



weekly worker

**Sex, symbolism and our
neanderthal close cousins:
four-page supplement**

- Pensions sell-out
- Egypt after elections
- Nigerian oil protests
- Stalinist impediments

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Austerity plans are proving self-defeating

Europe's mutual suicide pact



LETTERS



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

Archaic

Each one of Paul Anderson's responses manages to reveal more and more of his archaic Stalinist politics (Letters, January 12). Claiming that I was somehow "pro-Gaddafi" even though I didn't want to be is nothing more than twisting Christopher Hitchens' accusations - that those opposed to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq were "objectively pro-Saddam" - to fit a Stalinist ideology.

Sure, Chinese investment in Zimbabwe may benefit ordinary Zimbabweans feeling the pain of western sanctions and Mugabe's economic mismanagement. It has probably played a major role in stabilising the economy since the hyperinflation of 2004-09. That doesn't make making deals with Chinese capital a wise long-term strategy. If I am "demonising" the role of China in Zimbabwe, I assume that Anderson must have no problem with policies to appease Chinese capital like violent slum clearances, Chinese merchants selling shoddy goods, and Chinese business people taking over farmland that I thought was supposed to be for native Zimbabweans, according to Mugabe's land reform policy. Mugabe has also jailed oppositional socialists like those from the International Socialist Organisation, but then again I'm sure that Anderson has no problem with some Trots being roughed up.

Contrary to Anderson's assertions, unlike, say, the *Harry's Place* left, I have never dismissed anti-imperialism or sought to ferment colour revolutions. The Tunisian uprising was dubbed the 'jasmine revolution'. Does that mean it was an imperialist plot too? Anderson's views pin us into a corner. He doesn't claim Mugabe, Assad, Gaddafi, etc would be able to construct socialism if the west would just leave them alone. So what work then is acceptable for revolutionary socialists to carry out in countries such as these? If a Communist Party of Zimbabwe were to lead a revolution against Mugabe, no doubt the west would try to involve itself at some point. Any intelligent revolutionary would make such an assumption. That is not a reason to avoid a revolution, however. The only other option is a popular front, which Anderson *de facto* supports in Zimbabwe, Syria and Iran. Using historical precedents, that is going to make Anderson a bigger counterrevolutionary than I could ever be.

Roscoe Turi
email

Closer to Dave

I want to raise two issues in connection with a thread that was started, in part, by a review by Dave Douglass of VN Gelis' book on Greece and Europe ('Defence of the nation-state', December 8 2011).

It's quite true, as Arthur Bough says, that Trotskyist groups opposed the Communist Party's nationalism in the 1960s. They did not, however, endorse the European Economic Community. These groups all opposed any federalism of European nations along lines dictated by finance capital. It is correct - without exception - to oppose any and all of these fake 'United States of Europe' schemes, everyone of which is designed to address the crisis of capitalism for capitalists. To imply otherwise would not only be ahistorical: it would be a disaster politically.

Some bosses, for sure, always seek to use national boundaries to their advantage, be it protectionism, tariffs, restrictions on foreign investments,

etc, etc. But as a class finance capital - that is, imperialism, which is what we all live under - is opposed to these sort of national-capitalist responses and works against them at every level. Thus the European Union, the euro zone, Maastricht, Lisbon, North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organisation become the cutting edge of anti-working class offensives against the gains of the working class. It is this 'globalisation' that is the point for capitalism, not these petty minority of capitalists that seek to use the false Little England patriotism to spar with better financed rivals elsewhere. They are the exceptions, not the rule.

It is globalisation, not nationalism, that is seeking to roll back the gains of the working class and is the cutting edge of the class struggle. It appears to me that Arthur, in his desire to run away from anything smacking of British nationalism, is running straight into the arms of imperialism. Perhaps he is an 'alter-globaliser' - for an EU with a 'human face', or a WTO with workers' rights somehow grafted in. This is the direction of the 'Euro left'. It is also the direction of adapting to capitalism and, worse, capitalism's 'solutions' to its own crisis.

As for Dave, while we have sparred on energy issues - both us remaining small minorities on the socialist left, but from opposite sides - I'm closer to him on some his views on the working class and the crisis of capitalism than most, maybe.

I have not read VN Gelis's book. He developed his views largely from polemics with myself on the rather useless Usenet news group. In some ways VN Gelis parroted the views of French Trotskyist Daniel Gluckstein in his 1990s book, *Globalisation and class struggle*. The book describes how imperialism, under the guise of a kind and gentle 'globalisation', seeks to roll back the gains of our class, all won within the traditional borders of the capitalist nation-state, by going after that very nation-state. The thesis argues that such violations of national sovereignty go against the interests of the working class on an *international* basis. This, of course, can be debated, and should be.

On one level, VN Gelis's thesis is a contribution to this same discussion from a similar, but by no means congruent, point of view. Gelis, and his neo-Nazi protégé and ex-Healyite whose internet name is 'Dusty', argue that if you defend immigrant rights you are part of the 'globalist left'. On another level, VN Gelis represents a reactionary, rightwing nationalist response to this same crisis. He bounces off and adopts, for example, holocaust denialism bordering on anti-Semitism. He started veering from the traditional Marxist view on immigrant rights and immigration by calling immigrants "scabs".

While Dave Douglass in his review noted his anti-immigrant views in passing, VN Gelis's pure hatred of immigrants is beyond even the British National Party - basically calling on the unions to expel all foreigners from the working class and the country.

David Walters
California

Cuckoo controls

The CPGB *Draft programme* has this on immigration: "As a matter of principle communists are for the free movement of people and against all measures preventing them entering or leaving countries. Simultaneously, we seek to end poverty, lack of opportunity, war and persecution everywhere."

"Migrant workers are not the problem. The capitalists who use them to increase competition between workers are. The reformist plea for

non-racist immigration controls plays directly into the hands of our exploiters. It concedes the right of the state to bar workers from entering Britain."

I'd like to quote comrade Paul Cockshott for a different take on immigration, which criticises the *Draft programme* and suggests another approach:

"Are completely open borders in the working class interest? No, I am in favour of organised working class control of the labour market."

He concludes: "... if you think that a left party could win elections today if one of its key election planks was to remove all border controls and allow unlimited immigration, then you are living in cloud cuckoo land."

Jacob Richter
email

Still capitalist

Paul B Smith writes: "... 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" ('Politics of fear and despair', January 12).

But none of these things have been produced to meet social need any more than what is produced by private capital. A fundamental requirement for any commodity, according to Marx, is indeed that it should be a use-value, that it should meet some social need. The fact that the state takes over the production or provision of such commodities does not, in any real sense, change that. Some of these commodities are paid for collectively by workers, in payments deducted compulsorily from their wages, but that does not change the fact that they are still commodities.

Indeed, the current system of tax and national insurance operated by capitalist states is just a more onerous version of the truck system, that unscrupulous capitalists used in the 19th century, whereby they deducted money from wages, and provided workers with tokens that could only be used to purchase goods from the company store. That is precisely what workers are presented with today in the provision by the state of health, social care, education and so on. Why any Marxist should see this as contradicting the operation of capitalism is beyond me.

On the contrary, these kinds of provision have been fundamental to capitalist reproduction during the 20th century. It was Bismarck himself who introduced the first national insurance scheme in Germany in the 19th century. He did not do so to undermine the operation of capitalism, but to facilitate it. It meant deducting a sufficient amount from the wage fund to ensure that workers consumed a minimum level of education and so on to meet the changing needs of capital for a more skilled workforce, and, at the same time, facilitated the development of the kind of social stability that capital required in order to make the kind of very large, long-term investments that were by then required. These ideas were in fact nothing more than the application at a state level of the ideas that were adopted by Fordism at the plant level.

Anyone who doubts that all of the things mentioned are wholly within the sphere of the circuit of capital reproduction, that they exist not in contradiction to the operation of capitalism, but wholly in support of it, only has to look at the way in which the state adjusts the provision of all these things in accordance with the needs of capital. Capital introduced them to meet its needs by the most

efficient means it had available at the time. In doing so it also undermined the growing movement of the working class to provide many of these things for itself, which would indeed have contradicted the operation of capitalism.

If we really want to develop workers' consciousness, we have to return to those ideas that the early Marxist movement developed on workers' ability to meet their class interests via their own collective actions, usually in opposition to attempts by the capitalist state to frustrate them. That was the lesson that the Plebs League learned, for example, in attempting to provide independent working class education.

Arthur Bough
email

Cheap

I don't think as an anti-racist Marxist I can understand James Turley's argument ('A load of old balls', January 12).

Its clear that the words of footballer Luis Suárez words were unacceptable. Calling a man a 'little negro' eight times in two minutes was clearly designed to offend. This nonsense about the relatively superior situation of black people in Uruguay is total rubbish. It is a society where race and class clearly coincide, just like the United Kingdom, and the word *negrito* is unacceptable and racist. A black man calling a white man 'little Caucasian' eight times might be considered to have some racial significance - but, of course, that has never happened, because black people on the whole don't seem to resort to such stupidities.

This seems like a cheap excuse to have a go at the Socialist Workers Party, who, unlike the CPGB, have consistently defended ethnic communities under attack from white British racism. That's not to attack the white working class, from which I come, but to recognise the practical benefits of a Marxist based anti-racism. Why don't we recognise what we have in common instead of making very cheap and inaccurate arguments?

Mbiu Rogers
email

Worrying

I'm currently reading some CPGB pamphlets and I notice that the organisation is described as "the vanguard of the working class". I find this very worrying, as it sounds not only extremely arrogant, but suggests the grave mistakes of the past are being repeated and the necessary lessons not learnt.

No single party or organisation claiming to be based on Marxism can legitimately claim to be "the" vanguard. The fact is that there are several organisations claiming to be Marxist, presumably all supposing they are the vanguard of the proletariat. A more correct description would be one which used the indefinite article - 'a vanguard of the working class'.

This is extremely important, as pluralism is essential, especially after socialism is established. We need not only free debate within each party/organisation under the rules of democratic centralism (and I am pleased to note the CPGB allows factions). We also need to give the masses a choice on the various routes to communism, and between the various socialist models. A multi-party state with free elections, but under a socialist constitution, so that there is no attempt to return to capitalism based on one party gaining a majority. Only a substantial majority in a referendum could replace the socialist constitution, so in the absence of that situation all parties would have to be committed to preserving the socialist

nature of society in some form prior to the gradual transition to communism.

At some stage it may well be that the correct and successful socialist model is discovered and works so well that the various parties and organisations merge, creating one Marxist party with a mass membership taking a fully active part in inner-party democracy. This, however, is way ahead and well on the way to the self-governing society of communism.

Tony Papard
Battersea

Nothing to fear

Socialist Worker reports that at the SWP conference "A motion calling for internal bulletins in the run-up to party council meetings was defeated" (January 14). The SWP currently only has internal bulletins before their conferences, information about which has been revealed in the *Weekly Worker*, and that is also the only time in which factions are permitted.

So why these restrictions on internal democracy, stifling internal debate? When I was in the Socialist Party in England and Wales (and its predecessors, the Militant Tendency and Militant Labour) from 1990-98, there were quite a large number of faction fights resulting in splits, in Britain and other sections of the Committee for a Workers' International. There were sometimes internal bulletins and documents distributed through the national centre.

So should the lesson be that such internal democracy is a problem? No, not in my opinion. Suppressing debate cannot prevent factions or cliques from arising, which may result in splits (as has happened in the SWP with Counterfire and the International Socialist Organisation in Scotland in the last two years). It tends to prevent tactical turns which may prove essential in changed circumstances.

In these days of high internet usage, which the SWP not too long ago tried to dissuade its membership from using, suppression of debate is less easy. There are various Facebook groups for the SP and SWP which are open to non-members, but SP or SWP comrades on them rarely if ever criticise their party's position on any issue.

Someone who attended this year's SWP conference gave me an explanation for the opposition to internal bulletins, which may or may not be the official excuse. He said they are unnecessary because members can communicate directly with central committee members. I pointed out that there must be large numbers of SWP members who in an open debate would have doubts about the SWP strategy which prioritises building their own party at a crucial time in the anti-cuts struggle. The SWP have failed to get involved in the Coalition of Resistance, due to it being largely led by Counterfire. Instead they have favoured their own initiatives (Right to Work, followed by Unite the Resistance) and, in turn, this gave the SP an excuse to launch yet another anti-cuts campaign (out of the National Shop Stewards Network).

Steve Wallis
email

Altered farm

I am surprised that Paul Flowers did not mention the role of the CIA in changing the ending of the film version of *Animal Farm* (Letters, January 12). The CIA arranged for the notorious Howard Hunt (of Watergate fame) to buy the rights to the story in order to alter the ending. This was in 1955 at the height of the cold war.

Ron Lynn
email

SOLIDARITY

No room for anti-Semites

On Saturday the Palestine Solidarity Campaign will hold its AGM at Conway Hall, London. It takes place against the background of severe disruption by a handful of supporters and sympathisers of Gilad Atzmon - the anti-Semitic ex-Israeli jazz player.

