

weekly worker

**Ian Birchall's Tony Cliff
biography: the SWP is a
sect, not a party**

- Cameron's Euro veto
- Italy's general strike
- Anarcho-imperialism
- Jewish identity

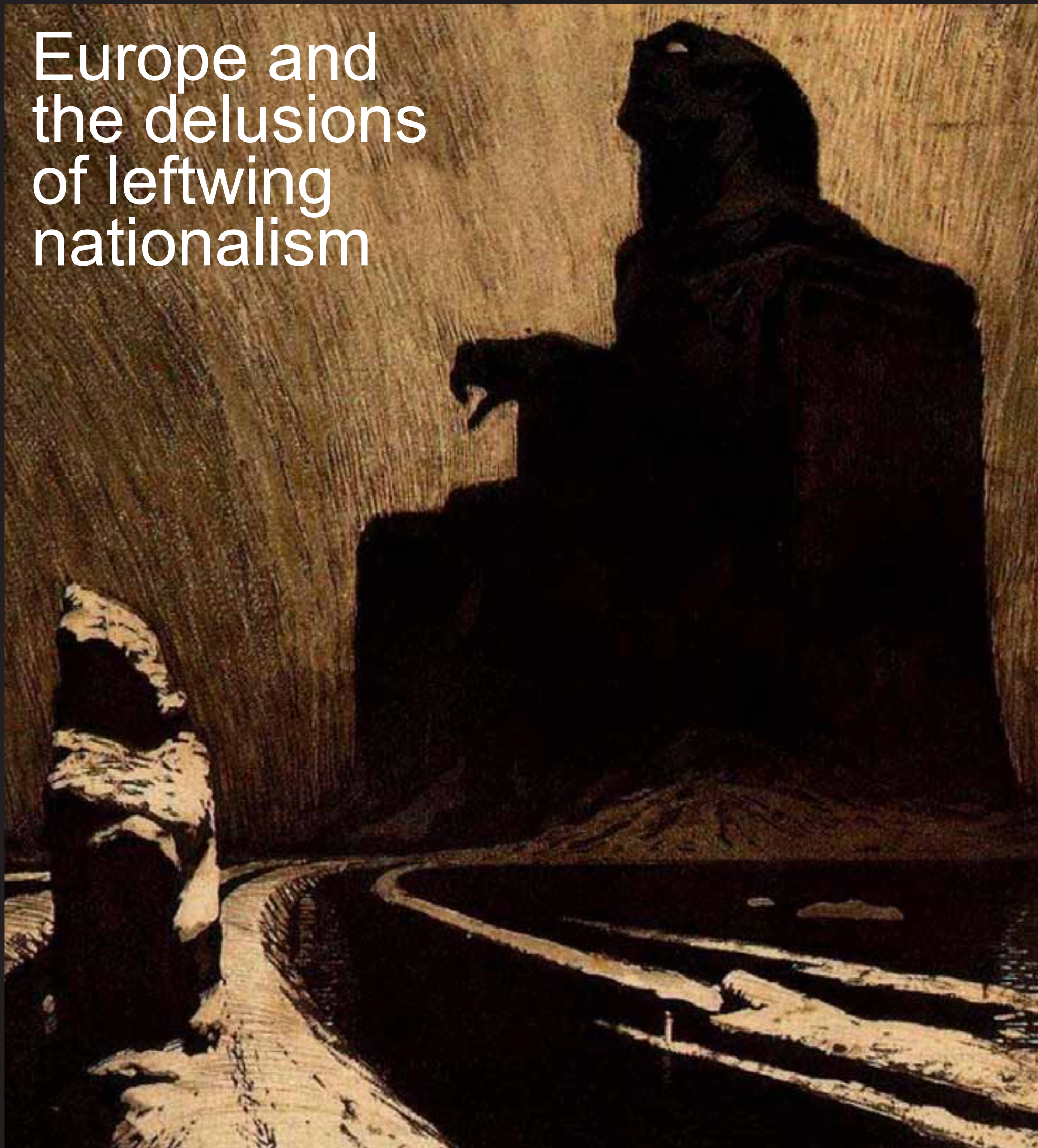
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Europe and
the delusions
of leftwing
nationalism



LETTERS



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

Twice wrong

Dave Douglass's account of the British left's attitude to the European Union is historically inaccurate ('Defence of the nation-state', December 8).

He writes: "One of the massive sea changes in my life has been the conversion of 'the left' in general from high universal opposition to the whole idea of a capitalist EEC to one of support and defence." This is wrong for two reasons. Firstly, when Britain first began to try to join what was the European Economic Community in the early 1960s, the attitude of the left was not one of opposition. The only organisation on the British 'left' which opposed entry was the Stalinist Communist Party.

Its opposition was largely driven by the dictates of Moscow, which, whilst adopting a position of peaceful coexistence with imperialism, wanted to ensure that it faced a fragmented opposition in western Europe. The nationalistic position of the CP went hand in glove with its reformist politics, which entails uniting the interests of British workers with British bosses for demands such as import and immigration controls. Both of these measures are ones that VN Gelis supports. Indeed, he has an entire website devoted to distorting the views of classical Marxism so as to make it look like Marx, Engels and Lenin opposed the free movement of labour and supported immigration controls!

In fact, for most of the 1960s, the Trotskyist left opposed the nationalist positions of the CP. They took the attitude that, although the removal of national borders and the formation of a larger European union would be historically progressive and therefore should not be opposed, we should not advocate it either - it is not our job to provide the capitalists with solutions. Our job is to fight within any progressive developments for the interests of workers and to advocate socialism as the real solution for workers' problems. On that basis, all of the revolutionary left in Britain at the time adopted an abstentionist

position.

But during the 1960s a number of these sects, probably buoyed by a certain degree of success in building their organisations, began to focus on the idea of 'building the party', by which they meant themselves. The first to move in this direction was the Socialist Labour League, which later became the Workers Revolutionary Party. This had a significant impact on the politics of the groups concerned. In order to 'build the party', the need to swim in a particular milieu becomes paramount. Political principle becomes subordinate to adaptation to that milieu. They may not have had the focus groups that the Blairites had, but they certainly knew where to pitch their politics in order to appeal to the particular niche of the market at which they were aiming. If the WRP, International Socialists and Militant wanted to recruit from that large mass of the 'left', which existed at the time in the trade unions, and by the 1970s around the Labour left, then it was necessary to adapt their politics accordingly in order to compete with the CP and its fellow travellers around *Tribune*, the Bennites, etc.

In other words, the policy of opposition to the EEC that existed in the 1970s was not some kind of long-standing, principled position that anyone reading Dave Douglass's account would believe it to be. In fact, it was the same kind of opportunism that the leaders of the Second International displayed in 1914. Then a working class still heavily dominated by bourgeois ideas, of which nationalism was a particularly virulent form, lined up behind its own ruling class and the leaders of the Second International, rather than stand against that tide, and collapsed with it. In the early 1970s, the revolutionary left did not collapse into nationalism and opportunism in order not to be separated from the working class. On the contrary, despite Dave's claim that the pros and antis divided on class lines, the majority of the British left voted in favour of staying in the EEC, but did so in order not to be separated from that limited milieu of 'left' public opinion from which each group sought to recruit.

The same is true in Greece. Dave says, of the plans for an EU state: "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." But this is not true. It is not just the revolutionary left in Greece that do not agree with Gelis's reactionary nationalist agenda. Every opinion poll shows that support for the EU and staying in the euro stands at around 70%!

And, of course, there is nothing in Marxism that advises workers to separate into smaller economic units. On the contrary, one of the principled bases of Marxism is the idea that we are in favour of larger units, bringing larger groups of workers together, where they are stronger and less divided. That is particularly true across borders.

The second reason that he is wrong, however, is that the left position today is not one of "support and defence" of a capitalist EU. The left position is to oppose the reactionary notions of people like Gelis, who advocate a return to capitalist nation-states. But opposition to a more reactionary alternative does not in itself mean support for the status quo. I oppose a return to private healthcare as an alternative to the state capitalist NHS, but that does not cause me to support or defend a bureaucratic, inefficient and oppressive NHS, as opposed to advocating a socialist healthcare system under the ownership and control of workers.

The socialist response to the situation in Europe is not to advocate reactionary bourgeois nationalism, as Gelis does, but to advocate workers' solidarity across Europe, the building of a real European labour movement committed to a single fight against European capital, based around a set of minimum demands, and for consistent democracy across the EU.

As I said recently, I have no reason to doubt that Dave Douglass wants to rip the head off capitalism as much today as he ever has, but the reactionary, nationalist politics of Gelis are the logical conclusion of the kind of nationalistic solutions that Dave has advocated in recent weeks and months at Bombardier.

Arthur Bough
email

Hopping mad

The *Weekly Worker's* headline writer titled the piece by Dave Douglass 'Defence of the nation-state'. As someone who has disagreed with headlines put on my articles, I will say in this case it is spot on.

At the end of the article, Dave spots a problem in his review of VN Gelis's *How the IMF broke Greece: eyewitness reports and role of the fake left*: "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."

I would suggest this, and the political trajectory behind it, is the mother and father of all problems. It did not smooth any of my sensibilities and made me feel not just "uneasy", but hopping mad. Or at least it would have done had I not known the road down which this comrade had gone many years ago.

Comrade VN Gelis, a Greek who claims to be a Trotskyist, has the following position on immigration: "Illegal immigration is not an exclusively Greek phenomenon. Yet Greece has received an enormous number of illegal immigrants, out of any proportion with its size and resources. This fact is not unrelated to the infamous Schengen agreement,

which defines Greece as a country responsible for the initial reception of refugees - a door open for the whole of Europe. As a result, we have a dramatic rise of unemployment, and the modification of its nature. It is no longer conjunctural. It has become synonymous with the social marginalisation of the Greek worker. The destruction of his social conquests and rights. Of course, the government and some of its fervent 'enemies' are denying all this. But working people know very well what is happening, as they are the ones called upon to pay the bill" (www.evangelos12.btinternet.co.uk).

This is racist to the core because it considers the Greek worker first and begins the struggle for workers' rights on a national basis. Marxism is a universal doctrine which fights for human equality on a material basis, in the here and now, when we overthrow our global oppressors, world imperialism. Our 'new Jerusalem' is here on earth, to be fought for right now, with that perspective. Progressive humanity has understood this right back to the English civil war, with John Lilburne, the Levellers, *et al.*

And here lies the nub of the matter, because capitalism cannot be defeated on a national basis (although it is true that revolutions must be made on a national basis), but with an internationalist perspective from the very start. What Gelis is proposing in practice will result in 'indigenous' workers attacking immigrant workers in alliance with a far-right section of the capitalist class to maintain the privileges of an aristocracy of labour. That was the essence of the reactionary strikes around 'British jobs for British workers' that *Socialist Fight* fought against so well.

It was the Irish immigrant workers (East End dockers) who turned out the vast bulk of the 300,000 that defeated Oswald Mosley in Cable Street in 1936, unifying the whole class behind an oppressed and threatened minority Jewish community to begin the revival of the *whole* class after the defeats of the 30s. Likewise, it was Irish immigrant dockers and women workers in the 1890s (the dockers' tanner strike of 1889 and Bryant and May's match girls' strike of 1888, labourers and women workers in the New Unionism movement) that saw the unification of the *whole* class behind them, which resulted in the formation of the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers' party after the 1903 Taff Vale judgement. Always the poorest and most oppressed are the immigrants; it is reactionary going to war in alliance with the far right against immigrants, blocking with one section of the capitalist class and using the fake argument that we want to defeat those other capitalists who want to exploit those workers as cheap labour.

We must fight for trade union conditions and rates of pay for *all* workers:

1. No borders, no immigration controls - a working man or woman has the right to seek work anywhere on the planet where they can get the best price for their labour, while capital roams the planet in search of profit without let or hindrance. It is a measure of the strength of the organised working class that there are still some relatively progressive immigration laws left. They are disappearing rapidly. When they all go, then we will have fascism. And quoting Lenin against immigration in defence of the first workers' state is an unprincipled sleight of hand.

2. Only on a global scale can we defeat all the ills of capitalism. In particular, the slogan of the world revolution sets Trotskyism apart from all other

political currents on the planet in understanding the global nature of capitalism *and* the necessary global approach to programme and practice of a world party of the socialist revolution to solve this crisis.

3. If you reject the programme of world revolution and the working class as one global class - only when that *whole* class fights for *all* its members and for *all* the poor and oppressed on the planet will it be able to raise its sights to the world revolution - then you end up like VN Gelis as a theoretical reactionary, the most fake of the "fake lefts" he rails against in the subtitle of his book.

Will he go and picket Dover and Heathrow to demand that the Nazi sympathisers in the UK Borders Agency do their jobs properly, arrest all (dark-skinned, of course) immigrants (by implication not just the illegal ones) and cease conspiring against the 'white British working class'? This crisis throws a sharp spotlight on reactionary views posing as 'leftism'. VN Gelis is advocating a most dangerous and reactionary perspective, one implicitly endorsed by the likes of the Campaign against Euro-federalism (see the letter by its secretary, John Boyd, in the *Morning Star* of November 7).

Dave Douglass should clearly distance himself from these positions, whilst the arguments about the EU are had out.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Main enemy

Roscoe Turi's equation of Stalinism with militant anti-imperialism is the exact place where 'modern' Trotskyism ditches Lenin's basic writings on imperialism as the highest phase of capitalism (Letters, December 8). It is no mere symptom, as Turi suggests.

