

weekly **worker**



**Another split, another
sect. Simon Hardy and
co quit Workers Power**

■ Ken Livingstone
■ Hopi school
■ French elections
■ German far right

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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finding a principled
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is like looking
for a needle in a
haystack**



LETTERS



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

Reinvention

Comrade Pham Binh's letter of April 19 makes a series of distinct points and I will respond to them largely in order.

1. On comrade Binh's protest against the "method of debate": it is completely normal in printed or web debate to respond to arguments published elsewhere which you do not intend to repeat, and I stated at the beginning of my piece that we had cut comrade Binh's article and gave a clear reference to where the full text could be found. There is nothing in this method at all inconsistent with "rigorous and honest debate".

2. I stand by my characterisation of comrade Binh's view of the Occupy movement. Comrade Binh's own title for his piece is 'Over a Cliff and into Occupy with Lenin'. He says that Occupy has functioned in *practice* like the much-sought-after but never replicated vanguard party that Lenin helped create in early 20th century Russia. He goes on to quote Lenin, in *Leftwing communism*, arguing that revolutionary discipline comes from (to summarise) the combination of (1) class-consciousness, tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism with (2) an ability to link up with the broad masses and (3) correct political strategy and tactics. For tenacity, self-consciousness and heroism he links Occupy with the US civil rights movement and the Black Panthers.

He also says that: "The correctness of Occupy's tactics and political strategy is deeply felt by huge numbers of people because both have proven to be unmatched in effectiveness. This mass feeling explains why the ideas, values, and methods that animated [Occupy Wall Street], such as general assemblies, modified consensus, autonomy, horizontalism, direct action and direct democracy, dominate all corners of Occupy."

He emphasises that "Lenin's vision of revolution was fundamentally inclusive, not exclusive, and the same is true of Occupy's vision." It would, I think, have made more sense for comrade Binh to back off from what is, frankly, obviously OTT praise of Occupy, rather than to accuse me of mischaracterising his position.

3. On the "multi-tendency party", I said that the CPGB's conception of what is needed is rather sharply different from common versions - and I attributed the commonest version to Louis Proyect and to the Mandelites. I did not make clear, as I should have, that I regard comrade Binh's argument about Occupy *not* as an example of this sort of "multi-tendency party" conception, but as an example of what I said slightly later in the piece, that: "Meanwhile, the anarchists and semi-anarchists episodically reinvent the square wheel of 'direct action' coupled with the 'tyranny of structurelessness': producing, as they have always produced, ephemeral spectacles which draw in wider forces briefly, but evaporate quickly ..."

4. On *Leftwing communism*, my argument is not that Lenin actually exactly asserted the later orthodoxy, but that he *spun* the pre-1914 Russian Social Democratic Labour Party's orthodox Kautskyism (as against Luxemburg and the 'direct action' left) as an example of the *uniquely long and successful experience* of Bolshevism (as against the 'youthfulness' or 'childhood disorders' of the post-1918 western left). The *effect* of that *spin* was to create the conditions for the development of the orthodox dogma that the fundamental split came in 1903.

It is, of course, true that Marx and Engels used the concept of 'party' in the sense of an unorganised political trend. I think it is highly unlikely that Lenin was speaking *merely* in this sense in 1920 after the long dominance of the model of the German Social Democratic Party as an *organised* party.

5. On 'Lassalleans' and 'Marxists' in the proto-SPD: certainly there were sharp differences, and these persisted *after* 1891. But both the 'Lassalleans' and the 'Marxists' when they unified in 1875 were already agreed on the fundamental questions of 'class' not 'popular' politics, and of working class *political* action, as opposed to the political indifference of the Proudhonists and the direct-action fetishism of the Bakuninists.

6. It is certainly true that US politics is different from politics elsewhere: if for no other reason than because (as Engels said of 19th century Britain) the US "exploits the entire world". But it is still not a 19th century politics. On the one hand, the *mass influence* of the 'fractured heritage' of the left is gone pretty much everywhere. On the other, the practical political significance of rather small left groups and parties has not "been completely uprooted and destroyed" even in the US. In particular, radical movements are *steered back towards* the Democratic Party not just by the dominance of the two-party system, but also by the continued influence in the left and the labour movement of the Communist Party of the USA, of its very numerous unorganised ex-members, and the wider influence of the ideas of 'official' communism.

On the other hand, "the ideas, values, and methods that animated OWS, such as general assemblies, modified consensus, autonomy, horizontalism, direct action and direct democracy" is merely a reinvention of the ideas of *one branch* of this 'fractured heritage': Bakuninism.

Mike Macnair
email

On other foot

Among the things that Barbara Finch gets a bit wrong in her letter (April 19) is the Jewish religious law of Halitza (Levirate marriage).

According to her, "childless Jewish widows have to go through a disgusting and degrading ceremony if they want to free themselves from their brother-in-law's right to have a child by them, as proxy for their dead husband. This involves kneeling to take off the brother-in-law's shoe and being spat on by him; some brothers-in-law blackmail the widow for money or other favours before they agree to this ceremony." She describes this as "medieval barbarism".

Had she bothered to consult the source - not medieval, but much older (*Deuteronomy* 25:5-10) - she would have realised that she had it back to front. It is the brother-in-law who is duty-bound to marry the childless widow; and if he refuses, she must degrade him publicly by removing his shoe and spitting in his face. See also www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Halitza.html.

This law of Levirate marriage played an interesting part in English history, as it was used by Henry VIII to argue that it was his religious duty to marry Catherine of Aragon, the childless (and most probably virgin) widow of his elder brother, Arthur. (Later he changed his mind, but failed to persuade the pope that it was all a big mistake.)

Moshé Machover
email

Never again

I entirely agree with Barbara Finch's criticisms of my letter (April 19). I

should have been more precise when I wrote, "If equal rights for Arabs and Israelis means no Israel, then that is a price well worth paying." What I was saying was that equal rights for Arabs and Israelis will mean no Israel as a Zionist entity - which is, of course, what the current demands for recognition amount to. It goes without saying that Jewish Israelis have the right to continue living in Israel as equal citizens with their Arab neighbours.

Of course, the bigots of Hebron and Kiryat Arba, to say nothing of many racists of the far right, will choose to leave. It will be no loss. The same occurred in Rhodesia and South Africa. In addition, many Israelis have two passports and it is the right of such a state to insist that those holding two passports make a choice. Many of those in Israel currently, such as the Russian Jews (or one-third non-Jews) didn't want to be there, but the Zionists campaigned for over a decade for the United States to shut the immigration doors (as they did during the holocaust). But a secular, unitary state cannot be founded on the expulsion of its inhabitants and, in this, I agree with Barbara.

As regards the Socialist Workers Party, Barbara is correct to deny a whole analysis based upon a single line, but unfortunately it is not just a single line. When Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign invited Lenni Brenner, author of *Zionism in the age of the dictators* and *51 documents*, to speak on holocaust memorial day, the Zionists mounted a vigorous campaign to exclude him from all publicity materials. They did the same with Hajo Meyer, a survivor of Auschwitz and a noted supporter of the Palestinians.

What was remarkable at the time was that the SWP criticised SPSC for inviting Brenner, who has written extensively on Zionist collaboration with the Nazis. Leave aside that it was a New Labour gimmick to institute holocaust memorial day, given their appalling record in respect of the deportation of Roma. But the SWP was recognising the Zionist monopoly over the holocaust and saying that Palestinian solidarity organisations would just have to grin and bear it and not challenge the Zionist claim to represent the resistance (as well as the Judenrat and other collaborators).

In Brighton some years ago, the SWP openly organised a joint meeting with Zionist speakers at which all criticism of the Zionist record in the holocaust was excluded - I know, because I intervened in one such session to point out a few home truths. In search of a fake anti-fascist unity, the SWP has tended to compartmentalise the holocaust on the one hand and anti-fascism on the other, and to repeat the mantra, 'Never again', without ever analysing how the Zionists use that specifically.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Incapable

Arthur Bough denies that capitalism is in decline (Letters, March 8). In so doing, he adopts positions consistent with bourgeois propaganda.

The category of decline follows from Marx's dialectical method. Marx assumed that capitalism - like every other natural and social entity - had a birth, maturation, decline and death. He discovered the law that regulates the system. This is the law of value. In other words, the contradiction between use and exchange value provides the dynamic for changes in the labour process and the mode of the extraction of the surplus product.

The essence of a declining capitalism is a weakening of the hold that the value form has over social relations. It is marked by a growth of forms of capital and labour-power unproductive of value and surplus value, and a disintegration of the source of value - abstract labour.

Some of the consequences of decline are the domination of capital by finance capital; the tendency to monopoly; the emergence of institutions trying to organise and manage the global economy; nationalised and regulated entities; increased bureaucracy; state provision of welfare; and the socialisation and politicisation of economic relations generally.

In contrast, Bough derives his ideas of decline from three non-Marxist sources. The first is Stalinism, the second bourgeois economics and the third is the Soviet economist, Kondratiev.

From Stalinism, he takes the proposition that 'decline' means either a terminal crisis or an absolute drop in the standard of living of the working population. As the system is not yet facing proletarian overthrow and capitalism is still capable of creating new jobs, he concludes there is no economic crisis and therefore no decline ('The crisis is financial, it is not economic', October 13).

From bourgeois economics, Bough takes the idea that decline consists in the falling growth rates of national economies. He argues that, despite falling growth in the US and major European economies, capitalism has generated growth in some developing countries. He cites - as evidence of a tendency - the 2007 pre-crash growth rates of Mauritania (18%) and Angola (26%). He thinks these figures prove that capitalism as a whole is not in decline.

Finally, from Kondratiev, he takes the notion of decline as a falling rate of investment in technology. This corresponds to waves within long cycles that Kondratiev predicted would last for 50 years. Using trade figures, Bough argues that capitalism is now in an ascending wave of the cycle. Bough dismisses Trotsky's criticisms of Kondratiev's schema as undialectical and states that - contrary to appearances - the global economy is now experiencing an upturn. It is therefore neither in decline nor in crisis.

Following Kondratiev, Bough is forced to argue that there has been no essential change in the operation of the law of value: 21st century capitalism is fundamentally no different from 19th century capitalism. Political events such as the October revolution (and the Stalinist defeat lasting 70 years) have had little or no effect on the development of the system.

Denial of decline drives him to defend some absurd positions. These include that the export of finance capital abroad has not been a source of revenue for imperialist countries; that Stalinism did not influence bureaucratic forms of control over workers during the cold war; and that no distinction can be made between productive and unproductive labour.

It is not clear, therefore, whether Bough is a Marxist. His rejection of reality is consistent with bourgeois ideas that the value form gains increasing hold over social relations each time capitalism recovers from a downturn and that the ruling class has not made any concessions to workers.

Indeed, if Bough is correct, there is no reason to believe the system should ever significantly alter or come to an end. If he is a Marxist and thinks that capitalism is still in a healthy, mature phase, then he has a responsibility to outline the

conditions that would precipitate its decline. I doubt whether he is capable of doing this.

Paul B Smith
email

Nice cup of tea

The irony of history is that the current crisis of capitalism has led to a crisis of the left. Since the financial crisis began in 2008, we have seen expulsions, resignations and splits in left organisations ranging from Socialist Appeal to the Socialist Workers Party. The CPGB/*Weekly Worker* have not been immune to this crisis of the left - hence the splits over what orientation Marxists should take towards the Labour Party.

As Robbie Rix recently explained in his fighting fund column, the *Weekly Worker* will be hard hit by the Royal Mail's increase in first-class postage to 60p on April 30 ('Extortionate', April 12). For all the organisations of the left, who produce hard copies of their publications, it is very likely that this price rise will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. The leaders of these organisations will exert enormous pressure on their members to make up the shortfall by increasing their monthly standing orders. However, the result of this increased financial commitment, in a time of austerity, will be that we will see even more expulsions, resignations and splits over the coming period.

It is likely that most of the former students who recently joined left organisations will use this increased financial commitment as an excuse to end their period of socialist measles. The left, who have built their organisations on the shifting sands of radicalised students, will be left high and dry, and increasingly dependent on older, affluent, middle class members. However, these members have as much connection with the real world of food banks and doorstep lenders as the man in the moon.

