



weekly worker

**Anniversary of founding of
'The Leninist': Mark Fischer
looks back over 30 years**

- Budget assaults
- SWP vanishing slogan
- Iran embassy stunt
- Clarkson furore

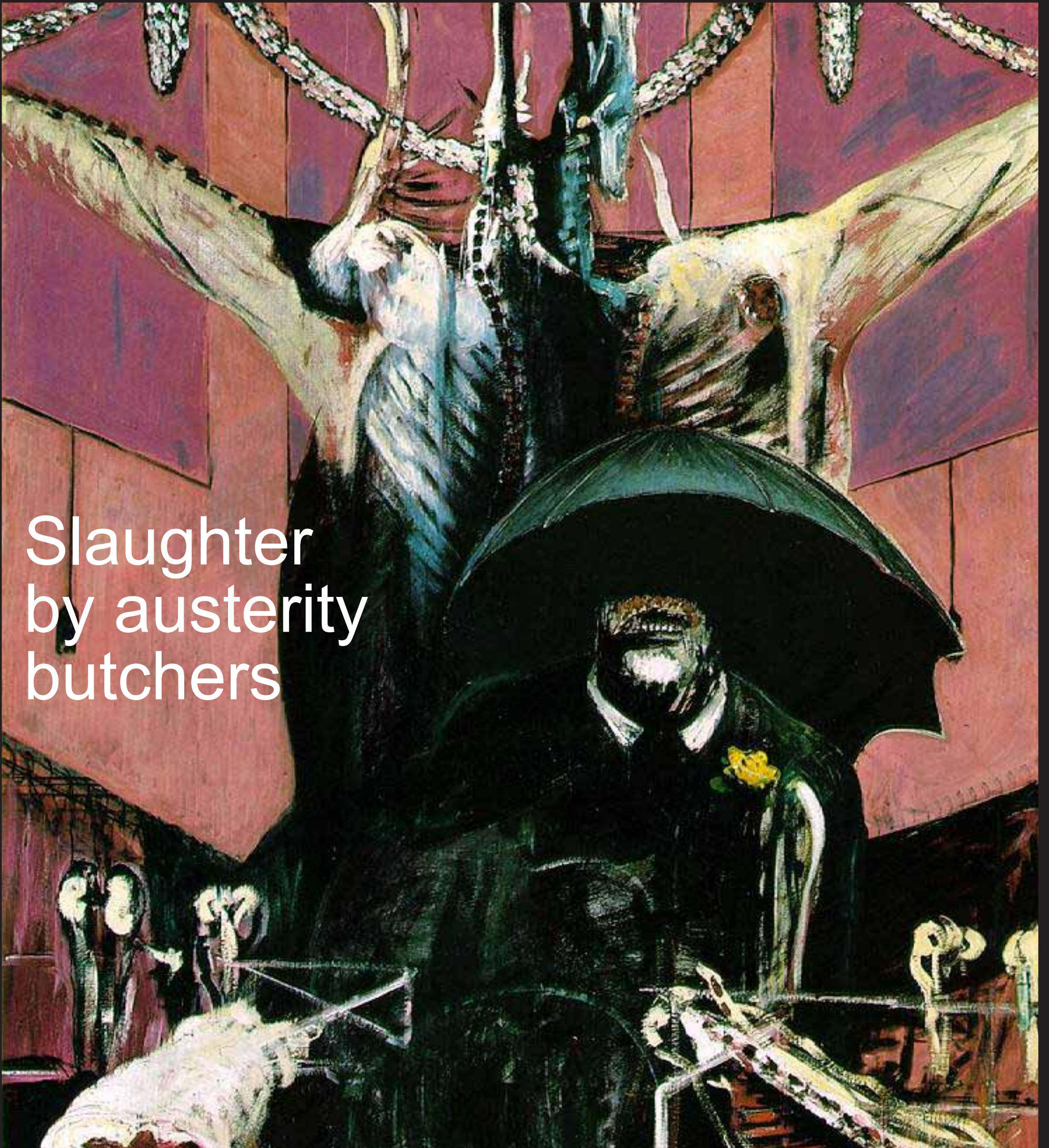
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Slaughter
by austerity
butchers



LETTERS



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

Pro-Mugabe

I'm afraid that Paul Anderson is stuck in the kind of mindset the left desperately needs to overcome if it is actually to challenge imperialism (Letters, December 1).

In saying that "The very term 'capitalism' without [acknowledging that it is interchangeable with 'imperialism'] is a suggestion of equality between nations", he shows no connection to reality. He simply uses the term 'capitalism' to describe nations and defines "equality between nations" in terms of development. There was certainly no equality in terms of the level of development before the turn to imperialism in the 19th century.

Many Marxist-Leninists target imperialism as the greatest threat - a moral evil on a par with fascism. Focussing on imperialism as the evil, as opposed to capitalism, has led to all sorts of ultimately counterrevolutionary ideas and downright bizarre positions from the Stalinists and their descendants. If imperialism is the main evil, we end up with Mao's 'bloc of four classes' and the patriotic or national bourgeoisie. They do not have solidarity with the workers of their nation, but simply long for the day when they will be strong enough to export capital to foreign lands.

Combined with the Stalinist theory of 'socialism in one country', Marxism-Leninism became nothing more than the bureaucratic path to capitalist development for underdeveloped nations. The transition to capitalism for many previously underdeveloped third-world states that were 'Marxist-Leninist' has been rather smooth for the bureaucracy. Angolan president José Eduardo Dos Santos is the exemplar on this one. He's probably Angola's richest man, owns a lot of land and many of Angola's largest companies, which are run by his family. Recently, his daughter's companies have turned the old colonial tables and are now investing in Portugal!

Anderson writes: "The mention of Zimbabwe as an opportunity for the working class utterly dismisses Zimbabwe's role as a target of imperialism." I am inferring from this that he believes that Zimbabwe - or, more precisely, the Mugabe regime - must be defended first and foremost. Mugabe's anti-imperialism has always depended on what he stood to gain from it. As leader of Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) during the Rhodesian bush war, he became the US and UK's preferred choice to win the 1980 elections because he was not pro-Moscow.

While Mugabe used foreign aid to post some impressive initial social and economic gains, he was willing to enter into an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programme, which almost led to the end of his rule in the 1990s. The Zanu elite were certainly in a position to profit from neoliberalism. By the time he turned on white farms and businesses in the late 1990s, he had already imprisoned, tortured or killed his African political opponents and terrorised the Ndebele. If Mugabe wanted to hold on to power and avoid a revolution, election loss or even a coup by members of his own party, he had to use anti-imperialism as ideological cover.

Certainly, the UK's withdrawal of funds to buy white farms hurt Zimbabwe. It did not, however, cause hyperinflation or the other economic disasters that Zimbabwe has suffered in the past decade. Yes, there is the legacy of the IMF structural adjustment programme and certain sanctions, but this did not mean that things had to

get as bad as they did. The economy has grown recently thanks to the Chinese. Mugabe bulldozed the slums of working class people on the outskirts of Harare in 2005 allegedly to provide land for Chinese businesses that had started to invest in Zimbabwe. Mugabe was now running a comprador regime to help Chinese capital. Compounding the collapse in food production, the Chinese started expanding the amount of tobacco grown in Zimbabwe. So hunger in Zimbabwe is caused by Mugabe tolerating Chinese exploitation of resources!

Mugabe's policies have hurt everyone from the middle class to the peasantry, yet it is the working class that has suffered the most. They have been jobless because of the collapse in industry brought on by the SAP. The working classes are attacked by Mugabe loyalists from the peasantry. Many of these peasants fought in the liberation war or in Mugabe's own internal security campaigns against opponents in the 1980s. For this reason they listen to Mugabe's 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric because they are desperately impoverished.

As a result of the working class being terrorised, the anti-Mugabe Movement for Democratic Change is led by the middle class and the recently dispossessed white farmers. Even the Zimbabwe International Socialist Organisation, affiliated to the Socialist Workers Party's International Socialist Tendency, had enough of them and pulled out (under dictatorial conditions you don't expect a group like the ISO to pull out of a popular front formation). MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai has proven to be both a voice of western capital and Mugabe's tool to gain stability. He can also appeal to workers because he was once a trade union bureaucrat.

While Tsvangirai was coopted by Mugabe under the threat of civil war, the quickness in which he folded is a demonstration of the MDC's pathetic liberalism. Mugabe uses terror. He tortures. He makes people disappear. Non-violent civil disobedience is going to end in violence. Mugabe can use the threat of civil war because the MDC has failed to mobilise the working classes. It just wants them to vote.

The class contradictions are manifesting themselves. The workers cannot get too radical. Many of them want the socialism that was originally promised after the end of white rule. The MDC isn't really promising much either other than an end to Mugabe. It can't even promise a return to the kind of society during the 1980s, because such redistributive economics would not get the thumbs-up from Washington and London, and no new IMF loan would come.

Mugabe could have probably finished the MDC off by now, especially since the economy is slowly recovering. Yet he hasn't. He continues to intimidate them with arrests and beatings to keep them in line and in government, so the continued survival of the MDC must have a reason. I believe he has used the MDC to provide competency. Other than the attempt to Africanise businesses (but not the Chinese ones), which is only going to benefit the existing Zanu-PF elite anyway, he hasn't taken any bold steps to create a more inclusive economy. Mugabe is quite content to let some pro-western liberals help administer the state, as long as they don't challenge his supremacy.

Given Mugabe's twists and turns and his willingness to accommodate Chinese capital, the only way forward for Zimbabwe is in the hands of the working class. Even bourgeois democracy seems impossible at this point. Calling for 'Hands off the People of Zimbabwe' is one thing, but those who dwell on keeping the west away

from Zimbabwe have a sad history of making apologies for Mugabe and his crony capitalism. That is not anti-imperialism. It is possible to say no to both Nato and dictators like Gaddafi, Assad and Mugabe.

While I do not know if Paul Anderson comes from the Stalinist tradition, his view of anti-imperialism is most likely influenced by it. It is something that the left must overcome if the working classes are actually going to emancipate themselves. Imperialism is but a symptom of capitalism, which is the main enemy.

Roscoe Turi
email

Learn Marxism

Hillel Ticktin argues convincingly that the first condition for revolution, as enunciated by Lenin, is in place ('Marx's spectre haunts the wealthy and powerful', December 1). This is that the ruling class has no strategy for the maintenance of the capitalist system and is therefore unable to rule in the old way. He also argues that workers do not yet pose a direct challenge to capital. Capitalism will not be threatened until there is a "shift in consciousness towards socialism, in which the various doubts and slanders are discussed and dealt with".

One of the most stubborn of these doubts and slanders is the idea that socialism is a utopian doctrine. Apologists for capitalism give three reasons why socialism is unrealisable. The first is that it is unviably economically, morally and politically. Socialism is inefficient and deprives individuals of their freedom. The second is that, even if it could be shown that socialism is a more rational system than capitalism, workers are too internally divided, demoralised and mutually antagonistic towards each other. They are therefore unable to form a class with the potential to take power and construct socialism. Finally, socialism is contrary to human nature. Human nature is essentially vicious, greedy and self-interested. Humans are therefore constitutionally prevented from creating a rationally organised society worldwide.

If Marxists respond to these doubts and slanders with outrage, they are in danger of being dismissed as dogmatic fanatics. On the other hand, it is not easy for class-conscious workers new to the socialist project to respond to them in an informed and reasoned manner. In order to counter the first point, workers need to be knowledgeable about both the political economy of capitalism and of Stalinism, as well as the Hegelian origins of Marx's metaphysics. The second reason requires them to be well informed about the effects of imperialism, Stalinism as a form of nationalism and the international division of labour. The third demands they understand commodity fetishism, alienation, anthropology and the history of ideas about human nature.

I therefore welcome the CPGB's decision to prioritise Marxist education ('Marxist education, not rote learning', November 17). I would recommend that, in discussions on the content of an educational programme, members be encouraged to study Ticktin's article, 'What will a socialist society be like?', from *Critique* No25. Ticktin's work on the political economy of Stalinism makes his presentation of socialism particularly enlightening. It is a good starting point for Marxist discussions of the political economy of capitalism, as well as the question of transition. It is sufficiently rich to lead on to further inquiries in philosophy and social science. Most of all, its content is an excellent contradiction to the bourgeois (and Stalinist) doctrine that socialism is an unrealisable utopia.

Ticktin suggests that a socialist party (or parties) with intimate links

to the working class is a necessary condition for revolution. In order to create the conditions for such organisations to emerge and flourish, Marxists can support and encourage worker activists to study individually and collectively. Marxists can create teaching and learning environments in which it is safe for workers to air the anti-socialist ideas they have picked up from living in a bourgeois society. Marxists can learn how to resolve these doubts and refute the slanders without antagonising and frightening workers in the process of doing so. These are not impossible tasks at the moment.

It is to be hoped that the lead taken by the CPGB in developing an ongoing Marxist education programme will be sustained and determined, and that others will be inspired to copy it.

Paul B Smith
email

Writing on wall

According to Hillel Ticktin, "There is no strategy available to the capitalist class which has any kind of realistic chance of success, other than going for growth of productive industry, but the bourgeoisie is afraid that this will produce a return to the 1970s, with a powerful working class demanding concessions, and ultimately the supersession of the system".