It should be no surprise that a minority - a very small minority - of PSC members have succumbed to the argument that 'the Jews' as a seamless entity are responsible for the horrific oppression of the Palestinians. For years supporters of the Palestinians and opponents of Zionism have been told that they are anti-Semitic. Zionism was held to be synonymous with being Jewish. It is little wonder that a few people have accepted the Zionists at their word. As I wrote for 'Comment is free', "If you cry wolf long and loud enough, when anti-Semitism does raise its head no-one will bat an eyelid."¹

Atzmon had the credentials as an ex-Israeli who had repented, as well as being a world-class jazz player, to give legitimacy to this Zionist argument. In 'Not in my name' he wrote: "To demand that Jews disapprove of Zionism in the name of their Jewish identity is to accept the Zionist philosophy. To resist Zionism as a secular Jew involves an acceptance of basic Zionist terminology: that is to say, a surrendering to Jewish racist and nationalist philosophy. To talk as a Jew is to surrender to Weizman's Zionist philosophy."²

For Atzmon the declaration of being Jewish is no different from coming out as a Zionist. Unsurprisingly his main target became 'the enemy within' - Jewish anti-Zionists within the Palestine solidarity movement. Zionists to him were at least honest.

And from this it was but a short step to holocaust denial. The holocaust was a 'narrative', a story whose ending could be changed. In fact Zionism's record was one of collaboration with the Nazis and the sabotage of all attempts at rescuing the Jews of Europe that did not involve Palestine. Zionism has shamelessly used the holocaust as a political weapon to justify the expulsion, massacre and racist exploitation of the Palestinians. It is not surprising that a small minority of their supporters adopted holocaust denial.

In 'Truth, history and integrity', Atzmon wrote: "If, for instance, the Nazis wanted the Jews out of their Reich (*Judenrein* - free of Jews), or even dead, as the Zionist narrative insists, how come they marched hundreds of thousands of them back into the Reich at the end of the war? I am left puzzled here. If the Nazis ran a death factory in Auschwitz-Birkenau, why would the Jewish prisoners join them at the end of the war? Why didn't the Jews wait for their red liberators? I think that 65 years after the liberation of Auschwitz we must be entitled to start to ask the necessary questions. We should ask for some conclusive historical evidence and arguments ..."³

Zionism and its propagandists, in what Norman Finkelstein termed the "misuse of anti-Semitism and the abuse of history"⁴ have taken holocaust denial out of the confines of a small coterie of European neo-Nazis and helped popularise it in the third world. The argument, popularised by Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is that, since Israel claims legitimacy through the holocaust, all one needs to do is deny the holocaust to deny Israel any legitimacy. However the holocaust is a fact and this 'logic' ends up as an endorsement of Israel.

It is precisely this phenomenon which has entrapped a small minority of PSC members and Palestinians. It is a product of an almost complete depoliticisation, coupled with a separatist reaction to oppression. Zionism was a separatist movement which adopted the framework of anti-Semitism. The anti-Semites said the Jews did not belong in non-Jewish society and the Zionists agreed. The same happened with Marcus Garvey and the back to Africa movement.

If Zionism had remained at the level of ideology it would have been an interesting historical curiosity. But Zionism was politically in accord with western colonialism. German, French and British imperialism fell over themselves to endorse a 'return' of the Jews to Palestine. The British won with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 - named after its author, Arthur James Balfour, the anti-Semitic foreign secretary who introduced the Aliens Act 1905, designed to keep Jewish refugees from tsarist Russia out of Britain. A British colony in Palestine would be near to the Suez Canal, the route to India. Indeed it was non-Jewish imperialists, not Jews, who were the first Zionists.

And, when it is coupled with the publication this year of Atzmon's *The wandering who?*,⁵ endorsed by at least five professors, including John Mearsheimer and Richard Falk, it is little wonder that a few of those inflamed by the persecution of the Palestinians should seek solace in holocaust denial.

It would be futile to pretend that this has not caused major problems for PSC. Four years ago, some of us tried to ban the Deir Yassin Remembered group. Unfortunately the then executive took a sectarian stance, denying that there was a problem. Today that is not possible. Up and down the country, individual branches have experienced problems. In my own branch, Brighton, former national PSC chair Frances Clarke-Lowes came out as a holocaust denier. He was promptly expelled by the local branch and his appeal against expulsion from national PSC will be heard on Saturday. In Liverpool the Friends of Palestine website was taken over by a holocaust denier. In Exeter the branch had some involvement in the organisation of an Atzmon meeting at the university (although others protested strongly). In Bradford the Raise Your Banners group invited Atzmon to play at a left cultural festival and claimed PSC support, until PSC disowned it. In Camden, Gill Kaffash was forced to step down as PSC secretary after her holocaust denial sympathies became clear.

It is entirely to the credit of the PSC executive and its secretary, Ben Sofa, that last September they changed the statement 'About our campaign' on the front page of the national website to make the PSC position absolutely clear: "Any expression of racism or intolerance, or attempts to deny or minimise the holocaust have no place in our movement. Such statements are abhorrent in their own right and can only detract from the building of a strong movement in support of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people."⁶

Atzmon immediately attacked the statement. He apparently did not know what holocaust denial means!⁷

These developments have been grist to the Zionist mill. *The Jewish Chronicle*, along with many other papers, has run a number of arti-

cles, including an attack on PSC by Atzmon's supporters, such as Lauren Booth, Tony Blair's sister-in-law.⁸ But the Zionists, trapped by their own racism, have been left struggling to find a response. Hence the *JC* has not only quoted my own blog frequently, but Anthony Cooper wrote a remarkably fair article (for the *JC*!), 'The Jews who can distinguish anti-Semitism from anti-Israel',⁹ for which he was predictably savaged.

Even the rabidly Islamophobic pro-war site, *Harry's Place*, reprinted this article - though not unnaturally taking delight at what it sees as problems for PSC. But the majority of Zionist propagandists have tried to pass this off as mere infighting.¹⁰ Indeed Atzmon has been praised by *Harry's Place* for his anti-boycott stance!¹¹

On Saturday there will be one motion on anti-Semitism and racism on the agenda from the national executive. Another, from Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and myself, which called for more internal education on Zionism, has been amended and accepted by the executive.

Although there have been in the past, and no doubt will be in the future, disagreements between ourselves and the executive over tactics and strategy, over one thing we are absolutely united. There is no place in PSC for any trace of racism or anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism today is primarily a marginal prejudice. It is not a danger to Jews so much as to the Palestinians. Without anti-Semitism there would have been no Zionism. It was anti-Semitism which drove a minority of Jews to Palestine. It was Hitler and the extermination of Europe's Jews which gave Israel its legitimacy as a refuge for the Jews, there to establish a settler-colonial state based on the very principles that the anti-Semites espoused. As the founder of political Zionism Theodor Herzl wrote over a century ago: "Anti-Semitism has grown, and continues to grow and so do I."

At the AGM there is also a not very clever motion from Gill Kaffash and ex-Israeli Ruth Tenne, which seeks to define racism so as to exclude holocaust denial! They also, no doubt unwittingly, manage to exclude Islamophobia by confining racism to its biological variants. It is a stupid motion from the stupid.

Support for the Palestinians is an anti-racist struggle. It can be no other. I urge all supporters of the Palestinians and members of PSC to come to the AGM and vote to ensure that the main motion is passed overwhelmingly and Kaffash/Tenne's motion is soundly defeated ●

Tony Greenstein

Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/may/31/vettinginpractice.
2. http://gilad.co.uk/html%20files/notin.html.
3. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/truth-history-and-integrity-by-gilad-atzmon.html.
4. N Finkelstein *On the misuse of anti-Semitism and the abuse of history* London 2005.
5. G Atzmon *The wandering who?* Abingdon 2011
6. www.palestinecampaign.org.
7. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/gilad-atzmon-psc-has-made-it.html.
8. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/59320/lauren-booths-attack-points-new-split-psc.
9. www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/comment/61200/the-jews-who-can-distinguish-antisemitism-anti-israel.
10. http://hurryupharry.org/2011/11/14/gill-kaffash-the-palestine-solidarity-campaign-camden-council-and-gilad-atzmon.
11. http://www.azvsas.blogspot.com/2012/01/harrys-place-praises-atzmon-on-bds.html.

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday January 24, 6.15pm: St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). 'Song-lines and rainbow snakes' (myths from Aboriginal Australia). Speaker: Chris Knight.

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.

Music against the blockade

Friday January 20, 6.45pm: Concert, Bolivar Hall, Grafton Way, London W1 (nearest tube: Warren Street). Cuban classical musicians raising funds for material aid to Cuba. Tickets: £10.

Organised by Rock Around the Blockade: www.ratb.uk.

Grass Roots Left

Saturday January 21, 12pm: Conference, Cock Tavern, Phoenix Road, London NW1. Restore democracy in Unite and take back control of our union for the members. Everyone welcome (though only members can vote).

Organised by Grass Roots Left: www.grassrootsleft.org.

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.

Arab revolutions

Monday January 23, 6.45pm: Meeting, the Gallery, Cowcross Street, London EC1. Speaker: Dr Adam Hanieh. Entrance: £3 (£2 concessions). In the wake of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, the World Bank and IMF are trying to call the tune.

Organised by *Le Monde Diplomatique*: enquiries@lemondediplofriends.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.

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>.

Counter Olympics

Saturday January 28, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference, Toynbee Hall, Commercial Road, London E1 (nearest tube: Aldgate). Topics include Olympic cost, debt, repression, pollution, displacement and lack of consultation.

Organised by Countering the Olympics: www.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/countering-the-olympics-public-meeting.

Sussex LRC

Tuesday February 7, 7.30pm: Meeting, Community Base (5th floor conference room), 113 Queen's Road, Brighton. Speakers: Mark Seddon and Michael Chessum (NUS national executive).

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.org.uk.

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.

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.

PENSIONS

Politics, not voluntarism

The left is trying to wish a mass fightback into existence. Peter Manson reports on the Unite the Resistance 'emergency conference'

The small hall in Friends Meeting House was crammed to overflowing for the January 14 meeting of Unite the Resistance. Billed as an "emergency conference" to mobilise against the public sector pensions sell-out, the gathering heard militant speeches from, amongst others, Public and Commercial Services union general secretary Mark Serwotka and leading Labour left MP John McDonnell.

The organisers report that 423 "delegates" squeezed into the small hall, whose official capacity is 200. Perhaps this claim is connected to the fact that around 450 attended a similar meeting called by PCS Left Unity on January 7 at the same venue - although that took place in the vastly more spacious large hall.

The background to both meetings was, of course, the dramatic and treacherous about-turn by top public sector union bureaucrats in relation to the government assault on their members' pensions. November 30 had seen tremendous unity, with 29 unions leading out well over two million workers on a 24-hour protest strike. Unison in particular had put every effort into prioritising this action. Yet, before December was out, Unison general secretary Dave Prentis had accepted the government's 'heads of agreement', alongside Paul Kenny of the GMB. Suddenly a huge chunk of the resistance had been demobilised, their leaders signing up to the principle of 'work longer, pay more, get less', as the government demands have become known. Treasury secretary Danny Alexander said the coalition's main objectives had been met in full. The proposed new deal would save "tens of billions of pounds" in the future - cash to be stolen from workers by slashing their deferred wages.

All Prentis and Kenny had to show for their criminal complicity - urged on by TUC general secretary Brendan Barber - were concessions whereby some changes would be delayed by a year or two and, more significantly, staff due to retire within the next 10 years would be able to retain their current projected retirement date. This divisive, two-tier arrangement recalls the public sector unions' ignominious retreat in 2005, when they jumped at a concession protecting *current members only* in a deal that raised the retirement age for *future* workers in the civil service, NHS and education from 60 to 65. As we commented at the time, "All they have won in exchange is a temporary truce in the assault on existing members' pension rights" (*Weekly Worker* October 20 2005).

Six years later it was a case of *déjà vu*. On December 20 2011 the GMB was still talking tough: it would resume talks with the government only if they were about more than imposing a deal without negotiations. But within days it had signed the non-negotiated 'heads of agreement' and, like Unison, agreed to put the 'final offer' to its executive. However, while Unison's local government and education group executives went along with this, the health executive declined and instead decided to put the offer to a ballot. Nevertheless, Unison troops have been withdrawn from the field.

Comrade Serwotka, although back then he had proclaimed the 2005 retreat as a "victory", is this time genuinely angry and not a little

incredulous. After the GMB and Unison sold out over the Christmas break, he asked: "How can we go, within a month, from a situation where two million people strike in the best supported action for a long, long time to a situation where all the government's key, central objectives have been conceded?" (*Morning Star* December 31-January 1).

Where next?

Unite the Resistance is, of course, the latest 'united front' set up by the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP hopes it will prove to be more successful than Right to Work, which has now been put on the back burner. Although the SWP denies that UTR is yet "another anti-cuts campaign" (alongside RTW, the Coalition of Resistance, People's Charter and National Shop Stewards Network), it is most certainly campaigning against cuts. However, the SWP tells its own membership that, while UTR is a "broadly based resistance" that "will hopefully draw in cuts campaigners and activists", the SWP would actually like to see it "become the framework for a new rank and file organisation" (SWP *Pre-conference Bulletin* December 2011).

Perhaps stung by accusations that UTR is too obviously an SWP front, the organisers went out of their way to give prominence to comrades from other left groups last Saturday. So sitting alongside SWP member Sue Bond, the PCS vice-president, as co-chair was Ruth Cashman, assistant branch secretary of Lambeth Unison and a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (it was a bit of a puzzle why two chairs were needed side by side on the platform). Meanwhile, the UTR statement was presented by George Binette, Camden Unison branch secretary and a member of Permanent Revolution.

In his speech, comrade Serwotka said it was important to "look back at what went wrong". N30 had been "one of the greatest days of the trade union movement", where we saw "the best of trade unionism and class struggle", but what has happened since "has been the worst". With "breath-taking speed", there had been "one of the biggest betrayals we've seen". Union leaders had signed up to a "crock of shit" - and tried to disguise it with "utterly pathetic" talk of having made gains. "Why did they call a strike on the 30th," he wanted to know, only to call off the resistance within a month? The answer he gave was that there was

a "fear in the union leaderships of a real alternative to all the parties". The "overwhelming majority of unions" had actually been ready to sign all along, but they had "calculated they couldn't avoid N30", although they did not want to be part of it.

