

weekly worker



**Mark Serwotka and PCS:
March 28 strike is not enough.
Electoral opposition needed**

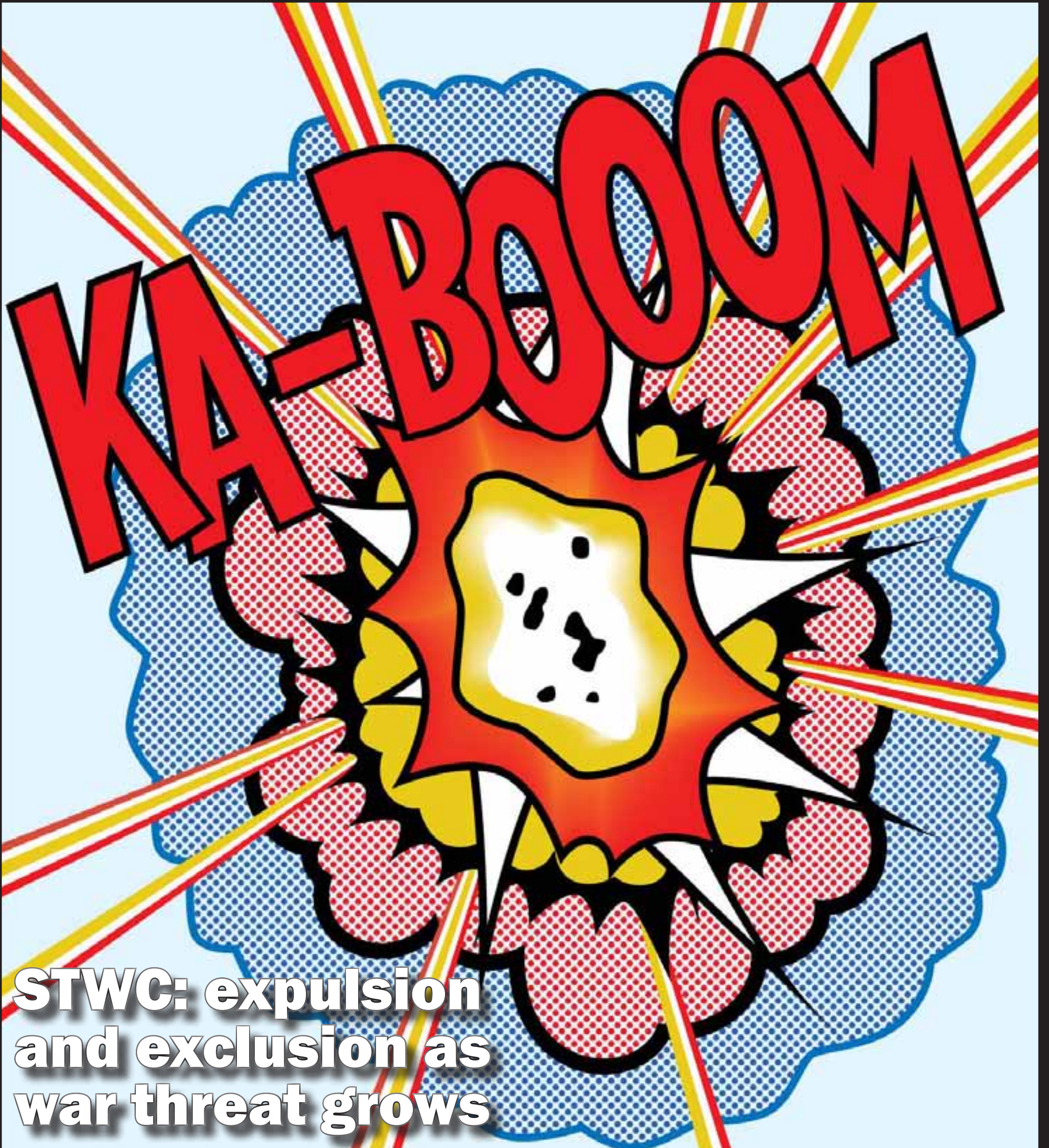
- Greece in revolt
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LETTERS



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

Left cover

It seems that Red Scribe still doesn't get it and insists on providing a 'left' cover for anti-Semitism in the Palestine solidarity movement (Letters, March 1).

I have no doubt that the cause of holocaust denial in the Palestine solidarity movement lies in the Zionist misuse of the holocaust to justify the oppression of the Palestinians. I was a friend of Frances Clarke Lowes, who was expelled from the national and the local Palestinian Solidarity Campaign. But, once he started on the road to questioning the holocaust, the first thing he did to justify his positions was to reach for neo-Nazi pamphlets and articles from the Institute of Historical Review. Frances came to adopt the whole baggage of anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews and that is when I broke from him personally and politically.

Very few Jewish anti-Zionists adopt the position of people like Paul Eisen. Eisen is a fully signed-up supporter of holocaust denial and an anti-Semite, both politically and personally. In a post on the PeacePalestine blog (January 13 2008), he explained how "The Ukrainian peasant listens about why the Jewish tavern keeper, tax farmer, landlord or whatever is doing what he's doing ... But the time comes when he's just had enough. He lifts his axe and splits the Jew's head - it's what they call a pogrom." Writing in his pamphlet Holocaust wars, Eisen describes how neo-Nazi "Ernst Zundel was once involved in the publication of a book called The Hitler we loved and why, but Ernst Zundel was not the only German who loved Hitler and is probably not the only German who still loves Hitler." Eisen is a full-fledged apologist for fascism. So what if he's a proud Jew? So were the Zionists who collaborated with Hitler.

Clearly, if you are a Palestinian and someone comes and takes your land, expels and massacres your neighbours and family, all in the name of the Nazi holocaust and Jewish oppression, then you may react by denying the holocaust. That is an understandable, but politically backward reaction, and different from holocaust denial in Europe. But the birth of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in the mid-1960s and the development of anti-Zionist Palestinian resistance organisations broke from the tired anti-Semitic rhetoric of the collaborationist Arab regimes. Red Scribe, Atzmon and Eisen want to go back to that.

That is why opposing Zionism in the same way as the ANC opposed the anti-white racism of the 'one settler, one bullet' approach of the Pan-African Congress makes sense. Imperialism seeks to divide and rule, to sow the seeds of racist confusion. It is a pity that the misnamed Red Scribe goes along with this.

Red Scribe shows how alienated he is from the workers' movement when he describes a clear differentiation between support for the Palestinians and holocaust denial as an "opportunistic accommodation to soft Zionist sentiments". The opposition of the labour movement to holocaust denial has nothing to do with Zionism and everything to do with Hitlerism's butchery of the German workers' movement and its bloody record. That Red Scribe dismisses this as soft Zionism demonstrates where he is coming from. Yes, much to the chagrin of the Zionists, British trade unions have begun breaking from Zionism and cutting their links with Zionist institutions. I am not in the business of trying to persuade them that they were

wrong and playing the Zionist game!

Red Scribe also fails to understand my comparison with Marcus Garvey. I was describing the reaction to anti-Semitism of Jews in 1881 with the Odessa and other pogroms when some turned to Zionism. Clearly they were oppressed, but their reaction was a wrong one and mainly confined to the petty bourgeois Red Scribes of the day. It was a separatist reaction to anti-Semitism. If Zionism hadn't achieved state power, it would have just been another historical curiosity, like Garvey. Red Scribe's enthusiasm to exonerate the most reactionary elements of the Palestine solidarity movement overwhelms his power of analysis or comparison.

I don't think it is for Red Scribe to question the democratic credentials of Omar Barghouti. Likewise, I've never accused Hamas of being anti-Semitic. The Zionists who helped create Hamas now point to the 'anti-Semitism' of the Frankenstein they helped bring about!

There is nothing red about someone who tries to excuse racism on the grounds that it impedes solidarity with the oppressed. That is an old labour movement tradition, symbolised by Henry Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation. Support for the Palestinians will not be won on the basis of Gilad Atzmon's and Paul Eisen's holocaust denial sophistry and their rehabilitation of European fascism.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Wrong, wrong

Paul Smith is wrong, both theoretically and historically, on a number of points. The "chief source of state revenue used to finance state provision in the imperialist countries" was not "derived from the export of finance capital abroad and the extraction of surplus value from the labour-power of African, Asian and Latin American workers in the colonies or semi-colonies" (Letters, February 23).

The first country to develop such systems was Germany, which at the time did not have such colonies. When advanced economies did begin to export capital and extract surplus value, it was overwhelmingly not to the places that Paul mentions, but to other advanced economies. Fordism, which provided higher wages for workers, better conditions and a degree of welfare, did not obtain the resources to do so by the means Paul sets out, but merely as a result of being able to extract higher levels of relative surplus value. Welfarism is merely Fordism at a macroeconomic level.

Paul's argument is refuted by his own evidence. He is right that "the high point of welfare expansion [was] in the 1950s and 1960s". That is true, but that is precisely the time when European colonialism was being dismantled! Paul continues that this period involved "imposition of bureaucratic controls over workers' activity". But the very opposite was true. This was the period of the massive growth of the shop stewards' movement, rank-and-file organisation and spontaneous strikes. In other words, at the very time when colonialism was being dismantled, and any potential revenue from it was drying up, workers were seeing both higher real wages and a higher social wage.

Paul argues: "Labour-power exchanged for state revenue is no longer productive of value or surplus value." This is not true. As Engels puts it in Anti-Dühring, "The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist,

the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers - proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head" (p360).

It is not true that "State revenue also subsidises the value of labour-power through free education and health". Neither education nor health are free. They are paid for by collective payments from workers in the form of various taxes and national insurance payments, along with prescription charges and so on. In fact, given the bureaucratic and inefficient nature of that provision in Britain compared with, say, socialised systems in Europe, it is likely that workers are actually being overcharged for what they receive.

Paul continues: "Presently, the ruling class has abandoned the funding of state provision as a strategy for the survival of capitalism. It is attempting to restore the conditions that existed prior to the rise of imperialism in the 19th century." That is clearly not true, as every developed economy has a state sector accounting for around 40%-50% of GDP. In most of these economies, spending on welfare provision, education, health, etc is continuing to rise. Labour trebled spending on the NHS, for example.

Finally, Paul says: "Some of the roles of these parties will be to counter propaganda that denies capitalism is in decline." But it is not propaganda that capitalism is not in decline; it is an easily observable fact. I have provided the facts of the scale of the boom of the global capitalist economy previously. The simple fact is that this illustrates not just that capitalism is in a boom at the moment, but that it is the most powerful we have ever seen.

Arthur Bough
email

Not political?

Jim Moody (Letters, March 1) makes a number of criticisms of my latest article on the Murdoch scandal ('Murdoch fights back', February 23).

I feel that on many matters he has simply missed my point. His analogy with the spying of the secret state apparatuses implies that I throw my hands up and condemn criticisms of News International's phone-hacking as so many Canutian admonitions against the inevitable order of things. My point is, in fact, stronger than that: it is good and proper for journalists, where the ends are justifiable, to resort to underhand methods, including the full range of Rebekah Brooks's repertoire - voicemail hacking, suborning police officers and all the rest. (Borrowing the Met's horses is less obviously useful to the pursuit of the truth, admittedly.)

The question is, rather, whether the ends are justified. Certainly, I do not endorse the antics of the 'fake sheikh' and his brave exposés of - shock! horror! - the cocaine use of the rich and famous; or paying police and ex-police to get the addresses (and perhaps murky pasts) of ephemeral celebrities. Yet it is necessary to challenge the predominant narrative of this case. First of all, it was Clive Goodman and Glenn Mulcaire who had been Very Naughty Boys; now, the 'corporate person' of News International is a Very Naughty Boy itself, guilty of determinate actions which in their essence are crimes.

Yet it was not the means that violated 'press ethics', but the ends. The point of the free press - the very reason why anybody thought it would be a good idea in the first place - is that it would arm the masses with the knowledge needed to become citizens in the full sense of the word: ie, people afforded a degree of sovereign power as individuals and as a collectivity. It was, in the ironic but nonetheless apposite words of Finley Peter Dunne,

to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". Just as it deforms and abuses science, just as it turns 'democratic representatives' into pliant stooges, capitalism utterly debases the notional mission of the free press.

The political point here, in a sense, brings us back to the beginning. The state wishes, to use Jim's words, to "embrace fully the public rage" over this issue to 'bring the press to heel'. It will never miss an opportunity to do so - as the farrago over David Kelly showed many years ago. We, as democrats, want the opposite - we want a press with as much bite as possible, and every means of attack at its disposal, for the more awful of truths are hidden in some dark places. For communists, this is only possible by sweeping away the moguls and the cartels; and it precisely requires us, whatever the scale of public anger, to reorient the 'ethical' question away from phone-hacking and towards the abandonment of the free press's democratic aim.

For Jim, it seems, the personal must always be private - even in the case, for example, of a rightwing politician explicitly standing for election as a family man upholding religious 'moral values', while covering up his own visits to prostitutes. Jim says that to counter this type of hypocrisy is to miss the point, since such behaviour "makes not an iota of difference politically". Yet the hypocrisy concerns a political platform that the politician is advocating and perhaps attempting to force on others.

Comrade Moody recommends a 2008 Weekly Worker article, in which, he says, "there was nothing that suggested the private was political". But I find that the article in question makes exactly the same point as I have made four years later:

"Scurrilous details of individuals' private lives, in the absence of harm to others, are irrelevant to what they do in public and to the political positions that they may hold. If individuals wish to keep personal matters confidential, then, unless there is demonstrable harm to others or political hypocrisy in what they are doing privately, it must remain that way. However, should someone's political positions jar hypocritically with their private life, then privacy cannot be sacrosanct (eg, publicly anti-gay, but privately cruising gay bars; publicly vaunting religiously sanctioned 'family values', but privately having affairs or using prostitutes)" ('Max Mosley's morals and ours', July 17 2008).

James Turley
London

Quick fix

It's interesting that Hillel Ticktin's robustly articulated article ('The decline of money', March 1) does not appear to have a specific solution for the quandary of mega-trillions stagnating in banks - aside from the implicit understanding that we may agree on: that the common and truly democratic ownership of banks would probably put an end to this.

The article is, of course, analysing the evolution of money and the growth of fictitious capital and does not propose a solution per se. Until the revolution though, we do need a quick fix, so perhaps a short-term one would be to withdraw money from banks en masse and for those who have spare cash to stash it at home or leave it with credit unions. This would be enough to unsettle the capitalist class and the resulting reaction might reveal a solution to the problem that was not evident before.

