

# weekly **worker**



**SWP conference 2012:  
programmeless muddle,  
passivity and conformity**

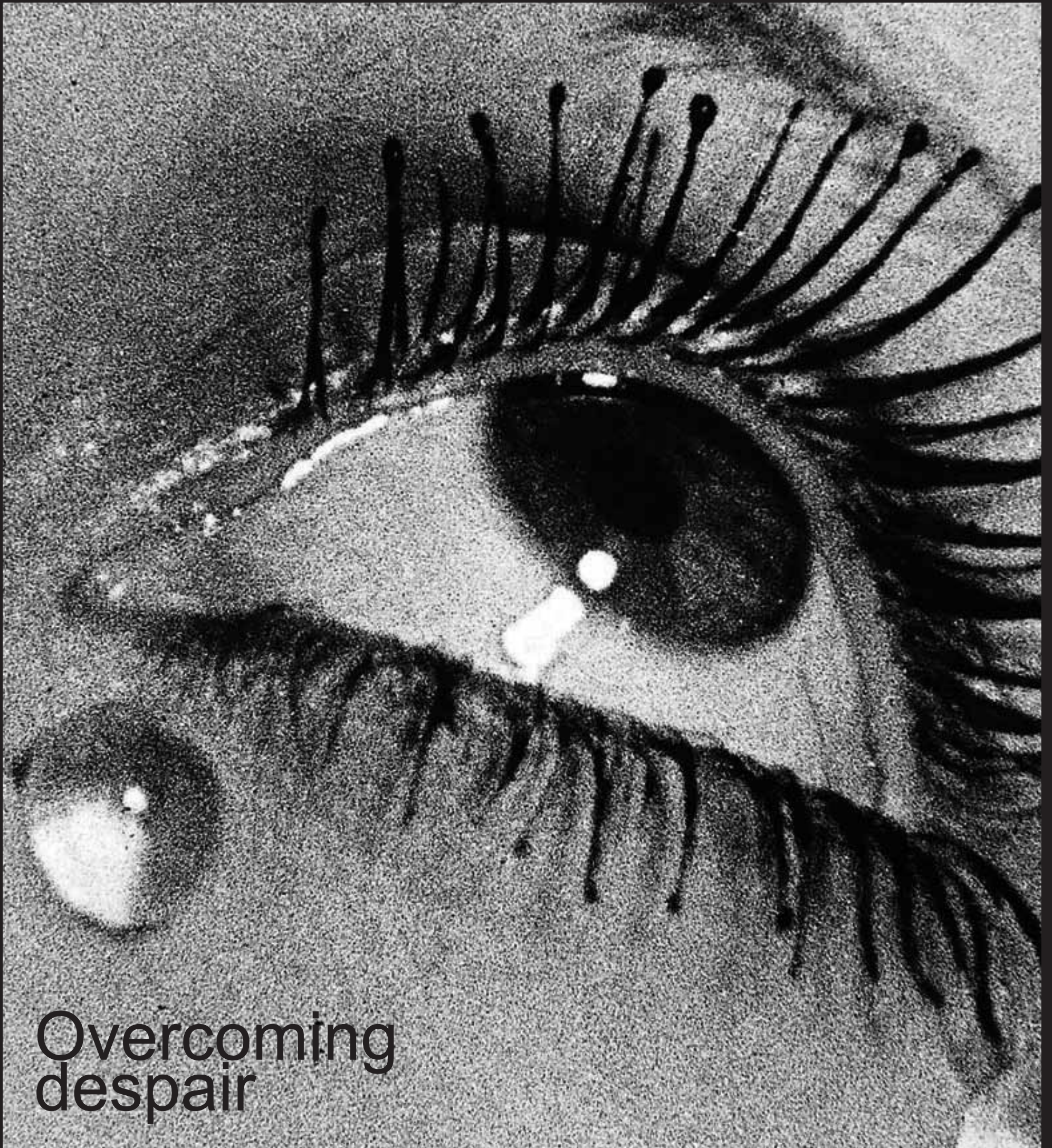
- Euro crisis deepens
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No 898 Thursday January 26 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Overcoming  
despair



# LETTERS



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

## Good company

David Walters makes the following repudiation of Trotskyism: "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" (Letters, January 19). Where does that leave us historically? In the context of the 1930s and 1940s, the main enemy was Roosevelt and Churchill, not Hitler and fascism? In seeking a solution within the system, he takes the line of great-nation chauvinism to defend the nation-state as the lesser evil.

He is in good company. This is the line of the US Sparts: "However, on a sufficiently large scale, immigration flows could wipe out the national identity of the recipient countries ... Unlimited immigration as a principle is incompatible with the right to national self-determination ... an 'open' US-Mexico border would not only introduce impoverished Mexican labourers to flood the US labour market, becoming an unprotected pool for capitalist super-exploitation, but would also lead to well-financed American 'colonists' buying up Mexican enterprises and real estate ... If, for example, there were unlimited immigration into northern Europe, the population influx from the Mediterranean basin would tend to dissolve the national identity of small countries like Holland and Belgium" (*Workers Vanguard* January 18 1974).

I think we can all identify the great-nation chauvinism under the guise of defending the native working class here. So David Walters and Dave Douglass can demur when VN Gelis draws the logical conclusion from his chauvinism and becomes an anti-immigrant arch-reactionary, but cannot see how he got there. David says: "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."

I have to inform David and Dave that imperialism, under the guise of the nation-state, is called fascism; it would do something far worse than just "roll back" the gains of the working class, as the German working class found to their cost in January 1933 and after. What monstrous theoretical and political confusion is contained in the passage above that "can be debated, and should be"!

All imperialist finance capital is nationally based. We cannot return to the idealised world that existed in the epoch of the historically progressive role of the bourgeoisie, the heyday of the British empire when the productive forces of the planet were being developed, albeit in the most brutal and oppressive manner. And it just never was the case, as the word 'empire' shows, that the productive forces could be developed on a national basis. Why do I have to make these elementary points to repudiate David Walters, a supposed erudite Marxist and Trotskyist? Dave Douglass at least has the excuse of an anarchist, Class War, localist political education.

As this crisis of global capitalism deepens, it demands ever more urgently the political elaboration of the theory of the world revolution, repudiated by Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy and defended only by the Trotskyists, however inadequately at times.

Which brings me to Arthur Bough, David's apparent opponent. He makes

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

But then he too shows his lack of understanding of the communist methodology. Ludicrously, he rejects nationalisation demands as reformist, seemingly unaware that 'workers' control' can be added to make that demand a fight for workers' power. And then the real disappointment. Having raised our expectations that he has now developed the argument for world revolution, he flops back to workers' cooperatives and praise for Jimmy Reid's work-in of 1974 as the way forward: "I argue for the workers to take over the means of production themselves when they are threatened with loss of their jobs. That is what the workers of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders did during the 1970s and it is what the French workers did in 1968 ... if they did do that, then I would be in favour of arguing for work to go to them rather than to foreign capitalist firms - not because they were foreign, but because they were capitalist!"

The French workers lost in 1968 because they were betrayed by the French Communist Party. The PCF persuaded them to leave their occupations, which were immediately threatening the whole system of private property and the state itself, and instead opt for the dead-end parliamentary road to socialism. Jimmy Reid, from the same stable, also defended capitalism, led those militant workers into a dead-end work-in, which defused the rising class struggle against Heath into a question of immediate jobs, and sold pay rates and conditions to defend capitalism. For this, he was mightily praised by a very grateful ruling class.

The work-in of Reid of 1974 was the political father of the scab Reid of *The Sun* column attack on the miners' strike of 1984-85, just as VN Gelis's economic nationalism to defend the privileges of the labour aristocracy is the political father of his vile anti-immigrant policy. We are communists. The clue as to how we treat immigrants is in our name; every working man and woman on the planet has the right, in our ideology, to seek the best price for their labour anywhere on the planet.

Now Arthur Bough thinks this other national road to socialism, which defends capitalism and its nation-state, is the way forward. He would become an economic nationalist himself under the illusion that a workers' cooperative under the capitalist state and mode of production was a form of socialism. He clearly never understood Engels' repudiation of Robert Owen in *Socialism: utopian and scientific*.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Debilitating

Concerning David Walters' letter last week, I write to endorse his general views with some additional points of my own around aspects of his analysis, which, firstly, clearly opposes the reactionary side of VN Gelis's pamphlet ("illegal immigrants"), which is never acceptable as part of socialist/communist terminology.

Walters said: "It is globalisation, not nationalism, that is seeking to roll back the gains of the working class ..." Bourgeois nationalism is indeed obliged to fight nationally against the independence of the working class and its class interests, containing past successes, but, over and above this, the most coercive bourgeois powers are those amalgamations of monopoly capitalism as adjuncts of imperialism, acting out their forceful economic and political roles as pacts and groupings.

Of these global amalgamations, the European Union is the most forced, disparate and contradiction-ridden. In so far as the national bourgeoisies have their own elective parliaments and vying parties, they will invariably seek to exploit bourgeois party political coalescences to rule in the name of bourgeois majorities where possible, either singularly or in coalitions with coerced parliamentary partners. This throws up sharp differences within those nations, particularly as they approach their own designated elective stages.

So how do we communists fight this? Today we find on the supposed revolutionary left a general debilitating attitude espoused by any number of groups and their spokesmen throughout Europe, projected toward the proletarians of Europe. They do this by saying that any perspective or programme by socialists and communists that would seek to delve deeper into the national ramifications of the existing, concerted bourgeois conspiracies of the Brussels centre - which itself does successively exert political, social and economic control into and over any country, through their bourgeois body politic and legislatures - are necessarily wrong. As if all critiques are fixed and limited to the bigger and more inclusive bourgeois framework. So socialists and communists must restrict their perspectives and programme to the demand for a European-wide revolutionary party in general, for national opposition cannot be Marxian and is bound to come to a sticky end.

Even James Turley, presumably writing on behalf of the CPGB, argued this when he wrote: "David Cameron's veto is a dangerous blunder, so why does the left reproduce Tory stupidity on the EU?" ('Europe and the delusions of leftwing nationalism', December 15). Here Turley chastises the *Morning Star* and Bob Crow, going right back to Tony Benn in the 1970s, for their nationalism in regard to the European amalgamation. Later he appears to roast Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party for his ambiguity toward the European Economic Community, though the article was sparse on analysing the recent Tory (88 MPs) and Labour (11) revolt, when they posed the referendum question against Cameron, Clegg and Miliband.

I would counter this by saying that not only was Lenin correct to identify the slogan, 'For the United States of Europe', as being a utopian and abstract bourgeois ground for socialists to engage their commonality of purpose in propaganda or organisational terms, but that, importantly, Trotsky expounded his developed and well-reasoned later critique, which retained both his and Lenin's earlier critique of the United States of Europe, under conditions and through the medium of the soviets, that emanated from the Russian Revolution of October 1917 itself.

Trotsky wrote: "Lenin, as is well known, was hesitant at the beginning of the war in regard to the slogan of the United States of Europe. The slogan was originally included in the theses of *Sotsial Demokrat* ... and then rejected by Lenin. This in itself indicates that the question involved here was not that of the general acceptability of the slogan on principle, but merely a

tactical appraisal of it, a question of weighing its positive and negative aspects from the standpoint of the given situation. Needless to say, Lenin rejected the possibility that a capitalist United States of Europe could be realised. That was also my approach to the question when I advanced the slogan of the United States of Europe exclusively as a prospective state form of the proletarian dictatorship in Europe."

Trotsky adds: "But even in this formulation of the question, Lenin saw at that time a certain danger. In the absence of any experience of a proletarian dictatorship in a single country and of theoretical clarity on this question, even in the left wing of the social democracy (communism) of that period, the slogan of the United States of Europe might have given rise to the idea that the proletarian revolution must begin simultaneously, at least on the whole European continent."

"It was against this very danger that Lenin issued a warning, but on this point there was not a shade of difference between Lenin and myself" (<http://marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/ti01.htm#p1-03>).

This whole chapter from Trotsky is most pertinent (as is its context within his tome on the Third International after Lenin).

**Ray Rising**  
email

## MIA parrot

David Walters hasn't read the book *How the IMF broke Greece*, but this doesn't stop him entering the fray against it, despite the fact that around one third of the material wasn't written by me. One presumes that soon the same will occur on the forthcoming book on what classical Marxists wrote and said regarding the issue of immigration.

Walters has the official role in determining what goes onto the Marxist Internet Archive and, following the well-trodden path of the globalist fake left, refuses to upload translations from the Greek revolutionary tradition. He and his avowed openly anti-communist collaborators on the MIA have made only one official pronouncement: to attack China using the pages of the *New York Times* (house organ of US imperialism).

He is a 'left' Zionist who permanently projects his self-professed Jewishness. He has, for more than a decade, parroted Bush's new world order, covering for the 9/11 put-up job and the non-existent role of al Qa'eda emanating from the fake caves in Afghanistan, which led to the fake weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He lauded the hyperpower role of the USA, which a decade later has finished broken with unpayable multi-trillion dollar debts. That has created the situation where one of the candidates for Republican presidential nomination openly seeks the return of all US forces from abroad before more disasters befall them.

His venom against Ahmadinejad and, indirectly, Iran, fits in precisely with the 'axis of evil' diatribes from Washington. Anyone questioning the historic role of Israel, the justifications created for its existence, 9/11, etc, must be an anti-Semite - after all, Arab unity can only realistically occur with the ending of the US airbase going by the name of Israel and then the 'left' Zionists lose their political compass.

**VN Gelis**  
email

## Stalinist!

Roscoe Turi is clearly a fantasist of the highest nature (Letters, January 19).

Firstly, on the comments of the reactionary, Christopher Hitchens. It is just a fact that being anti-war against Iraq and Libya put people

subjectively on the same side as Saddam and Gaddafi. This has nothing at all to do with Stalinism. It was part of the demonisation of Saddam. He supposedly gassed the Kurds, which was later denied by the American army college, giving the game away. Ever since then, I have been aware that most of the left have rallied around imperialist 'facts' like these. This would be the moment I became a "Stalinist" in the eyes of Turi.

Secondly, he accuses me of not minding the roughing up of the fake Trotskyists of the International Socialist Organisation in Zimbabwe, who in 2008 came out with "unconditional support" for the imperialist-linked Movement for Democratic Change - that later changed to "fraternal criticism". I certainly do mind; it is not a method I support. He is just telling lies here (like my supposed support for popular fronts).

Chomsky comes out with the idea that the role of intellectuals is to expose lies and to tell the truth. That might be a starting point. We should start by exposing all imperialist involvement in the efforts to achieve regime change in Zimbabwe. I don't see the evidence to show that the elections were fake. Hey, what a 'Stalinist' I have become!

