

weekly worker



**Norman Finklestein
switches from 'a critic
of Israel' to a 'diplomat'**

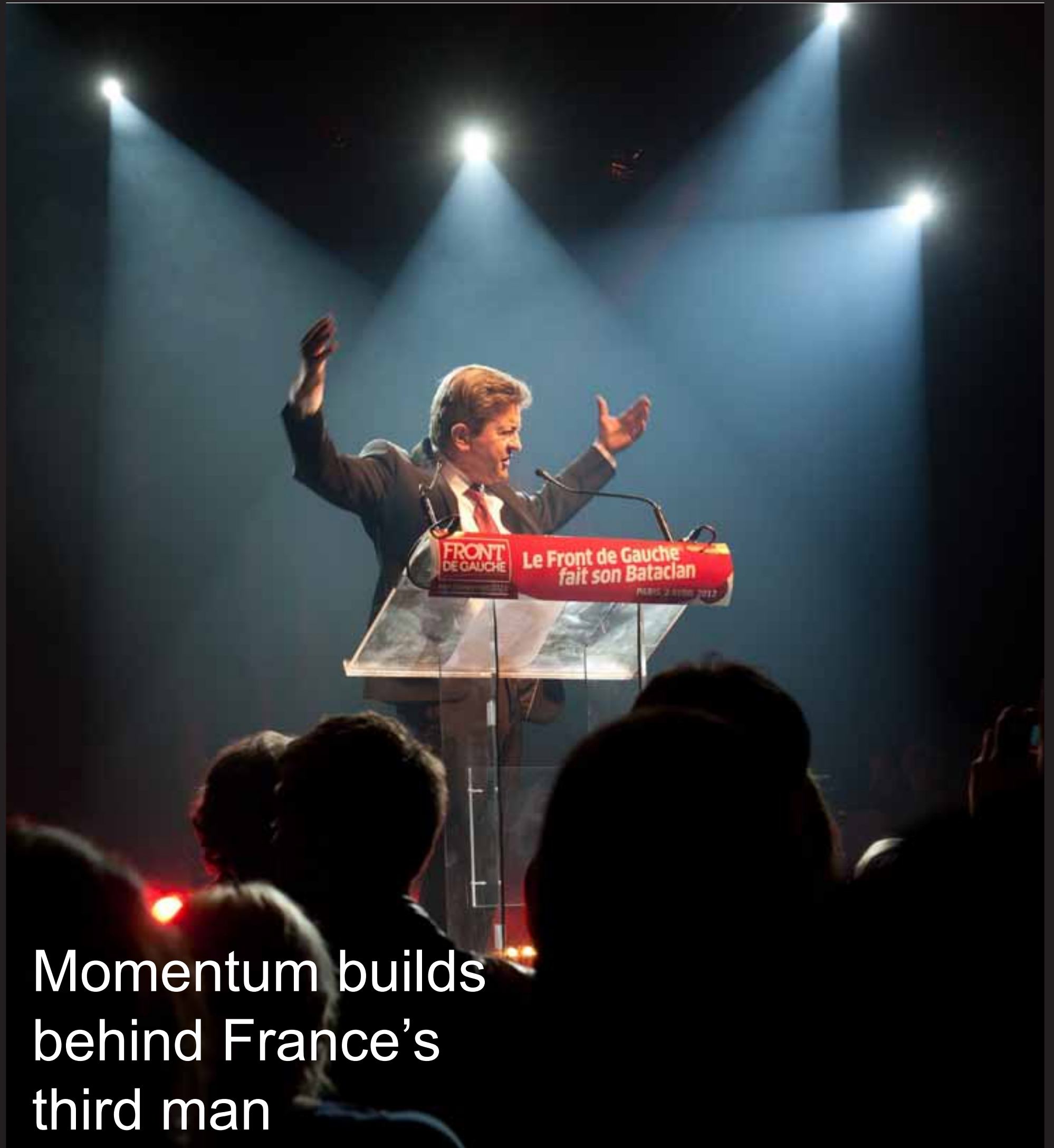
- Iran crisis
- World economy
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No 909 Thursday April 12 2012

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behind France's
third man

LETTERS



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

Progenitors

The trade unions are rotten. Working class action and unity is consistently stymied and undermined by a bureaucracy on a comfortable meal ticket at our expense. It doesn't matter whether we have leftwing or rightwing leaders: our struggles are sold out again and again.

How easy has it been for capitalism to pick us off a bit at a time, pay off this section to isolate and punish another? It is the same old story: when a union goes out to fight and asks for help from the others, the various officials, committees and rule book disciples wound or fatally undermine solidarity. Currently the rejectionist union leaders are scrabbling around to bring back into the field Unison, GMB, etc. Meanwhile the working class and the left wait for action. In James Connolly's words: "... by this inconsequent fiddling of time and opportunity, a thousand Romes would have burned to extinction" (1914).

The current situation is partly of our own making. The revolutionary left has become adept at fusing radical rhetoric with opportunist abdication. Instead of attempting to prepare and organise workers at the base of the unions we are called to a series of rallies and conferences where nothing is decided, little is debated and the stage is opened up for the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy to spout its platitudes. We are promised united strike action, civil disobedience and a mass movement of opposition. What we get is a dysfunctional fight, followed by a disorganised retreat. The left helps maintain this impasse through legitimising the bureaucracy and hoping to become part of it. Comrades need only to look at the Socialist Party's National Shop Stewards Network or the Socialist Workers Party's Unite the Resistance as all the evidence needed to understand the deep failings of such strategies. The time for relying on the bureaucracy for action has to end.

If we look at the state of the movement surely we can learn a few things from the electricians and their fight against imposed changes to the Building Engineering Services National Agreement? Here a small but militant section of the working class did not wait around to be called out to battle, but began an insurgency that spread from site to site the length and breadth of the country. Eventually the union caught up out of fear of letting the struggle go out of their control.

Paul Demarty confuses my appeal, 'Fresh attacks as unions retreat' (*Weekly Worker* March 22), for our movement to bypass "the bureaucratic structures whenever necessary" as some "leftist" attempt to ignore the mass organisations of the class (*Weekly Worker* March 29). The point is simple: under the blows of the capitalist onslaught workers should act with the unions where possible, but without them where necessary. Comrade Demarty was right to raise the necessity of revolutionary patience. Yet if patience is not tempered with meaningful participation within the class struggle now then all the patience in the world will amount to nothing. If half of this duality is ignored or sidelined by a communist organisation then very soon it will find itself going down the road of opportunism (Socialist Workers Party) or voluntarism (Socialist Party of Great Britain).

The student movement in Britain, Indignados in Spain and Occupy in the United States acted as the progenitor of a working class fightback against austerity, where the lethargic unions have been forced to solidarise and take

action precisely because the struggle was taking place beyond the traditional class organisations. The use of mass assemblies to make decisions and direct action to further the fight are tools large sections of the revolutionary left have to relearn. It was not the occupying of spaces that made Los Indignados stand out: it was what they did alongside hundreds of thousands of workers when they go there. Where the unions fail to fight we need mechanisms, networks and eventually a party to ensure the fightback is not aborted in a committee room at Congress House.

Leon Trotsky warned in 1940 that there is "one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organisations in the entire world: it is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power. This process is equally characteristic of the neutral, the social democratic, the communist and 'anarchist' trade unions. This fact alone shows that the tendency towards 'growing together' is intrinsic not in this or that doctrine as such, but derives from social conditions common for all unions" (1940).

Seventy-two years later it would be very hard to argue that Trotsky's assessment has not come to fruition. Whether looking at Unison in Britain, the CGT in France, Cobas in Italy, the UAW in the United States or the UGT in Spain, it is clear the trade unions have been partially incorporated by capital as a defence mechanism. We see this clearly with how the TUC is prosecuting the pensions dispute. The argument has long stopped being about whether workers get less, but more about *which* workers get less.

However, trade unions still remain disputed mass organisations of the class. We need to be inside and organised at the base, fighting for a winning strategy in the immediate struggles. We also need to provide spaces for workers to clarify a longer-term strategy for transforming the trade unions. The struggle against the bureaucracy, and the politics of trade unionism, is synonymous with the struggle against capital.

The electricians' dispute showed we need to be able to act and fight when the official structures do not move. Passive propaganda is just as much an abdication as playing the bureaucrats' game and, worse, it treats working class militants as dolts to be taught by a clever few with clever arguments. The necessity of creating an independent rank-and-file opposition is an immediate task for the working class. We need to fight the broad left strategy based on winning seats on committees instead of overcoming sectionalism, initiating action and opening a space for revolutionary ideas to be debated and flourish.

Chris Stafford
Manchester

Oiled up

Tony Clark says the problem for William Jevons 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" (Letters, April 5). He does not seem to recognise that, similarly, he himself does not have the required knowledge to be able to predict the coming energy revolution based on the variety of fuels that could replace oil. We cannot know by how much oil consumption will be reduced, nor whether, despite peak oil, there will continue to be not just sufficient oil to meet demands for it, but that there will be sufficient supplies of energy in general.

We do know, for example, that increased fuel efficiency in cars has dramatically reduced the amount of oil used per mile travelled. That is despite the world's largest car market

in the US having made little advance in that respect until now. In fact, the application of various new technologies means that fuel consumption is likely to decline dramatically over the coming decades.

Even with known alternatives to oil, it is possible to see how demand for oil could be dramatically reduced. For example, legendary oil man T Boone Pickens has been advocating to the US government for the last couple of years his Pickens plan to replace petrol and diesel engines in the US truck and bus fleet with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). Pickens argues, with all the necessary data, that the US could easily finance the conversion, and save itself billions of dollars in oil imports, by using its plentiful and very cheap supply of natural gas. In fact, once that conversion was done, and the necessary infrastructure for fuel stations established, there is no reason why a rapid conversion of other vehicles to LPG could not be achieved. That is before we have even looked at shale oil, of which there are billions of tons available in the US.

One fear of environmentalists is, of course, that global warming could unlock trillions of gallons of frozen methane lying at the bottom of the oceans. But methane is the very same natural gas. Rather than risk that gas escaping catastrophically, how much better would it be for scientists to provide the basis for mining it safely as yet another plentiful and cheap alternative to oil?

Finally, just of those technologies we know of at present that offer the potential to provide a replacement fuel for oil, we have the use of genetic engineering. At least one company is already using GE to create new life forms which metabolise sugars to produce a petrol equivalent on an industrial scale, and at a much lower cost than current ethanol production. The company I am aware of that is involved in this spoke a couple of weeks ago about ramping up their production to millions of litres per year in the near future. The Stone Age did not come to an end because we ran out of stones! The Steam Age did not end because we ran out of coal. The Age of the internal combustion engine will not end because we run out of oil.

Arthur Bough
email

Keep occupied

Comrade Mike Macnair's recent article is a welcome rebuttal to Pham Binh and Paul LeBlanc, but there are issues ('Both Pham Binh and Paul Le Blanc are wrong', April 5).

What has not been stated by any of the debaters to date regarding Occupy is the dynamic between the political and the economic. Occupy has done workers and 'the left' enormous favours by demonstrating that such activity will always surpass those coming from mere labour disputes precisely because it starts being political. I think this is the rationale behind Binh's 'idolising' of Occupy.

On unity, the word 'international' is so slippery. Left nationalism is quite compatible with international solidarity, and this is something comrade Macnair hasn't acknowledged. I am of the opinion that 'inter-nationalism' (note the prefix) is bankrupt, and that there are two (compatible, but otherwise different) replacements: transnationalism and workers' pan-nationalism (like, say, applied to the European Union as a whole).

On factionalism, its negative connotation is not the same as political diversity within a party, which can take on a number of more transparent forms, such as forums and horizontal networks, currents, platforms and tendencies. Factionalism is characterised by its very contrast to

publicised discursive unity. As opposed to tendencies, factions and their culture of secrecy limit audience access to intra-party discussions, overemphasise representative voting and top-down appointments, exhibit unprofessional behaviour in striving to be a political and organisational majority, refuse to act in accordance with agreed action, and abstain from presenting majority viewpoints in addition to their own.

The left should be against factions and factionalism, not because of Lenin, but because of Marx; it is no wonder why the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and his immediate conspirators, despite their baseless and hypocritical charge of authoritarianism on the part of Marx, were expelled from the International Workingmen's Association for maintaining the International Alliance for Socialist Democracy as a secret faction inside and outside the former.

The best approach to factions versus tendencies would indeed be similar to the left-reformist Eurocommunist approach (as described by Macnair himself in his *Revolutionary strategy*): the only organs that should be allowed to have one or two factional characteristics under pressing circumstances (overemphasising representative voting and top-down appointments, plus limiting audience access to intra-party discussions especially during politically revolutionary periods) are the central committee and its lower-level equivalents within the party.

Separate printing presses are economically wasteful in the long run. More people by the day are becoming internet-savvy, so I think things like party-run internet boards, email lists and social media are the way to go on the diversity front, while the printing press should have only the snapshots of the main debates (like 'left-right' editorial columns in mainstream newspapers).

Comrade Macnair's polemic against reformist unity terms ("if they are in control") is valid except perhaps on the language front. Shrill language tends to turn people off, and this is the language most of the left tends to use against 'reformists'. However, otherwise 'sensational' language (with obvious cynicism) should be adopted.

Before becoming a revisionist,

Bernstein recognised the usefulness of personality cults as means to mobilise workers, especially if the figures of said cults have short but nonetheless momentous or successful leadership tenures. Relatedly, long-standing leaders should not be able to override congressional or other mass representative or direct decisions, but I see no problem with them having 'strong veto' authority within small groups of about half a dozen participants. That is why, I think, the left should get past general secretaries, chairs and co-chairs, and continue to revive within the worker-class movement the presidential leadership function (I say 'continue' because the United Socialist Party of Venezuela started the revival of this German innovation).

Jacob Richter
email

Another one

We want to inform you that several revolutionary communist organisations have decided to found a new international organisation: the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT).

As you might be aware, the founding organisations - the Revolutionary Communist Organisation for Liberation (Austria), the Revolutionary Workers Organisation (Pakistan), United Lankan Workers Party (Sri Lanka) and the Revolutionary Workers Collective (USA) - have already collaborated closely for some time.

Since autumn 2011 we have published a joint English-language journal, *Revolutionary Communism*, and an email newsletter, *RC-News*, and will continue to do this. The RCIT also now has a new website: www.thecomunists.net. Naturally, the website is still under construction and we will put more articles online in the next days and weeks. It is in the English language, but we will also put it online very soon in German and we plan to translate it into other languages too. We ask you to take into account that for most of our members English is not the mother language so this explains mistakes and weaknesses in our translations.

For us, as Trotskyists, the programme plays a central role, since

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it summarises the Marxist analysis and the lessons of the past, and applies them to the present situation in order to intervene and change it. As we wrote in our introduction to the programme, it is, of course, not the last word. There are no last words in a world which is constantly changing. Future experiences, a broader integration of revolutionary organisation in more countries, deeper roots in the working class, further research, debates - all these will help us to improve our theory and programme.