The view that going for growth is a strategy available to the capitalist class is palpably untrue, at least where the mature capitalist countries are concerned. *All* options are running out for the capitalist class. The first thing to point out is that capitalism is experiencing the most serious financial crisis in its history, brought on by a lack of economic growth. The bourgeoisie recognise that growth is the solution, at least in the short term, but bringing it about is another matter. That's one reason why it's wrong for Arthur Bough to argue that monetising the debts of countries like Greece and Italy can provide a solution to the euro crisis.

Rather than fearing that economic growth will strengthen the working class and lead to socialism, the capitalists have always used growth and prosperity to buy off workers and divert them away from socialism. As long as capitalism was prosperous, socialism could remain on the backburner and those who advocated it were ridiculed and marginalised.

But the capitalist class will find it increasingly difficult to start growth and keep it going. That's why the writing is on the wall for capitalism.

Tony Clark
email

Percentages

Ben Lewis wrote a fine article critiquing Die Linke's second draft programme ('Left rhetoric and reformist illusions', December 1). I would, however, like to point out a bit of a contradiction between two statements of his. First, he writes of "the working class majority conquering political power". But later on he writes about the need for the "working class to win majority support in order to reshape society". There's too much classless democratism in that latter statement.

Consider what James Turley wrote succinctly in his October 20 article, 'A global act of refusal': "But then, there are medium-sized concerns owned by a larger layer of capitalists, who, while hardly as flush as the transnational jet-set, still have a considerable stake in the system; and below them a large layer of small owners - the urban petty bourgeoisie, remaining pockets of small farmers and the managerial middle class - who are in a more ambiguous relationship to capital. A corner-shop owner may want the power of the corporate elite curbed; but in fact he is just as reliant on finance capital as Tesco. The working class, in turn,

has interests antagonistic to, or at least conflicting with, around 30% out of the 99%."

Assuming we maintain the scenario where the working class forms the demographic majority, still not everyone in the population is working class. This means that a 51% majority in the class does not equal 51% majority in the population. We need to win concrete majority political support from the working class - a slogan like 'We are the two thirds' would be more class-explicit.

'We are the two-thirds' could garner support from two-thirds of the American working class, but that's only 44% overall. Within the context of a revolutionary period, this percentage should not deter the class-conscious workers from 'undemocratically' capturing political power. On the other hand, if 51% of the general population were supportive, but 51% of the working class demographic majority opposed, then I would deem any seizure of power 'on behalf of the proletariat' as a coup d'état.

Jacob Richter
email

Third way

On Ben Lewis's argument on Die Linke and participation in a coalition government, I am not convinced that there is not a third way, such as agreeing that the SPD can govern, but that the left will not take positions within it. This is called a 'confidence and supply' model: you negotiate the budget and leadership of the government, but sit outside it and can vote for or against what you like.

We can see that the Green Party, whose politics were much more transformative than the left, had their radicalism blunted and were transformed by the coalition with the SPD. So you are right - the left would be in danger from any deal. However, I think it's a moot point, as the most likely outcome next year is that Merkel will strike a deal with the SPD to remain in power. I just can't see the SPD, Greens and Left Party all getting along in a three-way agreement, and the Pirates are too unpredictable. A CDU-SPD coalition is the only thing that will work. The left party can thus argue about this for another five years.

James Tomkinson
email

Key figure

Your readers might be interested to know that the an association called Les Amis de Robespierre in Arras, northern France, is campaigning to open a museum dedicated to Robespierre and the French Revolution. Robespierre was born in Arras and the house he lived in is now owned by the city council, which intended to convert it into a museum, but later changed its mind.

People's views on Robespierre vary enormously, but they are often expressed as undisputable facts with no background knowledge to support them. Les Amis de Robespierre would like to redress this situation. Whether we see him in a positive, neutral or negative light, no-one can deny that Robespierre was a key figure of the revolution and, as such, he should be better known to the world at large. The museum at Arras can only be a modest beginning to achieve this end.

There is a petition online that has already been signed by several eminent writers and historians, as well as members of the general public, from 27 countries around the world. The link to the petition is www.opc-moe.com/robespierre/cousin22.php. If anyone has any questions or would like to know more about our aims, please contact me directly.

Maria-Elena Pickett
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ANNIVERSARY

Three decades of open struggle

CPGB national organiser **Mark Fischer** looks back to the founding of the *Weekly Worker*'s forerunner

Thirty years ago, in 1981, the first issue of *The Leninist* hit the streets and proudly announced its existence as the organ of a revolutionary faction of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Defiantly, it stated its purpose was to "unfurl the banner of revolt against opportunism, to save the Communist Party". To that end, "*The Leninist* will wage an uncompromising ideological struggle, will demand the purging of the greatest threat to the party, liquidationism. This struggle has to be and will be *open*, in front of the masses, not a secret conspiracy hidden from view. Yes, an *open* ideological struggle!" (*The Leninist* 'Founding statement', winter 1981-82, p7).

Of course, formally the comrades were not to win this decade-long factional battle - the party was officially liquidated in 1991. However, as *The Leninist* showed in detail over those 10 years of struggle, the organisation had already been *politically* liquidated as a revolutionary vanguard long before the final *coup de grâce* was dealt by a special congress convened by the Eurocommunist-dominated leadership - "death by a thousand opportunist cuts", as *TL* dubbed it.

This 1981 publication had been preceded by two years of study and political evolution by the small group of comrades that put it together. Naturally, *The Leninist* group carried the birthmarks of its political antecedents in the left, pro-Soviet opposition of the CPGB of the 1960s-70s. Nor did it try to hide these. Unlike later groups, such as the now-defunct Revolutionary Communist Party and today's Counterfire, there was no attempt pretend it had 'no baggage' and was some squeakily pristine and miraculous new issue of a political immaculate conception.

Similarly, our organisation today is proud to say that essential building blocks of the method that was on display in the pages of *TL* - some in rudimentary form, it is true - are still part of the political DNA of our group. I will highlight just two.

First, there was a partisan attitude to the workers' movement as a whole and recognition of the need for a *party* of the class. The comrades of *The Leninist* were well aware of the political degeneracy of the CPGB in 1981 - activists from this period still with us recall their "shock" at the extent of the decay that taken hold when they re-orientated

back to the party after a relatively brief detour. Comrades from those early days talk of *TL* emerging at "the last possible moment": that is, just before it became impossible to make any impact or headway at all.

Yet, despite the parlous state of the CPGB, it remained an historic conquest for the working class of Britain. It was not some "sect which declares itself a party when its membership exceeds the dizzy heights of 100 ... it has an organic relationship with the working class, and thus organises a significant section ..." (*TL* No3, September 1982, 'A call to all communists', p2). As such, it was incumbent on all partisans of that class to join the battle to defend, politically cleanse and reforge the CPGB - thus the editorial statement, 'The call', agitated for "all genuine communists to join the CPGB" to go toe-to-toe with the opportunist and liquidationist trends that had engulfed it.

Now it is true that some of the groups to whom we specifically directed this call to arms were pretty eccentric in hindsight - to my knowledge, no-one ever heard of the John MacLean Collective again after its fleeting 15 minutes of fame in our pages. However, the approach we adopted here is still our method today. That is, to democratically unite all genuine Marxists into a party formation and thus *positively* resolve the crises and contradictions of sections of the workers' movement. (The *TL* faction was, after all, a positive resolution of the contradictions that were inherent to Stalinism itself. If we could make the journey, we reasoned, so could others). We were not then and are not now the sort of sectarian vandals which 'The call' pointed out dismissed the party "with a sneer and a casual wave of the hand" (*ibid*). Its decline and disappearance would be a setback for every section of the movement, we declared - and subsequent events have proved this unfortunately accurate.

We took the same partisan attitude to the crises of other sections of the left, and recognise that it is *not* a good thing that the Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party imploded in the way that it did in 1985; that it would *not* be a good thing if the *Morning Star* simply folded for lack of cash, as seemed possible recently; it would *not* be a good thing if organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales or any other viable group simply blew

scattering cadre to the winds, spreading demoralisation and intensifying the poisonous cynicism with which many advanced workers regard the sects. The barriers between them and the Marxists would be reinforced, to the detriment of both.

The second aspect of the method of *TL* which still holds today is that we are about uniting the revolutionary left under a genuine regime of *democratic* centralism - not as a set of organisational norms, but as an open process of winning and continually consolidating communist unity around a revolutionary programme. From our very first issue, we blasted the regime of bureaucratic centralism that then prevailed in the CPGB (although, ironically, the party actually had more operative democracy and openness for members than a group like today's 'anti-Stalinist' SWP!).

In a passage that speaks volumes about the state of the contemporary left, our founding statement of 30 years ago positively cited Lenin's polemics - "all open in front of the masses" - and concluded that "it is not open ideological struggle that is alien" to democratic centralism, "but 'pub room conspiracy'". We concluded: "Open struggle develops the understanding of theory in cadres, it steels them and in truth is the only way to achieve a genuinely united party. Plotting and conspiracy in matters of ideology only lead to the stultification of comrades, it isolates them from the masses and in the end can only result in bitterness and disillusionment" (*TL* No1, p5).

It gives us no pleasure that these words ring so true when we survey today's stultified, isolated and disillusioned revolutionary left today.

The Leninist was to make the transition from a quarterly theoretical journal (in truth its frequency had been more like three times a year) to a monthly newspaper in 1984 to meet the demands of the miners' Great Strike, to a fortnightly in 1986 and was superseded by the *Weekly Worker* in 1991 when, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the official party, the tasks of our organisation broadened and the format of what was, after all, essentially a *factional* journal no longer fitted.

Looking over old copies of *TL* now can be fun. It was often a thumping good read - lively, controversial, sometimes genuinely funny and always pertinent to the needs of what it identified as its target audience - those actually interested in Marxist ideas and the travails and triumphs that purported to serve them. Given our relative youth and the undeveloped nature of some of our ideas, there were obviously some cringe-worthy moments. But not too many all in all. These kids looked like they might make something of themselves and their organisation later down the line.

The sooner we can get the back archive of *The Leninist* onto the party's website - either the revamped model or the current makeshift version - the better ●

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 11, 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 13: 'A Christmas fairy tale: the shoes that were danced to pieces'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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>.

Breaking up?

Friday December 9, 6.30pm: Panel discussion on euro zone crisis, Brunei Gallery Theatre, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1 (nearest tube: Russell Square). Speakers include: Costas Lapavistas, George Irvin, Paul Mason, Stathis Kouvelakis. Register via RMF website.

Organised by Research on Money and Finance: www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org.

Euro zone crisis

Saturday December 10, 3pm: Presentation, room 3A, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. What the euro zone crisis reveals about capitalism, and its effects on the UK and US economies. Speaker: Hillel Ticktin, editor of *Critique*.

Organised by *Critique*: www.critiquejournal.net.

Left unity

Saturday December 10, 3pm: Left forum, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. A new organisation for the anti-capitalist left?

Organised by Left Forum Manchester: leftforummanchester@gmail.com.

Defend Council Housing

Saturday December 10, 12 noon to 4pm: National meeting, Camden town hall, Judd Street, London WC1 (nearest tube: Kings Cross).

Organised by Defend Council Housing: www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk.

What next after N30?

Monday December 12, 7.30pm: Meeting, Sacred Hearts Social Centre, corner Downey Street and Regents Road, Hanley, Stoke.

Organised by Stoke National Shop Stewards Network: www.shopstewards.net.

End violence against sex workers

Thursday December 15, 6pm: Candlelit vigil. Assemble Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, for march through Soho for meeting and movie, 7pm, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include: GMB sex workers branch, English Collective of Prostitutes, John McDonnell MP.

Organised by Sertuc LGBT network: sertuc_lgbt@tuc.org.uk.

Radical Progressive Queers

Friday December 16, 7.30pm: Public meeting, 'Objectification, sexual liberation and the new moralism', Exmouth Arms, 1 Starcross Street, London N1 (nearest tube: Euston). Speaker: Thierry Schaffauser.

Organised by Left Front Art: queerradicalcaucus@hotmail.com.

End the siege of Gaza

Tuesday December 27, 1pm: Rally, Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street, London WC1 (nearest tube: High Street Kensington). Three years since Israeli attack on Gaza, December 2008.

Called by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, British Muslim Initiative, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Friends of Al Aqsa, Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Palestinian Forum in Britain. Info: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Fundamentals of political economy

Saturday January 21, Sunday January 22, 10am to 5pm: Weekend school, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1 (nearest tubes: Warren Street, Goodge Street). Labour theory of value (Moshé Machover); Money and finance (Hillel Ticktin); Political economy and the state (Werner Bonefeld). Against Keynesianism (Mike Macnair). Organised by CPGB: office@cpgb.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.



SWP

The disappearing slogan

Whatever happened to 'All out, stay out'? Peter Manson investigates

After the tremendous November 30 day of strikes, the whole left is united in calling for an escalation and broadening of the action in order to fend off the Tory-Liberal Democrat austerity assault. But what about a political strategy - one that can arm our class with the means not just to resist, but to go onto the offensive?

As we shall see, such strategies are a little thin on the ground. In fact, for the Socialist Workers Party, the plan seems to be a combination of bigger, better and longer strikes, which will spontaneously gather political momentum, and 'Join the SWP'. Right up to November 30 itself, the SWP had been answering the question, 'How can we win?', by suggesting gradual escalation and, simultaneously, an immediate, indefinite general strike - the latter in the form of the anarchistic 'All out, stay out' slogan.