I don't particularly support the slum clearances of 2005, but it is not clear to me what this has to do with Chinese business interests. Wasn't it also supposedly about crushing the current partner in power? I don't know how much Mugabe felt threatened by the violence coming from these slums. He did complain of it. However, it does appear to be an overreaction.

Unlike Turi, I don't believe that socialism in one country is possible. Hold on. Is that not the central tenet of Stalinism? Is that not odd?

The left in the UK ought to learn that regime change begins at home! Here in the imperialist heartlands, where the pound is at a near state of collapse. That would be a major step in the goal of world revolution and do more to free Zimbabwe from the shackles of financial terrorism than imagining a doomed revolution against Zanu-PF with its mass base of support. I say doomed, in that it would be no more successful at producing socialism in one country than the present regime. It would not be a revolution, but regime change - exactly what the imperialists want.

Imperialism must die for the conditions for socialism to develop in a sustainable manner in these impoverished neo-colonies.

**Paul Anderson**  
email

## Rumour mill

There are a lot of rumours going around the left about who's actually behind the CPGB (PCC) and the *Weekly Worker*. I've been aware of these for some time and paid little attention. I like the policies of the organisation and the paper is a fairly open forum, especially the letters pages, for various groups and individual comrades on the far left. This alone justifies its existence, in my view.

All non-mainstream parties and organisations, and probably those as well, will have been infiltrated, but what I find strange about the CPGB is that its membership seems to have increased very little in the past 20 years. For an organisation which professes to want to build a Communist Party of the European Union, this seems odd, to say the least. By now it should at least have a network of party or organisational branches across the country and links with similar organisations/parties across the EU. Even though it says conditions are not yet right for a mass communist party, one would expect the pre-party organisation to have greatly increased its membership



beyond a largely London base who can all apparently be fitted into a fairly small meeting room, along with sympathisers.

From my own personal experience, I know that actually joining the organisation, rather than just being a sympathiser, seems to be incredibly difficult and drawn-out, if not impossible. I'm afraid this lends credence to the rumours circulating on the left as to who is behind the organisation, since it appears they don't want members, but are happy to have sympathisers who are invited to aggregates and other events.

These monthly aggregates and the *Weekly Worker's* letters page make a very good sounding board for current thinking among the broad far left and, as I say, this can be useful for those of us on the left, as well as for the opposition.

For this reason I'm happy to continue reading the *Weekly Worker* and perhaps contributing to the debates via the letters pages. I am not now actively pursuing membership of the CPGB as, apart from the difficulties I've encountered, I really don't have the time or inclination to attend various seminars and aggregates.

I feel that, whatever they feel about the CPGB (PCC), other comrades on the left should perhaps consider its policies and adopt some of them. An internationalist stance is surely what is needed, and the 'Little Britain' and anti-EU mentality widespread on the left needs to be overcome. Yes, the EU is a capitalist club at the moment, but this can change. A breakaway group of socialist EU countries could be an option for the future.

Meanwhile, the current EU has forced much progressive legislation on Britain, including equality laws against ageism and the abolition of homophobic laws which existed into the 21st century here, nearly 40 years after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

I hope the *Weekly Worker* continues to provide a broad and open forum for those on the left. We badly need this if we are ever to cease being just small 'confessional sects' and develop into real socialist and communist parties building up their memberships and giving the masses real alternatives to the present three-party political set-up preserved by the outdated first-past-the-post electoral system, which penalises all other political parties.

**Tony Papard**  
Battersea

## Yachts up

The proposal to build a new royal yacht has rightly angered many at a time of great hardship and suffering. It shows the utter contempt that the Con-Dem government has towards us, rewarding not just the 1%, but also one parasitical family, while destroying the families and livelihoods of the 99%.

It is clear that this gives the anti-cuts movement and republicans a duty to work together to say that not only is the monarchy a completely undemocratic and corrupt 'institution', but it is also unaffordable. With 'yacht-gate' and the jubilee just months away, the question about why we are spending so much to keep one of the richest families in the world in their position needs to become a central question for us all.

For that reason, we would like to invite you all to attend a conference to debate, discuss and organise resistance to the monarchy, their power, privilege and wealth. 'Building the republican movement' will be taking place in Manchester on Saturday April 21. If you would like to register or find out more, see [www.socialistsforrepublic.wordpress.com](http://www.socialistsforrepublic.wordpress.com).

**Phil Wilson**  
Socialists for Republic

## Where are you?

We write to you out of concern at the lack of any real unity on the left, despite the most ferocious onslaught

on our class in living memory, and despite the beginnings of a fightback by the trade union movement. Clear evidence of this lack of unity is the existence of four different bodies all claiming to be the main national anti-cuts organisation.

One specific concern is the dwindling attendance at Left Unity Liaison Committee meetings. The LULC was set up four years ago to encourage greater cooperation on the left and promote ways of working more effectively together. It worked well for three years, gaining the active and regular support of 15 different organisations on the left and green left. Discussions took place to avoid electoral clashes. Organisations had the opportunity to critically discuss proposals such as the People's Charter and learn what motivated such initiatives. During the 2010 general election campaign, the LULC acted as a kind of liaison committee for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, feeding ideas into Tusc and attempting to resolve potential problems that emerged.

Since then attendance at LULC meetings has declined. A number of organisations who used to attend quite regularly now no longer do so. No-one has complained that the LULC has not met since the summer. We would like to know why this has happened, so that we can together decide how best to attempt trying to promote greater unity across the left in the future.

We ask that you discuss the situation within your organisation and provide a collective response which reflects the views of the majority of your members. To this end, we would suggest a timescale of six weeks for responses, with a deadline of Saturday March 10, after which we will publicise the responses as they are presented, with a summary of our own at the end with conclusions.

We ask for answers to the following questions. They can be as long or short as you choose:

- Does your organisation want to help promote left unity?
- If so, why does your organisation no longer attend LULC meetings, if that is the case?
- What concrete suggestions do your organisation have that would help promote greater unity on the left?

**Pete McLaren**  
LULC

## Consensus

The appearance of a number of members of the 'Occupy movement' from St Paul's on the Andrew Marr programme on Sunday should have been an opportunity to present a clear alternative programme and vision of what an uncaptalist society might look like. It didn't.

Outwith the perfectly acceptable defence of the right to protest, and reflections on how protest movements have shaped actual social policy in the past, when it came to a social policy of their own, they were more than let down. There was no radical presentation of a communist society, there was no exposition on where wealth comes from, there was no advancement of systems of workers' control. No ideas about production for use, not profit, meeting the real social needs rather than invented ones, etc. Instead we had a sort of plea that things could be shared out more equally, and bankers and money investment perhaps more democratically controlled: the questions of 'by who and how' were not engaged.

As other topics came up, any liberal vision began to slip away, particularly with the latest US-style evangelical cry to control wanton teenage sex pots. Some Tory female MP is introducing a private members bill to demand that schools and teachers teach abstinence and 'just say no' during sex education classes; that moral sexual behaviour and 'relationship' classes should be

included preferably *instead* of basic sex education. The aim being that young adults (she kept saying 'teenage girls' actually) should not engage in sex until they are in fixed and permanent relationships, preferably married.

I waited for this post-hippy generation to advance the prospect that actually bodies belong to those who live in them, that when people are ready to have sex they will have sex and this is a human right, and that anyway what is wrong with sex? It never came. Worse, there was a sort of meeting of minds that, yes, teenagers (mainly girls, but also boys) should not see their own bodies as consumer items to be consumed by each other! That capitalism and consumerism had created this problem of teenage pregnancies (and presumably the sex which led to them). That somehow teenagers were only having sex because 'society' urges them to, and they are more or less tricked into doing this stuff, which they actually don't really want to do. No-one advocated the right to say 'yes' as well as 'no' or separated moral proscription and repression from health and information and the opening up of social choices.

There was much lording of the Dutch and Swedes for their low teenage birth rates and the way they dealt with this issue. Odd then nobody noticed that the Dutch have a far lower age of consent law than here, or that the only country with a higher teenage pregnancy rate is the good old USA, which has a higher age of sexual consent and invented the whole 'Just say no', 'Jesus says sex is dirty' morality tirade. That banging this same old, tired sexual abstinence drum doesn't work: it just leads to more repression, more guilt, less openness and sensible review of free choices - and, of course, more poor souls locked up in jail for simple acts of human nature.

One would have thought a whole vision of a new society of sexual, economic and class freedom would have been presented here in prime TV time before an audience of millions. Instead, in my view anyway, the presence of Occupy only went to reinforce the media and bourgeois political line that there is lots of smoke and little of political substance in the movement.

Scratch any liberal.

**Simon John**  
email

## Rated

I rate Toby Abse very highly among commentators on Italian politics, and his shrewd reports appearing in the *Weekly Worker* are one of the main bonuses of the paper. 'No surrender on article 18' was no exception (January 12).

May I just add that what really does look worrying is the massive extent to which the Monti coalition's slogans are making inroads into the middle class left and the intelligentsia generally. Currently it is far from uncommon to hear lifelong Rifondazione voters and campaigners for all the right causes gravely suggest that 'We'd better not go to the barricades over article 18' (ie, the law protecting employees against unfair dismissal), as the article is supposedly not helpful to either the young unemployed or small business employees (where article 18 does not apply).

Such reasoning is strongly reminiscent of the 'Fox without a tail' fable - and yet here's the most dangerous trap for Italian workers at the moment.

**Alfonso Geraci**  
Palermo

## Big picture

Just one reader's opinion: the graphic art for the article 'Europe's mutual suicide pact' (January 19) is a little too graphic.

**Jay Rothermel**  
email

# ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday January 31, 6.15pm:** 'Human heroes, power and the cosmos in Borneo'. Speaker: Monica Janowski. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube).

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/countering-the-olympics-public-meeting).

### Building student resistance

**Saturday January 28, Sunday January 29, 10am:** National conference, Liverpool Guild of Students, 160 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3. What is happening to our education and how do we stop it?

Organised by National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts: [anticuts.com](http://anticuts.com).

### Electoral alternative

**Saturday January 28, 11am to 4pm:** Election conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Conference open to all Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition supporters, candidates and agents.

Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk).

### Anti-capitalist Left

**Saturday February 4, 11.30am:** Debate, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Left unity and rank-and-file initiatives in Manchester.

Organised by Anti-capitalist Left Forum: <http://en-gb.connect.facebook.com/events/184664398290882/?ref=nf>.

### Fighting the cuts

**Saturday February 4, 1.30pm:** Annual meeting, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2.

Organised by Manchester Coalition Against Cuts: [coalitionagaincuts.wordpress.com](http://coalitionagaincuts.wordpress.com).

### 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](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

### Convention of the Left

**Wednesday February 8, 7pm:** Meeting, John Dalton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M1. Are the trade unions the way forward or an obstacle?

Organised by Convention of the Left: [conventionoftheleft.org](http://conventionoftheleft.org).

### 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](http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk).

### Housing emergency

**Tuesday February 21, 6.30pm:** Meeting, House of Commons committee room 14, London SW1. Speakers: Ken Loach, Owen Jones, Stephen Battersby, Austin Mitchell MP. Challenge rent rises and government attacks on tenancies, rents and benefits.

Organised by Defend Council Housing: [defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://defendcouncilhousing.org.uk).

### Defend the right to protest

**Wednesday February 22, 1pm:** Protest, University of Birmingham, Clock Tower, Birmingham B15. Against University of Birmingham's draconian injunction banning all 'occupational protest action'.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: [defendtherighttoprotest.org](http://defendtherighttoprotest.org).

### 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.



**ECONOMY**

# Entering the danger zone again

All the signs are that the ongoing euro crisis is dragging the world economy into recession, writes **Eddie Ford**

**T**here appears to be no end to the crisis afflicting the euro zone and Europe as a whole. Greece still threatens to unravel the entire euro project, though 'hot spots' like Portugal, Spain and Italy are not far behind. Increasingly, all the signs are that the continuing saga could help to trigger a global recession.

In Greece, to the surprise of many, the government and its private creditors have not yet done a deal on debt repayment. European finance ministers are putting Greece's private creditors under intense pressure to accept a lower interest rate than the 4% previously offered - take an even bigger write-down ('haircut') on their loans to Athens. Therefore they have rejected, or effectively vetoed, all the offers/arrangements that so far have been put on the table by the respective parties. Various ministers have strongly reiterated that it is absolutely essential for the Greek government and its private creditors to come to a final agreement in order for the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika to release the next tranche of €130 billion bailout money for Greece - without which Athens will not be able to make €14.5 billion of loan repayments due in March.

Troika officials have called on both parties to reach a deal by the end of the week, which in reality is a demand that Greece's creditors swallow the bitter pill and accept the fact that they are going to make a substantial loss. The ongoing impasse in Athens raises the dreaded fear of a messy or disorderly default by the Greek government, which in turn could see it crashing out of the euro and unleashing economic chaos across the entire continent - if not the entire world. At the very least, the disagreements on display at Athens could overshadow - even disrupt - the January 30 summit of EU leaders.

## Brinkmanship

The essential bone of contention is that the European finance ministers expect Greece's creditors to accept a *nominal* 50% cut in the value of the loans they have made to Greece. However, the Institute of International Finance - which represents Greece's private sector creditors - are worried that they might have to take even bigger losses, hence the so-called 'line in the sand' of a 4% coupon (interest rate) on the loans. The creditors claim if interest rates were cut below that figure, the net present-value losses for bondholders could end up in excess of 70% - possibly a haircut too far for many of the IIF's clients. Hedge funds and 'vulture funds' in particular are holding out in hope that they will be able to cash in on credit default swaps, which pay out when a bond defaults.

However, Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the euro group and prime minister of Luxembourg, has been adamant that the creditors must accept an interest rate below 4% on the new, longer-dated bonds that are expected to be issued in exchange for their existing Greek holdings. In his words, European ministers asked their Greek colleagues to "pursue negotiations to bring the interest rates on the new bonds to below 4%" - which implies, apparently, that the interest "comes down to *well below* 3.5%" (my emphasis). So we read in the financial press, from an unnamed Greek banker close to the negotiations, that the IIF "authorised" its managing director, Charles Dallara, to negotiate a "compromise" at 3.8% - but this was



**No ideas, no future**

deemed to be still too high by the troika, who have demanded a smaller and "more realistic" rate.

The breakdown in talks was a bit of a personal humiliation for the Greek finance minister, Evangelos Venizelos, who had forthrightly told the Greek parliament - and the world - that the debt reduction plan had to be in place, no ifs or buts, by January 23 to give lenders enough time to draw up the details of the second bailout package before the January 30 summit. The grand aim, if you can call it that, is to shrink Greece's €100 billion debt from 160% to 120% of GDP by the end of the decade - though it hardly needs to be said that the 2020 goal looks like a semi-fantastic long shot at best. And of course, more to the point, whatever happens it will be at least eight more years of pain and austerity. To earn the money, show that they're worth it, the Greek government has to "accelerate structural reforms" designed to strengthen the economy - or that is how the story goes - before any future funds will be released. That is, the troika representatives want to *impose* further public sector lay-offs and revenue cuts - more and more attacks on the Greek working class.