But this will not come by itself or spontaneously. To make advances on this road we must start with what we have now: our present forces and our ideas. We must bundle them in one united organisation and a programme which serves as the basis of our interventions into the class struggles. A programme is a compass and without a compass one has no orientation in the upheavals of the political, economic and ideological class struggles.

We are fully aware of the fact that the RCIT is currently a small international organisation and there are many challenges and obstacles to overcome on the road to build the revolutionary Fifth Workers' International. But we are confident that, on the basis of a correct programme and a correct understanding, a revolutionary organisation has enormous possibilities to grow in the present historic period, which is full of sharp turns and profound instability in world politics, revolutionary events and counterrevolutionary dangers.

We want to join forces with all those with whom we have programmatic agreement and a common understanding of the methods of building the revolutionary party. We are therefore highly interested to hear your opinion on the RCIT programme and to discuss any criticism or suggestions.

Michael Pröbsting
 RCIT

Party slogans

Trotskyists in the United States have in the last few years abandoned the slogan of a 'Labour Party' and substituted it with the ambiguous 'workers' party'. This is a slogan that means all things to all people ... on the left. That may be its attraction. For some, the 'workers' party' is a substitute for the revolutionary party. For others, it is another name for the future revolutionary party. I would support the latter position, though the phrase by itself leads to confusion.

If we give the revolutionary party another name, it still requires us to develop the party as a theory and not just a slogan. Slogans can easily turn into phrase-mongering. We cannot simply copy the stereotype of the Bolshevik Party as if nothing has happened in the last 100 years.

The Mensheviks advocated a workers' party in 1902 in counterposition to Lenin's conception of the party, though we can still criticise the underground structure of the Bolsheviks. However, without knowing anything about the Mensheviks, their position is prevalent today among radicals who have given up on building a revolutionary party.

It is true that Trotsky advocated a 'Labour Party' in the late 1930s. (Trotsky's positions 70 years ago do *not* prove what we need to do today - that should be obvious.) Trotsky was reacting to the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Minneapolis general strike. There was logic to Trotsky's position then, but we are in a different situation now. That is, tactics correct for one period may be mistakes in another period.

There is little discussion in the US about revolutionary regroupment of Marxists to build a revolutionary party. Unfortunately, most Trotskyists in the US reject the necessary multi-tendency aspect of such a party, an inevitable

result of real regroupment. Of course, we cannot regroup with social democrats and centrists. However, we often have differences and splits based on our own ignorance of events in other countries - eg, Serbia and Libya. We can certainly split over anything, including our relative ignorance of movements in other countries, which we sometimes identify with because we rely on the bourgeois press. As long as we agree on basics - ie, *no* support to imperialist intervention at any time or anywhere - we can differ/and or hold off judgement.

I believe that, since Trotsky wrote the *Transitional programme*, there are new historical experiences we need to incorporate into our programme. I refer to the *Cordones Industriales* in Chile in 1972-73, the People's Assembly in Bolivia in 1973, the Oaxaca Commune of 2006. They all represent attempts at forms of people's assemblies, and have an aspect of soviets which we need to deepen as a practical alternative to bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

Earl Gilman
 email

Absentee

Regarding your feature '1912 and 2012' (April 5), I would say that the great absentee in the whole Leninist-Bolshevik tradition is the self-emancipation of the working class (and the oppressed in general), as enshrined in Marx's declaration, "The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves".

Instead of the proletariat being organised as the ruling class, there comes the great substitutionism: it is the party, arrogating to itself the legitimacy of representing the working class, which seizes political power, not the workers represented by the self-governing organs created by themselves (the 1871 commune, the 1917 soviets and factory committees). Really, the Bolsheviks seized power not from the provisional government,

but from the soviets. One should read Lenin's confidential letters to his party (leadership) comrades, written on the eve of October, to see how very derogatory his remarks were on the soviets, while publicly sloganeering 'All power to the soviets'.

One should also have a look at his so-miscalled 'libertarian' brochure, *State and revolution*, along with Marx's Gotha critique side by side to see how Lenin stood Marx on his head. Separating socialism from communism (equivalent in Marx), and qualifying socialism as being the first phase of and as transition to communism, he introduces into socialism hired labourers of the state. That is, both the enslaving elements of the old society - the state and wage labour. In Marx, even in the first phase, there is neither wage labour nor state. It is already the beginning of the association of free individuals (socialism or communism) without commodities, the wage system and the state.

Paresh Chattopadhyay
 email

Clarification

I was surprised to see Lee Rock's letter (April 5). He believes I attribute to him the view that the Public and Commercial Services union was right to cave in on pensions. In fact, I did not intend to attribute any such view to him, which even the most cursory look at his comments in the interview the previous week would contradict.

In fact, I wished to communicate my *agreement* with him on this point - that it would be wrong for the PCS to give up. My point was, rather, that success in all these matters requires a long-term, strategic-political view, not just haggling over exactly what form this or that strike ought to take. I realise now that my wording was pretty ambiguous, for which I apologise.

Paul Demarty
 London

Fighting fund

Extortionate

The ridiculous 30% increase in postage due on April 30 will hit the *Weekly Worker* hard. After having "thought very carefully about the impact on our customers", Royal Mail decided to raise the cost of a standard first-class stamp from 46p to 60p.

This extortionate rise follows several years of above-inflation price hikes and means it will cost us an extra £7 a year to get the paper to each subscriber. Yes, we all knew how efficiently Royal Mail would work when it was opened up to market competition. And I am sure you agree it will provide even better value once it is finally privatised.

In order as far as possible to avoid passing on the increase to *Weekly Worker* readers, one dedicated comrade has come up with a partial remedy: he has agreed to provide us with a large loan to buy up enough stamps at current prices to last for the best part of a year. Thank you, comrade TM, not only for thinking of this, but for providing the cash to make it happen.

Most of our web readers are oblivious to such problems. Only a small proportion of them ever contribute to our running costs. Of course, we willingly make the entire paper available to everyone for free, but we are very grateful all the same to those online readers

who show their appreciation by getting out that piece of plastic and using our PayPal facility.

There were two such donations last week, both for £20, so thank you, comrades WR and FG. Mind you, I still can't tell you how many internet readers we had last week due to a technical problem arising from our change of server, but our web experts assure me that all will be well by this time next week!

As well as those two PayPal gifts, we received a total of £65 in standing orders (let me give GD a special mention for his monthly £25), plus three handy cheques - thanks to comrades PJ (£50), MN (£20) and SW (£15 added to his resubscription). All that comes to £190 received over the last seven days, taking our running total for April to £550. But we need £1,500 and we are approaching the halfway mark.

Please help us if you can. Make your donations by post, bank transfer or our website - and if you fancy lending us the odd couple of hundred quid for stamps, just let me know!

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday April 15, 5pm: 'Marx's theory of agricultural rent', using Ben Fine's and Alfredo Saad-Filho's *Marx's Capital* as a study guide. Caxton House, 129 Saint John's Way London N19. Followed by weekly political report. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Hands off Venezuela

Thursday April 12, 6.30pm: Film showing, 56 Grafton Way, London W1. Screening of *Cuarto poder* to mark 10 years since the attempted Venezuelan coup. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Alan Woods. Organised by Hands off Venezuela: london@handsoffvenezuela.org.

Socialist films

Sunday April 15, 11am: Screenings, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Shabnam Virmani's *Come to my country* (India 2008, 98 minutes); Yasmin Kabir's *The last rites* (Bangladesh 2008, 17 minutes).

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

Palestinian rights

Monday April 16, 6pm: Lecture, SOAS University, Room B102, Russell Square, London WC1. 'The Jewish state and the hollowing out of Palestinian citizenship'. Speaker: Amal Jamal. Organised by SOAS Palestine Society: palsoc@soas.ac.uk.

Speak out!

Wednesday April 18, 6.30pm: Public meeting, St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road, London E2. Organising strippers and dancers in the workplace. Speaker: John McDonnell MP. Organised by GMB: www.gmb.org.uk.

Fight Remploy closures

Thursday April 19, 7.30pm: Public meeting, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Gail Cartmail (Unite), Les Woodward (GMB). Organised by GMB: www.gmb.org.uk.

Popular protest and today's struggles

Thursday April 19, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. 'The real history of Chartism'. Speaker: David Goodway. Followed by Q and A. Free entry, collection on exit. Organised by Socialist History Society: www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk.

Remember 1912

Commemorating 100th anniversary of the miners' minimum wage strike

Saturday April 21, 7.30pm: Sacriston Working Men's Club, 1 Edward Street, Durham. Organised by Durham Miners Association: 0191 384 3515.

Sunday April 22, 12 noon: Bridge Hotel, Castle Garth, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Organised by Tyne and Wear International Workers of the World: www.iww.co.uk.

Beyond the frame

Monday April 23 to Saturday April 28, 10am: Exhibition in support of the Miami Five, Gallery 27, 27 Cork Street, London W1. Work from leading Cuban artists. Organised by Cuban Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

No cuts

Tuesday May 1, 7pm: Organising meeting, Bletchley Railway Club, Station Approach, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley. Organised by Milton Keynes Against the Cuts: <http://mkagainstcuts.blogspot.co.uk>.

Stop the EDL

Saturday May 5, 11am: Demonstration, Wardown Park, New Bedford Road, Luton. Counter-protest against English Defence League march through Luton. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

Socialist study

Thursday May 17, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. Studying Hillel Ticktin's 'Conclusion' from *What will a socialist society be like?* Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

Don't Iraq Iran

Friday May 25, 6.30pm: Benefit, St James's church, Piccadilly, London W1. Evening of music and spoken word. Featuring: Mark Rylance, Tony Benn, Roy Bailey. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopthewar.org.uk>.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 9, 11am: Conference, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers: Bob Crow (RMT), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Kevin Courtney (NUT). Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.shopstewards.net.

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IRAN

Time is fast running out

It is clear that the Obama administration is preparing US public opinion for war, writes Yassamine Mather

On Saturday April 14 Iran will attend talks with six world powers. The US has indicated this is Iran's "last chance" to avoid military intervention and the Obama administration is taking very specific demands to the talks as preconditions for further negotiations: for example, Iran "must immediately close" a large nuclear facility allegedly built underneath a mountain if it wants to avoid a devastating strike.

Other "near term" concessions to avoid a potential military conflict include the suspension of high-level uranium enrichment and the surrender by Tehran of existing stockpiles of the fuel, according to senior US officials. US secretary of state Hillary Clinton made the usual noises about time "running out for diplomacy", while expressing "doubts" about whether Iran has any real intention of negotiating a solution. In other words, preparing US public opinion for an attack that is possibly already scheduled.

The preconditions put Iran's Islamic government in an impossible situation and, although Tehran might use the talks to buy more time, accepting such conditions would represent such a terrible humiliation that it would be tantamount to political suicide for a dictatorship whose unpopularity continues to rise. But, there again, the US is hardly aiming to make life easy of the theocracy. In Tehran, some senior clerics are hoping that the 12th Shia Imam will make his reappearance even sooner than they are apt to predict.

As for Washington, in an election year the Obama administration has decided it cannot afford to look "weak" on Iran, as the Republican right ups the pressure for military action. To add to the pressure, the US navy has announced the deployment of a second aircraft carrier, the USS Enterprise, to the Persian Gulf region, where it will join the USS Abraham Lincoln. This will increase its ability to launch a massive air war on Iran at short notice.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Centre for Research on Globalization quoted political analyst Ralph Schoenman to the effect that Nato and the US are arming Israel with missile capacity in relation to a "projected and planned attack upon Iran". According to Schoenman, Italy's sale of 30 M-346 training jets to Israel is part of these preparations. And the Israeli military has gained access to airbases in Azerbaijan, according to Mark Perry of the journal *Foreign Policy*.

"Obama administration officials now believe that the 'submerged' aspect of the Israeli-Azerbaijani alliance - the security cooperation between the two countries - is heightening the risks of an Israeli strike on Iran ... senior diplomats and military intelligence officers say that the United States has concluded that Israel has recently been granted access to airbases on Iran's northern border." One "senior administration official" is quoted as saying: "The Israelis have bought an airfield ... and the airfield is called Azerbaijan."

The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* is even more terrifying: "The roulette wheel continues to spin and the ball falls into a different numbered slot every time. Following defence minister Ehud Barak's estimate that around 500 Israelis will be killed in the event of a counterattack by Iran, Israel air force performance analysts have recently published a study



Israel: ready to attack

calculating that around 300 Israelis will die if Israel launches a war against Iran." The paper criticises the Israeli government for its "obsession" with an Iranian "hypothetical nuclear bomb", allegedly "forgetting the threat" of Iranian and Syrian chemical weapons. It calls on Netanyahu to protect Israeli citizens against an Iranian assault: "So, dear Bibi, ahead of the hot summer, we've got a tiny request. Give us gas masks."

For most Iranians the war has already started. After months of denials the ministry of oil admits that Iran's export of crude oil has dropped sharply even before the EU embargo from July has officially started. Insurers are showing growing reluctance to cover tankers carrying Iranian oil and refiners are said to be "increasingly wary" of crude from the country because of the threat posed by sanctions. China, India, Japan and South Korea are the four biggest buyers of Iranian crude in Asia, and all of them have cut imports.

However, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, remains in denial, claiming this week that the country has enough capital reserves to go "two to three years" without selling oil. It is difficult to believe such claims, when the government's efforts to improve the plight of the currency so clearly failed - the Iranian toman dropped to half of its value against the dollar in January 2012.

Iran's car manufacturing industry is also facing a serious crisis after Peugeot Citroen, fearing the enforcement of US-led financial sanctions, stopped its trade in February. Iran was Peugeot Citroen's second-biggest market in 2011 in terms of trade volume. However it came under increasing pressure after a US lobby group, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), called on the US Congress to investigate the French car company's transactions with the Islamic Republic.

In addition, top financial institutions such as Société Générale and the Rabobank Group have stepped back from business with Iran in recent months, fearful of political risk and logistical difficulties covering every aspect of financial transactions (including areas not directly affected by sanctions). Smaller banks that are willing to continue business with Iran demand much higher fees. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "firms and other intermediaries still brokering these trades are charging more than 6% per transaction for legitimate trade deals with Iran, on top of traditional banking fees ... Other institutions

involved in financing legitimate trade with Iran declined to speak on the record, saying they feared publicity could lead the US treasury to increase its scrutiny of their US-dollar operations."

The response from Iran's pragmatist capitalist ayatollahs is clear: let us resolve our differences with the US. This week former Iranian president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani criticised the country's current foreign policy - in particular the absence of formal diplomatic ties between Iran and the United States. In an interview with the Iranian *International Studies* quarterly journal, Rafsanjani stressed the importance of direct talks with the US.

Rafsanjani said that in a letter to ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, he had urged the former supreme leader of the Islamic Republic to "resolve" seven outstanding issues while he was still alive, one of them being the poor state of US-Iranian relations: "I wrote that our current approach, which is to not talk or have any ties, cannot continue. The US is the world's leading power. What is the difference, in our view, between Europe and the US, or between China and the US, or between Russia and the US? If we negotiate with them why can't we negotiate with the US? Holding talks doesn't mean we're surrendering."

