

weekly worker



**Mike Macnair asks whether
Keynesianism represents
an alternative to austerity**

- Israel war threat
- Greek crisis
- Miners 1984-85
- Cynical agitation

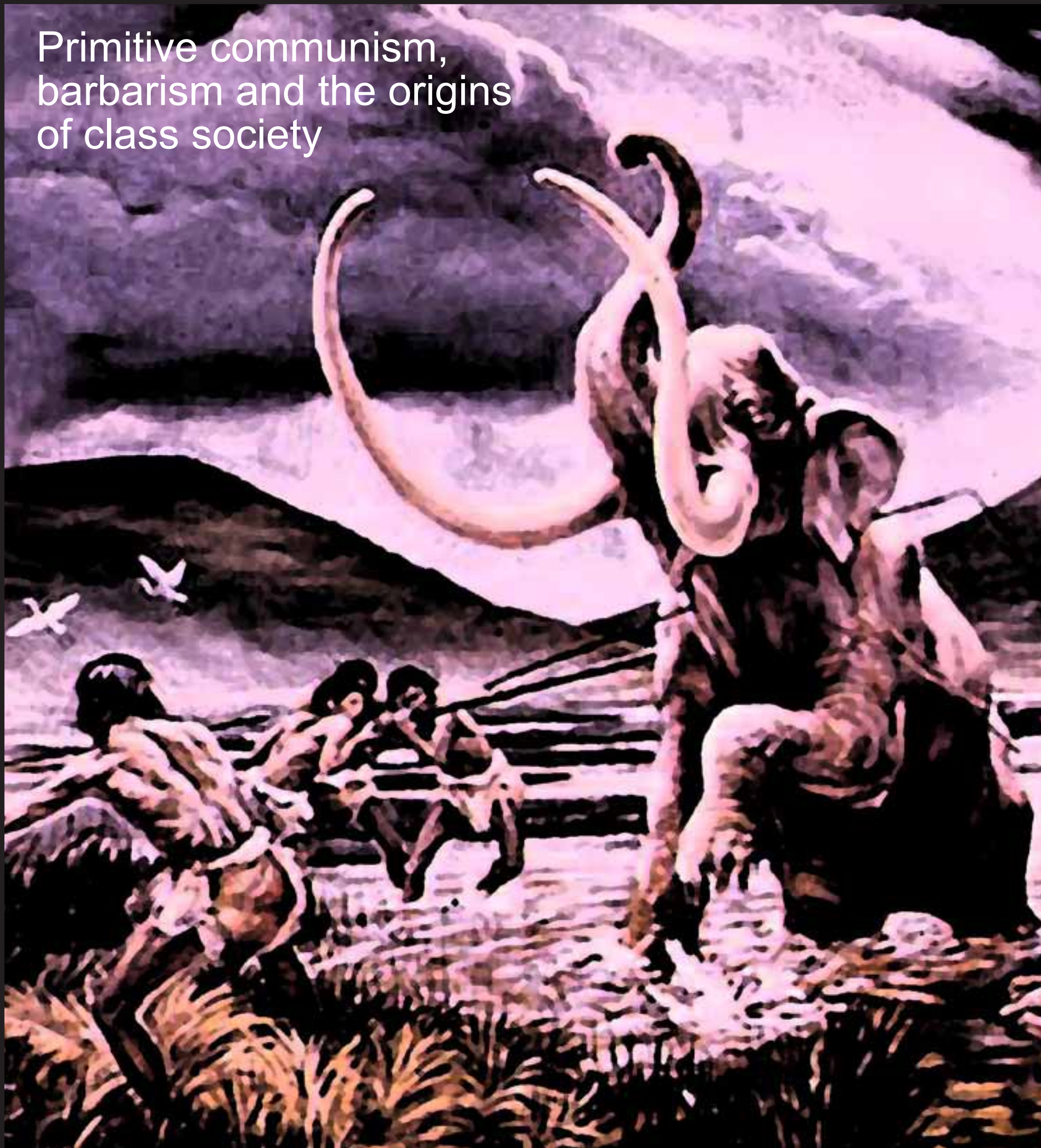
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Primitive communism,
barbarism and the origins
of class society



LETTERS



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

Muddled denier

Ruth Tenne's letter is a good example of the political muddle and confusion of Gilad Atzmon's supporters in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (February 2).

Of course, the Zionist movement has exploited the Nazi holocaust for its own political purposes, thus demonstrating its contempt for those who were murdered. What makes this even worse is that, throughout the period 1941-45, the Zionist movement and its leadership ignored or minimised the holocaust, in some cases citing Nazi sources to rebut the reports that were coming out of Europe. Their one priority was building a Jewish state. They opposed the emigration of Jews from Europe to any destination other than Palestine. Between August and November 1942, at the behest of the US administration, the Jewish Agency sat on the Riegner cable from Switzerland that provided definite confirmation of the holocaust.

As Saul Friedlander observed, "The rescue of the Jews in Europe was not at the top of the *yishuv* leaders' list of priorities. For them, the most important thing was the effort to establish the state" (Tom Segev *The seventh million* London 1994, p467). Likewise, Noah Lucas, another Zionist historian, described how Ben Gurion saw the holocaust "as a decisive opportunity for Zionism ... Ben Gurion above all others sensed the tremendous possibilities inherent in the dynamic of the chaos and carnage in Europe ... the forces unleashed by Hitler in all their horror must be harnessed to the advantage of Zionism" (ppl87-88).

Even Ben Gurion's own official biographer, Shabtai Teveth, remarked that: "If there was a line in Ben Gurion's mind between the beneficial disaster and an all-destroying catastrophe, it must have been a very fine one" (*Ben Gurion: the burning ground 1886-1948* p851).

It is therefore another example of their hypocrisy that the Zionists use the holocaust to justify their racist treatment of the Palestinians when theirs was a movement of collaboration and worse. And this is compounded by the fact that the Zionist movement used the reparations from West Germany after the war for their own pet projects, leaving the holocaust survivors, for whom the monies were meant, in dire poverty. Yet the more stupid and reactionary of the Palestinians' supporters have instead taken to denying the holocaust, falling right into the trap that the Zionists have set for them.

Thus Ruth Tenne speaks of "alleged, or imaginary, holocaust deniers". Yet the position in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign was quite clear. As I wrote in my article, the supporters of Gilad Atzmon and Paul Eisen, who believe that denying the holocaust is the key to unlocking support for Zionism, have caused significant disruption in a number of branches ('No room for anti-Semites', January 19).

Francis Clarke-Lowes, whose appeal against expulsion was rejected at the conference, wrote in an email on the Brighton and Hove PSC list: "You are, of course, right that Paul, like me, is proud to call himself a 'holocaust denier'" (April 4 2011). On April 8 he developed his theme: "the evidence for and against the six million figure, the gas chambers and the plan for Jewish extermination by the Nazis ... are quite technical issues ..." And two days later he wrote: "I do not believe that millions of Jews

and others were gassed in an industrial process of extermination ... The traces of Zyklon B gas (hydrogen cyanide) are, I believe, far too low in the places at Auschwitz-Birkenau where the gas chambers are supposed to have been, and are much higher in the places where the decontamination areas were."

Holocaust deniers are nothing if not stupid. They commissioned an execution 'expert', Fred Leuchter, to write a report based on traces he took from the walls of the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Compared to the residues where clothing, etc, was disinfected, they were of very low concentration. Here was their proof that the holocaust was a myth. Unfortunately, they forgot that human beings require very low concentrations of hydrogen cyanide to kill them, whereas bugs and such like require very high concentrations.

What Tenne fails to understand is that the holocaust occurred and there are countless witnesses to the selections, the disappearance of whole trainloads of Jews who only ever made a one-way journey. Where are the half a million Jews of Warsaw? What was the purpose of Treblinka and Belzec, since they were never labour camps, if not extermination? The evidence is overwhelming.

There is nothing that the Zionist ideologues want more than to see Palestinian supporters embracing holocaust denial. It is proof that support for the Palestinians is not because they are an oppressed people, but because we are anti-Semitic. Unfortunately, some people are stupid enough to fall into the trap that the Zionists set for them. Indeed, in his own speech to PSC conference, appealing his expulsion, Clarke-Lowes referred to the "holocaust myth".

Tenne says that I will, by the definition of one Tanya Gold, "be regarded as 'one of the leftwing anti-Semites [who] despise Israel, but are [not?] 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."

This is a non-sequitur. The second sentence bears no logical relationship to the first. Yes, I will be considered an anti-Semite by the Zionists' definition. The point is that I don't accept their definition! Ruth, like most Atzmonites, falls into the trap of believing the enemy's propaganda.

The decision of Camden PSC to remove Gill Kaffash as secretary, in the light of her consistent support for Paul Eisen, an open holocaust denier, is to be welcomed. However, that was the decision of the local group. It had nothing to do with national PSC.

Ruth speaks of the definition of racism that she and Kaffash proposed. But what a definition. If it had been debated, it would have gone the same way as Kaffash's other amendment and been overwhelmingly defeated. It was too clever by half. So clever that not only did it exclude holocaust denial, but also anti-Muslim racism and anti-Arab racism, from its remit, since they are primarily cultural, not biological.

The rest of Ruth's letter is equally incoherent. It starts off by describing the death of her grandparents and relatives in the holocaust, then talks of the "holocaust narrative" of the Zionists. It is irrelevant whether five or seven million died. What makes one a holocaust denier is if you deny that there was systematic extermination and intentionality, coupled with the use of poisonous gas to aid this task. There can be no doubt about the use of poisonous gas. Even David Irving conceded this in his libel action against Penguin. It was, after all, mentally and physically

handicapped Germans who were first gassed, between 1939 and 1941, so this is hardly something conjured out of thin air.

We simply don't know how many Jews (or gypsies) were murdered. The records of many Jewish communities vanished with those communities. An unknown number of Jews fled into the USSR, possibly as many as 1.5 million. There are plenty of unknowns about the holocaust, just as there is in physics and astronomy, but who when debating the virtues of the big bang would start arguing that the sun goes round the earth?

The Palestine solidarity movement, by its very nature, is anti-racist. To allow anti-Semitism or any other form of racism to gain a foothold would be to undermine the very cause that we support.

Tenne speaks with authority, as a Jewish person whose relatives perished in the holocaust. I have to tell her that, according to Atzmon's *Not in my name*, "Jews cannot criticise Zionism in the name of their ethnic belonging because such an act is in itself an approval of Zionism." She too is, by her mentor's definition, a Zionist!

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Mischief-makers

Ruth Tenne's letter draws a parallel between unravelling the Zionist mythology about the foundation of the state of Israel - which needs to be challenged to reveal the truth of events surrounding it - and 'revisiting' the facts and events of the holocaust, of which there is universally recognised and meticulous documentation.

She fails to see the distinction between the use of the holocaust as emotional blackmail (which every anti-racist is against) and denying or questioning the holocaust, which is a diversionary tactic employed by true anti-Semites. She conflates challenging the Zionist narrative of 1948 with the need to challenge the facts of the holocaust, a dangerously misguided and misleading approach. The PSC had every right to establish its anti-racist credentials against those mischief-makers who are detracting from the Palestinian struggle by introducing the deliberately fractious element of holocaust questioning, which has nothing to do with the Palestinian struggle and campaigning. This has the effect of diverting attention from action and campaigning, and playing into Zionists' hands by trying to defend the holocaust deniers, and giving them meat to accuse the PSC of tolerating anti-Semitism.

Tenne erroneously quotes eminent historians like Pappé, Finkelstein and Mark Ellis in their challenging of Zionist history or the use of the holocaust. But they have never questioned the clear historical evidence of the holocaust itself - a tactic used by anti-Semites. Omar Barghouti, the leading Palestinian supporter of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, very specifically stated at the PSC annual general meeting that there was absolutely no room for anti-Semitism, racism or for holocaust minimising or denial.

Anyone using the 'witch-hunt' description for the PSC places that person firmly in the court of defending the deniers, which does not enhance a reputation of the same person being a discerning critic of the Zionist state, and being able to sift out what needs to be challenged and what damages one's case. Unfortunately, Ruth Tenne's statement backing her and Gill Kaffash's motion to the PSC executive will make them even more likely to confirm that the action taken by the AGM in removing avowed holocaust deniers was the right one and more

likely to refuse their muddled and illogical motion and statement.

Abe Hayeem
email

Who is right?

I think a case can be made out for saying that, up until World War I, Lenin was a leftwing social democrat who argued that, under the autocratic political conditions of tsarism, social democrats there had to organise as a hierarchical, centralised party in order to overthrow the tsarist regime, and that for western Europe he accepted the German party's model of an open, democratic party pursuing a maximum programme (of socialism) and a minimum programme of reforms of capitalism, contesting elections, etc.

However, he changed his position after 1917. He now said that the organisational form and tactics that he had advocated for the overthrow of tsarism (which was not in fact how tsarism ended, as it collapsed more or less of its own accord; his tactics only worked to overthrow the weak government that emerged following this) should also be applied in western Europe for the overthrow of capitalism.

This is when he would have ceased to be a social democrat and become a Bolshevik, in which case *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* and *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder* are the significant texts of Leninism. People like Pham Binh can mount some sort of a case for their view that Lenin wasn't really an advocate of a vanguard party aiming to lead and manipulate the workers, as long as they ignore Lenin's post-1917 writings and, of course, practice ('Mangling the party of Lenin', February 2). But it makes them leftwing social democrats - to the disgust of hardcore Leninists, who remain true to his post-1917 vanguardist position.

Adam Buick
email

Cooperate

David Walters says he has a very orthodox Leninist view of imperialism (Letters, February 2). If he did, that would be part of the problem, given that Lenin's theory has been shown comprehensively to be inadequate. But actually there is nothing particularly Leninist in his argument.

David confuses several things. Of course, Marxists oppose imperialism, but the question is *how* they oppose it. As Lenin put it in another context, "The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc, and beyond them to socialism!" (www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/miliprog/ii.htm).

In other words, the fact that capitalism/imperialism moves in a certain direction does not require us to oppose it with a defence of the status quo. Nor a return to some previous state. We oppose it by arguing for the logical extension of that development. We do not demand that capital establish a United States of Europe, but, if it does move in that direction, we do not demand that it desist! On the contrary, we demand that in the process it should implement consistent democracy and we attempt to organise the workers to push forward their interests as far as possible.

It is not correct to say that the only purpose of trade pacts and currency and political unions has been to "destroy the gains of the working class that factually were won within those parameters". Firstly, the things outlined as gains *won* by the working class were by and large no such thing. The welfare state was established not because it was won by workers, but because it met the needs of capital. It was Bismarck who established the first national insurance scheme; it was the Tory, Neville Chamberlain, who drew up the original proposals upon which the welfare state was created; it was Winston Churchill who established the first minimum wage; and so on. The only things that workers have won have been improvements around the margin of what capital itself sought to provide for its own ends.

Secondly, there are many more important reasons for capital to seek closer integration and the establishment of larger markets than the rather trivial issue of undermining workers' wages and conditions. The whole experience of the 19th century, as Engels set out, showed that capital had long gone beyond the penny-pinching methods of extracting absolute surplus value, in favour of relative surplus value. The gains for capital in terms of economies of scale and so on obtained from a larger, integrated market dwarf any short-term gains that capital might obtain through attacks on wages and conditions.

