselves not with acting as supervisors of the historical process but by engaging in the class struggle. Only the growth of their international offensive will put an end not alone to episodic 'dangers', but also to their main source: the class society."⁶

Cheerleader

The AWL is reduced to commentating on the historical process, and its vision extends no further than the achievement of bourgeois-democratic goals. Losing faith in the working class to achieve even that, it is reduced to being a cheerleader for 'democratic imperialism', in so far as it is seen to be acting to implement what the AWL, mimicking Stalinist stagist theory, sees as the next stage to be achieved. What is ironic is that it ended up, in Libya, more clearly than anywhere else, acting as cheerleader for those very clerical-fascist forces that elsewhere it would have vilified. The AWL has been at the forefront in denouncing those, like the SWP, who have used the same arguments - now employed by the AWL in regard to Libya - to support clerical-fascist forces in Iran, in Gaza, in Iraq and in Lebanon!

Libya is the clearest example of this, but it is not the first time the AWL has adopted a similar position. In Iraq, it began by emphasising its belief that the 'insurgents' were essentially Sunni jihadists. In reality, it was clear that the most effective opposition was coming from Shia militias, being armed and financed by Iran. Yet, the AWL downplayed that, describing a Shia leader like ayatollah Ali al-Sistani as some sort of constitutionalist figure. This seemed like merely a repetition of the mistakes the AWL's predecessor had made over Iran in 1979, but it was different. The reason it downplayed the reactionary and sectarian nature of the Shia clerical fascists was that they were the allies of the occupation, against the Sunni sectarians and remnants of the regime of Saddam. Similarly, the AWL backed the imperialist-supported Fatah against the Iranian-backed Hamas.

In Libya, this development becomes easier to see. In pursuing this position, the AWL has repudiated many of the arguments previously used against the SWP and other "idiot anti-imperialists". In the past it correctly pointed out that the latter's argument - that former colonies have not really achieved independence, because they continue to be economically subordinate - is facile. In a capitalist global economy, it is inevitable that some economies will be stronger than others. Apart from some exceptional cases, this does not mean that these countries are not politically independent, and for workers there, the main enemy is their own bourgeoisie, not imperialism. The solution for workers in these instances is not some vacuous 'anti-imperialist' struggle, but socialist revolution. What the "idiot anti-imperialist" argument does is to give cover for a popular front of the workers in these countries with their own ruling class, against some nebulous external enemy.

But, in the case of Libya, the AWL abandoned this position and adopted the position of those very "idiot

anti-imperialists". In a comment on its website, Paul Hampton writes: "Libyans did not have 'ownership of their own future' under Gaddafi. What they had was the complete absence of liberty and the miserable prospect of more repression. They were not even 'independent' of the western powers since Gaddafi was brought back into the fold by Tony Blair. Nor was Libya free of the multinational corporations - look at the energy firms and the arms dealers who were knee-deep in contracts with his regime."⁷

The other "idiot anti-imperialist" argument the AWL has correctly attacked is the idea that support for reactionary, clerical-fascist forces was justified because these forces were the natural expression of a people that had suffered years of repression. This position was abandoned too. Sean Matgamna argued, in a post on the AWL website: "Is the NTC led by unsavoury elements? Yes. Are Islamists involved in the revolution? Yes. But what do you expect? If you wanted to wait indefinitely for a revolution that was spontaneously socialist, in a country with no freedom of speech, no kind of independent labour movement, no civil society - you'd be waiting a long time."⁸

So, no doubt, given the AWL's support for these forces, we can expect to see it on future demonstrations with placards proclaiming 'We are all Hezbollah'!

