



weekly **worker**



**Was Lenin a lying manoeuvrer? Lars
T Lih joins the debate over Cliff's
biography - four-page supplement**

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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A large, dark, high-contrast black and white portrait of John Maynard Keynes, showing his face in profile, looking towards the left. The text is overlaid on the right side of his face.

The leftwing
alternative
to nationalist
Keynesianism

LETTERS



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

Meat, two veg

I find Lionel Sims's article, 'Primitive communism, barbarism and the origins of class society', very interesting and thought-provoking (February 9). Not being an anthropologist, I cannot judge how much of it is well established and how much is speculation; but it looks quite plausible.

Yet it seems to me that something is missing in his description of the economic-sexual relationships in 'primitive' communist society. According to Sims and the Radical Anthropology Group, in early human society women bargained collectively manipulated sexual availability in exchange for meat obtained by men by collective big-game hunting. What is missing in this description is mention of any food other than the meat of big animals, and any food-production process other than big-game hunting.

But surely, in a hunting-gathering society, there was a division of labour, whereby men were the expert hunters and women were the expert gatherers. Moreover, even where there was abundance of big game, the staple human diet was not big-game meat, but the product of gathering, including some meat of small animals such as insects and water creatures. Meat of big animals is, of course, important - but as a valuable extra, an addition to the staple diet. (This is true also in all present surviving hunting-gathering societies in tropical and sub-tropical regions, though not among the Inuits, who are surely an exceptional adaptation to an extremely cold, barren environment.) It is virtually certain, and evident from our human dentition, that the original humans in Africa were omnivorous rather than carnivorous. Besides, even where big game is abundant, hunting is still chancy and many hunting expeditions end with a very meagre catch, if any. Gathering, done by experts, is much more secure.

So in the original human bargain between the two sexes, women had rather more than sexual availability to bargain with; namely, the staple food they gathered.

Moshé Machover
London

Denying denial

I was not altogether surprised to read Tony Greenstein's quotations-stuffed, pointlessly rambling and highly condescending letter, in which he resorts to his usual 'defence mechanism' by claiming that his opponent's letter is a good example of political muddle riddled with non-sequitur arguments and is totally incoherent (February 9).

The purpose of my original reply (February 2) to Tony's initial letter (January 19) and my submission to the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign's executive, as seconder of Gill's motion, was to point out that the crusade (should I say vendetta?) against alleged holocaust deniers has some dubious basis in reality and would only tear PSC apart and detract from its main objectives and actions. This is why I felt that it was important to amend the mission statement/aims on the PSC website to include a line which refers to one of the PCS's core principles - that is: "Equally PSC should endeavour to combat attempts of (mis)using the holocaust in order to fend off criticism against Israel's policies and in employing the holocaust's emotive narrative for defending Israel's racist actions and

apartheid practices."

I do not consider myself, or Gill Kaffash, to be an anti-Semite or a holocaust denier - although Zionist supporters regard the PSC, the highly-effective anti-Veolia campaign, the boycott movement against Israel, anti-occupation actions and even Tony's views as anti-Semitic. No wonder the pro-Zionist camp applies constant pressures on the PSC, hoping that we will call off our campaign activities - especially our boycott of the Israeli/Jewish state. Having read the derisory accusations against the PSC and myself on the *Harry's Place* website, I am quite certain that those behind these accusations now have a sense of great victory - for which Tony is given credit. Indeed, a comment posted by the current affairs officer of the Board of Deputies of British Jews gives Tony his due credit: "I stumbled across Tony Greenstein's blog this morning. Tony is an anti-Zionist, Jewish member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Whilst his views on the situation in the Middle East are a complete anathema to me, to his credit, he has led the opposition within the PSC against rising levels of anti-Semitism" (www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item_ID=130&Blog_ID=323).

Such approval may give further support to my argument that it is wrong to treat the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as if it was between two equal sides, as much as it is a mistake to regard Islamophobia - a phenomenon which is gaining pace all over Europe and the States - as equal to pro-Zionist claims of anti-Semitism. Such claims seem to have become the hobby horse of many public bodies, including the EU's working party against anti-Semitism, the British all-party inquiry into anti-Semitism and the Jewish Community Security Trust. Their singular purpose is to search for anti-Semitism in every corner of the world and take the alleged 'perpetrators' to court (as members of the Scottish PSC experienced last year, when they won a court case in which they were accused by the pro-Zionist side of racism and anti-Semitism).

Tony seems to cite the horrors of the holocaust in his defence, while pointing an accusative finger against my attempt to challenge the PSC's publicly declared policy against alleged holocaust deniers. He argues that "it is irrelevant whether five or seven million died", and offers a working definition of a holocaust denier: "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". My original reply letter, as well as my submission to PSC executive, made it clear that as a Jewish person, part of whose family perished in the holocaust, I have the right to ask questions and revisit or challenge the narrative of the holocaust (as much as the Israeli new historians had the right to challenge Israel's official version of the events which led to the creation of the Israeli/Jewish state by unravelling some of the closely guarded evidence of the extent of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine). It is also quite evident that it is not me who plays the "numbers game", but rather the pro-Zionists who virtually hijacked the narrative of the holocaust, as if the millions of non-Jews who were exterminated by the Nazis simply do not count. That misuse (or abuse) of the narrative helped support the 'victimhood syndrome', by which Israel justifies both its foundation and uniqueness as a Jewish state which practises rampant apartheid policies.

Tony's claim that "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 ... was the decision of the local group", and that it "had nothing to do with national PSC", is quite extraordinary. It implies that PSC branches have nothing to do with the mission statement/aims communicated by the executive. That, in my experience, could not be further from the truth.

I would like, once again, to emphasise that Gill's proposed motion (to which Tony, in his usual mode of intellectual supremacy, refers as being "a stupid motion of the stupid") was adopted and adapted from Wikipedia to include Islamophobia and prejudices against Jews. (That stands in a stark contrast to Tony's repeated arguments that the definition does not seem to apply to Muslims or to modern-day Islamophobia.) Gill sent her arguments in support of the proposed definition to the PSC executive, adding that she (as well as myself) is well aware that it is only an initial base for a working definition which should have been debated by members of PSC at the AGM.

My hope is that PSC executive would realise the long-term implications of its declared crusading against alleged holocaust deniers or purported anti-Semites. It ought, in the first instance, to amend its mission statement along the lines I suggested. That is, equally stating PSC's endeavour to combating attempts to (mis)use the holocaust in order to fend off criticism against Israel's policies and in employing the holocaust's emotive narrative for defending Israel's racist actions and apartheid practices.

My point has already gained some recognition by people of the left. It would also resonate, I believe, with Omar Barghouti - the founder of the Palestinian boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement - who asserted at the PCS AGM in January that "BDS is a universalist movement that categorically opposes all forms of racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. This is not negotiable. We should never welcome racists in our midst, no matter what. Equating Israel with 'the Jews' is unacceptable and is, in fact, anti-Semitic ... Claiming that a boycott of Israel is anti-Semitic because it is equivalent to a boycott of 'the Jews' assumes that Israel and 'the Jews' are one and the same. This implies that Jews are one monolithic sum who think alike and are all collectively equivalent to Israel and responsible for Israel. If this is not anti-Semitic, I am not sure what is! ... Many of the leaders of the BDS movement in the west are Jewish ... Many of them support the struggle for Palestinian rights through BDS not just out of a deep-rooted sense of international solidarity and moral obligation, but also based on their insistence that Israel, a colonial apartheid state, does not and should not speak in their names."

Is the PSC to ignore the BDS movement call for unity through diversion and difference of opinions for the pursuit of those who asking some self-searching questions and dare confronting a sacredly-held narrative which underpins the creation (and justification) of an exclusive and select Jewish state?

Ruth Tenne
Camden PSC

Stupid?

Tony Greenstein, while obviously correct in his laying out of the evidence for the historical truth of the holocaust, persists in missing the point of this issue in ascribing the erroneous views of people like Paul Eisen and Francis Lowdes-Clarke to

racism.

The stern lecture he also gives to Ruth Tenne, who, like Paul Eisen, is Jewish, does not manage to really explain how it is that prominent Jewish supporters of the Palestinians, such as Tenne, a relative of holocaust victims, or Gilad Atzmon, who, if he were politically 'mainstream', would be rightly claimed as a cultural icon by Jewish people in general, can be induced to defend people who make such an egregious error as to doubt or even deny the truth of the holocaust. Perhaps Tony G would like to argue that Ruth Tenne is motivated by anti-Jewish racism for opposing him on this?

This error has nothing to do with being "stupid and reactionary", as Tony G asserts, but does not come close to proving. If these people are so stupid and reactionary, how come they have spent in many cases decades in working for solidarity with the Palestinians? If the Palestine solidarity movement is so progressive in its aims, how come it can generate an organic current among veteran, often Jewish members who are "stupid and reactionary" enough to question that the Nazi genocide took place? Does the Palestine solidarity movement really have a pattern of attracting apparently the strangest kind of Jewish supporters, the kind who at the drop of a hat embrace Nazi sympathies, or is there something more profound, subtle, difficult to analyse and of considerable psychological and political interest going on?

Tony cannot give a coherent, convincing and political explanation why a not-inconsiderable number of people of Jewish origin, and people influenced by them, are prepared to expose themselves to public ridicule and hatred for expressing such a view, or why other Jews who do not actually appear to share their views on the holocaust, such as Ruth Tenne and Gilad Atzmon himself, are prepared to defend those who do.

Could it be that the motives of these people are not "stupid and reactionary" at all, but a misguided, emotionally driven and incoherent response to decades of Israeli crimes and mendacity and the anti-democratic actions of the Israel-Jewish lobby in the west today? That this is a witch-hunt is attested to by the fact that not only those who hold these positions, but those who do not hold them yet defend their right to argue their views on democratic grounds, are coming under attack in the Palestine solidarity movement and elsewhere on the left.

Red Scribe

<http://redscribbings.wordpress.com>

Huge bias

Moshé Machover, as expected, ignores the fact that the majority of Israelis support the two-state solution, as shown in numerous polls ('Netanyahu's war wish', February 9). Even Netanyahu publicly proclaimed his support for that solution, being the first Likud prime minister to do so. Even Liberman expressed his support this week.

Politicians like Livni, Olmert, Meridor and others who grew up in the revisionist camp now support the two-state solution. The border between the two states will be determined in direct negotiations between the parties, as stated in resolution 242. And if the Palestinians continue to refuse to negotiate, it is very possible that Israel will have to consider unilateral withdrawal.

As for Iran, a few days ago, the supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said to a cheering crowd in Teheran: "The Zionist regime is really the cancerous tumour of this

region and it needs to be removed and will be removed." Hours later Iran's latest domestically designed and made satellite was successfully launched into orbit. That means Iran can use that technology to fire ballistic rockets not only at Israel, but also at the United States. But it is only Israel that Iran has promised to destroy. That is why placing a nuclear weapon in the hands of a regime pledged to the eradication of the Jewish state is a different order of threat than Khamenei's usual bluster aimed at the US.

Because of its small size and concentrated population, one or two nuclear explosions would mean another holocaust. So when Khamenei repeats the Islamist regime's pledge to make good on its threat to destroy "the Zionist regime" in the same context as its vow to satisfy its nuclear ambitions, this is no minor rhetorical point. It is, instead, tangible evidence that Israel's alarm about Iran is justified and that the question of what to do about this threat is a matter of life and death for millions in the Jewish state.

Discussing the nature of the Iranian nuclear project, while ignoring the regime's murderous intentions toward Israel, demonstrates a huge anti-Israel bias by Machover.

Jacob
email

Save them

Bina Darabzand, a leading member of the Consistency Committee to Establish Workers' Organisations in Iran (CCEWOI), and his son Oktai, a journalist and blogger, have recently fled Iran due to threats by the Islamic Republic regime against their lives and security. They have sought refugee status in Turkey; however, they remain under threat from the Turkish authorities to return them to Iran. Given the serious and continuing risk to their lives, we urge the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to expedite the processing of their cases, grant them refugee status as a matter of urgency, and quickly facilitate their resettlement to a safe third country.

Bina Darabzand is a prominent activist who has been politically active from the age of 15 - first against the shah's dictatorship, and then against the Islamic Republic regime. In addition to being a leading member of the CCEWOI, he has also restarted his political blog: <http://salam-democrat.com>.

Numerous labour activists with the CCEWOI have faced persecution and imprisonment for exercising their fundamental rights to organise, and for demanding workers' rights, including unpaid back wages, fair pay, and benefits. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh is a political prisoner serving a 20-year sentence for his membership of this organisation. Nearly all members of the committee have been arrested, beaten or persecuted by regime authorities in Iran. Shahrokh Zamani and Muhammad Jarahi are now serving 11- and 10-year prison sentences, respectively, in Tabriz prison. Others have been released temporarily, but only on the basis of having paid hundreds of millions of toman in bail.

Bina's son, Oktai Darabzand, is a journalist with a focus on political and human rights issues. Six years ago, Oktai established a weblog called *Aseman Daily News*, which published news of political prisoners as well as other human rights violations by the Islamic Republic regime. The blog also included social, economic and foreign news sections. Journalists and bloggers covering human rights news in Iran are routinely persecuted, tortured, sentenced to lengthy prison terms and even execution.

During the 2009 uprising, Oktai's weblog was blocked on the orders of the judicial power. Immediately, with funding from his father, Oktai opened a website with the same name (<http://asemandailynews.com>), continuing with his activities. However, in April 2011, Oktai's website was designated by the regime as "a PMOI site". Many members of the PMOI (People's Mujahedin of Iran, or Mojahedin-e Khalgh) - and those accused of affiliation - are condemned to brutally harsh prison sentences and execution. Jafar Kazemi, Ali Saremi and Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei are only three recent and well known examples of those accused of PMOI membership who have been executed on that basis.

Although Oktai has no political affiliation or contact with any organised group, because of his journalistic activities, and because the Islamic Republic has designated his site as being linked to PMOI, his life is at clear and unquestionable risk in Iran.

