

weekly worker



Paul B Smith critiques Naomi Klein's 'Shock doctrine' and offers a Marxist alternative

- Racism hysterics
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How very British



LETTERS



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

Nationalism

Dave Douglass accuses me of misrepresenting his comments in the past on the question of state capitalism (Letters, December 22). Well, as he says, the public record is there for all to see what he actually said, and what I criticised him for. But, in fact, it is Dave who has misrepresented my position, suggesting that I had merely stated in relation to Bombardier that there was nothing that could be done short of the revolution, because “that is the way capitalism works”. That, of course, is a gross distortion. I said nothing of the kind.

I reject Dave’s nationalist solution of calling on the British workers to line themselves up with their own bosses at the expense of the German workers. The ludicrous nature of Dave’s approach can be seen by simply asking him what his response would be to German workers threatened with losing their jobs, had the decision been reversed as a result of pressure being placed on the government. Would he then, as a German trade union militant, have been calling on workers to have lined up with their bosses and the German government to demand that the decision be reversed once again to protect their jobs? How far are you prepared to go down that road?

But I also reject the reformist demand that Peter Manson put forward, and which Dave Douglass has supported in relation to BAe, for the workers to line up with the bosses in another way: by demanding the capitalist state become their exploiter in place of a group of individual capitalists - ie, demanding nationalisation. Marx and Engels were totally opposed to sowing such illusions in the minds of workers, and so too much later was Trotsky, who described such schemes as “the greatest deception”. Perhaps the clearest statements against such an approach were made by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, and in Engels’ subsequent letters elaborating on it. But Engels too made their position clear in his own *Critique of the 1891 Erfurt programme*.

The programme had called for: “Free medical care, including midwifery and medicines. Free burial.” Engels writes in response: “These points demand that the following should be taken over by the state: (1) the bar, (2) medical services, (3) pharmaceuticals, dentistry, midwifery, nursing, etc, and later the demand is advanced that workers’ insurance become a state concern. Can all this be entrusted to Mr von Caprivi? [German chancellor after Bismarck] And is it compatible with the rejection of all state socialism, as stated above?” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm).

Like Marx and Engels, I do not call on the workers to line up with their bosses against foreign workers, nor to put their faith in the good offices of the capitalist state, but to rely on their own revolutionary collective action. Like them, I argue for the workers to take over the means of production themselves when they are threatened with loss of their jobs. That is what the workers of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders did during the 1970s and it is what the French workers did in 1968. And, like many of the Argentinian workers have done, they should then turn these enterprises into worker cooperatives, as Marx and Engels advised. By the way, if they did do that, then I *would* be in favour of arguing for work to go to them rather than to foreign capitalist firms - not because they were foreign, but because they were capitalist!

But, if we are talking about misrepresentation, Dave’s response

to my comments about the attitude of the left in the past in respect of the European Economic Community is a good example of it. In my previous letter, I commented that the picture Dave had painted of a left which had opposed a capitalist EEC on a principled basis was not an accurate representation. I wrote: “In fact, for most of the 1960s, the Trotskyist left opposed the nationalist positions of the CP.” And then, having set out why attempts by these sects to party-build in the later 60s led them to seek to recruit from within the left milieu in the trade unions and Labour left, I continued: “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.”

I did not at all deny that much of the left held this nationalist position during the 70s, but the point was that it had collapsed into it, in opportunistic fashion, for narrow party-building reasons, abandoning in the process its previous principled, internationalist position. How does Dave refute this argument? He provides us with a quote from Chris Harman in 1971 and one from Ted Grant in 1975. So Dave simply avoids the substantive point that these positions were completely at odds with those held during most of the 1960s, and the question of why it was they changed them.

Moreover, as I stated previously, his assertion that the issue divided along class lines was not true either. There was a two-to-one majority for staying in, with the vast majority of workers voting for that.

Arthur Bough
email

Not so easy

Darren Redstar, (Letters, December 22) criticises me not so much for my criticism of Ian Bone and the Northern Anarchist Network’s support for Nato bombing of Libya, but because I chose to do it in a hated Marxist-Leninist newspaper. First off, let me emphasise that I think Ian has many great organising abilities and has been an inspired revolutionary anarchist organiser and initiator and I greatly like the comrade as a bloke - and a comic too. My criticisms were to a sincere comrade who has got it wrong, for the right reasons.

The *Weekly Worker* offers a non-sectarian platform for the whole left, anarchism too. Not only that: it happens to be probably the most well-read paper on the left. Despite the anarcho-criticism of my using the paper, I know from every meeting, book fair and rally I attend, that comrades in the anarchist movement actually *read* the paper, because they always comment on my latest review, article or polemic. I do use *Freedom* when the material suits it, but it is limited in space and ability to cover topical issues in a relevant time frame which is useful to the movement. It also tends to be rather exclusive in its readership, unlike the *Weekly Worker* - which everyone knocks, but they still read, by the way.

I consider anarchism to be part of the world communist workers’ movement. I think class war anarchists are fighting for the ear of the working class and authority in that movement. I am not so pessimistic as to believe any despotic ‘left’ Marxist/Leninist/Trotskyist/Stalinist coup will have the capacity to break us from the class and suppress us in the way Darren describes. It could be argued that we are actually the biggest politically tendency on the left, if not within the workers’ movement *per se*, but also because history ought to tell us to be better armed than them this time round.

Leftist tyrants of the kind Darren has nightmares about might find we have made sure we will not be so easy to

shoot and eliminate this time.

David Douglass
South Shields

Gulag bait

Let us recap. This paper publishes the opinions of David Douglass, an avowed and sincere anarchist, on a number of issues - including, most recently, an interesting dissection of Ian ‘Bash the rich’ Bone’s new-found social imperialism (‘In the footsteps of Kropotkin’, December 15). We also publish comradely political criticisms of anarchism’s strategic usefulness for revolutionary politics.

Darren Redstar has nothing to contribute to the substantive debate, but is “perturbed” that comrade Douglass should make use of our organ, since, should we succeed in our aims, the CPGB would - with the inexorable logic of history - “happily shoot all anarchists who presented an alternative opinion to their Leninist dictatorship”.

I wonder whether, given comrade Redstar’s endorsement of that tiresome anarchist paranoia about the invariably malign secret intentions of ‘Leninists’, we should not be watching our backs, rather than him.

James Turley
London

Wet dreams

The call for ‘no borders’ sounds grand, doesn’t it? Gerry Downing can stick his chest out, having come up with a pious, utopian trump card on all arguments about manning and immigration (Letters, December 15). In any argument which involves workers on this island fighting for their jobs and their communities, and workers from other countries being bussed in to take those jobs and break those communities, folk like Gerry will always condemn the British workers, and support the boss’s ‘right’ to employ who he wants.

‘No borders’ is utterly stupid as a slogan in the conditions which prevail right across the globe at present, and at least for a good couple of hundred years after achieving a communist world. ‘No borders’ cannot be a slogan under capitalism, except during the days of unhindered growth and expansion, such as we witnessed in the opening up of the west during the early years of the USA. Of course, it was someone else’s land, and this ‘right to earn a living’ by millions of poor migrants was at the expense of the native American, who must have prayed for ‘borders’ and ‘immigration control’.

Israel has no problem with ‘No borders’ either, at least not if you’re Jewish and you’re claiming the land of the Palestinians, Jordanians, Syrians or Egyptians. What’s wrong with that? Jewish settlers have the right to live anywhere they choose, don’t they?

Capitalist systems and all succeeding socialist systems will be closed systems to one extent or another. They can only operate based upon budgets and taxation. Socialist economies operate on plans, forecasting growth, populations, production. No matter how big ‘the unit’, its resources will always, until the global achievement of communism and superabundance of wealth, be limited. You simply cannot open up to unlimited migration, and share out the social pot, based upon collective contributions, to those who have not made any. Surely it is more of a racist option to force poor migrants to come here or anywhere else, when the solution is to improve and construct the economy and change where they actually live? Why should Scots, Geordies, Irish or whoever have to travel to London for work? Demanding the right of these workers to work in London misses an obvious point, doesn’t it?

Work and real productive wealth is limited - it must have an exhaustion

point, no matter how thinly you decide to spread the gruel. The amount of real wealth will determine the standard of life, and that will be determined - yes - by how many people are productively producing.

The slogan has no practical application in Britain or Europe. How could it possibly work? Or is it not meant to? Is this meant to drive the system to breaking point, with mass poverty, the collapse of the welfare state and society? Then presumably the Communist Party of the EU will take over on behalf of the people, and do what? Construct an open society with no limits on the demands of its scarce resources? This completely ignores the different stages of communism.

Maybe Gerry thinks you just make that demand in the belief that millions and millions would not actually come. But they would have the right to come. It would be a ‘dog eat dog’, buyers’ market - and a spiral of poverty, unemployment and loss of any sort of union control would follow.

I can just see the Communist Party of the European Union sweeping to a landslide victory across the EC on the slogan, ‘Down with all borders! Away with the racist, chauvinist workers of Europe! No union control on jobs! No seniority! I’ve had my criticism of the *Morning Star*, Militant and Bob Crow’s No2EU, etc over the years, but, compared with you lot, at least they are trying to fight in the real world, addressing real issues in real struggles, not jerking off to some self-serving, nonsensical wet dreams.

Wullie Hunter

Berwick Upon Tweed

Cover-up

The views of Roscoe Turi are highly reminiscent of the cold war posturing of the Socialist Workers Party - “Neither Moscow nor Washington” - with some added confusion. He champions the left wing of imperialism, as he declares the leaders of target nations to be either dictators or bourgeois nationalists. There is no nation on earth that is not under dictatorship of some form, hidden or open. Bourgeois nationalism, by its strictest definition, is also universal. The question of imperialist expansionism is thus legitimised, while only nominally opposed.

He then claims, confusedly, that fighting to stop the bombing of Libya was somehow not pro-Gaddafi. He was on Gaddafi’s side in this matter even if he did not want to be. The defence of Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, etc, requires support of the nations’ devices to defend themselves, with recognition that these countries are being demonised by the west; unlike Bahrain, whose current crackdown on its citizens is being ignored.

The Soviet expansion into Poland, which ended in defeat for the Soviets, could well have been a mistake, considering the history of Stalinism in eastern Europe; exporting revolution also seems particularly dangerous if you happen to be Welsh in Turi’s Stalinist projection of a socialist Britain. National sovereignty is hardly an obsession of mine, but it is an essential part of defending countries from imperialist intrigue.

Turi also echoes western propaganda by demonising China’s relations with Zimbabwe. He seems to be unaware of how much of an echo chamber he has become. It has become such a habit - a habit that makes him a counterrevolutionary *par excellence*.

The whole trend on the left that dismisses anti-imperialism in earnest, that seeks to foment colour revolutions in imperialist target countries, with no regard to the fact that these colour revolutions have all led to the production of imperialist puppets, is destined to be held suspect by those who follow events closely, like the

huge amount of youth let down by the cover-up of 9/11 by almost all of the left groups outside Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party.

Paul Anderson
email

Cheesy

Spencer A Leonard argues that Stalinism has had a harmful effect on leftwing interpretations of the relationship between Marx’s and Adam Smith’s political economy (‘Adam Smith’s profoundest reader’, December 22). He criticises David Harvey for caricaturing Smith as a liberal utopian who believed that capitalism can function perfectly in the absence of state intervention.

Leonard thinks that Smith’s political economy shows he was a philosopher of freedom and that Marx incorporated Smith’s emancipatory project into his own. He states that Marx’s *Capital* was “simply bourgeois political economy fully realised” and that Marx constructed “no theory of his own” and generated “no categorical apparatus of his own”.

Leonard’s assimilation of Marx to Smith has the danger of misleading readers into thinking that there was little, if any, difference between the two thinkers. Thus Leonard suggests that Smith’s method was dialectical and that Marx shared Smith’s opinion that the category of value is a “form of human freedom”.

As readers know, Smith’s method was far from dialectical. It was derived from the point of view of the isolated economic individual. The laws of capitalism Smith thought he had discovered were generalisations from observations he made about individuals’ experience and behaviour. Thus he assumed that individuals had a natural disposition to barter and exchange. The cause of this disposition was their sympathetic identification with the attention and praise the rich gained within a hierarchical society. This was Smith’s principle of betterment. It was supposed to operate at all times and in all places.

Smith was an empiricist philosopher whose method led him to eternalise and fetishise market relations. It also led him into inconsistent and confused positions, such as the idea that labour can be used as an invariable standard by which the value of a commodity can be measured. This confusion was adopted later by early socialists, such as Robert Owen, who attempted to put Smith’s ideas into practice. Thus Owenites tried to substitute money with certificates of units of labour. This theoretical confusion is repeated today in contemporary attempts to abolish money through local exchange and trading networks.