Iranian allies?

The Iranian regime, the Shia occupation government in Baghdad and Iran's allies in the Lebanese Hezbollah are all following events in Syria with great concern. The fall of the Assad regime would be a serious blow to the Shia camp and Tehran feels more and more isolated in a Sunni-dominated Middle East. For the last three decades much of the Arab media has blamed Iran for meddling in internal Arab affairs - not only in Iraq, but also in Lebanon and Bahrain.

In Palestine Hamas has distanced itself from both Iran and Syria. Strengthening its relations with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, it has denounced the Syrian regime's crackdown on its opponents and stated that it would stay 'neutral' if Israel attacked Iran. As a result of this shift Hamas is now getting a highly negative press in Iran, which hopes that at least it will be able to rely on Hezbollah. However, even there the relationship is not what it used to be.

In June 2011, Lebanon's new prime minister, Najib Mikati, formed a government in coalition with Hezbollah. While Israeli and US officials are keen to exaggerate the role of Hezbollah, the reality is that financial, political and therefore military power remains firmly in the hands of Christian and Sunni parties. Iranian finance might have helped Hezbollah set up a social-service network in the Bekaa valley, allowing it to recruit fighters and acquire an arsenal of rockets, but there is no comparison between this and the multimillion-dollar investments by Saudi Arabia and Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Lebanon.

Hezbollah was set up in 1983, under the Iranian 'reformist' premiership of Mir-Hossein Mousavi (currently under house arrest) and some Hezbollah leaders have long-standing relations with Iranian clerics and revolutionary guards currently out of favour in Iran because of their support for the 'reformist' movement. In fact, wary of the instability in Tehran since 2009 and a slashing of Iran's annual budget for Hezbollah by 40%

in early 2009, Hezbollah has been forced to impose austerity measures, reducing salaries and staff numbers and placing many construction projects on hold. In addition the party is being challenged at home by the indictment of several of its members for the murder of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri.

All in all, Hezbollah is not as powerful as the US and its allies claim and, although in the event of a military attack on Iran it will do what it can to support a Shia ally, the organisation is not in a position to prove an effective deterrent to military attacks. This is why raising false hopes about the ability of Hamas or Hezbollah to stop an attack on Iran is so misplaced.

Genuine solidarity with the people of Iran has to come from anti-war forces beyond the Sunni-Shia divide in the Middle East. We in Britain and elsewhere need to raise awareness of the current situation in Iran and the region so as to build an effective anti-war campaign. Next weekend's school organised by Hands Off the People of Iran in London will be an important part of such an effort.

Hopi's opposition to war and sanctions, as well as to the Islamic Regime, is attracting new support in Britain and abroad. Iranian comrades in Canada joined the anti-war protests last month in Toronto, where Hopi posters were prominent, and this prompted discussions and debates with the Canadian anti-war alliance. When I debated James Clark of Toronto Coalition to Stop the War in a TV broadcast, he agreed with many of the points we have raised over the last few years. A further debate is planned and we hope to make similar interventions in Vancouver and Montreal. Hopi's principled position is also supported by a number of Iranian leftist activists in Chicago and Washington. Over the next few weeks we intend to widen our activities in North America - opposing war, while building solidarity with Iranian workers, students, the women's movement and Iran's oppressed national and religious minorities. The April 21-22 London school will hopefully feature an online session to coordinate solidarity with activists in North America.

In France the collective around the journal *Carré Rouge* has played an important role in introducing Hopi to the French left. Translations of many

Hopi articles in both the printed and online versions have helped us gain supporters in the French-speaking world. We hope this cooperation will lead to Hopi meetings in France and Belgium.

Marathon support

This Sunday, April 15, 40 runners representing Workers Fund Iran will take part in the Vienna marathon to raise money for the charity.

Workers Fund Iran was set up in December 2005. It aims to reduce and relieve poverty amongst Iranian workers (employed and unemployed), who are victims both of the economic policies of the Iranian government and the sanctions imposed by imperialism. It aims to put at the centre of its activities the need to rebuild international solidarity - directly, with the workers of Iran. WFI is involved in many fundraising activities to support its work, ranging from social gatherings to solidarity cricket. Yet another WFI tradition is perhaps the ultimate test: marathon running. Last September WFI participation in the Berlin marathon raised well over €500.

Over the last few years Workers Fund Iran has sent funds to a number of working class families, including contributing to the medical expenses of a well known trade unionist, and helping with the housing costs of a number of working class families particularly badly hit by the poverty that is affecting large numbers. Of course, WFI has very limited resources. However, every penny collected in the UK is sent to Iran - the charity's administration and management is run on an entirely voluntary basis.

As the war threatens intensify, it is more important than ever to extend our solidarity. Please be generous in your sponsorship of our runners. Go to <https://www.charitychoice.co.uk/workers-fund-iran-11724/donate>, where your contributions will be gratefully received.

Notes

1. www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/28/israel_s_secret_staging_ground.
2. *Ha'aretz* April 8: www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/a-tiny-request-on-the-eve-of-an-iran-war-1.423197.
3. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303299604577323601794862004.html>.
4. <http://en.irangreenvoice.com/article/2012/apr/04/3586>.

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

11.30am: War, imperialism and the capitalist crisis Mike Macnair, CPGB; István Mészáros

2.30pm: Israel, Iran and the Middle East Moshé Machover, Israeli socialist and founder of Matzpen; Anahita Hosseini, exiled Iranian student

Sunday April 22

11.30am: 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

2.30pm: 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.



EUROPE

Momentum builds behind France's third man

Jean-Michel Edwin calls for critical support for Mélenchon in this month's presidential election

Campaigning for France's two-round presidential election is hotting up. The first ballot takes place on April 22, when all but the top two candidates will be eliminated, and the second round will be held on May 6. The monarchical president - either rightwing incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy or one of his opponents - will form a provisional government, and will hope to gain a majority of deputies in the French national assembly when the legislative elections are held on June 10 and 17.

Sarkozy and the Parti Socialiste candidate, François Hollande, are running far ahead of their opponents and look set to qualify for the second round, but the Front de Gauche (FG) candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, in alliance with the Parti Communiste Français, has unexpectedly gained support and now stands at 15% in the polls. He has promised his enthusiastic working class supporters that he will qualify for the second round: "We will do it!"

According to the media, Mélenchon is the "hard-left" candidate who calls for a "citizens' revolution" (*révolution citoyenne*). Last week he raised the demand that Sarkozy "account for the misery and ignorance he has spread during his five years in office". He was speaking at a rally at the Place du Capitole in Toulouse in front of 70,000 red-flag-waving supporters - only the latest in a series of mass rallies, where tens of thousands workers have come to hear him across the country. The climax of his campaign should be a monster rally in Paris three days before the election, where 100,000 are expected to gather from all over France. "This is not an ordinary campaign," Mélenchon says, "but the first stage of a revolution: you cannot stop us! We can't lose because it's not only an election, but the *révolution citoyenne* on the march!"

Early campaigning

The classic right-left stand-off between the conservative Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, plus liberal allies, and the Parti Socialiste began to take shape when the PS organised primary elections open to every French voter in October 2011. For the first time these primaries were opened up to candidates of other leftwing parties, but only the bourgeois Parti Radical de Gauche availed itself of the opportunity to join in - the FG, PCF and far-left organisations kept their distance.

The PS primaries need to be mentioned, as they attracted more than 2.5 million voters - far more than the PS membership. Amongst the six candidates in the first round, François Hollande finished ahead of Martine Aubry and the former won the second round. But the third candidate was PS leftwinger Arnaud Montebourg, who picked up an unexpected 17%.

In a press release issued on December 9 Mélenchon congratulated Hollande, but put particular emphasis on the Montebourg result: "... I note especially the spectacular breakthrough of Arnaud Montebourg and his ideas of *rupture*, which he raises in terms often identical to those of the Front de Gauche".

As campaigning began to get underway in January, Hollande was ahead in the polls - Sarkozy waited until February 15 to officially announce his own candidacy. Behind them were Marine Le Pen of the far-right Front National and the liberal François Bayrou, both with over 10% of voting intentions. At that time Mélenchon was languishing in fifth place - although even his 9% support



Jean-Luc Mélenchon: citizen revolution

contrasted favourably to the actual votes won by his most important current ally, the PCF, in the previous two presidential elections (just over 3% in 2002, falling to below 2% in 2007). The far left was, and is, doing even worse, with both the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière barely showing at only 0.5% each.

In the 2007 presidential election NPA candidate Olivier Besancenot received 4.08% of the vote (a little down on 2002, when he stood for the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) and the perennial Lutte Ouvrière candidate, Arlette Laguillier, won 1.33% (a big drop from the 5.72% she had registered in 2002). Overall the far left's electoral support seems to have diminished from around 10% five years ago to about 1% today. The fact that Besancenot stood down in favour of rank-and-file worker Philippe Poutou for the NPA, while comrade Laguillier retired and newcomer Nathalie Arthaud was selected for LO, does not explain this backward movement.

There is no doubt that the left-moving Mélenchon will gather the main part of the traditional far-left vote for the PG.

Sad tale of NPA

Readers will remember that the NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste) was formed in February 2009 on the initiative of the Fourth Internationalist LCR, whose comrades made up the majority of the NPA's active membership. The new party gained rapid support and later that year was claiming 9,123 signed-up members. Comrade Besancenot, who held out the "possibility of a new May 1968", was dubbed the "*de facto* leader of the left" by one of Sarkozy's ministers.

But Besancenot failed to go beyond the radical rhetoric. As millions of French workers went on strike against the Sarkozy government's anti-working class attacks, in one of its first acts the NPA leadership joined forces with Mélenchon's Parti de Gauche and the PCF in signing a statement "supporting the CGT and the other seven main trade union federations in putting 'the maximum pressure' on the Sarkozy government to 'oblige it to enter discussions' with the unions". As we wrote at the time, the NPA backed "a cosy consensus with the government" when the working class needed "a clear political lead and a programme to break with the token protests of the union bureaucrats" ('Everything to play for' *Weekly*

Worker February 12 2009).

At the same time Mélenchon, an ex-PS leader who had been a minister in Lionel Jospin's 1997 government, was launching the broad Left Front (Front de Gauche) around his newly formed Left Party. Mélenchon called on the NPA to join an FG common list in the 2009 European elections together with the PCF. This proposal was welcomed by the NPA's minority led by ex-LCR leader Christian Picquet, but the majority, including comrade Besancenot and veteran LCR leaders Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaid, put a condition on such an alliance: they would only join the Left Front if a long-term agreement was reached not to enter into any alliance with the Socialist Party in future elections, beginning with the regional elections in 2010.

Together with other Marxist members of the new NPA I considered at the time that instead of supporting a Mélenchon-PCF list in the European elections the NPA should formulate a "minimum revolutionary platform" for working class unity on a European scale, call on Lutte Ouvrière and others to join a list based on such a platform, and use the election to build the NPA profile and structures. Most probably this perspective was an optimistic one, as it went far beyond the NPA's dynamics and capacity.

Instead of that, the NPA leadership took a 'centrist' position: while refusing Mélenchon's proposal (Picquet and his supporters accepted them, splitting from the NPA and joining the FG), the NPA did not adopt a clear stand. It delayed several months before launching its own European list and platform, having engaged in seemingly endless discussions with the PCF, Mélenchon and other leftwing currents to try to reach an agreement. But these discussions took place behind closed doors, with little publicity: a kind of leftwing 'secret diplomacy', when an open and public debate would have been much more acceptable and productive.

This turned out to be even worse than an electoral agreement would have been: as the European elections have no practical consequences in reality (since the European 'parliament' has no real power), an electoral united front with the FG - for instance, a common list, with the different components standing on their own separate platforms - would have been far better. As it was, the NPA seemed paralysed until June 2009, and this caused more and more divisions within its ranks. The interminable

discussions even gave rise to the idea of a possible "common programme of the left" uniting reformists and revolutionaries around a common platform: the same opportunist illusion which had destroyed the old PCF hegemony in the working class and prepared the way for the success of Mitterrand in the 1970s.

Some leaders of the NPA majority tendency, who were at the time amongst those most opposed to any alliance with Mélenchon, are today part of the mass desertion of the NPA for the Front de Gauche. The ex-NPA "Anti-capitalist-Left" is now pleading (rather unsuccessfully) for a good share of candidates for the FG's legislative election campaign in June. One must remember that Mélenchon's 2009 call to the NPA came before he was able to rally the PCF behind him: he was then asking for the support of the most successful electoral representative of workers, Olivier Besancenot.

In the end the Front de Gauche got 6.05% in the Euro elections and the NPA 4.88%. As soon as they were over, the NPA leadership entered into fresh discussions with the FG and others on the regional elections, which were to take place in March 2010. The talks centred again on the "PS question" and the supposed necessity of a "common programme". The radical NPA had become mainly concerned with elections. In the event - one year after the NPA had been launched, having built on the previous electoral successes of comrade Besancenot - it went into the regional elections deeply split within its own ranks. While the FG more or less maintained its share with 5.84%, the separate lists of the far left (NPA and LO) could only muster 3.4% between them.

Radicalised working class

Since the presidential election of 1995, the tendency has been for the revolutionary left (the LCR, then NPA, and LO) to increase its share of the vote at the expense of the PCF. But most of all 1995 had marked a turning point in the mass movement - the November-December general strike was the largest since May 1968.

In 1995, the newly elected president, Jacques Chirac, and his prime minister, Alain Juppé, launched a massive programme of welfare cuts. Students and later workers went into action, with the major trade unions striking against a pay freeze and the

'Juppé plan'. The strikes paralysed the whole country and Juppé was forced to tone down parts of his planned 'reforms'. There followed major resistance to both the March-June 2003 assault on pensions, with millions on strike and on the streets in 2006, 2009 and 2010.

None of these movements obtained any important concessions from the ruling class - the right was in office for the whole of this time except for 1997-2002, when Lionel Jospin formed a PS government under Chirac's rightwing presidency. The only real victory in this whole period came when students and young workers rebelled in April-May 2006 against Juppé's CPE (first employment contracts).

As for elections, the increased support for the far left has been accompanied by reduced turnouts - this growing abstentionism has produced easy victories for the right. The class has proved its combativity and capacity to mobilise when it comes to strikes, but has obtained little to show for it and, most importantly, has failed to leave its mark on the political stage. But does the sudden upsurge in support for Mélenchon represent a departure?

According to Lutte Ouvrière, class-consciousness is low and the working class mood is one of disarray and despair. "Nothing serious has happened in this country," LO leaders say, "since the 1871 Paris Commune and we have to be patient: it may take a century or more to have another Commune." Hence the LO candidate Nathalie Arthaud's logical conclusion: "To get rid of Sarkozy, as Hollande, Mélenchon and Poutou say, doesn't mean anything, because Hollande would be no better than Sarkozy - he defends the bourgeoisie as well."

