



weekly **worker**



**Mark Serwotka and
PCS back down in
face of union disarray**

■ Italy and article 18
■ Rowan Williams quits
■ Lenin debate
■ Playing Arthur Scargill

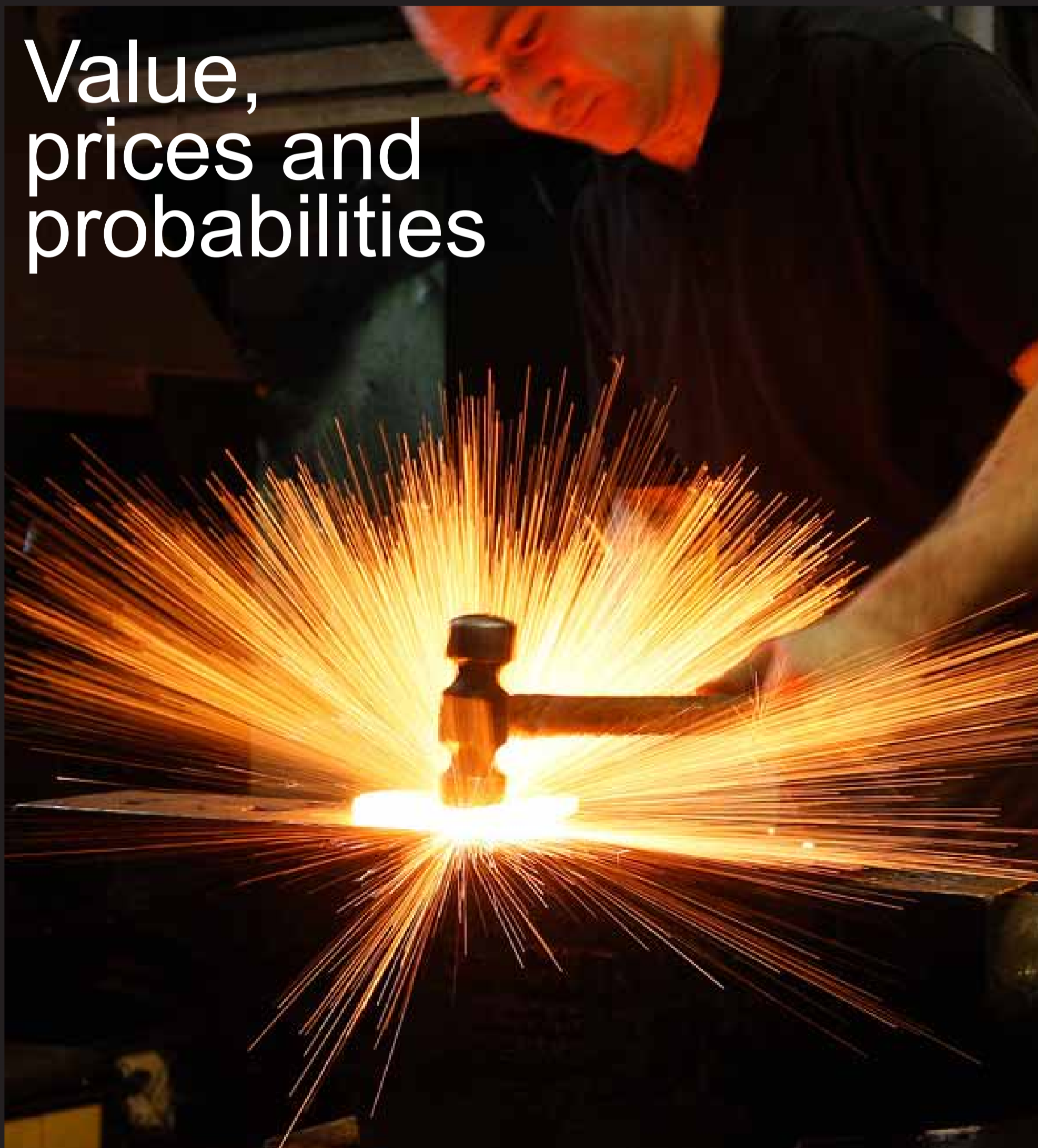
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LETTERS



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

Answer me!

Why is it that, when people keep on arguing we must stay in or join the Labour Party to 'pull it left', there is no explanation of how on earth 'the left' in the Labour Party will do so? Let's have some answers to continually repeated questions posed by myself and others.

The Labour Party conference does not make Labour Party policy any more. A little bit of dissent is expressed now and again, but the right learnt their lessons and changed the party's internal decision-making processes. In sheer desperation to get elected, the Labour left went along with all of Blair's changes. The Labour Party conference is, and has been, a rally of the largely unquestioning faithful for some years now.

Where have been the left challenges to Blair's anointment? The media, such as *The Sun*, told Labour Party members to vote Blair, as he was the only man who would make Labour electable. The left kept their heads down.

Why weren't the so-called Labour left able to ensure John McDonnell got onto the ballot paper? Twice he received nowhere near enough support even to stand, let alone succeed. He should not have stood aside for Diane Abbott. It's been a long, long time since there was a left challenge with anywhere near the support previously achieved by Tony Benn and Eric Heffer.

The oft quoted 'link with the trade unions' makes Labour the party for the working class. Not one Labour-affiliated trade union will dare ballot their members on retaining the link or at least reducing their donations. We all know why: because they'd lose. An incredible amount of gerrymandering goes on to bar any motions submitted along these lines from being debated.

The trade union link has not seen Labour listen and deliver for trade union members and workers for all the millions donated. Instead trade union bosses have always placed the Labour Party's electoral considerations way above the interests of their members. In government we can't fight Labour for fear of letting the Tories in. In opposition we can't fight for fear of *keeping* the Tories in! Who were the last unions to finally deliver unity of action over the attacks on pensions on November 30 and the first to abandon the fight? The GMB and Unison - major unions affiliated to the Labour Party. Which union had been calling for a united fight back for two years? The non-affiliated Public and Commercial Services Union.

Yes, it is asserted, we know - Labour have 'always sold out the workers'. Nothing new with Blair, Brown and co. Inspiring stuff,

comrades. But successive quantitative changes lead to a qualitative change. Plenty of people on the left were wise to Blair from the very start, but not the Labour left. For these dullards, the project is always to get Labour elected, no matter how many betrayals, because 'they are better than the Tories'. Do I have to point out, yet again, that in the civil service thousands of job losses, office closures, privatisation of services, regional pay (now to be spread across the public sector) came in under the last *Labour* government, and civil service pay restraint and the first attacks on our pension rights?

What about the promises of 'no tuition fees', that rail privatisation would be reversed, there would be no privatisation of air traffic control? What about an 'ethical foreign policy' and then the war in Iraq and Afghanistan? The massive expansion of eye-watering PFI projects? What about 'We will be sleaze-free'? What about Brown's dithering over nationalising the banks for how that would look? A Labour government against nationalisation! What about the gap between the rich and poor growing *wider* under a 13-year Labour government than under 18 years of the Tories, with a government elected on a landslide in 1997 that could (and should) have proclaimed socialism overnight? The anti-terror legislation and the proposed introduction of ID cards? Things can only get better! They did for the rich under Labour.

This little lot is off the top of my head. Just how much more are we supposed to take from Labour governments? Is there any further betrayal (is there any principle *left* to betray?) a Labour government can carry out that will finally cause the remaining dullards to leave Labour?

Admit the catastrophic decline in party membership (remember those joyous early declarations of so many joining following the Con-Dem government forming). Is the supposed flood now a trickle or even a leak? What is the calibre of these people? What is the state of Labour Party branches today, where the much called for 'move to the left' is supposed to take place? How many were at the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy meeting Mike Loates boasted about in his disingenuous, odd letter (March 8)? Who are these better NEC and PLP members he wrote about? How are the sad, desperate socialists still in the Labour Party better than all the thousands of working class activists who left in disgust, unable to stomach the constant betrayals, unable to tell union members constantly battered by a *Labour* government to vote Labour because they're better than the Tories?

I knew Mike Loates and I am surprised he is even aware of the *Weekly Worker*. He was hostile to reading any left papers when I was in the Socialist Workers Party. He used to be in PCS and condemned full-time union officials before leaving the civil service a few years ago to become one! He abandoned his union branch, which is a shadow of its former self. Mike joined the Labour Party as thousands of real socialists were leaving. He supported Oona King over George Galloway because she was black and a woman. Not for Mike any worries about her being a warmonger and the numbers of dead black women and children killed by US/British forces. A very odd socialist indeed. He condemned Galloway's support from Muslims as 'communalism', but had no problems when Muslims voted Labour.

Those still arguing for us to join Labour and 'pull it left' need to answer these questions and stop ignoring them. Stan Keable (Letters, March

15) doesn't think independent anti-cuts candidates will have much, if any, success. He may be right. He may also be wrong. Only one way to find out, as Harry Hill often says. Just because the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and others haven't done very well in the past does not mean they will always fail.

I can see, in my members, a real hatred of the Labour Party for what they did to them as civil servants. They hate the Tories and the Lib Dems too. I think most people are ready to consider voting for anti-cuts candidates if they see they have trade union support. It is for Labour-affiliated unions to justify keeping the link. Most union bosses do so for knighthoods and peerages (in exchange for putting Labour's electoral prospects so often above their members' interests). Those in the Labour Party urging we 'pull it left' (your string snapped decades ago, comrades) are the ones misleading the working class.

Answer these questions this time. Stop the bland, hopeless assertions, please. You are talking to yourselves; you're not fooling anyone who is class-conscious. Finally, yes, millions of working class people still have illusions in the Labour Party. They still do in capitalism. Both attitudes are changing. Our job as socialists or communists is not to once again return Labour to government. We've been there again and again.

David Vincent
email

Dead end

Stan Keable's letter demonstrates the political and strategic dead end comrades in the Labour Party find themselves in. Comrade Keable uses comments from Mick Loates, of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, that there has been a "vast" improvement in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the trade union representatives on the national executive committee as somehow an indicator of a leftwards shift. Even in dismissing a bit of Loates's delusions, comrade Keable clearly still thinks that a change has come; though he can't tell us quite what has changed.

No change has occurred: the bureaucratic machine remains intact and in terms of policy not even social democracy, let alone socialism, gets a look in. The left within the Labour Party closely resembles the necrotic masses from a George Romero movie more than a dynamic movement - faintly remembering that they used to be something and attempting to shuffle along regardless.

As many on the left have pointed out, the viability of strengthening the working class pole in the Labour Party is never going to happen whilst it is a party of austerity and cuts. Despite being presented with numerous openings on the NHS, welfare reform, tax and education, the Labour Party has tied itself in knots trying to appeal to business interests at the cost of alienating its base. The confrontations and struggles against the Tory-led government and the new austerity agenda is taking place beyond the Labour Party. The ironic thing, as Dave Vincent has pointed out, is that in spite of the mass demonstrations, unified strikes and youth riots, the Labour Party has doggedly condemned working class and extra-parliamentary action ('Striking on March 28 is not enough', March 8). This is against the expectations of the comrades who assumed that it would shift leftwards and provide space to open up a struggle. It is worth noting that Ed Miliband cancelled his planned address to a rally to defend the NHS on March 8 to go and watch football

with billionaire property developer Assem Allam.

Recognising that entry into the Labour Party is at best premature does not signal a retreat from fighting to democratise the unions. It is simply knowing where our forces are and the state of the movement. The left is not in a position to have any sort of impact on the direction or structures of the Labour Party. What we can have an effect on and build is working class action within our workplaces - through our unions where we can, but outside when we must.

Comrade Vincent's suggestion that we should look for independent, working class candidates in the upcoming election could be useful, but should at most be a tertiary concern. The two key tasks facing the revolutionary left in this period are, firstly, to firstly get its act together and ditch amateur sects for an actual party project; and, secondly, to strengthen and organise the resistance at the base of the unions to the sell-out, sectionalism and ultimately the politics of trade unionism.

Chris Stafford
Manchester

Tusc's progress

Former Chair of the Socialist Alliance and Respect Nick Wrack led an interesting and successful public debate at the Rugby United Railway Club on Monday March 19. The meeting was organised by Rugby Tusc, as a start to the party's 2012 election campaign.

Nick, who is the Tusc number two candidate in the London Assembly elections in May, set out a clear vision of an alternative to the present reliance on a capitalist approach by the three main parties: "They all see vital services within society as opportunities for profit," he argued. "The result of such an approach is the privatisation of public services and the driving down of the living standards of working class people."

Nick applauded the "founding ethos of the NHS", in which "all members of society contribute collectively to the communal well-being, taking back their individual care needs when required". He said he is for "a society in which this value informs all our communal action". This demands the emergence of a party that will represent the views and needs of the working class.

As Rugby Tusc convenor and prospective candidate for Wolston and the Lawfords, I spoke of my long-standing commitment to the ward. I then outlined the progress Rugby Tusc had made. The branch was formed just 12 months ago, but it has already made its presence felt in the area, with a number of stalls, leafleting, public meetings and campaigns against many aspects of the way public spending cuts have hit local people. These have included opposition to bus service cuts, the closure of hospital wards and the Welfare Reform Bill presently going through parliament.

Dave Goodwin (prospective candidate for Hillmorton) confirmed Tusc's commitment to opposing all cuts in public spending at every level, while Steve Roberts (Bilton) exploded the myth that the pensions pot cannot support the current commitments, using carefully researched figures. It was apparent that the raid on pensions was purely to bolster the bailout of the banks, he argued.

Julie Weekes (Rokeby and Overslade) spoke of the three-pronged effect of the cuts on women. Her research demonstrated that women are disproportionately more likely to lose their jobs; that cut services are more likely to have been

used by women; and that the gaps thus created are more likely to be filled voluntarily by women.

Pete McLaren
Rugby

Peak coal

In response to Tony Clark (Letters, March 15), who has argued the same point about "peak oil" repeatedly in our letters pages, I would point out that the early marginalist economist, William Stanley Jevons, argued in his book *The coal question* (London 1865) that, with continuing economic growth, the supply of coal would run out within a century - ie, by 1965.

The fact that new sources of coal were found does not affect the logic of the argument, but merely the predicted date. But what happened in reality was, rather, that capitalism found both new technologies which economised on coal (electrical power produced by consuming coal centrally was more efficient than local consumption by steam engines) and new technologies which used other energy sources (oil, hydroelectric).