But the battle for Athens continues. As far as the European ministers are concerned, with the Greek government following in tow, any interest that was not significantly below the 4% mark would make the '2020 plan' all but impossible. Raising the stakes - or temperature - Gikas Hardouvelis, who heads the economics team advising Greek prime minister Lucas Papademos, said the EU would be "abdicating its responsibility" if it allowed the banks, insurers, hedge funds and 'vultures' to offset a 50% write-down of the country's debts by charging interest rates of around 4%. Enforcing such rates, he insisted, would be the same as kicking Greece out of the euro. Take that, creditors.

Now it is brinkmanship all round, but who will blink first? Dallara declared on January 22 that if Athens did not accept the outlines of the deal taking shape, then it would have no choice but to default on its debt mountain. In response, Austria's finance minister, Maria Fekter, retorted that that a crash would be "far more expensive" - for everyone. More aggressively, Jan Kees de Jager, the Dutch finance minister bluntly stated that, whilst a *voluntary* agreement on debt reduction was the preferable option, it was "not a precondition for us". In a further display of tensions, Michael Noonan, Ireland's finance minister, told the German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, that it had been a "fatal" mistake to involve the private creditors (in the form of the IIF) in the negotiations at all - the subsequent insecurity and volatility

had "driven the markets crazy". He said that markets would only calm when they were convinced that euro zone countries were making "serious efforts" to solve their debt problems.

Meanwhile, Standard and Poor's rating agency said that it was likely to put Greece into "selective default" once the protracted debt negotiations were concluded - if they ever are. Selective default is one notch above 'restricted default', the black mark reserved for when a borrower simply stops repaying their debts. Of course, this is just a repetition of S&P's position from last summer.

## 1930s moment

As well as the drama surrounding Greece's debt restructuring, euro zone ministers have been discussing efforts to enforce stricter budgetary rules for EU states as part of the new "fiscal compact". They are also debating how to finalise the structure of a permanent euro zone bailout fund in the shape of the European Stability Mechanism, which is due to replace the European Financial Stability Facility in July, and which will have a *theoretical* lending capacity of €500 billion. Yet the sober reality is, as we all know, that the fund has been seriously depleted by the bailing out of Ireland and Portugal, not to mention the monies used to provide part of a second, €130 billion, rescue for Greece. And that was before the EFSF, along with France and Austria, were downgraded one notch by S&P, thereby further effecting its ability to borrow money on the open market.

Alarmed by the dwindling resources available to the EFSF/ESM, Christine Lagarde, the IMF's director-general - alongside the Italian technocratic prime minister, Mario 'not so super' Monti - have ventured that the bailout ceiling should be raised, possibly up to €1 trillion, so as to ensure it has more than enough capacity to handle any potential problems in major economies such as Spain or Italy. A more than distinct likelihood, of course.

In an not-so implicit rebuff to Angela Merkel, Lagarde delivered a speech in Berlin on January 23 where she told Brussels to drop its opposition to a bigger bailout/insurance fund, in a bid to convince the world money markets that Europe has the necessary fire-power to protect vulnerable - or distressed - countries in the euro zone. The former French finance minister pointedly gave her warning in Berlin, where Merkel's conservative government has led opposition to providing bigger loans for the EU's bailout fund. She suggested "folding" the money left in the EFSF, into the new ESM and maintained that the ECB should "provide the necessary liquidity" so as to "stabilise" bank funding and sovereign debt markets.

More controversially, she called on European leaders to complement the "new fiscal compact" they agreed last month with some form of "financial risk-sharing" - like, for instance, a debt redemption fund or "euro zone bonds". An idea that is currently anathema for both the German government and the ECB. Additionally, she re-emphasised her opinion that "across-the-board, across-the-continent budgetary cuts will only add to recessionary pressures". Aggressive austerity drives, in other words, are self-defeating folly - strangling the opportunities for economic growth, a vital prerequisite for any government that wants to pay off its debts. Her words are not a little hypocritical though, given that the IMF - as in Greece - has been an enthusiastic champion of 'balancing the books' and 'labour reforms', all of which have helped to kill the patient.

But the same question keeps resurfacing: where exactly is the money going to come from to make financial institutions like the EFSF/ESM into a real and effective firefighting force? It is obvious to all that a 'credit event' of any significant proportion - a major bank collapse, for example, or maybe a second rescue for ailing Portugal - would blow apart the bailout mechanism, and perhaps the euro itself. The *Financial Times* reported that Merkel was ready to see the ceiling of the combined firewall raised to €750 billion in exchange for agreement on "tighter euro zone budget rules" - but the story was immediately denied by her chief spokesman. Nobody wants to pay the bills. Yet one day somebody has to.

## Warnings

Unfortunately for the dithering Eurocrats, the crisis will not go away. All the indications are that Europe is slipping into recession. Therefore we discover in a report published on January 21 by the accountants, Ernst and Young, that the number of UK firms that had issued profit warnings had leaped by more than 70% in the last three months of 2011. In total, UK listed companies issued 88 warnings in the fourth quarter, up from 51 in the third quarter - marking the highest quarterly jump for a decade. For the whole year, 206 companies issued 278 profit warnings.

Quite predictably, the sectors that saw the most warnings were retail and support services, as cash-strapped customers - suffering an average 8% fall in disposable income - curbed their spending. Hence some 39 retailers issued profit warnings in 2011, more than the whole of 2009 and 2010 combined. Whilst many firms were still "expanding profitably", explained Ernst and Young, many other "zombie companies" - which "remain moribund by debt" or trapped in "defunct business models" - were simply unable to "build value or gain momentum" in these challenging economic conditions. In conclusion, the accountancy group thought that the rise in profit warnings in the fourth quarter had started "an upward trend that could well continue into 2012".

Then in its half-yearly health check on the global economy published on January 18, the World Bank cautioned that the world had "entered a very difficult phase characterised by significant downside risks and fragility" - the art of understatement. Meaning that the bank lowered its forecast for global growth in 2012 from 3.4% to 2.5%, but said governments

should be preparing for a downturn as bad as that which followed the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 - get your hard hats ready. Furthermore, this time round an "escalation of the crisis would spare no-one" - rich and poor alike, developed and developing country growth rates could fall by as much or more than in 2008-09.

According to the bank, the euro zone was already in recession and was likely to contract by 0.3% this year. High-income countries would grow by 1.4% as a result of a recovery in Japan from a tsunami-affected 2011 and a slight pick-up in activity in the US. Even so, rich countries are expected to grow in 2012 at only half the 2.7% it expected in the last forecast, published in June 2011.

If anything, the IMF was even more hard-hitting or pessimistic in its own study released on January 24, believing that the world economy is "deeply into the danger zone". Slashing its growth forecasts for most major countries in 2012, it urged governments to adjust the "rhythm" of their austerity measures to avoid derailing economic recovery - stop cutting your own throat. The IMF expects euro zone GDP to fall 0.5% during 2012, a large downgrade from the 1.1% growth it was originally predicting in September. And world growth prospects were downgraded from 4.1% to 3.3%. As for Germany, it is forecast to grow 0.3% in 2012, down from 1.3% - and France is expected to show just 0.2% growth in 2012, down from 1.4%. However - a silver lining? - the IMF stands by its 1.8% growth prediction for the US, based on the "recent strong domestic data" on jobs and manufacturing.

In the overall judgement of the IMF, output in most major economies was "decelerating but not collapsing". It should be borne in mind, continued its statement, that the predictions and forecasts were the most *upbeat* available - given that they are "predicated on the assumption that in the euro area policy-makers intensify efforts to address the crisis" - a very *big* assumption indeed. Not pulling too many punches, the IMF warned that the US and other advanced economies were "susceptible to spill-overs" from a "potential intensification" of the euro zone crisis. Things could get a hell of a lot worse - one far from incredible scenario could see the euro zone plunge by a further 4% and global growth tumble from 3.3% to merely 1.3%.

Naturally, the UK was not let off the hook by the IMF - it is now set to grow by just 0.6%, a sharp fall from the earlier 1.6% estimate. This is similar, of course, to the 0.7% pencilled in by the independent Office of Budget Responsibility last November. But the picture got even less rosy on January 25, when the Office of National Statistics published its latest update on the UK economy. We find out that economic activity shrank by 0.2% in the last three months of last year - a marked decline from the third quarter of 2011, when GDP expanded by 0.6%.

The UK economy - like the European economy - is sluggish and may well grind to a halt, even go into reverse at some stage. What glorious achievements have been produced by 'book balancing' and 'belt tightening' - steeply rising unemployment, poverty, widening inequality and a government debt of £1 trillion ●

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## EDUCATION

# Left goes back to school

Michael Copestake reports on the CPGB's Marxist political economy weekend event

As the present crisis of capitalism rolls relentlessly into its fourth year, there is still no sign of the ostensibly revolutionary left taking political advantage of this situation. Across Europe social democratic governments have been given the electoral boot and the left has not benefited at all in terms of masses of new recruits determined to fight for socialism in the belly of an obviously malfunctioning capitalism.

There was unprecedented public sympathy for the striking workers on November 30 and even papers such as the *Financial Times* feel compelled to fill their pages with systematic apologia for capitalism in spite of the utter absence of any prospect of working class power. For its part in the struggle the revolutionary left in its larger organisations such as the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party have a 'no to all cuts' line as a defensive shield, on the one hand, and the useless rubber sword of 'economistic, Keynesian-style programmes (sometimes dressed up as being 'transitional'), on the other. It is against this background that the CPGB organised a school held over the weekend of January 21-22 at the University of London Union on the 'Fundamentals of political economy', to which the left clearly must return.

The school itself was an unqualified success, with just over 70 attending over the weekend. The first session was led by comrade Moshé Machover - socialist, mathematician and philosopher - on his and Emmanuel Farjoun's interpretation of the labour theory of value, the foundation of Marxist political economy. This session was perhaps the most theoretically 'heavy' of the weekend and less algebraically minded comrades may have struggled with some of the equations drawn on the white board by Machover (despite his own dead-pan assurances that they were "childishly simple"), but overall his argument was clear, precise and comprehensible even to those such as the present writer.

The essence of his position was that Marx's "prices of production" introduced in volume 3 of *Capital* do not work as a method for directly comprehending the connection between the price of a commodity and its value, its socially necessary labour content. Such a method could work only in a system of perfect equilibrium, which also remained completely static. Capitalism is, of course, a dynamic system, where innovation, competition and so on constantly work to redefine the value of any given commodity. Thus one finds that there cannot be a direct relationship between prices and values.

However, comrade Machover stated that his version of the labour theory of value was precisely to accept that there can be no exact equilibrium in capitalism and yet there can still be a very strong relationship between values and prices. Comparing the individual values produced under capitalism to molecules in a cloud of gas, he explained that, just as the molecules in the gas cloud do not all move at the same speed, neither do they go flying off all over the place and become separate. This is because the speeds of the individual gas molecules are spread across a certain mathematical distribution, with upper and lower limits around an average, giving the cloud a



**Moshé Machover: algebra of revolution**

dynamic equilibrium, a coherence, as opposed to a static equilibrium or rapid disaggregation. In Machover's and Farjoun's analogy the individual gas molecules represent the individual values produced by competing capitals under capitalism - a system of dynamic equilibrium, with upper and lower bounds of an average, around which values and prices will fluctuate, whilst retaining a strong statistical relationship with each other at the global level.

This was perhaps the most demanding session - as reflected in the debate and questions which followed. Questions included whether or not the 'temporal single-system interpretation' of the volumes of *Capital*, a school associated with Andrew Kliman, may resolve the problems in Marx's theory in a more 'orthodox' way. Other comrades asked about the nature of commodities which are supposed to have exchanged 'at their labour value' in pre-capitalist social formations, about how the theory deals with the differing organic compositions of capital and the formation of a general rate of profit, as well as about simpler questions, such as the nature of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour under capitalism and the difference between labour and labour-power. In short a session of tremendous value, if you'll excuse the pun, to either the beginner or the expert in political economy.

### Capital and money

Editor of *Critique* and Marxist political-economist Hillel Ticktin gave an account of the power of money and its various semi-developed forms through history until it could blossom as full capitalist money. The present crisis, he contended, is characterised by an excess of money in the possession of the capitalist class which cannot function as capital due to a lack of productive outlets for investment - a form of stagnation which is apparent alongside the seemingly contradictory phenomenon of record profits for some firms.

As always, the angrier comrade Ticktin gets about capitalism, the better speaker he becomes and the second half of his presentation and his responses to the debate were undoubtedly the highlight of his session after a somewhat hesitant start. In response to questions about China as a potential new hegemonic state, Ticktin ruled out a major inter-imperialist war occurring in the near future due to its weakness and social instability, though some comrades believed that the increasing tensions around Iran could trigger something

along these lines. Comrade Ticktin's optimism that, even if there were a major war, the capitalists would refrain from the use of nuclear weapons, was also criticised by some.

Werner Bonefeld, radical academic and co-founder of the 'Open Marxism' school, gave an illuminating talk on the nature of the bourgeois state and its place in liberal political thought. Bonefeld began with Adam Smith's thoughts on the state, seeing it as a strong interventionist body against capital when it became monopolistic, and labour when it became rebellious.

The origins of neoliberalism as a doctrine can be traced to 1920s Germany and the 'ordo-liberals' - the pioneering neoliberals who went on to interest Hayek and others, and first theorised the strong state and the free market as the solution to the generalised social crisis and the threat of working class power that engulfed Germany during that period.

On the one hand, this can take the form of the withdrawal of services previously provided by the state - for example, as part of the Conservatives' 'Big Society' under the banner of 'freedom', 'entrepreneurship' and so on; and the encouragement of 'self-reliance', as opposed to collectivism - even the peculiar 'collectivism' of the capitalist state. On the other hand, it is judicious for the capitalists to actually integrate workers into the state/market with mortgage debt, small-scale share ownership, etc. This is the capitalist 'citizen' who is given a stake of some sort in order to prevent them from becoming dangerous 'proletarians' who have nothing and may seek to self-organise or make demands on the state. Bonefeld concluded that we must think about politics and our tasks in a way that is not bound up with the logic of the system if we are to avoid becoming part of it - categories such as 'the working class' and 'state power' are those of capitalism itself, he said.

### Keynesianism

The last words of the weekend were left to the CPGB's own Mike Macnair on the subject of Keynesianism. Comrade Macnair modestly noted that he was giving this presentation at the request of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and not because he was an expert of Keynes - he confessed that *The general theory of employment, interest and money* had made for pretty dismal Christmas reading. But he need not have worried.

