



weekly **worker**

Mike Macnair and Paul Le Blanc debate the disputed history of Bolshevism

- Tories spread petrol panic
- Siding with Syrian opposition
- Racism and free speech
- Cold war Lenin caricature

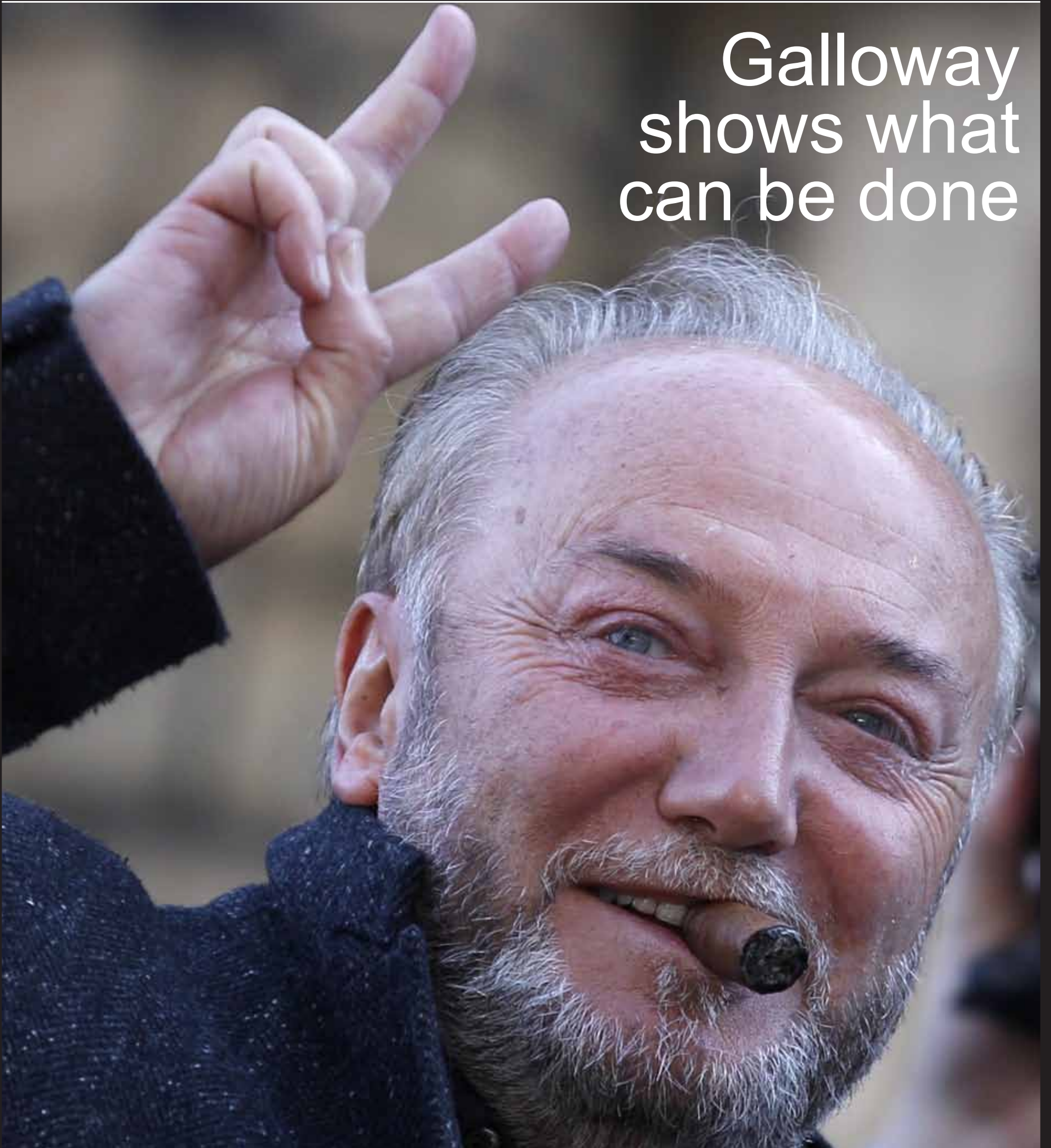
No 908 Thursday April 5 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/£1.10

Galloway
shows what
can be done



LETTERS



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

Arrogance

In the week of George Galloway's sensational return to the Commons, it is worth remembering that nobody is quite as indefatigable as comrade Gerry Downing in his stubborn, myopic defence of 'Leninist' orthodoxy on the party and democracy (Letters, March 29).

Gerry takes me to task for not providing a shred of evidence for my "anti-Leninist" diatribe. This is a bit rich, since the only textual evidence contained in his rambling letter is, firstly, a reference to an insignificant *Socialist Worker* piece and, secondly, a quotation from *What is to be done?*, displaced so drastically from its context that it might almost have washed up in *Mein Kampf*. Where better to start for a counterclaim than *WITBD* itself, the entire political thrust of which is directed squarely against Gerry's general line; he should also have a look at Lars T Lih's *Lenin rediscovered*.

"Without revolutionary theory," Gerry reminds us in the sombre tones of all loaded banalities, "there can be no revolutionary movement." Unfortunately, the paragraph or two of 'theory' offered by the comrade is laughable. He starts off well enough: "democratic centralism is necessary because of the peculiar form of oppression endured by the working class and their fightback against this". Unfortunately, Gerry identifies that 'fightback' wholly with the direct shopfloor struggle against employers.

From there, the errors multiply like flying ants. The strike requires workers to ignore the law and prevent scabbing; therefore, "all talk of democracy is forgotten". Workers' democracy "denies democracy" to the employers and to scabs. A class of employers with the right to hire and fire, however, is *anti-democratic*. Scab actions by workers, equally, break democratic decisions. (If a minority of adventurists go out on strike without winning people to follow them, it is *they* who are closer to scabbing than the people who stay in work.)

When Gerry says 'democracy', he *should* say 'liberty' - but he is guilty of a thoroughly bourgeois-liberal view of democracy, believing it to consist in a set of inalienable rights which it is impermissible to deny. Where JS Mill puts a plus, Gerry puts a minus; apart from that, they are in perfect agreement. He concludes with the aforementioned Lenin quote, in which the economists are accused of tailing spontaneous and unconscious politics. Bizarrely, this is supposed to characterise the CPGB (we tail *what*, exactly?) and, even more bizarrely, to an academic historian like Lih. It applies with perfect precision, however, to Gerry's political ontology of the picket line - and, indeed, to Trotskyist 'transitional programmes' of all kinds.

I, personally, am accused of "arrogance", of self-assuredly "answering the philistines". Indeed, the latter is one of my favourite activities. Gerry, however, treats all challenges, no matter how substantial, to his sub-Zinovievite dogma on the party as mere minor inconveniences to the repetition of the Revealed Truth - readers may decide who of us is 'arrogant'.

James Turley
London

Past our peak

Mike Macnair should repeat to himself every day the following mantra: 'Cheap, abundant energy is necessary for economic growth and

recovery under capitalism.' Unless Macnair does this, he will not grasp why peak oil is so serious and what the implications of it are. He will remain limited to 19th century Marxist political economy, which is basically an analysis of the circulation of money - or, as Marx put it, MCM' - independently of any consideration of energy. For Marxism, economic crisis can only originate from within this circuit. Based on this closed economic view, which excluded energy, Marx had no notion that capitalism could collapse because of an energy shortage.

Macnair uses William Jevons' failed 19th century prediction about Britain running out of coal and thus facing industrial collapse to undermine those who are warning society about the coming energy crisis and to minimise its importance (Letters, March 22). The first thing to say here is that Jevons was ahead of Marx and other political economists at the time in recognising the relationship between non-renewable energy and the new industrial society.

Jevons' real 'mistake' was not having the knowledge at that time to determine how much coal remained underground, nor being able to predict the coming energy revolution based on oil. Today the oil industry is one of the most technologically advanced in the world and petroleum geologists and researchers have the knowledge to give a reasonable estimate of when world peak oil, or Hubbert's peak, will arrive. The most valuable work in this respect is, I believe, that done by Richard Duncan and Walter Youngquist in *Encircling the peak of world oil production* (1999), which places the peak around 2007. This would suggest that the world has finally reached maximum oil production, so that any economic recovery will send oil prices soaring again, as supply fails to keep up with demand, thus resulting in another recession, which will eventually turn into a permanent depression.

Finally, Macnair argues that the biggest obstacle to changing to a new energy system is the US military's dependence on oil-based energy. It is no wonder then that the US military and intelligence establishments are the most conscious when it comes to the problems associated with the global peak. But surely it is not only the US military which is dependent on oil, but all the other countries as well. Macnair does not seem to understand the almost total dependence of modern society on oil, and so is unable to see the importance and seriousness of world peak oil, but this is a weakness he shares with most other Marxists.

Tony Clark
email

Left-right

As someone who has just resigned from the Labour Party after being a member again for only six months, I have read the debates in the *Weekly Worker* about the attitude Marxists should take to the party with great interest.

I resigned from the party after facing the prospect of having my meagre benefits cut by one-third, thanks to the work capability assessments (WCA) introduced by arch-Blairites James Purnell and Alan Johnson when they were ministers in charge of the department for work and pensions in the New Labour government. To continue to pay money to a political party that introduced the hated WCA medicals, which are causing so much distress to hundreds of thousands of sick and disabled people, myself included, is like turkeys voting for Christmas.

Whilst the CPGB did carry out entryist work in the Labour Party

during the 1920s and 1930s, to do so in 2012 would be like carrying out entryist work in the Tory Party and the Liberal Democrats or in the Democrats in the United States. My brief experience of attending my local branch of the Labour Party indicated to me that the active members are rightwing Blair supporters who are frightened of discussing politics just in case they face the wrath of 'regional office'. Dialectical materialism says that all organisations are in flux and constantly changing. The CPGB (PCC) has made a mistake when they conclude that the Labour Party is moving to the left. My experience of the Labour Party is that it is moving to the right.

Perspectives for British politics in the next period can be foreseen by looking at what is happening in Greece, where Pasok has been completely discredited during its recent period in government. Pasok is hated by Greek workers and youth alike. A similar prospect will face the next Labour government, which is likely to come to power at the 2015 general election. Hence why Ed Miliband and Ed Balls do not want a majority Labour government, but one dependant on the remnants of the doomed Lib Dems. In Greece, the left is in a far worse state than in Britain. There are 40 different groups in 15 different parties. However, the Greek Communist Party, Syriza and the Democratic Left are polling between them more than 40%.

Britain is therefore in need of a party to the left of Labour, just like the 'official' CPGB in the 1920s. The Bradford West by-election result clearly shows that there is a large constituency of voters who are willing to support left-of-Labour candidates. Bradford West shows that Ed Miliband's support for Tory cuts and austerity, and his lack of support for workers on strike, has little appeal. As such, Ed is likely to be replaced by his brother, David, in a Blairite palace coup, which will shift Labour even further to the right.

The CPGB (PCC), as outlined in letters and articles in the *Weekly Worker*, is therefore wrong to waste so much energy in advocating entryist work within the Labour Party, which is no longer a bourgeois workers' party but similar to the US Democrats. Whilst the CPGB (PCC) is right to play the long game, the cuts to jobs, benefits, pensions, services and living standards demand an immediate response. That means taking steps to build a party to the left of Labour now, and not in the distant future.

John Smithee
email

Still no answers

In response to my letter of March 22, when I asked for concrete answers to my questions instead of the usual assertions, I got ... the usual assertions! Those who assert that we should join/stay in the Labour Party to 'pull it left' have to explain whether conditions are more favourable for that fight now and why this did not happen the last time conditions were favourable.

Proponents should have the honesty to answer the questions that remained unanswered:

1. Labour Party conference no longer makes party policy or settles the election manifesto and the right has stitched up internal democracy. How will a tiny left get that back?
2. What is the calibre of those joining the Labour Party today - active or passive?
3. Why did the Labour left do nothing to halt the rise of Blair despite many on the left warning about him at the

time?

4. Why could the Labour left not ensure that John McDonnell at least made it onto the ballot paper (or more revealingly, why did they not even support him) twice now?