In contrast to Smith, Marx’s method was thoroughly dialectical. Unlike Smith, Marx did not place use-value outside the scope of his investigation. Marx started his investigation with the interpenetration of use- and exchange-value as contradictory opposites within the commodity form. Marx argued that this dialectical doubling of form exists within the substance of value itself. Thus Marx understood living labour dialectically as both abstract and concrete labour - as commoditised labour-power and labour-time that generates both value and use-value.

Contrary to Leonard, Marx thought his discovery of the interpenetration of abstract and concrete labour was a unique contribution to political economy that went far beyond categories used by Smith and Ricardo. Marx was also proud of his discovery of labour-power as the commodity exchanged for capital with the capacity of generating surplus value. These discoveries were “a categorical apparatus” of Marx’s own - not simply the realisation of ideas found within

Smith’s political economy.

The category of abstract labour refutes Leonard’s statement that, for Marx, value was a “form of human freedom”. If abstract labour is the form that workers’ alienation takes within capitalism, then workers’ time at work, their subordination to machinery and the rate of intensity at which they work is controlled by value itself. This is an extreme form of inhuman unfreedom leading to exhaustion, mutilation and premature death.

Nonetheless, Leonard is correct to note that Marx, like Smith, shared an emancipatory project. This was not just that they were both opposed to slavery, but that they were both committed to a scientific understanding of society. Smith hoped he would be remembered as the Newton of the moral sciences and Engels famously compared Marx to Darwin. Both thought that social science would enlarge the scope of human freedom.

There is a class dimension to this project. This again highlights their differences. Smith thought his science could be used by a professional elite in order to manage capitalism for the benefit of all classes. Marx hoped his science would be used to help the proletariat to recognise its potential to abolish value, exchange, the commodity form, abstract labour and the market as necessary means of creating a classless, democratically planned society worldwide.

As part of this project, Marx intended his critique of Smith’s political economy to reveal what was scientific and what was ideological. One aspect of the latter was not only Smith’s “liberal utopianism”, but - arguably more importantly in the struggle for class-consciousness - the utopianism of Smith’s socialist interpreters.

Paul B Smith
email

Ologies

I’d like to comment on Tony Greenstein’s wide-ranging review of my book, *Jewish identity and Palestinian rights: diaspora Jewish opposition to Israel* (‘Anti-Semitism in anti-Zionist garb’, December 15). Mainly, in fact, to comment on one sentence, which contains the core of the criticism he has of the book: “A major problem with Landy’s book is that it is overlain by sociological jargon and concepts.”

It would be easy to pour scorn on this sentence: ‘It’s a sociological book, damn it, about sociological issues - of course it uses sociological concepts.’ Or ‘Would the reviewer have complained about too much economic jargon in an economics book?’ And so on.

However, Greenstein’s disdain for the sociological language of the book is important, if for no other reason than because some other movement activists have said the same thing. In essence: ‘Nice enough book, shame about the sociology.’ This may well be a fault in my writing, in not being accessible enough. But, like any self-respecting sociologist, I’d prefer to blame wider social forces for any problems. In particular, I’d see this as a result of how sociological language actively repels many people in movements, itself a product of sociology’s retreat to the ivory tower.

This repulsion is a problem, for there are solid reasons I spoke in ‘sociology’ - modifying the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu with reference to social movement theory. Simply put, I found this to be the best way to elaborate complex and coherent arguments. In failing to, or rather deciding not to, engage with this language, Greenstein has also, unfortunately, failed to engage with any of the central arguments of the book. Thus his review remains strangely disjointed, a review which describes some pieces of the book quite well without describing the book itself.

The book’s central argument, briefly, is that this Jewish movement’s identity and even ideology is produced in the process of trying to ‘translate’ Palestinian demands to various local fields - mainly the national political field and the local Jewish field. Furthermore, this process of local field contention and translation can often erase these Palestinian political demands and political personhood. It is a tendency all distant-issue movements face, and as such is a problem which those of us involved in these movements should face up to. It is admittedly very tricky to do so. I know well that when I’m on a Palestine solidarity stall it is much easier to attract the public by calling for support for Palestinian human rights rather than asking them to support Palestinians struggle. And yet, by doing so, through this process of local field contention, I’m complicit in the portrayal of Palestinians as victims to save rather than as active political subjects with whom we should be in solidarity.

This argument then helps explain the tensions solidarity movements have to negotiate. It also offers a useful rejoinder to Gilad Atzmon’s toxic nonsense, which Greenstein rightly skewers. There are undoubtedly problems with how Jewish groups who oppose Israel relate to Palestinians - it would be astonishing if it were otherwise. However, such tensions and problems derive from their status as movements in contention rather than their status as Jews. Ignoring Palestinians is, in other words, not a Jewish problem - it is a movement problem, also evident within the wider Palestinian solidarity movement.

And, as a movement problem, it can be addressed; movements can learn and movements, fundamentally, move. Indeed, it is impressive just how far Jewish individuals and Jewish groups involved in criticising Israel have moved, how much more aware and responsive they are to Palestinian political demands than even five years ago. And, yes, unapologetically, I use concepts from sociology to discuss this - less to blind the reader with science; more as the best way of tracking and understanding this complex social process.

David Landy
email

HM puzzle

I am curious as to why the proceedings of the conference in London sponsored by *Historical Materialism* in November are not being made available online. I haven’t been able to locate any conference papers collected for distribution by *HM*, either by Googling the conference proceedings or *Historical Materialism* itself. That’s not ordinarily an insurmountable task.

Is it because they are being collected for another \$100 book to be published by Brill? If what was said at the conference is so significant, why isn’t it out there for comrades all over the place to take note of, discuss and even learn from? Is it that this contribution to the project is on hold until the press runs?

Does this in any way exemplify why the left is insignificant, and in such deep trouble?

Ralph Johansen
email

So modest

Writing about George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in *The Guardian* on April 17 2010, the late Christopher Hitchens proclaimed in the modest fashion we came to expect from him: “There is a Stalin pig and a Trotsky pig, but no Lenin pig ... Nobody appears to have pointed this out at the time (and if I may say so, nobody but myself has done so since; it took years to notice what was staring me in the face).”

Nobody noticed at the time? Someone did. Writing in *The Nation* on September 7 1946, US leftwinger Isaac Rosenfeld reviewed Orwell’s

tale, explaining that Snowball was “Trotsky, with a *soupçon* of Lenin - for simplicity’s sake, Vladimir Ilyich is left out of the picture, entering it only as a *dybbuk* who shares with Marx old Major’s identity, and with Trotsky, Snowball’s.” This review is reproduced in Jeffrey Meyers’ collection, *George Orwell: the critical heritage* (London 1975).

And did nobody else notice this fact until our observant Mr Hitchens made his discovery? Well, not exactly. Twenty or so years later, BT Oxley wrote in his brief *George Orwell* (London 1967) that “there is no figure corresponding to Lenin (Major dies before the rising takes place)”; and another decade down the line Alex Zwerdling, in his major study, *Orwell and the left* (New Haven 1978), wrote about the discrepancies between the course of the Russian Revolution and the events in Orwell’s fable, and informed us: “The most striking of these is the omission of Lenin from the drama. Major ... is clearly meant to represent Marx, while Napoleon and Snowball act out the conflict in the post-revolutionary state between Stalin and Trotsky. David Wykes’s *A preface to Orwell* (Harlow 1987) also clearly indicated the absence of a Lenin parallel in *Animal Farm*.

A decade ago, I wrote *I know how but I don’t know why: George Orwell’s conception of totalitarianism* (Coventry 1999, reprinted 2000); and a revised version of it was published in the collection, *George Orwell: enigmatic socialist* (London 2005). Once again, Lenin’s absence was duly noted: “Some of the characters are eponymous. The taciturn, devious and ambitious Napoleon is clearly Stalin, and the more inventive and vivacious Snowball is an equally obvious Trotsky ... There is, however, no porcine Lenin, as Major (Marx) dies just before the animals take over the farm, although the displaying of Major’s skull is reminiscent of the rituals around the embalmed Bolshevik leader.”

Many other authorities have attempted to find Lenin somewhere in the piggery. Jenni Calder’s *Animal Farm and Nineteen eighty-four* (Milton Keynes 1987) claimed that “Major is a composite of Marx and Lenin”; a view that also appeared in Averil Gardner’s *George Orwell* (Boston 1987), Jeffrey Meyers’ *A reader’s guide to George Orwell* (London 1984), *Brodies notes* (London 1976), and *York notes* (Harlow 1980).

On the other hand, Robert Lee’s *Orwell’s fiction* (London 1969) and Ruth Ann Lief’s *Homage to Oceania* (Ohio 1969) both reckoned that Major was Lenin. Finally, in *International Socialism* No 44 (autumn 1989), John Molyneux took a quite different viewpoint:

“It is clear that Napoleon represents Stalin, just as Old Major is Marx and Snowball is Trotsky. Who then represents Lenin? Since Orwell depicts the rebellion as led by two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, one is forced to the conclusion that Napoleon also represents Lenin. Thus in *Animal Farm* the figures of Lenin and Stalin are merged into one character.”

So the absence in *Animal Farm* of a pig representing Lenin, or of a character that at least partly represented him, has been discussed by a wide variety of writers over no less a time than six decades.

I will not say that *nobody* praised Christopher Hitchens for his modesty. But I doubt if many people did.

Paul Flowers
London

Too kind

I enjoy reading your articles, but your writer, Jim Creegan, is awful. Otherwise, please keep up the good work.

Comrade Sam
email

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>.

Don’t end the fight

Saturday January 14, 12 noon: Emergency national meeting on pensions, 12 noon to 4pm, central London - venue to be confirmed. Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

Rank and file sparks

Saturday January 14, 1pm: National meeting, Carr’s Lane Centre, Carr’s Lane, Birmingham B4 (10 minutes walk from New Street Station). All welcome. Organised by Electricians Against the World: www.jibelectrician.blogspot.com.

Socialist nationalism

Tuesday January 17, 5pm: Seminar, Room 915, Adam Smith Building, University of Glasgow - ‘Racism and the iron cage of socialist nationalism’. Speaker: Satnam Virdee (University of Glasgow). Organised by Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movements: gziinfo@udcf.gla.ac.uk.

Socialist study

Thursday January 19, 6pm: Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. ‘Socialist society - its early phase’. Based on Hillel Ticktin’s ‘What will a socialist society be like?’ (*Critique* No25). Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 21, 11am: Annual general meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London SW1. Cost: £8/£6. Organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

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.

Terminal crisis?

Wednesday January 25, 7.30pm: Meeting, Partick Burgh Hall, 9 Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow G11. ‘Is this the terminal crisis for capitalism?’ Speaker: Hillel Ticktin. Organised by the Glasgow Marxist Forum: lawatwork7@hotmail.com.

No intervention in the Middle East

Saturday January 28, 2pm: Picket, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W8. Oppose growing threats and increased sanctions against Iraq; signs of covert intervention in Iraq and Syria. Oppose all military intervention from the west in the region. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk.

LGBTQ rights

Saturday January 28, 10am: General assembly, Ridgeway Community Centre, Dulverton Drive, Furzton, Milton Keynes. Open to all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning organisations in south-east England. Organised by Q Alliance: ga@qalliance.org.uk.

Hands off Iran and Syria

Saturday January 28, 2pm: Protest rally, US embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Scrap the CCRC

Saturday January 28, 10am: Initial organising meeting, Clifton Old School, Clifton Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham. Call for a united national campaign to scrap the Criminal Cases Review Commission - an effective block to overturning wrongful convictions. Organised by West Midlands Against Injustice: <http://westmidlandsagainstinjustice.webs.com>.

Scottish PSC AGM

Saturday February 18, 10am: AGM, Augustine Church Centre, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1. Organised by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.scottishpsc.org.uk.

Stop the War Coalition

Saturday March 3: Annual conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.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.

RACISM

A load of old balls

Racism persists in society - but, as recent scandals show, serious analysis has been replaced by moral hysteria, argues **James Turley**

It may be the summer that is traditionally called 'the silly season'. However, bourgeois society is quite capable of serving up stupidities all through the calendar year.

This winter, silliness has had a distinctly racial flavour. The ground was prepared by the eruption of a series of race rows in football. That is a common enough phenomenon, of course; but now, after the guilty verdict against two of Stephen Lawrence's murderers, none other than hapless Labour soft left Diane Abbott has found herself at the centre of her own race row for somewhat innocuous Twitter comments.