Nato is by far the main military enemy of the international working class. Secondly, it is the ideology of imperialism that manifests on the left as tacit support for CIA/MI5 operations in target countries. These countries' national sovereignty is never mentioned, never mind defended. The leaders of these countries are put at the same level as the imperialist aggressors and this subterfuge serves the interests of the very same imperialism they nominally claim to oppose.

In reality, posing the question merely in terms of capitalism is an attempt to bury the national question. This is a long way from reality, but what is needed is a consistent exposure of imperialist interests and not only in the dumbing down of the left. This dumbing down process has the danger of missing out on the imperialist provocation of World War III.

Paul Anderson
email

Enemy's enemy

I understand the frustration of progressive, democratic and socialist forces in Russia over apparent irregularities in the recent duma elections in the Russian Federation. Russia has never had any experience of bourgeois democracy, democratic processes, norms or practices, and it is perhaps fortunate in that respect.

However, despite our affinities with our political sisters and brothers in Russia, we ought to be very careful about supporting what now has every appearance of a western imperialist-stimulated and supported 'colour revolution' in the Russian Federation.

The Medvedev-Putin leadership represents interests which are certainly in contradiction to those of the working people of Russia, but are also in contradiction to the old, decaying but exceptionally dangerous capitalist

Fighting fund

16-page high

As I mentioned last week, the next issue of the *Weekly Worker* will be the final one for 2011. The December 22 16-page edition will feature, among other things, an extended report of the discussions now taking place within the Socialist Workers Party before its January conference. It will be a good issue, I promise.

But the *Weekly Worker* could not cover such stories if it had to rely on sales receipts alone. Like every other leftwing paper, we need the active and committed support of scores of working class partisans just to put out a normal edition - which is why we call for, and usually get, £1,250 in donations every month.

However, when we publish extra pages or supplements, that, rather obviously, leaves us with a bill to pick up. So it's a bit worrying when, like this month, we are way behind where we need to be just to reach our normal target. With half the month already gone, we only have £440 towards

November's fighting fund - just over a third. Or, to put it another way, we need to pull in just about double that amount in the second half of the month.

Unfortunately, although last week we had 19,526 online readers, none of them contributed to our fund. The £130 we received was all down to comrades who support their paper via a monthly standing order. Thank you, comrades DW, AM, GD, ST and DV.

I would dearly love to end the year on a high, able to report a big boost next week. So how about it? If you're one of those who read us via the internet, please consider using our PayPal facility. Oh, and I still accept cheques as well as credit cards! Over to you, comrades.

RobbieRIX

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

powers of western imperialism. Our enemy’s enemy is ultimately our friend.

The treacherous comprador capitalist regime of Boris Yeltsin sought to completely prostitute the entire capital, natural and labour resources of the former Soviet Union to western imperialism. It was right and good that Yeltsin was despatched by Vladimir Putin, who subsequently sought to re-establish a strong central state and develop a strong and independent Russia, and to restore national pride and dignity.

A Russia which is strong, a Russia which is powerful and a Russia which is independent is in direct contradiction to the interests of western imperialism and is therefore, ultimately, in the interest of the working mass of the worldwide population.

We need to be clear that imperialist machinations to overthrow the Medvedev-Putin leadership are not about establishing democracy in Russia or about the best interests of the Russian people, but are about a second major attempt to subordinate, assimilate and absorb Russia’s great resources and assets within western capitalism. This is not in the fundamental interests of working people anywhere.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Naked Clarkson

Your article about Jeremy Clarkson was certainly very informative and put the question in a wider context (‘Keep quiet and drive’, December 8). Clearly, Clarkson’s comments were a godsend for Miliband, as he was able to distract attention from his failure to support the strikes (although who honestly thought that he would? When have Labour leaders ever supported strikes? There was no golden age of leftwing Labour leaders).

I also completely agree that discussion of legal action is ludicrous and completely unbecoming of the labour movement, who surely have better things to do with their time right now. We should not be dealing with our opponents in such a way.

That said, I see nothing wrong with a campaign for him to be sacked from the BBC, and I think your comparison of the people who complained about it with the *Daily Mail*-inspired vitriol against the brilliant *Brass eye* is an unworthy one. The people complaining about Clarkson were doing so not out of a sense of ignorant prudishness. They were upset that a man whose obscene, wholly unjustified salary they pay was taking a dump on the organised working class from a great height.

Or, better still, one could have his six- or seven-digit salary reduced to the average of the public sector workers he was excoriating so witlessly. The BBC is a taxpayer-funded institution. It should be democratically controlled and its employees should be paid fair, but not exorbitant salaries.

The whole Clarkson debacle is a great opportunity to re-examine the relationship with ‘our’ national broadcaster and see if it is acting in the interests of the people who fund it - the working class. In many respects, it represents a commercial broadcaster, just without the actual adverts, and we should be arguing for something quite different, with a wholly different pay structure and artistic/journalistic focus.

If it isn’t acting in our interests - and I wouldn’t particularly disagree with your analysis of it being “a propaganda machine for the British state” - it’s time to do something about it. It depends on subscriptions of a kind, and a mass non-payment campaign around the issue of Clarkson/*Top gear* in general (these comments are merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to him and his joke-free, weekly knob-measuring contest - sorry, show about

fast cars) could have some traction. It is naked political propaganda masking as light entertainment and we should be making that point as often as we can.

James Cunningham
email

Swap gear

There are several points that could be made about Clarkson and his pre-rehearsed ‘outburst’ (let’s face it, the Beeb doesn’t really do spontaneous).

Had some union officers taken their finger out, there could have been a demonstration outside BBC main studios on November 30, which might have given programme presenters something to think about and got some respect out of them for a change. But, as it was, a lot of nurses and hospital workers in west London seemed unaware what was expected of them that morning and activists were stretched getting to places they were supposed to picket. Where they turned up, the response was good from both staff and public.

There was a particularly impressive turnout on the day from people whom we’re not used to seeing on strike - for many it was the first time. I knew the head teachers were out and I was also impressed to see banners such as the probation officers, court officers and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists.

I would imagine these sort of people were genuinely upset by Clarkson’s remark, and quite rightly so. Some of us in bigger unions have probably got too used to the media, including ‘our’ BBC, treating us like dirt, whereas those respectable folk who are newer to the fray were understandably shocked by it. David Cameron might regret his daft remark about the strike being a “damp squib” when he encounters some of these people in his constituency.

It’s a pity Clarkson did not just say the strikers should be locked up, or someone could have told him how many prison governors had been panicked that morning because prison officers who have lost the legal right to strike were nevertheless holding meetings. Wandsworth prison officers joined the London march with their banner. Should Jeremy Clarkson ever find himself locked up, I am sure he will be treated with the respect appropriate.

There was also a small contingent from the broadcasting union, Bectu, on the London march, and this prompts me to ask a question of them and the electricians in my own union, Unite, though it might also involve the National Union of Journalists. Could not trade unionists pull the plug on Jeremy Clarkson and his career? Hearing not just union leaders but people like the Socialist Workers Party pleading with BBC bosses to act, or mentioning the police - yes, I know, union strength is not what it was, and there are all sorts of laws - but is it beyond our genius for someone to - whoops! - trip over a cable?

Now Clarkson is in China, with his oppo, and Edinburgh zoo has been lent a couple of pandas. That’s just a coincidence, but, as I have suggested in my blog, if Beijing zoo could be persuaded to make this a permanent swap, the pandas could stay and I’m sure they would be cheaper and much more popular.

Charlie Pottins
Middlesex

Full-on M-L

If ever Britain needed a strong party of the left it is now. Capitalism is dead. Its appearance of life is due only to the heart-lung machine of the media. Therefore, it is increasingly important that the people of all classes be made aware that a Marxist-Leninist style government is not any longer a political choice, but a political necessity.

We also have to awaken them to the fact that Britain is not a democracy. They must be alerted to the fact that all three main parties have the same political agenda. All they bicker about in parliament are trivial matters as to who would do something quicker or slower. But they all cling to the same dead doctrine of capitalism. This means, in effect, that Britain today is effectively a one-party, crypto-fascist state with an immovable head in the person of the queen.

The people must be told it is due only to our fascist government that they are being impoverished with taxes and price hikes. A Marxist-Leninist state would immediately nationalise the petro-chemical industry, as well as the banks, the power, transport, steel and communication industries. Further, no-one would be allowed to earn more than £75,000 a year.

That would bring in an additional £200 billion a year, which would enable us to eliminate VAT, halve the price of petrol and offer free hot water and heating. By lowering the cost of living by half - as such a nationalisation would - people would have money to spend, which in turn would cause the shops to order more and the factories to have to take on thousands of additional workers, who would also be a part of the buying public. Within just a few short years, Britain would have full employment, as well as a rise in our standard of living.

With this as a basic beginning, work could then begin on the elimination of the freehold laws, whilst at the same time turning Britain into a republic. Within 25 years, it could be possible to create a full-on Marxist-Leninist state. The kind of communism I believe in is based on government of the people, for the people and by the people. At present, we are very far from that.

But, unfortunately, I have noticed the media has ruled out of its lexicon even the use of the words, ‘communism’ and ‘socialism’.

The people must be told, but how do we tell them? Aye, there’s the rub.

David Lee
email

Cementing unity

Unite, Britain’s biggest union, has agreed to ask workers at the building materials company, Cemex, if they are prepared to be balloted for industrial action over pensions. The dispute concerns workers in the cement business at Rugby, Warwickshire and South Ferriby, North Lincolnshire, as well as drivers and other workers based at a number of sites across the country.

What this shows is that attacks on pensions are happening in the private sector as well as in the public sector, as we said on November 30 when we supported strikes around the slogan, ‘Fair pensions for all’. Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and Rugby Against the Cuts, will support Cemex workers, just as we support public sector workers. Attacks on pensions in the public and private sector are driven by an ideological desire by the coalition government to make workers pay for the economic crisis they did not cause.

In this instance, Unite is challenging the company over its decision to close the defined benefit pension scheme to existing members and also over the inadequate benefits in its defined contribution scheme, which was opened to new starters about five years ago.

The union wants an outcome which would provide decent pensions for all Cemex employees. However, to date the company has refused to enter into serious discussions.

Cemex generates over £1 billion in annual sales and has a UK supply network serving more than 500 locations.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

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 18, 3pm: Friends House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Discussing *From Lenin to Stalin* by Victor Serge. Organised by CPGB North: <http://northerncommunists.wordpress.com>.

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.

City of sanctuary

Friday December 16, 1pm: World ceilidh, Garnethill Multicultural Centre, 21 Rose Street, Glasgow G3. Discussion themes include: ‘What is sanctuary?’ and ‘How to make Glasgow more welcoming’. Also live music, storytelling and food. Organised by Glasgow City of Sanctuary: www.cityofsanctuary.org/glasgow.

Night out for Palestine

Friday December 16, 7.15pm: Fundraiser, New Red Lion, Islington, 27--273 City Road, London EC1. Celebration of protest song, verse and street art in the year of the Arab spring. Contributors include Lemn Sissay, Grace Petrie, Robb Johnson, Palestinian artist Reem Kelani, Dorian Lyskey and William Parry. Late night set of protest dance floor fillers from house DJ Melstar. Tickets £9.99. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Cuban solidarity

Saturday December 17, 8pm: Entertainment, Jericho Tavern, 56 Walton Street, Oxford. Latin dance night featuring Cuban-style big band Ran Kan Kan. All proceeds to Music Fund for Cuba. Tickets: £5. Organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign: cubasolidarityoxford@yahoo.co.uk.

Iraq picket

Saturday December 17, 2pm: Protest, US embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1. Demand the expulsion of US mercenaries, military advisers and reduction of the size of US embassy in Baghdad. Organised by Iraqi Democrats Against the Occupation and Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

After Dale Farm

Sunday December 18, 10am to 6pm: Second national meeting, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1. Organised by Traveller Solidarity Network: <http://travellersolidarity.org>.

The 99% demand peace

Sunday December 18, 1pm: Peace walk, assemble St Pauls Cathedral, original site of Occupy London, to peace camp in Parliament Square. Organised by Occupy London and Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk.

Decriminalise prostitution for safety’s sake!

Monday December 19, 6 pm: Meeting, Tent City University, Occupy London, St Paul’s cathedral, London EC4. Organised by International Prostitutes Collective: www.prostitutescollective.net.

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.

EUROPEAN UNION

Cameron's Euro veto con trick

Despite the deepening rift between the Tories and Liberal Democrats over Europe, writes **Eddie Ford**, both are committed to further attacks on the working class

Playing the part of Winston Churchill, or at least in his imagination, David Cameron went to the Brussels lair on December 9 and showed the British bulldog spirit. Standing up for the plucky underdog, he vetoed any amendments to the Lisbon treaty. Naturally, Cameron was defending Britain's interests against the creeping advance of the Hydra-headed Euro-bureaucracy.

Of course, what Cameron actually said he was doing was protecting the City and its interests - in whose name he exercised his veto. Not you and me. He made no bones about that. The very same bankers, speculators and spivs who have grown obscenely rich and privileged whilst British workers - just like European workers - face a regime of increasing austerity and steady immiseration. Indeed, the very same people - as servants of capitalism - who have been rewarded for their part in bringing the world economy to the brink of catastrophic collapse. They get fabulous bonuses beyond the dreams of avarice, whilst we get a pay cut or have to work longer for less when it comes to our pensions.