5. Why has there been no Labour left challenge anywhere near those of Tony Benn in 1981 and 1982?

6. Is it not the case that the much vaunted 'link with the trade unions' is only that of the union bureaucrats forcing their union to remain affiliated by not allowing their members any democratic chance to debate the link or amount of donations (the forthcoming GMB conference alone *appears* to be allowing this, but let us see if the debate actually happens)? Those looking to reform donations to political parties are live to this, which is why there are suggestions that trade union members opt *in* to the levy rather than having to opt out.

When the Tories passed legislation forcing unions to re-sign up members every three years, the unions managed to retain, I would guess, 95% or higher. No way would unions be able to get their members to opt in to pay the levy to Labour by anything like that ratio. Members can be (and were) convinced of the need to stay in their trade union. But pay money to the Labour Party?

7. The trade unions affiliated to Labour were the last to join the pensions fight led by the Public and Commercial Services union and the first to abandon it - yes or no? Please explain.

8. What about Labour winning a landslide victory in 1997? It could have proclaimed socialism overnight, but instead betrayed nearly all its main election promises and allowed the gap between rich and poor to widen, not narrow.

What betrayal by any future Labour government would cause the remaining dullards to finally leave Labour? What principles are you standing for by staying in Labour 'to pull it left'?

9. What is the current membership level of the Labour Party and is it growing (if so at what rate) or is it falling again?

10. Why did so-called socialists back warmonger Oona King (just because she was black and a woman?) over George Galloway - only to find most black people in Bethnal Green preferred a white man (in reality it was the policies they both stood for that determined their fate, but I put it like this because of the sheer ferocity of the Labour left attacks on Galloway for 'causing the loss of a black, female MP from parliament').

11. What did the Labour left do to try to stop Galloway being expelled due to his anti-war stance?

Why not try to answer these questions so we can see what basis in reality you have for continuing to demand we join/stay in Labour?

Stan Keable was the most sincere and fraternal of those who have replied to my letter. He basically reiterates his previous stance that we must challenge the control of the bureaucracy of both the trade unions and the Labour Party (Letters, March 29). An assertion then with no answers to my questions to show why it is worth staying in Labour to achieve this.

In another letter published on the same date Alun Morgan asserts that "events, events, events" will propel the working class into the trade unions and the Labour Party. He does not cite any actual event that will see this occur. The fight against the poll tax did not see either instance happen - the fight was won without the unions or the Labour Party. Roy Hattersley even called for "exemplary sentences" for the poll tax rioters. We should

all have just paid the poll tax, voted Labour and waited until they won a general election. Well, the working class were propelled into fighting the poll tax outside the unions and the Labour Party and caused Thatcher to resign.

Now, thousands of non-members did join the 29 unions who took action on N30. However, is the "event" of Unison, the GMB and other Labour-affiliated unions since deserting the fight going to get thousands more joining unions or Labour now?

Next we come to stormin' Norman Storms (also March 29). He cites the golden age of the Labour Party and the reforms brought in. But others have stated any party in power would have done the same because capitalism agreed with the need for those reforms. He failed to respond to my record of the betrayals of Blair's New Labour (which was also the Labour of the compliant Labour left, excited at power without any principles) and can only refer to concessionary bus travel in 2007 and agency workers regulations. Is that it for 13 years of power - during a boom time, remember (what clown said we have abolished 'bust?'), on a landslide majority? Comrade Storms should be arguing against the massive expansion of agency workers (under Labour) who would rather have a permanent job, thank you, than the limited 'protection' of these regulations that also craftily ensure agency workers do not feel the need to join a union!

Storms then condemns my fellow "noble members" in the civil service for requisitioning the armaments that "blew up their fellow workers in Iraq and Afghanistan". He needs to ponder the role of civil servants and how long they would have a job if they defied any government's orders. Remind me again, Norman - who ordered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? I can inform him that I and 17 other members of my branch went from Manchester to London on the two-million-strong historic protest against the illegal war in Iraq on February 15 2003 that many of the 'Labour is better than the Tories' crowd ignored. Was he there?

Labour prosecuted more wars in 13 years than the Tories did in 18, so, yes, Labour are 'better than the Tories' on so many issues - such as war, anti-civil liberties legislation, etc!

Then there is Paul Demarty's 'Long view' article warning of the twin evils of opportunism and adventurism, which is aimed at myself and Chris Stafford. Fine as far as the general advice goes - that always needs to be heeded. The main assertion (yes, another one) being basically: 'Stay in the trade unions and Labour Party and be very, very patient. After all, you are engaged in the noble, decades-long project to pull Labour/trade unions to the left. Get the slippers out and comfy armchair, as it will be a long time coming.'

No-one mentions the Scottish Socialist Party with its six MSPs before the avoidable split over Tommy Sheridan. They should have all stayed in the Labour Party, I suppose.

I incline towards David Douglass's constant reply to the comfy armchair theorists - we fight in the here and now, where we are and where we can, rather than tell everyone to wait until the revolution comes and all struggle is a diversion from creating a united Marxist party of the world (not that anyone is raising *that* demand within the Labour Party).

Now to the classic 'oh dear' moment in Alun Morgan's letter: "Nothing will be built outside the mass organisations of the class. Witness the debacles of the Socialist Alliance, Respect, the SSP - all have

BRADFORD

Galloway shows what can be done

How can the left make the most of the Bradford West result? Peter Manson joins the debate

George Galloway's tremendous win for Respect in Bradford West has given the left a real boost. Standing on an anti-cuts, anti-war, anti-establishment platform, he swept to victory with a huge 55.9% share of the vote.

It is fair to say that this result took everyone by surprise - apart from the Respect campaigners on the ground, who began to realise within the last week or so that they had an excellent chance of winning. I have to admit that I was among those who thought Galloway would do well to save his deposit - especially after his failure to get elected to the Scottish parliament last year, where the Coalition Against Cuts list he headed in Glasgow picked up only 3.3%.

But at least I was not caught out quite so spectacularly as Paul Routledge in the *Daily Mirror*. The early edition the day after the election carried a short piece on his political chat page headed "Imran races to victory". This began: "By the time you read this, Imran Hussain will have been declared Labour MP for Bradford West ... I would put my best shirt on a win for Ed Miliband's candidate in the by-election. Local boy Imran will make a good MP. And I would put my second best shirt on the Tories coming third behind either Ukip or Respect, with the Lib Dems nowhere ... These are real votes cast by real people, who have considered Osborne's budget and the scandal of cash for access to number 10. Their verdict counts" (March 30).

It seems those "real people" also considered the main alternative - the party that had held the 'safe' Labour seat of Bradford West for four decades - and decided they did not like it much. But at least Routledge was right about the Tories coming third - although it has to be pointed out that the UK Independence Party (3.3%) did not do quite so well as Respect. As for the hapless "local boy", Imran Hussain, his main attribute was that he was indeed "Ed Miliband's candidate" - a Labour yes-man through and through. The rebellion against all three main parties was one of the reasons why he lost, and why the Labour vote slipped to 24.99%, compared to 45.26% at the 2010 general election.

However, there was a rebellion against something else too: the local patriarchal networks dominated by Muslim 'community leaders' and businessmen, who had previously delivered the British Asian vote to Labour. Indeed one of the biggest cheers at Respect's 1,000-strong pre-election rally on March 25 was for Galloway's call to break with what he called "village politics": we must "shatter this mafioso grip", he urged. Hussain, the deputy leader of Bradford council, epitomises such "village politics". Indeed he inherited his seat in Toller ward from his father!

Labour's video of its local pre-election rally features lots of speeches in Urdu - something that does not go down too well with the Asian youth, whose first language is English and who consider themselves British first and foremost. And it was the youth that fired the Respect campaign, which saw a high proportion of first-time voters inspired to go to the polls (including many who were not so young).

The pro-Galloway bandwagon developed spontaneously, with many parts of this overwhelmingly working class and often drab constituency coming alive thanks to the dozens of self-made banners, proclaiming, "Vote Galloway" or "Vote Respect". A large part of the Labour Party local

machine, including the election agent, switched to Respect. When Radio Four went to Manningham Labour Club the day after the election, it could only find one person who had voted Labour!

Although the constituency is only around 40% British Asian, the mass switch by Muslims from Labour to Respect and the spontaneous mobilisation of young Asians was undoubtedly a key factor. But Respect won the most votes in all six of the constituency's wards - including the mostly white working class Clayton and Fairweather Green and the semi-rural Thornton and Allerton, where the Tories usually see off Labour in a two-horse race.

It is all the more remarkable that the local population rejected the patriarchal networks so firmly when you consider that it was those very patriarchal networks that first enabled Respect to get off the ground in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. It was largely due to them that comrade Galloway was elected in Bethnal Green and Bow in the 2005 general election and Respect became the official opposition to Labour with 12 councillors in 2006.

Freak result?

However, Respect had not suddenly appeared from nowhere in Bradford, which was one of the very few cities where the party still had a functioning branch - in fact much of its activity (such as it was before the by-election) had been in this constituency. In 2010 its two council candidates were both in Bradford West (they picked up only a couple of hundred votes each) and in that year's general election Respect won a meagre 3%, just behind the British National Party candidate. The local branch had a few dozen,

Muslim members and had sometimes been able to put on large meetings.

However, 'official optimism' aside, in early March very few Respect comrades seriously thought Galloway would be able to pull it off. For example, when a public meeting was called to announce that he would be putting in his nomination, many thought the attendance would be 10-15. But over 50 turned up, even before the campaign had begun. Once it got going though, it really struck a chord in a city where unemployment has suddenly doubled and there was a mood of real anger.

Much of the media has put it all down to peculiar local circumstances combined with Galloway's underhand campaigning methods - there was a large Muslim population, Galloway played up his own religious convictions (he is a Catholic) and stressed his opposition to the occupation of 'Muslim countries'. While all that is true, it cannot explain the absolute majority won in a seat where only a minority is Muslim. In any case, it was Imran Hussain who appealed to British Asian voters on the basis that he was the only Muslim contesting; and it was this that Galloway disputed, when he claimed that as a god-fearing teetotaler he was more entitled to the votes of believers than his opponent.

At the March 25 pre-election rally Galloway made frequent religious references and asked the mainly Muslim audience how any believer thinking of backing Hussain would be able to "explain on the last day" why they voted for those who "invade other people's countries" and slaughter thousands. But it would be foolish to put his victory all down to this factor - just as it is plain silly to allege that Galloway somehow "played the race card" by appealing to voters (both Asian and white) on the basis of solidarity with imperialism's victims who happen to have dark skins.

On April 1, when Galloway addressed a crowd of over 2,000 at his victory rally in Infirmary Park, he stressed the two main themes of his campaign, which distinguished Respect from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. First, there was Respect's opposition to austerity and cuts: "All three parties believe that ordinary working people should pay the price of the crisis", not the "bankers and financiers who caused it". Secondly, all three believe that "Britain has the right - the duty perhaps - to occupy other countries", whereas Respect opposes "British imperial repression". All this tapped into the mood of working class resentment. He also picked up huge support from students (the university is located in

the constituency) for his opposition to tuition fees.

Where next?

Many comrades, including myself, have assumed that Respect is not much longer for this world. Its leadership has been engaged in a lengthy debate about its future following Galloway's dismal failure in Glasgow and the loss of most of its councillors. With the national council split between those who wanted to effectively wind up Respect as a political party in favour of the Respect Foundation 'think tank' and those who wanted to continue contesting elections 'when the circumstances are right', a compromise was arrived at whereby the Respect Foundation and Respect now exist side by side. Even though Galloway was in the latter camp, after Glasgow it seemed like just a matter of time before his NC opponents would win the day.

But Bradford has changed all that - at least in the short term. According to Clive Searle, Respect national secretary, the organisation had about 640 paid-up members before the by-election campaign. But in just two days following the election Respect received over 1,000 telephone enquiries and about the same number of emails. Almost 300 new people paid their membership subscriptions via the website out of a total of 700 who had downloaded the application form. While around 30% of these enquiries came from Bradford itself (where scores joined during the campaign), the rest are from all over Britain.