It is certainly true that today's capitalism is more oil-dependent than Victorian Britain was coal-dependent. But it is a mistake to suppose that capitalism *as such* cannot change its 'energy shape'. The decisive obstacle to such a reshaping is the *military* technology of the dominant power: coal-based for Britain in its heyday, oil-based for the US (tanks and air power). "Peak oil" advocates are at risk of repeating Jevons' elementary analytical error by simply extrapolating forward current technology.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Day off

I recently got a Kindle device and started reading the *Weekly Worker* with it. While the PDF makes things too small, browser extensions such as 'Kindle It' are an ideal solution. With the Kindle I can start reading on the same day that the paper is released and I don't have to wait for the mailman to arrive. Despite that, the device reads nearly exactly like the paper (as there is no backlight monitor), which is why I bought it - devices like iPads tire your eyes after a short while.

I have therefore stopped my regular subscription for the hard copy of the *Weekly Worker*. But I will continue the 'subscription' regardless. I mean, what is a fiver a month for me if it can sustain such a good publication? If only a few hundred of the 15,000 readers thought like this, Robbie Rix could have a day off and we'd get more space for articles and less for his whining (I kid, I kid).

Benjamin Hill
email

Resort retort

This past weekend Mr Miliband proposed an employment programme that would pay businesses the equivalent of the minimum wage to hire people under the age of 25 instead of perpetual unemployment insurance, a programme to be funded by taxes on bank bonuses. Despite the back and forth between Arthur Bough and Mike Macnair that ignored the role of economic interventionism in favour of labour, only state policy can end structural and cyclical unemployment, only state policy can increase labour's bargaining power, and only state policy can increase real wages.

This Labourite scheme is nowhere close to an employer of last resort (ELR) policy, though, which would: include those aged 25 and over; establish pay rates to living-wage levels and more; not involve payouts

Second edition: it's coming



of any sort to businesses (the ELR programme is a direct employment programme); and be funded by more substantively progressive taxation (not just income).

Jacob Richter
 email

Zim 6 ‘guilty’

Six members and supporters of the International Socialist Organisation have been found guilty in a Harare court of “conspiracy to commit public violence” and given suspended jail sentences. They must also perform 420 hours of community service and pay a fine of 500 US dollars each.

The ISO - which is affiliated to the Socialist Workers Party’s International Socialist Tendency - had organised a public meeting in February 2011 to discuss the ‘Arab awakening’. The meeting had not got much further than watching a video of the upsurge in Egypt and Tunisia when it was raided by the police. All 46 comrades at the meeting were arrested, accused of “plotting to subvert the government by unconstitutional means”.

While 40 were released without charge, the six - Munyaradzi Gwisai, Tafadzwa Choto, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Hopewell Gumbo, Edson Chakuma and Welcome Zimuto - were detained for a month, during which time they were kept manacled in solitary confinement, subjected to torture and denied medical treatment and adequate food. Comrade Gwisai, a former member of parliament in the early days of the Movement for Democratic Change, reported receiving between 15 and 20 blows in one torture session.

The female comrades were not spared this brutality - including comrade Choto, who suffers badly from asthma and an ongoing condition for which she had recently had three operations. As with all the others, she was denied the medication and treatment she needed until the prisoners won a court order after two weeks, giving them the right to be examined by a doctor of their choice.

They were later charged with “treason”, although this was later withdrawn. It seems the six were targeted because of their role in the movement. Comrades Gwisai, Choto and Mombeyarara were Zimbabwe Labour Centre officers, while Hopewell Gumbo is a former president of the Zimbabwe National Union of Students and prominent anti-debt campaigner. Comrade Zimuto was another NUS activist, and Edson Chakuma is a trade union militant.

The meeting was to discuss the lessons of Tunisia and Egypt and the video being shown consisted of different news reports from international channels like CNN, Sky and Al Jazeera. While Zanu-PF, the party headed by president Robert Mugabe, urged the court to pass lengthy custodial sentences, its ‘power-sharing’ ‘partner’, the MDC, condemned the whole charade as “another assault on democracy and human rights”. The party stated: “We find it strange and barbaric that they are convicted for watching video material that is already in the public domain and can be accessed by anyone from anywhere in the world.”

The MDC, set up in 2000 by the trade union movement under the leadership of former Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions president Morgan Tsvangirai, was eventually taken over by an alliance of middle class blacks and white farmers, backed by international capital. It is now part of a government of ‘national unity’ alongside Zanu-PF. The former union leader holds no less a post than prime minister, but the trial and sentence say a lot about the balance of power between the two parties.

Showing where his own allegiance lies, prosecutor Edmore Nyazamba said, apparently approvingly, in his

final statement to the court, that the six would have faced death by stoning in ancient times. Likening president Robert Mugabe to Moses, he said that those who disobeyed Moses faced the most severe punishment. “This case reminds me of that in the *Bible* whereby those who revolted against authority were swallowed up when the ground opened up,” he said.

Although the charge carried a maximum term of 10 years, the actual sentences of two years, suspended for five, will be like “a chain attached to their ankles”, as one comrade put it. But Munyaradzi Gwisai remained defiant: ”We are not deterred. We are not intimidated,” he said. “To the ordinary people, this is not surprising. This is a staple of what is happening in Africa and across the world. So we take it as it comes - the struggle continues.” Gwisai had told the court during his trial that the charges were “meaningless”, “outright silly” and “a case of political harassment by the state”.

Over 100 activists had turned up at the court to show their solidarity on the day the verdicts were announced. The six are now to appeal against their conviction.

Ed Greene
 London

Sister act

At a reception in The Edge of Town, Edgware, London at 7pm on Sunday April 1, Fionbarra O’Dochartaig, founder member of the Derry Civil Rights Association, will make a presentation of a civil rights banner to Terry Gavin for her six decades’ campaigning for Irish republican prisoners.

O’Dochartaig was a founder member of the Derry Housing Action Committee in February 1968 with Eamonn McCann and JJ O’Hara (brother of hunger striker Patsy) amongst others. It campaigned vigorously against discrimination against nationalists in housing, suffering arrests and brutality from the Royal Ulster Constabulary until that fateful day of October 5 1968 - the civil rights demonstration in Derry, jointly called by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The shocking brutality of the RUC against the peaceful marchers, which included MPs Gerry Fitt, Eddie McAteer and

Ivan Cooper, is reckoned by many as the beginning of the ‘troubles’. Fit was brutally batoned and the image of the blood pouring from his head was beamed all over the world. O’Dochartaig took part in this year’s 40th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday march on January 29 with Ivan Cooper.

Theresa Gavin-McWeeney, known as Terry Gavin to her friends, was born in 1931 into a strong republican family in Leitrim; her father, mother and four brothers were hold-out republicans who suffered under the ‘free-staters’ and then under de Valera. She said: “People were always on the run.”

Terry immigrated to London in 1950 and became a nurse. Aged 19, she became involved in working for Irish republican prisoners, which has been her life’s work ever since. She never held office or was a member of a committee, but worked tirelessly for the prisoners and their families.

She worked closely with Sister Sarah Clarke, whom she remembers with affection as the “mad nun”. Sister Sarah told her: “You do the rubbish deals with the police and the guards; I’ll do the religion” - before she squirted holy water.

She brought “ciggies and matches and food” to Giuseppe Conlon, Frank Stagg and many others. She knew “all the prisoners”. She recounts that an EOKA (Greek Cypriot nationalist movement) prisoner in the late 50s was being harassed by a Turkish guard, but the Irish republicans surrounded him and threatened him with chairs if he didn’t leave the prisoner alone. It worked.

She visited Derry for the first time in 1954 on a ‘rambling tour’ and stayed in a youth hostel and returned many times during the troubles. She was in Derry during the run-up to Bloody Sunday but left the day before the massacre. She picketed Downing Street on her own with a placard with ‘Murderer’ written on it when she heard the terrible news from Derry. She stuck it up against the window of Brian Faulkner’s car when he passed her. She still campaigns for Irish republican prisoners, picketing the Lithuanian embassy for the repatriation of Michael Campbell in 2011 and demanding political status for Irish republican prisoners in Maghaberry.

Gerry Downing
 Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group

Fighting fund

Top bracket

I see that those in the big-money income bracket have done pretty well out of the budget, thanks to George Osborne slashing the top rate of income tax from 50p to 45p. ‘What’s 5p?’ you might ask. Well, it comes to a cool £40,000 a year if you ‘earn’ a million.

Unfortunately not many *Weekly Worker* readers take home that kind of money. Instead of being handed a nice little annual bonus from the chancellor, most have been hit by cuts, pay freezes and redundancies. Which is why it’s not exactly easy to ensure our £1,500 target is reached every month.

Take March. With three weeks gone, we haven’t yet passed £1,000. We did receive £403 this week - most of it from regular standing order donors. But that takes our total for the month to only £952, leaving us £548 to raise in nine days. That can be done, of course, but it needs a good few readers to get out either their credit/debit card and click on ‘Make a donation’ on our website (we had 14,942 online readers last week, by

the way); or their cheque book and pop a donation in the post.

Comrade RB did just that last week, adding £25 to his resubscription. Tongue in cheek, he writes that the extra amount is to “encourage your further evolution towards Second International Marxism!” Very droll, RB. But at least you’re paying attention to the current debate about Lenin and his so-called ‘epistemological break’. Actually it’s the sort of debate that keeps readers coming back. One that challenges leftwing dogma and makes you think.

But if you’re one of those who appreciates such challenges, you ought to consider helping us raise the money needed to keep the *Weekly Worker* up and running. Even if you haven’t just been awarded a £40,000 handout.

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 18, 5pm: ‘Merchant’s capital’, 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.

Northern Communist Forum

Sunday March 25, 3pm: ‘Class-consciousness’. Speaker: Paul B Smith. Room 3, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2.

Organised by CPGB Northern Communists:

<http://northerncommunists.wordpress.com>.

Marx’s Capital

Thursday March 22, 5.30pm: Reading group, Open University, Milton Keynes. Discussing *Capital* chapter three.

Organised by Milton Keynes Capital reading group:

milton.keynes@cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 27, 6.15pm: ‘The woman with the zebra’s penis’ (myths of African hunter-gatherers). Speaker: Camilla Power. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube).

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Women of Palestine

Saturday March 24, 11am: Public event, Kentish Town Community Centre, Greenwood Place, London NW5. Day of workshops and discussions with Palestinian women’s delegation.

Organised by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association: www.camdenabudis.net.

No to Cameron

Saturday March 24, 12 noon: Demonstration, South Beach Esplanade, Troon. Protest at Scottish Tory Party conference.

Organised by Scottish Trades Union Congress: www.stuc.org.uk.

Don’t Iraq Iran

Saturday March 24, 1pm: Protest, Trafalgar Square, London, WC2. Demonstration against the threat of military action on Iran.

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

Defend Alfie Meadows

Monday March 26, 9am: Lobby, Kingston Crown Court, Penhryn Road, Kingston. Support Alfie Meadows at his trial. Speakers: Tariq Ali, Owen Jones.

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

Fighting from London

Thursday March 29, 7.30pm: Illustrated talk - ‘International solidarity and anti-colonial protest’, Bishopsgate Library, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Speaker: archives manager Stefan Dickers. Free admission, advance booking required.

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

Save Mary

Friday March 30, 7pm: Campaign launch, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester M2. Join the campaign to support Mary Adenugba’s asylum appeal.

Organised by Refugee and Asylum Seeker Participatory Action Research: www.rapar.org.uk.

Socialist study

Thursday April 5, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. Studying Hillel Ticktin’s ‘Some objections to the concept of a socialist society’ from *What will a socialist society be like?*

Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group:

teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

Popular protest and today’s struggles

Thursday April 5, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. ‘The squatters movement 1946’. Speaker: Paul Burnham. Followed by Q and A. Free entry, collection on exit.

Organised by Socialist History Society: www.socialisthistorysociety.co.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.

Socialist films

Sunday April 11, 11am: Screenings, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Shabnam Virmani’s *Come to my country* (India 2008, 98 minutes); Yasmin Kabir’s *The last rites* (Bangladesh 2008, 17 minutes).

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Beyond the frame

Monday April 23 to Saturday April 28, 10am: Exhibition in support of the Miami Five, Gallery 27, 27 Cork Street, London W1. Work from leading Cuban artists.

Organised by Cuban Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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

PCS

We can still win

The executive of the Public and Commercial Services Union has decided that “PCS members will not be taking part in the March 28 strike” against the attack on pensions. Tina Becker spoke to **Lee Rock** (assistant branch secretary, department for work and pensions, Sheffield) about the decision



Mark Serwotka: looking towards April

Around 72% of PCS members voted for more strike action - that's a higher percentage than the vote which led to the June 30 and November 30 walkouts. Why has the leadership decided not to go through with the planned action on March 28?

I can understand the decision, though tactically I think it is a mistake. The reason is last week's decision by the leadership of the National Union of Teachers not to participate in a joint national strike on March 28. Although 73% of NUT members voted for strike action, the national leadership overturned that decision by 24 votes to 15. Some have claimed that the turnout was not good enough at 40% - but they went on strike following a similar turnout last June and November. To their credit, the left on the executive, including the Socialist Party, voted for strike action and managed to get the executive to agree at least to limited regional action in London on that day. The lecturers' University and College Union are now limiting their action to just London following the PCS decision.

The turnout of the PCS ballot was even lower than that of the NUT: less than 33% of PCS members voted. That is not good, but it's not the worst turnout we've seen. Only the three Socialist Workers Party members on the PCS leadership voted for striking on March 28. But Socialist Party members, who politically dominate the executive, voted against.

Of course, the NUT decision was a huge blow for our fight. We have made big play out of the coalition of unions resisting the attacks on pension and I can understand why the leadership doesn't want to take out our members on their own. However, I made the point at the Yorkshire and Humberside regional committee last week that in my view the action should go ahead. Firstly, that would have put more pressure on the NUT. And, secondly, it would have shown what the strength of feeling is within the PCS if we go it alone. We didn't take a vote at the regional committee, but nobody spoke against this point of view.