In short, Cameron was standing up for the interests of UK capitalist club and the predatory City - against the capitalist bureaucracy of the European Union 'superstate'.

Fraud

But in reality he did not even do that. Far from it. Despite the patriotic hype, amplified *ad nauseam* by the chauvinist tabloid press, Cameron's 'veto' in many respects was a fraud - a con trick on the British public. The idea that the City was under threat from Merkozy's 'new fiscal compact' was transparently absurd, unless you believe that ardently pro-capitalist politicians are somehow militant anti-capitalists in disguise. Most aspects of the British financial services industry (routine banking, insurance and accounting) that Cameron was supposedly defending in Brussels from the perfidious bureaucrats are wholly unaffected by the proposed changes to the EU treaty. Yes, there is the dreaded financial transaction tax ('Tobin tax') that so annoyed Cameron and apparently posed a mortal danger to the entire British way of life. Yet the plain truth is that for this to be in any way effective it would have to be agreed by *all* the EU members. Therefore the 'threat' was nil - a phantom. Even the fairly tame regulatory proposals, which in theory can be authorised by qualified majority voting, would require unanimity - otherwise they would be a nonsense.

So then what exactly did Cameron 'veto'? Bugger all. For him to return from Brussels as if he was a conquering hero is a joke. Rather, he has just isolated himself from the EU negotiating table, which actually makes it *more* likely - not less - that the interests of British capital might be sidelined relative to the other competing capitalist powers. David Cameron's beloved City is no safer or more protected today than it was before December 9. Get real. Not that the City movers and shakers were exactly quaking in their boots at the thought of what might happen to them if Cameron had not wielded his mighty Arthurian 'veto'.

But, of course, Cameron's pathetic theatrics at Brussels play well - at least for now - with the rightwing press and his demi-monde circle of hedge fund managers, millionaire business people,

country-house aristocrats and media executives (all of whom generously bankroll the Tory Party) - no to the federalist road, down with the EU juggernaut, and so on. As is only to be expected, a bit of Brussels-bashing can never do you any harm in British politics. In fact, Cameron has received a boost in the opinion polls - according to a Populus Poll conducted by *The Times*, 57% thought Cameron was "right to use the veto". Meanwhile, the latest Reuters/Ipsos Mori poll on December 14 showed that support for the Tories had risen by 7% to 41%, while backing for Labour had slipped two points to 39% - with the Liberal Democrats on 11%, down one point at less than half what they polled in the general election 18 months ago. A trend broadly confirmed by a ComRes survey for *The Independent* this week that put the Conservatives and Labour neck and neck on 38%. This predictable rise in support for the Tories post-Brussels is in dramatic contrast to the increasing pessimism with regards to the economy, given that only 12% expect it to improve in the next year - the lowest figure since the credit crunch began to bite home for real in September 2008.

Reading these statistics, you can conclude that Cameron's veto was actually a fairly smart move - from the perspective of naked political opportunism, that is. Which ultimately is what matters for establishment politicians.

Overall, Cameron's political calculations at the Brussels summit are not too hard to discern - we are not dealing with the mind of a genius here. Under no circumstance could he risk having to push an EU treaty change through the Commons in a situation where he would be reliant on Liberal Democrat, Labour and a minority of Tory votes - inevitably accompanied by a ever-more hysterical chorus demanding that there should be a referendum on Britain's relationship

with Europe. Imagine the constant beating of the war drums from his Eurosceptic right wing and its clamorous press.

Recriminations

The recriminations from Cameron's veto have come thick and fast. José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European commission, told MEPs in Strasbourg that the British prime minister wanted special privileges for the UK. Barroso insisted, however, that Cameron's decision to deploy the veto did not amount to a "split" between the 17 euro zone states and the rest. Rather, he stated, the new December 9-10 accord between the 26 EU states was "not an agreement at 17-plus, but an agreement at 27-minus".

Barroso went on to claim that, in search of "compromise", he had tabled a clause which made clear that the various regulatory measures in the fiscal compact applied only to the euro zone countries and thus would not undermine the single market or permit any "discrimination" against non-euro states. However, he added, this compromise "proved impossible" thanks to Cameron's intransigence, arguing that his demands represented a "risk to the integrity of the internal market" - which was just unacceptable for other member-states. Regardless of the UK though, most governments at the Brussels talks had "showed their willingness to move ahead with European integration towards a fiscal stability union" - they clearly wanted "more Europe, not less".

As for the Lib Dems, they could barely contain their fury, Cameron's veto coming as a humiliation for an avowedly pro-European party. But Cameron was prepared to see Liberal Democrat hand-wringing - he knows the Lib Dems cannot break with the alliance and so provoke a general election. They would get hammered, perhaps to the point of near liquidation

- in reality that looks likely to be the case even if the election is held in 2015, as constitutionally scheduled.

In other words, they are *slaves* to the Tory Party, not the other way round, as the paranoid Tory right wing like to make out. Chief slave Nick Clegg informed the BBC's Andrew Marr show that he was "bitterly disappointed" by the outcome of the Brussels summit - Cameron's veto is "bad for Britain", which will now be "isolated and marginalised" within the EU. More directly still, Clegg said there was "nothing bulldog about hovering in the mid-Atlantic" and admitted that the first he knew about Cameron's decision was when he was brusquely woken up by the PM's telephone call at 4am on December 10.

Like modern-day Kremlinologists, commentators wrote reams about Clegg's notable absence from the Commons on December 12 when Cameron defended his veto decision. Slightly unconvincingly, Clegg said he had stayed away to avoid being a "distraction" (isn't he supposed to be the *deputy* prime minister?) and insisted that the coalition was "here to stay". With typical sensitivity, the *Daily Mail* slammed Clegg for his "cowardly no-show" and accused him of a "deeply worrying immaturity which risks doing great harm to both his reputation and that of his party" (December 12) - it goes without saying that the *Mail* cares deeply about the fortunes of the Liberal Democrats, just as the rope cares about the hanged man. In the end, all 57 Liberal Democrat MPs abstained on a successful motion "commending" Cameron for his conduct at Brussels.

Perhaps more seriously still, Chris Huhne, the Liberal Democrat energy secretary, bluntly told Cameron in a cabinet meeting that he had "no authority" from the coalition to veto revision of Lisbon treaty - which might well be true from a strictly legalistic point of view. Apparently, Huhne and his colleagues had "not envisaged" the outcome at Brussels - the clear implication being that Cameron had the authority to table four agreed demands for Britain's financial services, but no actual authorisation from his coalition partners to brandish his veto in the manner he did. Now Clegg, by all accounts, is facing a whispering campaign from senior Lib Dem figures - especially the peers - who have suggested that he was "duped" by the prime minister. Nothing like loyalty to your leader.

We have seen a partial breakdown of coalition unity, though the loveless marriage continues purely because one partner in particular fears the consequences of divorce. And both, despite everything, remain committed to 'balancing the books' and further attacking the working class.

The Eurosceptic hounds have scented blood, however, and are hungry for more. If a veto, then why not a "fundamental renegotiation" of the UK's ties with Europe and a repatriation of powers back from Brussels in the lifetime of this parliament? Some Tory backbenchers are now referring to the "English spring" - for them the culmination of the 'revolution' would be a referendum on EU membership. They are now plotting to 'hijack' a vote in February on the overhauling of the European Financial Stability Facility's bailout fund by placing an amendment which would force through another referendum vote - essentially a rerun of last month's

rebellion, which saw 81 Tories defy the leadership.

Contraction

To nobody's surprise, the Merkozy plan to 'save the euro' was nothing of the sort - they still have no clue where the *money* is going to come from to avert the ongoing crisis and prevent a calamitous collapse of the banking system. We now learn that the European leaders will no longer be compelling private bondholders to take a loss ('haircut') as a result of euro zone bailouts, though "voluntary restructuring" remains a possibility. So gone is the forced "private sector involvement" in rescheduling of debt, which will no doubt delight the European Central Bank. Gone too, of course, are Eurobonds - the ECB will not be acting as a lender of last resort. No sign of Chinese gold either, or indeed any gold from anybody - maybe the International Monetary Fund will stump up something. Then again, maybe not.

Recession looms darkly in both Europe and the UK. Gerard Lyons, the chief economist at Standard Chartered, has predicted that the euro zone will contract by 1.5% next year, while the UK will suffer a fall in output of 1.3%. For Lyons a major concern is that macro-economic and regulatory policies are essentially pro-cyclical, hence the tendency of those in charge to carry on digging when they are in a hole. So the euro zone countries already suffering from a deficiency of demand are told to deflate their economies still further, making it impossible for them to hit deficit reduction targets. Similarly, banks are being told by the regulators to build up much bigger capital buffers to make them safer, a policy that would have had great merit during the boom years but - by restricting credit flows to firms - makes another downturn even more likely.

Meanwhile, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has issued another gloomy forecast - the UK labour market faces a "slow, painful contraction", with firms delaying recruitment of more staff. The CIPD predicted that the jobs market would worsen in the medium term amid global economic "turmoil" and its quarterly survey of 1,000 employers found firms' future hiring plans dwarfed by likely public sector losses - last month the institute reported that the public sector had been shedding jobs at five times the rate previously predicted by the Office for Budget Responsibility. In the CIPD's opinion, "recruitment intentions are falling", which will make further rises in unemployment "seem inevitable". And if the euro zone crisis ends up driving the world into a slump or depression ...

Such bleak forecasts have been given further credence by the latest Office for National Statistics figures, which reveal that UK unemployment rose by 128,000 in the three months to October to 2.64 million - the highest level since 1994. Therefore the jobless rate was 8.3%, up from 7.9% in the previous quarter. Youth unemployment climbed to 1.027 million, the highest since records began in 1992 and beating the previous record set only last month. And long-term unemployment continued to rise - the number out of work for 12 months or more rose to 868,000, amounting to one in three of all unemployed ●

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David Cameron: between a rock and a hard place



Europe and the delusions of leftwing nationalism

David Cameron's veto is a dangerous blunder, argues James Turley - so why does the left reproduce Tory stupidity on the EU?

The abiding reaction among the more serious elements of the British bourgeoisie to David Cameron's use of the veto to scupper an emergency European Union treaty is, quite frankly, one of baffled incomprehension. Even against the background of the Tories' inbuilt Euroscepticism, and Cameron's realignment of the party with the far-right cranks of the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists in the European parliament, there is much head-scratching to be seen - what on earth was the PM *thinking*?

Ed Miliband did not waste any time sticking the knife in, naturally, but perhaps more significant is the very visible strain in the coalition. Having tried, in the most laughably craven fashion, to put a brave face on things, Nick Clegg and Vince Cable ultimately had to lambast the prime minister for his frankly bizarre conduct. The Liberal Democrats, of course, are traditionally staunchly pro-Europe; their leaders have come, belatedly, to the conclusion that there is no way they can sell Cameron's apparent posturing stupidity to an increasingly disaffected rank and file.

All of this was obviously of no concern to David Cameron, which in itself is a snapshot of the power relations in the government. On the other hand, it is certainly true that pressure from the right of his party is mounting on the issue. It is not at the pitch that tore the Major government apart, but the breakneck speed of economic developments on the continent, almost all of them representing bad news, is apt to increase Tory twitchiness on the issue.

One depressing side effect of this whole mess has been to show up, yet again, the sheer scale of confusion that exists on the left in this country (and, for that matter, elsewhere in Europe) on the matter of the EU. Ever flying the flag for petty nationalism, the *Morning Star* reported quite uncritically Bob Crow's elation that more and more Britons favour withdrawal from the EU.¹ Elsewhere, an editorial argues that the EU has been anti-democratic and anti-working class from the beginning, and applauds the foresight of an earlier generation of Labour politicians in rejecting membership of the Common Market in the 1950s.

This summit, the comrades argue, existed solely to impose even greater fiscal restraint on national governments - an argument taken up by Labour left Owen Jones in *The Guardian*: "At a stroke, [the agreement] effectively abolishes social democratic governments in the euro zone," he worries.² The Marxist economist, Costas Lapavistas, meanwhile continues to argue for an orderly Greek exit from the euro zone - most recently at a debate on December 9 at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Lapavistas at least had the honesty to acknowledge that a Greek exit would trigger a foreign exchange crisis and thus enormous disruption to food and fuel imports - in time, however, this would be overcome.

Even Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party, despite his group's admirable refusal to succumb to the left-Labourite nationalism of the Bennites during the original debate over



Going it alone

Britain's accession to the European Economic Community in the 1970s - could be found at the Coalition of Resistance's Europe Against Austerity event calling for beleaguered nations to exit from the euro.³

The latest issue of the SWP's paper is a little ambiguous on whether the organisation is for a British withdrawal from the EU itself: "*Socialist Worker* is against Britain being part of a bosses' Europe and is against the latest treaty. But not for the same reasons as the Tories.

"The EU is a neoliberal bosses' club which aims to protect profits by attacking workers and public services. The Lisbon treaty enshrined this vision of a neoliberal Europe. It centralised a host of powers within the European council and European commission.

"But withdrawing from the EU wouldn't guarantee workers' rights - the Tories remain committed to attacking us."⁴

This commentary appears in a piece headed 'The new euro deal - your questions answered' as a response to the question, "Wouldn't things be better for workers if Britain pulled out of the EU?" So was that a 'yes' or a 'no' then?