In other words, Respect has probably doubled in size virtually overnight. Its *de facto* leader is back in parliament, having dominated the news for several days, and it is quite likely it will win more council seats in May's local elections - certainly in Bradford, where it will contest every ward. In Galloway's words, "Respect is here to stay".

However, that statement sits a little uneasily alongside another theme of the campaign: the "treason" committed by New Labour against the working class. At the pre-election rally Galloway said: "I am real Labour. I'm only *not* in Labour because Tony Blair expelled me." In his victory speech following the count he condemned the cuts assault and warmongering of the three mainstream parties. However, while he did not give a toss about the Tories and Lib Dems, "I do care about the Labour Party." He urged it to "turn away from the path of treason set by Tony Blair" and "be a Labour Party again". It should "stop taking your supporters for granted".

Comrade Galloway is a left Labourite and it is clear that Labour remains his natural home. You could easily envisage a situation where he was invited back into the fold - just as Ken Livingstone was quickly forgiven for standing as an independent for London mayor against the official Labour candidate in 2000. Blair had rigged the selection process against Livingstone, the obvious front-runner, who stood as an independent and was elected as mayor anyway. When it became clear that Livingstone would defeat Labour again if he stood once more as an independent in 2004, Blair swallowed his pride and readmitted him into the party.

So where does Galloway's triumph leave the left? *Socialist Worker* agrees that "his win is a boost for the left in Britain. It underlines the potential for building grassroots opposition to Tory austerity" ('How Respect won in Bradford West', April 7). However,

Alex Callinicos goes further in an article entitled 'The key lessons of Bradford West': "But the power of Galloway's appeal is also a sign of the residual strength of Labourism. Labour and its counterparts have embraced neoliberalism. So it is quite inevitable that challenges from its left will often be most effective when couched in the political language of traditional social democracy."

"A radical and revolutionary left that plans to have a future has to start by acknowledging the achievement of Galloway and Respect. They have re-opened an electoral space to the left of Labour. We now have all to work together to ensure that this great second chance isn't wasted."

It is true that, in a sense, the win has "re-opened an electoral space to the left of Labour". But if you think that left candidates contesting the May 3 local and Greater London Authority elections will automatically be able to ride on the back of Galloway's success you are badly mistaken. While he has demonstrated that thousands can be won to vote for a leftwing platform, they will not just vote for anyone - even if their challenge is "couched in the political language of traditional social democracy", as comrade Callinicos seems to be advising.

The Socialist Workers Party statement welcoming Galloway's win ends in this way: "The Bradford West by-election should encourage all of us fighting David Cameron's government of millionaires by strikes, protests and demonstrations - as well as those campaigning for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition at the May 3 elections" (www.swp.org.uk/statement/galloway-election-victory).

This wisely stops short of claiming that Tusc, with its smattering of SWP candidates, should be able to reap the benefit. The problem, as I am sure the SWP recognises, is the question of viability. People voted for Galloway in such large numbers because they believed he could win. Will they take the same view of Tusc? Of course not.

So how does the left become viable? By pretending to be Galloway-style old Labourites, as Callinicos implies? That has been tried and failed umpteen times. We need to end the crippling divisions that so debilitate our forces. However, neither the SWP, Socialist Party in England and Wales nor those leading any of the other left sects shows the slightest interest in seeking to overcome those divisions through organisational unity on a principled basis.

Unity for the sake of unity is not good enough. Usually it amounts to subordination to a section of the trade union bureaucracy or, failing that, to the politics of the trade union bureaucracy. Hence, we need to work out a clear Marxist programme to put before the working class, including in elections. It is only Marxism, not social democracy, that has answers - most of all at a time when the system of capital itself has been seen to fail by so many. We need to operate according to the principles of genuine democratic centralism, where competing tendencies are free to put forward their own ideas in public and openly fight to become the majority, while at the same time uniting their separate forces like a fist behind common actions.

In that way we can become a force to be reckoned with. We can become viable. In that way we might be able to "ensure that this great second chance isn't wasted" ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk



George Galloway: viable

TORIES

Pouring oil on stormy waters

The government's supposed 'Thatcher moment' has backfired spectacularly, writes **Eddie Ford**

Just because the mainstream media all agree on something does not necessarily mean it is a lie. So we have the overwhelming consensus that last week represented an extraordinary bad week for the Tories and the coalition government as a whole. Every announcement, statement or initiative merely generated a new rash of scathing (and mocking) headlines. Nothing went right. Crisis management and near panic reigned. Caught in the spotlight, government ministers looked ever more foolish and self-serving - or just plain venal.

We had the fallout from George Osborne's budget, which was a political and PR disaster. Like the 'granny tax' which effectively penalised those 'responsible' pensioners who had worked hard all their lives, sensibly tucking away a little sum each month and reading the *Daily Mail*. Not to mention the 5p reduction in the top rate of tax for the wealthy, at a time when workers are facing either a pay freeze or an absolute drop in wages; if not the loss of their jobs. Such measures make it obvious that the government believes its primary duty is to safeguard and advance the interests of the country's top 300,000 households. Too obvious as far as the more foresighted defenders of capitalism are concerned, as all this seriously throws into doubt the moral/political legitimacy of the ruling class and hence by extension the actual rule of capital itself.

Then there was the 'cash for access' scandal that erupted over Peter Cruddas, the Conservative Party co-treasurer. Yes, pay around £250,000 or so, he told potential donors to the Tories, and you can join the "premier league" of donors who get special access to the corridors of power. Kiss the hem of power. Attend private dinners at the prime minister's residence in Downing Street. Visits to Chequers. With a "policy committee" thrown in for good measure. Very nice. Even a bit of a bargain, you could argue.

Nor did it end there. It never does. When Cruddas was told by the undercover reporters that their money came from Liechtenstein, it being illegal under current legislation for foreign companies/agencies to donate to British political parties, he did not blink an eye. Instead, he helpfully suggested that they make use of his "compliance unit" to disguise the source of the donations by routing them through a UK company or appropriately "registered" UK citizens. Not that communists, as proletarian internationalists, support a ban on foreign donations - solidarity is no crime.

And to make matters even worse still, all these services (legal, semi-legal or illegal) were proffered by a man with an estimated private fortune of at least £750 million. His own company, CMC Markets plc, is worth some £1.25 billion. Naturally, he also has homes in Monaco, Antibes, Hertfordshire and Piccadilly, and regularly travels between them in a private jet. Now the entire world knew that the Tory Party co-treasurer was a dodgy corporate spiv with big money to splash round.

In other words, the whole Cruddas affair stinks of filthy lucre and political insider dealing. Just the sort of image that the Tories have spent years trying to shed. Fuck. Back to square one.

Downing Street had hoped to close down the issue when it announced on April 1 - how fitting - that Lord Feldman would take charge of an internal party inquiry into the



Putting panic into the public

obviously absurd idea that there was a 'tariff' for meeting the prime minister. But, moving into the territory of high farce, Feldman had to be quickly withdrawn in favour of Lord Gold (a senior litigation lawyer) from the inquiry team after it emerged that in fact he was the one who had appointed Cruddas to the position of co-treasurer. Could things get any worse?

Next we had the comical attempts by senior Tories to present themselves as ordinary folk, just like you and me, in response to the outcry over the 'pasty tax' - ie, the imposition of 20% VAT on all food served above "ambient" air temperature, such as supermarket rotisserie chicken, toasted sandwiches, pies and, of course, the beloved pasty. Or maybe not so beloved, to judge by the nonplussed expression on Osborne's face when asked by the treasury select committee on March 27 if he could recall the last time he ate a Cornish pasty - leading some internet wag to suggest that at a pre-budget treasury presentation Osborne was told that Cornish pasties were "similar to mini *boeufs en croute*". Pressed further on the great pasty question, Osborne blithely stated that *cold* pasties were not VAT-liable - so what was the fuss? Needless to say, *The Sun* newspaper - intent on doing over the Tories for the budget - ran the inevitable headline, "Let them eat cold pasty" (March 28).

Even worse, if anything, was the sight of the cabinet office minister Francis Maude determinedly munching on a pasty in front of the cameras to prove his proletarian credentials - immediately evoking memories of John Selwyn Gummer, the agricultural minister in the Thatcher government, virtually force-feeding a hamburgers to his four-year-

old daughter at the height of the 'mad cow' scare in 1990.

The most bizarre episode of all was David Cameron *pretending* that he had eaten - and enjoyed - a hot pasty manufactured by the West Cornwall Pasty Company at a Leeds train station. Unfortunately for Cameron though, the company has not had an outlet in Leeds train station since 2007. Major embarrassment for Cameron, now looking like a Tim Nice But Dim character from a Harry Enfield show - only not particularly nice: more cynical. A Tory toff who is out of touch - which, of course, he is.

Thatcher moment

Obviously, the Tories needed to create a diversion - *quick*, before events spiralled out of control even more. And they thought they had found one in the shape of the Unite union. Unite, whose 2,062 tanker drivers supply petrol to 90% of forecourts in the UK, had balloted for action on March 25. The union, quite correctly, is demanding that the seven haulage companies involved agree to minimum standards for pay, hours, holidays and redundancy - as well as establishing an appropriate forum to agree industry-wide best practice on issues such as training and safety procedures. Clearly Bolshevik madness.

Unite issued a statement saying there had been "unrelenting attacks" on drivers' terms and conditions. For instance, they are working longer and longer hours, mainly due to the fact that the profit-hungry bosses are cutting the scheduled time given to get from A to B - meaning that many drivers are not getting enough sleep. Or resorting to various drugs in order to stay awake longer, an obviously dangerous situation for both drivers

and the general public. Some haulage companies even impose fines on drivers who fail to meet the new delivery targets.

However, thanks to the existing trade union laws, the mandate for strike action expires after one month - additionally, the union has to give seven days' prior notice of a strike. Practically meaning that Unite, and the tanker drivers, have got to declare the strike dates by April 16. If not, any putative action cannot go ahead without a fresh ballot. Meanwhile, various negotiations between Unite and the haulage bosses were still ongoing - strike action, of whatever sort, was far from inevitable.

No matter for the Tories. They saw, or thought they did, the perfect opportunity to distract the attention of the media away from Tory corruption and towards the Labour Party by trying to mount a scare about union bosses holding the country to ransom. After all, the unions, including Unite, bankroll Labour. In this way, the Tories hoped to utilise the disclosure by Ed Miliband on March 30 that he has had eight formal meetings or dinners (Cornish pasties?) with Len McCluskey, the Unite general secretary, since he was elected Labour leader in September 2010. Surely a chance to turn the tables on Labour - too good to miss.

Thus the Conservative Party sent out a 'secret' memo to constituency associations outlining their cynical strategy to exploit, and ramp up, the dispute between Unite and the haulage companies. Unfortunately for them however, the memo was quoted in full by Charles Moore in the pages of *The Daily Telegraph*. There we read: "This is our Thatcher moment. In order to defeat the coming miners'

strike, she stockpiled coal. When the strike came, she weathered it, and the Labour Party, tarred by the strike, was humiliated. In order to defeat the coming fuel drivers' strike, we want supplies of petrol stockpiled. Then, if the strike comes, we will weather it, and Labour, in hock to the Unite union, will be blamed" (*The Daily Telegraph* March 30).

Yes, history could be rerun - made even more glorious. The tank drivers would take on the role of the miners and become the new 'enemy within'. Brilliant. Perhaps the Tory media could turn Len McCluskey, or even Diana Holland - Unite's assistant general secretary - into the new Arthur Scargill. Hate figures. A mortal threat to the great British nation. What a winner - nothing could go wrong.

Determined to stoke up the situation, with talk about bringing in the army to deliver fuel to the petrol stations, government ministers told the public to "top up" on fuel. Ed Davey, the energy secretary, advised travellers who did not want their holidays "disrupted by these strikers" - these evil people - that they should "make sure their tanks are full-up well in advance". Similarly, Maude offered the now infamous advice to put a "bit of extra fuel" in jerry cans as a "sensible precaution". Getting in on the act too, Cameron stated that it would be a "sensible thing" to top up your tank - even though he knew it was quite likely that the strike would not take place.