Thus, in last week's regular *Socialist Worker* - published a day early for sale to strikers and demonstrators - industrial organiser Martin Smith wrote: "The Socialist Workers Party says that the action must escalate. We want to see further one-day mass strikes of millions in January. Private sector workers and other public sector workers not yet out should be demanding to join the next wave of action. Our call will be for a general strike of all workers. But one-day strikes will not be enough - that's why we raise the slogan, 'All out, stay out'" (November 30).

The slogan had been given increasing prominence over recent weeks, yet, mysteriously, it seems to have disappeared immediately after November 30. So in the eight-page *Socialist Worker* special published

on December 1, the 'What we think' column concludes: "We can and must escalate the action and keep up the momentum of resistance." Full stop.

You might have thought that SWP comrades would have been raising the slogan at every opportunity during the action itself, and that this would have been reflected in the *Socialist Worker* reports the next day. But not a bit of it. The paper's correspondents had interviewed many strikers, trade unionists and demonstrators, including SWP members, but they all seem to have muffed their lines.

So we have quotes like: "One day is not going to win it - we need effective action again and again"; "I feel optimistic - this is just the start"; "We need to call on the TUC to call more action"; "If the government doesn't give in, we should have another strike"; "Next I'd like to see them call a general strike across the public and private sectors together"; and, finally, an exception that proves the rule - an anonymous striker says: "The next time we come out, it has to be all out indefinite." Even here the slogan has been disguised.

What about the final couple of interviews with senior SWP comrades Karen Reissmann and Mark Campbell? They are presented under the headline, 'After the November 30 strikes - how do we beat the Tories' assault?' So surely here at least 'All out, stay out' will be plugged? After all, it was comrade Reissmann who concluded the November 19 Unite the Resistance 'convention' with the memorable line: "All out, stay out on November 30. Then there'll be more strikes when we're all out, stay out!"

On this occasion her language was rather less inventive. She said:

"We have to escalate and pull more unions in We also need to name the date for the next united strike day ..." And she left it at that. As for Mark Campbell, a member of the University and College Union executive, he declared: "We will be arguing to come out again in January in our millions. We'll then extend that into February and we'll keep coming out until the government backs down."

Perhaps in the rush to edit up the reports for the eight-pager in such a short time this 'key' slogan was overlooked? Well, in that case it has also been overlooked in the latest *Socialist Worker* (reassuringly post-dated for next weekend in customary SWP fashion). Sean Vernell writes: "There was a clear consensus among strikers that a one-day strike would not be enough to win. It is important to push a strategy for all-out action. But the key issue facing us now is how to escalate as soon as possible" (*Socialist Worker* December 10). Escalate to what extent, comrade?

This is the same Sean Vernell who has been telling everyone at meetings and rallies for weeks how 'All out, stay out' has become increasingly accepted in his union, the UCU. Everybody must have suddenly gone off the idea of an immediate, indefinite general strike then.

Like comrade Vernell, Helen Davies, an SWP member of the Unison NEC, seemed to be building up to the inevitable rallying call, but then petered out at the end: "People feel that if the government doesn't back down, they're up not just for striking again, but for going further ... The question is over what form the strikes will take. I think everyone will be disappointed if it's not serious, united action ..." (December 10). Once again, we are left to work out for ourselves what that "serious, united action" should look like.

So what has happened? Has the central committee suddenly realised that 'All out, stay out' was just not on? Has it now accepted that it amounted to a cynical, sectarian recruiting stunt by posing as the most militant, the most revolutionary left group, rather than a serious attempt to arm the whole movement? If so, the internal *Party Notes* can surely be relied on to inform members about any line change. Can't it?

Afraid not. The slogan has just been dropped without explanation: "The argument now will be about 'Where next'. We want escalation, another day of all-out together as soon as we can (if possible even bigger), and we also support rolling, sectional and sectoral action that raises the level of resistance and builds the bigger days rather than being a substitute for them. We want the union leaders to name a day in January now for another strike by millions. And we don't want deals sector by sector" (*Party Notes* December 5).

All this is highly commendable - as far as it goes. Yes, it is essential to escalate the resistance, at the same time building the momentum in a way that draws as many sections of our class as possible into the action. But why has the CC not explained the dropping of 'All out, stay out'? Does the leadership seriously think that its members are so stupid they will not notice? Or is it a case of the CC itself being divided and, in true bureaucratic-centralist style, trying to

conceal its disagreements from those it is supposed to be accountable to?

But why do I say "as far as it goes"? Because, self-evidently, the capitalist assault is not limited to Britain. It is part of an international ruling class offensive and it ought to be met with an



Martin Smith: Indefinite general strike?

internationally coordinated working class response - at the very least on a European level. The post-strike *Socialist Worker* seemed to be arguing towards such a conclusion when in the 'What we think' column it stated: "And this isn't confined to Britain. All over Europe and the rest of the world, workers face the same attacks and are taking up the fight ..."

And so? If you were hoping to read a call for escalation and coordination across Europe, forget it. The internationalist build-up was merely driving towards the inevitable sectarian conclusion: "Join us - there's a whole world to win" (December 1).

The SWP clearly believes it is an excellent thing that workers all over the world are "taking up the fight". So what has it got against making that fight *effective*? If the international bourgeoisie can try to agree on common action, so can we. Why let them divide us instead of demonstrating that we are capable of resisting unitedly? The next step should be a common day of action *across Europe*.

Of course, the SWP is not alone in viewing the fightback, at least when it comes to practice, in narrow, British terms. The post-strike issue of *The Socialist* led with the November 30 speech given by John McNally, vice-president of the PCS union and member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Like the SWP's 'What we think' column quoted above, his demands for escalation are well and good *as far as they go*, but he concludes by calling for "national coordinated industrial action" (my emphasis, December 1-7).

To be fair, comrade McNally was meaning to pose "national" in opposition to 'regional' or 'sectional', I am sure. But it is a telling omission that neither he nor SPEW is thinking beyond these shores.

Similarly the *Morning Star* wants to see a stepping up. But with a

particular aim in mind: "Further, even more widespread action must be planned for the near future to defeat the government's vicious plans and force its resignation" (November 30). This is rather more vague than the SWP or SPEW when it comes to the next action, but it is clearer on what the aim should be: the end of the government and, presumably, its replacement by one headed by Ed Miliband.

The following day, it spelled out the corollary of this aim: "We are being confronted by the full might of finance capital in all its gory splendour, out to reverse the tide of history in its own favour. It's an offensive which must be seen for what it is. A coherent and planned initiative by the capitalist class. And it's going to take a coherent and planned resistance to defeat it - with a united and broad alternative programme to Tory 'austerity'. And that sounds like an accurate description of the People's Charter to us" (*Morning Star* December 1).

Leaving aside the fact that, once again, the fightback is viewed in purely national terms (what else would you expect from the *Star* and its Communist Party of Britain?), it has to be said that the Keynesian, reformist 'alternative' of the People's Charter is so obviously inadequate in the face of capital's global crisis that it is just ludicrous to even put it forward. The system *cannot be made to work*, comrades.

And that brings me to another unfortunate, though hardly unexpected, omission from the left's strategic thinking: the crying need for a single Marxist party to replace all the sects. That Marxist party, it goes without saying, must be armed not with pathetic national-socialist reformism, but with an internationalist, communist programme ●

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Fighting fund

Two to come

Just two issues of the *Weekly Worker* to come after this one in 2011. We shall be producing a bumper Christmas issue on December 22 before our two-week winter break. And, of course, the cover price will remain unchanged at just £1. Not to mention the fact that, as usual, you will be able to download the whole thing via our website.

But it goes without saying that a bigger *Weekly Worker* costs us more to produce. Just one more reason why we need our readers and supporters to keep on contributing to our fighting fund. In November we exceeded our £1,250 monthly target and this month we seem to be maintaining the momentum. After the first week we have £310, which is more or less on track for where we need to be.

Among the donations was £25 from RG, who tells us he has been reading this paper "off and on for many years", but "always on the internet, since I've never lived in the UK, and it finally sank in that I ought to help you out a little". Quite right, comrade. If only we had more online readers (there were 16,881 last week) who thought in those terms. Comrade

RG concludes: "I wish there was a paper like yours here in Italy, then I might have more of a clue of what the hell's going on ..."

We also received an email from comrade BB, who added £20 to his resubscription (paid for directly into the *Weekly Worker* account by bank transfer). The comrade, for some reason, didn't get his print copy a couple of weeks back and so, "I had to be one of the online readers that week, which just reinforced to me how much I value the paper edition."

In addition to those two, RI sent us a £10 cheque, while the largest part of what came in took the form of standing orders, including four regular donations of £30, plus a dozen or so for smaller sums. But they certainly all mount up.

Let me end with a plea for comrades to follow the example of RG, who used our PayPal facility to make his donation. It is easy and quick - and a way of showing your appreciation ●

Robbie Rix

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

NOVEMBER 30

Keep quiet and drive

There have been calls for Jeremy Clarkson to be sacked and hauled before the courts for his 'shoot the strikers' tirade. **Harley Filben** disagrees

And it was all going so well. November 30 saw two million workers on strike, and possibly 200,000 people on marches around the country; despite the rather ridiculous attempts of David Cameron to brand the walkout a "damp squib", it can nonetheless be chalked up as a much needed show of strength for the beleaguered trade union movement.

It was not Cameron, however, but his Chipping Norton chum, Jeremy Clarkson, who - unwittingly - managed to ruin everything. Clarkson, readers will be aware, is best known as presenter of the BBC's flagship motoring slot, *Top gear*; it is widely loved and derided in more or less equal measure for its unabashed macho oafishness and disdain for prissy *Guardian* reader types.

Clarkson was booked onto another BBC slot, the qualitatively more inane *One show*, to promote his latest DVD. Not two hours later, the Beeb was pushed into a grovelling apology, after Clarkson's comments, as they insist on saying these days, "went viral". "I would take them outside and execute them in front of their families," Clarkson said of the N30 strikers. "I mean, how dare they go on strike when they've got these gilt-edged pensions that are going to be guaranteed, while the rest of us have to work for a living?"

By Friday night, the BBC had recorded 21,000 complaints - the most on record since the infamous 'Sachsgate' scandal that cost the jobs of Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand. Clarkson's attempts to claim that his remarks had been taken out of context were just not enough to quell the outrage - he too was forced to apologise. The whole world, it seemed, had gone mad - not least Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, who announced his intention to take legal advice - and possibly refer Clarkson's comments to the police. Ed Miliband even managed to incorporate the farrago into his tortuous N30 balancing act, calling the tirade "disgusting". David Cameron could only respond that if Clarkson did say these things, his remarks were "silly".

This is a good moment to ask the question: *did* Clarkson call for strikers to be shot in front of their families? The answer is: not really. In this case, the weasel words 'out of context' really do apply. The broad outline of the *One show* sequence is: the presenters half-jokingly asked what his opinion on the strikes was, at which point he praised them to

the skies: there was no traffic, you could get a table at any restaurant in London you liked ... to say nothing of the warm glow of 1970s nostalgia. The presenters, very much in on the set-up, pointed out that this is the BBC after all and opinions should be balanced. So Clarkson offered the contrary opinion that has got him into so much bother.

One does not have to be a hardened student of literary theory to understand that there are two targets of this joke. The first is the BBC's notional commitment to political neutrality and 'balance'; the second is Clarkson himself, and his own reputation as a belligerent, macho rent-a-gob. Seasoned *Top gear* viewers will note that the latter accounts for about half the jokes in an average episode. Clarkson knows he is ridiculous, and rather onanistically mines his own reputation for comedy gold week in, week out.

The only insult here to the N30 strikers is, frankly, how little he cares about them at all, being that they are, after all, not Jeremy Clarkson; no doubt, this notoriously rightwing man was not out on a picket line leading a chant of "The workers united will never be defeated", but one suspects he is rather less put out by them than his tennis partner, Cameron. The closest thing to a devastating put-down here is the hoary old line about 1970s nostalgia.

So why is there such a hoo-ha over all this? There is, it should be noted, a positive side to it: a sense that the workers went into the strike knowing there was an ideological battle that would inevitably accompany an action on this scale. There cannot be many of the two million who walked out unaware of the increasingly desperate admonitions of 'irresponsibility' from the government and the increasingly hysterical jeremiads from the gutter press. Indeed, it is a battle we largely won; all manner of polls, from 'proper' ones by the likes of ComRes to surveys of the *Daily Mail*'s internet readers, indicated a wide base of support for the walkout.

Reactionary diatribes are to be expected, in this case - notable is the Murdoch press's inability to make up its mind on December 1, with *The Sun* mocking the allegedly pathetic failure of the walkout and *The Times* talking up the numbers and the disruption. The willingness to seize on the Clarkson insult is complicated, of course, by the matter that striking workers *have* actually been shot at various times and places - that was Winston Churchill's favoured

course of action in 1926, although he shrank away from it. The red flag is red partially to symbolise the tragic sacrifice of many working class partisans.

Unfortunately, this explosion of brittle, unfocused rage is hardly a positive response. The accumulation of 20,000 complaints against the BBC is a little too redolent of the Sachsgate farce; perhaps more pertinently, it puts one in mind of the storm of controversy over Chris Morris's *Brass eye* special on paedophilia (or, more accurately, British society's schizophrenic attitude to children), in which various leading dignitaries queued up to score cheap populist points against Morris and Channel 4 without bothering to watch the programme.

And so we have Ed Miliband frothing at the mouth in

parliament. 'In front of their families' and Dave Prentis threatening to call in the police to see if Clarkson is guilty of some unspecified 'hate crime'. These two certainly have the ring of *weakness* about them, not strength. In the case of Ed Miliband, the reasons are obvious - the pathetic contortions he and his cronies went through on the issue of the N30 strike have been a sorry spectacle for a couple of weeks at least.