He outlined the three prongs of a strategy agreed by the PCS. First, demand that the TUC reject the deal and coordinate another strike. But his union had only won the support of the National Union of Teachers for that position at the TUC-organised meeting held on January 12. Secondly, call an urgent meeting of the rejecting unions to decide "what we need to do to win". So far, however, unions representing just a million workers had refused to sign up to a deal and, even among these, "not all have rejected it out of hand". In fact only the PCS, NUT, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers and Unite have refused to sign the 'heads of agreement', but, as one Unite member subsequently pointed out from the floor, "[Unite general secretary] Len McCluskey is trying to kick the whole thing into touch." In addition, the University and College Union, Prison Officers Association, Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance and the Welsh-based teachers' union, Ucac (which "puts Wales, and members in Wales, first"), have neither signed nor refused to sign (the UCU leadership thinks the deal is good enough to put to a membership ballot, however).

Thirdly, comrade Serwotka called for the "battle to continue in every union". We have to "reassert the role of the rank and file", he said. Most unions are "not the property of their members" - their leaders "play fast and loose". This, in my opinion, is the key task *vis-à-vis* the unions, but it is closely related to a strategic *political* task that went unspoken throughout the meeting: the building of a united workers' party to give leadership to the whole class.

Comrade Serwotka then went on to point to the reality of the changed situation: "If key partners can withdraw at the drop of a hat" that, in the eyes of many union members, will be regarded as a setback. They will ask, "if a strike of two and a half million didn't win, how can one million?" What is more, those who have sold out will most definitely not extend the slightest solidarity to any action called by the rejectionists: they "will hope we go down to defeat" - otherwise all their talk of "gains"

would be exposed. You can see why comrade Serwotka is so detested by other union tops at the moment.

In such adverse circumstances, therefore, it was "more important to get a hard-hitting strategy to win rather than call an immediate strike" - this is "not a sprint, but a marathon". Does that sound "a bit downbeat"? Well, the comrade continued, he did have a "message of optimism": the "class struggle can win" - but we do have to "take account of the balance of class forces".

Voluntarism

It was a militant, thoughtful and realistic speech. However, the responses that followed - mainly from SWP comrades - while also militant, were not so thoughtful and realistic. The SWP's Sean Vernell had anticipated comrade Serwotka's remarks in the first platform speech: "If it's just the PCS, NUT and UCU, so be it." However, he tried to preempt the PCS leader's opposition to another immediate walkout by holding him up as an intransigent fighter, who is about to lead his troops over the top, like the head of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85: "We won't let what happened to Arthur Scargill happen to Mark Serwotka."

SWPers called to speak from the floor also plugged the line of another strike sooner rather than later - with whatever forces can be mustered. Candy Udwin said that "Most members will wonder why, if there's no more action." A "speedy strike" was necessary to "keep up the momentum, provide clear focus to build around and get rid of hesitation".

Other comrades backed her up, reporting militant local union meetings, where members were queuing up to urge further action, while comrade McDonnell said that reports from branches were "the same all over the country" - people "can't understand why the unions have settled for so little". I am sure these reports are true, but they only tell half the story. Union meetings are generally very poorly attended and, obviously, dominated by activists, who are most certainly outraged. But will they be able to generate support for further action right now, when most members will know that the majority of union leaders have shown the white flag?

Like Serwotka, comrade McDonnell was scathing about these sell-outs: "The bureaucrats and suits are a small, sad clique. Their lifestyles reflect more of the class they're

supposed to oppose than the class they represent." That was why it was up to the rank and file to organise. "The momentum for industrial action continues," he concluded.

Unfortunately there is not a little voluntarism in all of this. You cannot fault the fighting determination of McDonnell - or the SWP rank and file militants, for that matter. But leftwing militancy alone will not deliver the mass fightback we need.

What both sides of the debate - comrade Serwotka (who was backed up by Neil Cafferky of the Socialist Party in England and Wales right at the end) on the one side; and the SWP, other left groups and John McDonnell on the other - are missing is one essential ingredient: political leadership. Our class is desperately demoralised and almost entirely unwilling to act unless the union bureaucracies mobilise hard for their own purposes. How can this situation be changed? It can be changed by the creation of, and fight to create, a single, united, revolutionary working class party. Yet none of the speakers mentioned this crying need - I doubt if it even occurred to them.

With the creation of such a party we will be in a far better position to do more than *hope* for a fightback. Such a party could inspire courage and determination, facilitating the building of a powerful rank and file movement and the winning back of the unions as weapons for our class.

At the moment, however, we seem to be preaching to the converted at events like the UTR meeting. It was all very well for Sean Vernell to claim, "What happens in this meeting will make all the difference", but nobody takes that seriously. True, after a couple of hours the meeting split up into sectional gatherings, where comrades working in education, health, local government and the civil service were able to discuss a common approach. But, useful though that may be, it is hardly a substitute for the mobilisation of rank and file workers. It was the same the previous week at the PCS Left Unity event. Comrade Serwotka, who was the main speaker at both, commented that he "saw a lot of the same people here a week ago".

In fact last Saturday's meeting was overwhelmingly SWP, whereas it had been SPEW that was building for January 7. The political affiliation of the majority at the UTR event became crystal-clear when an amendment to the prepared statement was put by the AWL. Personally I did not see why the amendment could not have been accepted by the SWP, but a comrade rose to explain that its call for "rolling and selective action, sustained by strike levies, as well as one-day or longer all-outs", was too prescriptive. All but about a dozen of the 200 or so (sorry, 423) people present voted against.

A Workers Power amendment was, however, accepted. This called for the building of "rank and file committees with the aim of delivering action without the consent of national or regional officers if necessary". Strange that the SWP forgot to include something like that in the first place. It must have slipped their minds that UTR is itself aiming to become "the framework for a new rank and file organisation" ●

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Brendan Barber: doing the talk

ECONOMY

Europe's mutual suicide pact

Austerity plans pursued by European governments are proving to be self-defeating, writes **Eddie Ford**

Looks like the phoney peace is over. As has been expected since the end of last year, France was stripped on January 13 of its precious triple-A credit status - held since 1975 - by the Standard and Poor's rating agency. For president Nicolas Sarkozy this is clearly a huge political setback, if not a personal humiliation - given that he had spent most of 2011 saying he would fight "tooth and nail" to defend the country's pristine credit rating and rushed through two big packages of budget cuts later in the year on that very basis. Pain without the gain.

France's demotion was part of a mass downgrade of nine euro zone countries by S&P. It also deprived Austria of its triple-A and relegated Portugal and Cyprus to junk status - though that is more a question of why it took so long. Italy and Spain were demoted by two notches, whilst Slovakia and Slovenia were all cut by one notch. There was no change for Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Estonia, Finland or Luxembourg.

Somewhat inevitably, S&P also cut the European Financial Stability Facility's rating by one notch. Hardly astonishing, given that France and Austria account for some €180 billion of the credit guarantees underlining the €440 billion fund. Adding to the post-festive gloom, S&P warned that the EFSF's rating would be reduced again if member-states' creditworthiness were to erode further - which, of course, is very likely. Furthermore, logic strongly suggests that a score of European banks will be downgraded, or re-downgraded, in the coming week or so - reflecting the simple fact that their respective national governments are now seen as riskier bets.

It has been calculated that the French downgrade alone could reduce the EFSF's lending capacity to a less impressive €293 billion. Bad news indeed, when you consider that it has already committed around €250 billion to Greece, Ireland and Portugal. And what if Italy starts to buckle under the debt strain? Obviously, the downgrade will make it even more difficult and more expensive for the EFSF to raise funds from financial markets and sovereign wealth funds. Some "big bazooka" the EFSF has turned out to be, trying to 'leverage' money out of nothing. A rescue fund that can rescue next to nothing.

At the end of the day, S&P's judgement was merely an acknowledgement - or a symbolic indication - that the European economies are no longer gold-plated and the future of the euro itself is in serious doubt. Not exactly a blinding revelation. The euro zone has fallen into a spiral of downgrades, declining economic output, rising debt and further downgrades. In other words, the various 'rescue plans' concocted by the European leaders have proved to be totally inadequate, and the new year has only just begun.

Self-defeating

S&P's decision was met with a righteous howl of indignation. Olli Rehn, vice-president of the European Union commission, described it as "inconsistent" and made out that it ignored the supposedly "decisive action" taken by the euro zone countries to introduce a "new fiscal compact" at the December 7 summit meeting. The Lisbon government too complained that the two-notch downgrade to below investment grade was "ill-founded" and contained



"serious inconsistencies" with the agency's previous statements on Portugal.

Perhaps bucking the recent trend in German-French relations, Berlin tried to partially soften the blow to French pride. Thus Michael Fuchs, deputy leader of the Christian Democrats, declared that S&P was "out of order" and "must stop playing politics" - why pick on France? After all, if it was interested in being consistent or even-handed, then surely S&P should take action against the "highly indebted" Britain or United States.

More calmly, and for obvious reasons, French finance minister François Baroin sought to downplay things, saying the downgrade was "not a catastrophe". True enough on one level. Such an eventuality had already been factored in by the markets, obviously aware that it was coming for some time - hence the interest rates on French government bonds rose by only a very modest degree. But the real significance of S&P's move is that it starkly reveals an uncomfortable truth - that the course being pursued by virtually all European governments, including the UK, is disastrous. The austerity medicine is not working.

In justifying its decision, S&P pointed out that its assessment was "primarily driven by insufficient policy measures" by the EU leaders to "fully address systemic stresses". A "reform process" based on fiscal austerity alone "risks becoming self-defeating" - on the grounds that domestic demand tends to fall "in line with consumers' rising concerns about job security and disposable incomes, eroding national tax revenues". That is, the very policies being so ardently pursued by the EU governments prevent the economy from growing, leaving governments no way to pay off the debt.

More colourfully, but no less accurately, the notable US economist and Nobel Prize recipient, Joseph Stiglitz, likened the EU austerity drive to the medieval practice of blood-letting - the patient almost certainly dies (*The Daily Telegraph* January 17). In his opinion, the European governments have signed a "mutual suicide pact" by opting for fiscal slash-and-burn - the result will not be a "return to confidence", but "quite the contrary": *collapsing* economies, not rejuvenated ones. For Stiglitz, as an orthodox Keynesian, austerity measures should only be imposed when an economy is booming, not waning. Instead, he maintains, the 700,000 public sector jobs lost in the US over the past four years have

sucked demand from the system, as unemployment rises. And the UK is set to lose a similar number by 2017 - smart move. Same essential policies, same essential results. Economists like Stiglitz are not debating if the euro will break up, but how and when it will happen.

The response to such criticism was predictable. True to form, German chancellor Angela Merkel - worried that the so-called fiscal compact was being softened "here, there and everywhere" - called on euro zone governments to "speedily" implement the tough new fiscal rules. She also implored EU leaders to activate as "quickly as possible" the European Stability Mechanism, currently scheduled to succeed the EFSF by mid-year. But the EFSF kitty is almost empty, so the ESM, the supposed saviour of the euro zone, will inherit nothing.

Similarly, talking tough, the ECB criticised the draft of a new fiscal discipline treaty for the euro area, saying that the latest version amounted to a "substantial watering-down" of tough deficit levels that could allow "easy circumvention of the deficit rule" by struggling governments. Of course, ECB endorsement of the pact had been seen as absolutely crucial, since one of the main purposes of enshrining tough new debt and deficit rules - or so we were told - was to give the central bank more leeway to purchase the bonds of Italy and Spain: a licence to act more aggressively and lower the unsustainable high borrowing costs of those two countries.

But unless drastic action is taken, the chickens will come home to roost. Although Germany emerged unscathed this time from the stern judgement of the credit agencies, it too will come under increasing scrutiny, because its export-led growth is extremely vulnerable to a slowdown in the rest of the euro zone. Simultaneously, Berlin will now come under even more pressure to sign the cheques needed to keep monetary union in one piece.

Greek fault line

Yet the situation in Greece still has the potential to sabotage everything.

As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, no deal has been struck between the technocratic government in Athens and its private creditors. Last-ditch negotiations were taking place, as officials from the IMF, EU and the ECB troika arrived to continue their 'monitoring' of the Greek government's finances. Reaching such a deal is, of course, a precondition for Athens receiving the next chunk of bailout cash from the IMF and EU.

As things stand now, the talks in Athens involve creditors exchanging their existing Greek bonds with new ones of a lower value - taking a voluntary 'haircut' - with the bigger aim of cutting Greece's debt by €100 billion. Once a deal has been done then, at least in theory, Greece will get its second tranche of €130 billion from the troika - who have insisted that they will not extend any more support if a bond swap deal is not agreed. If so, Greece would almost certainly default on its debt in late March - if not earlier - when a €14.5 billion bond repayment is due. Adding to the pressure on Greece, troika inspectors are demanding even "faster" cost-cutting reforms - keep attacking the working class.

According to Charles Dallara, the managing director of the Washington-based Institute of International

Financial - which represents the global bond holders - the banks were "very surprised" at the stance taken by some unnamed officials representing both governments and multilateral institutions. "Some parties", we read, had not "responded constructively" to the proposed 50% debt write-off. Some of Greece's debts are rumoured to have been bought up on the cheap by so-called 'vulture funds' - speculators who specialise in pursuing troubled borrowers for payment in full. A common tactic of vulture funds is to veto agreements between distressed borrowers and their main lenders, in the hope of winning special treatment for their own loans.