At the same time, the prime minister renewed his call for a £50,000 cap on donations to political parties - trying to make us get angry about McCluskey and forget about Cruddas. Total hypocrisy. Cameron was making a bid to financially cripple, if not bankrupt, the Labour Party. On the other hand, the Tory Party, with its countless connections and ties to wealthy individuals and the establishment in general, would not be unduly troubled by such a cap.

But, as we all know, the Tory plan ended in ignominious failure, backfiring spectacularly in their face. Predictably, the advice - and the headlines - triggered panic buying. The Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI), which represents more than 5,500 petrol stations, issued a survey showing an 81% rise in petrol sales on March 28 from the same day a week before, with an equivalent 43% increase in diesel sales. Other groups representing petrol retailers bitterly complained that the Tory advice, or plea, to keep fuel tanks topped had caused an unnecessary fuel shortage. For almost everyone concerned, including newspaper editors, it was painfully transparent what Conservative game plan had been - to whip up panic, creating an entirely artificial shortage in the process, purely to serve the narrow interests of a deeply rattled Tory Party.

Delivering a damning verdict on the Tories, Brian Madderson - chairman of the RMI - wrote to Davey saying his members' confidence in the government's ability to manage the consequences of the tanker drivers' dispute had been "abruptly shaken" by all this. The coalition government has been made to look idiotic and desperate, even if it did manage for a few solitary days to get what it wanted - to take the Cruddas and 'cash-for-access' off the front pages. But just not in the way they expected ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

STATEMENT

Support the Syrian fight for freedom

Tarabut-Hithabrut, the Tel Aviv-based “Arab-Jewish movement for social and political change”, takes on leftwing objectors to the Syrian uprising

We, the Tarabut-Hithabrut movement, support unequivocally the Syrian people in their struggle for their liberty and their rights.

There are those who say that the situation in Syrian and the wider regional reality is complex, and they are right. However, we want to directly address the various objections raised against taking a position in favour of the democratic uprising of the Syrian people.

There are those who say that the Syrian regime is anti-imperialist and comprises the last barrier to western domination in our region.

The Ba’ath Party in Syria is a corrupt regime of a small group of super-wealthy and powerful people who control enormous amounts of capital, which was stolen directly out of the pockets of the Syrian people. This ruling junta is not motivated by anti-imperialist ideals and can serve neither as a model for these ideas nor as a defender of socialism. Although this regime is in a confrontation with Israel and the United States, a series of events such as the Gulf War show that the regime’s positions on international affairs are not consistent or principled, but opportunistic. In addition, the cold war is long over and the regime has since become friendly to Putin’s Russia, which is, it must be emphasised, a capitalist, authoritarian government with its own imperialist ambitions. In addition the regime is supported by the new empire, China, which is equally devoid of scruples or constraints.

Protestors against the regime are pawns in an imperialist plot

The uprising in Syria started in Dar’a when a group of parents protested when the security forces jailed and tortured their children for daring to write “The people demand the overthrow of Bashar” on their school building’s wall. Insults and humiliations directed towards the children’s parents and local leaders triggered the mass protests. The protests that spread throughout the country were inspired by the successful democratic uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. We cannot forget this.

There are also foreign forces that are trying to take advantage of the situation and ride the wave of Syrian protestors, but this does not turn the protestors themselves into pawns or agents of imperialism. *The source of the protest is in the Syrian situation itself.* Syria has no official statistics and no trustworthy data, but Syrians are well aware that even before the protests the unemployment rate was incredibly high and since then it has only worsened. Many people could only make a livelihood by joining the oppression and investigation apparatus of the regime or by supplementing their income by collaborating with them.

Most of the population can only survive their day-to-day lives through bribery, where they must receive and take bribes in order to live and get a hold of basic goods and services. Syrian voices demanding fundamental change have grown steadily louder and the masses have started to shake themselves free of their fear. The Syrian people are the source of the present protest and any consideration of this issue must begin with them: their rights, their suffering and their legitimate demands.



Syrian flags: but red is replaced by green

The Syrian regime defends the Palestinian resistance

The Syrian regime has a special security force whose purpose is to monitor and oppress the political activism of the Palestinian refugees who live there. The regime does not allow any political activity that does not conform to the regime. Regime dissidents are ‘disappeared’ and murdered. Syria has 19 different security forces who have one goal: to eliminate any threat to the regime.

From a historical point of view, the Assad family’s support for Palestinian organisations always came with preconditions. The Syrian army massacred Palestinians several times during its wars in Lebanon (Tel Al Zaatar, Tripoli) and of course, the regime acted again and again to divide the Palestinian national movement (its support for Abu Musa in Lebanon and encouragement of the war between Hamas and Fatah are only two of the most obvious cases) and by doing this they blocked the Palestinian national movement’s ability to make decisions independently.

The social protest is primarily a struggle between ethnic groups. The regime defends ethnic minorities and especially the Alawi population, which might suffer from a Sunni takeover.

There are inter-ethnic tensions in Syria, which sometimes result in hate crimes and revenge attacks. But the current regime is not an Alawi regime. The security force, known as ‘Al Shabiha’ (literally ‘ghosts’ - thugs that drive Mercedes cars that the regime pays for), is a security force established by the Ba’ath party whose goal is to suppress resistance and political activity among the Alawis.

Because Assad finds it problematic to use the standing army and the official security forces against his own community, he established an additional security force which is above the law. Many Alawi opposition leaders have been murdered by the regime and its agents, and many Alawis are in the opposition’s ranks today. Al Shabiha has been trying to exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions in recent months, and this is also the purpose of the recent attacks in Christian neighbourhoods, whose perpetrators are not known. This has no connection to the protests against the regime, in which members of all ethnic groups have taken part.

A large part of the Syrian people supports the regime - as many as oppose it, if not more.

In a dictatorial regime, there is not much meaning attached to citizens demonstrating in favour of the regime. Decades of dictatorial rule break down the social structure and prevent the emergence of local leadership. Every citizen who shows signs of leadership is in danger of being eliminated by the government. Other citizens know this and live in fear.

The same TV networks that publicised the ‘support protests’ also broadcast citizens kissing Bashar Al Assad’s photograph and declaring, “There is no god but Bashar”, while soldiers are standing on their back with a gun pointed at their head. If we examine our own history, we will remember that, before the first Palestinian intifada, Israeli TV would film Palestinian merchants and passers-by in the West Bank answering “yes” to a question by an Israeli journalist about whether they are happy, and a firm “no” when asked if they had any political problems. To see these expressions of support as something authentic is to be blind to the deep fear and oppression in Syrian society in light of these forced expressions of support by frightened citizens.

It is important to emphasise how paralysed the political system is, even though it is dependent on the regime: until now, after a whole year of protests, there has not been a single statement of support for the regime published by any local branch of the Ba’ath party or the artificial parties affiliated to it under the ‘National Progressive Front’.

Opposition to the Assad regime is armed and therefore not popular and not legitimate

Among the protestors there are those that use weapons. However, the strongest and clearest voice that has emerged from the protests in Syria from their very beginning is one that speaks of non-violent revolution and resistance. There is evidence that armed groups of rebels have also committed war crimes and murdered civilians - we condemn such crimes to the same degree that we condemn the regime’s crimes. Behind these crimes there may be different interests, but their background is a decades-long oppression that has prevented the establishment of a democratic political culture.

Concerning the question of the legitimacy of the armed resistance movement, let us not forget that Syria, like the countries that support it, arms and supports other armed organisations in other countries. Those who oppose the Syrian resistance because it is armed and support other armed resistance movements unconditionally are operating under a double standard.

It is not our purpose in this article to pass moral or ideological judgment as to whether the use of violence in order to rebel against an even more violent regime is justified or not, but history has proven to us numerous times that the weapons of the resistance have eventually been turned onto civilians, whether after the victory or on the way to it.

What about international intervention?

Today, after months of widespread protest and economic crisis, the current regime is being kept alive today only through the fulsome assistance of other states, such as China, Russia and Iran. This is also a form of international intervention in the affairs of the Syrian people.

We oppose international military intervention. Wherever such intervention has taken place, the consequences have been dire. The powers that intervene militarily do not do this out of their dedication to the well-being of the world’s freedom-seeking people, but rather in pursuit of their own economic and strategic interests. There are numerous examples in both space and time, not least Iraq and Libya. Nothing good comes to the world’s people from imperial military intervention, and there has never been a ‘Robin Hood’ armed with combat jets that will faithfully prevent massacres without massacring and plundering himself. This has been true especially for the US and Nato, but not only them. Obviously, any Turkish intervention would also not be on behalf of the Syrian people, but rather for the suppression of the Kurds and in the interest of the Turkish establishment. Different competing local organisations can invite foreign imperialist intervention - that is the way that it has always been. Every foreign military intervention is always carried out under the cover of a local organisation that invites it.

The question is not who is more cruel in bombing civilians - the

western powers or the local dictators. From a humanitarian point of view, all bombings are equal. But from the point of view of the long-term consequences of military intervention, the consequences of the initiation by local and foreign powers of pseudo-legitimate military activity in the region are totally different. It is a terrible blow to a people fighting for their freedom. Since at least the 19th century, western powers have been invading different countries to save the poor indigenous peoples from themselves. The argument about the cruel locals who slaughter each other is not new. This is how it was done in Africa, in Asia - and even Israel has tried it. We must not fall into the trap of foreign military intervention in the name of the ‘humanitarian ideals’ of an enlightened elite.

What will happen when the regime falls? A worse regime will rise in its place.

It is not for us to decide in the place of the Syrian people. The masses have flooded the streets and they are demanding the end of the current regime. There is no way of knowing what will happen the day after the regime falls. It is very likely that there will be additional, painful struggles.

We too are concerned by a potential rise of an Islamic, intolerant regime or a puppet regime ruled by the US, or perhaps a regime that will continue the current state of affairs under a different cover. There is a big chance that this is exactly what will happen. However, it is the Syrian people’s prerogative to create the alternative and to judge its merit.

There have been many examples of revolutions erupting in order to promote certain ideas, where after the revolution a regime totally opposed to its ideas has arisen. For example, the Algerian revolution ended with the establishment of an oppressive and dictatorial regime, and the revolution in Iran, which promoted freedom for Iranians, ended up being an oppressive and murderous regime. The final result does not undermine the justice of the struggle against colonial France in Algeria or the shah’s rule in Iran.

In Syria, more than 10,000 civilians have already been murdered by the regime. This fact on its own is enough to call for this regime’s immediate end. Even if certain aspects of the current regime are better than some possible alternatives, that does not mean that the continued existence of this regime has any legitimacy.

Of course, we would prefer a civilian, democratic, non-ethnic regime to be formed in Syria: one that respects the lives of its citizens and their social rights; a regime that expresses the will of the people; an independent regime free of external influence of the US, China, Russia, Turkey, Iran or others, which would express the Syrian people’s goal of freeing the Golan Heights from Israeli occupation and which will be friendly to the peoples of the region. But, as we have said, *this is the Syrian people’s decision, and only they have the authority to decide which regime and what government to have.*

We are sure that a people that has bravely opposed a murderous regime will never again accept oppression and dictatorship from any new regime that arises. The Syrian people have begun a path to freedom from which there is no going back, and they will continue to struggle until they achieve their demands ●

BOLSHEVISM



Lenin united with pro-party Mensheviks at Prague

1912 and 2012

Paul Le Blanc argues that the Bolsheviks constituted themselves as a separate party at the Prague conference and advocates a ‘united front’ for today’s disunited Marxist left

I would like to respond to two problematical contentions advanced by Pham Binh in his article ‘Wanting to get Lenin wrong’ (*Weekly Worker* March 29). One of these contentions is about my motivation for disagreeing with his interpretation of Lenin’s thought, and the other has to do with a historical question - when the Bolsheviks became a separate party. This is part of an extended debate having to do with history and politics (Lenin and the Bolsheviks; tasks facing socialists today). My own contributions touching on these questions can be found at <http://links.org.au/taxonomy/term/579>.