That can be seen by a cursory look at the facts. It is not imperialism in the form of the European Union that has attacked workers' pay and conditions; it has been the British state, which sought to exclude itself from regulations such as the working time directive and which has been at the forefront of those attacks. Far from imperialism, through the establishment of the EU, attacking "social welfare, social security, labour codes and healthcare laws", as David claims, there have been improvements for workers in most of those areas as a result of EU laws and regulations, and, in a period when workers have been generally too weak to win any concessions from capital, those improvements have been driven from the top, from the EU commission itself. Indeed it is that which causes many of the reactionary elements within capital and its political representatives within the rightwing populist parties to squeal with anguish over the intervention against their attempts to squeeze more profits out of their workers.

Perhaps it is because it has seen such improvements to its conditions over the last 20 years, including the right to move in search of work anywhere within the EU, we can agree with David when he says, "The Greek working class is quite clear about where it stands on Europe": Greek workers in every poll indicate 70% support for staying in the EU and in the euro. The latest elections in Finland, where a pro-euro candidate won hands down and the anti-EU candidates got trounced, is another indication that European workers are far more internationalist in this respect than David.

As far as the North American Free Trade Agreement and free trade is concerned, I'd suggest that he read the views of Marx and Engels on the subject (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/free-trade/index.htm). As for the imperialist dismantling of the nation-state, this is fanciful. No one forced any of the states in Europe to apply for membership. Most of them are falling over themselves to be able to join. Scotland has said that, if it were to separate from the UK, it would still want to be a member of the EU. Nor is it clear how opposing the EU would prevent capitalists from

moving their capital to wherever in the globe they wanted, any more than the existence of nation-states prevented that in the past.

But at least David appears to argue honestly, which is more than can be said for Dave Douglass. Despite the fact that I have several times refuted his statement that I merely tell the workers at Bombardier, “it’s capitalism and there’s nowt we can do till the glorious day of the worldwide revolution”, he simply repeats the lie rather than deal with the argument. It is odd, because later he writes: “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’.” I agree, and that is precisely the course of action I *did* propose the workers should adopt.

The difference is that, unlike him, Gerry Downing and others, I recognise the lessons that workers should have learned from the experience of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. There, when workers pursued that course of action, and similarly in France in 1968, the Stalinist leadership of the movement persuaded the workers to follow the course of action Dave Douglass and Gerry and others propose. They argued that, having seized ownership of the means of production, the workers should hand them back to the capitalists and their state. The state then proceeded to do what any property-owner would do. It exercised control against the workers, began a programme of rationalisation that saw tens of thousands of jobs in shipbuilding lost, before making it safe to be handed back to private capitalists. Marxists are supposed to learn the lessons of history, not endlessly repeat them.

The example we need to follow is that put forward by Marx when he praised the textile cooperatives set up by the workers by their own endeavours, or today of the workers in Argentina, such as those at Zanon, who have seized their factories, demanded their ownership be legalised, and then proceeded to exercise control in the only way workers can - through the establishment of cooperatives, which form an integral part of the class struggle.

Arthur Bough
 email

Bogged down

Roscoe Turi finds the US army council denial of Saddam’s gassing of the Kurds a “whopper”. He then goes on to say it might be plausible. Not much of a whopper then. He sees it as propaganda against Iran. If so, it must be the most unused piece of propaganda that the imperialists have ever conjured up. Just about all of the pro-war forces used this single atrocity as enough reason to launch a genocidal war on Iraq. As to Iran, an ‘accident’ of war is hardly the language of blame, although the neo-cons are trying to shift blame for the 9/11 attack to Iran, which is a much more worrying signal of US intentions.

Turi’s sophisticated anti-imperialism consists of aping the imperialist agenda by focusing on the internal crimes, supposed or otherwise, of the target nations, whereas the focus should be our ‘own’ imperialist crimes against these nations - ie, the undeclared war through sabotage, sanctions and assassinations. These crimes are continually ignored by the left, as though their narrative is controlled by imperialism itself. The “systematic duping of the working class” is not merely the prerogative of the Labour Party in Lenin’s vernacular.

It was not the fault of the Berbers or the Kurds that they temporarily became imperialism’s favourite oppressed peoples, but highlighting them here must be put in this context. In contrast, we hear very little about the struggles

in countries of nations whose rulers are friendly to the US, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen. What do we hear of the severe discrimination against non-Muslims or non-Wahhabi Muslims in Saudi Arabia?

Also, the present focus on the euro crisis must be seen through the prism of currency wars and not the default of debt by the periphery European countries. Here the left echo the champions of the pound and the dollar. Fortunately, the dollar and the pound are on their last legs and only need to be defeated by the resilient euro to go into a death spiral.

Finally, I tend to avoid the terms ‘Stalinist’ and ‘Trotskyist’. It’s as if the Russian Revolution informs every debate on the left, and that, I think, alienates the young, as it looks as though we are bogged down in the politics or perhaps dogmas of the 1930s.

Paul Anderson
 email

For and against

In the days of the ‘iron curtain’ and Berlin wall, citizens of the bureaucratic socialist countries who illegally emigrated to the west were described as ‘traitors’.

It seems to me that leaving your country of birth, which has educated you and looked after your health, to seek employment in another country is not necessarily treacherous, but if it leaves your own country impoverished because of the numbers leaving, then it could easily be seen in this light. It is certainly highly irresponsible.

I’d like to know why so many east and central Europeans came to the UK, working below the minimum rates of pay and, of course, well below trade union rates, consequently denying our own workers jobs, when they knew they were impoverishing their fellow-countrymen back home. At one stage so many Polish men had emigrated, there were not enough to man the fire stations in Poland, and many women had to be recruited to do so. Presumably at the low wages the men had left the country to escape.

If the Poles could organise a ‘trade union’ to eventually bring down the bureaucratic socialist government, why couldn’t they organise trade unions to fight for decent wages and conditions under capitalism? Why couldn’t they form cooperatives to avoid capitalist exploitation? Why indeed can’t exploited workers in all the former bureaucratic socialist

countries and in the developing world show some solidarity and form trade unions, cooperatives, etc, to fight for better wages and working conditions, along with the fight for a genuine transfer to socialism?

I’ve been told that in the case of the developing world of sweatshops and child labour it is because any worker who tried to form or joined a trade union would be ‘victimised’. The phrase ‘Tolpuddle martyrs’ comes to mind. Were we in Britain and other western countries handed better wages and working conditions by the capitalists on a plate? Were trade unions welcomed with open arms? Were we not victimised? We had to fight for what we got, every inch of the way. It is a battle which continues and will never be won till we have real socialism.

I’m all for free movement of labour and overcoming petty bourgeois nationalism. However, there has to be, in the case of the EU, a level playing field. Wages and working conditions have to be the same throughout the EU or else some states/countries will be drained of labour-power and others overwhelmed. Surely, this is obvious?

There really is no alternative to fighting for workers’ rights and socialism in *all* countries and, in order to do this, we need international solidarity. This could include sending comrades to countries where wages and conditions are much lower and helping them to form trade unions, cooperatives and political organisations to fight for their rights and for socialism.

All the gains of the distorted form of socialism we saw in the 20th century have been lost, capitalist exploiters have moved in to take the place of the former Stalinist bureaucratic ruling cliques, and the influx of so many economic migrants into the advanced capitalist countries has just caused unemployment, weakening the trade union movement and lowering wages.

Every state has the right to control migration, and indeed has to do so for practical purposes. The fight for workers’ rights, freedom from exploitation and socialism must take place in every country, in every state. Mass emigration is just a cop-out and is not a solution. Free movement of labour is a luxury we can’t afford till there is at least more uniformity of wages and working conditions and, ideally, worldwide socialism.

Tony Papard
 email

Fighting fund

Long and short

After last week’s minor downward glitch, our online readership once again continues its upward trend. Over the last seven days we had 22,196 visitors to cpgb.org.uk.

But I wish I could say the same thing about the number of donors to our fighting fund. At the moment, the bulk of contributions come in the shape of monthly standing orders. An excellent thing, of course, but I would really love to see a few more comrades using our PayPal facility or sending us a cheque as a one-off gift.

We had two of each this week. Via PayPal there were two £30 donations from long-time supporters JS and EJ. Thanks to both! And PK (£20) and FT (£10) were the comrades who still know what a cheque book is. Another easy method is the bank transfer. Either use your online banking account or go to your local branch and make the payment to account

number 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64). That’s how comrade SS got his £10 to us this week.

But, as I say, the greatest part of the money that comes into the fund arrives in the form of standing orders. We had nine of them, ranging from £10 to £30, and totalling £165. Thank you, SD, GS, SM, RK, CG, GD, SM, MWS and DV. All in all, we received £255, taking our February total to £426. But £1,500 is a long way off, especially when you consider that this is a short month and those two lost days can be the difference between success and failure.

If you appreciate the *Weekly Worker*, please do your bit to help us out.

Robbie Rix

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

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 14, 6.15pm: ‘The utopian promise of government’ (cargo cults in Papua/New Guinea). 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.

Battle of Saltley Gate

Friday February 10, 11am: 40th anniversary commemoration, Gate Street, Off Saltley Gate Roundabout, Birmingham B8. Speakers: Arthur Scargill, Ricky Tomlinson, Ken Capstick. Organised by Birmingham Trades Council: www.btuc.org.

COR speaking tour

Friday February 10, 7.30pm: Birmingham, Library Theatre, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3. Speaker: Paul Mackney. **Thursday February 16, 7.30pm:** Barking, Broadway Theatre, Barking. Speakers include: councillor George Barratt, Paul Mackney. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: coalitionofresistance@mail.com.

Hands Off the People of Iran

Saturday February 11, 5.30pm: Film showing, Caxton House, 129 St John’s Way, London N19. Fundraiser screening of Asghar Farhadi’s *A separation*, introduced by John McDonnell MP. £10 solidarity, £5 waged, £3 unwaged. All proceeds to Hands Off the People of Iran. Organised by Hands Off the People of Iran: office@hopoi.info.

One year on

Sunday February 12, 3.30pm: Meeting, Khalili lecture theatre, School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, London WC1. ‘Where now for Egypt and the Middle East?’ Speakers include: Dr Kamal El-Helbawy, chair, Centre for the Study of Terrorism, George Galloway (Respect), Kate Hudson (CND), Andrew Murray (Stop the War Coalition). Chair: Seumas Milne (*The Guardian*). Organised by Respect Foundation: www.respectparty.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.

No Borders

Monday February 13 to Wednesday February 15: Convergence, Richard Hoggart building, Goldsmiths College, Lewisham Way, London SE14. Strengthening networks of resistance to immigration controls.

Saturday February 18, 12pm: Carnival, St Paul’s Cathedral occupation, London EC4. Day of action against immigration controls. Organised by No Borders London: <http://london.noborders.org.uk>.

Fighting against fascism

Wednesday February 15, 7.30pm: Book launch, Labour Hall, Lyndhurst Road, Worthing. Pre-launch of Tony Greenstein’s *The fight against fascism in Brighton and the south coast*. Organised by Brighton History Workshop: www.labourhistory.co.uk.

Socialist study

Thursday February 16, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, News 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.w

ISRAEL

Netanyahu's war wish

The threat of a military provocation by Tel Aviv against Iran is very real, warns Israeli Marxist **Moshé Machover**

One thing is beyond any doubt: a major aim of Israel's foreign policy is the overthrow of the Iranian regime. What is not generally understood are the motives behind this aim, and the present Israeli government's preferred means of achieving it. In this article I would like to say something about the motives, and then explain why prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's preferred means is war - one likely to ignite a major conflagration.

Motives

In my 2008 article 'Zionism: propaganda and reality',¹ I quoted a recent *Jerusalem Post* report on a conference at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. That report deserves to be read very carefully, so here it is again:

"Iran's success in obtaining a nuclear capability will deter Jews from immigrating to Israel, cause many Israelis to leave and will be the end of the 'Zionist dream', former deputy defence minister Ephraim Sneh said Tuesday.

"A nuclear weapon in Iranian hands will be an intolerable reality for Israel," Sneh said during a conference on Iran's nuclear programme at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv. 'The decision-making process in Israel will be under constant [Iranian] influence - this will be the end of the Zionist dream.'

"Former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy slammed Israeli political leaders for calling Iran's nuclear threat 'an existential threat'. 'There is something wrong with informing our enemy that they can bring about our demise,' Halevy said. 'It is also wrong that we inform the world that the moment the Iranians have a nuclear capability there is a countdown to the destruction of the state of Israel. We are the superpower in the Middle East and it is time that we began behaving like [a] superpower,' he said.

"Iran's real goal, Halevy said, was to turn itself into a regional superpower and reach a 'state of equality' with the United States in their diplomatic dealings.

"Sneh said that, while the military option was not preferred, Israel needed to keep it on the table, since such a possibility was the motivation for the international community's efforts to use diplomacy to stop Iran. Sneh added that he was confident that the [Israeli Defence Force] was capable of successfully carrying out a military strike against Iran. 'We grew up in a place that when the political echelon wanted something, the professional echelon knew how to do it,' he said. 'I believe this has not changed in 2008.'"²

Two points in this report are particularly noteworthy. First, one of the experts, a former chief of the Mossad (Israel's counterpart of MI6 and the CIA) is talking here about the prospect of Iranian nuclear *capability* rather than actual production and possession of a nuclear weapon. As all experts are well aware, there is no evidence that Iran has a programme for producing such a weapon. This is as true today as it was in 2008. Indeed, the US defence secretary, Leon Panetta, confirmed this quite recently.³ (Nuclear capability is the ability to produce a usable nuclear weapon at fairly short notice. It is a policy pursued by several other



Binyamin Netanyahu: warpath

governments, and is not prohibited by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which Iran - but not Israel! - is a signatory.)

Second, contrary to Israeli and western hype, neither expert claims that Iran is actually planning to attack Israel, let alone subject it to a nuclear holocaust. The former Mossad chief is dismissive of the scaremongering propaganda alleging that Iran poses a credible military threat to Israel. Ephraim Sneh, a former brigadier general and senior Labour Party politician, does mention the (purely hypothetical) prospect of Iran producing a nuclear weapon, but even he believes that the threat it would pose to Israel is political rather than a direct military one.

Indeed, Israel's worry regarding Iran is the real political threat it poses to Israel's regional hegemony, not the imaginary threat of being attacked by the Islamic Republic. Possession of nuclear capability is certainly a component of this political threat, inasmuch as it would contribute to Iran's diplomatic muscle in its dealings with other Middle Eastern states and with the US. But it is only a component. Even without the nuclear issue, the Zionist state has a clear interest in replacing the present Iranian regime by one compliant with global US hegemony.

Divergence

As far as this aim is concerned, the interests of US and Israel are in complete agreement. But, as regards the means, there appears to be a divergence between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government.