Bina and Oktai entered Turkey and registered with the UNHCR. However, they were soon informed by the Ankara police that the Turkish interior ministry had refused to recognise their status as asylum-seekers; they were given until February 8 to leave Turkey and return to Iran. Thanks to pressure from Iranian and European supporters, UNHCR accelerated the interview process and requested that the ministry and police respect Bina's and Oktai's status as asylum-seekers whose case is pending review.

The Turkish police demonstrated their anger at the pressure that had been exerted on them and Bina and Oktai were required to leave Ankara and go to a small town that has no facilities, not even a bus terminal, three hours from any city. They remain at high risk of deportation at any moment. Should they be illegally deported to Iran by the Turkish authorities, not only would they face certain imprisonment and torture, but their lives would be at risk.

There is an urgent need for people to write to UNHCR in Turkey and request that UNHCR expedite the processing of the Darabzands' cases, grant them refugee status as a matter of urgency, and quickly facilitate their resettlement to a safe third country. We ask everyone to write to UNHCR in Turkey (turan@unhcr.org), with copies to the interior ministry (mustesarlik@icisleri.gov.tr), asking UNHCR to take urgent action, given the threat to the Darabzands' lives and their current insecure situation in Turkey.

Mission Free Iran
<http://missionfreeiran.org>

UCS myth

Can I just debunk another of Arthur Bough's historical myths, this one on the nature of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 'work-in'?

The point of the exercise was to keep the workforce and the four yards together as a viable, ongoing concern, and to demonstrate that the yards were open for business. The occupation ensured that equipment wouldn't be sold off, the yards degraded or split up and the workforce dispersed, *while a new buyer was sought*. The workers went into work and did their normal work without wages.

The receiver was in from the first day of the occupation and worked from the management offices, conducting potential buyers around the yards with the full support and engagement of the stewards and the workers. They thought this demonstrated the good faith of the workers for a new owner, not some symbol of soviet socialist Glasgow. While the occupation was of immense symbolic importance to us on the far left, as a demonstration that workers could take over and run industry directly, this was never meant

to be either the creation of a workers' cooperative, or a long-term attempt at workers' control of the yards.

The stewards ran the site and occupation with an iron grip and there was little in the way of revolutionary dissent and debate. It was always the intention to "give it back", in Arthur's words. While the far left outside the yards, and usually down in England, advocated that the workers should keep it, such 'an ultra-leftist adventure', as Jimmy Reid would have denounced it (as he frequently, very publicly did, sometimes on TV), was never the plan of the stewards or the workers.

Interestingly, a far more militant occupation was taking place down the road at Plessey's. Here the workers had banged closed and barricaded the gates to the yards, refusing to allow anyone in or out without their permission. Their occupation was popularly supported by the community, who kept the workers fed and the perimeter fences patrolled. The whole community turned out in weekly mass demonstrations in their support. The place was alive with debate and argument. Every item large and small was argued over and discussed and voted on. Reid and the CPGB of the period called them 'the anarchists' but actually it was their intention too that the whole plant and yard be sold to a new buyer - although in their case they were escorted through the gates by a team of workers, who stayed with them throughout, and then escorted them off again.

The significance of UCS was tremendously important in putting occupations and work-ins on the agenda of the workers' movement in Britain, where it had previously scarcely ever featured. After the spark was struck in Glasgow, occupations and work-ins exploded across the whole of Britain and, in at least two cases, workers continued production and sold their produce, and remained in operation for two years in one case. UCS itself had not been trying to achieve that. That's not to say they shouldn't have done, of course, but the truth is that it was only a spin the far left put on it.

I had the privilege of being part of the radical group, Cinema Action, which was commissioned by the UCS joint shop stewards committee to make their 'UCS film'. It's still around and still highly inspirational and ground-breaking. If comrades want to order it, I think Chris Reeves and Platform Films now distribute it. I also have a chapter ('Clydeside, Bogside, the miners' side') in my book *The wheel's still in spin*, written contemporaneously during this period, if readers wish to see more on this (available from me for £10, including postage).

David Douglass
South Shields

Snippet

I thoroughly enjoyed Dave Douglass's review of *The 1984-1985 miners strike in Nottingham: if spirits alone won battles - the diary of John Lowe* ('Forgotten heroism', February 9).

This snippet of the massive miners' strike, the Notts area, has never really been thoroughly parsed in a work dedicated to it. It's great someone deemed it a point to remember this important aspect of this great strike. I look forward to reading it.

David Walters
San Francisco

Quick questions

"What sort of reform proposals should the workers' movement propose?" asks comrade Mike Macnair ('Promoting the national economy divides workers', February 9).

Indeed, class-based political action (aka genuine class struggle) and social revolution are things that must be programmed. Perhaps the framework for answering the question above lies in these following

questions:

- Does the reform point to the need for class-based political action via pressure, paradigm shifts and related grassroots discourse for legislative implementation and more?

- Does the reform contribute to the systemic establishment of worker management (ie, planning, organisation, direction, and control) and responsibility over an all-encompassing, participatory economy free from surplus labour appropriations by any elite minority?

- Does the reform emphasise going beyond nation-state constraints regarding its achievement? Minimally, this means international solidarity and, maximally, transnational struggle and emancipation?

- Does the reform "make further progress more likely and facilitate other progressive changes as well" (to quote Robin Hahnel)?

I hope the proposals in the next article satisfy these questions.

Jacob Richter
email

Stop quibbling

Recent editions of the *Weekly Worker* have sought to question the right of the Scottish people to national self-determination. It should be pointed out that communists have always supported the right of all nations to national self-determination, up to and including the right to full independence.

In Scotland's case, the communist party in that country - the Communist Party of Scotland - supports full independence. The CPGB should support the principle of national self-determination for Scotland and stop quibbling.

Alex Beaton
email

Ground them

The Ryanair Don't Care campaign, supported by Solidarity Federation, is calling for an international week of action against exploitation and recruitment-scamming by Ryanair, starting on March 12.

Ryanair Don't Care was started by John Foley when his daughter was sacked as a flight attendant mid-flight and abandoned abroad, penniless. This led to the exposure of a cynical and highly exploitative recruitment scam by the airline.

Ryanair's current policy of recruitment-for-termination is part of the massive exploitation of people who apply to work for the company. As it stands, potential cabin crew have to pay a fee of €3,000 through an agency to undergo training for Ryanair. As many as 60 people are sacked at any one time after this initial training period - up to 200 people a month. Those who survive are put on a 12-month probationary period on a lower rate of pay than normal cabin crew and Ryanair pocket the difference - as much as £20 million a year.

We call on those who support the struggle of workers against exploitative employers to take the following action:

- Support the call for an international week of action against Ryanair from March 12 to 18.

- Hold pickets of airports where Ryanair put on flights, offices of Ryanair and agencies through which they hire staff.

- Picket the Cheltenham festival, which Ryanair sponsors, and particularly the Ryanair chase on Thursday March 15.

- Phone, fax and email Ryanair to complain about exploitative recruitment practices.

You can find more information on the Facebook event page at www.facebook.com/events/309679105736928.

Ryanair Don't Care
<http://ryanairdontcarecrew.blogspot.com>

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 21, 6.15pm: 'An Amazonian myth and its history'. 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.

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.

Monarchy and republicanism

Thursday February 16, 7.30pm: Lecture, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Speaker: Dr Ted Vallance. 'The English revolution and its republican legacy'. Entry: £8 waged, £6 concessions. Booking required.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

Saturday February 18, 11.30am: Conference, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers: Kelvin Hopkins MP, Christine Shawcroft (Labour Party NEC), Jim Kennedy, Peter Willsman.

Organised by Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: www.clpd.org.uk.

Scottish PSC AGM

Saturday February 18, 10am: AGM, Augustine Church Centre, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1.

Organised by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.scottishpsc.org.uk.

Education Activist Network

Tuesday February 21, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Kings College London, Chancery Lane, London WC2. Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Andrew McGettigan. 'Where next in the fight against fees and privatisation?'

Organised by Education Activist Network: <http://educationactivistnetwork.wordpress.com>.

Housing Emergency

Tuesday February 21, 6.30pm: Meeting, House of Commons, London SW1. Speakers: Ken Loach, Owen Jones, Austin Mitchell MP, Catherine West, Eileen Short.

Organised by Defend Council Housing and Housing Emergency: www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk.

Defend the right to protest

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

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: defendtherighttoprotest.org.

Marx's Capital

Thursday February 23, 5.30pm: Reading group, Open University, Milton Keynes. Discussing *Capital* chapter one.

Organised by Milton Keynes CPGB: milton.keynes@cpgb.org.uk.

March against the Tories

Saturday February 25, 10.30am: Demonstration, Assemble Woodhouse Moor, Leeds. Oppose council cuts at the Tory local government conference.

Organised by Leeds Against the Cuts: www.leedsagainstthecuts.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>.

Unite the Resistance

Wednesday February 29, 7pm: Public meeting, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester M1. Speakers: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Karen Reissmann (Unison). Debating and discussing the way forward for our movement.

Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

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>.

Kill the NHS bill

Wednesday March 7, 6pm: Rally, Westminster Central Hall, London SW1. Fighting to defend our NHS.

Organised by Trade Union Congress: www.tuc.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

GREECE

Danger of default catastrophe remains

Greece's economy has been driven into almost unprecedented depths by the relentless austerity measures, writes **Eddie Ford**

Over the last week, the chances of an imminent catastrophic Greek default seemed more real than ever. We witnessed a Russian roulette-style game of brinkmanship and confrontation between the Greek government and the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika - as the latter made relentless demands for additional austerity. Cut to the bone and then some more. For the troika, it seems, the Greek working class is to be sacrificed on the altar that is the euro zone project - whether the country remains in the euro or not.

After a near endless series of delayed meetings and missed deadlines, the Greek coalition or 'national unity' government headed by the technocratic nonentity, Lucas Papademos, finally gave its consent on February 9 to the troika's next austerity package - sacking 15,000 public sector workers by the end of the year, slashing the minimum wage by 22%, a further 'liberalisation' of the labour laws and an overall total of €3.3 billion in cuts.

The agreement came at a heavy political cost though. As previously threatened, Giorgos Karatzaferis withdrew his rightwing Popular Orthodox Rally (Laos) from the coalition government, abruptly pulling out its four cabinet ministers. Two ministers from George Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) also resigned in protest. The final straw for Karatzaferis and the others was the proposed pension cuts - even Antonis Samaras of the centre-right New Democracy came out in opposition to them.

In a stormy parliamentary debate on February 12, apocalyptic - and desperate - language was used by the remaining government ministers to justify the deal, or semi-deal, with the troika. "If we do not dare today," Papandreou declared, "we will live a catastrophe." His fellow Pasok member and finance minister, Evangelos Venizelos, even more dramatically asserted that the "war is now" and "if we falter" then "nothing will be left standing" - therefore, he exhorted, the "real dilemma is between painful measures and crushingly painful ones". Rattled, Samaras angrily told a dissenting deputy - "What do you want, a country where food will be handed out with food stamps and where we will have no fuel?" Some might argue that that would almost be an improvement on the situation that exists at the moment, where some 1.5 million Greeks have absolutely *no* income - so presumably are struggling to eat at all.

When it came to the actual vote in the 300-seat Greek parliament, MPs agreed by 199 to 74 - the rest cowardly abstaining - to implement the troika's austerity measure. In punishment, the coalition parties expelled from their parliamentary groups those deputies who failed to back the bill - with Pasok and ND booting out 22 and 21 MPs respectively, reducing their coalition bloc from 236 to 193. Naturally, the dissenters will be excluded from the lists of party candidates for the next general election - which looks likely to happen in April. Samaras was "absolutely clear" that there was no place for "rebels or bravehearts" in his party, a sentiment endorsed by Papandreou. In the new troika-dictated political-economic order, no disobedience is permitted. Everyone must toe the line and shut up. Cuts



Euro: facing death?

first, democracy a *long* way second.

But it will all be worth it, we were told. By butchering the economy and pulverising the working class, the corrupt Greek elite would receive the next tranche of €130 billion (or even possibly €145 billion) in bailout money and thus, come March 20, the €14.5 billion interest repayment would be met.

Not enough

Only not enough - nowhere near enough, it seems. If Greece wants to receive the next round of bailout money, it has to do *exactly* what it is told. There must be total compliance. Full spectrum troika dominance.

Philip Rösler, the German vice-chancellor and federal minister of economics and technology, said the vote was merely a "necessary condition" on the path to Greece's second rescue package - much more had to be done for Athens to prove that it is *serious* about enforcing the cuts. As for Bertrand Benoit, a spokesman for the German finance ministry, he said the offer was "not sufficient" and Greece had to come up with a "revised plan". Under the current plans, he claimed, Greece's debt would still be as high as 136% of GDP by 2020, as opposed to the 120% foreseen in the second bailout package.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the prime minister of Luxembourg and chair of the Euro group of finance ministers, put it more bluntly still - "no disbursement without implementation". Greece *must* turn its budget cuts into law - *fast* - and "flesh out" the €325 million still needed in spending reductions, given that the Greek government could not agree to further pension cuts.

Ominously, perhaps showing that the EU bureaucracy had finally lost all patience with Athens, Juncker cancelled the emergency February 15 meeting of euro zone finance ministers - supposedly the crunch meeting to finally authorise the Greek bailout money. Mario Draghi, president of the ECB, and Olli Rehn, commissioner for economic and monetary affairs, had also been due to attend the meeting. Instead, they held a teleconference on that day. In explanation, Juncker cited the "missing information" from Athens on how it plans to make the promised €325 million in cuts and the lack of written assurance from Samaras that the ND will fully implement the troika's cuts programme even after the elections (Pasok having dutifully signed up already). Whatever the result, and whoever wins, the EU bureaucracy will come out the winner - or so it hopes.