The PCS executive has instead decided to “continue to pursue a joint union campaign, including a coordinated national strike in April”. The plan is to wait for the NUT conference at the beginning of April in the hope that the NUT activist layer will get conference to vote for strike action and overturn the decision of their executive. **Mark Serwotka says he is “very confident” that there will be a joint action with the NUT in April.**

I'm not. Of course, it could easily happen that NUT conference instructs their leadership to call a strike. After all, it's mainly the activists that dominate the branches and go to conference. However, such a vote does not necessarily mean that the leadership will then act on it. I would have thought that the NUT executive must be very convinced of the correctness of their decision

- otherwise they wouldn't have overturned the outcome of a ballot in the first place. I think they will try to stick to their guns, whatever the outcome of the conference.

I can't say I understand that decision, because many of their members will be very angry. Of course, I very much hope that joint action will go ahead. We need to keep up the pressure if we're serious about fighting the attacks on our pensions. But, listening to Mark Serwotka, it seems clear that the PCS leadership will not call a national strike in April unless the NUT also calls one.

Can you talk us through the proposed attacks on the pensions?

There are different pension schemes in the public service. I'm on quite an old civil service scheme. From April 1, I have to pay 3.5% of my wages towards my pension, instead of 1.5%. This then goes up again in 2013 and once more in 2014 - all the while, the contribution of the employer remains the same.

Considering the low wages many people in the public service are on, this makes a massive difference. Also, this comes after a two-year pay freeze. And, with the threatened abolition of the national salary scale, it means most people in the public service who live outside the south-east will be hit by years of pay freezes to come. I will also have to work to 68 instead of 65. So, in a nutshell, we will not get pay rises in line with inflation, will pay more towards our pension, will have to work much longer, and in the end

will get a smaller pension.

Considering what's at stake, why do you think the turnout in the PCS was so low?

Turnouts are generally quite low in most unions today. Only about 10% of PCS members vote in national elections. The main reason is the lack of rank-and-file organisation and the lack of shop stewards on the ground. Some members might have thought, 'It's only a consultation ballot', but I don't think that's the main reason for the low turnout. We're missing activists on the ground.

The main organisation within the PCS is Left Unity, which has over 1,000 members. The SWP is part of Left Unity but is tiny and irrelevant - the SP, which is far more dominant, give them a few seats on the NEC and that is it. Unfortunately, Left Unity is nothing more than an electoral machine. It does not even attempt to build a rank and file. Since the SWP closed down rank-and-file organisations in most unions in the late 70s and early 80s, their only interest is to have some of their members re-elected to various committees so that they can then look important.

And let's not forget: in 2005, the SWP and the SP in PCS voted for the introduction of a two-tier pension scheme, as did Mark Serwotka. They justified their disastrous decision by claiming to want to protect the pensions of the existing members. Of course, once you make such a concession and allow new workers to get worse deals, it's only a matter of time until they come for the existing deals. Some of us argued at the time that we should have stood our ground and not let the government divide us. But they all voted 'yes'. And the current attacks on our pensions are partly the result of that sell-out.

Unfortunately, the left outside Left Unity has recently collapsed and is in no position to put up a fight. Because of the sectarianism of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Independent Left in the PCS has split and many members, including myself, left. The IL now consists mainly of members in London that are heavily influenced by the AWL. I predict that in a few years' time, the AWL will be pushing to get back into Left Unity. Of course, now that the attempt to build an alternative

to LU has failed, that could well be the right thing to do for all socialists.

In November, more than 2.5 million people were on the streets - and there was a lot of talk of this being the 'beginning of the fightback'. In hindsight, it seems that in reality it was the end of it.

It puzzles me that so many people on the left still have illusions in the trade union bureaucracy. The leaders of the big unions don't actually think they can defeat this assault, so they weren't even trying. They were happy to take the 'heads of agreement' deal, which is slightly better for workers who retire within the next 10 years. That they would sell us out was obvious from the start. They will sell out their members as soon as they have the opportunity.

What I can't get my head around is how naive or opportunist the SWP in particular have been in all this. They have been sucking up to the trade union bureaucracy all the way through. The platforms of their Unite the Resistance meetings were full of union bureaucrats and not once was there a critical word from the SWP that these are exactly the same people who have sold us out in the past and will do so again. They also quite explicitly argued against having rank-and-file speakers, for example, at their meetings in Sheffield. Only when the sell-out happens will they say, 'Well, that was, of course, a possibility ...' But, as they have done nothing to prepare members for this outcome, massive disillusionment and demoralisation sets in.

Can this fight still be won?

We should continue to fight and push for national action - but without the NUT, our chances of winning are massively reduced, I have to admit. We urgently have to start considering other actions: the banning of overtime, for example. But also regional and departmental strikes. We need to keep the action rolling and let the government know that they can't avoid disruption. It's a kind of guerrilla warfare: we have to try to wear them down. That way, I think, it is still possible to win. And if not to win this time, at least to put a marker down for the next round of attacks ●

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ITALY

Monti forces through right to sack

With most union leaders caving in, the Italian premier has got broad agreement for the proposed eradication of the workers' statute. **Toby Abse** reports

Mario Monti, the Italian prime minister, has shown himself to be no more than a puppet of the European Central Bank. Any pretence at mediation between capital and labour has gone. The days of tripartite 'concertation' between government, employers and unions are over.

Even what would have been a substantial concession from Susanna Camusso, the leader of the militant CGIL union confederation, was judged to be totally inadequate by this ruthless representative of the bourgeoisie. At the final meeting between the government and the 'social partners' on Tuesday March 20, Monti proved even more intransigent than his labour minister, Elsa Fornero. The last substantial gain of the Italian workers' upsurge in the 'hot autumn' of 1969 - article 18 of the workers' statute of 1970 - now looks like being wiped out. Although the CGIL executive has called for a protest strike of all its members, the rest of the union bureaucracy has simply caved in.

For months the European Central Bank had been insisting that article 18 had to go - this ultimatum was already contained in the famous secret letter from the ECB to the Italian government in August 2011. Labour market 'flexibility' - in other words, the right to sack workers at whim - was regarded as a key objective by the ECB, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and all the international speculators who lurk behind the seemingly impersonal 'markets', about which Monti and his ilk speak so frequently.

Article 18 protected those in workplaces employing more than 15 people from arbitrary dismissal by forcing companies to make an offer of reinstatement to any worker sacked "without just cause". Whilst mass collective redundancies were, of course, not covered by this article and the financial settlements such workers got varied widely in different periods, different regions and different industries, the victimisation of individuals for their trade union or political affiliations, or even for just standing up for their basic human dignity against the arbitrary bullying and harassment so characteristic of company bosses and line managers the whole world over, was a risky undertaking in any sizeable Italian workplace.

It needs to be emphasised that in the whole period between the defeat of the *fronte popolare* communist-socialist alliance in the April 1948 general election and the upsurge of massive working class militancy at the end of the 1960s such arbitrary sackings were an everyday occurrence in many Italian workplaces; the CGIL - and particularly its engineering section, Fiom - was systematically discriminated against, if not excluded outright in many key factories, including the Fiat plants in Turin. Whilst it is true, as the bourgeois media often emphasised, that only about 10% of the Italian workforce were covered by article 18, this should not be seen as a reason to decry its importance - such protection in larger workplaces did have some influence on smaller employers' behaviour, at least at times when the labour movement was strong. Rifondazione Comunista did on one occasion launch a sustained campaign to extend article 18 to all workers. This culminated in a referendum - one of the many in which a quorum was not reached



Divided we fall

because of the cynical abstentionism urged by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi and his supporters.

'Just cause'

Recent discussion around article 18 and the protection it offered to individuals has divided sackings into three categories. These are economic, disciplinary and discriminatory (relating to race, gender, religious and political beliefs and so forth). Article 18 meant that, regardless of which of these motivations was behind the sacking, a tribunal could impose on the employer if the redundancy was judged to be "without just cause". The package that the Monti government will now seek to impose means that only 'discriminatory' sackings, if proved, would warrant an automatic reinstatement, whilst unjust 'economic' sackings would just result in some measure of financial compensation (currently between 15 and 27 months salary is being suggested). In the case of unjust 'disciplinary' sackings, the normal procedure would be financial compensation, with the judge having the right to ask for reinstatement in "grave cases".

Last week it was widely reported that Camusso was prepared to accept such a deal in relation to 'economic' sackings - something which gave rise to much discussion within the ranks of the CGIL leadership, where Fiom was in total opposition to any alteration at all to the existing provisions of article 18 - but in the end the government was absolutely determined that the rules on 'disciplinary sackings' be altered as well, which was more than Camusso could stomach.

Although in the end Camusso adopted a very honourable position of totally rejecting the government's proposals, something needs to be said about 'economic' sackings, where it could be argued she showed too great a willingness to compromise - the classic posture of the traditional social democratic trade union leader (even if there is very good reason for thinking that she was put under enormous pressure by Pier Luigi Bersani, the leader of the ex-'official communist'-dominated Partito Democratico, to make such a concession). Obviously, whilst collective redundancies for economic reasons are a normal part of any variant of the capitalist system, individual 'economic' redundancies are a rather different matter. It is all too frequently the case that the employer

will claim an 'economic' motivation for getting rid of somebody considered to be a troublemaker rather than using disciplinary procedures, let alone engaging in overt discrimination.

Thursday March 15 was marked by two important meetings which had an impact on the course of the last few days' events. The first was an informal meeting of the CGIL leadership, including representatives of all the regions and occupational sectors. This meeting was a marathon - starting at 10.30am and not finishing until 6pm. Maurizio Landini, the general secretary of Fiom, led the minority who argued for total opposition to any change in article 18.¹ The *Corriere della Sera* estimated that Landini had 20%-25% support, but was clearly unable to obtain detailed information about who said what at the meeting - whatever their internal differences, the CGIL leadership maintained collective discipline in the knowledge that any detail about divergences would be useful to their opponents in the negotiations.

This informal meeting was determined to make sure that Camusso was accountable to her executive and agreed that an official meeting of the CGIL leadership on Wednesday March 21 would decide whether or not they would agree to Camusso signing any draft agreement put to her by Monti and Fornero the day before. In the event, Camusso very publicly refused to sign on the day, and this meeting, like Fiom's eight-hour strike on March 9 and its subsequent two-hour strike on March 20, undoubtedly helped to act as a counterweight to the pressure being put on her by the Partito Democratico (PD).

Some hours after the CGIL leadership meeting, on the evening of March 15, there was a prolonged summit at Palazzo Chigi, the official residence of the prime minister, between Monti and the three main party secretaries, Angelino Alfano of the Popolo della Libertà (Pdl), Pier Ferdinando Casini of the Christian Democratic Unione di Centro (Udc) and Bersani of the PD. Whilst questions connected with television and justice were discussed over aperitifs with the relevant ministers present, a more restricted group stayed for dinner and a detailed discussion of employment laws - including, apart from the prime minister and the three party leaders, Fornero, Corrado Passera (infrastructure minister and former head of the Banca Intesa) and Vittorio Grilli, the deputy minister for

economics.²

This grouping reached an amicable deal, which included drastic modifications of article 18 - in all probability more or less what was proposed on March 20. Although this was not the first summit of what journalists call the ABC (Alfano, Bersani, Casini), it was by far the most blatant indication of a grand coalition - against the working class - that we have seen so far. The gathering was immortalised by Casini, who got one of his subordinates to take a photograph of the three of them sitting down with Monti standing up behind them - something which neither Bersani or Alfano would have agreed to if Casini had given them any advance warning, since neither the PD's nor the Pdl's electorate would have reacted with much enthusiasm to such an image.

For the PD this photograph in practice suggests a change of alliances - in the days before Berlusconi's downfall, Bersani had been photographed between the Italia dei Valori leader, Antonio Di Pietro, and the Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà leader Nichi Vendola, the so-called 'Vasto photo', something which had alienated the Christian Democrat Casini. He may well prefer the PD to his former partners in the Pdl, but had no desire to consort with radical lefts, hard-line anti-corruption campaigners or advocates of secularism or gay rights. Whether or not Camusso shared the concerns of Vendola and Di Pietro, who were bound to wonder if their agreement to a centre-left alliance for this year's local, and presumably next year's general, elections still stood, she was not all keen on the parties negotiating over her head and behind the back of the CGIL. As she explained, "If the government has made an agreement with the parties, this gives us cause for concern."³

By this stage Camusso had made it clear that she was not prepared to make any concessions about 'disciplinary sackings', which she regarded as a completely different category from 'economic sackings': a change in the law relating to the former would be a much more overt indication of the change in the power relations between employer and employee. Having got her to accept in principle some alteration in the procedure for 'economic sackings', the politicians had wrongly assumed that she would be equally pliable on this question - Monti continued to brief the press that Camusso's opposition was only tactical and that an informal agreement would be reached at the weekend at the Confindustria conference in Milan.

Union collapse

Whilst both Camusso and Raffael Bonanni (the leader of the second largest union confederation, the CISL) had agreed to attend this gathering some time previously and Monti was automatically expected to attend in his official capacity as premier, the sudden decision of Elsa Fornero and Luigi Angeletti (leader of the third main union centre, the UIL) to join them at the conference gave rise to the mistaken notion that a tripartite agreement was imminent.⁴ On the contrary, for a brief period Camusso managed to get Angeletti to join her in opposing the changes in relation to 'disciplinary sackings', temporarily isolating Bonanni in his collaborationist position.⁵

On the crucial day Bonanni managed to talk Angeletti out of his

remaining scruples and Camusso alone resisted to the end. At 8pm, after four hours of discussions between the government and the 'social partners', Monti brought proceedings to a close and asked the participants for a straight 'yes' or 'no' to the deal as a whole, telling Fornero (who had wanted to avoid asking the participants for opinions on the new version of article 18): "No, it's useless. We all know that is the issue." Monti clenched his fist, saying, "*Signori*, please, let's wind up." One after the other, they all said yes.

Camusso did not realise that Angeletti had been bamboozled by Bonanni and Emma Marcegaglia, the president of the employers' federation, Confindustria, in a private meeting early in the day.⁶ Camusso said: "A mediation has not been attempted on article 18. The proposal has remained exactly the same as the one the government presented at the beginning. This is the third measure, after pensions and liberalisations, that penalises the workers and the weaker social groups, who continue to pay too high a price. It is the result of a government that only looks at the financial markets." But she warned: "You have risked opening a long season of tensions."