As Dave Vincent has indicated, the CPGB now has a deep entryist policy in regard to the Labour Party, which is very similar to Alan Woods's centrist Socialist Appeal. Such a policy of sitting in meetings of Labour Party branches waiting for the arrival of the massed ranks of the impoverished working class has doomed Socialist Appeal to oblivion. The thesis of the CPGB of playing the "long game" in regard to Labour Party entryism will be a finished recipe for resignations and splits similar to Socialist Appeal. If this thesis is followed, we may as well take off our slippers, put our feet up and have a nice cup of tea, whilst we wait for better times.

John Smith
email

Off the cliff

First off, I'd like to welcome the article on Mélenchon ('Momentum builds behind France's third man', April 12). The New Anti-capitalist Party had it coming for its sectarianism in the European Union elections, but not mentioned in the article is the need for the parties on the left to call for proportional representation (probably of the German sort).

I'd also like to welcome Paresh Chattopadhyay chipping in (Letters, April 12). I sympathise with his views regarding the need to abolish generalised commodity production, but he's really off the cliff to suggest that every single iteration of generalised commodity production is capitalistic, that capitalism doesn't need to rely on markets (consumer goods and services, labour and capital). His definition of 'state capitalism' really stretches things too far, I think.

Strategically, though, his line is ultra-leftist through and through. Real

parties are real movements and vice versa (so most of today’s ‘movements’ and today’s electoral ‘parties’ don’t count). The working class cannot become the ‘worker class for itself’ without constituting itself into a mass political party-movement in the real sense, distinct from and opposed to all the other ‘parties’. Taking the SPD model to a new level these days requires that the party-movement create new internal party organs: ie, central and executive workers’ councils replacing traditional central and executive committees; lower party councils replacing traditional party committees.

I do agree with Paresh on his criticism of the Bolsheviks’ sloganeering. They should have called, as Lars Lih noted, for a revolutionary provisional government to carry out the minimum programme; and this RPG should have been similar to Mao’s central people’s government and (to a lesser extent) Castro’s pre-1976 council of ministers in relation to formal accountability to some revolutionary convention (called for by Bukharin and others on the left to replace the constituent assembly and congress of soviets).

Jacob Richter
email

Deluded

I welcome Ted Hankin’s views on world peak oil (Letters, March 29). Hankin argues that the consequences of the peak ‘must deal the final blow to ‘productive forces’ theories of socialism’. However, further on, Hankin continues: “... unlike Tony Clark, I do not write off Marxism as ‘obsolete’ because energy abundance was taken for granted within the doctrine: the point is to bring the theory into line with reality (this goes for environmental degradation as well).” This at least affirms that Marxism does have an obsolete side to it, in that it excluded the central role of non-renewable energy in the development of capitalism and the expansion of the productive forces.

Marxism not only took energy abundance for granted; Marxism is also based on the abundance theory of communism - in Marx’s view communism was only possible in a state of abundance. He may not have directly advocated the productive forces theory of socialism, but, since for Marx the precondition for communism is abundance, it is clear that productive forces theory find its lineage in Marxism.

I believe communism is mostly the result of ideological struggle and transformation, not the result of abundance. The productive forces theory views expanding the productive forces as the essential goal for the attainment of communism, with the ideological side taking the back seat. While expanding the productive forces is desirable and necessary up to a point, I certainly would not subscribe to the view that it inevitably leads to communism.

Tony Clark
London

Three cheers

Good to see that Terry Gavin was honoured for her lifetime of work for republican and other political prisoners (Letters, March 15). Terry not only campaigned for republican prisoners with the late sister Sarah Clarke but also, in more recent times, for political prisoners and ‘dissidents’ in Tibet and China. Well done, Terry.

Alan Mitchell
email

World to win

The results from the first round of voting in the French presidential elections were another indication of a growing rage against the liberal-capitalist political establishment, a

rage which the populist right has been the most successful at galvanising. Marine Le Pen’s Front National is now going to be a key player in French politics (both in the run-up to the second round of voting and in the period of political and economic upheaval to come).

Whilst the campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Front de Gauche was successful in creating widespread enthusiasm, pushing Hollande’s rhetoric to the left and drawing in thousands, the inescapable fact is that ultimately the far right won the battle for the hearts and minds of the young and disenfranchised. Polls before the election demonstrated how FN is the most popular party amongst the French youth and it is clear that in recent years they have established a solid base amongst young working class people. For a youth who have had their dignity robbed by mass unemployment, Le Pen’s nationalist rhetoric offers a sense of pride and belonging (one based on vicious exclusionary nationalism).

Equally Le Pen’s noises on the economy - at a time of crisis throughout Europe that has cast doubt amongst the masses as to the merits of globalisation - have made it easy for her to tap into this discontent. The success of Le Pen (and to an extent Hollande and Mélenchon) is largely due to the rejection of neoliberalism and the tyranny of ‘finance’.

Bourgeois analysts have already started arguing that the election result demonstrates the similarities between far right and far left: Dominic Lawson argued in *The Independent*, for example, that these ‘protectionist’ ‘totalitarianisms’ should be counterposed to liberal democracy and economic ‘freedom’, which, of course, has resulted in a perfect and wholly self-regulating socio-economic system. This argument from liberals is to be expected: capitalism and its accompanying liberal politics go into crisis; the class struggle intensifies; and resistance to capital takes different, ‘illiberal’ forms which hegemonic forces within society must absorb or defeat. The anger that fuels the radical left also has the potential to fuel the populist right, and unfortunately this is what has occurred in Europe since the financial crisis hit in 2008.

The rise of the English Defence League; the 500,000 votes for the British National Party in the last general election; and the UK

Independence Party’s current performance in the opinion polls - all indicate a similar rise of right-populist sentiment in the UK. Large sections of the capitalist media have played their part in fuelling this (whipping up anti-intellectualist feeling in response to the resistance of students and lecturers to the government’s education reforms; framing the August riots as down to ethno-cultural problems; attacking public sector unions for not accepting austerity for the good of the nation; treating the Muslim community with suspicion, etc). It is likely that if this trend continues there will be an attempt by the capitalist class to usurp leadership of the populist movement in order to maintain social relations within society as they are in the politically turbulent years to come. What this means is the inevitable betrayal of the class by the right, as the populists become the willing servants of capital, and so the popularity of the right must falter sooner or later.

If the left internationally is going to combat the rise of the right it must do so by addressing the systemic causes of the crisis we are currently facing. Capitalism itself is falling to pieces - no government intervention, cliques of bankers or low-paid migrant worker have caused the crisis. We must rearticulate problems perceived as ethnic and cultural, in terms of class and the functioning of global capitalism in the 21st century. In doing so, we strive to unify all workers, students and unemployed people.

Communists must address the rise of rightwing populism and halt its further development by winning back the workers. This can be done if the left achieves meaningful unity around a programme for an alternative to crisis, war and poverty - intervening in the workers’ struggles, as the capitalists try and rob from our class the concessions gained after World War II, and challenging the ‘progressive’ credentials of the populists (Mélenchon did well in exposing how Le Pen’s plan to end state “refunds” for abortion will be a serious attack of women’s rights). Winning those frustrated with the status quo is possible for the left even in its current state, as George Galloway’s election in Bradford West demonstrated. However, there is a world to win and establishing unity on the left is going to be a vital precondition.

Callum Williamson
London

Communist University 2012 August 20-26

Communist University doesn’t shy away from the divisions that exist on the left. We discuss what divides us in an open, democratic and thorough way. This not only promotes clarity, it actually prepares the ground for principled left unity. That’s why CU is so different from the other schools of the left, which more resemble trade fairs than genuine festivals of competing ideas. That’s why it is such an important contribution to the preparation for the looming struggles that face us all. That’s why you should be there.

Amongst the speakers who have so far confirmed their attendance are:

- **Paul LeBlanc**, author of “Lenin and the Revolutionary Party”
- **Hillel Ticktin**, *Critique* editor
- **Moshé Machover**, Israeli socialist and founder of Matzpen
- **Yassamine Mather**, chair Hands Off the People of Iran
- **Reza M. Shalgouni**, from the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers in Iran
- **Chris Knight**, author of *Blood relations*
- **Lionel Sims**, Socialist Workers Party

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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 29, 5pm: ‘Marxism and the 21st century’, 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.

Global Women’s Strike

Saturday April 28, Sunday April 29, 11am to 6pm: Conference, Crossroads Women’s Centre, 25 Wolsey Mews, Kentish Town, London NW5: ‘The Wages for Housework campaign 40 years on’; and launch of Selma James’s *Sex, race and class - the perspective of winning*. Organised by Global Women’s Strike: gws@globalwomenstrike.net.

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>.

The rank and file organised

Saturday May 5, 11.30am to 5.15pm: Rally, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. ‘Life and times of Bert Ramelson - from the International Brigade to the fight against Thatcherism’. Speakers include: John Foster, Max Levitas, Bill Greenshields, Mary Davis. Organised by Terry McCarthy: terrylhm@virginmedia.com.

Love Music, Hate Racism

Saturday May 5, 8pm: Fundraiser, The Rich Mix, Bethnal Green Road, London E1. Night of poetry and music. Featuring: Jerry Dammers, Pandit G, Zana Rose. Tickets: £5 waged, £3 unwaged. Organised by Love Music Hate Racism: <http://lovemusichateracism.com>.

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 films

Sunday May 13, 11am: Screenings, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Jafar Panahi’s *Offside* (Iran 2006, 93 minutes); Grant Gilchrist’s *The great trade robbery* (UK 2008, 7 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Socialist study

Thursday May 17, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, News 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.

No to Nato

Saturday May 19, 1pm: Protest, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Part of protests round the world on the day Nato leaders meet in Chicago. No attack on Iran, troops out of Afghanistan. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Olympic spirit

Monday May 21, 6pm: Meeting, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1: ‘Resistance, the best Olympic spirit’. Speakers include: John Carlos (1968 Olympic sprinter who gave black power salute), Doreen Lawrence (mother of Stephen), Weyman Bennett. Organised by RMT activists: unjummirza@yahoo.co.uk.

Cut rents, not benefits

Wednesday May 23, 9.15am: Protest against welfare reform minister Lord Freud, 25 Northumberland Avenue London WC2. Stop housing benefit cuts.

Organised by Housing Emergency: mitchellav@parliament.uk.

A people’s history of London

Wednesday May 23, 7.30pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. The city’s poor and migrants have helped shaped its history and identity - the world of pamphleteers, agitators, exiles, demonstrations and riots. Speakers: John Rees, Lindsey German. £8 (concessions £6). Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

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>.

No war on Iran

Monday May 28, 7.30pm: Meeting, Fishermead Trinity Centre, Fishermead Boulevard, Milton Keynes. ‘Why we must oppose war threats and sanctions’. Speaker: Moshé Machover (Hands Off the People of Iran). Organised by Milton Keynes Stop the War group and Hands Off the People of Iran: <http://hopoi.org>.

CPGB wills

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

ELECTION

Like looking for a needle in a haystack

Peter Manson calls for critical support for Ken Livingstone, for Labour anti-cuts candidates and for all those standing on a left, working class platform

The left - both inside and outside Labour - was given a boost by the victory of George Galloway in the Bradford West parliamentary by-election on March 29. We in the CPGB certainly hope that this will feed into a general resurgence in class-consciousness, reflected in the election of militant working class activists.

However, it would be foolish in the extreme to imagine that the May 3 local and Greater London Authority elections will produce a sea change, with the return of a raft of Labour left and anti-cuts candidates and a substantial increase in the vote for the far left. When it comes to the former, Labour candidates had obviously long since been selected before March 29, and, while there is still time for a few to come out of the closet as working class fighters, do not hold your breath. It is vital that Labour candidates committed to opposing all cuts be supported, but these are so few and far between that you will be extremely fortunate if there is one to vote for in your ward.

As for left-of-Labour candidates, it is unlikely that many of them will make much of an impact, despite Bradford West. The Socialist Workers Party's Mark Krantz last week reported optimistically from Manchester in the internal *Party Notes*, "Galloway has shifted the ground for us all ... You can feel the qualitative shift compared to all previous election campaigns."¹ However, since then the SWP, with its smattering of candidates standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, seems to have thought better of forecasting anything approaching a breakthrough.

