

# weekly worker



**As Italy's prime minister Mario Monti prepares fresh attacks, opposition begins to grow**

- STWC demo
- Iranian film
- Murder plot
- Cuban capitalism

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## Tony Cliff: mangling the party of Lenin



# LETTERS



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

## Got it wrong

There were three letters (January 26) on the issue of nationalism and the rightwing character named 'VN Gelis'. I will respond to Gerry Downing because at least I understand his language and he wants to discuss the issues, even though I think he has it all wrong. Ray Rising's letter is far more nuanced and would require a much longer response. As I consider VN Gelis to be somewhat outside the workers' movement, he doesn't deserve a response to his slander and lying accusations.

Gerry takes issue with what I wrote here: "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." He writes as a prefix to this: "David Walters makes the following repudiation of Trotskyism". Wow - really? From holding up what I consider a very orthodox Leninist position on imperialism, Gerry derives a 'break with Trotskyism'. So let's update this then. 'Globalisation', which is a kind of civil-society term used to describe imperialism, is nationalism and *not* an imperialist onslaught internationally through the European Union/euro zone, North American Free Trade Agreement, World Trade Organisation and a host of so-called 'neoliberal' structural adjustment programmes?

How is my statement at all inaccurate? I make *zero* identification with anything advocated by little Englander/BNP/VN Gelis types. What I noted is that, as workers' militants, as Marxists, we should oppose *every* form of imperialist machination that seeks to make the working class pay for the crisis. This includes *imperialist* assaults on what hitherto had been, factually, sovereign nations. Not because of some abstract pro-capitalist loyalty to the 'nation-state', but understanding that such assaults through trade pacts, currency convention and political unions are designed for *one* purpose and one purpose alone: to destroy the gains of the working class that *factually* were won within those parameters.

I would love to see a struggle by the class across borders for a United Socialist States of Europe. But that is not the defensive strategy we can employ right now with regards to the real, living gains of our class paid for by struggle in the post-war era. The capitalists are using these liberal-sounding globalist terms to undo these gains. Where does Gerry stand on that? Because, as far as I'm concerned, anyone who doesn't struggle against Europe, against the euro, against the WTO and Nafta (in my neck of the woods) and against these attacks is simply doing the work of the 'alter-globaliser' NGOs in trying to weaken the workers' movement. The Greek working class is quite clear about where it stands on Europe; so should he be.

My organisation, Socialist Organiser, has been leading activists around *full* legalisation and in defence against the racist attacks on Latino immigrants in California. We reject the formalistic and mechanical position adopted by Gerry's straw man, the Sparts. Every immigrant rights organisation in the US today that is not a tail end for the Democratic Party is opposed to Nafta. Nafta is what caused the huge crisis that has destroyed the traditional national economy in Mexico and *driven* millions of Mexican peasants and workers to the US. We organise conferences against these policies in Mexico and the United States, fully independent from

the parties of the ruling class in both countries and from globalist NGOs and Soros-sponsored World Social Forum types who only want a 'kinder, gentler Nafta'. Is opposing Nafta 'nationalist'?

The defence of immigrant workers is *sine qua non* for any socialist. As part of the working class, they have every right to live and work where they want. That is part of the programme of the Fourth International and any communist organisation going back to the Socialist International before World War I. Daniel De Leon fought for this position at the 1904 congress of the Second International against rightwing socialists caught up in *real* national chauvinism. Defending immigrants means opposing imperialism *in all its aspects*, not just the ones that appear politically correct to you. It means opposing everything imperialism is trying to do.

Opposing the imperialist dismantling of the nation-state does not mean adapting to any sort of 'great nation chauvinism'. It means, first and foremost, opposing the capitalist class that is pushing these attacks. When workers oppose the dismantling of a steel plant to ship it to another country, it is not because of 'national chauvinism', but rather it is exactly what it seems: an attempt to destroy union jobs and wages for the *benefit of the capitalist moving the plant*. It means recognising that the *ruling class* is in favour of breaking down borders so as to rewrite social welfare, social security, labour codes and healthcare laws. It means logically overthrowing one's own bourgeoisie.

We cannot identify with any section of the capitalist class. Not even the small, incidental ones that, for their own narrow business reasons, support protectionism and tariffs and national chauvinism.

Gerry claims that "imperialism, under the guise of the nation-state, is called fascism". Funny, I call it liberal democracy. It is only "fascism" when the imperialists are unable to use the misleaders of the working class to demobilise them, and the traditional forms of the democratic-bourgeois state no longer function as a bulwark against workers' revolution. Not happening yet. I suggest this was just polemical excess on his part.

**David Walters**  
California

## Nationalist?

Gerry Downing writes of myself: "Ludicrously he rejects nationalisation demands as reformist, seemingly unaware that 'workers' control' can be added to make that demand a fight for workers' power" (Letters, January 26).

What is ludicrous about this rejection? It was similarly rejected by Marx, Engels and Trotsky explicitly! Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* was largely devoted to destroying Lassallean reformist ideas about calling upon the capitalist state to act in the workers' interests through various forms of 'state aid' and, in it, he sets out exactly why tagging onto such calls the demand for 'democratic control' - out of a sense of shame - was what was ludicrous. It was those like Gerry who raise such demands, which delude the workers about the true nature of the capitalist state. Marx wrote in the *Critique* that their socialism was "only skin-deep" and that, in these demands to be placed upon the capitalist state, they only demonstrated that the working class was not the ruling class nor yet ready to rule. By contrast, in the same place, Marx writes that it was precisely the self-activity of the workers, independent of the bourgeoisie and their state, in setting up cooperatives, that was truly revolutionary. Similar statements can be found in Engels' later letters to the German party

opposing the calls being raised for nationalisation.

Take Engels' criticism of the *Erfurt programme*, for instance, where he wrote opposing the demands for the setting up by the state of health and national insurance schemes. He writes: "These points demand that the following should be taken over by the state: (1) the bar, (2) medical services, (3) pharmaceuticals, dentistry, midwifery, nursing, etc, etc, and later the demand is advanced that workers' insurance become a state concern. Can all this be entrusted to Mr von Caprivi? [German chancellor after Bismarck] And is it compatible with the rejection of all state socialism, as stated above?" ([www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm)).

And, in the programme that Marx wrote for the First International, he says nothing about demands for nationalisation, but does advise the workers to establish cooperatives: "We recommend to the working men to embark in cooperative production rather than in cooperative stores. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system; the former attacks its groundwork."

There are, of course, many more such quotes from Marx and Engels. But the same message is provided by Trotsky too. In the *Transitional programme*, where Trotsky does raise demands for nationalisation, he at the same time is clear to point out that such demands, as with others, such as a workers' government, can only be transitional demands leading towards revolutionary conclusions under certain circumstances - ie, in a situation which is already itself one of dual power or is pre-revolutionary. He makes that specifically clear in relation to the demand for the nationalisation of the banks, for example. Outside those conditions, these demands would indeed be nothing other than reformist demands, or else would amount to mere revolutionary phrase-mongering, to use Marx's earlier term.

Here is what Trotsky says in relation to the demands for nationalisation and workers' control: "It would, of course, be a disastrous error, an outright deception, to assert that the road to socialism passes, not through the proletarian revolution, but through nationalisation by the bourgeois state of various branches of industry and their transfer into the hands of the workers' organisations." And: "The workers need control not for platonic purposes, but in order to exert practical influence upon the production and commercial operations of the employers. This cannot, however, be attained unless the control, in one form or another, within such and such limits, is transformed into direct management. In a developed form, workers' control thus implies a sort of economic dual power in the factory, the bank, commercial enterprise, and so forth."

If the participation of the workers in the management of production is to be lasting, stable, 'normal', it must rest upon class-collaboration and not upon class struggle. Such a class-collaboration can be realised only through the upper strata of the trade unions and the capitalist associations. There have been not a few such experiments: 'economic democracy' in Germany, 'Mondism' in Britain, etc. Yet, in all these instances, it was not a case of workers' control over capital, but of the subservience of the labour bureaucracy to capital. Such subservience, as experience shows, can last for a long time, depending on the patience of the proletariat.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Dancing

Gerry Downing clearly can tell us the theoretical configuration of how many

little Trotskys can dance on the head of a Lenin (although Ray Rising says he can't), but what he can't do is translate what being a communist militant means in the day-to-day struggles of the working class. With 10,000 job losses threatened in Derbyshire at the railway carriage construction industry, the response of the CPGB and Workers Power was what? Nowt, an abstention, while Bough tells us that's the way the cookie crumbles, it's capitalism and there's nowt we can do till the glorious day of the worldwide revolution. So is this communist leadership? Either 'No comment' or 'Take it on the chin, lads. It's dog eat dog and you just got eaten'.

To say that workers were right to fight for the jobs, and the struggle of the workers was dead right and had to be supported, doesn't make me a bourgeois nationalist, you fools. My criticism of Peter Manson was around the abstention and lack of practical transitional demands to meet the crisis of work and poverty right now. Peter at least then came back and suggested the workers should have demanded nationalisation of the plant. I responded by adding 'under workers' control' and elaborating what the rest of the class would need to do in response to this demand.

A work-in where production was maintained and vehicles demanded and used by ancillary workers, with workers taking control of the distribution of sales profits, for example, has nothing to do with 'nationalism'. The struggle of the workers who live in Britain (I say this because many workers who worked in Derby and who work elsewhere on this island are *not* British workers but still demand defence of the jobs) isn't *de facto* 'nationalist' because they happen on this island. What utter stupidity. But even supposing the workers had decided to throw their lot in with the company, should the firm (Canadian, by the way, not British) have threatened to pull out, and demand replacement contracts or whatever, this is not of itself some form of class-collaboration. The workers need to work to live; it's the jobs they are trying to save, not the firm as such, and workers wouldn't give a bugger at this stage who owned it, as long as their employment terms and contracts were protected.

For a communist, that isn't the end of the story, of course, but standing with the workers is at least the start line. Pissing off round the corner in case some liberal, politically correct critic charged you with 'nationalism' because the existing contract had gone to Germany isn't any way to prove the worth of self-declared communists. Neither is telling workers in Britain that they have to fall on their swords and accept the decision of the government to throw them on the dole.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Counterposition

There seems a tendency in this discussion to counterpose globalisation and nationalism. Though they seem to be in contradiction, there is also unity between these concepts.

The ideology of globalisation has not a lot of content. Its ideologues simply repeat phrases from Adam Smith. It's not an ideology that excites anyone other than financial speculators. Globalisation is an economic process; nationalism is an ideology.

Nationalism today is non-functional as an economic policy. Hitler tried economic nationalism, but it required the invasion of bordering countries to absorb their raw materials and capital. Stalin tried economic nationalism in the former Soviet Union, but it was initially successful only by destroying the peasant economy. Nationalist politicians today still follow the rules of the global capitalist economy, while

expressing anti-imperialism, which sometimes frightens investors.

However, nationalism as an ideology is extremely useful in deflecting the working class. It can be interpreted to mean almost anything. Nor does it require intelligence or even the knowledge of simple facts. Immigrants, Arabs, blacks can all be blamed. The globalising bourgeoisie thus can easily mask its world investments in nationalist rhetoric.

**Earl Gilman**  
email

## Templater

Paul B Smith asserts: "Workers had more freedoms in Nazi Germany than in Stalin's Soviet Union" ('Impediments to consciousness', January 19). By this 'logic', the heroic resistance of the Soviet Union to fascism was a waste of time and it would surely have been better if the Nazis had won World War II.

Smith states the obvious: "There is an ongoing attempt to distort the history of the Bolshevik revolution." In my view, the role of bourgeois intellectuals such as himself in pouring slime on each and every achievement of the international working class movement is part of this distortion.

The methodology is completely non-dialectical. Absolutely everything that happened under 'Stalinism' was negative. Conveniently, for Smith, "the period of Stalinism lasted from 1924 until 1991". Lenin can be maintained as a 'clean' icon and 'Stalinism' carried on for nearly 40 years after Stalin's death. This is equally convenient, as anything that Smith does not like can be subsumed under the generic concept of 'Stalinism'.

The reality is that Smith, in his Kafkaesque world of 'anti-Stalinism', lacks all objectivity: history is templated and one hardly has to think.

**Ted Hankin**  
email

## PSC witch-hunt

Tony Greenstein's piece, 'No room for anti-Semites' (*Weekly Worker* January 19), seems to have a lot in common with Tanya Gold's comments in *The Guardian's* 'Comment is free' ('LSE Nazi games in context, January 16). Gold claims that "Anti-Semitic discourse is now mainstream and to say it all comes from the crimes of the Jewish state feels disingenuous and a denial of the past. Anti-Semitism is too old to sprout anew from nothing."

Tony, a Palestine Solidarity Campaign member, will by Tania's definition be regarded as "one of the leftwing anti-Semites [who] despise Israel, but are vocal on the crime of other oppressive countries". Yet, Tony, like Ms Gold and the pro-Zionist camp, is bent on cleaning out PSC of any alleged holocaust deniers and anti-Semites. He claims: "It would be futile to deny that this has not caused major problems for PSC ... Up and down the country, individual branches have experienced problems ... In Camden, Gill Kaffash was forced to step down as PSC secretary after her holocaust denial sympathies became clear."

As a member of Camden PSC, I was appalled by the underhand way Camden PSC pushed Gill out of her post as secretary of the branch to which she dedicated more than five years of hard work - making good use of her organisational expertise and inspiring many PSC supporters. Gill has also spent long periods in Palestine, where she taught English and helped with establishing community facilities. Moreover, she was a member of the PSC executive for a number of years. Needless to say, I felt compelled to object to the branch's intention of forcing Gill out of her post and sent my objections to the small forum which was about to take that decision. Yet they



decided unanimously, on the basis of a previous resolution, to go ahead with their intended ‘coup’ - informing Gill of it in an email which was only copied to the members of the forum who took the decision rather than to the full email list of Camden PSC.

Since PSC does not seem to have an appeal mechanism, and the issue at hand was too important to ignore, Gill proposed a motion which stated that in the light of the pressure on PSC from accusations of anti-Semitism - which has led to expulsion of members on such alleged grounds - there is a need to “demonstrate the importance of agreement on the meaning of racism, anti-Jewish prejudice and Islamophobia, as used in the constitution”. Gill proposed a definition based on the Wikipedia dictionary.