Firstly, Pham has yet again tagged me as “a defender of Tony Cliff”. In my opinion - stated quite explicitly in a previous contribution - *Tony Cliff is not the issue*. I share the view of Lars T Lih, Paul D’Amato and others that aspects of Pham’s attack on Cliff are unfair, but I had no interest in entering this debate as “a defender of Tony Cliff”. That Pham chooses to insist otherwise has more to do with his fixation than with my motivation.

I have based neither my own

interpretation of Lenin nor my criticism of Pham on Cliff’s writings. I have indicated this more than once, in articles appearing in *Historical Materialism* and *Links*. This should also be evident from a careful reading of my book, *Lenin and the revolutionary party*. I was motivated to disagree with Pham’s interpretation of Lenin and the Bolsheviks because I think it is based on factual errors and faulty analysis, independently of anything that Tony Cliff has written.

Secondly, while I have expressed my own disagreements with aspects of Cliff’s interpretation of Lenin’s thought (especially with the way he deals with Lenin’s 1902 polemic, *What is to be done?*), I do believe that Cliff is closer to the truth than Pham regarding when the Bolsheviks became a separate party. Pham says it happened at some unspecified time in 1917 - though he acknowledges that he is at a loss about precisely when this happened (telling us it was “more like balding than a divorce”). Cliff says it happened in 1912, and for all practical purposes he is right.

Pham is basing himself on what

seems to me a misreading of Lars Lih’s criticism of another historian, Carter Elwood. At issue was a January 1912 conference in Prague of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) organised by Lenin and other Bolsheviks close to him. There are actually three parts to Elwood’s position:

1. the Bolsheviks became a separate party in 1912 based on what happened at the Prague conference;
2. this was what Lenin set out to accomplish;
3. Lenin was able to accomplish this only by lying about what he was actually doing.

Lars strongly argues against point 3 and raises questions about point 2. So far as I am aware, in his critique of Elwood, he does not argue against point 1. There is much evidence in Lenin’s writings (two of which are included in the Pluto Press selection that I edited, *Revolution, democracy, socialism*) and in the writings of others from that period that the Prague conference actually *did* result in an independent Bolshevik party.

Martov and other Mensheviks, and Trotsky as well, by denouncing

and rejecting the Prague conference (and instead organising an RSDLP conference of their own in Vienna in August 1912 - the so-called August Bloc), may be partly responsible for the actual outcome. Lenin may have hoped these comrades would behave differently, without necessarily expecting them to. The door was open for them to become part of the version of the RSDLP that emerged from the Prague conference. But, given the dynamics of their own politics and the overall situation, they could not go through that door. Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers went forward anyway.

This does not invalidate Lih’s argument (with which I basically agree): Lenin was fairly open about what he was doing, and he did not lie. It does run counter to Pham’s assertion, however, that the Bolsheviks did not become a distinct party in 1912, as a result of the Prague conference, but instead crystallised at some undefined time in 1917.

Pham says it was important that “the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were part of the same broad, multi-tendency party from 1903 until

1917” and today socialist groups should likewise, in his opinion: join together into a multi-tendency organisation. It is not necessary, however, to minimise the meaning of the 1912 Prague conference to make such an argument. Nor is it clear that the “broad, multi-tendency” RSDLP is the best model for genuine socialist unity.

Even when the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were actually part of the same RSDLP for the period that we agree they were (1903 to 1912), they seemed to function as incredibly hardened factions: separate newspapers; divergent strategies which they worked - separately - to implement; separate delegations in the duma; separate factional conferences; separate funds; separate leadership bodies; etc. I would be surprised if this is the kind of “socialist unity” that Pham is actually advocating for our own time. I think it might be more fruitful to reach for practical unity among revolutionary socialists - perhaps at some point leading to organisational unity - through working together in united-front efforts in the struggles of today ●

BOLSHEVISM

Both Pham Binh and Paul Le Blanc are wrong

The left has never properly grasped the history and significance of Bolshevism, argues **Mike Macnair**



The left: useless sects and unprincipled front politics

The debate on Tony Cliff's *Lenin* (volume 1: *Building the party*) and on the significance of 1912 in the history of Bolshevism, rumbles on. This contribution should be read in conjunction with Paul Le Blanc's response, published in this issue, to Pham Binh's piece in last week's paper.

The *Weekly Worker* editors cut Pham Binh's piece substantially; the full text, 'Over a Cliff and into Occupy with Lenin', is available on Louis Proyect's blog.¹ Our cuts were partly for space reasons, but also partly political. The larger part of what we cut from Pham Binh's article is directed to arguing that the 'Occupy' movement represented the 21st century equivalent of Bolshevism.

Our front-page story last week was Jim Creegan's very much more cautious assessment of the partial convergence and partial conflict between 'Occupy Oakland' and organised labour in the form of the International Longshore Workers' Union. Comrade Creegan does not speak for the CPGB, but the editors' view was that what he had to say was closer to the politics we want to promote than are comrade Binh, who tends to idolise the 'Occupy' movement.

The question is not just one of US left politics, any more than it is just one of the history of the workers' movement. Comrade Le Blanc's piece draws out a political question which

is fundamental for the left. Should we aim in the short term for a "multi-tendency" party with - if necessary - open factions with their own press and organisation? Or is the better approach, as Le Blanc argues and as Alex Callinicos has argued in the past, "to reach for practical unity among revolutionary socialists - perhaps at some point leading to organisational unity - through working together in *united front efforts* in the struggles of today" (emphasis added)? Le Blanc has argued this view at more length in a separate article in the Australian Democratic Socialist Organisation's *Links* journal.² This aspect of the debate was absent from James Turley's intervention two weeks ago.³

The problem of 1912 in this context is that comrade Le Blanc and others make a myth of that year as the moment at which Bolsheviks and Mensheviks became two *parties*, rather than two *public factions*, to substitute for the old myth of 1903 as the moment of the 'real' or 'decisive' split. The reasons for the myth are partly discussed in comrade Turley's article. But doing so obscures what 1912 was in reality about: the choice between, on the one hand, the line of the Bolsheviks and the pro-party Mensheviks led by Plekhanov and, on the other, that of the 'liquidators' who argued for the replacement of the illegal party, with its 'sectarian' commitments to the overthrow of the regime, by a broad-front party focused

on 'the struggles of today'.

Unity

The CPGB has fought in the short term for the unity of the Marxist left in a common party, on the basis of a platform for common action, which includes at the most fundamental level:

- the ideas of working class political independence under capitalism and of the goal of working class rule, as opposed to various forms of the idea of the people's front;
- the international unity of the working class, as opposed to various forms of left nationalism;
- radical democracy both in the state (as opposed to the various monarchies, presidencies, sovereign supreme courts, and so on) and in the workers' movement (as opposed to the dictatorship of the trade union bureaucracies and the party bureaucracies big and small).

The last of these points necessarily implies fighting for a party which *can* have public organised factions with - if necessary - their own press and organisation; though we argue that it is *preferable* for the disputes within the party to be fully ventilated in public in the party's common press.

The internal debates, disputes and nuances of opinion within the party are, in our view, the *common property* of the militants who read the party press and eventually of the working class as a whole. It is through - as far

as possible - participating in these debates, and through the broadest possible democratic self-organisation, that the working class develops itself as a potential ruling class. Hence the party has no right to privacy from the class and the leading committees have no right to privacy from the party.

'Multi-tendency party'

What I have just said, however, is *not* what is meant by Pham Binh when he argues for a 'multi-tendency party' - as can be seen from the arguments idolising 'Occupy' which we did not publish. Nor is it what is meant by a "multi-tendency party" by Louis Proyect, who has broadly backed Pham Binh against the comrades from the International Socialist Organisation,⁴ or by the Mandeliste Fourth International in their arguments with the British Socialist Workers Party over this issue over the last 15-20 years.

For these comrades the practical meaning of a "multi-tendency party" is one which unites 'revolutionaries' (understood *not* as advocates of the overthrow of the constitution and the creation of working class rule - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must - but as advocates of the mass-struggle 'revolutionary rupture') with 'reformists' - a category very difficult to identify at the present date, but which certainly includes left

nationalists, people's frontists and supporters of the organisational forms of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy in the workers' movement.

Our conception does not exclude the possibility of the participation of 'reformists' in this sense, or even 'reformist' factions, in a unified communist party. The question is, *on what terms?* From the beginning of the development of reformism, the reformists have wanted to insist that unity is only possible if *they are in control*: that is, that the party make no public commitments inconsistent with their projects, that they control the leadership, and that those to their left (if they are to be permitted to organise at all) use diplomatic language towards them. The policy began with the (originally unsuccessful) efforts of the right to stifle Marxist criticism in the precursor of the German Social Democratic Party in the 1880s.⁵

Unity on the reformists' terms has, in reality, been the character of many "multi-tendency" parties - like Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, like the Brazilian Workers' Party. In the case of the Scottish Socialist Party it involved Trotskyists *pretending to be reformists* (and in the process *becoming* left nationalists). Through the mechanism of 'consensus' it was the character of the World and European Social Forums. Its effect is - if you actually comply with the principle - to silence the argument for anything beyond what the reformists

are willing to see argued.

The fate of these projects has been diverse, but largely negative. The Brazilian Workers' Party became merely a participant in the dance of Brazilian clientelist bourgeois politics - at best an equivalent of the British Labour Party. Rifondazione blew up over real political issues - participation in a government which was, in turn, participating in the imperialist war in Afghanistan - and collapsed. The SSP split and collapsed for reasons which at first sight appear completely apolitical, but in reality reflect its leaders' decision to play the bourgeois political game - on the one hand by building a personality cult of Tommy Sheridan; on the other by adopting *statist* policies on prostitution which turned Sheridan's personal life into a point of political weakness.

Meanwhile, the anarchists and semi-anarchists episodically reinvent the square wheel of 'direct action' coupled with the 'tyranny of structurelessness': producing, as they have always produced, ephemeral spectacles which draw in wider forces briefly, but evaporate quickly; groups of semi-terrorist provocateurs heavily infiltrated by the police and used by them to make the state appear more attractive than the mass movement ('black bloc', etc), and longer lasting micro-groups even more fissile than the Marxist left.

The underlying problem is the extreme fragmentation of the Marxist left, our refusal to unify *as Marxists* and our repeated hopes that this or that small group in isolation can 'catch the tide' of this or that 'left reformist' or 'mass movement' and outgrow its small-group rivals so as to marginalise them. This prevents any group having sufficient organised weight and credibility as an alternative to be able even to negotiate *partial* unity with the left reformists (united fronts) on anything but the reformists' terms - which silence the political alternative to reformism.

The problem is exacerbated by and interlinked with the fact that the far left's organisational forms are commonly - to be frank - less democratic than the Chinese Communist Party's. In the first place, who on earth not blinded by the cult of the personality of Lenin (or of Cliff, or whoever) would imagine that a group whose leadership remains stable in an individual or a very few individuals for decades is the political representative of a future democracy? Second and equally important, the regime of *secret internal* discussion and monolithic external unity produces and reproduces split after split.

In other words, the *recent* history suggests that *both* Pham Binh and Paul Le Blanc are wrong about 21st century politics. Pham Binh is wrong because the 'broad movement' or 'broad party' conception *without solving the problem of unity of the Marxists* does not work as anything other than a form of process by which dissent is recuperated into the bourgeois political game.

Paul Le Blanc is wrong because the idea of the left groups cooperating through 'united front' policy is both a diluted form of the 'broad movement' policy *and* fails to get to grips with the problem of the dictatorship of the labour bureaucracy of the small groups.

Witness what has become of the British SWP's 'united front' orientation, argued by Alex Callinicos against the Mandelites as comrade Le Blanc now argues it against the 'Occupy' enthusiasts: from the SWP suppressing their own ideas for the sake of unity in Respect, to splitting Respect on a totally unprincipled basis, producing small splits in their own organisation on an equally unprincipled basis, and substituting mere SWP fronts which pretend

to unity while actually displaying *disunity*.