Feeling the pressure, however, Samaras capitulated to the troika's diktat and on the afternoon of February 15 dispatched a pledge that if ND wins the next election in Greece - a far from certain prospect - it will "remain committed" to the "objectives, targets

and key policies" as laid out by the troika. The 'missing' €325 million was to be found in cuts from defence, health and local government budgets.

But will it still be enough? Worryingly for the troika, Samaras said that "policy modifications" might be required to "guarantee the full programme's implementation" - which hardly sounds like complete, unquestioning compliance. More like the noises of a man, perhaps, who is trying to wriggle out of some of his 'commitments'. Indeed, one of his top advisers told the BBC that the troika's programme - as it stands now - was a "recipe for failure" that would plunge Greece into ever deeper recession. Obviously true. But the troika and its servants do not want to hear the truth - only total acquiescence to their austerity regime. It is not yet a done deal.

We now hear that EU officials are considering delaying Greece's second bailout until April, *after* the general election - on the basis that the finance ministers "are not satisfied that Greece's political leaders are sufficiently committed to the deal" (Reuters). The intention behind such a move, if true, is not hard to discern. Europe is signalling to Greek voters that *only* a government led by New Democracy or Pasok is acceptable, because both their leaders have 'taken the pledge' - even if it might turn out in the end to be a meaningless pledge. The EU bureaucracy's contempt for democracy could not be more plain.

Darkly, Venizelos warned that some euro zone countries were "playing with fire" - noting that there were "many" in the euro zone "who don't want us any more". He may not necessarily be suffering from paranoia. The Dutch finance minister, Jan Kees de Jager, militantly proclaimed: "We don't give an inch. We want everything. A complete package. If we don't have that clear, we cannot agree with the package." Hardly the spirit of compromise. There is no question that there are those within the euro zone who are quite prepared to jettison Greece as a price worth paying - but if it happens they may live to rue the day.

Relations have almost totally broke down between Greece and troika, it almost goes without saying. Exasperated, Christos Papoutsis, the Greek public order minister, exclaimed that the government has made "superhuman" efforts to comply with the austerity demands made by the euro zone - but has now "reached the limits of the social and economic system". Now, he pleaded, Europe "should act responsibly". In other words, give us the money anyway. Without it, Greece will go bankrupt and the consequences could be incalculable.

Inevitably, under such crisis conditions, support is draining away from the mainstream parties like Pasok and ND. The former has plummeted to 8% in the opinion polls. Karatzaferis denounced the "humiliation of the country" on TV: "Clearly Greece can't and shouldn't do without the EU, but it could do without the German boot" - a direct appeal to Greek nationalism and the still bitter memories of brutal German occupation during World War II.

Having said that, there is an obvious truth to what he says. It was Germany, after all, that wanted to put an unelected EU bureaucrat in charge of Greece's economy, and has also been particularly insistent that the main party leaders sign a pledge of eternal loyalty to the troika's austerity

measures. In fact, why bother voting at all if all the parties are meant to have the same programme? By behaving in such an authoritarian and essentially irrational way, the EU state order is rapidly losing all legitimacy. In which case, the centre cannot hold.

Karatzaferis is obviously calculating, no doubt correctly, that in the forthcoming elections the Laos presence in the parliament - currently standing at 16 MPs - will be substantially increased. Well worth quitting the government for, that is sure. Other 'extremist' parties are also very likely to do well. A recent poll has the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) holding firm at 12.5% and 12% respectively. The Democratic Left, a semi-rightist split from Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology (Synaspismos) - the latter being the largest party in the Syriza bloc - has had a surge in popularity too, currently garnering 18%, up 4.5% since last month. All together, the various left parties - however broadly defined - total a relatively impressive 42.5%, even if for now the KKE has stupidly ruled out all cooperation with the other parties. Also, support for the far-right Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi) has hit 3%, reaching the threshold for entering parliament. GD is "uncompromisingly nationalist" and opposes the "so-called enlightenment", the industrial revolution and, according to its charter, "only Aryans in blood and Greeks in descent can be candidate members" of the organisation.

Whatever the political and programmatic strengths and weaknesses of the non-mainstream parties, they all have one thing in common - adamant opposition to the troika's austerity measures and the package passed by parliament on February 9. And, as we have seen with his recent 'pledge', even Samaras himself has talked about how the ND and other parties should have the "ability to negotiate and change the current policy which has been forced on us" (my emphasis). No wonder Juncker is so worried about his steadfastness. Can he, or any of the others for that matter, really be trusted? If only the elections could be cancelled and that EU commissioner parachuted in...

Even if the virtually impossible happens, and the Greek government over the next few days conjures up a cuts plan that entirely satisfies the EU leaders, the national parliaments in Germany, Finland and the Netherlands still have to vote on the second bailout package. Since these countries have been the most vocal critics of the bailouts - why should we subsidise these 'lazy' and 'unproductive' countries? - it is by no means an automatic certainty that they will vote in favour of the second bailout package. They will need a *lot* of convincing that the deal will actually make Greece's debt sustainable again.

Then there are the long-running and torturous negotiations with Greece's private creditors over debt restructuring, which must also be concluded before it is too late - March 20 is not that far away. Yes, Rehn may have told reporters that the "draft agreement" with the creditors is "practically finalised", but in the new economic order nothing is guaranteed. And if the bailout deal is delayed to after the general election, then that could frighten the horses - causing the creditors to give up on Greece and backtrack on its 70% haircut. The

threat of a disorderly default remains.

Death spiral

Meanwhile, thanks overwhelmingly to the relentless austerity regime pursued by the troika, Greece has entered an economic death spiral - with no apparent way of pulling out. The statistics make for very grim reading. Ten-year bond yields for Greece have reached an utterly unsustainable 29.8%.

Then on February 9 Greece's central statistical office published data starkly demonstrating that the economy is heading over the cliff. In the latest month for which there is reliable data, November 2011, the unemployment rate increased by a massive 126,000 (to 20.9%) compared to October. Youth unemployment now stands at a staggering 48%. Of course, this trend is certain to continue, as the government starts pruning the 150,000 public sector jobs, as demanded by the troika.

Needless to say, production in Greece is falling through the floor, with its industrial production index in December 2011 down 11.3% compared to 12 months earlier, while manufacturing decreased by 15.5%. As might be expected, consumer confidence in Greece has also collapsed - unemployment and wage cuts mean no-one has any money to spend on 'frivolous' extras. Just getting food to eat is hard enough.

If you want more evidence of Greece's economic death agony, other official government figures released on February 14 clearly show that the deterioration in the economy accelerated in the final three months of last year - GDP contracting by 7% in the fourth quarter of 2011 compared with a year earlier. This represents an acceleration from the 5% contraction in the third quarter. Last year represented the fifth year of recession - with another eight years to look forward to.

In the opinion of Uri Dadush of the Carnegie Endowment think-tank in Washington - and many others - we may well be seeing an "historically unprecedented" economic contraction, with Greek GDP shrinking between 25-30% - which would mark, Dadush said, a "disastrous crisis". Such a slump downwards would put Greece in the same league as the United States in the 1930s, where the economy shrank 29% during the great depression.

For anyone of a rational frame of mind, the only conclusion is that the troika's bailout exercise is a monumental exercise in futility. Even under the most 'optimistic' scenario - in which the Greek government implements everything the troika wants and the working class declines to resist - the country is heading for disaster.

The only thing that might prevent Greece from being kicked out of the euro is the fear of contagion. If Greece is denied its bailout money or allowed to default, whether by conscious design or happenstance, and gets booted out of the euro zone - then contagion would quickly spread to Portugal, Spain and Italy, ripping apart the euro. Greece may be tiny, but if it goes down it could take the euro with it. A point explicitly made by Kostas Kiltidis, a Laos MP, who fulminated that "nobody can take us out of our own home" - if they attempt to, "others are going to die economically with us". Euro zone RIP? ●

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AGGREGATE

Centralism and autonomy

Saturday February 11 saw CPGB members convene in London for one of the organisation's regular aggregates. On the table for debate and voting were the interlinked issues of democratic centralism and the CPGB's relationship to the autonomous but closely related Communist Students and the proposals for that organisation's future put forward by Chris Strafford. Though there were two separate sessions, the essence of the aggregate as a whole was the question of the nature and extent of party discipline for CPGB members in general and especially those who are also members of Communist Students; and what this means for its autonomy when CPGB comrades comprise a majority of the CS membership.

Both debates were prompted by the proposal of comrade Strafford to transform Communist Students from a student-based organisation into a broader formation seeking to involve youth, campus workers, academics and so on. A similar proposal had been raised on the Communist Students email list before the CPGB was informed and this was viewed as a breakdown of democratic centralism by the Provisional Central Committee, which contested that such a major change should first have been brought up within the CPGB itself.

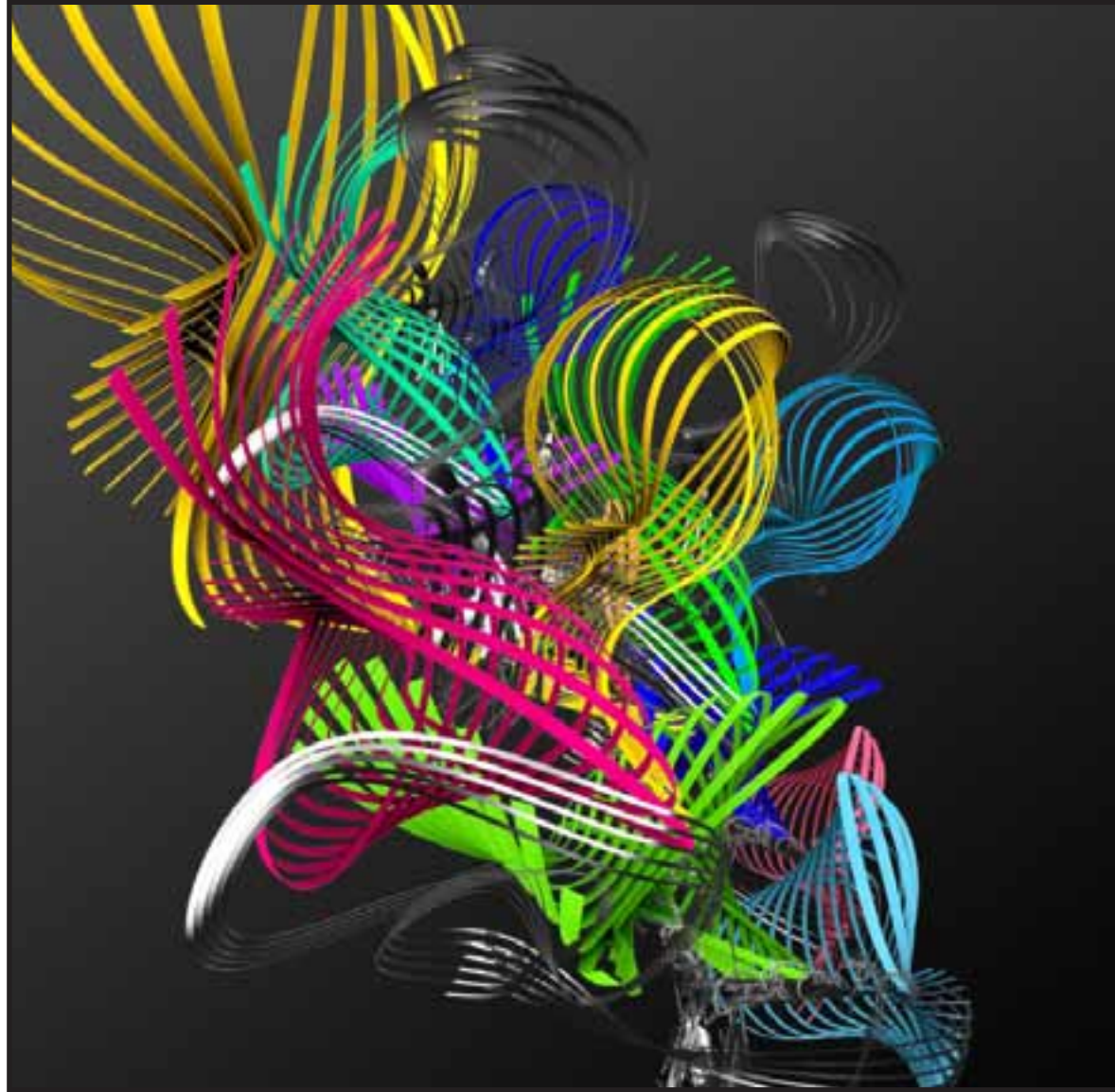
A minority of comrades held that the relationship between the CPGB and CS had not at all been made clear that comrade Strafford's action did not represent a break with established practice, and that this was the first time the PCC had intervened so strongly in CS business. They believed that CS's autonomy meant that CPGB members of CS were not completely under CPGB discipline. A related motion was put forward by Cat Rylance proposing that the party relax its discipline over its members of Communist Students in order to retain the organisation's autonomy and empower non-CPGB members.

Democratic centralism

Opening for the PCC, national organiser Mark Fischer spoke in favour of the leadership's motion on democratic centralism. In contrast to the bureaucratic centralism we see on much of the left, the motion reaffirmed the CPGB's view that "Democratic centralism does not require the unanimity of CPGB comrades on all political, historical or theoretical issues" and that comrades who disagreed with the majority in the party had a duty to express their views. The motion affirmed that the duty of party cells, fractions, etc, to be "self-activating" and not requiring of "micro-management" by the PCC does not contradict the right of higher bodies to be consulted and ultimately decide on *all* matters. In between aggregates and conferences, the PCC represents the whole.

The PCC noted that the motives of comrade Strafford and the minority were not in question and that there had been genuine confusion over the relation between the part and the whole, between CPGB members in Communist Students and their duties to the party in relation to Communist Students' own autonomy as a political organisation.