As a member of Camden PSC who witnessed the unacceptable ad-hoc mechanisms by which Gill and other PSC members were pushed out of their posts, or membership, I seconded her motion, being aware (as Gill was) that the proposed definition is only a basis for debate, to be followed by building up a coherent policy. Unfortunately, there was not enough time at the January 21 AGM to discuss all the motions and Gill’s was remitted to the executive, who presumably will discuss it among themselves and inform the membership whether it had been adopted or not. Since it seems this discussion will be carried out behind closed doors, I feel compelled to make my seconder’s comments public. These were to refer to my strong views about PSC’s recent policies on alleged holocaust deniers. As a Jew and an Israeli-born citizen, I believe the following comments as a seconder to Gill’s motion should not be disregarded by PSC’s membership:

“I am greatly alarmed by obvious attempts to ‘clean out’ PSC of alleged anti-Semites and holocaust deniers. My grandparents and many close relatives perished in the holocaust. Yet I believe that I, like other fellow citizens, have the right and perhaps the duty to ask questions about the background, extent and procedures/means employed by the Nazis for exterminating millions of Jews and non-Jews and the stages which led to the ‘final solution’. I do not consider the holocaust a taboo subject, which, in my view, is virtually hijacked by Israel and the Jewish community. If my questions lead to challenging the official narrative of the holocaust - which is promoted aggressively by Israel in order to defend the creation and the policies of the Jewish state - then I stand to be called a holocaust denier ...

“Let me remind you that we owe a great deal to the Israeli new historians ... who dared to challenge the Israeli national version of the so-called ‘war of independence’ and the steps which led to the Palestinian nakba. On the same principle, the Jewish scholar, Marc Ellis, has argued that the holocaust is not merely part of the past and should not be considered as if it was born in a vacuum - having no links to the present and future. In his words: ‘... To speak of the holocaust without confessing our sins towards the Palestinian people and seeking a real justice with them is a hypocrisy that debases us as Jews.’

“Marc Ellis, like Norman Finkelstein ... has been hounded and vilified by the mainstream Jewish community. Is the PSC going to align with such forms of inquisition-style witch-hunt on the lines of the McCarthy era, when alleged ‘communists’ were hunted out in public? Are we going to implicitly offer support to the Israeli ‘holocaust promoters’, such as Matan Vilnai - the ex-deputy defence minister, who in February 2008 threatened Gaza with a bigger *shoah* (holocaust), and Dov Weisglass, an adviser to former Israeli prime minister Olmert - who considered putting Gazans on a ‘starvation diet’ in the aftermath of Israel’s onslaught on Gaza?

“By looking out for alleged, or

imaginary, holocaust deniers and voting for a motion which makes it part of PSC’s official and publicly declared policy, we are placing ourselves on the same level of those who view PSC as an anti-Semitic organisation ...

“It is clear to me that PSC should avoid falling into the trap of employing an ambivalent and open-ended definition of anti-Semitism, or get engaged in an anti-holocaust denier campaign - which may stand the risk of conflating extreme criticism of Israel’s policies with, or view any attempt to revisit and challenge the narrative of the holocaust as, anti-Semitism ...

“I would submit that the PSC ... should add the following statement to the executive’s AGM motion 2 ...: ‘Equally PSC should endeavour to combat attempts of (mis)using the holocaust in order to fend off criticism against Israel’s policies and in employing the holocaust’s emotive narrative for defending Israel’s racist actions and apartheid practices.’”

The AGM adopted the executive’s motion, which says that “any expression of racism or intolerance, or attempts to deny or minimise the holocaust, have no place in our movements. Such sentiments are abhorrent in their own right and can only detract from the building of a strong movement in support of the fundamental rights of the Palestinians.”

Thus, the witch-hunting and ‘cleaning out’ of alleged holocaust deniers has become now one of the core policies of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. This would no doubt have a significant impact on the work of PSC, the use of its resources and on its cohesion as a movement which is supposed to stand up against those who in the name of the holocaust justify the creation of a ‘Jewish state’ based on indefensible colonialism and racism against the Palestinian people.

It is not, however, too late to include my above-submitted lines (or a similar wording) in PSC’s mission statement, which is posted on its website.

**Ruth Tenne**  
 Camden PSC

## Preacher man

Peter Manson’s criticisms of the Socialist Workers Party’s commitment to democracy would be much more convincing if the *Weekly Worker* got its own house in order (‘Muddle, passivity, conformity’, January 26).

The draft rules of the *Weekly Worker* group allow excessive powers to the Provisional Central Committee to dissolve party organisations, such as publications, minority groupings and, presumably, branches that are dominated by opponents and critics of the leadership. A standard rule for typical bureaucratic centralist groups.

As a long-term reader of your paper, I can’t remember the last time I read about a leadership election or you bringing in younger comrades, let alone a woman or BME comrade! Why is this? The *Weekly Worker* has to be one of the best of the left when it comes to democracy and debate, but still has so far to go. It would likely have more influence if it practised what it preached.

**Ian Costen**  
 Burniston

## Bastard

On the critique of the SWP’s resolution, Peter Manson writes: “Human labour creates all surplus value under capitalism.” This isn’t accurate. Human labour-power in productive labour, be it manual or mental (and taking into account its technological, labour-saving equivalent), is the only non-natural source of value production.

I use the term, ‘value production’, because business management refers to value-added processes. It refers to concepts of ‘value’ without using the academic term, ‘surplus value’. Taking into account one other factor is flexible enough to take post-

Keynesian criticisms of Marx’s labour theory of value (modern suggestions that machinery can add more lifetime product value than lifetime depreciation) with a grain of salt.

Speaking of Keynesianism, I’m quite disappointed that post-Keynesian economics and policies, as opposed to what they call ‘bastard Keynesianism’, were not discussed or criticised in the CPGB’s political economy event. I’m not sure how the term ‘nationalist’ easily applies to post-Keynesian policies.

**Jacob Richter**  
 email

## Take time

I’m sorry if I mischaracterised Paul Anderson as a Stalinist (Letters, January 26), but most people who share his crude anti-imperialism think that, at worst, Stalin was 70% correct, 30% incorrect, just like Mao did. I would hope that Anderson is at least aware of the kinds of Marxists who share his views on anti-imperialism.

Despite ‘progress’ in admitting to Mugabe’s crimes, Anderson gives us a new whopper - that Saddam didn’t gas the Kurds. Anderson is now promoting Reagan-era state department propaganda in order to defend Saddam from ‘demonisation’. The Kurds were working with the Iranians; this point is hardly controversial. Even if you can make a reasonable-sounding claim that the Kurds were caught in the crossfire of Halabja poison gas attack, you really can’t ignore other massacres of Kurds during the Al-Anfal campaign of 1986-89. I use this last example because Anderson once again takes a simplistic view of a conflict and this time rather strangely from an imperialist source.

Anderson correctly believes that the National Transitional Council in Libya is a counterrevolutionary army loyal to western imperialism, but he doesn’t realise that the NTC was not the only source of opposition to Gaddafi. The rebels in Misrata rejected the NTC’s authority and so did the Berbers of the Nafusa mountains. The Berbers’ opposition to Gaddafi is obvious. They were subjected to Arabisation by the Gaddafi regime, with their mother tongue of Tamazight and their Berber culture banned in public. So, I ask Anderson, should the Berbers of Libya have just shut up and accepted their marginalisation under Gaddafi?

I would hope that next time a conflict such as this breaks out, Anderson takes time to analyse more than the press releases of the state department and the government of whatever regime Nato will be threatening. There is always something more to the story, with many different forces at work. That’s what Marxism teaches us.

Anderson is right to say, “regime change begins at home”, but it is pure arrogance for us here in the west to be dictating what the most progressive and appropriate regime for a third-world country is. This kind of thing only leads to accusations of Marxism having a Eurocentric bias.

**Roscoe Turi**  
 email

## The other SP

The Socialist Party is standing a candidate in the Lambeth and Southwark and Merton and Wandsworth constituencies in the elections for the Greater London Assembly on May 3.

The Socialist Party is the oldest party calling itself socialist in Britain, going back to 1904. It says that socialism, as a system based on common ownership and democratic control, where goods and services are produced to meet people’s needs instead of for profit, has never been tried (and certainly not in Russia or China) and can only come about democratically when a majority want it.

**Adam Buick**

# 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 February 7, 6.15pm:** ‘The tower of Babel’ (Noam Chomsky and the myth of ‘universal grammar’). Speaker: Chris Knight. 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).

### Palestine solidarity

**Thursday February 2, 7.30pm:** Screening of *Arna’s children*, Cafe Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14. Recounting the story of a theatre group for Palestinian children set up in Jenin refugee camp. Followed by discussion. £2.50, refreshments available.

Organised by South East London Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [selpsc@gmail.com](mailto:selpsc@gmail.com).

### 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: [coalitionagainstcuts.wordpress.com](http://coalitionagainstcuts.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).

### Socialist films

**Sunday February 12, 11am:** screenings, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Emily James’s *Just do it* (UK 2011, 88 minutes); Gabrielle Tierney’s *Not in our name* (Ireland 2009, 30 minutes). Followed by discussion with film-makers.

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: [www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com).

### Socialist study

**Thursday February 16, 6pm:** Study group, the Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. Studying Hillel Ticktin’s ‘The politics of socialism’ from *What will a socialist society be like?*

Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: [teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com](mailto:teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com).

### Battlefields

**Saturday February 18, 5pm to 11.30pm:** Visual arts, performances and live music, Mori and Stein Gallery, Flying Dutchman, 156 Wells Way, London SE5. Exploring bodies, sexualities and genders.

Organised by Battlefields: <https://www.facebook.com/events/350597608299923>.

### 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).

### Global capitalism and crisis

**Saturday February 25, 10am to 5pm:** Conference, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2 (nearest tube: Holborn). Sessions: ‘Marxism and the crisis’ (Hillel Ticktin), ‘The death of the west?’ (Michael Cox), ‘Greece and the decline of Europe’ (Savas Michael-Matsas), ‘Hugo Chávez, oil and petro-socialism’ (Ben Blackwell), ‘The Arab spring’ (Yassamine Mather).

Organised by *Critique*: [www.critiquejournal.net](http://www.critiquejournal.net).

### Unite Against Fascism

**Saturday February 25, 10am to 4.30pm:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). £12 waged, £6 unwaged.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

### Stop the War Coalition

**Saturday March 3:** Annual conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party’s name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.



## ECONOMY

# Fool's paradise at Davos

Even though Greece continues to edge closer to default, writes **Eddie Ford**, there has been yet more inaction by global 'leaders'

Over January 25-29 the international capitalist class, albeit without their top Chinese associates, had their annual chin-wag at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Afterwards, the European 'section' then flew off to Brussels on January 31 for yet another summit - the main items on the agenda being the problems of unemployment and economic growth, the finalisation of the new "fiscal compact" for the euro zone and the establishment of the European Stability Mechanism - the supposedly permanent bailout fund due to replace the unhappy European Financial Stability Facility in July.

The overall theme presented at Davos was that the global leaders were not panicking any more - just relax, guys. After all, things do not look so bleak now - do they? For example, constant intervention by the European Central Bank prevented another credit crunch/freeze, if not a catastrophic collapse of the euro. Just look at how the ECB kept buying up 'distressed' Italian government bonds, thereby driving the interest rate below the 7% critical threshold, or the way it dished out €498 billion in loans at the end of last year to European banks (at an average interest rate of 1% for three years) in a form of 'quantitative easing'. You see, things could be worse.

And then, hey, look too at the latest official statistics for the last quarter of 2011 for the United States - projecting an *annualised* growth rate of 2.8%, up from the 1.8% of the previous quarter. OK, that was mainly due to businesses restocking, therefore heavily boosting the GDP figure by an extra 1.9%. But for those congregated at the WEF, it seems that any silver lining is better than none.

To use a common expression from Davos, they have somehow "muddled through" the euro crisis and now there are reasons to be cheerful again. However, for all the optimistic-sounding words, the crisis remains very real and still threatens to bust apart the euro zone.

## Greek spectre

The situation in Greece remains explosive. The government and its private creditors have still not come to a compromise arrangement over debt repayment and time is running out. Athens has to pay back €14.5 billion of debt by March 20, with money it does not have, as things stand now. If Greece is unable to make the payment, then it would be in default and in all likelihood would be forced out of the euro - probably sooner rather than later.

Although some myopically suggest that a Greek default need not necessarily be such a disaster, there is no doubt that such an eventuality would trigger a toxic chain reaction. Debt contagion would quickly spread into Portugal, Spain, Italy and, of course, France - given that its banks are exposed to dangerous levels of Greek debt. Lucas Papademos, the technocratic Greek prime minister parachuted in by an exasperated Brussels, darkly warned that the country faced the "spectre of bankruptcy" with "all the dire consequences that entails" - and held a post-midnight press conference in Brussels straight after the summit finished, saying that "everything will, and must, be finished by the end of

the week". Otherwise calamity looms. Yet, as the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, no deal has been done and Papademos has called for a "crisis meeting", perhaps on February 2, to be conducted between himself and the European Union, ECB and International Monetary Fund troika.

Tensions are rising. Over the last week Greek officials have launched vociferous, behind-the-scenes attacks on EU and IMF negotiators, who are demanding even more severe austerity measures - squeeze more blood out of the workers - before sanctioning the next tranche of €130 billion of bailout money. But the price may be too high, even for a Greek technocratic administration which is desperate for some sort of resolution. The price is certainly too high for most MPs in the Greek parliament, including those who are members of the 'interim' or 'national unity' coalition government. With elections not far away, it would hardly be a vote-winner to be seen approving further wage cuts and reductions in the minimum wage. As one government aide put it, the troika "doesn't appear to be willing to accept any concessions whatsoever on reducing the minimum wage and scrapping bonuses" - keep cutting and cutting - whilst no Greek political party is "willing to move either, saying wage cuts are a red line they are simply not going to cross". Impasse.

Athens now finds itself at odds with both its private creditors and the troika - not to mention the working class. Private creditors are worried that the losses ('haircut') they are being asked to accept - a nominal 50% write-down in order to slice an estimated €100 billion from Greece's overall €350 billion debt pile - will in fact end up being much larger: perhaps they will have to take a hit of 80% or more. And, as the Greek economy, thanks to the troika's austerity regime, continues to nose-dive - perhaps to the point of extinction - then such fears are well-founded. Private investors may be many things, but they are not complete idiots.