The two scandals are characterised by no little stupidity gushing forth from all sides; in spite - or rather because - of this, they provide a dispiriting glimpse of the schizophrenic attitude to race in contemporary British society: torn between creeping state authoritarianism and 'official' multiculturalism and anti-racism.

Beautiful game

The football farrago began last autumn. Chelsea captain John Terry, no stranger to media outrage, was accused in October of directing racist abuse at Queens Park Rangers defender Anton Ferdinand; more or less the same time, mercurial Liverpool striker Luis Suárez was accused of the same crime, this time against Manchester United's Patrice Evra.

At this point, the consequences are becoming clear. Suárez has been handed an eight-match ban (by comparison, a potentially career-ending horror tackle will get you banned for four); compared to John Terry, however, who faces prosecution for a "racially aggravated public order offence", he got off pretty lightly.

All elements of the British establishment, of course, like to make a big display over how very *seriously* they take racism nowadays; thus, what were - at worst - verbal taunts with a dubious undercurrent are treated as though Terry had led a motley band of Blackshirts through the East End, baying for the Jews' blood (a *public order* offence, remember).

An extra incentive was provided to the Football Association in the person of - who else? - the bumbling Sepp Blatter, head honcho of international football federation Fifa. Blatter once again managed to put his foot in his mouth, by claiming that incidents of racial abuse on the pitch could be settled with a handshake after the game. English football, never an institution to miss out on a bout of facile Blatter-bashing, immediately pounced on this.

The heavy-handed response to Suárez's behaviour has been widely interpreted as an attempt by the FA to put its money where its mouth is - it will not be happy to have England captain Terry as a second scapegoat, of course, but, as the English national squad disappears ever further into its own backside, the FA is keen to blame every force on earth apart from itself for its persistent failure to rise above mediocrity in major international competitions.

A corrupt oaf like Blatter is, for the equally corrupt and oafish FA, a priceless resource for its periodic bouts of blame-dodging. We have to ask, however: how bad was Blatter's statement, *really*? Sustained victimisation of one player by

another is perhaps, in extreme cases, a disciplinary issue for the referee; but the exchange of insults between rival players is a common feature of almost all team sports, even supposedly 'civilised' ones like cricket, where 'sledging' is a major part of the mental battle between batsman and bowler.

On such occasions where things go too far, why would it be such a bad thing for players to resolve it between themselves, like adults? Is the only effective way to resolve off-the-cuff racial epithets this absurd theatrical display of ritual punishment?

The Suárez case is probably a good example. Suárez is found guilty of calling Evra a 'negro' several times during a Liverpool-Manchester United match (always a fixture where tensions run high). Suárez, a Uruguayan, seems genuinely bewildered at the response. As well he might be. Uruguayan football has a relatively honourable record as far as relations between the Hispanic majority and black minority are concerned, fielding black players in the first Copa America in 1916, when that was still a controversial move in Latin America. The high watermark of Uruguayan football came under the captaincy of Obdulio Varela, an Afro-Uruguayan and nationally revered figure.

Not coincidentally, Uruguayan culture is less brittle on the matter of racial

rather than the cause.

Race and multiculturalism

If this narrative sounds familiar, it is because it is broadly the narrative of post-war British race relations. Football does not exist in a vacuum; its culture is wholly interpenetrated with the culture surrounding it - and, as we have gone from a situation

where racism is basically common sense (nobody except the left thought, for instance, Winston Churchill's repulsive views on race a matter for comment until after his death) to another where racism is almost the worst accusation one can make against anyone in the public eye, so have football and innumerable other cultural formations evolved as well.

The British establishment's official anti-racism is a combination of different elements. First and foremost there is a notionally 'inclusive' national chauvinism - tolerance and democracy are timeless 'British values', rather than (basically) a peculiar, accidental side-effect of World War II. On top of that is built a twin-track system of state policy - on the one hand, the official endorsement of ethnic minority 'leaders' that represents the core of so-called multiculturalism and, on the other, the accumulation of powers to police public discourse.

Taken together, this amounts to an ingenious, but unstable regime. Dissent from the popular classes - of which ethnic minorities comprise a disproportionate fraction - is partially undermined by material support to religious and other reactionary-patriarchal institutions with real roots in their communities. More radically reactionary tendencies arising from the increased power of the church, mosque and so forth can be tamed with recourse to police action against 'extremism'. Finally, the national-chauvinist ideology behind it all is quite as serviceable for intimidation as previous racist policy - are you with Britain, freedom and tolerance, the state has asked (in particular) Muslim communities of late, or are you a dangerous foreign element?

This set-up does a reasonably good job of maintaining orderly relations between ethnic communities (although race riots are not entirely a thing of the past). It is, however, reactionary to its core - it relies on coordinated efforts by a reactionary state, its reactionary police force and reactionary 'community leaders'. As such, it is not any kind of threat to reactionary ideology. Thus, for all the fulminations and admonitions of our betters, racism persists as a real phenomenon.

Diane Abbott

What better example of how this works than the Diane Abbott race row? Abbott took issue with a Twitter post by writer Bim Adewunmi, who had objected to the lumping together of all black people into an undifferentiated 'black community'. For Abbott, that is succumbing to the classic divide-and-rule tactics of our masters. Abbott, however,

made the mistake of identifying those masters as 'white'. Thus was Twitter - now the medium of choice for artificial outrage - sent into yet another tiresome frenzy. Was not Abbott being racist against whites?

The notion, to put it mildly, is hard to credit. Yet Abbott is a tempting target for the right - though an unashamed political opportunist, she is leftwing enough to constitute a nice sharp stick with which to beat Ed Miliband. Though the Crown Prosecution Service somewhat soberly concluded there was no criminal case to answer, Abbott was a victim of an internal establishment police action, which succeeded in extorting a humiliating apology and a promise of 'good behaviour' in the future.

The real irony in the case, however, is that Adewunmi was right to begin with. There is not an undifferentiated black community, and - as she argues in a piece on the whole scandal - representatives thereof are selected according to institutional biases of the establishment.² The straightforward identity politics promulgated by Abbott in fact constitute an important support for the multiculturalist doxa that reinforces bourgeois power over the working class. It was not Adewunmi who was playing the 'whites' game', but Abbott (the architects of modern multiculturalism were Thatcher's ministers, and you cannot get whiter than that) - the extended spanking she received as a result of her unfortunate tweet was visibly enjoyed by all who joined in.

The link between the football scandals and the public humiliation of Diane Abbott is the key role assigned in official anti-racism to hysterical outrage. It becomes so terribly important to *be seen* to take racism seriously that nobody really *does* take it seriously - in place of sober analysis of the contradictory social tendencies there is only posturing and related silliness.

The organised left has come to reproduce this attitude. In the post-war era, it was of paramount importance for the left in Britain and especially America to account for the links between capitalist exploitation and racist oppression; but that analysis seems to have hardened into a dogmatic assumption that capitalism is racist in its most fundamental workings. This is not true; for the abstract logic of capital, reactionary ideologies are quite interchangeable, and it is the contingent development of history that drives one or the other to pre-eminence in a given conjuncture. More than being incorrect, it leads to political opportunism - if the system is inherently racist, it is enough to support semi-official campaigns against racism to challenge the system itself (the *de facto* policy of the Socialist Workers Party).

A serious analysis of the place of race and racism in today's society is necessary; one that is neither a whitewash nor a hysterical moralism, and one based on the one thing Abbott's 'whites' really fear - working class politics ●

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Notes

1. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/16262537.stm>.
2. www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/jan/05/diane-abbott-twitter-row-racism.



Luis Suárez: banned for eight weeks

BLUE LABOUR

Glasman's new old pantomime

Blogger Steve Hanson critiques Maurice Glasman's take on Labour, race and class

Last week Lord Maurice Glasman criticised Ed Miliband's leadership. Biting the hand that feeds him, maybe, as Miliband gave Glasman his peerage.

What Glasman says usually troubles me though, particularly in relation to race and class. As this news emerged, I had just finished *The Labour tradition and the politics of paradox*, edited by Glasman and others. This ebook tries to re-orient the Labour Party and labour tradition.

Glasman had barely finished speaking when Diane Abbott's tweet created a storm over the word 'white' so intense that it risked nullifying any debate. The discourse was being evaporated by rendering its very terms massively unspeakable. The close proximity of this event to the end of the Lawrence trial illuminated how 'justice' is not somehow equally distributed, in a finally solved present moment we have now arrived at, and I experienced a basic horror listening to white people scream 'racism'. I don't care about her gaffe, but I do care about the wider ramifications of this, for politics, language, and the media.

Miliband's introduction to *Politics of paradox* states that he is for reining in capitalism's worst side-effects, but then merely co-opts a Big Society-esque debate about belonging, families and friends. Glasman's idea that Cameron has taken Labour's ground from them with the Big Society has some truth, but the Big Society is one-dimensional. Glasman is a community activist and does understand the grassroots, but my problem with the Big Society is that we own 'it' already. 'Community' is being coopted by politics in much the same way that dating is being coopted by internet capitalism, as Slavoj Žižek once pointed out. This is the sound of desperation, as Labour councillors are forced to impose cuts, along with the Tories and Liberals. It is mournful stuff, soaked in heavy nostalgia for a rosy vision of 'the Labour tradition'.

Here then are some of the details of that nostalgic vision, as well as some of my objections to it, and those of some other critics, particularly in relation to race and class.

Right at the start of the ebook, Miliband asks us to remember "the cooperatives, mutual associations, adult schools and reading circles that constitute a proud tradition of mutual improvement and civic activism". He then uses the term "going forward" to describe a new vision of Labour as "a grassroots community movement". The corporate jargon leading into this old-fashioned Labour phrase is interesting. It is historical. Miliband's idea of going forward is literally mired in the language of a now-old New Labour, despite trying to pull itself free from the mud. Glasman's recent criticisms of Miliband essentially say the same thing, but both Glasman and Labour's current dogma is a peculiar mix of nostalgia and futurism, masking a rightward shift.

EDL votes?

Out of all the contributions, Glasman's paper, 'Labour as a radical tradition', has drawn the most comment, mainly because of his unguarded remarks about opening up a dialogue with the English Defence League. In it, he says: "The Labour tradition has never been straightforwardly progressive, and that is not a defect which we are on the verge of overcoming, but a tremendous strength that will offer the basis of renewal."

It would perhaps be too easy to read this as 'and the EDL might vote for



Turning on Ed Miliband

us'. However, to think that Glasman's intentions are fundamentally racist would be wrong - he is an anti-racism activist - but to assume that his exhortations to the EDL, and for an end to immigration, were not in some ways foolish would be equally incorrect. Glasman says that Gillian Duffy, who Gordon Brown described as a "bigot", should be brought into the party, that she should have something to join Labour for again. I have a lot of sympathy with this argument, but the 'how' is where it gets tricky. Because if this essentially means adopting the language of Powellism, then alarm bells still ought to ring.

There are many complexities here. Glasman, in his paper, actually explains that Labour is totally, paradoxically plural, before giving us a very specific and ultimately one-dimensional view of it, and therein lies the real paradox. Glasman's description of the history of Labour ends with the "Balliol Commonwealthmen in the early 20th century". He's into some very old stuff. He goes back to the Norman conquest, the rights of the "freeborn Englishman" and the "relationship between the English church and the Labour tradition", which, he says, has been "neglected and is worthy of re-examination, if not resurrection".

In relation to this Jonathan Derbyshire has commented: "Glasman has been criticised for being nostalgic for an era of settled communities and patriarchal certainties. There is something rather other-worldly about his appeals to Aristotle, Tudor statecraft and the glories of the 'ancient constitution'" (*New Statesman* July 25 2011).

Glasman pointedly ignores the secular turn, and it is worth remembering that the leftist realisation that the extreme radical was now religious, not secular, can be traced back to Stuart Hall's comments after 9/11, a mere decade ago. Glasman's harking back to earlier splits and joins in Christianity ignores later religious groups too, which have been present within labour movements for some time, such as Islam. I am not the only critic here either, of course.

Dave Semple offered a good reading of Glasman's essay, via his shared blog, *Though cowards flinch* (<http://thoughcowardsflinch.com>).

Semple says that Glasman "doesn't create any kind of shared history, based on actual facts, for the people who are going to be developing the labour movement of the 2010s ... Glasman's reliance on what is ultimately an elitist interpretation of working class history creates more than a hint of condescension towards the English working class of a type that would make EP Thompson turn in his grave ..."