Comrade Fischer noted that every sphere of politics and organisation, from trade unions to parliamentary fractions, has its own particularities and needs, and that in each CPGB members are expected to act on their own initiative and take the appropriate decisions. But



Centralism and autonomy: interlinked

democratic centralism means that the party can instruct members in lower committees and other organisations to "act in accordance" with the decisions of higher bodies. Giving examples from the history of the communist movement, the comrade explained how at various times it has been erroneously asserted that, for example, only women should be able to vote on issues affecting women; how the Jewish Bund had attempted to monopolise decision-making in relation to Jewish RSDLP members until made to submit to democratic centralism at the RSDLP's 2nd Congress in 1903 (which provoked a split, although the Bund rejoined on the new terms in 1906.)

In reply comrade Rylance accepted that the part was subordinate to the whole, but after the confusion apparent in the debate on the internal email list it was important for the issue to be debated at aggregate. Comrade Rylance gave an account of her own involvement in Communist Students and how she and others had come to interpret the autonomous nature of the organisation. The comrade noted that in the debate within CS on whether it should affiliate to the Labour Representation Committee CPGB comrades did not vote under instruction and actually took up differing positions. Comrade Rylance expressed concern that, lacking access to the decision-making process within the CPGB, the minority of non-CPGB CS members were now effectively only "half-members" without control over the organisation. Comrade Rylance described her view that the principal purpose of Communist Students is to develop "communist activists" and that this can only properly occur without CPGB intervention, which had appeared to her as a new development.

In the ensuing debate comrade Tina Becker called for our future educationals to have a "back to basics"

character in order to allow a greater feeling of participation in party life by younger or less theoretically educated comrades and to tackle the sources of confusion such as had occurred over the issues under discussion.

Comrade Strafford referred to a motion passed at a past Communist Students conference to accept non-student youth as members, and noted that there had been no PCC uproar then even though the matter had not been raised within the CPGB prior to the decision. So why now? Asking for clarification as to the exact nature of CPGB discipline for its comrades in CS, the comrade blamed the incoherence of the PCC's previous statements and actions for nurturing the initial confusion over the matter.

PCC member John Bridge responded by saying that the extent of CPGB discipline over its members in CS - instructing them to vote a certain way on certain fundamental issues, for example - was always an art and not a science. Given that comrade Strafford's motion proposed a fundamental change to Communist Students - transforming it into a totally different organisation in fact - this necessarily involved the interest of the CPGB. This was rather different from the decision to allow youth who were not students to join CS. CS was to remain a student organisation and why should anyone object to non-students helping out?

On the subject of the non-CPGB minority in CS, comrade Bridge noted that in no sphere of work should political minorities be afforded special rights and the same applies to student organisations. In fact the CPGB hardly ever intervened to instruct its members in CS and there was no problem explaining this to non-CPGB members. It was entirely natural for the majority to decide, just as it was natural for that majority to apply voting discipline if that was considered appropriate. But in

CS there was no reason why a minority proposal could not be adopted and there was nothing to stop the minority becoming the majority - unlike in the various student front groups of other left organisations. Comrade Dave Isaacson compared the political autonomy of CS to the Socialist Worker Students Society which lacks any political autonomy and has no genuine democracy.

Echoing these points, PCC member Mike Macnair observed that Chris's proposals amounted to the liquidation of Communist Students and was not a minor issue, and the intervention of the PCC was completely legitimate. Restating the democratic and autonomous credentials of CS against the left's various student fronts, comrade Macnair explained that the non-CPGB minority was not disenfranchised, except in the sense that any organisation with factions has a majority and a minority. He pointed to the "illusion" of rising above this by banning factions - in fact that only empowers the party central apparatus as the only 'permanent faction' allowed. He gave the example of the SWP central committee, which really does disenfranchise the membership.

The PCC motion on democratic centralism was overwhelmingly accepted by aggregate following minor amendments stating that in all organisations CPGB comrades were "under discipline" - though not necessarily "under instruction" from the appropriate party body in every instance. Comrade Rylance's motion was overwhelmingly defeated.

CS future

The second session dealt specifically with the future of CS, with comrade Strafford presenting his motion to broaden it into a body for communist campus workers as well as students.

Speaking for the PCC, Ben Lewis

proposed an alternative motion, which resolved to "oppose any attempts to change the political basis or name of Communist Students". Comrade Lewis said that Chris's proposal did amount to a fundamental change in the basis of CS and that the PCC's opposition to it did not compromise the autonomy of CS. Comrade Lewis did not accept the view that Communist Students had fallen from previous lofty heights and that this necessitated broadening it out. While it had fewer activists than in the past, it was normal for student organisations in particular to gain and lose strength. The comrade noted that the student left as a whole was not benefiting massively from the current political situation and that CS has always had these ups and downs because of the very cyclical nature of student life and the competition from the large left student fronts.

Attributing comrade Strafford's desire to broaden CS so as to include academics and campus workers to "frustration" with the situation, comrade Lewis said that the proposals were not a solution and were not practical. Academics and workers on campus ought to be active in their trade unions and the CPGB itself, not a broadened Communist Students, he said. The thirst for Marxist ideas evident in society necessitated a student-based Marxist organisation.

For his part, comrade Strafford gave an exposition of how recent movements in Britain and around the world, from student fees protests to Occupy, highlighted the role of young people and pointed to the fact that increasingly young people could be mobilised to defend their economic interests. For example, a majority of British students were in part-time work during their university courses and this meant that the old model of organisation was outdated.

The debate that followed saw criticism of the proposals outlined in comrade Strafford's motion. *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson questioned where all of these communist academics, cleaners and campus staff were meant to come from. Unlike students, who would be recruited from among freshers who were often thirsting for new ideas, it was rather different with campus workers. It is relatively easy to get them to join a trade union, but how likely was it that they would turn up to an event with students?

Other comrades restated the need for students to have their own organisations for reasons that included the potential conflict of interest and approach with academics and the specific life-cycle position of being a student as opposed to being a worker. Comrade Isaacson noted that during political actions involving academics, campus staff and students, they could certainly form a joint "action committee", but, as comrade Becker pointed out, surely if it was possible to pull such a wide variety of communists on campus into a single organisation, they might as well just join the CPGB.

The PCC motion was again accepted by a large majority - with a single change, which inserted the word "fundamentally" so that aggregate now resolved to "to oppose any attempts to *fundamentally* change the political basis or name of Communist Students", thus emphasising the autonomous nature of CS. After a proposal to vote on comrade Strafford's motion section by section, the move to transform CS was clearly defeated, although other parts - including the need to "maintain the relationship of political solidarity between CS and the CPGB" - were agreed. ●

Michael Copestake

ANALYSIS

Global fight for reforms

Mike Macnair concludes his article on the alternative to nationalistic Keynesianism

This is the second half of the expanded and edited version of my talk on Keynesianism at the CPGB's January 22 school on political economy. In the first part I looked mainly at Keynes's arguments in the *General theory of employment, interest and money*, and argued that they were both incoherent, because of the author's commitment to the core of marginalist economics, and explicitly nationalist. I concluded, however, that there is a real argument for fighting for reforms, rather than saying nothing except the *strategic* truth that what we need is a global alternative to capitalism.

There is more than one kind of 'fighting for reforms'. The first kind is to fight for selected immediate demands of a communist minimum programme, or 'immediate demands'. These demands are formulated on the basis that the individual demands are consistent with the continued existence of capitalism as an *economic* order, in which there is wage labour and the accumulation of capital through exploitation, but that the adoption of the whole programme would amount to the overthrow of the *political* dictatorship of the capitalist class and the beginning of the class rule of the working class. All the more, success in winning *individual* demands of a communist minimum programme would strengthen the position of the working class as a class under capitalism.

The second kind of reforms is what was called 'palliatives' in the debates of the socialists before 1914: improvements in things like state welfare provision, which improve the material position of workers, the unemployed, etc, while containing within them commitments to the continued political rule of the capitalist class, *because* they are to be provided by state paternalism.

The point of fighting for 'palliatives' is that they would provide some immediate relief from pain, and that there is more chance of winning them than of winning demands which are more threatening to capitalist power. More chance for two reasons. First: if the regime imagines that the alternative to 'palliative' reforms is a real threat to its power, such reforms may be granted. Second: 'palliatives' may be in the interest of some social group in the elite, which allows the working class to make a partial temporary bloc with this group to force through the changes.

The case for the particular form of 'palliative' represented by Keynesian proposals has two aspects. The first is that they are in the interest of industrial capitals as opposed to financial capitals. The second is that they are in the interests of the state as such, as opposed to capital as such. Thus, for example, Bismarck promoted aspects of welfarism in the 1870s to undercut the German liberals; or the British state promoted welfarism partly because of shock at the unhealthiness of working class recruits to the armed forces in 1939-40.

The core of both these arguments for Keynesianism as such is that 'we know from the "golden age" of the 1950s-70s that Keynesianism can work'. The question is, do we?

'Golden age'

There was a set of real phenomena to which the 'golden age' idea refers, though we have to be careful not to overstate these. There were a series of



Soviet power: a contribution to post-war prosperity

reforms or concessions to the working class, particularly legalisation of strike action, development of the welfare state and so on. At the same time the period saw no really big serious financial crises with impact on the 'real economy' in the 'advanced capitalist countries' (US, western Europe and Japan).

That does not mean that there were no recessions, increases in unemployment, etc, in those countries. And it does not mean that there were no financial crashes globally, because in fact the cycle continued unabated in the capitalist 'third world' countries through that period, though the 'crash' phase tended to take the form of state defaults rather than bank runs.²

The question is, how far are these phenomena to be explained by governments using Keynesian policies during this period, and how far are they explained by other phenomena? A range of different explanations can be or have been offered, in which different relative roles are played by economic cycles and by working class political action and geopolitics.

First: maybe the experience of 1939-45 had made the capitalist class scared of the working class, leading to what were no more than concessions to the working class in some - not all - countries. 'Left Keynesian' arguments tend to attribute the 'golden age' *simply* to the internal political pressure of mass workers' movements. The turn to 'neoliberalism' in the late 1970s is then *simply* a counter-offensive of capital. The problem with this argument is that the existence of large mass workers' movements did not *before* the 'golden age' produce this form of capitalist concessions.

More plausibly in my view, Tom May told me a couple of

years back that the comrade who taught him communism said: "Your wage increases come from Uncle Joe [Stalin]". There is actually a substantial element of truth in that. There was a perceived geopolitical threat of Soviet tanks in the middle of Germany rolling across western Europe, perhaps with backing from mass communist parties in France and Italy. The post-war international capitalist class, with US capital at its centre, was desperately concerned to keep the working class onside, at least in the 'front-line' states (western Europe and Japan). This policy was reflected in active US state financial subventions to the 'non-communist left' (meaning the right wing of the social democracy) - which continued till the late 1970s, when the US state redirected its funds towards supporting neoliberal think tanks and so on.

Second: maybe there are long 'Kondratieff cycles' which run on an approximate 50-year period - 25 years of upswing and 25 years of downswing. Then (as, for example, Arthur Bough argues), as long as you are in the upswing of a Kondratieff cycle, it works to use Keynesian demand-stimulus methods to smooth recessions. I personally do not buy this theory because I simply do not think the numbers and dating actually support the idea of Kondratieff cycles. The short business cycle is a definite recurrent feature of capitalism. There is perhaps a 'Juglar cycle' of around 20 years overlaid on that. The idea that there are cycles of 50 years (even approximately) seems quite problematic on the numbers.³ The result of this problem is that supporters of the existence of Kondratieff cycles are not in or even near agreement as to the dates of the turning points, and

therefore - for example - whether we are now in a Kondratieff upswing or a Kondratieff downswing.⁴

Third: irrespective of 'long cycle' arguments, it may be that World War II cleared accumulated contradictions in the global capitalist order. The reason for believing this is that the state and credit money are 'endogenous' to markets - not, as is commonly argued by both academic and Marxist economists, 'exogenous' or involving 'external shocks'.

Global money

Comrade Hillel Ticktin made the point in his talk at the CPGB school that, as Marx said,⁵ in order for money to be truly money in the capitalist sense of the word, it has to be world money.

Now in fact, although people talked about the gold standard in the 19th century, the reality is (and it was already the case in the 14th century) that there is not enough gold and silver in circulation to support the number of transactions. Even with a high velocity of circulation, the quantity of precious metals in existence is already insufficient to support the transaction needs of emergent proto-capitalism under late feudal conditions: all the more under developed capitalism. Hence, under late feudal conditions what develops is a set of interpersonal debt relations, which are totted up and balanced against each other to avoid the need to hold and transfer specie. You did not lay out two shillings worth of pennies to buy a pair of shoes. You bought a pair of shoes and then you owed the cobbler two shillings; the next time he wanted to buy something from you he owed you; and at the end of some period of time you totted up the balance.⁶

The transition from mutual

interpersonal debt relations of this sort to capitalist money involves the state becoming a systematic borrower, which begins in some of the Italian city-states in the late middle ages, then in the Netherlands after the revolution of 1568-1609, and in England after the revolution of 1688 with the formation of the Bank of England. The state mortgages the tax revenues for the future to the people who have lent money to it. On that basis the central bank can issue paper money, and other people, too, can issue transferable debt securities of one sort or another, which can be used as means of payment. Hence interpersonal debt relations are replaced by impersonal debt relations in the form of bank notes, bills of exchange, etc.

The bank notes and so on are forms of what Marx called fictitious capital. We do not use commodity money, but fictitious capital, to make payments. The power of the state or central bank to issue money without it turning into waste paper like German marks in 1924 or Zimbabwean dollars in 2008-09 depends on its ability to borrow and the willingness of the lenders to believe the hypothecation of future taxes.

Hence, the ability of the state to engage in Keynesian demand-stimulus policies and so on is dependent on its credit-worthiness. This is in turn not just dependent on the underlying condition of the material economy (and in fact not even mainly on the underlying condition of the material economy). It is dependent primarily on *the strength of the state relative to other states*. When major losses are made in crisis in the financial markets of the 'core', the result is that credit - which is necessary to the continued functioning of both states and markets - is not 'rolled over' in countries further down the global hierarchy. As Ramana Vasudevan has pointed out, the phenomenon was already visible to Marx.⁷ We can see it going on before our eyes in relation to speculative losses made on New York and London financial markets, which have now been transferred to Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal.