In turn, the troika is becoming increasingly concerned that the country's second bailout might have to be increased - with all the economic and political ramification that carries. For instance, *Der Spiegel* quoted a troika official as saying that Greece may well need €145 rather than €130 billion if it is to be "saved once and for all". Similarly, the EU economic and monetary affairs commissioner, Olli Rehn, said last week that a "revised" analysis had shown that more rescue loans would be needed to make up for a "shortfall" in the second aid package. The extra money, he said, was required to ensure that Greece's debt burden was reduced to 120% of GDP by 2020 - which he believes is "manageable". More like a pipe-dream.

Of course, the heat in the Greek kitchen was considerably raised by a leaked, German-inspired EU proposal to install a colonial-style commissioner in Athens with veto powers over the Greek budget. According to the document, Athens' inability to meet fiscal targets had made the new post a "precondition" of further rescue funds from the troika - as "budget consolidation has to be put under a strict steering and control system". But, given the "disappointing compliance so far" from the Greek government, it was now time for it to "accept shifting budgetary sovereignty to the European level for a certain

period of time". The leaked document also stipulated that Athens must give "absolute priority to debt service" and agree to terms that make it impossible for Greece to "threaten lenders with default".

Fury erupted. Anna Diamantopoulou, the Greek education minister and former EU commissioner, denounced the plan as the "product of a sick imagination" - what a humiliation for the country. Her sentiments were widely shared, and not just in Greece. Whether a conspiracy theory or not, some analysts have suggested that Germany deliberately produced such a document knowing full well that Athens could not accept such conditions, therefore acting to accelerate Greece's departure from the euro and set an example to other 'wayward' and 'irresponsible' countries.

Meanwhile, quite predictably, the Greek economy is *collapsing*. Unemployment now stands at 19.2% and rising. Consumers suffering wage and pension cuts, rising inflation and a recession of a severity not seen since World War II, ensured that shops had one of their worst Christmases on record - with retail sales down 30% on the previous year. Since mid-2009, some 65,000 stores have been forced to shut down. Tough austerity measures, including a wave of new levies and tax increases demanded by the troika, have pushed another 50,000 to the point of bankruptcy. About 55,000 employees working in small and medium-sized enterprises - the mainstay of Greek enterprise - have lost their jobs, with *many* more to follow. And with the economy expected to contract by a further 6% this year, it is estimated that as many as half of the remaining 324,000 small and medium-sized enterprises will soon be forced to shut.

Yanis Varoufakis, who runs the department of economic policy at the University of Athens, told the BBC's *Today* programme that the troika's austerity plan was a doomed project - it would not work "even if god and his angels were to descend upon Athens and put them in place". He is surely right. It is transparently obvious that Greece, asked to do the impossible, is heading for basket status.

## Iberian storm

Private creditors and the troika may be fighting over scraps in Athens, but the storm clouds gathering over the Iberian peninsula could make the 'Greek question' look like little more than a minor headache by comparison. Even though Portugal is already shielded by a €78 billion package from the troika and thus does not have to tap the markets this year, yields (interest rate) on Portuguese government 10-year bonds hit a fresh record of 17.38% as of January 30 - more than twice the level normally seen as sustainable.

The bonds came under particularly intense pressure from investors after Standard and Poor's downgraded the country to "junk" status. Hence we read in a Reuters report that the 'upfront' payment required to buy €10 million of insurance on Portuguese debt hit a record high of €3.9 million on that date, a sure sign that investors were increasingly betting that the country will eventually have to 'restructure' its debt.

In the opinion of Citigroup, Portugal's economy will contract by 5.7% this year and 3.5% next year -

replicating the downward spiral seen in Greece, as austerity began to bite. While Portugal has so far delivered on its austerity promises, driving down living standards for the working class, the task confronting it is Sisyphean - a combined public and private debt of 360% of GDP, much higher than in Greece. Up until now, Europe's leaders have vowed that they will not inflict a 'haircut' on Portugal's creditors, insisting that Greece was a "special case" - never again. But the relentless exodus from Portuguese debt suggests that investors just do not believe them.

Then there is Spain, also entering bailout territory. Data released last week showed that GDP fell by 0.3% in the last three months of 2011 compared with the previous quarter - the first contraction in eight years. These figures followed statistics published on January 27, which showed that unemployment now stood at a staggering 5.3 million, putting the jobless rate at 22.8%. More than half of 16-24-year-olds in Spain are out of work. The rate is only set to worsen, as Mariano Rajoy's People's Party pursues a €40 billion 'budget adjustment', most of it in spending cuts, in order to meet the EU's deficit reduction target of 4.4% this year.

The levels of unemployment, and general misery, in Spain are clearly reaching 1930s levels. Almost 1.5 million Spanish households now have no wage-earner, with 3.5 million people joining the dole queue over the past four and a half years. Furthermore, around 35,000 companies folded in the second half of last year - a third of all those to have shut since Spain's economy started to run into serious trouble at the end of 2008. Much of the spending cuts have to come from regional governments, which provide basic services, such as health, education and welfare benefits. Spain is in danger of experiencing a social meltdown.

No wonder that we read that Rajoy has started to "quietly beg" the EU to ease up on its deficit targets, which are sending the country hurtling back into recession.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, he has demanded greater "realism" from Brussels, but there are no signs that it is listening. Gloomily, in a *Financial Times* article by Wolfgang Münchau - the paper's associate editor - he writes that Spain is "following the same path taken by Greece", despite the fact that it has a "much healthier economy".<sup>2</sup> But, he continues, it also "has a problem" that Greece did not, which is a "deeply indebted private sector", and that is the reason why a policy of "excessive deficit reduction could become so toxic". He concludes by stating that if Spain "were to fall down a black hole", then no rescue fund - however large - "would be able to drag it out". A sober thought indeed.

## Binding

Whilst the fool's paradise at Davos was keen to promote the message that things can only get better - the wise rulers of the world will guarantee that - the half-day Brussels summit was characterised more by subdued bickering over the "fiscal pact". All of the EU member-states finally endorsed the new compact except for the Czech Republic ("constitutional reasons") and the UK, David Cameron citing "legal concerns" about the use of EU institutions in enforcing the fiscal treaty - though he has upset many of his Eurosceptic backbenchers by going

quiet on the use of the veto, saying it was in Britain's national interest for euro zone countries to "get on and sort out the mess that is the euro".

The 25 leaders agreed to enshrine 'balanced budget' legislation into their national law, with annual structural deficits capped at 0.5% of GDP. There will be quasi-automatic sanctions on countries that breach the budget deficit limits, transgressors facing penalties of 0.1% of GDP - the fines being added to new ESM bailout fund. A rather ironic situation, you could argue, whereby countries are being provided with monies not only to pay for the normal running of government, but also their fines for fiscal indiscipline. The treaty also spells out an enhanced role for the European commission in scrutinising national budgets.

The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (SCG) will come into force once it has been passed by the parliaments of at least 12 countries that use the euro - qualified majority voting. Euro area leaders confirmed that they will "reassess" whether the EFSF/ESM has "sufficient" resources to meet any future crisis or 'credit event'. They also committed themselves to a new drive to "stimulate growth" and "create employment" across the region, particularly for young people. Additionally, they also vowed to help small and medium enterprises get access to credit.

In many respects, the new SCG compact is a triumph for Germany - enshrining Berlin's insistence on "rigour" and "discipline", particularly with regard to the new punitive regime for budgetary profligacy. For the first time, as chancellor Angela Merkel wanted, of course, the treaty empowers the European Court of Justice as the enforcer of fiscal rectitude in the euro zone - not the individual member-states or their respective governments. All euro zone countries are now obliged to introduce *binding* legislation or constitutional amendments effectively abolishing governments' rights to run their own economies in whatever way they see fit.

Concisely summing up the new fiscal deal in Europe, Merkel pronounced that the "debt brakes will be binding and valid forever"; from now on, "never will you be able to change them through a parliamentary majority". Whoever you vote for, the EU bureaucracy wins. Merkel could not have made the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of the current EU set-up more clear: an elitist project run in the interests of capital at our expense. Not that genuine communists have any illusions in the 'independent' bourgeois nation-state: inside or outside the euro zone/SCG, or the EU, capital needs to attack the working class in order to salvage its system. A system that is suffering from chronic dysfunction.

All the evidence is that the banks and other financial institutions are *hoarding* cash - sitting on the money as the fiscal environment looks more and more dangerous. Perfectly rational, of course, for the viewpoint of the individual capitalist - totally advisable, in fact. But it is totally irrational for the system as a whole. The second great credit crunch remains a very real possibility ●

## Notes

1. *The Guardian* January 27.
2. *Financial Times* January 29.



## ITALY

# Monti prepares for fresh attacks

The nature of the Italian resistance to austerity has so far been contradictory, writes **Toby Abse**

**W**hilst prime minister Mario Monti has restored Italy's status within the European Union and is in a position to debate with Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron on more or less equal terms - in marked contrast to his predecessor, Silvio Berlusconi, who by the autumn of 2011 had ended up as an object of mockery at European summits<sup>1</sup> - he is facing increasing opposition at home.

That is not so much the case in parliament, where all parties other than the rightwing Lega Nord and anti-corruption Italia dei Valori give him at least nominal support (even if Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà deputies seem increasingly reluctant to turn up and deliver their votes), but it is certainly true of a variety of social groups in the country at large. Although the latest opinion poll cited by political scientist Ilvo Diamanti shows 57.7% of the sample giving a positive judgement on the actions of the Monti government, it is very significant that 56.4% of the very same sample support the demonstrations and protests against that government. This figure far exceeds the percentage that sympathise with the Lega Nord or the radical left.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the whole thrust of Diamanti's *La Repubblica* article was an attempt to explain this apparent contradiction in terms of sectionalist attitudes - arguing that many groups supported 'reforms' targeting others, but opposed those affecting their own immediate interests - these figures do also indicate a substantial decline in support for the government since its honeymoon period in November 2011. A poll conducted on November 17-18 had given it 78.6% support - probably the nearest any Italian government is likely to get to a national consensus.

It would be absurdly simplistic to reduce all the conflicts of recent weeks to a straightforward direct confrontation between the ruling class and the workers, even if some on the British far left have done so. *Socialist Worker* - seemingly deprived of any expertise on Italy after the untimely death of Tom Behan (author of numerous books on Italian communism, fascism, the Camorra and Dario Fo) and the recent defection of Chris Bamberg to Scotland's International Socialist Group - takes this extraordinarily crass line.

Sadie Robinson starts by making the incontrovertible, but rather vague statement: "In Italy, workers are fighting privatisation and cuts imposed by the technocratic government of prime minister Mario Monti." But she then illustrates her contention by referring to taxi drivers, pharmacists and lawyers, alongside the more predictable rail workers, and even asserts: "One truck driver was run over and killed this week whilst protesting against government plans to privatise transport."<sup>3</sup> This wrongly suggests to her readers that Italian lorry drivers usually work for the state or municipalities rather than being for the most part self-employed or employees of small private firms. It is, of course, true that the Monti government does have longer-term plans to privatise state-run railways and municipally run bus services, but their implementation does not seem to be imminent and the lorry drivers' dispute was entirely focused on their own working conditions and not a solidarity action.

In reality many of those who have been involved in the recent

protests against Monti's January 20 liberalisation decree usually vote for the PdL and might more accurately be described as petty bourgeois or middle class professionals, rather than members of the working class in any meaningful sense.

Some of the liberalisations were clearly just a means of extending the role of the market at the expense of the common good - for example, moves towards competition and privatisation in local government services. This is in stark contradiction to the outcome of the June 2011 referendum, in which a clear majority rejected water privatisation. But some attacks on bank charges or lawyers' fees might be to the advantage of the average user of these services. Whilst increasing the number of pharmacists by 5,000 over the next few months will undoubtedly reduce the income of at least some of the existing pharmacists, it is at least possible that it might be in the interests of those who urgently need to obtain medicines. In short not all of the traditional privileges of the petty bourgeois groups, protected first by the Christian Democrats and then by Berlusconi's Forza Italia and PdL for clientelist and electoral reasons, are necessarily in the interests of Italian society as a whole.

Regardless of whether the protests were justified, and in some instances they undoubtedly were, they were often led by people with no connection to the labour movement, however broadly defined, and in the case of some of the more violent protests in Sicily there is little doubt that the Mafia was well to the fore, playing the time-honoured card of Sicilian separatism, which is always brought out when the Italian state starts to interfere with any of its economic interests. It might even be argued that a competitive free market is preferable to a Mafia monopoly over any economic resources - given the record of organised crime in keeping up food prices and in some instances, such as mozzarella cheese, producing poisonous products. And, of course, Mafia control of access to any labour market is damaging to trade union organisation.

Obviously, coordinated actions by the taxi drivers could, and did, create traffic chaos in the centre of a

number of major cities, including Rome, and the lorry drivers' actions had even more impact not just in terms of blocking roads, but also in terms of creating shortages of foodstuffs and other essential commodities. Given the sectional and, at best, apolitical character of this action, it is perhaps surprising that opinion polls should demonstrate such widespread sympathy for protests that had a very negative impact on the daily lives of working class consumers and small farmers without large cash reserves to fall back on.

### Labour 'reform'

If the liberalisation decree represented the second phase of the Monti government's programme - the first being the austerity package imposed last year - Italy is now entering the third phase: that of labour market 'reform'. Labour minister Elsa Fornero is currently aiming to achieve an agreement on changes by the end of March. Both Monti and Fornero have realised, as a result of the vigorous interventions of Susanna Camusso, head of the CGIL trade union confederation, and the December strikes, that the immediate abolition of article 18 of the Workers' Statute would provoke a massive social conflict. But it is clear that the pressure from the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund has in no way lessened since the August 2011 ECB letter to the Italian government.

Corrado Passera, the former head of Banca Intesa and minister for infrastructure in the Monti government, was reminded of the issue at the Davos World Economic Forum. At a round table on January 26 on 'The future of Italy', Vittorio Colao, a London-based Italian manager for Vodafone, pointed out that he would not have to put up with such obstacles if he were to open a call centre in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Such forthright comments, made at a gathering of unashamed advocates of free-market capitalism, indicate the absurdity of giving any credence whatsoever to the rhetoric of 'intergenerational justice' endlessly spouted by ruling class ideologues. It is abundantly clear that the attack on article 18 is an attempt to reduce the rights of Italian workers to those of the superexploited proletarians of the

third world.