Comrade Macnair began by noting that the left, from Labour to the SWP, was advocating Keynesianism of one sort or another. Instead of seeing Keynesianism as an alternative to capitalism, which it most certainly is not, or as an effective palliative for capitalist ills, which it probably is not, the left needs to develop new ways of thinking about politics and its project for society that do not tie us to capitalism's own premises. Keynesianism definitely does not fit this bill.

Keynesian demands are nationalist by their very nature, as their implementation is predicated on the relative economic success of one nation-state against others on the world market. This creates an obstacle to the independent political organisation of the working class and its action internationally. Alternatives to capitalism, said Macnair, are only viable insofar as they reflect the real extent of the division of labour in the world economy - for example, large-scale worker cooperative federations

organised *politically* would be required in order to prevent them lapsing back into mere capitalist competition. The same reasoning applies to the CPGB's demands for Europe-wide trade unions, a Communist Party of the EU and so on.

Aiming to slaughter one sacred cow of parts of the left, the comrade questioned whether Keynesianism was even responsible for the so-called 'golden age' of the welfare state, full employment and so on in the two decades after World War II in parts of Europe and North America. Answering in the negative, he listed instead the end of the British empire and the freeing of a world economy ripe for American expansion and a new boom period; the bourgeoisie's fear of its populations turning socialist; the presence of the Red Army deep within Europe; and the mass 'official communist' parties to be found in most countries.

So what sort of measures should Marxists be demanding, if not Keynesianism? Comrade Macnair's own suggestions were that Marxists can fight for the defence of existing levels of state benefits and wages. We can demand the shortening of the working day, we can make demands for health and safety legislation, we can make demands on how the existing state budget is collected/allocated in addition to our political demands. But we do so not because we think the winning of such demands would resolve the crisis. We do so because they are what the working class needs and what a workers' government would implement in the short term.

The debate around Keynesianism and Marxism was probably the liveliest of the weekend, given how close it is to the hearts of liberals, social democrats and even parts of the 'revolutionary' left everywhere. Comrades from the floor brought up

the experience of the Allende and Mitterand governments in Chile and France respectively as examples of Keynesian-type disasters similar to what parts of the left advocate today. Moshé Machover made the point that even to the extent that Keynesianism had worked in the developed countries post-war, it required bigger and bigger doses every time until it failed and blew up. Other comrades brought up the repudiation of Keynesianism by the Callaghan government, which took the first steps down the road of monetarism in Britain. Other comrades wondered if, in a crisis such as the current one, all that is feasible is to call for outright revolution - a suggestion rejected strongly by others.

All in all, the weekend school was a comradely, interesting, diverse and even humorous event, in which Marxists and lefts were free to debate and exchange views on some of the most fundamental elements of our political economy - elements which are decisive in our understanding of and approach to capitalism and the way we go about creating a new society. An example of open debate between contending ideas, the school stands distinctly apart from many left educational events, where dissenting views - particularly those voiced from the left - are unwelcome and 'high theory' is left to the party 'experts'.

The video files from the school will shortly be available on the internet, allowing a wider audience to access these ideas - hopefully the school took a small, but important step towards rehabilitating Marxism and combating the political degeneration of the left. The CPGB intends to organise more of the same - a highlight of 2012 is sure to be our annual Communist University, a week-long educational event to be held from August 20-26, to which all are welcome ●

## Fighting fund

# Supplementary praise

The publication last week of our four-page supplement has provided us with some plaudits. One or two comrades were so impressed that they decided to do their bit to ensure there will be more of the same in the near future.

We had 20,972 online readers last week and five of them decided to donate to our fighting fund. Pride of place goes to comrade GT, who sent me a cheque for £50 as "a contribution from a reader of the web edition". Then there was the £30 from EJ (to tell you the truth, he transferred this by PayPal in the first part of the month, but somehow I missed him out last week). Then there were £10 donations from comrades TK, LP and DF. "Wow, what an article!" was DF's response to the supplement.

Added to this was the £265 received in standing orders. Following the success of our campaign to increase the number of SO donors last year, this method

now provides the bulk of our fighting fund income. But we could still do with more: the advantage for us is that provides us with a base of regular, reliable cash; while you have a hassle-free, guilt-free and relatively affordable way of helping out. If you fancy joining our growing band of SO donors, you're more than welcome!

Taking into account the extra £10 from PB added to her subscription, we received £385 last week. That takes our total to £1,050, but, don't forget, our monthly target is now £1,500 and there are only five days left until the end of January. It would be a pity to start 2012 on a sour note, but I'm sure that won't happen - over to you, comrades: we need £450 by 12 noon on February 1.

**Robbie Rix**

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



## THE LEFT

# Overcoming despair

Paul B Smith concludes his three-part article on the challenge of class-consciousness

Hillel Ticktin argues that there are four reasons that combine to produce a contemporary atmosphere of despair. These are: firstly, the difficulty of understanding modern political economy; secondly, the effects of the concessions made through the welfare state; thirdly, fear of bourgeois revenge; and, finally, the real history of Stalinism.<sup>1</sup> I have addressed the last three of these in the first two parts of this article.<sup>2</sup> The first, however, I have only briefly mentioned.

Understanding capitalism is difficult for a variety of reasons. According to Ticktin, the chief reason is that capitalism is in decline and has resorted to forms that compromise and appear to threaten the system itself. Thus the last century saw wars, imperialism, fascism, authoritarian rule and welfare states that interfered with the process of capital accumulation. Capitalists have tolerated them as least worst options to the alternative of socialism. What arose and continues today is the appearance of rigid conflicts between the market and bureaucratic forms of administration, the market and government regulation, and the market and systems of welfare. Private enterprise has been seen as efficient and bureaucracy as inefficient. The opposite has also been maintained. War, imperialism and the welfare state are seen as signs of strength of the system rather than weaknesses. Marx's analysis of capitalism is therefore dismissed as outdated and irrelevant.

Another reason is that, since the October revolution in 1917, capitalism has entered a transitional period within which subjective changes have been as influential as objective changes. In the first part I mentioned the doctrine of socialism in one country. Ticktin recalls the vast number of political parties that have called themselves 'socialist'; the masses of books and pamphlets that have addressed the overthrow of capitalism; the numerous nationalist uprisings that have taken place in the name of socialism and the fact that none of this effort brought socialism any nearer.

Moreover, there has been a vast effort on the left to try and prove that there was something positive about the former Soviet Union, and on the right to prove that if workers try to improve their conditions of existence they will create something as dreadful and horrible. None of this effort has shed light on the real nature of the regime - a society neither capitalist nor socialist in form. However, it has served to obscure an understanding of the present and any clear perspective on the nature of what a planned, classless alternative to capitalism would look like in the future.

It is not easy for class-conscious workers to disentangle this mess. Moreover, it seems that intellectuals are not around to help them in the task. Apart from a few maverick academics, there are few intellectuals who have the resources and freedom to theorise what Ticktin states are the interrelations between the laws of capitalism, the laws of its decline and the laws of its transition.

An example of a popular public intellectual 'out' as a Marxist is Terry Eagleton. He polemicalises in favour of a Stalinised version of Marxism that neglects political economy and Marx's development of the labour theory of value.<sup>3</sup> Most academics that have made a career out of Marx are either anti-socialist or ambivalent - supporting a social democratic interpretation.



Learn from the past

This argues for market socialism or some combination of market and non-market forms. It thereby compounds workers' confusion and sense of powerlessness.

According to Ticktin, a combination of the four reasons he mentions causes workers to look for any form of temporary respite from an all-pervading atmosphere of despair. He mentions hedonistic forms of consumerism, authoritarianism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, green politics and the politics of identity, amongst others. For example, a temporary sense of hope in ending racism occurred when the apartheid system came to an end in South Africa. Despair overwhelmed hope after a majority government introduced policies that doubled the unemployment rate for black South Africans. Hope may have arisen in a strong leader such as Putin in Russia who offered stability and security, only to be deflated when he launched a destabilising war against Georgia. Hope also arose in the Middle East when Islamist parties came to power with policies guided by the principle of social justice. It disappeared when rates of poverty increased and corruption flourished.

Hope grows amongst young workers in imperial countries who may go into debt to buy a package holiday abroad. They look forward to partying and having carefree sex. It falls back into despair when one of them is hospitalised - a victim of alcohol-related violence - or another dies of alcohol poisoning. Hope flourishes amongst activists who think they can change government policy through direct action. Despair takes over when the government arrests or tortures their comrades.

The most desperate turn to rioting, attempting to organise armed

uprisings or crazy actions such as last year's massacre of youths in Norway. The desperate are also attracted to religions. These organise communal expressions of alienation through the repetitive acts of prayer and worship. Organised religions go, in some way, to contradict the feelings of isolation the atomised worker experiences. Ideologically they offer no hope for the present. They cultivate the expectation or anticipation of hope in the future - either after death or in some cataclysmic event, within which the faithful few will be saved.

Religious ideas encourage both an apolitical subordination to authority and - given a commitment to supporting the struggles of the oppressed - an excuse for martyrdom, self-immolation and posthumous glory. Many forms of nationalism use religion as a means of generating cross-class, communal allegiances. Secular forms of nationalism abandoned support for the struggles of the workers whom imperialism continues to oppress. This created a political vacuum which religious fundamentalists filled - with the armed struggle, local wars and sectarian killings.

## Immiseration

Marx argued in *Capital* that there was a relationship between the length of time that capital continues to accumulate and an overall worsening in the quality of life workers experience. He stated that the law that equilibrates the relative surplus population established an accumulation of misery amongst workers irrespective of whether their payment was high or low. The relative surplus population refers to those workers whose labour-power is useless to the process of capital accumulation because of age, disability, ill health, prolonged

unemployment or addiction. It also refers to a layer of workers that move in and out of the surplus population, competing for whatever work is available at whatever price employers are prepared to offer. This layer he calls the industrial reserve army of labour. The relative surplus population functions to control the level of wages of every worker, skilled or unskilled. It is a necessary feature of a mature capitalism and becomes even more visible during crises and as capitalism declines.

According to Marx, the accumulation of misery has an objective cause. This is the regulation of the process of capital accumulation as a whole. It also has subjective effects. Marx mentions overwork, the sense of no freedom, ignorance, brutality and mental degradation. If Marx meant by "mental degradation" that it would become increasingly difficult for workers to act in a class-conscious way towards each other, then it is an interesting hypothesis that workers' intellectual and emotional capabilities are more limited now than in the 19th century.

Fear and despair limit workers' intellectual and emotional capabilities by making them preoccupied with their distress. In other words, despite higher rates of pay, workers feel increasingly miserable. They are vulnerable to being drawn into the mental health system of oppression. According to the World Health Organisation, one in every four people worldwide develops one or more mental disorders in her or his lifetime. Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes or heart disease.

Workers feel they are unsafe with other workers, powerless to improve their own position and hopeless when they think of the condition the world is in. Victims of various forms of

oppression, they have two choices. The first is to understand the way in which these oppressions serve to prevent them from uniting with other workers worldwide to liberate themselves and humanity as a whole.

The second is to assert their intellectual, moral or cultural superiority over other workers more oppressed than themselves, hoping that, in doing so, they will be able to preserve privileges granted to them historically. Thus male workers choose to oppress female workers; white workers oppress black; skilled workers the unskilled; the employed the unemployed; and workers of one religion, nationality or culture choose to oppress workers of another religion, nationality or culture.

The causes of these oppressions - and the limits they impose on workers' intellectual and emotional capabilities - are the different political and economic responses the capitalist class has made to the class struggle. In the 19th century, as workers became more class-conscious, they posed a threat to the continued process of accumulation. The capitalist class turned to imperialism as a means of a continued source of accumulation, division and control.

In the 20th century, there was a global challenge to the system as a whole with the October revolution. The capitalist class turned to fascism, social democracy and world war to ensure the system survived the threat of its potential overthrow. The defeat of the Russian Revolution was also marked by the rise of Stalinism. This served to stabilise the global system in the post-war period of reconstruction and growth through the incorporation of trade unions, nationalisation, full employment and the welfare state. Increased workers' militancy and the collapse of Stalinism led the capitalist class to turn to finance capital, privatisation, mass unemployment and cuts in social spending. Presently the capitalist class is divided on how best to manage a prolonged depression. It will therefore resort increasingly to tolerating - if not actively encouraging - fear and despair, division and oppression amongst workers.

## Class-consciousness

Ticktin writes that the working class cannot replace the capitalist class simply by hoping for a failure of the system or as the automatic result of war or a depression. Workers must be aware that socialism is a new world system and "not just be disgruntled or desperate" (p14). The concept of socialism needs to be widely accepted both in theory and in practice. 'In practice' means that workers are involved in establishing forms of control from below and 'in theory' entails "a widespread education in the nature of the capitalist system and its successor, socialism".

He concludes that there are two features necessary for workers to become a class. First, there is a need for a theory to understand the present. The second is an organisational form to provide workers with the ability to take power. He maintains that all the forms of workers' self-organisation, from trade unions to workers' councils, have been corrupted and absorbed into the system so far. There needs to be "a party or parties of the working class" to ensure that the educational and organisational work are present. Class-consciousness does not simply emerge from an elite, but must be the



property of ordinary people. Struggles need to be mounted out of which workers can learn, and “a broad layer of intellectuals” can be created, who can expand the knowledge workers need to take power and refute the propaganda of the established order.

It does not follow from this that he thinks that a party or parties of the working class already exist. His analysis as a whole implies that he thinks there are barriers inhibiting the creation of a Marxist party or parties. As I have argued, workers associate party-building with the desperation of the left. This has led some members of revolutionary Marxist groups to act impatiently in relation to workers and foster false hopes in an imminent socialist revolution. It has led others to adapt to Stalinism and trade union consciousness - supporting nationalism and nationalisation as first stages in a revolution that inevitably never arrives.

Although there is a layer of academics whose consciousness has been formed for good or ill by involvement in these groups - Terry Eagleton is one such example - intellectuals have tended to avoid them. This is not just out of a fear that engagement might affect their careers detrimentally, but because it has been difficult to participate in a useful exchange of ideas with their members. I mentioned the habits of accusation, denunciation, implied threat and betrayal above. These have made individuals fearful of expressing criticisms or differences of opinion.

## Immediate tasks

Ticktin identifies three tasks necessary for class-consciousness to come into being. These are the development of a theory of the present. This would contradict the propaganda of the established order. Secondly, there is the organisation of forms of control from below. These would need to be designed to resist corruption and being absorbed into the system. The third is the education of workers into the nature of capitalism and socialism as its alternative.