It is, of course, correct to say that the EU is a "bosses' club", designed to impose the will of the market on recalcitrant populations without regard to anything resembling democracy. However, in the shift from the premise to the operative (in the SWP's case, implied) political conclusion - EU withdrawal - there is an ideological sleight of hand: the EU goes from being an institutional mechanism of capitalist control to the mechanism; it becomes, in other words, a fetish for global capitalism. This fetishised view of the EU leads these various left - even Marxist - forces down the petty bourgeois blind alley of left nationalism.

This is a general point; but it is

peculiarly obvious in the case of Britain. It is worth looking at the *dynamics* of last week's EU tragicomedy, and the British state's clownish role within it.

The British case

Let us return to the opening question: that is, just what the hell is David Cameron up to?

The initially obvious matter is the increasing intensity of grumbles from the more reactionary of his backbenchers. Within the factional life of the Tory Party, it makes sense for Cameron - already under fire for supposedly offering too many concessions to the Liberal Democrats, though Nick Clegg would no doubt beg to differ - to throw the right wing a bone now and again, and the latter have been overjoyed to see Cameron's 'bulldog spirit' on display.

This, surely, is not a sufficient explanation for a decision whose net effect, despite all the guff about Churchill and Dunkirk, will be to exclude - formally or otherwise - the British government from political processes whose outcome could spell economic disaster for this country. The Tory right may howl and groan at the erosion of British sovereignty, but Cameron has more than enough tricks up his sleeve to deal with them.

We also have to consider Britain's relationship to the United States. Ever since British entry into the European Economic Community as it was then, the US has made good use of the 'special relationship' to ensure that European unity proceeds at as cumbersome a pace as possible. Successive British governments, Tory and Labour alike, have been more than willing accomplices; it is the US and its agents in Europe that pushed for rapid expansion in the last 10 years, calculating - correctly - that it would act as a constitutional block on closer, deeper integration of the EU's

member-states.

America's interest in all this is quite clear - while it remains very much the global military and economic hegemon state, its power is in long-term decline, and a hypothetical United States of Europe would represent a potential rival. As for Britain, it gets all the benefits of being the 51st state - the UK, and especially London, is not only the pre-eminent tax haven, but also the lynchpin of the whole system of tax havens. The majority of transactions that supposedly take place in Jersey, the Caymans and so on in fact take place in the City. The reward is a healthy slice of imperialist superprofits, which allow Britain a more muscular role on the world stage, half a century after the empire coughed its last, than it strictly speaking deserves.

Visible between the lines of this whole farrago is the Atlanticist strategy under immense pressure from events. It is ultimately of peripheral significance, but nonetheless appropriate, that Cameron should have made his stand on some pretty trifling regulations, which may or may not have mildly hindered transactions in the City. Fundamentally at issue here is American power.

That is not to say that the answer to the perennial million-dollar question - *quo bene?* - is America. On the contrary, this seems to be a last desperate throw of the dice on the part of the Atlanticist establishment to obstruct closer European unity when the choice is quite boldly posed from the perspective of the major European powers - either closer union or disintegration; the slender hope of stabilisation versus the certainty of economic ruin. The point of no return is several miles behind us. No wonder Sarkozy told Cameron where to stick his veto. This looks rather like bungled Atlanticism - but the US and UK are running out of options.

Left idiocy

The nub of the matter is this: the EU is, indeed, a bosses' club; but it is *no more or less* so than the British state. Indeed, the net effect of British membership has been to pull the EU even further to the right - the endless niggling moans from Tories and more idiotic capitalists about the mountains of red tape and so forth refer to the fact that the EU as an institution - Viking, Laval and the rest aside - is actually more generous on the question of working conditions than Britain.

The more fundamental point follows from here: this is not true because we Brits (or, *pace* Scottish left nationalists, the English) are basically more conservative than those hot-headed continentals, but because Britain, and indeed every country in the world, is involved in a complex network of determinate relationships with other states and with global capital, be they economic or otherwise. Withdrawal from the EU is not a baby-step towards national self-determination, still less (god help us) some version of socialism on one island.

As for countries such as Greece, the picture is even more grim. Suppose the Greek people follow Alex Callinicos's advice and withdraw from the euro: will they no longer be at the mercy of speculators and other enforcers of the world market? The question answers

itself - it is an opportunist idiocy. The integration of capitalism on an international scale is not something we can wish away - it is a bald-faced objective *fact*, and it has been a tendency busily at work in capitalism since its first stirrings in the womb of feudal absolutism. Comrade Callinicos, who has written a substantial book on such matters,⁵ really should know better.

This tendency entails, to be sure, horrific suffering, with many millions dying of malnutrition and preventable diseases every year because there is no percentage in their survival - even the citizens of Greece and Ireland do not know the half of it. Nonetheless, it is objectively progressive, eroding the national prisons in which the different sections of the working class are held, and indeed making possible a workable, international socialism. One of the reasons capitalism needs to be overcome, in fact, is because it can only go so far along this road of globalisation.

The EU is not merely an expression of the internationalisation of capital, but also of the concomitant internationalisation of politics. It may, indeed, be irrational in the extreme and run by corrupt bureaucrats in the interests of its strongest members - but, for all that, it is a negative anticipation of the necessity of democratic, rational political authority that transcends national barriers. The soft-left and 'social-liberal' prettification of the EU as a potential 'progressive' counterweight to the blundering American colossus is wishful thinking, of course; but our job is to fight to transcend it, not retreat into petty nationalist stupidity.

Lenin, in a different connection, made a point that is highly pertinent here: "The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc, and beyond them to socialism!"⁶

In this, Lenin was simply being a good Marxist - for Marx and Engels, and all those who deserve their mantle, socialism is the future of capitalism, not some mangled mythologisation of its prehistory. For Marxists today, the key task is to use this convulsive crisis engulfing the EU to argue for Europe-wide working class organisation, and ultimately Europe-wide revolution ●

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Notes

1. *Morning Star* December 12.
2. *The Guardian* December 13.
3. See P Manson, 'Besancenot: go beyond outdated national borders' *Weekly Worker* October 6.
4. *Socialist Worker* December 17.
5. A Callinicos *Imperialism and global political economy* Cambridge 2009.
6. VI Lenin *The military programme of the proletarian revolution*: www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/milprog/ii.htm.

ITALY

Three-hour general strike forces concessions

Italian workers are determined to defend their pensions, writes Toby Abse

The general strike of Monday December 12 - the first involving all three major trade union confederations for six years - even if it was, unfortunately, only a symbolic three hours at the end of the working day, is the first clear indication of serious working class resistance to the vicious neoliberal austerity measures being imposed by Mario Monti's unelected government of bankers and technocrats.

It is very heartening that this strike appears to be the beginning and not the end of a confrontation between the three union centres and the government over pensions. An eight-hour public-sector general strike has been called by the CGIL, CISL and UIL for Monday December 19, and is planned to involve all the workers in public transport and essential services who were excluded from participation in the December 12 walkout, even if its limitation to the public sector will mean that it will not have the same direct impact on industry as this week's strike.

It is clear that the pressure from below, from the working class itself (or at least from the more militant sections of it), on the rival trade union bureaucracies is absolutely crucial to the transcendence - however temporary and partial it might prove to be - of the long-standing division between the more combative CGIL and the more collaborationist CISL and UIL, which not only had regular meetings with Berlusconi and his ministers behind the back of the CGIL, but were quite prepared to reach agreements with the employers at the CGIL's expense. The most notorious recent 'no-strike' deal was struck in the Fiat plants and this excluded FIOM - the CGIL's engineering affiliate, which generally takes a position well to the left of CGIL general secretary Susanna Camusso - from any official representation inside the company. Originally the CISL and UIL had called a two-hour general strike of their own for December 12, without consulting the CGIL at all. The CGIL had reacted to what it regarded as a devious and demagogic attempt to wrong-foot it by calling an independent four-hour general strike for the same day. Eventually on December 7¹ the ludicrous scenario of two parallel and partially overlapping general strikes was averted by a meeting between the three general secretaries - Luigi Angeletti (UIL), Raffaele Bonanni (CISL) and Susanna Camusso (CGIL) - which reached a compromise on a three-hour joint general strike and a common set of demands to the government for alterations to the austerity package.

It is significant, both in terms of Monti's style - which is more thoughtful and far less gratuitously confrontational than Berlusconi's - and in terms of the balance of forces, that the new prime minister, together with his ministers, were willing to meet the three union leaders, as well as Giovanni Centrella of the more rightwing UGL (a confederation whose origins can be traced to unions close to the now defunct neo-fascist MSI) on December 11 for talks designed to avert the general strike. There was some talk of concessions on both the upper threshold for those pensions that would still benefit from the traditional system of indexation in 2012, and on lowering the rates



Militancy brings results

of IMU/ICI (house tax) for poorer families. However, given what Monti presented as the absolute necessity of keeping the total austerity package at €30 billion, it was far from clear what further cuts or additional taxes would be introduced to cover the gap created by the proposed concessions, which in practice meant that there was a certain fuzziness as to precisely what was on the table.

Moreover, Camusso, who sent out a stream of tweets from the meeting² - very probably in order to avoid any shoddy compromise by Angeletti and Bonanni - made it clear in a subsequent interview with *La Repubblica* that a revision of pension indexations and of the IMU on first homes were not enough: "And we have also said this. There is a problem of quantity in the budget, but also one of quality. There are incomprehensible marks of unfairness - think of the abolition of the norm that permitted you to retire after 40 years of work."³ Camusso also emphasised: "We face a situation of extreme gravity for society. Workers and pensioners are the categories being made to pay over the odds for this crisis. But this is unfair - they are always hitting the same people, with recessive effects on the economy. What has changed is something you ought to ask the CISL and the UIL. Our judgement on the unfairness also applied to the previous budgets. We had great hopes of this government. Certainly it has regained authority at the European level, but on the other hand it has made 'the usual suspects' pay for the crisis. It is truly mistaken."

When asked if she would exclude the possibility of a general strike to follow the December 19 public sector action, she responded: "We exclude nothing. But for now we have not decided on any new initiatives." She also expressed profound scepticism about the explanation offered by Monti

and his ministers for not introducing a wealth tax - they needed time to study such a move, but if they had announced their intention, it would have "provoked a flood of capital abroad". Camusso commented that this seemed more like "an excuse to mask the fact that they don't want to introduce it".

The CGIL general secretary made it clear in her *Repubblica* interview that she had also not been reassured by Monti and his team that there would be no attack on article 18 of the workers' statute of 1970. The previous day welfare minister Elsa Fornero, responding to a question from the well-known leftwing journalist, Lucia Annunziata, about article 18 had said: "It is a question which I will not answer." Such weasel words are a clear indication that she plans to mount a further vicious attack on the working class, no doubt accompanied by further floods of tears. She has already announced, "Having modified the pension system, we must now act so as to make the labour market inclusive."

It is very evident from the similar tone of the reports in both *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* that Fornero has in effect let it be known off the record that she intends to try to get a trade-off between article 18 and article 19, which establishes the rules about union representation in individual workplaces. Article 19 was modified, in favour of the employers, by a referendum in the mid-1990s. It now says that only a union which has signed an agreement with the company that applies in an individual factory has the right to represent workers in that factory. Previously, the trade unions with a greater number of members in the factory had an automatic right to have delegates, regardless of whether there was an agreement or not. The current rules

have practical consequences, as can be seen from the exclusion of FIOM from the Fiat plants, despite the fact that it represents the majority of the workforce.

Fornero appears to be offering the unions a return to the original wording of article 19, under which the right to have delegates is linked to the number of members the union has in a particular factory, in exchange for a surrender on article 18. This would mean that from now on employees sacked "without just cause" would merely get some financial compensation instead of being reinstated. As even *Repubblica* - which is in favour of the 'reforms' - has to concede, article 18 was "devised to reduce the very widespread (and never totally suppressed) tendency among Italian enterprises to choose their employees on the basis of their political or trade union opinions".⁴ Or, as we might put it, abolishing article 18 would give the employers enormous scope for the victimisation of committed trade union activists and open the way for the employment of scabs and members of yellow unions - the situation that prevailed in Fiat and elsewhere between the start of the cold war in 1948 and the workers' upsurge of the late 1960s.

The December 12 general strike was a great success and was accompanied by demonstrations involving thousands of people all over Italy, from Milan, Genoa and Turin in the north to Naples, Palermo and Bari in the south. Most of the demonstrations involved all three confederations, but in a number of cities in the traditionally 'red' region of Emilia, such as Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Modena and Ferrara, the division between the CGIL and the others persisted, with the CGIL organising demonstrations in city centres, whilst the CISL and UIL confined themselves to workplace

assemblies.

In Naples, one banner proclaimed: "Italy is a republic based on the spread", parodying the article in the 1948 constitution - "Italy is a republic based on labour". In Florence, banners bore slogans including "Poor pope - the Vatican should also pay!" and "Neither Monti nor Tremonti - let the workers govern". Whilst the Florentine demonstration included some banners from the CISL and UIL, the extreme left had a large presence, with a huge portrait of Marx prominently displayed. In Rome there was a demonstration outside parliament involving all the main unions, and the banners included those of Rifondazione Comunista and the anti-corruption Italia dei Valori party, which, unlike the ex-'official communist' Partito Democratico, gave total support to the strike. Antonio di Pietro, leader of Italia dei Valori, described it as a "sacrosanct strike", because "as things stand, the pensioners will pay, but not the former prime minister, and not even the tax evaders, who, since they have never been punished, have quadrupled their thefts in the last 30 years". Amongst the placards outside parliament was one proclaiming, "Yes to the wealth tax - yes to cuts in the salaries of parliamentarians and their fabulous pensions".