It may be that the AWL's hopes for the establishment of bourgeois democracy in Libya will be fulfilled. But, for Marxists, the whole purpose of our science is that it provides us with a method for determining our actions, not merely hope that things will turn out the way we desire - Trotsky criticised this rejection of the importance of method by the 'third campists'.⁹

If a stable bourgeois democracy is established in Libya, I shall be delighted. But Marxists should analyse the facts on the basis of historical materialism, and on that basis it has to be concluded that not only are the conditions in Libya not propitious for the workers, but they are not propitious for bourgeois democracy either. Given events in Egypt and Tunisia, both of which are far more suited to bourgeois democracy than Libya, Marxists should have been very circumspect in simply becoming cheerleaders for reactionary bourgeois forces in Libya, and should have focussed on defending and building the small working class forces, and thereby protecting it as best as could be from the dangers it is likely to face ●

Notes

1. <http://boffyyblog.blogspot.com/2011/02/egypt-what-is-to-be-done-part-1.html>.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text12.htm#fc.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text12.htm#fc.
4. www.workersliberty.org/node/16323.
5. Pathfinder Press *The war correspondence of Leon Trotsky* New York 1980, p293.
6. www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol05/no07/bulletin.htm.
7. www.workersliberty.org/blogs/paulhampton/2011/10/27/another-disgraceful-article-milne-libya.
8. This comment was posted under Matgamna's well known pseudonym, 'Dalcassian', on November 2, but, mysteriously, was removed from the AWL website shortly afterwards. Equally mysteriously, exactly the same comment - this time signed by a certain 'edwardm' - has been posted in response to a different article (see www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/10/27/seamus-milne-and-jonathan-steele-libya-and-tunisia).
9. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text12.htm#fc.

REVIEW

Pushed as far as we will go

Keith Pattison and David Peace **No redemption: the 1984-85 miners' strike in the Durham coalfield** Flambard Press, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2010, pp104, £20

The limitation of words is soon encountered when trying to convey the power of this quite remarkable pictorial collection of scenes from Easington colliery during that historically dramatic year.

Easington even without the strike was boldly typical of the Sunderland coastal pits. Huge winding towers dominating the blackened landscapes in all directions, the grey industrial mass of tips, chimneys and surface structures. On the skyline, stark and perhaps a little foreboding, the headgear of Easington, Hordon and Blackhall collieries dominating the teaming ranks of pit houses and dense communities like steel castles overlooking their subjects. These places were built and exist for one reason - to mine coal. Almost every living soul in this coastal strip is fed, clothed and housed on its industry. The pit dominates all aspects of life, labour, love and death.

This in itself would be a dramatic muse upon which to base an intense, highly focused black-and-white photographic study. But Keith Pattison was commissioned by Sunderland's Artists Agency to photograph the strike in Sunderland over the period of a month. As it was, he stayed seven months, from August 1984 until the last days of the strike in March 1985. This place at this time stands like a rock of working class history; it will be forever fixed in our consciousness and memory and will never leave us, from the oldest to the very youngest. That this will now be a tangible and believable truth is made far easier with the images caught in this book by Keith.

There are few words in this book - in many ways perhaps, enough words have been spoken on the strike (not all of them useful or accurate), but the adage, 'Every picture tells a thousand stories', is certainly apt here and to a great extent they speak for themselves and offer a truth beyond argument. Those few words there are have been marshalled by David Peace, author of the deeply dark and troubling, fact-based fiction *GB84*, reflecting 25 years after the event (and incidentally on the eve of the 2010 election).

Alan Cummings, former Easington lodge secretary and area executive member of the National Union of Mineworkers, Jimmy Johnson and his wife, Marilyn, were all 12-month activists during the strike. They ponder their memories, these photos and what that all meant and perhaps still mean. Jimmy explains that the Durham area had not in fact voted to take strike action, and only did so, on the casting vote of the area chair, in solidarity with Yorkshire and Scotland, but, once out, they stayed out, in villages like Easington firm and solid.