The latest schedule for the discussions on labour market 'reform' has fixed a meeting on February 2 between Fornero and the 'social partners' (union confederations; the employers' organisation, Confindustria; the bankers' association, Abi; and other employers represented by the Rete Imprese and Ania). A report in *La Repubblica*, clearly based on a briefing from reliable sources, has indicated that the government's latest proposal is that article 18 would not apply to any workers taken on in the future, regardless of the size of the workplace, although, allegedly, the rights of all those workers currently protected would remain unchanged.<sup>5</sup> It is claimed that in return the problem of casual workers on short-term contracts would be resolved by giving them a greater degree of job security, with financial compensation for redundancy rather than reinstatement, graduated according to their length of service.

Such proposals have for some time been popular on the right wing of the Partito Democratico, the party dominated by former 'official communists'. The PD's Pietro Ichino has long been notorious as a rabid neoliberal opponent of article 18 and has recently written a book offering a long and convoluted theoretical justification for this frontal assault on the organised working class. Other experts in or close to the PD with a more old-fashioned social democratic outlook have come up with other proposals, under which workers would only gain full rights under article 18 after some sort of trial period or apprenticeship (a standard three years in the case of the Boeri-Garibaldi proposals and up to a maximum of three years in the case of Damiano-Madia). Even the proposal put forward by former PdL labour minister Maurizio Sacconi (which also involves a three-year apprenticeship and the elimination of some, but not all, short-term 'atypical contracts'), whilst being a bit vague and ambiguous, does not openly propose the abolition of article 18 advocated so zealously by the PD 'reformer', Ichino.<sup>6</sup>

Italian unemployment stood at 2.2 million (8.9%) in December 2011, the highest since the government statistical agency started collating the monthly figures in 2004.<sup>7</sup> Whilst youth unemployment is also high in Italy at 31% (compared with 22% in the United Kingdom), the figures are considerably worse elsewhere in the southern European periphery of the euro zone (30.7% in Portugal, 46.6% in Greece and 51.4% in Spain).<sup>8</sup> These comparative statistics would cast doubt on the standard neoliberal contention that youth unemployment in Italy is somehow due to the existence of article 18 and it is interesting that the highest figure is not even from Greece, which has suffered the greatest hammer blows of neoliberal austerity in the last year or so, but Spain, where neoliberal labour market policies have been pursued for many years.

So far Susanna Camusso is sticking to a very hard line on article 18 - to the intense annoyance of those who promoted her 'moderate' merits as a protégé of Guglielmo Epifani, the previous CGIL general secretary, and an heir to Luciano Lama, the CGIL leader at the time of the 'historic compromise'. This irritation on the part of the bourgeois intellectuals of the centre-left is best exemplified in

the recent exchanges in the pages of *La Repubblica* between its former (and founding) editor, Eugenio Scalfari, and Camusso herself. This began with an open letter from Scalfari, which started by quoting virtually verbatim from words spoken by Lama in an interview with him back in January 1978. It then tried to show that the logic of Lama's position of subordinating the immediate interests of his working class members to what he (and Scalfari) saw as the 'national interest' would in effect require Camusso to compromise on article 18. Scalfari asserts: "The trade unions can and must favour the flexibility of labour in both entry and exit. If they adopt as their own the trade union policy that Lama carried forward tenaciously for eight years, they will have done their duty."<sup>9</sup>

Camusso responded the next day. Since she cannot be seen to publicly repudiate the inheritance of Lama, she cleverly emphasised the differences between 1978 and 2012, pointing out that real wages are falling in 2012 in contrast to the inflationary spiral of 1978, so that the lack of purchasing power pulls the economy deeper into recession. Rather than accepting that allegedly old-fashioned restrictions on labour flexibility like article 18 are the cause of mass unemployment, she argued: "On the contrary, productivity in our country decreases with the growth of casualisation, which has not even increased employment, but instead produces that poor-quality labour that we would do well to ask ourselves about."<sup>10</sup>

Scalfari, having failed to use Camusso's old ideological position on the right of the CGIL as a method of moral blackmail, showed his own ideological colours, rather than wrapping himself in Lama's shroud, in his angry response. After accusing Camusso of "closing her eyes to reality" and implicitly supporting a protectionist response to the Asian tiger economies, as well as patronising her as "gentle Susanna" and not just "cara Camusso", he came to the heart of the matter when he said: "Personally I was never moved when I heard 'Bandiera rossa' sung, but, when I heard 'The Marseillaise' - yes, I felt something that agitated me in my very soul."<sup>11</sup>

In short, the veteran journalist counterposes the anthem of the bourgeois revolution to the anthem of the working class fightback against capitalism. At a time when *Corriere della Sera* has hinted that Raffaele Bonanni, leader of the rival CISL union confederation, is playing with the idea of pursuing a political career in the centre of the political spectrum, it is to be hoped that Camusso will continue to defend the interests of the organised working class once the negotiations start in earnest later this week ●

### Notes

1. The *Financial Times*, which held Berlusconi in total contempt by the end of his third premiership, openly calling for his resignation, has adopted a far more respectful tone in relation to Monti - see, for example, the January 17 lead article, 'Monti warns of backlash'.
2. *La Repubblica* January 30.
3. *Socialist Worker* January 28.
4. *La Repubblica* January 30.
5. *La Repubblica* January 30. Given the whole history of two-tier workforces internationally, it is likely the employers would come back for more once the proportion of 'protected' workers decreased.
6. See *Repubblica* January 30 for more detail on these proposals.
7. *La Repubblica* February 1.
8. *The Observer* January 29.
9. *La Repubblica* January 29.
10. *La Repubblica* January 30.
11. *La Repubblica* January 31.





**STWC**

# Opposing imperialism does not mean supporting oppression

Anti-war protest disrupted by attack on supporters of the Iranian green movement. **Ben Lewis** reports

**O**n January 28 around 300 protestors gathered outside the US embassy to oppose the increasingly bellicose rhetoric against Iran and Syria. Called by the Stop the War Coalition under the title of 'Stop the war before it starts: don't attack Iran/Syria', the protest was in many respects something that seasoned activists in the anti-war movement would be all too familiar with. With a few exceptions, the speeches were well-meaning, if often slightly tedious and repetitive. Then came a few chants and the promise to build an enormous opposition that could finally scupper the imperialists' plans once and for all.

However, it soon became clear that this was not going to be simply 'business as usual'. In a somewhat embarrassing indictment of the 'as broad as possible' approach typified by the coalition, several speakers were booed or chanted down, and fights broke out between groups of protestors. At one point a group of Iranians from the London green movement lined up against supporters of the Syrian Ba'athist regime. It was not pretty.

The first indications that something was not quite right came when I was handing out Hands Off the People of Iran leaflets, in support of Hopi's 'Make your voice heard' campaign.<sup>1</sup> The leaflets were readily snapped up, including by young men sporting baseball caps emblazoned with the Syrian flag (not that of the Syrian opposition) and a picture of Bashad Al-Assad in all his despotic glory. No problem, of course. We are revolutionaries, not *Guardianista* liberals, and should have no qualms about marching alongside, and entering into temporary alliances with, all sorts of people with all sorts of wacky ideas. (There were a few on this demo, as we shall see.) The point of propaganda is to change those ideas, or at least marginalise their effectiveness. We need solid arguments and the willingness to engage in critical dialogue with all those committed to stopping the plans of the imperialists.

While leafleting the Ba'athists, I saw about 40 Iranian protestors gathering behind banners reading 'Free Iran'. When the rather compromised figure of Abbas Eddalat of the Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran (Casmii) spoke, noise erupted from the 'Free Iran' contingent. In the din it was not all clear what he was saying. However, readers of this paper will be all too aware of his disgraceful apologia for the regime, not least when Hopi was excluded from the STWC in front of Press TV cameras back in 2007.<sup>2</sup> It was obvious that the Iranians, quite rightly, were demanding to hear a speaker who would present a less one-sided view of the situation in Iran.

This angered the Syrian Ba'athists and their Islamist allies, and soon the two groups were squaring up to one another. They were separated only by police barriers and four or five rather dumbfounded constables. Some of the younger male pro-Syrians initially managed to get quite close to the Iranian greens. Wrapped in Syrian flags and with bandanas reading "labeik Khamenei"



Headbands read: 'Pledge allegiance to Khamenei'

("I pledge allegiance to Khamenei") around their heads, they meted out some quite heavy blows to some of the Iranians leading the chants.

Chants of 'Long live Syria' were met with 'Down with Hezbollah'. The stage-led chanting ("one, two, three, four, we don't want ...") was utterly drowned out. Keen to find out just who some of these people were, comrades working with Hopi managed to speak to them. To give an example of the kind of views they hold, one woman went to some length to explain how it was actually acceptable for women wearing bikinis to be stoned.

There was a fleeting moment of humanity, when the clashes were temporarily halted to allow a small girl from the crowd, who had fallen down, to be safely removed. But from this point on things were really out of control. The stewards were understandably at a loss, and some protestors were calling on the police to break up the fights.

Speeches from the platform were constantly interrupted by megaphone chants from the pro-Syrians, who were complaining about the emphasis on Iran - the demonstration was, after all, supposed to be about Syria too. But the organisers were keen to play down the Syrian aspect and none of the platform speakers really discussed it at any length. This obviously upset the al-Assad fans, leading them to disrupt the demonstration and let loose on the Iranian oppositionists. They did their best to make it known just how much they loved al-Assad, much to the displeasure of the Iranian greens.

One of the main organisers of the Syrian contingent could be seen handing out copies of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) publication, *Proletarian*. I therefore wondered whether some of the hostility towards STWC speakers also stemmed from the latter organisation's unceremonious ejection from the coalition for their veneration of former Libyan despot, Muammar Gaddafi. That said, some of the leading CPGB-ML comrades I recognised were not in the thick of things.

Opportunism is the handmaiden of inconsistency. After all, just a few months ago the leadership of Stop the War booted out the CPGB-ML

comrades for their fawning praise of Gaddafi, supposed man of the people. So it was fine (indeed a precondition of membership!) to oppose imperialist intervention in Libya while supporting protestors against their own dictator, but when it comes to Iran ... no, no comrades, we cannot allow forces to affiliate to the coalition (like Hopi) who have the temerity to oppose imperialism and criticise the theocracy.

Many platform speakers were absolutely correct to ridicule the double standards of the west for its lecturing of Iran on the perils of nuclear technology. But if we are to go forward, we must also look at our own movement's double standards once in a while. We should not allow the coalition to become the private property of a handful of people like Counterfire's John Rees and Lindsey German or Andrew Murray of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, who high-handedly deem what is appropriate and what is not on the flimsiest, most inconsistent grounds.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately the overt apologia from this trio has gone, with comrade German seeming to recognise that it was quite possible to be anti-regime and anti-war: "You are making the biggest mistake of your lives if on the basis of opposition you support the war," she shouted over the noise. Quite right. In the past, the Iranian left has, of course, been tainted by the presence of all sorts of useful idiots lining up with the war drive. But the 40 or so Iranians at this demonstration were clearly, visibly anti-war. Most were keen to take Hopi's leaflet, and many carried official Stop the War placards reading 'Don't attack Iran'. Some of their supporters held up signs making the obvious point: 'Sanctions and war kill Iran's democracy movement'. If there is a criticism that can be made of the 'London green movement', it is that their opposition to the entire regime has come far too late.

But now is not the time to quibble. The Iranians present on the demonstration should affiliate to the STWC, take their arguments into the *British workers' movement* through initiatives like Hopi, and fight for basic internationalist principles. Indeed, they have some influential

comrades who will stand up for their voices to be heard, such as MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn. They both combined their opposition to imperialist intervention in Iran with support for imprisoned trade unionists and democracy activists. After all, such a basic internationalist position is hardly some kind of crazy, ultra-left departure. Not only have unions like the PCS and Aslef signed up to Hopi. So too have a whole range of well respected democrats and anti-imperialists.

We are in Britain and - yes - our first duty is to stop the warmongers. The main enemy is at home in the imperialist heartlands. But comrades Murray, German and Rees have consistently opposed the affiliation to Stop the War of anti-imperialists critical of the Iranian regime: specifically Hopi. We reject the notion that we must silence ourselves if we want to be a recognised part of the coalition. Given that the Iranian regime itself actually thrives on the threat of war, this matter is hardly a mere trifle.

In this context, I am also a bit perplexed by the notion directed against the likes of Hopi that 'the Iranian regime is a matter for the Iranian people themselves'. On one level this is a truism. But what about the notion of solidarity? Do we drop our proletarian internationalism when we campaign against imperialist war? And the Syrians and Iranians present seemed to think the nature

of the Tehran regime was a matter for everyone.

But is not the struggle against war in the Middle East bound up with the strength and success of radical movements for change from below? Is it so heinous a crime to have platform speakers who have things to say beyond 'Let's all stop the war'? Who perhaps suggest how an international working class movement could do this?

Fresh from a trip to Cairo, comrade Rees made a sound point against imperialist hypocrisy on 'democracy': the unfolding Egyptian revolution stood as an indictment of the arguments made by liberals and social-imperialists about how US intervention brings democracy - the Egyptian military are shooting democracy protestors with US bullets! Indeed, but what about examples of hypocrisy over democracy nearer to home? Why has the STWC been so opposed to combining opposition to imperialist wars with calls for democracy? Why has it deliberately prettified the oppressive Iranian regime? The notion of an 'anti-imperialist camp' that must not be criticised is something that far too many of the left still cling too.

Curiously, the report of the demo by Sian Ruddick in *Socialist Worker* online does not mention the stand-off at all (which presumably means it did not happen).<sup>4</sup> And at the end of the demonstration, Counterfire's Chris Nineham could only roll out the usual call: put aside our differences and build the broadest possible movement. We in Hopi also want the broadest movement of opposition to any imperialist intervention in the Middle East. But that does not mean putting aside our differences. We need a movement that thinks and debates, that encourages the healthy exchange of ideas, and that welcomes a whole range of critical views. However, the job of Marxists in particular is not to dumb down their Marxism, but to do their utmost to transform opposition to war into a working class-led challenge to the state ●

## Notes

1. <http://hopi.org/wp-content/uploads/leaflet.pdf>.
2. See 'Don't confuse the poor workers' *Weekly Worker* November 1 2007.
3. See my report of the underhand methods employed by Murray *et al* to reject Hopi affiliation to the coalition at the last STWC AGM: 'Lies will not help the anti-war movement' *Weekly Worker* November 4 2010.
4. *Socialist Worker* January 28.

