



weekly **worker**

Why 'Leninist' sects cling to their fictional image of Lenin despite the historical facts

- Running for Iran
- Osborne budget
- Cash for access
- Italian communism

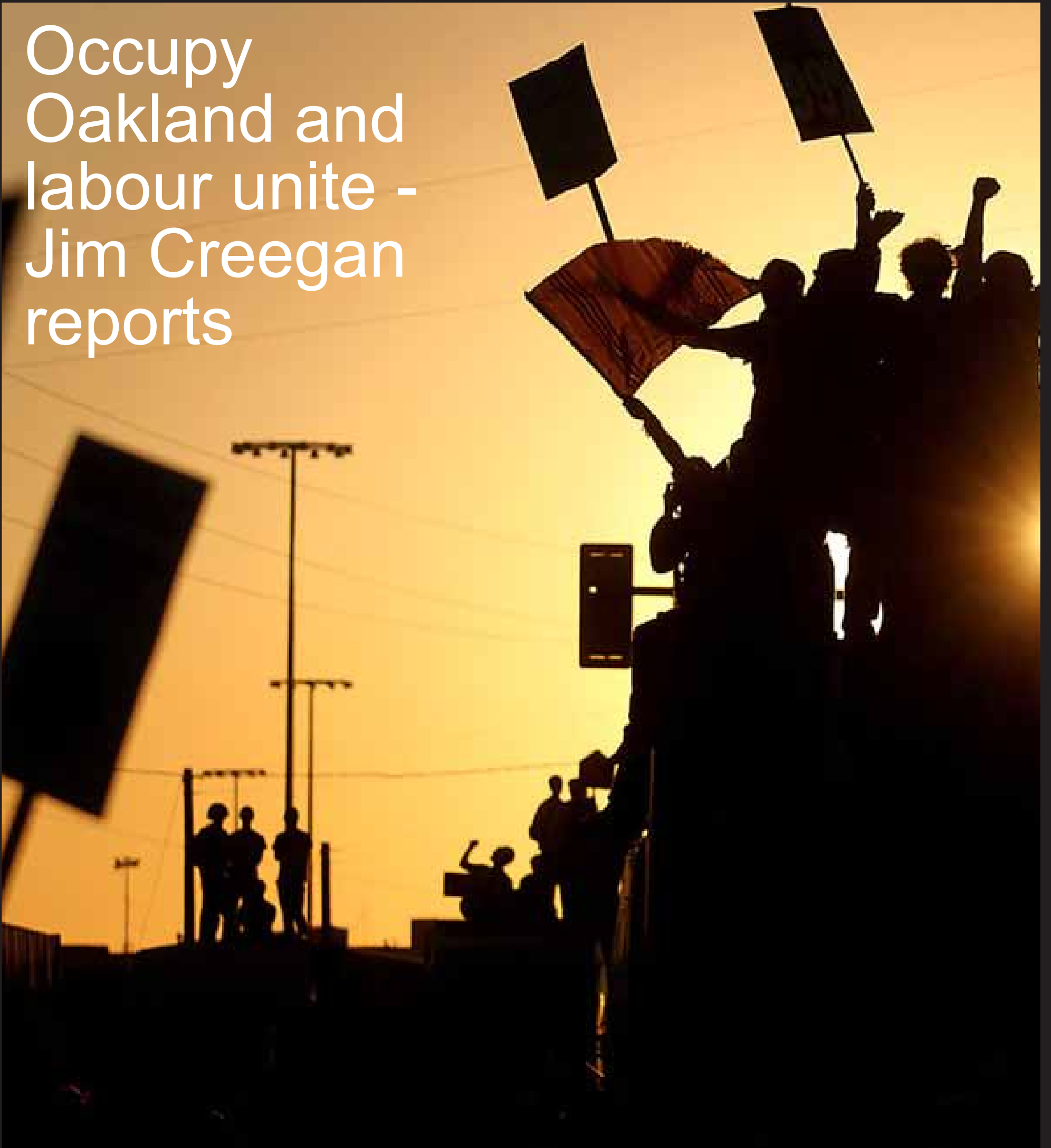
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LETTERS



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

Economism

James Turley, in his usual arrogant style (he “answers the philistines”), sets out his anti-Leninist views (‘Fur flies over Lenin’, March 22). He sets up a straw-man Lenin who “aimed to build a delimited, highly disciplined party of ‘professional revolutionaries’” and then demolishes this self-created nonsense. The party of ‘professional revolutionaries’ was for illegality when open work was very dangerous. It does not constitute the essence of Leninism at all. We find this in his battle with the economists. And that battle is still ongoing.

In an article entitled ‘The birth of the Bolshevik party’ (*Socialist Worker* January 21), Julie Sherry correctly sets out the differences between a revolutionary party, as pioneered in theory and practice by Lenin, and a reformist ‘party of the whole class’, as practised by the Mensheviks and theorised by Karl Kautsky: “The Mensheviks stuck to the ‘common sense’ idea that a socialist party meant one party for all workers, even if they had different politics. But Vladimir Lenin ... had another idea of what a party should be. His model starts with the fact that there is a spectrum of ideas within the working class - from revolutionary to reactionary, with most people falling somewhere in between. So, while some workers accept racist ideas, for example, others are staunchly anti-racist. Lenin said a revolutionary party should group together those with the most advanced ideas so they can try to win over other people.”

There, in a few pithy sentences, is the essence of Leninism. So the British SWP has made a great leap forward and at last overcome its opportunism and tail-endist political method? Unfortunately, no, because later in the piece she manages to assert the exact opposite to this position: “The Bolsheviks understood that the party learns from the working class and is forged in the thick of class struggle. Its role is not to bring ‘great ideas’ ready-made to workers too ignorant to have them. It is to take the best ideas thrown up by workers themselves, such as the soviets, and attempt to generalise them.”

Not even the “great ideas”, “ready-made” in the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, are sufficient to lead these workers; apparently: they will just lead themselves and the task of revolutionaries is to spoon-feed them what they already know in a ‘generalised’ and refined way - as the ignorant, anti-theoretical anarchists and ‘left’ communists thought and still think. This is substituting class-consciousness for Marxist theory.

There is a widespread rejection of democratic centralism in favour of ‘pluralist’ parties at the moment. All types of liberal anti-Trotskyists wish to be free of the discipline of the class struggle under the guise of escaping from ‘sectarianism’ and ‘dogmatism’. Without a revolutionary party based on democratic centralism as its organisational norm, it is impossible to educate the membership and the broader vanguard in revolutionary theory. We cannot learn from struggle unless we unite in struggle against the common enemy. Therefore, democratic centralism is necessary because of the peculiar form of oppression endured by the working class and their fightback against this. When they engage in serious strike struggles, they are obliged to mount picket lines. Whatever the law says, they know that to win in the first place they must prevent the more backward

of their ranks breaking the strike. If it is a serious struggle, all talk of democracy is forgotten and the battle commences in earnest.

Workers’ democracy denies democracy to capitalists to hire and fire at will and to other workers to scab. It requires the fullest discussions before votes are taken and these should be taken at meetings, where workers feel their collective strength, rather than in individual postal ballots, where workers are isolated and subject to media and domestic pressures. Once a majority decides some action, then the organisation must enforce compliance from opponents within its own ranks by whatever means available to it. So workers’ democracy is for struggle - workers’ organisations sorting out what they need to do in full discussion, enforcing their decisions by whatever means necessary at their disposal. Significantly, the Tories directed most of their anti-union legislation against these norms of workers’ democracy.

As the highest form of workers’ organisation, the revolutionary party must both reflect and develop the elements of workers’ democracy into a conscious practice and organisational norm. Thus the theory of DC was extracted from, and developed out of, the practice of the working class in struggle. The democracy is for deciding how to struggle; the centralism is in ensuring we strike together, so we can learn from our victories and defeats. In deciding how to handle serious political and ideological differences in the group, it is surely reasonable to demand that these are first raised internally on the highest body available to the member or members. The right to form tendencies must be facilitated by the constitution and must be seen as a normal part of internal life. It must be positively encouraged when substantial differences appear, because these generally reflect real problems within the class. Only by serious debate and struggle can theoretical advances be made.

But nonetheless there is a grain of truth - or, more correctly, good reason for the confusion displayed - in the centrist method of Julie Sherry and the SWP. It was not enough simply to have the correct programme and put that forward to the masses in a propagandistic manner. That is what Lenin learned from the failed revolution of 1905 and the appearance of the soviets; there he saw how he had ‘bent the stick’. But that did not mean that Lenin now adopted the method of the Mensheviks, which produced such good, but short-term results. Their opportunism contained an element of listening to the masses, but it tail-ended them to such a degree that it quickly led to disaster when reality imposed itself on the masses and on them. From this experience, he developed the theory of the Leninist party and, with it, the correct methodology of communism: how to intervene and win the leadership of the masses.

Lenin says of the economists (and he might be referring to the CPGB, the SWP and the academics Pham Binh, Paul Le Blanc and Lars T Lih): “There is politics and politics. Thus, we see that *Rabochaya Mysl* does not so much deny the political struggle as it bows to its spontaneity, to its unconsciousness. While fully recognising the political struggle (better: the political desires and demands of the workers), which arises spontaneously from the working class movement itself, it absolutely refuses independently to work out a specifically social democratic politics corresponding to the general tasks of socialism and to present-day conditions in Russia.”

“Without revolutionary theory

there is no revolutionary party” is justly one of Lenin’s best remembered quotes.

Gerry Downing
email

Qualitative?

Dave Vincent agrees with me that the Labour Party has “always sold out the workers”, but - urging us to abandon the struggle to democratise the party and to leave the bureaucracy’s domination unchallenged - he tells us, impatiently, how “successive quantitative changes” under Blair, Brown and co “lead to a qualitative change” (Letters, March 22).

Well, they can do, but this is wishful thinking. The simple fact is that Labour was born as a bourgeois workers’ party, and is still a bourgeois workers’ party. I do not agree that there was “Nothing new with Blair, Brown and co”. But the long evolution of the step-by-step incorporation of the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy into the capitalist state, described by Ralph Miliband in his 1960 book *Parliamentary socialism* and continued during the subsequent half century, has not ended the trade union link.

Chris Trafford insists: “No change has occurred: the bureaucratic machine remains intact” (Letters, March 22). Precisely. But Chris seems to regard Marxists’ struggle to win Labour to Marxism, to transform Labour into a party that backs working class struggle instead of running capitalism, as a mere tactic to be undertaken when the going is good. No, it is a strategic necessity in the struggle for socialism.

Chris wants to “ditch amateur sects for an actual party project” and organise “resistance at the base of the unions” to “democratise the unions”. Good. But democratising the trade unions and democratising the party they created is the same struggle, against the same bureaucracy - the bureaucracy of the workers’ movement. Uniting the revolutionary left is not an alternative to challenging the domination of the bureaucracy. When the revolutionary sects eventually stop splitting and start uniting around Marxism, they will have to overcome Labourism in order to win over the majority of our class.

Stan Keable
Labour Party Marxists

Absolution

Comrade Dave Vincent seems convinced that the Labour Party will never change - not under any circumstances, never ever, so there. Is a political analysis based on the idea that nothing will change really one of someone who calls themselves a socialist?

How remarkable would it be that in the grip of the revolution the Labour Party clung to Blairite - or, for that matter, Bennite - politics? The expectation has to be that we play the long game and build a presence inside the Labour Party as well as outside it. The party of the class must extend its roots into every institution - political, social and economic. That means the boy scouts, the Labour Party, the local credit union, the co-ops, the working men’s clubs, and so on, and bring to them the perspectives of a class conscious of its position in history and its potential once again.

The comrade rattles off examples that could be called a version of the question asked by Reg in *The life of Brian*: ‘What’s the Labour Party ever done for us?’ Well, there’s the roads - the Special Roads Act of 1949 laid the initial legislative steps towards motorway building in the UK - the health service, the welfare state (quite possibly a section of the civil service that made many of his members’ jobs necessary), the building of

entirely new towns to rehouse the blitz-battered workers and the education acts that made secondary education a right for all. The Open University, the Race Relations Act of 1965, the Trades Description Act, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, the abolition of capital punishment for murder, decriminalisation of homosexuality, the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, the Police Act of 1976, which brought in a formal process for complaining about the police, the Human Rights Act, devolution, minimum wage, freedom of information, the Concessionary Bus Travel act 2007 (free bus travel for the old or disabled), agency workers regulations in 2010, and so on. But, apart from that, what has the Labour Party ever done for us?