There is more than a hint in all this of LO excusing in advance the poor showing of its own presidential candidate. In fact the powerful class momentum in favour of Mélenchon represents a step forward despite his reformist programme. Our class wants to call a halt to the massive social destruction and injustice Sarkozy has promoted and implemented in office. The reason why Hollande might well be elected, on a platform that is, of course, much more timid than Mélenchon's, is that he promises to stop the social tsunami against the working class via a 'softer' austerity programme.

But even this is apparently unacceptable to the ruling class and finance capital, whose representatives are already warning that France will suffer devastating attacks via the monetary markets if Hollande is elected. He will come under intense pressure to become what Mélenchon calls "Hollandreou" (after the name of the former socialist Greek prime minister). Either France's workers will resist or they will face the Greek treatment. That is why the most militant sections of the working class are rallying behind Mélenchon.

And that is why many Marxists in France are now calling for a vote for Mélenchon, combined (probably) with a vote for Hollande in the second round of the presidential election. Even some comrades who are still involved in the NPA, trying to salvage something from the project, and who are calling out of loyalty for a vote for the NPA's Philippe Poutou, are engaging in the movement and rallies in support of the FG candidate. As one such comrade put it to me, "We cannot stand apart like the sectarian left".

The call is: build the movement; critical support to Mélenchon ●

ECONOMY

One fight, inside and out

What are the tasks of communists in relation to the Labour Party? **Mike Macnair** answers some key questions

Since early March there has been a running debate in our letters column about the question of the relationship of the left to the Labour Party. The debate is both internal to the CPGB (eg, comrade Chris Strafford's letter of March 22) and external. The 'break with Labour' argument has been most fully developed in this debate by comrade Dave Vincent - most recently in his letter in last week's paper (April 5). This article attempts to respond to comrade Vincent.

Comrade Vincent's letter argues that the CPGB's line on the Labour Party would lead us to call for a Labour vote in Bradford West; on the contrary, he says, George Galloway's stunning victory shows the possibility of wider anti-cuts candidacies in elections. It is perhaps unfortunate for this argument that comrade Vincent's letter appears in an issue of the *Weekly Worker* whose front page headline is 'Galloway shows what can be done', headlining Peter Manson's strongly positive evaluation of Galloway's victory. In other words, comrade Vincent *misunderstands* the CPGB's view of the question.

The debate is not new. In the Socialist Alliance the CPGB argued for the SA to use critical support tactics towards elements of the Labour left, as opposed to *simply* trying to maximise the number of alliance candidates. This was, perhaps, not much noted at the time. In the 2005 general election we argued for support for openly anti-war Labour candidates (there turned out to be exactly four who were prepared to stick their heads above the parapet) as well as for those Respect candidates who were linked to the workers' movement (as opposed to the mere political Islamists). This line was criticised both by comrades who found it too hard on Respect and those who found it too soft on Respect, but the aspect of critical support to a small number of Labour candidates was criticised only by real head-banging purists.

In 2009, the CPGB made the highly controversial assessment that the 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy' project was to the *right* of official Labour. In the context of that election, which was dominated by right-populist attacks on 'party politics' round the MPs' expenses scandal, it amounted *de facto* to a left cover for the United Kingdom Independence Party. Hence we were only willing to call for a vote for those No2EU candidates who made it clear that by 'democracy' they meant something other than defence of the pre-1972 Westminster parliament. We made the idea of the militia and the right to bear arms one of the tests for this. Whether that was tactically right can be debated, but the underlying point - that No2EU candidates were not supportable without a very sharp differentiation from the project's overall politics - is clear.

In the 2010 general election, we campaigned actively (so far as we could) for candidates of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition; but also argued for a vote for any Labour anti-cuts and anti-war candidates who could be found, and campaigned actively for John McDonnell.

Since that election, we have been debating the question of policy towards the Labour Party on and off more or less permanently.

Strategic line

I have given a superficial run-through of this recent CPGB history to



Fighting on two fronts

emphasise the continuity of the issue and the fact that our approach has been and remains *two-sided*. We do *not* advocate general entry into the Labour Party in order to "move it to the left". We *do* advocate the unification of the Marxist left in a real (albeit inevitably at first small) party, on the basis of a programme based on the elementary ideas of Marxism. For this reason we have given as much (critical) support as we can, given our small forces, to any practical attempt to develop a left political alternative to Labour which could, however remotely possibly, develop towards a unified party based on Marxist politics.

At the same time, we oppose the idea (commonplace on the left since the rise of Blairism) that the Labour Party has become *simply* a bourgeois party like the US Democratic Party. I argued the point in a pair of articles in July 2009.¹ The belief that Labour has become a purely bourgeois party displays a simple failure to compare British politics and political dynamics to those of countries like the US, where there is no 'bourgeois workers' party'. It leads in practical politics to attempts to *recreate* the 'old Labour' Party, which is imagined to have ceased to exist.

For these attempts there is - as yet - no political space: because *broad masses* retain a class identification with Labour. This was demonstrated with remarkable clarity in the 2010 general election. There was an unexpectedly high turnout in working class districts, Labour held onto its core vote and Clegg's attempt, backed by important sections of the media, to drive Labour into third place, was an unambiguous *failure*. Labour thus continues to exist as a bourgeois workers' party - one which, though

tied to the capitalist state, identifies itself, however weakly, as a party for the working class, and is identified by broad masses, however weakly, as a party for the working class.

In my 2009 article, 'Making and unmaking Labour', I wrote that Labour obtains and retains mass working class support, not as an instrument for socialism - only a small minority has ever seen it as this - but as an instrument for extracting concessions within the capitalist order and holding onto those concessions or mitigating capitalist attacks. Hence:

"... as long as all existing concessions have not been taken away, the bourgeois workers' party still appears to very many workers as an instrument of defence against the bourgeoisie's attacks, even if only to slow them down. It is, quite genuinely, such an instrument. New Labour in government has increased employment in the public sector, and has increased benefits to some of the poorest, even as it has continued Tory 'reforms' and the widening gap between rich and poor. For all Cameron's touchy-feely talk, it is certain that a Tory government from 2010 will launch much harsher attacks on public sector workers and the unemployed. These circumstances support Labour members and the more politically conscious trade unionists hanging onto Labour Party unity and the hope of Labour governments."²

In our view, as long as this continues, the Marxist left will need some policy towards the Labour Party and some intervention in it. And there are Marxists within the Labour Party - in very small numbers, it is true; but then the absolute numbers of Marxists outside are very small also. Our CPGB *Theses on the Labour Party* adopted in

November 2010³ aim to give a long-term orientation both to Marxists presently working in the Labour Party and to the future united party of the Marxist left - the Communist Party - we seek.

That orientation includes, in the first place, the idea that Marxists in the Labour Party should fight there for Marxist politics, not suppress such politics in the attempt to create a social democratic 'broad left'. And it includes, secondly, the insistence that both they and Marxists in the trade unions should fight to break the system of bans and proscriptions and the bureaucratic structures through which the right exercises its control. By doing so it would be possible to turn the Labour Party into something it periodically pretends to be, but in reality has never been: a general united front of workers' organisations. *Under such circumstances* we would argue that a future Communist Party should *affiliate* to Labour as an organised party (as distinct from secret or individual entry tactics).

We do not in the least pretend that success for this policy is on the immediate agenda. Unpredictable events apart, success would require both a serious, united Communist Party, and a political revolution in the trade unions; since in reality the Labour Party, as it is, is a means by which the trade union *bureaucracy* relates to and negotiates with the capitalist state. Witness, for example, Billy Hayes's defence of the unions' affiliation to Labour in a speech in March published on the *Socialist Unity* blog.⁴ It is for this reason that, however much they may grumble, when it comes to the crunch the union leaderships want to see an 'electable' Labour and vote to back rightwing

leaders, anti-democratic structures, and so on.

The line of our theses is, as I have already said, a *long-term orientation*.

Still a bourgeois workers' party?

However, this long-term orientation is only valid if the judgment that Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party is valid. If that judgment is wrong and the nature of Labour has fundamentally changed - or if it is at a 'tipping point', in which it faces collapse of its ties to the working class - we would have to think again.

Comrade Vincent does not express his argument in these theoretical terms; he merely argues that the facts on the ground show that work in the Labour Party is a waste of time and a delusion, and that Marxists should not defend the affiliation of the trade unions to the Labour Party, but argue to break it. Rather, we should put all our efforts into anti-cuts candidates. The point was made most clearly in his March 8 article, 'Striking on March 28 in not enough':

"Until we all agree on the need for a united Marxist revolutionary party to provide a lead, I will settle for working class anti-cuts independent candidates. Let working class people therefore discuss and decide to take politics and elections back into their hands. Getting any elected would worry the established parties. Admittedly our showing has been abysmal in the past, but I think this time an election challenge will take off."⁵

In a sense, his argument conflicts most directly with predictions which we in the CPGB majority have made in 2010 and since on the basis of the history of the Labour Party. We have

argued that, with Labour thrown into opposition, it would take a degree of distance from some of the policies it had espoused in government; that there would be some leftist talk; and so on. For example, in November 2010 I wrote:

“It is obviously not possible to categorically assert that the similar claims made by the Socialist Party in England and Wales at present have a similar character. It is possible that the coalition will break up within a year of its formation and Labour get back into office; or that more acute economic crisis or other events will produce a ‘grand coalition’; and so on. But, assuming Labour remains in opposition, it is, I think, fairly predictable that (1) Labour’s rhetoric will move left; (2) its membership and political life in the constituencies and branches will increase; and (3) Labour activists and MPs will be found participating in grassroots campaigns against the Con-Dem cuts, and so on. If Labour remains in opposition and none of this happens by 2015 then - assuming I have not become unemployed - I will pay £50 or the equivalent in 2015 money to the SPEW fund drive. I think it is a pretty safe bet.”⁶

As things stand, I will admit that this prediction looks overstated (though I do not think that my money is yet in real danger). It follows that comrade Vincent’s questions pose a real issue.

This issue is not that the Labour Party has become an equivalent of the Democratic Party. That was the Blairites’ and Eurocommunists’ aim. However, as I argued in 2009, that aim had already failed in 2005 with the failure to make *stable* gains among the middle classes and the drying-up of major capitalist contributions to Labour.

But it might be the case that Labour is at risk of *collapse*, due to a combination of factors. The first of these is the efforts of the Con-Dems, aided and abetted by Blairites, to force through an end to trade union funding of Labour in the guise of ‘party funding reform’.⁷ The second is the illusion that the Con-Dems will be a “one-term government” (as Ed Miliband argued on March 31⁸), as long as Labour “holds its nerve” in aiming for the centre ground. Efforts to hold the Labour core vote may be paralysed by attempts to please the media.

The third is that to win a general election Labour will certainly need to revive its active membership. But the ability to mobilise members on the ground may be blocked by the top-down organisational structures and culture which were created to force through the shift to the right. Labour allows *much less local diversity* than the US Democratic Party (or the Tories or Liberals), because, unlike the straight bourgeois parties, it cannot rely on multi-millionaire donors to make the final decisions. Capitalist control of the Labour Party depends much more indirectly on party bureaucrats and MPs dictated to by the corrupt advertising-funded media and on secret lobbying groups like Progress.⁹

Hence, it *might* be the case that Labour is on the verge of collapse; and George Galloway’s victory in Bradford *might* be a sign that the collapse is about to begin. If so, we should expect to see in the May local elections, at a minimum, massive advances for the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru; for Respect and Tusc where they are standing; but also, and probably more strikingly and generally, for the UK Independence Party and the British National Party. The reason for this is that if the class vote for Labour is on the verge of collapse, voters will turn to any credible candidate who plausibly represents ‘none of the above’; and,

though Galloway was credible in Bradford West, it is certainly not the case that there is a *credible* left alternative *on a national scale*. Hence we should expect in this event that right-populist nationalists will pick up large chunks of the vote.

How far do comrade Vincent’s eleven “questions” in his April 5 letter give credence to the view that working class support for Labour is on the verge of collapse? I will put them in a different order to comrade Vincent’s - one which I think brings together connected points.

Questions

“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.”

Elsewhere comrade Vincent has accepted the point which we have made repeatedly, that Labour has *never* been a vehicle for socialism, but only a means of the union tops negotiating with the capitalist state over the ‘social wage’. So why does he now come up with the silly idea that the Blairites, who *promised in advance* to carry on with the Tories’ budget, maintain the anti-union laws, and so on, “could have proclaimed socialism”?

“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?”

It is hardly news that Labour is committed to the interests of British imperialism and its overseas wars, since this has been a persistent characteristic of the party since 1914 at the latest. It should be noted, however, that Labourites were not alone in this policy: it was shared by the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, which represents itself as Marxist, from a position (largely) *outside* Labour.

“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.”

Unsurprising. As I have said above, the dominance of the right in the Labour Party is at the end of the day *because* the union tops back the right. We have never suggested that there would be more than a *rhetorical* move to the left and some willingness of Labour members to participate in protest action. It would be ridiculous to imagine *under present circumstances* that the union leaders, whether affiliated to Labour or not, would seek anything other than a negotiated solution to the pensions dispute: the alternative is an immediate struggle for political power.

All of these points tell us nothing about whether the Labour Party is changing or has changed its character, since they merely remind us of things which have *always* been true of the Labour Party and the leadership of the affiliated unions.

“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?”

This set of points says merely that the Labour left is very weak. It has been very weak since the collapse of the ‘official’ Communist Party and the adherence of the Eurocommunists to the ex-‘soft left’ part of the Labour right (now well to the right of old Labour rightwingers like Roy Hattersley).

And, like the far left generally, the Labour left is highly splintered: for example, the Livingstoneites and Socialist Action have consistently opposed McDonnell candidacies. Outside the Labour Party examples of equivalent wrecking tactics have been provided by SPEW’s unprincipled split in the Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party’s unprincipled split in Respect, and both SPEW’s and the SWP’s completely cynical exploitation of the ‘Sheridan crisis’ in the Scottish Socialist Party.

“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?”

As of 2011 Labour Party paying membership had grown to 193,000 (from 156,000 in 2009). Labour centre-leftist blogger Peter Kenyon expressed some doubt at the beginning of this year about whether the rise had been sustained.¹⁰

For the sake of comparison - the SWP in late 2011 claimed membership of around 7,100, of which only 38% (around 2,700) were paying.¹¹ SPEW claimed 2,000 in 2011.¹² The *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain claimed just under 1,000 in 2010.¹³ Peter Manson reports in last week’s paper that since Galloway’s victory in Bradford West Respect has seen a flood of membership applications ... taking its membership from under 700 to over 1,000. The rest of the left groups, CPGB included, are much smaller.

The comparatively trivial size of the left outside Labour should be understood as a warning to us that *Labour* is still a hell of a lot stronger than we are. Hence our point that, even if the far left unites in a serious party, it will still need a long-term policy towards the Labour Party.

However, it does not imply that the *current Labour left* has very much weight. *Socialist Appeal* reported in 2011 that the Labour-left Labour Representation Committee has 1,000 individual members: that would make it a medium to large-sized left group - if the LRC had the political coherence and ability of far-left groups outside Labour to mobilise members (it does not).¹⁴ There is also Labour left beyond the LRC ... it is just not very leftwing.