'Keynesianism' was abandoned in most of the world in the late 1970s, but in the United States only in *ideology*, not in *practice*. After the deliberately induced 'Volcker shock' in the early 1980s, the US has continued to do deficit stimulus in every recession since, despite all the talk about monetarism and so on. What has happened is merely that the *form* of the deficit stimulus has shifted onto primarily arms expenditure and expansion of military bases on US territory, leading to sharp regional divergences of wealth and employment within the US, depending on the location of military facilities, etc.⁸

Why? The answer is that it has remained possible for the US to pursue demand-stimulus policies *to the extent that* losses are externalised on other countries, as they were on South America in the 'Latin American debt crisis', on Japan in the aftermath of the 1987 crash, and so on, and other countries do not pursue stimulus packages in the same way as the US.

During the 1950s-70s active state management of the business cycle produced a degree of *resynchronisation* of the business cycle between different countries. The state management was not just - as Keynes recommended - by deficit spending in recessions, but also by 'cutting off' booms from

developing into bubbles by cutting credit availability, a policy Keynes opposed (*General theory* p322). This was the policy called in Britain ‘stop-go’; more widely practised without the name. When, in the 1970s, all the major capitalist states *simultaneously* pursued demand-stimulus, the result was an acceleration of wage offensives from the side of the working class, and of offshore operations from the side of the capitalists; the outcome was ‘stagflation’.

The US uses the levers it has through the IMF and World Bank, but also through the interpenetration of high US government with Wall Street (enabling coercive use of speculation against non-compliant governments), and US covert support to neoliberal parties, etc, to prevent a recurrence of the simultaneous pursuit of demand-stimulus by all capitalist governments. US politicians can publicly urge demand-stimulus, while the US state and its close financial sector allies privately act against it: this conflict between public statement and practical policy is the small change of political behaviour taught in the US political science schools. The net effect is to externalise losses made in US financial markets onto other countries.

This depends, of course, on the continued ability of the US to print dollars and run deficits without losing its ‘safe haven’ status. Why can it do so? The answer is that, though inward investment to the US is less profitable than direct investment in the ‘developing countries’, it is safer; and underlying this is the proposition that it is safer for US corporations to invest in ‘developing countries’ than for their foreign counterparts to do so (witness, for example, the fate of French and German investments in Ba’athist Iraq). The global top-dog status of the US originated in its higher productive capacity in 1939-45, yielding global military dominance. This in turn yields global reserve-currency status and ‘seignorage’ not just on currency transactions, but on global investment flows. This can continue long after dominance in *productive industry* is gone.

None of this is new to the US. The UK retained a closely analogous position (sterling reserve-currency status and seignorage in financial transactions and global investment flows) on the basis of its military superiority created in 1791-1815, long after the superior productive capability which permitted this military superiority had evaporated. British top-dog status even survived 1914-18 and meant that the 1930s depression was a lot less severe in Britain than in the US. It was only when Britain’s global military-strategic position collapsed in 1940 that the way was open for the US and the dollar to take over.

One effect of this inflow of surplus value to the top-dog state is that capitals in that state which are stuck with obsolete forms of fixed capital and would otherwise be bankrupted can persist through forms of direct and indirect state support. Examples are the British textile industry and aspects of the British rail and shipping industries in the later British empire; and the US car industry and aspects of the US oil industry.

The cyclical return of crisis in capitalism is a *necessary* process of readjustment of the overall quantity of capital demanding returns above the rate of interest, of the relationship of money to labour values, and of the proportionalities between different capitals. The effect of the preservation of the inflow of surplus value to the top-dog state has the result of *postponing* the necessary shake-out in values and, in consequence, leading to the continued accumulation of contradictions. Eventually, resolution of the accumulated contradictions requires *destruction of the military*

power of the top-dog state and an associated devalorisation of the capitals associated with it. For the Netherlands the loss of naval supremacy happened in 1689-1713, but the loss of assets was deferred till the 1790s; for Britain 1940 was decisive.

Change in conditions

How all this relates to the ‘golden age’ is that it was *made possible* by the destruction of British power, and enormous destruction and devalorisation of capital, in World War II.⁹ This overthrow made possible a strong expansion led by the US. The *particular form* of the expansion - ie, ‘Keynesianism’/welfarism was the product of the other outcome of World War II: ie, the survival and expansion of the Soviet regime and the demands of ‘containment’. But these policies would not have been possible without the prior destruction of British global power and the associated capital losses.

How does this relate to the underlying claims of Keynesianism? There are two aspects. First, go back to Keynes’s point that the wages are “sticky downwards” in money terms, but not in real terms. He says the same thing is true for different reasons of interest rates (ie, interest rates are “sticky downwards” in money terms and not real terms) (chapters 13 and 16). Hence, by running a certain amount of inflation you can get at the end of the day what he calls “the euthanasia of the rentier” (p376). That is, that it would be possible to minimise the marginal efficiency of capital by making capital super-abundant (pp220-21).

In reality of course, once the post-war arrangements began to come unstuck, which happened in the middle 1960s, the working class started to fight against inflation by what was called ‘wage drift’. At the same time, the rentier class also fought against inflation. Their method was a combination of offshore transactions (initially the ‘euro-dollar’ market), with law changes so as to allow rent to be raised annually on long leases, and ‘floating interest rates’ on loans, which means that the interest rate can be lowered or increased as it is convenient to the lender.

The effect is to contract out of the conditions which made Keynesianism apparently work. If Keynesianism worked, it worked provided there were fixed contractual interest rates and rents, and provided wages were not “sticky downwards” in real terms. The reality is that wages *are* “sticky downwards” because they cannot fall below the cost of subsistence, and the cost of subsistence includes rents, current prices and so forth. Equally, proletarianisation is an unattractive prospect for at least sections of the middle classes and threatening to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, so that rent and interest are also “sticky downwards” outside of an actual crash, devalorising capital assets. The “euthanasia of the rentier” was a utopian idea.

Another way of making the same point is the argument of Reinhart and Sbrancia.¹⁰ That is, that Keynesianism worked in the 1950s and 1960s because there was “financial repression”. That is to say that there were systematic controls on the free movement of capital and systematic controls on the free movement of labour. Keynesianism worked in the sense that there were reforms and concessions in western Europe, in the front-line states and in the United States. It did not work in that sense in Latin America, Africa and much of Asia.

Hence the underlying political logic of Keynesian mercantilism was imperialism and the inequality of

nations, and a world in which people imagined that the contradictions between states were more fundamental than the contradictions between classes. Of course, decolonisation (in most cases backed by the US), the apparent success of the USSR in industrialising outside capitalism and Maoism all contributed to this world. But without the system of concessions to the working class in the front-line capitalist states, financial repression and controls on the movement of capital and labour, these arguments would have remained implausible.

The conditions of the ‘golden age’ are gone, and they will not come back without the destruction of the global military power of the USA. This is true in the underlying dynamics - that the process of the US externalising losses puts pressures on other states making concessions to the working class, and in particular makes Keynesian demand management extraordinarily difficult, and that capital in spite of the immediate crisis does not feel under threat in the ways in which has in the periods when major concessions to the working class have, in fact, been granted.

It is also true in the more immediate sense that the global capitalist class, with a good deal of US (and British) state backing, found ways around the tools of ‘financial repression’ which enabled ‘Keynesian’ policies to work; but the turn to financial ‘globalisation’ is in fact in the state-mercantilist interest of the US (and all the more of its British satellite); so that no return to capital movement controls is likely (except as a temporary measure in response to a meltdown of the financial system) without the overthrow of US state power.

The consequence of what I have just argued is that there is no significant likelihood of either states or any politically significant section of capital backing a return to ‘Keynesianism’ in the sense of the political-economic conditions of the 1950s-60s. What is likely is something in some ways darker. States *will* turn to protectionism and the attempt to construct a degree of economic ‘autarky’. But this will require rearmament and the construction of *bilateral* relations with raw material suppliers - a policy on which China at least has already embarked.

Reform demands

Does this mean therefore that everything is bound to get worse and there is nothing we can say except ‘Make revolution now’? No. There can be reforms won within capitalism. It is just unlikely that there will be reforms won within capitalism *through winning capitalist governments over to a Keynesian policy*. What sort of reforms should we fight for? I can do no more than give examples.

First. The fundamental problem posed to the working class by capitalist crises and recessions is unemployment. The idea of Keynesianism is precisely that the state should invest with a view to promoting ‘full employment’. But the existence of unemployment is in reality posed because the high productivity of labour means that current production is capable of supporting the population with less than ‘full employment’. The point is stronger today than it ever has been: in the ‘global south’ unemployment is at heartbreaking levels; in the ‘global north’ many people are employed in make-work jobs.

The problem is that the capitalist incentive structure requires that ‘full employment’ be in ‘full-time’ jobs. In the 1730s early trade unionists were prosecuted for conspiring to refuse to work more than 16 hours a day, to the “great loss and damage” of their employers. The capitalists’ attitude to this has not changed. The Con-Dems are trying to change the tax credit system to force working tax

credit recipients to work more hours.¹¹ The TUC leadership falls in behind to condemn “under-employment”.¹²

Suppose we demand a 30-hour week, or indeed a 20-hour week. This in no way involves a nationalist-mercantilist policy. It is a demand which can be applied across the board globally, and *not* a demand which involves forcing the state to spend more money. The 10-hour day was won in Britain under conditions far more difficult for the working class as a class than today’s. The demand for the eight-hour day formed the focus of the Second International’s *global* May Day campaign.

The same is true of defending the ‘health and safety’ regulations which the capitalist press hate so much. Despite the occasional stupidities perpetrated in the name of ‘health and safety’ (and usually blown out of all proportion by the press) every trade unionist knows they are worth defending. It does not require a deficit budget, and fighting for decent safety at work is plainly a global issue on which global common demands are possible.

Second. There can be demands made for the redirection of the existing budget. This is a point which Marx made in relation to education in the later years of the First International. The Proudhonists and Bakuninists argued that the working class should not demand public education. Marx said in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* that we do not want to demand education controlled by the kaiser. In the arguments in the First International, however, he argued positively *for* demanding public education, and castigated the opponents of this demand.¹³ The difference is not about demands which require public expenditure, but about the central-state *control* of education (Thatcher’s ‘national curriculum’) which the *Gotha programme* seemed to demand ... of the Prussian absolutist state.

Third, we certainly defend welfare benefits, which are much older than Keynesianism. That does not mean uncritical support. Take, for example, the current controversy over the housing benefits cap. Unlimited housing benefit is in substance merely a state subsidy to private landlords and the provision of white-collar employment in the local councils. The left should be raising as an immediate demand the *restoration of rent control*. Our strategic demand is public ownership of the *rentier* interest in land; but rent control is a partial and limited movement in that direction. The tactics in face of the Con-Dems cutting benefits without cutting rents will sooner or later have to include collective rent strikes and mass (as opposed to small anarchist) squatting movements.

While we certainly defend people’s welfare benefits as far as we can, the reality is that our actual ability to force the state to spend money - short of overthrowing it and seizing power - is nearly as limited as our ability to stop the state going to war (also, short of seizing state power). The last 10 years have shown pretty clearly how limited this latter ability is (if 1914 did not already show it).

The consequence is that a central *present* question has to be the cooperative association of the working class itself: building cooperatives; building trade unions and their welfare and solidarity functions; building workers’ mutuals; and so on.

I said in the first article that Marx had disproved the Proudhonist idea of co-ops linked by the market. That does not alter the present value of cooperation as a form of workers’ self-defence. Moreover, cooperation does not have to be limited to single firms competing in the market: the creation of federated cooperative production can reduce market-

dependence. Nor does activity of this sort have to be limited to the national scale. At least *European*-wide cooperation of trade unions and other workers’ organisations is immediately posed by the present European crisis.

To pursue this policy requires, alongside it, building workers’ independent political parties - independent not only of the capitalist parties, but also - unlike Labour - of the capitalist states and the capitalist media. The point of doing so is not the ‘little cog driving the big wheel’ beloved of much of the ‘Leninist’ left. It is that capitalists can and do intervene through parliament, the judiciary and the media against workers’ organisations or to bring them under control. A workers’ party, taking its stand on the general interests of the working class and the need for the working class to take over, can, by satire, exposures and so on, *delegitimate* the capitalist political order (for example, pointing out the extent of electoral fraud, the corrupt character of the advertising-funded media and of the ‘free market in legal services’). By doing so it can defend the workers’ organisations of immediate cooperation against capitalist attacks and interventions.