None of these tasks are prioritised, but Ticktin assumes that if a Marxist party or parties came into being they would undertake all three. In the absence of a party or parties, it seems that the first task will fall on intellectuals within or outwith the existing groups. Ticktin states that in order for workers to overcome the barrier of understanding the complexity of the present they need to be able to make sense of the interaction of laws of capitalism, the laws of its decline and the laws of its transition. However, I do not know of anyone working on this apart from Ticktin himself. I imagine that the work required in this area will take the concentrated effort of motivated intellectuals for some time outwith the confines of a propagandist group (and probably a university setting). However, I may be wrong and work on capitalism, decline and transition could become a priority of a particular organised group for a short period of time.

Ticktin also mentions that Marxists have not discussed the circumstances that enable workers to become a class and take power. I conceive this as a project of research and development with the potential to take on more of a collective character. It should have a resonance within a left inspired by the achievements of the Bolshevik revolution and interested in learning from the past. However, this would need to be a theoretical as well as a historical project. The dangers are that it would degenerate into mindless point-scoring about what happened from 1917-1924 in Russia. To avoid this, perhaps Marxists could initiate a discussion based on their understanding of capitalism in the present. This could engage critically

with Ticktin’s analysis of decline, as well as with the line agreed by the leadership of their particular group.

I understand the organisation of forms of control from below broadly to include workplace, community, student and grassroots global struggles (including international movements of solidarity with workers in struggle). Moreover, the fact that trade unions and workers’ councils have been incorporated and absorbed into the system does not imply that in all circumstances they will be in the future. Trade unions and workers’ councils may come into being led by Marxists or principled class-struggle anarchists.

The question arises of the nature of Marxists’ involvement with these organisations. If they are already corrupted and incorporated, then they might decide it is not safe to be involved or a waste of time. On the other hand, if workers’ leaders have an understanding of the possibility of socialism as a global system (and do not confuse this goal with Stalinism or social democracy), incorporation and corruption are less likely. This requires that Marxists who choose to get involved in struggles support leaders consistently and reject the practice of parachuting in and out of disputes and campaigns favoured by some groups.

Marxists can assume that workers are the most knowledgeable people when it comes to organising from below. Workers are likely to be more experienced than intellectuals. They do not need to be told how to get things right. The nature of support therefore requires careful thought and discussion. It could be moral, political, educational or intellectual. It may be listening to leaders’ thinking on how to retain and generalise control from below or on how to develop direct and mandatory forms of democracy. It may be lecturing about capitalism and socialism within a structured setting derived from best teaching and learning practice. There are many exciting opportunities here to pool experience on what has worked in the past and might work in the future.

Conversely, Marxists’ involvement in workers’ organisations may need to wait until a culture of teaching and learning has established itself elsewhere. As I have noted previously, there is a growth of interest in studying Marx outwith both leftwing groups and institutions that instruct formally. There are now a few reading groups studying *Capital* in England. This movement is to be expected during a prolonged crisis and has been assisted by the publication of David Harvey’s online lectures on *Capital* and his books.

## Marxist education

I understand that these study groups are not led by members or previous members of socialist groups. In fact most leftwing groups appear to have abandoned the study of *Capital* and appear to resist suggestions that this is an essential activity for anyone who wants to understand the nature of capitalism and socialism. One of the leftwing arguments against studying *Capital* is that it has nothing to say about socialism. On the contrary, there are many insights into the society of the future within the book. This argument is therefore based on ignorance of the text.

A further argument is that the book has lots to say about the way capitalism was in the 19th century but is irrelevant to an understanding of the way capitalism is in the 21st century. This is an argument about identity and difference. During the cold war, it was much easier to argue that capitalism was not a political and economic system within which the social surplus is derived from the use of labour-power within commodity form. It seemed that a bureaucratic

elite could extract a surplus product from alienated workers without producing value - that the exchange of labour-power for a wage was no longer essential to the distribution of the surplus. It seemed that a new form of class society was emerging, based on bureaucratic controls over labour-power.

However, the point remains that capitalism now is not exactly the same as it was. The Marxist agrees with this point. Marx theorised a mature form of capitalism. Today’s capitalism is in decline. The law of value does not operate in the same way as it did. If workers are to understand the law of value and its decline, they need to appropriate concepts found in *Capital*, such as abstract labour and commodity fetishism, for themselves.

Bourgeois economics has none of these concepts. It assumes that capitalism is natural and eternal. It has no origin, development or termination - except one that coincides with species extinction. It is therefore useless for understanding the ways in which capitalism is the same as it was 150 years ago and how it differs from this now. Ignoring the importance of workers’ education in political economy therefore abandons workers to commodity fetishism and bourgeois intellectual influence.

The most convincing argument against prioritising the education of workers in political economy is that study only arms them intellectually. Organising workers and supporting them to develop policies are more important activities than study. Revolutionary political action takes a higher priority than intellectual activity. It is more important to change the world than to interpret it.

This argument implies breaking Marx into two. It suggests two separate and unrelated stages in Marx’s intellectual and political development. The first is the revolutionary socialist Marx of the *Communist manifesto* and subsequent political writings. The second is the social scientific Marx of *Capital*. In reality, there was no such separation. Marx’s political economy was at the heart of his revolutionary socialist politics (and the latter was at the heart of his political economy). There is no reason - other than the stultifying legacy of Stalinism - why revolutionary socialists today cannot aspire to be competent political economists (nor political economists revolutionaries).

Moreover, it is impossible to support workers to participate in formulating policies without encouraging them to study. For every democratically organised group with a programme or policy document there will be a process of study and discussion. If this process is inhibited or repressed, the group will become undemocratic. If Marxists have written these documents they will embody the best of their understanding of the relationship between the achievement of the socialist goal and the means of achieving it.

The literature of a Marxist group presupposes not only that workers are capable of understanding concepts and categories derived from Marx, but also that workers can acquire such an understanding if they deny they have this capability. Using policy or programmatic documents for teaching and learning can therefore be a means of educating workers in political economy - in helping them to conceptualise and use Marxist ideas to theorise capitalism and socialism. It should interest them in studying further and in greater depth. It should open up a range of organised opportunities that can develop the intellectual needs of workers attracted to a particular party or group. Study groups, classes, lectures and courses come into play as means both of introducing workers to the need to organise as Marxists, but also as a place where they can

evaluate critically or challenge the superficiality or depth of the thinking of their elected leaders.

Finally, workers’ knowledge of political economy is essential to the first phase of socialism after a proletarian seizure of power. This phase requires measures that make sure the economy remains in control of the ordinary worker. One of these is that workers have a basic command of political economy. Without this, a strong state that crushes those involved with value could transfer exclusive control of the surplus product from the capitalist class to a bureaucratic or military elite. Without an education in political economy, workers would be unable to participate in debates on the economy and how to realise the transition from market to planned social relations. They would be politically and intellectually excluded from democratic decision-making.

## Places of safety

I noted in the first part of this series that Naomi Klein’s idea of a shock doctrine ignores the influence of the Soviet Union on the inculcation of terror and fear within a population. Her analysis starts with research into the disorienting effects of sensory deprivation on students in 1950s America.<sup>4</sup> It could however, have started with the similar experiences of the victims of Stalin’s purges in the 1930s. The secret police of many regimes have trained in these methods throughout the world. The terror, fear and despair of the Soviet population served to atomise workers so completely that it was impossible for them to organise against their oppression for over 50 years. It was a shock with longer-lasting consequences than anything that happened in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s or more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I also mentioned the effects this shock had on the organised left throughout the world. Anyone critical of the former Soviet Union from the left might be accused of being an agent of imperialism or of assisting the project of imperialist domination. Internal to the USSR, leftwing critics were exterminated. This created an atmosphere of fear and distrust. It served to prevent anti-Stalinists from developing a theory of Stalinism. The role Stalinism played in controlling workers during the cold war became opaque, obscure and confused. Klein, for example, makes no connection between the shock that Stalinism had on the left and its powerlessness when faced with the onslaught of the ideas and interests of finance capital from the 1970s to the present.

Is the left still in a state of shock? And does this explain the non-threatening nature of contemporary organised resistance to governments’ austerity regimes? Certainly, the left is weak. It has no popular influence or intellectual credibility. If it had, then the ruling class would be more united in opposition to it. It would be less tolerant of division within its own ranks. It would be more inclined to resort to terror and repression.

The experience of the terror of Stalinism was that there was an absolute absence of safety. Escape was impossible. Mutual communication and independent self-organisation were inconceivable. In the absence of a market, people were dependent upon each other for security, privilege and preferment. Even the ruling elite was atomised and a member could lose position or disappear from view as quickly as she or he had achieved recognition or prominence. There were no places of safety.

The terror experienced by the left in the period covered by Klein has been different in its intensity, scope and efficiency. Those with money or contacts were able to escape abroad. Capital’s reliance on economic rather

than political forms of atomisation means that the secret police of military regimes are less well informed and integrated within the population as a whole. This enables limited forms of mutual communication and self-organisation to arise relatively quickly to form the basis of mass collective resistance and opposition. There are places of safety within which people could organise underground.

Research into teaching and learning has shown that people learn best when they are in a safe environment. As I have argued in this article, capitalism is an unsafe environment for workers. Klein’s review of contemporary events is evidence that a declining capitalism intensifies the levels of unsafety within the population. If a new Marxist culture is to come into being, then the question of safety arises. Without some guarantee of a safe environment, workers will find it difficult to learn what they need to find out about capitalism and socialism.

When repression intensifies, it is important that Marxists try to avoid - if possible - disappearing, along with other people deemed a threat to capitalism. It is important therefore to organise for a range of places of safety prior to this possibility. Marxists need a wide range of non-Marxist contacts and allies both at home and abroad. Given the extent of state surveillance and penetration, it would be careless to rely exclusively on members of their own group for protection.

Within the organised left, a starting point might be to address the lack of safety that exists between leftists. This manifests itself in a fear of criticism. Under Stalinism, criticism took the form of *ad hominem* attacks, leading to humiliation, exclusion or much worse. Fear of criticism led to dishonest relationships based on favours and flattery, acquiescence to the wishes of the most aggressive individual, an inability to think, and mindless recitals of the party line. The creation of places of safety, within which thinkers and writers can express their ideas free from fear, is therefore essential to the emergence of class-consciousness and a democratic form of class collectivity.

## Conclusion

The challenge of class-consciousness is a collective one. Its immediate aim is to overcome the subjective barriers of fear and despair. It will be inspired by the courage and clarity of individuals’ goals for freedom. These individuals will be intellectuals and workers organised around a Marxist understanding of capitalism and socialism. Some of these individuals will prioritise theoretical work. Others will prioritise educational and organisational work. A joint project implies that at some stage a Marxist political party (or a variety of parties) will form nationally and globally.

These parties will be coordinated worldwide in order to counter all forms of propaganda for the established order. They will interact with and support the building of workers’ forms of control over production, distribution and consumption from below. Workers worldwide will then be in a position to contemplate the seizure of power and the abolition of the system of generalised commodity production we call capitalism. Workers will also create the conditions for the establishment of a democratically planned, classless, global society - thus realising their goals for self-emancipation and the emancipation of humanity as a whole ●

**teachingandlearning**

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## Notes

1. H Ticktin, ‘Political consciousness and its conditions at the present time’ *Critique* Vol 34, No1, pp9-26.
2. ‘The politics of fear and despair’, January 12; ‘Impediments to consciousness’, January 19.
3. See T Eagleton *Why Marx was right* Yale 2011.
4. N Klein *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism* London 2007.



**SWP**

# Muddle, passivity, conformity

The SWP's annual conference was a big let-down following the positive ideas put forward in the final pre-conference internal bulletin. **Peter Manson** reports

Ten days after the Socialist Workers Party's January 6-8 annual conference, the official record of the decisions taken landed in SWP comrades' email inboxes.

According to national secretary Charlie Kimber, this report provides members with "a summary of the debates, commissions and motions" (*Post-conference Bulletin* January 2012). But it does no such thing. It lists all conference decisions, including the final version of motions and 'commissions' after any amendments, but it says not a word about the "debates". So SWP members are none the wiser about points of contention, about arguments for and against; nor are they informed whether there was any opposition at all to any of the leadership's proposals, or whether any votes were close.

The truth is that, as usual, all the decisions were either unanimous or overwhelmingly carried. There is, of course, nothing wrong with that in and of itself. But the problem is that in the SWP only such an outcome is considered acceptable by the leadership. Views that seriously challenge those of the central committee are strongly discouraged and in practice blocked. Any comrade known to oppose the CC's trajectory will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to be elected to conference as a delegate. The leadership simply instructs local officials to mobilise against such comrades.

So, for example, when in 2009 the CC faced opposition from the SWP's deposed leader, John Rees, it went all-out to ensure that as few supporters as possible of comrade Rees's Left Platform were delegates. In that case it was unable to keep them out altogether, since Rees supporters actually controlled a handful of branches.

Any serious organisation seeking to win the trust of the working class would behave in a diametrically opposite way. It would positively encourage comrades to develop their own critique in order to be able to rectify mistakes, reject opportunist errors and in general *strengthen* the organisation's policy and approach. It would strive to ensure that dissenting individual comrades or groups of comrades were able to put their minority views before the membership, especially at conference. Not in the SWP, where opposition to the leadership, or even an aspect of its politics, is regarded almost as treason.

Rank-and-file members may not even meet up outside official SWP structures to exchange experiences of their activity or discuss a common approach. To do so would risk being accused of 'factionalism' - factions are completely banned outside the three-month period before annual conference. The CC is the only permitted permanent faction. In other words, the SWP does not even practise the basic democracy that it demands of the bourgeois state. It does not permit freedom of association or freedom of expression.

This results in conferences that are little more than rallies. For instance, you might think that an enthusiastic and partisan membership organised in dozens of branches would throw up all sorts of contending ideas, leading to scores of motions and amendments on every conceivable subject. But the *Post-conference Bulletin* records just 13 motions (seven of them from the central committee itself), plus two 'commissions' (in effect the same as



**Led by same old slate**

CC motions). The membership is not provided with the text of the handful of amendments that were put forward - although those with sufficient patience can theoretically identify the two amendments put to CC motions or commissions by comparing the final version to the one published in the appropriate *Pre-conference Bulletin*.

## Motions

All but two of the 23 pages of motions in the official post-conference document are taken up by the nine lengthy submissions from the CC. A good deal of what is contained within them is out of date. For example, 'The centrality of November 30 - industrial perspectives' begins: "The public sector general strike planned for November 30 will be the largest strike this country has seen since 1926."

What is the point in putting such long, detailed and time-specific analyses to conference for approval? Why not try to identify the principles and points of potential disagreement in a motion of a couple of paragraphs? As I say, only two (minor and non-controversial) amendments were moved to these motions/commissions.

The six successful motions that came from below were equally uncontroversial - at least in the sense that neither the CC nor anyone else was opposed to them (certainly not those that were amended by the CC). It was agreed that branches should produce more leaflets for workplaces instead of relying on the leadership

to supply them; that there should be a debate within the SWP about new possible uses of the internet; and that the SWP should also launch an internal debate on the details of its precise position before and during a Scottish independence referendum (as opposed to its support for a 'yes' vote, which was agreed last year).