The US, smarting from the wounds of its adventurous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, would like to avoid an outright open military conflict with Iran, a state that can inflict serious damage to its attackers. Moreover, in the present economic climate a sharp rise in the price of oil - an inevitable concomitant of war in the Middle East - may have catastrophic consequences for the global capitalist economy. True, the scary game of 'chicken' the Obama administration is playing against Iran can inadvertently get out of hand and lead to disastrous unintended consequences. (Recall the classic James Dean film, *Rebel without a cause* ...). But the administration is hoping to keep this danger under control and avoid outright war - at least for the time being.

Not so the Israeli government: there are increasing signs that Netanyahu and his defence minister, Ehud Barak, are considering - against the advice of

some of their military and intelligence experts - a provocation that would lead to a major war. This causes the Obama administration serious worry: they do not wish to be dragged into such a war by their Israeli junior partner.

On January 20, while on an unadvertised and little noticed visit to Israel (no press conference, no public statement), general Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, "told Israeli leaders ... that the United States would not participate in a war against Iran begun by Israel without prior agreement from Washington ... Dempsey's warning, conveyed to both prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak, represents the strongest move yet by president Barack Obama to deter an Israeli attack and ensure that the United States is not caught up in a regional conflagration with Iran."⁴

His warning seems to have fallen on deaf ears. On February 2, Associated Press reported:

"US defence secretary Leon Panetta won't dispute a report that he believes Israel may attack Iran this spring in an attempt to set back the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

"Panetta was asked by reporters to comment on a *Washington Post* opinion column by David Ignatius that said Panetta believes there is a 'strong likelihood' that Israel will attack in April, May or June. Ignatius did not say who told him this.

"Asked whether he disputes the report, Panetta said, 'No, I'm just not commenting' ...

"He noted that Israel has stated publicly that it is considering military action against Iran. He said the US has 'indicated our concerns'."⁵

In my opinion this is not just sabre-rattling on Israel's part. There is reason to believe that Netanyahu is seriously considering a provocation designed to trigger off a major Middle East conflagration, despite the enormous risks, that include Iranian retaliation causing loss of many Israeli lives.

To explain Netanyahu's reckless calculation we need to turn our attention to Zionism's nightmare: the Palestinian 'demographic peril'.

One state, Zionist style

By now most people are aware that the present Israeli government has done all in its power to torpedo a so-called 'two-state solution'. What is less well known is that opposition to a sovereign Palestinian state in any part of Eretz Yisrael is not a mere quirk of a rightwing Israeli government, but a deep-seated and fundamental principle shared by all mainstream Zionist parties.

In 1975, General Moshe Dayan put it like this: "Fundamentally, a Palestinian state is an antithesis of the state of Israel ... The basic and naked truth is that there is no fundamental difference between the relation of the Arabs of Nablus to Nablus [in the West Bank] and that of the Arabs of Jaffa to Jaffa [in Israel] ... And if today we set out on this road and say that the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights, then it will not end with the West Bank. The West Bank together with the Gaza Strip do not amount to a state ... The establishment of such a Palestinian state would

lay a cornerstone to something else ... Either the state of Israel - or a Palestinian state."⁶

Thus, for mainstream Zionism any admission that "the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights" would undermine the legitimacy of the Zionist state, and eventually its very existence.

This has remained a cornerstone of Israel's political strategy. For this reason, no Israeli government has ever signed a legally binding commitment to accepting a Palestinian Arab state. This applies, in particular, to the Oslo accords of 1993, which the second government of Yitzhak Rabin co-signed with the Palestinian leadership under Yasser Arafat. In this treaty there is no mention of a Palestinian state. This was not an accidental omission: when presenting the Oslo accords to the Knesset for ratification - on October 5 1995, a month before he was assassinated - Rabin pointedly stressed that what Israel was going to insist on was a Palestinian "entity which is less than a state".

Many observers have been puzzled by Israel's adamant rejection of any Palestinian sovereign state, however small, west of the Jordan River. This seems terribly short-sighted. For, if the whole of pre-1948 Palestine is to remain under Israeli sovereignty, that would mean that Israel would have to rule over a hostile Palestinian Arab people. In effect, the whole of that territory will be one state. Right now there is a rough numerical parity between the two national groups. Since no large-scale Jewish immigration is expected, and since the natural rate of increase of the Palestinian population is higher than that of the Hebrew population, the former will considerably outnumber the latter within a few decades. Surely, the Palestinian majority cannot indefinitely be denied equal rights; but equal rights would lead to the demise of the Jewish state. For Zionism this 'demographic peril' is worse even than a sovereign Palestinian mini-state. So it would seem that by sabotaging the creation of such a state, Israel is heading for what its own ruling ideology regards as the abyss.

This apparent contradiction disregards a third option: neither a two-state solution, nor a single state with an Arab majority, but 'population transfer'. Large-scale ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs would result in a single state in the entire territory, with a large Jewish majority, which is the ultimate aim of all mainstream Zionist parties.

But implementing ethnic cleansing on a sufficiently large scale - while technically quite easy, as explained by the Israeli military theorist, Martin van Creveld⁷ - is politically very tricky. It cannot be done in normal, politically tranquil circumstances. It requires what in Zionist parlance is called *she'at kosher*: an opportune moment of major political, and preferably military, crisis.

Interestingly, quite a long time ago, on November 16 1989, a junior minister in the Shamir government made precisely this point in a speech delivered at Bar-Ilan University, a hotbed of clerical ultra-chauvinist Zionism.

The Jerusalem Post of November 19 1989, quoting a tape recording of the speech, reported that the

deputy foreign minister (roughly equivalent to parliamentary under-secretary of state in Westminster) "has called for Israel to exploit political opportunities in order to expel large numbers of Palestinians from the [occupied] territories". He told students in a speech at Bar-Ilan University that "the government had failed to exploit politically favourable situations in order to carry out 'large-scale' expulsions at times when 'the damage would have been relatively small. I still believe that there are opportunities to expel many people'."

Oh, the name of that junior minister: Binyamin Netanyahu.

A sacrifice worth making

A war with Iran would present a golden opportunity for large-scale expulsion of Palestinians, precisely because (unlike the Iraq invasion of 2003) fighting would not be over too soon, and major protests and disturbances are likely to occur among the masses throughout the region, including the Palestinian Arabs under Israeli rule. What better way to pacify such disturbances than to "expel many people".

Of course, a decision to ignite a war against Iran is not one that any Israeli leader would take lightly. There is a non-negligible risk that Israel would suffer many casualties. This is not a price that even the most adventurous prime minister would consider paying, unless the expected prize is extremely high. But in this case the prize is the highest possible one from a Zionist point of view: eliminating the demographic threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish ethnocracy. So Netanyahu will be sorely tempted to make a sacrifice of his own people for the greater national good.

I assume that American policy-makers are aware of Israel's *special* interest in a military denouement of the conflict with Iran, an interest not quite shared by the US. This is why they are worried, and issue stern warnings to Netanyahu and Barak - discreetly and behind the scenes, of course, because especially in this election year, when he will face Republican crazies, Obama cannot afford to appear pusillanimous.

However, Netanyahu cannot flagrantly go ahead and start a war without US approval. Therefore the most likely scenario is a series of provocations instigated by Israel, mostly by devious and covert means, in order to escalate the conflict and drag the US by degrees into mission creep.

I do not wish to sound too alarmist, but the coming few months may well be 'interesting' in the Chinese sense ●

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* September 18 2008.
2. 'Iranian nukes mean end of Zionism' *The Jerusalem Post* internet edition, September 9 2008.
3. 'Panetta: Iran has not yet decided to make a nuclear bomb' Associated Press, January 8 2012; reported by Fox News: www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/01/08/panetta-iran-has-not-yet-decided-to-make-nuclear-bomb.
4. IPS report, February 1 2012: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=106621>.
5. *Washington Post* February 2 2012.
6. *Ha'aretz* December 12 1975.
7. Martin van Creveld, 'Sharon's plan is to drive Palestinians across the Jordan' *The Sunday Telegraph* April 28 2002: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/1392485/Sharons-plan-is-to-drive-Palestinians-across-the-Jordan.html.

ECONOMY

Greek razor edge

A default by Greece would unleash chaos way beyond the euro zone, writes **Eddie Ford**

With one 'deadline' after another flashing by, the crisis in Greece continues to rage - it might even escalate. A catastrophic default still remains a very real possibility, whether in the immediate future or some time later.

As I write, Lucas Papademos, the technocratic prime minister - in reality the European Union bureaucracy's man in Athens - still has not agreed to a package of austerity and 'labour reforms' (ie, attacks) that sufficiently please the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika: not enough cuts, not enough blood squeezed from the workers. Troika patience, and that of European leaders as a whole, is said to be running very thin. So much so that they could just press the eject button on Greece, leaving it no longer a member of the euro.

The central obstacle at the moment to any deal between the Greek government and the troika comes in the shape of the leaders of the three coalition partners who make up the 'national unity' government: George Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok); the mainstream centre-right New Democracy of Antonis Samaras; and the rightwing, populist-nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-Turkish, Popular Orthodox Rally (Laos). At least two of them are *deeply* unhappy with the austerity plans, especially Laos. Before heading into a meeting of the coalition leaders on February 6, Giorgos Karatzaferis, the Laos leader, declared that "we will not give in to ultimatums". If the troika "doesn't budge", he asserted, then Laos "will not take the package". He might even stick to his words, as the pressure builds up to just sign on the dotted line and like it or lump it.

No-one wants to give ground, yet someone must. And the odds are stacked in favour of the troika, of course. As one infuriated EC spokesman, Amadeu Altafaj-Tardio, put it - the "truth is we are already beyond deadline" and the "ball is in the court of the Greek authorities". So just do what the troika wants and comply, little Greece.

Sticking points

Showing the tensions, a meeting of the party leaders and Papademos due to start on the night of February 7 was postponed to the next day - and even the time of that meeting kept being pushed back. Ostensibly, it had only one purpose - to approve the 50-page "final draft document" outlining the austerity measures demanded by the troika. But even at this late hour it is not absolutely guaranteed that the deal will be ratified or that the rightwing leaders will not demand even more negotiating time (it seems that Pasok has decided to swallow the bitter pill of further austerity).

According to the ever changing and improvised timetable, euro zone finance ministers scheduled a meeting for February 9, originally due to take place three days before. The aim was to "review" the budgetary plans contained in the "final draft document" so that the Greek parliament could vote on the measures at the weekend. Of course, even if the party leaders eventually concede to the troika's demands, it is not an impossibility that parliament will reject them - disgruntled and angry Greek MPs might rebel. Events hang on a razor's edge.



Euro: in danger

One of the main sticking points to date has been the troika's insistence on a cut in the minimum wage. According to Altafaj-Tardio, the Greek minimum wage is over €100 a month higher than Spain's and €200 more than in Portugal and so it should be cut by at least 20%. In addition, in order to satisfy the troika's bailout demands, the Greek government was still "assessing" €1.3 billion of spending cuts for 2012 as part of total reductions of €3.3 billion. The government has already made plans for huge cuts in health, defence, local government subsidies and pensions, not to mention the axing of 15,000 civil service jobs by the end of the year - part of the 150,000 public sector posts scheduled to be cut by 2015.

Meanwhile, to make life even more difficult, there are the parallel negotiations with Greece's private creditors. The Institute of International Finance - the group representing the majority of Greece's global bondholders - is apparently prepared to write off 70% of the value of current loans, which currently stands at €205 billion. But only, of course, if the troika package of cuts is securely in place. In turn, the troika will only authorise the next tranche of €130 billion bailout money if the Greek government has formally ratified the 'reforms' demanded - which is dependent on Samaras and Karatzaferis playing ball. Obviously, if the Greek government fails to get the money, then it cannot meet its €14.5 billion interest repayment on March 20 and will therefore be in default - almost certainly leading to its exit from the euro zone.

What we are seeing in Athens is a high-risk game of poker. The Greek government, or at least the coalition party leaders, are hoping that the troika will blink first and row back on some of the austerity measures. Greece may be tiny and only constitute about 2% of total EU GDP, but the calculation is that forcing the country out of the euro zone would have ruinous repercussions for the whole EU and it is therefore in the troika's interest to compromise further. Or so the Greek government hopes.

But, whatever exactly happens over the next few days and weeks, the unthinkable is now routinely thought about - which is 'Grexit', to use the term coined by Willem Buiters, the chief economist at Citigroup. He now reckons there is a 50% chance of a Grexit over the next 18 months, up from his previous estimate of just 25%-30%. This is because, he argues, the "willingness of euro area creditors to continue providing further support to Greece despite Greek non-compliance with programme conditionality" has

"fallen substantially". He therefore recommends that the Greek government must either "exhibit a minimum degree of compliance" with the fiscal and structural conditions of the bailout programme or "choose to temporarily cede authority" over certain budgetary decisions to EU representatives.

Yet how likely is either option? Fury and outrage erupted last week over the "sick" idea of an EU commissioner effectively running the Greek economy, all the better to pound the working class with yet another round of cuts. But something has to give.

Social explosion

You can see why the Greek party leaders have dragged their feet. With elections pencilled in for April, to be seen signing up to more savage cuts is to run the risk of becoming utterly hated - if they are not already. However, their reluctance to put their names to the troika's "final draft document" is even more basic than that; fear of the massive social explosion that could occur if the troika pushes Athens too far, sweeping them *all* away. Not for nothing did Karatzaferis pronounce that he was not "going to contribute to the explosion of a revolution" by backing a "wretchedness that will then spread across Europe". Time will tell if this reactionary's nightmares come true.

We saw possible intimations of this explosion on February 7, as the coalition partners held yet another fraught meeting, with a 24-hour national strike called by the country's two main unions - the public sector Civil Servants Confederation (ADEDY) and its private sector sister, the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE). Between them they represent 2.5 million workers or roughly half the country's workforce. Some 20,000 took part in demonstrations in Athens, protesting against the prospect of further job losses and budget cuts, which had driven the economy into a downward - death - spiral.

Workers were originally told that the job losses could be attained through "staff attrition" (or 'natural wastage'). No compulsory redundancies. However, Dimitris Reppas, the public sector reform minister, has now stated that the job cuts could be carried out under a new law introduced on February 6 allowing public sector workers to be dismissed in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Naturally though, being a good social democrat, he was "opposed to indiscriminate firings" - rather, he explained, the reduction in the workforce is "strictly connected with the restructuring of services and organisations at each ministry". How reassuring.

Yannis Panagopoulos, president of the GSEE, stated that the unions have "moved beyond negotiation" now, as any further austerity measures would utterly "destroy" the Greece economy. For him, the troika's demands for 20%-30% cuts in private sector wages are the "chronicle of a death foretold" and represent a "brutal cynical blackmail against an entire nation" - the cuts to private sector wages will affect people on the minimum wage as well and in general increase the number of people now living below the poverty line. According to the unions, some 1.5 million people in Greece have *no* income - the troika insists that there is no alternative but to add to this destitution. Similarly, an ADEDY

statement castigated the austerity regime for "turning workers into pariahs, jobless people and pensioners into paupers". This "must be stopped at any cost".

On the demonstrations, protestors tussled with police outside parliament, chanting: "No to mediaeval labour conditions!" There is wide resentment against German chancellor Angela Merkel - the most militant advocate of cuts/austerity and key architect of the euro zone's new "fiscal compact" (the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance), who almost boasted about how "parliamentary majorities" will not change anything from now on: the EU bureaucracy will always win.