History

We argue about history in this context for two reasons. The first is indicated by what I have just said, which concerns the *recent* history from the 1990s up to the present day. In this sense we cannot avoid talking about history: *all* arguments about what might work in the future are drawn from what we believe happened in the past. This is true even where, as in the physical sciences, 'what happened in the past' means tightly controlled experiments; and even where, in everyday life, what is involved is trivial ideas like 'the sun will rise tomorrow' (because it routinely has in the past) or 'if I don't put my foot on the brake I will run into the car ahead of me'). In this sense, anyone who argues that we should *not* talk about history when deciding what to do in the future is either a fool or a liar.

More narrowly, we argue about the history of Bolshevism because our common project is in a very basic sense for the working class to take over running the society. And in October 1917 a coalition of workers' parties and organisations *did* oust the political representatives of the capitalist class from power in Russia and create a new constitutional order which aimed to be the frame of the class rule of the working class.

How long workers' power survived in Soviet Russia is a matter of debate: for anarchists and 'council' communists it was at best very brief, for Trotskyists and 'left' communists it lasted into the 1920s before succumbing to a 'counterrevolution within the revolution'; 'official' communists from the 1930s characterised the regime as 'socialism' *as distinct from* workers' power, and on their terms this 'socialism' lasted till 1991; for Maoists 'socialism' in the USSR was overthrown by the Khrushchev administration in the 1950s. But on any argument except that of the full anarchists, workers' power in Russia lasted longer than the Paris Commune or other workers' uprisings.

Meanwhile, there were widespread revolutionary movements of the working class in far more countries in 1918-20, most notably in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy; and all these movements ended in defeat.⁶

Hence, we argue about the history of Bolshevism in order to draw lessons from it about what might work in the future.

Leftwing communism

The beginning of this sort of argument was when, in the year 1920, Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder*.⁷ This was part of a polemic in the Communist International with what became the left and council communist tendencies. The actual line Lenin defended in this pamphlet was in substance completely orthodox Bebel and pre-1914 Kautsky, and common ground between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (except the liquidators) until 1914. But to say so would have cut no ice: Kautsky had gone over to the right, and among the principal leaders of the 'lefts' were Herman Gorter and Antonie Pannekoek, who had polemicised against Kautsky on just these issues in 1910-12.

Lenin therefore *tactically represented* the line he was arguing as the result of the long experience of the history of the Bolshevik Party, which had succeeded in making the revolution in 1917 where the western left had failed in 1918-20, as opposed to the limited party experience of the western left (hence 'infantile disorder,' meaning 'childhood disease'). In the process he *rewrote* the history of

Russian social democracy before 1917 so as to *write back* the independent *party* existence of the Bolsheviks all the way to 1903.

The new history of Bolshevism, and the idea that the left worldwide had to learn from the uniquely successful experience of Bolshevism, rapidly became orthodoxy. It is reflected in Grigory Zinoviev's 1923 *History of the Bolshevik Party*.⁸ It is reflected, unsurprisingly, in Stalin's *History of the CPSU(B) (short course)*.⁹ And it is also reflected in Trotsky's writings, where he refers to the history of Bolshevism, following from his sharply self-critical attitude in the 1930s to his own conduct and views on the party question before 1917. There are only a few limited exceptions where he polemicises directly with the CPSU leadership majority's, and later Stalinist, attacks on his history. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Cliff's *Building the party* uses the same general framework.

Because the version in *Leftwing communism* rapidly became an orthodoxy, the result is that if it is unreliable, *all witnesses producing after 1920 recollections of earlier events*, who may have been influenced by *Leftwing communism*, are also unreliable. This is not only (obviously) true of Bolsheviks, but also of (for example) Menshevik witnesses, who rapidly adopted the 1920 narrative in support of the idea that Lenin had always been an unprincipled power-seeker and manoeuvrer. From these sources the version of the cold war academy was shaped. For some people the adoption of this narrative was clearly cynical; for others, however, it seems to have been a 'false memory syndrome' resulting from reinterpreting the past through 1920 eyes.

In what I have said so far I *de facto* assume that the *Leftwing communism* narrative is unreliable. This point is, in fact, not difficult. Its unreliability is visible from comrade Le Blanc's own *Lenin and the revolutionary party* (1990), or from any systematic reading of the relevant volumes of Lenin's *Collected works*, or of the RSDLP congress and conference resolutions of the period.¹⁰ When comrade Le Blanc argues, as he does here, that 1912 was the beginning of an independent Bolshevik Party, he is *already* contradicting Lenin's 1920 narrative. It is a valuable bonus, but not strictly essential, that the unreliability of the *Leftwing communism* narrative is strongly confirmed by Lars Lih's scholarly work in the Russian-language sources.

It follows, then, that the left is still required to ask questions about the ingredients of Bolshevik success and the failure of the western socialist movement in 1917-20; but also that we have to ask these questions *without* the framework of Lenin's *Leftwing communism* narrative of the history of Bolshevism.

Two questions

There are two modern questions at issue; and 1912 is relevant to only one of them.

The first question is the viability of a party which conducts its debates in the open and has, where necessary, public organised factions. 1912 is quite irrelevant to this. The reason is that it is perfectly clear that, whether they were a separate party or not, the Bolsheviks continued to conduct their internal debates in public *into and after* 1917.

Witness, for example, the debate over policy towards the provisional government, of which Lenin's *April theses* were part: conducted in the public press of the all-Russian central committee on one side, and of the Vyborg district committee on the other. Witness the refusal of the Bolshevik CC in November 1917

(overriding Lenin) to expel Zinoviev and Kamenev for carrying their opposition to the seizure of power into the *bourgeois* press. Witness the left communists in the debate over Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Indeed, even after the 1921 ban on factions, a good deal of the debates of the 1920s were carried on in the public press.

In rejecting public debate of internally disputed issues, the Trotskyist left has, in fact, adopted a norm of *Stalinism*. In doing so, since the Trotskyists do not have a state to give them financial backing and global credibility, or a secret police to marginalise dissent, they have committed themselves to a 'party' form which *cannot* sink real roots in the working class or get beyond a few thousand members.

The second question is the basis of worthwhile unity. To this question 1912 is relevant; but it has to be placed in a degree of context.

In the 1890s and early 1900s the SPD and Second International were vigorously promoting the idea that broad-based unity of the socialists could provide the basis of a breakthrough - as the 1875 Gotha unification had provided the basis of the SPD's breakthrough.

Its should be emphasised that - contrary to a common view on the far left - the SPD itself, and the unitary parties it supported, were *not* conceived as 'parties of the whole class', but as organised parties founded on a definite political programme, of the general character of the SPD's *Erfurt programme*. The anarchists had been excluded from the Second International in 1896.

One of the products of this unity policy was the 1903 attempt to unify the divided Russian left in the form of a second congress of the stillborn RSDLP, founded in 1898. The planned 1903 party had the same character as the SDP's other unity projects: it was to be based on a programme and included advocates of working class power, *not* the whole of the Russian socialist left - which included the Social Revolutionaries and their peasant-based socialism.

In fact, the 1903 Congress produced a new split, with both sides claiming to be the 'real' party, though the Bolsheviks had a majority of the delegates - hence their name: 'Majorityites'. The split issue was whether the congress majority was entitled to remove long-standing members of the editorial board of the newspaper *Iskra*.

The subsequent history included independent action of the two factions in 1905; reunification in 1906, continued into 1907; a new debate on participation in the elections for the third дума on a restricted franchise which separated, on the one side, the Mensheviks and Lenin and his immediate supporters from, on the other side, the 'Otzovists' and similar factions - mostly drawn from the ranks and leaders of the Bolsheviks - who argued for a boycott tactic. This led to a formal split in the Bolshevik faction and the constitution of the *Vperyod* group in 1909-10.

Meanwhile, a section of the Mensheviks began to argue that the right solution was to dissolve the illegal party and build a broad labour party not based on a definite programme, but committed to legality. These were the 'liquidators'.

Lenin and his wing of the Bolsheviks continued his bloc with the Plekhanov group among the Mensheviks, which had initially developed in the struggle against *Vperyod*, into calling the Prague conference of the RSDLP in 1912. The idea of the Prague conference was to reconstitute the RSDLP organisation, and to do *without the liquidators*. Far more detail can be found in Lars Lih's February 16 *Weekly Worker* supplement. As he

points out, of only 14 delegates at the conference - a small number - two were Mensheviks: a minority, but definitely not a trivial one.

Other Mensheviks and the national-minority parties rejected the 1912 conference, and formed various alternative organisations. The RSDLP constituted at Prague and its rivals contested the 1912 fourth дума elections separately, and the 'Prague RSDLP' had considerably more success. The period 1912-14 was one of limited political opening and a rise in the direct class struggle, and in this context the 'Prague RSDLP' grew and sank roots rapidly, while the rival groups tended to break up into their component parts.

The 1912 bloc, however, was broken up when on the outbreak of war Plekhanov took a social-chauvinist line and in doing so joined up with the *right* wing of those who had boycotted 1912 - and this new formation obtained, as war supporters, a degree of legality denied to both Bolshevik and other opponents of the war. It was 1914 which in this way created the 'Mensheviks', 'Bolsheviks' and *Mezhrayontsi* (non-faction anti-war social democrats) who went into 1917.

Although this is an obscure history of manoeuvres among émigrés and their supporters within Russia, both 1903 and 1912 display real underlying political issues which are still relevant today. In essence, they are about the question I have discussed above: unity *on whose terms*?

The Mensheviks in 1903 lost the vote on the question of the editorial board, and walked out in order to deny the congress decision legitimacy. The question here is: is the *right* of long-standing leaders to continue as leaders to override majority decision-making?

In 1912 the question was: should the illegal party be revived on the basis of its existing programme, or a new broad-front party (perhaps a 'multi-tendency party') created on the basis of nothing but a commitment to legality?

The curious paradox about 1912 and 2012 is thus that the large majority of today's far left, while defending Stalinist organisational norms on the basis of variant forms of the myth of Bolshevik history created in 1920, defend the *actual politics* of the liquidators: the abandonment of any practical struggle for the fundamentals of Marxism in favour of the constitution of one or another sort of broad-front party. We have to get beyond *both* sides of this politics ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