However, the plot thickens. A Greek government source quoted by Reuters puts the blame on the IMF, which is apparently adamant that Greece pay just 4% interest on its debts as part of the deal - considered far too low by many lenders. Indeed, the financial press has carried reports that Greek debts are currently valued at only 20% of face value by bond markets, implying that the markets expect total losses to ultimately be 80% of the amount lent - and not the 50% currently under discussion. You can understand why some creditors are blanching at the thought.

The odds are that some sort of 11th-hour 'debt restructuring' deal will be struck - effectively giving Greece longer to repay its debts, as well as cutting the amount due. It may also contain a clause that prevents minority lenders, such as 'vulture funds', from vetoing future restructuring agreements. The hope is that Greece's debt load will be reduced by 2020 from 160% to 120% of GDP - another eight years of austerity and negative growth. And this is the most optimistic scenario.

Clearly, Greece could still bring down the house of cards - it remains the euro zone's fault line. If it were to default - not exactly an impossibility - that would be the first time in 60 years that a relatively advanced capitalist country has defaulted (leaving aside somewhere like Argentina). There would be an immediate effect on other countries and banks, which would all take a hit of some size or other. A Greek default would not just impact on the direct lenders, but throughout the whole parasitical, exploitative chain. Any sensible capitalist, or lender - not being charities - will have insured the loans against losses. Therefore a Greek default, or crisis, will ripple throughout the entire world capitalist system - throwing up all manner of unpredictable and dangerous consequences.

More Balls

The standard complaint from rightwing economists and politicians is that some countries and parties are not sufficiently committed to pushing through 'reforms' - by which they mean attacking workers' rights/conditions and in general rolling back (or ideally dismantling altogether) the gains of the 1950-60s.

Hence the constant attacks on "labour rigidities" and so on. The ruling class wants to make a bonfire of workers' rights in Europe, with Greece and Italy paving the way. Naturally, there is no alternative course of action if we want to cut deficits and produce healthy, growing, economies - shorn of all waste and inefficiencies. Tough decisions have to be made.

But this has revealed itself to be an unpleasant fantasy. The economics of masochists. Recession is looming

over Europe and not even Germany is immune. The same goes for the UK too, which, according to both the Ernst and Young Item Club and the Centre for Economics and Business Research, is "likely to already be in recession" - GDP shrank in the final quarter of last year and will fall again in the first three months of this year, they forecast. The Item Club dourly reported that "deteriorating" levels of confidence will see business investment "stagnate" in 2012, while export prospects have already slowed - thanks to the continuing crisis in the euro zone. And unemployment keeps spiking upwards. On January 18 the Office for National Statistics said it rose to 8.4%, the highest since January 1996 - another 118,000 were on the dole in the three months to November.

The figures support the picture of a totally flat UK economy. In which case, you would think - in the face of so much economic failure - the 'new' Labour Party of Ed Miliband would be taking up the cudgels against austerity and mapping out an alternative strategy for growth. But, criminally, we are getting no such thing - rather, just more of the same coalition medicine. Thanks for the kick in the teeth, brothers. In a speech to the Fabian Society on January 14 - then repeated in various interviews over the weekend - Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, announced that he accepted the need for a freeze on public sector pay and that Labour would not make "any commitments" before the next election to reverse the coalition government's tax rises or spending cuts. In fact, we discover, it is now "inevitable" that public sector pay restraint would have to "continue for longer in this parliament".

Of course, not being a Tory, Balls said he would not have taken *exactly* the same approach to tackling the deficit, as Labour has always made the argument that cutting spending and raising taxes "too far and too fast risks making the economy and the deficit worse, not better". But none of that detracts from the fact that the next Labour government will have to "deliver social justice in tougher times" - you just "cannot duck that reality". And Ed 'man of steel' Balls would never do that - no way. Labour was committed to "balanced, but tough spending and budget discipline now and into the medium term" and "responsible capitalism" over the longer term.

Balls' comments were endorsed by Ed Miliband - Labour must be a responsible alternative party of government, he said: a safe pair of hands for capitalism. Miliband even crowed about how David Cameron was "coming on to my ground" on issues such as taking on "vested interests" and "crony capitalism". Vote Labour - and lose your job or pension.

Not exactly an inspiring message, so why bother voting for them at all? A point ably made by Mark Serwotka of the Public and Commercial Services union, who condemned the position outlined by Balls and Miliband as "hugely disappointing" - "instead of matching them on the cuts they should be articulating a clear alternative and speaking up for public sector workers and ordinary people in society".

Only one problem though, at least for communists. How come Mark Serwotka is not straining every sinew trying to get the PCS affiliated to the Labour Party, where it can lead the fight against Balls' plans? ●

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EGYPT



Islamists courted by imperialists

The Muslim Brotherhood has shown itself to be the biggest political force. Meanwhile the left is under attack. **Yassamine Mather** gives her impressions following a recent visit

After months of elections, incorporating three rounds of voting, Egypt has elected a new lower house of parliament dominated by Akhavan Al Moslemin, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafites.

The Egyptian paper *Al-Masry Al-Youm* summarised the results as "Islamist-Islamist". After a year of upheavals, Mubarak's departure has not led to the kind of regime change the progressive demonstrators in Tahrir Square had envisaged. The political and economic elite remain very much in control and the last two months of 2011 will be remembered as the time when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) brutally attempted to crush the revolutionary forces. In this they had the full support of their new allies in the Islamic parties. Despite the post-Mubarak parliamentary line-up the US and its allies (with the exception of Israel) do not seem to be too concerned.

Interviewed by *Akhbar al-Youm*, the British ambassador in Cairo confirmed that the UK was not worried by the Muslim Brotherhood, while William Burns, deputy to US secretary of state Hillary Clinton,

met with the MB's head. Throughout 2011 the party has tried to project a moderate image and has worked closely with SCAF and then the military council's government led by Kamal al-Ganzouri. And, of course, the US has a history of cosyng up to Muslim Brotherhood.¹

MB's election campaign was probably boosted by Saudi/Gulf money and the party used its existing organisations through mosques and long-established grassroots networks. It and other Islamist parties were able to exploit the political vacuum that emerged after the February 2011 anti-Mubarak uprising. They have now secured 232 seats, or 46%, in the lower house, while Al Noor, another Islamist party, came second with 23% of the vote. The Freedom and Justice Party is trying to portray itself as a moderate force, although the ultra-conservative Al Noor Islamic block aims to implement strict Sharia law.

As we approach the January 25 anniversary of the uprising, then, all the heroism and sacrifices of the Egyptian people in their struggle against president Hosni Mubarak have resulted in the victory of reactionary Islamic forces - and the US is ready

to work with them, provided they cooperate with the army. The Turkey scenario - a military state fronted by Islamist 'moderates' - seems to be what they have in mind. However, it is far too early to write off the protestors of Tahrir Square and the Egyptian working class. The protests and demonstrations of November and December 2011 clearly challenged what has been called the "fateful triangle"² - the unholy alliance of Islamists, SCAF and Mubarak's National Democratic Front.

Even before the MPs take their seats, many Egyptians are expressing concern about the future of democracy. This weekend the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, withdrew from the presidential elections, saying, "The military rulers who took over from Mubarak have governed as if no revolution took place and no regime has fallen." The slogan, 'The revolution is dead, long living the revolution', seems appropriate.

Election campaign

After years of Mubarak's party winning 99% of the vote, the recent elections were a novelty and

Egyptians were clearly enthusiastic, participating in large numbers in the electoral process. However, no-one but the Islamists had the organisation necessary for serious campaigning. On my recent visit to Cairo election posters still covered walls, lampposts and shop windows, and were still displayed in cars, buses, taxis ...

The official policy of the electoral commission was that religious propaganda was not allowed. But two of the main parties and many smaller ones carried a clear religious message in their names, while the Muslim Brotherhood stood on a clear enough slogan: "Islam is the solution". MB was taking nothing for granted and did everything in its power to make sure of victory. It organised a cycle race in Alexandria to show its 'concern for youth sport'. It also distributed meat (a rare commodity in Egypt) in the poorer districts of Cairo. A leftwing activist told me that when she was canvassing in the same area the crowd asked: "Why don't you give us meat?" She told them that they were fighting the elections "to make sure you get your own meat", but, of course, this message was not as powerful as the Muslim Brotherhood's.

The security forces have, it seems, been doing their best to support the Islamists. A young activist who set up an anti-Islamist Facebook page was arrested and given a three-year prison sentence. Many of the bloggers who have recently been arrested are accused of "insulting religious beliefs".

A number of parties were described by their supporters as liberal, although terms such as 'liberal' and 'secular' are open to many interpretations. One contemporary Egyptian joke sums up the feeling. A voter asks his friends, "What does liberalism mean?" His friend replies: "It means your mother removing her veil and wearing a bikini." Another joke summarises liberalism as a situation allowing the marriage of two men. Two 'liberal' groupings, the Wafd Party and the Egyptian Bloc, came third and fourth.

The Islamic vote is not purely reactionary. It expresses a resentment of Mubarak's subservience to the US and the Sadat/Mubarak peace deals with Israel. The army is clearly ready to continue rapprochement with Israel, so how the Muslim Brotherhood reconciles its alliance with the army with its supporters' opposition to

any peace deals with Israel remains a crucial question. One demonstrator I saw in Tahrir Square carried a placard addressed to the army: “For 30 years you did nothing about Israel. Now you open fire on unarmed Egyptians in this square - shame on you.”

The Muslim Brotherhood is already softening its approach to Israel. Islamist MPs have been quoted as saying that the new government cannot renege on existing deals. It will be interesting to see how the Islamist parties react once SCAF and the US push the MB to make concessions on the peace treaty with the Zionist state.

December demonstrations

The day after the one million-strong demonstration on December 23, a protestor in Tahrir Square told me that in the coming months the people of Egypt face two demons: the army and the Islamic fundamentalists (he meant the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Salafites). “They will both fight the protestors and once they succeed they will fight each other.” The first part of this statement is certainly true. The army and Islamic fundamentalists are united in wanting to defeat the protests. However, the second part is doubtful. As I have noted, at the moment all the signs point to an alliance between the military and the Brotherhood.

Some people I met in Tahrir Square have their own conspiracy theories about why people are targeted by the army. A man describing himself as a moderate Islamist tried to convince me that the five victims of shootings and beatings in the square were selected by SCAF to frighten the different constituencies of the protest movement. The December victims included a prominent moderate cleric, who was fired on while he trying to mediate between protestors, a young engineering student shot from a high-rise building overlooking the square and the “girl with the blue bra” - a volunteer doctor at the Tahrir Square field hospital, who was beaten up by soldiers and disrobed as she was being dragged to the ground. Some Egyptians clearly believe each death was supposed to signal a warning to a particular section of the protest movement: moderate clerics, young students, professional women ... Given SCAF’s many blunders in recent months, the reality might be more straightforward: the military junta is trying to impose enough fear through terror to prevent large protests. It is certainly true that SCAF is not alone in trying to defeat the continuing uprising, even before the declaration of election results the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafites were discouraging demonstrations and strikes ...

Not far from Tahrir Square on Christmas Eve, a group of well-to-do Egyptian ladies were entering the Intercontinental Hotel for a Christmas ball. With their blond hair and décolleté evening gowns they had little in common with the women you see in the protests or those on the streets of Cairo in general. Appearances can be deceptive, but it did not look as if for them much has changed in Egypt since Mubarak’s departure. Parallels with Iran in February 1979 are everywhere. However, there are also stark differences. Egypt’s mainly Sunni Islamists are different from their Shia counterparts in Iran and, of course, 33 years is a long time even for religious groups that aspire to return to the ‘safety’ of the caliphate era of the 6th century.

The anti-army protests of late December were boycotted by the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Noor. A leading female figure in the Freedom and Justice Party went so far as to accuse the one million-

strong women’s march against military brutality of being funded from abroad.³ However, the moderate Al-Wasat party joined the protestors in Tahrir Square. In Iran in 1979 Hezbollah did not just boycott women’s protests: they actively attacked them with chains.

There are similarities, however. For example, in the way crowds gather in groups of 10 or 20 to argue politics - street democracy in Cairo is as lively as it was outside Tehran university in early 1979. It may be better humoured and less aggressive, but it is as interesting as it was back then. The crowds are united in their opposition to the army. As far as the topics of debate are concerned, they are different from what was argued outside Tehran University, where Marxist issues dominated. In and around Tahrir Square crowds seem to be obsessed by questions of nationalism vs religion and one slogan summarises the nationalist/religious discourse: Is “religion above society”?

Nationalist slogans about Mistr (the Arab name for Egypt) dominate placards. Islam here has a very Egyptian character and unlike in Iran, where 33 years of Islamic rule has eroded any religious belief amongst the majority of the country’s young population, in Egypt 30 years of Mubarak - especially the last few on the side of the US and its ‘war on terror’ - have produced a situation where the overwhelming majority of the population, even amongst the educated, urbanised youth, consider themselves believers. Many of the women protestors, even those supporting the April 6 Youth Movement, wear headscarves. In fact unlike Iran (both before and after the revolution) it is not possible to detect a woman’s politics or class from the state of her hijab.