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## REVIEW

# Choose your conspiracy

Robert Green **A thorn in their side: the Hilda Murrell murder** Rata Books, 2011, pp208, £26

It is 1984. Thatcher's prestige has risen on the back of the Falklands war, the opening engagement of which was the sinking of the old Argentine battle cruiser, General Belgrano, by British nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror. The Belgrano was outside the exclusion zone and steaming away from the conflict zone.

The Tories' covert plan to engage and defeat the miners involves long-term plans to replace the economic and social dependence on coal and switch to a nuclear alternative. In the run-up to the greatest class engagement since the General Strike, the enquiry into Britain's first pressurised water reactor nuclear power plant at Sizewell, Suffolk is just opening.

Tensions between the military, the USA, the police and women peace campaigners at Greenham Common airbase in Berkshire are rising. Top-secret deployment plans for cruise missiles are being blown wide open by peace campaigners exposing the routes of the vehicles and publicly tracking them. Trident is in the public limelight and exposed to increasing protest and hostile public opinion. New Zealand has imposed an anti-nuclear exclusion zone, which bans all Nato and particularly American nuclear-capable ships from its waters.

All this had serious consequences for the UK nuclear state. Halfway through 1983 a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament demonstration in London had attracted over 250,000 protestors and the secretary of state for defence, Michael Heseltine, responded with the creation of a pro-nuclear propaganda unit called DS19, with direct links with MI5. Whistleblower Cathy Massiter revealed that the F Branch was operating against 'domestic subversion' and had been massively expanded to counter the anti-nuclear movement. In conjunction with special branch, the whole range of surveillance, phone taps, letter opening, break-ins was engaged in. Labour MP Tam Dalyell was later to speculate that hired agents and rogue elements within MI5 had been given a free hand, largely due to the threats posed by the miners, and were increasingly out of control.

Hilda Murrell is an anti-nuclear campaigner, one of the witnesses due to testify against permission for the PWR. In 1984, in the second week of the miners' Great Strike and before she can present her evidence to the Sizewell enquiry, Hilda Murrell is murdered in the most suspicious of circumstances. It is one of the biggest and most famous murder cases of the 20th century, with allegations of political conspiracy and cover-up involving the nuclear industry and the Falklands war. Her mutilated body was found six miles from her home in a popular copse. She was 78 years old. It took police 11 years to find a suspect and convict Andrew George, at the time of the murder a 16-year-old foster home runaway.

Here we have the bare ingredients of a mystery, conspiracy and crime which is the stuff of fiction writers' imaginations. But this tale is true. Murrell's nephew, Royal Navy commander Robert Green, set about reviewing the facts of these events, and to start to challenge the whole nuclear concept - both weapons and civil-use. Just before the murder of his aunt he had led the top intelligence naval team providing information and support for the Polaris nuclear fleet. He was released from service



Michael Heseltine: unit DS19

following the Falklands war.

In many people grief and loss of a loved one engender a search for someone to blame; or sometimes friends and relatives will be consumed by self-blame, following an unexpected death. In this case, with a murder, a sexual assault, a body dumped in a wood, and a suspect whose partial confession of guilt cannot be the whole story, it is entirely understandable that Green, whose whole life had been turned upside down, would start a search for the truth.

### Unlikely culprit

Andrew George admitted being at the house where the murder and rape took place - his semen, DNA and fingerprints were found at the scene and on the victim's clothing. His story is that his brother committed the deed while he was there solely to take part in an opportunist robbery. His brother, he said, tried to involve him in the sex attack by masturbating him and this is why his sperm was found. Despite this statement and the fact that the DNA and sperm of an unknown person had been found at the scene, the police chose to ignore the accusations against his brother, who was never charged. George's confession contained no mention of any other person involved in his version of events.

The police believed that after being beaten and stabbed Murrell was driven to a distant copse, where she was attacked again and left for dead. The autopsy suggested she was alive for some time afterwards, having crawled a little way from her abandoned car despite desperate injuries. The cause of death was "hypothermia, plus penetrating wounds to the abdomen, with multiple bruises to the face".

The trouble with that scenario is that Andrew George was unable to drive, while Hilda, with her severe injuries, including a broken collarbone and abdominal stab wounds, could not have been the driver either. The car was found crashed, but the passenger door was smashed shut and unable to open. Apart from which, it was in full view of a busy road. The car keys were found in Hilda's pocket. A

large kitchen knife from her kitchen was found near the body, although it was not used in the attack. The DNA and a fingerprint found in the car did not belong to either Hilda, any of her friends or the man convicted of her murder. This element was not pursued by the prosecution, defence or the many investigation officers. The prosecution contended that she had managed to move across to the driver's door to escape, presumably remembering to take her car keys from the ignition.

The car sat there for days, although it was reported almost as soon as it was spotted by the farmer who owned the land. The police arrived soon afterwards and went to Hilda's home. But, finding the doors open and lights on, they did not seem to think her absence from either the car or the house was suspicious enough to start a search for her - although autopsy evidence suggests that if they had, and if indeed her body had not been moved, they would have discovered her, probably still alive and with a strong chance of recovery. Instead it is alleged that she was lying there undetected for days, within sight of the abandoned car.

The problem with the police version of events is that the farmer had made a tree-by-tree examination, before a planned programme of felling, the day after Hilda was said to have died, and it is utterly inconceivable he would not have seen the body. He swore in a statement to the police he was in the copse 24 hours after her approximate time of death and "must have walked within a yard of where her body was found". The implication is that she had been taken from the house, tortured, murdered in an unknown location, and then dumped days later in the woods.

Andrew George's story, with or without the involvement of his brother, does not answer these anomalies, yet if there were other forces, other agencies involved here alongside the petty thief and sadist, why not mention them in the statement? Much later he claimed that men with guns had appeared in Hilda's house and threatened to kill him and his brother if they mentioned the gunmen's presence. But by this

time allegations of a conspiracy involving the state had already been circulating.

The reader is left to try and fit all the loose ends, dead ends and overlapping features into some kind of coherent whole, since clearly the cops had not done so, preferring simply to drop elements from the narrative if they did not fit. For example, Hilda's car had been seen being driven on the day of her death by a number of her neighbours. They reported seeing a person flopped forward in the passenger seat wearing Hilda's hat and coat, and a strange man at the steering wheel.

Increasingly frustrated by the lack of answers to glaringly obvious questions, Green started to investigate the crime himself. As part of this he delved into Hilda's activities, finding out what campaigns she was involved in and with whom. The picture becomes grimmer with every new interview and revelation. What is revealed is a saga of strange deaths, murders, threats, robberies and surveillance - all of them involving fellow anti-nuclear campaigners, and people whose paths have crossed Hilda's. Strange individuals start to appear uninvited and persistently in people's lives. Green himself finds he is the object of intense surveillance, potentially lethal sabotage and naked threats. Put together with the crime itself, there is clearly something going on here, in which Andrew George, the man now doing time as the sole perpetrator of the murder, cannot have had any involvement.

During all the controversy of the inquest and then the demand for a second autopsy, Hilda's body had been allowed to decompose, contrary to all established procedures in such cases. Later all the vital organs extracted for future examination disappear and are never found.

### State accused

On December 20 1984 Tam Dalyell gets to his feet in the House of Commons and declares that British intelligence are involved in the murder. He wrongly states that commander Green had been the officer aboard the Conqueror who

gave the order to sink the Belgrano, and had privileged information on the Falklands. The implication was, Green may have intended to pass on sensitive information to his aunt for public exposure through the anti-nuclear movement.

The most popular rationale for the whole bloody affair is the idea that Hilda might have been holding secret information on the Falklands and the nuclear industry obtained from her nephew and it was this that provoked her eventual murder. Others have offered the theory that in fact Dalyell was deliberately misinformed, both about Green's role and the centrality of the Falklands adventure, in order to distract attention from agents operating for the nuclear industry either directly or in collusion with the secret state.

Four months after the murder *The Observer* broke a story about private investigative agents operating for the nuclear industry with links to British intelligence. Their role was to identify witnesses and objectors at the Sizewell enquiry, their backgrounds, politics, contacts and connections. Zeus Security Consultants refused to name who hired them, but Green traced them to a firm of London solicitors, who in turn took instructions from "a large corporate client whose identity was never disclosed".

When it comes to evidence about unusual vehicular activity around Hilda's isolated and usually quiet house, we find a virtual parking lot for unidentified cars and vans. Numerous sightings of strange vehicles and odd-looking men are noted and often reported by the neighbours. There is clear evidence that other vehicles are on Hilda's premises, apart from her own car, around the time of the murder and clearly for some time following it. Also, between the visit of the first, none too curious, police officer and subsequent police searches, curtains close or open, lights are switched on or off. The phone is disconnected to give just an engaged tone, but then after the death and start of the police enquiry it is pulled from the wall. Clothing disappears. None of any of this ties in with the imprisoned man's statement and version of events.

It would be unfair to readers to have me present my conclusions on this complex and conspiracy-ridden drama, because, apart from its dreadful human consequences, the uncovering of facts and loose ends is fascinating. As the book and the evidence unfold, I changed my mind twice as to what happened and who happened it. Readers might like to form their own conclusions ●

David Douglass

### Second edition: it's coming





## FILM

# Normalised duplicity

Ashgar Farhadi (director) *A separation* general release



Simin with her husband: selfless

**A** *separation*, which has just won the Golden Globe award for the best foreign-language film, successfully depicts the complexities of contemporary Iranian society. Simin, a wife seeking divorce as a member of a lower-middle class family, around which the narrative revolves, does most of the housework, looks after her daughter and her husband's elderly father, whilst also managing to hold down a full-time job as a teacher. However, her reason for wanting a divorce is more serious. She hopes to leave Iran for the sake of her daughter's education - a common worry for generations of middle class Iranian mothers - but her husband will not hear of it.

The film was made prior to recent changes to the higher education curriculum of some of the country's top universities. Imposed by the Islamic regime, these removed many courses popular with female applicants, such as sociology, media studies and journalism, and instigated gender quotas aimed at producing more male university entrants. Simin does not trust Iran's Islamic education system to provide her daughter with decent opportunities in education. Contrary to what some Iranian critics - who have accused Simin of egoism - have written, she emerges as a determined, selfless heroine.

In preparation for her departure she finds a maid, Razieh, to replace her in the unpaid jobs she performs

daily. The film's depiction of the maid's working life allows us brief glimpses of working class life in Iran. To reach the central Tehran flat where she works, Razieh has to travel two-three hours each way, to and from her home - probably located in one of the sprawling working class districts of south Tehran. Because her wages are not enough to afford childcare, she brings her small daughter with her every day. Her husband has lost his job - a common plight amongst Iranian workers, not eased by the country's misogynous culture; he is angry not only because his wife is now the sole breadwinner, but also because she has to take their child to work.

Not surprisingly for a country ruled by clerics for more than 30 years, virtually none of the film's characters, who hail from various classes and backgrounds, are practising Muslims - a truthful representation of contemporary Iran. Razieh is the only character with any religious beliefs at all. We know this because her job involves caring for and washing Simin's father-in-law and she is so concerned about this aspect that she phones a cleric for religious guidance. While the viewer can only imagine the surprise of the cleric at the other end of the line at hearing of such innocence in a country where innocence has long been lost, he duly gives his consent to the performance of this duty.

The director, Ashgar Farhadi,

draws our attention to the fact that everyone in this scenario is a victim of their circumstances. Despite this, he cannot hide the fact that the plight of the worker, his wife, their daughter and their unborn child is far worse than the lower-middle class family they get involved with.

Farhadi is a student of dissident filmmaker Jafar Panahi, who is currently under house arrest, having been sentenced to six years' imprisonment for "assembly and colluding with the intention of committing crimes against national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic". Farhadi is therefore influenced by Panahi's mentor, Abbas Kiarostami, who is famed for his poetic dialogue and documentary-style narratives. However, Farhadi's films lean towards traditional narrative structures. They have a beginning and an end. He is also a fan of Alfred Hitchcock and critics have admired the Hitchcockian style of the low-budget *A separation*.

During the first part of the film, middle class western audiences will probably find a lot in common between their own lifestyles and what they see on the screen - until, that is, the story of the maid and her husband, who must seem to them to belong to an entirely different world. In this way *A separation* reveals the extent of the social and ideological divide between the middle and working classes in Iran.

Critics have praised the

in a sense, as the film deals with real-life issues in a country where a religious dictatorship has normalised duplicity, there is no need to overact. They are so used to it, after all.

A minority of Iranian exiled directors maintain that all films and plays produced inside Iran are tainted because nothing worthwhile can be achieved under the dictatorship. Ironically, however, the supporters of Iran's Islamic order claim the film's success in the west is solely due to its 'Islamophobic propaganda': portraying women in Islamic societies as victims. In fact filmmakers such as Farhadi, Panahi and many others have pushed the tolerance of the regime to its limits. Their subtle, often thoughtful approach to the problems of contemporary Iranian society is not just more interesting: it often results in a far superior portrayal of the tortuous lives of its citizens than the 'political' films made about Iran by exiles.

Just as *A separation* was pulling in the plaudits at the January 15 Golden Globe ceremony, the regime was deciding to shut down Tehran's independent House of Cinema, which it has declared "illegal" - the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance said that it would now assume direct control of the industry. This followed weeks of claims in pro-regime newspapers that the institution - and, by extension, Iranian cinema - was a haven of "low moral standards" ●

**Yassamine Mather**

## Hands Off the People of Iran

Saturday February 11, 5.30pm

### *A separation*

Solidarity screening, Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19. Iranian food available. £10 solidarity, £5 waged, £3 unwaged.

Part of the 'Make your voice heard against war on Iran' campaign, organised by Hands Off the People of Iran:

[www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org).