I imagine that Thompson spin, as Glasman warns us what would happen "if you didn't build a movement with others to protect yourself from degradation, drunkenness and irresponsibility". For Glasman, morality is as unreconstructed as a 19th century vision of it. The upswing in drinking is real, of course, but his monologue is cloying and sepia-toned. Glasman writes that he does not like idealisms, before appearing to write one. It is theological. It is a sermon. Of course, all political rhetoric sermonises, but this one is often much less than the philosophical abstractions Glasman claims to abhor, and sometimes it is a fairy tale.

Semple points out that Glasman does not really nuance what he means by immigration. Via Bourdieu he argues: "... the use of the word 'immigrants' to describe people who have already arrived is illogical ... The perceived threat to 'cultural identity' is actually to do with the relationship between (now longstanding) British Asian (and to a much lesser extent Afro-Caribbean) people and white British people."

Semple argues that Labour needs to examine its own uncomfortable past regarding race and racism. In my view, instead of trying to stitch together some sort of unbroken Labour lineage, we need to see the Labour tradition (both the party and more widely) as significantly broken - by Thatcher, by consumerism, by neoliberalism - and not cling to ancient Aristotle, the Norman invasion and the "free-born Englishman". Admitting the tradition is broken and moving on is crucial, I think, and I would like to add these thoughts to Semple's more specific critiques of Glasman's text. Semple is trying to move the Labour debate forward, to try to find "the key to unlocking the door to a post-Glasman future of Labour and race relations". He says that "racial and ethnic disharmony is not an inevitable development" and that "we need to be in a position to repudiate these quasi-intellectual outpourings on the basis of historical fact as well as anti-fascist emotion".

Cloth-capped

Semple also tries to deal with Glasman's rather cloth-capped view of the working classes, and he urges Labour to develop a thesis which "moves us beyond the position, inherent to Glasman's thesis, that the working class is instinctively, and amorphously, socially conservative, insular and closed to the outside world. Such a position, as I have suggested, verges on the condescending, removing the proactive agential power that EP Thompson was so keen to evoke in his *Making of the English working class*, in favour of an almost fatalistic structuralism, in which the working class will only ever be seen to respond *en masse* to an environment structured for them by their masters."

Via Mike Kenny, Semple argues

that "the continued definition of the white working class as an unthinking rump ultimately simply reinforces this stereotyping". I agree, but I would also like to nuance his argument by saying that the media should not be underestimated in terms of its ability to create precisely such a structured environment. We should not ignore the fact that this environment is being generated daily, met complicitly, and that there are varying degrees of criticality within it.

My current research leaves me in little doubt on this point. We should not be blind to working class bigotry, but we should not take Glasman's cosy cruises with the EDL either. If Glasman is fixed on a dim past, Semple's gaze is occasionally too fixed on an idealistic vision of the working class present. I also beg to differ, a little at least, with his reading of EP Thompson. Thompson more or less knew that the working classes of the era were variously screwed down and thrown to the winds by industrial capitalism, despite their autonomous culture, labour movements included. Glasman is a realist of sorts, and I appreciate this part of his proposal - and to some extent his call to listen to the bitterness of the extreme right - but I think his response to the 'realism' thus far is potentially dangerous too, because it seems to believe that we can take all of these discourses straightforwardly, at face value. 'Realism' just isn't what it used to be.

Where I really start to scratch though, is when Glasman talks about capitalism. He says: "Not only was capitalism more efficient; it was, in fact, more moral than planned economies. It allowed greater freedom and diversity, while promoting a challenge to existing hierarchies and sensibilities. The over-the-counter culture exerted a liberating force."

This liberating force is acknowledged, but capitalism liberates *from*; it does not simply liberate. As this crisis moment was triggered by the failure of mortgage-backed securities, Glasman's reading of capitalism's supposedly superior morality is not just ahistorical, but barking mad. He rejoined Labour in 2008, right at the start of the crisis of capitalism, so where has he been?

Later he states: "... if people work hard, they can take their reward in having more money, if they want; just as it's true that if the market doesn't give them enough to live on then that's just not right ... just as it's true that we won't have built a common life if people who do the right thing still end up without a home, a pension or a job."

Real paradox

It seems to me that Blue Labour is trying to be all things to all people, and one thing to itself and its acolytes, all at the same time. Again, these are the real 'politics of paradox'. Capitalism, reward in having more money, is always taking from the other things Glasman lists above, those without homes and pensions included, but he refuses to acknowledge this. There is no simple or 'natural' relationship between 'hard work' and money, and ultimately, unless the form that capitalism takes is addressed, the symptoms of its processes will not be put in check.

In attacking Miliband, Glasman explained that the Labour leader needs to stop defending his party's "toxic" economic record. But we can trace the wider economic collapse back to demutualisation and the Thatcher government, as much as the Brown

years. As they gaze back through the mists at their proud and unbroken lineage, the cooperative banners and flags, they fail to see the one thing that is really unbroken: a fibre-optic cable reaching past them into the future, carrying data about the movement of container ships, overseas labour costs, copper prices and coffee futures.

In the interval of this 'new old Labour' race and class pantomime, I reread *My country right or left* by George Orwell. Afterwards, I picked through some more of his journalism, and read a review of a book by Franz Borkenau, which Orwell wrote for *New English Weekly* in 1938. In it, Orwell agreed with Borkenau's idea that a Russian-style revolution is unthinkable "in advanced western countries", but disagreed that some middle way could be found:

"Where I part company from him is when he says that for the western democracies the choice lies between fascism and an orderly reconstruction through the cooperation of classes. I do not believe in the second possibility, because I do not believe that a man with £50,000 a year and a man with 15 shillings a week either can, or will, cooperate. The nature of their relationship is, quite simply, that the one is robbing the other, and there is no reason to think that the robber will turn over a new leaf."

Orwell thinks that we must be "willing to make drastic changes" and shift capitalism - but in a way which "does not lose touch, as communism and fascism have done, with the essential values of democracy. Such a thing is by no means unthinkable. The germs of such a movement exist in numerous countries, and they are capable of growing. At any rate, if they don't, there is no real exit from the pigsty we are in."

There seems to be little in recent Labour Party gestures and publications which provides the exit from the pigsty - for Labour or more generally. In this, Glasman is right to criticise Miliband, but the advocacy coming from academics like him, and Labour politicians such as Liam Byrne, indicate a clear rightward shift. One exception to this rule is Sally Davison's essay in response to Glasman, which is titled 'Gramsci, not Machiavelli'. Gramsci also knew that the church could be a component of both resistance and revolution.

He understood the paradoxes of his age, but he wanted intellectual refuse collectors actively shaping the social future, not a queue of compliant apprentices for more exploitative capitalism staring at pictures of workers from the past - out of which the lines of race and class are built again, before being erased as 'natural', or unspeakable ●

Second edition: it's coming



ITALY



Susanna Camusso: resisting. Surprisingly, given her politics and past

No surrender on article 18

Toby Abse reports on the intransigent defence of Italy's Workers' Statute coming from an unexpected source

The replacement of Silvio Berlusconi's increasingly erratic video Bonapartism - which by the end could satisfy neither the Italian and European elites nor his own mass base - by Mario Monti's unelected cabinet of technocrats has intensified rather than quelled class conflict in Italy.

President Giorgio Napolitano's new year message to the Italians - "We will do it: the sacrifices are for our children and grandchildren" - was openly criticised only by the rightwing Lega Nord. By contrast, Susanna Camusso, the general secretary of the CGIL union confederation, for form's sake endorsed the president's words, although she adopted a very different tone in her own new year message the following day: "In the next few months there is a risk of growing social tensions. The recession will have a harsh impact on employment and earnings."

This was enough to cause prime

minister Monti to respond angrily: "Nobody has any evidence to claim that there will be social tensions, but certainly if we begin to evoke them from January 1 ..." Despite Monti's furious assertion that Camusso's concerns had no empirical foundation, she, along with the leaders of the two other main union centres, the CISL and the UIL, had drawn the nation's attention to some stark factual data: namely that 230 enterprises, employing about 300,000 workers, were in crisis according to the government's own figures and there were likely to be at least 30,000-40,000 redundancies in a variety of sectors in the next few months.¹

The spread between German and Italian 10-year bonds was back up to 527.3 at the close of trading on January 6. Although this worrying figure was less than the all-time peak of the euro zone era on November 9, when it reached 552 (prompting the *Evening Standard's* apocalyptic front-

page headline: "The descent into chaos begins") and sealed Berlusconi's fate, Friday's figure was far higher than the relatively encouraging 368, to which it fell on December 4, when Monti's austerity package was approved by his cabinet. When trading resumed on Monday January 9, the spread had climbed further - to 531.² Meanwhile, the Milan stock exchange was down 1.67% on January 9 and the yield on 10-year bonds was at a totally unsustainable 7.16% - enough to trigger an Italian default by the end of this year, given the vast number of Italian state bonds due for renewal at auctions over the next three months.³

At least some of this lack of confidence in Italian shares and state bonds has been caused by grave doubts about the ability of the Italian government to impose the labour market 'reforms' that the European Central Bank, the EU commission and Angela Merkel herself have all been demanding since August 2011.

Whilst Monti is taken seriously by his EU counterparts in a way that Berlusconi was not and it looks as if he has succeeded in forging an alliance with Nicolas Sarkozy to put pressure on Merkel to allow the ECB to act more like a lender of last resort, the speculators - many of whom do not live in the euro zone - will not be satisfied unless and until the Italian trade unions are reduced to the kind of abject conception of 'damage limitation' we associate with Dave Prentis and Brendan Barber cowering before Francis Maude and Danny Alexander.

Monti's savage neoliberal austerity budget was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on December 16, with all discussion on amendments being cut drastically short by the now customary device of a vote of confidence - the same tactic used to pass Berlusconi's austerity packages in the second half of 2011. Although the parliamentary majority in favour of the package was

very large indeed, the 495 votes in favour of austerity - including from the Partito Democratico, dominated by former 'official communists' - represented a visible diminution from the 556 who had given a vote of confidence to Monti's cabinet at its installation on November 18. It is worth remarking that the PD was far more solid in voting for austerity than Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PdL).

Next phase

No sooner had the first round of austerity gone through the Chamber of Deputies - the debate in the Senate continued into the following week - than the assault on article 18 of the Workers' Statute became absolutely crucial to the next phase. Whilst very broad hints had already been made that an attack on article 18 was being prepared - for example, when welfare minister Elsa Fornero refused to answer a question about it on a

television programme on December 11, it was Fornero’s interview with *Corriere della Sera*⁴ that made completely explicit what had been hinted at in the off-the-record briefings she had given to *Repubblica* and the *Corriere* the previous week.

Fornero, who doubtless looks forward to what others might call a gold-plated pension, took a very hard line throughout the interview. She defended the current pensions ‘reform’, describing previous moves in that direction as “excessively gradual” and added: “This time the reform had to be a strong one. The priority was to send a decisive signal to Europe about our capacity to rebalance the system on the basis of intergenerational justice.” She emphasised: “If we look at our graph of wage levels, the salary rises with seniority, whilst in other countries it increases with productivity and therefore until the age of professional maturity, but then goes down in the final phase because the old worker is as a rule less productive.”⁵

She fiercely denounced both employers and employees for resolving what she regards as the problem of higher paid elderly workers with early retirement deals, adding: “And the state covers the implicit pact between enterprises and old workers at the expense of young people.” She posed as the champion of women and young people, proclaiming: “Young people and women are the most penalised groups because the Italian road to flexibility only affects them.” She claimed to want a “life cycle” that “permitted young people to enter the labour market with a real contract, not a precarious one. But a contract that recognises you are at the beginning of your working life and need training and where you start with a low wage that rises with productivity. In short, I would take a favourable view of a single contract that includes the people who are now excluded and perhaps does not give 100% protection to the usual overprotected segment.”

The allegedly “overprotected segment” consists, of course, of the workers on permanent contracts in workplaces employing more than 15 people covered by article 18. Since the interviewer was well aware of this, inevitably the next question was about article 18 itself. Fornero responded: “I am old enough to remember what the leader of the CGIL, Luciano Lama, once said - ‘I don’t want to win against my daughter’.”⁶ Now I don’t want to say there is a single preconceived recipe, but equally there are no totems and therefore I invite the trade unions to have open and intellectually honest discussions.”⁷

Fornero, aware of the difficulties in ripping up existing contracts of employment, claimed: “I certainly think we need a more gradual approach to the introduction of the new rules than we have done for pensions.” When it was suggested to her that women were losing out, Fornero, who is also minister for equal opportunities, answered: “As far as women are concerned, we need to overturn the logic of compensations. We don’t want these, but equality instead. When I hear it said, ‘I work a lot and then I have to take care of my husband and my home’, I say families still don’t share caring duties enough.” In other words, she places the entire blame on the shoulders of the men of the family rather than the inflexible and unsocial hours demanded by the employer or the inadequacy of Italy’s welfare state. Whilst Italian men are probably less helpful in the home than the European average - a situation exacerbated by the example of Silvio Berlusconi and the grotesque stereotypes at the heart of his TV programmes over nearly three decades - this is an inadequate analysis, given the widely shared view that the extreme rapidity of the fall in the Italian birth rate has not just been

due to liberation from the shackles of traditionalist Catholicism, but owes a great deal to the inadequate provision of childcare that forces women to choose between work and children.