A motion from Manchester district and others called for *Socialist Worker* to "frequently carry" features on the theme, "debates in the movement". It went on: "When such debates are also reflected within the party and united action is not immediately required on the issue, the features can also be used to air debates between SWP comrades ..." This is an advance of sorts, but do not expect *Socialist Worker* to be transformed into a forum for controversy, with SWP leaders being challenged by the rank and file, or CC members arguing against each other. If the membership itself is not informed about internal differences, then it is hardly likely that the CC will suddenly go public on them.

The fifth successful motion, also moved by Manchester, called for the *Socialist Worker* column, 'What the Socialist Workers Party stands for', to be changed - although the new wording was agreed only after a CC amendment. The first sentence of the column previously read: "The workers create all the wealth under capitalism." This, as Manchester explained, quoting Karl Marx from 'Critique of the Gotha programme',

was completely wrong. *Wealth* ultimately derives from nature and it is added to by the labour of workers and other classes such as the petty bourgeoisie.

The CC-approved wording now reads: "Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit." I suppose you can say that at least this is not a crass blunder like the previous version, but it is not exactly accurate. It would have been correct to say that 'human labour creates all surplus value under capitalism', but the CC position was that an easily understood term like 'profit' should be used instead. The trouble is that profit and surplus value are not identical. For instance, if a commodity trader buys cheap and sells dear there is not necessarily any labour involved in the transactions that produced that particular profit.

The real problem for the SWP is that this 300-word column, which substitutes for a carefully considered programme, is just a mess. It contains just four sections: 'Revolution, not reform', 'There is no parliamentary road', 'Internationalism' and 'The revolutionary party'. What about immediate demands, democracy, socialism and the transition to communism, to name but a few obvious omissions?

This is even more clear when you look at the second part of Manchester's amendment - to insert: "We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference." Let me say first of all that, while a working class organisation should indeed have something to say about religion, it needs to be a lot more thought through than this. In Britain there is generally no problem with believers being able to practise their faith. But there is a problem with the privilege extended to one particular religious institution: the established church in England. If I was only allowed one sentence on the subject, I would call for secularism, equality between believers and non-believers, and separation of church and state.

However, leaving the inadequacy of the addition to one side, in which of the above sections is this new sentence inserted, do you think? You will find it under 'Internationalism', of course! You can see how this absurd situation came about. In this section there appears: "We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries. We oppose racism and imperialism." It must have seemed natural to add demands for women's, gay and now religious rights after this.

Let me repeat: this jumble results directly from the SWP's opportunist refusal to draw up a programme. The absence of such an essential document allows the CC to twist and turn as it pleases according to circumstances, without risk of being held to account for any breach of principles. First develop the programme and then summarise its essential features in a short column. The programme must come first.

## Democracy?

It is incredible that Manchester district, supported by its Rusholme branch, was the only SWP body other than the CC to propose any motions. It actually put forward four out of the six that came from below (the motion on leaflets was also from Manchester). The other two were put forward by individual comrades. So an organisation which claims over 7,000 members and scores of

branches, industrial fractions and districts can only muster six ideas for change? Something is very wrong, comrades. What happened to the many constructive ideas raised in *Pre-conference Bulletin* No3 (see 'Signs of an awakening' *Weekly Worker* December 22 2011)? How come they did not make it to conference floor?

The one motion I have not yet mentioned is the only unsuccessful one. Once again it was proposed by Manchester and it began: "One internal bulletin to which the CC and any comrade or group of comrades can contribute should be produced prior to each party council meeting." This is hardly asking the earth. According to the SWP constitution, party council "normally meets once a year", so the comrades were in effect requesting an increase in the number of discussion bulletins from three to four.

But, no, Alex Callinicos rose to oppose it. There is so much to be done and so little time to do it. The SWP must be a party of action, not a never-ending discussion forum. Debate must be concentrated in the period before conference, the organisation's decision-making body (in fact party council also "has power to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC"). And, in any case, there is nothing to stop any SWP body or individual raising pressing matters directly with the CC in between conferences.

The leadership's opposition to this extremely modest proposal clearly symbolises its determination to cling onto its uncontested power to run the organisation as its own private fiefdom. No democracy, please: we're SWP.

Talking of 'democracy', the CC itself was re-elected as a block using the notorious, 'take it or leave it' slate system. No alternative slate was proposed, so once again the existing members retained their places on the nod. However, the number of CC members was increased from 13 to 14 by the addition of "a trade union activist whose name has been withheld to protect them from their employer" (*Socialist Worker* January 14).

But the name of this individual is published in the *Post-conference Bulletin*, and was previously published in *Pre-conference Bulletin* No1. These bulletins are supposed to go out to all 7,000 "registered members" - ie, anyone who has filled in a membership application form within the last two years. So much for security.

SWP comrades really should consider the use of pseudonyms ●

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## Second edition: it's coming





## REVIEW

# Left Zionism exposed

Tikva Honig-Parnass **False prophets of peace: liberal Zionism and the struggle for Palestine**  
Haymarket Books, 2011, pp264, £14.99

**Z**ionism, the movement for an exclusivist Jewish state in Palestine, is today the last active project of colonisation. Its domination over the area from the Mediterranean to the Jordan is intertwined with the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinians. Not just the dispossession of those living in the West Bank and Gaza, but also that practised on the Palestinian citizens of Israel. It is a historical process that until this day ranges from institutional discrimination to blockades, land seizures and outright massacres.

Yet a great deal of Zionism's success in gaining legitimacy among western public opinion has historically stemmed from its ability to project a certain image abroad: that of a vulnerable liberal democracy with socialist leanings, in the midst of an Arab world ruled by authoritarian nationalist or religious dictatorships. This myth was carefully constructed, not by today's dominant right and far right, but by liberal Zionism in the form of the once hegemonic labour Zionist movement, which laid the infrastructure of Israel's legal system, including, among others, the law of return and the land laws. Despite being politically irrelevant today, its ideological premises have survived and constitute an essential part of Israel's political culture, as well as propaganda machine, otherwise known as *hasbarah*. They also form the backbone of Israeli academia; the role of left Zionist intellectuals has been instrumental in conferring legitimacy - at home and abroad - on a series of left Zionist policies, from the Oslo process to the rampant neoliberalism dominating the Israeli economy. More critically, these myths are also used to stifle, hijack and divert leftwing or even liberal criticism of Israeli policies, away from the increasingly successful BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) campaign and towards a watered-down discourse which views the conflict as being merely about peace between two symmetrical opponents.

This makes a reading of Tikva Honig-Parnass's new book all the more important. It is not only an academically brilliant work, backed up by a thorough description of contemporary left Zionist and post-Zionist discourse in Israel, but also an accessible and useful handbook for activists engaged in the struggle for Palestinian rights. Moreover, it is written by a former insider: Honig-Parnass, a radical sociologist and socialist activist, was actively involved with the Mapam, the most leftwing Zionist party, during the formative year of 1948, and also served as the party's Knesset secretary in the 50s before breaking with Zionism in the early 60s.

### 'Democratic'

For starters, Honig-Parnass points to the evident contradiction in Israel's self-definition as a 'Jewish and democratic' state, a definition coined by the labour Zionist movement and which has prevailed since then in the discourse of most progressive intellectuals and publicists. This definition postulates the concept of the 'Jewish majority' as a condition for preserving the 'Jewishness' of the state. She hints at the sinister connotation of this formula, which does not point to the right of self-determination of Israeli Jews, but

rather to the Zionist 'right' to the ongoing colonisation of Palestinian lands, while denying the legitimacy of Palestinian rights - both their collective rights as a national minority within Israel, and their right of self-determination in the 1967 occupied territories.

Not only has the Zionist left not resisted the prevalent racist discourse of a "demographic danger" to the Jewish character of Israel due to higher Arab birth rates, but it has actively fostered it as its main thrust of justifying a two-state solution. For the Zionist left this solution includes the annexation of important blocks of settlements to Israel, a fragmented Palestinian state of limited sovereignty, as well as a rejection of any debate about the fate of those Palestinians expelled by Zionist militias in 1948. Whereas Netanyahu, Lieberman and the ethno-religious settler movement do not feel compelled to present any progressive credentials to liberal world opinion, Zionist left intellectuals have in the recent years being engaged in a series of semantic acrobatics, aimed at diluting the inherent contradiction of having an ethnocentric liberal democracy. All this is ably demonstrated in the book.

Especially affected by the discourse and practice of the Zionist left are Israel's Palestinian citizens, those who survived the 1948 ethnic cleansing. They make up almost one fifth of Israel's population within the Green Line. Whereas the state of Israel grants some civic rights to its Palestinian citizens, its refusal to recognise their status as a national minority renders those rights ineffective, as Honig-Parnass shows through a series of facts and legal precedents. Also, the historical emphasis of the Zionist left on land means that most of what is defined as "state lands" were confiscated from Palestinian's owners - refugees and citizens alike - under the rule of Labour-predecessor Mapai and the more leftwing Mapam (largely constituted today by Meretz) in the first years of the state. Even today, 93% of the land in Israel is reserved for exclusive Jewish use. This has led to a suffocation of Arab towns and communities, given their inability to grow naturally. Finally, the law of return, which grants automatic citizenship to Jewish newcomers and which was put into effect by Mapai and Mapam, is not only about "full citizenship" as such: it confers a wide range of benefits like access to land, education and housing.

The book also examines the love-hate relationship of secular, liberal and leftwing trends of Zionism with religion. While claiming to stand for a humanist and secular vision, the Zionist left never questioned the religious criteria for entering the Jewish national collective and never hesitated to close ranks with the most extreme rightwing brands of Zionism, secular and religious. The Zionist left's inability to answer the question, 'Why precisely here?' (Palestine) rendered it captive to religion and thus receptive to a series of capitulations and compromises with the religious establishment, like the 'status-quo agreement' signed between Ben Gurion and the orthodox establishment before the creation of the state, which guarantees a rabbinic monopoly on matters of birth and marriage, for instance.

Ultimately, the Zionist left has



Unequal contest

from its inception steadily moved to the right, abandoning every trace of progressive pretence and reducing the meaning of 'left' in Israel to a slightly more conciliatory attitude towards US-sponsored initiatives. The socioeconomic dimensions of the term 'left' have also largely remained dormant, since left Zionism's main two parties endorsed - and initiated in the case of Labour - the neoliberal restructuring of the Israeli economy since 1985. Their electoral results are today meagre, with Labour being a junior partner of the current right-extreme right government.

Not only the Zionist left, but also the post-Zionist current, comes under scrutiny in the book. Post-Zionism refers loosely to a point of view among parts of Israeli academia, according to which the age of Zionism has come to an end, thus making an ethnocentric Jewish state obsolete. According to Honig-Parnass, this liberal attempt at a departure from Zionist discourse has failed to rise to the challenge. Being influenced by the post-structuralist stream of the early 90s that focussed on identity politics, it has repeatedly evaded the entire issue of Zionism's ongoing discrimination against Palestinians and ignored their special status as the dominant Other from a Zionist point of view. Post-Zionists have never questioned the legitimacy of neoliberalism and Israel's status as the US's main enforcer in the region, and their proposals for an 'inclusive' set-up deny in practice the validity of Palestinian national rights - for example, by accepting the legitimacy of West Bank settlements.

### Zionist left influence

Given this current state of affairs, it is easy to ask why all of this matters. It does, in the sense that the Zionist left positions have been adopted by the right and far right. All Zionist parties have in principle accepted that the continuation of Zionist colonisation must be conditioned on the granting of some form of self-rule, however meaningless, to the Palestinians in the occupied territories in order to placate their resistance. This also includes an acceptance of "mutually agreed land swaps" with the Palestinian Authority in order to curb the "demographic peril". This is a far cry from the irredentist claim of Menachem Begin to the east bank of the Jordan river as part of "Greater Israel". But this process constitutes just a part of a wider trade-off: whereas the Zionist

right has adopted those principles, as well as the Zionist left's aversion to employing Arab labour (today Israel prefers to employ migrants from Asia and eastern Europe for the most unskilled jobs than possibly cheaper Arab labour), the Zionist left has disturbingly adopted the most militarist aspects of the right.

This seemingly led to a mass conversion of Zionist left intellectuals after the failure of the Camp David talks in 2000. From advocating 'peace', they suddenly adopted the slogan, 'There is no partner for peace', and gave legitimacy to Ariel Sharon's subsequent onslaught on the Palestinian Authority. And in recent years, they have trailed behind rightwing governments in supporting the 2006 war on Lebanon and the 2009 Gaza massacre.

But for progressive people outside Israel/Palestine, an analysis of Zionist left discourse and practice, as provided in this book, has a far deeper meaning. It begs the question of what a left is all about. In Israel, the once dominant Zionist left has never been about fighting for workers' rights (not even in a mildly social democratic manner) or the rights of oppressed minorities, first and foremost the indigenous Palestinians. Instead, the Zionist left, even after losing its monopoly in government in 1977, has traditionally formed the backbone of Israeli political, economic and military elites. Its intellectuals and publicists like Amos Oz are still considered to be the 'consciousness of the nation' and have a great impact on today's proponents of the vegetating two-state solution. Zionist left figures like Yossi Beilin have played a critical role in fermenting a veil of equality regarding the highly unequal terms of the Oslo agreement and the more recent Geneva initiative.

And herein lies the Zionist left's main international success: namely the framing of the conflict as being about war and peace between two equal parties, 'two peoples who fight for the same territory', rather than that involving colonisers and colonised, as clearly shown around the end of the book. Included in this success is also the spreading of the idea of a conflict starting in 1967, with its fictitious semantic differentiation between 'Israel proper' and the 'occupied territories'. These premises have for years succeeded in banishing the Israel-Palestine conflict to a completely different moral universe than other conflicts like Algeria, Vietnam or South Africa under

apartheid.

These are also premises accepted at first glance by many people in the west sincerely appalled by Israel's brutalisation of the Palestinians. They are today not just propagated by Labour and Meretz, but also by far more principled members of the Israeli 'peace camp'. Despite their courageous resistance against the 1967 occupation, they have stopped short of addressing the connection between Zionism's main premises and the regime discriminating against Israel's Palestinian citizens. Equally problematically, this trend, which did not capitulate to the open warmongering after 2000, has uncritically lent its support to the corrupt and collaborative Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas and the 'reformer' Salam Fayyad, effectively condoning the authoritarian neoliberal regime imposed by the PA in the West Bank.