The strike has to some extent been effective in forcing further, albeit limited, concessions from the Monti government. For the coming year, the threshold below which pensions will be indexed has been raised from €936 per month back to €1,400, so that 78% of pensions will still be index-linked. However, this only applies to 2012 - as from 2013 the threshold will descend to €936 again. Some concessions have also been made in respect of those born in 1952, who will become 60 next year. Instead of making some of these wait an additional six years for their pension, they can now retire after 35 years of employment (men) or 20 years (women), once they reach the age of 64. There has also been some modification in the new IMU (house tax) for first homes, with graduated reductions for every child; a modification that seems to owe more to Catholic social teaching than to more secular conceptions of social justice.

There have also been a few minor measures slightly increasing the burden on the wealthy. There will be a one-off 15% 'solidarity contribution' on pensions above €200,000, and some increase in stamp duty, which *La Repubblica* tries to present as the feared "wealth tax" •

Notes

1. Gad Lerner ascribes this initiative to the weakest of the three confederations, the UIL ('Se il sindacato torna a fare il suo mestiere' *La Repubblica* December 11).

2. The four key messages on Twitter, as reported by *La Repubblica*, were:

20.49: Monti says that the budget is fair as it is. He says wealth has been hit.

20.50: Monti says the situation is serious, the pension reform guarantees fairness between the generations and that the strike is an instrument of democratic life.

21.50: Camusso replies to Monti: the budget is profoundly unfair, and hits only lower earners and pensioners.

21.54: Grilli says IMU is all right as it is. At this point, with the static positions of the government, we don't understand what is to be gained from the discussion of the budget.

3. *La Repubblica* December 12.

4. *La Repubblica* December 12.

Too early to say

Ian Birchall **Tony Cliff: a Marxist for his time** Bookmarks, 2011, pp664, £16.99

Tony Cliff, born Ygaël Gluckstein in Palestine in 1917, was the effective founder-leader of the Socialist Workers Party. When I had finished reading Ian Birchall's biography of him, my first thought was to begin this review with the Latin tag, *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*: 'If you need a monument, look around you'. Googling it to confirm my recollection of the source, I found that Paul Hampton had already used it for his September 7 review in *Solidarity*.¹

Hampton and I independently had the same thought because this is actually the substance of comrade Birchall's message. Tony Cliff was above all else a 'party man', and his monument is the SWP and its international tendency, the International Socialist Tendency. Birchall says at the outset: "I have written a biography and not a history of the SWP and its predecessors"; but he precedes this with the point that "Cliff's life was bound up with the organisation he helped to build" (piv).

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, 'The making of a revolutionary', covers Cliff's early life and his political involvement, including in early clandestine Trotskyism, in mandate Palestine, his migration to Britain and involvement in the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party and its collapse, and the early history of the 'Cliff state-capitalist' *Socialist Review* group, which emerged as one of the fragments of the RCP. Part two, 'From theory to practice', covers 1960-79, a period when revolution in the short term seemed increasingly possible. It covers the passage from the Socialist Review group to the International Socialists and from there, in 1976, to the SWP. Part three, 'Building for the future', covers 1979-2000: the 'downturn,' as Cliff identified it, and - as he began to imagine towards the end of his life - the beginnings of a new 'upturn'.

The chapters within each part are similarly chronological. There is only in any sense a *thematic* treatment of Cliff's ideas to the extent that his major writings in a particular chapter give some thematic shape to that chapter. Each chapter after the first contains a combination of: (1) narrative of the political situation, as seen from a Trotskyist-SRG-IS-SWP perspective; (2) narrative of the activities of the Trotskyists-SRG-IS-SWP, their debates and Cliff's involvement in them; (3) discussion of Cliff's writings of the period of the chapter; and (4) personal memories of Cliff, mostly from people who were inspired by him to join the SRG-IS-SWP at the period of the chapter, but also some from those who disagreed with him at this time. These last are perhaps a little toned down by passage through interviewing by Birchall, as compared to published statements at the time and since.

The book is not *completely* a hagiography (life of a saint, or the equivalent) since there are points at which Birchall is willing to criticise Cliff. These are summarised in a paragraph in the conclusion:

"Cliff, like all of us, had his weaknesses. His 'stick-bending' could lead him to exaggeration and overstatement, which produced errors of judgement. He was not always a good judge of character, adopting

comrades as favourites - when it was often obvious to others that they had serious limitations - and then dropping them again. He could be impatient and operated best when others took care of details he could not be bothered with. He was sometimes unkind and even ruthless. In his later years he largely concentrated on defending the Marxist tradition rather than developing a critical Marxism appropriate to new conditions, as he had done in the 1950s and 1960s" (p559).

In addition, the book is thorough, systematic and well-documented. The 'oral history' element is useful, in the sense that Birchall's interviews and communications have been done while memory is still relatively fresh; though reading a series of stories of Cliff the inspirer, which predominate in this material, becomes after a while a little tedious. If at some future date a full critical appreciation of Cliff's life, work and ideas proves desirable, Birchall has laid a large part of the foundations for such a study.

Nonetheless, Birchall's book is not itself a critical biography. It is not even a critical biography within the 'IS tradition' or within the framework of general agreement with Cliff's basic idea - 'Cliff state capitalism', or a radical modification of Trotsky on Russia, which retained the fundamentals of Trotskyism on the nature of the epoch, the party, and so on.

The problem is precisely the *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice* aspect of the book. Birchall's commitment to the *present* SWP, considered as a success and as a fitting monument to Cliff, contains implicitly a rejection of *political* and *theoretical* criticisms of the SWP (and of Cliff's ideas) on the basis that the SWP has succeeded in building "the smallest mass party in the world" (Cliff's, or perhaps Birchall's, own phrase) and that its rivals and splinters from it have, on the other hand, failed. Their criticisms are therefore at the end of the day not to be taken seriously: as Michael Raptis (Michel Pablo) wrote at the time of the 1953 split in the Trotskyist Fourth International, "They desert - we go on". Within this framework, criticisms of Cliff's ideas and choices, which at the end of the day produced today's SWP, *have to be* - as Birchall's are - marginal.

SWP 'success'

It is a half-truth that - among the groups of the British far left - the SWP is a success and the rest are (comparative) failures. It is at best questionable whether this result follows from the value of Cliff's specific ideas and his role as an inspiring leader. It also may be that under the conditions that have so far prevailed in most of the world, the 'party model' the SWP shares with most of the global far left can get up to 5,000-10,000 members, but no further. Reason: because splits and erosion of cadre through 'turnover' combine with a perception among the broad workers' vanguard that the leading group in any country is *not* a 'small mass party', but the largest of several competing sects.

The half-truth is relatively simple. At the end of the World War II there was the 'official' CPGB, with its membership at its highest



Tony Cliff: produced a sect

around 60,000 in 1943; there was the Trotskyist RCP, with a couple of hundred; and there were some very small Trotskyist groups outside the RCP. The RCP in 1949-50 broke up into smaller fragments, of which Gerry Healy's 'Club' was the largest, Cliff's *Socialist Review* group the second largest, and the Grant group (later *Militant*) the third largest. This pattern of relative size survived into the late 1960s.

In the early 1970s the Cliff group (by now the IS) grew to a few thousand and overtook the Healy group (then the Socialist Labour League, and from 1974 the Workers Revolutionary Party). The *Militant*, a long way behind at this stage, temporarily overtook the SWP in the mid-late 1980s, but broke up in the 1990s, and the current Socialist Party in England and Wales is smaller than the SWP. The International Marxist Group, which had effectively appeared in the 1960s, grew to 600 in the mid-70s, but blew up in the 1980s. The WRP blew up and collapsed into political gravel in 1985-87.

The old CPGB declined, revived and was eventually liquidated by the Eurocommunists in 1991. The *Morning Star* group/Communist Campaign Group/Communist Party of Britain managed to salvage a membership which is substantially smaller than the SWP, and predominantly aging, though still in the high hundreds. It retains a daily paper and substantially stronger links with the trade union bureaucracy - and stronger ideological influence in what remains of the Labour left than the SWP.

The upshot is indeed that the SWP has outstripped its rivals. This is a truth. But it is only a half-truth. What the SWP has not done, in spite of an aim of doing so, is to replace the Communist Party. Its *paid-up* membership is substantially smaller than its *claimed* membership, and its *mobilisable* membership substantially smaller than its paid-up membership. It is, in the upshot, an organisation larger than SPEW or the CPB, but on the same absolute scale; and perceived by the broad workers' vanguard as one of the sects, not as a potential alternative.

Was this relative success a product of Cliff's role as a thinker or as an inspiring leader? He clearly *was* an inspiring leader to his followers - Birchall documents the point - but the same was true of Gerry Healy till

it came to the crunch in the 1980s. In relation to the ideas, 'Cliff state capitalism' certainly avoided some of the difficulties the Mandelites experienced, by simply distancing the IS-SWP from the 'Soviet question'. 'Deflected permanent revolution' and the 'permanent arms economy' were no more than debating gambits. The biography of Lenin was said by John Sullivan to "read like a biography of John the Baptist written by Jesus Christ" - that is, it presented Lenin as a forerunner to Cliff.

The party conception adopted in 1973-76 was derived from James P Cannon. It certainly succeeded in preventing large, damaging splits by pre-emptive action against dissent - at the cost, however, of creating ongoing attrition of hostile ex-members and absolutely precluding any larger regroupment: as came to be seen when the SWP first took over the Socialist Alliance, then destroyed it for short-term tactical advantage, then, having created *Respect*, destroyed it in turn in a split without any real political motivation, because it was not delivering the gains the SWP central leadership had hoped for.

To put this another way. The IS-SWP grew dramatically in the late 1960s-early 1970s. So did all the left groups; even the 'official' CPGB experienced an uptick in membership at this time. The SWP has become the biggest left group because the Healy group first took an ultra-sectarian turn, then went mad; because the Eurocommunists liquidated the old CPGB; and because *Militant* split, first over the Labour Party and then over the Scottish question. The SWP did not outgrow these groups: it out-survived them. As long as it pre-emptively suppressed dissent and did not engage too seriously with any ideas except the party conception,² it was in a good position to do so.

The British Trotskyists are not in the least peculiarly sectarian: the pattern of competing sects - each attempting to outgrow the others and thereby hegemonise the left - has been tried all over the world. Nowhere has it got beyond groups of a few thousand, except in actual revolutionary conditions - as in Iran in 1979, where groups recruited tens of thousands but continued to behave as if they were groups of a few thousand and proved useless. In the very late 1960s to early 1970s it was possible to think that revolution was on the immediate agenda in Britain. It is in retrospect pretty clear that this was an illusion. But there were plenty of countries where at that time revolution - or violent reaction - *was* on the immediate agenda. Organisations built on the Cannon model of the party proved as useless in revolutionary conditions as, in less violent conditions, they have proved unable to get beyond the level of a few thousand.

In other words, the Cannonite party conception is a trap; and Birchall's belief that the SWP's relative success is Cliff's best monument is also a trap.

Look around you

Zhou Enlai reportedly responded in 1971 to a question about the impact of the French Revolution that it was "too early to say". He thus earned a reputation in the west

as an inscrutable Chinese sage. It is now reported that it was actually a misunderstanding: Zhou had thought he was being asked about the French events of 1968, for which "too early to say" was a pretty fair response in 1971.³ Paul Hampton's view is that Cliff was a complete disaster and to "look around you" shows it: "Cliff built the SWP into the locust of the left it is today." On this question I am with Zhou Enlai.

It is *true* that the SWP is the biggest organisation of the far left. That represents in part merely the inheritance of being the second-biggest Trotskyist group in 1950, and therefore picking up more of the newly radicalising forces in the 1960s and 70s than smaller groups. But it does also represent certain strengths of Tony Cliff as a leader who inspired people with ideas of radical socialism. The same could, of course, be said of Henry Hyndman, who founded the Social Democratic Federation which eventually (after ousting Hyndman in World War I) became the core of the old CPGB.

It is certainly the case that the current course of the SWP on the party question - like that of the far-left groups in general, including Paul Hampton's Alliance for Workers' Liberty - is a disaster. But it is perfectly possible to damn the current course of the SWP out of the mouth of the older writings of Tony Cliff. The AWL has done so itself; and so have many people and tendencies that have departed from the SWP since the Protz-Palmer-Higgins faction in 1975.

The *possibility* therefore exists that SWP militants themselves could come to auto-critique their current course; and to do so in part by using the ideas of the older Cliff against the man's development in the 1970s and that of his successors. If they were able to do so, the SWP could pass beyond being the largest among a range of sects, to making itself the core of a broader regroupment of the Marxist left: the SDF of a future communist party.

I admit that this possibility does not look very likely right now. The people who have recently emerged as oppositionists in the SWP, like Rees-German and Bamberg, have stuck with party monolithism and hence walked before they were pushed in unprincipled splits. But we should seek a *positive* outcome of the SWP, not the negative ones of explosion like the WRP or withering away into a small sect like the US SWP; even if that positive outcome at present also looks unlikely.