Anger obviously mounting, Nikos Sofianos - who sits on the central committee of Communist Party of Greece (KKE) - told a local radio station on the morning of the demonstrations that the Papademos government is "murderous", and pledged that the KKE will "do everything in our power to stop this agreement with foreign lenders" being carried out. The troika - "We won't let them pass", he told his audience in demagogic fashion.

The real tragedy, of course, is that the KKE's 'solutions' to the crisis in Greece - and Europe as a whole - would be just as disastrous for the working class as the troika's austerity plans, if not more so. Withdrawal from EU "capitalist club" into splendid 'socialist' isolation: the 'Albanianisation' of Greece. A programme for true misery and impoverishment from the JV Stalin and Mao handbook.

Euro overboard?

Inevitably, divisions are opening up amongst the euro zone leaders and representatives. Merkel cuttingly remarked that she "honestly can't understand how additional days will help" for Greece. "Time is of the essence" - given that a "lot is at stake for the entire euro zone". A tetchy sentiment shared by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, who sternly noted that Greece's leaders "have made commitments" and hence "must respect them scrupulously" - the deal with the troika "needs to be concluded". EU officials have now said that the "full package" must be agreed with Greece and approved by the troika before February 15 at the very latest - yet another deadline.

Less patiently, the Dutch vice-president of the EC, Neelie Kroes, told the *Volkskrant* newspaper on February 7 that it is "absolutely not a case of man overboard if someone leaves the euro zone". Going on, whether advisedly or not, she noted how we are always told that if a country "asks to get out" - like maybe Greece - then it is inevitable that the "whole edifice" will collapse. But this is "simply not true", she maintained - the euro zone can live without Greece. She warned the Greek government that the conditions for a second bailout package *had* to be met - it was a case of "too few spending cuts, too little restructuring". The Greeks have to realise, she lectured, that "we Dutch and we Germans can only sell emergency aid to Greece to our taxpayers if there is proof of good will" - the obvious suggestion being that there is precious little of that from Athens.

Kroes's scathing comments seem to reflect those made by Jean-Claude Juncker, the chair of the euro group of

finance ministers, in *Der Spiegel* the day before. Greece, he wrote, "could no longer expect solidarity from other euro zone members" if it failed to implement the "reforms" it has agreed to. Furthermore, he said, if all else fails, "in March they have to declare bankruptcy". So it was essential for Athens to "get muscles", he said, concluding with a barbed remark about the "elements of corruption at all levels of the administration" in Greece. How to make friends and influence people, EU-style.

However, doubtlessly alarmed by the aggressive tone adopted by his colleagues, José Manuel Barroso - president of the EC and EU vice-president - emphasised the costs of a Greek default and a possible speedy exit from the euro would be "much higher than the costs of continuing to support Greece": it is "very important" to remember that, he stressed. Though it was equally as important, he pointed out, that Greece undertakes to "clearly" and "unambiguously" make the "necessary adjustment efforts", as laid out by the troika. Good EU cop, bad EU cop.

Now everything hangs in the air. Juncker has openly backed a German plan premised on the idea that a proportion of future bailout money should be paid into an 'escrow account' that can only be used by the Greek government to repay its other, private-sector lenders. Some investors and EU officials have also suggested that any additional money needed to make Greek debt "sustainable" could come from the ECB, which holds a portfolio of around €40-50 billions worth of Greek paper (ie, debt). Unsurprisingly, such a notion is not too favourably looked upon by the German government.

Meanwhile, private investors are looking *very* nervously at Greece - whatever the eventual outcome, deal or no deal. If Greece defaults, chaotically or otherwise, they stand to lose a lot of money. But even if Greece does eventually come to an arrangement with the troika, they still stand to potentially lose substantial amounts of money - they are already looking at a 70% 'haircut'. Who then is to say that they will not have to do the same in Portugal, Spain and Italy?

Perhaps most worrisome of all to those who have lent to Portugal, for example, is that Greece might well pass a law that would *force* a reluctant minority of bondholders opposed to the restructuring to participate nonetheless. Hence the wide speculation in the financial press that the Greek government is planning to retroactively adopt "collective-action clauses" that indeed bind the minority of creditors to the decisions of the majority. Such CAC clauses are a perfectly normal market practice when new bonds are issued, but retroactively inserting CACs in sovereign bonds via legislation is totally unprecedented. The upshot is that the private investors in Greece and elsewhere could end up being force-fed the same debt 'restructuring' terms that are on the table for the Greeks.

One thing is for sure. If Greece defaults and gets kicked out of the euro, this will be the equivalent of an economic and social nuclear bomb. The contagion would quickly spread to Portugal, Spain and Italy ●

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ANALYSIS

Promoting the national economy divides workers

Does Keynesianism represent an alternative to austerity? Mike Macnair begins by looking at John Maynard Keynes's actual theory

This article is an expanded version of my talk at the CPGB school, 'Fundamentals of political economy' (January 22). It is expanded because when I came to edit the transcript, I found that a large and necessary chunk of argument was missing due to the time constraints at the school. I have also provided more of an introduction than I gave at the school.

The increased length means that the article will appear in two parts. This first part consists of the introduction and engagement with Keynes's actual arguments. The second part will consider the 'golden age', around 1950-70, in which 'Keynesianism' appeared dominant, whether a return to this period is a realistic or desirable policy, and how we can propose reforms within capitalism without seeking a 'Keynesian' policy and government.

In 2008 a financial bubble partially burst. The response of states worldwide was (in effect) to print large amounts of money to be poured into the banks to bail them and the rest of the financial system out (the technical measures involved were considerably more complex, but the details are irrelevant for present purposes).

In spite of these measures, the crash had an immediate effect of tightening the availability of credit. Since businesses depend on credit for their everyday operations, there was a - brief - sharp decline in the productive economy before the temporary stabilising effects of printing money kicked in. In Britain, there was a rash of short-time working and wage cuts in the private sector, though not massive redundancies; the government and the banks agreed to avoid a wave of foreclosures on mortgages which were (and remain) in default, in order to avoid a crash in the price of houses and commercial property: ie, keep at least this bubble semi-inflated.

The next step was that, since *states* were required to print money, and are able to do so with effects other than merely producing hyperinflation (because states borrow too), the problem shifted to the relative credit-worthiness of *states*. This problem began with Iceland and Ireland, is ongoing with Greece, and threatening in relation to Portugal and Italy. Another global financial crash, looming around the end of 2011, was averted (at least temporarily) because the European Central Bank agreed to print still more money to bail out European banks.

Middle class savings

The capitalist class is a small social group. The 'Occupy' movement's '1%' slogan if anything overstates its size. This minority is only able to rule over the society through the support of much larger social strata: the middle classes, both 'classical' petty bourgeoisie (small businesses, including the genuine self-employed¹) and employed middle class (managers, bureaucrats, etc).

This support is material and financial and not merely ideological and political. To be middle class is to be (slightly) above the working class,

to continue to be so in old age, and to be able to pass that social position on to your children. To achieve these effects, the middle classes have to save. A small business, and *a fortiori* self-employment, is not marketable at the capitalised value of its current income stream, because its future income depends very sharply on the personal characteristics of the owner-manager. So merely keeping the business going or selling it off will not (usually) provide sufficiently for old age or the kids.

Before capitalism, savings took the form of gold and silver hoards (withdrawing money from circulation), small land acquisitions, and local lending based on interpersonal trust. In capitalism, a large part of these savings are instead mobilised by financial institutions (starting from state borrowing and markets in transferable state debt) into large accumulations of money capital. Today the level of financial intermediation is great: most state debt and company shares are held by institutions; but these institutions still depend, in the last analysis, on a mass of middle class small savers, who are less likely to make large destabilising withdrawals than large capitals.

Printing more money to bail out the banks saves both big capitals and small savers from *immediate* loss of their capitals/savings. But it also dilutes the relative value of the savings. This is true even if it does not produce immediate consumer price inflation: to retain their value, savings have to keep pace with *capital asset* prices, not with consumer prices.

From these circumstances flows a *necessary* narrative for capitalism: that the costs of crisis must fall primarily on wages and the working class. To say that the costs must fall on capital (which is in the end true) would be a suicidal degree of altruism for any individual capitalist; to say that they must fall on small savers and *not* on big capitals would destroy the social base of capital, not merely in the sense of causing middle class disaffection, but also because, if the returns through finance are bad enough, middle class savings *can* return to hoards, small land acquisitions and local interpersonal lending, which would destabilise the financial system.

In the present crisis - more exactly, the aftermath of the 2008 crisis - this necessary narrative is expressed as 'austerity'. States, the capitalist media and politicians claim, have been 'living beyond their means' by undue provision of welfare to the working class (and employed middle class, but these are less mentioned). The value of wages and in particular of the 'social wage' - collective welfare provision - must be reduced.

The particular form of the narrative responds to recent conditions. Its underlying content is an old, 19th century dogma of bourgeois economics, already present in Malthus, and persistent in the marginalists: that economic crisis and unemployment are caused by excessive wages, and real wages must fall to restore the conditions for capitalist equilibrium.

The responses of the left (in a very broad sense of 'left') to the 'austerity' turn have been almost

across the board dominated by the counter-narrative of Keynesianism. From the Labour leadership and 'let us cut more slowly, let us have a plan for growth', through the majority of the Labour Party, through to the far left. Even the Socialist Workers Party, effectively abandoning its own history of criticising Keynesianism, is advocating Keynesian economic stimulus programmes and is doing so particularly in relation to Irish politics.

But how much sense, and perhaps more importantly what sort of sense, does this counter-narrative make?

Alternative to capitalism

The problem starts in a sense with a fundamental question: what is the real alternative to capitalism? The answer is conscious cooperation, among our different productive activities, as opposed to private, individual decision-making.

Marx's *Capital* is in part a polemic against the Proudhonist case for cooperatives linked by a market as an alternative to capitalism.² In the first part of *Capital* volume 1 it is shown, among other points, that both a return to individual artisan production and cooperatives linked by a market (as opposed to linked by cooperation on a scale wider than the individual productive enterprise) will naturally and automatically develop into capitalism. *By the mechanism of market competition itself*, small differences in productivity are amplified, and this generates a process in which artisans - or cooperatives linked by a market - turn into groups of exploiters and exploited.

This is, in fact, also a description of what happened to artisan production in the late medieval and early modern towns, and what happened to peasant farming in late 15th through middle 16th century England.³ The original equal, free, independent producers, by virtue of marginal differences in productivity, turn into capitalists on the one side and wage-workers on the other.

More immediately, cooperatives *under capitalism* - ie, leaving in place capitalist control of the financial system, which coordinates production, and the form of judicial corruption called the 'free market in legal services' - wind up as an analogue of the old 'putting out system', in which artisans carried on production on a household scale, but merchants controlled access to raw materials, finance and the marketing of the produced goods: what Marx called the "formal subsumption of labour to capital". A significant number of the producer cooperatives of the 1850s-60s wound up in this position.

Hence, the real alternative to capitalism is cooperation *across the level of the whole material division of labour*. That is, we need to link in relations of conscious cooperation primary materials producers, workers in manufacturing industry, in transportation, warehousing, distribution and retail, in planning activities (the lower parts of management), in all forms of education and training, and so on. There are, of course, activities in a capitalist society that a socialist society could get rid of: eg, advertising, finance practised by a large part of the multiple competing institutions, and a lot of related legal services. But in order to have something other than capitalism, without its tendency towards extremes of rich and poor, recurrent crises and ultimately world wars, there must be conscious cooperation across the whole division of labour and democratic methods of decision-making for questions which affect us all.

Karl Kautsky argued in *The class struggle*, his extended explanation of the German Social Democratic Party's 1891 Erfurt programme, that the national scale - at least in large nations - was sufficient for a cooperative-

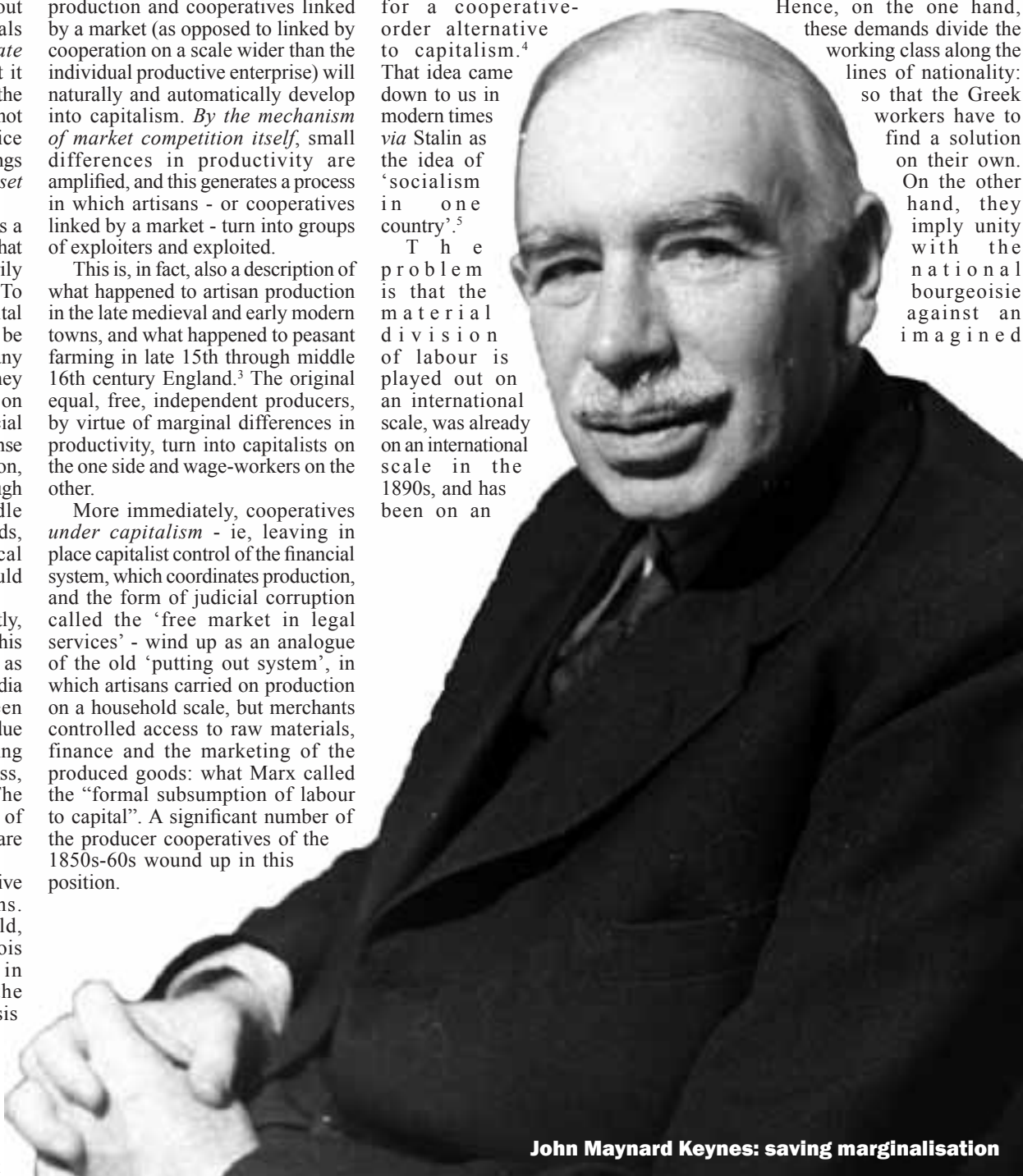
order alternative to capitalism.⁴ That idea came down to us in modern times via Stalin as the idea of 'socialism in one country'.⁵

The problem is that the material division of labour is played out on an international scale, was already on an international scale in the 1890s, and has been on an

international scale since the later middle ages. For example, early enclosure in late medieval England was characterised as 'sheep eating up men'. What that meant was that grain production was being replaced by sheep on grassland. The wool was being produced for sale to the Netherlands, where putting-out merchants were engaged in wool cloth production. The merchants were selling the products across the whole of western Europe and into the Islamic world. From the Islamic world they were getting back goods not produced in western Europe, and goods that the Islamic merchants were buying in from east Asia. An example: spices. Not a simple luxury: spices were used to preserve foods (for example, pickled herring, produced by industrial methods by early Dutch capitalism), and by increasing the life of foods, the same amount of food could feed more people.