Monti, apparently unperturbed, said: "I appreciate the frankness of your intervention. I take note of the critical judgment. But I reply to you that this government has a great regard for the weak and the workers. It is also true that we have looked at the markets because we can't do anything else. It is also through this that we have avoided for Italy situations like that of Greece. This is the right way to help the weakest, because if the country went bankrupt it would be these who would suffer most." The tone was restrained but icy on both sides. Monti had tried to get Camusso to agree to take a more favourable position on the first part of the agreement (about contracts and 'shock absorbers') than on the second (article 18 itself), but she had retorted: "No, the overall judgment of the CGIL is single and critical."⁷

Camusso said: "The CGIL will do all it can to oppose this reform. It will organise the necessary mobilisations. It will not be a short-term thing." On March 21 she accepted Fiom's call for a general strike. However, following the surrender of the CISL and UIL, and with the left virtually absent from the political stage, the situation can hardly be described as favourable. At least Camusso, as an old-fashioned social democrat, is in the last analysis unwilling to follow the treacherous road down which two former 'communists' - PD leader Bersani and current state president Giorgio Napolitano - have sought to drag her •

Notes

1. See *Corriere della Sera* March 16.
2. Monti is not only prime minister, but the nominal holder of the economics ministry as well - this was a tactic to reassure the markets when the technocratic cabinet first came to power.
3. *La Repubblica* March 17.
4. Roberto Mania, writing in *La Repubblica* March 17.
5. See Enrico Marro, 'Angeletti rafforza "il fronte del no" Oggi un vertice a tre' *Corriere della Sera* March 19 for some remarks about disciplinary sackings ascribed to collaborators of Angeletti and Roberto Bagnoli; and 'Bonanni: lotterò per l'intesa. Seguiamo la via dei partiti' *Corriere della Sera* March 19 for an interview that conclusively demonstrates Bonanni's supine attitude.
6. An episode showing that Bonanni is not just a servant of the politicians, but a lackey of the bosses as well.
7. Enrico Marro, 'Il premier e Camusso, l'ultimo duello' *Corriere della Sera* March 21.

THEORY

Value, prices and probabilities

What is the connection between value and price? Moshé Machover concludes his discussion of the labour theory of value



How much will it sell for?

This is an edited version of the second half of a talk given on January 21 at a weekend school on the 'Fundamentals of political economy' sponsored by the CPGB. The first part of this article, based on the first half of my talk, was published in the last issue of the *Weekly Worker*.¹ We looked briefly at the basics of the labour theory of value (LTV), as Marx presents it in the first volume of *Capital*, clarifying the notion of the (exchange) value of the commodity and the vital distinction between labour and labour-power.

There is a lot more that can be said about these basic matters, and Marx devoted to them other writings, ranging from the popular *Value, price and profit* (a talk delivered in 1865 at a meeting of the general council of the First International) to the massive collection of critical research notes published long after his death as *Theories of surplus value*. But I shall leave it there. Instead, I would like to turn to some difficulties - problems arising in connection with Marx's LTV; some of which he deals with, others which he does not.

There are two kinds of problem. First, those regarding the definition and measurement of the quantity of value itself. I will mention some which are, in my opinion, relatively slight difficulties that can be fairly easily resolved - one of them in at least two different ways. The second kind of problem is the exact connection between the value of a commodity and its price. These are the most serious difficulties.

Problems of definition

It must be stressed at the outset that *value* is a theoretical quantity that

cannot be directly observed. When you look at a transaction in which some good (or service) is sold and bought, you can observe the price being paid for it. But its value can, at best, only be estimated using rather complicated calculations and assumptions. Contrary to the claims made by some authors, this does not disqualify value as a scientific concept. In fact, many quantities used in the most exact sciences are not directly observable. Take, for example, the apparently simple physical quantity, *temperature*. It seems straightforward enough: you place a thermometer in some substance and read off its temperature. But what is the relationship between the reading of the thermometer and the temperature of that piece of substance *as defined in modern theoretical physics*? This turns out to be a surprisingly tangled tale. A few years ago a philosopher of science won a prize for a 300-page treatise dealing with this 'simple' issue.²

So let me now mention some of the problems regarding the definition of value. First, there are commodities that apparently do not require any work for their production. If you buy a copy of some software then, yes, there was labour involved in producing the *original* software; but the actual production of this extra copy involves virtually zero labour: you just click and download it. Does it have no value?

There are at least two ways of resolving this problem, which is why I do not think it is a serious one. Briefly, one answer is that the commodity produced is the original software written by the programmer; and when

you buy a copy you are not really buying a part of that commodity, but being charged rent for using it. The owner of the original software has copyright, an information monopoly on it, just as a landlord has monopoly on a piece of real estate.

Another way of looking at this problem is by noting that it is not essentially different from what happens when you buy a copy of a newspaper. The labour involved in producing one extra copy is negligible. In effect, the value of the entire edition of the paper is divided by the number of copies actually sold, so each such copy carries an equal share of that total. But the copies that remain unsold have zero value, because only a commodity that gets sold has value. The same applies to a service commodity such as a train journey (note, by the way, that a commodity need not be a physical object).

Then there is a problem with unique one-off artefacts, such as a work of art. Intuitively, some works of art have value way beyond the amount of labour embodied in them. At any rate, their price can be huge, and some of them are priceless. Well, we can put these aside: the LTV is applicable to commodities that are, in principle, reproducible (a so-called reproduction of a painting does not really reproduce it ...).

A more serious difficulty is one that Marx himself raises in volume 1 of *Capital*, which is the distinction between several kinds of labour, skilled and unskilled. Apparently skilled labour contributes more value per unit of time to the product. Clearly, skilled labour-power may

have greater value than unskilled, because it takes more work to (re) produce it: this is what training is all about. But does this mean that it *creates* greater value per unit of time? Marx says it does: "Skilled labour counts only as simple labour intensified, or rather, as multiplied simple labour, a given quantity of skilled being considered equal to a greater quantity of simple labour."³ But by how much should unskilled labour be "multiplied" to yield a given sort of skilled labour? Marx tries to resolve this, but in my view what he says is circular, or at best vague. He does not actually tell you how to quantify skilled labour and "reduce" it to a multiple of unskilled labour. And then he simply puts the problem aside.⁴ This is a remaining difficulty; but if you follow the logic of what I will later enlarge upon, I think it more or less dissolves.

Then there is the problem of joint production. Suppose several commodities are produced together, in one process. The stock example is the work of a shepherd. The sheep yield wool, milk and meat. So certain parts of the labour are specific: the shearing labour you can allocate to the production of wool (although you have to shear the sheep anyway, otherwise they will die of heat); the labour of milking is for the milk and the labour of slaughtering is for the meat. But what about the overall work of the shepherd in tending the flock, etc? How are you going to allocate this labour to the milk, meat and wool? This is a serious problem that has exercised people. I will not go into it here. It is discussed from a Marxian viewpoint in the *Langston memorial*

volume, a collection of essays devoted to the value controversy.⁵

Value and price

But the difficulty I want to concentrate on is the connection between value and price. The original idea behind the LTV was that value determines relative price: the price of a commodity is proportional to its value. (Note: *proportional* rather than *equal*, because they are measured in different units. Price is measured in pounds, dollars, euros, etc, and value is measured in worker-hours, or workers-years and so on.) In the first part of this article I raised the question of whether it was ever like this, under simple commodity exchange, in pre-capitalist commodity exchange. Was price proportional to value? Adam Smith believed it had been so in older societies. I suppose there must have been a strong correlation between the amount of labour needed to produce something and the price it would fetch in market exchange, otherwise people would not have come up with this idea. How strong that correlation was is a serious question for economic historians.

But in the modern capitalist system, in which the capitalist mode of production predominates, this (like everything else ...) becomes more complicated. Strict value-price proportionality contradicts another law, which arises from the competitive nature of a 'free' market economy.

Marx recognises this difficulty. The first approximation, which is used in the first volume of *Capital*, is value-price proportionality. But then Marx recognises that in the capitalist mode of production this proportionality

cannot prevail. Marx believed - as did Adam Smith, David Ricardo, as well as many economists after Marx - that the rate of profit across the economy tends to equalise. This is due to competition. If the rate of profit in a given sector of production is higher than average, then capital investment will flow into it, lead to increased production, and competition will reduce the rate of profit down to the average.⁶ There is an idea, as it were, of an equilibrium situation (Marx does not use the word ‘equilibrium’, but this is what later economists have called it); a state of ideal equilibrium, which is never actually reached, but works as a tendency pushing the rate of profit across the economy towards uniformity.

But then prices cannot be proportional to values. This is because in an industry, or a firm, in which there is a high capital intensity (high organic composition) - that is, the invested (‘fixed’) capital per worker (or per worker-hour) is greater than average - the amount of surplus value extracted per unit of invested capital is smaller than in an industry where the organic composition of capital is low. If profit comes from the exploitation of labour in the form of surplus value, from the difference between the value of labour-power and the actual labour that is done in the process of production, then value-price proportionality would imply that in industries with higher capital intensity - where there is a greater investment of capital per worker - the rate of profit would be lower than in other industries. This contradicts the idea that there is a tendency for the rate of profit to become uniform, to equalise.

Marx tries to deal with this in the third volume of *Capital*, especially in chapters 9 and 10. He introduces a sort of link between values on the one hand and market prices on the other. This is because market prices are concrete and directly observable; they are what you actually pay the shop, or the supplier. They are subject to all sorts of contingent and incidental influences, such as fluctuations in supply and demand, ‘special offers’, etc. Values, however, represent theoretical quantities that would be extraordinarily complicated to calculate exactly for every minute input. Marx introduces in between these two another *theoretical* concept: the *price of production*. The price of production is not the actual price that you pay in the shop, nor is it observable; it is a theoretical quantity that, according to Marx, would do two things.

1. It would equalise the rate of profit in all sectors of production. This is a theoretical situation that does not exist in reality, but it is supposed to be a limit position of equilibrium.
2. In a hypothetical, purely theoretical situation in which all commodities would be sold at their prices of production, this uniform rate of profit *in money terms* would be equal to the rate of profit calculated globally, across the whole economy, *in terms of value*.

This global (or average) rate of profit in terms of value is defined as follows. You take the surplus value *S* produced in the whole economy over a unit of time - say, a year - and you divide it by the value *K* of the capital invested - the *fixed* capital, not the *constant* capital⁷ - in the whole economy. So the rate of profit calculated in terms of value is $r = S/K$. For example, if *S* is a tenth of *K*, then $r = 1/10$ (or 10%) per annum. And this, Marx said, is going to be the rate of profit according to which the prices of production are determined. Once you have determined the price of production, the actual market price is this plus ‘noise’ (Marx does not put it like this; but this is how it would be expressed today). The price of

production of a given commodity is the ‘centre of gravity’ around which its market price is supposed to fluctuate.

Now, in *Capital* Marx actually tries to work out the prices of production and to show how they are determined. Here he introduces a very important mechanism, which does not work for him, but is important nevertheless, and that is schemes of reproduction. These are the schemes where the same commodities enter both as inputs and as outputs. (The germ of this idea was the *tableau économique* introduced by François Quesnay in 1759 and used by 18th century French economists, known as the ‘physiocrats’.)

Marx (as edited by Engels) deals with the problem in a very simplified form. He assumes an economy (in effect, what would now be called an economic model) with just three or four types of commodities as output, and just one type of non-labour input. He also assumes, for simplicity, that the whole of the fixed capital is constant capital (in other words, that all the invested capital is used up in one year). But the exercise does not work out. This was suspected a long time ago, but becomes clearer when these schemes, now known as price-profit equations, are written out in modern mathematical notation in a much less simplified form.⁸

The problem is that if you assume that each commodity has a unique price of production and that when all commodities are sold and bought at these prices the rate of profit is uniform across the whole economy, then this rate of profit (in money terms) turns out in general to be different from *r* (the global rate of profit in value terms). Alternatively, you can ‘force’ the uniform rate of profit in the equations to be equal to *r*, but then the price-profit equations do not balance: you get one ‘price of production’ for a given type of commodity when it is bought as input, and a different ‘price of production’ for the very same type of commodity when it is sold as output. In my opinion, this makes the notion of price of production quite arbitrary and devoid of explanatory power. This was discovered by the students of Sraffa, the so-called neo-Ricardians, in the 1950s or 1960s and gave rise to a controversy between them and the Marxists.

The value controversy

Well, no wonder Marx could not see this problem with the idea of price of production. He was a moderately good mathematician, but by no means an expert. But even had he been one, no mathematician at that time knew how to handle such equations in proper generality. The precise algebraic theory that deals with this kind of situation depends on a theorem finalised by two mathematicians, Oskar Perron and Georg Frobenius, in the early 20th century.

The idea of schemes of reproduction is extremely useful - in economic planning, for example, calculating quantities and values. Someone who did make use of it and got a Nobel prize for his efforts was Wassily Leontief. He was born in 1905 in Berlin of a Russian family and graduated at a very early age (he was a mathematical and economic prodigy) and at age 19 began working in the Soviet Union for the economic planning committee, Gosplan, using a variant of Marx’s schemes of reproduction as a planning device - which is actually a very sound idea. He left the Soviet Union very early and ended up in America, where he became a very famous economist and developed the so-called Leontief input-output analysis that won him the Nobel prize in 1973. Not many people realise that an idea based on Marx’s third volume of *Capital* has been acclaimed by mainstream economics

in this way!

The controversy between the neo-Ricardians, led by the economist, Ian Steedman,⁹ and the Marxists was raging through the 1970s. Both sides assumed that there is a theoretical state of equilibrium in which the rate of profit becomes uniform. No-one claimed that this actually happens in reality; but it was assumed to be the limiting ideal situation towards which the economy tends. The neo-Ricardians concluded that Marx’s LTV is, so to speak, without any real value, as it does not explain prices. The Marxists for the most part tried to patch up the idea of prices of production as a bridge between values and market prices. In my opinion, the main motive for these orthodox attempts was to acquit Marx of error or inconsistency rather than to provide a realistic explanation of the connection between values and prices.¹⁰

Deceptively attractive

Then, in about 1980, Emmanuel Farjoun came up with a radical, unorthodox idea, which we later developed together in a jointly authored book.¹¹ What he said was: ‘Wait a moment: this is all wrong. A situation in which the rate of profit is uniform across the economy is not a state of equilibrium, even as a theoretical limiting state. The argument for it is deceptively attractive, but it is fallacious.’ And the reason for this, the explanation, was suggested by analogy with a branch of physics called statistical mechanics.