Birchall's book could be only very indirectly helpful in such a process. Helpful to some extent because of its data about Cliff's ideas before the 1970s; but unhelpful because it reads the early Cliff as far as is humanly possible as in continuity with the later Cliff and the current SWP ●

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Notes

1. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/09/07/tony-cliff-%E2%80%99Si-monumentum-requiris-circumspice%E2%80%99D.
2. On not engaging too seriously with ideas, Sean Matgamna's account of Cliff in *Workers' Liberty* September 2000, is illuminating.
3. 'Zhou's cryptic caution lost in translation' *Financial Times* June 10.

REVIEWS

Anti-Semitism in anti-Zionist garb

Gilad Atzmon *The wandering who?* Zero Books, 2011, pp203, £8.99

David Landy *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights* Zed Press, 2011, pp272, £19.99

In the blurb for Atzmon's *The wandering who?* are listed five professors: William Cook, James Petras and Samir Abed-Rabbo, as well as John Mearsheimer, professor of political science at Chicago University, and Richard Falk, professor of international law at Princeton. The first three had no reputation to lose. The latter two have probably torpedoed their reputations permanently. It would seem that stupidity can be a useful attribute if you want to be a professor.

Perhaps Falk and Mearsheimer could set their students the following essay: "Why is the following a classic example of racism and anti-Semitism? 'Sixty-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz we should be able to ask ... Why were the Jews hated? Why did European people stand up against their neighbours? Why are the Jews hated in the Middle East ... Why did America tighten its immigration laws amid the growing danger to European Jews?'" (pp175-176).

Our good professors might draw their students' attention to the way the Jews of Europe are elided together with the Zionist settlers of Israel, to say nothing of the notion of a single European people. Jews are one seamless whole. But did Poland's Jews colonise another land? Were the Dutch Jews so hated that the workers of Amsterdam reacted with a three-day general strike to protest the attacks on them, broken only by fierce military repression and the deportation of the strike leaders to Mauthausen, where they died?

Did the Danes who in October 1943 rescued almost the whole Jewish community - 8,000 people - by transporting them by boat to Sweden, "stand up" against their Jewish neighbours? Or the Bulgarians, who refused to allow a single deportation from Old Bulgaria? Or the Albanians? Or the French and Italians, 75% and 85% of whose Jews survived the holocaust, mainly through hiding out with non-Jews?

Atzmon directs much of his venom against the anti-Zionist Bund, who are "not fundamentally different from Zionism" (p122). If by that he means both were Jewish movements, then he is correct. But they were also political antagonists. The Bund believed in fighting where Jews were, not escaping to colonise someone else's land. In the 1938 local council elections in Warsaw, the Bund obtained 17 out of 20 seats, compared to just one for the Zionists. The obvious comparison is between the pogromists of Russia and Poland and the mobs who chant "Death to the Arabs" in Israel.

Marek Edelman, a Bundist and commander of the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto, was different enough from a Zionist to pay tribute to the Palestinian resistance in the second Intifada.¹ That was why the Israeli embassy in Poland did not even send the lowest clerk to Edelman's funeral in 2009, although the president of Poland found time to attend.

Atzmon demonstrates his anti-communist (and anti-Semitic) credentials when he writes: "The Jewish nationalist would rob Palestine in the name of the right of self-determination; the Jewish progressive is there to rob the ruling class and even international capital in the name of world working class revolution."²

All Jews are thieves and Jewish socialists' desire to abolish the capitalist class and deprive them of their plunder is equated to the theft

of Palestinian land by Zionism. Presumably non-Jewish socialists believe in enriching those who are already rich! Another example of Atzmon's myopia and racism is his reference to the closing of America's borders, as the holocaust approached (in fact it was 1924). But this was not aimed at just the Jews. How is this any different from immigration controls and the deportation of asylum-seekers in the west today? Does the US now welcome non-Jewish refugees fleeing from persecution?

Atzmon blames the victim for racism. This is anything but "transformative" (Falk). However, Atzmon does not fish in an empty sea. This book has achieved a certain resonance because of the wider context. Accusations that they are 'anti-Semitic' are standard fare for anti-Zionists and Palestine solidarity activists and many people, rather than challenging the underlying premise, take their accusers at their word. If told it is anti-Semitic to support the Palestinians, then there are those who accept that allegation as a price worth paying. In other words, Zionism forces people into adopting an anti-Semitic outlook.

The wandering who? is purportedly about Jewish identity. In reality it is about Atzmon's own identity crisis. Is he Jewish, Christian, ex-Jewish or just Artie Fishel, a spoof character and ardent Zionist who is Atzmon's alter ego? What the book does not even understand, let alone recognise, except by way of caricature, is the real identity crisis of today's diaspora Jews.

Instead he dwells on a *Jewish Chronicle* feature on David Rosenberg and Julia Bard of the non-Zionist Jewish Socialists Group and their agonising over whether to have their two boys circumcised. To Atzmon this is "a peep into the strange and inconsistent world of the Jewish tribal left ... [it] presents Zionism in a new light." In fact it says nothing about Zionism, but everything about Atzmon. Circumcision is also practised by Muslims. One assumes that there are not too many Muslim Zionists! Atzmon's reduction of Jewish identity to circumcision is probably more worthy of psycho-analysis.

If you read Atzmon's 'Credit crunch or rather Zio punch' or Diana Henriques' *Swindler's list*, you could be forgiven for thinking that Alan Greenspan and Paul Wolfowitz single-handedly brought about the credit crunch in order to enhance the power of Israel and international Jewry. This type of crude anti-Semitism has no popular purchase. Its only effect is to

discredit the Palestine solidarity movement by virtue of Atzmon's association with it.

According to Atzmon, "the Judaic god" is an evil deity who leads his people to plunder, robbery and theft. What Moses and Joshua did over three millennia ago explains Israel's behaviour today. Given that Britain was the world's largest empire and also a Christian state, one wonders why Atzmon converted to a religion whose god is also evil? God was always on the side of the colonist, whatever their religion.

Atzmon associates his work with the late Israel Shahak, a professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, who personally uncovered the remains of over 300 Arab villages which had been razed to the ground. Shahak was a child survivor of the Warsaw ghetto and Belsen-Bergen. Shahak's saying, "The Nazis made me afraid to be a Jew, and the Israelis make me ashamed to be a Jew", is featured at the beginning of the book. But that was not a rejection of being Jewish, but a rejection of what Israel was doing in the Jews' name. Atzmon is not above juvenile name-dropping, but Shahak's argument is too sophisticated for him. Shahak did not argue that Zionist barbarities were intrinsic to being Jewish: rather that the settlers were using long forgotten passages in the Talmud in order to justify their Judeo-Nazi practices.

In his *Jewish history, Jewish religion: the weight of three thousand years* chapter 3,³ Shahak wrote: "A great deal of nonsense has been written in the attempt to provide a social or mystical interpretation of Jewry or Judaism 'as a whole'. This cannot be done, for the social structure of the Jewish people and the ideological structure of Judaism have changed profoundly through the ages." For Shahak, the Jews and

Jewish identity have "changed profoundly". There is no one Jewish identity. But for Atzmon there is no change. The 1st Zionist Congress of 1897 was held in Basel, Switzerland rather than Munich, Germany because of the objection of the latter's Jewish community. It is not something that easily fits into Atzmon's narrative.

The first questions anyone genuinely interested in Jewish identity would ask would be: Will Jewish communities outside Israel survive? What is their material basis? Is Zionism or opposition to Israel enough? Atzmon asks none of these questions. If Shahak was still alive he would have sent Atzmon away with a flea in his ear. Atzmon's absurd statement (chapter 1) that "Israel and Zionism were just parts of the wider Jewish problem" completely misunderstands and distorts Shahak's main argument that Zionism has resurrected an old Jewish identity based on classic rabbinical Judaism.

Atzmon focuses on an unchanging and essentialist notion of Jewish identity. It matters not whether he defines race by reference to biology, culture or ideology. Racism takes many forms. His definition of Zionism as a "global network with no head - it is a spirit ..." could be the words of Nazi anti-Semites Julius Streicher, Alfred Rosenberg or Theodor Fritsch (p88).

When Atzmon writes that "It is more than likely that 'Jews' do not have a centre or headquarters ... that they aren't aware of their particular role within the entire system, the way an organ is not aware of its role within the complexity of the organism", who can doubt that Atzmon's 'organismus' is the old world Jewish conspiracy?

As Gabriel Ash explains, "Substituting 'Jewish ideology' for 'the Jewish spirit and Jewish consciousness' is the only thing that makes Atzmon's take on Jewishness 'ground-breaking'. Everything else is derivative."⁴ Atzmon has married the hostility of his revisionist Zionist grandfather to the left with the anti-Semitic contempt that Zionism reserves for Jews outside Israel.

Atzmon proclaims: "Zionism is not a colonial movement with an interest in Palestine ... To be a Zionist means to accept that, more than anything else, one is primarily a Jew" (p21). Here he acts as mirror to the Zionist image. According to him, the real target should be those who control Israel - Jewish

Zionism exists inside Israel - it's a diaspora phenomenon. What is needed is not boycott, divestment and sanctions (which Atzmon has never supported), but a campaign against your local Jewish community! Instead of picketing Ahava, the Israeli cosmetics company, we should demonstrate outside a Jewish kindergarten.

Perhaps the only concession to the truth in the entire book is when Atzmon declares: "At a certain stage, around 2005, I thought to myself that I might be King of the Jews" (p54). Atzmon is just another in a long line of false messiahs.

Atzmon justifies his anti-Semitism by noting that "Early Zionist ideologists were pretty outspoken when it came to the 'diaspora' Jewry" (p58). He cites Hashomer Hatzair's description of Jews as "a caricature of a normal, natural human being". But that is precisely what he pretends not to understand. Anti-Semitism created the Zionist movement, which in turn adopted the outlook and internalised the ideology of its creator.

Atzmon believes that "Emancipated Jews are identified by negation - they are defined by the many things they are not." This is a familiar Zionist theme. But it is untrue. Jewish anti-Zionists are not merely defined by that which they oppose, but also by a long tradition of Jewish opposition to racism and fascism.

Atzmon's thesis is that Zionism was not a settler-colonial movement born in the age of colonialism and that Zionism's adoption of the idea of Jewish nationhood was justified. What is clear from this is that Atzmon has retained intact the Zionist outlook of his relatives. He may indeed be outraged by the consequences of Zionism, but politically he has never broken from it.

Atzmon's hero is Otto Weininger, about whom Hitler apparently remarked that he was the only good Jew, which is why he killed himself. A racist and misogynist, Weininger "helped me grasp who I am, or rather who I may be" (p90). There is a turgid passage about what percentage there is of the masculine and feminine in an individual. The analogy is with the percentage of Jewishness in someone. His conclusions? "With contempt, I am actually elaborating on the Jew in me" (p94). And therein lies the real problem.

The chapter 'Truth, history and integrity' is named after an essay of the same name. But he omits three paragraphs from the original, including the statement, "... if the Nazis ran a death factory in Auschwitz-Birkenau, why would the Jewish prisoners join them at the end of the war?" But Atzmon still cannot resist a nod in the direction of holocaust denial. He writes: "Sixty-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, we must be entitled to start asking questions. We should ask for historical evidence and arguments rather than follow a religious narrative that is sustained by political pressure and laws" (p175).

Those who doubt that Atzmon is anti-Semitic should ponder his statement, "If there are some remote patches of humanism in Jewish culture, these are certainly far from being universal" (p113). Like his friend, Israel Shamir, Atzmon is attracted to medieval anti-Semitism. On Jewish identity today Atzmon has nothing to say.

Koshering the boycott



communities
outside
Israel.
Atzmon
denies
that

A book which has not received the publicity given to *The wondering who?* - or the praise of professors - is David Landy’s *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights*. Landy’s purpose is to examine how a global movement of Israel-critical Jews came about and the tension between Jewish identity and Palestinian rights. It has to be said at the outset that Landy has only scratched the surface of the second objective, though he gives a good description of the first.

People forget that 30-40 years ago, Jewish anti-Zionists were found almost exclusively in organisations of the far left. People like Tony Cliff of the International Socialists, who were themselves uninvolved in Palestine solidarity and rarely spoke about it. When I became an anti-Zionist there was no-one with whom I could identify. Today there are thousands of Jews who, to a greater or less extent, oppose Zionism.

Why have so many Jews fallen out of love with Israel? Primarily they resent being told that Israel’s eternal wars are ‘on their behalf’. Imperialism has always cloaked its economic interests and ambitions behind a veneer of humanitarianism. We have seen that in Libya. Similarly the war in Iraq was for democracy. The very last thing one could expect from imperialism is honesty, an admission that we must attack Iran because we wish to control its oil resources! Far better to hide behind the Jews and the holocaust, and in that sense the holocaust has been transformed ideologically into something that happened only to Jews. Israel is sold as a guarantee against a repetition of the holocaust and so all the imperialist bloodsuckers are concerned about ‘anti-Semitism’ and the holocaust. Many Jews have begun to smell a rat. The young especially have begun to rebel. According to Landy, for every 10-year drop in age, there is a decline by 5% in support among Jews for Israel (p82).