Instead of poo-h-pooing those of us who choose to get into the only party the working class has and seek to introduce Marxism to its perspectives, however many generations it may take, perhaps this dull, pessimistic civil servant could come out the closet and make peace with the big blue Tory inside himself that fears even the most feeble of attempts to change the certainties of his little workers’ England, where the Labour Party are the enemy and forever more shall be so. And his noble members in the civil service who followed orders and sent the emails that requisitioned the bullets, the depleted uranium shells and smart bombs that blew up their fellow workers in Iraq and Afghanistan are somehow absolved, whilst the Labour Party is not.

Norman Storms
Birmingham

Hard knocks

Those sects outside the Labour Party have learnt nothing and know nothing of how the class moves. Their shrill denunciations of the leaders of the Labour Party are correct, but no-one is listening.

The Tories are continuing with the programme set in motion by the Labour leadership. The Labour leaders cosy up to the city, don’t support strikes, accept that the working class has to bail out the banks and criticise ineffectively the cap on benefits (they could have explained that anyone in work should get at least £26,000 rather than take it out on those whose benefits payments are over £26,000). They continued with privatisation in the national health service, which has been a disaster, but has redistributed wealth to the rich. The LP leaders support the war in Afghanistan and the covert torturing of suspects in secret prisons situated all over the world. The pension reforms suggested by Hutton are robbing us blind. They didn’t they renationalise the railways, water, gas, electricity or telecoms?

Now ask yourself, why are the votes for the sectarian groups derisory, when the Tories are protecting the class they represent; the Lib Dems are in bed with the Tories; and the Labour Party does not support the working class (and is under the control of public school oiks and suit men)?

The working class is going to experience some hard knocks over the coming years. It is on the basis of events, events, events that it will be propelled into the trade unions and the Labour Party. Nothing will be built outside the mass organisations of the class. Witness the debacles of the Socialist Alliance, Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party - all have come to nothing. Only the blind cannot see that this is inevitable.

Alun Morgan
email

Not well oiled

Depending on which particular research one specifies, world peak

oil has either been with us since the turn of the century or will occur at the latest by 2015. World peak oil is the maximum possible extraction of petroleum, after which a ‘plateau’ will occur and then a slow, but inexorable decline in oil production. In short, the effects of peak oil may not become apparent until some time after the event has occurred. A major economic decline, such as the current one, will obviously lengthen the period of grace.

It is worth mentioning that peak oil refers to relatively easily accessible, and therefore relatively cheap, oil and not ‘unconventional’ oil, such as tar sands. Some of the ‘unconventional’ oil will require almost as much energy to obtain as it could provide and some of it would cause massive environmental damage to obtain. The idea that the laws of supply and demand will negate any effects of world peak oil can therefore be rejected.

Capitalism has had an enormous boost from being able to rely on an abundant and reliable supply of cheap energy. However, capitalism, precisely because it is an economic system which relies on continually expanding production, would appear to be singularly inappropriate to cope with a period of energy scarcity. Likewise this scenario must deal the final blow to ‘productive forces’ theories of socialism.

Mike Macnair (Letters, March 22) may be correct and some new technology of which we are not yet aware may come to the rescue; then again it may not. As to what the consequences of world peak oil may be, the scenarios range from energy adjustment to catastrophe theories.

Unlike Tony Clark, I do not write off Marxism as ‘obsolete’ because energy abundance was taken for granted within the doctrine: the point is to bring the theory into line with reality (this goes for environmental degradation as well). It is no longer acceptable for ‘Marxist economists’ to be writing about the crisis with no reference to the mid- to long-term consequences of world peak oil as if, because it does not exist in their terms of reference, it does not exist at all. This is pure idealism.

Looking at the history of the left, what may very well happen is that the issue of world peak oil will be ignored until the consequences are too obvious to ignore - and then will come the rush by each microsect to claim to have ‘predicted’ it years back (many of the grouplets now claim to have ‘predicted’ the demise of the USSR, but always after the event!).

However, it does not have to be this way and, if nothing else, Clark has done a persistent job of bringing peak oil to the attention of *Weekly Worker* readers and should be credited for that. World peak oil is likely to be a game changer and to simply dismiss it or ignore it would be to ossify Marxist theory into a dogma.

Ted Hankin
Nottingham

Compulsory

To tie in to my letter last week, Marx and Guesde called for “legal prohibition of bosses employing foreign workers at a wage less than that of French workers”. Another application of economic interventionism in favour of labour could be included in our demands in relation to migrants: pro-cooperative compulsory purchase against bosses who hire foreign workers at wages less than that of domestic workers. This would, of course, be funded by various specific business taxes.

Jacob Richter
email

HOP



Sport solidarity, not Sport relief

The threat of war in the Middle East is increasing daily. The drums are beating especially loudly in Israel, and the Iranian people are facing a fight on two fronts: against imperialist intervention and against the Iranian regime. Now, more than ever, we must show active solidarity.

Workers Fund Iran was set up in December 2005. It aims to reduce and relieve poverty amongst Iranian workers (both employed and unemployed), who are victims both of the economic policies of the Iranian regime and the sanctions imposed by imperialism. It aims to put at the centre of its activities the need to rebuild international working class solidarity, directly with the workers of Iran. WFI is involved in many fundraising activities to support its work, ranging from solidarity meals to solidarity cricket (!). Yet another WFI tradition is perhaps the ultimate test: marathon running. The last such event with WFI participation was in Berlin, where well over €500 was raised last September. This year, 40 WFI runners will be pounding the streets of Vienna in the name of international solidarity.

Last August, as I was whiling away another pleasant summer's day in the CPGB office, I was asked if I'd be up for running a marathon at some point over the next year. "Why not?" I replied. Words I have come to regret uttering on many an occasion over the past eight months or so (normally somewhere around the 18km mark during a training stint). Having been a semi-competent middle-distance runner for the last six or seven years, I wasn't quite starting from scratch - but going from the *concept* of running 26.2 miles to the reality of it is ... well, painful.

So a small squad of us registered for the Vienna marathon (the point, for me at least, where the idea become a reality). Since then, we've battled the weather, training through the winter's high winds, cold and rain. We've sustained injury (all of us have done ourselves damage at some point through running stupid distances). Now, with less than three weeks to go we're hoping to make it intact to the finishing line (my personal goal is not to get overtaken by a 70-year-old dressed as a chicken), with a pint of Austria's finest beer glowing in the sky like a Monty Python-style Holy Grail animation. Though we are looking forward to April 15 (albeit with

trepidation!), I think it's a safe assertion that we're looking forward even more to April 16 when this is all over (as, I'm sure, are our friends, colleagues, family, etc, who we've bored to death with our running tales).

There are important lessons to be learned from this experience (not least, don't mix isotonic sports drinks with energy gels). By taking part in events that involve active solidarity you get a sense of being a part of something, whether that's through training, competing with each other (in a comradely fashion, of course), organising meals for the runners, putting on meetings and events around the marathon or planning walking tours exploring the history of Red Vienna. It's fair to say those who are running and those who are flying across to support us are very much immersed in the event. In essence, our comrades have put in blood, sweat and tears (some of us quite literally).

We are now asking for your support. With two and a half weeks to go, we need all the sponsorship we can get. So, comrades, dig deep! Think of those hours of pounding the pavements and parks; though sleet, snow and iliotibial band syndrome.

The most important lesson, of course, is that it is both possible and urgently necessary for the working

class to organise solidarity, not charity. The popularity and universality of sport can greatly assist this process. For example, the BBC's *Sport relief* recently saw people in this country raise over £50 million. What a shame that these funds will be frittered away, filtered through the corrupt, bureaucratic and undemocratic apparatuses of bourgeois charity. Surely, our goal as the workers' movement must be to raise this kind of money and beyond - strengthening the cause of working class self-organisation and combativity across the globe. The funds we raise right now will, of course, be much smaller. But they are symbolically important, and point towards what our movement *could* achieve.

We would also urge comrades to show their support for the Iranian people by attending the Hands Off the People of Iran school in central London over the weekend of the April 21-22. There will also be a full update of how our marathon runners got on in Vienna and you can, of course, buy us a well deserved pint in the pub afterwards.

You can sponsor us by going to http://hopoi.org/?page_id=11 (please clearly state the purpose of the donation: ie, Workers Fund Iran marathon). We would very much appreciate your support!

Sarah McDonald

Weekend school

The danger of an attack on Iran is increasing every day. That is why Hands Off the People of Iran is hosting this school. Our aim is to highlight the dynamics behind the sabre-rattling in order to mobilise against the threat the more effectively.

Saturday April 21
War, imperialism and the capitalist crisis Mike Macnair, CPGB; István Mészáros

Israel, Iran and the Middle East Moshé Machover, Israeli socialist and founder of Matzpen; Anahita Hosseini, exiled Iranian student

Sunday April 22
The political economy of the Iranian regime Mohammed Reza Shalgouni, Rahe Kargar/ Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran; Yassamine Mather, Hands Off the People of Iran

Solidarity with the people in Iran John McDonnell MP; Donnacha De Long, president, National Union of Journalists; Sarah McDonald, participant in Vienna marathon for Workers Fund Iran

University of London Union, Malet Street, London.



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 April 1, 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.

Marx's Capital

Thursday March 29, 5.30pm: Reading group, Open University, Milton Keynes. Discussing *Capital* chapter three.

Organised by Milton Keynes Capital reading group: milton.keynes@cpgb.org.uk.

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 Dickens. Free admission, advance booking required.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.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.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller rights

Friday March 30, 7pm: Talk, School of Oriental and African Studies, room B102, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Part of Traveller Solidarity Network nationwide speaker tour.

Organised by Traveller Solidarity Network: 07879 345588.

Solidarity with Palestine

Friday March 30, 5pm: Protest, Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street, London W8. In support of Global March to Jerusalem.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: <http://www.palestinecampaign.org>.

No to cuts

Saturday March 31, 9.30am to 4.30pm: Regional conference, Burngreave Vestry Hall, Burngreave Road, Sheffield S3. 'Organise for the alternative'. Sessions on: 'Save our NHS' - Wendy Savage; Campaign for the Book - Alan Gibbons; Welfare Reform Bill - Chris Walker. £5 waged; no charge unwaged/low income. Refreshments provided.

Organised by Sheffield Anti Cuts Alliance: <http://sheffieldanticuts.wordpress.com>.

Art Not Arms

Saturday March 31, 12 noon: Protest, National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Campaign launch: Love Art, Not Arms - end the National Gallery's links with the arms trade

Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.caat.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.

Hands off Venezuela

Thursday April 12, 6.30pm: Film showing, 56 Grafton Way, London W1. Screening of *Cuarto poder* to mark 10 years since the attempted Venezuelan coup. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Alan Woods.

Organised by Hands off Venezuela: london@handsoffvenezuela.org.

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.

BUDGET

Revenge of trickle-down economics

George Osborne's budget shows that we are not 'all in it together', writes **Eddie Ford**



George Osborne: bad press

Budgets ain't what they used to be. Once upon a time the chancellor and his colleagues were expected to maintain a state of strict purdah. Every chance meeting between a treasury official and a journalist had to be formally reported during the weeks before the statement. Hugh Dalton, the Labour chancellor, was forced to resign in 1947 because, whilst walking to the House of Commons to give the autumn budget address, he made an off-the-cuff remark to a journalist hinting at some of the tax changes to be made - which were then printed in the early edition of the evening papers before he even had time to complete his speech and while the stock markets were still open. Scandal. Dalton resigned.

Whether sadly or not, those days are almost certainly long gone. Pre-budget leaking is now a long established political pastime, almost an obligatory ritual. This year though the numbers of leaks was unprecedented. But the reason for that is fairly obvious: the scramble for credit within the coalition government, as Liberal Democrats and Tories both try to show their supporters they are fighting their corners. The Liberal Democrats want to prove that they are not Tories and the Tories want to prove that they are not Liberal Democrats. Also, when it comes to anything that might potentially impact upon the wealthy, the Tories find leaking a useful way of discovering what their backers think -

not least those individuals who donate so generously to the Conservative Party.

Distorted

George Osborne's budget was essentially one for the wealthy - hardly astonishing, given that over 20 cabinet members are millionaires. The basic assumption was that those at the top of society are the wealth-creators and hence need to be incentivised - *lots* of carrots - to encourage them to create yet more 'wealth' (ie, make larger profits and grow even richer). Given this grotesque premise, tax cuts - personal and corporate - are a vital necessity if we are to unleash a wave of entrepreneurship that will in turn create jobs for those languishing at the bottom.