The sudden withdrawal of millions of people's money from the banks might trigger a rash of unforeseen events. The problem of salaries and benefits being made directly into

bank accounts could be resolved by the use of building societies - at least in the short term, if people's banks could not be established quickly enough. To take this one step further we would then need to start to push for a money-free society, but one that had an inbuilt mechanism to prevent the establishment of a new layer of privilege and elitism that bedevilled the Soviet Union and still presumably the existent neo-Stalinist countries.

The removal of money from the neo-capitalists (as we could perhaps call these banks and institutions that 'guard' money), as well as the twin act of removing the ownership of the means of production from the old-fashioned capitalist ruling class, would be a good way to start building our communist future.

Eleanor Lakew
London

Disdainful

As my own thoughts have been revolutionised by comrade Hillel Ticktin over the years, with his idea of the USSR as a formless form, an historical anomaly - and perhaps this as a theoretical analysis is a key to working class unity within our world. I ask him and his comrades around the *Weekly Worker* and *Critique* to consider the idea that unipolar imperialism is 10 times more out of time than this single, isolated political counterrevolution that was barely a part of the world market at the time.

It is important to consider 'full spectral dominance' and how this is related to fictitious capital in the here and now. As a matter of open ideological struggle, I have mentioned 'currency wars' twice in my correspondence - now thrice. Do communists disdain to hide their views?

Paul Anderson
email

'Child' labour

I have to say I was grossly disappointed, though I shouldn't really have been surprised, by Lindsey German's contribution as apparent spokesperson for the left on the Vine programme, on Friday February 24, when the subject was the 'child labour' employed by western companies making sportswear and so on. The call was to ban 'children' from working.

Utterly predictably, given her political tendency's inclination to tell people what to do and to know best what people really need, Lindsey was supporting the call. This she did regardless of what the actual workers themselves thought of it, or the impact such a move would have on income, poverty and health standards. These companies, she added, should not only not employ 'children', but also pay for their education. She was asked by Vine why would Nike or Nestlé, who wouldn't be employing these young people, do that? She really thought they just should, and I wondered if she was suggesting they form governments in those countries and take over social and welfare care of the populations? The practical didn't matter, of course; we were being self-righteous and cleansing middle class consciences here. I couldn't get in on the discussion, but, had I done so, these are the points I would have made.

Firstly, this notion of 'childhood', which middle class moralists use as a major instrument of control, is now being extended to any young adult under the age of 18. Britain is to face in 2013 legislation which effectively makes anyone under 19 a 'child' and their freedom of work and lifestyle options will be massively controlled. You must stay at school or do a job which has a recognised apprenticeship. Leaving school and

working in a hairdresser, café or wherever will no longer be allowed by law. Obviously, with manufacturing on death’s door, there are very few such apprenticeships, so you will stay at school and be regarded as a child.

‘Motherhood’, long despised on the left and never defended as a lifestyle choice, will be declared illegal in the sense that a young mother, even a young married mother, will not be able to stay home and bring up her children through the first years of their lives before they go into full-time nursery education. So young adult workers of 16 and 17 are now being called ‘children’, young married people will be strictly regulated as to their ability to work and bring in an income and to raise their families. Such draconian and authoritarian attacks on individual and collective civil liberties will be defended in exactly the way Lindsey did because someone else knows what’s best for you and you will do what we say.

Anyone who works in mainstream education today will tell you that, whereas masses and masses of young, non- academic pupils can’t wait to leave, and at one time would have joined the labour market and looked for jobs, skills and apprenticeships, seeking the independent life of a young adult, this forthcoming law will close that option. It will force them to stay confined in an institution which they hate and have no interest in, and they will resist by means fair and foul attempts to make them conform to it. This is actually enforced detention without trial or charge, and will come at the expense of all those academic students who wish to get on and study. They will have their educational environment disrupted and made unpleasant by people who do not wish to be there.

One wonders also how this whole draconian nightmare will be enforced. School or jail? Police in the classroom and schoolyard? Snatch squads for absentee young adults? Children seized from young mothers if they don’t conform?

In many countries in the ‘developing world’, young people (unless from very rich families) currently leave school at 12, which is the end of the normal school period, and start work. Why on earth do Lindsey and her ilk think they have the right to demand this no longer happens? If they are to be banned from working until they are 18, how will they and their families live? It is quite absurd to think multinational firms who no longer employ such workers will pay for their education and welfare just because previously they would have employed them. There is an issue of cultural and social imperialism here. Who says that just because the USA and Britain now have an obsession with rendering young adults into children, entirely different cultural traditions and social values in the east should fall into line?

My dad started work at 12 here in Britain, as did all of his friends. I left school at 14 (and, had I been allowed, would have left earlier) and started work at 15. We were young workers, not ‘children’, and while inexperience and foolishness requires special care and tuition in the workplace, the idea that either his generation or mine would be banned from employment would have been seen as totally unwarranted and unjust, which, of course, it is. Successive British governments have raised the age at which compulsory detention in school is enforced, until we reached, one would have thought, a reasonable benchmark of 16. Young workers currently are employed at 16. Few, if any, of them think of themselves as ‘children’. I was working when I was 15 and happy to be doing so and earning a wage. I actually applied to become a boy bugler in the Royal Marines at 14, and only my developing

political consciousness stopped me. I did not think then and do not think now that I was too young to have that choice.

While it is vital that we force the multinationals to conform to international standards of health and safety, hours of labour, shift working, time off for educational programmes, healthcare programmes and union rights - all of which are achievable and, more importantly, acceptable to the workers involved - imposing outside bans on working on impoverished third world people desperate for work and income is, I suggest, both impractical and morally wrong. It puts me in mind of the Victorian outrage over child labour in the coal mines pre-1870 (children of six and seven years old upwards, working 10 to 12 or more hours per day). They cared not why the child worked in the mine or mill in the first place; only that they, in order to solve their middle class consciences, should be banned from doing so. The fact was that people were so impoverished that all the family, including the youngest, were forced to work. The ban, applied without any imposition of a higher wage rate for those over 12 years old, literally meant the family starved, but the middle class drawing room was satisfied they had done good.

Poverty and destitution increased after the ban - the legislation hadn’t addressed the problem of low wages. Higher wages would mean children were no longer forced by the whip of poverty to work to support older family members. A simultaneous demand for school and/or skill provision could have been made, but there was simply a blanket ban on employment, with the social context entirely ignored. Certainly, a ban on child workers was in order, as part of an overall social welfare reform programme, but not as a magic bullet in isolation.

In the case of third world society, we need to understand what their norms and accepted cultures of work are. Twelve seems fairly commonly accepted as the age that youngsters start work. That should perhaps be accepted (by outside western observers looking in) as a normal, non-academic life pattern which they would choose at this stage to continue with. However, a graduating scale of hours, educational facilities taking over where the formal school years leave off, health and safety and special supervision measures for young workers should be demanded. This would be far preferable to this social/cultural/moral imperialism, which seeks to impose what are actually minority values on the world, regardless of conditions and the wishes of the workers who live there.

John Temple
 email

Cut out cutters

It is with regret that the Rugby branch of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition announces that it has ended its engagement with the Green Party as part of Rugby Against the Cuts. This has immediate implications for electoral arrangements, as outlined below.

Our main reason for this is the recent decision of the Green Party controlling group on Brighton council to promote and implement £35 million of cuts, which will lead to redundancies and devastate local public services. Tusc, like Rugby Against the Cuts, is against all cuts and believes they should be opposed at every level.

It is politically untenable for an anti-cuts organisation to promote anti-cuts election candidates from a party which, when it has power, implements cuts. The Green Party is clearly not an anti-cuts party and, although individual members may say they are against public spending cuts, as some did in Brighton, and some do in Rugby, if elected they would be in no position

to stand up against them, given their party’s national policy.

This will mean that Tusc, standing as Tusc Against Cuts, will field anti-cuts candidates in as many Rugby wards as possible, regardless of whether Green candidates stand or not, and we will clearly not be working cooperatively with the Green Party in the 2012 council elections.

Tusc has a very firm set of policies to oppose the cuts, ratified at a national conference in January, meaning that any elected Tusc councillor shall under no circumstances support cuts in public services, unlike the u-turn recently made by the Green Party in Brighton.

Pete McLaren
 Rugby Tusc

Labour move

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy held its annual general meeting on Saturday February 18 at Conway Hall in central London. As usual, the well-attended meeting generated much discussion on the way forward for the left in the Labour Party.

Reporting on the national executive, NEC member Christine Shawcroft said that the election of a new party general secretary, Iain McNicol, was to be welcomed, and the trade union NEC members were a vast improvement upon previous years.

Kelvin Hopkins, MP for Luton North, gave the Parliamentary Labour Party report. Kelvin believed that Ed Balls and Ed Miliband were more successful when they are forced to move to the left on particular issues, as proved by the policy on News International and NHS reforms. The PLP was now much improved and a strong stand against the coalition’s cuts could win the next election. Labour needs policies to expand construction and public services and to create new jobs. David Miliband’s attack on social provision in the New Statesman recently had shown why Ed was the preferred leader for the party.

Seumas Milne from The Guardian led the debate on the way forward. Seumas, an old friend of CLPD, said the Labour left had been marginalised over the last 30 years, but, although the neoliberal model of Thatcher and New Labour was now broken and discredited, the left does not automatically benefit.

Mick Loates
 CLPD

What next?

With the next round of pension strike coming up on March 28, Unite the Resistance, the Socialist Workers Party-dominated anti-cuts front, held a meeting in Sheffield to tackle the subject last week. Unfortunately there appears to have been some bureaucratic shenanigans by the SWP - it seems that some trades council members had sought to ensure there were more rank and file speakers rather than just the list of union officers and so on apparently decided on in advance by the SWP.

The meeting was attended by around 30 people - a disappointing number, given the participation of most of the left and labour movement in the city. Comrades were united in trying to make the upcoming strike a strong one, but there was little agreement on what would come after. A PCS union member pointed out from the floor that these one-day actions will not get our pensions back, especially if there is ever decreasing union participation. We should have anticipated a sell-out and prepared the rank and file for this.

While this comment was viewed as “pessimistic”, in the absence of a political strategy, it seems to me that ‘realistic’ and ‘sensible’ might have been better descriptions.

Michael Copestake
 Sheffield

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>.

Northern Communist Forum

Saturday March 10, 3.30pm: ‘War, sanctions and resistance’. Speaker: Yassamine Mather. Room 3, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Organised by CPGB Northern Communists: <http://northerncommunists.wordpress.com>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 11, 5pm: ‘The falling rate of profit’, using Ben Fine’s and Alfredo Saad-Filho’s *Marx’s Capital* as a study guide. Caxton House, 129 Saint John’s Way London N19. Followed by weekly political report. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 13, 6.15pm: ‘The wives of the sun and moon’ (Arapaho Indians). 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.

Marx’s Capital

Thursday March 8, 5.30pm: Reading group, Open University, Milton Keynes. Discussing *Capital* chapter 2 and first part of chapter 3. Organised by Milton Keynes CPGB: milton.keynes@cpgb.org.uk.

Wellingborough diggers festival

Saturday March 10, 7.30pm: Social, Diana’s, Finedon Road, Wellingborough. Featuring: Leon Rosselson, Michael Buchanan, The Geripatricks. £10, £8 concessions. Organised by Independent Socialists of Wellingborough: <http://wellsocialists.org.uk>.

Right to Work

Sunday March 11, 12noon: Emergency forum, Canterbury and Hughes Parry Halls, 12-26 Cartwright Gardens, London WC1. Speakers: Owen Jones, John McDonnell MP, Tony Kearns (CWU). ‘Austerity and resistance’. £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Organised by Right to Work: <http://righttowork.org.uk>.

Socialist films

Sunday March 11, 11am: Screenings, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Eyal Sivan’s *Jaffa: the orange’s clockwork* (2010, 86 minutes); Serge Avédikian’s *Barking Island* (France 2010, 15 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Racism, the state and the police

Monday March 12, 7pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers: Bob Crow (RMT), Weyman Bennett. Organised by RMT: www.rmtlondoncalling.org.

Defend Council Housing

Tuesday March 13, 6.30pm: Council lobby, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes. Lobby for secure, affordable, decent housing. Organised by Defend Council Housing: www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk.

Socialist study

Thursday March 15, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. Studying Hillel Ticktin’s ‘The political economy of socialism’ from *What will a socialist society be like?* Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

Unite the Resistance

Thursday March 15, 7pm: Public Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Speakers: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Steve Kelly (Unite). Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

Palestine and the uprisings

Saturday March 17, 9am: Conference, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1. Discussing the location of Palestine in the Arab uprisings. Entry: £12 (£10 concessions). Booking required. Organised by SOAS Palestine Society: www.soaspalsoc.org.

Cooperative Schools

Wednesday March 21, 7pm: Public meeting, Carnegie Hall, Central Library, Northampton. Speaker: David Boston. Discussing cooperative solutions to education issues. Organised by Cooperative Party: nptncoopparty@yahoo.co.uk.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Wednesday March 21, 7.15pm: Rally, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Launch of Tusc GLA campaign with Bob Crow. Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.tusc.org.uk.

Roma nation day

Sunday April 8, 12pm: Demonstration, Hyde Park Corner, London W1. International solidarity to defend the Romani communities. Organised by Traveller Solidarity Network: travellersolidarity@riseup.net.

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.

STWC

Expulsion and exclusion as war threat grows

The SWP no longer controls Stop the War, writes **Peter Manson**, but its successors still practise SWP-style bureaucracy



In the face of war, unity needed

Last weekend's Stop the War Coalition conference demonstrated that, while the anti-war movement has undoubtedly seen a big drop in mobilised support, there remains a hard core of local activists still meeting and organising. There are STWC branches engaged in some kind of activity in more than 50 urban centres and a fair proportion of them were represented at the March 3 conference in London.

Previously these branches were dominated by Socialist Workers Party comrades, but today the anti-war movement is way down the SWP's list of priorities. I would say that out of the 200-plus people gathered at the University of London Union only a handful were SWP. This was unsurprising, since the nearest the organisation came to mobilising its comrades was when in the internal *Party Notes* Judith Orr asked those who were going to the conference to contact her (February 27). In fact the latest *Party Notes* - used routinely

to urge comrades to rally to the SWP's current priorities - mentions neither the STWC nor the burgeoning imperialist threats against Syria and Iran.

For its part *Socialist Worker* (March 10) carries a very brief report, in which it understates the numbers attending by about 50 (the STWC itself overstates them by the same amount). But, apart from its 200-word report, *Socialist Worker* has nothing on the war threats: the SWP is very much in anti-cuts, anti-workfare mode, with comrades being directed to actions and events organised by its fronts, Unite the Resistance and Right to Work.