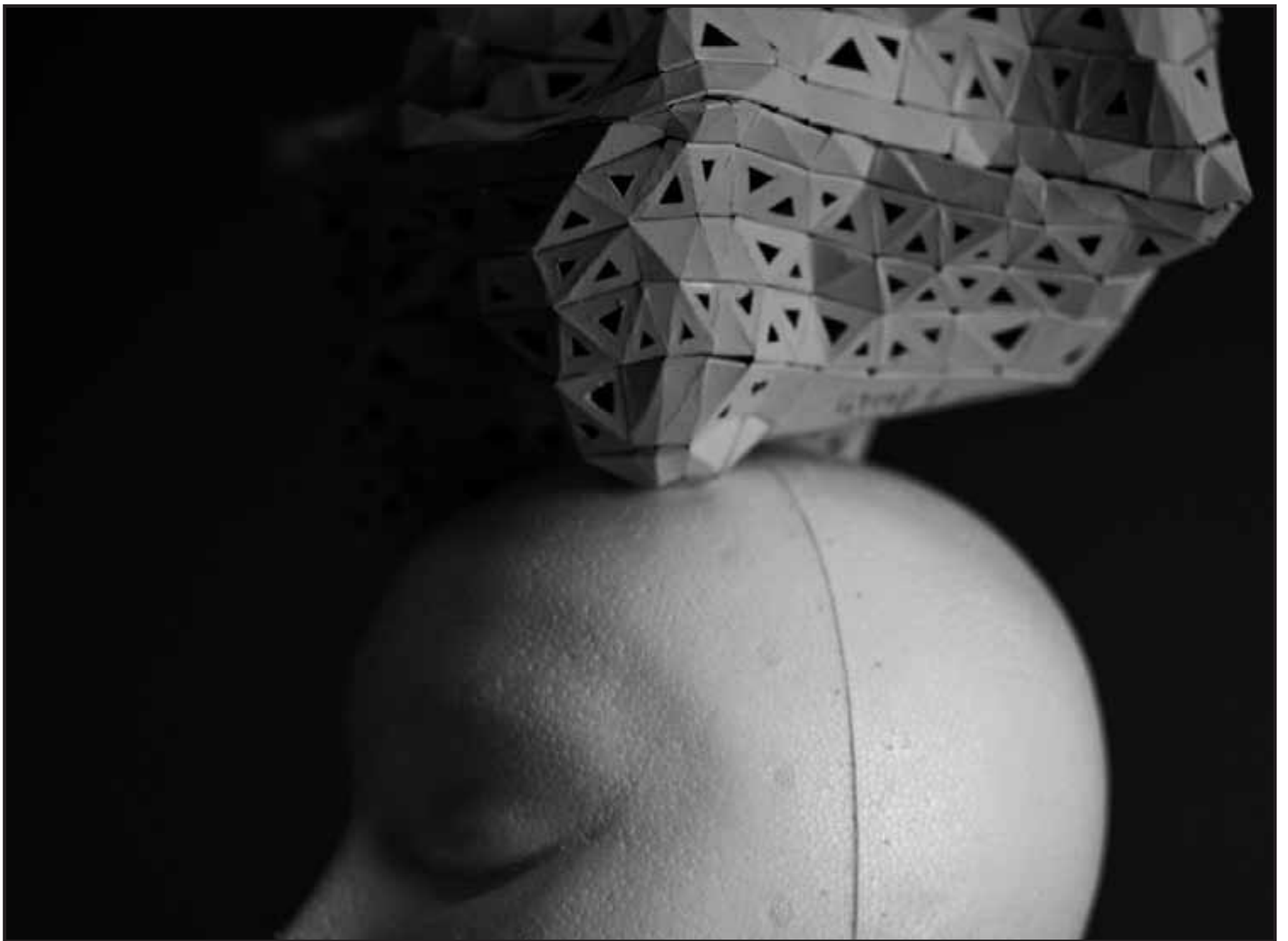
Notes

1. <http://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2012/03/27/over-a-cliff-and-into-occupy-with-lenin>.
2. 'Revolutionary organisation and the Occupy movement', February 16 2012: <http://links.org.au/node/2749>.
3. 'Fur flies over Lenin' *Weekly Worker* March 22.
4. Various posts at <http://louisproyect.wordpress.com>.
5. This is more clearly brought out by the academic biographers than by more general histories of the SPD: eg, GP Steenson *Karl Kautsky 1854-1938: Marxism in the classical years* (Pittsburgh PA 1978); WH Maehl *August Bebel: shadow emperor of the German workers* (Philadelphia, PA, 1980); RH Dominick III, *Wilhelm Liebknecht and the founding of the German Social Democratic Party* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982); in all cases references to the SPD right attempting to suppress the public expression of dissent from their ideas are *passim*.
6. The rightwinger A Read's *The world on fire: 1919 and the battle with Bolshevism* (London 2008) in spite of its biases provides the most geographically broad-ranging survey of the high tide of the workers' movement.
7. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc.
8. Translation: London 1973.
9. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/index.htm.
10. Lenin's *Collected works* are available at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/index.htm; resolutions, etc in RH McNeal (editor) *Resolutions and decisions of the CPSU Vol 1*; R Carter Elwood *The RSDLP 1899-October 1917* Toronto, 1974.

BOLSHEVISM

Breaking with the cold war consensus

Has today's anti-Stalinist left sleepwalked into a Stalinoid conception of 'Bolshevism'? This is an edited and expanded version of the speech delivered by the CPGB's **Ben Lewis** to the March 31-April 1 Platypus convention in Chicago



We do not need the mental burden of wrong history

I must begin by thanking Platypus for hosting this debate. It is a shame that Pham Binh cannot be present to put forward his views, but the debate he has initiated on Lenin and his legacy is, in my opinion, of great import to our movement today. We in the CPGB certainly want to see this debate widened, deepened and raised to a higher level. Personally speaking, I cannot lay any claim to expertise in Bolshevik or even Russian history more generally. My interests primarily revolve around Germany, not Russia. Much of what I am going to argue is based on the latest theoretical and historical insights of my good friend and collaborator, Lars T Lih.

I would like to preface my remarks with a quote that neatly sums up where we currently are in terms of the debate around the 1912 Prague conference,

the 6th Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party: "Prague party conference. Bolsheviks constitute themselves an independent Marxist party ... The party strengthens itself by purging its ranks of opportunist elements - that is one of the maxims of the Bolshevik Party, which is a *party of a new type fundamentally different from the social democratic parties of the Second International*."¹

Stalin and Zinoviev

Many on today's far left share this view. Worryingly, however, the quote is from Joseph Stalin. Moreover, this is not the Stalin of 1912, when, like all other leading Bolsheviks, he vehemently denied that they were out to constitute themselves as a single party. No, it is Stalin from his *Short course*

of 1938, a text in which he is quite patently rewriting and falsifying the history of the RSDLP for his own particular purposes. Of course, the reason Stalin has to reinvent party history is to justify his monolithic party regime: in 1912 the Bolsheviks created a party of one faction, ie, a party of no factions at all. Further, Stalin argues that creating such a single-faction party had always been Lenin's plan since the RSDLP's 2nd Congress in 1903. While on occasion the Bolsheviks had sought rapprochement and even unity with the Mensheviks and others, essentially this was a kind of trick, a concealment of the Bolsheviks' true aims and a way of influencing (duping?) the supporters of such groups - or at least that was what this version drives us to conclude.

Lars Lih has also dug up an extremely revealing comment by

Zinoviev a few years earlier. In 1933, looking back to 1912, Zinoviev wrote: "I don't know why the records of the Prague conference have not yet been published. I think they've survived and, I'm pretty sure, in quite detailed form."² (These comments were not published at the time.)

The records of the Prague conference of 1912 did not emerge until 1982, when the academic historian, Carter Elwood, discussed them in an article entitled 'The art of calling a party conference'. Looking back, we can obviously answer Zinoviev's question: publishing the records would have completely undermined the Stalinist myth. And we all know what informed these attempts to reinvent Bolshevik history: three years later Zinoviev was murdered in cold blood.

Interestingly, according to Lars

Lih, Elwood's 1982 analysis, as well as that of his recent book, *The non-geometric Lenin*, overlap with the Stalinist falsification thesis. Perhaps this should be of little surprise. For Elwood, after all, there are two kinds of Lenin: the human being who liked hiking through the mountains and enjoying a glass of beer afterwards, and the *geometric* Lenin - that is to say, the cold, factional operator, calculator and political manipulator. Thus, as is often the case with Lenin studies, a cosy consensus emerges between bourgeois academic historians and the far left: what Lars Lih has deemed the 'academic' and activist' interpretations of Lenin.

For academic historians, many of whom were nicely funded by the Hoover Institute for their troubles, this interpretation of events proves that Lenin was a liar and manipulator.

For the left - particularly the Stalinists - it proves that Lenin was an unrivalled leader and skilled ‘stick-bender’, as Tony Cliff might have put it. I think that recent scholarship, not just from Lars, but from others locating Lenin’s views in the context of Second International Marxism, is helping us to move beyond such a cultish Lenin. But, as I shall argue, I also think that the left has not quite taken on board some of the new insights and understandings. This is also true of 1912, although it would seem that the ball has started to roll ...

Why does this matter?

Some might think that agonising over the exact course of events at a conference that took place just over a century ago is of little relevance to the tasks of the left today. Fiddling while Rome, or Athens, burns. But Marxism is, or should be, deeply historical. Getting out of the mess the far left is currently in, or at least thinking about how to get out of that mess, requires a rigorous interpretation of our own history - warts and all.

It is undoubtedly the case that we still live in the gloomy shadow of what passed itself off as ‘communism’ and ‘socialism’ in the 20th century. This is not only true of how the majority of people perceive our movement today, but also of our own ideas and alternatives. The 20th century saw an enormous defeat for the working class movement internationally, and this has manifested itself in a crisis of working class politics. We must confront this crisis openly, boldly and honestly - the only way we can seek to rearticulate the political project of Marxism as a viable alternative to capitalist decline.

Yet some of the material that is being uncovered in the course of the discussion on 1912 is revealing how in many ways those of us who call ourselves ‘Bolsheviks’, ‘Leninists’ and ‘Trotskyists’ do so on the basis of a cold war caricature, a Stalinoid misrepresentation of the organisation that was able to lead the masses to power in 1917. Given the subordinate position of the working class in society, and the general confusion that surrounds us as a result of our defeats and setbacks, perhaps this is no surprise.

Yet such a conception of ‘Bolshevism’ directly feeds into some of the real, concrete problems we face today, not least in the proliferation of competing sect regimes and outfits. Stalinists and Maoists, for example, can justify the existence of their monolithic organisations on the basis of Stalin’s arguments about 1903 and 1912. Similarly, many Trotskyist groups will deploy such arguments as a way of clamping down on public dissent and factionalising - witness, for example, how comrades on the left usually refer to *internal* discussion and debate. Apparently, most left groups have a very healthy *internal* regime. But how would anybody on the left, let alone in the working class more generally, know unless they join?

The necessary concomitant of this form of so-called ‘Bolshevik’ organisation is

splits, disillusionment and fragmentation, not partyist unity. Moreover, the slight resurgence in anarcho-libertarian ideas recently can be partly explained by the existence of *bureaucratic centralist* regimes claiming the mantle of ‘Bolshevism’. If that is ‘Bolshevism’, so many anarchists reason, then we want nothing to do with it. Again, the result is further fragmentation and strategic disorientation/valorisation of spontaneous struggle, as opposed to political strategy.

Basing ourselves on this kind of toy-town Bolshevism, the left today is rendered near impotent in the face of enormous historical tasks and challenges. We cannot seriously unite anyone because we cannot unite ourselves. There are various forms of latent and actual resistance against the effects of the capitalist crisis, but at present we are collectively failing to offer anything viable, practical or inspirational.

More fundamentally, the question of the party form, the kind of party regimes we fight for and organise around today, cannot be separated from the *kind* of society we are trying to build, the way we conceive working class rule. For us in the CPGB, revolution must be the *conscious* act of the majority of the population, aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it and able to organise if that plan is not sufficiently being carried out or being undermined. The degeneration of the Bolshevik Party, along with the retreat and defeat of the Russian Revolution itself, underlines this basic point. In order to rule, the working class needs democracy at all levels of society. It certainly could not exercise political power through the kind of bureaucratic centralist regimes that are features of the left and held up as ‘Bolshevism’. Hence the importance of this discussion: it is certainly not a “waste of ink”.

Moving forward

As I mentioned before, recent scholarship has taken some great strides in terms of understanding the history and evolution of Lenin and the Bolsheviks: firstly with 1903 and now with 1912. Many on the left have quite rightly applauded the efforts of those like Lars Lih, but I think we have not taken on board what implications these insights have for our *own* practice. For example, when I watched the Socialist Workers Party’s John Molyneux debate Lars at Marxism back in 2008, I heard Molyneux say something along the lines of ‘This is a great book for students of Russian history who want to prove that Lenin does not lead to Stalin, but cannot quote a non-academic source like Tony Cliff ...’³

But, while Molyneux may not think so, we are gradually beginning to understand the context of the emergence of Bolshevism - namely in the Second International - and we are beginning to see that Bolshevism was a *mass* phenomenon, aimed at merging the workers’ movement with a programme for society *as a whole*, not just for issues directly affecting the working class. Fundamentally, this meant fighting for the ‘light and air’ of political freedom, leading other classes to challenge for state

power. The class unity required for such a momentous task was based around the *acceptance* of a Marxist programme, not *agreement*. This was a crucial distinction, and informed the partyist democracy which the Bolsheviks upheld. Unity did not, as in many left groups today, revolve around philosophical or historical agreement, but *political commitment*: unity in action and freedom of discussion.

This led to robust political debate and discussion both between the competing factions of the RSDLP and within the Bolshevik faction itself: electoral tactics, the national question, the question of a second revolution in April 1917 etc, are all noteworthy examples. This conception of the party is often portrayed as one ‘of the whole class’, but this is just a tired repetition of arguments made back in 1977-78 by Joseph Seymour in his *Lenin and the vanguard party*. This view implies that anybody could be allowed into a revolutionary party, and that this was the major flaw of so-called ‘Second International Marxism’.