Alan is one of the officials who still feel aggrieved at the lack of a national ballot, but all the evidence shows that we would have won such a ballot anyway - the National Coal Board commissioned two opinion polls and both confirmed that a strike vote - taken in the heat of an already rolling strike ballot - would be successful. He knows *how* we came not to have a ballot - because conference, after seven exhaustive proposals and mass pithead meetings, voted simply not to and to call instead on all miners to respect picket lines. *Why* that was he knows too, but perhaps still does not agree with that rationale.

The issue remains vexed in any discussion of the strike, but these pictures and this story demonstrate it was the strike, together with solidarity and community cohesion in the teeth of every sort of brutality and deprivation, which was decisive here and not the means of its arrival.

Alan says: "We had a very young workforce. I mean the average age at our pit must have been 34 years. Didn't have many people at the pit who were over 55.



Alien force

By virtue of the redundancy scheme. And so the strike was solid. And traditionally our pit has a name that goes back to the 1920s as a really militant pit. So men were really good. And the women. That was key and all. Because if women wanted her man back, I think the man went."

Really that statement reflects the key focus of this book. Of 180,000-190,000 men on strike, the greatest number of pickets we managed to mobilise was 25,000 at Orgreave. This means 155,000 strikers *never* picketed, and yet remained loyal. That they were able to do so was without the slightest doubt due to the women's support groups and the solidarity groups around the world who held the fabric and moral of these villages together. They fed the families, organised the holidays and day trips away from the heavy, imposing presence of the occupying police force, organised the parties and hardship funds under the sullen gaze of the welfare agencies, who were following instructions to starve the miners back to work.

The toughest battle for the miners and their families was not on the picket line, or in that field at Orgreave, but back within the four walls of the family home, as it slowly became depleted of furniture and possessions, coming in from the incessant rain and snow, wet and demoralised, to an empty hearth and cold, damp house. Hungry children, despondent teenage family members. That battlefield was here, the World War I trench of the strike.

There are many close studies of people's faces in this book - deep, enquiring, searching photos. Intense, lost in thought and wracked by mental conflict. Photos of men on the cobbles, in idle groups, passing time. The intensity of the picket line, the sheer, raw anger at the audacity of scabs so wretched and shallow they break that link, that bond of solidarity and loyalty, in a social betrayal so deeply felt, the whole community reacts in a huge collective surge of repudiation.

The police enter these scenes, these alien and hostile streets as total outsiders, strange and at odds with everything around them; they look lost. They are unwanted, they do not belong here, they are the hostile occupation troops in a foreign country, they have neither the language nor the culture. They march, besieged on all sides by people

standing on their own streets and looking from their own windows, just looking.

In scenes reminiscent of occupied Belfast or Derry, the town goes about its business, as the army of police stake out shops and street corners, fields and back lanes. The armoured transits push through crowds sullen and unwilling to move. One is reminded of the cops in Harlem ordering the black crowds, "Go home", and their response: "We are home." For crowds of old pit lads and their wives it is a revisitation from their youth in the 20s: the same scenes, the same bitterness, the same struggle.

In scenes which could be interchangeable with the 20s or the 1890s, gangs of cops mount shotgun on solitary scabs, escorted through the back lanes, their heads bowed, their sin buried like their hands deep in their pockets, watched by betrayed children and their mothers from their doorsteps. An old lady in a headscarf walking with a stick passes the line of helmeted aliens, her facial resentment as evident as if she had been carrying a placard bearing the word 'contempt'.

Then there is the desperate scramble for coal from abandoned pit tips, from the beaches and the raging sea - anything to keep some cheer in the hearth and hot water at least enough for a bath once a day.

This book is a testimony and a monument, I think, beyond anything so far produced. It will stand forever in tribute to these coastal villages and the resilience of its population. Two thousand, five hundred men worked at Easington and only 54 went back before the end of the strike. But 32 of those men returned in the last two weeks, broken and dispirited, with no sense of direction or hope. It was the knowledge that we were now making scabs of good men that finally made us decide to end it together and march back together.