Meanwhile, the working class and the poor find themselves at the wrong end of below-inflation increases to the minimum wage, less generous tax credits, regional differentials in public sector pay, and so on. In other words, the budget saw the unwelcome return - or revenge - of trickle-down economics. Not that it had ever gone away, of course.

The budget flagship, at least for the Tories, was the reduction in the top-rate of tax from 50p to 45p - so party time for Britain's richest 300,000 households. Indeed, it would have been further reduced to 40p if Osborne had got his way - he told the treasury select committee on March 27 that he had not assigned a "special status" to the 45p rate, which would

be kept under "review". But the idea was blocked by David Cameron and Nick Clegg, the latter saying he would only accept a 40p rate if a 'mansion tax' on properties worth more than £2 million was introduced - something rejected out of hand by the prime minister. Cameron likes to look after his buddies.

Osborne disingenuously argued that the 50p rate had "distorted" the economy by "encouraging" tax avoidance. Presumably the poor, downtrodden super-rich had no choice but to employ armies of extremely well remunerated accountants and financial advisers to exploit every tax loophole (but it hurt them to do so). Osborne surely missed an opportunity to develop this logic to its fullest extent and declare that from now onwards the rich would not have to pay any income tax at all. That way, no more 'distortions' would be introduced into the economy and the rich could finally enjoy guilt-free sleep.

Cutting the top rate of tax down to 45p, Osborne argued, would only cost the exchequer £100 million - given that the current rate "raises at most a fraction of what we were told" and, in fact, "may raise nothing at all". But a recent HMRC report he referenced indicated that the 50p tax rate raised £1 billion in its first year (2010-11) - far less than the £2.6 billion originally predicted, admittedly, but this was mainly due to people 'forestalling'; that is, being paid early ahead of the introduction of the 50p rate in April 2010 in order to avoid paying it. But "nothing at all"?

Further defending top-rate reduction before the treasury select committee, Osborne posited that "dynamic modelling" suggested the 45p rate was likely to lead to a smaller loss of revenue than retaining the current rate. His calculation is based on the economic model known as the Laffer Curve, which hypothesises that under a 0% rate no tax is paid and at 100% no tax is paid either because no-one will bother working: therefore the trick is to locate a midway point that will optimise income.

According to basic arithmetic, the cost of cutting the top rate will be £3 billion in the first year, rising to £4 billion by 2016-17. But Osborne would have us believe that the net cost would fall to just £100 million or so thanks to the extra revenue from wealthier people working harder and harder - by the sweat of their brow - and gratefully bringing 'home' their monies stashed away offshore now that we have a "competitive top rate of tax". Voodoo economics, UK-style. Straining credibility even further, Osborne asserted that, taking into account such calculations, the rich (people like himself, for instance) would end up paying five times more tax as a result of all the measures taken in the budget. Naturally, the chancellor said that his budget was "unashamedly" pro-business and would help the country "earn its way in the world".

Another major plank of the budget was the imposition of a 7% stamp duty on properties worth more than £2 million - with immediate effect.

Currently the tax is levied at 5% for all properties over £1 million. Additionally, the duty on residential properties over £2 million which were purchased via an offshore company would increase from a paltry 0.5% to 15% - leading some to describe it, approvingly or not, as a "workable" mansion tax. Yet, obviously, this new rate would only affect a small number of properties, owned by the likes of Sir Mick Jagger and Ringo Starr - or Russian oligarchs.

For example, the latest statistics from the Land Registry showed that in November 2011 there were 121 homes sold for more than £2 million in England and Wales - accounting for just 0.2% of the 57,967 homes sold that month. Under the current system, if all those people paid stamp duty - a highly unlikely eventuality - it would raise £142.2 million. At 7% it would raise to £198.8 million, an additional £56.8 million. Not exactly staggering amounts of money. In reality, it is extremely doubtful whether the treasury will be able to collect the extra stamp duty from the Russian oligarchs, oil sheikhs, bankers, private consultants, rock stars Hollywood actors, footballers, etc - famous for their creativity when it comes to avoiding tax.

And, of course, what the chancellor takes from the rich with one hand he gives back with another. Hence on page 63 of the red book he sneaked in an inheritance tax exemption for non-domiciled individuals. Presently, a taxpayer domiciled in the UK can transfer their entire £325,000 inheritance tax allowance to their spouse if they are also based in Britain. This figure is reduced to £55,000 if a UK taxpayer makes a transfer to a spouse who is not domiciled in the UK. Osborne said he would increase this, though has so far declined to set a figure.

'Granny tax'

Just about the biggest budget fuss has been over the so-called 'granny tax'. Citing the need to "simplify" pensions, Osborne intends to freeze age-related allowances (ie, the amount of income that is tax-free) for half of Britain's pensioners by the end of the parliament. The treasury says this will bring an extra 230,000 into the income tax system, saving the government £1 billion by 2015.

Currently, the allowance is £8,105 for those under 65 (changing to £9,205 in the 2013-14 financial year), £10,500 for those aged 65 to 74, and £10,660 for those aged 75 and over. However, this 'extra' allowance is gradually withdrawn from those pensioners with a taxable income of between £24,000 and £29,000 - about 10% of all pensioners - and anyone with an income of more than £100,000 has all their personal allowance gradually withdrawn regardless of age.

Practically meaning that from now on anyone turning 65 after April 5 2013 will get the same personal allowance as the under-65s, but someone who turns 65 just before the same date will still get the £10,500 personal allowance. As for people on the basic state pension and pension credit (some

50% of all pensioners), they do not earn enough to pay income tax, so will be unaffected by the changes. They constitute about 50% of pensioners. Therefore that leaves a middle stratum of pensioners whose income is likely to be made up of a combination of state and private pensions, as well as some money in savings accounts - the near mythological decent, hard-working, 'responsible' pensioners who have 'done the right thing' all their lives. Prudently saved a bit each month and loyally voted Tory each election - possibly. This large grouping might well feel the tax goalposts have suddenly been moved, leaving them with less than they might have expected. The treasury's own statistics show that, taking inflation into account, Osborne's measures will leave 4.41 million people worse off by an average of £83 a year come 2013-14.

Under the budget we can see that we are not "all in this together" - always a cynical lie. While the top 10% of earners and the super-rich with their Mayfair pads will certainly gain, the poorest will lose the most. A living insult to the unemployed, disabled, poor pensioners and the 200,000 part-time workers, who are having their tax credits snatched away this April. That is when the qualification threshold is raised from 16 hours to 24 hours - at a time when the bosses are slashing employees' hours due to the economic environment. Resulting in a grim situation where low-income families with parents in part-time work, more often than not because they could not find full-time employment, could lose nearly £4,000 per year. How are they in the same boat as Elton John or, for that matter, everyone sat round the cabinet table?

The entire budget is a monument to the government's blatant failure to deliver its central promise. The coalition commitment to getting rid of the deficit within its first term was premised on a 2%-3% growth rate, but that now looks like a fantasy figure. The recession in the US and Europe, combined with the government's own suicidal austerity programme, has seen government spending *increase*, as it forks out ever more money in the form of unemployment benefit, housing benefit, etc (even after the cuts in these areas).

Bluntly, it is almost a statistical fluke that the UK is not technically in recession. Outside of Osborne's fiscal Alice in Wonderland, the prospects for the economy are bleak - something confirmed by figures published by the Office for National Statistics on March 28. The economy contracted by 0.3% between October and December last year, more than the 0.2% drop previously estimated by the ONS and other economists. That left growth for the year as a whole at just 0.7% - down on the 0.8% originally pencilled in. Furthermore, the ONS said real household disposable incomes in 2011 as a whole fell 1.2%, the biggest drop since 1977.

Not exactly a sign of roaring success, George ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

CORRUPTION

Thin dividing line

The 'cash for access' row has once again exposed the contradictions inherent in capitalism, writes **Peter Manson**

No wonder the Tories have suddenly slumped in the polls and are now 10 points behind Labour. Hot on the heels of the PR debacle over the budget, with its 'granny tax' and handouts for the rich, we have the disaster of the latest 'cash for access' row. The affair has neatly illustrated the nature of the class divide - put simply, the bourgeoisie funds parties and politicians to act in its interests; and we ought to back those who serve us in the same way. Quite straightforward really, and it is not surprising that mainstream commentators have tried to muddy the waters. But unfortunately, as we shall see, not everyone on the left sees things quite so clearly.

It is hardly a secret that capitalists, bankers and the rich in general always attempt to use their positions of power to influence political decision-making. Two years ago, on February 8 2010, the then leader of the opposition, David Cameron, talked about the "next big scandal waiting to happen" - namely, "the far too cosy relationship between politics, government, business and money".

He actually did a pretty good job of describing this relationship and the lobbying it produces: "... we all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business to find the right way to get its way." But the Conservative Party believes in "market economics, not crony capitalism", he said, which is why Cameron was so determined to end this cosiness once and for all. Or so he said.

But we have all read about the reality and watched the video of Peter Cruddas - Conservative Party co-treasurer until his forced resignation following the undercover investigation conducted by *The Sunday Times*. Just make a donation to the Tories for, say, £250,000 and "things will open up" for you big time, Cruddas is heard saying. A quarter-million buys you an invite to number 10 or Chequers for lunch or dinner, and "You really do pick up a lot of information ... when you see the prime minister." What is more, "within that room everything is confidential - you can ask him practically any question you want." In fact, "If you're unhappy about something, we listen to you and put it into the policy committee at number 10". To give just one example, a generous donor was personally able to express his anger to Cameron about proposals to legalise same-sex marriage, said Cruddas.

The embarrassing footage threw the Tories into a panic and they produced a series of contradictory statements. First they pretended that Cruddas had been "way out of line and made outrageous claims". Dutifully he concurred, claiming that all his big talk had just been "bluster". So it was simply false to allege that rich donors were hosted at number 10, was it? A spokesman initially claimed that "no donation resulting from any such offers had ever been accepted". As for Cameron, "If he wants to have friends around, that's a matter for him."

Within hours, however, the Tories were in damage-limitation mode: it was "exceptionally unusual" for donors to visit Cameron's Downing Street flat. But then Cameron himself soon put paid to that one, admitting



Brandy and cigars: buying influence

that 15 such donors, who had coughed up more than £25 million between them, had secretly been hosted at Downing Street or Chequers.

The Sunday Times had got wind of all this when Cameron's former aide, Sarah Southern, was heard boasting that she had made a "tidy sum" by introducing a client to the prime minister. Subsequently the press had a field day with their speculation about who might have raised what with the PM and how policy might have been influenced as a result. For instance, Michael Spencer, the owner of spread-betting firm City Index, dined with Cameron in February in return for his recent donations of over £3.6 million. And it was Spencer who had "led the campaign to scrap the 50p top rate of income tax" (*The Daily Telegraph* March 27). Labour MP Grahame Morris has pointed out that private health companies with their eye on lucrative pickings in the national health service have donated a total of £8 million to the Tories.

If we take the example of Spencer, in my opinion it is far too simplistic - not to say absurd - to suggest that the 5p tax cut resulted from his visit to number 10. Spencer was actually voicing the demands of capital as a whole, or at least a substantial section of it, when he argued that businessmen need greater 'incentive' to invest and get us out of the current stagnation. There was a substantial consensus within the ruling class on this question, which is why George Osborne included it in his budget, knowing it would provoke an angry response amongst the millions of workers and middle classes hit by the hard times.

So what can explain the contradiction between Cameron's seemingly genuine desire, expressed just months before the 2010 general election, to end "the lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear" and the continuation - possibly in a more intense and better-organised

form - of exactly that? The problem is that capitalism is a system based on the promotion of individual business interests and it cannot operate unless those interests are facilitated. While, especially in the case of the Tories, there is a very close connection between the political caste and business, the two are not identical and so it is necessary for the former to be made fully aware of capital's subjective needs.

Partly this awareness comes about formally: through conferences, official meetings, the exchange of ideas; but partly informally: through "the quiet word in your ear" and so on. But there is a further contradiction: that between the objective interests of capital as a whole and the subjective interests of individual capitals. So the demands of individual capitalists may be fully in line with those objective interests or they may be entirely sectional - and perhaps in opposition to the whole.

It is the conflict between the part and the whole that produces the contradiction. In other words, it is one thing to attempt to advance the interests of the whole system, but quite another to be seen promoting sectional interests at the expense of the latter. Many have commented on the thin dividing line between what passes for standard bourgeois practice and actual corruption, which can be largely traced to this contradiction - and to the impossibility of completely separating the interests of the whole from those of the individual.