In summary, we can fight for reforms, and also - and most fundamentally, because the capitalist class and its state are set on rolling back the reforms of the past - we have to fight for working class self-help and cooperative organisation. But we do not have to fight for Keynesian policies in order to fight for reforms. On the contrary, fighting for ‘stimulus packages’ inevitably involves us saying we want the jobs to stay here and to be lost in Germany (as in the Bombardier affair). It is so because Keynesianism is a doctrine of *mercantilist state action* at the expense of other countries. It only appeared otherwise when it was a system of cold war management made possible by the outcome of World War II ●

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Notes

1. Googling the words ‘socialist’ and ‘palliatives’ will produce a variety of sources.
2. State defaults partly documented in CM Reinhart and KS Rogoff *This time is different: eight centuries of financial folly* Princeton 2009. A Marxist discussion of the period which avoids overstating the ‘long boom’ is offered by MJ Webber and DL Rigby *The golden age illusion* New York 1996.
3. Solomos Solomou *Phases of economic growth 1850-1973* (Cambridge 1988) argues in considerable depth and elaboration that the ‘Kondratieff cycle’ in the 19th century is merely a statistical artefact, concluding that “the coincidence of the post-war boom falling within the Kondratieff time band is an exceptional event” and “significant growth variations have been shorter than the Kondratieff periodicity” (p169).
4. Eg, Arthur Bough sees the downswing as running from 1975 to 2000, so that we are now about 12 years into the upswing: ‘Kondratieff’s long waves’ (2008) <http://bofflyblog.blogspot.com/2008/06/kondratieffs-long-waves.html>. In contrast, A Korotayev and S Tsirel (cautiously) support Kondratieff cycles. They argue for the last Kondratieff downswing running 1968-84, with the upswing 1984-2008 and the 2008 crash marking the beginning of the downswing (‘A spectral analysis of world GDP dynamics’: www.escholarship.org/uc/item/9jv108xp#page=1).
5. *Capital* Vol 1, London 1976, pp240-41.
6. C Muldrew *The economy of obligation* London 1998.
7. ‘From the gold standard to the floating dollar standard: an appraisal in the light of Marx’s theory of money’ (2009) 41 *Review of Radical Political Economics* pp473-91.
8. For discussion of a relatively recent aspect of this see JK Galbraith and J Travis Hale, ‘American inequality: from IT bust to big government boom’ *The Economists’ Voice* October 2006.
9. An argument also made on a slightly different basis by Andrew Kliman in *The failure of capitalist production* (New York 2011).
10. ‘The liquidation of government debt,’ NBER working paper 16893, March 2011.
11. *The Guardian* February 11.
12. *The Guardian* February 14.
13. ‘Speech to the IWMA general council on general education’ (1869): www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1869/education-speech.htm; ‘Political indifferentism’ (1873): www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/01/indifferentism.htm.

IRAN

Threats, opposition and solidarity

On what basis should we mobilise against an attack on Iran? Not by calling a truce on our opposition to the Islamic regime, argues **Yassamine Mather**

In the last few weeks Iranians have woken up every day to news of further military threats and new sanctions. Anyone you contact in Iran will tell you how the constant media 'analyses' of if/when the bombing will start is affecting the national psyche, how morale is down, how the current situation is reminiscent of the terrible days of the Iran-Iraq war.

One Iranian blogger summarised the frustration of many Iranians when he lambasted callous statements by United States and Israeli officials debating the likely timing of air raids and military attacks against Iran. He wrote "These people discuss the timetable for bombing Iran as if they were deciding on dates for family holidays." The following headlines from the last couple of weeks, translated into Persian and broadcast daily to Iranian audiences, give a flavour of what he means:

- "The US and Israel are publicly disagreeing over timing for a potential attack on Iran's disputed nuclear facilities, as that nation's leader said it won't back down."
- "Obama: US and Israel 'in lockstep' to stop Iran becoming nuclear power."
- "US expects Israel to attack Iran."
- "United States Defence Secretary Leon Panetta believes there is a growing possibility Israel will attack Iran as early as April."
- "US admiral warns Iran: we are ready today."

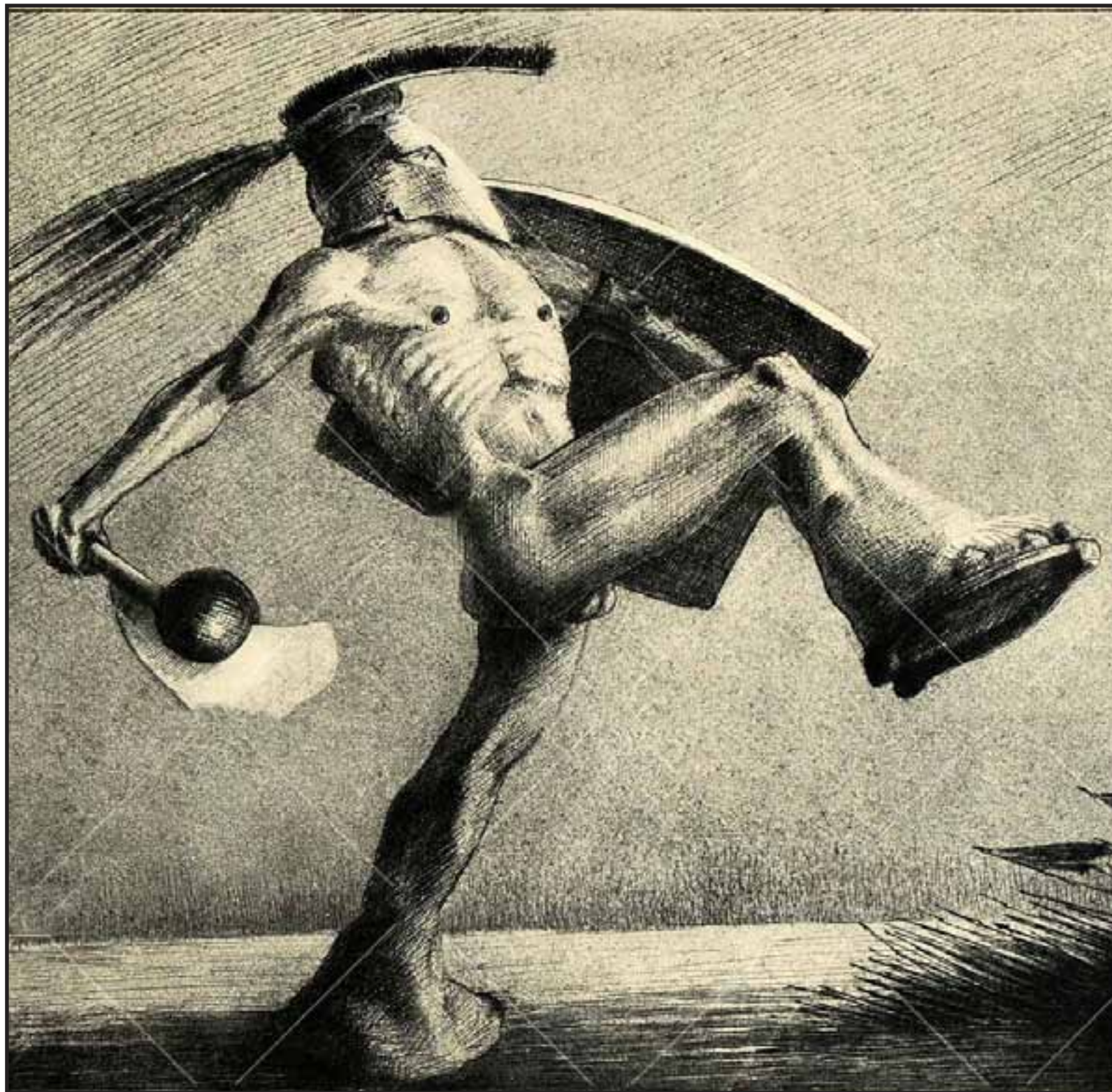
The first point to make is that, as far the US and its allies are concerned, the current threat of war/sanctions has little to do with Iran's nuclear capabilities. Israel has made it clear that it will not tolerate further advances in Iran's nuclear programme and a few months before the US presidential elections, pro-Israeli lobbies are busy exaggerating the threat of Iran's nuclear programme. However, there are more significant factors pushing the US towards conflict with Iran.

First and foremost is the need of a superpower in decline, damaged by two unsuccessful wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to assert its authority against all those who have dared to oppose aspects of its foreign policy. This is true even of countries that in the economic sphere have followed the dictate of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as Iran's Islamic Republic has done.

Iran's 1979 revolution deprived the US of a strategic ally in the region and, although the stupid posturing of the US embassy takeover had nothing to do with anti-imperialism, it did show to the world and the US that the new regime in Tehran was going to be a nuisance - 30 years of US sanctions are proof of this.

Secondly, the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in the coming to power of a Shia government in Baghdad which takes orders from Iran's religious regime and a government close to Tehran in Kabul. This has dramatically changed the balance of forces between Shias and Sunnis in the region, and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have time and again complained to the US that, as a consequence of the war with Iraq, Shia influence covers a vast section of the region from Iranian Baluchistan in the east to Levant in Lebanon in the west.

Next, the Arab spring has changed the map of the region and the US can no longer rely on the likes of Mubarak and Ben Ali. Shias in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are rising against local



War is getting nearer

dictators, while in Iran the Sunni Arab population is accused of being part of a plot by Saudi Arabia to divide Iran. In many ways the civil war in Syria could be seen as a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and so, in addition to Israel, the Saudis and the Gulf states have joined the chorus calling for the US to bomb Iran.

Last but not least, the Islamic regime in Iran, frightened of its own population and faced with continuing anti-dictatorial protests, seems incapable of stepping away from the abyss. Tehran needs a war, or at least an ongoing conflict situation, as much as does the US and Israel. What better diversion from the terrible economic political situation sustained by severe repression. In Tehran people say the regime is playing a dangerous game of chicken with a superpower.

At the moment, it seems the conflict is being conducted on the level of individual terror. According to news agencies, it was the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, that trained and financed a group that has carried out a series of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. An unnamed US official has alleged that the People's Mujahedin of Iran dissident group

actually carried out the killings.

Iran is said to have retaliated with car bomb attacks on Israeli officials in India, as well as other incidents in Georgia and Thailand. A man thought to be Iranian had both legs blown off after attempting to throw a bomb at police in the Thai capital, Bangkok.

Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu was quick to blame Iran hours after the attacks, claiming that Israel will "continue to act against the international terror Iran produces". This is a bit rich, coming so soon after the assassination of Iranian scientists for which the Israeli secret service had been patting itself on the back. However, this demonstrates how the US/Israeli tactic of putting pressure on Tehran to provoke an irrational response is working and how Teheran's leaders are falling into the trap. The plan is clear: if the west keeps up the pressure the clerical dictatorship in Iran will eventually do 'something stupid', providing the perfect excuse for military intervention.

Sanctions

In addition to the constant psychological pressure, Iranians have to cope with the hardships

caused by the new wave of sanctions. Malnutrition plus lack of medical and surgical equipment are already taking their toll. The new international sanctions against Iran look set to shrink its economy, force inflation up and erode the value of the country's currency. These sanctions have clearly little to do with curtailing the nuclear industry. They are part of a policy of 'regime change from above'.

Few areas of Iran's economy now remain untouched by sanctions. Because of payment difficulties, Iranian ships have in recent days stopped loading imports of Ukrainian grain. The United Arab Emirates has told its banks to stop financing Iran's trade with Dubai. Iranians are finding it more difficult to obtain hard currency to travel abroad.

Fariborz Raees Dana, professor of economy at Tehran University, explained to Hands Off the People of Iran last week how proposed oil sanctions starting in July are already affecting Iran's economy. They have eroded 'confidence', causing the currency to plummet. He pointed out how Iranian capitalists, both within the state/military apparatus and in the private sector, have brought the

economy to a standstill, as they bought up dollars, creating a serious crisis.

The state has acted aggressively to try to stabilise the rial, raising interest rates on long-term bank deposits to as high as 21%. That may have eased pressure on the currency for now, but, as the rich, including within the religious bureaucracy, continue to move their capital out of Iran, the currency crisis looks set to continue.

In separate developments last week, major shipping groups controlling more than 100 supertankers said they would stop loading oil cargoes from Iran. Overseas Shipholding, based in New York, said on February 10 that the 45 supertankers in which its carriers trade will no longer go to Iran. Nova Tankers and Frontline, with a combined 93 vessels, said they will no longer ship Iranian crude oil.

Previous efforts to curb Iran's oil income failed because vessels owned by the shipping industry are often managed by companies from outside the US or European Union. All this changed in January 2011, when an EU embargo on Iranian oil extended the ban to shipping insurance. With about 95% of tanker fleets insured under rules governed by European

law, there are now fewer vessels able to load in Iran.

Sanctions have put major oil buyers, including China, Japan and India, under pressure to reduce crude imports from Iran. The sanctions lockdown has left some payments for Iran’s oil stranded. South Korea pays for its oil in its own currency, but Iran has hit a wall trying to transfer the money back to Tehran, leaving the equivalent of \$5 billion sitting in South Korea banks.

In its assessment of the Iranian economy published last July, the International Monetary Fund estimated energy exports would amount to \$103 billion in 2011-12, or 78% of total exports. The EU decision to halt imports of Iranian oil from July will hit hard, as EU countries had been taking a fifth of the country’s shipments; other big buyers such as Japan and South Korea, each with about 10%, may also be pressured into reducing purchases. Iran might have to sell its oil at hugely discounted prices in order to find buyers.

Yet crude oil remains Iran’s major source of the foreign exchange it needs to pay for critical imports, such as food staples - what was left of Iran’s agriculture and food industry has been destroyed in the last few years. Iran imported 62% of its maize, 45% of its rice and 59% of its sugar in 2010-11. But exports to Iran of such staples are falling, as the collection of payments from buyers becomes ever harder. Indian exporters and rice millers say that Iranian buyers have defaulted on \$144 million in payments for rice imports from its biggest supplier. Vijay Setia, the president of the All India Rice Exporters’ Association, called on members to cease exports to Iran on credit terms. Malaysia has already halted palm oil exports to Iran because of payment problems. The sanctions have made it difficult for Iranian palm oil buyers to use letters of credit and make payments via middlemen in the United Arab Emirates.

Bread and rice dominate the diet of most Iranians, many of whom can no longer afford to buy meat, now selling for about \$30 a kilogram in Tehran. However, bread prices have tripled since December, while rice costs about \$5 per kg. Iranians earn about \$350 a month on average, while the official poverty line is set at \$800. The official inflation rate has jumped from single digits to around 20% in the past 18 months - analysts think the real rate is higher. The rise is mostly because of economic ‘reforms’, which cut energy and food subsidies at the end of 2010, but also because sanctions make imports more expensive.

High inflation is adding to a collapse of confidence in the Iranian rial, boosting its black market rate to above 20,000 to the dollar from roughly half that level a year ago. The rial has plunged, as the west has increased sanctions, raising the price of imports and making it difficult to find Dubai-based middlemen who can process payments to keep the country’s trade flowing.