The final shot in the book is the mass lodge meeting voting to return to work with a forest of hands held erect. There are few smiles and cheers. Relief perhaps in this instance, but within 10 years it was all gone. Just the ghosts and the memories remain, though now too we have this book and a growing feeling that we as a class have been pushed as far as we will go and it is time to be bold and brave again ●

David Douglass

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a Communist Party member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

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

weekly worker

Climate conference greenwash

Nothing to contribute

The Durban conference on climate change is likely to be even more useless than its predecessors - **James Turley** argues it is time to serve notice on capital's stewardship of the environment

The first casualty of war, they say, is the truth. The first casualties of an international conference of governments on climate change, on the other hand, are invariably the paper-thin 'commitments' the various notables present blithely signed up to last time around.

The latest such jolly is taking place in Durban - and the actual role these events have in the real activities of bourgeois governments is neatly highlighted in the environmental impact of the November 28-December 9 Durban conference itself. The South African city is, to put it mildly, a bit of a trek for most of the visiting dignitaries; a group of boffins has calculated that a total of 15,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide will be unleashed upon a groaning atmosphere as a result.

Not to fear, though; the organisers have 'offset' the whole lot. Carbon offsetting is one of the bourgeois establishment's favourite bits of pseudo-scientific greenwashing; reducing greenhouse emissions in one place, so the idea goes, will allow you to increase them a little elsewhere. In practice, of course, this simply results in companies concentrating their dirtiest industries in the least environmentally regulated economies - congruent with the dictionary definition of the word 'offset', I suppose, but not exactly in the spirit of responsible ecology.

The particular Durban 'offset' scheme is such a peculiarly naked greenwash, however, that it is worth looking at in some detail. A couple of no doubt worthy local NGOs have set up the Community Ecosystem Based Adaptation (Ceba) initiative, which will throw money at various local 'green' infrastructural projects; "Delegates, corporates and residents of Durban will be able to contribute towards the project by buying 'Ceba credits' to play their part in helping offset the environmental impact," says local bureaucrat Debra Roberts. That's right - the organisers have written off those 15,000 tonnes on the basis of ... a *voluntary* scheme.

So it is with the conference as a whole: as the hours go by, it looks increasingly likely that the abortive Kyoto protocol is finally to be ditched. The agreement is due to expire in 2012 - many more naive green activists had hoped that a new, better treaty would replace it, but that now seems unlikely. Signed initially in 1997, the Kyoto agreement was on one level a victim of politics; later attempts to firm up the emissions targets cost the (in any case lukewarm) support of the United States under George W Bush.

The *Guardian's* environment blog is keen to point the finger at Canada this time around,² for playing hardball over its own carbon promises, which have remained quite dramatically unfulfilled. Indeed, Canada's net carbon emissions *rose* in the period from 1990 to 2005 (the year the Kyoto commitments officially entered into force) by over 50% (of the 36 industrialised countries to fully ratify Kyoto, almost all that have significantly



Not safe in their hands

reduced their carbon emissions - even by the extraordinarily vague standards of the Kyoto protocol - are in the ex-Stalinist bloc, and have not exactly been economic powerhouses in the intervening years).

In a sense it is not surprising that attitudes have since hardened even further - in 2005, Canada's ruling Liberal Party spiralled into an intense political crisis from which it has yet to recover; since then the government has been headed by the Tory, Stephen Harper, a quite odious individual with a great fondness for Bush Jr.

But, while it is no doubt true that the fickle particularities of bourgeois politics have been unkind to Kyoto and subsequent multilateral climate efforts, it is surely not worth the effort to grumble about American (or Canadian) intransigence 'ruining everything'. Underlying the series of agreements and international conferences since the Kyoto conference has been a common thread completely analogous to the PR-friendly 'offsetting' of today's Durban jamboree - governments talk big about targets which, however, are conveniently 'offset' into the future, so some other poor sod can face down the big oil and other industrial lobbies; or, better still, chicken out entirely. The

emergence of a Bush or a Harper is more or less written into the script.