So the material division of labour is beyond the scale of the nation, and has been since the earliest beginnings of capitalism. But the left puts forward Keynesian demands on *the nation-state*, which by their nature require that the working class should support the nation-state against rivals.

Hence, on the one hand, these demands divide the working class along the lines of nationality: so that the Greek workers have to find a solution on their own. On the other hand, they imply unity with the national bourgeoisie against an imagined



John Maynard Keynes: saving marginalisation

‘cosmopolitan’ capital - or, immediately, ‘Eurocrats’.

This character actually flows from the nature of Keynes’s original project. It is not particularly surprising from the dominant elements of the left. Labourism has always been a nationalist and class-collaborationist project, and continental social democracy became such a project during and after World War I. ‘Official communism’ has been defined since 1935 by the projects of socialism in one country, national roads to socialism and the people’s front, as well as party monolithism. So it is unsurprising that these trends should find Keynesianism attractive. The SWP was founded as an enemy of social democracy and Stalinism, but, as it has sought to take over the role of the old ‘official’ CPGB, it has gradually been moving ideologically towards ‘official communism’.

The fact that Keynesian perspectives have become the only ones put forward as an alternative to capitalist ‘austerity’ - except by very small minority groups on the far left and unorganised individuals - is a deep political obstacle to the working class organising itself independently of the capitalist class and taking its own independent political initiatives. It is equally a deep obstacle to cooperation at the level at which the division of labour exists. As long as working class politics is canonised between different nation-states, there is a drive to accept the infernal logic that British competitiveness requires us to defend the City of London, to accept lower wages, and so on.

Now it might nonetheless be the case that we have to do this. This sort of argument has been put forward by, for example, Dave Douglass in the letters column of the *Weekly Worker*: that if we do not support national protectionist demands, we are saying that ‘nothing can be done before the revolution’. Or the argument which the leaders of the SWP use for raising Keynesian demands: ‘We have to apply the policy of the united front: that means moderate demands, militant action.’ That is, we have to accept the *demands* which are being put forward by the right wing of the labour movement, but then say that in order to win them you need all-out strike action. The upshot of these and similar arguments is that the idea of a real alternative to capitalism is silenced because the left, which *might* put forward an alternative, instead puts forward Keynesianism.

To address this issue I will take a step back. I will look briefly at Keynes’s own arguments; and equally briefly at their real support, the so-called ‘golden age’ between 1950s and 1970s when Keynesianism was a widespread ideology in the economics profession. How far did the Keynesian theory actually describe what was happening in terms of state economic management in that period? I can then come back to the question, what does this policy mean now?

Keynes

Over Christmas I spent some tedious time slogging through Keynes’s *General theory of employment, interest and money*.⁶ It was tedious because Keynes’s actual arguments are logically incoherent. This is because in the first place he specifies his definition of things like wage, interest, capital and so on, on the basis that nothing can be a valid definition unless it can be expressed in, or form part of, a differential equation. If you cannot do $\Delta x \Delta y$ equations with a definition, then he says (to paraphrase) that definition cannot be either true or false (pp40, 153-53). We are to create definitions on the basis of the *antecedent* (and unargued) *postulate* that it has to be possible to describe the economy through a system of differential equations.⁷

The consequence of this, together with the nature of Keynes’s underlying political-economic project, is that he actually shifts definitions between chapters. When he is doing one set of equations he has one definition for - say - the wage; when he is doing another set of equations he has another definition for the wage. So he shifts his analytical foundations and usage of ‘wage’, ‘equilibrium’, ‘capital’ and so on from chapter to chapter of the book and you have to keep tracing backwards and forwards in order to try and see if there is logical coherence. My conclusion was that there is not.

The underlying project of Keynes’s book is to save marginalist economics. In some sense it is to save capitalism from itself, but it is actually narrower: Keynes criticises marginalist economics, in order to save it.⁸

Marginalism (to express the point in a highly simplified way) is related to the issue of expressing economic claims in the form of differential equations. The proposition is that the underlying explanatory power of economics has to be the explanation of marginal changes in price, etc; and that this can be done in the form of differential equations. Hence we postulate definitions of economic phenomena which will enable differential equations to describe an equilibrium state of capitalism.

The marginalists’ postulated definition of the wage is from two angles. One is the marginal product of labour, meaning that the amount which is produced by the *addition of one extra worker* fixes the wage. If you have x workers employed and you move to x+1, the wage is fixed by the marginal product of that one extra labourer. The second is the marginal disutility to the worker of working one extra hour. Marginalists provide analogous definitions of capital, but this is not material here.

Now these definitions of the wage implicitly postulate *a priori* that the wage could fall indefinitely (or, for that matter, it could rise indefinitely). There is no material floor. This is a conception of economics without natural limits. The marginalist definitions of the wage *presuppose* that workers could in principle work for more than 24 hours a day on zero calories.

The logical conclusion from this approach was one defended by Arthur C Pigou, against whom Keynes polemicises. In Pigou’s view there is no such a thing as involuntary unemployment, because the work would be offered if only the unemployed were prepared to accept *lower wages*. OK, it is a bit hard for them if they accept work for which pay is only 10% of the rent which they have to pay and leaves nothing whatsoever for food; tough, the marginalist would say, that is just how it is; and, of course, in the free market if workers accept work for less than subsistence costs, as enough of them starve to death (Malthus’s solution to the problem of unemployment), lack of demand will force the prices of subsistence goods down.

Keynes, writing in the early 1930s, wants to save the general methodology of marginalism from Pigou’s conclusion that there is no such a thing as involuntary unemployment; because in the early 1930s the fact that there is involuntary unemployment is blindingly obvious. It was plainly untrue that people were unemployed because they were skivers and it was ridiculous to suggest it. Hence at the time of Keynes’s writing, marginalism was under severe ideological pressure in the form of ‘respectable people’ and fellow academics. Marginalism was regarded not even as flat-earthism, but as analogous to a ‘scientific theory’ whose central conclusion is that the

sun rises in the west.

Hence, part of what Keynes does is multiply shifting redefinitions, which enable him to give what are not really marginalist answers, without directly interrogating the underlying marginalist assumptions. There are episodes in *General theory* where Keynes slips towards the labour theory of value or admits that labour inputs actually seem to be more predictive than marginalism; but then he shifts back again (pp213, 215, 252).

Marginalism makes the assumption that time does not exist and then reinstates it. This is part of the point of the centrality of the calculus. The method is one of ‘comparative statics’: you have a series of distinct points in time, and you draw a curve on the basis of an equation which models the movement between these distinct points in time. But the distinct points in time are *pre-given*, because the method is in origin about the method of calculating orbits, which, although they are not actually perfectly stable, nonetheless are sufficiently stable that they appear to move, yet at the end of the day remain the same.

Marginalism is, analogously, looking at the economy on the basis that it moves, yet at the end of the day remains the same. This is not unique to Keynes, because all the marginalists do it: you may introduce time and uncertainty at *specific points*, but at the foundation, in the mathematics used to test claims, you are still analysing a *static* system, the economy in equilibrium; so that the partial introduction of time and change inherently involves methodological inconsistency.⁹

Unemployment

The second aspect of the project of the *General theory* is that Keynes offers a defence of a very traditional idea: that you can deal with the problem of unemployment in a slump by using public works. By hiring more people in public works, you get more people employed overall, and then they are going to buy more food, housing, clothes ... and that is going to push the economy forward. The marginalists claimed that this was impossible. On the assumptions of marginalist economics, the free-market economy is always running at equilibrium, meaning here the most efficient possible level. Hence if you put money into public works it is just going to divert money from private investment, so that what you gain on the swings with employment on public works, you lose on the roundabouts by the loss of employment in the private sector.

From there in turn, Keynes polemicises against the British ‘treasury view’ that government should always run a balanced budget. He says, no, you can run a deficit budget under slump conditions, when there is less than full employment, and by doing so you stimulate the economy and move it back into boom conditions. The flip side is that when you are in boom you should not run a deficit budget.

Unambiguously, Keynes’s project is also methodologically and politically nationalist. He is perfectly explicit that all his arguments rest on the assumption of a closed economy (pp11-12, 120, 264-65, 270). At the end of the book he relaxes that assumption. But he then says that if the states individually *behave as though* they are closed economies, aiming for full employment, then the reasons for conflicts between states will be mitigated, because states and capitals will no longer be searching for market share overseas (chapter 23).

In the preface to the 1936 German edition he says: “... the theory of output as a whole, which is what the following book purports to provide, is much more easily adapted to the conditions of a totalitarian state than is the theory of production or distribution of a given

output produced under conditions of free competition and a large measure of laissez-faire” (pxix). Obviously that is intended to commend his book to German academic economists as of 1936, under Nazism.

Again, towards the end of the book he explicitly commends the mercantilist authors of the 18th century as against Smith, Ricardo, and so on (chapter 23). He says that at the end of the day the wealth of the nation depends on the full employment of capital and labour; and the full employment of capital and labour may well involve controls on the movements of capital and labour at the level of state borders.

In sum, the *General theory* displays a set of logical inconsistencies which are connected with Keynes’s attempt to save marginalism from itself, and with Keynes’s commitment to what is in substance a nationalist mercantilist policy.

Positive argument

There are two core elements of Keynes’s ideas. The first is the proposition that the *money* wage is ‘sticky downwards’: that is to say, workers do not like wage cuts and they tend to go on strike in response to attempts to impose them. But the *real* wage is not sticky downwards: that is, if the value of wages is reduced by inflation, the working class will not be able to organise effectively to resist, and may not even perceive that they are being screwed over by their employers. So step one is: Keynes says he agrees entirely with the marginalists that when there is a recession, real wages have to go down; but the way to achieve this may be to generate a bit of inflation, while leaving the money wage as it is (pp10, 14, 17, 232-33, 237, 270, 284).

Secondly, Keynes argues what is in the last analysis a variant of the old ‘underconsumptionist’ theory of capitalist crises, but gives it a different, psychological, explanation. This is essentially that, the better off you get, the lower the proportion of your income you are prepared to spend: consumption does not go up at the same rate as income. This produces a gap in consumption demand, particularly in relation to rentiers, the people who live off dividends and interest.

This gap has the consequence that, if there are more people in employment at lower levels of income, there will be a multiplier effect, because this consumption gap will be filled up (or partially filled up). Once full employment is achieved, if you carry on engaging in deficit spending, then you will produce genuine, serious and problematic inflation. But in the interim period, if the economy is not at full employment, then the multiplier effect means that relatively limited state spending will get more people in employment and that will increase demand by an amount which is more than or considerably more than the spending itself represents. (The Keynesians debated at length in the 1950s-70s what full employment is, and what the trade-off is between levels of employment and levels of inflation.)

This proposition is pretty clearly at a certain level straightforwardly true, and it is true on Marxist premisses as well. Of course, many Marxist economists object to ‘underconsumptionist’ theories of crisis and it is true that underconsumptionism cannot explain the cyclical return of crises. The cyclical return of crises started in Britain in 1760 and - as Engels (or possibly Marx) pointed out in the *Anti-Dühring* - the underconsumption of the broad masses has been present since the beginning of class society in at some point in the second millennium BCE.¹⁰ The cyclical return of crises, in contrast, is a specific phenomenon of capitalism.

Nonetheless, there is a real gap in

effective demand, and this demand gap has to be filled by capitalist investment. The objection to underconsumptionism is that in growth and boom periods it *is* filled by capitalist investment. Hence Keynes’s argument that the gaps could be filled in slump conditions by state investment is a partial truth. Nonetheless the underlying argument is logically incoherent. This is most obvious insofar as Keynes’s policy proposal is to increase effective demand among the relatively poor by increasing employment, *while at the same time reducing effective demand among the relatively poor by reducing the real wage through inflation*. Otherwise he would not assert, repeatedly, his agreement with the marginalists that in a recession the real wage has to fall.

The argument for the left putting forward Keynesian demands is essentially that after 1945 there were major reforms, at least ideologically represented by the ‘Keynesian consensus’, which had the effect that working class life was better (clearly when the left puts forward Keynesian demands it does not mean it is in favour of wage cuts through inflation). The same point in a different way was made by Werner Bonefeld in his talk at the ‘Fundamentals of political economy’ school: He said that ‘Don’t rely on the state’ is not a serious policy for the unemployed, etc, who are dependent on benefits. If ‘Don’t not rely on the state’ means taking away benefits, that is not just brutal, but also profoundly disadvantageous to everybody, because it tends to drive down wages.

Suppose, then, we agree that it is no good just saying, ‘We want revolution’, and we have to propose slogans for reform under capitalism. The real, underlying case for the particular form of slogans represented by Keynesian proposals is: ‘We know from the golden age of the 1950s-70s that Keynesianism can work’. The question is, do we? It is not at all clear that we do. I will discuss this question and the consequences in the second part of this article. Is a return to the ‘golden age’ feasible? And, if not, what sort of reform proposals should the workers’ movement propose? ●

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Notes

1. ‘Genuine’, as opposed to those working under sham arrangements, whereby they are ‘self-employed’ to allow the employer various advantages: eg. *Autoclenz v Belcher* [2011] UKSC 41.
2. J Harrison *Marxist economics for socialists* (London 1978) develops this point.
3. Artisan production: the discussion in *Capital* Vol 1 has not been contradicted by subsequent evidence. Peasant farming: J Whittle *The development of agrarian capitalism* (Oxford 2000).
4. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/ch04.htm.
5. E van Ree, ‘Socialism in one country: a reassessment’ *Studies in East European Thought* No50, 1998, pp77-117 draws out the links between Kautsky’s conception and Stalin’s.
6. Royal Economic Society edition, Basingstoke 2007.
7. I do not mean by this to reject in principle any use of differential calculus in political economy. The point is merely that if you *postulate* that claims about political economy are validated by the applicability of calculus and hence *must* have a form which can be expressed in the use of calculus, you will be driven either to create a closed system, which manifestly has no relation to reality (marginalism), or to logical incoherence (Keynesianism). This is not a uniquely Marxist criticism of mainstream marginalism: it is, in fact, sared by the Austrian-school version of marginalism.
8. Keynes calls marginal economics ‘classical’ economics. This can lead to confusion. For Marx and hence the Marxist tradition ‘classical’ political economy meant Adam Smith, Ricardo and other authors who accepted versions of the labour theory of value; later authors who tried to find an inherent contribution to capital Marx called ‘vulgar’. For Keynes, who studied under Marshall, the labour theory of value was merely a mistake and the early marginalist authors - Jevons, Walras, Marshall - were ‘classical’.
9. Compare A Freeman, ‘The psychopathology of Walrasian Marxism’; and G Carchedi (ed) *Marx and non-equilibrium economics* Cheltenham 1996, chapter 1.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch25.htm.