All this is very much connected to the fact that the SWP's former control of Stop the War was abruptly ended when the three comrades who ran it - Lindsey German, Chris Nineham and John Rees - were ousted from the SWP central committee and eventually left to form Counterfire. And it was Counterfire that had

the largest contingent of any left group on Saturday - a position that is reflected on the new 40-strong leadership, where Counterfire has six representatives, followed by the SWP and Communist Party of Britain, with three each.

While some supporters of Socialist Resistance, Socialist Action, Respect and so on were also present, it seemed to me that the overwhelming majority were local activists of no particular political affiliation. However, the absence of a large SWP bloc under a three-line whip has not undermined the steering committee's domination, with conference overwhelmingly voting down the slightest challenge to any aspect of its political strategy. This is undoubtedly because comrades German, Nineham and Rees continue to pitch their appeal to the soft, liberal left, and this green, pacifist milieu in return feels it must demonstrate its faith and loyalty in the leadership.

That was a pity, because there are

two, linked, aspects of the STWC approach that particularly need challenging.

'Neutral' on Iran

First, its tendency, at the very least, towards sympathy with the Iranian theocratic regime; and, secondly, its continued refusal, on completely spurious grounds, to permit the affiliation of Hands Off the People of Iran - Hopi, of course, consistently opposes the Iranian regime, while at the same time recognising that the main enemy is imperialism.

Although the STWC leadership claims that it takes a neutral position on the question of the regime, its choice of platform speakers says otherwise. Obviously the conference was dominated by the imperialist threats against Iran and it was obvious that authoritative speakers were needed to put the anti-war case. But it was Abbas Edalat of the pro-regime Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran (Casmii)

who was invited rather than someone like John McDonnell or Yassamine Mather of Hopi.

To be fair, Edalat's contribution was for the most part sound. He compared the current imperialist manoeuvres against Iran with those that led to the overthrow of the nationalist prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1953. Back then the west used the same arguments, claiming Iran posed a threat to "international security". But he concluded by saying that, "whatever you think of the internal policies" of Iran, it was undeniable that the 1979 revolution had "seriously challenged the domination of the imperialists". Obviously then, our sympathies could only be with the current 'anti-imperialist' regime.

Likewise Casmii's motion - 'Western neo-colonial intervention and the right of self-determination of Iranian people' - was largely supportable, except for the final phrase, which declared that, in the absence of western interference, the Iranian people are "perfectly capable of solving any internal problems themselves" (my emphasis). I suppose Casmii might accept that the brutal repression of workers, socialists, democrats, women, gays and national minorities might just about qualify as one of those 'internal problems'. But Casmii prefers mealy-mouthed diplomatic equivocation.

The big problem with such speeches - apart from the fact that they constitute a gross betrayal of the Iranian struggle for freedom - is that they allow the warmongers to portray the STWC, with some justification, as mere apologists for the regime. This completely undermines our campaigning potential, since no-one in their right mind can accept the 'progressive' credentials of such a ruthless dictatorship. By contrast the Hopi position - no to imperialist war and sanctions, no to the regime - would hugely strengthen our hand.

But George Galloway's concluding speech was far worse than Casmii's in this regard. Sounding like a personal spokesperson for the more unhinged elements of the Tehran regime, he stated that, if Israel attacks Iran, then the thousands of US troops in the region would find themselves "on the receiving end" of the inevitable (divine?) retribution. "Iran will respond within an hour with all its might," he ranted. All the region's oilfields "will be on fire" within that same 60 minutes and the Straits of Hormuz will be closed. The subsequent oil crisis will trigger global "economic collapse".

Who would have thought that the gang headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had such destructive power in its hands? In fact it was almost enough to make you think that some of the propaganda about the Iranian 'threat to peace and security' had been true all along. I hope Galloway does not base his campaign in the forthcoming Bradford West by-election on such inanities (he announced his candidature to the meeting).

Don't take sides

With such a crude pro-regime speech receiving a generally positive response,

readers will not be surprised to learn that the motion put by Communist Students - which called for “active solidarity with the Iranian people, who are fighting not just the sanctions and the war threats, but also their own theocracy” - shamefully had only a small minority in support.

The vote followed the intervention on behalf of the officers group from STWC treasurer Steve Bell of Socialist Action. Ignoring the fact that the coalition’s current pro-regime position is not only divisive, but counterproductive, he alleged that to advocate “regime change” would be “to split the anti-war movement”. Any change of government must result from “a decision of the people of the country itself” (we agree; but whatever happened to the idea that socialists should take sides with the oppressed?). Furthermore, comrade Bell found the use of the term ‘theocracy’ “unpleasant” - the implication was that the CS motion had Islamophobic undertones.

This theme was taken up by Tansy Hoskins of Counterfire later on. She treated us to a quiz by asking which three countries have a head of state that is also head of the established religion. Apart from Iran, the other two are the Vatican and the United Kingdom. So the theocracy isn’t so bad then.

I was fortuitously able to answer this when I was called to speak in the hour or so when local activists (like comrade Hoskins) were being asked to share their campaigning experiences with us. Discussion of those tiresome motions had been limited to one speaker for and one against, with no exceptions, but the chair for the session, Chris Nineham, called “Peter Manson from Wandsworth Stop the War” to the microphone (I had put in a request to *oppose* a motion from Wandsworth - see below).

I pointed out that the meeting was being run in a way that prevented the clarification of differences. Instead of curtailing debate and encouraging local (and some not so local) anti-war activists to say whatever they wanted in a completely structureless way, why not actually focus on the areas where we are divided with the aim of achieving greater unity? I asked why it was so wrong to even contemplate taking sides *against* a regime that is being targeted by imperialism, so long as we side with the people and oppose imperialism as our main enemy. To heckles about the “theocracy”, I stated that the answer, both in Iran and the UK, for democrats was the separation of church and state, and equality between believers and non-believers.

However, the insistence that there must be no criticism of regimes under imperialist threat applies *exclusively* to Iran, it seems. Libya is rather different (as was Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq). Last year, the then chair, Andrew Murray (who has since stepped down, but remains on the steering committee), wrote in an STWC publication: “While few people are admirers of the Gaddafi regime, the experience of Iraq underlines the dangerous futility of trying to impose ‘regime change’ from without” (STWC *Newsletter* No10, April 2011). In other words, regime change from within might be OK.

On another country currently under threat, steering committee member Andrew Burgin stated to the conference: “What Assad is doing in Syria is brutal.” Even comrade German admitted: “I don’t agree with what Assad is doing” - in fact she found it “upsetting”. Easy, Lindsey. But she said that, while there was room for “a number of different views”, what was important was our “duty to oppose western intervention”. So why does that not apply to Iran and Hopi?

No exclusions

Which brings us to the actual argument used to justify Hopi’s continued

exclusion as an affiliate. Apparently, according to comrade German, “Hopi thinks the Stop the War Coalition shouldn’t exist - it wants to replace it.” And no organisation would permit the affiliation of such a deadly rival, would it?

This is so absurd that it is almost beyond belief. As Tina Becker put it, “Surely our anti-war movement must be healthy enough to ... think, openly debate and *take its politics seriously*.” Hopi has never had any such aim, nor could any comment by a Hopi leader be *honestly* interpreted in that way. Comrade Becker had been moving the CPGB motion calling for the ban on Hopi to be ended - and for a new, similar rejection of the affiliation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) to be overturned.

This ultra-Stalinite organisation had protested against its own expulsion right at the start of the conference. In September 2011 the officers group had written to it to say that it had decided to “reject the affiliation” of the CPGB(ML) - even though it was *already* an affiliate. The reason given was that the CPGB(ML) had called some STWC leaders “pro-imperialists” and “traitors”. So “general secretary” Zane Carpenter raised a point of order: the exclusion of his group should be put to the conference after the CPGB(ML) had been given the opportunity to put its case.

The chair, Jeremy Corbyn, asked comrade German to reply to the point of order and she asserted that such language was “unacceptable”. But there was no need to debate this immediately, she said, as the question was on the agenda for “this afternoon”. In fact the motion from the CPGB protesting against the exclusion of both Hopi and the CPGB(ML) was taken in the final session, just before the closing speech from George Galloway.

In response to comrade German, CPGB(ML) general secretary Carpenter pointed out (despite attempts by Corbyn to shut him up) that it was “no good deciding later if I can’t speak all day”. He had a point, but comrade Corbyn would have none of it. He put his ruling - that the conference proceed along the lines of the published agenda - to the vote and, of course, this was agreed by a huge majority. So finally, after a 10-minute interruption involving prolonged shouting (and in one case screaming) by around eight ultra-Stalinites, the CPGB(ML) had to accept that its arguments were not going to be heard.

But that did not stop it trying again following the speeches of comrades Becker and German. But, no, these two brief contributions were deemed to constitute a full and fair debate, and the CPGB(ML)’s view on its own expulsion was totally irrelevant. Even the imperialists usually allow those charged with a misdemeanour to put their own case before declaring them guilty. But the chair - for the final session Jeremy Corbyn was back in his seat - indicated that time was pressing, as we still had to hear George Galloway’s closing speech. Once again there was a noisy protest by the CPGB(ML) and once again it was only ended when conference voted to move on to comrade Galloway.

The latter began by slyly attempting to divert attention from this injustice by pouring scorn on both ourselves and the CPGB(ML). He felt he had been caught in a “pincer movement between two organisations calling themselves the Communist Party of Great Britain, neither of which is the Communist Party of Great Britain”. We agree, George: that party does not exist, but we have claimed the name in order to stop it falling into the hands of opportunists until such a time as it can be reformed. But what does Galloway himself intend to do to help bring back into existence the party for which he

appears to have such a soft spot?

In reality, his version would be more like that of the CPGB(ML) - and, in one respect, any of the other ‘revolutionary parties in waiting’ that litter the left. I am referring to the bureaucratic centralism they all practise - as demonstrated by the way oppositionists like Hopi and the CPGB(ML) are treated. Galloway ironically remarked that he “admired the rigour with which Jeremy enforced the party line” - although many a true word is spoken in jest.

But why does the STWC leadership behave in this way? After all, there is nothing to stop individual members of organisations denied affiliation from joining Stop the War, speaking at conference or even putting motions (provided they do so on behalf of an organisation that is affiliated). And surely the reaction of the CPGB(ML) to its expulsion was entirely predictable. So was it worth the disruption?

I think we are in the realm of gesture politics here. On the one hand, the disaffiliation of the CPGB(ML) tries to put over the message that Stop the War does not touch deranged dictators like Gaddafi. On the other, the exclusion of Hopi is aimed at a different audience: those holding powerful positions in Tehran. The STWC is a safe pair of hands and its leaders can be promoted on media such as Press TV and by other means.

Too expensive

The motion from Wandsworth Stop the War which I opposed was entitled ‘Welfare, not warfare: the cost of war’. It wanted to put the expense of imperialist war at the very centre of STWC campaigning, since the “Con-Dem government spends huge sums on unjust wars”, while “simultaneously it is cutting billions from public expenditure”. As it is “vital that STWC wins over the trade union movement”, it should attempt to do so by linking war to anti-working class cuts. In other words, the money could be better spent.

So the motion called on the steering committee to organise “a major ‘cost of war’ conference”, produce “resource materials explaining links between war cuts and poverty” and “draft a model ‘cost of war’ resolution for trade union branches”. A comrade from the National Union of Students had earlier explained the rationale for a parallel policy within the student movement: a lot of people don’t accept the anti-war case, so let’s link it to something they *do* agree with.

In my contribution I pointed out that this whole position is, to begin with, opportunist - they don’t agree with us, so let’s sneak in our policy through the back door. Secondly it is counterproductive: what if they could make war cheaper, or manage to afford it without making cuts elsewhere? How about sanctions? They don’t cost much to implement, so does that make them OK?

In order to mobilise a movement capable of halting the imperialist war plans in their tracks it was necessary to *win the argument*, I said. And we do not oppose those plans because they are too expensive, but because they are *not in our interest*. While I had no objection to including references to the hypocrisy behind the cuts - ‘They say we must cut back on healthcare, but there’s always enough money for their wars’ - I objected strongly to the resolution, which would see an appeal for ‘sensible’ cuts act as a substitute for principled opposition to wars fought in the pursuit of imperialist aims.

But, of course, Wandsworth’s motion was agreed by a large majority - although it was gratifying to see a number of activists did vote against this ‘common sense’ approach ●

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Doing their job

Tina Becker’s speech on behalf of the CPGB

This is one of the very few controversial motions at this conference, so I hope the chair will use his discretion to allow an actual debate on this issue. In short, two organisations have not been allowed to be officially present here today. I am not just a member of the CPGB, but also of Hands Off the People of Iran, which was never allowed to affiliate. The CPGB(ML) - which is very different from the CPGB, sharing nothing with us but part of the name - was expelled last September (after having been an official affiliate for many years).

In both cases, the reason cited was that the organisations were “publicly attacking the Stop the War Coalition” or, as Lindsey German put it earlier on, they had used language that was “not acceptable”. Well, what is a public attack? That’s quite hard to define, isn’t it? Were they sabotaging STWC events? No. Did they call on people to leave the STWC? Form a rival organisation? No. Were they in breach of the aims and the constitution of the coalition? Not even that.

No, in reality, we are talking about *political criticism*. The CPGB(ML) criticised the STWC for not actively siding with the Libyan government of colonel Gaddafi (and they used quite colourful language, as often happens when there are disagreements). It is a view I find absolutely risible and I’m glad it was voted down earlier on today. But is that a reason to expel an organisation? Hardly.

In the case of Hopi, we are campaigning for the view that the anti-war movement should actively support the people of Iran against their dictators, while also fighting against war and sanctions. You voted against that position this morning, which obviously is your right. However, Lindsey said earlier on that there are “very different views on Iran” represented in the STWC. This one isn’t! But Hopi is clearly a legitimate part of the anti-war movement and should be officially

represented: for example, PCS, Aslef and the Green Party are nationally affiliated. When parliament debated the latest threats against Iran last week, it was Hopi that prepared the briefing paper for John McDonnell MP.

Hopi is clear - and totally agrees with the STWC on this: the *main enemy is imperialism*. Hopi is totally opposed to the drive towards war and the use of sanctions. Hopi also meets *all* the criteria of membership outlined in the STWC’s aims and objectives. These in fact state that “supporters of the coalition, whether organisations or individuals, will, of course, be free to develop their own analyses and organise their own actions”. Which is precisely what Hopi and the CPGB(ML) have done.