Union funds

All the Tories can do is hope to divert attention from the shambles by pointing to the opposition: "Unlike the Labour Party, where union donations are traded for party policies, donations to the Conservative Party do not buy party or government policy," read their statement. It is, of course, an obscenity to equate the defensive struggle of the working class to limit their exploitation through collective

organisation to the attempts by capital to increase and deepen that exploitation. But it is an outright lie to claim that "donations to the Conservative Party do not buy party or government policy". Why on earth donate at all in that case? The reality is that political parties are shaped by class interests - you pay your money and hope to be rewarded. And you usually are.

The exception actually arises with the Labour Party. Because of the intermediate interests of the trade union bureaucracy, the subscriptions of millions of union members, intended to defend and advance the collective interest of our class, are in large part wasted - especially the political fund, used to write blank cheques to Labour. Because of the bureaucracy's fear of something worse, it is prepared to continue handing over such sums without lifting a finger to ensure we get anything approaching value for money.

It goes without saying that the answer lies not in breaking the Labour link and trusting the bureaucrats to fund an alternative, more 'responsive', party, but to hold them to account - to take back control of our working class organisations, not least the unions. It would be an excellent thing if trade unions and other working class bodies not only continued to pool their resources in order to fund a party established to serve our interests, but also ensured that the party actually delivered.

That is why we say, just as capital pours millions into funding the parties of big business, so we should oppose all attempts to prevent us doing the same thing to further the needs of the working class majority. There should be no limits on donations (and no bar on foreign donations either - the struggle of our class is an international one). There should be no state funding of political parties - that would come with strings attached to ensure we

could not effectively challenge state power.

As the *Morning Star* correctly says, further state funding of parties would "entrench the status quo" (editorial, March 26). However, the *Star* continues: "Parties should rely primarily on their supporters for financial backing, but arrangements should be transparent and jail sentences should await those trading cash for political influence." So union leaders should be locked up if they try to get their money's worth from the Labour Party?

The following day, the *Star* editorial got itself into another tangle over the use of official residences such as 10 Downing Street or Chequers. Apparently "most reasonable people" think that they "should be restricted to government business" (such as drawing up the latest cuts package or planning the next imperialist war). Yes, the *Star* admits that number 10 is also a "family home", but did you know that "one of the dinners was actually held downstairs ... rather than in the private residence"? (March 27).

For its part *Socialist Worker* commented: "The budget last week saw the Tories throw money at the rich. They did it in precisely the way that their rich donors asked - by cutting tax on profits and for high earners." Quite right. But what about the conclusion drawn in the paper's short commentary piece? "Lobbying is organised corruption," it reads (March 31). We can put things politely and say that this is badly thought-through - will the Socialist Workers Party henceforth cease organising lobbies of parliament, council premises and union executives?

No, we should not oppose attempts to influence political parties either by political action or by financing them outright. To propose either 'solution' is to play the ruling class game ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

POLEMIC

The long view

Communists must be patient, writes **Paul Demarty**, avoiding the twins of opportunism and adventurism



Patience

The most fundamental problem for the Marxist left at the present time is the disparity between the grand scale of its ambitions and the paucity of its human and intellectual resources. We aim to storm the heavens; towards this aim, however, we are (in this country) only able to marshal a scant few thousand soldiers, divided on sectarian lines and hopelessly disoriented.

The question is, then, how can we overcome this dire state of affairs? What would an organised and effective *strategy* for these forces look like, and where would we have to direct our energy?

Many pieces in the last issue of this paper (March 22) touch on this problem - letters from comrades Dave Vincent and Chris Trafford on the Labour Party; an interview with comrade Lee Rock on the aborted PCS strike; and an article, also by comrade Trafford, on the same subject. Missing from all these contributions is the long-term view our movement needs to take.

Labour

On the Labour Party question, it has to be said that comrades Vincent and Trafford's arguments suffer from a remarkably persistent refusal to lead anywhere - once again (twice, in fact), we are to dance around the issue of whether the Labour Party has shifted, or is posing, to the left.

The details change; and this time, we at least have a fine image from the pen of comrade Trafford, of the Labour left as "the necrotic masses from a George Romero movie ... faintly remembering that they used to be something and shuffling on regardless." (This is, if anything, too kind a description - the Labour left

certainly lacks the strength in numbers and clarity of purpose common to Romero's undead flesh-eaters.) Beyond that, his points are very much recycled from previous polemics, to which the CPGB majority has previously replied.¹

We have the usual laundry list of bad things Ed Miliband has done recently; and the usual lack of attention to nudges in the other direction (which, contrary to Chris's stereotype of our argument, were all we ever expected). Given that, in his article, comrade Trafford suggests we should 'learn from Occupy' (of which, more later), it will perhaps suffice to mention Margaret Hodge's public declaration of support for that movement. It would seem that Chris's line is getting through to Labour rightwingers, in spite of himself.

Comrade Vincent makes much the same kind of argument, albeit more thoroughly and at more length. Their suggestions for alternative activity are different - Dave believes that "anti-cuts candidates" could attract serious votes should they come with union backing, while for Chris this is a "tertiary concern", less important than overcoming sectarian divisions on the far left and rank-and-file organisation in the unions.

The first problem with such candidates is they will be anti-cuts, but pro what? Common sense will draw that question to the lips of many people one would meet on the knocker, and it will be necessary to have an answer. Comrade Vincent's union, PCS, has an answer - a laundry list of left-Keynesian policies compiled in a short pamphlet. Yet Keynesianism entails political commitment to the nation-state, and leftwing variants of it at the

very least will encourage speculators to attack the economy, capital to flee and all the rest. Alternatively, comrade Vincent could propose a programme of internationalist socialism for his anti-cuts candidates - but he is quite unlikely to attract union support for such a programme, things being as they are.

As for Chris's proposals, they are supportable as far as they go. The CPGB's overriding priority is the fight for the unity of Marxists on a Marxist programme - this is the alpha and omega of our politics. Our arguments on Labour are, indeed, unlikely to make much immediate impact on the Labour Party - their primary purpose is to clarify a strategy for *the Marxist left* in relation to Labour, opposed both to sectarian abstentionism and entrust liquidationism. In order to fight for meaningful political unity on the Marxist left, it is necessary to take up these questions.

Rank-and-file organisation is, indeed, necessary - and a united, principled left *could* make serious progress on this question. Yet it, too, requires *strategic* thinking about the overall political questions facing the unions - not the least of which being the Labour Party, and the labour bureaucracy more generally. Throughout his arguments thus far, Chris systematically dodges the question of union affiliation to Labour, unlike Dave; any serious rank-and-file organisation will not be able to do so.

Relearning tactics

In Chris's article ('Fresh attacks as unions retreat'), we get more detailed perspectives - and, indeed, more problematic ones. "In my view," he

writes, "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."

The first point - about "relearning tactics" - is basically risible. The occupation tactic was common to the student protests of 2010-11, and periodically surfaces in labour disputes the world over, invariably to much far-left fanfare. As for occupying public places, Parliament Square was occupied not too drastically long before Tahrir and Syntagma. Does Chris really think our memories are *that* short?

In fact, this is not just a point of pedantry - a characteristic of the Occupy and UK Uncut movements is the rhetoric of novelty: we are new, you are old. Yet there is nothing 'new' about anything either have done, barring skilful manipulation of Twitter, today's favoured outlet for microdemagoguery and thoughtless outrage. Such ephemeral anarchistic movements come and go as regularly as the seasons and, while the Occupy phenomenon was inspiring in some ways, it did not teach the Marxist left anything it did not already know about 'diversity of tactics'.

The problem with the left today is not its unwillingness to support occupations of public places; quite the opposite. It is its fetishisation of every passing fad in mass protest, and above all its focus on questions of *form*

- tactics and suchlike - instead of the meatier content of political strategy and programme. Occupy has much to learn even from the battered remnants that make up the Marxist left today on these questions; but it will learn nothing while we enthusiastically join in with its historical amnesia.

As for the workfare affair - it was certainly encouraging to see repulsive Tory policies crumble to dust before one's very eyes, but the truth is that the ruling class was split six ways to Sunday on the issue. It was a - small - point of weakness, which our side was in the event able to exploit. We cannot expect this to provide a model for future actions except in the most inconsistent manner; the ruling class more often is able to pull together in the face of challenges to its rule, and this will become easier if the left and workers' movement gain in strength.

Lurking in Chris's arguments as a whole is an impatience with the inertia of the mass organisations of workers in this country, their abject political weakness and domination by the labour bureaucracy. He is right to object to this (unlike some comrades in the Socialist Party in England and Wales, who have argued to me that Bob Crow, Mark Serwotka and the rest are somehow exempt from being bureaucrats on the basis that they sometimes organise strikes!); but the reason his and comrade Vincent's arguments are spurious is that they do not treat the existence of this layer as a wall to be broken down, but rather a hindrance to go around.

Chris's rank-and-file policy seems to be just such a way of working outside the official structures. "We need to build real spaces and networks within which workers are able to organise campaigns and solidarity, bypassing the bureaucratic structures whenever necessary," he writes, criticising the left's "horse-trading for this or that position". The horse-trading, however, is a distorted reaction to the fact that the structures themselves need to be taken on and transformed. The left is utterly hopeless at this task - but its opportunism is precisely the flipside of Chris's 'leftist' impatience, consisting precisely in SPEW, the SWP, etc trying to take shortcuts to mass influence. Both positions are fundamentally *passive* in relation to the labour bureaucracy - one must either fit into or work around the existing structures, not overcome them.

The CPGB argues consistently for a strategy of patience - against leftist adventurism and opportunism, the twin forms of impatience. It is certainly necessary, as Chris argues, to 'rebuild at the base' the forms of workers' organisation that have become so hopelessly decayed over the years; it would be wrong, as comrade Lee Rock argues, for the PCS to give up the fight over pensions; and an electoral intervention against the austerity consensus (provided it was *for* something useful) would be a fine opportunity for propaganda. None of them, however, will amount to anything without a long-term political view aiming at the overthrow of the labour bureaucracy ●

Notes

1. Most recently, James Turley, 'Repackaging of a tenuous argument', August 11 2011.

REVIEW

Memoirs of a loyal oppositionist

Rossana Rossanda (translated by Romy Clark Giuliani) **The comrade from Milan** Verso 2010, pp384, £29.99

Rossana Rossanda - still active at 87 - has been one of the most significant female political figures of 20th century Italy. For many years she was the dominant figure within the editorial team that produced the leftwing daily *Il Manifesto*, a newspaper that has survived until the present day, albeit often very precariously in financial terms, demonstrating a continuity unparalleled elsewhere in Europe - where the French centre-left daily *Libération* bears no resemblance to the Maoist ancestor whose title it still bears.

Given the marginalisation of women within Italian political life in general and within the upper reaches of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) in particular, one is bound to wonder whether Rossanda's lifelong radicalism was linked to a discomfort with the traditional roles of wife and mother assigned to Italian women of her generation. She is childless and left her husband in 1964, although her lifelong partnership with KS Karol, which began fairly soon after her separation from Rodolfo Banfi, might be seen as a marriage in all but name. Whilst some might be tempted to draw parallels between Rossanda and both Luciana Castellina and Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, two other prominent female communist intellectuals who broke with the PCI at the end of the 1960s, Rossanda, unlike Castellina, never rejoined the party and, unlike Macciocchi, never abandoned communism for some variant of social democracy. She remains a communist, as she emphasises in the preface to this autobiography, rehearsing other people's objections to her stance: "Why do you say you are a communist? What do you mean, when you have no party, no position, when you have lost the newspaper that you helped found? Is it an illusion you cling to, because you are stubborn or stuck in the past?" (p1).

Rossanda makes a number of passing references to the prevalence of *machismo* within the political culture of the PCI leadership group. For example, she observes that on the party leadership "*machismo* ruled and women tore one another to bits as usual over the same man and there were no normal couples to be found ..." (p131). Rossanda's memoir has a certain old-fashioned reticence, so by and large she does not name names apart from Giancarlo Pajetta, of whom she remarks: "He used to tease Amendola and Ingrao for their fidelity; he was a macho show-off like most men in those days, but after the death of his beloved mother, Elvira, he behaved like a randy stray dog" (p223).