Vote Livingstone

Probably the most important vote on May 3 will be for London mayor, where, according to the latest opinion polls, Conservative incumbent Boris Johnson is neck and neck with Labour leftwinger and former mayor Ken Livingstone. Livingstone declared in his 'State of the race' speech on April 23: "Our NHS is under attack. Students are being made to pay for an economic crisis they did not cause, with higher tuition fees. Public servants, not bankers, face job losses and pay cuts." And he concludes: "A victory for the Tories in 10 days time will be used as a green light for deepening the Tory onslaught. They will use it to vindicate the next phase of their plans."²

That is quite correct. But there is another reason why we want to see a victory for Livingstone, and that is to do with Labour's own internal dynamics: a Livingstone defeat would undoubtedly strengthen the hand of the openly pro-capitalist Labour right, who would argue that the party needs to stand firmly and unambiguously on the pro-business 'middle ground' it occupied under Tony Blair, that it can only hope to win if it bases its policies on a straightforward appeal to the 'moderate centre' (read: the bourgeois media).

In the same speech Livingstone showed his opposition to such an overtly pro-capitalist approach: "... in the way ancient religions worshipped the power of the sun, wind or sea, we are supposed to bow down before the unstoppable power of market forces. But when energy bills rise and fares are hiked this doesn't mean there is less money around: just that ordinary people - the 99% - have less of it. The big energy companies, the rip-off lettings agents and [Transport for London] under the Tory mayor all

have more money. And the bankers to whom the Tories have just given a tax cut are still getting their bonuses. The Labour argument is that ordinary people should not be made to pay for the crisis."

Of course, that is not the "Labour argument" - not the argument employed by the leadership and the vast majority of Labour candidates, at any rate. Ed Miliband actually insists (although he does not say so openly) that "ordinary people" *should* be made to pay: it is just that they will be forced to shoulder the burden more gradually via less severe cuts, to be implemented over a longer time scale. However, it goes without saying that Livingstone is not advocating a genuinely working class solution, but a return to old Labour-style Keynesianism: "The post-war Labour government took over a financially bankrupt nation. Its response was not to scrap public sector jobs, increase taxes on older people and hike up fares. It was to get people back to work, a massive programme of reconstruction, home building and the introduction of the welfare state. Not only was it fair. It worked. These were Labour values in action."

Not that Livingstone claims he will be able to introduce Keynesianism in one city following May 3. In his official election statement, delivered to every household in the capital, he admits: "The mayor does not have the powers to fully protect Londoners against this Tory government assault. But, faced with the worst economic crisis for 50 years, I will use all of the powers of the mayor's office to protect them." In other words, "We have to use *what money is available* to ease the squeeze ..." (my emphasis).³

So Livingstone argues that Transport for London has built up such a surplus that it can easily afford to cut fares by seven percent straightaway - he promises to resign if he has not done this by October. By contrast, Johnson argues that such a policy would eat into the resources needed for vital investment, which Livingstone denies. Whoever is right, it is clear that Livingstone has accepted he must work within the austerity limits set by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government: it is not possible *either* to reduce fares to an affordable level *or* to make the public transport capital investments that are really necessary.

Similarly, Livingstone promises to introduce a London education maintenance allowance of "up to £30 a week". But this modest commitment to ease the burden of a small minority of students will be met by being "innovative, by bringing together other organisations that do have funding available, to re-create a London-wide EMA". The one firm pledge he makes in relation to cuts is in the bullet point which reads: "Crack down on crime by reversing police cuts." Obviously, however, if more money is to be spent on the police, less will be available for other, more useful services.

Despite glaring weaknesses and obvious inadequacies, candidates like Livingstone signify that the battle for the Labour Party is far from over. In however distorted a fashion, Livingstone represents working class interests - in the same way as trade union bureaucrats represent those interests despite forever conceding to employers' demands - as opposed to the right, which would dearly love to transform Labour into a fully-fledged bourgeois party.

That is why we say: vote Labour anti-cuts; vote Livingstone. But our support for such candidates must be *critical* if we are to win the fight for the politics of our class. And I was pleased to hear that the leftwing Labour Representation Committee in London accepted a motion from Labour Party Marxists to include that word in its backing of Livingstone.

Vote left

In the vast majority of contests there will be no supportable Labour candidate on May 3. But in England and Wales the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing 133 candidates in 39 local authorities, as well as a full state of London-wide candidates for the GLA (not to mention Tony Mulhearn, the ex-Militant Tendency Labour councillor, who is standing for mayor of Liverpool).

As Tusc points out, it is contesting over five percent of all council seats, which probably represents a higher proportion than Labour anti-cuts candidates. For example, there are 17 Tusc candidates in Coventry, 13 in Southampton, 10 in Liverpool and Portsmouth, eight in Rugby, six each in Cardiff and Stevenage, and five in Sheffield and Lincoln. One of the 17 in Coventry will be Dave Nellist, the sole remaining councillor who is a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. It will be interesting to see whether comrade Nellist will be able to do what his fellow SPEW member, the late Rob Windsor, who died in February, could not achieve last year - hold onto his seat in St Michael's ward. St Michael's may be regarded as the seat where we will be able to judge most accurately the extent to which the left has benefited from the 'Galloway effect'.

In Preston Town Centre ward ex-councillor and Socialist Workers Party member Michael Lavalette will be attempting to recapture the seat. While the SWP is standing two Tusc candidates in Manchester, and one each in Barnsley, Sheffield, Portsmouth and Cambridge (in addition to having four out of 17 on the Tusc London-wide list), Preston is its absolute priority. In fact SWP comrades in Manchester and Sheffield are amongst those instructed to head for Preston rather than help their own local SWP candidate, much to the annoyance of some.

The same applies to Glasgow, where SWPers Angela McCormick and Graham Campbell are contesting for Tusc's sister

organisation, the Scottish Anti-Cuts Coalition. Glasgow comrades have also been told to send people to help comrade Lavalette's campaign - although the other SWP SACC candidate, Willie Black in Edinburgh, has been permitted to hold onto his helpers.

SACC has 36 candidates across Scotland, although the Chris Bambery-led International Socialist Group, which is very close to John Rees's Counterfire, declined to get involved with SACC on the grounds that what was needed was not an anti-cuts electoral coalition, but a new 'left unity' initiative. It would be nice to think that what it means is a single, all-Britain Marxist party, but I can assure you that the ISG, like most of the rest of the left, is looking for yet another dead-end halfway house.

The Scottish Socialist Party also refused to join the coalition and has 31 candidates - although thankfully an agreement was negotiated to avoid clashes, so that in Glasgow every ward will have either a SACC or SSP candidate (Glasgow will also be a reasonable test of the 'Galloway effect', I suppose). Tommy Sheridan's largely defunct Solidarity has a handful of candidates standing under the SACC umbrella.

Talking of Galloway, what about Respect? It has 12 candidates in Bradford, but, incredibly, only three others in the whole country on May 3 - one each in Manchester, Oldham and Tower Hamlets (a by-election). The reason for this is mainly down to the short time available (under a week) between Galloway's stunning victory and the deadline for the May local elections. While the party was inundated with people (mostly new members) offering to stand, the leadership decided to reject such

quantities, many of whom were undoubtedly attempting to jump on the Galloway bandwagon in the hope of securing a nice little niche for themselves.

As for the pre-existing active membership, it had mostly accepted that Respect's time had passed as an electoral force and, apparently, could not be aroused out of its lethargy in the few days before the April 4 deadline for nominations. So in Birmingham, for example, there are no Respect candidates and instead party leader Salma Yaqoob has issued a call to vote Green in the city.⁴

Finally, the shell of Arthur Scargill's party has made its usual reappearance at election time: "The Socialist Labour Party is pleased to announce that we will be fielding candidates in all three countries," according to the home page of its website.⁵ But with less than a week to go it is unable to provide any details whatsoever.

That - together with the Communist League, Socialist Party of Great Britain and Lewisham People Before Profit, all standing in London - constitutes the sum total of the left's efforts (apologies to any I have overlooked). Undoubtedly we should give *critical* support to all of the above, and it is clear where our main criticism lies - in the left's dismal failure to even attempt to build what we really need: a united, democratic working class party that proudly declares its Marxism ●

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Notes

1. *Party Notes* April 16.
2. www.kenlivingstone.com/ken-livingstone-delivers-state-of-the-race-speech-
3. www.londonelects.org.uk/im-voter/information-booklet.
4. www.salmayaqoob.com.
5. www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk.



Few left candidates... and most of them are standing on dreadful politics

LIVINGSTONE

How not to fight Tory smears

The tax row between Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson reveals the limits of Labour's individual moralism, argues Eddie Ford



Ken Livingstone: left populist

This year's contest for London mayor will be probably be most remembered for the fierce exchanges between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone over their respective tax arrangements rather than their different political positions and policies - a further 'Americanisation' of politics, typified by personal attacks on individuals and their supposedly 'immoral' private lives or personal conduct.

For many weeks the Tory attack dogs in parliament and the press - desperate to get the obnoxious Johnson re-elected on May 3 - had been attacking Livingstone for the fact that he is paid via a company (Silveta Limited) and therefore was only liable for corporation tax at 20%, as opposed to paying full income tax. The allegation was that Livingstone was involved in some sort of nefarious tax avoidance scheme, unlike his clean-as-a-whistle Tory opponent, of course, allowing him to avoid paying at least £75,000 in 'extra' tax. Thus, according to Livingstone's Tory critics, he fully deserves to be condemned as a hypocrite, given his extremely harsh remarks in the past about those who do not cough up enough in taxes.

For example, in 2009 Livingstone wrote in *The Sun* that "rich bastards just don't get it" - like members of David Cameron's cabinet who "have become super-rich by exploiting every tax fiddle" and devise tax policies that "aim to reward the rich and screw the rest of us". He went on to demand that "no-one should be allowed to vote in a British election, let alone sit in our parliament, unless they are paying their full share of tax" - urging any incoming Labour government to "sweep away all the tax scams" and make everybody pay tax at the "same rate on their earnings and all other income". A populist attempt to exploit the growing resentment against the better off sections of the middle class and the bourgeoisie.

However, during a live LBC radio debate on April 3 the long simmering tax dispute - fuelled by the Tory press

- flared up into a personalised row. When pressed about his financial affairs, Livingstone stated that he was not operating a "tax avoidance thing", as he paid income tax on "everything" he gets - to say otherwise was a "smear". But, he added, he had to pay three members of staff and "you can't do that just on some casual arrangement" - after all, he continued, "nobody in Britain employs people and pays income tax on the money they pay them". Therefore he and Johnson were in the "exact same position", bearing in mind that the latter had run a TV production company called Finland Station when he was a Tory MP, meaning that "we both had media earnings" and "we both put them through a company" - hence, Livingstone reminded the listeners, you "pay tax on the money you take out" out of the company. In no way does this equate to tax avoidance or anything remotely corrupt.

In response to Livingstone's logical-sounding argument, Johnson angrily exclaimed that the "guy's a bare-faced liar". True, he had "briefly" been a director of Finland Station, but had never used it to avoid paying income tax - righteously declaring that he had "never used a company to minimise my tax obligations" (apparently, Johnson had "privately explained" his tax arrangements to Livingstone some three weeks earlier). Still feeling bruised, immediately after the radio show Johnson called Livingstone a "fucking liar" whilst sharing a lift with him and the Liberal Democratic candidate, the gay former Metropolitan Police officer, Brian Paddick - who jokily remarked about arresting the mayor for "threatening behaviour". The fractious exchanges rumbled on the next day on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme, where Johnson refused to apologise for his lift comment. On the same show the four main contenders for the mayorship - including the Green, Jenny Jones - pledged to publish all earnings and taxes paid in the past four years in order to "bring it all out into

the open", as Jones put it, and finally bring an end to the personal acrimony.

Of course, that did not bring an end to the tax row - far from it. On the subsequent day, April 5, Johnson and Paddick published their tax details in the form of PDF files checked and authorised by their accountants. However, Livingstone initially refused to do this, claiming that the only way to achieve "full disclosure" would be for all the candidates to reveal their *total* household incomes - not just their individual earnings. His reasons for this were that the tax avoidance allegations levelled against him also involve his wife, Emma Beal, who typed up her husband's memoirs - and other tasks - and was paid by the same company (ie, Silveta Ltd). He admitted furthermore that he did not know how much his wife earns and has "no interest in managing my financial affairs", having hired an accountant after his 2008 mayoral defeat because he was travelling the world advising mayors and so on. "I'd have just screwed it up," he remarked, if he attempted to manage or "sort out" his own various financial dealings. Doubtlessly correct.