There is nothing more miserable than the sight of a Labour leader faced with industrial action, and the problem was accentuated by the fact that the rightwing press and government had failed to turn the population against the strike; Miliband and his cronies had to oppose the strike in order to appease capital, but not condemn it and alienate Labour from the public mood. Clarkson is a convenient foil for the Labour leadership to appear sympathetic to the strikers' cause, without actually doing anything to help.


As for Prentis, his day in the sun on November 30 should not lead us to forget what a criminally rightwing Labourite he actually is; he does not have much stomach for a sustained battle with the bosses and the government, and if he has his way Unison will now be trooping back to the negotiating table. It is mass pressure that compelled him to go through with the walkout, and he has every interest in diverting that mass pressure elsewhere - even to the most ephemeral scandal.

His prompt recourse to his lawyers more or less sums the man up: a career bureaucrat, with a bureaucratic

for the BBC to terminate Clarkson's contract forthwith. This is more understandable; after all, do we not fund his antics rather generously through the licence fee? Why should we have to tolerate the contempt of people who make upwards of a million pounds annual income out of our pockets? Even this, though, is pretty ridiculous. The BBC is a propaganda machine for the British state; it presents all kinds of reactionary politics, and most of those politics are presented as bald 'facts', behind the fig-leaf of 'balance' so crudely sent up by Clarkson in this case. However tasteless his joke, it surely does not compare to, say, the BBC's obscene coverage of the Mavi Marmara massacre last year.

Clarkson is a reactionary, and not a particularly sophisticated one. A Twitter-storm of affected outrage merely





FANTASTIC REALITY

Second edition of Jack Conrad's Marxist critique of religion - coming soon

response to everything. If something goes wrong, drag it through the courts. Prentis, like all bureaucrats, fears mass initiative - his instincts point in a different direction, whereby the fate of his members can, in spite of everything, be left in the hands of the lawyerocracy that has all but outlawed effective trade unionism in the last 30 years.

He was not the only one to suggest that anti-democratic 'hate speech' laws might be an appropriate solution to the Clarkson 'problem'. In this, frankly, he is digging all our graves; it is hardly the case that the left is immune to outbursts of bloodthirsty rhetoric (humanity will not be happy until the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist!), and, the wider one prises open the remit of such legislation, the greater the risk that even brother Prentis will find himself on the wrong end of legal repression.

This was also the week that Emma West, now immortalised as the 'racist tram lady', was arrested for launching into a xenophobic tirade against the 'Poles' and 'blacks' infesting Britain, on a tram from Croydon to Wimbledon. West's racism is not a pleasant thing to see, but it was hardly murderous stuff - more of a cab driver moan than a Nuremberg rally-style call to mass murder. She will no doubt go down for some ill-defined hate crime, while the public school racism (and, for that matter, general contempt of the lower orders) typical of the upper echelons of the establishment will go unpunished.

The other widely popular call is

feeds his ego (which is well fed enough already); calls for the BBC to sack him merely make him look like a daring rebel, rather than a fully paid-up member of the Chipping Norton set. Calls for his prosecution are downright dangerous. What, then, is one to do? It would surely be best to turn his own tools against him.

The lefty comedian, Stewart Lee, memorably sent up *Top gear*'s love of aggressive cheap shots by saying this of the near-fatal car crash of Clarkson's colleague, Richard Hammond, during a shoot: "I wish he'd been killed in that crash. I wish he'd been killed and decapitated. And I wish the next series of *Top gear* had been presented by Jeremy Clarkson, James May and Richard Hammond's severed head on a stick. It's just a joke, like on *Top gear* ... But coincidentally, as well as it being a joke, it's also what I wish had happened." It was a routine which managed to shock the *Daily Mail* into another round of 'Ban this sick filth' outrage; this time around, the *Mail* gets to be the voice of reason against the humourless PC brigade.

I would propose, then, that better than 21,000 complaints to Ofcom would have been 21,000 carefully crafted death-threats directed at Jeremy Clarkson. The creativity of the masses has the power to reshape the world - showing an idiotic provocateur how it's *really* done should be small work. As it is, the brittle response to his joke is an embarrassment to the workers' movement, just when we were looking to be regaining our strength ●

ECONOMY

Slaughter by austerity butchers

The 'Merkozy' plan for greater 'fiscal union' looks set to be another failure, writes **Eddie Ford**



Making the working class pay

With the clock ticking loudly against the euro zone project, if not the continued existence of the actual European Union itself, European leaders are - yet again - holding crunch, 'make or break' talks on how to resolve the crisis. *Déjà vu*. There are wide expectations therefore that the European Central Bank's December 8 monthly policy meeting will outline new measures and then on December 9 there will be a crucial - excuse the cliché - EU summit in Brussels.

However, nothing seems to be working. The euro crisis continues inexorably, threatening to bring down the house of cards that it is the world economy. Perhaps desperately, on November 30 the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the central banks of the UK, Canada, Japan and Switzerland announced that as from December 5 they would take "coordinated action" to contain the growing credit crisis among the various euro zone banks - and China too said it would "free up" money for its banks to lend to Europe by cutting the minimum amount of cash the country's banks have to hold in reserve to 21% from 21.5%. Mere tinkering.

The idea is to provide liquidity to the chronically dysfunctional financial system by lowering the price on existing dollar swaps by half a percentage point, making it easier for banks to get access to dollars. Central banks have also agreed to supply liquidity in other major currencies if needed. Hitherto, euro zone banks have been struggling to raise dollars as the traditional sources of dollar funding - such as US money markets - have become extremely reluctant to make short-term loans to many European banks. Either that or they are simply asking too high a price to do so, immediately evoking fears that the 2007-09 credit crunch/economic crisis is about to repeat itself - but possibly on a far worse scale.

Not everyone was impressed. For Michael Hewson, a market analyst at CMC Market, "basically all they are doing here is quantitative easing on steroids" - which is fine as far as it goes, but "it does not deal with the underlying issues". Similarly, the governor of the Bank of Japan, Masaaki Shirakawa, was quoted on the Dow Jones news agency as saying that this new initiative would

only have a "limited impact" on the bigger economic problems unfolding in the euro zone - the European debt problem "can't be solved by liquidity provisions alone".

In other words, investors are fleeing the euro zone bond market and the sovereign debt crisis engulfing the continent could see *countries* collapse - not just banks.

Euro downgrade

Surely adding to the heat in the Brussels kitchen, on December 5 Standard and Poor's rating agency announced that it had put 15 euro zone states on "credit watch" - not to mention the European Financial Stability Facility mechanism as well. The 'watched' countries include Germany, France, Austria, the Netherlands, Finland and Luxembourg, all of which currently enjoy triple-A status. This raises the dreaded possibility of debt contagion spreading from the 'periphery' of southern Europe to the core countries. For example, France could be downgraded by two notches, a potentially devastating blow for the second largest euro zone economy.

In explanation, S&P said the decision was triggered by the belief that "systemic stresses" in the euro zone "have risen in recent weeks to the extent that they now put downward pressure on the credit standing of the euro zone as a whole". These "stresses", according to the statement, take the form of "tightening" credit conditions across the euro zone and "markedly" higher risk premiums on a growing number of euro zone sovereigns, including some that are currently rated triple-A.

Then there are the "high levels" of government and household indebtedness and the "rising risk of economic recession" in the euro zone as a whole - there is now a "40% probability" of a fall in output in 2012. An assessment shared by the Markit's purchasing managers' index (PMI) of activity, which dropped to 46.4 in November from 47.1 in October - any reading below 50 indicates economic contraction.

Just as importantly for S&P, there are the "continuing disagreements" among European policymakers on how to tackle the "immediate market confidence crisis" and in the longer term how to ensure "greater economic, financial and fiscal convergence" among euro zone members. Taking

everything into account, S&P concludes that there is a "one in two chance" that those countries placed on "credit watch" would see their credit rating fall within 90 days, though there was an implication - or threat - that the downgrades could happen as soon as the weekend if the EU leaders gathered at Brussels failed to come out with anything convincing.

Unsurprisingly, S&P came under heavy fire for its decision - some even suggested that it was a nakedly political attempt to undermine the Brussels summit and drive a wedge between Europe and the United States. The chairman of the euro group, Jean-Claude Juncker, complained that S&P's move was a "wild exaggeration" and "unfair" - whilst Christian Noyer, the governor of the Bank of France, said the rating agency's views were "completely at odds with events". His Austrian counterpart, Ewald Nowotny, perhaps suffering from a bout of paranoia, thought that the "timing and the content of this warning has a clear political context".

But, totally unrepentant, Moritz Kraemer, S&P's head of European sovereign ratings, offered the opinion that the European leaders' efforts to date had been "hesitant" and "piecemeal", and that "our experience with previous summits suggests that it is far from certain" that anything meaningful will emerge. Frankly, it is hard to disagree.

On the day that S&P issued its downgrade threat, Angela Merkel and Nicola Sarkozy were holding crisis discussions in Paris with the intention of cobbling together a plan which they could then present to the summit meeting on December 9. They would "take note" of S&P's warning, we heard, and French foreign minister Alain Juppé explained that the Merkel-Sarkozy talks were "precisely the response to one of the major questions" asked by S&P: namely, the "insufficiency of European economic governance".

Fiscal union

The 'rescue plan' for the euro, in so far as there appears to be one, revolves around the 'Merkozy' scheme for greater or even full "fiscal union" within the euro zone. Essentially, the Merkozy proposals are for a regime of automatic sanctions against any country which runs up a deficit of more than 3% of GDP; a so-called 'golden rule' built into each euro zone member's budget forbidding them from running up a deficit, with the European Court of Justice acting to "verify" whether such a transgression had taken place or not; making sure that oppressed and downtrodden private investors are never again asked to take huge losses, as in Greece; bringing forward from 2013 to 2012 the replacement of the European Financial Stability Facility with the European Stability Mechanism, with decisions based on a "qualified majority", as opposed to the unanimity currently required; and for euro zone leaders to meet every month as long as crisis continues in order to "discuss growth".

At a joint press conference on December 6, Sarkozy sternly declared that things in Europe "cannot continue as they are" - it never hurts to state the obvious - and that the Franco-German desire was for a "forced march" aimed at "re-establishing confidence in the euro zone". In turn, Merkel stated that the two countries were "absolutely determined" to maintain a "stable" euro and wanted to see "structural changes which go beyond agreements"

- meaning changes to the EU treaty. Ideally, they both said, these "treaty changes" would be implemented by all 27 member states of the EU, but if that proved not to be possible - is the pope a Catholic? - then just the approval of the 17 states that have adopted the euro would be sufficient.

As for Eurobonds (or 'stability bonds') - a German red line - we were told that they have been ruled out as a solution, Sarkozy describing it as a "strange idea" premised on the notion that "harmonising the debt" would be beneficial for the EU. Of course, this represents a humiliating U-turn for the French government, given Sarkozy's previous agitation for Eurobonds - fearful of what might happen to French banks, heavily overexposed as they are to Greek, Italian and Spanish debt, without the ECB acting as a lender of last resort. However, logically, any plan for fiscal union must as a necessity require active and expanded intervention by the ECB - Eurobonds or no Eurobonds.

Going by precedent, the chances of this "fiscal union" actually doing what it says on the tin - saving the euro - look slim indeed: more like another failure in a long history of failures. After all, we have had a near endless parade of 'grand plans' and 'rescue packages' which turned out to be nothing of the sort: a quick examination of the small print revealing that no real action was being undertaken. Just smiles and handshakes in front of the cameras. Therefore there is no particular reason to think the Merkozy plan will be the salvation of the euro; more like far too little, far too late. A sentiment reinforced by Sarkozy's comment that EU leaders "must move quickly", by which he meant that treaty changes should be "concluded" by March - a strange definition of "quickly". Meanwhile, the credit markets and money supply is freezing up *now*.

IMF shift

The stakes are high. According to EU commissioner Olli Rehn, the "economic and monetary union will either have to be completed through much deeper integration or we will have to accept a gradual disintegration of over half a century of European integration". Juppé struck an even darker tone, talking about an "existential crisis" for Europe - one that could even degenerate into violent conflict. "We have flattered ourselves for decades that we have eradicated the danger of conflict inside our continent," he remarked, "but let's not be too sure."

To stop the "disintegration" of the euro requires a *lot* of money, whether to recapitalise the banks or bail out 'distressed' countries. Supposedly, this was to come from ramping up the financial firepower of the EFSF/ESM - maybe to something in the region of €1.2 trillion, a figure that most serious analysts regarded as inadequate. But following a meeting of euro zone finance ministers last week it was admitted that the bailout fund would probably be only half as big as originally hoped for, at about €625 billion. Less than inadequate. As the crisis gets deeper, the 'solutions' are getting thinner.

Confronted by the ever diminishing bailout fund, Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister, signalled a policy shift towards the International Monetary Fund - declaring that he was now "open" to increasing the IMF's resources through a series of bilateral loans, thus reversing the stance Berlin took at the G20 summit at Cannes on November 3. In this way, it seems, the

ECB can get more directly involved in protecting the euro via IMF interventions - but no Eurobonds, please: we're German.

Some more details have emerged after *The Daily Telegraph* published a "confidential document" by Herman Van Rompuy, the European Council president, in which he backed plans for a "new fiscal compact" for the euro zone. The text called for "additional measures", including giving the ESM a banking licence which would potentially allow it access to hundreds of billions of ECB liquidity, and the document argues that euro zone central banks, backstopped by the ECB, could step in to "ensure the IMF has sufficient resources to deal with the crisis through the provision of additional means" - like bilateral loans.