Nonetheless, despite these trenchant criticisms of most leading PCI men, she seems rather ambivalent about the feminist movement and never prioritises gender in her political thinking in the way Macciocchi did. Indeed Rossanda remarks: "... when, straight after the 1953 elections, the party tried to reassign me to political work among women, I saw it as an act of spite" (p146) and adds: "These militant women ... bored me to death" (pp146-47). However, she had no patience for the party's reluctance to confront the Catholic church over either divorce or abortion and her role in organising a Convention on the Family in 1964 aroused much antagonism from the PCI hierarchy: "The leadership sent Emilio Sereni, Nilde Iotti and maybe Marisa Rodano



Rossana Rossanda: lifelong radicalism

- I don't remember - to challenge the comrades, mainly Luciana Castellina and me, who were intent on destroying the family, the basic unit of society" (p242).

In the light of this rather contradictory and ambivalent attitude that combined hostility to *machismo* and to Catholic conceptions of the family with an indifferent or hostile attitude towards women organising separately, it is hard to gauge to what extent Rossanda's ultimate willingness, in 1969, to challenge the party hierarchy was primarily a matter of gender or of political generations (the main male figure associated with the new, anti-Stalinist, left current in the party, the older Pietro Ingrao, drew back after 1966). The English translation of her autobiography has the title *The comrade from Milan*, which an attentive reader will see is a reference to a remark made by PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti at a central committee meeting in 1964 - disapproving of her political stance, he affected to have forgotten her name (p249). However, the original Italian edition had the title *La ragazza del secolo scorso* (The girl of the last century), which could be interpreted as a decision by the author herself to place greater emphasis on her gender.

Class origins

Rossanda's entry into the communist movement cannot be attributed to her class origins, as her family was clearly bourgeois. As she puts it, "I didn't discover communism at home, that's for sure; or politics either" (p3). Whilst this was less unusual amongst leading figures in the Italian party than amongst, say, their French or British equivalents, it is not without significance.

Rossanda's background was not working class or peasant - indeed her family were originally rather wealthy, although the impact of the 1929 Wall Street crash seems to have led to her father's bankruptcy and the sale of their substantial villa in what is now Croatia. Both her parents had to take paid employment, leaving her and her sister in Venice in the care of an aunt for some years. It is also worth noting that none of her family were leftwingers or even committed antifascists - although they do not seem, on the evidence of her own account, to have been enthusiastic fascists either. Her political radicalisation came through her involvement in the resistance in the autumn of 1943 and she was drawn to communism by Antonio Banfi, a university professor, whose teaching on art history had already impressed her in her apolitical years studying in Milan in 1941-42 and whose son she eventually married.

This essentially patriotic and popular frontist initiation into the party is probably the explanation for the stance she takes - even in retrospect and long after breaking with the party in a leftward direction - over the resistance and its immediate aftermath, essentially dismissing the revolutionary potential of the years between 1943 and 1948. This can be seen in comments like: "From the events that followed after 1945, and especially in 1947, I still draw an image of working class struggle at its purest in a non-revolutionary phase, shackled by powerful legal and international constraints" (p105). She clearly sided with Togliatti in his opposition to armed struggle against Pietro Secchia, for whom she has little or no sympathy. However, her comment, "... whether Secchia nurtured insurrectional tendencies has been more claimed than demonstrated" (p148), seems an attempt to minimise the tensions that existed in the party before the late 1960s, when she espoused a very different variety of dissidence.

Whilst Rossanda's emphasis on the differences between Milanese and Roman communism, often used as synonyms for northern and southern communism, is in many ways quite illuminating and gives at least a partial explanation of why the central leadership of the party was so slow in coming to terms with the changes in the Italian economy and society between the late 1940s and the late 1960s, she is often, probably as a consequence of her own intellectual formation, more interested in cultural questions than political ones. Although Togliatti's old-fashioned and dogmatic approach towards artistic, literary and cultural matters caused her understandable irritation, it was by no means the worst of his faults.

The account that Rossanda provides us with of the events of 1956 is perhaps as notable for what it does not mention - Togliatti's enthusiastic support for the Russian invasion of Hungary in November 1956, a course of action he had actually urged on Khrushchev - as for what it does: Togliatti's *Nuovi Argomenti* interview, whose arguments she compares with Isaac Deutscher's, probably forgetting the classically Stalinist conspiracy theory about 1930s 'Trotskyite' murderers to be found within it. 1956 undoubtedly shook her faith in the PCI - she claims: "My hair turned grey then - it's true: it really does happen. I was 32 years old" (p156). But she did not leave the party or publicly express dissent within it.

Given her relative youth and intellectual rather than proletarian or peasant background, one is bound to

make comparisons with the reactions of figures like Edward Thompson or John Saville to these events. Whilst it may seem rather harsh to ascribe her obstinate loyalty to the party to the fact that she was a full-time employee of the PCI from 1947 to 1969, it is quite apparent that the intellectual circles in which she moved, often as a result of performing various cultural roles for the party, meant that there was no question of her being ignorant of the critiques of Stalinism and accounts of the worst features of the Soviet Union. These were being advanced by a wide spectrum of authors, such as "the likeable Koestler and the unlikeable Orwell" (p159) - an assessment of character that may lead some to question her judgement.

Left shift

Rossanda first got to know Togliatti personally in 1958, when she was brought onto the editorial board of the party journal, *Rinascita*, and was part of a younger generation that Togliatti promoted in a bid to isolate and marginalise most of his own contemporaries in the leadership. Whilst her portrait of Togliatti in his last years is not totally devoid of criticism, it is far more sympathetic than any objective appraisal of his conduct could justify. Any real shift by Rossanda to a more wholeheartedly critical position only came after Togliatti's death. Whilst, as her text makes apparent, this has to be seen in the context of the struggle between Giorgio Amendola on the right, who was veering towards social democracy, and Pietro Ingrao on the left, who put forward a rather more original position in PCI terms that was sympathetic to social movements and critical of the Soviet Union, one is bound to wonder if her relationship with KS Karol - who had left Poland for France in the late 1940s and experienced the Soviet Union at first hand during World War II - may have played more of a role than she chooses to admit.

Whether Rossanda and her allies would have been any more successful in their efforts to pull the PCI leftwards if they had showed more determination and less loyalty to the party's rules is hard to judge, but it seems unlikely that their opponents on the right and centre of the party ever showed any of the same scruples about engaging in factionalism. A failure to organise and recruit made the Manifesto group's ultimate expulsion a foregone conclusion, even if we assume Rossanda is right in believing, on the basis of a personal conversation with national secretary Enrico Berlinguer, that he was not anxious to purge them.

Whilst Rossanda and the Manifesto group took up the fight as a result of the upsurge amongst first Italian students and then Italian workers in the 1967-69 period, her recollections do not suggest that she had a firm grasp of these developments outside the PCI. Numerous other accounts indicate that *operaista* (workerist) ideas originating from students or older intellectuals had more impact on some big northern factories than she seems willing to accept, trapped as she is in a framework that emphasises the gulf between workers and students as a result of some, albeit brief, personal experience of French events.

Her vivid first-hand accounts of journeys to Cuba in 1967 and Paris in late May 1968 are of considerable historical interest, even if the claim that Fidel Castro in 1967 was unaware

that Stalin had organised Trotsky's assassination (p295) beggars belief - although there is no reason to doubt Rossanda's own sincerity in making it, as opposed to Castro's in the conversation she reports. Whilst her descriptions and analyses of Cuba and Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, whatever their defects in terms of detail, show a clear intellectual independence and a willingness to engage with reality, sadly when it comes to the Chinese Cultural Revolution - which she, like the rather younger and less well informed Italian student movement, misunderstood at the time - she, like the Bourbons in 1815, had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. According to Rossanda the PCI "saw the Cultural Revolution simply as a power struggle among the leadership of the CCP: that is, not important. Whereas, whether you liked it or not, the Cultural Revolution once more raised the question, this time violently, of the nature of revolution, a question that had been waiting for an answer for some time from the left in the west. The films of Godard and Bellocchio had more to say about it than any central committee meeting" (p288). Here, one has to admit, the PCI Central Committee did get it right and one is puzzled how an opponent of Zhdanovism and socialist realism, easily disgusted by the paintings of Renato Guttuso, still seems to find nothing untoward in the Red Guards' grotesque and murderous variant of cultural criticism, a variant which would have had little patience with the films of Godard, a director whose fate, had he lived in China in the late 1960s, is not hard to envisage.

Romy Clark Giuliani's translation is generally admirable and performs a considerable service to Anglophone readers interested in the history of 20th century Italian communism. However, the derogatory Stalinist epithet 'Trotskyite' is used throughout the text (for example, in an otherwise friendly reference to the "Trotskyite musicologist Rognoni" on p137) and not just where it might be appropriate - in other words, where a Soviet or other orthodox communist is accusing some heretic, whether rightly or wrongly, of Trotskyism. Since there is no corresponding word in Italian, this is very odd indeed (and particularly in a text produced by Verso, a publishing house whose founders, in the days when it was called New Left Books, were originally much closer to Trotskyism than to Stalinism).

Whilst very occasionally Giuliani indicates, in a footnote, some inaccuracy in Rossanda's recollections, quite a number of incorrect dates for events, such as the Nazi-Soviet pact or the assassination attempt on Togliatti, are left unchallenged. Rossanda says at the beginning of her text: "... my memory is arthritic" (p1), but it is arguable that, when it comes to events that are clearly in the public sphere, such tact on the translator's part may do a disservice to readers unfamiliar with modern Italian history or that of the communist movement. However, the glossary will prove very useful to those unfamiliar with the history of the period, filling in the background on a wide variety of personages whom Rossanda mentions in passing. But it is a bit unfortunate that the leftwing socialist, Riccardo Lombardi, has been confused with a fiercely reactionary priest with the same surname! ●

Toby Abse

USA

West coast rebound

Oakland and Longview - Jim Creegan reports on two parallel struggles

When, in October and November, Occupy encampments were being swept away by police in city after city in the US as part of a strategy clearly coordinated from Washington and among the mayors of major cities, it seemed to many that the movement had lost its forward momentum, as it temporarily did in New York and other towns. But rumours of the death of Occupy could turn out to be greatly exaggerated. On the west coast, in particular, its vital signs are particularly strong. There, it drew strength from an outstandingly combative contingent of the American labour movement, which in turn escaped total defeat partly as a result of Occupy support.

While Scott Olsen, an Iraqi war veteran and occupier, was fighting for his life (successfully, as it turned out) in hospital after being hit on the head by a tear-gas canister fired by the police during an October 25 night-time raid on the Occupy Oakland encampment, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) was engaged in a bitter battle with employers hundreds of kilometres up the coast in Washington state. In the Columbia River port town of Longview, a consortium called EGT Development, controlled by Bunge Limited, a multi-billion dollar grain shipper, was preparing to load its cargo vessels at a newly opened terminal with workers who did not belong to the longshoremen's union. This was an audacious assault on the ILWU's exclusive jurisdiction over all such work on west-coast ports, in place since the 1930s. To cover their tracks, EGT contracted the building and running of the terminal to an out-of-state construction company, which in turn hired members of an operating engineers union branch willing to scab on the ILWU. EGT could therefore claim that the entire struggle was nothing more than a jurisdictional quarrel between rival unions.

Although the dispute involved only about 50 jobs, the union knew that any contractual breach, however small, would soon be followed by others on the part of waterfront employers grouped together in the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), who were paying close attention to the outcome. Thus, like the wounded Olsen, the ILWU was also engaged in a fight for its life. And thus Longview became the scene of one of the most heated labour-management confrontations in recent US history.

The ILWU embodies some of the more militant traditions of American unionism. Led by Communist Party-linked president, Harry Bridges, and supported by a general strike in the city at large, the San Francisco longshoremen conducted one of the three winning labour battles that helped turn the tide in favour of industrial unionism in 1934. The strike led not only to better pay and hours, but to the replacement of the infamous 'shape-up' system on the docks, in which workers were hired on a daily basis at the bosses' whim, by the equitable dispatching of members to jobs through union-controlled hiring halls that are there to this day. Strong support for Bridges among the rank and file also allowed his union to withstand the red purges of the McCarthy period.

Although the ILWU as a whole became bureaucratised like other AFL-CIO unions over the years, it still contains pockets of militant class-consciousness. The majority-black branch in Oakland - the country's



Occupy Oakland occupies docks

fifth-largest port city, across the bay from San Francisco - has taken the lead in organising the only political labour actions to take place in the US within living memory. West coast longshore workers refused to move cargo from apartheid South Africa in 1984, and conducted symbolic one-day port shutdowns for the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal, against the Iraqi war and, most recently, to protest the fatal shooting, captured on video, of a handcuffed black man named Oscar Grant on an elevated train platform by the Oakland police in 2009. (Occupy christened its encampment in downtown Oakland "Oscar Grant Square".)