The most militant protestors are those staging sit-ins in tents in and around Tahrir Square. The 200 or so who stayed after the November 28 anti-military demonstration bore the brunt of the military’s anger the next day, when army and security forces attacked them. Yet there are still dozens of tents in and around Tahrir Square. As I tried to take a picture of one such tent, making sure that no-one’s face was in the frame, an Islamic man shouted at me to stop - only to be confronted by crowds telling him to shut up. Amongst those who defended me, to my surprise, was a fully veiled, middle-aged woman wearing a niqab, who was among the crowd telling the Islamist to leave me alone.

Economy

Mohammed Reza Shalgouni has rightly pointed out in a series of articles the process of intensification of economic and social crises, the increase in the cost of living and particularly of food products to explain the major factors behind the Arab awakening and its timing. Of course, this issue is a result of the food crisis on a global level. Discussing the situation across the whole of the Arab world, he writes:

“The price of all food products, including rice, wheat and corn, increased sharply in international markets from 2006 to 2008. In particular, the price of rice rose threefold in a five-year period, meaning it went from around \$600 per ton in 2003 to more than \$1,800 per ton in May 2008. In 2009, the prices for major grains decreased to a degree, but it never went back to its previous years’ level, and in the second half of 2010, based on the general index of food products issued by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, the price of major grains/cereals increased by 23%, and this organisation’s combined index for

December 2010 surpassed that of the June 2008 record, and reached the highest level in its history (which started in 1990).”⁴

The Nile valley has fed the Egyptian people for 6,000 years. However, today Egypt is the world’s biggest importer of wheat, relying on other countries for nearly half of what it needs. Why? The answer should be sought in the neoliberal policies of the country’s rulers over the last four decades. As Alex Callinicos has pointed out, “Egypt can claim to have pioneered neoliberalism in the global south.”⁵ This started in 1974 with *infitah*, the ‘open-door’ economic policy of Anwar Sadat. This was supposed to open up the country to trade and investment. In 1991, Mubarak took Sadat’s plan to its logical conclusion by accepting the ‘structural adjustment programme’ demanded by international financial institutions.

The plan included the abolition of the Nasser-era land reforms, paving the way for leaseholders and landowners to get rid of peasants and small farmers from agricultural lands. This policy was carried out through a violent crackdown on peasants, a majority of whom lost their livelihoods, and the production of grains and food products in particular was severely hampered.

Thanks to these policies, today nearly half of Egypt’s population live on less than \$2 per day and “Food comprises almost half the country’s consumer price index, and much more than half of spending for the poorer half of the country.”⁶ These policies have meant Egypt is hostage to price fluctuations in the world markets, and is one of the first countries adversely affected by sharp increases in the price of food products globally. It is worth remembering that the steep rise in the price of bread, and its scarcity, caused the workers’ strikes of 2007 and 2008 - the strikes that played a very important role in creating the conditions for the ongoing revolution.

Cairo is a huge, overpopulated city of eight million, with another half a million entering the city during the day to work. The traffic is unbelievable. On a weekday it seems like there are eight million cars - many of them 30-40 years old, in pretty bad shape, but still running on cheap petrol. Egypt is not an oil exporter, but it has enough oil in the Sinai desert to provide cheap fuel for internal consumption and the population takes advantage of this. The main roads are full of cars zig-zagging in and out of the four or five lanes, their drivers seeming to keep their hands permanently on their horns.

As in most ‘developing’ cities, the contrast between the affluent few and the poor millions is obvious everywhere. First there is the ‘City of the Dead’, where the poor live in a vast cemetery dating back to the Ottoman era, which covers over six square kilometres. Then there is Garbage City, where vendors recycle whatever they can salvage. Most of those who live in such areas have been forced out of other shanty towns or from central Cairo at various stages of the ‘urban renewal’ demolitions dating back to the 1950s. Others have migrated from the countryside, but have been unable to find work in a city where signs of mass unemployment and underemployment are everywhere you go. Underemployment is obvious even in the bustling bazaars, where every stall, every small shop has four or five sellers, often with few if any customers.

The tourist industry is dead in Cairo, Luxor and Alexandria - the historical sites have lost 95% of their custom. The recession in Europe and the US, as well as the political uncertainty, has kept the

tourists away and thousands have lost their jobs, while others struggle to find work one or two days a month. Visitors to Cairo’s national museum overlooking Tahrir Square can expect to be approached by several expert Egyptologists offering to act as a guide.

The booming industry is ‘security’. The entrance of every hotel, every government office, every museum has the kind of facilities we see at European airports. Bags have to pass through a scanner, as do people. Presumably these strange security measures started in 2001, when Mubarak signed up to the ‘war on terror’ of George Bush and Tony Blair. However, this has clearly created tens of thousands of jobs around the city, although it is difficult to understand which ‘terrorists’ they are looking for. But the demonisation of the left and the April 6 movement in sections of the Islamic press is ominous and this overwhelming security apparatus can become another weapon to be used against the revolutionary movement.

Those activists who reject formal politics or wish to work independently often find themselves the target of the security services - a state media machine that has painted them as troublemakers and, increasingly, traitors; and of the SCAF-led project to promote “stability” over “chaos” and “sectoral demands” - code for supposedly parochial concerns, whose expression is deemed to be detrimental to national progress. With so many living in abject poverty, it is inevitable that calls for ‘stability’ will have their appeal (for the majority destitution is rather chaotic). But it is clear whose stability SCAF wants to defend.

The Shabaab youth movement that played such a crucial role in the overthrow of Mubarak has lost some of its appeal, mainly because of the way the unofficial alliance between the armed forces, Islamists and supporters of the *ancien régime* have managed to portray it as the source of instability. However the April 6 movement has not given up and is trying to organise mass protests on the forthcoming anniversary of the anti-Mubarak uprising.

The group’s leaders say their ranks have swollen in the last 12 months from 3,000 in January 2010 to 20,000 in November. But they do accept that the organisation’s reputation is tarnished in the eyes of many Egyptians and they rightly blame the SCAF, Islamist and NDF triangle. According to Ahmed Maher, a youth movement leader, “They destroyed our reputations. This is more dangerous than detention or arrest. They have the most powerful weapon of all: the media.”⁷ One could add the ever-present mosques to the list of their foes.

Preparing for the demonstrations of January 25, leaders of the April 6 movement have launched a nationwide tour “to issue specific unified revolutionary demands and coordinate popular action on the first anniversary of the revolution”.⁸

Strikes

Little is heard in the official media about workers in Egypt and it is true that, given the lack of political freedom and the severity of the economic crisis engulfing the country, until recently the Egyptian working class has not been a major player on the political scene. However, immediately after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, a number of major strikes showed the potential power of Egyptian workers. Most important amongst them was the mass strike of September 2011, which paralysed the government and the military council and, some argue, “opened up the road to the crisis of November”.⁹

According to Kamal Abbas, head

of the Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services NGO, “The question today isn’t ‘Who’s striking?’ The question is ‘Who’s not striking?’”¹⁰ April 2011 saw a wave of strikes, including at the Shebin El-Kom Textile Company, north of Cairo, where the management called in the army, who fired bullets in the air and threatened to arrest striking workers. The workers had organised a 35-day sit-in to protest against the threat of redundancy. The same month the Suez Canal Authority was affected by the strike wave.

Other sections that have seen walkouts in the last 12 months include butane gas cylinder workers in the Delta governorate of Daqahliya, employees of the ministry of social solidarity in the city of Talkha, tax authority employees, clerks in the offices of the justice ministry, teachers, spinning and weaving workers in Assiut, train drivers ... the list goes on. Most of these strikes were over pay or other economic issues. It is unlikely that any new Islamic-led government will be able to alleviate the country’s economic problems and no doubt 2012 will see a continuation of these strikes.

There can be no doubt, however, that the working class movement is in its infancy, especially compared to Islam. There is a mosque around every corner in Cairo and yet new ones are still being built. The majority of apartment blocks where workers live appear to be unfinished, presumably because of shortage of funds, yet I did not see one mosque in operation that had not been completed. No doubt Saudi money is paying for some.

From speaking to both hard-line and moderate Islamists, it was clear that Sunni clerics clearly depict the Shia religion as the main enemy. Although Sunnis accept Ali as a legitimate successor to Mohammed, some Sunnis are told from the pulpit that Shias worship Ali as god (Ali Allah) and are therefore heretics. One might assume that the younger generation with access to the internet would know better, but that does not seem to be the case.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is, of course, the Shia pariah and even after Mubarak Egyptians do not seem to be keen on Iran’s version of Islam. In fact the only thing I found supporters of secular and religious parties have in common when they realise they are talking to an Iranian is to emphasise that Egypt is not going to be like Iran ●

Notes

1. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Cairo and its anti-communist conservatism has been a useful tool for western powers over the last few decades. As early as 1928, the party’s paper *The Lighthouse* gained British approval for denouncing Egyptian nationalists as “atheists and infidels”. In his book *Unholy wars: Afghanistan, America and international terrorism*, John K Cooley describes how the US worked with the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and others in developing an “anti-Nasser, anti-Soviet Islamic pact”. According to Kooley, president Anwar Sadat “relied upon Islamists to fight communist influence in Egypt”. That was where the connections with Al Qa’eda were forged. But nowadays no-one in the US wants to talk about the influence of the Brotherhood on the formation of al Qa’eda.
2. See Issandr El Amrani, ‘Sightings of the Egyptian deep state’: www.merip.org/mero/mero010112.
3. ‘Leading female figure in Muslim Brotherhood slams December’s women march’: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/15/188404.html>.
4. http://revolutionaryflowerpot.blogspot.com/2011/05/sharp-rise-in-food-prices-arab_13.html.
5. ‘The return of the Arab revolution’ *International Socialism* spring 2011
6. Spengler, ‘Food and failed Arab states’: www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MB02Ak01.html.
7. *Washington Post* January 13.
8. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* January 15: www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/600621.
9. A Alexander, ‘The Egyptian workers’ movement and the January 25 revolution’ *International Socialism* spring 2011.
10. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12460657.

NIGERIA

Oil struggle aborted

Despite the ending of the protests, workers in Nigeria have demonstrated their potential power, writes **Nick Rogers**

The first two weeks of 2012 witnessed an impressive upsurge of working class and popular combativeness in Nigeria that for a few days took on the form of a social uprising. Even the compromise agreed by the country's trade union leadership - that failed to secure the demands of strikers and protestors - cannot hide the potential of Nigeria's working class to offer a progressive solution to the country's multi-faceted social and political crisis.

The trigger for the explosion of demonstrations, occupations and strikes was the surprise announcement by president Goodluck Jonathan on Sunday January 1 of the immediate and complete removal of the subsidy on domestic supplies of petrol.

This was a step long demanded by the international financial institutions. Within Nigeria its keenest advocates were finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and central bank governor Lamido Sanusi - the key figures in shaping the economic policies of the Nigerian government formed after the April 2011 presidential election. These policies have recently been praised by Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund. Jeremy Sachs, visiting Nigeria earlier this month as special adviser to the United Nations secretary general, applauded the subsidy move - subsequently the cause of great controversy in the country and eliciting something of an apology from Sachs. Okonjo-Iweala and Sanusi allege that the cost of the subsidy has risen so much that it absorbs \$8 billion of the government's annual budget. Oil accounts for 95% of Nigerian export earnings and 80% of government revenues.

The day after president Jonathan's announcement petrol prices increased from 65 naira (26p) per litre to at least 141 naira in filling stations; and from 100 naira to at least 200 on the black market, where many Nigerians buy their fuel. In some remote areas it was reported that petrol prices had tripled.

The subsidy, in place since 1973, has become a vital prop for the living standards of the mass of Nigerians. In the absence of viable public services and any kind of welfare state most Nigerians regard the subsidy as the only benefit they receive from the two million barrels a day that Nigeria produces - the country is Africa's largest producer of oil.

It is not just those Nigerians who own cars who approve of cheaper petrol. The price of public transport is closely tied to the price of fuel. And, since almost all goods are transported by road, price levels of a wide range of the commodities sold in markets all around the country are dependent on the price of petrol.

Even in the short period since the subsidy's removal minibuses have doubled or tripled and, according to the BBC, the price of the humble staple, the tomato, has risen seven times. For the population of 160 million, the majority of whom subsist on the equivalent of \$2 a day or less, the president's announcement meant a sharp cut in their standard of life.

Businesses and middle class households also use subsidised fuel to power the private generators that cut in when the country's erratic power supply is unavailable.

Protestors on social media responded to the price rise by styling themselves Occupy Nigeria and articulating opposition to Nigeria's



Police: shooting to kill

ruling elite and the wide-scale corruption and outright theft by which it has enriched itself. Over decades politicians, military rulers and businessmen have squandered the billions of dollars-worth of oil that Nigeria has produced. Nigeria remains one of the most poverty-stricken countries in the world. Even its capacity to refine oil meets only a small part of its own needs. Oil is exported in unrefined form, leaving a large proportion of value to be added overseas and requiring Nigeria to spend a fortune on re-importing oil products such as petrol.

Even with the subsidy the Nigerian petrol price is higher than in virtually all other Opec countries. The government complains that the subsidy benefits the cartel that controls the import of petrol. However, rather than tackle the cartel, casting Nigerians into even deeper poverty is seen as the easier option.

Protests spread

The public response was instantaneous. On Monday January 2 people gathered in central Abuja, Nigeria's capital, chanting, "Remove corruption, not subsidy". There were reports of protests in the northern city of Kano.

Nigeria's two main labour organisations, the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trades Union Congress, issued a joint statement condemning the move: "We alert the populace to begin immediate mobilisation towards the D-Day for the commencement of strikes, street demonstrations and mass protests across the country. This promises to be a long-drawn battle; we know it is beginning, but we do not know its end or when it will end. We are confident the Nigerian people will triumph."