In the 19th century it became established that heat is actually the kinetic energy of the molecules in any piece of matter - say, a volume of gas. Put simply, heat is the movement of molecules. In a famous series of experiments done by the Lancashire brewer, James Prescott Joule, who was an amateur scientist, he showed the rate at which mechanical energy is converted into heat. And he has a unit of energy named after him: the joule. (These experiments, whose “result would have delighted old Hegel”, performed by “an Englishman whose name I can’t recall”, are mentioned enthusiastically in a letter by Engels to Marx, dated July 14 1858.¹²)

The idea was, originally, that if you take a volume of gas at a given constant temperature, the molecules are rushing all over the place and they collide with one another. Now, the fast molecules will collide with slower molecules and slow down, and the slower molecules will get hit by the faster ones and speed up; and so at equilibrium the speed of all the molecules will equalise. The higher the temperature, the greater this uniform speed. And Joule actually made a calculation of what would be the speed of the molecules of a given mass of gas at a given temperature.

But then statistical mechanics was initiated by two famous scientists, James Clerk Maxwell and Ludwig Eduard Boltzmann, about the time *Capital* was being written. And they said, no, this is a deceptive argument. Actually at equilibrium there is no uniformity of speed: this is impossible; even if at one moment the molecules were to travel at a uniform speed, then that uniformity would be scrambled in an instant. What really happens is that at equilibrium there is a certain statistical distribution (known as the Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution). And they worked out what this statistical law was. This at first sight seems counter-intuitive, but it is correct and the whole later theory of heat, thermodynamics, is based on it.

But the same logic also applies to the economic argument. At equilibrium, the rates of profit of the multitude of firms in an economy are distributed according to a definite

statistical law. A situation in which the rate of profit equalises across the economy is not even a possible theoretical state of equilibrium. So it is not only that the whole notion of prices of production does not work for explaining market prices in terms of values: it is pointless, because it is based on wrong assumptions.

In a hypothetical situation in which each commodity is sold and bought at its ‘price of production’ so as to yield a uniform rate of profit in money terms, this rate of profit would in general not be the same as *r* (the global rate of profit in value terms). But nor would such a situation be a state of equilibrium. So Farjoun and I proposed to excise the whole notion of prices of production; it does not do what it is supposed to do, nor make any sense for the reasons given.

LTV without the bridge

Then what is the connection between value and price? And how much of the labour theory of value remains without prices of production? What we argue is that a capitalist economy is normally at or near a dynamic state of equilibrium.

Please do not misinterpret this as a hunky-dory stasis, in which each individual firm is in a stable state. On the contrary, the rates of profit of individual firms can change or fluctuate rather rapidly; but their statistical distribution - that is, the proportion of the total fixed capital that yields a given rate of profit - is normally stable or changes fairly slowly. Only in times of major crisis is there a rapid shift in the distribution. A similar statistical logic applies also to market prices: at equilibrium, not only does the rate of profit have a statistical distribution, but also the price of each type of commodity. There is no such thing as *the* price of a given commodity - say, a kilo of sugar - even on a given day. There is a distribution of prices. Do a survey of the prices charged for a kilo of sugar in the various shops and supermarkets in London on a given day, and you will see (this is what shopping around is all about).

It turns out that, although there is no theoretical way of connecting the *individual* prices of *individual* commodities to their respective individual values, there is a *statistical* connection that can be established without the bridging concept of prices of production. Take two big ‘baskets’ - two large random samples of commodities of diverse types. Then the ratios between their respective total values and total prices will, with extremely high probability, be very close to equality. So there is a macro relationship between prices and values, but the relationship is statistical rather than individual. Even if you gave me the value of every commodity at a given moment, if such a thing were possible, I would not be able to calculate the price of any individual commodity. But for a whole basket the relationship is very close to proportionality. In other words, if you are talking about big macro baskets of commodities it does not matter whether you reason in terms of values or in terms or price, as they are virtually identical (or, strictly speaking, proportional).

What about the rate of profit? Take the global rate of profit calculated across the whole economy in terms of price, which econometricians can actually calculate: you take the total price of the annual surplus and divide it by the total price of the capital invested. It turns out, as a corollary of what I have just said, that with a high probability this global rate of profit will be almost exactly the same as the rate of profit calculated in terms of value. I think this resolves the issue in a positive way, because it saves the core of the labour theory of value.

What Marx wanted to show with his reproduction schemes was not that he could calculate the price of each commodity. What he was trying to show was that the global rate of profit over the whole economy is equal to what it would be if you calculated it in terms of values: and this turns out to be correct.

There are other benefits of focusing not on the supposedly uniform numerical rates of profit, but on their statistical distribution. An example is what happens at a time when the average rate of profit moves up or down. If the average rate of profit represents all rates of profit and it declines, say, from 10% to 7% per annum, then it seems no big deal: 7% per annum is still quite handsome, thank you very much. But if you focus on distribution, then it gets interesting. Remember that the average rate of profit is exactly that: an average along the overall distribution of the different rates of profit across the different firms of the whole economy. Firms with a profit rate of 3% or less become losing firms. The average has not changed very much, but a lot of firms will go bust. On the other hand, even when the average rate of profit plummets, there are still many firms making large profits.

We lose the whole idea of the prices of production, but there are gains. The whole notion of the productivity of labour makes very good sense in statistical terms. If you take a commodity over a long period of time - say, a bushel of corn - its value in terms of labour will tend to decline: it takes less labour to produce it. You can actually show that. And the only way you can show it is with a statistical argument. A firm producing this commodity will certainly want to reduce its costs of production. This may be done by introducing labour-saving devices, which will tend to reduce the direct labour per unit produced. But it could also be done through capital savings, so that less *money* is spent on fixed capital. But less money spent on fixed capital does not mean that the *value* of fixed capital is going down, because there is no one-to-one relation between value and price, which is also what Marx says. Perhaps the price of the fixed capital goes down, but its value does not. However, the statistical argument shows that with very high probability the value, the total labour content, of the commodity tends to decline over time; and thus that the productivity of labour tends to rise.

In conclusion I would like to say that Marxist theory grows more vigorously if you prune it judiciously ●

Notes

1. ‘The centrality of labour-power’, March 15.
2. Hasok Chang *Inventing temperature: measurement and scientific progress* Oxford 2004.
3. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 1.
4. “For simplicity’s sake we shall henceforth account every kind of labour to be unskilled, simple labour; by this we do no more than save ourselves the trouble of making the reduction” (*ibid*).
5. See, in particular, E Farjoun, ‘The production of commodities by means of what?’ in R Langston, E Mandel and A Freeman *Ricardo, Marx, Sraffa: the Langston memorial volume* London 1984.
6. For statements to this effect quoted from several authors, see F Farjoun and M Machover *Laws of chaos: a probabilistic approach to political economy* London 1983.
7. This is a vital distinction: in Marx’s terminology, constant capital consists of the non-labour inputs used up (consumed) in production during the given period. Fixed capital is the invested capital used, but not necessarily used up, in the process. The rate of profit (in money or value terms) is calculated relative to fixed capital.
8. For the precise mathematical form of the price-profit equations, see <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/36428>.
9. I Steedman *Marx after Sraffa* London 1977.
10. For a later attempt in this vein, see A Kliman *Reclaiming Marx’s ‘Capital’: a refutation of the myth of inconsistency* Lanham 2006.
11. F Farjoun and M Machover *Laws of chaos: a probabilistic approach to political economy* London 1983. See also Farjoun and Machover, ‘Probability, economics and the labour theory of value’ *New Left Review* No152, pp95-108, 1985.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1858/letters/58_07_14.htm.

RELIGION

Rowan Williams quits before next great schism happens

Eddie Ford demands the immediate disestablishment of the Church of England

On March 16 the 61-year-old Rowan Williams announced that he was resigning as the Archbishop of Canterbury. In this capacity he was both the leader of the Church of England and symbolic head of the worldwide Anglican communion - which has an estimated membership of 80 million.

Williams, who without a hint of irony once described himself as a "hairy leftie", will be taking up the position of 35th master of Magdalene College at Cambridge University next January - and will step down as archbishop in December. In his announcement, Williams described the CoE as a "great treasure" and a place where many people "sought inspiration and comfort in times of need". Partly explaining his resignation, Williams confessed that "crisis management" was not his "favourite activity", but denied that the persistent rows over homosexuality (gay bishops, gay marriage, etc) had "overshadowed" everything he did. But, having said that, he did admit that it had "certainly been a major nuisance".

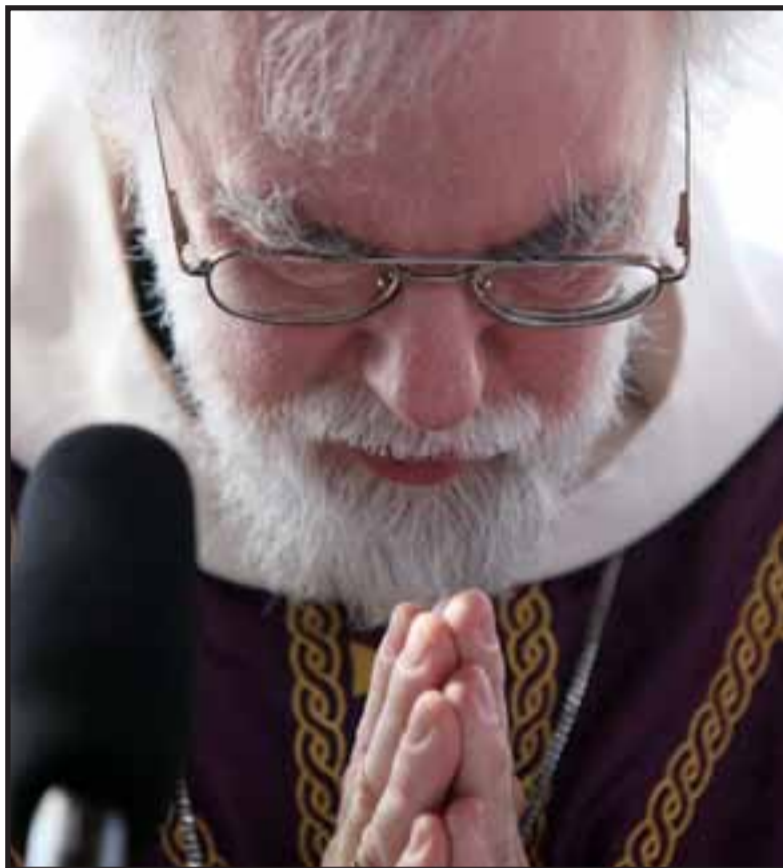
Striking a more militant tone, Williams said he did not believe that the church was losing the "battle against secularisation". Absolutely not. Yes, there may be waning congregations, but that is not because the church is becoming ever more remote and irrelevant - perish the thought. Rather, he argued, it is down to the fact that too many just "don't know how religion works" - once they did, the seats would start filling up again on a Sunday. Without the Church of England to protect the spiritual well-being of the nation, so we are told, godless anarchy and moral dissolution beckons.

Peculiar

Without doubt, the CoE is a very peculiar organisation indeed. The institution, and it certainly is one, contains a fissiparous range of theological and ideological tendencies stretching from half-mad, Bible-thumping evangelicals, through ritual-obsessed Anglo-Catholics, to liberally-minded Christian progressives - and, of course, subdivisions thereof. Left to their own devices, without the organisational and financial shelter - and constraints - provided by the church, such antagonistic and disparate forces would in all likelihood split in next to no time.

Therefore the departing Rowan Williams has been praised by many more for his *diplomatic* skills in holding together (just) this conflicting spectrum of forces. So David Cameron complimented him for being a man of "great learning and humility" who "sought to unite different communities" and "offer a profound humane sense of moral leadership that was respected by people of all faiths and none". In the same vein, Ed Miliband - who claims to be a non-believer - tweeted that Williams will be "sorely missed" as archbishop because, apparently, he "did what he said he'd do": ie, "challenge the imagination of our country".

More to the point than the talents and prowess of one man, however, is the role of the CoE itself. Its status as the established church means that the UK has an official state religion, privileged over all other faiths. The monarch, currently Elizabeth Windsor,



Rowan Williams: hairy but no leftie

is not only the head of state, but the "supreme governor" of the CoE.

This arrangement results from the historical legacy bequeathed by Henry Tudor in the 16th century, who for nakedly political (and economic) reasons split from Rome and effectively *nationalised* the church. Or, to put it another way, he ran a nationalised form of Catholicism and remained a theological opponent of puritanism to the day he died - putting many Lutherans and non-Catholics to a grisly death. The rituals, services, liturgy, etc of the 'new' Church of England brought into existence by Henry all remained essentially the same, although, as time went on, the church imported all manner of innovations from Switzerland and elsewhere, incorporating *aspects* of Protestantism. That is, the CoE is a church moderately reformed in doctrine, as expressed in the '39 articles' - essentially its version of confession - but also emphasising *continuity* with the Catholic and apostolic traditions of the church fathers. Centrally, however, it was constitutionally entwined with the state.

The result of this history is the strange situation where it will be the prime minister, David Cameron - a man renowned for his theological/ecclesiastical expertise and devotion, of course - who gets to select the next archbishop, albeit 'under advice'. This is a bizarrely convoluted process that was brilliantly satirised in the 1986 'The bishop's gambit' episode of *Yes, prime minister*.¹ In short, the retiring archbishop tells the monarch he wants to retire, the monarch accepts the resignation and then the grandly named Crown Nominations Commission begins to oversee the selection of a replacement. The CNC consists of the archbishops of Canterbury and York, three members elected by the General Synod's House of Clergy, three by the General Synod's House of Laity, six by the Vacancy-in-See Committee and the chair, who must be an "actual communicant lay

member of the Church of England". He or she is appointed by the prime minister. Furthermore, the prime minister's office helps supply the commission with information on possible candidates.