What, then, is to replace even the pathetic fig leaf that was Kyoto? It is testament to the lack of enthusiasm for the current round of talks that the likes of David King, former government scientific adviser and still a man who finds himself in close accord with the official doctrines of the British state, is prepared to ditch the idea of a binding international treaty altogether. The logic is that offering 'encouragement' to governments to commit to voluntary targets is a better use of scientists' time than haggling over treaties for years without even the hope of getting the biggest polluters on board.

Exactly what makes the supporters of this line believe that states are *more* likely to fulfil voluntary commitments on the issue than (formally) binding ones is unclear; the truth is, this is code for the abandonment of any expectations that anything will be done. Certainly, the apparent tacit agreement with King of the various dignitaries in Durban begs the question - what on earth is this conference even *for*?

In recent years, the frenzied backtracking of the dominant world powers on their climate commitment

has taken a more worrying form still - 'offsetting' their own targets by dumping bigger commitments on countries further down the pile. Some remarkably underhand attempts to do so made headlines at the last of these gatherings, in 2010. Yet even this is more politically difficult than the 'first world' would like; not least because concessions to green concerns are increasingly and overwhelmingly in the nature of insubstantial PR jobs.

The nub of the matter is that capitalism as a system is remarkably badly placed to deal with ecological crisis, and (though such crises are not new to the history of humanity) peculiarly apt to cause them. Its incessant drive for the expansion of production cuts very sharply against the need to reduce emissions, which involves at the very least hard limits on many productive processes at current levels of technology and technique, as well as strictly-speaking unprofitable investments in 'greener' technology.

Now, of all times, such initiatives are a hard sell. It is fairly plain to everyone concerned that the economic crisis is far from over, and indeed that the worst of it is most probably still to come. The need for retrenchment is at the forefront of every 'responsible' government's mind, as they all flail in the direction of stemming the effects of crisis on their own turf. International cooperation in such circumstances is immeasurably harder to achieve, even on matters of mutual interest, such as, for instance, the need to prevent climate change-induced catastrophe.

Instead of anything substantial, then, we get an ever-increasing mass of guff about 'carbon trading', whereby emission allowances would be traded among companies as a pseudo-commodity. The problem is obvious - for this to work, there would have to be a hard global limit on total emissions; capitalism, on the other hand, only works if capitalists get out more than they put in. The result would be either

swift failure or the transformation of carbon credits into yet another dubious financial derivative, not different in principle from commodity futures, collateralised debt obligations and all the rest. They would come to represent exactly the same thing: that is, nothing. Even if - by some miracle - something hard *is* agreed in Durban, and serious enough attempts *are* made by the world's governments to impose stringent environmental regulations on industry, capital will, by its very nature, eat away at such barriers to its self-expansion.

There are innumerable barriers to the logic of capital, but the considerable dynamism of this unstable social relation finds a way to overcome them. Its inability to sustain the natural environment is better thought of as an absolute limit - if bourgeois society exhausts this world, it cannot make another. The scientific consensus on global warming, in spite of a huge number of points of dispute, is remarkably consistent - if there is not a drastic shift in the way the human race relates to the planet, the planet will have its revenge.

The series of international climate conferences no doubt reflects an honest concern on the part of many people to confront this issue seriously. Yet behind the rhetorical flourishes, mendacious compromises and tortuous deals, capitalist politicians have nothing to contribute to any such effort. That truth was better disguised in Kyoto and elsewhere than it is now - put simply, the administrators of the capitalist world not only have no ideas: they no longer have even the most perfunctory fig leaf to cover it up ●

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Notes

- 1 . www.southafrica.info/cop17/durban-151111.htm.
- 2 . www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2011/nov/29/kyoto-protocol-julius-caesar-durban.

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