Mario Draghi, the new ECB president, has also hinted that the bank is ready to act more aggressively to fight the euro zone debt crisis - if the European leaders agree to stronger deficit and debt rules. Fiscal union would be the "most important element", he said, and argued that a "new fiscal compact would be the most important signal from euro area governments for embarking on a path of comprehensive deepening of economic integration"; it would present a "clear trajectory for the future evolution of the euro area". Acknowledging that credit had tightened "seriously" in recent months and that weakening economic growth "does not bode well", Draghi informed the European parliament that the "most important thing for the ECB is to repair the credit channel". He added that the ECB was particularly aware of the "continuing difficulties" for banks in raising capital. That is, the ECB will step up its bond-buying programme if the EU leaders commit themselves to a new fiscal pact or union.

Increasingly alarmed by the European crisis - unchecked it could tip the US economy into a full-on depression - treasury secretary Timothy Geithner said the US backed Germany and France's plans to create a "fiscal union" and supported the "constructive" efforts of the IMF in backing the euro zone. But, of course, he refused to commit extra US money to the fund - we have our own problems, you know.

One thing is for sure: any "fiscal union" from above carried out by the Eurocrats and bankers (even if such a thing is possible, which is extremely doubtful) will require *more* attacks on the working class; more 'balancing of the books', more austerity drives. That has been made more than clear by the likes of Merkel, Schäuble, Rompuy and Draghi. Hence the Greek, French, Irish and Italian parliaments have approved another round of vicious, anti-working class, austerity measures - even if Italy's welfare minister, Elsa Fornero, had the semi-decency to start crying (with shame?) at a news conference unveiling the latest attacks. Unlike the capitalist robot, Edna Kerry, who in a TV address on December 4 told the working class that the 2012 budget "will be tough" (on workers and the majority) because "it has to be"; therefore VAT will be hiked to 23%, a new household tax imposed, child benefit reduced and social welfare slashed even more.

In or out of the euro, with or without "fiscal union", the only 'solution' on offer is to make the working class pay for the failings of capitalism ●

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REVIEW

Defence of the nation-state

VN Gelis **How the IMF broke Greece: eyewitness reports and role of the fake left** 2011, pp222, £9

The immediate context of this book is, as the title suggests, the economic and social disaster unfolding in Greece. Solutions seem to be determined by how one perceives the immediate cause of the crisis.

Reviewing this book in a paper which proclaims, "Toward a Communist Party of the European Union" (not simply 'Towards a European Communist Party') tends to suggest a less than a warm welcome. In fact this is a fraught subject entirely as a result of what have become principled as well tactical approaches to the whole proposition of the European Union, the euro, plans for a European superstate and, for some, the creation of a European 'national' identity.

Gelis identifies the dilemma for the seething Greek masses, who have concluded that at least under present conditions - the autocratic rule and impositions of world bankers and power elites - they want little of it. Yet all the conventional political parties, as well as most of the far left, are, for ideological reasons, tied to the proposition of making it work and the impossibility of anything other than that. There is a vacuum of credible political leadership - strikes and riots rage, but all existing political formations are refusing to engage with the Greek masses' central conclusions.

The book is not easily summarised, being a collection of articles, email exchanges, polemics (including exchanges in the *Weekly Worker*), leaflets and press and radio reports on the developing situation in Greece. This makes for frequent repetition, and a confusing chronology in relation to the tracing of the debt trajectory and the recording of events since Greece joined the EU. Elaborate calculations of how to engage with the challenge, putting forward dynamic, non-euro zone solutions to allegedly intractable problems are not easily condensed.

Suffice to say that this is a bold reflection of unfolding events and a historic record of the decimation of Greek society spelt out clear enough. Gelis traces the origin of 'the debt' to the ruling class's preparations for entry into the European Economic Community in the 1980s. The supremacy of 'market forces' increased consumerism without a matching productive base, which resulted in disproportionality, a balance of payment deficit and an explosion of public debt to feed the widely promoted consumerist appetites.

Circle of debt

The creation of a welfare state was built not, as Pasok (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement, led by Georgios Papandreou) had promised, by a redistribution of wealth and taxing the rich and ruling class community of tax-dodgers, but by heavy borrowing. The circle of debt servicing started an ever worsening crisis. Public debt as a percentage of GDP increased by five times over six years from 8% in 1979 to 42% in 1985. The corresponding total external debt quadrupled within the same period from 13% of GDP to 50%. Government spending rose from an average of 28% of GDP in the 70s to 41.1% in the 80s. One third of this increase was due to huge increases in debt repayments, which more than tripled as a percentage of GDP. Since the 1980s both the public and external debt have increased again by three times, the Deutsche Bank suggesting that public debt today is 135% of GDP, while external debt is 150% (p18).

During this whole process, manufacturing and agriculture was dismantled and there was an ongoing

and worsening balance of trade deficit. Entry to the EEC and later accession to European Monetary Union made what little Greek exports there were even less competitive. From the beginning of the decade to date the euro has become dearer by 20%. Needless to say, the rising debt hits the poorest much more than the richest, since the tax burden lays disproportionately on the shoulders of the poor - apart from the fact that the working class is actually the only sector of society routinely paying taxes. The whirlpool of deprivation gets worse, as public spending on education, health, welfare, etc falls to less than half of the European average.

Following this worsening situation the European commission moved in to take direct control, "with the most intrusive scrutiny of an EU member-state's fiscal and economic policies and book-keeping ever attempted" (*The Guardian*, quoted p27). An intense and semi-permanent system of monitoring has been put in place, involving strict quarterly reports and the need to demonstrate that the plans externally produced are being implemented. Needless to say, none of the commission's measures aim to lighten any burdens on the working class or bring about social safety nets and support. Gelis charges that the whole euro crisis and its current impact in Greece are inherent in the system:

"... as could be shown by both theory and historical experience, in any economic union consisting of members characterised by a high degree of economic unevenness (as is the case with the EU) the establishment of open and liberalised markets for commodities and capital would inevitably lead to a situation where those which primarily benefit from the free movement of commodities and capital would be the more advanced regions/countries (which have already developed high productivity levels and advanced technologies), at the expense of the rest. No wonder therefore that Greek productivity in manufacturing in the period 1980-84 was about 42% of that in Germany and that after almost 20 years of membership it was even lower at 38% in 1995-99" (p31). These advanced countries and economies did not proclaim the message of open economic frontiers and free movement until they had gained that position behind protected markets for themselves.

When Greece entered the EEC, 31% of the active population was in agriculture (as against 6% average in the metropolitan EEC centres), but

between 1981 and 2006 this dropped to 13%. Gelis argues that 18% of the population were forced into the "parasitic services sector". This displacement of agricultural labour was not due to rises in productive efficiency, as agriculture "completely stagnated" - production actually fell by 0.9% between 1990 and 2006 (p32).

The complete loss of democratically elected government in Greece, with not a single person in the cabinet elected by anyone, and a junta of technocrats imposed by the European Bank and International Monetary Fund to carry out a programme which has no endorsement by the people, amounts to a white-collar coup. Gelis, referring to the period just prior to this, talks of "a complete colonisation of the country by the transnational elite ... to enforce compliance". This is especially so when you consider that the elected government had stood on a quite contrary programme. At the same time the democratic deficit reaches rock bottom, with the entire political parliamentary spectrum standing aside and refusing to represent the mass opposition of the people to the dictatorship. The enforced measures are everywhere presented as unavoidable.

For the left there is a problem here. While claiming to be in favour of 'extreme democracy', it tends to the defence of the EU as a progressive entity - a harbinger of a new European identity - even when it is clearly autocratically and ruthlessly trampling on basic, never mind 'extreme democratic', rights. The attempt to ride two horses with one backside is scarcely tenable.

Sea change

One of the massive sea changes in my life has been the conversion of 'the left' in general from nigh universal opposition to whole idea of a *capitalist* EEC to one of support and defence. Way back in the 70s at the time of the national referendum on Britain's entry to 'the Common Market', the pros and cons lined up pretty much along class lines. All the establishment political parties and the Confederation of British Industry supported entry, while the unions and the far left, along with the usual suspects like Tony Benn, opposed it. So too, of course, did their rightwing equivalent in the Tory party, and far-right racist groups who just hated foreigners. Only the Maoists supported entry - they were following Mao's line of the "bloc of four classes", surrounding the 'main enemy' and developing a bourgeois

political and military bloc against US imperialism.

Universally the left proclaimed in its stead the Union of Soviet Socialist European Republics. We meant by that a federation of separate socialist nations increasingly united and integrating, but retaining their own national and regional identities and strengths. This as a prelude to a global soviet socialist world commonwealth and various versions of a world democratic supreme soviet council. The pro-Common Marketisers of the period would never have owned up to plans for the creation of a single currency, let alone a single capitalist superstate, with a single parliament and a new European 'nationality'. Those of us on the left would have seen such a state not, as most of the left now do, as a stepping stone to the creation of a single socialist European revolutionary entity, but the consolidation of our class enemies, tipping the balance against organised labour and historic national and regional class identities, upon which we all stood.

For the bulk of the far left the concept of the EU, its logical progression to a single currency and even the creation of new single European identity have become wedded to concepts of internationalism, anti-racism even. This has led to a *de facto* defence of the EU as a structure which firmly resists any idea of the component nations breaking free of its strictures, which in turn has led to a crisis of leadership across Europe as to what to offer in terms of real, practical answers to the deepening crisis and democratic deficit spreading across the continent. For some, the world as it is, despite its horrendous consequences, has become some sort rational pain barrier we all have endure in order to consolidate the European proletariat and give us a single identity. To millions of workers across Europe, 'the left' now seems to stand with the bourgeois politicians in defending a political structure and economic programme whose existence can only continue at the expense of the social gains of a century. It is in this context that the book's subtitle addresses itself.

Gelis demands as a bottom-line expression of democracy an immediate referendum on whether the Greek people endorse the measures being imposed upon them. Whether they endorse the right of "the Greek political elite on behalf of the European elite" to make such an imposition. One would have thought in a paper which

demands self-determination for the Irish people as a whole, but also self-determination for the British loyalist minority within that, that the Greeks would be afforded some measure of unconditional self-determination too.

In the absence of an alternative, that means:

- Leaving the euro and returning to a Greek currency (Gelis addresses head on all the theories of the skies falling in and being isolated by the world, etc, in far too much credible detail and argument than I could give justice to here).

- Cancelling the debt, as Iceland has and Argentina did. Or "renegotiation of the debt (under the threat of an immediate stoppage of payments in case this is not accepted) aiming at a significant lengthening of the period of its repayment and a corresponding reduction of the present exorbitant amount".

- A highly progressive tax on wealth on and any kind of property with a total value exceeding €1 million, as well as deposits in foreign banks, with the state proceeding to confiscate any property of a corresponding value to the estimated tax in case property-owners declare inability to pay within a reasonably short period of time.

- Strict controls of capital movements.
- Fair, open and equal presentation of arguments in such a referendum against the bias and propaganda of the media.

Gelis writes: "... power is being transferred slowly out of the national terrain into the hands of the unelected EU-IMF vultures, with only a quivering role assigned to the governments of Greece and Ireland (and soon Portugal and Spain). It is becoming clear that the project for a European Union with a single currency but 17 different governments is unravelling right before our eyes. No serious commentator believes it will survive in its present form. The stage will arrive in the not too distant future, if it isn't actually here already, that the blood required by the vultures of the EU-IMF will no longer be able to be given. Bankruptcy and default of all foreign debts will occur" (p124).

What are the consequences for democracy for such developments - when all such defaulting countries have their governments removed and replaced by a posse of non-elected bankers and technocrats? Before the cheering from the left at the end of 'nation-states' and individual national parliaments dies down, will they will be subsumed not by some super-European elected chamber, but a junta of IMF EU and World Bank directors, accountable to no one?

The majority of the 'left' in Britain today will see this little pamphlet as a scandalously seditious document challenging many dearly held perspectives. Admittedly there are things in it which make me feel uneasy - the highlighting of "mass illegal immigration" and its effect on the already straining system, for example - but comrade Gelis is not trying to put a gloss on anything, or smooth any sensibilities.

The crisis spreading through European capitalism requires that we on the left are at least honest, that there is an open and frank debate on the issues, not least that the views of the masses themselves be heard - and not ignored in the belief that we ourselves have already developed the medicine they all have to take, like it or not. For those reasons alone you ought to get this book and read it ●

David Douglass

Damned illegals: no gloss



IRAN



Spontaneous action?

Embassy stunt backfires

The attack on two diplomatic compounds was a gift to the imperialists, writes **Yassamine Mather**

The storming of the British embassy compounds in central Tehran and Gholhak followed a week of political pressure on Iran and the imposition of UK sanctions against the country's central bank.

If it was to be ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 'US embassy moment', harking back to the takeover of the US embassy by pro-government Islamic students in 1980, it backfired badly. First of all, Iran underestimated how the UK government would react. It expected the chargé d'affaires to be called to the foreign office to hear some harsh word; but it clearly did not expect the expulsion of all its diplomatic staff.

However, the US and its allies, especially the UK, are keen to escalate the conflict with Iran and any excuse would have been useful. In this context, the storming of an embassy and the attempt to take its staff hostage can only be described, as one Tehran paper put it, as a suicidal act. Worst still, the event was a failure internally too.