Forthright

The following day Susanna Camusso of the CGIL replied to Fornero in an equally forthright interview with *Corriere della Sera*.⁸ It should be remembered that Camusso’s adult experience of politics and trade unionism has not been on the extreme left, whatever stance she may have taken in the student movement of the 1970s. She was for a period a member of the Partito Socialista Italiano and was groomed by the previous CGIL general secretary, Guglielmo Epifani, in 2008 as the candidate of the right. Moreover, until recently she has been the object of continuing left criticism for her failure to back Fiat workers, among other matters. In short her current courage in defending the working class against the neoliberal austerity is doubly admirable because it was by no means predictable.

In her interview Camusso pulled no punches in her criticism of Monti and Fornero. Asked whether the budget had saved Italy, she responded: “I see that they attribute to themselves the role of saviours of the *patria*. The reality is that the situation is grave, but the correct recipe is not Monti’s.” Asked why, she continued: “Because it weighs down on the usual suspects, those who declare their income to the tax man - in general middle and low earners. Because it aims to get money rapidly from those who cannot and never have avoided taxes.” It will lead to recession and “the impoverishment of a great part of the country”. Instead there should be “serious forms of levies on large fortunes”, a “healthy ceiling on higher earnings” and “incisive” moves against tax evasion.

She described the pensions ‘reform’ as a “brutal intervention” against “so many people who cannot draw their pensions and are not entitled to a state subsidy”. There was “a level of aggression towards male and female workers, which, when carried out by a woman, is really shocking”. Her intransigent class analysis of the budget continued with a condemnation of the privatisation of pensions provision - “a reform to demolish the central pillar of public pensions”. Refuting the interviewer’s reiteration of the bourgeois commonplaces about deficits in the public pension system, she pointed to the “insecurity and fear” for dependent and casual workers in particular that would result from “handing the system as a gift to private insurance companies”. The interviewer, aware of the potential gravity of her accusation and anxious to nail her down, asked her outright: “Are you saying Fornero is working for the private insurance companies?” Camusso, undaunted, bluntly replied in the affirmative.

Stressing that the government was supposed to be a temporary emergency administration, she added: “I find it is displaying an authoritarian trait in wanting to say it is the great reformer of the country because such matters belong to politics.” In what proved to be one of her most widely reported comments she emphasised: “Fornero should get down from her professorial chair if she is contemplating an operating theatre with 70-year-old nurses.” She continued: “Aren’t there people who do heavy work that they can’t manage even at 66? They are certainly not all bankers. Instead we treat people who retire after 42 years of work as if they were profiteers, whilst there are those who retire after one legislature as parliamentarians.”

Asked about Fornero’s proposal for a single contract for all young workers, she showed no hesitation in exposing this fraud: “That would be a new apartheid, at the expense of the

young. If we analyse reality, we see that casualisation is to be found above all where article 18 does not apply: in small enterprises.” She boldly defended article 18 as “a norm of civilisation”.

Having attacked the government on pensions, on its treatment of the young and on article 18, Camusso showed the same justified contempt for Fornero’s bourgeois liberal, feminist posturing: “Fornero ought to strengthen the law against blank resignation letters⁹ and bring in one on obligatory paternity leave. These would be concrete steps towards equality.”

Lest anybody imagine that Camusso’s intransigence is purely verbal, it should be stressed that the planned one-day public sector general strike by the three major union confederations did go ahead on December 19 as planned and was presented, by the CGIL at any rate, as at least as much an action in defence of article 18 as it was a defence of workers’ pensions. The government alleged it was a flop, claiming only 9% of the relevant workforces participated, whilst the unions claimed it had “gone very well”.¹⁰ Camusso had been unrelenting on the strike day, demanding that Fornero “descend from the heavens, come into the world, talk to the unions”, as well as correctly pointing out that the government “speaks of labour reform, but in reality announces easy sackings”.¹¹

Bourgeois reaction to Camusso’s spirited defence of her members and the working class as a whole was predictably vitriolic - the *Corriere della Sera* published an article on its front page denouncing her for using “20th century language” and implicitly comparing her to the Red Brigades by referring to a phrase - *servo dei padroni* - that was a regular feature of their old communiqués, but one that she had not actually used.¹² Elsa Fornero whined: “I am displeased by a language that I thought belonged to the past. I don’t understand the personalised attack on me.” Pier Ferdinando Casini of the Unione del Centro claimed Fornero “does not deserve the truculent language that Susanna Camusso used today”, whilst Emma Marcegaglia, the president of the Italian employers’ organisation, Confindustria, predictably claimed that “on article 18 and labour market reform we need seriousness and pragmatism, and not ideology” (presumably she is so enchanted by neoliberalism that she genuinely fails to recognise it is an ideology too). Instead the unions ought to show “a great spirit of collaboration and a constructive attitude”.¹³

Contrast

Camusso’s position is essentially that of a classic, old-fashioned social democrat, but it contrasts dramatically with that of the PD leaders, who are engaged in something resembling the very worst of the ‘historic compromise’. PD leader Pier Luigi Bersani is now having regular meetings with PdL secretary Angelino Alfano to discuss how best to work together to prop up the Monti government, as popular discontent with austerity increases.¹⁴ Camusso has become the most prominent representative of the working class on a political as well as economic plane. Whilst she may eventually yield to pressure, so far she shows no sign of the dreadful and enthusiastic collaborationism of Luciano Lama in 1977-78, or even the more shamefaced capitulation of the CGIL leaders in 1992-94. Perhaps the fact that she never went through the Eurocommunist experience of the latter years of the Partito Comunista Italiano will prove to be her saving grace.

Despite the solidarity offered to Fornero by Confindustria, the UdC and journalists in *Corriere della Sera*, she was soon forced into an apparent

retreat on article 18. She claimed on December 21: “I did not have anything in mind on article 18. I fell into a trap.” The editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, Ferruccio De Bortoli, regardless of the undoubted sympathy he had for her anti-trade union stance, was not prepared to accept this blatant attack on his paper’s journalistic integrity and sarcastically tweeted: “She fell into a trap of her own making.” Fornero, increasingly desperate, unconvincingly responded: “I was not referring to the *Corriere*”, although it had been her interview with that daily which had set off the entire controversy.¹⁵

In spite of demands from Camusso that the government meet the leaders of all the trade union confederations jointly as part of the kind of tripartite negotiations between government, unions and Confindustria that had often taken place in the past, and that such talks involve a general discussion of the country’s economic situation, including pensions and taxation as well as the labour market, Monti has insisted that Fornero will meet the leader of each confederation separately and that these bilateral discussions would be confined to questions linked to the ‘reform’ of the labour market.

The welfare minister started the process by meeting her most vehement antagonist on January 5 and then followed up with separate meetings with Luigi Angeletti (UIL) and Raffaele Bonanni (CISL) on January 9, before concluding with a meeting with her ally, Emma Marcegaglia, president of Confindustria, on January 11. Officially this strategy of ‘divide and rule’ is solely concerned with proposals about moving towards a single contract for young people entering the labour market and new ideas about changes in the subsidies or benefits for the unemployed or those made redundant by the recession, but it is abundantly clear that in reality the attack on article 18 is still very much on the agenda.

Monti gave the game away in

his wide-ranging TV interview on January 8: “We have a mental attitude in which there are no taboos and it was in this sense that minister Fornero also mentioned article 18. In the past these matters were dominated by important symbols, but in this phase we don’t need symbols, but work - work that is not precarious - for young people.”

One does not need to be an avid reader of Sigmund Freud,¹⁶ as perhaps these two elderly professors were in their youth, to realise that in the context of labour market ‘reform’, Monti’s ‘no taboos’ and Fornero’s ‘no totems’ are in practice interchangeable ●

Notes

1. *La Repubblica* January 2.
2. Some of this surge in the spread was due to the troubles of Unicredit, Italy’s biggest bank, which lost 37% of its share value in a mere three days (January 4-6) as a result of its decision to make a rights issue. This led the markets to assume it might go the way of RBS. *Corriere della Sera* reported that Unicredit has lost 74.39% of its value over the last year (January 7). Since then the slide has continued, with a further loss of 12.8% on January 9.
3. *Corriere della Sera* January 10.
4. *Ibid* December 18.
5. This presumably does not apply to elderly, highly paid economics professors like herself.
6. Luciano Lama was the communist leader of the CGIL at the time of the ‘historic compromise’. He was an enthusiastic advocate of austerity in 1977, eagerly signing agreements with the government and employers that severely damaged workers’ living standards. He became the principal target of the ‘Movement of 77’ in general and the autonomists in particular, and to say that he was unpopular with young people at that point would be a gross understatement.
7. The key phrase, ‘no totems’, will probably have a greater resonance in Italy in the coming months than Lindsey German’s infamous ‘no shibboleths’ had on the British far left nearly a decade ago.
8. *Corriere della Sera* December 19.
9. A reference to the disgraceful practice by unscrupulous employers, who demand female employees sign a commitment to give up their job if they become pregnant.
10. *La Repubblica* December 20.
11. *Ibid*.
12. *Corriere della Sera* December 20.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Their intrigues have attracted the attention of journalists: see *La Repubblica* December 21.
15. See *La Repubblica* December 22.
16. One of Freud’s most well known works is entitled *Totem and taboo*.

Fighting fund

Optimistic

We at the *Weekly Worker* have every reason to be optimistic as we begin the new year.

Slowly but surely, this paper has been gaining in readership and influence. The principled politics we advocate has gradually been seeping into the consciousness of the organised left. While most of the groups continue to pretend that they alone exist, our central message - against sectarianism, for Marxist unity - has been gaining an ever wider hearing.

In my last column of 2011, I reported that we had notched up over 20,000 internet readers the previous week. Well, I am pleased to say that our final 16-page issue of last year did better still - 22,411 people read it online the week after it was uploaded. In fact over the three weeks since it was published readers continued to scour our articles - we had a total of 62,409 visits.

I also mentioned that from January our monthly fighting fund target would be increased to £1,500. This will allow us to produce more 16-pagers (the next of which is planned for next week) and more full-colour features. Fortunately our supporters seemed to have anticipated this, as we almost reached that figure in December.

Despite the Christmas break we received donations amounting to £398 in the last week of the month, which took our December total to £1,411 - beating the old target by £161.

A very large part of that was down to two comrades - JR and EJ. The former had contributed a magnificent 300 Canadian dollars, which comrade EJ bumped up to a nice round £200. Thanks to both of you! Also worth a particular mention for their generous standing orders are JT (£75), PM (£30) and DO (£20).

January too has already been marked by a handsome gift - thank you, SW, for your £100 donation. And the 17 standing orders received so far this month, plus the three cheques in the post, have given us £410 towards our first £1,500 target. That’s not bad, but we are behind the asking rate, with more than a third of the month already gone.

Comrades, let’s start the year as we mean to continue ●

Robbie Rix

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

KOREA

Of kings and Kims

Given the media's love of pomp and circumstance - and hereditary monarchy - there is no little hypocrisy in its mocking of North Korea, argues **Eddie Ford**

Following the death of the 69-year-old Kim Jong-il on December 17 2011, the western press has taken great delight in mocking the Stalinist theatrics surrounding the Dear Leader's funeral and the official anointment of his son, the 28-year-old Kim Jong-un, as the Great Successor: ie, replacement tyrant. He is the grandson of the Great Leader, Kim Il-sung - the "eternal president" - who died in 1994 and whose *Complete works* currently stand at 99 volumes; not to mention the eight-volume autobiography, *With the century*, and the revolutionary opera, *The flower girl*.