As he notes, the Lebanon war of 1982 was the beginning of Jewish stirrings (p5) and this has been enhanced in particular by the attack and siege of Gaza (p65), with the obvious comparison being made between Jewish persecution by the Nazis and in particular the Warsaw ghetto. Landy states that it is with good reason that Zionists such as Anthony Julius are devoting much time and energy into ‘proving’ how Jews who oppose Israel are helping anti-Semitism.

A major problem with Landy’s book is that it is overlain by sociological jargon and concepts. One gets the feeling that the content is being forced into a narrow academic template, the effect of which is to restrict its ambit. It is difficult to know whether it is an academic or popular audience that the book is aimed at. Landy is right to focus on the problems inherent in Jewish group relations with Palestinians, but his picture is often too subjective and anecdotal rather than analytic. What governs Jewish diaspora and Palestinian relations primarily is the weakness of the latter and that is why some Palestinians have been attracted to Atzmon’s superficial nonsense. It is a short cut, or so they think, to liberation.

Landy excludes from his definition of “Israel-critical Jews” those like the Israeli NGO, Peace Now, whose main purpose is to attack the solidarity movement. At the time of the Lebanon war in 1982 we had the foreign emissaries of Peace Now leading the defence of Israel on British campuses. The capital gained from the 400,000-strong demonstration against the massacres in Sabra and Chatilla was spent on supporting the very state and its policies that led to the massacres.

Landy argues that building up a positive Jewish identity is necessary to counter Zionist attacks. To some extent this may be true, but it runs the

risk of becoming self-indulgent and navel-gazing. One of the good things about groups like Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods is precisely that we are defined primarily by our activity, not by sterile consciousness-raising. A positive Jewish identity must be based on what we do, not just what we say.

Landy talks about “identity contestation”, but this is problematic. Zionism provides an identity, albeit one which is estranged from society. The identity of those opposed to the mainstream narrative is, by definition, going to have to focus on the victims of the majority Jewish identity, and therein lies the problem. Landy writes: “Diaspora is more than a territorial condition; it is an ideological construct.” But this begs more questions than it answers. Leaving aside that there is no one Jewish community, the question remains, what is the content of this ideological construct? How are the contradictions between the Zionist claim of one Jewish people and the reality of Jewish communities with interests counterposed to Israel to be resolved? The ideal Zionist solution would be the abolition of the Jewish Diaspora. That is part of the reason why there has been such a furore over the hastily withdrawn adverts in the United States which implied that expatriate Israelis would lose their sense of identity and forsake Chanukah for Christmas, if they did not return to Israel.⁵

There are estimated to be one million Israelis who choose to live anywhere but the Jewish state and most European Israelis have taken the precaution of obtaining a second passport. The Jewish community in Britain is elderly and shrinking. Zionism is not a material basis for a continued Jewish existence outside Israel. In particular there has been a collapse in what was known as ‘central orthodoxy’ around the United Synagogue. Both secular Jewry and the ultra-orthodox sectors have grown. Landy notes that a 1997 survey of British Jews found that Zionism had become increasingly irrelevant to Jews - witness the low numbers of Jews who attended the Zionist Federation Trafalgar Square demonstration in support of the Gaza attack. Most Jews chose not to celebrate the use of white phosphorous against a civilian population (p78-79).

Despite Zionist hectoring, the fact is that historically anti-Semitism has been at an all-time low. There is no sign, despite the efforts of Atzmon, that people are inclined to blame the Jews, a small but affluent part of the majority white population, for the economic crisis of capitalism. It is because of the decline of anti-Semitism that Jews are rapidly and freely assimilating to the majority non-Jewish population. More than 50% of Jews today are ‘marrying out’ (p81).

Whereas Jews were historically seen as being on the left, Zionism acted to pull them rightwards. Landy describes how American Jews were asked to check their liberalism at Zionism’s door. But today there is a simmering revolt in the USA. Jewish Voices for Peace, which after Gaza began to adopt boycott, divestment and sanctions policies, has over 100,000 supporters. Even more radical groups have split off and thrived (p107).

Landy shows how Jews have played an effective and important part in “koshering the boycott”. In the University and College Union, Jewish lecturers have been to the fore in arguing to cut the links between British and Israeli universities. In other unions Jewish activists have played a key role and the Zionists have complained long and hard about this. It is what Landy calls “strategic Jewishness” (p140). It is no accident that the main target of Atzmon is Jewish anti-Zionism. The question is why this ex-Israeli should be so focussed.

Landy also focuses on the breakaway, as he sees it, from Jews for Justice for Palestinians, which is

not an anti-Zionist group, to Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods. In fact many members of J-J-Big are also members of J-J-FP and equally a number of J-Big members, including myself, have never been in J-J-FP.

The kind of hysteria that Zionists routinely indulge in has, ironically, been helpful in a way, because it has become clear to many that it is all but impossible to argue rationally with these people. When Melanie Phillips described the liberal Independent Jewish Voices, at its formation in 2007, as “Jews for Genocide”, no-one could take her seriously. IJV’s first public meeting in Hampstead town hall was packed to the rafters and the mood was decidedly critical of Israel. Because if there is one thing Zionism hates it is debate or discussion. Indeed it spends much of its time opposing such debate and the increasingly fractious arguments within the Zionist movement, reflect that fear. We had the spectacle recently of Danny Sheldon of the thoroughly bourgeois Union of Jewish Students accusing the most prominent leader of British Zionism, Jonathan Hoffman, of openly demonstrating alongside the English Defence League, which he had. Sheldon was forced to retract, but the damage was done by that time. Along with this is the abuse and physical violence that Palestine solidarity supporters meet from Zionist supporters, who nonetheless profess their love of peace!

Landy addresses the question of what motivates Jewish activists. That some are more concerned with the reactions of fellow Jews and oppose boycott because it is not seen as being helpful is undisputed. J-J-FP’s leadership was long been of the opinion that to support boycott will cut them off from other Jews (p152-60). Atzmon, of course, says that this proves that Jews are fighting their own battles at the expense of Palestinians. Contrary to his expectation, Landy found that Jews opposed to boycott were no closer to Israel politically than supporters (p162). But Jewish groups opposed to boycott or ambivalent on it (like J-J-FP) often felt that their work should be primarily with Israeli dissidents rather than Palestine solidarity groups, though again this has slowly changed (pp175, 199).

Part of the problem, as Landy admits, is that there is no Palestinian equivalent to the African National Congress. What he terms “distant issue movements” have to relate to particular Palestinian villages or individuals. Landy also explores the idea of Jews as “rootless cosmopolitans”, but I am not persuaded as to its validity, or whether it applies to particular socio-economic groups regardless of ethnicity. Likewise the comparison of Jews in the Palestine solidarity field to white South Africans is also of limited utility.

Landy’s book is the first attempt to detail the modern phenomenon of Jewish activism which is opposed to Zionism and Israeli practices. It is not a comprehensive book, nor is it meant to be. It raises interesting and useful examples of both Jewish participation in the movement and the problems that this can bring. Unlike the destructive, racist tome of Atzmon, Landy’s book, despite its sociological mystification, will be part of the process whereby Jews with conflicting identities and loyalties can resolve these conflicts whilst living the life of “the Jew as pariah” (Hannah Arendt) ●

Tony Greenstein

Notes

1. P Foot, ‘Palestine’s partisans’ *The Guardian* August 21 2002 (www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/21/comment.israelandthepalestinians).
2. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/gilad-atzmon-swindlers-list.html.
3. Thanks to Debbie Maccoby for pointing me to this source.
4. http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/2011/09/few-point-for-occasion-of-atzmon-saga.html.
5. See http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2011/12/netanyahu-forced-to-withdraw-racist.html.

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ANARCHISM

In the footsteps of Kropotkin

How did self-declared anarchists come to support the Nato bombing of Libya? **David Douglass** reports

On Sunday November 6 I was confronted out of the blue by a political development in anarchism which knocked me off my feet. Surrounded by comrades in a fairly well attended meeting of the Northern Anarchist Network and the North East Anarchists at the Bridge Hotel in Newcastle, I listened with jaw dropping to the item on the agenda marked 'Libyan Solidarity Campaign'.

The 'Support Nato bombing tendency' is how I would roughly designate it. I subsequently traced back this disturbing development to Ian Bone's blog. Ian, a long standing comrade of mine, founder of Class War and many great initiatives, surely could not be the origin of this absurd and reactionary viewpoint?

This is what he wrote in March: "The left, anarchists, myself and all of us are against western military intervention and a no-fly zone. Some of those arguments are worn out already - 'We did it because we wanted Libya's oil'. But political positions have real consequences ... without such intervention we shall watch thousands die in Benghazi and the triumph of a nutter which will set back uprisings in other Arab dictatorships. We will have maintained our impeccable anti-imperialist integrity against the cries of soon-to-be-annihilated rebels now asking for a no-fly zone."¹

Here we have Ian deliberating with himself basically on not wanting to see the anti-Gaddafi rebels go down in blood, but realising the consequences of western military intervention. This is fair enough as thinking out loud, but how many thoughts did Ian have as to the nature of what was being proposed against the Gaddafi regime? The rebels were not just living their lives or minding their own business, but posing a military and political challenge. What were they offering? This is crucial in any discussion, not whether my enemy's enemy is my friend, but is my enemy's enemy worse than my enemy or the same? The Benghazi-based rebellion was rooted in Islamist and monarchist opposition to Gaddafi. Does this effort further the struggle of the working class to gain power for itself? Can we take a side in a war which always ultimately may be against us and people of our political stance, and the working class as a class acting in its own interests? Can Nato ever spearhead a progressive revolution? Really?

'Arm Libyan rebels'

Two days after the above post, Ian quoted the concerns of one of the Libyan rebels' leaders: "If you don't want to do something, you rely on the diplomatic side. It is not enough when people are dying," said Iman Bugaighis, spokeswoman for the revolutionary council. "We need more than diplomacy. We need a no-fly zone, but we need more than that. We need air strikes. I think they know where to bomb if they want to bomb. They know how to intervene.

It's urgent."²

The original report, from *The Guardian*, quoted by Ian, went on: "The rebels appealed for weapons supplies, saying they are being outgunned by Gaddafi's forces. However, Bugaighis said the revolutionary administration remains opposed to foreign troops intervening in Libya on the ground."³

He responded: "This is a game-changer in my opinion. We should at the very least provide weapons to the rebels and I would be quite happy to see western planes bombing the fuck out of Saif Gaddafi and his cronies. How can revolutionaries in the UK gainsay what rebels fighting and dying are crying out for? Quite easily is the answer - far better to keep your revolutionary credentials than soil your hands with reality - the reality that the rebels will die unless we support them. Not that tough a choice, is it? - but spare me the crocodile tears, comrades. Contrast with the left's calls for support for republican Spain during the Spanish civil war."⁴

Ian was now doing a number of quite strange things. I for one would never, never talk about 'our government', 'our soldiers', 'our police'. I do not do it and it is not hard because *it's not our government, soldiers or police*. They all belong to the ruling class, which the working class is at war with. The ruling class is not in class terms, in cultural terms, in physical terms anything to do with me. So when did Ian become part of it? If he says that "we" should arm the rebels and impose a no-fly zone, it is clear he is not talking about anarchists: he is talking about the armed bodies of men, the *state's* armed bodies of men. And he calls the RAF and Nato "we", as if we all have one interest.

The 'no-fly zone' in itself was a phrase used to con a reluctant UN concerned not to get involved in a civil war and take a side. The example which comes to mind was the no-fly zone imposed on Saddam Hussein, which basically grounded his aircraft and stopped him being able to use disproportionate military power against his opponents. To my recollection, until the actual invasion of Iraq that is all it did. The UN clearly was led to believe that is what would happen here, with the Gaddafi air force being unable to operate and the rebels given a fighting chance. That is not what happened, of course, and the 'no-fly zone' became a 'no-move zone', as Nato went on the offensive, acting as the rebels' air force - deployed against all Gaddafi's ground operations headquarters and areas of support.

It is also utterly obscene and offensive to compare the socialist/communist and sometimes anarchist government of Spain, which was trying to bring about a progressive, pro-working class, communistic society, with Libyan rebels, many of whom are trying to impose some form of fundamentalist, theocratic Islamic state, or at the very best - and this is not even a strong minority view - a bourgeois democracy in which sharia law is a great part of the country's jurisprudence, and the



Ian Bone: man in black

rights and liberties of women and non-Muslims are probably made worse. The *Morning Star* reported in November that an Al-Qa'eda flag was flying over the main Benghazi court house.⁵ Not that such a flag flying next to the new 'official' Libyan flag would demonstrate the level of Islamist political support. But the fact that no-one dared take it down might

No support to Nato

However, let us be quite clear here. The nature of the forces involved and their goals is almost unimportant,

compared to the main issue: that of calling for and supporting Nato's military agenda in Libya. Would this be different if the rebels were an anarchist/communist revolutionary force? It most certainly would not, but such a force (a) would not call in Nato and (b) even if they did their request would be ignored, as in Spain, for the most obvious of reasons.

The *failure* of Spain in the civil war was that the government made appeals for help to states which were part of the class enemy, instead of appealing on behalf of the Spanish working class over the heads of bourgeois national governments to

the workers of the world for direct class assistance and defence as part of those workers' own struggles against capitalism. Did we seriously think the British and American ruling class would ride to the rescue of anarchism in Spain when threatened by fascism? So that the Spanish revolution could continue and expropriate the capitalist class and spread revolution throughout Europe? Of course not, and the failure to recognise that, to see this as a class, not a bourgeois democratic, issue caused the defeat, along with outright treachery from Stalin.