But, somewhat inevitably, Livingstone was accused of stalling and after coming under even more pressure from the other candidates and the likes of *The Daily Telegraph* - now running a barely disguised hate campaign against him - he eventually issued a PDF of his own outlining his financial/tax dealings over the last four years, even if was not from his actual accountant (though claiming that is where the figures came from)¹. From now on, he promised, he would openly publish his tax records every year - which, he maintained, should be a relatively simple matter because with the exception of LBC radio (where he has a regular show) everything else he earns is a "one-off".

'Honest mistake'

There were anomalies or inconsistencies with Livingstone's records, most notably his claim that

he paid £23,730 in "corporation tax on dividends". Yet this is an obvious nonsense, as dividends do not attract corporation tax, but rather income tax. Subsequently, Livingstone said this was an "honest mistake" - whether by the accountant or Livingstone himself is unclear - and released a 'revised' declaration on April 12, so the column reads "corporation tax *already* paid on dividends". Though still slightly cryptic, Livingstone seems to be telling us about the 21% corporation tax (the 2010 rate) he has paid on that part of his personal earnings - channelled through Silveta Ltd - which he has not set as "expenses" against tax (which according to his figures appears to be at just under 19%, testimony to the level of tax-deductible expenses he has claimed). It should also be remembered that Livingstone can avoid paying national insurance altogether and can split his earnings with his wife - a 50% shareholder in Silveta) - even though the money was earned entirely by him, therefore saving yet further tax. And he has previously admitted, quite openly, that he has held a large sum of money earned in one year as a cash pile in the company, taking it out as dividends in smaller chunks over several years to avoid higher-rate tax - a practice known in the business as "income spreading".

The new 'revised' accounts now show that in 2008 Livingstone's earnings were £63,400 and his taxes £20,000 - before they had said that that he earned £21,645 and paid £6,214 in tax. The difference, a Livingstone spokesman said, was due to a "relocation grant" paid to the former mayor when he left office in that year that the accountant "had not been aware of". Doubtlessly correct too.

Naturally, the rightwing blogosphere lit up in rage - or glee - when Livingstone published his records. Yet another chance to nail the detested 'Red' Ken. On April 5 the Guido Fawkes blog run by the wretched libertarian, Paul Staines - who once described his politics as "Thatcher on drugs" and himself as a "rightwing pain in the butt" - published a chart purporting to demonstrate that Livingstone's effective tax rate was actually 14.5%, compared to Boris Johnson's magnificent 45.1%, *if* Silveta Ltd's "numbers from all his media earnings are included" in the total picture.²

Retaliating quick in an act of blog warfare, the Liberal Conspiracy blog counter-claimed on April 9 that Guido/Staines just could not add up - he was not comparing like with like.³ Instead, LC argues, he wants to include Silveta's earnings as Livingstone's earnings - though they are *separate* legal entities - and then wants to compare this to the most favourable year for Boris Johnson; that is, last year, the only year Johnson did not take allowable expenses upwards of £6,000 and the 50p tax rate applied to him. The basic point, LC reiterates, is that tax is paid on the income Livingstone receives, not the company earnings. Profitable companies pay corporation tax on their profits and they pay that tax after meeting their expenses, including pay - only then can they pay dividends. And the tax on dividends is deducted by the company from the recipient. For LC, Livingstone's tax rate is lower than Johnson's for the very simple reason that his income is much lower - less in four years than the mayor earns in

a single year.

Ed Miliband weighed into the debate, declaring that the near unrelenting focus on Livingstone's financial affairs and allegations of tax avoidance were part of a "desperate Tory campaign" to try to discredit Livingstone because he was "winning the battle of ideas" before the May 3 election. Therefore the Tories were running a United States-style "negative ad campaign all about Ken Livingstone and that says it all". After delivering a speech on March 12 urging the government to ensure top earners contribute their "fair share" of tax, Miliband confidently said that Livingstone had "paid every pound of tax he is required to by law".

There's the rub, of course. Livingstone, like everyone else, is playing the system - perfectly legally. Frankly, why shouldn't he? Moralistic handwringing in its leftist or rightist forms about the relative success Livingstone, or his accountant, have had in gaining pecuniary benefit from the diabolically complex tax system are quite ludicrous. And for Tories to come out with such accusations is a repellent exercise in utter hypocrisy. The communist position is clear. If the state sets rules which allow tax exemption/reduction in certain situations, then you cannot blame individuals for taking advantage of those rules - people are not saints nor should we expect them to be. We flatly reject the notion that there is a universal, classless, morality which dictates that each individual must in *all* circumstances hand over a portion of their money to the bourgeois state to use as it sees fit - ie, build up the means to oppress us. The bourgeois state is an *enemy* which we want to smash, not hand over money to like supplicants.

Having said that, communists do have criticisms of Livingstone over the tax spat. Not so much because he found a way to avoid paying so much, but because he - and the row in general - reduced the question to one of bourgeois individual morality rather than collective struggle. My tax records are more honest or scrupulous than yours - prove me wrong, punk. His rightwing critics, though, are not really concerned about such issues - that is transparent. A mere opportunist convenience. Like those in the US who obsessively spent years demanding that Barack Obama release his birth certificate in order to prove that he was a *bona fide* US citizen - not a commie-Islamist Kenyan - their real goal was not to see the documents themselves, but to distract the public from the wider issues and promote their irrational rightwing ideology, gradually undermining Obama. Ditto with Livingstone.

Not that communists, it goes without saying, are against making demands relating to taxation - 'Tax the rich' or 'close the loopholes' are perfectly legitimate slogans. But basically this is a demand that the bourgeoisie pay for the failings and inadequacies of their *own* system, not us ●

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Notes

1. www.kenlivingstone.com/uploads/9ed45aeac661-9044-5df9-f9a45647e85a.pdf.
2. <http://order-order.com/2012/04/05/compare-and-contrast-candidates-effective-tax-rates>.
3. <http://liberalconspiracy.org/2012/04/09/ken-livingstones-actual-tax-rate-and-how-guido-fawkes-spun-the-truth>.

HOPi

Ideas to empower the anti-war movement

Michael Copestake reports on a successful weekend school

The only thing that is certain is uncertainty," said Labour MP John McDonnell in his talk at the April 21-22 weekend school organised by the Hands Off the People of Iran at the University of London Union.

Given the negotiations between the five members of the United Nations security council plus Germany and Iran that have just completed in Istanbul and are due to resume next month in May in Baghdad (of all the places to talk peace in the Middle East, could there be a more ironic one?) and the decline in the number of those mobilised on demonstrations and marches against war, the truth of this statement should be well noted by all. The continued threat of direct military action against Iran combined with factors such as the US electoral cycle constitute a heady and unpredictable brew.

The weekend school was part of the continued efforts of Hopi to reorientate the left against both the imperialist war drive and the sickening anti-working class regime of the Iranian state itself. Aiming to provide an analysis of the forces driving to war and the general condition of the Iranian state and society, Hopi brought together a range of speakers, including Iranian activists and exiles, National Union of Journalists president Donnacha DeLong, as well as comrade McDonnell himself.

Irrationality

The speaker for the first session on the Saturday was CPGB's Mike Macnair, who sought to explain what he judged to be the increasingly irrational military adventures of the United States and its imperialist allies. These tend to end in social chaos, as in Iraq, rather than the imposition of some *pax Americana*, and comrade Macnair linked them to three distinctive cyclical tendencies within capitalism.

The first of these is the business cycle, which in its upswing phase imbues a sense of optimism and belief in progress, while a period of downturn or stagnation provokes attempts, including through war, to distract attention from the ensuing crises of capitalist legitimacy.

The second cycle is much longer-lasting and relates to the rise and decline of the hegemonic capitalist state itself. Giving examples of this process from history, comrade Macnair referred to the Netherlands, the British empire and now, in the present day, the United States itself. Here the qualities which create the success of the new pretender in stealing the crown from the previous declining hegemon breed their own failure over time. These take the form of the loss of previously world-beating industrial production, which provokes the use of brute military force to maintain 'top dog' status - irrational adventurism in order to maintain credibility and deter potential successors.

Lastly there is the general decline of capitalism itself, said the comrade. This expresses itself in the fact that United States intervention has not stimulated the significant economic development of capitalism in the states where it has intruded that was seen in the case of previous imperial powers. Taking patterns of immigration as a measuring stick, comrade Macnair noted that previous empires led to an exodus of the population of conquering powers to the new colonies, whereas today the reverse is true - people from the oppressed countries are driven to seek a better life in the core countries.

It is the failure of much of the left



Binyamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama: war threats

to understand these factors that leads it down the dead end of calling for the bourgeoisie, in essence, to act more rationally: it should desist from starting wars and spend the money on the welfare state or whatever. But that fails to grasp the wider - perfectly rational from the point of view of imperialism - imperatives that drive the seemingly crazy waves of destruction.

This interpretation proved controversial for some in the debate that followed, with speakers questioning the category of 'irrationality' and suggesting it was lacking in explanatory power. Others pointed out that the war on Iran has been a long time coming, with sanctions going back over 30 years, when capitalism was, presumably, still more 'rational'. The connection between the business cycle and general political ideology was questioned by one speaker, as was the phenomena of a 'cyclical hegemon', while another comrade wondered exactly why China might not be a legitimate rival to the US for this position. During the following exchanges comrade Macnair offered a robust defence of his thesis and expanded on many of its elements in relation to the points being made.

Iran working class

Iranian trade unionist and former political prisoner of the Iranian regime, Majid Tamjidi, gave an illuminating and hard-headed assessment of the plight of the Iranian working class, caught as it is in the vice of imperialist sanctions and neoliberal Islamic despotism.

What came through in comrade Tamjidi's talk was the nightmarish coincidence of the needs of the US and Iranian states, which serves to push both further down the road towards military conflict. The bluster and bravado with which the Iranian

regime responds to sanctions and threats of war feed US portrayals of Iran as intransigent and in need of a swift and harsh remedy. The missing element in the narratives of both the imperialist and Iranian governments is the masses themselves, yet they are being crushed under the weight of both sanctions and the neoliberal policies of the theocratic state, resulting in 60% of Iranians living below the poverty line, 12 million on insecure 'instant dismissal' temporary work contracts, and at least 30,000 deaths per annum in workplace accidents.

This focus on the desperate economic situation of Iran and the Iranian working class was picked up in a session on the second day on the political economy of Iran, addressed by Mohamed Shalgouni of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers in Iran and Hopi chair Yassamine Mather.

The audience was straining to hear the words of comrade Shalgouni, not just because he was so quietly spoken, but because of the great interest in the things he had to say. He provided a compelling dissection of the role of the regime in the economy of Iran, of which 70% is directly or indirectly controlled by the state and its related bodies, increasingly under the auspices of utterly phoney privatisations that give ownership of companies to state and military officials technically at 'arm's length' from the government in a kind of pocket-bursting, oligarchic give-away, last seen on a such a scale in the crash privatisations undertaken in the collapsing Soviet Union. That there can be such a bonanza for state bureaucrats and heavies is a legacy of the revolution, which resulted in the expropriation of the holdings of the royal family and a series of nationalisations. This self-interested gangsterism by the state, taken with three decades of increasingly severe sanctions, has led to the ruin of much

of what remained of the Iranian economy and, with the possible closure of French car plants under the pressure of the United States, the situation grows more and more dire.

Indeed, the size of the 'black economy', much of which is controlled by state, army and militia bureaucrats, and includes imports, currency and the trade in alcohol, is estimated at being worth \$60 billion a year: about the same as Iran's official imports. As comrade Yassamine Mather elaborated, domestic industry, including the production of agricultural staples at a price affordable to the Iranian proletariat, has been deliberately run down by the mercantilist, middle-man interests of the state and bourgeoisie, as it is easier to extort money from the masses when all of the country's needs are met by imports controlled by the collective state gangster rather than from domestic production.

Aware of the basket-case economy and a desperate, volatile society it has created, the Iranian state, whilst it slashes subsidy and welfare for everyone else, continues to subsidise around five million supposedly grateful economic dependants who can potentially act as extra-military brownshirts against Iranian workers when society inevitably produces explosive protests.

Speakers from the floor wondered how the supposedly deeply religious government of the clerics justified its privatisations, though the answer was provided quickly that this was done with great ease - and was typical of theologians throughout history, whenever god gets in the way of fistfuls of hot cash. Other questions ranged from the role of the military in exploiting the economy and the possibility of conflict between them and the clerical wing of the state.