The campaign the ILWU waged against the EGT union-busters also reprised some of the prouder moments of its past. The union did not rely exclusively upon the arcane legal manoeuvres that bureaucrats typically employ these days in lieu of class struggle. Instead, beginning in May, it mounted a fightback that included mass picketing of the EGT terminal, and forming human blockades on railway tracks to stop trains attempting deliver grain. The sharpest confrontation took place on September 7-8, when 800 union members from across the Pacific Northwest stormed the terminal, while police and security guards ran for cover. One thousand longshoremen at other ports up and down the coast stayed away from work in solidarity that day; 10,000 tonnes of grain were dumped on the tracks, and railway cars disabled. The police claimed - falsely, according to the union - that six security guards were held hostage. Police tackled the president of the ILWU International, Bob McEllrath. And on September 21 the head of Longview Local 21, Dan Coffman, was arrested, along with nine members of the union's women's auxiliary, who were attempting non-violently to block a train carrying

wheat to the terminal.

The ILWU faced fierce intimidation throughout the struggle, both from the company and the government. EGT engaged the services of the Special Response Corporation, a modern high-tech version of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, infamous for ruthless strike-breaking tactics in the early 20th century. Composed of former cops and servicemen, Special Response boasted the use of the latest military gadgets and repressive techniques perfected in Iraq. In August, Obama's National Labor Relations Board - repeatedly denounced by the Republicans as a nest of crypto-Marxists - issued an injunction against Local 21 for 'aggressive picketing', soon followed by court-imposed fines totalling over \$300,000. The homes of members were raided at night by police, who arrested more than 200 over the course of the dispute, many of whom still face serious charges. Federal agents circulated amongst workers, hinting that the government would deprive anyone who was arrested of the security credentials required to work the ports.

Back in Oakland ...

Meanwhile, a parallel confrontation was heating up in Oakland. In response to police use of tear gas and rubber bullets to attack the Oscar Grant Square encampment on October 25, the Occupy general assembly approved a call for a city-wide "general strike" on November 2. The assembly's call referred implicitly to the Oakland general strike of 1946. During the enormous wave of work stoppages that swept the entire country that year, workers spontaneously shut the city down for two days in response to police attempts to herd scabs on behalf of two department stores. This was the last real general strike in the US.

Its latter-day re-enactment,

however, never even came close to being the real thing. Union officials, though supportive of Occupy in words, were hardly prepared to defy anti-strike laws on behalf of the movement, and no agitation beyond occasional leafleting had been conducted by Occupy among rank-and-file workers. Although individual workers bravely stayed off the job to participate in the events of November 2, the city as a whole remained open for business. Occupy members did, however, picket several bank headquarters, forcing them to close. There was also a big rally in the centre of town, from whose speakers' platform all elected officials, including Democrats, were pointedly excluded (the mayor who ordered the police attack was the Democrat and former Maoist, Jean Quan). Later that afternoon, over 10,000 demonstrators succeeded in blockading the port, closing it down for the rest of the day and the following night. Few longshore workers participated in the shutdown effort themselves, although nearly all honoured the blockade by staying out of the ports, some complaining about their loss of pay. Media coverage focussed less on the shutdown than on the vandalism of a handful of masked black bloc demonstrators, repudiated by the majority of Occupy, and a skirmish with police over an attempt by some Occupiers to take over a vacant building later that night.

Another port shutdown was called for December 12, this time on the initiative of Occupy Los Angeles, with a view to disrupting the operations of Marine SSA, a shipping company owned by Goldman Sachs. But leadership of the action soon passed to Occupy Oakland, whose resolution called for a coast-wide port shutdown. Although the main purpose of the action was to hit the profits of the "1% on the Waterfront", the Oakland resolution also proclaimed solidarity

with the ILWU in its fight with EGT. And not for the last time, as we shall see below, the ILWU leadership publicly dissociated itself from the stoppage, allegedly because Occupy was calling upon workers to act without first consulting the union.

In the event, Occupy succeeded in closing the ports of Oakland, Seattle and Longview, while efforts in Long Beach (LA), San Diego and Vancouver were less successful. Non-union waterfront lorry drivers, mostly Latino, used the occasion to draw attention to their abominable working conditions. In most actions longshore workers respected Occupy picket lines, with attitudes ranging from enthusiastic to hostile. A ruling by an arbitrator exempted union members from disciplinary actions on the grounds that attempting to cross the lines would have posed a danger to their health and safety.

The final act

The final act in the ILWU drama unfolded in the early days of January, when it was widely expected that EGT would soon attempt to load its first ship with grain using scab labour. The union told members to prepare for mass action at Longview. Occupy, again over the strenuous objections of the ILWU leadership, organised caravans from up and down the coast to go to Longview and aid the union by shutting down the port. The federal government prepared to intervene once again on the side of the bosses by announcing its intention to have Coast Guard boats and helicopters escort the cargo ship through a "safety zone" in and out of the port. At this point, the Democratic governor of Washington State, Christine Gregoire, acted to broker a settlement between the ILWU and EGT.

Gregoire was probably motivated by a desire to avoid a big confrontation between labour and the federal

government during an election year. But she had attempted to intervene a year earlier, only to be rebuffed by EGT. Nearly all actors and observers agree that it was the intervention of Occupy that made the difference. This is evident from the language that EGT itself inserted into the text of the final agreement: “The ILWU Entities shall issue a written notice ... to the general public, including the Occupy movement, informing them of this settlement and urging them to cease and desist from any actions.” In the words of Clarence Thomas, an ILWU militant rank-and-file leader (with the misfortune of having the same name as the ultra-reactionary black supreme court judge): “It is clear that the port shutdowns on November 2 and December 12, and the impending mobilisation in Longview, is what made EGT come to the table”.¹

The agreement that emerged as a result of renewed negotiations fell short of a total rout, in that the ILWU retained its jurisdiction over longshore operations at EGT. All dockers will have to be dispatched from the local hiring hall. The scabs were sent away, and on February 7 the first cargo ship carrying grain out of the EGT port was loaded by union labour. In just about every other respect, however, the contract was abysmal. The clerks at the terminal were not included in the agreement, as they had been in the past. EGT is no longer required to employ union workers for construction; the control room of the new terminal is to be run by management instead of, as elsewhere, by the union; the company was no longer required to pay workers overtime for more than eight hours on the 13-hour shifts they demanded and got.

In stipulations that greatly undermine the power of the union hiring hall, workers dispatched there must be ‘pre-qualified’ by the company, and EGT is free to hire workers from outside the ILWU if the union cannot provide ‘qualified’ workers; any worker not deemed ‘qualified’ can be removed from the hiring list “at the sole discretion” of the company. The company is not required to shut down operations for health and safety reasons. And in contract language specifically directed against Occupy and any similar movements in the future, union officers are required to order longshoremen to work behind community picket lines and blockades and to denounce any such blockades as ‘unauthorised’. After three ‘unauthorised’ work stoppages, the company can cancel the contract.

Union members fear that this deeply concessionary agreement will be seen as an opportunity by other maritime employers to savage the union. Seasoned observers speculate that the leadership of the International union (so named because it includes Canadian dockers) put extreme pressure on the far more militant Longview Local 21 to swallow the settlement. The March 14 *Maritime Worker Monitor*, a rank-and-file newsletter, featured its analysis of the contract under the Churchillian headline, “Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory”.

Questions of consequence

Compared to the class struggles now unfolding in Europe, the Longview/Oakland events were small beer. Their immediate impact was largely confined to the west coast. National media coverage was scant, and even Occupiers in the rest of the country were often only dimly aware of what took place. Yet the confrontations raised issues of great consequence concerning the possibilities of unity between Occupy (and, more broadly, the many millions of unorganised precarious and jobless workers), on the

one hand, and the steadily diminishing numbers of the unionised working class, on the other - a collaboration upon which will ultimately depend the future of class struggle in the United States and other western countries.

The main internal obstacle to the broad campaign that could perhaps have resulted in an unalloyed victory for the ILWU was the trade union bureaucracy. The officialdom of the AFL-CIO refused to come to the defence of Longview workers at all, echoing EGT’s line that the whole affair was nothing more than a jurisdictional dispute between unions. But, despite its participation in some militant actions against the company, the leadership of the ILWU international union in San Francisco not only declined to join the call of Occupy for port shutdowns, or coordinate tactics with them, but went to great lengths to distance itself from Occupy support. As efforts got underway to prevent the loading of the first ship by scab labour in Longview, International president Bob McEllrath sent a letter on January 3 to all ILWU branches, stating that “a call for a protest of EGT is not a call for a shutdown of west coast ports and must not result in one”. The letter also urged all branches “to take extreme caution when dealing with supporters of non-ILWU sanctioned calls to action relative to EGT”.²

The rationale offered by the leadership concerned the severe legal sanctions the union could incur under the Taft-Hartley law for participating in any port shutdown. Branded ‘the slave labour bill’ by union militants when it was passed by Congress in 1947, Taft-Hartley forbids ‘secondary boycotting’: ie, labour action by any union against employers not directly involved in a given dispute. This prohibition deprives unions of one of their most powerful weapons: bringing indirect pressure through other employers on a company hit by a strike. Since EGT was only one of a number of companies utilising the Longview port, a shutdown of the entire facility could be construed as a secondary boycott.

Many at first thought that McEllrath’s letter was written simply to provide the union (which privately welcomed Occupy efforts) with legal cover. They were soon disabused of any such notions when several ILWU branch presidents, surrounded by a dozen or so liquor-breathed minions, actively disrupted a meeting called on January 6 in Seattle, Washington to drum up support for the Occupy caravan convergence on Longview. The international union had already forbidden Dan Coffman, the militant president of Longview Longshoremen’s Local 21, from appearing on the speakers’ platform beside a number of other rank-and-file militants and Occupy representatives. The disrupters demanded at the beginning to read McEllrath’s letter to the assembled audience of about 150, and were assured that they would be given a chance to do so in the discussion period following the speakers’ presentations. But they were not content to wait, and interrupted the penultimate platform speaker, causing a shouting and shoving match in which audience members were verbally abused and manhandled before the letter was finally read.

The speaker they chose to interrupt - not accidentally - was Jack Heyman. A veteran of the 1960s student movement and the Trotskyist left, and for 40 years a rank-and-file longshore militant and union business agent (now retired), Heyman has long served as an all-too-uncommon liaison between the union and the San Francisco Bay Area left; he was one of the main movers behind the several symbolic political strikes to take place in west-coast ports, and a key figure in the recent solidarity campaign.

Heyman has for years been a thorn in the bureaucracy’s side and an object of its spleen.

Although the Longview showdown for which the January 6 meeting prepared never happened due to governor Gregoire’s intervention, the fracas gave rise to widespread controversy. Particularly noted was the response of country’s largest self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist group, the International Socialist Organization, affiliated to the Socialist Workers Party (UK) until expelled from the latter’s International Socialist Tendency in 2001 in an apolitical authority fight. An article on the ISO’s website essentially sided with the ILWU bureaucrats against the organisers of the January 6 meeting. It argued that the latter were responsible for the donnybrook because they had failed to invite officials from Seattle Longshoremen’s Local 19 to speak, and because they should have given in to the demand of “ILWU members” to read McEllrath’s letter earlier in the meeting.³

The ISO line did not sit well with at least one of the group’s members, who is also an activist in the teachers’ union and a member of the Occupy Oakland Labor Solidarity Committee. Writing on the ISO’s website, Dana Blanchard, while agreeing that the organisers committed tactical errors, complained that the ISO account did not place “enough emphasis on the damaging behaviour of ILWU officials who broke up the meeting - and who, by some accounts, were sent there to do so by the International”.

Blanchard continues: “Beyond the January 6 meeting, I think the ILWU international officers right now are moving backwards in this struggle and trying to distance themselves from the Occupy movement. Specifically, local 21 in Longview has faced tremendous pressure from the International because of the militant actions it has organized against EGT and the broader community support the local has been building”.⁴

The pressure on Longview Local 21, a branch that employed militant tactics and welcomed Occupy support, was exerted by the International union leadership through the bigger ILWU Local 19 in Seattle. On January 12 this branch passed a resolution accusing Occupy of interfering in union business and attempting to speak and act the workers’ name without consulting the union (the port shutdowns are mentioned specifically) and of physical violence against its members (presumably at the January 6 meeting). It enjoins members to “withhold all support for Occupy, formally or informally” and demands a public apology from Occupy for attempting to usurp union prerogatives. Local 19 also temporarily withdrew support from local 21 picket lines at Longview.