By Tuesday January 3 thousands were demonstrating and the first death by police shooting was reported from Ilorin in Kwara state. On Wednesday January 4, the NLC and TUC announced an indefinite strike and mass demonstrations to begin from the following Monday: "After exhaustive deliberations and consultations with all sections of the populace, the

NLC, TUC and their pro-people allies demand that the presidency immediately reverses fuel prices to 65 naira." In the absence of a capitulation by the government, "all offices, oil production centres, air and sea ports, fuel stations, markets, banks, amongst others will be shut down. We advise Nigerians to stockpile basic needs, especially food and water."

In the early hours of Thursday January 5 2,000 demonstrators, who had occupied the main traffic roundabout in Kano, renaming it Liberation Square, were beaten and tear-gassed by police. Three hundred were injured.

From Monday January 9, public servants, bank employees and other workers went on strike, in defiance of a ruling by the National Industrial Court against the strike. Not only workers, but petty traders and shopkeepers joined the stoppage. In addition to offices, schools, petrol stations and Lagos international airport, shops were also closed. The streets of Lagos were described as "eerily quiet".

That was before large rallies began to gather and demonstrators starting marching in Lagos and other cities. A carnival atmosphere accompanied many of them. Musician Femi Kuti, son of Fela Kuti, addressed the main rally in Lagos, wearing a 'Kill corruption, not Nigerians' slogan on his T-shirt and calling for resolute opposition to the price rise. In Kano, police again used tear gas and this time live ammunition. Two demonstrators were shot dead. In Lagos there was one death in a confrontation with the police. As the week wore on, demonstrations grew in size and momentum continued to build.

The response of the state was increasingly harsh. On Tuesday January 10 a further five protestors were killed in Kano. The following day a 24-hour curfew was declared in Niger state and partial curfews in Kano, Zamfara, Borno and Oyo. The trade unions moved to up the ante. Oil production workers had not been called out on strike, but on January 12 the white-collar Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (Pengassan), threatened

to call out its 21,000 members from midnight on Saturday January 14.

The oil workers' strike was destined never to happen. By January 13 president Jonathan was offering talks to union leaders. As negotiation wore into the weekend, union leaders suspended the general strike - announcing it as a pause to allow people to restock their domestic supplies - and postponed the start of the oil production strike.

Discussions were reported by the union side as "fruitful", but, with no concrete progress announced, workers began to resume the general strike on Monday January 16. The state's response to attempts to march was even more brutal than the previous week. The army and police deployed tear gas and live ammunition in Lagos to try and forestall the return of hundreds of thousands to the streets. For the first time army checkpoints were set up. A pattern reminding Nigerians of the military's post-independence role in suppressing popular dissent.

It was at this juncture that president Jonathan appeared on TV in a pre-recorded address to announce a partial restoration of the subsidy that would take petrol prices down to 97 naira. He also announced measures to tackle corruption in the oil industry. He said that total removal of the subsidy remained a longer-term ambition.

A 50% increase in petrol prices - rather than the earlier announced 120% - was enough to win the consent of the trade union leadership, who called off the strike at midday. They said they were acting to save lives, given the hard-line stance of the army and police, but would monitor the actions of the government in building up Nigeria's infrastructure and rooting out corruption.

Conflicting forces

The trade union movement has played an extremely prominent role in Nigerian history. From the 1940s the unions were at the heart of the independence struggle. After independence in 1960, the demands they presented on behalf of the Nigerian working class were one of the determining factors in the

Nigerian politics. The unions were the strongest opponents of successive military governments.

But, as has been demonstrated in the struggle of the last two weeks, union bureaucrats are incapable of presenting a positive alternative that can supersede the mess the various factions of the ruling class have made of Nigeria's oil wealth and economic potential by directly empowering the working class and the social allies it is transparently capable of leading.

Instead - with tens of millions on strike or staying at home and probably millions marching on the streets - the trade union leaders appealed to politicians in the national assembly to remonstrate with the president. They accepted a modest concession that leaves Nigerians massively worse off in the third week of January than they were in the last week of December as an excuse to abandon a campaign that was developing a radical social critique.

They suggest that the current representative of the Nigerian ruling class occupying the presidential mansion might just be capable of resolving problems that are endemic to Nigerian capitalism. Yet in the space of two weeks the mass protests and strikes have demonstrated the ability to overcome divisions that increasingly looked likely to tear Nigeria apart.

Since the middle of last year the Islamist group, Boko Haram, has engaged in a campaign of attacks on mostly Christian targets in the Muslim north - Christian-Muslim violence has been escalating over the last decade in this, the most impoverished region of Nigeria. General Carter Ham of the US Africa Command alleges Boko Haram has pan-African links with al Qaeda in the Islamic maghreb and Islamists in Somalia. That would justify increased US intervention in a country that supplies 10% of US oil imports.

Others, including the US state department, suspect links with internal Nigerian factions. On Christmas day Boko Haram spread its net to Abuja, bombing a Catholic church and killing 25 people.

In the delta region retaliation was taken against a koranic school. Mosques have also been attacked. The delta region itself, the source of most of Nigeria's oil, has only recently seen the potential resolution - by means of an amnesty, and the promise of an increased allocation of resources and a clean-up of the environmentally-devastated Ogoni region - of a rebellion against the Nigerian state that severely cut oil flows.

The general strike and the protests that accompanied it were a truly national phenomenon. No part of the Muslim north was unaffected and Kano was one of the principal centres of the popular uprising. Muslims and Christians protested together and formed cordons to protect each other's prayer sessions.

Only an independent party of the working class can build on the inspiring example of January 2012 to provide the vision of a genuine alternative. An alternative that democratises society, develops Nigeria's economic potential to benefit the mass of Nigerians, and also points towards an pan-African solution to the crisis of the whole continent ●

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REVIEW

Tory glee and political fantasy

Phyllida Lloyd (director) *The iron lady* 2011, general release

After huge hype - advanced publicity, huge billboard and bus adverts, gushing acquaintances of Margaret Thatcher on breakfast TV, a Jeremy Vine phone-in, Thatcher's face haunting us everywhere again and Meryl Streep being canvassed for another Oscar basically for just taking on the role - *The iron lady* is crushingly disappointing. Politics has only a walk-on part in the film. As Streep herself has said, "It's an imagined story of who she might be - probably not accurate" (*Women's hour* January 6). Got it in one. In fact that could be a one-line review of the film.

Thatcher is an all too real character, but she is located in an entirely fictional world. The writer has taken the character and imagined what it must be like for Thatcher in ill health, with dementia; imagined how her memories might haunt her, how her past plays out in her mind.

This fictional reconstruction of her life starts with an old woman in a mac - a traditional working class housewife, headscarf on her head - having popped out for some milk to the corner shop, ignored and unrecognised. As well she might be, for this is meant to be Margaret Thatcher. Then we see flashbacks to a lower middle class shop-owner's daughter, hard at work delving out measures of sugar and lard in a working class community. Her dad, though the Tory leader of Grantham town council, has a distinct working class accent and talks homely home truths of thrift and enterprise.

This is in stark contrast to her adoption of aristocratic diction and haughty mannerisms at Oxford University, though the makers do not explain it. Here we see a bright, young, attractive thing, flirting and dancing, fussing with her make-up. Is any of that real? One suspects little of it relates to anything other than the writer's attempt to invent a 'rags to riches', 'I've come from the streets' narrative. Indeed the film has Thatcher telling her Oxbridge colleagues in the cabinet how she came from the bottom and understands the masses because she has been one of them! Even if that were true - and it isn't - can anyone imagine Thatcher claiming that heritage after aspiring so hard to bump the queen from the throne and take her place? I recall the comment of HRH as to why she felt uncomfortable in Maggie's presence: "I never know which of us is supposed to curtsy," she is said to have responded.

The upper class followers of Thatcher who have made much of her "unique fashion sense" and "style" do not see this simply as the uniform of the rich Tory women faithful - the only "unique" thing about it is that it at once identifies the lady with would-be aristocrats and petty royalty: all neatly styled hair, pearls and conservative twin sets.

Having set out her 'struggle to the top', the makers hope to have won the audience to the side of Thatcher when it comes to her political trajectories. Director Phyllida Lloyd admits: "The whole story is told from her point of view" - and justified accordingly. Although, to be more accurate, it is probably what she imagines her point of view might be - this film makes no claims of actual biography, and especially none of political analysis. Jeremy Vine was at pains to convince us that, while we might not like Thatcher, we 'have to admire her principles' and the fact she was ideologically driven - it didn't wash



Meryl plays Maggie: a lone woman

and the phone-in was swamped with callers expressing their outright hatred of her and her political legacy.

The film's attempts at humour involve, strong put-downs of 'the men', whether the long suffering Denis (who is much stronger and independently willed in this film than in reality), her cabinet colleagues or the US ambassador. The portrayal of her assertiveness and dry wit drew irritating laughter from a small section of the Newcastle preview audience who watched *The iron lady* with me. I wanted to go over and slap them for being too stupid to realise that such dialogue is totally invented. While she did in reality get her gob round some memorable phrases - "the enemy within" and "U-turn if you want to: the lady is not for turning" - these remarks were not among them. A scriptwriter wrote them and put them into the fictional mouth of the character.

So, other than this being a hard-working girl from the lower classes who makes it to the top through her own effort, what is the other conclusion the film is urging us to draw? The view is very strongly pushed that Thatcher is a feminist. Streep in her *Women's hour* interview expresses the view that no other advocate of her politics attracts anything like the hatred she does, and this can only be because it was a women advancing them, not a man. It takes the female presenter to remind her that Thatcher was an anti-feminist.

All of Thatcher's rhetoric regarding women was connected to their role as mothers, housekeepers and shoppers, not as economists, politicians or activists, and the effect of her policies has been fiercely anti-women - especially anti the aspirations of working class women and girls. Yet still the film persists in trying to paint that picture. We are shown the Thatcher-eye view of her entering parliament as a lone woman in an exclusive male club - as if a number of strong women, especially working class Labour women, had not been there before her, or were not still logging it out in those chambers. One expects that this whole caricature is

aimed at the US audience, who will not know this is sheer invention.

When it comes to the actual political aspects of the film, we might be surprised to find she has the leadership of the Tory Party thrust upon her unwilling self! Not the fierce and relentless faction fight she in fact waged against Ted Heath - a fight to replace him and his 'one nation Toryism' with herself and naked class war. We are reliably informed that neither she nor Keith Joseph voted in the 'Who rules Britain?' election because they wanted to bring Heath down.

In the portrayal of the mass working class opposition, I can find no fault. It is clearly presented that her policies were being violently rammed down our throats and that they were characterised by injustice and inequality. I do not know if this part of the film was made by different folk from those who made the first part, but it certainly feels like it - the whole thing ends up as a kind of 'push me, pull me' weld of two conflicting measures of the woman and her policies.

The chronology of events is strangely chopped and changed, much in the style that the BBC famously cut and reversed footage of the Orgreave picket and police clashes. In that piece of historic reconstruction, a fierce police and cavalry charge into placid pickets, who then retaliate with missiles (lumps of clay actually, though they looked like half-bricks on the TV news), is reversed to show the hapless police officers coming under attack by brick-throwing pickets and forced to retaliate. In the film, we have the miners' strike of 1984-85 taking place *before* the 1982 Falklands war. Why? Because otherwise we would have the Falklands 'achievement' and the crest of the nationalist wave first, followed by the tyranny of the state's response to the miners, and then the mass poll tax movement and riot. This would have suggested a brief period of popularity, followed by decline, mounting opposition and state repression. It would have made

the counter-image of Thatcher as a stubborn fanatic too strong. So we have the episodes jumbled up: first the miners' strike, then the Falklands victory, then the poll tax.

Even then we would still have got a strongly repellent portrayal of

a rightwing zealot if the whole film had not been dominated by all that fictional, sentimental pap. The first two-thirds of the film are meant to nail this image in our heads so deeply that it cannot be dislodged by her manic egotism. This ploy does not actually succeed - although grandees of the Tory establishment have wet themselves with glee to see Maggie's face everywhere: this film is the greatest propaganda coup for the Conservative Party they could ever dream of. And *The iron lady* is supposed to cement her reputation as some super-visionary politician etched into the national character, to be honoured with a state funeral.

Margaret Thatcher's actual legacy is not shown in this rewrite of history. That legacy can be seen in the desolation, poverty and hopelessness of working class Britain. In the end of productive manufacturing, of trade union strength, of solidarity and of visions of a fairer, socialist alternative to greed and 'dog eat dog'. In the rise of money capital, in finance speculation and in the gradual replacement of industrial bricks and mortar with a house of cards. Those abandoned, traditional, working class communities - the north, the valleys, Scotland and the inner cities - would make a suitable final scene for this film, rather than the long dead ghost of Denis walking out on Thatcher, leaving her finally totally alone.

Depressingly tedious, *The iron lady* is a missed opportunity, which hopefully someone more inspired will revisit in the not too distant future.

David Douglass

Fighting fund

Defence fund

Ipromised a couple of issues back that the *Weekly Worker* will be bigger and better in 2012. So, having said goodbye to 2011 and hello to 2012 with a 16-pager (with a marvellous full-colour front cover), in this, only the second issue of the new year, I am delighted that we are carrying a four-page supplement, a work of groundbreaking scholarship that doubtless will be of the greatest interest to every fighter for communism.

It would appear that our neanderthal cousins managed to make a revolution. But it was a partial, incomplete and reversible revolution. There was, as a result, no cultural take-off. Explaining why the neanderthals did not succeed in making their revolution permanent raises interesting questions. Questions that surely necessitate cutting-edge answers.