There is a lot to mock, of course, given the extreme personality cult which bestows near divine status upon North Korean leaders in a bizarre hybrid of Confucian state worship and a particularly degenerate form of Stalinism. In this vein, the official North Korean news agency, KCNA, reported various miracles that attended the death of Kim Jong-il. Ice ruptured with an "unprecedented loud crack" at Chon Lake in Mount Paektu, where previously Jong-il's birth had been greeted by a double rainbow and the formation of a new star in the firmament. If that was not enough, Kim Jong-il's name glowed in the rock face with letters of fire at sunset, the message saying: "Holy mountain of revolution, Kim Jong-il". Nature paid homage to the Dear Leader as well, so we are informed that on a freezing midnight a Manchurian crane flew down to one of his many statues and remained there in what appeared to be a state of grief - "Even the crane seemed to mourn the demise of Kim Jong-il, born of heaven, after flying down there at dead of cold night, unable to forget him".

As for the new leader, he too has been officially described as a "great person born of heaven", as well as "the eternally immovable mental mainstay of the Korean people", the "people's spiritual pillar and the lighthouse of hope", and so on. The state press also reminds us that "the Korean people now pledge themselves to remain true to the leadership" of Kim Jong-un, who was quickly promoted to the position of "supreme commander" of the armed forces. *Rodong Sinmun*, the newspaper of the Workers' Party of Korea additionally reports that Kim Jong-un is now the acting chairman and vice-chairman the Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea - the country's most powerful decision-making body. Furthermore, he is also the acting general secretary of the party.

For quite a period, Kim Jong-un's eldest half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, had been the favourite to succeed - as would be the Confucian-Stalinist primogenitary norm in North Korea. Unfortunately for Jong-nam though, he seriously blotted his copy-book in 2001 when he was caught attempting to enter Japan on a fake passport in order to visit Tokyo Disneyland - and now lives in *de facto* exile in Macao, where he is said to be a regular visitor to the Chinese territory's casinos.

We gather that Kim Jong-un studied computer science and physics and that, according to Kim Jong-il's former personal chef, Kenji Fujimoto, he is "exactly like his father" - possessing "superb physical gifts, is a big drinker and never admits defeat". Ideal qualifications for the job, obviously.

Apparently, for the time being Kim



Pomp and circumstance, just like official Britain

Jong-un will be advised by a small group of "senior revolutionaries", including his aunt, Kim Kyong-hui, and uncle, Jang Song-thaek, until the country marks the centenary of Kim Il-sung's birth in April - so expect a lavish 'jubilee' celebration and impressive rows of tanks. Slightly ironically for such a gerontocratic society, Kim Jong-un is the youngest head of state in the world.

Purpose

Though madness on one level, these miraculous stories promoted by the official media do serve a clear political purpose - to stress the line of continuity between the old leader and the new leader, and the general harmony that exists amongst the state elite. The Stalinist tyrant is dead - long live the Stalinist tyrant. In other words, business as usual. That is something that the outside world wants to hear as well, for all its mockery and noises of disapproval.

The Dear Leader's death reminds us that North Korea was not *totally* isolated. Cuba declared three days of official mourning for the despot - flags at half mast - while Nicaragua and Venezuela sent governmental condolences. The KCNA website proudly carried messages of commiserations from the emir of Qatar, the former president of Moldova and the "great king and great queen of Cambodia". More loyal still, Didymus Mutasa, the secretary of administration for Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party, told Zimbabwe's Voice of the People radio that Kim Jong-il was a "lovely man" and "our great friend" - someone "we are not

ashamed of being associated with".

Then there was the actual funeral, to which the western media devoted acres of bemused coverage. Thus we had highly televised scenes of mass grief and mourning that looked on occasions like mass hysteria, though it was extremely difficult from this distance to work out how much of it was choreographed. Overly cynical western journalists have suggested that the grief on display was *entirely* faked, but that seems unlikely.

Naturally, Kim Jong-un led the mourning, which lasted for 11 days and culminated in a state funeral and processions through the capital on December 28-29. Wearing a long black coat, he walked in front of the hearse carrying his father's casket wrapped in a red flag. Mourning stations were opened in locations across the country.

The government in Seoul did not send an official delegation to the funeral. Indeed, it imposed a strict travel ban on ordinary citizens. But it did authorise a select group of people to attend. Among them was Lee Hee-ho, the wife of the former South Korean president, Kim Dae-jung, whose so-called "sunshine policy" of engagement in the late 1990s eventually gave way to frostier relations under the current president, Lee Myung-bak - a nod to the fact that the north sent representatives to her husband's funeral in 2009. Accompanying her from Seoul was Hyun Jeong-eun, the chairwoman of the Hyundai group, a major investor in the north. It was assumed by some commentators that she used the funeral as an opportunity to discuss North Korea's seizure of Hyundai

assets earlier in the year.

Overall then, there are no indications whatsoever that Kim Jong-il's death has sent the country into crisis or increased north-south tensions. OK, sure, on January 4 KCNA ritualistically denounced Lee Myung-bak as a "pro-US fascist maniac" and a "chieftain of evils" because he placed his troops on 'high alert' after Kim Jong-il's death and prohibited ordinary South Koreans from attending the funeral. In contrast to ordinary North Korean citizens, of course, who are free to travel where they like, when they like - in their dreams.

Hypocrisy

For us, the idea that the North Korean regime represents any form of Marxism - a theme repeated *ad nauseam* by the gleeful mainstream media - is just as fantastic as Pyongyang's fairytales. In fact an examination of the regime's own pronouncements reveal not a shred of Marxism or working class politics of any kind - fake 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric at best. Rather, the official state doctrine of *juche* - founded on the three key principles of "political independence", economic "self-sustenance" and "self-reliance" in defence - is the polar opposite of genuine proletarian internationalism. And a straightforward lie, or self-deception, given that the country is totally reliant on external aid (mainly from the United States) just to survive in the miserable state it does today. It should not have to be said that the revolting deification of the Kims is the utter *negation* of the revolutionary, democratic and republican politics espoused by Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc.

But communists have other objections to the western portrayal of North Korea as the weirdest part of the world - ever. Such an idea only works if you have a very short historical attention span. Just look closer to home. For the most part, generations of schoolchildren have been told that Britain has a glorious and uninterrupted history going back to at least 1066. This history is dominated by an endless succession of hereditary monarchs - totally natural and normal, of course.

In fact, as every schoolchild ought to know, from medieval times onwards dynastic succession was portrayed as being divinely sanctioned. This became official doctrine with the Tudor and Stewart monarchs. Our present queen, Elizabeth II, is the defender of faith - although nowadays it is not considered apposite to refer to her god-sanctioned right to rule over us. Why is that any less weird than the nonsense about double rainbows and miracles over Mount Paektu?

And, hang on, what about the scenes of mass grief outside Buckingham Palace following the 1997 death of Diane Spencer in that Parisian tunnel? Those memorable images of people sobbing and bubbling over some aristocrat they never knew? If anything, the fact that the grief outside Buckingham Palace was most certainly spontaneous - not a show to prevent you being arrested by the secret police for 'disloyalty' - makes it even more disturbing. Similarly, the mass mourning for that appalling, gin-sozzled reactionary, the queen mum - how rational was that?

Now, strangely enough, the queen's diamond jubilee is almost upon us -

David Cameron used his new year address to inspire us with the "global drama" that will make 2012 the year in which "we go for it", proud in "who we are" and "what we can achieve". We will have to endure an endless - and mindless - parade of pomp and circumstance, the various media outlets competing as to who can be the most sycophantic towards the monarchy. Feel the dread coming on yet? Fear not, it is all worth it - we lucky subjects of the crown will get an extra bank holiday on June 5 - joy of joys - tagged onto the queen's Official Birthday (how stupid is that?) on June 4. All of which will be meticulously planned and choreographed on a near North Korean-type scale - with the queen and other members of the royal family carried down the Thames on a special royal barge. You see, Britain is *so* different from North Korea.

And when the queen pops her gilded clogs I wouldn't be surprised if there was a lavish state funeral, not to mention interminable days of official mourning. Not to show visible and evident signs of grief, preferably to the point of a nervous breakdown, will be interpreted, if not as an act of treachery, then definitely as most unBritish. A bit like not wearing a red poppy. We might even be told by wise people that she was one of the greatest people ever to have lived - just like Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, come to think of it.

The only real difference between the British and North Korean monarchies is that Pyongyang is new to the game of absurd ritual and dynastic pomp - the Koreans are just parvenus. Johnny-come-latelies. Just look at the Kims, for whom the height of Stalinist bling is a Rolex watch or Ray-Ban sunglasses. How tawdry when compared to the real thing. By contrast, our dear queen does it properly, draping herself from head to toe in an ostentatious display of gold and diamonds. And in this time of austerity we are supposed to be all in this together - tell that to the homeless and unemployed.

No, I'm afraid the idea that Britain is distinctively normal, sensible and rational in comparison to North Korea just doesn't cut it - the constitutional monarchy is *weird*.

The final hypocrisy is that, in reality, nobody in the 'international community' wants the North Korean regime to come to a sudden end. In fact the United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea - they are all busy shoring it up. It is not hard to discern the reason for this. A total collapse would be massively destabilising for the region, if not the world. Just think of the tidal wave of refugees from the north, and what the hell would you do with it if such an implosion actually happened? Reunification would create enormous problems - remember the acute digestion problems caused by the sudden end of East Germany?

Clearly, the North Korean regime is not just kept in power by those 1.1 million armed personnel or its two or three nuclear warheads - which if ever used would probably blow up in their silos or go off in the totally wrong direction. No, the regime continues to exist in large part thanks to the *complicity* of its neighbours and the USA itself, which will do nothing to destabilise the vile regime ●

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INTERVIEW



'Official communists' protest: in spite of their leaders

Preparing for the second wave

December saw huge protests in Moscow and St Petersburg against the rigging of the elections to the duma. Mark Fischer asked Russian socialist **Boris Kagarlitsky** about their significance

The movement seems to have been very diffuse, with the far left rubbing shoulders with the extreme right and nationalists. How would you characterise it?

For a few years there has been growing unhappiness with the current system among the people - in that sense the effect of the economic and social crisis has been more or less the same as in other countries. But in the case of Russia we previously saw no active expression of that discontent. Millions of people were angry, but that was not translated into political action.

This led some among the elite to imagine that Russians are simply unable to protest for some cultural or psychological reason. As for the intellectuals, they tended to explain this anomaly through fear. However, neither explanation was correct. While the population was so passive that it seemed to be paralysed, this situation could not continue forever.

Meanwhile there has emerged a new generation of young Russians - those who did not live through the disasters of the 1990s. This generation is extremely naive and inexperienced, often lacking even a basic understanding of political and social issues, but it is full of energy and it wants to change things.

The internet has played a role in this awakening, but its importance should not be exaggerated - for some time dissent and expressions of discontent have been common on

Facebook, but this was not reflected in events on the street. That situation has changed, but even now those on the street are not necessarily the same people as those agitating on the web.

Elections to the duma have always been rigged, and in any case this fake parliament has no real power. All the parties involved in the electoral process - not only the pro-government United Russia, but the so-called 'opposition' as well - are controlled by the administration, and most people have been well aware of that, including, of course, those who joined the protests in December. But people needed a pretext to go onto the streets and they got it with the rigging of the elections.

It was no great surprise when the opposition parties, whose votes were stolen, decided not to support the movement. However, some of their members did - especially in the case of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, in open confrontation with their own leadership.

As for the non-parliamentary opposition, it tried to benefit as much as possible from the new situation; and to a certain extent it has managed to do so, because the government claims that official opposition politicians are 'representatives' and 'leaders' of the protest. This means that if you want to go to a protest rally which is not going to be attacked by the police, you choose those organised by the 'Democratic Coalition'. So far that has worked, but there is a growing frustration among the youth who

initiated the movement. A coalition which unites some of the left with liberals and the far right can be sustained only at the price of political ineffectiveness. These people lack principles and that makes them stay together rather easily, but it also prevents them from thinking out a political strategy.

Within the left there is now a debate. On the one hand, we have some 'moderate socialists', backed by some anarchists and Trotskyists, who say that we need to follow the liberals because they enjoy the support of "the masses". That also means avoiding any discussion of social issues and not putting forward any demands except 'free elections'. On the other hand, there is a tendency which aims to form an independent left coalition able to formulate its own agenda and which refuses to go along with rightwing nationalists and liberals. *Rabkor.Ru*, the web journal of the Institute for Global Research and Social Movements, tries to be an expression of this tendency.

You have previously noted the paradox that, while prime minister Vladimir Putin has scored as high as 80% approval as an individual politician, even his most popular policies register only 20%-30% support. Has that situation now changed?

Today Putin is in big trouble. It is true that his personal popularity has been used to cover up the extremely unpopular neoliberal policies which

he is implementing. But this could not continue forever. Now his popularity is collapsing because more and more people associate him with the government he leads (unlike during the times of his presidency). President Dmitri Medvedev is simply hated and the obvious identity between the two men makes things much worse.