Substitutionism?

The common thread running through all the criticisms of Occupy actions in this struggle, both from union bureaucrats and the leftwing organisations that take their part (including the Spartacist League, which from its perch on the outer margins of an already marginal left, took a position remarkably similar to that of ISO, whose opportunism in other matters the SL is constantly attempting to expose) is that Occupy was attempting to substitute itself for the organised working class.

To be sure, Occupy’s cavalier use of the ‘general strike slogan, (they have called a national one for May 1), combined with its failure to undertake any serious agitation amongst workers for the actions they announce, does indicate a certain light-mindedness about class struggle, as well as an exaggerated self-importance typical of middle-class radicalism. Some in Occupy are convinced anarchists, who

tend to equate the union rank and file with the bureaucracy, and view unions as an integral part of the capitalist order. These, however, are only tendencies within a movement that, unlike much of the 1960s new left, has expressed broad sympathy with union struggles, and evinced a strong desire to come to the material aid of striking workers. A labour movement desperately in need of wide support is far more likely to find genuine allies here than in the Democratic Party.

Even the anarcho-syndicalists of the Seattle Black Orchid Collective (BOC), who have incurred the particular animus of the bureaucrats and their defenders, are not, judging by their writings, quite as unreasonable as their detractors make them out to be. They say they do not oppose the existence of unions or denigrate their struggles; they do not follow Hardt and Negri in dissolving the proletariat into some gelatinous ‘multitude’. One can rightly criticise their slogan, “We are the 89%”, as potentially divisive without dismissing the kernel of truth it contains: that the 11% who are still unionised cannot, as in decades past, be seen by the rest of the class as embodying the collective worker (there are, for instance, only about one tenth as many workers on the docks today as there were during the 1946 Oakland general strike); that, even to win defensive struggles, unions must become part of a broader class alliance that necessarily includes the unorganised, precariously employed and unemployed; and that such an alliance is bound to have a more populist coloration than the industrial struggles of yesteryear.

Yet, while eschewing extreme anarchist positions, and claiming not to be against unions, BOC’s writings suffer from a certain ambiguity on this score. They tend to argue that existing unions are *defined* by the legal straightjacket in which they are placed by the National Labor Relations Board, and that these legal impediments are inseparable from the process of legal union representation and collective bargaining. They therefore advocate new union structures, more akin to the Wobblies’ ‘one big union’ model, that they think will avoid these constraints. They also abdicate the fight for revolutionary leadership of existing unions, arguing instead for ‘direct organising’ methods that will involve the members in militant actions despite the leadership’s disapproval.

While it is true that one major purpose of ‘new deal’ labour legislation was to enmesh the class struggle in bourgeois legality, does BOC think that workers would do better in the semi-legal conditions under which they were forced to operate before winning the right to organise, and to which their ‘alternative structures’ would no doubt be consigned today? Then as now, it seems that the force of restrictive or repressive laws are a function of the willingness of members and leaders to obey them, and not any inherent power of the laws themselves. Experience also shows that there is no way around the existing union leadership. As long as the bureaucrats retain power, workers will tend to follow their lead, as opposed to the counsels of anyone outside their ranks. In order to replace abject class-collaboration with class-struggle methods, the existing leadership must be discredited and replaced. One way of doing so is for socialists to fight within the union for action proposals that answer workers’ needs in order to expose the leaders when they withhold support. Thus the November 2 and December 12 ‘general strikes’ would probably have been much more effective with the aid of a concerted campaign of support within the ILWU and other unions.

BOC’s arguments, however, are somewhat reminiscent of the debates concerning dual unionism that took

place within the early communist movement and can, one hopes, be pursued on a comradely basis.

The trade union bureaucracy, however, is another matter entirely. There should be little patience with the liberals, social democrats and self-styled Marxists who regard groups like BOC as the enemy within, and the labour officialdom as honest comrades with whom one may occasionally disagree. The union bureaucracy is, on the contrary, a distinct social stratum, with a definite ideology and *modus operandi*. Deriving certain privileges from its status as a broker between workers and bosses, the bureaucracy seeks instinctively to preserve the class order in which it acts as a broker. Bureaucrats therefore typically preach a gospel of class-conciliation. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, mostly at the lower echelons, but also occasionally among top officers at the local level (Longview Local 21 president, Dan Coffman, by all accounts, acquitted himself in a principled way throughout the struggle). From a tactical standpoint, Marxists should not ignore these exceptions or be insensitive to tensions within a fragile stratum that, when all is said and done, lacks any solid material base of its own. But neither should we lose sight of the bureaucracy’s overall role as an important prop of the capitalist order within the working class.

It is therefore absurd to take the ILWU’s International’s condemnation of Occupy’s alleged substitutionism as more than a fig leaf for the bureaucracy’s instinctive aversion to anything it does not control, or to any escalation of class struggle that may ruffle the feathers of its friends in high places.

As for Taft-Hartley and other repressive anti-labour laws, the penalties for defying them are severe, and should not be taken lightly. But a general attitude of submission often comes disguised as a temporary tactical expedient. What is the bureaucracy’s long-term strategy for breaking these legal trammels? Voting for Democrats in the 65 years since Taft-Hartley was enacted has never come close to achieving its repeal. Yet AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka has nothing to propose but more of the same, having just offered up the federation’s early endorsement of a president who froze federal government wages and is trying to break teachers’ unions throughout the country. Trumka also announced his intention to spend hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used for organising, and field 400,000 campaign workers, to keep Obama in the White House next year.

Any strategy to revitalise the labour movement leads not this way, but through a broad alliance with forces that evince a will to struggle. For its part, Occupy - or at least some among what has become its most advanced west coast detachment - is coming to see its future in a convergence with the organised working class, which, for all the defeats it has suffered, can still supply a cohesion and social power that encampments do not possess by themselves. The Oakland/Longview events - a counterpoint to Occupy’s hibernation in the rest of the country since November - will, it is hoped, be the first tentative steps toward a convergence between unions and the unorganised millions, who need each other more than ever ●

Notes

1. Citations from www.indybay.org/news-items/2012/02/14/18707374.php.
2. www.longshoreshippingnews.com/2012/01/ilwu-pres-mcEllrath-prepare-to-take-action-when-egt-vessel-arrives.
3. <http://socialistworker.org/2012/01/19/the-solidarity-we-need>.
4. <http://socialistworker.org/2012/01/23/ilwu-officials-shouldnt-get-a-pass>.

DEBATE



Stalinist fakery: cropped photo designed to give a false impression of the closeness of Lenin and Stalin. Many 'Leninist' sects have their fake Lenin too

Wanting to get Lenin wrong

Pham Binh challenges those who insist on maintaining their fictional image of Lenin and the Bolsheviks - despite the overwhelming evidence

The response by blogger 'Pink Scare'¹ to the debate ignited by my review² of Tony Cliff's *Lenin: building the party* affords me the opportunity to clarify issues of secondary importance. Things like timing, judgments, method and implications did not fit with the content of my responses to the Cliff book's two defenders, Paul Le Blanc³ and Paul D'Amato⁴. In addition, I will discuss the role of Lars T Lih in this little firestorm.

PS is appreciative, but ultimately dissatisfied with Lih's contribution,⁵ because the latter does not spell out the practical implications of his research for revolutionary Marxists today and instead adopts a "non-political posture" of "scholarly neutrality". Le Blanc⁶ and D'Amato⁷ also tried to fault my book review for similar reasons - namely, that it did not situate Cliff's book in today's context - although my views on party-building today were made abundantly clear in two different articles⁸ prior to the Cliff debate and one article⁹ after it. It seems no-one is allowed to examine the historical record surrounding Lenin or challenge anyone else's presentation of Lenin's work without including a detailed 'how to' manual for today's revolutionary left.

This line of criticism fails to address a very basic point: why should

a book review of Cliff's *Lenin* (written in 1975) include a discussion of how Lenin's actions are applicable today when Cliff's book contains no such discussion of how its content should be applied by Cliff's group, the International Socialists (predecessor of the British Socialist Workers Party) in their political context of the mid-to late 1970s? Surely what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

I mirrored Cliff's narrow focus on Lenin and the history of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). If my book review or Lih's contribution suffered because neither of us drew up a balance sheet of applicable lessons for today, the same is equally true of Cliff's book, although our contributions have not been shown to contain the kind of errors that marred Cliff's *Lenin*.

Timing and judgments

So the question remains: why did I review Cliff's book in early 2012? Why re-litigate battles from a century ago, as battles today rage in the streets of New York city, Athens and Homs?

In fact, I began my review of Cliff's *Lenin* around the time I wrote 'The Bolshevik experience and the "Leninist" model'¹⁰ in the summer

of 2011, before Occupy Wall Street (OWS) broke out almost literally on my doorstep. The lull in OWS activity following the November 15 eviction¹¹ allowed me to complete this project, since I had far more important things to do during the encampment than reread Cliff.

This explains the 'odd' timing of the book review. What prompted me in the first place to look at Cliff's book carefully, chapter by chapter, in the summer of 2011 was Lars Lih's response to Chris Harman and Paul Le Blanc in *Historical Materialism* No18. Here, Lih mentioned some of *Building the party*'s factual errors. I was curious to see if there were any errors that Lih had not brought to light. The rest, as they say, is history.

Does it follow then, as PS claims, that, "Pham thinks Cliff's book is of zero value and should be thrown in the dustbin of history. He makes it sound as if the most important debate right now is, in some sweeping sense, 'Tony Cliff: yay or nay?'"

My book review never claimed that Cliff's *Lenin* has "zero value and should be thrown in the dustbin of history". I was much more careful and specific, arguing that the book was "useless as a *historical* study of Lenin's actions and thoughts". Believe it or not, plenty of books have value

even if they are not historical studies of Lenin's thoughts and actions. Cliff's *Lenin* is no exception.

The value of Cliff's *Lenin* is a separate issue from any sort of sweeping judgment of Tony Cliff as a man, writer or revolutionary. He wrote about a huge range of subjects during the almost 90 years of his life. One book, no matter how awful or problematic, is an insufficient basis for making a "yay or nay" judgment on someone's life and work. Anyone who read my book review and thought that my goal was to 'get Tony Cliff' or make such a judgment has probably spent too much time in the marginal and unhealthy environment known as the socialist movement, where straw men, sweeping personalistic condemnations, and sweeping yays and nays have become the rule rather than the exception.

PS says that the body of my review consisted of "quibbling complaints about this or that error made by Tony Cliff". Getting the meaning of democratic centralism wrong, distorting Lenin's attitude towards party rules, failing to represent Lenin's view of the famous 1903 Menshevik-Bolshevik dispute, as expressed in painstaking detail in *One step forward, two steps back*,¹² and ignoring the fact that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks did not become separate, independent parties

until 1917 hardly constitutes quibbling for any serious student of Bolshevism.

If all of the above is quibbling, it begs the question of what exactly for PS would constitute significant distortions, inaccuracies, flaws or factual errors? Should we rest content that the moral of the story - we must build a revolutionary party! - is the correct one? If so, why bother being accurate at all?

Accuracy

Historical accuracy is paramount if we are trying to use history as a guide to action.

We cannot learn from what happened unless we actually know (and acknowledge) what happened. History, like the present, will always be contested to some degree, but intelligent debate over what happened, when, and why is not possible when those involved in such disputes maintain their views despite a growing body of evidence that contradicts the factual basis for their particular interpretation. Paul Le Blanc's insistence¹³ that the Bolsheviks became a separate party from the Mensheviks in 1912 at the Prague Conference falls into this category because to adhere to this interpretation one must ignore or downplay the testimonies of conference participants such as Lenin and

Zinoviev, as well as a slew of documentary evidence from the period, since all of it points in the opposite direction.

Why the 1912 issue is important I will examine later in this piece.

Cliff’s *Lenin* has value - as a cautionary tale of how not to approach the work of others (Lenin’s primarily, but also that of scholars) and how not to handle historical documents and complex issues (*Building the party*’s Russian-language citations are copied from secondary sources without proper attribution, making it almost impossible for anyone else to look at the material he used to write his book).

The single most important lesson we can learn from Cliff’s *Lenin* is the necessity of putting the work of Lenin and the Bolsheviks back into its proper historical context, which is the international social democratic movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s. This Cliff did not do in his zeal to ‘prove’ this or that point about the nature of the revolutionary party (a loaded concept that deserves to be unpacked), the nature of said party’s internal regime and its alleged leadership style. By contrast, Lih’s work will withstand the test of time and the harshest of critical examinations because he seeks to understand Lenin historically, as he was, as he evolved over time, *regardless of the implications for revolutionary organisers today*.