The STWC was set up as a broad and inclusive organisation, to gather together as many anti-war activists and organisations as possible. And, as Tony Benn put it earlier on, it is an anti-war organisation, not “an ideologically pure” coalition. For example, I have very little sympathy for the politics of the CPGB(ML) - and vice versa, I presume. I also think the Coalition Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran is very soft on the Iranian regime. There are lots of different views and organisations in this room, but all are agreed that imperialism is our main enemy.

And yet some organisations are allowed to be officially represented here and others aren’t. It seems to me we are weakening our own forces if we pick and choose what is a ‘good’ anti-war organisation and what isn’t. We are on a very dangerous trajectory by doing this - we are actually doing the job of our opponents.

Surely our anti-war movement must be healthy enough to absorb such criticism and be able to think, openly debate and take its politics seriously. That’s why we want the officers to look again at these issues and overturn the ban on these two organisations ●

Not our friend

Caitriona Rylance’s speech on behalf of Communist Students

There are lots of motions here today on Iran and Syria, but ours is different. It spells out some issues that other motions don’t. Namely: *the government of Iran is not our friend and is not the friend of the Iranian people*.

That does not mean for one second that we think imperialism has any kind of progressive role to play there or anywhere else. Imperialism is our main enemy, we must campaign tirelessly against any imperialist intervention in Iran and elsewhere. We must fight against the new sanctions and against the already existing sanctions. They are not an alternative to war - *they are a form of war*.

And, let’s be very clear about this, we must also fight against attempts to buy off the opposition with so-called ‘pro-democracy’ funds. The US, the UK and Israel have no interest whatsoever in establishing real democracy in Iran - or their own countries, for that matter. They are desperately trying to exercise their hegemony over a rapidly changing region and are using every possible method to achieve this.

We are against war on Iran,

because it would hit the people below the hardest. We are against sanctions, because they force precisely those people into destitution who are the *only ones that can bring about real democracy*: those, the workers, the students and women. Those who have come out in their millions onto the streets of Tehran and other cities after the fraudulent 2009 elections. Those who have been fighting against a war on their country *and the theocracy*. Just like here in Britain and the rest of the world, in Iran there are those above and those below. And those above have been waging a brutal, 30-year-war against those below.

This is why we must not close our eyes to the real repression that is going on in a country like Iran or pretend it does not happen or has nothing to do with us. We should be in active solidarity with those below and support them in any way we can. Because they don’t want war or sanctions either!

Talking about international solidarity does not weaken our movement - it actually makes it stronger. *Our enemy’s enemy is not our friend!* ●

PCS

Striking on March 28 is not enough

Dave Vincent applauds the leadership style of Mark Serwotka and calls for electoral opposition to the cuts

Regular readers may recall my observations at the time of the May 2011 Public and Commercial Services union conference debate over the strike planned for June 30 last year. I argued at conference for the action to be delayed until more unions were on board (*Weekly Worker* May 12 2011).

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka, replying to my concerns, admitted the strategy was a gamble, but worth taking. Shortly after, the massive media coverage given in the main to the National Union of Teachers, but also the fact that four unions would be out, gave me confidence that PCS members would now support the action. They did, and it was the best supported strike in our history. Until November 30. Twenty-nine unions would be out then and I had no worries about membership support on that date - it was even better.

And for the second time in recent history initial PCS action had succeeded in bringing other unions on board. Workers on picket lines visited those of other unions wanting to revel in this rare unity. The public were overwhelmingly supporting us (in complete contrast to the lies of the media). It seemed everyone was smiling and thrilled to be fighting back at last.

After being on the picket lines at 7am, our new PCS branch samba band went down a storm on the Manchester city centre march and rally that followed at lunchtime. I have never seen so many people in Manchester stopping to watch marching strikers and shouting their support and applauding us and the band. More than once I heard someone shouting, "Glad someone's fighting back!"

Workers on strike who just took the day off missed all this, but those who were on the picket lines or marched to their local rally will never forget what they saw. Trade unions were still relevant after all. Unity is strength! And all the unions taking part saw thousands of non-members joining up to be part of this strike. Two years of arguing for a united fightback against the cuts at two successive TUCs, and finally it happened.

Even the civil service mandarins' union, the FDA, were out, as were headteachers and others who had never before struck in their history. The disunity and defeats of the 80s and 90s now seemed a bad memory rather than just the way it will always be. A new generation of young union members took their first ever strike action, stood on their first ever picket line. What lessons to learn, what experience to gain.

Not even the pathetic bleating of Ed Miliband for 'both sides to sit down and talk' (What did he think we had done? Go on strike before any

negotiations?) could dampen the euphoria. Who needs the joke Labour Party when there is this much unity and public support?

The government offered more minor concessions. We knew they were rattled. N30 was the biggest strike in a generation - even since 1926. Come on! Let's call an even bigger strike with still more unions. Let's give this cruel coalition government a good smacking. Then Unison, the GMB and others stated they were prepared to stop action and recommend acceptance of minor concessions. Eh? What the ...

Betrayal

I was stunned. I didn't get it. Why would they do that? Then it dawned on me: Unison managed to get a two-year delay in increased pension contributions for their members. So, just as their members begin to pay more and blame the coalition government, their union will be there to say, 'Vote Labour' in the forthcoming general election. But Labour is not even promising to reverse the pension increases. It *agrees* with privatisation, is *against* strikes, *supports* making savage cuts - it even supports the public-sector pay freeze.

So Unison is betraying the best, most united trade union fightback in decades - a fightback that has massive public support we could only dream about in the 80s and 90s. Do Unison leaders think the thousands of people who joined the union were doing so only for one day? This was a fantastic opportunity wasted. An opportunity to make unions relevant to young people. For unions to help other groups and communities organise and join together against the cuts - to give so many people the confidence to decide they will stand up and fight.

The TUC saw over 500,000 people turn out in March 2011 as proof of what can and should be done. Unison even encouraged their activists to get involved in local trades councils and

have joint meetings with the activists of other unions in the run-up to N30. On the N30 marches and rallies you could not get near the front for all the purple Unison flags and banners - as if Unison, not PCS, had led the way from the start. But it is white flags Unison have issued now.

So where do we go from here? PCS is currently holding an indicative ballot (we could still call action under the statutory ballot we held last year) for a further one-day strike on March 28 and comrade Serwotka was guest speaker at our branch AGM in Manchester on February 29. He moved on to another branch AGM after ours, and was then a top-table speaker at the Greater Manchester Unite the Resistance launch rally later that day.

This is how Mark explained the PCS strategy. The Unison/GMB decision is a blow. He knows that members will ask how less than one million out on M28 can hope to win now when two million on N30 came away empty-handed. But do we just give up? Nineteen unions remain in the fight. It is possible Unison members will reject a settlement if they see others still fighting. Militant activists are certainly horrified at their union's stance and are demanding a special conference.

PCS was originally for total opposition to the coalition insistence that we must pay more, work longer and get less for our pensions. But the ballot paper now asks members to endorse fighting for concessions. I agree it is right, given the changed circumstances, to put the situation honestly to our members and seek a fresh mandate, but I am uneasy at the idea we should accept worse conditions in advance.

PCS can ask members to vote by text or telephone right up to the last day in order to get voting figures up. Mark highlighted the hypocrisy of the government - condemning low postal ballot turnouts, whilst banning activists from having workplace meetings of members at which they could vote.

The current public-sector pay freeze is also costing members money - as is inflation, as will increased pension contributions from April 1. This dispute is making the link between the pay freeze, job losses and pensions.

Mark argued that M28 is only the start of the latest phase of a campaign and we should think of ways members can cause maximum disruption (two-hour strikes, targeted and joined-up action) for the least financial cost to members. He stated that all the cuts we are facing now only amount to 10% of the government's austerity measures. What will the other 90% affect? Massive privatisation of our public services is also the aim.

well received. Unison NEC and Socialist Workers Party member Karen Reissman was as good as ever - and she definitely wanted Unison to be with PCS.

Nearly everyone who wanted to got the chance to raise points from the floor and I stated we should not forget the two million who were against the war in Iraq. They saw through the lies of the media and will be against an invasion of Iran - as well as being cynical about the media support for austerity measures. I also suggested that, as all three main parties are anti-strike, anti-union, pro-privatisation, pro-public-sector pay freeze, pro-market, we should stand working class anti-cuts candidates (this is PCS policy and members will vote on putting this into practice this later this year). That got applause, but no-one else took up this theme. There was also applause when some argued that one-day strikes will not win this fight. There is no getting away from the fact that Unison's collapse has undermined what was looking possible. Maybe we can only expect concessions at best, but better to fight on than just throw in the towel and encourage deeper and faster attacks and cuts.

Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat politicians alike hate leaders like Mark - as do the more backward union leaders hoping for a knighthood to reward them for their class betrayals. However, not only PCS members, but many activists in other unions really rate him. I hear their admiration time and time again, with many stating they wished their leaders were like Mark. My members thought Mark's address to our AGM was more thoughtful, less rah-rah, but still brilliant. Two younger members were inspired to get more active in PCS. He arrived at these meetings by himself - no entourage, no superior attitude, no patronising dismissal of the calls to fight back.

Pull Labour left?

In a debate that runs and runs in the *Weekly Worker* how can anyone *still* suggest we fight within the Labour Party to pull it left? How ridiculous are the earlier assertions of some

CPGB leading lights that this climate and the struggles will force Labour to talk and move left! The GMB, Britain's third largest union, will debate its relationship to the Labour Party following a large number of branches submitting motions on this subject. I would like all Labour-affiliated unions to do so. Just what are the unions getting from a cash-strapped but ungrateful Labour Party, compared to their business donors? Once again Unison is misleading workers by mounting protests to 'Save the NHS' based on the unspoken '... by voting Labour at the next general election.' Pathetic.

Until we all agree on the need for a united Marxist revolutionary party to provide a lead, I will settle for working class anti-cuts independent candidates. Let working class people therefore discuss and decide to take politics and elections back into their hands. Getting any elected would worry the established parties. Admittedly our showing has been abysmal in the past, but I think this time an election challenge will take off.

The government and media condemn riots and violence on demonstrations, yet ignore peaceful protests. If there are to be no further massive strikes (unless Unison/GMB, etc can be forced back into the fightback), we need to pose an independent electoral threat to the three main parties, and call demonstrations uniting all those affected by the ever widening and deepening cuts.

As the *Weekly Worker* constantly says, we need parties like the SWP, Socialist Party and so on to put their own interests aside so as to foster the greater unity and confidence of trade union activists and all those wanting to join together and fight back. Meetings like the packed UTR event in Manchester are a good start.

Fighting the cuts and the destruction of public services means, as a woman Unison delegate said at a recent TUC Congress, "We have to be in the fight of our lives". Can the TUC and Unison honestly say they are organising this? ●

Fighting fund

Little problems

Last week I confessed I had no idea why the number of online readers of the *Weekly Worker* had dropped so dramatically compared to previous weeks. But now I do have the answer.

It has nothing to do with our readers suddenly losing interest, but in being unable to fully access the website. This situation has not yet been resolved - it results from the ongoing work to relaunch the CPGB site, which, believe it or not, is nearing completion. In the meantime let me apologise to all those comrades having difficulty reading our paper via the internet.

Last week there were 15,057 who managed to do so, although many of them would have had trouble accessing our archive, amongst other things. However, our March fighting fund has got off to a reasonable start despite this, with £339 in the kitty after the first week. That mostly came from standing orders, but there

were also three comrades who used our PayPal facility in spite of our website problems - thank you, EJ (£30), RK (£20) and BB (£10). Then there was the fiver that comrade JM added to his resubscription.

Comrades may also have had difficulty in trying to contact us by telephone. That's because we have just moved office and our old landline is no longer correct. Apologies for this too.

It goes without saying that both these little problems involve expense. Which is why it is essential that our readers and supporters step up the pace of their donations, so we can achieve our £1,500 target in full each and every month. Can you help us?

Robbie Rix

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



My AGM had 85 members present (the highest for a decade), while 100 were at the department for work and pensions PCS AGM and 200 showed up at the UTR event, where Mark was very

LEFT

Silencing voices

Workers Power is again embroiled in internal disputes. James Turley asks why it insists on hiding its internal differences

Workers Power, a smallish Trotskyist organisation (with, inevitably, its own ‘international’, the League for a Fifth International, or LFI) is positively abuzz with activity - of one sort and another - at the present time.

Some of this activity is supposed to be visible to those of us mere mortals in the broader movement who do not accept their particular micro-silver of the Trotskyist tradition. Most notably, its repeated propagandistic calls for a new anti-capitalist organisation have seen attempts, in various localities, to actually bring it into being in some form (expectations have been apparently revised downwards from a new anti-capitalist *party*, as it previously was, to the more sensible level of a ‘network’ or ‘organisation’).

Inside the sacred circle of revolutionary Trotskyism, however, things are not quite so rosy. WP is caught up in a great row over the relationship between democratic centralism and strategic debate, and between its hallowed tradition and its recent tactical decisions. The dispute has split its six-strong political committee 4-2; innovatively, it is the *majority* that argues for a critical re-examination of WP’s practice, and cries foul over the tenor of internal discussion.

‘New’ anti-capitalism

WP’s ‘new anti-capitalist network’ initiative is not, as noted, new to its public positions. What is new is that it has begun to put it into practice.

A simple declaration now appears on the WP website, and relatively reasonable it is too. The coalition government represents “a real offensive by the bankers and the capitalist class to make the workers pay for their crisis. We are not the only country to face this offensive: this is an international attack by the capitalist class against the working class.” (Correct and correct again - banker-bashing clichés aside.) All manner of social ills await, “unless we can organise an anti-capitalist force, rooted in the working class, that can break this government and open the road to a new socialist society”.

This is not possible at present, because the forces arrayed against the government are hampered by futile divisions. The statement points to the existence of rival anti-cuts fronts with no discernible difference between them apart from the groups backing them. Wisely, it suggests that “the seriousness of the crisis in Britain is forcing us to take a look at the left as well, to see if we are ‘fit for purpose’”.

The three organisations pointed to as examples, however, leave something to be desired. The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste of France is suffering severe internal strains; the New Anti-capitalist Left has hardly made an enormous splash in the Czech Republic; and the Greek regroupment Antarsya’s best electoral showing gave it seven councillors scattered across the country, which is hardly putting the scare into Papademos. It seems (who’d have thought it?) that the combination of left regroupment and the word ‘anti-capitalist’ is not necessarily a recipe for overnight success.