The situation is deteriorating so fast that the plans for this year's presidential elections, in which Putin will stand once again, have been called into question. There is no way Putin can get elected in the first round without massive fraud. And letting the elections go to a second round is something the Russian bourgeoisie doesn't like, because this increases 'instability'.

In line with Lenin's theory of revolutionary situations, there is now a crisis at the top. The elite doesn't know how to run the country - they certainly can't continue in the old way. But this is not specific to Russia. We are affected by the global crisis of neoliberalism.

If Putin survives, presumably he will head a weak regime?

I don't think that he will survive for long. A weak regime is hardly regarded by the elite as the best option for dealing with the crisis. The bourgeoisie and oligarchy needed Putin when he was capable of delivering stability. Now he's exactly the opposite to what is needed, so they may start looking elsewhere. At the moment Mikhail Prokhorov, the

billionaire entrepreneur standing as an independent, looks like a bad option, but the very fact that he is running tells us that the elite is looking for a candidate to replace Putin. Whether they succeed in finding a solution is a different story. It doesn't seem too likely right now.

Has the working class made its presence felt to any extent?

Not so far. There have been some strikes, but they have not been connected to the democratic protest. And the liberals don't want working class support and participation. However, in Petersburg local union leaders are visible on the streets. I think that the working class will be central to the second wave of protests, which is surely approaching.

You mentioned Lenin's theory of revolutionary situations. How do you view the current situation?

The first wave of protest brought about very little, if anything, except that the duma parties and liberals have now been discredited. But the next wave will be more incisive and will put forward social demands - not necessarily very radical, but essential for mass mobilisations. The majority of Russians aren't yet ready to fight for socialism, but they are demanding a return of the welfare state - something opposition liberals will never support.

New movements, new forces and new leaders will emerge - this is all a normal part of the revolutionary process, in which we as Marxists are happy to take part ●

ANALYSIS

Politics of fear and despair

Paul B Smith calls on the left to face up to the challenge of class-consciousness. This is the first part of a three-part article

An atmosphere of fear pervades the writings of many journalists writing on financial and economic matters today. The unresolved crisis triggered by the crash of 2008 is compared to a horror movie.¹ Faced with finding solutions to the problems of the collapse of the euro zone, falling house prices, the absence of growth, indebted governments and capitalists who refuse to invest, it seems that some members of the ruling class have lost confidence not only in finding solutions, but also in the continued future of the capitalist system itself. Some journalists have even made favourable references to Marx, suggesting that his analysis of capitalism as a crisis-ridden system incapable of satisfying the needs of the majority of the world's population is correct.² Rather than being excoriated for having betrayed the cause of what should be a resurgent capitalism, these authors are no longer even mildly rebuked.

This loss of confidence is not, however, reflected in the thinking of workers. On the contrary, despite extensive cuts in social spending, job losses, rising unemployment and regimes of enforced austerity, workers do not tend to target capitalism as the cause of their misery. At best workers direct their anger at particular personifications of capital such as the chief executive officers of banks, or particular politicians or political parties. Their anger finds sympathetic allies within the establishment, who worry about social inequality - especially if it leads to disorder and civil strife.

Workers' anger also enables moralists to attribute an ethical character to a real distinction within capital as a whole. Capitalists who invest productively in industry and labour are thought of as virtuous. In contrast, those who invest unproductively in finance are vicious. Surely, if only the latter's activities could be brought under the rule of law and taxed more heavily, then the effects of crisis - at least at the moral level - can be controlled? Is it not evident that tax revenue should be used to subsidise failing industries rather than insolvent banks? Thus philanthropists such as Warren Buffet state they would be happy to have their billions taxed more heavily. Similarly the pope and the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury call for a tax on financial transactions. The slogan, 'Tax the rich', appears to have become as popular within a section of the ruling establishment as it is on student demonstrations.

Even where there is organised mass resistance, as in many European countries, there are no popular democratic demands for bringing capitalism to an end or for workers to embrace the task of the emancipation of humanity through the seizure of power. There is little if any discussion amongst workers on how to establish a rationally planned global society based on the fulfilment of social need. Workers are not hammering at the doors of revolutionary Marxist political groups demanding to be let in. Whilst there is a renewed interest in studying Marx amongst a section of the intelligentsia, most of the organised groups are intellectually moribund or frozen into mindless forms of hyper-activity.

Two authors

What stops workers from realising their emancipatory potential? Are the chief determinants of contemporary political consciousness subjective? I



Naomi Klein: shock doctrine

will address here the ideas of a couple of authors who have answered the latter question in the positive. These are Naomi Klein and Hillel Ticktin. Klein in her book *The shock doctrine* describes how terrifying a population has become a tool of political and economic policy. This enables capitalism to survive and, until the present crisis, to appear to flourish, even though its ability to address social need is further minimised.³

Ticktin, on the other hand, highlights despair about the possibility of political or economic improvement. A climate of despair temporarily traps and obscures workers' consciousness. This leads workers to seek individual solutions, such as hedonistic forms of consumerism. Despair also causes them to acquiesce to any form of politics, however authoritarian or reactionary, if it offers some temporary respite from uncertainty, insecurity and instability. This means workers can be won over to racist, nationalist, sexist and homophobic forms of politics, if they are packaged in a way that offers them some sense of hope - however fleeting and impermanent.⁴

The two authors differ in many important respects. The chief difference is that Klein looks back to what she sees as a benign form of capitalism. This began with Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, was inspired by the economic ideas of Keynes and flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. This can be restored, she thinks, in the present - if people struggle for it. Ticktin, on the other hand, argues that the capitalist class will not reflate the economy through policies of full employment, nationalisation and a reinvigorated welfare state. He suggests that the absence of a discussion on the real possibility of a socialist alternative to

capitalism reflects the despair of a left demoralised by Stalinism and social democracy.

I argue here that we should look at the operation and influence of fear and despair from a class perspective. For example, the objects of fear and despair differ according to whether they are experienced by a worker or by a capitalist. I refer to Marx's so-called law of the accumulation of misery and suggest that the state of contemporary political consciousness backs this thesis up. Finally I address some of the social forms that might contradict the causes of fear and despair. These include the study of the objective conditions for hope and the organisation of places of safety.

Klein's book gives a readable description of the political and economic policies that dominated the period from the end of the 1960s until 2007. This was just before the crash that precipitated the present crisis. She states that - in order to introduce unpopular economic policies, such as privatisation, financial deregulation and cuts in social spending - a shock needed to be administered to the population. This could be a coup d'état, a market meltdown or a war. It may also mean taking advantage of a natural disaster, such as a hurricane or a tsunami. The effect on the population is that it suddenly feels fearful and helpless. It is totally disoriented. It is made incapable of resisting new policies which increase social inequality and vastly enrich a few capitalists.

Klein's account gives no explanation for the introduction of the policies she describes. According to her, they were the result of a campaign by a group of economists from Chicago University led by Milton Friedman. She does not make the

necessary connections between these economists' success and a change in capitalist strategy.

In the historical period she covers from 1970-2007 there was a turn away from industrial to finance capital as the chief means of generating profits and securing capitalist survival. The policies of the preceding post-war period were based on subsidies to the industrial and public sectors to stimulate growth in employment and productivity. This entailed the incorporation of trade unions into forms of political and economic management. As Ticktin argues, this was only possible in the context of the cold war. The containment of workers' militancy through the influence communist parties had upon the unions, however, broke down towards the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. The ruling class pulled the plug on the consensual period of concessions and adopted a change of policy that involved a change in the mode of the extraction of a surplus. There was a shift from the employment of productive, industrial capital to unproductive, financial capital. It was only when it was clear the previous strategy had failed that Friedman's students came into their own.

Klein also forgets to mention the influence of the Soviet Union on the administration of terror and fear on a population. There was nothing in human history more shocking than Stalin's purges. Here, the shock doctrine was used for opposing political aims other than those of finance capital. The former Soviet regime terrorised a whole population for over 50 years in order to prevent any collective opposition to it. The aim was to extract an economic surplus by force alone. Similar systematically brutal means used in China, North Korea and Burma are proof that torture and the use of a secret police force to destroy the possibility of workers' opposition are not the sole prerogative of free marketeers. They can just as well serve policies promoting nationalisation and full employment. They were used for these aims long before the 1970s.

Ticktin's approach is richer than Klein's because he understands that there is a relationship between changes in subjectivity and the objective reality with which they interact. This is typical of a transitional period, when the old system is decaying, but the new order has yet to come into being. The classical example is the way the doctrine of socialism in a single country changed from a subjective idea into a social and economic system that could be studied objectively.

The doctrine had no pedigree in Marxist theory. It was born of fear and despair. The disaster and shock of prolonged civil war caused a generalised fear of capitalism. Despair kicked in with the idea that the world's working class could not succeed in overthrowing capitalism anywhere else. This sense of hopelessness trapped the regime into utopian policies reflecting the needs of an elite of a backward and isolated country. Lack of hope was a crucial element in Soviet subjectivity. Both fear and despair drove the regime towards the establishment of a malfunctioning social formation. This was neither capitalist nor socialist.

World in transition

The notion of transition is understood

differently by Marxists and non-Marxists. There are two variants of non-Marxist understanding: one of them is optimistic; the other is pessimistic. The optimistic notion of transition is that we live in a world which is moving towards greater democratic political freedoms. This was a fashionable idea in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Attempts were then made to integrate formerly Stalinist regimes within the capitalist world. It went out of fashion with the rise of Putin in Russia. It became clear that liberalisation of the Soviet Union had led to social disintegration and impoverishment of the intelligentsia. The resumption of authoritarian forms of police control and the restoration of fear as a means of control has temporarily stabilised conditions enabling the accumulation of capital to take place.

The transition to liberal democracy has had dreadful economic consequences for workers. Klein notes that Poland in 2007 had the highest rate of unemployment in the European Union. Forty percent of young workers under the age of 24 were unemployed - twice the EU average. There was a 44% increase in the numbers of Poles living in poverty from 1989 until 2003, the period of so-called transition (p192). In Russia, the transition had even worse effects. The population shrank by 6.6 million from 1992 to 2006 and a Moscow academic alleged in the same year that the transition had killed off 10% of the population (p238).

Another blow to liberal optimism was the rise of China as an economic power. This depends on Stalinist police methods of control - the suppression of workers' ability to organise and the stifling of criticism and freedom of speech. The optimistic understanding recently had a boost with the overthrow of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. However, confusion and gloom now obscures previous hopes with warnings of destabilisation, sectarianism and religiously inspired nationalism. Moreover, the grievances of the social layer that triggered the overthrow of the old regimes have not been met. Youth unemployment remains high and graduates are still having difficulty finding suitable employment.

The pessimistic non-Marxist understanding of transition is that we live in a world which is moving towards species extinction. Popular culture, literature and films reinforce this perspective by presenting the future as a nightmarish dystopia, in which humans are wiped out by natural disasters, alien invasions, out-of-control technology or - more realistically - out-of-control corporations and governments.

The desperation informing this viewpoint has its origins in the cold war with the threat of nuclear holocaust. The idea that nuclear war is likely is still felt by many who survived this period and has a leftwing version based on a reading of Lenin. This is that the present crisis will lead to protectionism. The latter will result in inter-imperialist rivalry and world war.

Within this projection, it is unclear which countries presently would be prepared to threaten nuclear war. Would it be the USA and China? Given the two countries' dependence on China's investments in US government bonds, this seems unlikely. Moreover, even if China

became a major imperialist rival, it would not necessarily lead to nuclear war. It is now well known that - despite the rhetoric - neither the USA nor the USSR was seriously prepared to use nuclear weapons against each other.

Other versions of this apocalyptic vision of transition include pollution creating changes in the climate that make the planet inhospitable to life or a general collapse of society, the state and social order. Both of these reflect changes that are happening in the world, as capitalism disintegrates. These involve the examples of increasing numbers of floods, retreating ice caps and countries such as Somalia and Afghanistan. These instances of change are then generalised into trends. It is argued that they will dominate and destroy the world, society and life. Both ignore the fact that a rational, planned society could solve the problems of pollution and political collapse easily. This would be done by diverting resources away from wasteful economic forms based on profit and war. They could then be used to combat climate change and the damaging effects of social disintegration.

Transition to socialism?