But this is simply untenable - it was the *programme* that decided. For example, the Second International was formed on the basis that all those who rejected class *political* action, like the syndicalists, were automatically ruled out. Moreover, those who broke with the basic programmatic outlook of the Second International were expelled: eg, the ‘governmental socialist’, Alexandre Millerand. The Bund was excluded from the RSDLP, etc, etc. Membership of the party was not open to everyone. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that we wish to win as many to our banner as possible. But the problem is that it is simply impossible to unite millions in the kind of bureaucratic centralist organisations that characterise most left groups - where membership is often predicated on particular *historical* positions, like the class nature of the USSR, etc.

Although the dating and particular motives vary depending on the particular organisation and dogma, most of today’s far left is convinced that Lenin and his comrades ultimately broke with the guiding programmatic and strategic pillars of the Second International. But - and it gets a little tiresome to repeat this - it was *Kautsky* and his supporters who broke with, *reneged* on, the outlook they had helped to shape (note the linguistic connection between ‘renegade’ and ‘renege’).

I will finish with another Zinoviev quote which might help to clear things up for those who are still in doubt. The quote comes following the ignominious collapse of the Second International: “We are *not* renouncing the entire history of the Second International. We are not renouncing what was Marxist in it ... In the last years of the Second International’s existence, the opportunists and the ‘centre’ obtained a majority over the Marxists. But, in spite of everything, a revolutionary Marxist tendency always existed in the Second International. *And we are not renouncing its legacy for one minute*.”⁴

Nor should we. Moreover, we should note that the attempt to create a gulf between the Second International and the later ‘party of a new type’ is something that sets in later, with the retreat of the Russian Revolution and the attendant problems - not exclusively, but primarily, with the Stalin school of falsification on party history. To the best of my knowledge, the concept of a ‘party of a new type’ is not Lenin’s. Fundamentally, such a perspective bears the fingerprints of Stalin, as does the common interpretation of Prague 1912. If Stalinism was one of the key subjective obstacles to the formation of working class politics in the 20th century, then similar perspectives cannot exactly provide a strong starting point for working class politics in the 21st ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. JV Stalin *Kraktii kurs* 1938 (emphasis added). Quoted in LT Lih, ‘The non-geometric Elwood’ (forthcoming).
2. G Zinoviev *Izvestia* TsK KPSS, 1989, No5, p196.
3. To be fair to comrade Molyneux, he did at least review Lars’s *Lenin rediscovered*: ‘What is to be done?’ in context: <http://johnmolyneux.blogspot.co.uk/2006/11/lihs-lenin-review-of-lars-t-lih-lenin.html>.
4. Quoted in J Riddell (ed) *Lenin’s struggle for a revolutionary International* New York, p105.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

office@cpgb.org.uk

Become a
Communist Party
member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

Printed and published by: November Publications Ltd (07950 416922).
Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © April 2012

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.



**HANDS OFF
THE PEOPLE
OF IRAN**

weekly Worker

Free speech - even for drunk bigots

Racism as thoughtcrime

The genuinely shocking sight of Bolton Wanderers midfielder Fabrice Muamba keeling over on the pitch at White Hart Lane had perhaps more cultural impact than you would expect; but it provoked a far more significant event which, initially, was a little out of view.

That was, of course, the decision of a by all accounts inebriated student in Swansea to post an obnoxious gloating tweet about the stricken footballer; when called out on his callous (though, by internet standards, relatively mild) comments, he resorted to racist abuse.

Liam Stacey, 21, no doubt greeted the next morning with one hell of a hangover. It has since gotten much worse for him. Swansea magistrates' court sentenced him to 56 days imprisonment for 'inciting racial hatred'. His appeal was dismissed with remarkable speed. The authorities take Bad Racism very seriously indeed nowadays.

Nobody expects the Hampstead inquisition

There are two elements to this story - the one farcical, the other seriously worrying. To begin with the farce - here, on display once again, is the clownish, Bonapartist anti-racism of the state machine.

Stacey's conviction is a nakedly absurd iteration of an increasingly common phenomenon: the Spanish Inquisition-style show trial of anyone whose racist utterances end up in the public spotlight. Sometimes - as with the late *Big brother* contestant, Jade Goody - the trial is limited to the court of public opinion. On other occasions, as with Stacey and Emma West, the infamous 'racist tram lady' of YouTube fame, the authorities blunder into things.

It is a common view on the left that there is something *intrinsicly* racist about the state, or even capitalism. This is not true - capital is, in itself, quite indifferent to the persons whom it dominates; and it does not require racial prejudice from the state to reproduce itself. It is more true that the state is *intrinsicly* bad at anti-racism.

After all, racism *happens* to have a long history as a key part of bourgeois ideology and state policy. As generations of migrants from the four corners of the Earth settle in Britain, racism becomes, paradoxically, a *less* useful means of winning loyalty to the state. It is better to set the British, of all hues, against some outside force (typically the latest wave of migrants, but also Muslims at the present time), who stubbornly refuse to integrate themselves into our fine society.

That, indeed, is the prevailing official state ideology today - a national chauvinism, in which one of the key elements of our shared national virtue is 'tolerance' ... as opposed to those terribly illiberal Muslims. Alas, while it is easy enough to promote such an ideology, it is somewhat harder to stop it being channelled through old-fashioned, racist forms; indeed, they are reinforced by the discourse against 'outsiders'.

Thus, the British state finds itself

in an endless and futile guerrilla war against the *symptoms* - be it substantial far-right votes or the odd drunken Twitter outburst - of a disorder it is unable to cure. It fights this quixotic fight with the only means it has available to it: bribery and repression.

Liam Stacey is a sacrificial lamb to this contradiction. His conviction will do nothing to stop racism. Indeed, it will have the exact opposite effect. Genuine racists will be convinced further that their ideas are being repressed because they are dangerous to a political set-up utterly divorced from their concerns - and their case will be easier to put to others. Even if every explicit racist statement could somehow be prosecuted, the result would be the 'dog whistle' politics so beloved of the US Republican right (ie, racist sentiments communicated through mutually understood code words).

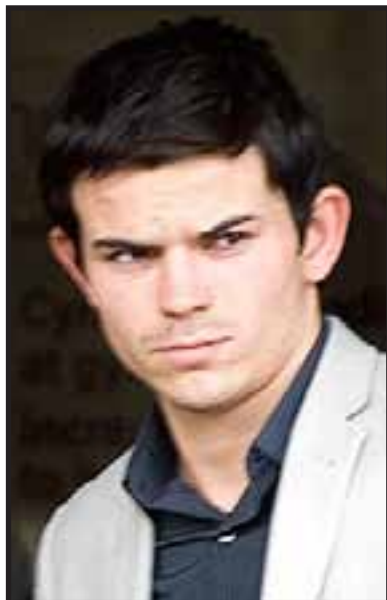
Who's next?

If racism has a life of its own, however, so does state authoritarianism.

It is easy enough to mock this little hysterical flap - but not quite so easy to dissociate it from the general pattern of attacks on free expression, in this country and others. We have had a decade or so of increasingly punitive anti-terror legislation; new laws against 'religious hatred'; and governments, Labour and Tory alike, wailing hysterically about the European Court of Human Rights and its occasional (and largely incidental) obstruction of the whole process.

There is now an international offensive against the *relative* freedom offered by the internet, which - thanks to the troublesome ability of data transmissions to squirm in and out of any given legal jurisdiction almost unnoticed - has proved difficult to monitor. Crackdowns against piracy in the US and European Union, in defence of technologically moribund concepts of intellectual property, conceal new powers to circumvent the state's approved list of thoughtcrimes.

Now our coalition government has itself begun the process of making it easier for police and other authorities



Liam Stacey: racist prat

to monitor emails and social networks. The government says it is necessary to prevent 'crime' and 'terrorism'; in truth, the main spur was the 'hot summer' in Britain's inner cities last year, which saw a whole series of draconian sentences passed out in some cases to those who did not even join riots, but merely talked big on Facebook.

Twitter, with its large population of busybodies, curtain-twitchers and copper's narks, mostly regulates itself in this regard (it was fellow Tweeters who reported Stacey to the police) - but even that population finds itself at odds with the state machine on occasion, most notably over superinjunctions.

Indeed, the first home office proposals on this matter were slightly too authoritarian even for some of the police. Chris Fox, former head of the Association of Chief Police Officers, remarked that the plan was "fraught with danger for the innocent vast majority". Stronger words than we got from Nick Clegg, who promised to slow down the timetable and put a draft of any law to a full parliamentary discussion.¹ Given the spectacularly lame procedural criticisms offered by Ed Miliband, equally frightened of

middle England and his own shadow, this is hardly reassuring.

The left has a strategic interest in opposing the creeping authoritarianism of the state - political freedom, as emphasised by Marx, Engels and Lenin, is the light and air of the workers' movement. The working class, because it is divested of the power offered by private property, can only truly rule in a collective, democratic manner; the bourgeoisie can only rule through state fiat or utterly hollow liberal 'democracy'.

We also, however, have a very narrow interest in taking up the fight against restrictions on free speech. A great many people, indeed, were offended by Liam Stacey's infantile outburst; but the project of proletarian revolution is mortally offensive to all those who wield power in the capitalist world. There are a great many more crimes than 'racial hatred' to which it is possible to 'incite' others; the woollier the definition of 'incitement', the less actual room for manoeuvre we have. After the riots, is it really so difficult to imagine a slightly over-effusive tweet from a Socialist Workers Party comrade about thieving bankers leading to a visit from the boys in blue?

The left, unfortunately, is utterly hopeless at dealing with either racism or democratic questions more generally. The SWP is a case in point: it is, at the moment, pushing its Defend the Right to Protest campaign - but only because the battered student demonstrator Alfie Meadows is in the news, now that he is going on trial (presumably to be convicted of denting that nice policeman's truncheon). Whenever questions of political freedom have no immediate agitational value, they are simply deemed too complicated for the poor benighted masses.

As for racism, the rabidly sanctimonious attitude of this group, its hysterical denunciations of 'Nazi scum', are well known. They do not defeat racism, but simply make the SWP look like an adjunct of official liberal anti-racism. That is fair enough, because in practice, that is what it is.

There is no mention of Stacey's conviction in what is a particularly racism-obsessed latest number of *Socialist Worker* - perhaps it slipped their minds, or perhaps the SWP's suspicion of anything related to football is to blame. It is difficult to imagine what they *could* have said - in the weird world of the SWP, racism is a matter of Nazi scum and unreconstructed inner city police forces, not insignificant outbursts on the part of Welsh students.

There is no doubt that Stacey's drunken Twitter tough-talk is unpleasant. There is, equally, no doubt that it is an unremarkable example of a certain sort of widely-deployed internet discourse, whereby racial epithets are thrown around as infantile provocations (the infamous 4chan forum is legendary for this phenomenon).

Unpleasant is all that it is - a nihilistic, adolescent process of acting out. Nobody is going to read Liam Stacey's tweets and promptly be convinced to join the British National Party (though the hysterical response may, indeed, have that effect). Where racism manifests itself politically, it must be challenged politically. Where it manifests itself as, in the classic case, the mouthing off of a certain kind of pub bore, there are means to confront it socially.

There is, on the other hand, no means of outlawing particular ideas or forms of speech without outlawing freedom of thought or speech itself - from that point on, the legitimacy or otherwise of any belief is decided by the state. Freedom is indivisible: the right of communists to call for the revolutionary overthrow of the system is the same as the right of drunk students (and, for that matter, full-on fascist politicians) to bandy about racist nonsense.

Marxists should be *consistent* defenders of this right, not outliers of the shrill and futile official anti-racism of the establishment ●

Paul Demarty

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17595209.

Subscribe here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £10 a year. Minimum every 3 months... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£25/€28	£50/€55	£200/€220
Europe	£30/€33	£60/€66	£240/€264
Rest of world	£60/€66	£120/€132	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer:
3 months for £5

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

Total £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310

sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*

until further notice, commencing on _____

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____