The Iranian regime presented it to the outside world as a spontaneous action by "Tehran University students". Ironically the day the embassy demonstration took place most Tehran student activists were at an anti-government, anti-capitalist gathering at the university and were later furious when they heard they were being associated with such a stunt.

Anyone who has followed Iranian politics is aware that Tehran University students have been at the forefront of the struggle against the Islamic government at least since 1998. That is precisely why all universities in Tehran have been forced to accept bassiji (Islamic militia) and Hezbollah students even if their grades do not meet university entrance requirements. Their main role is to spy on the political and personal activities of their co-students and to put on staged-managed shows of support when president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or other government officials visit campus. However, it is

clear that even these two groups of pro-government students were not part of the rent-a-crowd set which stormed the two compounds. In an unprecedented move, both the bassiji and Hezbollah student organisations of Tehran University have issued statements denying any part in the attack on the embassy.

The event also exposed the bitter rivalry and infighting within the regime. First came the intervention of the police, apparently ordered by Ahmadinejad. They removed the demonstrators and escorted British diplomats and embassy staff to a safe location in the perimeter of the embassy. That was followed by a full apology issued by Iran's foreign minister, who was clearly taken by surprise. He later issued an even more grovelling statement.

Initial reports from Tehran implied Ahmadinejad might resign or 'threaten to resign' (this time a parallel with Mehdi Bazargan, the Islamic republic's first prime minister, who stepped down during the US embassy hostage episode in 1980). As the week progressed, the divisions became more pronounced. This is, after all, an election year (the elections to the majles, or Islamic parliament, will take place before the end of the current Iranian year on March 20 2012) and, with the 'reformist' faction seen off by suppression and arrests, the current bitter infighting is between Ahmadinejad and the supreme religious leader, Khamenei.

Last week's adventure also infuriated the regime's economic experts. The last two weeks have been turbulent ones for Iran's economy. Following the announcement of new sanctions by the US/UK against Iranian banks, the Iranian rial fell dramatically against foreign currencies, forcing the central bank to print money so as to inject cash into the economy. These temporary measures seemed to be working - on Monday November 28 the rial made gains and there was a marked drop in foreign currency exchanges in Tehran. However, all this was to be history by

Tuesday afternoon, as the rial went into freefall. By Friday December 2 gold and foreign currency prices were spiralling out of control, as Iranian capitalists within and outside the ruling circle reacted to the crisis by sending their wealth abroad.

The storming of the embassy did not go down well with Iranian diplomats expelled from London either. When their plane landed in Tehran, a group of around 150 bassiji supporters were at the airport to greet them with flowers. However, the diplomats and their relatives refused to meet the welcoming party and left the airport through a different exit. Clearly the Islamic regime's embassy and consular staff were not happy about having to leave London at 48 hours' notice.

The crowd storming the embassy were believed to have had the support of the supreme leader - all initial statements pointed to this. However, as expulsions orders were issued and it became clear that Iran was facing isolation, the supreme leader panicked and backtracked. By Sunday December 4 even this version of the story was in doubt, after ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, a senior cleric close to Khamenei, sharply criticised the "illegal" storming of the British embassy: "I explicitly say that I am against attacking embassies and occupying them," he said, likening such acts to "invading a country". Another cleric, grand ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, claimed that "foreign elements" may have infiltrated the protests to provoke the backlash. Iran could "pay a high price" for such folly, he said.

No doubt some misguided sections of the left will consider this latest adventure of the Iranian clerics an anti-imperialist act. But Iranians themselves see it for what it is: a second-rate imitation of the 1980 US embassy takeover, but this time resulting in more spectacular failure. There is no doubt that in the current political situation - with the fall of pro-US regimes in the Middle East, the prominence of Iran as a consequence

of US wars in the region, and the continued need of the Iranian regime to identify a foreign enemy to secure its own survival and justify repression - Iran follows a relatively independent foreign policy line. But that does not make it anti-imperialist in any genuine sense. True, the US and its allies would prefer a more subordinate regime in Tehran, but no-one should be in any doubt about Iran's total compliance with the world capitalist economic order.

Workers protest

In the week when the storming of the embassy by a few dozen supporters of the regime made the headlines throughout the world, the news in Iran was dominated by two major working class protests. In Tabriz tens of thousands of workers demonstrated in the streets against yet another attempt to change the labour legislation to enforce casualisation and contract employment, along with further privatisation. The workers chanted slogans including "Minister of labour, shame on you, resign."

The same week there was also a major protest by 50,000 Iran Khodro industrial group workers whose leaflet was entitled: 'We do not want to be slaves'. These workers, divided by separate contracts awarded to more than 30 companies employed at the Iran Khodro industrial complex, were also protesting against the changes. Their leaflet began: "We, the workers of companies and contractors of Iran Khodro, hereby declare our opposition to the proposed amendments to the labour legislation ..."

It went on to point out that the 100,000 workers employed in Iran Khodro are denied the right to union representation and therefore have no means of collectively commenting on the changes, which "prove that the sole purpose of the labour law is to preserve the interests of the employers and the state, although its name implies it should support workers' rights". Two decades after the passing of the original legislation, many of its key policies have failed

to materialise, or else its provisions have been interpreted in such a way as to make them "meaningless". Every year we see the "watering down of any measure designed to provide workers with minimum protection against employers".

The leaflet went on to point out that the legislation fails to provide even a simple definition of permanent and contract work - a "basic issue resolved in most international labour law". In fact all employment agreements are now based on contract work, resulting in "life-long job insecurity" and enabling employers to "impose temporary contracts on the entire workforce". In addition the regime's High Council on Labour will from now on decide whether workers are to receive an annual bonus, while the minimum wage is to be determined by the labour ministry "without the participation of labour unions". Nor do the proposed changes "recognise strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations as legal rights for workers".

All this is happening at a time when Iran is facing serious threats of military aggression. The economy is in ruins, divisions within the establishment have reached unprecedented levels and the entire clerical regime is paranoid - with very good reason. In addition to sanctions and even acts of sabotage (including two incidents in Isfahan, at or near nuclear plants), the propaganda war is hotting up. Last month Iran was accused of a plot to murder the Saudi ambassador in the US. But now there is another snippet of information about alleged Iranian terrorism every day. If the western intelligence agencies are to be believed, last week alone Iran was involved in two plots against US personnel in Europe.

We in Hands Off the People of Iran are clear. We are fiercely opposed to all such provocations and threats. But equally clearly we stand with the workers, women, students and oppressed nationalities of Iran against the corrupt and reactionary theocracy ●

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ITALY

Budget assault ups the ante

Almost all Italian parties have fallen in behind the attacks fronted by the new government of technocrats, reports **Toby Abse**

The budget unveiled by the government of Mario Monti on Sunday December 4 (before the reopening of the markets on the Monday morning) is a classic neo-liberal deflationary package, resembling the Irish one announced the following day. This despite the rhetoric about growth and 'social justice' being spouted by Monti's supporters in the Partito Democratico and the centre-left daily *La Repubblica* - whose front page editorial on December 5 claimed that its equitable nature was shown by the maintenance of indexation for the coming year for the very lowest pensions and some other utterly minor concessions.¹

As many had forecast and the European Union/European Central Bank/International Monetary Fund troika had repeatedly demanded in their communications to Italian governments since the summer, there has been a massive attack on pensions. The old seniority pensions are being rapidly phased out, with some people being abruptly deprived of the rights they thought they had. For example, a worker who is 61 in 2012, having started work aged 26 and paid 35 years worth of contributions, instead of retiring next year will have to wait another four years, seven months if male and three years, six months if female. The whole system is now shifting to one based on defined contributions rather than defined benefits - the changes in the 1990s had meant that younger people were already subjected to this regime, which will now cover everybody by 2035.

Exactly as in the United Kingdom, the hypocritical partisans of such assaults on the working class claim this is 'generational justice' in the same manner as the vastly overpaid *Guardian* journalists Martin Kettle and Peter Kampfner, who do not have to worry about needing to pay winter fuel bills in their own old age. There seems to be no attempt to dress up the increasingly rapid equalisation of male and female pension ages in liberal feminist rhetoric, since women will have to work for longer too - the process has been accelerated by eight years, with a retirement age of 66 now being imposed in 2018. The absurd spectacle of welfare minister Elsa Fornero bursting into tears on prime-time television as she tried in vain to utter the word 'sacrifices' when talking about the pension cuts will give absolutely no consolation to the vast numbers being forced to work longer or receive less or both - even if it might arouse less anger than the self-satisfied smiles and smirks of our Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander.

It needs to be pointed out that, whilst many Italian welfare benefits were far below the EU average - creating a very partial and flawed welfare state, in which many caring responsibilities are in practice delegated to families, and particularly women within them - Italian pensions were traditionally some of the best in the EU and the trade unions had been able to recruit large numbers of pensioners to their ranks, giving them a bargaining power that our own National Pensioners Convention sadly lacks, despite the more militant stance recently taken under Dot Gibson's leadership. Pensions had already been subjected to a series of earlier attacks in the 1992-96 period, as a result of the economic crisis associated with Italy's exit from the European exchange rate



Mario Monti: stealing workers' pensions

mechanism.

Whilst the fall of Silvio Berlusconi's first government in 1994 was in very large measure the product of a general strike on the pensions issue, it should not be forgotten that it was the government led by former banker Lamberto Dini - which relied on the consistent support of the former 'official communists' of the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the Left) - that actually carried out an only slightly watered-down version of the attack demanded by the capitalist class. In the light of the PDS's dismal record on the pensions question in the 1990s, it is utterly predictable that its successor party, the PD (Democratic Party - no longer even 'of the left'), will provide the votes in parliament to ensure that this second major assault is carried through.

Although the trade union confederations notorious for collaboration with the Berlusconi government, the CISL and UIL, have called a two-hour strike at the end of the working day on December 12 and the more leftwing CGIL, which had not been privy to discussions between the other two union federations, subsequently called its own four-hour strike for the same day, such a token protest will not be enough. The PD parliamentarians will undoubtedly protect themselves from the anger of much of their own base by turning any vote on the budget into a vote of confidence in the Monti government, which they can present as the lesser evil after all the years of Berlusconi's dominance. There has been some suggestion that the incredibly low upper threshold of €936 a month on pensions that will still qualify for the indexation in line for inflation next year might be slightly amended in the light of PD pressure, but this is by no means certain. Although there may be a case for a threshold for those few high-level state bureaucrats who do indeed get platinum-plated pensions,

it is a disgraceful that indexation itself has been made the exception rather than the rule.

'Social justice'

Since the PD and *La Repubblica* are desperately trying to pass off a new version of stamp duty on shares and life insurance policies as a *piccolo patrimoniale* (mini-wealth tax), it should be stressed that there is no real wealth tax in this package, despite all the hopes (whether based on illusions or the product of a desire to deceive their own supporters) raised by the PD.

There is a rather feeble attempt to stop tax evasion by setting a €1,000 limit on transactions that can be carried out in cash, but in reality it will be the workers in large factories and all public sector workers, whether white-collar or blue-collar, who will as always bear most of the tax burden - the additional regional income tax will be raised from 0.9% to 1.23%. The new taxes on luxury cars and yachts are a very nominal concession to social justice, will not raise vast sums and do not seem to be linked to any serious attempt to resolve the riddle of how so many people who declare very low incomes to the tax inspectors can afford such extravagant hobbies.

It would be reasonable to suppose that the 2% increase in VAT in the second half of 2012 will have a much greater effect on workers and the poor, who are always the primary victims of this very regressive tax. The tax on petrol is also being increased and, although some might argue for it on ecological grounds or point out that those with the biggest cars might end up paying more, it will in practice hit ordinary people very hard at a time of recession. The only serious tax on property is the reintroduction, at a higher rate, of the tax on first homes abolished by the last Berlusconi government. Given that large numbers of Italians own their own houses or flats, this cannot be seen as an assault

on the rich, even if it is a tax which will not hit the very poorest.

The extra burden on an average family arising from all the budget changes is €635, according to *La Repubblica*, although some consumers' associations think €1,700 is a more realistic estimate.²

Whilst the current austerity package does not include an attack on article 18 of the 1970 workers' statute protecting those in larger workplaces from dismissal 'without just cause', one does not have to be all that cynical to think that the new exemption of employers who take on women and young people from national insurance is a way of moving in this direction - part of the endless rhetoric about generational justice rests on the idea of levelling down: the division between a group of predominantly older, predominantly male, workers in larger workplaces protected by article 18 is said to be 'unfair' to the casualised, young and often female workforce that has grown in both absolute and relative terms in the last few decades. Even in better times of greater trade union power Italy always had a large 'black economy', in which many were employed on low wages for long hours in appalling working conditions and often found their capacity to resist weakened by links between rogue employers and organised crime - a phenomenon that is sadly not confined to Sicily or Naples.

This budget is clearly a disaster for workers, pensioners, the unemployed and the poor in general. It is exactly what we might have expected from a government dominated by Monti and figures such as Corrado Passera, who was previously head of Italy's biggest bank, the Banca Intesa. The ideological and class-based agenda behind the cuts has been revealed by Italy's confirmation on December 6 of a massive order for war planes. As the autonomist Popolo Viola movement and no doubt others on the radical left pointed out, if Italy can afford these,

then surely she can afford to give her people decent pensions.