Bourgeois blood is thicker than democratic water. So why *did* Nato

go into Libya? Because it was concerned that people were going to be massacred? Well, that's odd, isn't it? They didn't have any no-fly zones when Israel was bombing Lebanon back to the Stone Age, or was massacring the helpless people of Gaza. When the Palestinians rose up to stop the illegal land grabs and Zionist genocide in the West Bank, did anyone see any SAS or Nato planes? Did anyone see them in Bahrain or Dubai? Now why would that be?

Ian, if he stops and thinks, knows damn well why. Because blood is not the question here - imperialism doesn't give a monkeys about that. Gaddafi was another peg in the board game against formally anti-imperialist leaders in the Middle East who proved a threat to Israel, the US and western oil interests. Certainly some progressive elements, maybe even some socialistic advocates, joined this rebellion, but they do not characterise its trajectory, as we have already seen. Let us hope their fate will not be the same as similar forces in Iran.

Whichever way this shapes up, our demand can only be 'No war but class war'. Had Ian been talking of drumming up an international brigade of left and progressive volunteers to overthrow Gaddafi and help create a more socialistic and progressive social system, we could support at least the good intentions. The bottom line for any support to this revolution would be a commitment to a democratic, secular society, which guarantees the rights of women, non-Muslims, trade unions and workers. Under no circumstances, however, do we (and that means the working class, and progressive political forces of the left) *ever* call for action by our hated class enemy, including Nato.

The 1926 general strike was in part defeated by the CPGB call, "All power to the TUC general council!". This conceded our power - the power of the class - to the bureaucrats, who promptly used it to sell us out and bring about our defeat. Stupid though that slogan was, here we have Ian Bone, a self-declared anarchist, calling for, if not all power to the Nato jets and the generals, then licence to Nato jets and generals to prosecute the war. Once you have brought them in - and they would not be in unless their own interests were being served - *they* will set the agenda, and that agenda is not about bringing about a progressive society in Libya.

In a later posting on his blog Ian uses the Maoists as a straw man to represent the forces calling for *defence* of Gaddafi. Anarchists especially cannot 'defend' or 'support' Gaddafi. We wanted Gaddafi brought down, but not by Islamists, Israeli invasion or Nato bombing. If this rebellion had really represented the 'voice of the people', if it had indeed popular mass support, it would have been able to topple Gaddafi's ramshackle forces without outside help.

To be consistent, if you backed Nato in

Libya you would have to become the one-eyed cheerleader of western intervention around the world. Then you would have to move back through history, and recognise like Kropotkin that it was right to fight World War I to defend 'poor little Belgium' against the blood-crazed Hun. Perhaps the Crimea war was right - poor little Turkey and that big Russian bear. Maybe, Ian, these were all 'game-changers' and we are just waking up to it. Pass the poppies and the union jacks. After all, if any of 'our boys' get killed fighting in a cause we support, we should surely honour them - perhaps we could draft a red and black poppy for the occasion?

Progressive wars

So what are the wars in which we take a side? I would side with anti-imperialist wars of national liberation, where the aim is the establishment of a system or at least the circumstances in which a progressive, egalitarian, secular society can be built. I would call for a victory to all pro-working class tendencies within an overall liberation struggle and the defeat of imperialism. In such circumstances calling for active physical support and mobilising international working class units would be fine by me, providing it was practical in a military sense. Where there is an anti-imperialist struggle - say, for example, Saddam versus the US/UN - I would not support either side, and would condemn any imperialist intervention, while calling for the internal overthrow of Saddam by socialistic/communistic/anarchistic forces, and demanding non-intervention by the superpowers. It is the same with Iran. Against any Nato or Israeli strikes or provocations on Iran, while calling for the revolutionary overthrow of the regime by progressive, egalitarian, socialistic, secular forces. In this case we are unlikely to be outflanked by any anti-Iranian regime which is more repressive than the one already in place.

Let us return to the November 6 Northern Anarchist Network (NAN) conference in Newcastle. This is when I first come across this anarchist, pro-Nato, Libyan interventionist tendency. I am told by the people who support this line that I am doing them an injustice by saying they support Nato. In fact they only support Nato bombing and the Nato prosecution of the war against Gaddafi. Sorry, I don't see the distinction. You clearly can't be against Nato while calling for it to act.

It is clear that the people supporting this line had been largely inspired by Ian's blog. That's not too much of a presumption, since the main speaker and two others used exactly the same quotes and word-for-word justifications as Ian had. But there was more. In quite an odd irony, I think, and quoting the same sort of list found in the *Mail* and *Telegraph*, the speakers reminded us that Gaddafi had armed the IRA!



Pyotr Kropotkin: pro-war

Now here we have a paradox: it seems that, while the Islamist insurgents were quite justified in calling for Nato and western special forces to fight directly on their side against Gaddafi, it was unacceptable that the IRA - fighting against British imperialism and the occupation of Ireland - got Semtex and AKs from Gaddafi. Indeed the main speakers at this meeting have always been major critics of the IRA, which, contrary to the Libyan forces being supported now, put forward a socialistic, democratic, secular, non-sectarian programme for a new Ireland based on workers and small farmers in a 32-county republic. 'We' in the anarchist left could not then get our hands dirty and support such a struggle because it was for 'a state' and had strong nationalist elements in it. The bombs then, of course, were on our doorstep and attacking 'our' state.

NAN's convenor angrily declared that the Stop the War Coalition had marched against the Nato bombing of Libya alongside people calling for victory to Gaddafi. He equated this with the Blackshirts marching in London! Well, leave aside that we all marched against the war in Iraq alongside people calling for the victory of god, wearing niqabs, alongside Tories, Lib Dems and even communists of the Mao variety. Who is NAN and the Nato anarchist tendency marching with now? *All* the bourgeois political parties, the mullahs, Israel ... It is the kettle calling the frying pan. How the fuck did NAN and Ian Bone get mixed up in a pro-war, pro-Nato campaign?

I must make the point that not all of NAN's supporters were at that meeting and that this line, which is not the policy or perspective of the whole group, is offered by only some of them. However, out of maybe 15 north-east anarchists at that meeting, only one spoke against this line.

I am getting on a bit now, and I have been in this movement as long as Ian, but I have never, ever seen self-declared anarchists so wrong-footed and so totally confused in my entire life. It ranks with the US Trots who ended up deciding that the USSR posed the greatest danger to socialism in the world and the USA would have to be supported to stop it. In the end they were joining the US army, supporting calls for the atomic bombing of Russia and China, acting as apologists for the massacre of millions of reds of all sorts in Indonesia, Kenya, Congo, Angola, backing the Korean and Vietnam wars, etc, etc.

It's a slippery slope, comrades, or, as someone else said a long, long time ago, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. But at least I can now understand how old Kropotkin ended up supporting World War I ●

Notes

1. Ian Bone, March 10: <http://ianbone.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/libyan-rebels-facing-military-defeat-do-we-have-a-problem>.
2. Ian Bone, March 12: <http://ianbone.wordpress.com/2011/03/12/libyan-rebels-appeal-for-no-fly-zone-we-should-be-arming-them>.
3. *The Guardian* March 11.
4. Ian Bone, March 12: <http://ianbone.wordpress.com/2011/03/12/libyan-rebels-appeal-for-no-fly-zone-we-should-be-arming-them>.
5. *Morning Star* November 10.

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.**

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■ **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.**

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Targets become ends in themselves

Education, not exam culture

The pernicious and self-defeating influence of targets, league tables and over-examination in schools has thrust the education system once again into the media spotlight. This time outside its regular place in the annual news cycle, which, as residents of Britain at least will know, usually follows the release of exam results in the summer. Ever rising pass rates among young learners are marked not only by scenes of celebration outside their schools and colleges. There are also claims that exams have become too easy and qualifications therefore 'devalued'.

This latest scandal, like the uncovering of the MPs' expenses scam, was revealed by *The Daily Telegraph* and, also like MPs' expenses, the story itself was nothing new at all. Despite all the hullabaloo and the outrage, the fact that the exam boards collude with teachers to help school students get through was more or less an open secret. The aim is to ensure better pass rates and thus, on the one side, a higher league table position for the schools; and, on the other, a bigger slice of the action for the examination boards compared to their rivals.

Undercover journalists from the *Telegraph* simply paid a couple of hundred pounds and bought their way into special seminars aimed specifically at teachers that were put on by exam boards licensed by Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. They surreptitiously recorded the proceedings, as the representatives were nudged and prodded into coughing up some juicy hints as to what material they could expect to be included in upcoming exams. An undercover journalist filmed a representative of Edexcel, one of the biggest boards, boasting that its geography exam was so lacking in content she was amazed it was actually allowed by the regulator.

Interestingly, the story soon moved on from expressions of outrage at the behaviour of a 'few rotten apples' to the wider issues that affect the education system as a whole. There is a whole string of interlocking material interests which drive and incentivise the behaviour of the actors caught up in the pseudo-market mechanisms introduced into the education system by various governments.

The practical effects of the introduction of such tools of competition, including league tables and targets, have been utterly antithetical to their stated purpose. Instead of improving education, they have helped create a bureaucratic system of manipulation, with the careers and livelihoods of teachers at stake, on the one hand, and the market share of the exam boards on the other. Caught up in the middle of all this are the students and pupils themselves.

League tables are perhaps the aspect most loathed by teachers, who well understand how schools are driven to do anything to improve their positions, regardless of the effects this has on the kind of education being provided. This culture of fear produces the collusion that has hit the headlines and the further devaluation of education - far from encouraging creative or critical



Schools should not be prisons

thought, it reinforces narrow curricula and rote learning. The idea that a rise in league table rankings represents some kind of better education is an utter nonsense.

Rather like the 'planning' imposed in the former Soviet Union, measures that are supposed to lead to all-round improvement cause only duplicity and chaos. It is generally agreed that the all-pervasive targets in education are damaging, in that they lead teachers to concentrate on particular sections of students at the expense of others, in the belief that better scores from a minority will produce an increase in the overall average. So some teachers, it is suggested, may neglect the 'solid B' students whose results are unlikely to drag the class average down, thus reducing the possibility that they could score an A (or even, god forbid, actually begin to develop work of value). Instead attention is focused on the D students in order to get them up to C and raise those all-important averages. On the other hand, the system may lead to the writing off

of the same D students, depending on how numerous they are, and a shift in attention and resources onto the already higher achievers.

Clearly there is room enough for both situations to arise. But the point is that all this effort is specifically directed not at any genuine improvement in individual students' understanding, let alone creativity, but at bumping up averages as an aim in itself. Exams, which are ostensibly meant to provide a measure of a candidate's abilities, instead are used primarily to provide masses of data, which in turn help set new targets and continue the trend to replace genuine education - the 'leading out' of an individual's talents - with mere schooling.

To measure is to limit - to believe one can dispense something like education in the way one may measure out millilitres of water leads to an impoverishment of the learning experience, the measure itself becoming the most important factor, and certainly not the quality of the subject matter. People get taught

how to pass exams, which can often be a poor measure of ability for many reasons. The appearance of success, the hitting of the target, becomes crucial, yet that appearance comes into conflict with the actual reality - the whole practice is counterproductive, even from the point of view of *bourgeois* schooling. This is designed to inculcate discipline, obedience and jumping through the necessary hoops in accordance with whatever it is the 'business community' is demanding at any given moment. There is already limited scope for a rounded education - Mick Waters, a former director of government exam regulation, of all people, comments: "There are children who learn paragraphs all day, every day ... just so they can write them [once] in June" (*The Guardian* December 8).

The *Financial Times* warns that there is a risk of a "race to the bottom" as a result of this competition, and many bourgeois commentators mirror this concern, but none go much beyond seeking to re-establish the "credibility" of British exams

(December 9). Conservative education secretary Michael Gove and his Labour counterpart, Stephen Twigg, have jumped with hippo-like agility onto the condemnatory bandwagon with cries of 'Discredited!' and 'Culture of corruption!' But these are the representatives of the same parties that have subjected the education system and its students to the very system that could do nothing else but produce the outcome we are now witnessing and that they condemn.

Restoring the 'credibility' of the exam system, by whatever means, would not make capitalist education fit for purpose in our eyes. There was no golden age, no Eden to return to. Our alternative - the total transformation of the whole of society, including the nature of education - is not on the immediate horizon, but there are tasks facing the workers' movement in which it should immediately become engaged. We need to ensure, as far as possible, that education is shaped by the interests of labour, as opposed to those of capital and the capitalist state - an education that enriches a working class culture of independence rather than a reliance on the institutions of the class enemy, institutions within which there can only ever be partial gains for our class. Trade unions should provide far greater educational facilities for their members and insist that 'on the job' training reflects the broader needs of workers, not just the narrow demands of employers.

The creation of an alternative working class culture within capitalism was to a great extent achieved by the Social Democratic Party of Germany in the second half of the 19th century. The SPD's educational facilities included a well-equipped Berlin centre, where Rosa Luxemburg taught economics. We cannot end the system until the working class takes power, but we can build a base in the here and now - one that not only provides a space for free, creative thought, cooperation and dissent within capitalism, but actually makes that coming to power more likely.

Michael Copestake

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

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____