Solidarity

More focused on the immediate situation facing the wider world and its working class movement was the talk given by comrade Moshé Machover, co-founder of Israeli socialist party Matzpen. This was also the case with the panel discussion led by left-Labour stalwart John McDonnell MP, who humorously referred to himself and Jeremy Corbyn as the "parliamentary wing" of Hopi, Sarah McDonald, a runner in the previous weekend's Vienna marathon in aid of Workers Fund Iran, and NUJ president Donnacha DeLong.

Comrade Machover focused on the relationship between Israel and Iran. He believed that the recent Istanbul negotiations with Iran had produced a vaguely positive outcome despite Hillary Clinton's hawkish rhetoric. Attempting to identify exactly why Israel was so pro-war, the comrade identified two main factors. The first was that an Iran with nuclear arms, or nuclear potential within the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, reduces the relative power of Israel in the region and its ability to be the watchdog of the United States.

The second reason was that the Israeli state is seeking a pretext in order to engage in a further ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, thus solving the so-called 'demographic problem' of the growing Arab population of Israel. The acceptance by the Israeli military in its own documents and in the words of some of its own leading figures that the 'Iranian bomb' is not a serious threat disproves the notion that this issue is about Iran's nuclear capability. It is more about provoking a situation of such turmoil that the mass expulsion of Palestinians could

be more conveniently undertaken.

The panel discussion made up the final session of the weekend, with comrade De Long recounting his experience of the Iranian regime during his time as an Amnesty International worker and gave an example of the power of the social media in spreading cutting criticisms of the regime than can serve as morale boosters and potential incitements to action for ordinary Iranians.

John McDonnell reported that the word in the Westminster village was that, should there be an attack on Iran, it may be around September time, though the Israelis were suffering from an itchy trigger finger and he did not discount them acting alone. Comrade McDonnell emphasised the correctness of Hopi's line against imperialism, sanctions and the regime itself and that it was essential that these ideas be spread more widely into the labour and trade union movement as a whole. Whether this took the form of meetings with individual trade union general secretaries and MPs, of cultural events and campaigns such as the film screenings in aid of Jafar Panahi, of direct action or of good, old-fashioned marches and demonstrations was not important: what matters is spreading the message.

The comrade also emphasised another part of what Hopi stands for as particularly important: support for working class and progressive forces and for socialism in the Middle East. We absolutely must not, the comrade insisted, ever refrain from stating plainly that the only progressive force in Iran (and elsewhere) capable of combating imperialism and overthrowing the neoliberal clerics is the working class, and that the only way to lasting peace and prosperity in the whole region is through socialism.

Describing her experience of practical solidarity with the Iranian working class was CPGB member Sarah McDonald, fresh back from the Vienna marathon. She, along with others, had raised almost £1,000 for Workers Fund Iran. Comparing the project of transforming the left into a healthy and principled anti-war force to a marathon rather than a sprint, the comrade emphasised how the act of having to ask others for support and sponsorship for the marathon had itself been a very useful form of political activity: it provided the opportunity to explain the aims of Hopi and its stand against any war against the people of Iran.

During the ensuing debate comrade McDonnell was asked what the atmosphere in parliament was like at the moment, given that earlier in the year he had reported that it felt like a rerun of the lead-up to the Iraq war. He replied that the atmosphere had calmed somewhat, but that in the EU Britain remains the most hawkish state. Donnacha DeLong, by this point proudly wearing his cap decorated with anarchist badges, suggested that Hopi might be able to use the Levenson inquiry to expose the collusion between the Murdoch press and the government to bring the Iraq war to bloody fruition.

Others from the floor emphasised that, despite real anti-war sentiment - for example, around the Afghanistan debacle - the conclusion that many had reached from Iraq and the endless 'numbers are everything' marches organised by the Stop the War Coalition was that war cannot be stopped. That is why it is so essential to link the struggle against war to a rounded, working class politics and that is what Hopi will continue to do ●

Michael Copestake

IRELAND

ULA: opportunity to lead

The United Left Alliance conference this weekend comes at an important juncture in Irish politics.

The political climate is once again shifting to the left. The referendum on the European Stability Treaty on May 31 is likely to be the site of significant struggle, with opposition building rapidly. Prominent unions Unite, Mandate and the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union have called for their members to vote 'no'. Even the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has refused to back the treaty - in contrast to 2009, when it campaigned for a 'yes' vote. General secretary David Begg has said that he is against the treaty personally, but he will not stick his neck out with a call for a 'no' vote.

Such lack of support from reliable friends in the trade union bureaucracy has been a bitter blow to the Labour Party, junior partner in the coalition government. Its leader, Eamonn Gilmore, this week in desperation appealed directly to workers to ignore their unions. He issued dire warnings of the consequences of not signing up to the treaty: Ireland will no longer have the right to apply for help from the European Stability Mechanism permanent bailout fund. It will be left to fend for itself. His admonitions echo those of Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny, and many other bourgeois politicians both in Ireland and Europe. And the Washington-based Institute of International Finance has stated that a 'no' vote would provoke instability in the euro zone and cause investors to take fright and go elsewhere.

Sinn Féin, campaigning for a nationalist 'no' vote, is determined to prove otherwise. At its press conference on April 25, Gerry Adams declared that suggestions that Ireland would be cut off from ESM funding were "complete and utter rubbish". The treaty clause stipulating that funding will only be granted to signatory states does not have legal standing, according to Adams, as it is in the preamble and not the articles. He has confidently predicted that Ireland will have to be given more money, as no country could be denied such help if the security of the euro zone itself was under threat. However, this wishful thinking ignores reality - and the motivations of European capitalism. There is in fact every risk that if Ireland refuses to toe the line it will be seen as too much of a nuisance - especially given its financial instability and continual demands for bailouts. Irish capitalism has sunk deep in the mire since the halcyon days of the Celtic tiger. It is no longer an example of small-nation dynamism, but an unwelcome drain on the resources of European capitalism.

Clearly a 'yes' vote cannot be considered. The European Stability Treaty is replete with plans to crack down on public spending within cash-strapped member-states and threatens punitive measures for non-compliance. It promises nothing but deep hardship for the working class of Ireland and Europe. We have already had a taste of this hardship with the 'Programme for Ireland' drawn up by the International Monetary Fund and European Union. This four-year austerity deal was agreed with the Fianna Fáil/Green government in November 2010 in exchange for an €85 billion bailout for Ireland's financial sector. A "fiscal sustainability corrective" to raise €50 billion by 2015 was to be imposed over four years, with new taxes aimed



Clare Daly (left) and four other ULA representatives

at squeezing yet more money out of the working class.

Household charge

The softest option, the €100 household charge would be introduced in March 2012 and a register of homeowners set up. It was thought this would be easy to push through. Then with all homeowners on the register, a draconian property tax of on average €800 per year and a water tax of €400 would be imposed. But the plan, adopted in 2011 by the incoming Fine Gael/Labour government, has backfired dramatically. Tactics designed to dupe people into registering have instead resulted in half of those eligible refusing to sign up.

The struggle around the household charge has exposed the Labour leaders as liars and hypocrites. Their electoral promises to protect the poor in 2011 have been shown to be a farce. There was never any intention of backing down on the IMF-EU austerity package. Instead once their bums were on their Dáil seats, the coalition loyally awaited orders from Europe, eager for as much cash as possible to fill the coffers of national banks. It is no wonder that recent surveys indicate deep disgust with the government. The latest *Irish Times* polls reveal that satisfaction with the Kenny-Gilmore partnership has dropped 14 points to 23% since last October. As the *Times* notes with concern, "this is an ominous development, given the difficult decisions it will have to implement over the next three years" (April 20). It has been the Labour Party, which doubled its seats in the general election just over a year ago, that has been hit hardest. Now profound anger at its leadership has cost it support, which has gone to Sinn Féin, the ULA and independents.

As the ferocious austerity of the EU/IMF programme drives many to desperation, the working class is beginning to regain a sense of defiance. Frustration, anxiety and depression are giving way to anger, as people feel they cannot take any more. The mass boycott of the household charge is an indication of the depth of

this rebellion, despite a government campaign and warnings of criminal prosecution. The Campaign against the Household and Water Tax now has branches throughout the country. It has expanded rapidly over the last few weeks and with the March 31 deadline for registration now past, the determination not to pay appears to be unwavering. Working class people, including many pensioners, have declared their absolute refusal to submit to yet another tax. Militant demonstrations up and down the country have seen people declare their willingness to face jail rather than pay up.

The protest has been compared to the anti-poll tax movement which brought down Margaret Thatcher in Britain in 1990. With government ratings falling rapidly, there is a deep sense of unease in the corridors of power. Protests at recent government party conferences have been significant in number, with an estimated 15,000 protestors outside each of the Fine Gael and Labour Party *ard fheises*, angry and militant. The media horror at the jostling of a conference delegate who was mistaken for Phil Hogan (environment minister) at the Fine Gael *ard fheis* was nothing compared to the outcry when over a thousand protestors charged police lines outside the Labour Party conference. We were told that the militancy was orchestrated by shadowy forces within the crowd. However, a glance at photographs will leave you in no doubt that these were ordinary working class people, incensed beyond belief by the treatment being doled out to them by the Labour Party.

But the government is determined to press on. Eamonn Gilmore, leader of the Labour Party, said he would not be deterred in the task of implementing the EU-IMF austerity package. The unpopularity did not worry him and he declared that this is "a time for courage" and "we have to have the courage to stick to the task".

The ULA has played a leading role in the boycott of the household charge. Its five TDs, along with some independents, have announced they

will not pay and called for others to join them. Unlike Sinn Féin TDs, who refuse to support the boycott, the ULA has been at the forefront of the campaign. Joe Higgins, Richard Boyd-Barrett, Joan Collins and Clare Daly have shown the enormous possibilities that exist for the working class to make advances. They have to their credit been determined fighters. With the struggle continuing and a national conference of the campaign on May 19, there is a great deal to fight for - this is a key struggle which the government is determined not to lose.

Abortion rights

Another issue over which the ULA has made a breakthrough is abortion rights. Clare Daly introduced a private members bill, the Medical Treatment (Termination of Pregnancy in Case of Risk to Life of Pregnant Woman) Bill 2012 for debate in the Dáil on April 18-19. This was to legislate for abortion in extremely limited circumstances, when the life of a woman is at risk, including from suicide. The state has recently been ordered to implement such legislation by the European Court of Human Rights, but is dragging its feet. It has set up a committee of doctors and lawyers - 'experts' who will make recommendations in July. Clare Daly's bill was fiercely debated and voted down - including by the Labour Party. But the debate has continued in the media, with a number of women courageously speaking out about their own abortions and joining the call for the right to choose. Because, although the bill was set out in very narrow terms, the discussion itself has been about precisely that - the right to choose.

In a public debate in Cork on April 24, Clare Daly agreed that a clearer pro-choice position now needed to be taken up, in order to win this struggle. She said the response had been overwhelmingly positive and that the working class is far in advance of the political establishment on this issue. Irish women in their thousands have abortions every year - in Britain or Holland, or using pills ordered over the internet. Everybody knows it

goes on - and women are more likely to have an abortion than have their appendix removed. But Irish women have to face huge stress and financial difficulties to travel abroad. The web of silence and shame affects women deeply, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Now we have a chance to put the question on the political agenda. The Cork branch of the ULA recently voted unanimously to call for free abortion as a right, with facilities put in place to enforce that right. The ULA nationally does not have a position on the question. We were told previously by Richard Boyd-Barrett and others that it would be too divisive. Now thankfully Clare Daly, along with Joan Collins and independent Mick Wallace, have actually taken a stand on it. The conference this coming Saturday, April 28, must adopt the position of the Cork branch.

The question of the Irish constitution is central. The eighth amendment "acknowledges the right to life of the unborn with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother". Irish politicians and religious leaders have always been determined to control women. They claim to represent the 'right of the unborn' and argue that a foetus has as much right as the woman who carries it. We must call immediately for the removal of the eighth amendment and the provision of abortion facilities in Ireland free at the point of need - as early as possible, as late as necessary. Clare Daly agreed with this position at the Cork meeting. That will, I believe, find an echo with the masses of people who are heartily sick of the dominance of the discredited church over their lives and the hypocrisy of successive governments.