HUMAN REVOLUTION

Primitive communism, barbarism and the origins of class society

Socialist Workers Party member **Lionel Sims** identifies both errors and the profound truths discovered by Engels in his *Origins*

In 1884 Engels made a remarkable claim in *Origins of the family, private property and the state*. We are a revolutionary species, he says. We were born in complete equality and fraternity. Women were respected, women were leaders. There were no social classes, there was no state, there was no filth, there was no war. Those were our origins, but this was all lost with the neolithic revolution. Nevertheless, when we make the next revolution for communism, we will be returning on another level to a place we have already been. Therefore our knowledge of our origins is part of our weaponry, our ammunition, to wage our struggle for a better future.

Official anthropology *hates* this argument. Indeed modern field anthropology, which is taught in the universities, established its place by destroying, or believing to its own satisfaction to have destroyed, the claims of this book. In particular, during the middle decades of the 20th century Bronislaw Malinowski of the London School of Economics and Franz Boas of Columbia University believed they had demolished Engels' claim. Such was the acceptance of this new orthodoxy within academia, that those who argued for the *Origins* in an anthropology programme were effectively silenced. In fact, any inquiry into cultural origins were disallowed in modern anthropology.

Can we on the left defend Engels successfully? If we can, then we are enormously strengthened. We can fraternally approach feminists and argue that women were leaders in the first (communist) societies. Of course, in the mid to late 1970s feminists began to dump any engagement with what happens in the real world under the influence of postmodernism and in the process they also dumped Engels, which was a great shame. And on the left there was a very unsatisfactory debate around Engels and the women's liberation movement, in which explaining the roots of women's oppression was not solved.

I would like to argue that Engels' main argument is correct; that the research of the last 20 or 30 years (which includes sex-strike theory) confirms this. However, in order to do this we have to critically approach the text and work out what is weak as well as what is strong within it. My argument is that Engels' main model within *Origins*, the 'two modes' theory, is wrong and does not work. But there are five other theories in the book which are undeveloped. We need to identify and develop these so as to reconstruct Engels' argument on the basis of solid scientific evidence.

Two modes

As an aside we must note that Engels wrote the 'two modes' theory on the wishes of Karl Marx and we must understand the conditions under which Engels did this. He was very much involved with the building of the Second International and he rushed out this book. In fulfilling Marx's wish he pulled together all the main arguments going round in anthropology, as if they were different parts of an argument that could be harmonised. I want to suggest that

of the theories in his book the main one is wrong, while others are correct. And we have to work out how to synchronise these five secondary arguments.

The 'two modes' argument refers to the mode of reproduction and the mode of production. These, he says, determine the course of history. Engels argues that there were three main phases in human history, called (using the 19th century language) savagery, barbarism and civilisation. During the first two phases of savagery and barbarism, society was largely organised around kinship rather than economic relationships. He argues that the emergence from our ape-like ancestry was led by women. Mothers policed their daughters' sexual relations on the basis of their knowledge of who was and who was not a close relative. These prohibitions on incest were at first unconscious, but slowly expanded.

Engels took this argument entirely from the work of Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan was a millionaire Republican railroad speculator pushing the railway to the west coast and he had dealings with the Seneca Iroquois Indians in the eastern states. Being an upright, honest and straight-talking Yankee, he was much respected by and came to know them well.

He was astonished to find that for the Seneca there were no *individual* descriptive kinship terms. There were whole groups of people called 'husbands' and 'wives', and other groups called 'mothers' and 'fathers'. Later the Smithsonian Institute carried out a survey and discovered that there were many other places throughout the world that used the same group kinship terms, in which whole categories could be 'partner' or 'parent'. Morgan called these practices 'classificatory kinship systems' and 'group marriage'. This was a primitive, early stage in human evolution, in which group marriage was allied to hunting, gathering and early horticulture. Engels and Morgan believed that the economic basis for these cultures was extremely fragile and that people were constantly on the edge of starvation.

However, the argument goes, as we evolved and became more human-like, we were better able to invent technology and from there to grasp and organise the basis of our subsistence. This then moved us away from being on the constant edge of starvation. Hunting and gathering won't cut it - that was the belief. It is fragile, and does not facilitate easy survival. Therefore, the closer we are to hunting and gathering, the closer we are to animality. The closer we are to agriculture, the closer to humanity.

According to this argument, the 'group marriage' mode of reproduction of our earliest ancestors was eventually replaced by pairing marriage. It is through this evolution of kinship terms that we then became fully human: we became more intelligent, more able to build technology and, through that technology, more able to move towards a mode of production in which food is *produced* rather than hunted or gathered. This is the 'two modes' argument.

So in the stages of savagery and barbarism - the Iroquois being in barbarism, according to Engels - the mode of production was extremely



Mammoth hunting: big-game abundance

narrow and we had not fully evolved. As Engels is making this argument, however, he is at the same time saying, 'Women are enormously respected amongst the League of the Iroquois. They have leadership roles, their voices are equal to men, women are not abused.' He thus has enormous respect for the Iroquois based on the reports of Morgan. But he goes further. He says that amongst the Hawaiians we can find even more ancient kinship terms, in which it is not just groups, but brothers and sisters and possibly fathers and daughters, mothers and sons who can have sex. According to Morgan and Engels, this must indicate an earlier form of kinship less able to prohibit incest. So it is possible to find even more ancient forms of group marriage than those amongst the Iroquois.

The argument is that if society is organised around kinship terms and if the economy is undeveloped, then we are not fully evolved. The more equal we are, the less developed the economic organisation, the less agriculture there is - the less there is a mode of production. So where there is equality between men and women, where there is communism, it is in the most primitive conditions, where we are driven by biology, but have little control over our economic survival. In fact the term 'mode of production' hardly applies to Engels' argument about the equality of primitive communism. Instead of specifying the relations of production this argument specifies biological relations. It may be consistent with the concept of a mode of reproduction, but as a Marxist method it does not work. Within anthropology today no-one would ac-

cept this characterisation of kinship organisation.

The Hawaiian Indians, for example, did *not* practise a form of group marriage where brothers and sisters or fathers and daughters could have sex. Morgan, and therefore Engels, completely misunderstood what was going on amongst the Hawaiians, where the verbal categories 'brother' and 'sister' or 'husband' and 'wife' do not match our expectations. They had a very loose language system and used the terms in a way that was outside the linguistic categories we are familiar with. Straight after Engels died the German Marxist anthropologist Heinrich Cunow wrote a critique of *Origins*. He said that Marx's method was strong in so far as it specified the relationship between economic organisation and social practices; and that to suggest that primitive communism is not related to economic organisation, but simply to the sexual dynamic to overthrow incest, is a deviation from the Marxist method.

Other models

Origins also contains other models separate from the two modes theory. Let me start with what I would call the chastity model and another I would call the 'marriage by capture' model.

According to the chastity model, women were attempting to end incest by removing group marriage. As I have said, group marriage entails a situation where whole groups of women could have any man within a group as a husband. Engels argues that the move towards pairing relationships implied an aspiration to chastity as a form of release from group marriage. In stating this he is capitulating to

Victorian morality, because in other parts of the book he states that at certain festivals women enjoyed a release from the bonds of marriage through brief liaisons with young men.

The 'marriage by capture' model predicts that, once pairing marriage is brought in by the mothers, and once there is an ideal for chastity, then from men's point of view there occurs a scarcity of women. So groups of men go on the hunt for women and, when they capture one, in Engels' words, they "have their pleasure with this woman, and the man who led the capturing party then has her as his wife". Not to put too fine a point on it, this is gang rape. Again, remarkably, when Engels is talking about the high status of women with the Iroquois, he also refers to marriage by capture. These arguments do not fit.

Engels has another theory relating to what he calls the 'primitive communistic household'. He talks about groups of women amongst the Leagues of the Iroquois, as sisters with their mothers and brothers, running the long house. And in these relationships their husbands from another matrilineal clan are temporary sexual partners who come to visit them. The men live with their sisters and their mothers but they have wives in another long house.

Engels points out that because of sororal solidarity a visiting man who sexually approaches a woman is then at a disadvantage because he must go to a house where she has all her sisters and her mothers around her, and perhaps her brothers if she needs help. Therefore a visiting husband must be on his best behaviour because he is being watched and assessed as to

whether or not he is respectful towards the woman. The most significant way he can demonstrate respect is to provide her and her relatives with hunted meat.

In this model of the matrilineal long house women have power because they are sisters. They do not have power as mothers policing the sexual relations of their daughters against incestual liaisons. So the communistic household argument, which also came from Morgan, gives power to women as matrilineal sisters and, unlike the incest avoidance argument, it works. The whole of modern anthropology supports it.

When Engels was writing, anthropology was in its infancy and very little field work had been done. But I would suggest that Engels is not using the term ‘mode of production’ in a Marxist way. Looking back today from modern capitalism it seems that the low level of simple ‘flint and fire’ technology, typical of the Palaeolithic, was one of fragility. But what does it mean when we talk about forces of production? It means labour itself, instruments of production and the objects of labour. Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers, according to our standards, had extremely diminished instruments of labour.

However, what we have found in the anthropology of the period over the last 30 or 40 years is that the hunters of the Palaeolithic lived, effectively, in a garden of Eden. They lived in a situation of mass, big-game plenty. An extreme affluence, in that abundant objects of labour were roaming the landscape. As long as you have solidarity, as long as you have fire, as long as you have flint, you have enough for regular, successful, big-game hunts. All of palaeoanthropology has established this through the archaeology of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Therefore, measured from the point of view of labour-time, these cultures were ones of mass luxury.

That brings us back to Engels’ claim that in so-called primitive communism there was complete equality, freedom, no classes, no oppression and enormous respect for women. But now we can see that the economic basis of such equality was one of mass affluence. This contrasts with Engels’ claim that such equality and respect for women was based on extreme scarcity - on cannibalism in fact! He says that they lived in such terrible conditions that cannibalism was endemic in these cultures. No, cannibalism began later - it was with agriculture that there developed a human sacrifice dynamic. There was no cannibalism among the big-game hunters of the Palaeolithic.

So Engels has it completely upside-down in terms of the economics of hunter-gatherers which preceded agriculture. We need to link the term ‘mode of production’ to our hunter-gatherer ancestors and then come up with an argument that works on the basis of modern anthropology.

Sex strike

There are two final models within Engels’ *Origins*, the first of which concerns the overthrow of primate jealousy.

There is an astonishing little paragraph where he quotes Alfred Espinas, a primatologist of the 19th century. Espinas had pointed out there were two types of ape social system: monogamy, in which one ape male monopolises one ape female; and the harem system, in which one ape male monopolises a group of females. Engels points out that what unites these two family forms amongst apes is the fact of primate jealousy - males cannot cooperate amongst themselves, because they are always competing to monopolise females.

All of modern primatology confirms this argument - cooperation

beyond a certain level will always break down. And it goes further. No ape male provisions an ape female. Males may guard them or fight off other males, but what we know about primate social systems today is exactly what Engels was talking about. He argued that our ancestors, our common ancestors with the apes, somehow overthrew the system of competitive male sexual jealousy - they must have done it in some way, although he was quite candid that he did not know how.

Now this argument works, because the primatology is correct. But notice that this is not just us becoming a little less ape-like or a little bit more human-like. This is a revolutionary argument: competitive male sexual jealousy must have been overthrown.

This is why I support sex-strike theory, which uses exactly that same foundation to work out an abstract model about how we could have become human. That abstract model can then be tested against all the different types of evidence we have available. I do not know of any other argument that comes close to explaining how we overthrew ape male sexual jealousy other than sex-strike theory. And it is based on the radical conclusion of women’s leadership. Groups of women repelled approaching males with the demand that they become economically useful. The women only released themselves from inviolability once they were being economically provisioned.

Human children are enormously dependent on adults, and the burden of bringing up a child is colossal. A female in the Palaeolithic needs lots of support. She gets support from sisters and mothers, but it would be a real advance if she could also get support from the male who may be the father of the child. You can work out the costs and benefit to those females who did not reject approaching males compared to those who did temporarily reject doing so - the costs and benefit of getting males to provision you, as opposed to just looking after yourself.

The greater the coalition you can bring around you, the more likely you are to survive; and the more likely your offspring are to survive, who then will have their own offspring. That is the way the new Darwinism makes the argument, which is confirmed by the mathematical models.

When did it all go wrong?

The economic precondition for all of these arguments is mass, big-game plenty. Therefore this is not a sex argument: sex drives apes, but economics drives humans. We turned sex around, we domesticated sex, we set the conditions under which sex can happen when as hunter gatherers we were present at our own making.

However, the material precondition of mass, big-game plenty in the Palaeolithic eventually collapsed and there is a mega-extinction of big-game animals at the end of the Palaeolithic. Almost certainly that happened because we humans are really good at killing animals. When we got together in a group, we only had to kill one or two of the matriarchs in, for example, a mammoth herd, and that herd would collapse. It could not have been climate change that was the cause, because there had been seven ice ages before the Palaeolithic and the big animals did not die out. It was only when we developed a sufficiently high level of social solidarity that we could organise collective big-game hunts. And then, wherever we arrive, wherever we spread all over the globe, within about one millennium all the big-game animals have gone. Our success actually undermined the very conditions of what Engels called

primitive communism.

The next period in archaeology in north-western Europe is the Mesolithic, where humans are now *small*-game hunters. But with small game large groups cannot survive. Therefore the large coalitions for the provisioning of mothers with children collapse - in fact in the archaeology books it is called the ‘Mesolithic crisis’. During the Mesolithic evidence of the existence of large social groups disappears completely.

We are almost certainly completely human 120,000 years ago - maybe 200,000 years ago. The end of the Palaeolithic is 10,000 years ago. Therefore for well over 100,000 years - an astonishing period of time - we are living in what Engels called primitive communism. And then it collapsed. If sex-strike theory is correct, it makes some very unusual predictions. In fact these predictions are so unusual that they are easy to test and therefore easy to refute. It makes the prediction, for example, that women led sex-strike strategy through synchronising their menstrual cycles by collectively secluding themselves and collectively bleeding at the dark moon, then mobilising the men as husbands to go on a hunt at full moon, its illumination facilitating this over the nights and days required. The hunt is complete and the meat is brought back to the camp, which is the sphere of the women. The cooking fires are re-lit and the menstrual blood is removed. Their blood and that of the animals is conflated symbolically and it can then be consumed. Women and meat can be ‘consumed’.