## Fighting fund

# Blank cheque

**W**e narrowly failed to reach our new £1,500 fighting fund target in January - the first month following our decision to up it by £250. Despite one or two fantastic last-minute donations, we were almost £150 short at £1,353.

The consolation, of course, is that this comfortably beat the old target, but that isn't much help when it comes to raising what we actually need, especially when you factor in our plans for extra pages and more use of colour. Nevertheless, thank you very much, comrade RG, for your tremendous £75 cheque and, PJ, for your £50 PayPal gift. Comrades JT (£20) and FR (£10) used the same method (they were just some of our 19,376 online readers last week). Finally a total of £138 came in via standing orders.

I can also report that we already have £171 towards our February fighting fund - that all came from 10 standing orders received on the

first day of the month. But I would really like to see a big increase in those making use of our PayPal facility. Just get out your credit or debit card and fill in the online form stating 'Donation'. Or else you could email us separately explaining what you have done and why.

Some people are far too modest to write a covering note though. That certainly applies to RG, whose £75 cheque arrived inside a folded piece of blank paper. But I know from past experience of the comrade's quiet generosity that it was meant for the fighting fund.

If anyone wants to match that, I don't mind if they write me a few words too!

**Robbie Rix**

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



## CLIFF

# Mangling the party of Lenin

Opportunist twists and turns and the perversion of democratic centralism have characterised the Socialist Workers Party and the groups it has influenced, including the US International Socialist Organization. But where did these practices originate? Former ISO member **Pham Binh** examines the method employed by SWP founder Tony Cliff

**The following is dedicated to anyone and everyone who has sacrificed in the name of 'building the revolutionary party'.**

Tony Cliff's *Lenin: building the party*, published in 1975, was the first book-length political biography of Lenin written by a Marxist. As a result, it shaped the approach of subsequent investigations by academics like Lars T Lih, as well as the thinking of thousands of socialists in groups like the British Socialist Workers Party, founded by Cliff, the US International Socialist Organization, and Paul LeBlanc, author of *Lenin and the revolutionary party* and former member of the American SWP (no relation to Cliff's group).

Cliff begins his biography by debunking the USSR's official state religion of Lenin-worship that "endowed [Lenin] with superhuman attributes". Yet throughout the book Cliff refers to these "superhuman attributes": Lenin "adapted himself perfectly to the needs of industrial agitation".<sup>1</sup> He "combined theory and practice to perfection" (emphasis added).<sup>2</sup>

If these passing remarks were the main flaws of Cliff's book, it would still be useful to read, full of political and historical lessons. Sadly, this is not the case.

Cliff's errors and distortions begin with Lenin's political activity in the mid-1890s. According to Cliff, "[the economic pamphlet] *Ob Agitatsii* had a mechanical theory of the relation between the industrial struggle, the struggle against the employers, and the political struggle against tsarism, based on the concept of 'stages' ... [W]hatever the official biographers may say, the truth is that in the years 1894-96, [Lenin] did not denounce *Ob Agitatsii* as one-sided, mechanical and 'economist'. His writings of the period coincide exactly with the line which it put forward."<sup>3</sup>

To show that Lenin's writings of this period "coincide exactly" with the arguments of *Ob Agitatsii*, Cliff quotes Lenin's 1895 draft Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) programme<sup>4</sup> and cites his article, "What are our ministers thinking about?",<sup>5</sup> in which, Cliff claims, "Lenin urged the expediency of leaving the tsar out of the argument, and talking instead about the new laws that favoured employers and of cabinet ministers who were anti-working class."<sup>6</sup>

Cliff later states in *Building the party*: "Not to point out the direct connection between the partial reform and the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism is to cheat the workers, to fall into liberalism."<sup>7</sup> Did Lenin fall into liberalism at this early stage of his career?

Anyone who reads either document will find that Lenin's views do not "coincide exactly" with those of *Ob Agitatsii*. Neither the draft programme nor the article Cliff cites are mechanical, one-sided, stagist or "economist". In "What are our ministers thinking about?" Lenin did not "urge the expediency of leaving the tsar out of the argument". Lenin did not fall into liberalism.

These egregious misrepresenta-

tions of Lenin's views occur throughout *Building the party*.

### 'Bending the stick'

Cliff closes chapter two by claiming that Lenin's penchant for "bending the stick" was "a characteristic that he retained throughout his life". Lenin "always made the task of the day quite clear, repeating what was necessary ad infinitum in the plainest, heaviest, most single-minded, hammer-blow pronouncements. Afterwards, he would regain his balance, straighten the stick, then bend it again in another direction."<sup>8</sup>

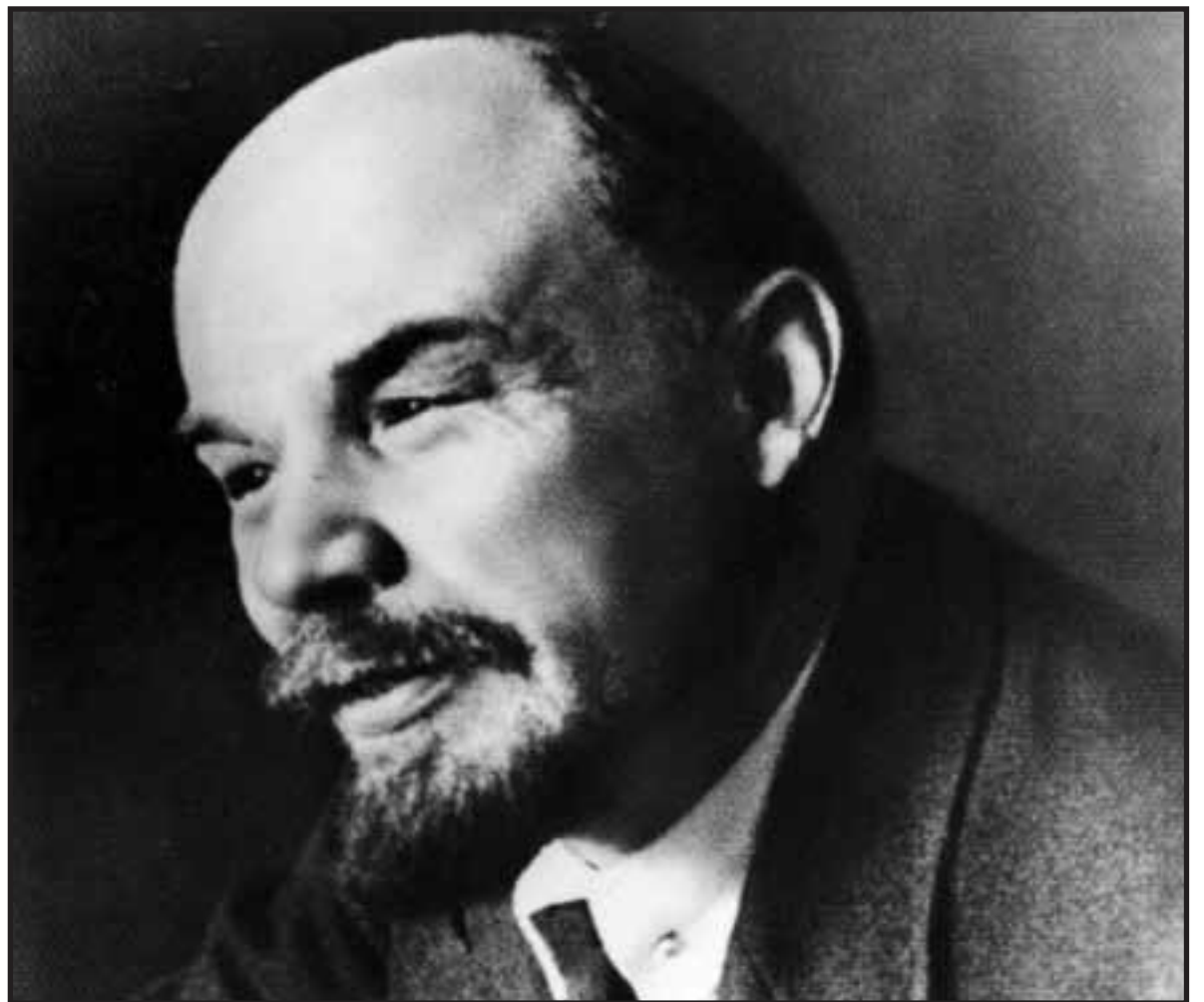
Throughout the book Cliff makes reference to Lenin's "stick bending", by which Cliff means deliberately and one-sidedly overemphasising something one day and then the opposite thing the next day in different circumstances.

If "stick bending" was Lenin's political method, it would mean that none of his writings should be taken at face value. Each piece would suffer from one-sided overemphasis and distortion. Such a method would also call into question Lenin's intellectual and political honesty. How could anyone be sure what Lenin really meant or thought, if his arguments were always exaggerated in some way? Furthermore, why would anyone in the Russian socialist movement take what Lenin had to say seriously if the only thing that was consistent about his message was its exaggerated character? Such a method would create a culture of disbelief and cynicism among Lenin's followers that would grow more toxic with each "bend".

Lenin's letter to Georgy Plekhanov on the economist trend that Cliff uses to illustrate "stick bending" tells us something very different from what Cliff claims:

The economic trend, of course, was always a mistake, but then it is very young; while there has been overemphasis of 'economic' agitation (and there still is here and there) even without the trend, and it was the legitimate and inevitable companion of any step forward in the conditions of our movement which existed in Russia at the end of the 1880s or the beginning of the 1890s. The situation then was so murderous that you cannot probably even imagine it, and one should not censure people who stumbled as they clambered up out of that situation. For the purposes of this clambering out, some narrowness was essential and legitimate: was, I say, for with this tendency to blow it up into a theory and tie it in with Bernsteinism, the whole thing of course changed radically ... The overemphasis of 'economic' agitation and catering to the 'mass' movement were natural.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Lenin's real method emerges. The one-sidedness Cliff lauds is not Lenin's, but a feature of a particular stage of the Russian socialist movement's development: namely the transition from study circles and propaganda to the field of mass action and agitation. In this transition some mistakes were inevitable and "one should not censure people who stumbled as they clambered up out of that situation".



**Lenin: no petty-minded, stick-bending, bureaucratic dictator**

However, when people elevated inevitable mistakes, errors and stumbles into a full-blown theory and then connected it with Bernstein's revisionism "the whole thing of course changed radically". Once the whole thing changed radically, Lenin wrote 'A protest by Russian social democrats'<sup>10</sup> in 1899.

Cliff conflates features and stages of objective development with Lenin's subjective responses to them:

[F]ear of the danger to the movement occasioned by the rise of Russian 'economism' and German revisionism in the second half of 1899 ... motivated Lenin to bend the stick right over again, away from the spontaneous, day-to-day, fragmented economic struggle and toward the organisation of a national political party.<sup>11</sup>

Lenin did not undergo a transformation from an armchair revolutionary in a study circle into an economist factory agitator, from economist factory agitator into top-down party-builder, and from top-down party-builder into a proponent of building the party from the bottom up around the elective principle in the name of the spontaneously socialist working class in 1905, attacking his own former positions all along the way. He continually grappled with the development of Russia's worker-socialist movement through each of its distinct stages, each of which had unique challenges and opportunities (or "tasks"). Together, these stages were part of a single process that Lars T Lih described as Lenin's "heroic scenario" - the RSDLP would lead the workers, who, in turn, would lead the peasants, oppressed nationalities, and all of the downtrodden, exploited and oppressed people of tsarist Russia in a revolution

that would destroy the autocracy, setting the stage for international socialist revolution.

In polemics Lenin typically reminded his readers about the importance of keeping the whole process of development in mind and, instead of isolating its individual elements:

That which happened to such leaders of the Second International, such highly erudite Marxists devoted to socialism as Kautsky, Otto Bauer and others, could (and should) provide a useful lesson. They fully appreciated the need for flexible tactics; they themselves learned the Marxist dialectic and taught it to others (and much of what they have done in this field will always remain a valuable contribution to socialist literature); however, in the application of this dialectic they committed such an error, or proved to be so undialectical in practice, so incapable of taking into account the rapid change of forms and the rapid acquisition of new content by the old forms, that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndman, Guesde and Plekhanov. The principal reason for their bankruptcy was that they were hypnotised by a definite form of growth of the working class movement and socialism, forgot all about the one-sidedness of that form, were afraid to see the break-up which objective conditions made inevitable, and continued to repeat simple and, at first glance, incontestable axioms that had been learned by rote, like 'three is more than two'. But politics is more like algebra than elementary arithmetic, and still more like higher than elementary mathematics.

In reality, all the old forms of the socialist movement have acquired a new content, and, consequently, a new symbol, the 'minus' sign, has appeared in front of all the figures; our wiseacres, however, have stubbornly continued (and still continue) to persuade themselves and others that 'minus three' is more than 'minus two'.<sup>12</sup>

It was Lenin's appreciation for the totality of development, not "stick bending", that led him to write polemics against economists, Mensheviks, followers of Bogdanov, liquidators, 'left' communists and Karl Kautsky, all of whom did not make the transition from one stage of the "heroic scenario" to the next by adapting themselves to the new "tasks".

In chapter three, Cliff continues his "bending the stick" narrative:

It was fear of the danger to the movement occasioned by the rise of Russian 'economism' and German revisionism in the second half of 1899 that motivated Lenin to bend the stick right over again, away from the spontaneous, day-to-day, fragmented economic struggle and toward the organisation of a national political party.<sup>13</sup>

This is totally false. The 1895 draft RSDLP programme Lenin wrote and Cliff cited in chapter two proves that Lenin sought to build a national political party years before the economist trend emerged:

The Russian Social Democratic Party declares that its aim is to assist this struggle of the Russian working class by developing the class-consciousness of the workers,



# CLIFF

by promoting their organisation, and by indicating the aims and objects of the struggle. The struggle of the Russian working class for its emancipation is a political struggle, and its first aim is to achieve political liberty.<sup>14</sup>

Anyone who reads Lenin's draft programme will know where he stood on the party question in 1895. Fear had nothing to do with Lenin's commitment to organising a national political party.