Lih has no dog in our fight, nor should he. Claiming, as PS does, that he “position[s] himself as a mere scholar - rather than activist - [who] repeatedly invokes his expertise and specific role as a ‘historian’” and, as a result of such so-called positioning, “offers little insight into the questions that really matter here” is ridiculous for the following reason: no matter how wonderful Lih’s scholarship on Lenin is, *he is not going to do our thinking for us*. Drawing out the implications of his work is *our* job, not his.

Any student of that era, those issues or the man (Lenin) would do well to imitate Lih’s method in approaching the history of Bolshevism if they really want to mine that experience for the valuable lessons it undoubtedly contains.

When studying history we should focus on precisely that - history. Engaging in historical study focused on “advancing our understanding of the contemporary conjuncture and struggles within it”, as PS suggests, will inevitably distort what we get out of looking at events that occurred yesterday, yesteryear and a century ago - especially when they happened in foreign countries, whose cultures, languages and traditions are not readily comparable to our own. Approaching the past with a ‘what do I get out of it in the here and now?’ or a ‘what in this is immediately applicable to my situation?’ mentality is to blind ourselves to history’s rich contradictions and nuances in favour of something simplistic and readily digestible.

Clarifications

The dedication of my book review to “anyone and everyone [who] has sacrificed in the name of ‘building the revolutionary party.’” has nothing to do with declaring that project to be a “bankrupt political goal”, despite what PS seems to think. If that is what I thought I would just come out and say it. I do not mince words.

The dedication is a reference to the fact that generations of socialists all over the world have made personal sacrifices of one sort or another in the name of the title of Cliff’s book, *Building the party*, under the assumption that their efforts would contribute in some way to the creation of a Bolshevik-type party. I have no problem with people choosing to make such sacrifices, but choosing to do so based on severe distortions or a non-existent historical precedent is a different story.

PS’s concluding words compel me to clarify where I do *not* stand on some questions as well:

If there is one relatively clear political implication of Pham’s intervention, it seems to be that Lenin was “an orthodox Kautskyst” and that the distinction between Second International reformism (associated with Kautsky and the SPD) and early Third International

revolutionary politics (associated with Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lenin) is historically inaccurate.

I am mystified how anyone could read my book review of Cliff’s *Lenin* and my replies to Le Blanc and D’Amato and write that Cliff getting Lenin wrong has “one relatively clear political implication” on issues such as Lenin’s relationship to Karl Kautsky or the Third International’s relationship to the Second. Cliff’s book did not delve into those topics at all and neither did I. Perhaps I am somehow being confused or conflated with Lih, since he has actually done work on Lenin’s take¹⁴ on Kautsky?

Whatever the case, I would never be so stupid to think that the distinction between the Second and Third Internationals “is historically inaccurate”. I do believe that the character of those distinctions has been profoundly misunderstood by ‘Leninists’. That topic, along with ‘Leninism’ and whether the Bolsheviks really constituted a ‘party of a new type’, will be addressed in a future piece that I began before OWS. Stay tuned.

The importance of 1912

To be candid, these debates have zero importance beyond the ranks of historians like Lih and those who continue to find inspiration in or lessons to be learned from the Bolsheviks. But the issue of 1912 looms large for those of us in the latter milieu because of statements like this from D’Amato:

The outcome of the period 1912-17 was that two independent political parties entered the arena of struggle in 1917. The irreconcilable differences between these two parties, which led one to support soviet power and the other to oppose it, led to a Bolshevik victory over the opposition of the Mensheviks, and later to the founding of a new international that was based upon soviet power and the need for revolutionary Marxists to organisationally *separate* themselves from social democratic reformism. Can a debate over the exact date when the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks split shed any more light in these critical developments in the history of the socialist movement?

My answer to his closing question is unequivocally ‘yes!’ - although the evidence indicates that there is no single “exact date” in 1917 when this separation took place. It was a process - more like balding than a divorce.

The reason I say *yes is* because the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were part of the same broad, multi-tendency party

Fighting fund Urgent action

After a poor week for the fighting fund, we now need £367 in just three days. We are asking readers and supporters to take urgent action to ensure we reach our £1,500 target for March by 12 noon on Sunday April 1, so there is no time to mail us a cheque. But there is time to make your donation using our online PayPal facility at cpgb.org.uk or by transferring it directly to our bank account: 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64).

As usual the bulk of the £191 that came in this week arrived via standing orders. Thanks to all, especially JT for his fantastic £75. Then there were cheques for £25 from RT, £20 from JK and £8 from IR. But I can’t report any donations received via our website. True, there were far fewer readers this week - just 10,396 - once more caused by the problems with the ongoing work on the site. But it was still disappointing not to get anything at all donated online.

April 1, as well as marking the cut-off for the end of one month’s

from 1903 until 1917 that ‘Leninists’ today strenuously reject as a bankrupt model doomed to fail. The 1917 Russian Revolution proves that this model is anything but bankrupt or doomed in advance. The differences between the two factions were not always irreconcilable. To insist otherwise would be ahistorical (or undialectical, if you prefer). Lenin’s writings up until 1917 are filled with rejections of the notion that there could or should be two “organisationally separate” RSDLPs: one Menshevik, the other Bolshevik. (Interesting fact: the phrase “Bolshevik Party” never occurs in Lenin’s *Collected works* during the 1912-16 period except as explanatory editorial notes written by people other than Lenin. Only in 1917 does Lenin himself speak and write of the Bolsheviks as a party.)

Conflating the liquidationists, the Mensheviks and social democratic reformists (Bernsteinists) with one another, as D’Amato does, makes all of this impossible to understand or even acknowledge. Neither Lenin nor the Bolsheviks were what we call ‘Leninists’, and they did not build a ‘party of a new type’ totally unlike and superior to their international social democratic brethren. The historical evidence indicates that they were *revolutionary social democrats* who defended what they considered to be orthodoxy from the likes of Eduard Bernstein and, later, the man who did more than anyone else to create that orthodoxy, Kautsky.

All of this goes to show how history’s rich complexities and ironies clash with the simplistic and distorted accounts of the Bolsheviks and Lenin put forward by detractors and would-be imitators alike.

What (if anything) this means for us today is a matter of debate, but historical falsehoods and fictions (when we know better!) should not be part of that debate ●

Notes

1. <http://pink-scare.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/politics-of-debate-over-lenin.html>.
2. ‘Mangling the party of Lenin’ *Weekly Worker* February 2.
3. <http://links.org.au/node/2718>.
4. <http://links.org.au/node/2735>.
5. ‘Falling out over a cliff’ *Weekly Worker* February 16.
6. <http://links.org.au/node/2716>.
7. <http://links.org.au/node/2726>.
8. <http://links.org.au/node/2657>; <http://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/a-response-to-paul-leblancs-marxism-and-organization>.
9. <http://spnyc.org/home/2012/02/17/another-socialist-left-is-possible>.
10. <http://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/a-response-to-paul-leblancs-marxism-and-organization>.
11. www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/569.php.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/index.htm.
13. <http://links.org.au/node/2752>.
14. See ‘VI Lenin and the influence of Kautsky’ *Weekly Worker* September 3 2009.

fund and the beginning of the next, sees the start of our drive to increase our subscriptions. Of course, despite our continuing website problems, the number of internet readers far exceeds those who take the printed paper. But paying subscribers are the bedrock of our finances and if we could win just an extra 100 of them, that would increase our net income by over £4,000 a year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

Attacking poorest part of drinking classes

Moralistic gesture politics

Friday March 23 saw David Cameron announce, on behalf of his Conservative-led coalition government, that its forthcoming legislative programme would include measures for a minimum price on alcoholic drinks on a per-unit basis.

Make no mistake: this measure is not based upon any kind of scientifically founded expectation that consumption will be reduced. It will not address the reasons *why* so many people drink quite so much. It will achieve almost nothing in terms of its effects, except irritating drinkers in proportion to their poverty - the minimum price will mean nothing to the more comfortably off. The whole thing will, however, enhance the standing of the Tories among certain parts of its voting constituency - those who enjoy a good moral panic and approve of measures claiming to set the feckless onto the straight and narrow. But is alcohol at 40p per unit up to the job? Or is the whole thing pure cynicism?

Over the whole recent past (and the not so recent past - one is reminded of Hogarth's famous Gin Lane and Beer Street images) there has been an almost continuous campaign against excessive drinking, particularly among youth. If it is not those brightly coloured alcopops aimed at the juvenile drinker with a sweet tooth, then it is the '24-hour drinking' that was supposed to bring about the end of western civilisation as we know it. This is not to say that alcohol is not a real problem for many who may become addicted, who drink so heavily as to damage their health, or who suffer or cause alcohol-related injuries (and take up the time of paramedics and hospital workers as a result). But the point is that minimum pricing will not affect any of this one iota. The new measure manages to tick the box for ineffectual public health gesture politics as well as for reactionary moral hysteria.

Justifying his new policy, David Cameron says: "Binge drinking isn't some fringe issue: it accounts for half of all alcohol consumed in this country. The crime and violence it causes drains resources in our hospitals, generates mayhem on our streets and spreads fear in our communities." But we should not forget the flurry of recent newspaper stories exposing the 'silent crisis' of 'middle class binge drinkers', who are apt to sit on their sofas and drink far more wine than is good for them. Unless they are paying £3.99 a bottle or less, I am afraid this 'silent crisis' will continue unabated.

Alcohol consumption has actually been declining for around a decade now (after increasing steadily from at least the mid-1960s), and the biggest decline, believe it or not, has been amongst the young.¹ Indeed, what kicked off the drinking boom from the 1960s onwards was that most middle class of alcoholic beverages, wine. In fact those who drink to excess are most commonly those with the most disposable income, so in a sense there is a connection between the price of alcohol and its consumption. It is just that the new measure will not affect most of those who drink to excess, precisely because they can already afford it. As usual it will punish the



William Hogarth's 'Gin Lane'

poorest sections of the working class.

The drinks that will be most affected in terms of increased price are the low-quality, high-alcohol-volume 'white' ciders and high-strength beers that are most associated with alcoholics, teenagers drinking in parks and others for whom an immediate jolt of potent alcohol is the only redeeming feature of such a beverage. As we all know, those who suffer from a

substance addiction are more likely to become involved in crime in order to continue their habit when the price of that substance goes up. This is seen most clearly in relation to illegal drugs, particularly heroin and crack cocaine, where the failure of, say, a poppy harvest in some distant part of the world translates into higher rates of crime in the core countries. So not only will the health of sensitive sections of

the population be either marginally affected or not affected at all, but we can predict that the proposed measure will lead to an *increase* in crime.

But that is exactly the opposite of what Cameron claims. According to the government, "The 40p a unit minimum price could mean 50,000 fewer crimes each year and 9,000 fewer alcohol-related deaths over the next decade."² That would represent a

5% reduction, but the problem is that the figures have evidently been plucked from thin air. It is true that a reduction in alcohol consumption would be likely to produce a reduction in crime, but, for the reasons already stated, the measure will almost certainly *not* result in a drop in consumption.

The idea that these measure will cut down 'binge drinking' via inhibiting the 'pre-loading' of drinks is also flawed. If people can afford to go to a bar or club, having 'pre-loaded' by drinking beforehand, it seems unlikely that they will not be able to afford the new minimum price of 40p per unit - alcohol bought in supermarkets and corner shops will remain far cheaper than in pubs and other venues where it is sold for immediate consumption.

Another problem is that, compared to price trends in other commodities, the tendency has been for alcohol to be totally *overpriced* (not least when you consider the proportion that is taken by tax duty), to the point that there is already a flourishing underground industry in 'fake' or imitation alcohol brands, increasingly sold in bottles with very sophisticated reproductions of the graphics and appearance of prestigious manufacturers. It is not exactly unknown for such drinks to contain all manner of contaminants - including methyl alcohol, which can cause blindness.

The manufacturers of a well-known beverage famously proclaimed it was able to refresh the parts that other drinks could not reach. However, the new law will not only reach all the wrong parts, but the result will be far from refreshing, continuing to penalise the least well-off and having, at best, an absolutely marginal effect on the problems it claims to be tackling.

Yet again the ruling class has demonstrated its total bankruptcy in the face of the social problems its own system creates ●

Michael Copestake

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12397254.
2. www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/mar/23/coalition-minimum-alcohol-price-40p.

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