The Marxist understanding of transition is different. It starts from the notion that every social form has an evolution. It has an origin, maturation, a decline and a death. Capitalism is not eternal. Nor has it always existed. There was a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism. There were transitional forms. A mercantile form of capital accumulation coexisted with surpluses extracted by force from serfs. Rents in kind coexisted with rents in cash. Peasants producing commodities for internal and external consumption coexisted with serfs producing goods for subsistence.

The transitional period of capitalism is part of the story of its decline. It begins with the Russian Revolution in 1917, when a significant part of the world was taken out of the market. Since then there have been non-market transitional forms that contradict the operation of capitalism. These include nationalisation, welfare systems, pensions, social housing, free education and social security. They have contradicted capitalism by extending the sphere of production for use or social need. They have also served to keep capitalism going by dividing workers in imperialist countries from those in colonial and post-colonial countries. Imperialism is one of the objective forms capitalism has taken which has created a fearful and desperate subjectivity amongst and between workers. I shall discuss this further below.

The Marxist understanding of transition is optimistic. Capitalism is in decline. Its basic laws of operation are inhibited and restricted. It no longer has the power to control and influence social relations in the way it once did. There is a tendency operating in the present towards the eventual introduction of a socialist society. However, socialism is not inevitable. An accident might intervene such as collision with an asteroid. Marx's assumptions about human nature or capitalism may also be incorrect. Perhaps humans are not essentially cooperative, sociable or rational. Perhaps a new form of non-market class

society might emerge out of the death of the present social system. Maybe, a failed attempt at a workers' revolution could produce a bureaucratic elite that extracts a social surplus from workers for a limited period of time. A society in decline and transition is difficult to understand and the complexity of understanding the present becomes a factor in delaying the process of transition.

There is a class dimension to understanding this complexity. According to Marx, a social group only becomes a class when it creates a recognisable collective expression of it goals. The capitalist class has a form of collectivity that arose historically in its battles with a feudal ruling class. The goal was to enlarge the scope and means of capital accumulation. This sense of collective unity was further enriched in its battles with workers.

The capitalist class conceded various measures to workers in order to continue to manage the continuing goal of accumulation. Thus imperialism provided both the means for further accumulation and public revenues sufficient to provide social housing, insurance and a welfare state. As we shall see, it also functioned to divide workers in imperial nations from workers in the colonised nations. Class collectivity also united capitalists during the cold war to fight for the reintegration of the former USSR within the capitalist economy.

Workers, on the other hand, will not form a class until their collective opposition to their exploitation goes beyond the local or national sphere. Workers are all those who sell their labour-power unless, like managers and some other professionals, they also control the labour-power of other workers. The recognition of workers' real relationships to capital and the state is, nonetheless, insufficient for class-consciousness to arise. It can coexist, as it did in the cold war period, with forms of economic improvement that divided workers from each other.

Class-consciousness forms and is formed by a sense of global collectivity. Workers become class-conscious when they understand the universal nature of the task they have the power to achieve. This is to go beyond local and national struggles and take on the responsibility to emancipate not just themselves, but the whole of humanity. This consciousness needs an understanding of the real relationships within society freed from ideological distortion. The Marxist notion of class-consciousness is therefore very different from the sociological theory that workers' consciousness is formed by ideology and that there is no aspect of objective reality which is free from ideology.

Conversely, the consciousness of the capitalist class is necessarily ideological because this class no longer seems to want to understand real relationships. For example, class is theorised according to income, status or education in order to inculcate a sense of common interest between workers and capitalists. Sociological notions of class, such as the 'underclass', also nurture a sense of superiority that some workers are more privileged than others. The recent divisive and harmful effects of this form of classism are documented powerfully in Owen Jones' recent book, *Chavs: the*

demonisation of the working class.

Class and subjectivity

Do fear and despair have a class dimension? The objects of the fears of the capitalist class concerning the present global depression are stated vaguely as a form of extreme risk aversion. It is not just that some capitalists, some banks or some companies are being wiped out. This would be grounds for some individuals to be frightened of losing face, influence or status (if not personal wealth). Nor is it just that some individuals' hopes of running small businesses will be dashed and that they can no longer escapes wage-slavery. It seems to be more fundamental.

According to Klein, an economic meltdown induces a sense of fear in the population. This enables policy-makers to introduce unpopular policies of privatisation, deregulation and cuts in social spending. They are unpopular because they lead to job losses, mass unemployment, poverty and social inequality. The present austerity programmes recommended by the International Monetary Fund, the central banks, governments and political parties are indeed following this path.

If Ticktin is right, however, surplus capital cannot find paths for investment. Capital is no longer functioning as capital. It is no longer money that is making more money. Billions of dollars are being withheld from investment out of fear that they will cease to accumulate. The crash of 2008 marked the beginning of a fundamental malfunctioning of financial capital. The fear of the more insightful members of the capitalist class is that policies that helped finance capital accumulate through Klein's shocks to the population will stifle workers' demand for commodities and strangle the possibility of further investment in the industrial, productive sector - the source of surplus value.

In other words, there is a decreasing consensus within the capitalist class on how to proceed, or how to manage capitalism effectively. The fear seems to be that the system will run out of control, that their class collectivity and consciousness will break up and that popular resistance will overcome fears of repression and limit investment opportunities further. For the more historically and philosophically minded, there is also the fear of revolution, in which members of their class's heads are put on the block. Fear of revolution has informed the more conservative and authoritarian sections of the capitalist class.

Very few workers are class-conscious. This makes any ruling class fear of revolution appear disproportionate and fanciful right now. On the contrary, the majority of workers are atomised and fear for their security and prosperity. The worker who turns on other workers of a different nationality, race, religion, gender and sexual orientation (or physical or intellectual ability) does not need to have met or had any close contact with the objects of their fear. It is sufficient that the worker believes either that strangers are responsible for his or her insecurity or poor quality of life or that she or he is, in some way, superior culturally, intellectually or morally. Thus the native worker fearful of losing her or his employment, standard of living or livelihood may turn against the immigrant worker. The worker fearful of losing their home through repossession may turn against the Jewish or Chinese worker (imagining her or him to be in alliance with greedy bankers). And the worker who fears losing benefits he gains from divisions of labour in the household and the workplace may try to exclude, socially ostracise or ridicule women, gays and the disabled ● teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com

Notes

1. "The US economy has started to stumble lethargically, as if bitten by a zombie. The euro zone countries, one by one, are being drained of life-blood by a swift and merciless vampire" - Alan Beattie *Financial Times* August 6-7 2011.
2. See, for example, S Stern, 'Marx was right about change' *The Independent* August 16 2011.
3. N Klein *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* London 2007.
4. H Ticktin, 'Political consciousness and its conditions at the present time' *Critique* Vol 34, No1, pp9-26.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

Rank and file movement needed

Sovereign busworkers fight back

Gerry Downing, secretary of Grass Roots Left, calls for the rank and file to act against union sell-outs

We are all aware of the attacks on London bus drivers' pay and conditions and on the fightback which has emerged. The sacking of Abdul Omer as convenor of Sovereign buses, with garages in Harrow and Edgware, in March 2010 was a central part of that attack. He lost his employment tribunal case in early November 2011.

The judge at the tribunal ruled that Unite regional industrial organiser (RIO) Wayne King was a liar and that on the balance of probability he must be lying on Omer's behalf. This cannot be true, since the relationship between the two of them broke down after King gave away everything that was won for the members. Omer told his supporters at the employment tribunal that King is indeed a consistent liar. But he is not his own liar: he is the company's liar. Omer promised to put out a statement on this, but he was taken to hospital the next day with a heart attack. He has only recently been able to return home, but he is still very ill.

Sovereign buses was the lowest paid in London when Omer became convenor and he negotiated parity with the parent company, London United, with its eight garages in Fulwell, Hounslow, Hounslow Heath, Shepherd's Bush, Stamford Brook, Park Royal, Tolworth and Twickenham. This parity deal amounted to a £4,000 pa increase over three years.

After his sacking and even before his appeal against it had been heard in April 2010, Wayne King had negotiated the annulment of that pay parity agreement, so Sovereign drivers are still the lowest paid, with the possible exception of those employed by Abellio. He gave away all the gains and he explained to the regional sector committee for the transport sector, of which Omer is an elected member, that Unite the union instead offered the company a self-funded pay rise (in fact it was a pay cut). Under pressure from Omer, King told the committee that Unite had felt it necessary to give back the gains won by the sacked convenor in consideration of the company's financial difficulties. No wonder the relation between the two broke down.

Meantime, the employers have pressed forward with their attacks on all fronts. Unite has refused to hold a strike ballot over the sacking of the convenor, despite workplace ballots and motions passed by the two garages supporting a strike. But the drivers have rebelled over the cancellation of their parity agreement, and Unite finally agreed to carry out a legal postal ballot for industrial action on the 2011 pay offer, already rejected twice in garage ballots.

Release the result

The result of the strike ballot on pay was due on December 27. Sovereign sought to circumvent this by approaching individual drivers with an offer to backdate the 2% deal (which included a no-strike clause) to July 2011, giving the drivers an average of £235 in time for Christmas. The company claimed "many drivers" had accepted.

New drivers in particular were



Busworkers need unity

given a raw deal with this offer. When Omer was convenor he negotiated a 14% increase and a reduction of the probationary period from one year to six months - again to bring Sovereign in line with London United. The 14% has now been withdrawn and the probationary period has been increased back to a year - with a new two-years grade to be introduced from December 2012.

Thanks to King and his concern for Sovereign's interests, conditions are now *worse* for drivers than when Omer became convenor three years ago. The RIO is giving away every one of the substantial gains that Omer had won for his members - driving the last nail in the coffin of the parity agreement.

Omer has urged the drivers to resist and a mass meeting was called in the middle of December. Unexpectedly King turned up - as one driver put it, he "came from nowhere to take the fight out of the members and manage it". King kept the meeting waiting for 50 minutes while he negotiated with the managers. The drivers had already

begun dispersing when he returned to tell them that, as a "large number" of drivers had signed the no-strike deal, the result of the Electoral Reform Society's ballot would therefore be invalid. Uproar ensued. Members shouted at him that Unite was a management outfit, and there were calls for everyone to leave the union. King left the meeting to more abuse. Petitions then began circulating in the two garages, demanding, amongst other things, the resignation of the two reps.

Remove Wayne King

Wayne King should be dismissed as Unite RIO in view of his disgraceful behaviour. Apart from the fact that a contract containing a no-strike clause is void, as it is illegal and cannot be enforced, the company is not entitled to pay the drivers who have signed one rate and those who have not signed another for the same work (neither King nor Sovereign has come up with

any figures to back up their claims of a "large number").

Since when do trade unions promote individual deals on pay and conditions? King's behaviour was in sharp contrast to the position taken by Jim Buckley, another Unite RIO, who had put a stop to this underhand tactic in 2008, correctly observing that it amounted to derecognition of the union. The company was forced to back down on that occasion and the revolt of the drivers now has had that same effect: Sovereign has written to all drivers saying the company accepts collective bargaining and working with the trade union. It has proposed a two-year deal of 3.1% from December 2012, but this would not apply to rest days or overtime rates, which remain the same. Of course, this is still below the rate of inflation and so should be rejected by the drivers; the demand must remain parity with London United.

Wayne King and the new acting convenor, Jamil Abbasi, have pressed ahead with this new offer, refusing still

to reveal the result of the strike ballot. They hope to push the deal through in separate garage ballots after meetings.

Grass Roots Left

Grass Roots Left is a national group of Unite members dedicated to fighting against bureaucracy and for rank-and-file control of the union.

We say Sovereign drivers can still win by taking the following urgent action:

- Don't leave Unite - stay in the union to fight the sell-out misleaders and reinstate Abdul Omer.
- Convene meetings in Edgware and Harrow, and pass a resolution saying that drivers do not accept the pay deal and will fight on for both the full claim and brother Omer's reinstatement. Reject the pay offer - parity with London United.
- Renounce the company for intimidating individual drivers into signing up to an invalid deal. Organise petitions.
- Demand that Wayne King should answer for his actions and be removed from his union position.
- Demand that Unite releases the result of the ballot and convenes a meeting of members - including those who may have temporarily left in disgust - to ask them what they would like to do.
- Be prepared to consider coordinated strike action across the bus companies in the future to stop the 'race to the bottom'.

All London busworkers should unite around these demands:

- Peg wage settlements to the rate of inflation.
- One wage rate and one set of conditions throughout London.
- End competitive tendering.
- Renationalise the buses.
- Build the Grass Roots Left in every garage to oust the corrupt, sell-out union bureaucrats ●

For more information and to assist the Sovereign campaign contact sacked convenor Abdul Omer Mohsin: 07830 424395; omermohsin2@yahoo.co.uk

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