Nevertheless, the British initiative is not *entirely* without merit. First of all, it *has* involved, thus far, forces outside Workers Power itself - the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Socialist Resistance

and Permanent Revolution are all involved to some degree. All of them taken together, it is true, do not add up to much in terms of numbers, but in this time of increasingly absurd disunity movement in the other direction is not to be sniffed at.

While the public statements of WP, though muddled, would at least suggest a political programme *slightly* more radical than the sub-Keynesian dross on offer from ‘rival’ initiatives such as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, the key question is the type of formation that needs to be formed: a united Marxist party or yet another halfway house?

Discontent of the majority

Despite its apparent congruence with previous positions, however, this policy *seems* to be at the root of the aforementioned internal ructions.

‘Seems’, because both sides are nominally committed to it. Around the edges of the policy, however, a series of disputes are forming, with a distinctly inter-generational tilt to the argument. Just as the AWL was ‘forced’ to move decisively to circumvent dissent at its most overt pro-imperialism from its ‘Maoist youth’, so older and (in their own opinion) wiser heads now seek to prevail over younger recruits less wedded to the notionally impeccable orthodox Trotskyist heritage WP exists to defend.

In a recent internal bulletin (dated February 2011, but clearly from this year), four documents appear: ‘We need a change in our culture’ by comrades ‘Cade’, ‘Coates’, ‘Haskett’ and ‘Morrow’ (these appear to be cadre names) does what it says on the tin, and additionally complains at ill-defined bureaucratic mishandling of the debate on internal culture. One comrade ‘Simpson’ replies, defending WP’s concept of a ‘fighting propaganda group’; and two more comrades - ‘Eugen’ and ‘Firman’ - weigh in against the first document. Finally, there is a resolution condemning its authors.

WP’s decade-and-a-half-old turn to the youth, however, has not been without consequences - so, the most extraordinary thing about this dispute, as noted, is that the four comrades who wrote the first piece in fact constitute a *majority* of WP’s political committee. You would not know they were a majority of *anything* from reading it; let alone the shower of condemnation their document meets elsewhere in the bulletin.

Their central argument, though articulated in a slightly confused way, is clear enough, and indeed articulates a point this paper has made throughout its existence: it is futile to expect all members of an organisation to express complete political, theoretical and ideological unity in public: “We think ‘lines’ should largely be applied to practice: what slogans we will raise to win a strike, what initiative we will take for a new organisation, etc, and that we should recognise far greater plurality - of a diversity of opinions and outlooks - when it comes to ideas.”

In contrast, the culture of Workers Power as it stands is such that “subtle issue[s] of analysis” are subject to ‘democratic centralist’ discipline - even to the point that reference to Marxists outside the WP tradition ought, in the view of some comrades, to be OK’ed by the leaders. (In fairness, the *verboten*

‘Marxist’ in question is Mark Fisher, a punkish cultural theorist. His short book, *Capitalist realism*, which cobbles together bits and bobs of Marx, Deleuze and Lacan in a scatterbrained Žižekian fashion, has become something of a ‘little red book’ for WP’s younger set.)

Most sensibly of all, the comrades are quite insistent that a critique of the left’s failures - which the leaders have approved for inclusion in WP’s material on the anti-capitalist network project - *must* involve an autocritique of the WP tradition. That their answers are diffuse - it is difficult to see exactly *what* they have in mind in terms of a more “pluralist” WP - does not negate the very valuable impulse to subject a tradition they rightly say has not grown substantially since its birth to a thoroughgoing critique.

As for the minority documents, it must be said that some complaints have some justice (and they do not, for the most part, read like strikes of the bureaucrat’s gavel). The frustration that there is little tangible to attack in the self-confessedly embryonic critique of the PC majority is understandable, for one; and ‘Simpson’ is right to point out that a sharp distinction between the correct and incorrect is simply an epistemological necessity for debate.

On the whole, however, the elder ‘dissidents’ are caught defending positions that are simply antiquated. They argue that WP must remain a ‘fighting propaganda group’; the implied argument here is that for such a group propaganda *itself* is ‘action’, and producing propaganda of any kind divergent in any way from agreed policy is an infraction of discipline.

This character, Eugen and Firman argue, will have to be *redoubled* in the anti-capitalist party initiative. After all, WP will be under pressure from libertarians and the “ossified centrists” of the Permanent Revolution group; strict unity will be required to win the organisation to WP’s particular programme. (Unfortunately, these comrades insist on the tautological Trot definition of centrism, with the inevitable result that *all* organisations not explicitly on the right of the workers’ movement become ‘centrist’).

If they are to take this initiative seriously, however, there is a flat contradiction here. For any resultant anti-capitalist organisation to succeed, it will have to be able to take united action, and make united propaganda, just like its component parts; but for the ‘regroupment’ aspect to succeed, debate among factions will be necessary.

If one is to make propaganda for the formation of an organisation with this character, to reject such a character for one’s own group *undermines that propaganda*. If it is good enough for one party, why is it not good enough for the other? Put it another way - the public expression of differences in a propaganda group, combined with effective unity in action, *is itself propaganda for democratic organisational norms*, in politics and society at large; we demonstrate in our practice that democracy *works*, in contradistinction to the capitalists, their state and our rivals on the left, who insist on bureaucratic diktat. Eugen’s and Firman’s obvious discomfort with the anti-capitalist initiative, then, is hardly surprising.

Enforcing public unity on all matters, as the PC majority points out, does not result in actual unity. In another matter, several Workers Power members have

now been expelled, suspended or otherwise put ‘on notice’ for ‘breaking discipline’ over the Libyan conflict.

The two disputes do not appear to be directly connected, but a public political argument on the ‘anti-imperialist united front’ (which these particular rebels would like to uphold against the anti-Nato/anti-Gaddafi line WP took in the event) would surely be preferable to producing a drip-drip of embittered ex-comrades. WP, however, insists on upholding the ambiguous stance on the party question that has driven the entire Trotskyist movement to its infamous endless splits.

Where they come from

Workers Power, like many a far-left sect in this country, should know better than to cling to this idiotic shibboleth, as the group is a product of the mid-1970s ‘turn to Lenin’ in the Socialist Workers Party (then the International Socialists), which saw the IS shedding factions left and right. It began its independent existence in a fusion with Sean Matgamna’s International Communist League - now the AWL - which foundered rapidly on the rocks of comrade Matgamna’s almost paramilitary-grade sectarianism.¹

WP developed quickly into a distinctive trend in its own right. Its comrades rapidly dropped Tony Cliff’s theory of state capitalism in the Stalinist regimes, and reverted to the orthodox Trotskyist ‘degenerated workers’ state’ analysis; but, unlike most orthodox Trotskyists, they did not posit a grand, unbroken thread of principled Marxism from Marx, through Lenin and Trotsky, and your choice of post-war Trotskyist leaders, to their organisation.

Instead, the red thread - in their narrative² - is snapped at Lev Davidovich’s murder. A series of incremental betrayals turned, as they say, from quantity to quality in the 1953 split between the (‘Pabloite’) International Secretariat and the (‘orthodox’) International Committee of the Fourth International, both of which were called “degenerate fragments”. “Neither the International Committee nor the International Secretariat, nor any of the tendencies claiming continuity with them, have proved capable of regenerating a democratic-centralist international based upon a transitional programme re-elaborated to encompass the new circumstances and tasks of the last 30 years” - a 1980s-vintage judgement no less damning for its convoluted Trot-speak.

Such, indeed, is the fundamental contradiction at the heart of Workers Power summed up in a single sentence. The re-examination of Trotskyist history is best thought of as making a virtue out of necessity. WP was a product of Cliffism, not some ortho-Trot sub-fragment - so there was no way the red thread could finish up tied to its ankle. Yet in avoiding the retrospective identification with the ‘anti-Pabloite’ International Committee so common to similar organisations, the ground was nonetheless clear for a serious advance on the crypto-mystical narratives of apostolic succession characteristic of orthodox Trotskyism.

Alas, the Trot-speak testifies to the fact that there was a hard limit on criticising the tradition. Trotsky *did*, according to WP, perform a lasting service to the movement in his voluntarist-economist *Transitional*

programme. The other fundamental bases of his project - an historically disproven theory of the Soviet Union, the need for a ‘democratic-centralist International’ (ie, an international *sect*) and all the rest - equally survive.

And so, just as no lineal descendent of Healy and Cannon was capable of maintaining political principle or sound revolutionary theory and activity, so the ‘class of 73’ has been made to look quite silly on occasion. A single example will suffice: throughout most of the 1990s, it was simply denied that the “degenerated and deformed workers’ states” had reverted to capitalism; they were instead “moribund workers’ states”. At the end of that decade, readers of WP’s eponymous journal were informed, perhaps to their surprise, that this judgement had been summarily reversed - capitalism had indeed taken hold.

Here, again, all the problems are neatly encapsulated. It is easy enough to mock the “moribund workers’ state” theory; but the brute fact of the matter is that, along with innumerable other features of Stalinist societies (starting with their post-war multiplication), Trotsky’s theory *simply cannot account* for the manner of their fall. WP hewed closest to his analysis in the 1990s of all Trotskyist groups - a feat it could only accomplish by flatly denying the reality before it.

Secondly, we may *presume* that there was a wide-ranging discussion on the matter internally - but we cannot *know*, thanks to WP’s insistence on maintaining a public front of unity. This has two consequences: firstly, the *appearance* of a monolithic about-face - which no doubt alienates many on the left suspicious of cultism and inspires mirth in those who mock such ‘Toytown Bolshevism’ - simply makes the group look ridiculous. Secondly, it means that the wider movement was unable to participate in the debate. Who knows? - perhaps the rest of us might have been able to persuade the comrades to drop this obvious absurdity sooner, to the mutual benefit of all.

Clinging to that perspective has cost Workers Power dear. It lost a substantial portion of its membership five years ago in the split that produced Permanent Revolution, and that portion included many of its most hardened and experienced comrades. More recently, the LFI’s meddling in its Austrian section forced out another faction, again including relatively prominent members.³ Now, the cryptic Facebook dissent of some members from the prescribed line on Libya has provoked more bureaucratic expulsions and suspensions; and the dispute over ‘party building’ initiated by the PC majority has all the makings of yet another split (though it is to be hoped that it will not come to that).

How much smaller does Workers Power have to get before it takes the comrades’ cue and re-evaluates the merits of its ‘tradition’? ●

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Notes

1. The AWL’s side of the story is available at www.workersliberty.org/node/6633; given its ignoble record of deliberately botched ‘fusions’, the account is most likely disingenuous, but WP does not appear to have replied.
2. www.fifthinternational.org/content/publications/pamphlets/death-agony-fourth-international.
3. The criticisms advanced by the expelled minority are substantially on workerist grounds: www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site/editorial-rev-com-1.

GREECE

Pre-revolutionary situation triggers talk of a coup

Whether or not Athens 'selectively' defaults this week, writes **Eddie Ford**, the working class is refusing to be ruled in the old way

Greece's future within the euro hangs in the balance despite the February 21 paper deal with the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank troika over the next bailout. Having in theory secured the €130 billion second tranche of bailout money and therefore avoiding immediate bankruptcy - or so the plans goes - the Greek finance minister, Evangelos Venizelos, declared that the country had escaped a "nightmare". Catastrophe had been averted.

That may possibly be the case for the corrupt Greek elite, its ill-gotten gains and dubious investments safely squirreled away in foreign financial institutions - especially British ones. For decades the Greek government has in reality been a clientelist state, operating through an ubiquitous system of patronage and bribery - jobs and perks for those who toe the line. But for the Greek working class the nightmare is set to continue, if not get *much* worse, thanks to the onerous - hellish - terms and conditions that come attached to the bailout money.

Lucas Papademos, the technocrat prime minister imposed on the Greek people by the European Union bureaucracy - which increasingly regards any form of democracy as an irritant - has pledged to do whatever is necessary to finally secure the bailout and hence be able to make the €14.5 billion bond payment due on March 20. Nothing else matters. Any resistance to the austerity measures, Papademos stated, would "set the country on a disastrous adventure" and "create conditions of uncontrolled economic chaos and social explosion". Pension cuts totalling €300 million, a 22% reduction in the minimum wage and the loss of 150,000 public sector jobs by 2015 are all on the troika agenda and will hit almost every Greek household.

"Now they want to take away everything" - in the words of a spokesperson from the civil servants' union, Adedy. Wages and pensions slashed, longer hours. Unemployment is rocketing, especially for youth, which now stands at 48.1%. Greek workers are going hungry and homelessness in the form of rough sleeping is growing at an almost exponential rate. Cancer wards are being closed. People are sitting in cold flats because they cannot afford to pay the bills - especially after the introduction of new legislation last September, which sought to collect property taxes via electricity bills. Large numbers of Greek workers are experiencing the phenomenon of 'negative wages', with mortgage repayments directly deducted from their falling salaries - leaving them with less than nothing.

Nor will Greek workers be living the life of Riley, or Zorba, on unemployment benefits - though you would almost think so to judge by some of the commentaries that appear in the rightwing press. The Greek version of the dole is only available to laid-off salaried workers who have made full social security contributions over the previous two years. If you are self-employed you are automatically disqualified, as are those with "other sources" of income. Benefits are currently paid monthly at a fixed rate of €454 (with a little extra



Clamouring for change

for each under-age child) - though, of course, that figure will be substantially reduced if the troika, and the present Greek administration, gets its way. Claimants are eligible at most for 12 months and after that, regardless of the circumstances, their benefits are cut off. *Indefinitely*. No appeal.

Elections are pencilled in for April. Inevitably, support for the two partners in the coalition government - Pasok and New Democracy - is draining away: they are hated for their part in pushing through the troika's savage austerity measures. On February 15 the weekly *Epikaira* newspaper published the first opinion poll since parliament passed the austerity bill on February 12. ND is down to 27.5% and Pasok would at most get 11%. In the 2009 elections these two parties combined received 77.4% of the vote. As for the rightwing, populist Laos - which withdrew from the coalition on February 9 in protest at the proposed cuts - it too has declined in popularity, now on 4%, as opposed to the 7% in December. Still compromised by its previous role in the coalition government.

Meanwhile, there is growing support for parties to the left of Pasok. The 'official communist' KKE is now on 14% - up from 12.5% in January - the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) gets 13.5% and Democratic Left (a rightist split from Syriza) stands at 16%, an increase from 13% in January. Thus the total votes for main left parties according to the *Epikaira* poll represent 43.5% of the electorate, whereas in the 2009 elections they won just 13.1%.