After all that, the CNC then chooses two names and sends them to the prime minister for approval. If the prime minister likes the choices, one name is selected and sent to the monarch who - in constitutional theory - has the final say. Though if she were to have a funny turn and reject the prime minister's 'nomination' then we would be confronted by a near full-on constitutional crisis. Needless to say, this commission meets in secret, and its deliberations and arguments - a bit like those on the SWP central committee - are kept secret from the church membership.

Historically, the CoE's privileged role in public life can be seen in many ways. For example, it exerts great influence over education to this very day. We read on the CoE website (underneath the tagline, "a Christian presence in every community") that it has a "long and successful" history of involvement in education as a "statutory provider" of schooling.² Yes, this writer went to a CoE primary school and still remembers the nonsense taught about god creating the world, even if it was not *literally* made in six days (mine was a very liberal and 'progressive' school). We also discover on the website that approximately one million children attend CoE schools and there are about 15 million people living in Britain who went to one. Seeing that 25% (4,605) of all primary/middle schools and 236 (6.25%) of secondary schools are CoE, the church is the biggest single provider of education in England.

For communists the established church represents a violation of elementary democratic principles, which can only rest on the basis of secularism. By which we mean a state of fundamental *equality* between all faiths/denominations and non-believers: no-one should be privileged

or enjoy special access to state power. Hence we in the CPGB demand the immediate disestablishment of the Church of England - the state should have no say in how it finances itself or appoints its leaders. Like trade unions or political parties, the church itself should decide who gets to be its leader - not the prime minister or any other state official or body.

Fudge

Williams has been dogged by two issues almost since the beginning of his term of office - the ordination of women and openly gay bishops, plus the related issue of gay marriage. On these matters, Williams has opted for a *fudge* in the name of church 'unity'. Some admire him for this, while others detest him.

Thus the question of women bishops came explosively to the fore in December 2009 when an open lesbian, Mary Douglas Glasspool, was elected as suffragan bishop in the diocese of Los Angeles. Leaders from 20 Anglican provinces, meeting in Singapore in April 2010, declared that the election and intended consecration of Glasspool "demonstrated, yet again, a total disregard for the mind of the communion".

Inevitably, traditionalist reactionaries within the church have threatened a schism over the issue. There will now be a general synod in July to give final approval to the introduction of women bishops, but with one important sop to the ultra-conservatives - they will be allowed to have 'special' priests if they object to the presence of a woman official. Or to use a more accurate term, the traditionalists will now have the right to special *bigot* bishops - a diplomatic 'solution' devised by Williams.

Then there is the even more incendiary question of gay bishops and same-sex unions. In 2002, the Anglican Church of Canada's diocese of New Westminster voted to allow the blessing of gay couples. Then in August 2003 the episcopal diocese of New Hampshire elected an openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, as a bishop. This came shortly after a similar controversy in England, when a gay priest, canon Jeffrey John, was appointed to become the suffragan Bishop of Reading. Eventually, however, John agreed to withdraw in order to "avoid division". In 2004, in the aftermath of Robinson's election as bishop, John was installed as Dean of St Albans.

Naturally, the traditionalists were outraged - and again in 2005 when the CoE affirmed that lay homosexuals who have entered into civil partnerships are still eligible for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and communion. Responding, the Anglican Church of Nigeria issued a statement proclaiming its "commitment to the total rejection of the evil of homosexuality, which is a perversion of human dignity" - it went on to "encourage" the Nigerian House of Representatives to approve a new bill that seeks to impose a five-year sentence upon anyone convicted of being openly gay or practising gay sex.

Rebelling against the perceived 'pro-gay' sentiments of Williams, the traditionalist boycotted the 2008 Lambeth Conference and set up an alternative - holding the Global Anglican Futures Conference in

Jerusalem. Representing about half of the 80 million practising Anglicans worldwide, especially those from Africa, they declared a state of "impaired communion" with their western counterparts.

Desperately, Williams planned to heal this schism by getting all constituent churches of the Anglican communion to sign up to a treaty or covenant which would stop them from ordaining openly gay clergy without central consent. But for the covenant to mean anything, it would have to be approved by a majority of the dioceses in the Church of England. 17 have so far rejected it and only 11 approved. It looks likely that five more will reject it soon, which would kill the scheme entirely. Which way forward for the church then? A final schism?

Presently, the bookmakers' favourite to succeed Williams is the Ugandan-born archbishop of York, skydiving enthusiast John Sentamu. And he is not just the bookies' favourite - he is also the preferred candidate for rightwing Tories and conservatives within the CoE, who are now busily lobbying for a more traditionalist archbishop. Someone who, in the words of Nadine Dorries, the Tory MP for Mid-Bedfordshire, would "stand up" for the "traditional values" that the "vast majority" of Christians - so she believes - would "identify with".

You can see why reactionary forces within the Tory Party would plump for Sentamu. He has come out strongly against gay/same-sex marriage, ranting at one point that Cameron would be acting like a "dictator" if he "forced" through gay marriage - apparently it is not the "role of the state to define" what marriage is, which for him is a sacred institution "set in tradition and history".³ Though opposed to same-sex marriage, Sentamu is on the record as saying he does believe in "civil partnerships", which are "not the same". Yet, he noted, "that difference does not mean one is better than another". Surely not the message that most of his traditionalists supporters want to hear - which is that heterosexual marriage, and no other form of partnership, is the natural moral foundation of society.

A government consultation on gay marriage has been officially launched this week, allowing three months discussion before legislation is drawn up. Same-sex couples would be able to marry in registry offices, but the laws on wedding ceremonies that allow only a man and woman to marry in church will remain untouched. Civil partners will have the option to convert their relationships to a marriage. Additionally, the proposed new marriage law will also allow people who undergo sex changes to stay married - at present they *must* legally divorce.

For communists, it is a basic democratic right that gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, etc should be accorded the same rights in society as heterosexuals. As for the church and state, the sooner divorce proceedings begin, the better ●

Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bishop's_Gambit.
2. www.churchofengland.org/education/church-schools-academies.aspx.
3. *The Daily Telegraph* January 27.

FREE SPEECH

A tale of two states

Harry Paterson compares the treatment meted out to two bloggers for their ‘grossly offensive’ comments

No-one should be under any illusion regarding the increasingly oppressive nature of the UK state. The creeping criminalisation of previously legal protest action has been seen many times recently; students protesting against tuition fees and the politically motivated sentences handed down to those convicted of last summer’s riots being just two of the most obvious examples.

Things have taken a very sinister and outrageous turn, though, with the arrest of 19-year-old Azhar Ahmed. It is alleged the youth recently posted the following comments on his Facebook page (all blog comments reproduced in their original form):

“People gassin about the deaths of soldiers! What about the innocent familys who have been brutally killed. The women who have been raped. The children who have been sliced up! Your enemy’s were the Taliban not innocent harmless familys. All soldiers should *die & go to hell!* *The lowlife fokin scum!* gotta problem go cry at your soliders grave & wish him hell because that where he is going.”

Strong words, to be sure, and undoubtedly offensive and upsetting to many, not least the bereaved families of serving soldiers. However, we will gloss over the tragic irony of his comments being lent substance by the rampage of a US serviceman which resulted in the deaths of 16 civilians, including nine children and three women. An irony further compounded by the motivation for his comments being the imbalance in the media coverage of casualties in Afghanistan. With blanket coverage given to the six recently killed British soldiers compared to the virtually non-existent acknowledgment of Afghan civilian casualties, it seems he at least has a point, however uncomfortable some might find his choice of words ...

But, be that as it may, the *real* concern here is that he was charged by West Yorkshire Police over those comments; not only that, but he was originally alleged to have committed a “racially aggravated public order offence”. It is difficult to see how his words, as reported, constitute racism in any way. Instead, significantly, and



Azhar Ahmed: offensive, but so what?

worryingly, his comments amount to an overtly *political* statement. So it seems we have a state which now deploys the flimsiest of legislation to silence political dissent. Set in the context of vicious austerity measures and the increasingly totalitarian methods used to suppress and quell the resulting protests, this marks a new and very serious attack on civil liberties and personal freedom.

Maybe something of the obvious hypocrisy of the charge and the transparent political persecution it represents was a factor in it being withdrawn and replaced, when the youth appeared at Dewsbury magistrates court on March 20, with that of “posting a grossly offensive message on Facebook” - the clumsily worded replacement reeking of a kind of ‘make it up as you go along’ justice. Apparently, the offence is covered by the 2003 Communications Act. Ahmed has now been bailed and will stand trial under the new charge

at Huddersfield magistrates court on July 3.

However, do not despair. It is not *all* bad news. It seems we also have *another* state in operation - one which works in parallel to the one experienced by the unfortunate teenager. Under *that* state it appears perfectly acceptable for serving, or former, soldiers and their friends to post the most noxious and racist filth on Facebook without incurring any sanctions.

On March 12, one Scott McHugh, who appears to be a serving soldier, posted on his Facebook wall, in response to Ahmed’s comments: “Azhar ahmed you sick horrible twisted paki bastard, how can you say that about our soldiers!”

Further investigations reveal conflicting reports of McHugh’s military status, with friends of the youth contacting this writer to claim he was actually discharged some three months previously. However,

the Beirut daily, *Al-Akhbar*, reports an army spokesman stating McHugh was discharged as recently as last week, following the comments: “as a result of abnormal administrative action” he is “no longer a serving member of the army”, according to a British army spokesman.¹

To add yet *further* confusion, Liberal Conspiracy reports a ministry of defence spokesman as stating that McHugh had *not* been discharged.

In any event, McHugh’s remarks provoked comments from several of his friends on Facebook.

Leighanne Gillott: “ He’s disgusting and should be fucking hanged!! He won’t get away with it, locked up or not somebody will get him, he will get what he deserves!!x”

Lee Crisculo: “Fucking sick twat burn his eyes out smelly fukka”

Helen Massey Gordge: “Cheeky smelly pakki cunt wants tying to a tree n shooting ... Smelly fukker ... Lock him up n throw the key away ...

Grrrrhhh ... *skum ...!!*”

Robbie Joedys Sampler: “He’s nothing he’s gunner die very soon.”

Danielle Lufc Harker: “Dirty smelly greasy bastard needs fuking torturing the dirty paki bastard!!”

The comments were subsequently removed and it appears that someone reported McHugh to Facebook’s administrators, as his defiant rejoinder, and that of a friend, seem to suggest.

Scott McHugh: “some body else had just reported my comment who ever it is Get back on ya Camel and f**k off!”

Danny Wheeler: “probably a paki shagger lad fuck em there shitbags for not admitting who it is!”

In contrast to the absence of any support for the source of McHugh’s fury, members of the far right were on hand to make their protest felt as Ahmed arrived at court and some three dozen members of the English Defence League, Casuals United and assorted neo-fash detritus brandished placards demanding the jailing of the hapless teen and of anyone else committing the heinous crime of insulting British troops. They were easily controlled by some 50 police officers, complete with four video vans.

The nature of these two connected but contrasting cases raises serious and disquieting questions. The obvious class spite of Ahmed’s arrest, contrasted with the pro-troops racism and bigotry of McHugh and his supporters, not to mention the clear and overt threats of violence and death directed at Ahmed, reflect well the current viciously reactionary period.

Welcome to justice and democracy, UK style. Right about now, I doubt I am the only one with a grim smile, fearing for the future while hearing Joe Strummer intoning, “Know your rights”... ●

This article appeared in its original form on Harry Paterson’s blog: <http://harrypaterson.co.uk>.

Notes

1. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/british-soldier-discharged-after-saying-he-wanted-shoot-%E2%80%99Ctowel-heads%E2%80%99D>.

Police try to stop anti-fascist book launch

Book launches, even on the left, are supposed to be civilised, metropolitan affairs. A short speech, a few questions, a glass of wine and the tinkle of cash, as the author signs his or her book!

Last July I was invited by Brighton Labour History Workshop to deliver a speech on the fight against fascism in Brighton and on the south coast. So pleased were the organisers and those who attended that I was asked to write up and expand the speech into book form. For many years people have spoken about writing a history of the fight against fascism in Brighton, but for one reason and another it was never undertaken. Meanwhile, old activists were dying without anyone recording their memories.

The book was therefore written up, with the help of a whole box of assorted anti-fascist material that had been stored in a loft plus an old MA dissertation, and a book launch was planned for Saturday March 17.

Pretty uncontroversial, you might think. However, Sussex police thought differently.

Under New Labour, the powers of the police increased enormously, as has their willingness to intervene more openly and proactively in opposing radical initiatives. On this occasion Brighton police telephoned the owners of the hall where the book launch was taking place, Friends Meeting House, warning that the book’s subject matter was “contentious” and that the English Defence League did not like it. As a result the meeting could become “violent”. This seemed to put the fear of god into the Quakers, who decided to comply with police advice that the best course of action would be to cancel the meeting.

Fortunately the meeting’s organiser managed to get it transferred to another venue - the Brighthelm Church and Community Centre, whose management was made of sterner stuff than the aptly

named Quakers. When the police contacted the BCCC, its organiser had already been prewarned that this was likely, but were determined to go ahead. Because of the local publicity garnered, the attendance was at least double that which we had originally estimated.

Ironically, the actions of the police helped to build the meeting. I had made it clear that the launch would go ahead even if I had to hold it outdoors with a loudhailer. Free speech for anti-fascists would not be prevented by Brighton’s political police.

And the fascists? All seven of them, who looked no more than 15 years old, gathered outside, alongside at least 40 police - who, it seems, were intent on mounting their own picket of the meeting. One anti-fascist was arrested for suggesting that the fascists get a job! After the meeting the EDL young hooligans made their way to Churchill Square, where they proceeded to threaten a Palestine Solidarity Campaign stall.

What happened next was that hundreds of ordinary people - shoppers, youngsters out for the day - turned on them and soon the police had to provide the fascists with protection and escort them from the area!

What is worrying, however, is that under the guise of ‘public order’ the police are now actively attempting to prevail upon the owners of halls - who naturally do not want them damaged or even smashed up - to no-platform sections of the left. Far from providing reassurance that any threat from the far right will be contained, in essence the police are acting as the fascists’ messenger boys.

This is something that the left and the labour movement need to take to heart - not least when some people, even within our own ranks, are calling on the state to be given more powers to ban meetings they do not like.