Anyway, having supplied a bigger (and hopefully ever better) paper, it is up to our readers to carry out their side of the bargain - making sure we reach our new monthly fighting fund target of £1,500. I'm glad to report that our internet readership now seems to be consistently hovering just above 20,000 (we had 20,892 online readers last week). That is, roughly speaking, a 100% increase over the last 12 months. But, once again, too few of our e-readers are putting

their hands in their pocket to ensure we meet our financial target.

An exception this week is MM, who donated £50 using our PayPal facility. Thanks, comrade! By the way, responding to a critical one-liner in last week's letters pages, MM added an explanation for his generosity: "Consider it part of the Jim Creegan defence fund!" I'm sure our excellent correspondent in the United States will be suitably pleased.

There was another £10 donation made via the website from comrade CS and the receipts from our standing orders came to £195 over the last week. Our total for January's fighting fund now stands at £665 - but that is quite a bit down on where we ought to be at this stage. We need £835 in 12 days. I know that cheques are a bit old hat nowadays, but I can tell you that I could really do with receiving a few - none at all in the post over the last seven days.

Don't forget, if you want more supplements, and more colour pages, then you know what to do: help us reach that target every month.

Robbie Rix

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

THE LEFT

Impediments to consciousness

In the second of three articles, **Paul B Smith** discusses the negative impact of imperialism, Stalinism and social democracy

The process of capital accumulation controls workers both in economic reality and in their thinking about it. Workers are atomised and compete to sell their labour-power against one another. They also see capitalism as a necessary, natural and eternal system. They are economically oppressed and see capital as an alien force dominating them, but at the same time they believe they have equal rights and freedoms with capitalists. Equality before the law seems to guarantee real equality in life. Marx calls this form of economic and ideological control commodity fetishism.

Commodity fetishism generates certain kinds of fears that most workers are aware of. Atomisation through competition isolates them. It makes them suspicious and distrustful not only of their employers and managers, but also of their co-workers and colleagues. Workers are fearful of losing their jobs or being made redundant. It follows they are fearful their co-workers or colleagues may report their behaviour or opinions to a manager who could use this information to discipline, sack or make them redundant. They are also fearful of being driven to the point of exhaustion through an extension of hours or an increased pace of work. They fear making insufficient money in their wages or salaries to pay for the needs of their children, for education and healthcare and to keep up rent or mortgage payments. Behind these fears lurk the ultimate life-threatening conditions of overwork, work-related injuries, homelessness and malnutrition.

Fear of loss of the independence given by a wage or salary and - in the privileged imperialist countries - of having to depend on bureaucratically controlled forms of income leads to indifference. As the old jazz/blues number states, "Nobody loves you when you're down and out". If the worker has no money, then it seems as if most people (apart from those motivated to save your soul from going to hell) do not care about her or his survival. In work, competition for better wages and conditions operates to create an indifferent attitude between workers that can easily turn into antagonism and violence. Once there is no longer a contractual relationship that binds workers and employer together, the employer who lays off workers is indifferent to their welfare, passing responsibility elsewhere. Looters are indifferent to the businessman's alienated need to make a profit when they appropriate retail produce directly without participating in exchange.

Commodity fetishism also kicks in when workers organise collectively against their oppression. They are told that to get a decent level of wages the firm must be competitive. They are told their firm must stay profitable if they are to stay in employment. Many strikes and occupations fail because employers threaten to withdraw investment from the workplace in the dispute. Even those workers who succeed by taking over the firm and running it themselves as a cooperative soon find they are dependent on whether or not there is a market for the goods and services they provide. If there is not, they are forced to depend on financial institutions for loans (thereby putting themselves into debt) or to lay themselves off.

Workers who have the time to reflect on their condition therefore



Stalin is dead and buried

despair that they will ever live in a society that does not involve commodity production, distribution, exchange and consumption. They are told they have a shared interest in their employers' success. They are educated to believe that the unintended consequence of capitalist competition is the benign distribution of goods to workers through the workings of what the Scottish political economist, Adam Smith, called the market's "invisible hand".

Mistakenly identifying an indifference to others as a universal human attribute, they argue that a classless society is conceivable, but unrealisable, because it is unnatural. It contradicts human nature. The idea that humans are biologically conditioned to be violent, uncooperative and uncaring of anyone (save their immediate family and friends) is therefore also a product of commodity fetishism.

Stalinism

By emphasising fear as the emotion necessary for the introduction of unpopular and socially destructive, market-driven policies, Naomi Klein ignores the sense of despair that most workers feel when they look to the future.¹ Despair is the absence of hope. The absence of hope entails not just that the future is perceived as one within which the individual's desires and expectations cannot be realised,

but also that individuals feel powerless when faced with the challenge of trying to achieve them. For workers to feel despair they must not only have given up hope that the world can be changed into one in which they are no longer exploited or oppressed, but also feel powerless when faced with the challenge of bringing about this change. A sense of powerlessness is where fear and despair link up.

Hillel Ticktin argues that this desperation cannot be fully understood without considering what passed as an alternative to capitalism in the recent past.² He calls this "Stalinism". In the first part of this article I mentioned this as the subjective doctrine that it is possible to build socialism in one country separate from the rest of the world.³ This definition is derived from Trotsky. Ticktin follows this, but he also defines it as the doctrine of a ruling group controlling and exploiting workers in an economy based on nationalised industry.

Workers fear a future society based on nationalised industry. The former Soviet Union proved that nationalised property, full employment and a non-market society was compatible with capitalism abroad and extreme forms of atomisation, exploitation, waste and inefficiency at home. However destructive capitalism is, it has proved superior to Stalinism. Despite the use of force in Chile, Argentina and elsewhere that Klein eloquently

records, workers have been less atomised during periods of intense capitalist repression than in the former Soviet Union or modern-day China. This is true historically. Workers had more freedoms in Nazi Germany than in Stalin's Soviet Union.

One reason for workers' acquiescence to contemporary capitalism is that workers reject a nationalised alternative because of its association with inefficiency and unfreedom. Workers do not want to exchange the present ruling class with one that is more brutal and exploitative. They do not want to exchange a society in which there is the opportunity for a few to have unlimited access to well made commodities for one in which the many have limited access to poorly made products.

Revolution

Not only members of the capitalist class, but also workers view the idea of revolution with a sense of dread. There is an ongoing attempt to distort the history of the Bolshevik revolution. There are now a plethora of popular histories and biographies of Bolshevik leaders such as Trotsky and Lenin. They portray the Bolsheviks as immoral, insane fanatics, intent on introducing an inefficient, murderous regime. An unquestioned prejudice of the intelligentsia is the assumption that, had Lenin lived or Trotsky taken power, they would have behaved like Stalin. Moreover, the experience of revolutions in the 20th century has been bloody and violent. It is one in which workers have died in their millions, capitalism has continued to survive and socialism has not arrived any sooner.

The effect on workers' consciousness is to establish a belief that the struggle for an alternative to capitalism leads to even greater suffering than they experience at present. This awareness is coupled with the knowledge that ruling class vengeance towards attempts to implement policies that challenge capitalism is ruthless. As Klein records, it has included wars, boycotts, withdrawal of investment, destruction of assets and the assassination of workers' leaders and socialists. The transitional period appears to be a nightmare. Despair of an alternative and fear of retribution if workers challenge capitalism reinforce the conservative belief that revolutions worsen rather than improve their conditions.

Marxism is a theory that explains the nature of capitalism and points to the possibility of a rational alternative to it. Stalinism, however, dressed up anti-Marxism as Marxism. As a result Marxism now appears as a totalitarian ideology. Workers in the former USSR, for example, have lost all hope of socialism. Workers think of socialism as a failed or utopian doctrine. Marxists active on the left in capitalist countries were, until recently, portrayed as extremists who peddle inhumane and corrupt doctrines. During the cold war both Stalinists and capitalists characterised revolutionary Marxists as insane and in need of vigorous forms of suppression. Nowadays, they are sidelined or ignored as irrelevant.

The result is that workers despair of being any freer than they are already are. Forms of capitalist unfreedom are accepted as the least worst option. Workers may have a declining standard of living, they may be increasingly insecure, poorly paid,

overworked and exhausted, but they are not attracted to socialist ideas.

It is true that despair can overcome fear of state terror. The young people who riot no longer fear the violence of the police. The mass civilian opposition to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East fuelled by the despair of unemployed youth has cost hundreds of lives to the forces of repression. However, these actions are neither anti-capitalist nor pro-socialist. It does not follow, as some leftists have suggested, that if the system breaks down and there is a collapse of society, workers will revolt against capitalism and spontaneously come up with brilliant plans on how to take control and reorganise the world. On the contrary, they are just as likely to abstain from voting in elections or opt for policies that appear to provide them with some security and stability. These tend to be authoritarian, nationalist and divisive.

Imperialism and division

I am arguing that the fear and desperation workers experience operate to prevent class-consciousness emerging. The causes of this experience are a combination of commodity fetishism and Stalinism. This combination is fused together with another important causal influence. This is imperialism and the exploitation of division and difference between workers.

The Latin author, Tacitus, writing on the German-speaking tribes in the ancient world, wrote that, as long as they were more preoccupied with fighting amongst themselves, the Roman empire would remain safe and secure.⁴ During the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the emergent imperial European powers, such as England (later Britain), were to foster division amongst the peoples they colonised in order to secure their acquiescence. This was needed to extract an economic surplus through exploiting the colonial population. The fear that workers have of other nationalities is a result of these past and present policies of divide and rule.

The imperialism of a mature and declining capitalism has had an effect on workers' consciousness in the imperial countries. It has divided skilled workers from other workers - not only from workers in the colonised countries, but also from unskilled workers at home in the imperialist countries. As is well known, Lenin described this layer of skilled workers as an "aristocracy of labour" - a group privileged by income, education and status.

Another important effect of imperialism was on the trade unions. During the late 19th century and early 20th century, the trade unions abandoned a global perspective on socialism as the solution to workers' oppression. They became preoccupied with economic improvements for workers within a national framework. The more successful trade unions were in extracting economic concessions from their national governments, the more these turned embryonic forms of class-consciousness into a nationalist consciousness.

Trade unions colluded with imperialism by arguing that the profits extracted from the exploitation of colonial workers could be turned into revenue. They argued that governments could use this revenue to improve the standard of living of

workers. Ticktin argues that imperialism is not a thing of the past. There is still a flow of wealth from underdeveloped to developed countries. He calculates that this is approximately \$500 billion a year. Even within the limits of the trade unions’ nationalist consciousness, imperialism has failed to improve workers’ conditions within imperial countries as a whole.

Hurricane Katrina showed to the world that many people in the United States live at third-world levels. If workers are working longer hours, their pensions and health are poor and the minimum wage is low, then it is hard to argue that the whole of the population is better off through imperialism. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly a number of workers who have high wages or salaries and can afford better healthcare, pensions and education.

Racism and hostility towards immigrant labour are an effect of imperialism and play an important role in instilling patterns of fear between groups of workers. Native workers fear immigrants because of a combination of commodity fetishism and imperialism. They are forced to compete with each other for jobs and benefits, as well as being drawn to the belief that they are morally, intellectually or culturally superior or inferior to each other.

Oppression and liberation

Racism (and other forms of oppression, such as sexism, homophobia, ageism and anti-Semitism) tends to kick in when the controls provided by commodity fetishism become more transparent and obvious. Marx argued that capitalism requires a flexible, homogeneous workforce. It is often said that capital is gender-, race- and age-blind. In other words, it will exploit the form of labour-power that is the most accessible and amenable at a particular time. It does not care for rigid divisions and tends to reduce all forms of labour to a common denominator - abstract labour. Divisions are costly to maintain and produce inefficiencies. Without the fear of workers’ potential power and the need for a controlling intermediate social layer, capitalists would be happy to completely proletarianise professionals such as lawyers, teachers, academics and doctors.

On the other hand, imperialist strategy institutionalised divisions amongst workers. Divisions are useful in preventing class-consciousness. Divisions exist between workers in imperialist countries and workers in the third world, skilled and unskilled workers, white- and blue-collar workers, the employed and the unemployed, the exploited and the superexploited, and men and women. Divisions are kept in place through mutual antagonism and help prevent the working class from coming into existence.

Klein looks back to a time when economic concessions for workers could be extracted from capitalism within a national framework. The ruling class abandoned this policy over 30 years ago and Klein documents the detail of the effects of this decision. Ticktin argues that the capitalist class will not return to this strategy and reflate the imperialist countries’ economies. Fear that workers will again become a militant and challenging force (as they were perceived to be in the 1960s and 1970s) motivates this decision.

The period of Stalinism lasted from 1924 until 1991. Stalinism was a nationalist doctrine. It taught that the Soviet Union could develop separately from the rest of the world. Stalinist support for anti-colonial movements dominated the politics of the left during the period. Not only did the USSR provide a model of separate development to anti-colonial activists, but also military and economic support.

Stalinism made a major contribution to nationalist and separatist perspectives and politics worldwide. The communist parties in both imperialist and post-colonial countries argued for workers’ economic improvement within national frameworks through nationalisation, social spending and policies of full employment. They promoted these policies as the strategy for national liberation from colonial oppression. Klein records how quickly they

were abandoned in post-apartheid South Africa. Unfortunately she does not mention the role liberalisation in the Soviet Union had on the South African Communist Party. The SACP was influential in the decision to adopt policies favourable to finance capital.