Opposition

Iran is holding parliamentary elections on March 2 and in the absence of the ‘reformists’, who have called a boycott, and at a time when president Ahmadinejad’s own supporters are facing exclusion, these elections will be even more of a joke than previous attempts by the Islamic Republic regime to present the electoral process as proof of ‘democracy’. On February 9, the Council of Guardians announced that just 3,320 out of the 5,395 individuals who registered for the elections would be permitted to stand.

Demonstrations called by the Coordination Council of the Green Path of Hope for February 14 marked the anniversary of protests called by ‘reformist’ leaders Mir-Hossein

Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi in support of the people of Egypt and Tunisia were brutally repressed. The Coordination Council gave the worsening economic conditions and governmental mismanagement of Iran’s resources as reasons why people should protest, declaring it was “the human, legal and legitimate right of Iranians to show their protest against the state of their lives and their country”. However, the green movement of the ‘reformists’ is now more discredited than ever and the call for a *silent* protest was the last straw for many former supporters of Moussavi/Karroubi.

Sporadic protests did take place in Tehran and other major cities. However, the presence of hundreds of heavily armed security forces frightened many off, leaving the green leaders looking even more isolated. Instead Tehran experienced two days of organised traffic jams (demonstration by cars) on February 13-14.

Although virtually no-one in the Iranian opposition is stupid enough to call for direct military intervention, regime change via sanctions has its supporters even amongst sections of the ‘left’. The vanguardist sects with their self-appointed leaders, who until 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union supported ‘socialism from above’, are these days reduced to one or two foot soldiers. No wonder some are eyeing US/EU funds designated for regime change in Iran.

The threat of war has divided the Iranian opposition into three distinct groups

1. A minority - mainly splits from Maoist groups - are edging towards support for the regime, given the kind of threat Iran faces. It should be added that none of these groups have yet expressed open support for the regime: they have just toned down their opposition.
2. There are, in contrast, regime-change forces both within and beyond the green movements. Last week some 50 exiled members of the Iranian opposition and ‘civil society’ gathered in Stockholm. According to the organisers, the ‘Unity for Democracy in Iran’ conference aimed to “make it possible for different parts of the opposition to meet and discuss how they can coordinate their efforts for democracy”.

The participants included social democrats, nationalists, republicans and sections of the green movement, including the Fedayeen (Majority). The gathering was probably Europe’s answer to US attempts to achieve regime change through more conservative figures. In Iran, however, no-one has any illusions in any of these forces, although the type of government envisaged by US and EU to replace the Islamic regime is clear. As Fariborz Raees Dana put it to Hopi, they are made up of a combination of neoliberal capitalists, ‘reformist’ Islamists and maybe supporters of the ex-shah - all backed up by military forces in the army and Sepah ground troops.

3. Finally there are those who oppose imperialist war and sanctions, and call for the overthrow of the Islamic regime from below.

Of course, in this category one can distinguish between a number of groups. For example, sections of the deluded exiled left are calling for the formation of a “third front”. It would be tremendous if working class forces were capable of stamping their authority on a movement for democracy directed against both imperialism and the regime. But, apart from anything else, the phrase implies that Tehran is somehow on a par with the US. Yet Iran’s Islamic regime is a weak ‘third world’ dictatorship on the brink of collapse, while the US remains a world hegemonic power with long-term designs on the region.

However, although the firepower the regime is able to muster cannot be equated with the military threat posed by the US, the threat of war has played a crucial role in the survival of the Islamic regime and will continue do so.

For the US’s plans for regime change, Iran’s national minorities play an important role - plans to divide the country have long been part of the Pentagon’s plans. Just as the US found allies against Saddam Hussein amongst Iraq’s Kurds, so a number of Iranian Kurdish groups are now totally dependent on US funds. Others proudly tell us they only accept funds from the Iraqi government of Jalal Talabani ...

Of course, national minorities - not least the Kurds - have every reason to despise the Islamic regime that has been responsible for the worst forms of cultural and political repression, while maintaining the shah’s policy of deliberate underdevelopment. However, the route many appear to have chosen to achieve their ‘liberation’ will only lead to disaster.

Solidarity

In the midst of all this confusion, today more than ever, both inside and outside Iran, Hopi’s clear, principled slogans - No to imperialism, no to the Islamic regime - have shown what true solidarity means. We have stepped up our activities and plan to do much more over the next few weeks.

It is in this context that the sad story of the Committee of Defence of the Iranian People’s Rights (Codir) should serve as a lesson to all those on the left who might now tell us that in the face of imperialist threats we must support Iran’s Islamic regime. Codir - a campaign associated with Iran’s discredited ‘official communist’ Tudeh Party - is now campaigning against war and against the regime, claiming on its website: “Codir, established in 1981 and based in London, has campaigned to expose human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

You do not need to be a historian or an expert in the politics of the Iranian left to know that the above statement is a blatant lie. Between 1979 and 1983-84 Tudeh and all its affiliated organisations, including Codir, *supported* the Islamic regime of Iran and cooperated with its repressive forces both inside and outside the country. One of Tudeh’s specialities was to spy on, harass and insult other activists of the left. When I was in Kurdistan, my family fell victim to one such attempt - by Tudeh in Iran and Codir in the UK. In the first years of the Iran-Iraq war the party called on its members and supporters to become “soldiers of Imam Khomeini”.

However, in 1983-84 almost all of Tudeh’s leaders were shown in official videos confessing to “treason”, “subversion” and “horrendous crimes”, praising the Islamic government and proclaiming their new-found recognition of the superiority of Islam over atheism. But it was not enough to prevent the jailing and execution of hundreds of Tudeh militants.

In the 1990s Tudeh tried to recover from this disastrous episode by rewriting its own history and pretending it had always been part of the opposition to the regime. However, for the majority of Iranians, including the youth, its conversion to opposition politics came too late. Today no-one takes Tudeh seriously.

Let us hope those sections of the British left that are telling us this is not the time to oppose the Islamic regime will learn the tragic story of Tudeh and its Codir front before it is too late ●

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HOPI

Preparing for military action

John McDonnell's speech to the February 11 meeting of Hands Off the People of Iran



John McDonnell: war warning

I was present in the Commons on January 24, when foreign secretary William Hague made a statement on European Union sanctions against Iran. In response to a question, he said that, while the UK was "not calling for, or advocating, military action", it is "the job of our armed forces to prepare for many contingencies" and "all options remain on the table". This was reflected on the Labour front bench by shadow foreign secretary John Spellar, that well known progressive politician (there's no irony in Hansard, but I hope it's not the same in this meeting). Spellar reflects the same attitude - that we should be ready for military action.

Some caution was sounded, including from Tories - the Tory chair of the Iran All-Party Group basically said, 'Look at the situation from Iran's point of view. It's surrounded by nuclear states: Pakistan, India and Israel. Then there are the occupied territories. What would the government think if that was happening here?' So, while there is a clear majority on all sides of the house for ensuring that military intervention remains on the agenda, there were reservations being expressed even on the Tory side. The Iran All-Party Group is basically an alliance of Tories and big capital, which is concerned about the repercussions on trade more than anything else.

There were two interventions from our side: from myself and Jeremy Corbyn. Jeremy raised the issue that, if there really is so much anxiety about nuclear weapons - Hague's line is that we need to intervene now before nuclear weapons were obtained and developed - then the government should adhere to its legal commitments under various treaties

and press for a conference to establish a nuclear-free zone within the Middle East. Hague's response was fairly derisory, refusing to confront the issue that there might be another path to securing peace. Obviously, they don't want to confront Israel - that's not on their agenda either.

I asked a question about current military action and about the covert operations and assassinations that have already happened. Interestingly enough, Hague denied the UK's involvement in assassinations, but it's useful to look at the phrasing he used: he said he was not going to comment further, because the British government does not comment on intelligence matters. What that confirms effectively is that they know about the covert operations - the assassinations as well as the bombings, etc. But they are unwilling to acknowledge the role of Mossad, with the support of some movements within Iran itself, for those sorts of military actions. Of course, you can only put one question; you cannot engage in debate.

But if you compare the responses last month to what was being said in the run-up to the war against Iraq, there is a clear similarity. There is a need to ratchet up sanctions, and a tacit acknowledgement that covert operations are already happening. There is a build-up on the Tory side, backed by the Labour front bench in a coalition of agreement, if you like: all three parties agree that military intervention would be supported if and when they felt it was appropriate. As with Iraq, once that ball starts rolling, it begins to pick up speed and I genuinely think that is where we are at. I do think that they are now clear in their own minds that military intervention will take place - it will

probably take the form of a strike by Israel and then if necessary another intervention force of some sort.

There are also arguments about intervention in Syria, maybe moving towards a no-fly zone. That then gives them a base to move on to Iran later. They are plotting these options very clearly and we need to do the same thing in relation to our response to what we think those next steps will be.

There will definitely be an escalation of sanctions, and our job is to expose their implications. Here I must mention the work Yasmine Mather has done - on the resulting economic situation in Iran, on the destabilising effect on the Iranian currency and on trade, and the knock-on effect that has on ordinary working class people. I think it is critical that we get that message out, because it is not reported anywhere: there's no discussion of this in our national press or media at all. We in Hands off the People of Iran have argued that sanctions are just war by another means - war perpetrated not on the ruling elite of Iran, but on the ordinary working class people. They're the ones who actually suffer as a result of sanctions.

We need to be the people who are exposing the covert operations, because I don't think we can give the media the credit for doing that. The fact that it's not British troops on the ground is irrelevant: whether it's British boots or not, there's a covert war going on and it's our job to expose that. Above all else, our job is to try and make sure the anti-war forces in this country are mobilised effectively and, hopefully, in a non-sectarian way to prevent any further military action taking place.

I think that, with Iraq still in the memory, there is a popular sentiment

that can be mobilised against direct intervention by this country in Iran. But it has to be worked upon. So I think our job in the coming weeks and months is to continue the work which Hopi is doing and to expose what's going on, to expose the sanctions, to expose the build-up of covert operations and to expose the potential that there is for intervention by the US and the UK and others in some sort of 'coalition of the willing', which I think they're trying to prepare, certainly in propaganda terms.

It's interesting that the propaganda is so extensive. *The Guardian* - supposedly a left-liberal newspaper - carried a piece by Jonathan Freedland [February 11] arguing in favour of an intervention in Iran. It actually attacks those people who demonstrated on the Stop the War Coalition demo on January 28 - we also participated, of course. The arguments are beginning to be presented in terms of a 'humanitarian intervention' - an intervention that is required *at this stage* to prevent the development of nuclear weapons.

Well, Jeremy posed the right solution, you have to be engaged in the debate about nuclear proliferation overall if you are going to tackle this issue. And the reason they don't want to address it seriously is because they are not willing to address the issue of the nuclear arms held by Israel. So, again, it's our job in the coming period to expose that and work against military intervention. If we can win the argument against direct intervention, we can then roll back the argument about the sanctions issue as well.

We might well then be able to start a discussion deep in the heart of the labour and trade union movement in this country about the *real* force for change in Iran. In other words, how can we give effective support to the progressive forces, individuals and organisations in Iran? At the moment the solidarity work of the labour and trade union movement is at an extremely low level - a few tokenistic statements by the general secretary of the TUC, for example. It hasn't become a feature of the international

work of the labour and trade union movement in this country amongst the official organisations, and that's part of our mission in the coming period. We must learn how to be successful in raising this in individual trade unions and we need to step up to the plate on this now.

Let me finish on this. On the first day following the recess there will be a debate in the Commons on Iran, on the initiative of Elfyn Llwyd of Plaid Cymru, who is reasonably progressive on a number of issues. Jeremy and I will be intervening in that debate. We as Hopi need to prepare the lines of argument that should be posed in parliament - because, as sure as day follows night, there will be an organised intervention, not just from the Tories, but from the Labour side as well. They'll be seeking to consolidate their consensus over sanctions, but also ratcheting it up into support for intervention. So we on our side have to use that debate as best we can to argue not just against sanctions and military intervention, but also for an alternative. That means revolutionary change in Iran. But revolution on the basis of working class people and working class organisations, together with progressive forces, coming together to challenge the current regime.

If Hopi can make such an intervention in parliament, that will give a lead to others. One thing that struck me about the January 24 exchanges in parliament was that MPs were absolutely lost. Then there was the realisation: 'Oh my god, we are going down the same route as with Iraq.' The same drums are beating. That shift from 'weapons of mass destruction' to sanctions, covert operations and military build-up. As soon as the navy arrives in the Gulf area then the inevitability of military intervention is posed.

There might just be the potential to set out our alternative - an alternative to the usual escalation that develops into another war. If we can make a good intervention in parliament, then we can use that as part of our propaganda base to alert the British people as well ●

Fighting fund

Not ungrateful

Are comrades actually starting to take my advice? I mean, for as long as I can remember, I've been bemoaning the fact that hardly anyone is using our PayPal facility to make a donation to the *Weekly Worker*. But suddenly, within the space of two days, five people have contributed to our fighting fund via our website.

The total of £85 that this produced has made a difference this week - so thank you, comrades GC, BD, RL, PO and FT. They were among 23,143 online readers over the last seven days - that's one figure that's been going up consistently over the past few months, so perhaps we are doing something right. However, while I don't want to sound ungrateful, five out of 23,143 is not a high proportion.

I also received a total of £118 in standing orders - thanks to MKS, JD, SP, DW, AM and JM

- plus three cheques in the post amounting to £65, the donors being HJ, DR and SW. All that means that this week's receipts total £268 and February's fighting fund has reached £694.

But that is still less than halfway to our £1,500 monthly target and we are two days into the second half of the month. Let's see a bit of smooth acceleration now, comrades. We don't want to miss out for two months in a row, do we? After all, this week's *Weekly Worker* shows why we need the extra cash: we want to publish more and better supplements carrying articles like Lars Lih's well researched piece.

Won't you help us do that?

Robbie Rix

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LAW

Free Abu-Qatada

Abu-Qatada al-Filistini is not, it is probably fair to say, a progressive-minded sort of fellow.