The Quakers have a long tradition

of hosting left, including anti-fascist, meetings. Their decision in Brighton to bow to police dictat was both surprising and cowardly. They cited their pacifist beliefs and referred to a Unite Against Fascism meeting last year when the EDL’s thugs were repulsed. What better way to embolden fascism than to give in to their threats of violence? If pacifism means anything, it means standing up actively for peace, not running away from it.

Meanwhile I’m now working on a second edition of the book! ● **Tony Greenstein**

Tony Greenstein’s *The fight against fascism in Brighton and the south coast* is published by Brighton History Workshop, price £8.99 (cheques payable to ‘BUWC’). Order from Brighton Unemployed Workers Centre, 4 Crestway Parade, The Crestway, Brighton BN1 7BL.

PARTY

Fur flies over Lenin

What has the debate over 1912 got to do with current communist practice? James Turley answers the philistines

The broad sweep of the character of today's left - its divisions, profound and trivial, and the strengths and weaknesses of its practice and theory - hinge, one way or another, on one concept: the 'Leninist party', or 'combat party', or 'party of a new type' ...

Stalinists justify their purges and bureaucracy on the basis of the 'iron discipline' supposedly bequeathed to the communist movement by Lenin. Anarchists accuse Lenin of envisaging an enlightened dictatorship of intellectuals over the benighted working class. Trotskyists justify every other pointless split on the need to purge their ranks of 'centrists'. Even, as with the recent ructions in Workers Power, when the organised left attempts to break from this practice, it self-conceives as breaking with Lenin, thus leaving him to the tender mercies of the bureaucrats.

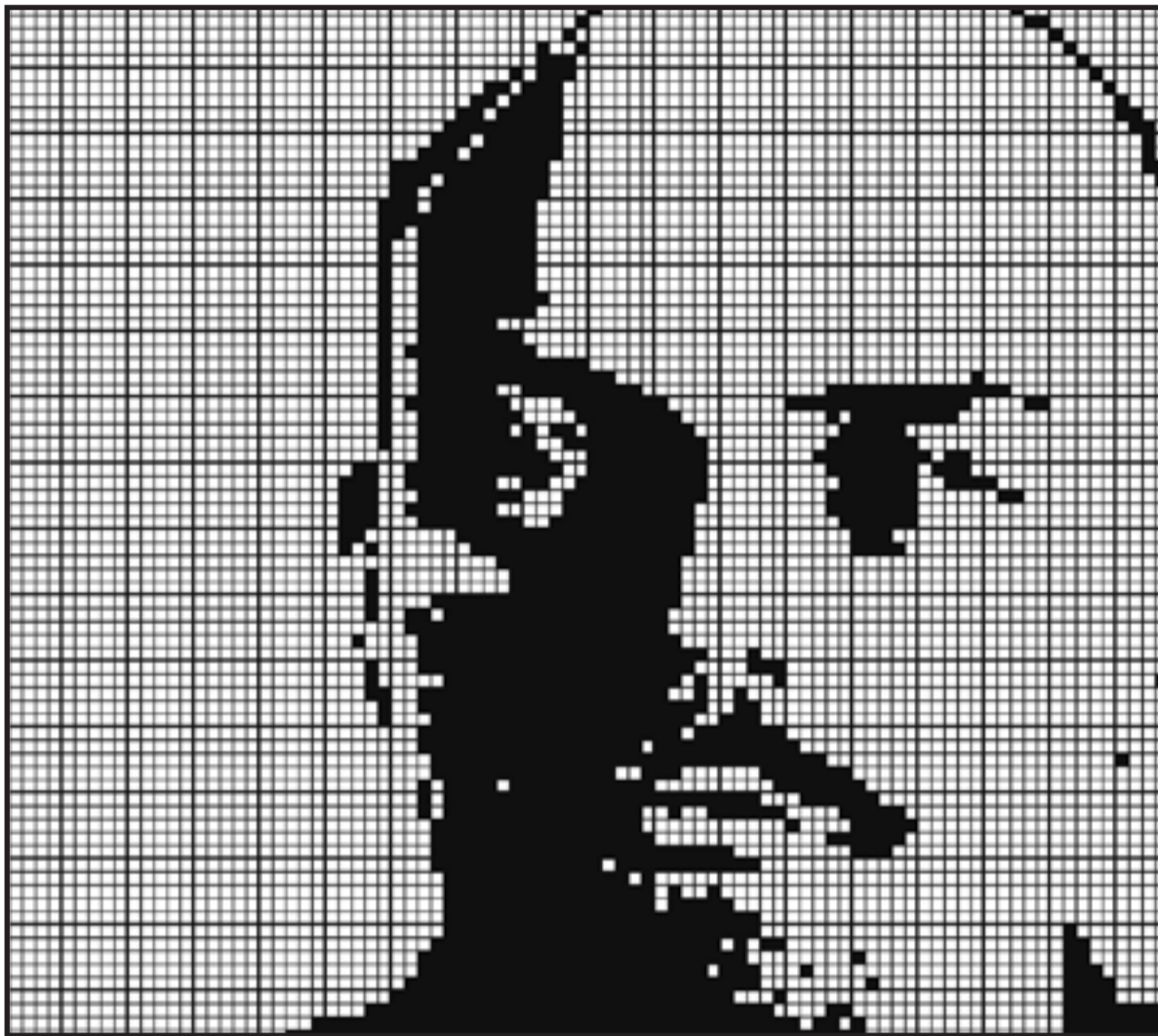
The core idea in this narrative is that Lenin broke decisively with the mainstream of the Second International - whereas the latter aimed to build slightly diffuse 'parties of the whole class', Lenin aimed to build a delimited, highly disciplined party of 'professional revolutionaries'. He came to this conclusion in 1901, with the publication of *What is to be done?*; or he came to it in the revolutionary days of 1905; or he came to it in 1912, with the *de facto* Bolshevik-Menshevik split; or in 1914, with the outbreak of World War I; or in 1915, after rereading Hegel's *Logic*.

He came to it consciously, or unconsciously - or unconsciously and then consciously. This innovation marked him out as the great Marxist of his time (Trotskyists, Stalinists and Maoists); a petty bourgeois bureaucrat (anarchists and council communists); or a hopeless Blanquist (the late Kautsky). Whatever the details, his break is decisively important.

It should be said, at the outset, that all these loaded variations on the same theme have one other thing in common - they are historically false. Cracks, at least, are starting to appear in this monolithic narrative. Lars Lih, a scholar of Russian left history, has done much of the more recent legwork, in his book *Lenin rediscovered* and short biography, *Lenin*, as well as other writings.

Lih argues that Lenin drew the essential points of his strategy from the Second International mainstream, especially its foremost leader, Karl Kautsky; that he aimed to build a mass socialist party on the model, so far as it was applicable to tsarist despotism, of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD); and that he foregrounded the question of *political freedom* and vehemently opposed those who argued for a focus on low-level agitation that could produce meaningful concrete actions ... as does most of today's far left.

The latter has responded to Lih's work in a slightly two-faced manner, promoting it on the basis that it proves conclusively that Lenin was not an aspiring Bonaparte throughout his political career, but simply ignoring much of the fine detail, which places most Trotskyist groups squarely *against* Lenin on general political questions. This approach, too, is failing, as is obvious from the expanding debate on Lih's work taking place in and around the American International Socialist Organisation



Lenin: why debate?

- formerly allied to the Socialist Workers Party in this country, until a bitter and basically apolitical split a decade ago.

The debate was initiated by Pham Binh, an ex-member of the ISO, who advanced a scathing critique the biography of Lenin written by SWP founder-guru Tony Cliff¹; ISO comrades Paul D'Amato² and Paul Le Blanc³ responded, as did comrade Lih.⁴

This is, on one level, a discussion about abstruse points of history; but there can be few of those where the stakes among Marxists are higher. At issue is the whole political method of the contemporary far left, founded on a particular reading of Bolshevism's trajectory from 1903 to 1917 (and interpreted either positively or negatively). Also at issue, it has to be said, is the post-1920s mainstream of Hegelian Marxism, which in the work of Georg Lukács and the young Karl Korsch was equally founded on a philosophisation of 21-conditions Bolshevism, and an argument that Lenin made a clean and decisive break from the Second International centre.⁵

Not all of these issues apply to all participants in the debate. Le Blanc is a latecomer to the ISO, has less invested in defending Cliff's *Lenin*, and has highlighted the importance of political freedom to Lenin's political thought in different ways. The same cannot be said of Paul D'Amato, who in his response to Binh is left squaring the impossible circle; he is unwilling to call Lenin anti-democratic, yet he defends an account of Lenin's political work in which the latter comes out as a great man with a good nose, a distaste for procedural fussing and a habit of wildly and cynically overstating the case to reposition a given debate (the infamous 'stick-bending').

Indeed, D'Amato quite unwittingly

puts his finger on the matter when he claims that Cliff's textual jiggery-pokery is justifiable on the grounds that his book is not a work of academic history, but - in the words of Duncan Hallas - "a manual for revolutionaries" that "might well have been called *Building the party - illustrated from the life of Lenin*". Cliff mobilises a caricature of Lenin precisely for his own political purposes, which at that time amounted to transforming the International Socialists definitively into the sect we now know as the SWP.

Already political

Another, anonymous, commentator - obviously close to the ISO - takes the only route left open: avowing suspicion at the debate's relevance. Lih is criticised for focusing on two particular disputes in 1905 and 1912, and failing to justify doing so in terms of present political priorities. "We have to justify ... why we read Lenin right here, right now, rather than, say, phone books. Our answer, inevitably, will [have] something to do with our practical political commitments, goals and self-understanding."⁶

The problem is that Lenin's behaviour, at these junctures and others, has been mobilised by the left, Cliff included, to justify concrete political practice - and still is. Reading *Lenin rediscovered*, an extended commentary on *What is to be done?*, is quite an odd experience, since Lih's position is that the latter is simply an incidental polemic to which Lenin assigned no great significance until his opponents spuriously seized on it to hammer him. It is a book that argues in substance that it should not have had to be written.

Simply doing the history in an academic fashion - as Lih does, with scrupulous attention to detail - is *already* political, because the

issues themselves have *already* been politicised. The far left has imagined itself to be following the royal road to October 1917; but it has actually ended up weak, demoralised and divided into a swarm of competing sects. Debunking the myths of October, and the myth of the Bolshevik break from 'Kautskyism', leaves the way open to try something different.

"What matters for socialists today," our anonymous author says, "is when, where and why [Lenin] (and, for that matter, Trotsky, Luxemburg and others) broke with Kautsky, and why they thought it necessary to build an entirely new international." Indeed, that does matter (although the very different circumstances obtaining today maybe do not qualify it for *immediate* importance). But the more significant question is surely: *what was it about Lenin and Bolshevism that allowed it to make revolution*, where all others failed? It is partly, to be sure, the question of 1914 and the split in social democracy; but Luxemburg, unlike Lenin, was unable to build effective opposition to the social-chauvinist traitors; and Trotsky later acknowledged his hopelessness in this period with lacerating self-criticism.

The truth is that, unlike the followers of Trotsky (whose conciliationism was utterly hopeless) and Luxemburg (whose ambiguous connection to mass-action leftism led her primarily to build sects), the Bolsheviks emerged into a revolutionary situation a *mass party*, with profound roots in the class, untainted by August 1914. It was precisely the perspective of building *mass* revolutionary workers' parties, inherited through Kautsky from Marx and Engels, that allowed the Bolsheviks to win out.

The more that serious work is done on this question, the more cold war historiography (in both its Soviet

and anti-communist forms), and the Trotskyist myth of 'Leninism', are debunked. The whole edifice is built on air - or, in its more sophisticated forms, philosophy ... which amounts to the same thing.

Of course, only the most self-defeating of conspiratorial sects would argue that larger parties as such are worse than smaller ones; but innumerable justifications exist for political practices destined for diminishing returns. D'Amato excoriates Pham Binh for daring to advocate unity of the socialist left: "a 'united' socialist organisation that has in its ranks both those who consider North Korea, China and Vietnam socialist, and those who think that they are bureaucratic despotism; both Stalinists and genuine Marxists; and both supporters and opponents of the Democratic Party would be a stillborn project".

Pham Binh, in reply, rather acidly points out than none other than Paul Le Blanc is a supporter of 'socialist' Cuba, and that has not blocked his path to ISO membership in good standing.⁷ He probably does, in fact, underestimate the strategic importance of differences on the left - but he is right, nonetheless, to argue for the democratic unity of Marxists.

The Bolsheviks were more than a little prone to enormous and wide-ranging polemics in their ranks: Bukharin very obviously represented a different trend, in the 1910s, to Lenin, to name one example, and the two came into dispute repeatedly. What is important is disciplined unity *in action*, and *acceptance* of (rather than full agreement with) the party programme as a guide to action. With those conditions met - both formulations of Lenin, as it happens - it is right and proper to let the fur fly on disputed issues great and small.

Enforcing ideological unity on particular interpretations of the class character of Stalinism, or any other point of dispute in theory, is simply the road to split after split. Any ISO member should know better (but, given the ISO's characteristically *laissez-faire* attitude to educating recruits, probably does not) - for a cigarette-paper difference on the character of the anti-globalisation movement, the ISO was summarily expelled from the SWP's 'international'. The SWP claimed, of course, that it was terribly important, that the ISO was drifting into 'abstentionism' and so forth; it was all nonsense. A healthy culture of debate (and perhaps a democratic vote on the matters of immediate practical significance) would have resolved things perfectly productively.

That the Bolsheviks managed to build such a culture under conditions of tsarist autocracy is one of their greatest achievements; that we cannot do so under relatively benign political regimes is the surest mark of our desperate condition ●

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Notes

1. 'Mangling the party of Lenin' *Weekly Worker* February 2.
2. <http://links.org.au/node/2726>.
3. www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=24112.
4. 'Falling out over a Cliff' *Weekly Worker* February 16.
5. See especially Lukács's *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought*.
6. <http://pink-scare.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/politics-of-debate-over-lenin.html>.
7. <http://links.org.au/node/2735>.