So the ULA has an opportunity to make great strides forward in this period. However, the continued sectarian divisions between the alliance's two main components, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, continue to dog the project. The conference itself looks likely to be another talking shop, with no provision for votes. Many non-aligned members have left in disgust at the lack of democracy - and the inactivity of the branches. After continued calls for representation, non-aligned members will be able to vote for their representatives on the steering committee on Saturday. Also proposals from a working committee recommend that the organisation moves forward with delegate-based structures, but put the stress on 'consensus' rather than democracy. This is in opposition to the practice in branches like Galway and Cork, which are making decisions on the basis of majority voting. The centre of the organisation in Dublin is where the leadership of the SWP and SP are based. It is dragging its heels and the in-fighting between the two main organisations is holding the project back.

But the opportunity is there now to create a party. It must be built on principles of socialism. There cannot be any Irish Keynesian solution to the current crisis. The ULA can provide leadership to the Irish working class in a way that the SP and the SWP themselves can never do. It presents a united alternative, rather than a sect mentality. All those who support such a call need to put their efforts into fighting for their view at conference and overcoming the bureaucracy and sectarianism that currently stymies us.

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FRANCE

Disappointing result for left



Marine Le Pen: more successful than father

Nicolas Sarkozy's 27.18% in France's presidential election on April 22 - for the first time in the history of France's 5th Republic the incumbent president came only second in the first round of voting - delivers a clear verdict on the last five years of austerity, cuts and attacks on the working class. Sarkozy was just behind Parti Socialiste candidate François Hollande (28.3%).

Readers will also know that the third-placed candidate was not Front de Gauche leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, as many had expected. Mélenchon won only 11.11% - a particular disappointment for the candidate himself, who seemed to be convinced he was heading for second place. No, third place was won by Marine Le Pen of the Front National with 17.9%. All but a few commentators say that she did even better for the far right than her father in 2002, when he qualified for the second round with 16.86%. But in that year FN dissident Bruno Mégret picked up 2.34% in the first round, taking the far right's total to 19.20%.

However unpleasant and annoying this latest vote may be, there is at present no 'major fascist threat' in France. So how could Marine Le Pen go from 11% in the polls a couple of weeks ago to nearly 18% last Sunday? The obvious reason for that is that another candidate unintentionally boosted her campaign by adopting and promoting parts of her programme for himself - I mean, of course, Sarkozy. But this had the opposite effect to what he intended, as many rightwing voters presumably decided they might as well switch to the genuine article ...

What happened to Mélenchon's support? One cannot say that the 1.15% won by Philippe Poutou of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste

made much difference to his score or even that Hollande did to Mélenchon what Le Pen did to Sarkozy. When asked, "How do you explain the distance between the dynamic of the Mélenchon campaign and his final result?", PS leftwinger and former Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire leader Gérard Filoche correctly replied: "There is no 'distance' really. 11.1% is a *good* result. Millions thought like Mélenchon and voted Hollande." Millions of Mélenchon's potential voters backed Hollande because they feared that both men might be eliminated in the first round if Mélenchon took too many votes from the PS - that would mean another five years of the hated Sarkozy.

Filoche went on: "If the left wins, it will be because of the Front de Gauche's campaign dynamics ... Mélenchon has skilfully revitalised such essential themes as pensions, the right to work, the redistribution of wealth, the struggle against finance and austerity ... those slogans are massively shared on the left, including amongst François Hollande's electors."

In the second round Mélenchon has called for a vote for Hollande, while the NPA's Poutou prefers to make the same appeal more cryptically - "make sure we get rid of Sarkozy on May 6". As for the right, Le Pen's supporters are unlikely to vote massively for Sarkozy: she has said she will not make any recommendation for the second round until May 1, when the FN is staging a big street rally in Paris. But she has already said, "Now Sarkozy is finished" and "I am the future leader of the opposition to François Hollande". So she will probably call for an abstention. Meanwhile the 9.13% won by the centre candidate, François Bayrou,

in the first round is an unknown quantity. Many soft-right electors find Sarkozy's platform too extreme: the incumbent president continues to campaign along the lines of Marine Le Pen's anti-immigrant, chauvinist programme (perhaps even more so than before the first round) - to the disgust of the miserable people he is appealing to.

The Front de Gauche has called for a huge street demonstration "behind the trade unions" on May 1 - some have predicted clashes in the street with the NF. That would play into the hands of Sarkozy, the 'law and order' candidate, so Mélenchon himself is stressing the importance of the massive street rally he has called for May 4, just before the end of campaigning for the second round. This is a clear sign that his campaign for a 'citizens' revolution' is not over. And many Hollande supporters may be attracted to such rallies, making them even larger than those called before the first round.

Whether members of the NPA or not, Marxists are calling for a Hollande vote on May 6 to make sure that we get rid of Sarkozy. When that result is secured, the task will be to draw up a united front programme of demands to put to comrades in the Front de Gauche as well as to the Parti Socialiste leftwing rank and file. Such demands must not be restricted to the trade union-type economic questions that the NPA leadership would undoubtedly prefer, but must address key social and democratic issues, including the right to vote for migrant workers and the end of the 5th Republic with its monarchical president. Only in this way can Mélenchon's slogan "Take power!" be answered in a positive way.

Jean-Michel Edwin

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WORKERS POWER

Another split, another sect

The left must organise on the basis of genuine democratic centralism, argues Ben Lewis

Readers might be aware that Workers Power, the organisation which heads the League for a Fifth International (LFI), has recently suffered yet another split - its second haemorrhaging of cadre in the last six years. Around 15, predominantly younger comrades departed, reducing WP's forces by about a third.

The 2006 split came as a bolt out of the blue, when a substantial number of the predominantly more experienced members were expelled, after a protracted period of internal argument, and then proceeded to form the Permanent Revolution grouping. While the latest parting of the ways also results from the usual tale of comrades being prevented from openly expressing tactical and strategic differences, it has been subject to dynamics that have led to some strange results. For example, the combined forces of Workers Power, the recent split *and* the Permanent Revolution group are - irony of ironies - the current main players in another far-left *unity* drive, the Anti-Capitalist Initiative. The ACI has some meetings in places where WP and PR have cadre, like Manchester and London.

It is worth looking at the split in closer detail to establish what it means for the current state of the left.

No public dissent

In this instance, the dispute played out around the question of 'party' building, democracy and the lessons of Bolshevism. On the one hand, the 'old guard' of Workers Power, led by Richard Brenner and David Stockton, defended the typical conception of the Trotskyist 'propaganda group', according to which, in order not to inhibit effective intervention in the class struggle, there must be no public dissent from, or expressions of disagreement with, the majority 'line' worked out behind closed doors.

The dissenters initially formed a *majority* of the WP political committee. Thus, when it came to publishing articles written by dissenting comrades, the bureaucratic centralist 'discipline' of the LFI 'international committee' was invoked in order to doctor articles and make official statements fit the 'line' of what was, after all, the British leadership *minority*.

Not only is the whole idea of treating political ideas in such a way absurd, but when this is excused by falling back on some vacuous references to an 'international' that is to all intents and purposes run and staffed from London, tragedy becomes farce.

In some ways, the recent misfortunes of Workers Power and its dwindling numbers reflect the very difficult history that the far left has experienced. However, given the challenges ahead, we need to break from the irresponsible propensity to split and split again - seemingly located in the very DNA of 'fighting propaganda groups' like WP.

Those in WP questioning the 'keep polemics private' dogma emerged gradually, and found support amongst the group's younger members. Some of them are very inexperienced, having joined during the student demonstrations of the last few years. But others have been around for a lot longer, and were leading cadre (eg, Simon Hardy and John Bowman). These comrades presented a number of oppositional documents to the WP conference in London over the weekend of March 24-25, which called for a change in direction, and sought to correct the erroneous WP

conception of democratic centralism (in reality bureaucratic centralism). This change, so they argued, would allow the group to positively intervene in the 'new anti-capitalist project' established by the (then united) WP, rather than seeing it as a 'bigger wheel' to simply be manipulated by the 'small cog' of an artificially homogeneous WP.

As it was, the majority on the PC did not translate into a majority of the membership as a whole, and their perspectives were soundly defeated. However, some of the minority members *did* get re-elected onto the leadership. But after their proposals were defeated at the LFI international council in Berlin on April 8, they resigned from the organisation and were followed by a number of supporters (mainly from Britain, but also from Austria and the Czech Republic). Apparently there were no hard feelings, and comrades who had gone separate ways were able to go for a drink together afterwards.

Open struggle

No harm in being civil, of course. Yet the minority comrades must surely be criticised for simply 'walking', rather than staying and fighting. Of course, the bastardised version of Bolshevism that informs the practice of those like Workers Power, Counterfire, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, etc means that dissenters have no option but to keep their heads down and pretend to the outside world that they are in total agreement. But the comrades should have defied this gagging-order, openly rebelling against such a farcical conception of working class democracy. They could, and should, have published and spoken out openly, all the while maintaining their commitment to the *transformation* of their organisation.

This might have inevitably resulted in expulsion. So be it. Bureaucratic methods need to be exposed for what they are. Moreover, an open fight would then have brought the whole controversy into the light of day, allowing militant workers to follow and learn from the disputes. As it is, the only *public* expression of their opposition thus far is a short statement

signed by the former *Workers Power* editor, Simon Hardy.

The fact that this has not happened is more than a shame, because the minority comrades have actually spent some time reading, writing and criticising some aspects of the past. I have been able to access some of the documents they have worked on, and it is encouraging to find that they are engaging with the better historical scholarship on Lenin, including that produced by Lars T Lih. They are attempting to show, as this paper has been for years, that the public airing of differences was a healthy, normal characteristic of Bolshevism from its inception.

It is here that the new split contrasts favourably with that of Permanent Revolution in 2006. While making some nods towards interrogating Bolshevik history, the PR group has, debates about Kronstadt notwithstanding, actually done very little in this regard. It has firmly established itself as simply another Trot group, albeit with particular quirks about ongoing upswing of the world economy and the long wave, etc.

In contrast, the former WP minority seems more willing to think. As they have argued in one of the documents they presented to the March conference, WP should be willing to show that it is a "vibrant and critically minded organisation rethinking the 'big questions' ... prepared to listen, to learn and to be open to new ideas, as well as to teach others what we ourselves already know. In the best spirit of the revolutionary tradition our debates should be open and fraternal."

For the time being, the recently decamped WP comrades do not seem to be interested in forming a separate organisation. They seem to be throwing their entire weight into the project of the ACI. As I will briefly discuss below, however, the political approach and the method informing the ACI appear to be seriously flawed, and there is a real risk that they will simply dissolve into it, and the 'movement' more generally, without taking the time to crystallise the lessons of their experience in WP and move forward positively in a *partyist* way.¹

Strangely, as an aside, the CPGB itself has been affected by the ACI enthusiasm. Comrade Chris Trafford has recently announced that he has decided to leave, and he did so in a not dissimilar fashion to the WP minority. Comrade Trafford decries the

"irrelevance" of the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* - instead of fighting for the creation of a *political* force capable of leading our class, we should follow his example and prioritise the anti-cuts work. In other words movementism. However, unlike the WP comrades, he had the right (and the duty) to express his views openly in our press. Instead, we have yet another dismal example of the 'if you have a difference, split' method of politics.

'Anti-capitalism'

So where are the minority WP comrades going? There are certainly some healthy signs of a rethink. Yet there is also the danger that they will simply break with Trotskyism's conception of Bolshevism without fundamentally challenging the false dichotomy it draws between the tightly-knit propaganda group (sect) on the one hand, and the 'mass', 'broad front' on the other. As Simon Hardy puts it in his statement, "We came to the conclusion that a method of organising exclusively focused on building specifically Leninist-Trotskyist groups prevents the socialist left from creating the kind of broad anti-capitalist organisations which can present a credible alternative to the mainstream parties".²

Given its jaundiced understanding of both Bolshevism and mass, *revolutionary* social democracy, the WP school of Trotskyism tends to view everything 'mass' or 'broad' as non-Marxist. A good example is the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, which the WP younger comrades helped to establish on an explicitly *non-revolutionary* basis. The NCAFC has rapidly become a safe haven for left-talking bureaucrats in the student movement and has not helped to propagate the fundamentals of *Marxism* amongst students one bit. It would be a real shame if, as a result of the bad experience of so-called 'Bolshevism' in Workers Power, the comrades junk sectarianism and go on to throw themselves into a liquidationist Anti-Capitalist Initiative.