“2. What is the calibre of those joining the Labour Party today - active or passive?”

This is extraordinarily difficult to assess, precisely *because* the left is so weak overall both inside and outside Labour that we do not have much in the way of assessment from the ground either from within local Labour Parties or from the outside: ie, in relation to non-Labour comrades’ experiences of local Labour Party members on the ground.

“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?”

As I have said already, the overthrow of this constitutional regime would require the trade unions to overthrow it. They could easily do so, but it would require them to be willing to accept a split of the right; and probably require a political revolution in *the affiliated unions*.

“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.”

‘Donations reform’ is a proposal aiming to destroy Labour Party funding for the benefit of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, and for the benefit of the system of corruption of public affairs by dependence on *capitalist* funding. The capitalists hope to exploit union members’ disenchantment with Labour to this end. If it succeeds, Labour will certainly be at risk of collapse. But there is no reason to suppose that this would be a move to the *left* in British politics. Rather, it would be a move to the *right*, a further Americanisation.

That is linked to a more general point which I made in my 2009 articles. The political dynamics of the Labour Party merely collapsing, in the absence of a serious unified challenge from the left to replace it, would represent a further sharp step in the drift of British politics to the right, which has been ongoing since the 1980s.

Overall, however, comrade Vincent’s questions and the answers to them tell us very little, because too many of them are not questions about current political dynamics, but about either the past (the defeat of the Labour left in the 1980s-90s) or about eternal verities (that Labour is not a party which can ever be expected to bring in socialism, lead trade union struggles to victory, or oppose British imperialism).

On the other hand

On the other hand, there are a number of indicators that Labour, in spite of bureaucratic control in the interests of the right, in spite of its hideous record in government, and so on, remains a large ‘bourgeois workers’ party’.

In the first place, the bourgeoisie clearly thinks so. Indeed, the capitalist media declares that Ed Miliband’s slight tack to the left to win trade union backing in the leadership elections was a very bad thing and means that Labour cannot be trusted. Hence the media continue the smear campaign begun against Gordon Brown, albeit in a different form in relation to Ed Miliband. They want to replace him with an open Blairite. They want to see the links between Labour and the unions broken.

Secondly, while we have not seen large numbers of Labour councillors, etc, campaigning against cuts, the context of this is that grassroots anti-cuts campaigns have, in reality, not taken off. Reported meetings have been very largely a story of the ‘usual suspects’.

What has happened, instead, is that people have been turning to their trade unions to resist attacks. Both the number of disputes and the number of days lost through industrial action have risen, and not just because of the pensions dispute and large one-day strikes.

While Labour *MPs* have remained in majority Blairite, and in their large majority unwilling to talk left, Labour *trade union leaders* have been very much more willing to do so. They *talk* left, but do not put their money to any great extent where their mouths are: but that is no novelty.

As we saw above, Labour Party membership is substantially up in response to the formation of the Con-Dem government, though there are real and legitimate questions about the politics of the new members and the extent to which they are active, and about how far the increase will be sustained.

Bradford West is undoubtedly an

important event. But it has not impacted significantly on national opinion polls. The April 10 YouGov poll in *The Sun* puts Labour at 40%, with the Conservatives on 36%, Lib Dems on 9%, and others on 15% - ‘others’, of course, includes the nationalist parties, the Ulster loyalists and the far right, as well as (probably a pretty limited part of that 15%) Respect, Tusc, etc.¹⁵ Contrast Greece, where - unsurprisingly - polls have shown a *real* collapse in support for the Greek Socialist Party, Pasok, though some recovery is likely before the May 6 general election.¹⁶

This is not a matter of misplaced optimism. It is completely the opposite. What is required is *realistic* recognition of the present weakness of the left, as opposed to the ‘official optimism’ which comes out of the SWP, Tusc and so on. Part of that is to recognise that, though it is perfectly *possible* that Labour will collapse, it does not seem to be on the immediate agenda.

That judgment is one which, it seems, we share with George Galloway. His article about his election victory in the *Morning Star*, ‘Bradford points the way’, does not resound with a call for a new party to replace Labour. Instead, he says:

“Hundreds are joining Respect, including people with great track records in the labour and progressive movements. We’re delighted by that. At the same time, we have always seen our job as not only advancing our party as a voice and instrument for working people and the poor, but also strengthening the whole left and, crucially, the capacity of the mass of people to take some control of their lives and end the years of one-sided war of the rich against the poor. Within parliament and without we will cooperate with any who are prepared to break with the austerity consensus.

“There are some in Labour’s ranks who rightly draw the conclusion that the age of Clinton-Blair triangulation is dead and that the politics of Labour must be based on the interests of working people. I’m with them, and against those who want to stick with the disastrous course set by Tony Blair and continued through to today.”¹⁷

We have very substantial political differences with Galloway. But this approach - fighting *both* outside the Labour Party *and* as far as possible inside it alongside what remains of its left - is in its fundamentals correct. Those who make a fetish of ‘inside Labour only’ condemned themselves to inaudibility for most of the period 1990-2010. But those who make a fetish of ‘outside Labour only’ *also* risk condemning themselves to inaudibility under present conditions ●

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Notes

1. ‘Labour Party blues’, July 23 2009; ‘Making and unmaking Labour’ July 30 2009.
2. *Weekly Worker* July 30 2009.
3. Draft: *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010; agreed version: *Weekly Worker* December 2 2010.
4. www.socialistunity.com/recent-changes-in-the-relationship-between-unions-and-the-labour-party/, March 16 2012.
5. *Weekly Worker* March 8.
6. ‘Dances with scabs’ *Weekly Worker* November 11 2010.
7. ‘Clegg proposes way to end “big money” political donations’ *The Independent* April 4; ‘Unions do have a hold on Labour, says former aide’ *Daily Express* April 4.
8. *The Observer* April 1.
9. A summary of the anonymous report on Progress can be found at www.leftfutures.org/2012/02/call-for-labour-inquiry-into-the-organisation-activities-of-party-within-a-party-progress.
10. http://musingsfrommedway.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/camerons-trap.html; http://petergkenyon.typepad.com/peterkenyon/2012/01/an-indelicate-question-labour-party-membership-stalled-locally-nationally.html.
11. P Manson, ‘No ambition, no vision’ *Weekly Worker* November 10 2011.
12. www.stokesocialistparty.org.uk/?p=822.
13. www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/database-of-registers/statements-of-accounts/soa/pdfs/soa_25-05-11_10-13-58.pdf.
14. www.socialist.net/lrc-2011.htm.
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16. www.phantis.com/topic/opinion-polls.
17. *Morning Star* April 6.

ECONOMY

Expecting the unexpected

The euro crisis never went away. But resistance to austerity is certain to intensify, says **Eddie Ford**

For the last few weeks we have been led to believe that the euro zone crisis is all but over. Thanks to the second Greek bailout, the dishing out of €1 trillion in cheap loans to distressed banks by the European Central Bank and economic recovery in the United States, there was now a bright light at the end of the tunnel. Everyone could breathe a sigh of relief.

But this has proved to be a self-serving fantasy. As the May 6 Greek elections approach, there is a distinct possibility that the Greek people will elect a parliament that will reject the bailout terms imposed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika. Raising the spectre again of a default. No wonder that some within the European Union bureaucracy wanted to indefinitely postpone the elections - you never get the right result. Meanwhile, the US jobs market has stalled and all the ECB's Long Term Refinancing Operation (LTRO) did was slap a piece of sticking plaster on the euro zone's open wound - which continued to fester. The crisis never went away.

Hence we discovered that there were just 120,000 new jobs in the US last month, a sharp drop from the 240,000 created in February. Confounding some economists who had been expecting that this would be the fourth month in a row where the figure was over 200,000. True, the unemployment rate - obtained by a separate survey of US households - actually went *down* by one tenth of a percentage point to 8.2%. But this is hardly a cause for celebration. Rather, this drop is at least partially the result Americans just giving up in despair and leaving the registered labour force altogether. And doing good knows what.

The disappointing jobs situation will undoubtedly increase the pressure on Ben Bernanke to pump more money into the economy and launch a new round of quantitative easing. He has repeatedly declared that no options are off the table and that the federal reserve would be "compelled" to act if the economy took a turn for the worse. However, the latest minutes from the federal open markets committee (which sets US interest rates) seemed to indicate that Bernanke and the committee were cooling on the idea of a further monetary stimulus - arguing that whilst the Fed is always waiting in the wings, "at some point we need to take the training wheels off and ride this bike ourselves". Not much consolation for the unemployed or the nearly two million 'homeowners' threatened with foreclosure last year (from the start of the financial crisis in September 2008, there have been approximately 3.4 million completed foreclosures).

All good news, of course, for multi-millionaire Mitt Romney, especially now that Rick Santorum has dropped out of the presidential race, leaving Romney with no serious rivals - both Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul are obviously half-mad and, more importantly, cash-strapped. Yes, unemployment may have dropped fractionally for the time being, but it remains a thorn in the side of Barack Obama. It stood at 7.8% when he took office in January 2009, peaked at 10% nine months later and has now fallen to the lowest level in three years. But the fact remains that no president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt has won re-election with



Don't be taken by surprise

unemployment standing so high.

US economic stagnation is also extremely *bad* news for the euro zone - European Union leaders had been hoping that an American recovery would help drag them out of recession and crisis. That plan scuppered, they are locked into plan A, which promises more of the same - cuts, cuts, cuts.

Spanish storm

Now Spain finds itself at the centre of the storm, though watch this space. Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party government is trying to force through a punishing series of austerity measures, the same sort of medicine that has brought Greece to the point of economic annihilation. Spain is already suffering from 24% unemployment, with some 50% of young people out of work. A horrendous act of social-economic warfare against the working class - near economic genocide. However, Rajoy - as instructed by European finance ministers - announced last week that there will a further round of €27 billion in cuts and tax hikes and at the weekend said the government would pass new laws to provide an additional €10 billion of cuts in health and education.

Not that the government in Madrid has met its own deficit target of 6%. It is finding it extremely difficult to cut back spending at a time when unemployment is going through the roof. More and more benefits have to be paid out, even if individual amounts are being cut. However, euro zone finance ministers - seized by a collective lunacy that throws logic

to the wind - are *demanding* that the resulting 8.5% deficit has to be slashed to 5.3% this year and then to 3% the following year. An obviously problematic task as unemployment, inequality and poverty grows. More to the point, were these EU-dictated goals somehow achieved, it would only come at great cost - the ignition of a social explosion that could sweep the country.

Inevitably, given the 'emergency' austerity conditions, the Spanish economy is already projected to shrink by 1.7% this year. The total 'fiscal adjustment', to use the jargon beloved of EU bureaucrats, of more than €60 billion over two years (or almost €1,500 per Spaniard) is guaranteed to drive the country into even deeper recession - or a "contradictory dynamic", as the Bank of Spain now likes to euphemistically call it. The upshot being that the suicidal socio-economic policies pursued by the EU and the Spanish governments mean that the country is caught in a classic vicious circle: as the economy contracts, the relative deficit rises.

Feeding into the crisis, worried eyes are now turning to Spain's creaking banking system - which has done next to nothing to shed the toxic debts (ie, real estate assets) it accumulated when the housing bubble burst four years ago. The good times came to an abrupt end. Many loans to developers have simply been rolled over - hope the problem goes away - while many Spanish banks have had to accept properties and land in lieu of payment. Less than satisfactory.

Yet with house prices tumbling and building land often worthless, several of the smaller banks have had to be rescued with taxpayers' money. In turn, this glut of toxic loans to developers still swishing around the banking system has forced a further round of 'consolidation', with the merger of CaixaBank and Banca Cívica creating the country's biggest high street bank. The government has already instituted a reform that will require banks to come up with an estimated €50 billion (\$65 billion) in provisions to cover real estate holdings, many of them grossly overvalued. A fall waiting to happen.

Confronted by the disastrous mess that is the Spanish financial system, concerns are rising that in the relatively near future Spain will be forced to request a 'partial' bailout from the European Financial Stability Facility - soon to be replaced by the European Stability Mechanism - in order to prop up the country's distressed banks. In the opinion of Citigroup analysts, Spain is "likely to be pushed into a troika programme of some sort during 2012".

Needless to say, this prospect has spooked the markets - already in a state of anxiety following Bernanke's gloomy comments about the US economy and the latest batch of poor Chinese trade data, showing a 3.1% fall in exports to the EU and a slowdown in annual growth from 8.9% in the fourth quarter of 2011 to 8.4% in the first quarter of 2012. Not to mention alarming reports in the financial press that Italy's economy is likely to contract this year by between 1.3% and 1.5% - far more than the original 0.4% prediction. All against the backdrop of rising unemployment across the euro zone as a whole, which hit a new high of 10.8% in February - with an estimated 17.1 million people now out of work. The euro area seems once more to have fallen into an uncontrollable spiral of debt and recession.

Hence on April 10 the financial markets placed Spain firmly in their target sights, as a panic sell-off of Spanish debt began - investors were demanding high premiums for holding Spanish (and Italian) bonds, as fears of a double-dip recession and possible bailout grew. Spanish 10-year bond yields (interest rate) hit a four-month high, reaching 5.99%, and shares in Madrid dropped by almost 3% to hit their lowest level since March 2009. In Italy, yields jumped to 5.7% - drifting dangerously towards the danger zone - and share prices slumped by 5% on rumours that the government was preparing to officially downgrade its growth forecasts. And after the share price of several Italian banks fell sharply, trading was quickly suspended. Take the heat out of the kitchen.

The euro came under pressure on the foreign exchange markets as the mood darkened on April 10, losing 0.2% against the dollar and more than 1% against the yen. By contrast, 'safe haven' assets such as gold and the US dollar - and government bonds in the US, Germany and Britain - were all in demand. For some, a killing was to be made. But for the rest the dominant feeling was of fear, that debt contagion was spreading to Italy - the ultimate nightmare. Europe's third largest economy may be too big to fail, but it also too big to bail out. *Far too big.* Trying to cope with such a calamity would immediately empty the EFSF/ESM's entire rescue funds - and still be utterly inadequate. If Italy

were to buckle under the weight of debt, that would surely signal the end of the euro - thus almost certainly triggering a global slump.

Resistance

Meanwhile, working class resistance to the relentless attacks of the Eurocrats is mounting. In Italy, Mario Monti's government is facing growing hostility to labour market 'reforms' - ie, proposals to make it easier for bosses to sack workers. In Greece, ferry workers began a 48-hour strike on April 10 - leaving numerous travellers stranded on a day that marked the start of the high season for the tourism sector.

Over the Easter break, protests against the austerity measures being introduced by the technocratic government of Lucas Papademos saw home-made fire-bombs used against government buildings. As for the May 6 elections, a poll published by Mega TV showed that almost 20% of voters had not yet decided who they will vote for. Of the 1,200 people interviewed, a only 32.4% said they supported one of the two main parties, Pasok and New Democracy. However, a greater number (34.2%) declared their support for the smaller parties - overwhelmingly leftwing in composition - that are implacably opposed to the austerity deal brokered by Pasok, ND and the troika.