This is an unusual argument, and most people do not know how to ‘hear’ it. Many will understand this as the ‘little woman stuck at home’ argument - on occasion it has led to a terrible hue and cry, because it is thought that I am collapsing into a domestic portrayal of a woman’s role. But the women are collectivised, women control the fires, women control the centre. The men go away to do the hunting and this sounds as if the men are being active and the women passive, but that is not how this argument works. Our culture makes it hard to hear this the way the argument is intended, which is why it has yet to get anywhere and there are only a few of us making it. For those of us who study it carefully, however, it works. We must go for the long haul and stick to the argument.

However, the model I have described also explains its own collapse. Once the big-game animals go, large-scale, collective organisation cannot sustain itself. Look at it from the point of view of a woman with a young baby who sees a big animal during the Mesolithic. She says to the men, ‘Quick, food, go get it!’ But they say, ‘Sorry, it’s the wrong moon. We can’t hunt it.’ We must remember that there were 100,000-200,000 years which say that they hunt during the waxing phase of the month. If the women instruct them to hunt anyway, then the ritual aspect, the prescription to hunt at certain times, has to be ignored. Yet if you are to survive under new conditions you have to undermine your own religion, your own cosmology.

Perhaps the old women would demand that the old ways that worked were stuck to. But in the Mesolithic they do not work any more. You can imagine the terrible divisions that might have emerged in the group: should they stick to the old ways or should they innovate? If the argument gets out of control, then the collective starts to break down. How can they stay together as a group? Economically you adapt by fragmenting the group, but symbolically you must find something to hold you together, by making revisions to the system. Perhaps they did this by agreeing to meet up only once or twice a year, on the solstices perhaps, to act out the

dark-moon ritual which can no longer be followed every month.

The group that emerges, according to all the field work that has been done, is one in which men have displaced women in taking over the leadership role, and they do this in alarming ways. They do it by taking over the blood symbolism that women previously used; by organising ‘brotherhoods’, secret societies, organisations of men, in which they then substitute themselves for the group as a whole. Women now will be unable to stay together as a group, unable to synchronise menstruation and drive the social dynamic according to a monthly lunar schedule that oscillates between waxing and waning phases.

So men take over the leadership, and they do this with initiation rituals, in which they in turn bleed, they themselves ‘menstruate’. The logic is to sustain the old symbolism of blood, but now under a new leading group which can cohere under the new conditions of the Mesolithic. So this counterrevolution, or counter-monopolisation of previously female power, is the way in which the group can sustain itself and keep together.

Civilisation?

However, with agriculture - in particular with domesticated cattle - a new situation arises, in which the economics can now sustain large groups.

Once again look at this from the point of view of a woman. A man now approaches her mother and father and says, ‘I want that woman as my wife and here are X cattle in exchange. This makes up for all the hunting services I would have provided under the old rules.’ The old rules meant ‘bride service’, whereby a hunter earns a wife through providing hunting services for her relatives. But now, thanks to domesticated cattle, a man can come along and offer many years of hunting service all in one go. From bride-service we have moved to bride-price.

Still from the point of view of the woman, imagine after some months she no longer likes the man. What will her mother and father say? They will say that she should return to her husband, whose cattle they now own. The same cattle they intend to use to buy the girl’s brother a wife. The woman is now isolated, locked into marriage. With the rise of a new economic system of cattle-herding and domestication, we now have ‘wedlocked’ marriage, where a woman is locked in a marriage and her own relatives will not support her. An economic transaction has been completed and she has been *purchased as a chattel*. Now we have compulsion in marriage or, as Engels called it, monogamy.

Monogamy, says Engels, emerges in the late stage of barbarism and is the precondition for civilisation. Both Marx and Engels argued that monogamy is the cellular social form of civilisation and of all class societies. As Marx put it in his *Ethnographic notebooks*, “the modern family contains in germ not only slavery, but also serfdom, since from the beginning it is related to agricultural services. It contains in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout society and its state.”

Let us go back to the term, ‘mode of production’. What are its dynamics? Normally, because we struggle in capitalism today, we see its origins in feudalism and become fixated on just these two modes of production (for correct reasons). But let us remember that this is an argument about primitive communism preceding all civilisation, all civilised societies. How does a mode of production work? Capitalism emerges as an expansion of the productive forces under feudalism, but that is not the case with the other main historical modes of production.

A slave mode of production is based upon *declining* productive forces. If you turn peasant production into slave production, as happened in classical antiquity, then there is a steady decline in the productive forces. According to Engels, the classical slave society collapsed into barbarism. But, hang on a second, slavery emerged *out* of barbarism (which was originally primitive communism) and now we have slavery collapsing into barbarism. So if slavery emerged from barbarism, and if it descended again back into barbarism, what does that mean?

This argument just does not work - it is a jumble. ‘Barbarism’ must have different meanings with this usage by Engels. The barbarism of ‘primitive communism’ must mean, or so I would argue, a society in which men and women, as brothers and sisters in matrilineal clans, supported each other and in which men served women from their own matrilineal clan. But this broke down in the Mesolithic and the old society was adapted - now the men were doing the organising. Now the old groups were scattered, reduced to hunting small game. That is not primitive communism at all: it is something new, another ‘barbarism’.

What does this new barbarism mean? It means that men have taken over as a collective to keep the group together on the basis of the declining productive forces of hunting in the sparse Mesolithic conditions. Again according to Marx, “the authority of the patriarch over his family is the element or germ out of which all permanent power of man over man has been gradually developed” (L Krader *The ethnological notebooks of Karl Marx* Assen 1974, p333.) To put it another way, it is the sex-strike theory in reverse, in which the men are running the blood rituals from the previous historical epoch. This is masquerading as keeping the old religion going under new economic conditions. But there has been a collapse, a reversal, a counterrevolution, leading to male secret cults, Stonehenge, human sacrifice. It is in this way that we can understand and locate Engels’ ‘chastity’ model and ‘marriage by capture’. They are part of the collapse of the earliest communism that would have taken place during the Mesolithic. It is impossible to imagine such perverse gender relations within a system in which all women were supported by their brothers to ‘domesticate’ husbands. These would have been practices associated with what Marx called “all the old crap”.

Engels argued that the German tribes saved civilisation with their barbarism. The German tribes had a far more lenient, human relationship between men and women. They were in barbarism, but the quality of the relations between the sexes was much softer than gender relations under the slave system of classical antiquity.

Barbarism and its base unit, monogamy, is the resource out of which all class societies emerge and it is also the form into which class societies collapse when their mode of production is no longer sustainable. If monogamy contains the potential for all subsequent types of class oppression, then it is not a type of class, but the proto-type for all social classes. Therefore all of the pre-state societies since the Palaeolithic, with all of their enormous range of gender relations, are not pre-class, but proto-class societies. All of them carry an echo of their origins in communism, but that echo is largely embedded within a political reversal of male-appropriated ritual leadership. And, as economic circumstances alter, this gender inequality becomes generalised to men as well. The family is the origin of private property, class and the state ●

REVIEW

Forgotten heroism

Jonathan Symcox **The 1984-1985 miners strike in Nottingham: if spirits alone won battles - the diary of John Lowe** Pen and Sword Books, 2011, pp176, £12.99

Another chapter is here added to the ever-expanding canon of literature on the British miners, and specifically the Great Strike of 1984-85 and its consequences for the industry. This highly readable book takes the familiar form of a diary, following in the footsteps of Arthur Wakefield's *The miners' strike day by day* (2002) and *Yorkshire's flying pickets*, based on the diary of Bruce Wilson (2004). While each of these works adds a little more colour and reveals the impressions, aspirations and understanding of the strikers, with this book we have something so far unique - the day-by-day struggles of a rank-and-file striking Nottinghamshire miner - that is to take nothing away from Keith Stanley's *Nottingham miners do strike* (2011).

John Lowe was a coalface worker at Clipstone colliery. A full-blooded union miner, in a coalfield whose conviction and commitment to that code had been steadily bleeding away. John was neither a branch official nor a member of the branch committee; he was one of those who 'have greatness thrust upon them'. His role was leader, organiser, coordinator, picket - and often tattler-peeler in the absence of anyone else.

His story reveals one of the many heart-wrenching dilemmas which occurred in the Nottingham coalfield above all others, where loyalty to his class, his union and the strike is at the expense of coal mining members of his own family who chose the other side: "My position is this. My wife is 101% behind my stand. Two sons are scabs, as is a son-in-law at Mansfield colliery. A row developed in which a daughter-in-law decided that her view was totally right, hence a split. The rest of the family then isolates both of us for a while ... For many weeks [my wife] cried herself to sleep nightly, and awoke each morning in the same state ... [It] was like a knife twisting inside me. The hardest part was not seeing our grandchildren - the worse scenario [which] I could not have envisaged ..."

His grandson, Jonathan Symcox, has no problem honouring his granddad's principles and has been the driving force in ensuring this work is published and made available for future generations to read - hopefully they will understand the truly monumental sacrifices made by folk like John. As Jonathan says, "In these times of job losses, pension cuts and protests, the 1984-85 strike resonates with the little man or woman as potently as ever before. John Lowe's diary is a priceless record of the most important of all industrial disputes, one that shaped the country we know today, from the very heart of the Notts battleground, upon which the miners were ultimately impaled. But it is also the tale of a man, flesh and blood, who stood up for what he believed in: I hope the reader will see this man lost to us these last few years within the pages and recognise a true working class hero."

The book reveals the confusion of the first weeks of the strike, with mixed messages and lacklustre resolve from the area leadership. Perhaps an overenthusiastic and premature response from over the Yorkshire border added to the problem - getting people's backs up and strengthening the anti-strike core propaganda among the Nottingham miners. Disagreements over how this vexed

situation should have been handled persisted throughout the strike.

John and the Notts striking minority plead for tangible, visible support; they pray for better tactics, but are continually frustrated:

Saturday August 11 1984: "The NEC did not give me the boost I was looking for. National need to realise the desperate need at grassroots level in Notts for an offensive. The media battle is wearing down even the staunchest of hearts. For god's sake, Arthur, come to the picket lines, soup kitchens - let the lads and their families talk to you and the rest of the leadership. Listen to their thoughts and needs. Heed their complaints. Help us take the initiative again."

I confess I thought I knew most things about the 84-85 strike, and was at the centre of its Yorkshire hub. But I had no idea that we as a union had failed the Notts strikers so badly. The women's group, desperate for premises to set up a food kitchen for the kids and strikers, found themselves shunned and isolated, turned away by their own miners' welfare and working men's clubs, as well as council premises. Not until the strikers staged a sit-in at a youth centre, resisting all the threats of scabs and police, did they manage to win the use of the St John's Ambulance hall, from which to mount a much needed welfare operation.

So it was with funding too. I had no idea until reading this book how poor and desperately short they were of funds for pickets' petrol and other expenses, as well as to buy food for the kids and relief of hardship. Although we had pulled out all the stops and money was no object to get our Yorkshire pickets into Nottingham, it seems we failed to provide anything like the financial aid which would have kept their own pickets in place, maintain the strikers' families and help Notts be a full and equal part of the strike. It becomes clear from reading this book that a great many striking miners were driven back to work for want of a few quid to save their houses, or keep their cars on the road. I am frankly ashamed we did not plug such an obvious gap.

Thursday July 12 1984: "Jim Downen phoned later to tell me the £300

we were expecting from National is no longer on. We have £130 this week and the financial situation is becoming difficult again."

Such tiny amounts, against such urgent and strategically vital need, and still we expected men to stick it out.

Tuesday February 5 1985: "There is much dissatisfaction with the seeming lack of concern by our national leaders over our position in Notts and the lack of information given us; we only found out by phoning HQ at Sheffield that the national executive committee meeting has been put back to next Tuesday."

However, the book is also very illuminating in showing that the strike in Nottingham was far from ineffective - something which the National Coal Board and government went to great lengths to disguise.

Tuesday June 5 1984: "Two cars were sent to Rufford; reports later of a large picket. As there was no through flow of traffic to complicate the situation, the lads were hit from the front and when many tried to get out of the way were hit from behind with the horses. A whisper from 'over the wall' states that, even with the drift back to work, production is still down by almost two thirds; have not been able to verify this."

"... during September, tonnage figures were circulated, we at Clipstone pit were having a far greater effect on production there than was the case at many of the Notts pits. A comparison of tonnages for the weeks ending October 29 1983 and September 27 1984 showed that production was down by 59% from 20,526 to 8,400 tonnes."

The impression being peddled by the NCB and government was that Notts was virtually working normally, but here we have first-hand evidence that nine months into the strike production was seriously affected:

Tuesday November 13 1984: "Some figures of the board's losses in South Notts so far show this must be the most expensive coal ever mined; the amount lost at five pits ranges from £6.5 million to £24.5 million."

As the strike wears on and the bitterness in the close and tight-knit villages increases, a veritable war is unleashed on the strikers and their

families: abusive letters, phone calls and graffiti, escalating to smashed windows, wrecked cars and physical attacks; arrests and intimidation by police; blanket bail restrictions and hefty penal sentencing by the courts; victimisation and sackings by the Coal Board; stonewall indifference from the benefits agencies. On top of all this, the lack of financial back-up and tangible solidarity which those of us in the solid areas came to take almost for granted.

Call me naive, but I, along with everyone else, assumed that the needs of Notts were covered by our area and national officials. They weren't. And, with half of the Notts leadership scabbing and the others - according to this book anyway - afraid to get fully into the water, it is little wonder good hearts were broken and good men were turned into scabs. On top of this were the personal letters from colliery managers to the strikers, headed "Your job is in danger" - implying, 'If you don't want your job, even though all your mates are back at work, we will have to replace you.' Despite all this, a heroic minority led by rank-and-file men like John Lowe stood firm.

John had been a striker in the 70s when Notts was as solid as every other coalfield and we were winning. He reflects on the different police attitudes between 74 and 84. Denied the right to build a picket shelter in the midst of a bitter, sleet-filled winter, pickets were forced to stand in the open, unprotected from the gales. They were stopped from using the traditional brazier to keep warm and cook food. The screws were turned as tight as can be imagined. The union demanded they stay at their post, freezing in the open, and risk arrest for talking to drivers or attempting to stop them. And - god love them - a minority of iron men and often women did that day after day, from dawn till dusk, for 12 months.

Friday July 27 1984: "Arrived home about 2pm from the centre to find the phone ringing. It was a lad calling from the hospital to ask if I could get down there immediately. Our old friend, Sid Richmond, was in trouble there. What an appalling story! ... he was stopped by police

at the traffic lights and told he had to turn back. Being alone in the car and an obvious pensioner, it should have been quite plain he couldn't be a threat to anyone, despite the fact he was wearing one of our stickers."

"He insisted he was going forward about his legal business. This was when the police, the London Metropolitan Y division, became nasty and abusive. They opened his car door and attempted to pull him out. He resisted and was told, 'Get out, you old bastard' again and again ... five of the brave Met boys set about dealing with him at once. Eyewitnesses ... stated that one of them struck Sid three times in an effort to dislodge him. He was taken to the roadside with handcuffs on one hand and there was detained for a time; because he was showing his manacled hand to passing motorists a constable put his helmet over it and held the arm, hiding it from view. The handcuffs were so tight that the marks were plainly visible late tonight."