Clearly, though the left is hopelessly divided and programmatically mired in nationalism and semi-Keynesian nonsense, revolutionary conditions are rapidly maturing. The masses are refusing to be ruled in the old way.

No wonder that some fiscal 'hawks' within the EU are strongly suggesting that the bailout should be delayed until after the elections, by which time we will know whether the 'responsible' parties of government have obtained between them a parliamentary majority - otherwise no bailout money. Why throw good money after bad? Others though are hinting that the elections should

cancelled or postponed altogether through some kind of coup and Papademos's mandate indefinitely extended. The problem with elections, and democracy in general, is that it can throw up unpredictable results - which is bad for business. And *very* bad for forcing through deeply unpopular and hated austerity measures.

Debt deadline

Yet there is still the possibility that the bailout deal, and the cash, will never happen at all - and that Greece could default as early as March 8, spreading chaos throughout the euro zone and beyond.

Racing against the clock, Athens has until May 8 - unless the deadline is somehow stretched - to conclude a debt swap arrangement with its private creditors in what would be the largest debt restructuring package in history, the aim being to reduce what it owes by around €100 billion. This restructuring forms a central element to the bailout accord that the Greek government has signed with the euro zone leaders. No debt restructuring or 'haircut', no bailout: Greece goes bankrupt.

The February 21 plan involves private investors taking a nominal 53.5% loss, which equates in reality to a 73%-74% hit (as feared all along) on their Greek bonds - in all €206 billion. In an attempt to clinch the deal once and for all, investors have been lured by all manner of sweeteners - a cash equivalent for upfront payment, a new bond issued under English law, a GDP warrant offering higher interest if the Greek economy does better than expected, equal treatment for the new bonds with the public sector, and so on. Venizelos has adamantly insisted that there must be "near universal participation" in this scheme, by which he meant at least a 90% uptake.

Talking tough, though perhaps more in desperation, Venizelos warned Athens' private creditors on March 5 not to hold out any longer for a better deal - what is currently on the table was definitively the best they would get - take it or leave it. As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, Charles Dallara - the head of the Institute of International Finance, which represents about half of Greece's creditors - was "optimistic" that his members would accept the terms of the deal. In his opinion, as they "look at the real choices they face", there will be "growing recognition of the benefits" to be gained from accepting the swingeing 'haircut'. On the same day that Venizelos issued his warning, 12 banks, insurers, asset managers and hedge funds on the IIF steering committee (including BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank, National Bank of Greece, Allianz and Greylack Capital Management) said in a joint statement they would take part in the exchange. Reuters has roughly calculated that this grouping holds some €45 billion of Greek bonds.

If necessary though, Venizelos has threatened to activate collective action clauses (CACs) through retroactive legislation. This would allow the deal to be imposed on *all* bondholders if 66% or more agree to it - a totally unprecedented move that could end up being replicated elsewhere (Portugal, Spain, Italy, etc). Stepping up the pressure, on March 7 Greece's Public

Debt Management Agency (PDMA) said that if it got enough support from the majority of bondholders, it intended to make losses "binding on all holders of these bonds" on the grounds that the country's "economic programme does not contemplate the availability of funds" to make payments to private-sector creditors - like a clutch of so far unnamed Greek pension funds - which still refuse to take a 'haircut' at the rate demanded.

Not that such has a course of action does not have consequences, of course. For example, on March 1 the International Swaps and Derivatives Association said the Greek debt deal did not constitute a "credit event", though it prosaically noted that the situation in Greece was "still evolving". The ISDA regulates (insofar as anyone does) the murky, semi-subterranean world of complex financial instruments that are traded directly between parties rather than on exchanges ("over-the-counter derivatives") and governs a market worth £439 trillion - more than 10 times the size of the entire global economy. In other words, the ISDA effectively gets to decide on what is classified as a "credit event".

However, if the Greek government were to invoke CACs then in all probability the ISDA would reverse its decision and that would almost certainly trigger the paying out of billions of dollars to the holders of Greek credit default swaps; essentially an insurance contract against a country or company defaulting. A default in all but name. In turn, the Standard and Poor's credit rating agency has declared that any attempt to force bondholders into a deal using CACs would be viewed as a "selective default" - the practical outcome being that the ECB would no longer accept Greek government bonds as security for new loans. This follows on from Moody's March 3 re-downgrading of Greece - this time to the lowest rating on its bond scale, Ca. Moody's argued that the risk of default remains "high" even if the bond-swap deal is successfully concluded by March 8 (or whenever).

Demonstrating what is at stake in this high-risk game of poker between the Greek government and the private investors, a 'confidential' staff note by the IIF drawn up on February 18 - and subsequently obtained by Reuters - paints a bleak picture of what would happen if Greece succumbed to a 'disorderly' or 'hard' default come March 20. Though it is "difficult to add all these contingent liabilities up with any degree of precision", we read, it is "hard to see how they would not exceed €1 trillion". This figure is based on how much it would cost to "contain the fallout" in Spain and Italy (€350), on "helping" Ireland and Portugal over the next five years (€380) and on recapitalising the devastated banks (at least €160). As a conclusion, the IIF note remarks that the "global growth implications" of an "extreme event" like a disorderly default are "hard to quantify", especially when you consider that Lehman Brothers was "far smaller" than Greece and its "demise was supposedly well anticipated" - and just look at what happened there. Near global economic meltdown.

Alarmed by the situation

developing in Athens, stock markets sharply declined on March 6 - with the German and French markets losing 3% and the Dow Jones index down 1.6%, its biggest fall in nearly three months. Bank shares also tumbled by between 4% and 6%. Failure on March 8 or some other "credit event" could see far more dramatic losses.

Losing patience

Papademos made out that the February 21 deal, such as it is, would "create the conditions" for growth and recovery. Pure fantasy, as the Greek economy enters the fifth year of recession - with many more grim years of recession and contraction ahead. Frankly, the figures just do not add up and everyone knows it. According to a leaked IMF assessment of the Greek economy, its debt-to-GDP ratio will be 160% in 2020 - at the same level as today, that is, and far above the rescue programme's notional target of 120.5%. Reality is starting to intrude. Stefanos Manos, a former Greek finance minister, commented last week that the debt would only become "sustainable" when cut to 90% of national outlay - a figure which everyone regards as impossible.

In all likelihood then, with its economy spiralling downwards, Greece will need *another* bailout within a relatively short space of time. On March 4 *Der Spiegel* carried a major story saying Greece will need a third international rescue package worth €50 billion by 2015 - a viewpoint that seems to be shared by the troika itself, which has cast doubt - to put it mildly - on the idea that Greece will be able to borrow again on the international money markets come 2015.

This leaves Greece in an utterly impossible position. With sky-high debts, a recession stretching out indeterminately into the future and massive loan interests to pay, there is no way Athens can meet Brussels' never-ending demands for austerity and "reforms". A circle that cannot be squared.

And some European governments are already running out of patience - most notably Germany. At the March 2 EU summit, which saw all but two (UK and Czech Republic) of the member-states sign up to the new fiscal treaty/compact institutionalising austerity economics, the German delegation were playing hardball, insisting that the second rescue package for Greece must be the "final word". If the bailout cash on the table proves to be insufficient - the debt mountain keeps growing - or the Greek government finds it can no longer afford to pay public sector wages or pensions, then tough luck: it must default on its debts and declare itself bankrupt. "There is no standing still for Greece," said one German official at the summit - it must either "move forward with reforms" or leave the euro, if not the EU itself.

If Greece does get kicked out of the euro - disorderly or chaotically, now or later - then one thing is guaranteed: contagion could easily spread through the entire European economy and beyond. The capitalist class and its system would find itself in the deepest of crises ●

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ITALY

Rifondazione opposes rail link

Workers' discontent has found an unexpected outlet, notes **Toby Abse**

The last week has seen a spectacular revival in Italy of the movement against the building of a high-speed railway link between Turin and Lyons, the Treno ad Alta Velocità (Tav), which would dramatically improve communication between Italy and France across the Alps.¹

The trigger for this sudden flare-up was the accidental electrocution of Luca Abba, a 37-year-old anarchist and small farmer born and brought up in the Val di Susa, the high Alpine valley through which the line is intended to go. He tried to climb up an electricity pylon as a protest on February 27, and made contact with a high-voltage live wire and remained in a coma. Some parallels have been drawn with the death of the anarchist railwayman, Giuseppe Pinelli, in 1969, with a cartoon in *La Repubblica* making a somewhat tasteless joke about "the accidental coma of an anarchist".² The latest reports suggest that Abba is recovering, so the story is, fortunately, now unlikely to fit the title of Dario Fo's most famous play, *The accidental death of an anarchist*.³

Whilst a case can clearly be made for the tactics adopted in recent years by a number of groups of Italian workers - protesting on the roofs of workplaces faced with closure or getting up on cranes and refusing to come down - climbing electric pylons is bound to strike most outsiders as an extremely risky, if not downright suicidal, form of protest that probably owes more to Catholic notions of martyrdom than the traditions of the workers' movement. To those of us outside the anarchist milieu, the incident involving Abba seemed more reminiscent of the tragic and futile death of the famous publisher turned leftwing terrorist, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli - who accidentally killed himself whilst blowing up an electric pylon at Segrate in March 1972 - than of Pinelli's murder by the police.

Strange

The 'No Tav' movement has been in existence for many years and is a strange alliance of local farmers from the Val di Susa, pacifist environmentalists, who might best be described as 'deep greens', anarchists and autonomists. Whilst some anarchists have a genuine interest in ecological issues and perhaps there may be an ecological strain in autonomism (although it is generally a much more consumerist ideology than classical anarchism⁴), the main attraction for these groups seems to be the chance of engaging in skirmishes, if not pitched battles, with the forces of the state, with some degree of backing from sections of the local population.

Many such high-speed rail links inevitably arouse a certain amount of protest and antagonism amongst those

whose homes or land lie directly in the path of a projected railway. However, most of the opposition to the London-Birmingham HS2, so far at any rate, has no such radical leftwing coloration - indeed much of the opposition in rural areas comes from people who are Conservative in the party-political sense.⁵ Moreover, such intransigent opposition would not necessarily be shared by all environmentalists elsewhere in Europe - many dedicated campaigners against climate change see railways as infinitely preferable to cars, lorries and aeroplanes in terms of the production of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, even if they do not all wax so lyrical on the prospect of railway journeys halfway round the world as Jonathan Neale at full throttle.⁶

It might also be noted that no such widespread movement seems to have arisen in the mountainous areas of France that would be equally affected by a Lyons-Turin rail link. Work started on the French side as early as 2002 and the project seems to be supported by both the local administrations and the vast majority of local citizens. This has been explained by the fact that financial compensation has been paid to those adversely affected, that there has been a greater degree of public consultation about the project than was the case in Italy. In addition, 86% of the work so far has been done by local firms and any workers brought in from outside the area have slept in local hotels and been fed in local restaurants. This has brought benefits to the local economy, at the same time avoiding the disruption that the building of a camp for such labourers would have caused.⁷

The reaction to Luca Abba's accident was both rapid and widespread. On February 27 Rome's main railway station, Roma Termini, found its traffic paralysed for a quarter of an hour by what *La Repubblica* described as "200 *antagonisti*". Demonstrators invaded the railway lines at Bologna and the police charged at them in retaliation. The railway stations at Pisa, Palermo and Ancona were occupied, with repercussions on rail traffic throughout Italy. In Florence a sit-in on the tramway slowed down the service. There were also protests in Aosta, Reggio Calabria, Reggio Emilia, Piacenza, Forlì, Modena, Parma, Cosenza, L'Aquila, Trieste, Genoa and Cagliari. Meanwhile computer hackers from the internationally notorious Anonymous attacked the internet sites of both the police and the carabinieri.

A lot of this activity was organised relatively spontaneously by the massive use of social networks, but Paolo Ferrero, the secretary of Rifondazione Comunista,

also appealed for a nationwide mobilisation, so it would be a mistake to ignore the role of more old-fashioned forms of political organising.⁸ Rifondazione's support for the No Tav campaign is not belated opportunism of the kind displayed by Antonio Di Pietro of the populist Italia dei Valori party. Di Pietro is now calling for a moratorium on building work in the Val di Susa, despite his earlier enthusiasm for Tav and other large-scale building projects when he was minister of public works in one of the centre-left governments. Rifondazione's campaigning on the issue long preceded its 2008 split, with party leader Fausto Bertinotti clearly identifying himself with the No Tav protests and Rifondazione getting an impressive share of the vote in the Val di Susa - an area of the country with no particular association with the radical left. So it is not surprising that Nichi Vendola's Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left, Ecology, Freedom) has also taken an intransigent position of opposition to Tav throughout the disturbances of the last week, making no concessions on this front, despite its rather soft and ambiguous attitude towards its potential electoral coalition partners in the ex-'official communist'-dominated Partito Democratico (PD) on other issues.

Majority

February 29 saw more dramatic and violent clashes between the protestors and the security forces in the Val di Susa itself, with the police not only resorting to violent charges at the demonstrators, but employing both tear gas and water cannon. Whilst the No Tav protestors clearly have some popular support in the valley, it is hard to tell whether they have a majority of the population behind them. The advocates of Tav talk about the "silent majority" that supports the building of the rail link, but so far their talk about organising a march in favour, along the lines of the famous 'March of the 40,000' that brought the Turin Fiat strike to an end in 1980, has remained empty rhetoric. Some local mayors are still committed to the No Tav movement, even if a few municipalities have changed hands in recent years and elected supporters of the link.

It is interesting that these clashes in the Val di Susa led Piero Fassino, the PD mayor of Turin, to take a very hard line against the movement, opposing any dialogue or negotiation. Fassino claimed that while there was "popular consensus" for the movement back in 2005, No Tav has a "much more limited consensus". It has "superimposed on the popular identity an ideological antagonism against Tav and against any public works, attracting into the valley the groups that oppose the *rigassificatore* [gas

terminal] of Livorno, the Dal Molin airport,⁹ the bridge over the strait¹⁰ and any other infrastructure. The Turin-Lyons railway has been transformed for these people into the 'mother of all battles'."¹¹

March 1 saw a new wave of nationwide demonstrations and protests over Tav. Rome saw an invasion of the PD's headquarters, signalling the protestors' awareness that the PD was becoming their most vocal opponent amongst the political parties - Fassino's hostile stance received the wholehearted backing of the party's national leadership. In Milan, there was a sit-in at the stazione Centrale, the A14 motorway from Bologna to Taranto was blocked near Bologna, in Florence the Camp di Marte railway station and one of the bridges were blocked, in Naples activists occupied the high-speed rail tracks near Piazza Garibaldi, in Turin a major road was blocked for an hour and a half and there was a protest outside the Turin offices of the RAI television station, something which was replicated in Cagliari.¹²

On Saturday March 3 there were protests all over Italy.¹³ Inevitably the numbers of people involved were greater than in the previous weekday demonstrations. There was serious disruption in Rome, where the police were unable to stop demonstrators from blocking the nearby access road to the Rome-L'Aquila motorway for a couple of hours. Protestors also managed to block a large tract of the ring road around the city, effectively cutting the capital in two in terms of the circulation of traffic. In Pesaro demonstrators burnt the banners of the PD to show their disgust at that party's enthusiastic support for Tav.