Understanding the philosophy of liberal Zionism is essential to formulating an alternative path, possibly leading to resolving a conflict which claims the lives of many ordinary Israelis. In her critique, Honig-Parnass also succeeds in mentioning past instances of principled Israeli-Jewish resistance to Zionist policies. This includes the Israeli Black Panthers of the early 1970s, a group of disaffected Mizrahim (Jews from north Africa and the Middle East), who linked their socioeconomic grievances to solidarity with the Palestinians. It also includes the now defunct Matzpen, the socialist organisation with its pioneering class analysis of Zionism as an active colonisation project and wider regional context of the Middle East, of which Honig-Parnass was a member. Given the essentialist quagmire of identity politics, the futility of a just two-state solution, the Arab revolts, as well as the all-encompassing global crisis of capitalism, a recourse to this alternative vision presented in the book may well offer the reader an inspiring new approach to understanding the conflict.

Finally, at a time when the *hasbarah* is working overtime to present Israel as a place where liberal democratic values, individualism and LGBT rights thrive amidst a sea of fundamentalist obscurantism, *False prophets of peace* is essential reading for winning the debate against those keen to smear solidarity with Palestinian rights as employing double standards and engaging in the demonisation of the 'only democracy in the Middle East' ●

**Leandros Fischer**



## TURKEY

# Postscript to demise

Esen Uslu recounts the sad story of the Communist Party of Turkey

The English version of the liberal-cum-conservative-Islamist daily *Zaman* (Times), *Today's Zaman*, recently published an article about a new Communist Party of Turkey (TKP).<sup>1</sup> I read it with some amusement, but when my comrades from the *Weekly Worker* enquired as to my opinion, I felt obliged to return to a subject on which I have refrained from writing for so long.

Let me give a brief history of the TKP. Despite all its pretence of a long and glorious history, the party as we knew it in the 70s and 80s was a quite recent phenomenon. It was formed in the early 70s in a move known as the 'leap forward', after the name of the monthly newspaper *Atilim*, which appeared in the autumn of 1974. The effort was led by the remnants of the former external bureau of the central committee, which had been defunct for years.

## Invented tradition

The article in *Today's Zaman* referred to the "TKP tradition" by using the name of the website, *From Suphi to Bilen the tradition is alive*,<sup>2</sup> which campaigns for the creation of a new TKP. Mustafa Suphi was a founding leader of the TKP, while İsmail Bilen became secretary general in 1974. However, such a tradition has never existed - it is just an invention.

Suphi was one of those who took part in the Baku Congress of Peoples of the East in 1920. Shortly after, in September 1920, the TKP held its founding congress and Suphi was elected president of the party. However, he and his 15 comrades were murdered on their way from Russia to Turkey by the covert forces of the nationalist government. The brutal killings have stood as a constant reminder of the nature of the Turkish regime to generations of communists.

At this time the imperialist occupation of Istanbul and other industrial centres was continuing, and as a result the TKP in seaboard Turkey and the TKP in central Anatolia were practically two different organisations. Bringing them together in a single, united party was the order of day after the independence and unification of Turkey. But this was the beginning of the period which saw the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey, the repression of Armenians and Jews, the uprising in Kurdistan, and the ongoing terror of the nationalist government directed against the party. The TKP never had a chance to set up a stable organisation, let alone forge a tradition.

And, of course, the TKP blindly followed the twists and turns of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. To cut a long story short, in 1937 the Communist International adapted a resolution to decentralise the TKP, which practically put party activity on hold till the end of World War II.

The party emerged again as an organisation in the late 40s at a time when Turkey was experimenting with multi-party democracy. But soon after the newly formed legal parties were crushed in a new wave of arrests and trials, and the TKP's attempt to reorganise illegally was wrecked in 1951, when a large number of party comrades, including leading members of the central committee, were arrested. After a show trial they were sentenced to imprisonment, followed by internal exile.

Some members escaped and joined the external bureau, which was given a new lease of life following the meeting



Istanbul: May Day

of communist and workers' parties in 1958. However, until the late 60s TKP activity was more or less restricted to daily radio broadcasts from East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria. Although a new wave of working class activity was building up in Turkey, the external bureau was completely cut off from it.

The tension produced by this situation led to splits. While a handful of leading members were at the forefront of the new left movement in the 60s, by the early 70s, almost all members of the central committee who remained in Turkey were dead. In view of this the external bureau assumed the title of central committee, while its secretary was now referred to as general secretary of the party, which had not had a congress since the 30s.

## 'Leap forward'

So, when orders were passed down from Moscow to organise once more in Turkey, the remnants of the external bureau took charge of the effort known as the 'leap forward'.

The broad plan was to work among Turkish migrant workers across Europe, using the organisations created as a kind of bridgehead to make inroads into mainland Turkey. The migrant workers' associations had been divided into rival bodies taking their lead from various political parties. But some quite influential organisations were swayed by the TKP - it was, after all, the representative of the political line of the CPSU.

Apart from the comrades from the migrant communities, a group of former members of the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP), which was banned following the March 12 1971 military intervention, took part in the effort. Among them were former members of the Socialist Youth Organisation (SGO), which was associated with the TIP, mainly in the Ankara region. One of the most well known names from that organisation was Rıza Yürükoğlu, who moved to London during the post-March 12 terror days and formed the nucleus of a TKP branch there.

Another grouping that took part in the new organising effort was also from the TIP, but mainly from the Istanbul region. It had its origins in the students' organisation, the Federation of Opinion Associations (FKF), in the

late 60s. The FKF was transformed into Dev Genç, the Federation of Revolutionary Youth of Turkey, just before the March 12 coup.

To their credit these comrades helped organise working class struggle during the years of terror, helping to bring together leading workers in the trade union movement, especially in Disk, the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey. They were known as the Partisan group, since they published a short-lived newspaper of that name while they were in charge of the TIP branch in one of the central districts of Istanbul. One of the most celebrated names within that grouping was Haydar Kutlu, who was to become the TKP secretary general in 1983.

We must take a brief detour to mention the new leadership of Dev Genç. It organised two armed guerrilla organisations: namely, the Popular Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO) and the Popular Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (THKP-C). Those short-lived organisations took part in armed actions and its partisans were gunned down or hanged in the terror days. When a general amnesty was declared in 1974, the remnants of THKO gradually came closer to the Maoist movement, while THKP-C supporters split into many groups.

One of those splinter groups was organised around the Genç Öncü (Young Pioneer) newspaper and a youth organisation called the GSB, the Association of Young Socialists. They participated in the efforts to organise the TKP in Turkey later than the above-mentioned organisations, but they brought a new spate of experienced comrades with good connections with the youth movement into the fold.

Those were the main participants of the TKP reorganisation on Turkish soil. Some comrades who joined the party in various European countries returned to Turkey, and assumed leading roles in illegal organisations. The bulk of cadres were from the Partisan group and Genç Öncü, especially in the youth movement.

What bound these groups together was the general political line and support provided by the CPSU. During the initial days of the 'leap forward' a document called the third programme

was drawn up. However, given the experiences of Turkey's left during the heightened political struggles of the late 60s and early 70s, it was already out of date.

Despite a few weak protests, the third programme formed the basis of a coming together of those groups, but in reality it was not used as a basis for party activities. The various sections tended to follow their own programmes in a pragmatic manner. The third programme was not a sufficient basis upon which to amalgamate such a wide range of groupings.

This lack of theoretical and programmatic clarity started to show itself manifestly when the organisation began to grow quite rapidly. On May Day 1976, the first open demonstration against the regime, there were less than 50 members of the TKP within Turkey. However, a year later numbers had greatly increased. But the centre was not capable of handling such growth either organisationally or ideologically.

What the centre did manage to achieve was the organisation of the 1977 Konya conference - named after the central Anatolian town, although it was actually held in Moscow. The confusion among leading party bodies, and the discord between the TKP and CPSU, became apparent after the conference. The secretary general's speech to the conference contained references to barricades, etc, which fitted the mood of the comrades who had come from Turkey, but many comrades in leading positions were followers of the Soviet line and got extremely irritated.

In order to rectify the lack of theory and absence of any kind of useful programme comrade Yürükoğlu was brought onto the party's ideological bureau, but this quickly led to a split just before the September 12 fascist coup.

## After September 12

The dismal performance of the party during the terror years partly resulted from the bringing together of various groups without paying adequate attention to ideological unity. Branch organisations simply collapsed, and prominent cadres were withdrawn from Turkey. The idea of a new,

'decentralised' party grew, an idea that represented organisational paralysis.

İsmail Bilen died in 1983, and a struggle over the leadership resulted in further splits. It was in this situation that the idea of uniting all the workers' parties was proposed, and in late 1987 the TKP and Workers' Party of Turkey simultaneously dissolved themselves, forming the United Communist Party of Turkey in early 1988 with a view to organising legally within the country. The two new leaders of the UCPT returned to Turkey in a bid to force the hand of the government and remove the ban on communist parties, but they ended up in jail.

Eventually they were released and a legal UCPT was formed in June 1990. However, the constitutional court banned the party in 1991 before it had had the chance to develop any kind of organisational life. But it had held its first legal congress in Turkey, where it was resolved that the UCPT should itself be dissolved in order to participate in the formation of the Socialist Unity Party (SBP), along with remnants of the Socialist Workers Party of Turkey (TSIP) and a group split from the Maoist Socialist Party.

The SBP limped into life, winning a derisory vote in local elections, but in 1995 it too fell foul of the constitutional court. The remnants of the organisation took part in formation of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), which was formed as a broad church of various political organisations maintaining their own independent organisational structure. However, gradually one of the groups started to dominate the rest, and more splits followed - one of the recurring features of this whole sad story.

Another aspect of that sad story was the demise of *İşçinin Sesi* (Workers' Voice). After the split in 1979, the London organisation of the TKP formed a temporary coordination committee, and started organising as an alternative party. It was among the groups that bore the brunt of the post-September 12 terror.

*İşçinin Sesi* took part in various attempts to organise in Turkey during the upsurge of working class struggle in the late 80s, and later in the rejuvenated movement of the Alevi religious and cultural community. However, in the days of reaction ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union it slowly disintegrated, especially after the untimely death of its leader.

## Legality

Meanwhile, a group that had split from the TIP in 1978 had gathered around a monthly journal called *Sosyalist İktidar* (Socialist Power). It had published 11 issues by September 12.

Following the fascist years it reappeared under the name of *Gelenek* (Tradition), which was a major force behind the formation of the Socialist Party of Turkey (STP). Like so many others before it the STP was banned by the constitutional court in 1993. The same year the party was re-formed under the name of Socialist Power Party (SIP) - a reference to its 1970s name.

In 2001 the SIP renamed itself the TKP, tapping into the widespread desire to see a legal communist party. After many vacillations it ended up as a nationalist-socialist organisation seeking recognition among the remnants of 'official communism' in Europe.

Despite all these aberrations,



many small groupings still survive with the declared aim of reorganising the TKP in its imaginary and idealised former glory. Many of them publish irregular newspapers or journals, together with occasional declarations or statements on traditionally important dates, such as the anniversary of the foundation of the TKP, or of the assassination of its original leaders in 1920.

Prominent among them are *Ürün Sosyalist Dergi* (Harvest Socialist Journal). Other groups that had shown signs of life in the early 2000s seem to have gradually weakened and disappeared. The *Ürün* group was noticeable at last year's May Day demonstration in Istanbul. It is this group that recently established the website referred to above, *From Suphi to Bilen the tradition is alive*. In its initial declaration the group described itself as "those who worked under the slogan of 'Freedom to the TKP'" and "those who believe in forming a legal TKP".

*Ürün* organised an event commemorating the formation of the TKP on September 8 last year. It issued a bulletin in November and held a preparatory conference in Istanbul, where it adopted a draft programme and rules. Since then the group has declared that it would hold nine local meetings in various cities (as I write, six have taken place).

## Zaman article

Let me now return to the article I mentioned at the beginning. The *Zaman* newspaper is not exactly familiar with leftwing jargon, and its knowledge of Turkey's communist movement is more meagre still.

However, timing is everything. Neither *Zaman* nor its English sidekick, *Today's Zaman*, had previously published anything about the communist movement in Turkey. So why did this article appear? Especially one dealing with the thorny legal issue of two political parties with the same name? I believe it was related to the efforts of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government to change the political balance in its favour following its success in amending the constitution.

Previous attempts to reorganise the political scene have ended in failure. The strategy of making overtures to the Kurds - which the soft-Islamist AKP hoped would

lead to the disarming of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in return for the granting of some constitutional rights - has collapsed, and armed conflict has flared up again. All goodwill was lost following the arrest and trial of many elected members of municipalities, and moves against the Kurdish-based Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which now stands accused of being a legal front for the PKK. The BDP had 35 of its members elected to the national assembly as independents in the 2011 elections.<sup>3</sup>

But the AKP is aware that, as things stand, it cannot win an election in Kurdistan. It is hoping to see the creation of a new political force to stand as a rival to the BDP. And preparations to bring such a party into existence have become apparent in recent months. A prominent leftwing Kurd, Kemal Burkay, who had been in exile in Sweden, has now returned to Turkey amid a positive press campaign. In the 70s he was a close ally of the TKP and his organisation, the Kurdistan Socialist Party of Turkey (TKSP), has had good relations with the party.

The AKP government's other strategic aim had been to draw sections of the Alevi people into the fold of Islamist-conservative politics. The overtures had started with a series of joint 'workshops', where prominent Alevi leaders and organisations stated their basic demands. However, when the government announced its intention to bring Alevi clergy under the control of the department of religious affairs, that really set the cat among the pigeons and the initiative collapsed.

However, this has resulted in the further politicisation of the Alevi movement, and for the first time in many years Alevi community organisations and leaders have started to work with Kurdish organisations and leaders. The changing attitude of Alevi has in turn helped produce a mood swing amongst the central Anatolian left in favour of cooperation with the Kurds. This has led to the formation of the Democratic Congress of Peoples (HDK), which has stated its aim of becoming a political party.

Amid deteriorating relations with the European Union over Cyprus, the AKP believes that it needs to improve its

support among the liberal left of Turkey. Interestingly, the liberal daily *Taraf* has recently featured a discussion on the viability of Marxist socialism. Four of the regular participants have been Halil Berktaş, a former Maoist leader and historian; Murat Belge, a professor and former ideologist of the new left in Turkey; Roni Margulies, a poet and prominent member of the Socialist Workers Party in Turkey; and Nabi Yağcı, a former TKP general secretary. The leftwing novelist, Oya Baydar, has also been among those joining the discussion.

The tacit support given by Turkey's left to the AKP, when it appeared under threat from the would-be junta within the armed forces, helped bring the AKP victory in the 2010 referendum on changing the constitution. However, since then the expectations of a peaceful settlement with the Kurds has been replaced by a new dirty war against Kurdistan. The Alevi are staunchly opposed to the AKP, whose oppressive nature has become apparent in the recent period. That is why the AKP has sought to make inroads into the main body of liberal and leftwing opinion. As the liberal left starts to show new signs of life, the AKP is trying to incorporate the left and former left, and if necessary play various sections off one against the other.