"... when he was allowed finally to go it was minus his car and with his arm and wrist badly bruised ... On their way back to Mansfield they were stopped by more police; his son dragged out of the van, arrested and put in a police van. Sid was taken with them to Mansfield police station, where his request for a doctor was finally granted; he was taken to Mansfield General Hospital ..."

Tuesday October 16 1984: "An alarming story: the Creswell food kitchen was burned down yesterday. It seems arson is claimed by the strikers, while the police just don't seem interested. It took them 45 minutes to get there, while a scab complaining can get them out in minutes. Later reports said that chairs, paper and tablecloths were piled in the centre and fired: entry had to be gained by breaking a window. Only the bravery of one of the ladies who rushed inside and turned off the gas heating which was due to come on prevented a disaster. As it was, downstairs was gutted."

With the collapse of the strike, with the birth of the demon child known as the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, with the whip hand (and jackboots) now with the managers and a nest of snakes in the union office, the Notts strikers could breathe no sign of relief. They were forced to fight a battle every much as hard and uncompromising as they had faced in the 12 months of the strike.

"We in Notts ... had to return without the fanfares and publicity. There were no bands to lead our lads through the villages and into the pit yards; there were no cameras to show our defiance in the face of defeat; people did not line the streets of our pit villages. This was Nottinghamshire; we were a minority and surrounded by hostility. The spirit of our lads on their return was nothing short of heroic."

Clipstone was closed as an NCB colliery in 1993 and was taken over by the private company, RJB Mining, which bought up the bulk of the pits surviving the closure programmes of Thatcher and Major. Clipstone was closed for good in 2003. Its headstocks - the highest in Europe - are preserved as an industrial heritage. But the real industrial heritage is to be found in the pages of this book, and in the hearts of the men and women depicted in it ●

David Douglass



Facing the full might of the state

© Martin Jenkins

SWP

Realistic propaganda and cynical agitation

Has the SWP learnt the lessons following the debacle of ‘All out, stay out’? Laurie Smith investigates

Readers may recall that the Socialist Workers Party’s slogan, ‘All out, stay out’ - the demand for an immediate, indefinite general strike to stop the cuts - went from being the centrepiece of the group’s offer to the anti-cuts movement to quiet oblivion, literally overnight.¹ More precisely between the regular edition of *Socialist Worker* dated November 30 and the eight-page special that came out on December 1.

In the SWP’s second *Pre-conference Bulletin* (November 2011), at a time when ‘All out, stay out’ was being pushed hard, the central committee rather defensively informed the membership: “Clearly, this is largely a propaganda slogan.” By the third bulletin (No3, December 2011) the slogan had been dropped, and part of the justification for this was that it had ‘only’ been a propaganda slogan anyway.² By which we are, presumably, to understand that the CC did not really mean it when it was raising it. Whether or not the SWP ever actually believed in ‘All out, stay out’ is not unimportant. But the whole episode raises interesting questions about what ‘propaganda’ is, and the consciousness-raising role of revolutionaries in the trade unions and worker’s movement as a whole.

Definition

The classic Marxist definition of propaganda comes from Georgi Plekhanov and is best known through Lenin’s quotations in his 1902 pamphlet, *What is to be done?*: “A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people.”³ Of course, there are grey areas and so on, but it is necessary to understand this distinction to be even slightly effective politically in the varied situations encountered in real life. A short flyer or banner designed to be seen by many is not the natural medium for presenting an extended argument about the inevitability of capitalist crisis that a newspaper or website can. A three-minute speech at a protest rally, unlike an hour-long introduction at an educational event, would not be the occasion to explain the declining rate of profit and its relationship to the organic composition of capital. There is also temperament. Some comrades are better at agitation than others.

Note that in the Marxist definition, ‘propaganda’ has no negative connotations: it is simply about the expounding of many ideas. In *What is to be done?*, Lenin defends Plekhanov’s meaning against the likes of Alexander Martynov and the journal *Rabocheye Dyelo*, who had attempted to justify their own economism (ie, giving primacy to economic and trade union-type struggles over democratic and political struggles) by reading into the above distinction another, false one between ideas and action. By agitation, they said, Plekhanov meant only calls for “concrete actions”; ideas could wait for those who were interested in the propaganda. In this way, the quote could be made to fit with their narrow outlook: that economic issues inevitably lead to political revolution. In fact agitation can be for an idea, just as much as it can be for a demand like increased pay or the repeal of a piece of legislation.

Rabocheye Dyelo’s criticism of *Iskra* under Lenin’s editorship was that it placed the “revolutionising of dogma above the revolutionising of everyday life” (a criticism levelled by some against the *Weekly Worker*). Lenin happily acknowledged an emphasis on propaganda, because political education was what the movement needed most of all at that time; and for small groups to go calling for actions left, right and centre was often superfluous anyway,



Know when to make things simple

because the masses might well be ahead of them when it came to strikes and so on.

Another fallacious approach to propaganda can be found in an article from a 1984 issue of *Socialist Worker Review* penned by Duncan Hallas - at the time touted as one of the SWP’s great thinkers.⁴ He makes a distinction between what he calls “abstract propaganda” and “realistic propaganda”. And, as might be expected, the former is to be rejected, the latter promoted. So what is “abstract propaganda”, according to Hallas? It may be “formally correct”, he says, but it does not “relate to struggle or to the level of consciousness which exists” - as an example Hallas uses the abolition of the wages system under socialism. “Realistic propaganda”, on the other hand, is for “flat rate increase, the full claim, all-out rather than selective strike, etc”. Hallas clearly wants to turn propaganda into agitation, and in the process reduces socialist work to routine trade unionism. It is, of course, vital to explain why wage-slavery has become historically redundant and why the free association of the collective producers is needed to replace it. Not that one would give such an explanation at every strike meeting, rally, etc.

But note here Hallas’s claim that “constant demands for a general strike, regardless of whether the prospect is a real one in the present situation, leads not to agitation, but to abstaining from the real struggle in the here and now”. This was in the midst of the miners’ Great Strike ... when there was the real possibility of dockers, railworkers, pit supervisors and print workers coming out too. There was also Liverpool, Lambeth, the national struggle in Northern Ireland ... The SWP was arguing against others joining the miners and against demands for a general strike with or without the TUC. Such calls were dismissed as “abstract propaganda”.

Sectarian

It is clear that ‘All out, stay out’ was not propaganda in the Marxist sense - of disseminating many complex ideas to a few people. It was in fact an agitational demand.

There is nothing wrong with this *per se*. But ironically the CC was actually using the slogan as ‘propaganda’ in the pejorative, mainstream sense of cynical messages, meant to deceive for the purpose of control. The assumption of party cadres - if the experience of “Justin”, related in *Pre-conference Bulletin* No3, is at all

indicative⁵ - is that ‘All out, stay out’ was intended as a recruitment tool rather than a realistic demand; the idea being that by ‘out-militanting’ the other sects, the SWP could gain an advantage over its rivals in getting more workers to sign up to it.

Essentially it was one-upmanship in economism, not a serious Marxist answer to capitalist crisis, to the question of government and democracy. The working class is not, thankfully, stupid, however: workers know that to launch an all-out, indefinite general strike is to pose the bringing down of the existing government - and that means being able to say what sort of government will replace it. The SWP, of course, has been silent on such questions.

All this would not be so bad if the SWP actually encouraged the growth of open and democratic class organisations, and could comfortably accommodate differences in its ranks. But it does neither (if it did, that really could make a difference in the coming battles). This is not to dismiss the idea of escalating action to general strike proportions - if not immediately, then over the coming period - which is in fact perfectly possible and necessary if we are to force a retreat in the cuts assault. The speed with which the working class can organise itself might well surprise the spontaneity-worshippers at the end of the day.

That will not come about through the calls of one of the present groups, or sects. But it could happen more quickly, and be a lot more effective, if we sought to arm the class *politically*. As Lenin explained at length in *What is to be done?*, workers do not need us to explain how to organise a union branch or a strike. And socialist trade union representatives - if they have an economic outlook - are no different from other trade union reps, who, especially among the rank and file, are often very good at fighting for their members’ interests and giving a militant lead.

But these are ultimately struggles over the employment relationship; they remain in the sphere of trade unionism ●

Notes

1. ‘The disappearing slogan’ *Weekly Worker* December 8 2011.
2. ‘Signs of an awakening’ *Weekly Worker* December 22 2011.
3. <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1984/09/agitprop.htm.
5. See ‘Signs of an awakening’ *Weekly Worker* December 22 2011.

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.

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weekly worker

Left needs more than banker bashing

Better dead than Fred

The recent bout of hand-wringing over bankers' bonuses conforms to the general pattern of bourgeois hypocrisy, argues **James Turley**

Who'd be a banker? The post-Christmas period has seen yet another iteration of an increasingly tiresome annual ritual - an outburst of partly genuine, partly manufactured outrage at the extremely generous bonus packages meted out to those at the top of the banking sector.

This year, however, the scandal has an added sweetener - Fred 'the shred' Goodwin, top dog at the Royal Bank of Scotland as it barrelled towards collapse, has had his knighthood revoked, putting him in the esteemed company of Robert Mugabe and Nicolae Ceausescu, among others.

The logic is simple - Goodwin was knighted, in the characteristic syntax of the British honours system, for "services to banking"; but at this point, it is fairly clear that those "services" amounted to driving the financial system to the brink of collapse. The British establishment has granted itself the benefit of hindsight, re-evaluated his "services" and found them to be rather different to its initial estimation.

Still, this has not been an uncontroversial move. Many dispute whether stripping Goodwin of his knighthood is strictly concordant with the letter of the law; it is possible that he might get the decision overturned on judicial review, although he might think better of making yet another public spectacle of himself under the circumstances. Others cry in horror at the precedent set - are we now going to see every other ennobled banker involved in the financial crash stripped of their honours? (Perish the thought...)

Political football

The underlying rationale for this decision is quite obviously political expediency. No name is so closely associated with the innumerable failings of the financial system as Goodwin's; the persistent inability of any relevant authority to bring him to book on *anything* is an increasing source of embarrassment to a government (and, indeed, an official opposition) viewed as thoroughly compromised by high finance.

The timing, likewise, is no massive surprise. Fred Goodwin's 'debasement' (such is the official term for knighthood-stripping) comes after the annual bonus farrago focused almost completely on events in the RBS boardroom. Stephen Hester, Goodwin's successor, was awarded £1 million worth of shares as an annual top-up; chicken feed by banking standards (more typical is the £100 million carved up between the three top executives at Barclays), but then RBS is no ordinary bank. It is 82% owned by the taxpayer.

Public outcry reached fever pitch; the Labour Party threatened to force a Commons vote on the issue; and eventually, Hester waived the bonus. He had not anticipated the scale of public outcry, he said - which would appear to mark him out as either extraordinarily cynical or totally removed from reality. The official job of corporate executives is to deliver shareholder value. Since he was parachuted in to steady the ship in

the wake of RBS's part-nationalisation, the value of the bank has halved. Can Hester really have imagined that the great collective shareholder that is the British public would react well to a substantial reward for no obvious positive achievements?

One body that did not come out of this well is the coalition government, which - like its Labour predecessor - made no apparent effort to rein in

nor trouble themselves. There will be no deluge after Goodwin - because Goodwin is the very dictionary definition of a scapegoat. The poor man has been dumped on to absolve the guilt of those who defend the *general conditions* for obscene boardroom payouts. The latter will continue - although the word in the City is that they will have to be repackaged to avoid this clockwork-regular annual scandal in future.

Such a repackaging effort would be prudent, particularly at RBS and HBOS, where the government owns a 43.4% voting share. One should not be too harsh on Hester for the decline in RBS's stock price, which was surely inevitable under the circumstances - but, given the furore over the government's sale of Northern Rock at a considerable loss to Richard Branson, the very much more considerable losses to be made with a quick sale of RBS or HBOS do not make them tempting options. This farcical pseudo-nationalisation situation is likely to continue for a couple of years at least, and further headaches will inevitably result.

Get over greed

Lurking in the background is a notion that has become somewhat commonsensical - we are now in such dire economic straits because of the greed and callous irresponsibility of the financial elite in the years leading up to the crisis. David Cameron and Ed Miliband alike talk of the need for a more "responsible" capitalism, to restore some sense of moral fibre to a system with serious and very visible difficulties. Needless to say, this is empty phrasemongering.

The anger over bankers' bonuses has more to it than the cheap demagoguery of a Cameron or Miliband, of course. After all, the latter only attempt to manipulate a public mood that is already there. It can take rightwing forms, as in the US Tea Party's opposition to the 'socialist' bank bailouts on those shores; but most commonly it finds expression in a

primitive leftish feeling that those at the top live in an utterly different, morally corrupted world, from the rest of us.

There is some limited justification for this view - which is that empirical studies in fact confirm that well-paid City types simply have no idea how the vast bulk of the population live, down to imagining the average wage to be around £80,000 and other such basic factual misapprehensions; nor, largely,

folks. Inasmuch as Occupy can bring itself to make positive demands at all, they invariably amount to tinkering with the financial sector - the Tobin tax being a popular example.

The problem is that capitalism needs credit to work at all; the vastly different turnover times of productive processes even in the same industry ensure that a ready supply of credit is necessary to stop supply chains grinding to a halt, and the maintenance of basic infrastructure requires governments to run deficits. The bankers have not accomplished some kind of coup to get the power they have, but are afforded it by the nature of the system; and the hypertrophy of fictitious capital that imploded so spectacularly in 2007-08 is equally a quite normal feature of the business cycle. It is not the greed and profligacy of bankers that has ruined capitalism, but capitalism that has made bankers greedy and profligate.

The far left, equally, is not above a little opportunistic banker-bashing. In part, like Cameron, Miliband and Occupy, it is trying to tap into the public disgust at the obscene amounts of money these people pay themselves for wreaking the havoc they do. The bonus, however, is that it ties neatly into the opportunist *politics* invariably advocated by the likes of the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales *et al.* After all, if the problem is simply a deranged financial sector, why should not the left-Keynesian fantasies offered up by such organisations have some traction on society?

At a time when the world bays for his blood, it is the task of Marxists to argue that Fred Goodwin is an irrelevance - it is the capitalist system which needs 'debasement'. It is a difficult case to make at the best of times; but incomparably more difficult is the task of fixing a system which is fundamentally driven towards crisis and disintegration ●

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Was Sir Fred ...



... Now just plain Mr

do they have any comprehension of the obstacles to success in a capitalist world that pertain to those further down the social food chain. Anecdotes about City slickers' hookers-and-blow orgies abound - and, after all, what else is there to spend your share of £100 million on?

The conclusion drawn from this premise - that individual greed and 'casino capitalism' got us into this crisis - is equally widespread, but not so easy to credit. The most visible representative of this view is the Occupy movement; the '1% versus 99%' sloganeering is clearly enough not a class analysis, but a position that draws a line between the super-rich corporate elite and honest, ordinary

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