Then we had the high-profile suicide of Dimitris Christoulas, a 77-year-old who was "deeply politicised but also enraged". He shot himself in Syntagma Square in Athens because, as he explained in his one-page suicide note, it would be better to have a "decent end" than be forced to scavenge in the "rubbish to feed myself". He also compared Greece's coalition government to the puppet regime of Georgios Tsolakoglou under Nazi occupation during World War II and implored young people to rise up and "hang this country's traitors" in Syntagma Square "just as the Italians hanged Mussolini in 1945".

Many Greeks find themselves in the same precarious situation as Christoulas, especially the elderly - their pensions slashed by handsomely paid EU bureaucrats living in well-appointed apartments in Brussels, Strasbourg, Paris, etc. Of course, Christoulas is not the first and nor will he be the last Greek to take his own life during this crisis - whatever the exact motivation. The official suicide rate, which used to be Europe's lowest, has doubled over the last three years.

Similarly in Ireland, three people a day are now committing suicide - and the Irish suicide helpline, Ilife, has revealed that it is struggling to cope with the one hundred or so calls a day it is receiving from people driven into penury by the government's austerity regime. There are fears that as many as 1,000 people will take their own lives in Ireland in 2012. A clear sign of social despair.

However, on the other hand - as exemplified by the suicide of Dimitris Christoulas - it also a gesture, perhaps the ultimate one, of defiance against the ruling authorities and the social-economic order in general. But the main point to stress is that resistance, possibly taking unpredictable forms, will inevitably intensify - expect the unexpected. George Galloway's stunning victory in Bradford West should remind us of that.

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REVIEW

Presaging the 21st century

Paul Mason **Why it’s kicking off everywhere: the new global revolutions** Verso 2012, pp244, £12.99

Some people may dismiss Paul Mason as just another journalist, especially since he advocated more effective policing to contain the ‘Black Bloc’ after the March 26 2011 TUC demo.¹ Yet this is no reason not to read *Why it’s kicking off everywhere: the new global revolutions*.

Simply by bringing together insightful reports from the uprisings of 2010-11 - in Egypt, Greece, Israel, Spain, the UK and the US - Mason helps the reader get an overview of the present state of global class struggle. But, more than this, he puts these struggles in a historical and theoretical context and so provokes more interesting questions than any other recent book.

Mason’s main historical analogy is to compare the uprisings of 2011 with the waves of unrest in Europe in 1848 and in the period before World War I. He argues that the radical intelligentsia, the newly unionised workers and the slum-dwellers of the 19th century can be compared to the “graduates without a future”, the shrunken trade unions and the precarious workers of today. He also claims that the globalisation of the world economy, the revolutions in communications technology and the striving for individual freedom at the start of the 20th century can be compared to similar tendencies at the start of the 21st century.

Mason sees the internet-networked individual, driven to struggle by an unprecedented economic crisis, as the key participant in the uprisings of 2011. He even goes so far as to say that “in the revolutions of 2011, we’ve begun to see the human archetypes that will shape the 21st century” (p152). He wants these uprisings to lead to real change and is not afraid to cite Marx’s criticisms of inadequate alternatives, such as cooperatives and ‘back to the land’ socialisms. He writes that Marx argued: “you had to find a way to take control of the big stuff - finance, industry and agribusiness - and create enough wealth ... to eliminate human need ... [and] begin to address the alienation and unfreedom at the heart of human existence” (p142).

This is genuinely revolutionary stuff. But in other sections of the book he appears sympathetic to the reformist New Deal policies of the 1930s (p169). He also claims that today’s politicians have a choice: either “a new, more equitable and sustainable form of globalisation ... or [a] retreat behind national barriers” (p124). And, in an interview with *Mute*, he denies that a socialist alternative is even an option. This is consistent with the pro-capitalist, neo-Keynesian policies he advocated in his earlier book, *Meltdown, the end of the age of greed*. There he merely proposed wealth redistribution, the “re-regulation of global finance” and a “wider reinsertion of the state into the economy” (pp163-72).

Keynesian reform and war

Mason’s main concern is less bringing about revolutionary change and more that, without such neo-Keynesian state intervention, humanity will descend into “nationalism and protectionism”, “competing economic blocs” and an end to “rising personal freedom” (p124). In a *Red Pepper* interview, he even claims that “this generation of protestors could easily suffer the fate of social democracy in

1914, [which] had to choose between being a recruitment sergeant for mass slaughter [and] becoming an underground movement.”

But how likely is it that the present crisis will lead to a return to 1914, a return to nationalism, authoritarianism and global war? And how accurate is it to contrast ‘good’ Keynesian reform with ‘bad’ nationalism, authoritarianism and war? Surely, it is more accurate to say that the peacetime Keynesianism of the New Deal was a failure, considering that, by 1939, the US still had 10 million unemployed. Indeed, Keynesianism could only be made to work once nationalism, authoritarianism and the 1939-45 war had devalued sufficient capital to restore profitability, and the US had become the dominant global power.² Keynesianism then required the cold war to maintain both military spending and a wartime discipline, in which militant workers could be discredited as conspiring with the ‘communist’ enemy.

In other words, rather than being an alternative to nationalism, authoritarianism and war, Keynesianism actually required these horrors. The moment that nationalism and wartime discipline declined, as they did in the 1960s, workers took advantage of Keynesian full employment and welfare provision by striking and working less, and the whole Keynesian system went into crisis.³

This is why the ruling class are so reluctant to return to Keynesianism and have, instead, opted for long-term austerity. But austerity also requires war. Whether Stalinist, fascist or Thatcherite, 20th century rulers could only impose austerity on people by both distracting and uniting them through a constant state of war emergency. The cold war was ideal for this. However, all attempts to revive it in the 21st century, as the ‘war on terror’, have resulted in failure.

Despite the brutality of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, international opposition deterred the US from attempting to bomb and massacre people into submission as it did in Korea and Vietnam. At the same time, the US population’s reluctance to sacrifice its soldiers compelled the US military to use so much violence to protect its personnel that it created irreconcilable hostility to the American presence.

Unable to risk putting troops on the ground in Libya, Syria or Iran, the US now finds it increasingly difficult to unite western populations around military confrontations with smaller powers. What western capitalism really requires is a new ‘communist threat’. But the only candidate for this is China. And, having had to contain its own workers by deindustrialising, western capitalism now completely depends on the ability of the Chinese communists to contain Chinese workers while they manufacture the world’s consumer goods. This makes a new cold war, with an increasingly unstable China, highly unlikely. As Hillel Ticktin argues, unable to revive either the credit boom, Keynesianism or the cold war, capitalism simply has no strategy.⁴ Maybe all it can do is to disintegrate slowly, while people’s expectations of a better life are dashed again and again.

This situation may last for years. But there has never been a time in history when people have put up with endless impoverishment, while the available technology could so

easily create abundance. And, as the collapse of the Soviet empire and Arab dictatorships shows, when regimes cannot provide a better life, people start looking for alternatives - which, once expressed in an oppositional movement, tend to spread internationally very quickly. Such movements can be repressed for a while. But, without the justifications of the cold war, repression delegitimises any regime that uses it, and this just creates more opposition.

This all means that Mason is right to say that we may be returning to something like the social unrest before 1914. The big difference is that today, unlike in 1914, our rulers cannot escape such unrest by launching a global war.

Big history

Mason appreciates some aspects of this situation and predicts “repeated stand-offs between the masses and the policymakers” (p90). However, all his historical references, from 1848 to the 1960s, involve social conflicts that were eventually followed by a revival of the capitalist system. Yet what if such a revival is no longer possible? We would then need historical references on a larger scale than the past 200 years. We would then need to compare the present crises of capitalism with the rise and fall of social systems over thousands of years.

Mason, however, is reluctant to explore bigger historical patterns. He insists both that “there is no predestined outcome to ... the development of ... class struggle or individual freedom” and that “you can’t return to the past” (pp152, 142). These statements are, strictly speaking, true. But it is also true that people’s desire for community and freedom does create cycles in history, in which the past does, in some ways, return.

Marx was not averse to predicting such cycles. For example, when writing about a range of ‘primitive’ societies, including Russian village communes, he not only says that “the vitality of primitive communities was incomparably greater than that ... of modern capitalist societies”. He also says: “The best proof that this development of the ‘rural commune’ is in keeping with the historical trend of our age is the fatal crisis which capitalist production has undergone in the European and American countries, where it has reached its highest peak, a crisis that will end in its destruction, in the return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type - collective production and appropriation.”⁵

Marx was wrong in this prediction of a fatal capitalist crisis in the 19th century. He also failed to predict how capitalism would be able to use two world wars, the cold war, Keynesianism and, more recently, cheap credit to prevent any fatal crisis in the 20th century. But, if capitalism has, at last, run out of survival strategies, then Marx’s prediction could turn out to be uncannily prescient in the 21st century.

If capitalism cannot revive itself to, at least, give the younger generation the hope that they will be better off than their parents, then we need to prepare ourselves for some interesting times. And we certainly need to do more than just repeat the political projects of the 20th century, such as Keynesianism, Leninism or anarcho-syndicalism.

Any return to Mason’s 19th century model would be little better. After all, his favourite revolutionary project, the Paris Commune of 1871, soon began to go in the same authoritarian direction as the similar projects of the 20th century - such as the factory committees of the Russian Revolution and the anarchist collectives of the Spanish Civil War.⁶

In its short life, the Paris Commune attempted to forcibly repress prostitutes, beggars and drunkenness. The state tobacco company decided to threaten dismissal for insubordination and even for singing at work. And the ‘socialist’ leaders of the Louvre cooperative complained that its workers were lazy and greedy and that: “Communism’s a joke. Hard workers shouldn’t feed idlers.”⁷

People in the 21st century will not risk the upheavals of revolution just to create this sort of authoritarianism. People will only be attracted to anti-capitalist revolution if it enables them to create a freer society than capitalism, a society without any alienated work, a genuine communist society.

Such a ‘genuine communist society’ seems impossibly utopian until we recall that vast amounts of music, films, software and books - things that used to cost significant amounts of money - are already available free on the internet. If these things are free today, why not food, housing and transport tomorrow? If artists, hobbyists, activists and many web content providers can be productive today, without the motivation of wage labour, why can’t all production be based on unalienated labour tomorrow?

Few people will be interested in such genuine communist ideas while they still believe that capitalist prosperity will return. But, when they realise that it will not, more and more people will feel compelled to search for real alternatives to capitalism. Imagine a situation in which protests, like the 2011 Occupy movement, became regular events, involving millions of workers on the scale of the 2003 anti-war demos, bringing cities across the world to a halt, again and again. Rather than going back, the next day, to their insecure individual lives, wouldn’t people be tempted to end this insecurity for good and to take over - to occupy - everything? Wouldn’t they be tempted to start networking globally and to start working out how to run this world without poverty, insecurity or alienation?

Such communist insurrections might well be defeated by a combination of repression, Keynesianism and nationalism. But, if capitalism still cannot improve living standards, any defeats will merely educate workers in how to succeed the next time.

Women and genuine communism

These speculations on future revolutions raise many more questions, such as who would be at the forefront of them? Mason’s suggestion of “graduates without a future”, in alliance with both organised and more precarious workers, is plausible. He also suggests another element when he notes that women were the backbone of the 2011 uprisings. Indeed, one of

his interviewees points out that the Athens protests especially attracted “young single mothers, who realise that this crisis is going to hit them very hard” (p89). Meanwhile, in Britain, one survey claims that 70% of families are living on the edge financially and that almost half of the mothers who responded to the survey feel abandoned by the government in their time of need.⁸

These tendencies towards women’s politicisation are consistent with past revolutionary situations. From the women’s march to Versailles during the French Revolution to the women workers who started the Russian Revolution in February 1917, impoverished women have repeatedly catalysed social revolutions. Having overthrown the old regimes, these women then retreated from the public sphere. Meanwhile, hunger and scarcity discouraged people from sharing things or from even attempting to live without the alienation of wage labour. These post-revolutionary societies then descended into civil war, reinforcing masculinist militarism and restoring women’s subservient role.

However, the revolutions of the 21st century will be different from this, if only because women have already overthrown much of this subservient role. As Mason noted in his original blog post, ‘Twenty reasons why it’s kicking off everywhere’, “the ‘archetypal’ protest leader ... now is an educated young woman”.¹⁰

The other difference from past revolutionary situations is that industrial production now has the potential to end all significant scarcity. Under these circumstances, it is less likely that future revolutions will descend into brutal civil war - especially as men are already less willing to fight than they were in previous centuries. It is also less likely that any post-revolutionary society, especially its working class female members, would settle for a new regime centred on wage labour and the economy. Surely, any post-revolutionary society would be more likely to centre itself on sharing, community and child-rearing?

Mark Kosman

Notes

- Mason ends his March BBC report by saying: “Today many union members are outraged at the scale of violence and destruction ... And, with the ‘Black Bloc’ growing, the policing methods needed to contain it may need to evolve some more” (*Newsnight* on March 26 2011TUC demonstration).
- J Holloway, ‘The abyss opens: the rise and fall of Keynesianism’ (available at libcom.org).
- H Ticktin, ‘A Marxist political economy of capitalist instability and the current crisis’ (available at libcom.org).
- H Ticktin, ‘Marx’s spectre haunts the wealthy and powerful’ *Weekly Worker* December 1 2011.
- Any idea of returning to the ‘archaic’ past is unsettling for many people - including many Marxists. Marx himself, however, insisted that “we must not let ourselves to be alarmed at the word ‘archaic’” (*MECW* Vol 24, pp346-59). See also *Origin of the family, private property and the state* which Engels wrote at Marx’s “bequest” and which ends with a similar prediction of a revival of ancient relations. The most scientifically rigorous development of Marx’s and Engels’ anthropological insights has been that of the Radical Anthropology Group: see C Knight, ‘Solidarity and sex’ *Weekly Worker* August 31 2006, and L Sims, ‘Primitive communism, barbarism and the origins of class society’ *Weekly Worker* February 9 2012.
- M Seidman *Workers against work; labor in Barcelona and Paris during the popular fronts* Los Angeles 1990.
- The Daily Telegraph* February 16 2012.
- R Tombs *The Paris Commune 1871* pp87-96.
- www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2011/02/twenty_reasons_why_its_kicking.html.
- See, for example, *The Cambridge encyclopaedia of hunters and gatherers*.

FINKELSTEIN

Pragmatism in the service

Norman Finkelstein admits he has switched from being 'a critic of Israel to a diplomat who wants to resolve the conflict'. Tony Greenstein looks at the issues

On November 11 2011, Norman Finkelstein gave a talk at the Institute of Education in London. It was a sell-out. Every seat was filled and a thousand people attended. Finkelstein came on half an hour later, like a rock star, to rapturous applause. The event was sponsored by the Palestine Return Centre and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods.