During this period, both socialists and anti-socialists emphasised the differences that exist between workers. This had the effect of downplaying the role of workers as a whole. Historically, social democrats privileged the struggles of skilled and white-collar workers; feminists women’s struggles; and anarchists those of the marginalised and unemployed. Workers were encouraged to find hope in struggles to free groups of people oppressed by colonial, racial, religious and patriarchal domination. In the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed, however, white workers became the targets of black workers in southern Africa, men the target of women in Europe and the US, and workers who benefit from imperialism the target of workers in colonial and post-colonial states generally. This spread despair amongst those who campaign to end divisions caused by racism, nationalism, religion and sexism.

These struggles have been cross-class in nature and tend to subordinate awareness of a socialist solution for ending all forms of oppression to separate campaigns to end racism, sexism or imperial domination. The struggles of particular oppressed groups have given people a sense of group solidarity and collectivity, but on a limited scale. In extreme cases they have degenerated into war between oppressor and oppressed groups. The war in Yugoslavia was fought between national groups that had the experience of being in both oppressed and oppressor roles historically. It was particularly vicious. The experience of the Stalinist period demonstrates that nationalism - including the nationalism of the oppressed - has no progressive role to play in developing class-consciousness.

The left

The desperation of the left has played an important role in preventing workers from developing class-consciousness. Impatience with workers’ refusal to act informs this. Leftwing groups have called on workers to organise general strikes, and arm themselves in the belief that a socialist revolution is imminent. However, class-consciousness does not automatically follow from the fact that the system is collapsing and objective conditions are getting harder for workers.

As Ticktin remarks, Marxists have not discussed the circumstances that enable workers to become a class and take power. They have assumed, along with Lenin and Trotsky, that objective changes within capitalism would cause positive, subjective changes. Thus Trotsky thought that workers would begin to act when an upturn followed a downturn in the world economy - in other words, when their material position improved after being depressed. But he did not explain why this should be.

It has been hard for Marxists to have any serious exchange of ideas about the development of class-consciousness when they were subject to confusion with Stalinists. During the cold war, anyone who was critical of the former Soviet Union might be accused of being an agent of an imperialist secret service. Conversely, within anti-Stalinist groups, anyone critical of the thinking of the leading group could be accused of being an agent of the KGB. The atmosphere of the left was one of fear and distrust. This influenced those workers who became involved. The aim was to isolate critics of the former USSR. Accusing critics of being secret service agents legitimised violence and exclusion towards them.

A less extreme form of internalised violence and exclusion was experienced within the Trotskyist left. These were individuals who had broken with Stalinism, but continued to reproduce the practice of accusation, counter-accusation, denunciation and exclusion they had experienced as members of Stalinist groups. This atmosphere made individuals fearful of expressing criticism or differences of

opinion - not only regarding the nature of the former USSR, but of any viewpoint - Marxist or not. When criticisms were made, they took on a tone of accusation and implied threat or betrayal.

The habits of accusation and denunciation spread an atmosphere of desperation within and between people of the left. The feeling was that it was impossible for working class leaders and leftists to work together with any sense of shared goals, strategies and tactics. Fear of exclusion functioned to make people distrust their own judgement and reproduce the ideas, however confused, of the most forceful, arrogant or Machiavellian of individuals. The people best able to cope with these patterns of behaviour rose to power as leaders of various left groups and organisations.

During this period, the atmosphere was not as claustrophobic or intense within trade unions. Some people of the left therefore found a more congenial home in careers as labour activists. Where this involvement crossed over into electoral activity through trade union sponsorship of political parties, some leftists moved over into a more conventional political career pattern. The price they paid was an adaptation to an environment which was hostile to Marxism. The socialist goal - if mentioned at all - was conceived of in national terms or as one too far off to give attention to.

The result was conformity to social democratic ideas and the notion that limited improvements and reforms were all that workers could achieve. As long as the capitalist class was secure that workers’ knowledge of Marxism and socialism was policed internally by social democrats and Stalinists, concessions could be made. These concessions made it appear as if social democracy was the only viable political form leftists could adopt and advocate.

The trade unions’ failure to effectively police workers’ militancy in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the breakdown of Stalinist forms of control over workers convinced many capitalists that it was safe to abandon the strategy of concessions. This meant also abandoning trade union involvement in management and giving finance capitalists greater influence on government policy. This, in turn, led to the hegemony of Friedmanite ideas within bourgeois economics and the subsequent effects on populations that Klein records.

What continues to pass for a left in the present day has internalised the despair of the cold war period and feeds workers’ despair about their power to organise collectively to emancipate humanity. The attempt to protect workers from the worst effects of capitalism through support for trade union policies involved giving the unions greater control over workplaces. This led to undemocratic and corrupt practices. Moreover, privileging workers in imperial countries against workers elsewhere reinforced a nationalist, racist and anti-immigrant consciousness. Support for ‘social democracy in one country’ has contributed to the belief that welfare benefits and social housing should only be given to worker-citizens of the imperial country and not for the millions of workers and peasants of the former empire. It has led leftists spending much of their time defending the indefensible and arguing for a least worst political alternative of voting for parties financed by the trade unions. As Lenin pointed out many years ago, it is not true that workers’ economic struggles for better wages, conditions, benefits and public services will necessarily lead to class-consciousness. Yet this is what many people on the left still promote in practice, even if they do not believe it in theory ● teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com

Notes

1. See N Klein *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* London 2007.
2. H Ticktin, ‘Political consciousness and its conditions at the present time’ *Critique* Vol 34, No1, pp9-26.
3. ‘The politics of fear and despair’, January 12.
4. ‘Long, I pray, may the Germans persist, if not in loving us, at least in hating one another; for the imperial destiny drives hard and fortune has no longer any better gift for us than the disunity of our foes’ - Tacitus *Germania* 33 (98AD).

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

Fight for a democratic federal republic

Climax of tartan nationalism

The Scottish independence referendum is a choice between Westminster and Berlin, argues **James Turley**; yet the left offers no alternative to nationalist illusions

Since Alex Salmond's Scottish Nationalist Party won overall control in Holyrood, the question of Scottish independence has presented itself all the more forcefully on the British political agenda. As all sensible voices have predicted, the political battle looks set not to be a great climactic confrontation between British unionist chauvinism and petty Scottish nationalism, however, but a insidious and frankly undignified backroom struggle over every miserable detail.

Both Salmond - whatever else one might say about him, an able and experienced politician - and his principal opponent, David Cameron, are alert enough to know that the battle starts now, and will end long after the dust has settled on a referendum.

The principal points of contention at present amount to choosing the ground where the two sides will eventually join battle. Salmond wants a referendum to take place at the end of this parliament; Cameron would prefer it to take place much sooner. Salmond wants a third option on the ballot - so-called 'devolution max', which, if you were wondering, means pretty much whatever you want it to - while the Tories want a straight 'yes or no' choice on the question of independence.

It is no enormous mystery as to why this is. The government's popularity may not be soaring (especially not in Scotland, where the Tories have effectively been wiped out), but in 2014 - after two more years of Cameron/Clegg-fronted austerity inflicts further social devastation - it will be considerably lower. A third option on the ballot would soak up some softer nationalist, or even localist, sentiment (it has even been mooted, somewhat ridiculously, that a three-option referendum could be taken according to a preferential voting system), and would thus be another Salmondian salami slice closer to independence.

All these wrangles have not stopped the two sides starting tomorrow's squabbles today - in particular, there are the vexed questions of North Sea oil (the nationalists want the lot), the national debt (the nationalists want as little as possible), and Trident nuclear submarines. The latter are based in the Clyde naval base, and Salmond has very publicly declared that they have no place in an independent Scotland - the British military brass would not exactly be keen to let him keep them, but they will use the excuse to extort considerable 'compensation' from the Scots to cover the costs of relocating this obscene monument to post-imperial hubris.

Vision thing

There is, of course, nothing wrong with grubby struggles as such. The path to socialist revolution, certainly, is not a smooth one - as our movement has learned to its considerable cost. The more fundamental problem is one of vision.

What do David Cameron and

his unionist allies have to offer the Scottish people? In a word, Trident; not simply the dubious privilege of having the submarines parked in the Clyde, but the whole weight of the union's glorious imperial history (which saw the Scottish establishment perhaps even more enthusiastic about colonial plunder and butchery than their English counterparts) that accompanies Britain's nuclear-armed status. Beyond that, nothing - or at least nothing more than he offers the rest of us beleaguered Brits: austerity, leading to a lost decade, accompanied by thoroughgoing social reaction and subjugation to a decrepit constitutional order.

That much is obvious; and Salmond relies on it being so. But what is his grand vision of the future? An independent Scottish statelet that assumes membership of the European Union. He no longer rabbits on about the so-called 'arc of prosperity', of which only Norway remains even a remotely attractive model, but the basic scheme remains the same; given developments in the EU, he seizes Scotland from the English to hand it gift-wrapped to the Germans. Such is the 'choice' offered to the Scots when this sorry farce comes to a vote: domination by the Westminster bureau of the White House, or the Brussels bureau of the Bundestag?

Given such a shop-soiled selection of non-answers, it was once possible for people to turn to the far left for a more compelling vision. Unfortunately, in this instance, no such vision is available. Scotland has represented a peculiarly weak programmatic spot for the British far left for some years now; the *de facto* death of the Scottish Socialist Party has not acted as a cautionary tale as regards the merits of adopting petty bourgeois nationalist politics, and numerous organisations seem to have coalesced around a single, particularly dismal political line in support of a vote for independence.

Emblematic is an editorial in

*Socialist Worker*¹: socialists should first of all campaign for the 'devo max' option to be included on the ballot, and then campaign for an independence vote in any case. To justify this, the SWP - in this instance, comrade Kier McKechnie - has picked up on a frankly idiotic line beloved of Scottish left nationalists, that a Scottish breakaway would be a blow to British imperialism: "Britain is a major imperialist power that still wants to be able to invade and rob other countries across the globe," he writes. "A clear 'yes' vote for independence would weaken the British state and undermine its ability to engage in future wars."

As a factual statement, this is questionable (as a rule, no *evidence* is ever offered for it). Let us be blunt: it is not the pluckiness and military prowess, however impressive, of the Scots that allows Britain to do these things, but the technological and logistical largesse of the United States. In effect, the SWP line is informed by a moral glee in any misfortune that befalls an allotted 'bad guy', rather than any serious analysis of - you know - *what would actually happen*.

The real fun is yet to follow, however. "We are internationalists, not nationalists," comrade McKechnie soberly reminds us, "and we should not become cheerleaders for Alex Salmond." What ingenious method, then, should 'socialists' employ to distance themselves from Salmond at the same time as repeating his political line? By making a laundry list of worthy but dull-as-ditchwater anti-austerity demands on Salmond's cabinet, against cuts, against bailouts for the banks - "and that includes the Royal Bank of Scotland" (oh, surely RBS is going too *far*, comrade!) - and so on, and so forth.

The SWP is renowned for its contempt for 'propagandism'; but what it proposes here is to overload a simple political choice - between independence, devo-max, the status quo or none of the above - with all

manner of additional political points. Whether the SWP likes it or not, it is doing propaganda rather than agitation - and what utterly dreadful propaganda this is.

The neat summary of this policy is provided, not unironically, in a piece by Chris Bambery - who, readers will remember, left the SWP on a completely apolitical basis last year, taking a good chunk of the organisation's young Scottish comrades with him. That summary is: "an anti-austerity, anti-imperialist 'yes' vote".²

It is a neat name, because it aptly condenses what is so catastrophically wrong about it. Bambery, the SWP and the Mandeliste Socialist Resistance (who, of course, wheeled out the Scottish question as cover for an apolitical split from Respect) all share a commitment to making the vote on independence about the *current* regime in Westminster. The "anti-austerity 'yes' vote" amounts to the cynical employment of this referendum as an opportunity for a big protest vote against the coalition. The *Socialist Worker* piece can only find five lines to justify a vote for Scottish independence, but dedicates eight paragraphs to humdrum anti-cuts material. Readers may decide which side of the equation has been given the most thought.

Democratic solution

The tragedy in all this is that, while Salmond's referendum is merely a choice of butchers, the Scottish question - and more broadly the *British* question, of the relations between the constituent parts of this state and its arcane constitution - is hardly a non-issue.

The standard left-nationalist claims to Scotland's status as an oppressed nation are historically illiterate, to put it kindly; but Scotland finds itself in a union which is politically and

economically centred overwhelmingly on London (rather than England). That union is complicated by the unity of the British working class. It is paramount for communists to support the right of Scotland to self-determination, and also to protect the hard-won unity of our class.

Squaring that circle means taking *democracy* seriously as a political task for the working class; and that means first of all pointing out that this merry dance between the SNP and Westminster is a sick parody of self-determination from beginning to end.

It begins with a referendum, which is in itself a profoundly anti-democratic manoeuvre, the favoured method of rule among Bonapartists, fascists and every other species of crooked demagogue. Inordinate power is granted to he who sets the question, the possible answers and the time and manner of the plebiscite - hence the bun fight between Cameron and Salmond over exactly those matters. It ends either with a sham 'independence' which is, in reality, junior membership of the EU, or a sham mandate for the continuation of the blood-soaked union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as presently constituted.

The only appropriate response to such a referendum is a spoilt ballot - combined with *serious* propaganda for a democratic federal republic in Britain, in which the Scotland and Wales have full national rights, up to and including the right to secession. Our job is not to provide left cover for the break-up of existing states - no matter how far up the imperial food chain they are - but to build the unity of the workers' movement across all borders, and fight to place the workers' movement at the vanguard of the struggle for extreme, republican democracy.

Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* January 21.
2. <http://counterfire.org/index.php/articles/opinion/15409>.

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