The Milanese protestors seem to have confined themselves to the more conventional and traditional march to the central Piazza Duomo but in the Val di Susa itself greater creativity was displayed when No Tav supporters occupied the toll booths on the A32 motorway and allowed motorists to pass by without paying - a popular, but arguably not very environmentally friendly gesture. Some have suggested that the No Tav protesters have been copying the tactics used by taxi and lorry drivers in recent protests against prime minister Mario Monti's liberalisation decree, but, although there may be some truth in this, since the drivers gained national media attention by disrupting traffic and communications, such tactics as blocking railway lines have been used by the Italian left on quite a number of occasions in the past, especially during anti-war protests.

The Tav controversy has also revived the national debate about the capacity of organised crime groups, such as the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra and the Calabrian Ndrangheta, to obtain large-scale public works contracts for their associates and front companies. Writer and journalist Roberto Saviano, the most famous opponent of the Camorra, raised this issue in the context of the Tav in an article focussing on the role of the Calabrian Ndrangheta.¹⁴ The region of Piedmont, he pointed out, was in third place nationally in terms of Calabrian Mafia infiltration. The following day, the Torinese prosecutor, Giancarlo Caselli, responded to Saviano's article by emphasising that it had been the successful police investigations and arrests in Turin, Cuneo and Alessandria that had brought the issue to national attention and that the authorities should respond by increasing their controls over public

works contracts, not by stopping them.¹⁵

The Tav controversy is being treated by Monti and president Giorgio Napolitano purely as a public order issue, with both of them emphasising that the works will go ahead. They insist that Italy must abide by its international obligations to its French partner, with Tav sometimes being promoted as a symbol of general European integration. However, the whole affair clearly raises wider issues about the environment and about widespread corruption and criminal involvement in Italian public works schemes. Moreover, it indicates that, despite the efforts of the PD to win traditional centre-left voters to uncritical support for Monti's technocratic cabinet, there is still quite a lot of discontent, particularly amongst wide layers of Italian youth, which may eventually be mobilised for a more focused opposition to the whole austerity programme.

It is precisely this possibility that has made the PD's leadership so fearful about the national demonstration called by the metalworkers' union, Fiom, for March 9 in a demonstration in which the No Tav movement has been invited to participate ●

Notes

1. At present the main rail passenger link is a slow night train between Paris and Turin, whilst most freight is carried by heavy lorries.
2. *La Repubblica* February 28.
3. For those unfamiliar with the play, or the real historical events on which it is based, it should be stressed that Pinelli's death was far from accidental - he 'fell' from the top-floor window of a police station in Milan. The authorities talked of a suicide, but it was clearly a political murder carried out by Inspector Calabresi or men under his command. Calabresi was subsequently assassinated in revenge for Pinelli's death. Many years later some former members of Lotta Continua, including the organisation's leader, Adriano Sofri, were arrested, tried and sentenced for this killing.
4. Whilst the more committed members of the Spanish FAI/CNT were renowned for their austere lifestyle, the autonomists of the 1970s embarked upon 'proletarian shopping expeditions', some of which resembled the looting of London's lumpenproletariat last August.
5. Whether the advantages of HS2 outweigh the disadvantages is, of course, more debatable, as there is already a reasonably good rail link between the two cities and the price of tickets on the new line may make it a niche market for wealthy business travellers. There is also an argument about whether the destruction of working class communities by the expansion of Euston station can be justified. Nonetheless, opposition to HS2 may be broadly characterised as coming from Tory nimbies, not the extreme left.
6. Having on one occasion some years ago sat as an observer in a discussion on transport at a Green Party conference, I am aware that there is a current within the party that only supports slow local trains and seems to think that we should not travel more than about 20 or 30 miles from where we were born. I do not believe that such views are shared by Caroline Lucas, Jean Lambert, Jenny Jones or Darren Johnson.
7. This is a summary of an article in *La Repubblica* March 1. Whilst the editorial line of the paper is sympathetic to the building of Tav, the article seems a genuine attempt to explain why French and Italian reactions have differed rather than an overt piece of propaganda.
8. *La Repubblica* February 28.
9. This is for an American military base rather than a civilian airport.
10. This refers to Silvio Berlusconi's megalomaniac plan to build a bridge linking Sicily and Calabria, which, as many have pointed out, would be a wonderful opportunity for both the Sicilian Mafia and the Calabrian Ndrangheta to get their hands on massive and lucrative public works contracts. Others have raised queries about the safety of such a project in an area prone to earthquakes, even if it were to be built by scrupulous engineers and not cost-cutting associates of organised crime bosses.
11. *La Repubblica* March 1.
12. See *La Repubblica* March 2. Other examples of local protests are given in three pages of coverage of the No Tav movement.
13. See *La Repubblica* March 4, which devoted its first seven pages to No Tav.
14. *La Repubblica* March 6.
15. *La Repubblica* March 7.



REVIEW

Imperialism before Lenin

Richard B Day and Daniel Gaido (editors and translators) **Discovering imperialism: social democracy to World War I** Brill 2012, Historical Materialism book series, Vol 33, pp951, €149

Communist politics after 1924 began to be characterised by the cult of the personality of Lenin. The cults of the personalities of Stalin and Mao were, in a sense, merely offshoots (leading to increasingly bizarre imitative phenomena further down the line, from Enver Hoxha to ... Bob Avakian). Trotskyists responded, perhaps unconsciously, by creating a cult of the personality of Trotsky.

The effect of these personality cults has largely been to cut the left off from any real knowledge of the historical development of its own common ideas as a *collective* product - and particularly of the real history of the Second International and the debates in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, which was the largest party, the model for others and had the most vigorous internal life.

For this real history there was substituted a caricature derived originally from the criticisms of the anarcho-syndicalist left, and the 'mass action' left of Rosa Luxemburg, Anton Pannekoek and others inside the International but influenced by the anarcho-syndicalists. These criticisms were glued together with a fictitious history of Bolshevism, which asserted its existence as an independent *party* from 1903 and retrojected some of the arguments Lenin offered *after 1914*, to make Lenin before 1914 - purely fictionally - into both an ally of the 'mass action' left, and an advocate of the sort of 'monolithic' conception of the party which emerged as a doctrine in 1921.¹

The bourgeois academy was only too willing to promote this caricature, but with the opposing conclusion, that bureaucratic managerialism or 'technocratic elitism' is inevitable in 'modern society', calling to witness left-syndicalist, Weberian and later fascist Robert Michels' *Political parties* (1911), a book still used in US 'political science' courses. The conclusion the academics draw is, of course, that, since the 'mass action' lefts were unrealistic, only the 'revisionist' right wing of the Second International, which argued for full engagement with the parliamentary politics of coalitions, offered a real 'democratic' alternative to the dictatorship of the party bureaucracy which the 'lefts' described.

In relation to the question of imperialism, the result of the cut-off is that Lenin's 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* is treated as the beginning and the ABC of Marxist understanding of the issue. There may be grudging recognition of Nikolai Bukharin's *Imperialism and world economy* (1915), while Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance capital* (1910), which substantially influenced Lenin, has been cited more often than read. Rosa Luxemburg's *The accumulation of capital* (1913) has been acknowledged (and, indeed, its economic reasoning has, together with Keynes's different underconsumptionism, profoundly influenced the *Monthly Review* school). But the context in which these works were written has largely been missing: the caricature substitutes for it.

In *Witnesses to permanent revolution* (2009), an earlier book in the same series, Richard B Day and Daniel Gaido provided English-speaking readers with a way behind the personality cult cut-off in relation

to Trotsky and 'permanent revolution': a great deal of the context of other contemporary writers and writing on the topic. In *Discovering imperialism*, they do the same thing for the question under discussion. They publish 54 articles, sometimes abridged, or extracts from books, beginning with Max Beer on 'Modern English imperialism' in 1897 and ending with Pannekoek on 'Imperialism and the tasks of the proletariat' in 1916. A 93-page introduction, and individual introductions to most of the pieces, provide additional context. These introductory components are written broadly within the frame of the 'orthodox' left narrative; but not so as to do actual violence to the materials. An appendix offers a technical critique of the core of Luxemburg's argument.

Overall, this is a really excellent book, which is deeply informative about the development of Marxist ideas about imperialism before Lenin's famous text. The hardback price will put it out of most people's reach, but it should be recommended to libraries. Haymarket Books have produced very much cheaper paperback editions of several books in the series,² and it is very much to be hoped that they will produce this one, too.

My response to the book in general is one of enthusiasm. To go through listing all the pieces translated would be tedious and to try to synthesise them fully would also take too long. So in the rest of this review I will look at three issues which reading it posed to me. The first is the editors' choice of 'start date'. The second is the belief that *imperialism* was a new phenomenon of the late 19th century in some sense larger than the imperialist ideology pioneered by Benjamin Disraeli, a broadly common feature of most of the Second International authors whose work is translated here, shared by Hilferding, Luxemburg, Bukharin and Lenin. The third is the evolution of Karl Kautsky's position. Kautsky's evolution is important to the history because, as Lars T Lih has demonstrated, *Lenin's* underlying political approach was founded on Kautsky's earlier work - which Lenin continued until very late in his life to champion - both against the later, renegade, Kautsky, and against the 'mass action' lefts (notably in *Leftwing communism, an infantile disorder*).

Dates

The end date of *Discovering imperialism* is 1916: the year in which Lenin's book on the subject appeared. This is an obvious choice: writing on the issue of imperialism after the Russian Revolution would be profoundly different. The start date is 1897, but not quite consistently: Kautsky's 1898 three-part series in *Die Neue Zeit*, 'Colonialism old and new' (parts 1 and 2) and 'Kiaotshau' (Jiaozhou), is absent, though mentioned. Shameless plug: Ben Lewis has translated this series and we hope to publish it in the near future.

1897 is not a straightforward start date, because the issue was, in fact, already under discussion. The 'revisionist controversy' in which Eduard Bernstein published his notorious Fabian polemic against Marxism, *The preconditions of socialism* (1899), in fact began with an exchange about colonialism between Bernstein and British socialist Ernest



British rule: from Cairo to the Cape

Belfort Bax in 1896. Kautsky's 1898 series started as an intervention in the 'revisionist controversy', though it mutated rapidly into an argument against German imperial navalism and ended as a polemic against the German annexation of Jiaozhou.

Since *Discovering imperialism* was published, in fact, Daniel Gaido has noted what must be one of the very first socialist uses of the word 'imperialism' to mean 'colonialism'

(Marx, in *The civil war in France* [1871], uses it to mean what leftists now call 'Bonapartism' or the 'strong state').³ This is Belfort Bax's article 'Imperialism v socialism' in the *first*, February 1885, issue of *The Commonwealth*, the paper of the recently founded Socialist League, whose most famous leaders were William Morris and Eleanor Marx Aveling. Already in 1885 Bax's argument was - as he argued in 1896

- that imperialism results from the drive for external markets resulting from overproduction, and defeating it would intensify the contradictions of capitalism. His political conclusion in a certain sense displays the core of the standard far-left 'Leninist' approach, and is thus worth quoting:

"No, the foreign policy of the great international socialist party must be to break up these hideous race monopolies called empires, beginning in each case

at home. Hence everything which makes for the disruption and disintegration of the empire to which he belongs must be welcomed by the socialist as an ally. It is his duty to urge on any movement tending in any way to dislocate the commercial relations of the world, knowing that every shock the modern complex commercial system suffers weakens it and brings its destruction nearer. This is the negative side of the foreign policy of socialism. The positive is embraced in a single sentence: to consolidate the union of the several national sections on the basis of firm and equal friendship, steadfast adherence to definite principle, and determination to present a solid front to the enemy.”⁴

Already in 1883, Kautsky had published in an early issue of *Die Neue Zeit* a polemic against Germany pursuing colonialism and navalism.⁵

The editorial choices which have produced the 1897 start date and the exclusion of Kautsky’s 1898 series are rational enough. The 1896 Bernstein-Bax exchange has already been translated in H and JM Tudor’s collection on the ‘revisionist controversy’, *Marxism and social democracy* (1988, chapter 2). Kautsky’s 1898 series is long (and *Discovering imperialism* is already very long). And it consists overwhelmingly of an anglophile account of history between the 16th and 19th centuries, which would now be seen as pretty weak history: certainly, one long superseded as historical writing and, for that matter, as Marxist historical writing.

Nonetheless, it is significant that the mutation in the meaning of ‘imperialism’, from Bonapartism to colonialism, began in England with Disraeli, and that it was Bax who seems to have first identified imperialism in this sense as a strategic problem for the workers’ movement.⁶

The reality is that, though ‘imperialism’ in the modern sense was new as a *political ideology* with Disraeli (like his ‘one-nation Conservatism’, of which it is the reverse side), this was not true of the *economic and geopolitical practice* it ideologised. This practice, the export of capital associated with financial operations, and steps to hold places overseas in political subordination for commercial purposes, whether by the direct seizure of territory, by making states dependent on loans, or by raising up local client groups to undermine regimes which were getting too autonomous, was already - for England and the Netherlands and to a lesser extent for France - old.

The free trade illusion

In 1609 Dutch author Hugo Grotius published the book *Mare liberum* - ‘the sea is free’ - arguing for a right in international law to travel and trade freely. This piece of legal ideology in fact reflected the mercantilist interests of the Dutch shipping and fishing industries, which were close to dominance in Europe and - in shipping - engaged in breaking into the closed trade territories of the Spanish-Portuguese empire.

The British shipping industry at this time was emergent rather than dominant. British author John Selden in 1635 published *Mare clausum* - ‘the sea is closed’ - arguing for a right to claim territorial waters, from which the Dutch could be excluded. 1651, after the fall of the monarchy, saw the first Navigation Act, restricting certain forms of trade to British ships. The Navigation Acts regime continued in force till 1849, though levels of enforcement varied sharply in the period.