Born in 1959 or 1960, his rise to a certain level of international notoriety has coincided with the trajectory of Islamist extremism from a peculiar reactionary creed of some use to US and allied imperialism as a bulwark against the spread of communism to its current status as a putative epochal threat to western civilisation. Certainly, his affiliation to a particular brand of Salafist insanity cannot be denied; and some version of Osama bin Laden's dream of a global caliphate no doubt drives his political activities.

Abu Qatada is also an asylum-seeker - after the conclusion of the first Gulf War, he was deported from Kuwait to the country of his birth, Jordan. From there, he fled in 1993 under a false passport to Britain to claim political asylum, which he was duly granted. Those, after all, were the days before September 11 2001; and before the rise of the asylum-seeker to the status of public enemy number one in the eyes of the reactionary press in this country.

Then, everything changed: he and his wing-nut comrades were declared to be a global enemy as threatening as any that had faced down the west. Following 9/11, his days of liberty, like all those who share his odious goals, were numbered; the London bombings in 2005 gave the authorities the excuse, and a whole host of new authoritarian legislation gave them the means, to prepare to deport him. For the last seven years he has languished at her majesty's pleasure, in one form of custody or another.

Now, he has finally been released, but only into the waiting arms of a whole new mode of state harassment. He suffers a 22-hour-a-day curfew; his two precious hours away from house arrest will see him, no doubt, at the head of a 20-strong conga line of special branch agents, and electronically tagged for good measure. He is banned from attending a mosque, preaching in any capacity or speaking to 27 named individuals.

All this, however, is a poor runners-up prize for the authorities, who were desperately keen to dispatch him to the tender mercies of the Jordanian Hashemites. The immovable obstacle in their path has been the European Court of Human Rights - satisfied though it was with British assurances that Abu Qatada would not be subject to torture upon his return, the court decided, somewhat wisely, that no reasonable assurance existed that evidence used against him in a Jordanian court would not itself have been extracted through torture. He had no chance of a fair trial.

Indeed, that is almost certainly true. The Jordanian kingdom is of a piece with the regimes that surround it - a corrupt and brutal autocracy, and a willing patsy for imperialism in the region. When king Hussein, the previous head of state, was at death's door, the 'international community' was fulsome in its tributes to his role in the Middle East 'peace' process - prompting some hacks to remind their readers that he was, after all, a dictator (whose 'legitimacy', let us not forget, derived in part from a supposed genealogical link to the prophet Mohammed). As ever, one is never a dictator when one does the US state department's bidding.

This story, of an Islamist asylum-seeker who cannot be deported thanks to the whims of a Brussels judge, is almost tailor-made to send the *Daily Mail* into that curiously libidinous outrage that is its trademark. It is the sort of thing, in other words, that its journalists normally have to stitch out of whole cloth. Sure enough, bourgeois and petty bourgeois opinion has greeted this ruling with, to put it mildly, some

distaste. The *Mail* itself rather ingeniously characterises that 22-hour curfew as "round the clock protection" for Abu Qatada's family (February 13).

Certainly, as far as the state is concerned, the fight is not over. They have three months to seek further assurances from Jordan; after that time, Abu Qatada's bail conditions will have to be relaxed, and he will be at liberty to bring on the collapse of the west, or whatever it is he is supposed to be doing. Theresa May and her underlings will spend the intervening time frothing at the mouth over the Brussels *diktat*; perhaps the Jordanian monarchy will find the right wording to delude the ECHR into agreeing the deportation.

It may appear faintly ridiculous (at least, to those who have not swallowed the absurd overestimation of Islamism's destructive potential put about by our leaders) that the British state is going to such lengths to commit Abu Qatada to the tender mercies of a Jordanian jail. Yet, having made such a fuss over him, there is possibly no other option. Consider the political ructions over detention without charge; the last New Labour government wanted to detain terror suspects for 42 days, while some brave and principled libertarians such as the Tory rightwinger David Davis considered 28 days quite sufficient to gather the necessary evidence.

Abu Qatada, however, has been in British custody not for 28 or 42 days, but for *seven years*. If he is all - indeed, *any* - of the things of which he is accused, surely the criminal justice system and the combined might of MI5 and MI6 ought to be able to prove it by now. If he is somehow implicated in the 7/7 bombings, then somebody should have managed to demonstrate that to the satisfaction of judge and jury. If he is, as a Spanish dignitary claimed, the lynchpin of al Qa'eda's European activities, then some paper trail or other ought to establish that.

The conclusion is inescapable. Even by the increasingly baggy standard of contemporary anti-terror legislation, under whose terms it is inadmissible even to protest peacefully within a certain distance of parliament, it is obviously impossible to convict him of anything. Impossible, that is, without torturing supposed associates until they sing like the proverbial canary. For Theresa May, it is Jordan or bust.

We must be clear: Abu Qatada is a repulsive individual. The Islamist ideology he espouses seeks to bury all appeals to reason under theocratic repression; it seeks to return women to a condition of existence for which 'mediaeval' is too generous a term; it seeks, needless to say, to extinguish any hopes that remain for socialism, which represents the very antithesis of his

reactionary utopia.

That his views are so repugnant, however, does not alter the essence of the matter. Abu Qatada must be defended. Communists - indeed, anyone with the most elementary concern for political liberty - should fight for his right, and indeed the right of all the 57 varieties of Islamism, to the most extensive political freedom we can wrest from the bourgeois state.

There are many reasons why the workers' movement, and especially its revolutionary contingent, has a direct interest in this case. The first is the very character of Abu Qatada's views. Despite its reactionary character, Islamism fills a certain void which was once occupied by one or another form of leftist politics. In order to reclaim that space, we will have to defeat these ideas - and the only means we have to do so is to tear them apart, openly before the eyes of all who may be attracted to them, with the time-honoured weapons of reason and sharp polemic. Before the informed gaze of almost any observer, radical Islamism wilts like the absurd fantasy it is. The escalation of state repression has the paradoxical effect of making it *more* attractive - it offers a false sheen of attraction to the least liberatory politics imaginable.

Secondly, and most importantly: if they can do it to him, *they can do it to us*. Abu Qatada is not a threat to western civilisation: communism, and the organised self-activity of the working class more generally, *is* a real threat to the people who spuriously claim to defend that civilisation. The examples from history are innumerable - we might mention the Public Order Act of 1936, ostensibly aimed at Mosley's Blackshirts (and criminally supported by parts of the left for that reason), but in practice employed overwhelmingly to suppress the left.

More recently, there was the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. The story of that struggle was the story of a state machine in full, almost military mobilisation against the strikers. Pickets were attacked with incredible violence; the internal movement of National Union of Mineworkers activists was restricted; the secret state tapped every relevant phone; and the BBC, along with the rest of the media, happily parroted Number 10's line on every clash.

This looked very familiar to those, like this paper's forerunner, *The Leninist*, who had any experience of the contemporaneous Irish liberation struggle. The machinery of oppression, designed in the laboratory of the Six Counties with (again) the criminal silence of parts of the official left, was brought home with terrifying enthusiasm and brutal effectiveness.

It is not hard to imagine a situation in the near future where struggle between the authorities and the left reaches such a pitch that an unlucky rabble-raising speaker, invited over from Greece or Egypt, finds herself peremptorily dispatched to the slammer, facing deportation for a slew of phantom crimes, amid the screeching hysteria of a pliant media. Indeed, the more successful the left is, the more likely such scenarios become.

Abu Qatada must be defended, not because his views are our views, but because his freedom is our freedom. ●

James Turley

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What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
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Abu Qatada: troublesome priest

weekly worker

Put NHS under democratic control

Tories wobbling over health bill

Using the argument that there is "too much decision-making led by bureaucracy rather than clinicians", David Cameron insists he will ride the opposition and stay the course on the government's Health and Social Care Bill. The bill will further undermine the national health service through introducing more competition, outsourcing and private facilities within the NHS itself.

Cynically claiming he wants to give "power to doctors and nurses", Cameron points to the new right granted to general practitioners to commission services. But it will be the patients who will be told to choose between rival 'service providers' - GPs will not be permitted to advise them, as this could "distort competition". So, instead of doctors pulling together with other healthworkers to provide the best possible treatment, their role will be to watch impotently while ill-informed patients flounder between various (perhaps unsatisfactory) options.

No wonder that GPs are up in arms - just like every organisation representing those who work in the NHS. For the unions and professional associations it will mean *less* control by their members over the way they do their job. It is true that organisations like the British Medical Association can be described as "vested interests" - part of the "medical establishment", as Conservative supporters of the bill like to point out. But their leaders and most members are hardly radicals - many are natural Tory voters. They do, however, have professional pride, yet they know that the proposals will severely compromise healthcare, weaken the NHS and compromise their ability to do their job.

Much as health secretary Andrew Lansley denies that the bill is about privatisation, that is exactly what it foresees. NHS wards and even hospitals will close, allowing private competitors to take over. According to the pro-NHS Health Emergency campaign, "A group of general practitioners in Yorkshire has already pre-empted the enactment of the bill by deciding, unilaterally, that certain minor surgical procedures will no longer be covered by the NHS, then offering to provide the treatment privately through a company they own."¹ Clearly there are some GPs who have decided they might as well see what is in it for them.

Another campaign, Keep Our NHS Public, has publicised the example of US consultancy firm McKinsey, which helped draft the 'reforms'. McKinsey has taken advantage of its role to share the information it has gathered with private health providers. No doubt additional information was gleaned from senior staff at Monitor, the NHS regulator, who were entertained and even sent on junkets abroad at McKinsey's expense.

Meanwhile the department of health is sitting on the 'risk register' it compiled, which apparently warns of longer waiting lists and patient deaths should the bill pass. The elimination of 'bureaucratic layers' will also entail the merger (and closure) of services. Although it is claimed that it is mainly management that will no longer



Not safe in coalition hands

be required, many of those made redundant will be clerical workers, while large numbers of front-line clinicians will be forced to relocate.

The Tories are deeply divided over the bill in view of the resentment it has generated among professionals and sections of the middle class. This has been reflected in several setbacks in the Lords, where no fewer than 130 changes have been voted through - although the bill's central trajectory remains intact. It has also been reflected on the Conservative Home website, which declared: "The NHS was long the Conservative Party's Achilles heel. David Cameron's greatest political achievement as leader of the opposition was to neutralise health as an issue. The greatest mistake

of his time as prime minister has been to put it back at the centre of political debate."²

The conclusion? The "bill could cost the Conservative Party the next election. Cameron must kill it." Or at least so says Tim Montgomerie. It was Conservative Home that revealed the fact that three cabinet ministers have been giving briefings calling for Lansley to be replaced. One Downing Street source was quoted as saying he should be "taken out and shot".

There is no doubt that Lansley is in big trouble, with Tory MPs accusing him of failing to "sell" his 'reforms' adequately - as if it was all just a matter of PR. It is said that Conservatives in marginal seats have been among those pressing him to stay away from local

hospitals. They fear that any hint of association with the beleaguered health secretary might cost them their seats.

And it goes without saying that the Liberal Democrats are more than concerned. Deputy leader Simon Hughes called for Lansley to be replaced. Referring to leader Nick Clegg, one Lib Dem insider is widely quoted as saying: "Nick is simply not going to be able to keep the party on side."

There has been talk of a cabinet reshuffle, with health being handed over to a Lib Dem (who would no doubt 'modify' the Health and Social Care Bill out of existence) in exchange for Vince Cable being replaced by a Tory as business secretary. But to do as Tim Montgomerie demands would be a humiliation for Cameron, who has come out four-square behind both the bill and the minister responsible for it. However, if Tory grumbles become outright rebellion, he may well have no choice. If that happens, it will be the tensions within his own party, more than ructions among the Lib Dems, that will force his hand.

The *Weekly Worker* has strongly disagreed with the continual statements of, for example, the Socialist Workers Party that the coalition government is "weak", simply because it is made up of two parties traditionally proposing different priorities within British capitalism. But the fact that they have come together in defence of their *common* interests at a time of crisis is not only presented as a strength, but actually is.

That is reinforced when you examine the forces at work within the coalition. Short of a miracle, the Liberal Democrats are facing wipe-out at the next election, because a huge proportion of their voters have deserted them in disgust following the Lib Dems' adoption of diametrically opposite policies to those they promised before the 2010 election - particularly in regard to cuts and tuition fees. Which means that the Lib Dems have no alternative but to stick it out. They cannot risk a government defeat and the calling of an early election. Better to hang on and hope that -

somehow - things will turn around.

The leaders are, of course, more clear in this than some of their backbenchers, who perhaps have less to lose and for whom the health bill is viewed as a betrayal too far. With the Lib Dem spring conference coming up, there will be no letting up on the pressure on Clegg. After all, if even Conservatives are expressing disquiet about the bill ...

The Lansley bill undoubtedly represents a devastating attack on the NHS. Yet our determination to defeat it should not lead us to pretend that the health service is just fine. The Tories' identification of a bureaucracy that gobbles up resources, and results in patient care and treatment that is tardy and inefficient, is not exactly inaccurate. *All* publicly owned services and industries under capitalism tend to be characterised by those failings. That is why Health Emergency, whose campaign director is John Lister of Socialist Resistance, can be criticised for its tendency to defend the NHS *as it is*. It is probably true that "the NHS delivers very well in comparisons with other health services" and the UK's record on, for example, diabetes is "among the best in the world".³ But should we be satisfied with that?

While the Tories' 'solution' of replacing bureaucracy with the market is such an obvious non-starter that it needs no further comment, that does not mean we should just leave well alone. The NHS needs to be brought under the direct, democratic control of its workers and users - yes, "power to doctors and nurses", as well as porters, cleaners, secretaries ...

That really would be a way to overcome bureaucracy ●

Peter Manson

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Notes

1. www.healthemergency.org.uk/pdf/FAQ-HASCB-090112.pdf.
2. <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/thetorydiary/2012/02/the-unnecessary-and-unpopular-nhs-bill-could-cost-the-conservative-party-the-next-election-cameron-m.html>.
3. www.healthemergency.org.uk/pdf/FAQ-HASCB-090112.pdf.

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