Mike Macnair neatly sums up this problem, one which the far left as a whole faces: "The curious paradox about 1912 and 2012 is ... that the large majority of today's far left, while defending Stalinist organisational norms on the basis of variant forms of the myth of Bolshevik history created in 1920, defend the actual politics of the liquidators: the abandonment of any practical struggle for the fundamentals of Marxism in favour of the constitution of one or another sort of broad-front party. We have to get beyond both sides of this politics."³

For far too long much of the left has laboured under two main illusions. That the Labour Party has ceased to be a workers' party in any sense, and that consequently the left can, and must, establish itself as the 'Marxist wing' of a broader, explicitly non-Marxist alternative.⁴ This alternative is often conceived as resting on the need to win the trade union bureaucracy to break with the Labour Party and fund instead a Labour Party mark two. But this is hopeless. Bitter experience shows that we cannot simply 'outdo' the Labour Party by luring the labour bureaucracy. We have to create an alternative to Labourism itself, based on radical democracy, internationalism and the idea that the working class majority must take

over the running of society to initiate a new period in human history.

Some months ago, the CPGB wrote to (the still united) Workers Power to ask what its intentions were behind the ACI project. We did not get a response. Yet reading WP's suggestions for this weekend's conference, we see the same tired, tried-and-failed exhortations to establish a (politically undefined) 'mass working class alternative' to Labour. While some of the WP proposals floating around the internet have a slightly more radical edge to them than formations like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition or Respect, ultimately the same political *method* is in operation.

In his official WP response to Simon Hardy's 'A simple proposal for a new anti-capitalist left', comrade Richard Brenner is clear: "In Britain we are campaigning for a rank and file movement in the trade unions, for the unification of the anti-cuts campaigns, for a new mass working class party *based on the unions and the left*".⁵ Both sides of the split seem to agree that the new formation must be "opposed to austerity, privatisation, racism, sexism, imperialist war ...". Fine. But what are we actually for? What do we want to achieve? Should we limit ourselves to Britain? What about the question of Europe? What about the question of the state? What about the unions? The Labour Party? These are the kind of strategic questions that must come to the fore. For all the excitement and hype about the creation of a so-called 'new' left through the ACI, its outlook and *modus operandi* thus far appears to consist of distinctly *old*, recycled variants of previous far-left electoral campaigns.

We cannot avoid these strategic questions, nor can we simply rely on the 'logic of struggle' to clarify matters. Political unity springs from serious programmatic discussion, and in the first instance is built at the top, not 'from below'.

We in the CPGB have always been amongst the most consistent champions of revolutionary political unity on the British left. We are willing to engage with *all* comrades addressing this question, no matter how confused or incoherent their current position. But we should be under no illusions: democratic unity around the *acceptance*, not (*à la* Brenner) complete agreement with every detail, of the revolutionary Marxist programme is the *only* way to lastingly and effectively regroup the left and the class more generally.

Anything short of that can only lead (no doubt after a brief flurry of excitement) to generalised disillusionment, as proved by the electoral disasters of the 1990s and 2000s, or for that matter by the decline of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste 'model' in France ●

Notes

1. However, there is potentially a willingness to engage in discussion on Marxist unity. The Workers Power youth group, Revolution, has also recently written to Communist Students to look to establish "more formal discussions ... about closer unity" (email, April 20). Hopefully, these talks can also be made public and initiate the kind of strategic debate on the 'big questions' that our side so urgently needs.
2. <http://louisproject.wordpress.com/2012/04/14/a-simple-proposal-for-a-new-anticapitalist-left>.
3. M Macnair, 'Both Pham Binh and Paul Le Blanc are wrong' *Weekly Worker* April 5.
4. This is true as much of the Socialist Alliance, Respect, Tusc *et al* as it is of the long list of failed 'united fronts' that have been established in student politics.
5. <http://louisproject.wordpress.com/2012/04/14/a-simple-proposal-for-a-new-anticapitalist-left> (Comment 4, emphasis added).



Simon Hardy: former editor

INTERVIEW

Antifa, nationalism and democracy

Maciej Zurowski interviews **Freerk Huiskens** - until his recent retirement a lecturer at the University of Bremen - about his new book



National Democratic Party: under threat of state ban

In last week's issue of the *Weekly Worker*, we looked at the institutional anti-fascism of the German state.¹ But what about the anti-fascism of the German left? Surely, in a country that has seen an exponential rise of far-right activity following reunification, the left has developed a thorough political analysis of neo-fascism, coupled with a scathing anti-capitalist critique?

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. On the left, the "German neurosis" that we described last week finds its expression in abstruse phenomena such as the pro-imperialist, pro-Zionist 'anti-German' movement. Peddling slogans which, at their most extreme, wish death and destruction upon the German masses, the 'anti-German' movement is based on a simple political error: it conflated the imperialist project of 'reunification' with the confused, resentful and often murderous far-right reaction to its material effects in the former German Democratic Republic. It must have somehow escaped the 'anti-Germans', who attribute neo-Nazism to some defect in the German national DNA, that the entire former Soviet bloc, including Russia and Poland, has seen very much the same sort of developments since 1989.

Elsewhere on the German left, things do not look a lot better. Though taking its name from the Communist Party of Germany's street fighting squad of the 1930s, the

present day Antifaschistische Aktion (Antifa) is a somewhat ramshackle alliance of anarchists, leftists and - let us be honest - left liberals who regard fascism as the central threat facing humanity today. Divided into mutually hostile 'anti-German' and more traditionally anti-fascist camps, Antifa's programmatic propensity to treat mere symptoms at the expense of proposing a cure is reflected in the broader anti-fascist discourse that dominates the Left Party ('Die Linke') and the publications close to it.²

The German writer and academic, Freerk Huiskens is that rare thing on the German left: a Marxist voice critical of left anti-fascism. In his new book, *Der demokratische Schoss ist fruchtbar* ('The democratic womb is fertile'), he argues that the left's anti-fascist critique is in a poor state and, furthermore, that "democrats of all stripes" are incapable of criticising fascism.³

Much as comrade Huiskens's book is refreshingly provocative, I would argue with some of his views. In the course of this email interview, I felt Huiskens had a tendency to blur the distinction between democracy under capitalism and fascism, misinterpreting any objective evaluation of the different conditions of class struggle under these two forms of bourgeois rule as apologia for the latter. Then there is his idiosyncratic understanding of 'democracy', which, in my view, has more to do with Bordigist and various

other left communist interpretations than it does with the actual, radically democratic programme espoused by Marx and Engels. However, I decided to leave further discussion around the dictatorship of the proletariat for another time.

Leftwing papers and websites in Germany are full of reports about neo-Nazis. Some even have permanent Antifa sections in their pages. Does the preoccupation with neo-Nazis constitute a kind of vicarious satisfaction for the German left?

That has nothing to do with psychology, with "vicarious satisfaction". It is indeed the case that considerable layers of the German left do not focus their critique on the political and economic forces that administer and enforce capitalism - that is, forces which make people's lives difficult in the present. Instead, they construct the neo-Nazis as a particularly severe looming threat. **Then again, let us not downplay the problem. There really exists a relatively strong and well organised neo-Nazi movement in Germany. What is wrong with the way the left deals with it?**

It declares the neo-Nazis to be its main enemy. That is a political error - not least because really existing bourgeois rule does everything it can of its own accord to eliminate the neo-Nazis as political competition. Therefore, German Antifa act as auxiliaries of

the government.

In your new book, you provide eight examples of "how to criticise (neo) fascist statements and slogans, and how not to criticise them". Could you illustrate one of the false arguments?

When nationalists claim that immigrants are stealing 'our' jobs, for instance, there is a tendency to argue that immigrants create jobs, that there is unemployment even though migrants have left Germany over the past few years, and so on. These arguments treat the slogan as if it were a serious labour market political statement. That is not what it is about, though. It is merely a variation of the 'Foreigners out!' slogan, and the material employed to illustrate it is relatively arbitrary. Today the immigrants are drug-dealers, tomorrow parasites, and the day after tomorrow they steal our jobs. That is why such nationalists would not be satisfied even if all Germans had jobs and all immigrants too. To them, every foreigner in Germany is one foreigner too many.

Since the early 90s, countless books about neo-Nazism in Germany have been published. Why was yours so necessary?

Firstly, I do not know of any book that explains how democracy - or, more precisely, democratically administered capitalism - necessarily breeds frustrated nationalists again and again. These frustrated

nationalists are the fundament of every far-right or fascist movement. Secondly, it is precisely Antifa that lacks an accurate critique of fascism. This is particularly visible in their helplessness when confronted with the anti-capitalism of the fascists. And, finally, it seemed necessary to me to counter the insipid, purely moralistic gibberish about nationalism and racism that you hear among parts of the left with a more precise analysis. It is particularly important to me to provide evidence for the fact that nationalism and racism are part and parcel of democratic societies.

Some try to 'confront' neo-fascists with placards and educational articles, while others argue for anti-fascist violence at all times and in all situations. Do the former neglect a fundamental pillar of fascist movements, the 'power of the street'? Do the latter fetishise violence? Or do both sides lack tactical flexibility?

Of course, there is nothing wrong with education, and sometimes you cannot avoid confrontation with neo-Nazis. How useful these methods are always depends on the concrete circumstances. If such education exhausts itself through preoccupation with the German slogan 'Fight the beginnings' instead of critiquing democratic nationalism, then it is useless. And if Antifa cobbles together an entire political programme based

on the defence of shops and offices that are attacked by neo-Nazis, then that is useless too.

‘Physical force’ anti-fascists all seem to agree that you must not talk to Nazis - at best, you prevent them from talking. But is the battle of ideas not something that Marxists should engage in as a matter of course, no matter who is to be debated?

Of course. My book is a plea for precisely that and a manual explaining how to do it. The question of whether one should debate with confident neo-Nazis is irrelevant, as they cannot usually be won for debate anyway. Rather, the ‘battle of ideas’ must be fought against those nationalists on whom German bourgeois rule rests. It must be fought against those who, intellectually and practically, enable that rule to convert one capitalist crisis after another and one capitalist boom after another into German successes on the world market - at their expense. Every citizen who understands that their siding with bourgeois rule, whether critically or uncritically, means that they are harming themselves.

Some German activists who claim to be on the left want a so-called Querfront: ie, an alliance between far-left and far-right forces. The former Kommunistischer Bund and ex-‘anti-German’ activist Jürgen Elsässer, whose magazine Compact features contributions from ‘new right’ authors, springs to mind. What do you think of such people - can we work with them or should we exclude them from the left?

It is true that the *Querfront* phenomenon exists not only in the bourgeois camp, but that there are ex-leftists who have curious affinities to the extreme right. When they discover their love for Germany, I begin to wonder whether that is a sudden change of direction or whether they have not always been somehow driven by that kind of sentiment. I do not care for either of the two alternatives you are offering: cooperation or exclusion. Wherever these ex-lefts stick their noses, they and their followers must be criticised.

What I find to be far more upsetting than these blatant *Querfront* alliances is that, since the uncovering of the National Socialist Underground,⁴ some groups within the leftwing Antifa regard the state authorities’ measures against neo-fascism as useful. They are coming round to support a National Democratic Party ban and, when it comes to uncovering fascist groups, they are offering their services as superior Nazi hunters. They seem to be indifferent to the fact that the ruling democrats regard the leftwing Antifa as ‘extremists’ who must be fought. Nor do they seem bothered by the fact that banning political parties was an instrument

of National Socialist rule.

The classic social base of fascism was the petty bourgeoisie and the lumpenproletariat. Does this also apply to the new Nazis in Germany?

I do not share this view. In my opinion, you are already pointing in the wrong direction when you speak of a “social base”. There is no connection between one’s social position and fascism. Fascism has always won supporters from all classes and camps, including from the working class, and it is no different today. It does so by addressing the nationalism of frustrated citizens: ie, their patriotically tinged dissatisfaction with the state of the nation, which continues to be present in all classes.

It seems that you do not care too much for the term ‘democracy’, whether you are referring to bourgeois democracy or the “true democracy” that Antifa advocates. But didn’t Marx regard the battle of democracy as an essential element of the class struggle? What is wrong with “true democracy” - ie, the democratic dictatorship of the majority?

Antifa’s talk of “true democracy” has nothing to do with the dictatorship of the proletariat. In general, Antifa does not want to abolish existing power relations. They merely want rule *over* the people to involve greater participation within the framework of existing class relations. It does not even occur to them that they effectively want to give antagonistic interests more power in equal measure.