## Lenin and party rules

Cliff's chapter on Lenin's *What is to be done?* is unremarkable except for the section dealing with Lenin's attitude towards party rules. Cliff quotes Lenin's 1902 'Letter to a comrade on our organisational tasks' that was circulated as an RSDLP pamphlet in 1904 to show that Lenin had a "distaste for red tape and rule-mongering".<sup>15</sup>

Cliff goes on to say: "Lenin's faction was for a long time very informal indeed. He started to build his organisation through *Iskra* agents. When, after the 2nd Congress, as we shall see, he lost the support of his own central committee, he reorganised his supporters around a newly convened conference that elected a Russian bureau."<sup>16</sup>

There are a number of errors here.

The first is that the purpose of *Iskra* agents was to build the RSDLP, not an organisation loyal to Lenin (another falsehood that runs throughout *Building the party* is the notion that Bolsheviks and/or the central committee were "his").

The second and more serious error is to use Lenin's actions in the aftermath of the RSDLP's 2nd Congress that gave birth to the Menshevik-Bolshevik split as proof of Lenin's preference for informal or loose rules. One of the central charges<sup>17</sup> that Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers levelled at the Mensheviks was that their resignations, boycotts of party institutions, refusal to call a third congress despite the expressed will of the majority of the 1903 congress delegates, and declaration that the League of Social Democrats Abroad was autonomous from the RSDLP all violated the rules<sup>18</sup> adopted at the 1903 congress.

Anyone who reads Lenin's *One step forward, two steps back* will find that Lenin paid very close attention to rules, regulations, procedural minutiae, and abided by them.<sup>19</sup> One of the central reasons why Lenin spent years working to convene the 1903 congress in the first place was to *eliminate* the informal rules and procedures that prevailed in the socialist circles and *replace them with the formal rules necessary to govern the workings of a professional political party*. In contemporary terms Lenin sought to overcome what feminist Jo Freeman described as "the tyranny of structurelessness".<sup>20</sup>

Lenin's 'Letter to a comrade on our organisational tasks'<sup>21</sup> proves the opposite of what Cliff claims. In that letter Lenin writes:

It would be all the less useful to draw up such rules at present [1902], since we have practically no general party experience (and in many places none whatever) with regard to the activities of the various groups and sub-groups of this sort, and in order to acquire such experience what is needed is not rules, but the organisation of party information, if I may put it in this way. Each of our local organisations now spends at least a few evenings on discussing rules. If instead, each member would devote this time to making a detailed and well-prepared report *to the entire party* on his particular function, the work would gain a

hundredfold.

And it is not merely because revolutionary work does not always lend itself to definite organisational form that rules are useless. No, definite organisational form is necessary, and we must endeavour to *give such form* to all our work as far as possible. That is permissible to a much greater extent than is generally thought, and achievable not through rules, but solely and exclusively (we must keep on reiterating this) through transmitting exact information to the party centre; it is only then that we shall have real organisational form connected with real responsibility and (inner-party) publicity.

For who of us does not know that *serious* conflicts and differences of opinion among us are actually decided not by vote 'in accordance with the rules', but by struggle and threats to 'resign'? During the last three or four years of party life the history of *most* of our committees has been replete with such internal strife. It is a great pity that this strife has not assumed definite form: it would then have been much more instructive for the party and would have contributed much more to the experience of our successors. But no rules can create *such* useful and essential definiteness of organisational form; this can be done solely through *inner-party publicity*. Under the autocracy we can have no other means or weapon of inner-party publicity than keeping the party centre regularly informed of party events.<sup>22</sup>

Here Lenin stressed the importance of reporting and inner-party publicity as opposed to rules because he believed (correctly) that proper decisions about rules could only be made if the RSDLP's leaders were fully aware of the work each of its members engaged in. (Lenin viewed the centralisation of information regarding members' activity into the hands of the party leadership as a response to operating as an illegal organisation; presumably information would be decentralised among the membership as a whole through the medium of a newspaper if the party was legal.)

Lenin closed this letter with the following words:

And only after we have learned to apply this inner-party publicity on a wide scale shall we actually be able to amass experience in the functioning of the various organisations; only on the basis of such extensive experience over a period of many years shall we be able to draw up rules that will *not be mere paper rules*.

So, while it is true that Lenin detested rule-mongering, it is equally true that Lenin spent the better part of 1904 and 1905 fighting in defence of the rules adopted by the 1903 congress and against the informal methods that the Mensheviks proved unwilling to part ways with.

Chapter five on the 1903 congress is again replete with errors. In discussing the famous debate between Lenin and Martov over what the definition of a party member should be, Cliff attacks Martov and Trotsky for supporting Lenin's organisational plan, as laid out in *What is to be done?*, and then opposing Lenin's formulation on membership, writing:

To combine a strong, centralist leadership with loose membership was eclecticism taken to an extreme ... [T]he revolutionary party cannot avoid making strong demands for sacrifice and discipline from its own members. Martov's definition of party

membership fitted the weakness of his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>23</sup>

Cliff fails to note that *Martov's membership definition became the basis for recruitment into the Bolshevik wing of the RSDLP for three years* until the Mensheviks agreed (in conjunction with the Bolsheviks) at the 1906 party congress to a formulation in line with Lenin's 1903 wording. According to Cliff's logic then, the Bolsheviks during 1903-06 were guilty of "eclecticism taken to an extreme" for combining "strong, centralist leadership with loose membership" and "weakness" with regards to proletarian dictatorship, while the Mensheviks were innocent of these things after 1906 because they supported Lenin's definition of party membership.

Eclecticism indeed!

In this regard, Cliff is like most other 'Leninists' who invest the 1903 membership debate with an artificial and ahistorical significance. If Lenin did not mention the issue in his discussion on the 'Principle stages in the history of Bolshevism' in *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder* written for foreign communist audiences unfamiliar with RSDLP history, it could not have been a terribly important issue from his point of view.

Cliff's next egregious error comes in his discussion of Lenin's actions after the 1903 congress that gave birth to the Menshevik and Bolshevik trends within the RSDLP:

With the aid of Krupskaya in Geneva, and a group of supporters operating inside Russia, [Lenin] built a completely new set of centralised committees, quite regardless of rule 6 of the party statutes, which reserved to the central committee the right to organise and recognise committees.<sup>24</sup>

He goes on to say that these "completely new" and "centralised committees" began to agitate for a new RSDLP congress in 1904 to resolve the disputes that arose between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks at the end of the previous congress.

If Cliff's statement is true, then Lenin was a hypocritical and ruthless faction fighter who attacked his political opponents for not playing by party rules that he exempted himself from. If true, it would have fatally undermined the whole basis of post-1903 Bolshevik agitation for a new congress because it was based on the following rule adopted by the second congress: "The party council must call a congress if this is demanded by party organisations which together would command half the votes at the congress."<sup>25</sup> If Lenin himself violated these rules by creating "completely new centralised committees" it would have been impossible for him to attract support within the RSDLP for his claim in *One step forward, two steps back* that it was the Mensheviks who were making a mockery of the RSDLP's rules.

Cliff's assertion has no footnote, so it is unclear what the source of his claim is. What is certain is that there is no mention of illegal (in the sense of being against the RSDLP's rules) and "completely new set of centralised committees" in Krupskaya's memoirs. Surely if Lenin had done what Cliff claims the Mensheviks would have pounced on this monstrous fact and included it in their bitter attacks on Lenin in the pages of the post-congress *Iskra*.

Another element that appears in this chapter and throughout *Building the party* is Cliff's 'truisms' about a variety of topics that have no basis in things Lenin said or did. For example:

[T]he leadership of a revolutionary

party must provide the highest example of devotion and complete identification with the party in its daily life. This gives it the moral authority to demand the maximum sacrifice from the rank and file.<sup>26</sup>

Lenin certainly appreciated the sacrifices people made for the revolutionary movement, but this was not limited to those who were party leaders or even party members (for example, his attitude towards earlier generations of Russian revolutionaries, the Narodniks and Decembrists). At no time did Lenin use his position as a party leader to demand "maximum sacrifice from the rank and file". This sounds like something from the Stalin era or from Mao's *Little red book*, which is full of timeless, moralistic phrase-mongering.

Cliff's references to Lenin's imaginary disregard for rules serves an important purpose in the *Building the party* narrative: Lenin has to constantly circumvent rules and fight against his own followers who become "conservative" and "formalistic" in their approach to politics by resisting Lenin's continual "stick bending". This narrative reaches its climax in chapter eight, which celebrates Lenin's fight at the RSDLP 3rd Congress held in April 1905 against the Bolshevik committee men over two issues: recruiting workers to party committees and democratising the party in the midst of the 1905 revolution. According to Cliff, "Buttressing themselves with quotations from *What is to be done?*, [the Bolshevik committee men] called for 'extreme caution' in admitting workers into the committees and condemned 'playing at democracy'."<sup>27</sup>

The problem with Cliff's account is that Lenin and the Bolsheviks *never* fought about either recruiting workers to party committees or democratising the party at the 3rd Congress. It simply did not happen. Lih discovered that this episode in *Building the party* was "lifted wholesale from Solomon Schwarz", a Bolshevik-turned-Menshevik who wrote *The Russian Revolution of 1905: the workers' movement and the formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism*.<sup>28</sup>

Cliff's plagiarism is a relatively minor issue compared to the real scandal: he evidently never bothered to read Lenin's 'Report on the 3rd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party',<sup>29</sup> written in May 1905! Had Cliff read Lenin's account of the 3rd Congress, he would have discovered that Lenin makes no mention of any conflict, debate or friction over whether to recruit workers and democratise the party in light of the new conditions created by the 1905 revolution. The report is positively glowing about the results of the 3rd Congress, which included more clearly defined party rules (so much for Lenin's alleged informality) and a series of resolutions guiding the RSDLP's conduct during the 1905 revolution.

The conclusion is inescapable: *either* Cliff did not read what Lenin said about the 1905 3rd Congress *or* he knowingly repeated a falsehood taken from someone else's work in order to support his narrative of "Lenin versus the party machine he built". Neither is acceptable for a political biographer of Lenin.

It is in this chapter that the contradictions embedded in Cliff's "Lenin must continually fight the party machine he built" narrative become most apparent. Suppose that Cliff was right that the committee men did indeed defeat Lenin on the issue of recruiting workers at the 3rd Congress and stubbornly resisted such recruitment efforts. The question then becomes: how did the Bolshevik wing of the RSDLP grow so rapidly? How could workers join the party against the will of the people who were the party? Cliff does not explain this impossi-

bility, but exclaims, "nevertheless it moves" and quotes figures showing the rapid growth of the Bolsheviks in 1905 and after.<sup>30</sup> Cliff's Lenin was evidently a magician who could make the party take actions the people who constituted the party opposed.

## 'Democratic centralism' and party discipline

In chapter 15 Cliff's litany of errors continues.

The 1905 revolution created strong pressure from the RSDLP's rapidly growing ranks to unite the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions. This unity was consummated at the RSDLP's 1906 congress held in Stockholm. Cliff neglects to mention that this congress elected a central committee of three Bolsheviks and six Mensheviks.<sup>31</sup> He recounts that an RSDLP conference in Tammerfors held in 1906 decided to create an electoral bloc with the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets), a liberal party backed by big business. Lenin insisted that the decisions of this conference were not binding on local party bodies. A surprised Cliff writes:

What had happened to the democratic centralism so dear to Lenin? For years he had argued for the subordination of the lower organs of the party to the higher, and against the federal concept of the party. In *One step forward, two steps back*, written February-May 1904, he had said that 'the undoubted tendency to defend *autonomism against centralism* ... is a fundamental characteristic of opportunism in matters of organisation'.<sup>32</sup>

What Cliff means by "democratic centralism" is "subordination of the lower organs of the party to the higher" and a non-federal party. What Lenin meant by "democratic centralism" was altogether different.

The quote Cliff cites from *One step forward, two steps back* is misplaced because Lenin was arguing against those, like Trotsky, who held that the editorial board of the party's newspaper should be autonomous and not subject to the democratic control of the party congress, a very different issue from the autonomy of local committees or local party branches to make decisions regarding local work. The notion that local autonomy was a new element in Lenin's thought in 1907 is mistaken. Lenin noted that the 3rd Congress of the RSDLP in 1905 affirmed this principle:

The autonomy of the committees has been defined more precisely and their membership declared inviolable, which means that the CC no longer has the right to remove members from local committees or to appoint new members without the consent of the committees themselves ... Every local committee has been accorded the right to confirm periphery organisations as party organisations. The periphery organisations have been accorded the right to nominate candidates for committee membership.<sup>33</sup>

The principle of autonomy was first affirmed at the RSDLP's 2nd Congress in 1903: "All organisations belonging to the party carry on autonomously all work relating specially and exclusively to the sphere of party activity which they were set up to deal with."<sup>34</sup>

Another element missing from Cliff's account of "democratic centralism" is the following rule, also adopted at the 2nd Congress: "Every party member, and everyone who has any dealings with the party, has the



right to demand that any statement submitted by him be placed, in the original, before the central committee, or the editorial board of the central organ, or the party congress.”<sup>35</sup>

This rule seems to have been designed to prevent secret expulsions and other abuses of power by party officials that plague all ‘Leninist’ organisations, abuses which are almost always justified on the grounds of ‘democratic centralism’. The term has been abused to such an extent that it no longer conveys the organisational norms that prevailed within the RSDLP among Mensheviks (who first coined the term)<sup>36</sup> and Bolsheviks alike until the 1917 revolution.

Lenin famously defined “democratic centralism” as “freedom of discussion, unity in action”.<sup>37</sup> Cliff appropriately quotes Lenin on what this meant in practice:

After the competent bodies have decided, all of us, as members of the party, must act as one man. A Bolshevik in Odessa must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing a Cadet’s name even if it sickens him. And a Menshevik in Moscow must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing only the names of Social Democrats, even if his soul is yearning for the Cadets.<sup>38</sup>

Note what “freedom of discussion, unity in action” *did not* mean. It *did not* mean that the minority had to publicly champion the “line” or argument of the triumphant majority. “Unity in action” for a dissenting minority simply meant acting in concert with the majority, not singing their tune or arguing for their ‘line’. Nowhere did Lenin say, ‘A Bolshevik in Odessa must argue with his workmates that supporting the Cadets is the way to go’, or ‘A Menshevik in Moscow must convince everyone he knows to vote Social Democrat even if his soul is yearning for the Cadets’. A line of action and a line of argument are two different things; “unity in action” did not mean unity in argument or political position.