Tensions

The budget will doubtless give rise to tensions within the PD, especially amongst those closely linked to the CGIL, but it would be foolish to imagine that those who still cling to mildly social democratic beliefs within that party will mount a serious fight against a leadership that fully accepts the neoliberal agenda. It is worth noting that Antonio Di Pietro of the anti-corruption Italia dei Valori party (IdV) has come out against the budget and announced that his party will be voting against it. Given the way he was forced to retreat from his initial outright opposition to the Monti government by the majority of his own deputies, one can not be sure that this will happen, but it should be remembered that the IdV, alone amongst the parties represented in parliament, voted against Berlusconi's last austerity package.

If Di Pietro manages to hold the line on this occasion, it will at least ensure that the Lega Nord does not have a monopoly over parliamentary opposition to Monti's savage cuts - a demagogic position that enables the followers of Umberto Bossi, traditionally advocates of neoliberalism, to pose as the last defenders of the seniority pensions of the northern working class.

The position of Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left, Ecology, Freedom) remains ambiguous - Nichi Vendola's lack of any parliamentary representation may perhaps let him off the hook, but he seems desperate to maintain an alliance with the PD at any price.³ Unfortunately the December 3-4 congress of Rifondazione Comunista (PRC)⁴ was rapidly followed by an interview with *La Stampa* in which general secretary Paolo Ferrero stressed the pressing need to work together with SEL,⁵ rather than engaging with the militant workers in the FIOM and Cobas unions, and the students who engaged in massive nationwide demonstrations immediately following the formation of the Monti government.

Whilst at present 64% of Italians have faith in Monti, this is a drop from the 73% before the budget decree. At present the PD seems to be able to hold its own supporters in check, with 56% of its voters supporting the increase in the pension age, it is unlikely that this honeymoon - in large measure caused by people's relief in seeing the back of Silvio Berlusconi - will last.⁶

Notes

1. 'Ezio Mauro, il sentiero stretto' *La Repubblica* editorial, December 5.
2. *La Repubblica* December 6.
3. Whilst I know from direct personal contacts that this is not the position of the London SEL group, I have no idea how widespread the opposition to the Monti government is among the party members in Italy.
4. Paolo Ferrero's majority faction had the support of about 80% of PRC delegates, while the Trotskyists of the *Gratite Falce e Martello* had about 13% and the 'base' - another left opposition to the leadership - 5%.
5. Vendola, unlike Di Pietro, and Naples IdV mayor Luigi De Magistris, did not attend the PRC congress, so this appeal to SEL came across as rather desperate supplication. This desire for reconciliation with the unrepentant splitters is linked to a position that sees the German Die Linke and the Spanish Izquierda Unida - rather than, say, the French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste or the Portuguese Left Bloc - as the model for the PRC to emulate.
6. Poll organised by the widely respected political scientist, Renato Mannheimer, for *Corriere della Sera*.

IRELAND

Keynesian fantasies are no substitute

The Fine Gael/Labour coalition has unveiled the country's fifth austerity budget. Despite that the leading factions of the ULA continue to dither, writes **Anne Mc Shane**



Joe Higgins: steer clear of the national question

The United Left Alliance could make a hugely positive impact in Ireland, but only if its leadership had the courage and the political conviction to take the necessary steps. A conference should be called for January to bring together the left and working class throughout Ireland to discuss and build around a strategic programme to organise the working class into the ruling class and replace bankrupt capitalism with a socialist society. If the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party cannot rise to the task in such unprecedented times then there is little hope for them ever being able to do so in the future.

The economic crisis continues to cause deep social dislocation. The working class is desperate for leadership it can trust. The Fine Gael/Labour coalition made a lot of promises in order to get elected in February. Labour in particular pledged above all else to stand up for the poor and vulnerable. It was, of course, a sham. The two parties knew full well that in order to pay the bondholders and keep Irish capitalism afloat they would be required to attack the living standards of the working class. Now, after nine months in office, they are really putting the boot in with a budget that is, even by recent standards, extraordinarily vicious. When asked about the turn-around in his position on the *Frontline* current affairs programme on December 5, Labour Party leader Eamon Gilmore just shrugged and said: "Someone's got to take the pain."

But there are cracks showing in the Labour camp. A number of backbench TDs freely express their unhappiness at the budget. The newly elected member for Dublin West, Patrick Nulty, walked off the government benches on December 6 in disgust. He followed another Labour TD, Tommy Broughan, who resigned last

week over the renewal of the bank guarantee scheme. Although this will not cause any immediate problems for the coalition with its overwhelming majority, it will certainly have an impact on the Labour Party grassroots. Nulty openly calls himself a socialist and the ULA should be looking to engage with such people in order to break their supporters from Labourism.

The government is well aware that there is deep anger at the attacks. Taoiseach Enda Kenny went on national television on December 4 in an attempt to persuade people that there was no alternative to further cutbacks. But his gloomy 'state of the nation' speech had the opposite effect. He hypocritically called for workers to tighten their belts, take the pain and some time - maybe by 2016 - things will get better. Stressing his faith in the courage and patriotism of the Irish people, he appealed for unity in facing the challenge of austerity. We were reminded of Ireland's many successes and now we are "fighting for our survival as an independent small nation". It sounded like we were going to war ... all Irish people proudly marching forward together. An attempt to stoke up national loyalty to cover for yet another brutal offensive against the working class.

The budget

The fifth austerity budget Ireland has seen aims to claw nearly €4 billion back out of the public sector to satisfy the strict requirements of the European Union bailout package.

In some parts it is deliberately vague and it has been hard to work out where exactly the axe will fall in the health service and other vital facilities. This has already caused alarm among both staff and users. But there is no doubt that it will be slash and burn. Single-parent allowance is to be abolished for children aged seven and over and there

are more cuts in child benefit - this time targeting families of more than two children. Working class women are to have their benefits removed at a time when it is virtually impossible for many to get a job. Redundancy rebate to employers has been cut from 60% to 15%, meaning many more sacked workers will not receive minimum redundancy payments. And one of the more sickening measures has been a six-week cut in the cold weather fuel allowance. If this winter is anything like last year, it will mean a very serious situation for the elderly and physically vulnerable.

Disability benefits for 18-24-year-olds will be halved. State benefits for those on partial lay-off are also to be slashed, along with training programmes and funding for many advice and support services. The most vulnerable have been targeted. The section of the working class which is the most in need, which is even now forced to ask for help from charities, will be attacked once again. Tuesday's announcement of a further rise in VAT of 2%, taking the rate up to 23%, will make it even more difficult to afford food, electricity, gas, etc. The government is also introducing an annual household tax, to begin at €100 per home, but with the likelihood that it will be raised to as high as €1,000 after a couple of years. In a country where over 80% own their own homes, this flat tax will apply to all households, irrespective of income or wealth.

Keen to show that austerity is already bringing rewards, the media have portrayed Ireland as about to turn the corner, with growth in the region of 0.4% and a healthier economy forecast for 2012. But new figures have exposed this as self-serving drivel. The latest report from the Economic and Social Research Institute predicts that the Irish economy will grow by 0.9% next year, instead of its previously

projected 2.3%.¹ Profits made this year have resulted from an intensification of exploitation, as agency workers replace permanent staff, wages are cut and hours are increased.

At the moment the working class is pessimistic and demoralised. In 2009 and 2010 there were mass demonstrations of over 100,000. There were 4,000 at most at last week's national anti-budget protest. There are anti-austerity groups in most towns and cities, but for the most part they remain isolated and politically directionless. The struggle to make ends meet has taken over people's lives. While officially there are half a million unemployed, the true number is more like one million (almost a quarter of the population) - for example, self-employed construction workers in the collapsed building industry are not entitled to benefits and therefore do not register in the government statistics. An emphasis on 'entrepreneurship' in the days of the 'Celtic tiger' has now resulted in thousands of small businesses going into liquidation. This section, like the young, unemployed 'building contractors', now has nothing and is entitled to nothing. The surge in emigration and the high number of students - due to the lack of jobs - also disguises the true state of affairs. For the rest, cuts in wages and price hikes, along with the constant fear of job loss, makes for a grim reality.

Social partnership

Ireland has been through an economic rollercoaster over the last 20 years. The current level of poverty has followed more than a decade of credit-fueled boom. The level of spending in those years was something very new.

Southern Ireland had been a traditional rural economy up to the 1970s. It has never had a solid indigenous industrial or commercial sector and there has been a huge dependence on the transnationals, with successive governments bending over backwards to make sure that the country is an attractive destination for these corporations. In particular there was the lure of very low corporation tax, jealously protected by all governments. It is an unquestioned norm of Irish capitalism that, while the working class is forced to absorb continual tax rises, company profits are off limits. Corporation tax is only 12.5%, compared to 33.33% in France, 30% in Spain and 21%-28% in Britain. It is the biggest sticking point in Europe, with Sarkozy and Merkel furious that Ireland is still refusing to budge. There are constant rows reported, but government ministers refuse to give an inch.²

The other attraction for transnationals has been the existence of the so-called 'social partnership'. This was created in 1987 and brought employers, unions and the government together in a tripartite pact. The first three-year agreement was the 'Programme for National Recovery', followed by others which also aimed at prosperity, competitiveness, etc. As the economic bubble grew, 'social partnership' was feted as the keystone of Irish success. The working class would benefit from the trickle-down effect, if it worked alongside the

bourgeoisie in the 'national interest'. Trade union membership plummeted from 62% of the workforce to 31% in 2009.³

Trade union bureaucrats have very clear vested interests and themselves hold positions within state and semi-state bodies. David Begg, general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, actually has a number of directorships, including a position on the board of the Central Bank and a non-executive position in Aer Lingus, the national airline. In addition to the income he receives from these, he is paid around €140,000 by the ICTU.⁴ It is no wonder he is always so keen to promote social peace.

There are plenty others like him. Jack O'Connor, outgoing president of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, the country's largest, was awarded 'business person of the month' in December 2010 for his role in recommending that his members vote for the Croke Park agreement, which imposed cutbacks and pay freezes in the public sector.⁵ 'Social partnership' breeds corruption, with jobs for the boys and perks for families and friends. One particularly notorious scandal was that surrounding the government training agency, Fas, revealed in 2008 to be a luxury gravy-train. EU grants and taxpayers' money were spent on first-class flights, luxury hotels and shopping sprees. High-ranking employees, government ministers and trade union leaders took off on junkets together to the USA, Australia and a range of attractive destinations.⁶ Peter McLoone, leader of Impact trade union, was forced to retire as chairperson of Fas and take early retirement from his union position.⁷ He had been enjoying a salary of €155,000, along with €25,000 from Fas, as well as many other freebies and bonuses.

New poor

Such lifestyles have only ever been the preserve of the inner circle. For the working class, especially the young, the only option has often been to emigrate. In the 1980s thousands went to Britain, Australia and the US, as so many generations had before.

But then something new happened - for the first time in the mid-1990s people began to return home. They joined those already settling into a comfortable life. As house prices soared, credit was no object. Even people receiving social welfare were given mortgages. The better-off bought second and third homes, and holiday villas in Turkey and Bulgaria. Shopping became the new religion, as malls sprung up all over the country. It seemed that the money would never run out. When it did in 2008, it had dreadful consequences for the majority of those caught up in it. The same banks which had been such enthusiastic and generous lenders turned nasty.

Up to recently many families had two earners, with a joint income of €1,000 a week or more. Job losses mean that many of these same families are now trying to survive on €300 a week. The high court in Dublin orders repossessions on a weekly basis. The applications are often

brought by maverick subprime lenders - previously the most eager to lend at huge interest rates. Mortgage debt will become a major problem in 2012, as moratoriums and payment freezes run out. Most debt is related to property bought between 2006 and 2008, at the height of the boom. These homes are now worth less than a third of their purchase price. Those who got caught up in the credit boom now cannot cope with mortgage payments, loans and credit cards. Ireland has a new poor - those who in the years of the ‘Celtic tiger’ would have seen themselves as a middle class.

The crisis began in 2008 when banking insolvency became an overnight phenomenon. The first and most controversial bailout was for Anglo-Irish Bank, an elite institution concerned with commerce, property and wealth management. It was the main bank involved in funding the construction industry. It first received €1.5 billion, then €4 billion, then €8.3 billion and finally €12.7 billion. A ‘golden circle’ of banking executives were exposed as recipients of enormous secret loans. Chairman Sean Fitzpatrick suddenly and conveniently took early retirement - owing €155 million, which he has never repaid. He filed for bankruptcy in 2010, declaring he only had €188 a month to live on. He neglected to mention that he had conveniently transferred many assets to family members and ring-fenced others. There is an ongoing criminal investigation into his financial dealings and those of his cronies, Willie McAteer and David Drumm, both high-ranking executives in Anglo-Irish. Drumm took off suddenly to the US to avoid arrest and is now refusing to return.

The banking bailouts are deeply unpopular, particularly as there is no mercy shown to ordinary borrowers by these same banks. There is no debt forgiveness for a working class person in trouble with mortgage and credit card payments. Also, as in the UK, banking executives have brazenly continued to award themselves huge bonuses.

Protests against cutbacks began in late 2008, when pensioners took to the streets to defend their right to free medical treatment - and won. Another demonstration of 120,000 filled Dublin’s streets on February 22 of that year, including among its numbers for the first time a contingent of 2,000 Gardai. Then in November, after a lot of prevaricating by union leaders, a one-day strike of 300,000 government workers was called. This very solid action unnerved the government and there was talk in the media of the spectre of working class resistance. Luckily for the Fianna Fáil/Green coalition the union leaders were only too anxious to return to talks. They had been unhappy when the government had walked out of social partnership earlier in March. The militancy of their members was cynically used to get a foot in the door and a subsequent strike due for December 3 was called off at the last minute.