REVIEW



Michael Stobel plays king Arthur

Not Jesus but Brian

Ade Morris (writer and director), Ralph Bernard (producer) **Dust**; on tour

For those who only speak Arthur Scargill's name in hushed tones with bowed head while genuflecting, this play is sacrilegious, blasphemous or "shite" (as, I think, Ken Capstick - former Yorkshire area National Union of Mineworkers vice-president and now Arthur's right-hand man in the Socialist Labour Party - called it).

The response of the tiny SLP sect has been comparable to a hysterical religious outrage. The second commandment is perhaps recalled: "Thou shalt not take the name of the lord thy god in vain." Despite any real assault upon Arthur in the play, it has been denounced as a veiled attack upon him. For those naive enough not to understand, the timing is, of course, of immense importance: as the masses start to awake and look for solutions and leaders, and Arthur's oratory is ever more in demand (just when his second coming is due), along comes this wicked, disgraceful play - or so we are told.

The play is clearly part of a political conspiracy linked to the Russian gold slander. You can plead, 'It's just theatre' all you like: all that does is place you on the list of traitors and dupes. The internet has been alive with the hysterical condemnations by the faithful.

In fact this is a *fiction*; I stress that, because one former Women Against Pit Closures activist was moved to heckle the actors at the Barnsley showing of the play. In her case she knew damn well she would be annoyed - outraged even - but came along anyway to let everyone else know.

That this is fiction is clear from the fact that (a) it is set on the morning of Margaret Thatcher's death, and (b) the former NUM leader is using a laptop. One suspects that some of the objections from residue Scargillites arise from the fact that the scene is set in Arthur's controversial penthouse flat in the Barbican, the cause of impending legal action - the union wants to free itself of such crippling expenditure, while Arthur wishes to hang onto his 'grace and favour' pad. But what we have to keep in mind throughout this play is that it is not meant actually to be Arthur: none of the words, actions and thoughts are his; they are all made up by Ade Morris.

The other major player on stage is the character of Lawrence Davies - and he is based roughly on me! This character, for all his revolutionary past and connections,

ends up a broken man, eaten by rage. Worse, he is now a Doncaster councillor implementing Tory cuts which affect even his own son. If I were to follow the example of some of my former comrades' outrage at Scargill's portrayal, I would object strongly to this drunken, bitter creature, but it is clear that it is not actually meant to be me - even though many of my anecdotes are put into the mouth of this character. It seems ridiculous to have to labour this point, but in the light of some of the bluster on various miners' lists, it seems it is necessary.

That people had their lives ruined in the strike, that some were broken (and a few even killed) is without doubt true, and it is this haunting and disturbing feature of the play which quite overpowers the laughter provoked by some of the tales. We, of course, would not choose to tell the story this way. These personal disasters did not characterise the strike, and are not part of our legacy, but none of us can say they are not true of some then and now. However, there have been many other presentations - *Billy Elliot*, *Brassed off* and *Faith*, for example - which tell the story in a more palatable way perhaps and from that different standpoint.

Another bone of contention, I suppose, is the portrayal of Arthur's flatmate, Barbara, once a young journalist covering the strike. One might search for a real-life person who this might be, but in the end she is not a real person either, so far as we can judge. There is a Scargill biography though ready for publication and Arthur's long-awaited book, I am assured, is finished - the PR men are biding their time looking out for the right moment to release it. (Doubtless we will all be flayed alive in print.)

But back to the play itself. There is a certain genre that cares to see us miners as hapless victims - pawns in a big game, where all the moves are made by others out of sight. According to this view we were engaged in a sort of class-war 'charge of the light brigade', misled and manipulated. Sadly this is one of that genre. The drunk Geordie rages not so much against Thatcher as against Arthur, presumably because somehow he caused it all, or "in his ivory tower" he was somehow unaware of the suffering and grief of his members. There is at least a suggestion that Arthur was obsessed with avenging the defeat of the miners and his hero, AJ Cook, for our defeat in 1926, but that one does not work,

given that we probably achieved that in 1972 and 74.

This is a weird play, by anyone's yardstick. You cannot exactly relax in your seat, as the emotions raw and bitter are bounced round the stage. Actually there is nothing overtly derogatory about Arthur in it. It is just that the play simply does not eulogise him in the manner which his diehard supporters expect. Far from "shite" though, it is complex and not easy - a thread of two or three interwoven lives and histories unfolding in a drunken rage in a Barbican flat.

This scene, however - and the need of one individual to confront Arthur with his own anger - does not encapsulate the story of the Great Strike. It does not tell the tale of heroism, as an important section of our class undertook a conscious attempt to seriously challenge the system. We were not victims and we were not misled by anyone other than Thatcher and National Coal Board chief Ian MacGregor. The stand we made was a conscious, determined choice and, as I never tire of telling folk, we started the strike, not Arthur.

Go and see it - unless you are going to give it the *Life of Brian* treatment, that is. The fundamentalists just do not get it: this is not Jesus ●

David Douglass

Dust (Quidem Productions).
future dates:

Tuesday March 27:

Beggar's Theatre, Millom

Wednesday March 28:

Cumbernauld Theatre

Thursday March 29:

Scottish Mining Museum,

Newtongrange, Edinburgh

Saturday March 31:

Dundee Rep

Tuesday April 3 for three nights:

Lancaster Grand

Tuesday April 10 for three nights:

Roths Hall, Glenrothes

Monday April 16:

Motherwell Civic

Tuesday April 17 for three nights:

Mansfield Palace Theatre

Thursday April 19:

Kirkgate Theatre, Cockerham

Friday April 20 for two nights:

Lantern Theatre, Liverpool

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

Unions have organised token resistance

Fresh attacks as unions retreat

As chancellor George Osborne was unveiling his March 21 budget combining tax cuts for the rich with further austerity attacks on the majority, he did so in the knowledge that the unions leading the fight to defend public sector pensions have effectively shelved plans for another day of action.

The executive of the Public and Commercial Services Union, meeting on March 19, voted by a large majority not to strike on March 28, despite the 90.5% rejection of the government's derisory pensions 'offer' and 72.4% vote for further action. While the 33% turnout was actually reasonable compared to similar ballots, several EC members, including comrades from the Socialist Party in England and Wales, argued that, in view of the earlier decisions by the National Union of Teachers and University and College Union to limit March 28 protest walkouts to London, it would be better not to test the loyalty of the large section of non-militant PCS members and to work instead for a national strike in April, when there is still a chance that Unite, together with the NUT, UCU and some smaller unions, will come on board. The membership of the NUT and UCU have both recently voted for further national action by convincing majorities.

The unified opposition to the pension reforms witnessed in the November 30 mass strike collapsed in disarray over the winter, with the Unison, GMB and TUC leaderships doing the capitalists' work by caving in before the government's proposed 'heads of agreement'. In effect they have accepted the 'principle' that public sector workers must work longer and pay more in exchange for a reduced pension. That left the unions split between the capitulationists (Dave Prentis of Unison, Paul Kenny of the GMB, the TUC's Brendan Barber *et al*) and the rejectionist unions (PCS, UCU, NUT). Speaking to 150 activists in Manchester at a Unite the Resistance rally on February 29, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka correctly characterised the surrender of Prentis, Kenny, etc as a "mistake of historic proportions".

March 28 could have been an opportunity to instil confidence into other workers, persuading them to take action and pile pressure on the bureaucracies of Unite, Unison, GMB, etc to act. But there was also the danger that a damp squib could have led to further demoralisation and we would be left to fight hospital by hospital, school by school and region by region. Unless we do better than this our movement could take a beating my generation has never seen.

Clearly Serwotka was right - a divided trade union movement in retreat has opened the door to even harsher attacks. And now it seems that the government is preparing the destruction of national agreements, whereby the same pay rates, pensions and working conditions apply to every public sector worker across the country. Millions would be pitted against each other and the weakest and most poorly organised would be worst hit. This is intended to be part of the

process of 'rebalancing' the economy. In other words, driving down of conditions and pay of the public sector to the level (or below) those suffered by many, often unorganised private sector workers.

Apparently the first workers to be hit by this 'regional' attack would be the 100,000 staff employed by the department for work and pensions, over 20,000 in the home office and 16,000 in the department of transport. For public sector workers this is yet another downward pressure on real wages. If you add to the increase in pension contributions and the threat of regional pay relatively high inflation, pay freezes and the increase in VAT, then living conditions are clearly going to take a nose-dive if the coalition gets its way. In this context trade union sectionalism will allow the capitalists to further play workers off against each other. Not simply on the basis of grade or longevity of service, as with the pensions dispute, but north v south, city v countryside and Scotland/Wales/Northern Ireland v England.

As a member of Unison at Manchester Royal Infirmary commented to me, regional pay within healthcare will result in a further deterioration within understaffed, overworked and mismanaged

hospitals. As union organisation is undermined yet again, the best healthcare workers will migrate to more highly paid areas and the Tories will have got what they wanted: good healthcare for rich areas only, with working class areas reduced to basic services. The impact on patients caused by the driving down of wages has a precedent. The privatisation and outsourcing of elderly care, resulting in the stagnation of wages has had a marked, negative effect on the provision of care and support for the elderly.

Trade union sectionalism already aids the divide-and-rule strategies of the capitalists. During the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, it was clear that this was not simply a battle over conditions or the mines, but an attempt to break working class resistance. A resistance that coloured the political landscape in the post-war period of working class self-awareness and militancy. Yet the miners were defeated because they and their union were left to stand alone, as the spineless TUC leadership limited its 'solidarity' to tokenistic gestures, while other unions were bought off by Margaret Thatcher. This betrayal has been played out many times since.

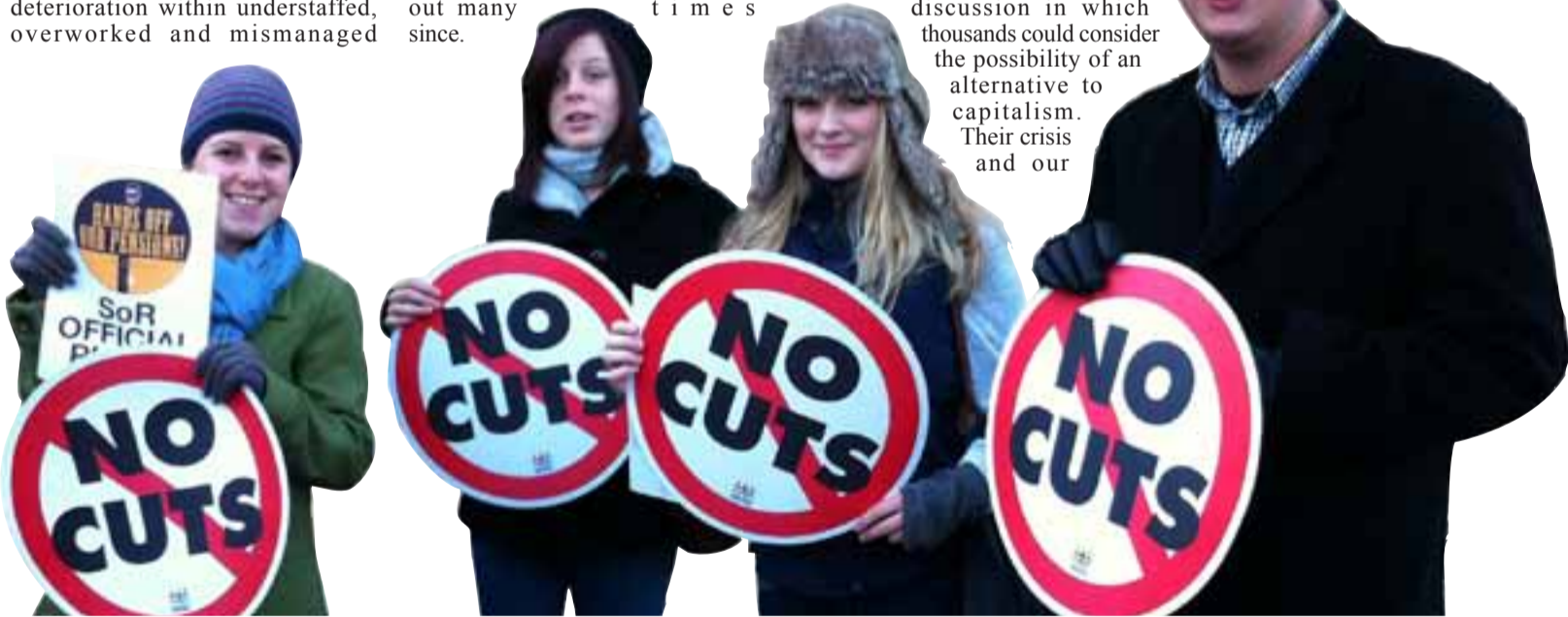
It is therefore incumbent on us as a revolutionary left to consider alternative strategies within the unions. The broad left strategy first sponsored by the Stalinists, was later eagerly taken up by the likes of SPEW and the Socialist Workers Party. But this never-ending fight for union positions conducted by the few is nothing but a sick game of musical chairs between leftwing and rightwing bureaucrats for the top posts.

Where the trade union bureaucracy acts as an obstacle to action and resistance we must seek to go around it, as well as continuing to work through official structures in order to transform the unions. In my view the Occupy and Indignados movement has begun to help the revolutionary left relearn tactics we had long forgotten and the recent pickets against workfare managed to push back the employers and the government on key aspects, where they lost the argument nationally. These protests resulted from the organised left working with activists from campaigns such as UK Uncut. Occupations of public spaces, workplaces and symbols of capitalist dictatorship opened up a space for discussion in which thousands could consider the possibility of an alternative to capitalism. Their crisis and our

resistance has taken a heavy toll on capitalist realism.

Within the trade unions and our workplaces we must begin to fight for policies that unite workers regardless of grade or union affiliation. We need to combat sectionalism by reviving the demand for industrial unions: one industry, one union. We have to stop playing the bureaucrats' games - horse-trading for this or that position and giving left cover to the like of Unite's Len McCluskey. The revolutionary left, though weak and disparate, could make a real start in beginning to organise the rank and file. The SWP's Unite the Resistance and the Socialist Party's National Shop Stewards Network are fake rank-and-file initiatives, whose real aim is to act as a front for and recruit to 'the party'. We need to build real spaces and networks within which workers are able to organise campaigns and solidarity, bypassing the bureaucratic structures whenever necessary.

Chris Strafford



But the cuts keep coming

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