However the Norman Finkelstein who spoke was a different person from the person who had written *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London 2000). The latter was a savage critic of the way the Zionist movement and US imperialism have used and exploited the extermination of European Jewry in the service of settlement, expansion, war and genocide. One example of this was the refusal of Elie Wiesel to pressurise the Israeli government into ending the supply of weapons to the Guatemalan junta, which murdered up to 200,000 Mayan Indians in the 1980s. Genocide is fine by Zionism's favourite Auschwitz survivor, as long as Jews are not the victims.

Norman Finkelstein was the brightest star in the firmament. His searing academic dissection of Zionist propagandists and frauds was second to none. Joan Peter's fraudulent *From time immemorial*, which asserted that the Palestinians were recent immigrants to Palestine attracted by the Zionist economy, was blown out of the water.¹ Among the many jewels in Peter's crown was her citation of the medieval Arab historian, Makrizi, who died in 1442, as an eye-witness to mid-19th century population movements!

Finkelstein's critique of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's willing executioners: ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London 1996) - which blamed the Holocaust on something inherent to being German, holding that Nazism was benign except for the Jews - was clinical and merciless. For Goldhagen the problem was not fascism or Nazism, but "eliminationist" anti-Semitism.² When Metropolitan Books agreed to publish *Nation on trial: the Goldhagen thesis and historical truth* by Finkelstein and Bettina Birn, it came under massive pressure not to publish - Birn was chief historian of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Canadian justice department. Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League proclaimed that "the issue ... is not whether Goldhagen's thesis is right or wrong, but what is 'legitimate criticism'". Publisher Sara Bershtel's response was that the former was "precisely the issue".³

Finkelstein, a political scientist, went head to head with Zionism's Holocaust historians, for whom all criticism of Zionist behaviour during the Holocaust or their use of the Holocaust as a propaganda weapon is 'illegitimate'. With two parents, both survivors of the Warsaw ghetto and the extermination camps, he was able to command authority when he wrote on the subject. Finkelstein understood how Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Guttman, Ghili Fatran *et al* of Yad Vashem, the Zionist Holocaust propaganda museum, used the extermination of over five million Jews to intimidate and silence all those who did not accept Zionism's sanitised history. Instead of being a movement of collaboration, Zionist fiction was that it had led the resistance and been proved 'right' when it said that Jews

could never live among non-Jews.

Yad Vashem created the ideological underpinnings for the use of the Holocaust to justify Israel's war against an indigenous Palestinian population. Finkelstein showed how Zionist organisations that claimed reparations from Germany - in particular the Jewish Claims Conference - had stolen and defrauded the survivors, via expense accounts, lawyers and 'educational projects', whilst the survivors had to don yellow stars and pyjamas and take to the streets to protest about the theft of their money and resulting poverty.⁴

Finkelstein provided us with the absurdity of how Ronald Reagan - who in his Bitberg speech in 1985, had described the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS as "victims of the Nazis as surely as the victims of the concentration camps" - was awarded by the Simon Wiesenthal Center the title of 'Humanitarian of the Year' in 1988, while the Anti-Defamation League of Abe Foxman gave him the 'Torch of Liberty' in 1994.

But the Socialist Workers Party disagreed. The SWP lives in hermetically sealed ideological spheres - one marked anti-fascism and Holocaust, the other 'anti-Zionism' - and ne'er the twain shall meet. SWP guru, professor Alex Callinicos, declared that Finkelstein was "dangerously close to giving comfort to those who dream of new Holocausts".⁵ The tunnel vision of the SWP prevents it from understanding the difference between the Holocaust and the Holocaust industry, that Zionism's misuse of the Holocaust is a real comfort for Holocaust deniers.

Finkelstein's second book, *Beyond chutzpah: on the misuse of anti-Semitism and the abuse of history* (Los Angeles 2005) proved that *The case for Israel*, the book written by Harvard professor of law Alan Dershowitz, was plagiarised. He had faithfully copied Zionist mistakes! One of the consequences of his attack on Dershowitz, was that Finkelstein was denied tenure at DePaul University.

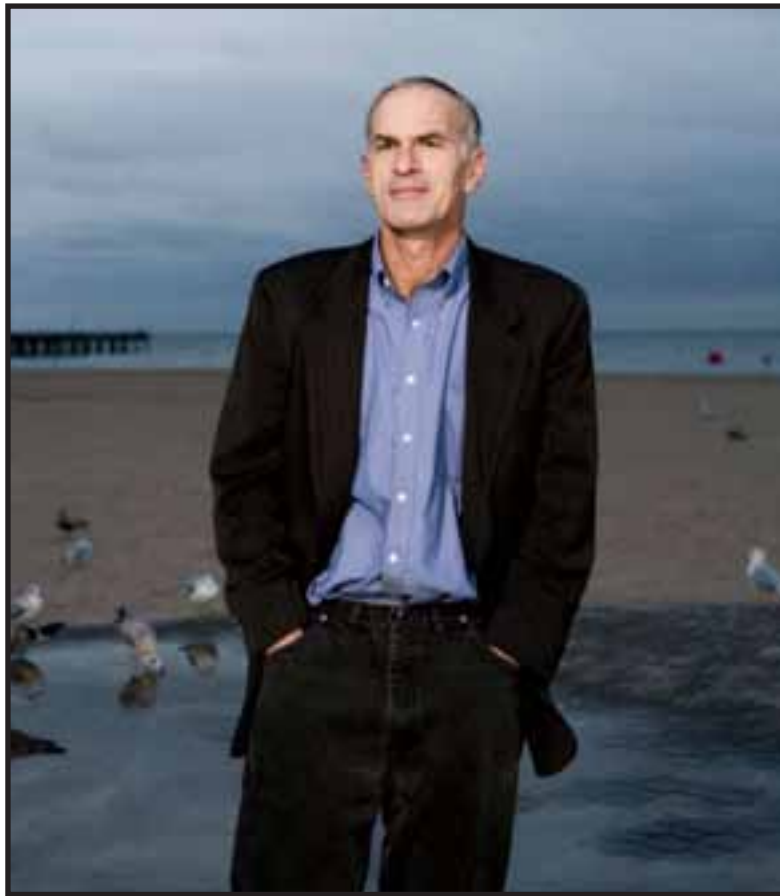
But Finkelstein is a man in a hurry. In his own words, "I switched hats from a critic of Israel to a diplomat who wants to resolve the conflict."⁶

'International law'

Norman Finkelstein has had a remarkable academic career. The warmth of the audience at the Institute of Education was testimony to that fact. Yet he has taken advantage of his reputation in order to promote an imperialist settlement of the Palestinian question.

Today Finkelstein does not mention the word 'Zionism'. Israel is just another state gone astray. Its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is an aberration. Its treatment of Arab Israelis merely another example of how states (mis)treat their minorities.

Finkelstein's problem is his lack of any class analysis. He sees the United Nations as representing the 'community of nations'. International law is his panacea. But international law is helpless against US drone attacks on Pakistan's north-western frontier. It is might and might alone which lies at the heart of imperialist power relations with their client regimes in the underdeveloped world. Even in the imperialist metropolis, when the bankers and capitalists are challenged, the police resort to naked and brutal force against peaceful protest, as when the Occupy protestors were pepper-sprayed in Oakland,



Norman Finkelstein: from Mao to Naider

California. Of course, the law gives a semblance of authority and rationale to the rule of capital. It legitimises the US's actions and those of western imperialism through institutions such as the UN. But the UN can only act when the USA allows it to. That is why Israel is allowed to break international law with impunity and, just to make sure, the US vetoes all resolutions which are critical of Israeli actions.

The UN has a human rights council and commissioners. Not one country has proposed that the UN reverse its policy of opposition to torture, yet a large majority of its members practise torture as an act of state policy. Yet this is the body which Finkelstein argues can impose a just solution to the Palestinian question. The same UN which was responsible for endorsing the creation of the Israeli state and which has never proposed a single sanction against Israel for disregarding its resolutions on the refugees, settlements and occupation.

Every year the United Nations passes by an overwhelming majority a motion calling for a just solution to the refugee problem and proceeds to do nothing. The UN is a gang of thieves and cut-throats. Its representatives include all the world's butchers. In the 1970s, at the US's insistence, the representatives of Pol Pot and the genocide of up to two million people in Cambodia also took their rightful seats in the assembly. The only people who are not represented in the UN are the poor and impoverished. The UN is a parody of a democratic world society - in practice it is controlled by the security council, on which the major imperialist powers have a right of veto.

Finkelstein puts his eggs in the basket of international law. Yet the whole concept of international law is dubious. Who legislates for the 'international community'? How is international law implemented? Who is accountable? What body impartially administers it? The International Criminal Tribunal and Court prosecute only anti-western war criminals. Bush, Blair and Pinochet have nothing to fear. Only secondary war criminals

get their collar felt.

Finkelstein argues that one should not be "selective with the law", which is "a package". But this is not true. Most people understand that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor:

They hang the man, and flog the woman,

That steals the goose from off the common;

But let the greater villain loose,

That steals the common from the goose.

Law is not neutral. It reflects the interest of the ruling classes in society, the powerful and rich. This is even more true of international law than domestic legislation. Law in capitalist society is concerned not with human rights or justice, but property. We can see that in the complicity of New Labour and the execrable Jack Straw with extraordinary rendition. Torture is illegal, but never has it so thrived.

Abnormal state

The fact is that Norman Finkelstein is not an anti-Zionist. He sees Israel not as a settler-colonial state, but just another normal western state. But in most European countries there is, at the official level, at least an attempt to eradicate direct and obvious racial discrimination. In the European Union there have been race directives and legislation aimed at outlawing racial discrimination. Anyone living in Britain today knows that racism on the football terraces is clamped down upon, whereas Jerusalem's Beitar football team openly refuses to play an Arab and its supporters can stage an anti-Arab pogrom, unhindered by the police.⁷ In Britain the Scarman report deemed the cost of racism as being too high.

In Israel the state and its parties compete as to who is the greatest racist. The state introduces legislation which is overtly racist, such as a citizenship law which prevents an Israeli Arab living with another Arab in Israel. Clayton Swisher has described how foreign minister Tsipi Livni has been negotiating with the Palestinian Authority about the

transfer of Israel's Arab citizens into any future bantustan.⁸ To pretend that Israel's racism is no different from other countries is to fail to understand the nature of Zionism.

In an Israeli newspaper Finkelstein is quoted as saying that "Nobody really defends Israel any more" - apart from a few Zionist zealots. That is why "I switched hats from a critic of Israel to a diplomat who wants to resolve the conflict".⁹ It is true that Israel is losing the propaganda battle. The reason is that deeds outweigh words, despite the best efforts of the BBC. The idea of a little David (Israel) against the Arab Goliath has not been heard of for some time. But winning or losing public opinion, which to Finkelstein is so important, is only half the battle. Opinion polls in the US support taxing the rich, but congress simply ignores it. The idea that western foreign policy is opinion-driven is but one of Finkelstein's mistakes.

But support for Israel is not negligible. There is a close linkage between western economies and that of Israel. If the political case against Israel has begun to be won, it is because of the reality on the ground and the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). A campaign that Finkelstein opposes.

There has also been a process of political clarification. Support for the Palestinians comes primarily from the left. It is the right, including the British National Party and English Defence League (and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty!), which support Israel. Thirty years ago, stalwarts of the Labour Left like Tony Benn and Eric Heffer were members of Labour Friends of Israel. Support for Israel was a defining hallmark of New Labour. Today it is the preserve of western elites. As oil supplies decrease, the militarisation of the Middle East proceeds apace - and with it Israel's utility to the west. Although most western countries would concede a two-state solution, they are not prepared to pressurise their watchdog. The settlements and confiscations are Israel's political price.

It is true that "young liberal Jews have difficulty defending the use of cluster bombs in Lebanon or supporting the Israeli settlements".¹⁰ But it was always a fiction that support for Israel depended on a 'Jewish' vote. Jews and the Holocaust were the cover for imperialist interests. This is not new. Britain expanded its empire at the same time as its navy patrolled the African coast seeking to intercept slave boats. Very few imperial powers have justified what they did in terms of naked interests.

Without a doubt the loss of Jewish intellectual and political support for Zionism heralds the beginning of the end. That is why it is important to be clear that seeking to repartition Palestine represents a continuation of the conflict.

The weakness of Finkelstein's politics is exemplified by his adoration of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi represented the rich peasants and Indian capitalists in their battle with the British. He was extremely wary of the use of the strike weapon for nationalist ends and called off the mass 'no tax' Bardoli campaign in 1922 for fear of its success. George Orwell wrote:

"Gandhi has been regarded for 20 years by the government of India as one of its right-hand men. I know what I'm talking about - I used to be an officer in the Indian police. It was

of imperialism

always admitted in the most cynical way that Gandhi made it easier for the British to rule India, because his influence was always against taking any action that would make any difference.

The reason why Gandhi when in prison is always treated with such lenience and small concessions sometimes made when he has prolonged one of his fasts to a dangerous extent is that the British officials are in terror that he may die and be replaced by someone who believes less in ‘soul force’ and more in bombs.”¹¹

Gandhi was a friend of the jute mill and steel owners and despite his ‘pacifism’ recruited for the British army during World War I, as well as accepting Britain’s communal electorates that paved the road to the butchery of partition in 1947. Ghandi’s mythical status owes much to a British wish to deceive people that passive resistance won out over a cold and calculated decision that Britain was no longer able to afford to hold on to India.

Two states

So too with the Palestinians. An independent state alongside a militarily powerful Israeli state would be the Palestinian Authority writ large. It would be a travesty of independence and make the apartheid-era bantustans seem like models of independence. Most people in the boycott campaign do not support a two-state solution because such a solution is an apartheid solution. It will leave intact a ‘Jewish’ state based on the idea that there will always be a Jewish majority.

In 1948 three quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were expelled in order that a Jewish majority could be created in Israel. As the Arab population has grown, Israel’s racist demographers, such as professors Arnon Sofer and Sergio Della Pergola, argue that a two-state solution is necessary in order that Israel can remain a ‘Jewish’ state. What Finkelstein is saying is that Zionism should be allowed its victory with the resulting apartheid discrimination against Israel’s 1.5 million Arabs. Not only should the exile of three million refugees be ignored, but the Zionists should effectively be allowed to repeat the process, since two states is an open invitation to expel Israeli Arabs from the first into the second.

The demographics of Israel are different from South Africa. Within the area of Palestine/Israel there is a rough parity between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. In South Africa whites were outnumbered at least six to one. After the war against Angola was lost and then the formation of Zimbabwe, South Africa was never again able to dominate its neighbours. In the Middle East the Arab spring has been absorbed and diverted by imperialism. Israel has remained largely untouched except for its first mass movement, the tent protests.

At the heart of Finkelstein’s advocacy of two states lies his own political confusion. Israel is abnormal, a state not of its own citizens, but of the ‘Jewish people’. He devoted a chunk of his speech in November to the inability of Israel’s most ‘liberal’ chief justice, Aharon Barak, to reconcile the irreconcilable - that Israel is both a Jewish and a democratic state. Yet he drew no conclusions from the fact that, even though democracy means that Palestinians have the right to form a majority, Israel’s status as first and foremost a ‘Jewish’ state, a state which accord privileges to those defined as Jewish, means that it can never be democratic. As Meir Kahane, the neo-Nazi Zionist member of the Knesset, used to say, either Israel is a Jewish state or a democratic state. It cannot be both.