The “democratic dictatorship of the majority” that you are talking about seems to be neither here nor there. As with your replacing of ‘proletariat’ with ‘majority’, I read your paradoxical “democratic dictatorship” as an audience-friendly compromise term. Since “dictatorship” sounds nasty, you prefix it with “democratic”. And because the “proletariat” has allegedly been overcome, you speak of abstract “majorities”, whoever may be part of it and whatever ideas and interests they may have.

Marx and Engels did not have such views even when they still thought they could gain something from democracy. What they had in mind was a class-conscious proletariat that might abolish capitalism through the vote. Such revolutionary consciousness does not automatically arise with one’s class position - unfortunately!

There is a certain ultra-leftist tone to your writings: you acknowledge little difference between fascism and bourgeois democracy. But has the working class not fought hard for every democratic right, and should it not defend these concessions against those who would crush the working class altogether? If nothing else, we

can organise and circulate our propaganda with relatively little interference.

I am a little surprised at how you are defending democracy. What good is a system in which you have to fight state power to extract the most elementary, natural requirements in relation to health, holidays, breaks and wages above bare subsistence level? What good is it if such concessions are regularly under attack? What good is it if they are conceded only as ‘rights’: ie, within a legal framework in which the state and its powers have permanently preserved their sovereignty?

What is more, I would not dream of commending a political system on the grounds that it allows you to do political work “with relatively little interference”. It is obvious that this system does not invite its opponents to participate in a “battle of ideas”, but reserves the right to either ban those ideas or, according to its own calculations, allow them to circulate “with relatively little interference”, but under close observation and control. Democracy manages quite well to render the ideas of its opponents ineffective through the very freedoms that it grants them. To disable unwelcome criticism, one does not necessarily need to disable the critic, as the fascists used to do.

Which of the classic analyses of fascism do you find to be the most useful? That of Trotsky, Dimitrov, Thalheimer, Bordiga, Poulantzas ...? I don’t care much for any of them. I have learned the most from Konrad Hecker’s 1996 book, *Der Faschismus und seine demokratische Bewältigung* [‘Fascism: overcoming it democratically’]. You argue that neo-Nazis are simply nationalists frustrated by the official nationalism of the bourgeois parties. Does nationalism still sit easily alongside capitalism in a globalised world? Or has it, as some would argue in relation to the crisis-shaken European Union, become more of a hindrance to capitalism?

Well, who enforces measures to cope with the financial crisis? Who fights wars in the Middle East? Who is in the UN security council? Who constitutes the G8 and G20? Nation-states - and leading nation-states and their leaders in particular. And in each and every one of their domestic and foreign policies it is apparent that they want to improve the economic and political position of their respective countries at the expense of other states - whether by cooperation or competition.

Globalisation is nothing but the current imperialist competition for political hegemony and the wealth of the world; it is the competition between the most successful capitalist states. From this point of view, their regents are professional nationalists. To them, it is of the greatest importance that their populace backs them through political parties when, for instance, they introduce a low-paid employment sector at home in order to outcompete European rivals.

In Germany, they have been very successful at both: Greece is completely devastated, and good German patriots who have endured increased exploitation in order to achieve this now rant about the “lazy Greeks who live off our tax money”. Capitalism only exists in the shape of mutually competing nation-states, and the nationalism of the people remains its political ‘lubricant’ ●

Notes

1. ‘Günter Grass and the German neurosis’, April 19.
2. There exists also a flipside of the ‘anti-Germans’: the Maoist and post-Maoist Anti-Imps (anti-imperialists), some of whom harbour a bizarre fondness of the fatherland and, presumably deriving their theoretical foundation from the Georgi Dimitrov line, regard the forces of international finance capital as the ‘real’ fascism.
3. F Huisken *Der demokratische Schoss ist fruchtbar* Hamburg 2012: www.vsa-verlag.de/nc/buecher/detail/artikel/der-demokratische-schoss-ist-fruchtbar.
4. The NSU (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund) is a German neo-Nazi terrorist group that committed at least eight racist murders between 2000 and 2006. To much popular outrage, it emerged earlier this year that state security agents had been planted in the organisation all along, while the German government had downplayed the assassinations as ‘vendetta’ killings between Turkish families.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Fighting fund

£370 by Monday

This week our readers donated a total of £270 towards our April fighting fund target of £1,500, which takes our running total to £1,130 with four days to go. So we now need £370 by Monday April 30 - can you help us make it?

There is still time to post us a cheque if you do it straightaway, or else use our PayPal facility on our website, or transfer your donation to our account (sort code: 30-99-64; account number: 00744310). Making the full £1,500 and more will ensure we at least meet our current running costs.

But from that same date those costs will increase hugely, thanks to Royal Mail’s price hike of over 30% - postage alone will go up by well over £100 a month. We have therefore decided that, while the cover price will remain at £1, a subscription will increase by £10 a year, from £50 to £60, as from May 1. If you pay by standing order, the new quarterly payment will be £12 - in other words, you can keep down the cost of

your subscription to below current levels if you switch to standing order. Fill in the form on the back page or download it from our website. Or you can still get a year’s sub at £50 if you pay by Monday.

Of course, a number of comrades do not take a hard copy, but read us online (once more, unfortunately, I am unable to tell you how many web readers we had last week because of a technical problem). They have been joined by comrade DL, who has just ended his subscription for the print version. But he is continuing his standing order to the paper and, what is more, has sent us a cheque for £15 on top!

Thanks to DL and to all other comrades who donated this week.

Robbie Rix

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

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Terrorism, suicide and capitalist decay

Crisis and creeping despair

On Wednesday April 4, Dimitris Christoulas, an elderly retired pharmacist, walked to Syntagma Square and shot himself in the head outside the Greek parliament. As the anti-austerity movement, and civil society more generally, was coming to terms with Christoulas's final protest, another country had its own bit of soul-searching to do, as the trial of Anders Behring Breivik began in earnest in Oslo.

On the face of it, not an awful lot connects these two individuals. Christoulas was, by all accounts, a committed leftwinger and a regular fixture on anti-cuts protests in Athens. At 77 years old, he does not cut the now stereotypical figure of the young black bloc partisan, petrol bomb in hand; rather, he has become symbolic of the utterly indiscriminate devastation wrought by the austerity programme of the troika and its Greek patsies.

Breivik, on the other hand, is affiliated with the extreme right. At 33, he is young; but his rightism is of a very contemporary sort as well, consisting in admiration for the Tea Party, English Defence League and other expressions of 21st century petty bourgeois outrage. Unlike the seasoned protestor Christoulas, Breivik's horrific massacre of Norwegian Labour Party youth seemed to appear 'out of nowhere'; until then, he had apparently no far-right activity to his name, barring some relatively sanguine comments on far-right internet sites. His war in defence of Christendom was conducted entirely behind a keyboard (apocryphally, he is supposed to have taken a year out of the writing of his bloated 'manifesto' to play the online World of Warcraft game).

'Delirium of a madman'

In order to draw links between the two men, it is worth asking ourselves the question that will continue to dominate proceedings in the Oslo courthouse in the coming weeks: viz, is Anders Behring Breivik sane?

The question is, of course, politically loaded. Those on the far right whom Breivik admired are very keen to single him out as a lunatic. A spokesman for Vladimir Putin, one of Breivik's less likely heroes, condemned his actions as "the delirium of a madman".

On the left, meanwhile, there is the opposite temptation. Breivik's hatred of Muslims and multiculturalism is the common touchstone of the contemporary far right, especially in Europe. There *is*, the argument goes, an exterminationist logic to these ideas; not to say a certain tendency towards murderous anti-leftism that stems from the millenarian character to the rhetoric surrounding Europe's 'Islamisation'.

Besides which, Breivik's crime was not one of passion, or the result of a momentary psychotic episode. It was planned with disturbing lucidity; he even refrained from saying anything too hot-headed on the internet that might alert state security services. Everything played out perfectly, down to the last

detail; only his desire to be martyred in a hail of police gunfire went unfulfilled, but he is finding ways to make use of his time in court for similar ends.

This is all true, and it is probably enough to establish a criminal standard of culpability in his case (although his trial is already being cited as a possible turning point in the history of forensic psychology). Yet, if he indeed was not in some kind of hallucinatory delirium, there nonetheless is something more than a little psychotic about Breivik. The classic Freudian definition of paranoia is a kind of excess of meaning; all manner of epiphenomena are totalised into a narrative of persecution focused on the paranoid individual.

There surely exists no better description of Breivik's views - a grand conspiracy of Muslims, multiculturalists and Marxists to undermine Europe's cultural integrity and bring about a 'Eurabian' caliphate. One does not have to be a liberal Guardianista to understand that this conspiracy simply does not exist; it takes a contingent encounter of west European and American state policy *vis-à-vis* ethnic minorities and the emergence of the war on terror, throws in some perfunctorily secularised, millenarian Christianity, and stitches it all together into a 1,500-page narrative.

If Breivik, on this analysis, is a madman, then

so are an awful lot of others. Tommy Robinson of the EDL, Tea Party icons like Glenn Beck and a whole host of far-right populists across the European continent rehash major aspects of this narrative. It should perhaps not escape notice that, in advance of Sunday's presidential election in France, the *Daily Mail's* Melanie Phillips urged a vote for Marine Le Pen. Her paper at least tried to be horrified at Le Pen's senior's triumph in 2002; now, it seems, the author of *Londonistan* - yet another paranoid narrative of 'Islamisation' - is happy to risk reminding people of the *Mail's* 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!' prime.

Suicide

The killing spree finds something of a dialectical opposite in suicide. While the former is almost by nature a public spectacle, suicide is the consummation of very private psychic forces.

These days, however, suicide has

been recuperated as a spectacular act of protest. Christoulas's death cannot but remind us of the self-immolation of the impoverished Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, which unleashed all the pent-up frustrations of his compatriots against a corrupt and tyrannical regime, and in turn sparked the series of protest movements that became the Arab awakening. And Christoulas is not the only one to follow Bouazizi's example: a spate of self-immolations was reported across the Arab world last spring.

That is one context in which to place Christoulas. There are others. Rather more mundane suicides are on a noticeable upward statistical trend on countries worst hit by the economic crisis. Ireland is a peculiarly disturbing case: in 2009, 527 people took their lives, according to official figures - the highest number on record ... until, that is, the stats for 2010 came back with 600. Suicide helpline ILife is buckling under the weight of a hundred desperate calls a day, and charities believe the government figures are highly conservative.

This is, of course, a statistical abstraction of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of particular cases of the most abject despair; these suicides were not supposed to 'mean' anything, unlike those of Christoulas and Bouazizi. Still, the distance between the two phenomena is not as great as all that. Those close to Christoulas were not aware that he had anything of the sort in mind. If the act itself was public, it still marks the same kind of progressive, introverted abjection that leads anyone to commit suicide.

It would be easy enough to draw a direct causal link between economic crisis, with its associated devastation of millions of people's lives, and the termination of those lives in suicide. There is a missing mediation here, though - and its nature is precisely highlighted

by the case of Breivik. There are all manner of ways of rebelling against intolerable conditions, ranging from revolutionary struggle to reactionary terrorism.

In fact, all three cases - that of Breivik's massacre, of Christoulas's suicide and the creeping despair in Ireland - are different responses to the decay of capitalist society in the longer term than the recent crisis. The collective life of capitalism is increasingly bureaucratised; it is something which is *done to you*. The result is atrophy at the base, and the increased social atomisation of people.

Most importantly, the decline of the left and associated defeats of the workers' movement have all but destroyed the most effective counterweight to this process - the development of an authentic collective life in and against the decaying forms of capitalism.

Crisis then sends capitalist ideology, like everything else, into chaos - one can, like Breivik, find solace in the pseudo-community of European Christendom and the irrationalist far-right milieu; or one can privately sink into despair; or one can make of one's death a voluntaristic protest. We can add in last summer's riots as another option - a white-hot outburst of nihilistic rage.

One hears, more and more often these days, the notionally Chinese curse - 'May you live in interesting times'. The 'interest' for most lies in the way the west collapses into one futile and destructive war after another, the way stock markets suffer palpitations every time a European population gets a sniff of an election, and all the quotidian signs of Armageddon that litter newspaper front pages these days.

Yet there is another story behind it, which is a kind of psychic disaggregation. Whether it takes the form of the rise and rise of a clinically psychotic far-right populism or the recuperation of suicide as a political act, capitalism is eroding our minds as surely as our bodies. ●

Paul Demarty



Anders Behring Breivik: insane politics

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