I tend to think the article in *Today's Zaman* is one aspect of this policy. It can also be seen as giving the green light to moves to create more confusion within the communist movement through the formation of two legal parties with the same.

However, I do not give much credence to the AKP's efforts. Nor do I see any chance of an 'official communist' revival. The *Zaman* article is in a sense a postscript to the sad story of the demise of the TKP ●

## Notes

1. *Today's Zaman* January 10: [www.todayszaman.com/news-268211-as-tkp-shifts-to-neo-nationalist-line-traditional-socialists-open-new-party-with-same-name.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/news-268211-as-tkp-shifts-to-neo-nationalist-line-traditional-socialists-open-new-party-with-same-name.html).
2. See [www.suphibilen.org](http://www.suphibilen.org).
3. The BDP is the successor to the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which in 2009 was itself disbanded following a constitutional court ruling. Twenty-four DTP members were elected to the national assembly as independents in the 2007 general election.

# No war on Iran! For regime change from below!

The war drums against Iran are beating ever louder. The new embargo on Iranian oil, to come into force on July 1, is only the latest in a long list of measures imposed by US and EU imperialism. It bans all new oil contracts with Iran, and cuts off all existing deals. Also, all of the Iranian central bank's European assets are to be frozen.

We are told that the sanctions are designed to weaken the regime and "force Iran back to the negotiating table" over its nuclear programme. This is clearly nonsense:

● In reality, the 'nuclear danger' is used by imperialism as an excuse to deal with an increasingly unstable situation in the Middle East. Imperialism has recently lost a number of friendly regimes in the region (like Egypt) and needs to reassert control in this oil-rich area. War is also a useful distraction from economic misery and the current crisis of capitalism.

● Former International Atomic Energy Agency analyst Robert Kelly has debunked the latest report purporting to show that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Of the three pieces of 'evidence' that are not out of date, two are entirely unverifiable, and one an obvious forgery (see <http://hopoi.org/?p=1841>). But the regime draws sustenance from these rumours: the threats against Iran help the theocracy to stay in power, neutralise the opposition and unite the people behind a regime under attack from imperialism.

● The new sanctions will make it even more difficult for Iran, Opec's second largest producer, to be paid in foreign currency for its oil exports (which were worth more than \$100 billion in 2011). Previous rounds of EU and US sanctions targeting Iran's financial system have

already caused a shortage of foreign currency. A shortage of foreign currency means that Iran cannot import food at a time when food prices have already risen to astronomical levels. The Iranian rial has tumbled to a new low.

● But the sanctions are unlikely to dramatically weaken the regime. The rich and powerful are able to protect themselves to a large degree from the effects. In fact, leaders of sanctioned regimes are almost always strengthened (and enriched) by sanctions.

● However, the sanctions will mean even more misery for ordinary Iranians: many workers will not receive their wages in time (if at all) and even the BBC has warned that social security payments and the remaining food subsi-

dies could be the first to be cut by a theocracy under financial pressure. This will only increase the hardship and miserable conditions that our brothers and sisters in Iran have had to endure for many years.

● Further, the military provocations of US-led imperialism - assassinations, sabotage and preparatory military manoeuvres in the region - have also dramatically upped the tension in the country and are being used by the theocracy to increase repression.

● As the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan prove beyond doubt, democracy can only come from below, from the people themselves. But a people driven to their knees by brutal sanctions are hardly in the position to overthrow dictatorship.

We know from history that sanctions are only the first step in wars being waged against 'unfriendly' regimes. A military attack against Iran is very much on the agenda. Should the regime really decide to close the Strait of Hormuz, this could happen sooner rather than later.

That is why it is so important that we side now with the people of Iran in their struggle against their own theocracy and the threats by imperialism!

Make your voice heard now! Send us a message in the form of an email, voice mail, short video or a photograph holding the poster pictured alongside (download from [www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org)) and encourage your comrades and friends to do the same. We will post all messages on a special section on Hopi's website and on YouTube, Facebook and other social media sites. Plans are also afoot for solidarity events, film screenings and fundraising events.

**Yassamine Mather**  
Chair, Hands Off the People of Iran  
[office@hopoi.info](mailto:office@hopoi.info)



# 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.**

[office@cpgb.org.uk](mailto:office@cpgb.org.uk)

Become a  
**Communist Party**  
member

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Printed and published by: November Publications Ltd (07950 416922).

Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © January 2012



# weekly worker

## Male aggression myths - again

# Science and the square wheel

If there is one phrase that should raise a sceptical eyebrow whenever it appears in a newspaper headline or sub-head, it is 'according to scientists'.

There is, it should be widely known, no guarantee that the persons concerned are, in fact, scientists; if they are, there is no guarantee that they are doing legitimately scientific science; and above all else, there is no guarantee that the article in question has reported their findings with any degree of accuracy.

So it is with the recent flurry of interest in a study led by Mark van Vugt on the 'male warrior hypothesis', which attempted to marshal existing evidence in support of that classic canard of bourgeois common sense - men are fundamentally violent, competitive and tribal, while women are more likely to seek compromise. *The Daily Telegraph* summarised his findings thus: "The male sex drive is to blame for most of the world's conflicts, from football hooliganism to religious disputes and even world wars, according" - naturally - "to scientists."

(As a 'topical' illustration of this phenomenon, the *Torygraph* rather mischievously chose a still from Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, with William Wallace leading some underdressed Scots into war, woad-faced and maddened. Such, presumably, is the root of the present difficulties with the union - Alex Salmond's alpha male complex.)<sup>1</sup>

The argument runs, broadly, that in the most primitive stage of *homo sapiens*, it was an evolutionary advantage for men to be violent, as this allowed them to conquer more territory and seize more potential mates. At the genetic level, we humans of the 21st century AD are not substantially different from our ancestors; so the male need for more mates can be used to explain everything from match-day violence to the Mongol conquests (the urban myth about Genghis Khan's 16 million descendents is wheeled out by the *Telegraph*, rather laughably, as 'smoking gun' evidence for the link between male virility and belligerence).

The narrative itself is, of course, hotly disputed. By no means all Darwinian investigations into early human societies come up with that kind of picture of them - the 'sex strike' theory of Chris Knight and his colleagues in the Radical Anthropology Group is rather scornful of this kind of reasoning, for example, and that is not the only line of thought at odds with bourgeois common sense about the biological basis of gender relations.

Indeed, in its obsessive focus on 'male warrior' behaviour, the press coverage has missed out an important part of the study's argument; namely, that collective and group behaviour is *in itself* an evolutionary advantage. Van Vugt and his colleagues attempt, rather, to account for why something in their view hard-wired into both men and women should be expressed, among human males, as conflict and violence.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the argument is shaky indeed; and the best piece of evidence against the study is its existence itself.

After all, Van Vugt is a man, with a Y chromosome wired stubbornly into every cell nucleus in his body; by all accounts, however, he seems not to be the picture of macho aggressiveness - though perhaps, like the antihero of M John Harrison's excellent novel *Light*, his scientific career is shadowed by a habit of desperate sociopathic violence.

His work is, nonetheless, caught - like the hypothetical early humans he cites - in a fierce competition for resources. Scientific research, like everything else, requires funding; and scientists compete with one another for grants in order to carry out their work. In fact, this *does* lead to dubious behaviour, as the 'Climategate' scandal a couple of years ago demonstrated. Scientists *tend* to overestimate the importance of their findings, or leave the overstatements of others (especially in the mainstream media) uncorrected.

So the problem is that competition over resources (and, indeed, suitable mates) takes a vast diversity of forms in contemporary society, not all of them violent, tribal or otherwise amenable to Van

Vugt's warrior male stereotype. It is possible to argue that these are all so many sublimations of the basic urge to put a spear in the belly of the fellow from the next tribe over, of course - a kind of night in which all cats are red in tooth and claw. At that point, however, the *rest* of the argument immediately collapses, because women compete in these various forms

quite as much as men. In that case, Van Vugt is reduced to saying, in effect, that humans are biologically capable of ruthless competition between social groups; something everyone over the age of seven had grasped anyway.

The more remarkable thing about this latest scientific 'discovery' is how frequently it recurs. A simple Google search will produce minor variations on the same news story more or less every few years, at least back to 1993. Before then, there was Desmond Morris's *The naked ape* and

its follow-ups, which were particularly dogmatic on the point of sexual difference. This shows us two things: firstly, that sociobiologists are quite addicted to this narrative, to the point that they make the same 'discovery' with almost Freudian levels of repetition. The other is that the bourgeois media has an insatiable appetite for such stories.

The first matter is explicable primarily through the constraining disciplinary viewpoint at work. Put simply, the methods of investigation and basic axioms of this discipline will tend to throw up errors of this kind, which in turn tend to be corrected by people in other disciplines, to whom the limitations of that viewpoint are more obvious. Throw in the tendency towards overstatement, and all the conditions are there for reinventing the square wheel once in a while.

As for the bourgeois media, the detachment of violence and struggle from history has obvious uses. The *Telegraph's* use of *Braveheart* makes this peculiarly obvious - its editors obviously want us to identify Scottish disaffection with the union as an act of meaningless willy-waving, rather than a historically specific response to a historically specific situation.

The denigration of conflicts in this way is invariably selective. If not even the *Telegraph* can really argue that there is a noble mission for British troops in Afghanistan, it is unlikely to reduce their travails to an expression of unconscious tribalism. Sociobiology is one of those things that happens to other people.

More fundamentally, the more constrained we are in the prison of our fundamental biological imperatives, the easier it is to make the case that this world, in all its obscenity, is the best of all possible ones. How could we seriously entertain the idea of universal human liberation, if what it means to be human (or, at least, a human with a penis) is to find oneself an Other and set about him? Under socialism, what would we men *do* with ourselves all day?

There are more general problems with how the media treats science. This is, after all, the time of year when a particular 'science' story

gets a sudden spike in prominence - the idea of Blue Monday, supposedly the most depressing day of the year. As is fairly well known today, the notion - supported by a meaningless bit of pseudo-maths - was cooked up by an opportunistic teacher as a PR job for a holiday company.

Nowadays, the holiday 'angle' is only picked up by the occasional article discrediting the story; but nonetheless, various mental health charities keep it alive by using Blue Monday (variously the third Monday in January, or the Monday of the last full week in January - but who's counting?) as a platform for 'awareness raising'. Charities are quite as involved in grubby, cynical struggle for a limited pool of philanthropic donations as scientists are for grants; it is now *their* PR departments that peddle this garbage. The media still gobbles it up whole.

Science, in theory, has immense potential as a liberating force; not primarily because it translates into technological progress, but because as a practice it is founded on critical thought. Science is not so much about erecting grand theories as tearing them to pieces. The eagerness of the media and other bourgeois ideologues to peddle simplistic, just-so stories as if they were scientific fact would not be a major issue if the subject was not, in its essentials, restricted to those who pursue it in an academic or professional capacity.

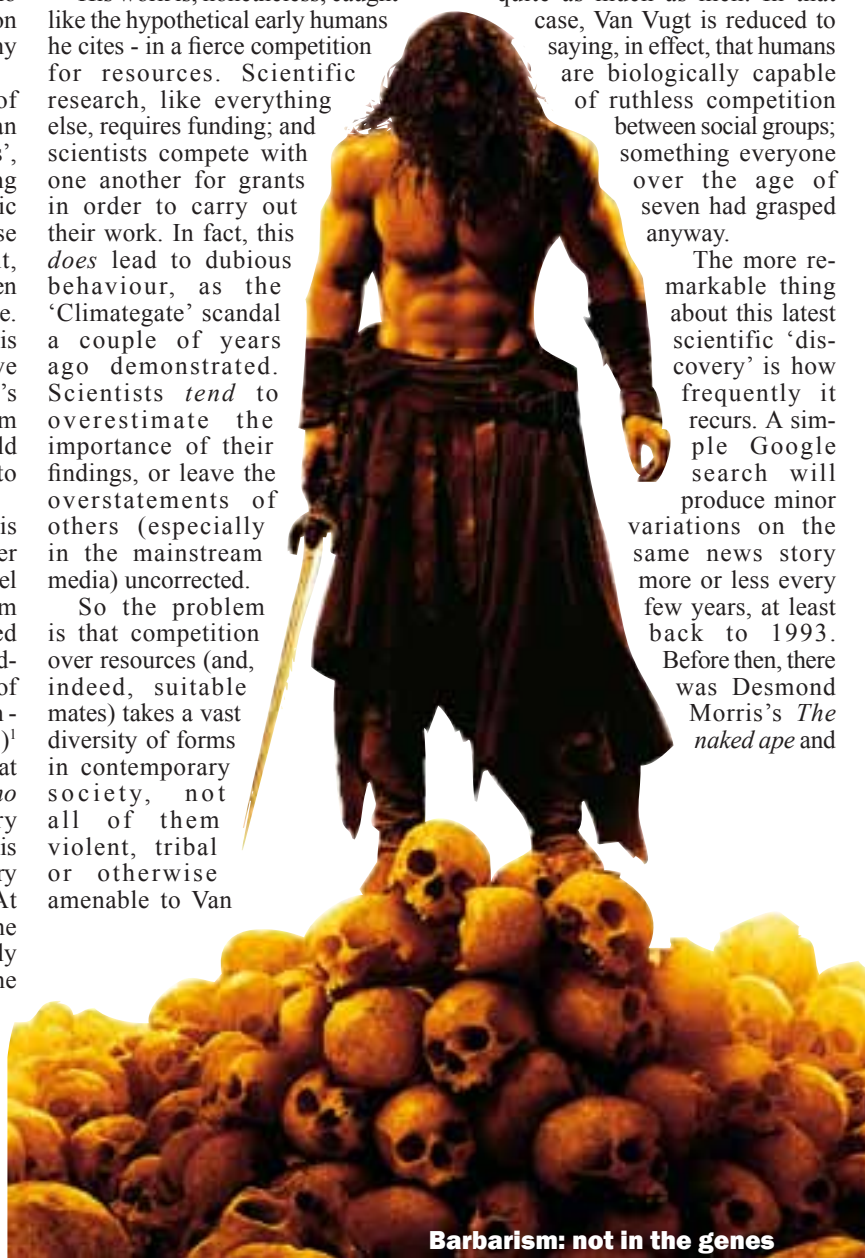
For the vast majority of people, however, science is something done by others to them. It is a particularly harmful aspect of the way in which bourgeois society expropriates the common intellectual and cultural heritage of humanity, and feeds it back to us in deformed chunks. It is a travesty of the most powerful form of knowledge the human species possesses. Maybe we should organise to take it back ●

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### Notes

1. [www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/9030828/Male-sex-drive-to-blame-for-worlds-conflicts.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/9030828/Male-sex-drive-to-blame-for-worlds-conflicts.html)
2. <http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/367/1589/670.full.pdf+html>



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