In fostering illusions in the 42-year-old ‘peace process’ Finkelstein helps provide a fig-leaf for occupation. Even open anti-Arab racists like Israel’s foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, support a two-state solution. But because Zionism’s goal is the occupation of the entire biblical land of Israel, any Palestinian state is anathema. A Palestinian statelet can only be a temporary

solution until such time as it is reconquered and its inhabitants expelled across the Jordan.

As Moshe Dayan explained, “Fundamentally, a Palestinian state is an antithesis of the state of Israel ... The basic and naked truth is that there is no fundamental difference between the relation of the Arabs of Nablus to Nablus and that of the Arabs of Jaffa to Jaffa ... And if today we set out on this road and say that the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights, then it will not end with the West Bank. The West Bank together with the Gaza Strip do not amount to a state ... The establishment of such a Palestinian state would lay a cornerstone to something else ... Either the state of Israel - or a Palestinian state.”¹²

Finkelstein sees ‘statehood’ as an end in itself. He makes no attempt to spell out what a two-state resolution would mean in practice. Hence his ‘diplomacy’ never extends to asking why Israeli Jews and Arabs should live separately in different states. Are they mutually incompatible, as used to claimed by the whites of South Africa in relation to blacks? This is not nationalism, but racism of the nationalist variety. Far from achieving ‘peace’, all the racial fantasies and fears of ‘dirty Arabs’ will build up behind the border. Partition has an unenviable record. A response to the calamity of colonialism, it has been a terrible failure, whether in Ireland, India or Cyprus. Yet the cerebral Finkelstein does not even acknowledge the possibly calamitous consequences.

Israel/Palestine is already an apartheid unitary state, with half the population deprived of all political and civil rights. The real task is to de-Zionise Israel and create one unitary, secular and democratic Israel/Palestine. Like all settler peoples, the Israeli Jews are Jewish Palestinians.

BDS success

Finkelstein’s attacks on the boycott movement for not supporting a two-state solution is as breathtaking as it is misplaced. It is Palestinians who call for boycott - the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel first made the call. He has found the magic bullet and expects Palestinians to fall in line. He compares his formative political influences in Maoism - in his words a political cult - with the boycott movement. Finkelstein expects Palestinians to pay the price for his political gymnastics.

In an interview with activist Frank Barat, Finkelstein says: “Yes, BDS has had some victories, but ... it’s a cult. I’m tired of it. I went through my cult stage. I was a Maoist. There were two competing possibilities - you can be a Maoist/Leninist and waste 20 years of your life; [or] you can work with Ralph Nader - lot of bills through congress ... I’m not going to be in a cult again.”¹³

Finkelstein appears to believe that he has wasted his life on a cause that is not bearing fruit. Banished from Israel and the West Bank, he is turning on the solidarity movement and BDS, looking for a pragmatic solution within imperialism and capitalism. He has become attracted to what he believes is immediately achievable - hence Ralph Nader is his consummate political hero. Finkelstein has grown cynical of revolutionary change, which is what the liberation of Palestine demands. He is not so far from the reactionary, cultish Maoism he purports to abjure.

Finkelstein says: “If you are serious about politics you can’t go beyond what the public accepts, and that is international law.”¹⁴ This is his most important and enduring political mistake. Israel does not today rule over 4-5 million Palestinian Arabs because ‘international law’ granted them permission to do so. It does so because Zionism was based on “creating ‘facts on the ground’”.¹⁵ From this there came the law.

Finkelstein insults and caricatures the BDS movement as a “little ghetto”, a

“cult”. If this were so, it is hardly likely that the knesset would pass a law which effectively criminalises calls for a boycott of Israel. Israeli propaganda now focuses on ‘delegitimisation’ of Israel. BDS has forced Zionism onto the back foot. It throws into question the legitimacy of the Zionist state and its apartheid institutions. Finkelstein belittles its accomplishments, but BDS has made a significant impact - not only economically but in the academic, cultural and political arenas.

Veolia has just suffered a £500 million loss of contract in west London and is trying to withdraw from the Jerusalem light railway project. The decision of British and Irish trade unions to support BDS has hurt the morale of the Israeli state. Our task is to turn these resolutions into reality. The growth of supermarket boycotts is a reflection of the growth in support for Palestine. A range of artists and musicians - Elvis Costello, Roger Waters, Santana - have supported the cultural boycott and refused to play in Israel. Others have disrupted Israeli concerts in London. There is even a Boycott from Within group in Israel itself.

Of course, the Palestinian struggle faces major problems in comparison with the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The liberation movement there was based on the black working class and the Communist Party leadership. The Palestinian leadership is made up of collaborators and wannabe oppressors. The Palestine Authority in Ramallah tortures those under its control, as does Hamas. Both opposed the movement against Mubarak and suppressed demonstrations against the tyrant. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the last resort of the Egyptian military, are the parents of Hamas, who only joined the demonstrations against Mubarak at a late stage.

Norman Finkelstein has abandoned support for the right of the Palestinian refugees to return. He asks whether a “person in the public” would find it “reasonable for six million Palestinians to descend on a country which right now has 1.8 million Palestinians and five and a half million Jews”.¹⁶ Put in those terms, probably not, but that is not the choice. Most Palestinians, given the chance to return, will not take it up. They will likely choose to stay where they are, but they should have the *right* if they so wish. Most European and American Jews will likely return to Europe. Already many of them possess two passports. Israeli Jews are increasingly seeking an escape route.

Finkelstein says: “If we end the occupation and we bring back six million Palestinians and we have equal rights for Arabs and Jews we have no Israel. That’s what it’s really about. And you think you’re fooling anybody?” It is hard to disagree. If equal rights for Arabs and Israelis means no Israel, then that is a price well worth paying ●

Notes

- See C Hitchens and E Said (eds) *Blaming the victims: spurious scholarship and the Palestinian question* chapter 2, London 1988.
- ‘Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s “crazy” thesis: a critique of Hitler’s willing executioners’ *New Left Review* July-August 1997.
- See N Finkelstein *The holocaust industry* London 2000, p66.
- http://forward.com/articles/11471/jerusalem-offers-aid-after-holocaust-survivors-mar.
- Socialist Worker* July 22 2000.
- www.haaretz.com/blogs/focus-u-s-a/norman-finkelstein-bids-farewell-to-israel-bashing-1.422684.
- See http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/beitar-football-fans-stage-pogrom.html.
- C Swisher *The Palestine papers* London 2011.
- ‘Norman Finkelstein bids farewell to Israel bashing’ *Ha’aretz* April 5: www.haaretz.com/blogs/focus-u-s-a/norman-finkelstein-bids-farewell-to-israel-bashing-1.422684.
- Ibid*.
- The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell* Vol 2, London 1970, p136.
- Ha’aretz* December 12 1975.
- http://vimeo.com/36854424.
- www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/152799#.T4VqVtnYpaY.
- www.normanfinkelstein.com/marriott-to-host-fund-raiser-for-heil-hebron-haus.
- www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/152799#.T4Vs3NnYpaY.

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.**

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weekly worker

Democratic rights being eroded

The creep of the secret state

Liberal democracy' is always a matter of give and take. The 'inalienable rights' of bourgeois mythology are, in practice, thoroughly alienable: the state will grant freedoms one minute and withdraw them the next, depending on the general political climate and - crucially - the steps in the great dance of the class struggle.

At the moment, it has to be said that we are living through a very worrying period on this front. In Britain, the general drift of events is exemplified by two proposals from the ruling coalition. The first, the 'justice and security' green paper, proposed last October, in practice amounts to the extension of secret trials and the use of secret evidence in court in 'sensitive cases'. Secondly, the equally euphemistically named 'communications capability development programme' will require internet service providers and other communications companies to hold data on telephone and internet usage for the perusal of all varieties of spooks.

Nothing to hide?

The green paper, considering its ominous implications, is notable for its general absence from the news cycle. Interestingly, the government has justified its proposals not on the usual grounds that it will help lock up evil terrorists, but that it will prevent sensitive state secrets from coming out in open court for all - including our fair nation's enemies - to see, under such circumstances when private individuals bring civil proceedings against the state.

That is not particularly reassuring. Indeed, one does not have to be some kind of leftwing radical to see something wrong with it. The joint parliamentary committee on human rights - a motley crew of MPs and lords supposed to oversee this type of thing - has launched a (by parliamentary committee standards) stinging attack on the green paper, having been reviewing it for some time.

"One of the constant themes," they write in their report, "in the evidence we have heard has been that the green paper seriously underestimates the extent to which its proposals represent a radical departure from the UK's constitutional tradition of open justice and fairness, or natural justice." There is no ambiguity about what is supposed to be meant by 'natural justice': "A party has the right to know the case against him and the evidence on which it is based. He is entitled to have the opportunity to respond to any such evidence and to any submissions made by the other side. The other side may not advance contentions or adduce evidence of which he is kept in ignorance ... the parties should be given an opportunity to call their own witnesses and to cross-examine the opposing witnesses."¹

The government has rather attempted to play down the significance of what it would like us all to see as technical changes; yet there is every reason even for the bourgeois establishment to be somewhat concerned by the extension of secrecy provisions. In a



Watching you

constitutional arrangement which so systematically shuts people out, the possibility for many of having your say in court before a notionally impartial judicial system is a key component of the regime's legitimacy (the 'rule of law' so beloved of bourgeois liberals).

That it is an illusory view of the rule of law is only relevant as and when the illusion falls apart. Put another way - the legal system is *already* quite sufficiently stacked against the sort of people the ruling class does not want to win. In order to force this through, the government will have to tread on the toes of the judiciary, who can make enough of a stink when they want to. Why the hurry? What is it that they are trying to hide?

Some indications as to an answer came from David Davis, the backbench Tory MP who has been a persistent thorn in David Cameron's side since the latter came out on top in the last party leadership election. Davis, perhaps not entirely inaccurately, is thought of as something of a maverick; but, more importantly, he is a skilled and Machiavellian political operator who knows when to break ranks.

The last major occasion on which he did so - although, like the Tory right in general, he has made his distaste for coalition government quite clear - was over the extension of detention without trial from 28 to 42 days. He stakes out his opposition to secret trials and evidence, however, not by decking himself once again in high-blown libertarian principles, but with a story of farcical infighting in the American secret state.

In brief: in the late 1990s, the Taliban regime set out to build

a modern telephone network in Afghanistan. The contract was awarded to an American citizen of Afghan descent by the name of Ehsanollah Bayat, who - unbeknown to the Taliban, was a mole for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He hired two British telecommunications experts to manage the technical side of things; but part of the job was to implant wiretaps while the work was going on, to enable the Americans to spy on the Taliban.

Then, in 1999, with the job half finished, Bill Clinton imposed trade sanctions on Afghanistan. This turned out to be a play by the Central Intelligence Agency to wrest control of the project; it got moving again only on September 8, 2001. Three days later, Al Qaeda flew two planes it had hijacked into the twin towers. By Davis's reckoning - and it is perhaps not too unreasonable an assumption - a farcical turf war cost thousands their lives and America its sanity.

This is where the secrecy aspect comes in. The American state attempted to cover up this embarrassment by using its state secrecy privileges. It had to do so, because - in the meantime - Bayat had attempted to defraud his British advisors out of millions of dollars' worth of shares. The latter were very much in on the dirty details of the CIA-FBI spat. The CIA berated, bullied and threatened the two, and leaned on the British government to shut down a civil case they brought back home. Now, Davis notes, it is all perfectly fine to talk about this - everyone involved has retired or otherwise moved on. The moral of the story: "giving a government agency an absolute right to secrecy encourages bad behaviour" (understatement of the century, surely ...).²

If Davis is right, there are two drivers for the suggestions included in the green paper. The first is the need to conceal instances of manifest incompetence on the part of British state agencies - of which, one can surely be convinced, there are many. The second is to stop secrets that

might embarrass the US coming out in British trials.

Yet this is *still* not the whole story: if the debate between different factions of bourgeois politicians has focused on hypothetical civil cases where official secrets may turn up as evidence, it is clear enough that the broader provisions of the green paper represent a considerable extension of the *formal* powers of the state to rig trials against the defendant, by denying access to the prosecution's evidence, removing the right to choose an attorney and hiding the proceedings from public knowledge - in short, by violating all the supposed principles of 'natural justice'. That is why, as is clear from reading between the lines, the Americans are quite so keen for this to go through - and equally why anyone with a progressive bone in their body should oppose it.

Cyberspooks?

As if that were not enough, there is also the prospect - to which I briefly referred last week³ - of sweeping new laws relating to internet monitoring. With ISPs and social networks logging all internet activity, it will be possible for all manner of state-employed unsavouries to probe into the minutest details of our lives, increasingly narrated through these media.

This is unlikely to take quite so Orwellian a form as it might first appear. This is not because of due restraint on the part of a prudent government, of course: it is simply a function of the fact that there is so damned *much* of the internet. One might, here, make a parable out of the police hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper, which was trumpeted as a state-of-the-art, high-tech investigation, with several phone lines and computers in use for data storage. The sheer volume of information, even by late 1970s standards, was rather too much to handle; and in the end, it failed to compensate for the pre-existing inadequacies of the police investigation.

Likewise, there is some debate about exactly how useful state data

mining operations actually are, even from the point of view of the state. They have been in operation in the US for some years - it has been widely pointed out that, given the number of personnel employed and the volume of data, there would have to be a million 'terrorists' in America for there to be a statistically significant chance of anybody finding one out purely by that method. On the other hand, if you have *already* made it onto the list of likely terror suspects, you can bet your bottom dollar that MI5 are reading your emails quite regardless of the legal niceties. The inevitable result, then, will be a good handful of falsely-fingered innocents for each 'terrorist' (by any definition).

Most will probably be let off, but it is not difficult to imagine an especially unfortunate innocent being pulled up for a dubious off-hand comment (or, indeed, merely sharing a name with a Salafist lunatic), detained for 42 days, then sent to a secret trial, and convicted on the basis of secret 'evidence'. Franz Kafka did not know the half of it.

Lurking behind both these measures, as noted, is the shadow of the United States. Barack Obama may have made a great play of distancing himself from the more overt swaggering authoritarianism of George Bush, but he is absolutely and steadfastly committed to maintaining the sharp end of the American secret state and its ability to sink its tentacles into anything it likes (indeed, in some areas, he has gone further than Bush dared). Even the most feeble British commitment to transparency is an obstacle to that, and so is any nod in the direction of internet privacy.

That David Cameron is quite as content to grovel before US power as *his* predecessor should surprise absolutely nobody, of course ●

Paul Demarty

Notes

1. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201012/jt-select/jtselect/286/28604.htm.
2. <http://politicshome.com/uk/article/50009/david-daviss-statement-on-foreign-secret-intelligence-and-state-secrets-privilege.html>.
3. 'Racism as thoughtcrime' *Weekly Worker* April 5.

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