The result of these negotiations was the Croke Park agreement of March 2010, ratified by the unions in subsequent months. They accepted major ‘reforms’ to the public sector in return for a promise of no further wage cuts for government employees. It seems there will be no further strikes - or demonstrations - while the deal remains in place. The union bureaucrats promised the government and employers that they were men of their word. But reforms, of course, meant cuts resulting in huge job losses in health and education. There is no replacement of permanent staff who leave and conditions in some hospitals are dangerous due to shortages of beds and nurses. There is worry about what will happen next year when there will be a mass exodus of civil servants taking early retirement - the last opportunity to do so on a full pension.

ULA response

The ULA has issued a document entitled ‘Austerity is not working: tax the rich, invest in jobs’.⁸ It contains a number of proposals for a scheme of public works and job creation. It also calls for a reversal of all cuts and a demand to ‘burn the bondholders’. All good stuff as far as it goes. The main problem with the submission is what it does not say. There is

no mention of the working class at all and certainly none of socialism or revolutionary change. Instead we are told that the “only way out of the current crisis is to generate real economic activity and create jobs”. This will be done through an assets tax and increased income tax on the wealthy - calculated to raise €15 billion per annum. Tax exiles will also be targeted.

Curiously there is no mention of corporation tax. There have been discussions at ULA meetings where some individual members expressed concern that the transnationals would leave if corporation tax was raised. Could it be that the ULA is also worried about losing support on this issue and has backed off? The document is essentially about solving the economic problems within Ireland. Europe is addressed by calling for “a Europe-wide alternative, including a state-led programme of socially useful investment to halt the slide into depression”. In other words, cooperation between bourgeois states rather than the building of an all-Europe working class movement aiming for a European workers’ state.

Although the submission calls for people before profit, its appeal is to the “Irish people” rather than the working class. It is a Keynesian fantasy to suggest that government funding from wealth tax will put things right. It is a national solution to what is an international class problem - dangerous and worrying.

Church crisis

As well as the economic crisis, there are other major changes in Irish society. The Catholic church, which has been so dominant in Irish society since the formation of the Free State in 1921, is seriously disgraced.

The 1999 documentary *States of fear* revealed for the first time the level of abuse within institutions run by the church. The response was one of deep shock. The institution that was meant to protect children was systematically abusing them. The worst were the industrial schools, where children of the poor were sent to carry out slave labour and be ‘reformed’. Not only were they deprived of a family life and kept in terrible conditions, but they were physically, psychologically and sexually abused. The church had - and continues to have - a systematic loathing of the working class.

The Fianna Fáil government at the time moved to limit the damage to the church by setting up the Residential Redress Board in 2002. The state would indemnify the church and compensation would be made to victims of clerical abuse who could prove their case. The stipulation was, of course, that the hearings take place behind closed doors and there could be no criminal prosecutions of clergy.

A commission of inquiry was set up which reported in 2009. The Ryan report confirmed the scale of the abuse as endemic and it was described as “Ireland’s holocaust”. Again the government had made sure that there would be no criminal prosecutions of clergy as a result of any revelations. This inquiry was followed by the Murphy report into abuse within the Dublin diocese and the Cloyne report into occurrences in East Cork. All showed huge levels of ill-treatment and physical and sexual abuse. And recent church-sponsored audits of parishes have shown the problem has by no means gone away. Abuse is still going on and the church is still doing its best to cover up.

The obvious answer is a secular state. The complete separation of the church and state is the only possible way to deal with the power and influence of the church. Its massive assets should be seized and put to common use. There should be no more religious indoctrination of children in schools. Religion ought to be a private matter and the church removed from a position of power within the state. It remains in a predominant role - the fact that the ‘life of the unborn’ is protected in the constitution says it all. Women are prevented from seeking an abortion in Ireland because of a religiously-inspired law. They have to travel to Britain or Europe to do that - a costly process especially now.

The European Court of Human Rights

rapped the Irish state over the knuckles last year and demanded that the right to an abortion - albeit in very limited circumstances - be put in place. But the government does not even want to debate the question and has shunted it off to be examined by some specially formed commission. But abortion rights, still a very controversial issue in Irish society, must be tackled head-on. The ULA is far too cautious - it does not want to lose votes or potential support from those who oppose abortion. The demand for a woman’s right to choose has never been included in election literature and the leadership has refused to adopt any position on the question. The five ULA TDs must take this up in the Dáil as a matter of urgency.

This coming February sees the 20th anniversary of the ‘X case’. This involved a 14-year-old girl who had been raped by a neighbour and became pregnant, yet was denied a termination. The supreme court subsequently decided that abortion should be allowed where a woman’s life was at risk, including by suicide. A referendum three years later supported that decision, but it has never been legislated for. The ULA should come out for abortion as a right in all circumstances and the anniversary of the X case provides us with an opportunity to launch a campaign for abortion rights, including in the Dáil.

Irish society has become more secular in many respects and even many religious people no longer look to the church for advice on personal and ‘moral’ decisions - and little wonder. The role of the family has changed. Many couples now decide not to get married and being a single parent is not at all the scandal it was 20 years ago. Forty percent of all marriages in Dublin now take place in a registry office and many people no longer get their children christened. Attendances at mass have plummeted. But the church remains very much in control of education and continues to push for influence in all spheres.

We need to campaign now for the separation of the church and state. But this should be part of a broader campaign for a new, democratic and secular constitution.

National question

There has been a limited debate within the ULA on the north-south divide, but it seems to have generated a lot more heat than clarity. The SWP is in favour of an all-Ireland ULA, but the Socialist Party is completely against - the SP dismisses the entire republican movement as an enemy of the working class. It wants trade union and community unity in the north and glaringly ignores the question of national rights.

But it is essential that we put forward a democratic solution - for a united, federal Ireland with the right of secession for some territory where the Northern Ireland protestants form a clear historically established majority. I believe that the details should be determined by an all-Ireland assembly. However, the most important question is that socialists in Ireland oppose all kinds of nationalism and champion consistent internationalism. The unity of Ireland must be a voluntary unity.

To summarise, we need a working class party with a revolutionary programme. That programme must address the specific questions in Ireland in respect of how we are ruled. This means dealing with the Catholic state, the national question and women’s rights. There are many other questions that also need to be considered, including ethnic minorities and Irish travellers. The economic issues are part of a programme, not its entirety. And the essential point is that the programme must be based on what the working class needs to advance its interests, to build itself into a ruling class. Politics comes first ●

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Notes

1. www.rte.ie/news/2011/1130/esri.html.
2. www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/1203/1224308524982.html.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Partnership.
4. www.ictu.ie/about/staff.html.
5. www.businessandfinance.ie/index.jsp?p=793&n=708.
6. www.herald.ie/news/taxman-probes-fass-luxury-junkets-1647044.html.
7. www.swp.ie/industry/peter-mcloone-quits/2250.
8. www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/node/731#attachments.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Socialists need to play the long game

Islamist election successes have lessons for left

A year after Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, the new political landscape of the Middle East is beginning to emerge. The tumult of the Arab awakening, it seems, is producing a tranche of new Islamist governments where former tyrants have been toppled.

The first round of results from what looks to be an extraordinarily tortuous electoral process in Egypt display, to the considerable surprise of some, a strong showing for the Muslim Brotherhood's political front, the Freedom and Justice Party. More worryingly, the Salafist fanatics of the Nour Party look to have taken second place in this part of the poll, which covers the major urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria.

In Tunisia, after two decades of Ben Ali's repression, it was an Islamist party that emerged in pole position when it came to the country's first electoral test. The Ennahda Party - in origin, a spin-off of the Muslim Brotherhood - polled well in elections to the country's constituent assembly in October, taking 40% of the vote and the seats in the assembly.

Both results are, superficially, all the more remarkable in that the initial stages of the Arab revolts were notable for the relatively low profile of Islamists on major demonstrations. In Tunisia, trade unions were prominent; in Egypt, secular forces seemed to predominate in Tahrir Square, while the Muslim Brotherhood chose to bide its time. That course of events did not chime well with the portrait of the Arab world painted by imperialists and their apologists, of a seething pit of fanaticism and reaction; indeed, that picture was equally well endorsed by certain 'third worldist' elements, for whom Islamism was a 'natural' form for anti-imperialist resistance to take. Suddenly, the bourgeoisie's 'clash of civilisations' gibberish began to look more than a little shaky.

That Islamists were not the main visible presence, however, should not be taken to mean that they were not there at all. The Muslim Brotherhood is the most socially well-rooted political force in Egypt. Though officially proscribed, it has had a ready outlet for its teachings in the organisations around the mosque. Egyptian imams may be tame state appointees, but the realm of religion remained fertile ground for the MB.

The MB did more than that. With some considerable enthusiasm and commendable patience, it built a hugely powerful organisation that encompasses political activism, religious education, social welfare and innumerable other functions - in a way that recalls what the mass organisations of classical social democracy were able to do in the 19th and early 20th century. It is this deep and very real penetration into the actual lived experience of the Arab masses that has bought the Islamists credit in their eyes.

The MB's penetration has come of a very real - and from its perspective,



Tahrir Square: Muslim Brotherhood's low profile

very wise - shift in strategy: from somewhat classic terrorism to community activism and ceaseless propaganda. Its mass base has - naturally - caused it to be courted, not least among a US establishment looking for stable allies after the loss of its Egyptian and Tunisian client tyrants. The MB's comparatively low profile in Tahrir Square reflects its cautious political approach; and now the consensus opinion emanating from Washington and elsewhere is that these are 'moderate' Islamists.

This 'moderation' should not be overstated, of course - Ennahda likes to style itself after the European Christian democratic parties, but a closer analogue for it and the MB would perhaps be the Christian Coalition and its various clones in the US, who use their roots in society to turn out millions of shock-troop voters for candidates of the Republican right (and, on a smaller scale, the 'faith, flag and family' wing of the British Tory Party). The *direct rule* of this cabal

of religious reactionaries over the American state, should it ever come to pass, would not be very much congruent with even the imperfect democratic ideals of the founding fathers.

Likewise, it is quite possible for the MB to find a place for itself within the new political horizon as a straightforward bourgeois party of the state - albeit such a state will likely be an authoritarian theocracy with limited political freedom after the fashion of the Iranian Islamic republic. It remains reliant on a petty bourgeois base of support, of course - but so, in a sense, do the US Republicans and our own Tories. Nour, it has to be said, is another matter. Inspired by a particular Saudi brand of Salafism, it openly declares its support for the constitutional enforcement of sharia law, and its contempt for democracy as 'ungodly'.

It is plain to see that the imperialist establishment is most keen on driving a wedge between the MB and Nour; far

better, it argues, would be a coalition with the currently marginalised liberal and secular forces. At this point, however, there is the problem that this simply may not be supported by the electoral mathematics; many estimates put the total Islamist vote at 65%, with 25% going to Nour. There may be no other option than to bring the latter in.

The other major force in all this is the Egyptian military, the basis for the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. Having ditched the latter, the army has done its utmost to retain the fundamental political structure through which it ruled. Its rule, it should not be forgotten, allowed the top brass to accumulate enormous reserves of wealth; the Egyptian army is not merely a standing military force, but an enormous, unwieldy and corrupt capitalist firm. There is still a great deal at stake for Mubarak's inheritors in the new situation.

It was the army which wanted to press forward with elections - and the army which equally wanted the electoral process to be as convoluted and long-winded as possible (a *de jure* government - as opposed to a transitional regime to discuss constitutional changes - is not supposed to be elected until 2014). It has been quite happy to strike a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to ensure an 'orderly' transition.

For the army, however, this is playing with fire. Let us naively assume that the MB is quite serious in its Islamo-socialistic rhetoric - then surely the corrupt holdings of the Egyptian army will eventually come under threat. Should, as is more likely, a victorious Freedom and Justice Party proceed immediately (as did the Khomeini regime) to fill its own pockets, then it will find in the army a competitor. Either which way, the army is likely to come up against the new government; throw in the probability of increased tensions with Israel and the raw material is there for

a major conflict within the state.

Where does this leave the left? It has certainly been outstripped electorally so far, and further rounds of voting - for the most part in the countryside - are unlikely to redress this deficit at all. In fact, it is necessary to take a leaf out of the Muslim Brotherhood's book, and prepare to play the long game. The Arab awakening is quite genuinely an event of historic significance, and the left can hardly be expected, after such long years of anti-working class repression, to make immediate gains.

What is critically important is to maintain, and fight to deepen, the new political freedoms which resulted from the fall of Mubarak. Political freedom, as Marxists from Marx to Kautsky to Lenin always emphasised, is the light and air of the proletariat. The forced march to early elections was not at all in our interests; it favoured those forces already best rooted in society, which - as is now obvious - means the different brands of Islamists on the one hand, and the army on the other. Neither has any interest in extending democracy. However, the protracted electoral process at least holds out for the left the possibility of *beginning* to sink roots in society, as does the likelihood of grubby political warfare between two factions within the state.

The raw material is there. Egypt has been the site of considerable labour struggles in recent years; now it has experienced the exhilaration of a (partially) successful democratic revolutionary movement. Now that the dust begins to settle, those who would administer capitalism - whether they be military bureaucrats or Islamist radicals - will have to face up to uncomfortable and unpopular choices. The revolutionary left - in Egypt, alas, as elsewhere, pitifully weak and divided - needs only to get its act together to make a real impact ●

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