Given this understanding of what “democratic centralism” meant to Lenin and the RSDLP, the following lines by Cliff are wildly, unfathomably wrong:

A couple of months later, in January 1907, Lenin went so far as to argue for the institution of a *referendum* of all party members on the issues facing the party - certainly a suggestion that ran counter to the whole idea of democratic centralism.<sup>39</sup>

Polling the party to determine the party’s course of action is antithetical to “democratic centralism” *only if* we use Cliff’s definition of the term and not Lenin’s. The answer to Cliff’s question, “What had happened to the democratic centralism so dear to Lenin?”, is simple: nothing.

Cliff’s failure to understand the meaning of “democratic centralism” becomes a problem again in chapter 17, when he discusses a Menshevik-led party trial of Lenin in 1907. Surprisingly, Cliff agrees with the Mensheviks that Lenin was guilty of violating party discipline, writing:

Lenin’s behaviour at the trial is very interesting, because it shows the relentless way in which he conducted a faction fight against the right wing of the party. As the trial opened, Lenin calmly acknowledged that he used ‘language impermissible in relations between comrades in the same party’, but he made absolutely no apology for doing so. Indeed, in fighting the liquidationists and their allies in the movement, he never hesitated to use the sharpest weapons he could lay his hands on. Moderation is not a characteristic of Bolshevism.<sup>40</sup>

The incident that precipitated the trial occurred after the Mensheviks in St Petersburg created an electoral bloc with the Cadets in defiance of the majority of the local RSDLP organisation. Lenin wrote a pamphlet attacking the Mensheviks for doing so. The Mensheviks retaliated

against Lenin by having the RSDLP central committee, on which they had a majority, charge Lenin with violating party discipline. So it was the Mensheviks who were violating the rules of the RSDLP, *not* Lenin.<sup>41</sup>

### Formed in 1912?

In chapter 17, Cliff discusses Lenin’s fight against the liquidationist trend in the RSDLP. He notes that a January 1910 RSDLP conference vote forced Lenin to disband the Bolshevik faction, close its newspaper and break off relations with the ‘boycottists’ in their ranks, while the Mensheviks were obliged to do the same: disband their faction, close their newspaper and break with the liquidators in their midst. Lenin dutifully complied. His Menshevik counterparts did not.

After the Mensheviks proved unwilling to follow through with their obligations, Lenin launched a new weekly paper at the end of 1910, *Zvezda*. Cliff omits this fact and instead picks up the story with the Prague conference held in January 1912. He also omits the fact that this conference elected a pro-party Menshevik (one of two who attended) to the RSDLP’s central committee. This is important because the 1912 Prague conference is almost always referred to as the beginning of the Bolsheviks as a separate party from the Mensheviks. Cliff evades this issue by referring to those elected to the central committee in 1912 as “hards”, a term used nowhere else in *Building the party*.

After chapter 17, Cliff claims the RSDLP’s daily newspaper *Pravda* played “a central role in building the Bolshevik Party”, declares that the Bolsheviks became “a mass party” in 1912-14, and says that the Bolshevik дума deputies “finally ended” relations with their Menshevik counterparts in late 1913 (when World War I broke out, the deputies issued a joint statement, so this is false). Based on these claims, it is clear that Cliff adheres to the myth that the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks separated into two parties in 1912.

However, a cursory glance at Lenin’s writings in 1912 reveals how wrong this view is. Shortly after the 1912 Prague conference, Lenin wrote the following in an explanatory note to the International Socialist Bureau:

In all, 20 organisations established close ties with the organising commission convening this conference; that is to say, practically all the organisations, both Menshevik and Bolshevik, active in Russia at the present time.<sup>42</sup>

The 1912 Prague conference separated pro-party Mensheviks and Bolsheviks from the liquidators. The Menshevik-Bolshevik divide did not culminate in two separate parties until the 1917 revolution.

Cliff’s account of the 1912-1914 period is terribly flawed because it is predicated on falsehoods. The Bolsheviks were not a party; therefore they could not “become a mass party”, nor could *Pravda* have played “a central role in building the Bolshevik Party”, because such an entity did not yet exist. This explains why, when Lenin referred to *Pravda*’s success against its liquidationist rival *Luch*, he wrote, “four-fifths of the workers have accepted the Pravdist decisions as their own, have approved of Pravdism, and actually rallied around Pravdism”, instead of using the terms “Bolshevist” and “Bolshevism”.<sup>43</sup>

Cliff’s treatment of the history of Lenin and *Pravda* is just as error-ridden as the rest of *Building the party*. For example, he claims, “Lenin practically ran *Pravda*”.<sup>44</sup> What he neglects to mention is that 47 of Lenin’s articles were rejected,<sup>45</sup> and that many of Lenin’s published articles were heavily edited to weaken their factional content. If Lenin “practically ran *Pravda*”, why would he reject so many of his own articles and censor himself politically?

*Pravda* was run by a team of editors, not by Lenin, and the initiative for it came from the lower ranks of the party. It was not “Lenin’s *Pravda*”, as Cliff claims, but a workers’ paper to which Lenin was one contributor among many (Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg and Kautsky also wrote for it). The overwhelming majority of *Pravda*’s content, including poems and humour columns, was written by workers, not by higher-

ups in the party or the paper’s editorial team.

### Conclusion

*Building the party* has so many gross factual and political errors that it is useless as a historical study of Lenin’s actions and thoughts. This conclusion is inescapable for anyone who reads the book closely and compares it with the writings of Lenin and the historical record. Those who read *Building the party* and take it seriously will need to unlearn the falsehoods and misinformation contained in its pages if they want a reasonably accurate picture of Lenin’s work in the context of the Russian socialist movement of the early 20th century.

Bookmarks in Britain and Haymarket Books in the US should think twice before republishing, selling and profiting from *Building the party*, since it contains so many errors, falsehoods and lies about Lenin ● **Pham Binh’s articles have been published by Occupied Wall Street Journal, The Independent, Asia Times Online, Znet, and Counterpunch. His latest project is thenorthstar.info, a collaborative blog by and for occupiers from across the US**

### Notes

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# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Become a
 

# Communist Party

 member
 Name
 Address
 Town/city
 Postcode
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 Age
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 Date
 Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX



# weekly Worker

## End the blockade of Cuba

# Taking the Chinese road

**T**his week, Dilma Rousseff, the president of Brazil, makes her first state visit to Cuba.

As many commentators have pointed out, this is an ironic sort of homecoming. In the 1960s and 70s, Rousseff was engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Brazilian military government, and foremost among the inspirations for her and her comrades was the successful overthrow of the Batista regime by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the rest.

This time, however, the newly minted head of state will arrive in Cuba after many years of participation in social-liberal governments of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) - as Reuters rather pithily points out, this week "she'll have capitalism on her mind".<sup>1</sup> Specifically, she will want to talk about the \$800 million construction of a container terminal at the Cuban port of Mariel, a large natural harbour west of Havana. The contract for this job has gone to a Brazilian firm.

There is nothing particularly new about Brazilian capital being ploughed into nearby Latin American countries, even 'dissident' ones such as Cuba or Venezuela. There is particular significance to this, though. That container port can make money one way - by facilitating trade with the United States. In the opinion, at least, of the Brazilian president - and, indeed, the Brazilian state development bank, BNDES, which will pony up most of the money - the 50-year-old American embargo on Cuba does not have much of a future.

At this point, the embargo is an increasingly embarrassing anachronism. It is a relic from the cold war days, when Cuba represented an agent of the Soviet Union just a few miles off the coast of the USA. Soviet dominance and the concomitant rule of Castro's Cuban Communist Party were broadly accepted by a Cuban populace sick of being an American plaything.

The Soviet Union, however, is gone. To any sensible American policymaker, the political threat posed by a small and impoverished island state is negligible. To an American bourgeois, with half an eye on China, Vietnam and the other extant Stalinist countries, the embargo is basically an obstacle to otherwise lucrative business opportunities, opportunities that look even more attractive with the ascendancy of Fidel's 'reformer' brother, Raúl.

Nonetheless, something about the American electoral cycle has kept the blockade in place. Graphic illustrations were forthcoming from the two Republican front-runners as they electioneered in Florida this past week. Newt Gingrich, moralistic hypocrite and the looniest rightwinger still in the race, promised the Floridian people a new round of covert ops missions to overthrow the Castro brothers; Mitt Romney, a man with one eye at least on *Realpolitik* (much to the distaste of the unhinged Republican activist base), was more circumspect, but could still be drawn into frothing against the Cuban regime.

This is, in a sense, the fault of former Florida governor Jeb Bush, who infamously deployed all kinds of dirty



**Raúl Castro: new Florida friends?**

tricks to swing the 2000 presidential poll there. The Floridian vote was on a knife-edge, and eventually the whole election turned on it. Just as the Cuban embargo was truly becoming a useless throwback, then, American politicians were given a very sharp lesson in the importance of winning the sunshine state.

With that lesson comes an obvious solution - courting one of the tightest bloc votes in the US, the Floridian Cuban exile community. This notoriously anti-communist layer has traditionally been winnable through anti-Castro sabre-rattling; giving quarter on the blockade is, conversely, a sure way to alienate the Cuban Americans.

Now, however, even that may be changing. A substantial amount of money is moving from the exiles back to the homeland - in some cases, this amounts to petty cash and commodities to help surviving relatives get along, but in others it involves serious investments, in Cuba's lucrative tourist industry and elsewhere.

Opposition to the regime may still be staunch among the exiles, but capital has a way of numbing those kinds of feelings. Investors in Cuban businesses will see a good whack of their profits stemming directly from low labour costs, for which gratitude is due to an authoritarian regime which can be relied upon to keep the working masses in their place. More generally, if you are onto a financial winner, rocking the political boat looks a less

attractive option.

Raúl Castro's admiration for his comrades in the Chinese Communist Party is well known, and his intent to drive Cuba down the Chinese road to a peculiar state capitalism, reliant on foreign investment, is pretty obvious to all not blinded by nostalgic Castroite dogma. What is remarkable, perhaps, is how closely Cuba is tacking to the Chinese example. When Deng Xiaoping and his allies initiated the first economic reforms in China, the Chinese diaspora around the world was an important early source of investment. For the Castros, whatever their overall plans, the same narrative appears to assert itself.

It is not at all clear that there is a happy ending to this narrative. For the Cuban masses, of course, the increasing penetration of capital into the economy is likely to erode that welfare system which is the object of so much envy in the region (Cuba presently has higher life expectancy and literacy rates than many states of the US), just as Dengism destroyed the so-called iron rice bowl. More to the point, as noted, consent for the regime - which is real, in a way that it never was in eastern Europe - is substantially on nationalist grounds. Re-enslavement to the dollar will be a slap in the face.

Even the Cuban party bureaucrats may not come out of this too well. The underlying drive is for them to become, as their Chinese counterparts have, a peculiar caste of the capitalist

class, offering off-the-peg labour discipline. China was able to do this at least in part due to the particular historical circumstances of the time - the USA launched its final drive to conclude the cold war, and used China to further isolate the Soviet bloc. At the same time, outsourcing and related economic processes were necessary to discipline the working class in the west, for which the Chinese 'communists' were equally willing partners.

The world is a very different place now. Despite the new wave of Sinophilia that has ripped through sections of the bourgeois commentariat, it is by no means clear that China's present economic and political set-up has a bright future. The recent battles with the US over the value of the yuan suggest that China's status as a mass exporter of cheap goods to America may not be taken for granted.

Should it have to go alone, the augurs are not good. Unlike 'ordinary' capitalist regimes, the Chinese are proving unable to raise labour productivity, which remains lamentable compared to other major exporters. The early stages of this crisis saw thousands of factories closing in China. Whatever future awaits Raúl Castro's Cuba, a 'Chinese miracle' is not the most likely option; a return to the country's previous status as an offshore brothel for the American bourgeoisie looks a little more likely.

What, then, of the world's remaining starry-eyed Castroites? The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain should, naturally, have no problem with these developments, as it is also a cheerleader for 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Nonetheless, the *Star's* coverage remains characteristically evasive, reporting on a gripping-sounding Cuban Communist Party conference "to discuss proposals on how the party can bolster its capacity to govern amid the drive to boost national economic efficiency".<sup>2</sup> Such is the wonder of the *Yawning Star* - when the subject at hand is a misbehaving western government, all manner of shallow populist language is available; when,

alternatively, the subject is a Stalinist gerontocracy, the prose becomes as jargon-laden and euphemistic as an IMF press release.

As for the comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Group, it is business as usual - which is to say, the uncritical repetition of whatever line the Cuban regime considers it clement to peddle. Recent delights include a puff piece on the rights of Cuban women, and a more intriguing article about the possibility of substantial oil reserves being tapped off the island's northern coast. Up to 20 billion barrels-worth of black gold may be lurking in Cuban waters, a figure which would place Cuba, fittingly enough, directly between China and the USA in the oil wealth league table.<sup>3</sup>

For the RCG, this would make Cuba "energy-independent"; but it is not energy which the Cuban masses lack: rather, basic consumer goods, including almost all foodstuffs beyond the basic staples. ('If only there was cheese,' goes the Havana refrain.) The Soviet Union was not short of fossil fuels, and it collapsed readily enough. The contradictions in Stalinist regimes are above all *social*, which is why they so readily conform to type. The RCG seems unable to grasp this at all; its articles on China are content to repeat banal Maoist drivel about malignant 'capitalist roaders', as if that was ever more than an exercise in question-begging.

The grand irony is that the RCG, and similar formations, have long been fighting strenuously for an end to the US blockade - which is, let us be clear, an imperialist obscenity. Now it looks likely that the blockade will end on US terms, however; the result will not be flattering to Cuban 'socialism', nor to its disciples around the world. How far down the 'capitalist road' must Raúl go before they finally lose faith? ●

**James Turley**

## Notes

1. [www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/25/us-brazil-cuba-idUSTRE8001QX20120125](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/25/us-brazil-cuba-idUSTRE8001QX20120125).
2. [www.morningstaronline.co.uk/news/content/view/full/114744](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/news/content/view/full/114744).
3. [www.revolutionarycommunist.org/index.php/cuba/2386-cuban-oil-exploration-the-revolution-digs-deep](http://www.revolutionarycommunist.org/index.php/cuba/2386-cuban-oil-exploration-the-revolution-digs-deep).

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