By the 19th century, the *British* shipping industry was dominant. ‘Free trade’ was therefore in the mercantilist interest of the shipping industry, as it had been for the Netherlands in the 1600s. It was almost certainly incidental that the end of agricultural protectionism - the repeal of the corn laws - was demanded by *domestic* industrialists as a means of reducing wages, and by Liberal workers as a means of reducing the cost of living. Meanwhile, from the beginning to the end of the century the British state remained at the disposal of the shipping industry and the financial operators associated with it, and also to a lesser extent of - for example - the exporters of mining

and railway equipment to Latin America from the 1820s on, and the financiers who lent the new Latin American states the funds to buy the capital equipment.

British world-dominance in the 19th century gave the political ideology of free trade a cachet and set it up as linked to liberalism as an alternative to the surviving *anciens régimes*. Manchester was the great centre of the ideology (Chicago succeeded it when the US became dominant). The belief that the dominance of industrial capital, liberalism and free trade went together as a package was an illusion produced by British world dominance.

It is a striking feature of most of the writings translated in *Discovering imperialism* that - as is also true of Kautsky’s 1898 series - they completely buy the illusion that there was a real period of dominance of industrial capital, liberalism and free trade, as opposed to a period of the dominance of free trade *as an ideology*. There are only a few exceptions.

These are interesting. They are mostly authors who after August 1914 zig-zagged sharply to the right, becoming social-chauvinists: Parvus (Alexander Helphand), Heinrich Cunow, Paul Lensch (and perhaps Max Beer, who worked for Parvus’s wartime *Die Glocke*, though he later moved to Moscow). The authors understandably do not include any of their writings from their social-chauvinist period. Perhaps it is to be inferred that their view was that, since imperialism and war were - they argued - necessary features of modern industrial capitalism, and Britain was in decline, a British defeat would represent progress?

In any case, it is worth noting that it was not only those on the right or the party leaderships who became social-chauvinists. As well as these, I have already mentioned Michels; and the most spectacular example was Michels’ inspiration after World War I, the pre-war ‘mass action left’ leader in Italy, Benito Mussolini.

In the majority of the articles, the emergence of imperialism as an ideology - for Britain the *re*-emergence, since the British had thought of themselves as controlling an empire of trade and production throughout the 18th century - is treated as requiring explanation by some *new* feature of capitalism, or by capitalist *decline*. Lenin’s *Imperialism* codified the idea for subsequent generations of the left.

Kautsky

Kautsky’s 1914 and 1915 articles printed as numbers 47 and 49 in this collection⁷ are dreadful examples of muddle. The 1915 piece argues for a sentimental, neo-Kantian idea of clipping the claws of the capitalist nation-state tigers and restoring the imagined dominance of industrial capital, liberalism and free trade, in a world of nation-states *without* a top-dog state to keep order and provide a global reserve currency. Their disputes are to be settled by ‘courts of arbitration’, a precursor to today’s left illusions in the UN.

This muddle has both deep and shallow roots. The deep roots go back to Kautsky’s beginnings in the *Kathedersozialist* school of statist-nationalist socialism; to the illusion that national scale would be sufficient for the cooperative commonwealth, in *The class struggle* (1892); and to the illusions in parliamentarism as a form of democracy expressed in *Parliamentarism, direct legislation and social democracy* (1893).

It is the shallow roots which are more clearly displayed in this collection. Kautsky was to a considerable extent an intellectual hit-man for August Bebel (a central leader of the SPD until his death in 1913). Between the late 1890s and 1905, Bebel saw the principal danger affecting the SPD as coming from the right, and he pushed Kautsky to write polemics against them.⁸ In addition Kautsky himself probably moved somewhat to the left in response to the Russian revolution of 1905. His most critical account of parliamentarism was offered in the series, ‘Republic and social democracy in France’ (1905), which could have been *both* a response to 1905 *and* a defence of Bebel against Jean Jaurès.⁹

Meanwhile, the arguments of the Austro-Marxists of Karl Renner and Otto Bauer in favour of a multinational state had emerged into the full light of day with the publication

of Bauer’s *The question of nationalities and social democracy* in 1907, triggering more debate, notably Rosa Luxemburg’s 1908-09 polemic against the traditional self-determination slogan.¹⁰ Kautsky intervened in this debate to defend the “self-determination of nations” and in doing so argued strongly that political democracy depended on the possession of a common state language.¹¹

By 1910-11, the ‘mass action’ left had begun to emerge, and it attacked both the SPD Reichstag fraction and Kautsky: not only directly over the mass strike question, but also in pieces translated in *Discovering imperialism* from Luxemburg, Pannekoek and others (this particular debate at numbers 29-42). The Reichstag fraction had put forward proposals for international arms limitation agreements (which was new) and the establishment of international arbitration courts (which was already in the 1891 Erfurt programme). The lefts argued that these proposals were utopian: the only alternative to imperialism and the drive towards war was mass action to pose the question of the working class taking power and bringing in socialism.

On the purely tactical issue posed by the arms limitation proposal it is by no means clear that the attack of the ‘lefts’ on the Reichstag fraction was correct. The substantial political effect of proposals for arms limitation at this period could have been exposure of the aggressive policy of the German imperialist state. It is not, I think, entirely accidental that Lensch went over to social-chauvinism, and that the argument that imperialism was inevitable became part of the armoury of the social-chauvinists.¹² The ‘mass strike line’, which was posed as an alternative to the SPD’s parliamentary tactic, really was ultra-left and the voice of an impatience which could easily tip over into an ‘actionism’ of the right - and did so, as I have already said, in Mussolini.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Kautsky at least *reacted away from* the arguments of the ‘lefts’ by retreating from the analysis of ‘Republic and social democracy in France’ and from the language of *The road to power* (1909) in favour of an actual fetishism of the nation-state and its bureaucratic apparatus and of the parliamentary form. This fetishism is, quite clearly, already present in the arguments of 1911-12. It had, as I have said, roots in Kautsky’s earlier writings. But in Russia, where the ‘actionist’ tendency of *Vperyod* had actually been marginalised, Lenin and others, whose own politics were built on Kautsky’s earlier politics, were able to move in the opposite direction to Kautsky’s shift of 1911-15.

As I said earlier, these are merely partial thoughts stimulated by reading *Discovering imperialism*. I have not discussed at all its material on Hilferding’s and Luxemburg’s economic theories. My final point is simple: this book should be as widely read on the left as possible. It opens up a vista of a much more complex debate and development than our ‘traditional’ left narratives of the issue allow us to see ●

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Notes

1. On the aspect of the history of Bolshevism, see most recently Pham Binh, ‘Mangling the party of Lenin’ *Weekly Worker* February 2, and L Lih, ‘Falling out over a Cliff’, supplement *Weekly Worker* February 16.
2. www.haymarketbooks.org/category/hm-series.
3. The introduction to *Discovering imperialism* discusses the shift in meaning at pp5-8.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/bax/1885/02/imperialism.htm.
5. ‘Auswanderung und Kolonisation’ *Neue Zeit* Vol 1, pp365-70, 395-404 (online at http://library.fes.de/cgi-bin/populo/nz.pl).
6. I leave aside Marx’s and Engels’ journalistic comments of various sorts. See in particular K Anderson *Marx at the margins* (Chicago 2010).
7. The first was also extracted in *Workers’ Liberty* Vol 2, No3, 2003.
8. G Steenson *Karl Kautsky: Marxism in the classical years* (Pittsburgh, 1978) makes this case in detail from their correspondence.
9. An extract from this series translated by Ben Lewis was printed in *Weekly Worker* April 28 2011.
10. Bauer: translated by E Nimni, Minneapolis 2000; Luxemburg: www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm.
11. Translated by Ben Lewis in two parts in *Critique* Vol 37, pp371-89 (2009) and Vol 38, pp143-63 (2010).
12. As can be seen from the articles of 1915 by both Kautsky and his critics (numbers 49-53).

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

Theocracy rests on ever narrower base

The last president?

Iran's Islamic constitution automatically bars anyone objecting to the theocratic nature of the state from standing for election and, as a result, parliamentary and presidential elections have often been used by the electorate to express their discontent with the more powerful factions of the religious state. Since 1997 this has been expressed in votes for 'reformist' candidates - not necessarily to support 'reformism', but, since it represented the lesser of two evils, to express discontent with more conservative factions.

The parliamentary election just completed was different: for the first time in more than a decade the choice was between complex lists of conservative factions only. Like Shia Islam, itself the product of factional infighting, over the last 12 months - as 'reformists' were manoeuvred out of the official political scene - the conservatives and 'principlists' split and split again. In the words of one ayatollah: "We wanted to create a unified, single principlist faction, but we ended with 16 to 17 factions fighting the principlist corner."

There was no doubt the turnout would be abysmal and this is precisely what happened. The supreme leader had made this an election about 'honour' and pride, and his supporters predicted exactly the percentage of the population that had participated in the elections: 64%. As if by magic, the electoral commission declared this to be the official figure - mere hours after the booths closed. Yet many Iranians believed these figures were false; some of those who had ventured out onto the streets had already posted photos of deserted polling stations on the internet.

Foreign reporters, under carefully controlled official guidance, were taken by bus to selected polling stations to be shown the queues of those waiting to vote. However, this failed to impress the foreign press corps - and, of course, in the absence of independent observers and opinion polls, it is impossible to say whether the official figures are correct. The 'reformist' opposition, together with the liberals and the left, had largely boycotted the vote and were quick to find contradictions in the official story.

They pointed to a gaffe made on live TV by Seyed Solat Mortazavi, the head of the interior ministry's election centre. On state television, Mortazavi quoted the interior minister, Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, as saying that the turnout was almost 34% - but instantly 'corrected' this to 64%.

The other blunder came from the Mehr news agency, which had reported 373,000 people eligible for voting in the province of Ilam. The same agency reported 380,000 had voted there. Mehr later amended the figure on its website to 280,000. Another news outlet, Baztab, reported that the number of eligible voters was 2.5 million less than were eligible in 2009.¹ There are also reports of cash payments made in the provincial cities in a desperate effort to entice people to



Ahmadinejad trumped by Khamenei

vote. Apparently the going rate in Fars province (Shiraz) was 30,000 toman: \$15 at the current exchange rate.

Ahmadinejad the loser

Just as the turnout was foreseen with remarkable accuracy by the supreme leader and his allies, so too was the result. The various factions of those loyal to Ali Khamenei have likely picked up at least 75% of the seats in the majlis (parliament).

The big loser, then, is president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; his increasingly open rupture with the supreme leader has effectively ended in his defeat and, while he himself does not go back before the electorate until 2013, he now faces strong opposition both from above and from the next rung down the Iranian constitutional ladder. Both in Tehran, where he has traditionally fared worse, and in the provinces, where his populist rhetoric has more purchase, he has been comprehensively beaten - legitimately or otherwise.

If that was not bad enough, even the outgoing parliament, in which he had wider support, is to call a hearing to discuss the hapless

president's handling of the economy and foreign affairs. The official unemployment figure hit 15% last year, and Ahmadinejad's decision to cut food and fuel subsidies caused widespread discontent - given how reliant an increasingly impoverished population was on them. The concession - a monthly cash payment to every citizen worth \$45 - is equally criticised for contributing to spiralling inflation, which is officially estimated at 22.5%.

It is unlikely that this hearing would result - as it could, if Khamenei gave the nod - in Ahmadinejad's impeachment. Nevertheless, it would have at least two major uses for the conservatives. Firstly, it would pile further pressure on an already reeling president, and reduce further his room for manoeuvre by effectively putting him on notice. Secondly, it would divert the popular anger at the subsidy cuts into safe channels - Khamenei and his allies will be only too aware of the contribution of similar policies to the unrest in Tunisia and Egypt.

It remains to be seen, however, whether Ahmadinejad is truly down and out. Though constitutionally disbarred from running for a third term, and surrounded by enemies, this

wily political operator may yet have enough tricks up his sleeve to avoid political oblivion. "Ahmadinejad's camp has not been demolished. We have to wait and see what happens after the new parliament convenes in June," one analyst told Reuters.²

Long game

Speculation abounds as to Khamenei's long game. One popular theory is that he wishes to abolish the position of president altogether. Last year, he suggested that the selection of a prime minister from the majlis itself would be an improvement.

From his perspective, locked in a war of attrition with Ahmadinejad, the appeal is obvious. "Khamenei will essentially have everything he does approved and pushed through parliament by his allies," an exiled reformist told the *New York Times*.³ And what is the point of being supreme leader if not?

Certainly, for the time being, he appears to have achieved a measure of success. First, an alliance of convenience with Ahmadinejad and his faction allowed him to neutralise the 'reformist' 'opposition'; after facing down the mass protests of 2009, outmanoeuvring Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, the cringing leaders of the green movement, was a simple enough matter. The result was this year's election: purged even of the most pliant of opposition candidates.

In fact, as far as the death of the 'reformists' is concerned, one event in this election put the icing on the sorry cake. The opposition boycott, if all these pictures of vacant polling stations are to be believed, achieved some measure of success; but one man who did manage to put a cross next to a name was Mohammad Khatami, former 'reformist' president and now a spokesman for the green movement, whose visit to the polling booth was gratefully covered by Iranian state media. His supporters are angry,

although those close to him argue either that he voted to try to prevent another crackdown on 'reformists' and liberals, or that he was personally coerced into doing so. Readers may decide.

Now that he has worked Ahmadinejad, likewise, into a hole, the way should be clear for the authority of Khatami to become as absolute as his honorary title suggests. For many Iranians, there are echoes here of the last years of the shah. After years of pretending Iran had two parties, Adl and Iran Novin, albeit both monarchist in their politics, the shah decided in 1975 to abolish both of them and merge them into a single party, Rastakhiz. He said: "What is the point of having a 'yes' and an 'of course' party? It is better to have one party. Those who believe in the Iranian constitution, the monarchy and the principles of the White Revolution must join the new party. Those who do not believe in these principles are traitors who must either go to prison or leave the country."

A week before the recent elections Khamenei made a similarly chilling speech: the results of the elections are obvious; he will have a much more unified majlis; there may be 16 or 17 principlist factions in the new parliament, but they will all be united in their absolute obedience of the supreme leader; and every faction will be too weak to propose or do anything.

For now, the supreme leader has got his way. Craven 'reformists' will not stop him; and imperialist sanctions, sabotage and war will only make things worse. Only the Iranian masses can put an end to this blood-soaked regime ●

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Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/world/iran-blog/2012/mar/04/iran-elections-turnout-regime-factions.
2. in.reuters.com/article/2012/03/04/iran-election-result-idINL5E8E403D20120304.
3. March 4.

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